

# Groton Daily Independent

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"GIVE YOURSELF ENTIRELY TO THOSE AROUND YOU.  
BE GENEROUS WITH YOUR BLESSINGS. A KIND  
GESTURE CAN REACH A WOUND THAT ONLY  
COMPASSION CAN HEAL."  
-STEVE MARABOLI



Girls Soccer  
Groton Area hosts Garretson  
1 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 14, 2021

GTIGERS  
GDILIVE.COM

## 2021 Sturgis Rally Vehicle Count - Through Day Seven

STURGIS, S.D. – Vehicle traffic counts from the South Dakota Department of Transportation for vehicles entering Sturgis for the 81st Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally Aug. 6-15, 2021, are available and will be updated daily.

Traffic counts at nine locations entering Sturgis for the 2021 Rally are as follows:

Friday, Aug. 6: 55,326 entering. Up 11.0% from Friday last year. Down 13.2% from the 75th Rally  
Saturday, Aug. 7: 67,482 entering. Up 23.1% from Saturday last year. Down 18% from the 75th Rally  
Sunday, Aug. 8: 65,771 entering. Up 17.1 % from Sunday Last year. Down 27.2% from the 75th Rally  
Monday, Aug. 9: 64,158 entering. Up 12.6 % from Monday Last year. Down 33.5% from the 75th Rally  
Tuesday, Aug. 10: 60,626 entering. Up 15.0% from Tuesday last year. Down 28.5% from the 75th Rally  
Wed., Aug. 11: 57,675 entering. Up 17.2% from Wednesday last year. Down 37.0% from the 75th Rally  
Thurs., Aug. 12: 52,235 entering. Up 12.9% from Thursday last year. Down 38.0% from the 75th Rally  
Seven Day Total:

2021: 423,273 Vehicles

2020: 365,979 Vehicles

2015 (75th Rally): 593,317 Vehicles



## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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## Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information Compiled from 6 a.m. Saturday August 7, 2021 to 6 a.m. Friday August 13, 2021

| Item                 | Sturgis   | Rapid City District | District Total | Last Year to Date |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| DUI Arrests          | 85        | 14                  | 99             | 117               |
| Misd Drug Arrests    | 100       | 28                  | 128            | 202               |
| Felony Drug Arrests  | 62        | 34                  | 96             | 112               |
| Total Citations      | 815       | 428                 | 1243           | 1044              |
| Total Warnings       | 2284      | 1070                | 3354           | 2728              |
| Cash Seized          | \$1862.00 | \$0.00              | \$1862.00      | \$18763.00        |
| Vehicles Seized      | 0         | 0                   | 0              | 7                 |
| For Drug Poss.       | 0         | 0                   | 0              | 7                 |
| For Serial No.       | 0         | 0                   | 0              | 0                 |
| Non-Injury Accidents | 15        | 20                  | 35             | 39                |
| Injury Accidents     | 21        | 27                  | 48             | 47                |
| Fatal Accidents      | 0         | 2                   | 2              | 2                 |
| # of Fatalities      | 0         | 2                   | 2              | 3                 |

### Fatal Crashes:

At 5:30 p.m., Thursday, South Dakota Highway 87, mile marker 62, eight miles northeast of Custer: A 2013 Harley-Davidson FLTRU was southbound on South Dakota Highway 87 when the motorcycle crossed the center line and collided with a northbound 2011 Chevrolet Impala. The 58-year-old male driver of the motorcycle was pronounced dead at the scene. He was not wearing a helmet. The two occupants of Chevrolet – the 19-year-old male driver and the 15-year-old female passenger -- were not injured. They were wearing seat belts.

### Injury Crashes:

At 1:15 p.m., Thursday, at the intersection of U.S. Highway 212 and South Dakota 79, three miles south of Newell: A 2005 Buick LaCrosse was southbound on U.S. Highway 212 when a 1997 Dodge Ram pickup and trailer pulled out in front of it. The two vehicles collided. The 31-year-old male driver of the Buick sustained minor injuries and was transported to the Sturgis hospital. The 19-year-old male driver of the pickup was not injured. Charges are pending against him. Both drivers were wearing seat belts.

At 1:26 p.m., Thursday, South Dakota Highway 36, mile marker 40, six miles southeast of Hermosa: A 2013 Harley-Davidson Road Glide motorcycle was eastbound on South Dakota Highway 36 when the driver lost control and was thrown from the motorcycle. The 57-year-old male driver sustained serious non-life threatening injuries and was taken to a Rapid City hospital. He was not wearing a helmet.

At 1:40 p.m., Thursday, U.S. Highway 16A, mile marker 55, one mile south of Keystone: A 2006 Harley-Davidson FLHTCI motorcycle was southbound on U.S. Highway 16A when the driver failed to negotiate a curve. The motorcycle crossed the center line and collided with a northbound 2004 Harley-Davidson FLHRI motorcycle. Both occupants were thrown from that motorcycle. The 57-year-old male driver sustained life-threatening injuries and the 55-year-old female passenger suffered serious non-life threatening injuries. Both were transported to a Rapid City hospital. Neither occupant was wearing a helmet. Both occupants of the FLHTCI motorcycle – the 63-year-old male driver and 61-year-old female passenger -- received minor injuries. Neither occupant was wearing a helmet. Charges are pending against the driver.

At 2:07 p.m., Thursday, South Dakota Highway 87, mile marker 62, eight miles northeast of Custer): A 2007 Harley-Davidson motorcycle was traveling on South Dakota 87 when the driver failed to negotiate a curve. The 73-year-old male driver sustained serious non-life threatening injuries and was transported to the Custer hospital. He was not wearing a helmet.

At 5:12 p.m., Thursday, Interstate 90, mile marker 58, near Rapid City: A 2005 Honda VTX1300 motorcycle was eastbound on Interstate 90 and had gone onto Exit 59 when the driver hit a traffic cone. The driver lost control and was thrown from the motorcycle. The 68-year-old male driver suffered serious non-life threatening injuries and was taken to a Rapid City hospital. He was wearing a helmet. Charges are pending.

At 5:47 p.m., Thursday, near the intersection of South Dakota Highway 44 and Norris Peak Road, near Johnson Siding: A 1994 Harley-Davidson motorcycle was southbound on Peak Road when the driver failed to negotiate a curve. The motorcycle crossed the centerline and collided with a northbound 2019 Indian Chieftain motorcycle. The 55-year-old male driver of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle was not injured and was wearing a helmet. Charges are pending. Both occupants on the Indian Chieftain motorcycle sustained serious non-life threatening injuries and were transported to a Rapid City hospital. Both were wearing helmets.

## **Governor Noem Accepting Applications for Fall and Spring Interns**

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem is now accepting applications for the Governor’s Office fall 2021 and Spring 2022 internship programs.

Student interns will work with staff on various projects depending on interests and strengths. Additional duties include aiding the governor’s general counsel, constituent services, and communications team; conducting policy research; preparing policy briefings; and staffing events. Internships provide students with first-hand knowledge of the state government and the functions of a governor’s office.

College students who would like to be considered for an internship should submit a resume, cover letter, and letter of recommendation to [megan.goltz@state.sd.us](mailto:megan.goltz@state.sd.us). Applications for fall interns should be submitted by Friday, August 27, 2021. Applications for spring interns should be submitted by Friday, November 26, 2021.





**Officials from Heartland Consumers Power District and the city of Groton presented five bird feeders with seed to Avantara Groton for a public power community service project. Pictured, seated, Groton Mayor Scott Hanlon with Avantara resident Jack. Standing, from left to right: Groton Finance Officer Hope Block, Avantara employee Christina, Groton Assistant Finance Officer Kellie Locke, Groton Deputy Finance Officer April Abeln, Avantara resident Tom, Avantara employee Dana, and Heartland Chief Financial Officer Mike Malone.** (Photo by Ann Hyland, Heartland Chief Communications Officer)

## **Donation brings joy to Groton seniors**

### **Heartland donates bird feeders for community service project**

GROTON, S.D. – Residents of two Groton senior living centers were recently presented with special gifts. Bird-watching is a popular pastime for elderly adults. It relieves stress, helps them reconnect with nature and is accessible for people with a range of abilities. It also provides sensory and memory benefits. This activity became especially important during the pandemic when residents were socially isolated.

Heartland Consumers Power District donated bird feeders with seed to Avantara Groton and Rosewood Court as part of the Public Power Month of Giving.

### **Power supplier gives back**

Public power utilities, such as the city of Groton, are owned and operated by the communities they serve. They are a division of local government, run by boards of local officials accountable to the citizens.

Public power is defined by commitment to community. Across the country, they support local commerce, employ 93,000 people in hometown jobs, and invest more than \$2 billion annually directly back into the communities they serve. Employees volunteer their time on community boards and improvement projects. Residents have a voice in utility operations and the opportunity to make decisions that benefit the community.



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Public power is embedded in the fabric of the communities it serves.

To celebrate this commitment to community, public power utilities across the nation celebrated a Month of Giving in June.

"Public power is all about serving the community. That's our number one motivation," said Heartland CEO Russell Olson. "What better way to serve Groton than by going beyond our day-to-day electric work and making a difference."

Heartland, a non-profit public power utility located in Madison, South Dakota, provides wholesale power as well as energy services and community development programs to the city of Groton as well as other municipal electric utilities throughout the Midwest.

Heartland donated 115 bird feeders and 30 bird houses to 29 facilities in 19 communities. Local officials were also invited to join for presentations and be recognized as the hometown public power provider. Groton Mayor Scott Hanlon and finance employees Hope Block and April Abeln joined Heartland officials at both facilities to present the items to residents and staff.

Heartland staff traveled more than 2,400 miles overall and committed about 60 hours to this project. What can't be measured is how much joy it brought to everyone involved.

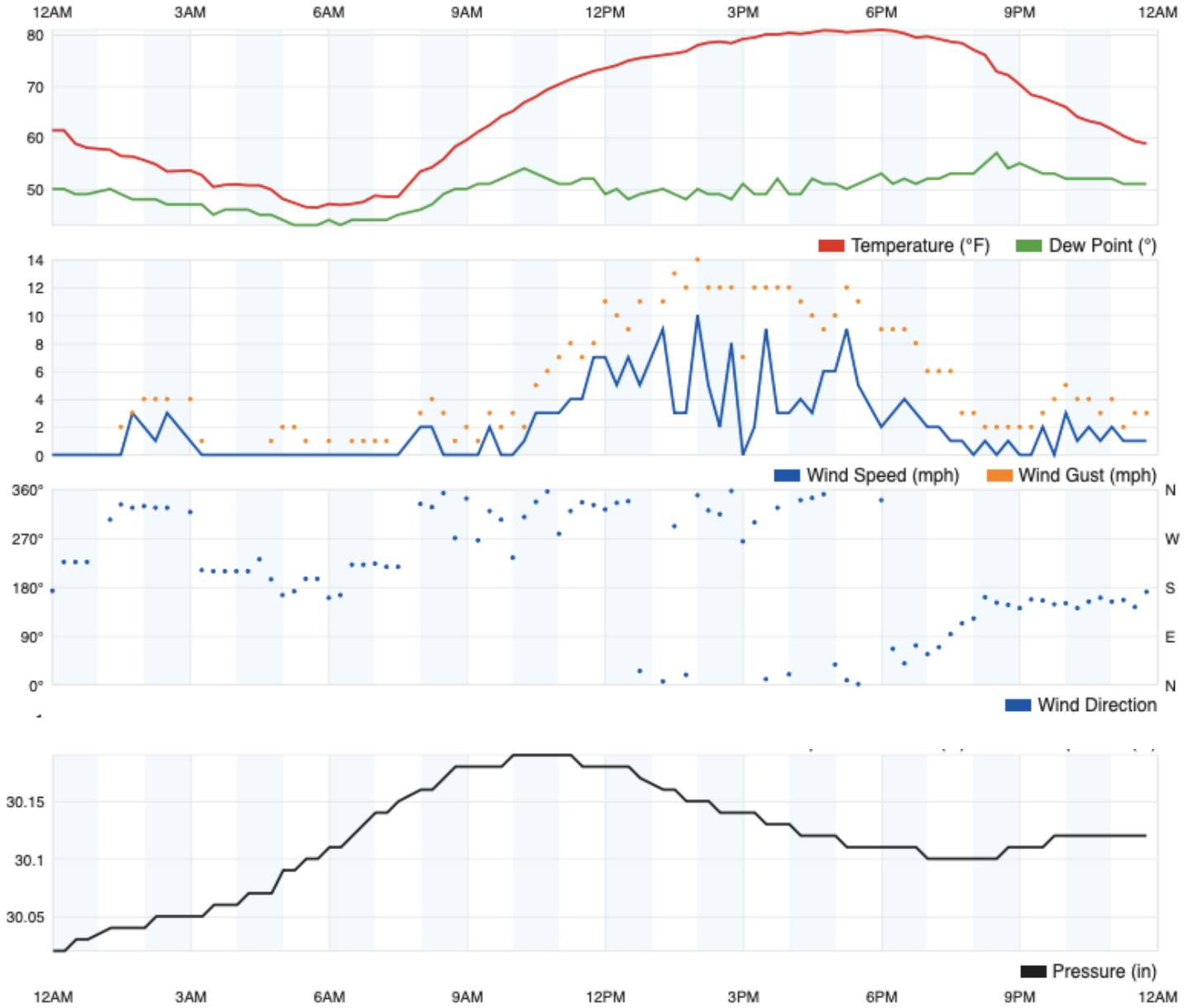


**Officials from Heartland and the city of Groton presented bird feeders plus seed to Rosewood Court as part of a public power community service project. Pictured standing from left to right: Rosewood Court employee Cindy, Groton Finance Officer Hope Block, Mayor Scott Hanlon, Rosewood resident Doris, Deputy Finance Officer April Abeln, Groton Assistant Finance Officer Kellie Locke, and Heartland Chief Financial Officer Mike Malone. Seated, left to right: Rosewood residents Rochelle, Beulah, Barb and Jean.** (Photo by Ann Hyland, Heartland Chief Communications Officer)

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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| Today   | Tonight   | Sunday  | Sunday Night   | Monday  |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms   | Slight Chance T-storms then Partly Cloudy   | Hot   | Mostly Clear   | Hot   |
| High: 91 °F   | Low: 65 °F  | High: 92 °F   | Low: 66 °F   | High: 91 °F   |

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
Updated: 8/14/2021 5:29 AM Central

## Heat and Humidity Returns

Today  
HI: 85 to 95°



Sunday  
HI: 86 to 96°



Monday  
HI: 86 to 98°



Tuesday  
HI: 88 to 100°



Most locations stay dry, but a few showers and t-storms are possible today mainly across central SD. Southerly breezes bring increased humidity.

High temperatures in the low to mid 90s along and west of the James Valley and mid to upper 80s across and east of the Prairie Coteau are anticipated today. These above average readings persist into the upcoming work-week too, along with increasingly muggy conditions. A few showers and storms can't be ruled out today across the area, but most stay dry through early next week.

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## Today in Weather History

August 14, 1898: A deadly, estimated F4 tornado moved southeast from 12 miles northwest of Clear Lake, passing 7 miles north of town and ending about 4 miles west of Gary. Deaths occurred on two farms. One man was killed when the kitchen of his farm house was torn off. Five members of one family were killed along with two labors on another farm as every building was swept away. Buildings suffered massive damage on eight farms. This tornado was one of the earliest, estimated F4 tornadoes on record for South Dakota.

August 14, 2008: Several severe thunderstorms developed along a cold front across parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Large hail, some flash flooding, and a couple of weak tornadoes occurred with these storms. An EF0 tornado touched down briefly at the Brown County Fairgrounds, blowing over several tents and awnings. Another EF0 tornado touched down briefly in an open field causing no damage north of Stephan in Hyde County.

August 14, 2009: A warm front brought severe thunderstorms with large hail up to the size of golf balls along with sixty mph winds to parts of north central and northeast South Dakota. Also, very heavy rain fell across western Brown County with 2 to 4 inches of rain reported. This heavy rain brought flash flooding conditions. Numerous county roads and area fields were overrun with flowing water. The water level on Richmond Lake rose nearly a foot the next day after the event from high inflows. This rapid rise in the lake level resulted in numerous boat and fishing docks being submerged. Several boats were also trapped under lift canopies due to the high water. There were reports of several boats breaking free of their mooring and floating toward the spillway.

1953: Hurricane Barbara hits North Carolina as a Category 2 hurricane. Damage from the storm was relatively minor, totaling around \$1.3 million (1953 USD). Most of it occurred in North Carolina and Virginia from crop damage. The hurricane left several injuries, some traffic accidents, as well as seven fatalities in the eastern United States; at least two were due to electrocution from downed power lines. Offshore Atlantic Canada, a small boat sunk, killing its crew of two.

1969: Hurricane Camille, a powerful, deadly, and destructive hurricane formed just west of the Cayman Islands on this day. It rapidly intensified, and by the time it reached western Cuba the next day, it was a Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Camille was spawned on August 5th by a tropical wave off the coast of Africa. The storm became a tropical disturbance four days later on the 9th and a tropical storm on the 14th with a 999-millibar pressure center and 55 mph surface winds.

1975: In London, England, a localized torrential downpour known as The Hampstead Storm, drops 6.72 inches of rain in 155 minutes at Hampstead Heath. One died in the storm. The water floods the Underground and forces sewer covers up.

1936 - Temperatures across much of eastern Kansas soared above 110 degrees. Kansas City MO hit an all-time record high of 113 degrees. It was one of sixteen consecutive days of 100 degree heat for Kansas City. During that summer there were a record 53 days of 100 degree heat, and during the three summer months Kansas City received just 1.12 inches of rain. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1987 - Slow moving thunderstorms deluged northern and western suburbs of Chicago IL with torrential rains. O'Hare Airport reported 9.35 inches in 18 hours, easily exceeding the previous 24 hour record of 6.24 inches. Flooding over a five day period resulted in 221 million dollars damage. It was Chicago's worst flash flood event, particularly for northern and western sections of the city. Kennedy Expressway became a footpath for thousands of travelers to O'Hare Airport as roads were closed. The heavy rains swelled the Des Plaines River above flood stage, and many persons had to be rescued from stalled vehicles on flooded roads. (13th- 14th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - Eighteen cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, and the water temperature at Lake Erie reached a record 80 degrees. Portland ME reported a record fourteen straight days of 80 degree weather. Milwaukee WI reported a record 34 days of 90 degree heat for the year. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms resulted in about fifty reports of severe weather in the northeastern U.S. One person was killed at Stockbridge MI when a tornado knocked a tree onto their camper. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



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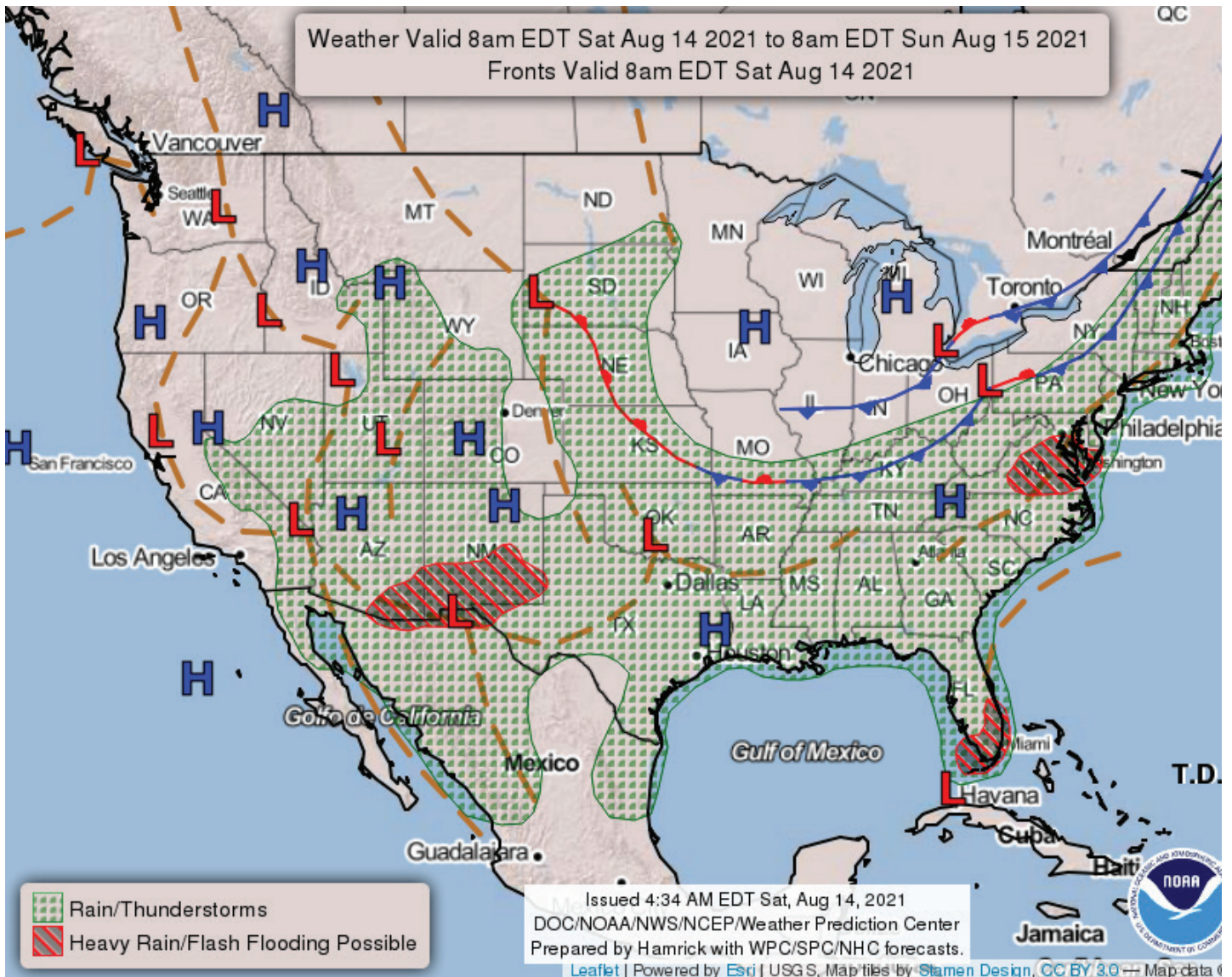
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 80.9 °F at 6:00 PM**  
**Low Temp: 46.4 °F at 5:45 AM**  
**Wind: 14 mph at 2:00 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 104° in 1935, 1952**  
**Record Low: 38° in 1968**  
**Average High: 83°F**  
**Average Low: 57°F**  
**Average Precip in Aug.: 0.94**  
**Precip to date in Aug.: 1.12**  
**Average Precip to date: 15.04**  
**Precip Year to Date: 8.39**  
**Sunset Tonight: 8:42 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:35 a.m.**



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## FATHER

Recognizing someone as "father" carries with it a very special significance. Immediately, and without doubt, the one who we call "father" is the one who is responsible for our being born. Without that one, the one we call father, we would not have been brought into existence.

Because a "father" is responsible for our existence, he then becomes responsible for our well-being. Whatever concerns us must ultimately concern him. Whether it is food or clothing, shelter or healthcare, protection or education - it is his responsibility to meet that need. It is a role that is not to be taken lightly or without careful thought and planning.

There is more, however, than the responsibility factor. There is the relationship factor. This includes acceptance and openness, honesty and trust, a willingness to hear that goes beyond listening to what is on the child's heart and in the child's mind. There must also be loyalty and love, faithfulness and friendliness, between father and child.

One without the other leaves children lacking.

In Psalm 89 David said to God, "You are my Father, my God, the Rock - my Savior." If an author were writing about David today he would probably say that "David led a charmed life." He would look at the times he escaped his enemies, faced death, struggled with depression, and knew what abandonment was all about. At times, he could hardly face God because of His sin, knew the extreme pain of guilt and shame.

David knew, however, that it he did not "live a charmed life." No. It was about having a Father who not only provided for and loved His child - but becoming his Savior.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, that You are our Father. We are humbled by Your love and care and especially our salvation. How blest we are! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 89:26 He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.'

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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  
10/29/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween) 5:30-7:00  
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

### Event draws attention to missing, murdered indigenous women

By WENDY PITLICK Black Hills Pioneer

STURGIS, S.D. (AP) — In the shadow of Bear Butte, members of Native American tribes from across the country gathered to offer prayers in their native language for missing and murdered indigenous women and their families, as well as for the protection of the bikers who gathered to raise awareness and funds with the Medicine Wheel Ride.

The ride, which drew more than 130 bikers to the base of Bear Butte for an escorted ride to Crazy Horse Memorial, was organized to raise funds and awareness to help Native American women and families who are victims of murder, sexual abuse, and abductions.

Women are sacred in the Native American culture, but according to statistics from the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women database, Native American women are sexually assaulted and murdered 10 times more than the national average, and homicide is the third leading cause of death for women ages 10-24 years old. It is the fifth leading cause of death for women who are 25-34 years old.

In South Dakota alone, according to information from the city of Sturgis, Native Americans make up 67% of all the missing person's cases in the state, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

All funds raised from the Medicine Wheel Ride were split between the Red Ribbon Skirt Society and the Winyan Wicayuonihan Oyanke (Where All Women are Honored) — both non-profit organizations in Rapid City. The Red Ribbon Skirt Society helps canvass communities and raise awareness when a missing person has been reported, and provides diapers, clothing and food for families who are left behind when a woman is missing or murdered.

The Winyan Wicayuonihan Oyanke organization is a healing center that provides housing for women who survive violence, sex trafficking and sexual assault, provides community education about teen dating violence, helps victims with legal advocate referrals, and provides transportation to medical appointments and schools.

The event started at Bear Butte State Park, where members of the MMIW and their affiliates lead a traditional Native American prayer and smudging ceremony that offered blessings for all who joined the ride, with special emphasis on the women. Sturgis Mayor Mark Carstensen read a proclamation from the city of Sturgis, designating the day as the Sturgis MMIW Medicine Wheel Ride day.

"The crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women has tragically impacted an incredible number of Native American families, every tribal community, and is a significant issue in urban populations throughout the state, with a significant concern around the Sturgis event," the proclamation states.

When kickstands went up at Bear Butte, a police escort lead the group through Sturgis and the Black Hills to Crazy Horse Memorial. Keynote speaker for the ceremony was Ruth Buffalo, the first Native American woman to be elected to the North Dakota Legislature. Buffalo helped pass Savannah's Act, federal legislation that gives tribal access to federal databases on missing persons and helps strengthen working relationships between federal, state and tribal law enforcement.

Other speakers included Lily Mendoza of the Cheyenne River Sioux Red Ribbon Skirt Society, Norma Rendon, from the Oglala Lakota with "Where All Women are Honored," and Deanna Shoup, from the Rosebud Sioux Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Health Board. Christi Ahl also presented a self defense demonstration.

For more information about the MMIW Medicine Wheel Ride and its mission, visit <https://www.medicinewheelride.com>.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

17-21-35-40-53, Mega Ball: 11, Megaplier: 2

(seventeen, twenty-one, thirty-five, forty, fifty-three; Mega Ball: eleven; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$225 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$258 million

## MyPillow CEO says aggressive poke led to attack claim

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — MyPillow chief executive Mike Lindell says he was aggressively poked by someone seeking a selfie in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, this week, which led him to say he was attacked.

Lindell, who hosted an election fraud symposium in the city this week, told the conservative talk show FlashPoint that he was approached by a man who wanted a photo on Wednesday night.

"He put his arm around and stuck his finger, it was so much pressure, I just knew if I did anything something more was coming," Lindell said, gesturing to his side. "He jammed it in where it was just piercing pain."

Lindell had told the crowd Thursday at the election fraud symposium that said he was still in pain and wanted everyone to know about the evil in the world, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

The Sioux Falls Police Department said it is investigating a report of an assault at a hotel near the symposium. Police spokesman Sam Clemens has declined to identify the victim, citing Marsy's Law, a state constitutional amendment that protects crime victims.

Lindell announced the symposium in July, saying he hoped hundreds of "cyber-forensics experts" would attend and back up his claims that voting machines were hacked to flip votes for former President Donald Trump to President Joe Biden in 2020.

Almost all of the legal challenges casting doubt on the outcome of the election have been dismissed or withdrawn and many claims of fraud debunked. State and federal election officials have said there's no evidence of widespread fraud.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said last month she suggested Lindell hold the event in her state.

She said that when she heard Lindell was looking for a place to hold the symposium, she told him: "Why don't you do that in South Dakota? We would love to host guests."

Noem did not attend the event. She acknowledged last month that Biden is the "duly elected president," but raised the possibility of election fraud by adding, "If there is fraud, we should know the facts."

## Governor says suspended Secretary of Corrections has retired

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday announced the retirement of a Cabinet secretary who she suspended amid an investigation into complaints of low employee morale and sexual harassment at the State Penitentiary.

Noem last month suspended Secretary of Corrections Mike Leidholt within hours of being briefed on a human resources review of an anonymous complaint that alleged supervising corrections officers at the State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls regularly sexually harassed their fellow employees. The governor has fired the warden, deputy warden and the director of a prison work program. She also hired a third party to review the prison system and indicated she intends to push for widespread changes.

"While it is now clear the issues at the Penitentiary were the responsibility of others, I believe new leadership is needed to address the ongoing challenges in our prison system," the governor said in a statement announcing Leidholt's retirement.

Leidholt was previously the Hughes County Sheriff and president of the South Dakota Sheriff's Association.

## South Dakota reports jump in virus cases in nursing homes

STIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials reported a jump in active COVID-19 infections Friday, with a high number coming from long-term care facilities.

The Department of Health reported 139 new infections, and 43 of those were in long-term care facilities, the Argus Leader reported. COVID-19 vaccines have allowed nursing homes nationwide to make dramatic progress since the dark days of the pandemic, but senior care facilities are still experiencing scattered outbreaks that are largely blamed on unvaccinated staff members.

In South Dakota, one death was reported Friday, from a woman 80 years old or older. The number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 remained at 76, but the number of COVID-19 patients on ventilators and in Intensive Care Units increased.

## Wildfire near Sturgis motorcycle rally 100% contained

STURGIS, S.D. (AP) — Firefighters have contained a wildfire which burned southwest of Sturgis.

The U.S. Forest Service says crews will continue to patrol and mop up following containment of the Kirk Hill fire. Smoke is expected to be present for the next several days.

The fire burned approximately 80 acres (32 hectares). No structures were lost in the fire.

Meanwhile, the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally was expected to attract hundreds of thousands of people to the region. No evacuations were ordered.

## Taliban approach capital's outskirts, attack northern city

By AHMAD SEIR, RAHIM FAIEZ and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban seized two more provinces on Saturday and approached the outskirts of Afghanistan's capital while also launching a multi-pronged assault on a major northern city defended by former warlords, Afghan officials said.

The insurgents have captured much of northern, western and southern Afghanistan in a breakneck offensive less than three weeks before the United States is set to withdraw its last troops, raising fears of a full militant takeover or another Afghan civil war.

The Taliban captured all of Logar province, just south of the capital, Kabul, and detained local officials, said Hoda Ahmadi, a lawmaker from the province. She said the Taliban have reached the Char Asyab district, just 11 kilometers (7 miles) south of Kabul.

The insurgents also captured the capital of Paktika, bordering Pakistan, according to Khalid Asad, a lawmaker from the province. He said fighting broke out in Sharana early Saturday but ended after local elders intervened to negotiate a pullout. He said the governor and other officials surrendered and were on their way to Kabul.

The Taliban meanwhile attacked the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif from several directions, setting off heavy fighting on its outskirts, according to Munir Ahmad Farhad, a spokesman for the provincial governor. There was no immediate word on casualties.

The Taliban have made major advances in recent days, including capturing Herat and Kandahar, the country's second- and third-largest cities. They now control 19 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, leaving the Western-backed government in control of a smattering of provinces in the center and east, as well as Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani delivered a televised speech on Saturday, his first public appearance since the recent Taliban gains, in which he vowed not to give up the "achievements" of the 20 years since the U.S. toppled the Taliban following the 9/11 attacks.

The U.S. has continued holding peace talks between the government and the Taliban in Qatar this week, and the international community has warned that a Taliban government brought about by force will not be accepted. But the insurgents would appear to have little interest in making concessions as they rack up victories on the battlefield.



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"We have started consultations, inside the government with elders and political leaders, representatives of different levels of the community as well as our international allies," Ghani said. "Soon the results will be shared with you," he added, without elaborating further.

The president had flown to Mazar-e-Sharif on Wednesday to rally the city's defenses, meeting with several militia commanders, including Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ata Mohammad Noor, who command thousands of fighters.

They remain allied with the government, but during previous rounds of fighting in Afghanistan, warlords have been known to switch sides for their own survival. Ismail Khan, a powerful former warlord who had tried to defend Herat, was captured by the Taliban when the insurgents seized the western city after two weeks of heavy fighting.

Residents of Mazar-e-Sharif expressed fear about the security breakdown.

"The situation is dangerous outside of the city and inside the city," Mohibullah Khan said, adding that many residents are also struggling economically.

"The security situation in the city is getting worse," said Kawa Basharat. "I want peace and stability. The fighting should be stopped."

The withdrawal of foreign forces and the swift retreat of Afghanistan's own troops — despite hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. aid over the years — has raised fears the Taliban could return to power or the country could be shattered by factional fighting, as it was after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

The first Marines from a contingent of 3,000 arrived on Friday to help partially evacuate the U.S. Embassy. The rest are set to arrive by Sunday, and their deployment has raised questions about whether the administration will meet its Aug. 31 withdrawal deadline.

The U.S. Air Force has carried out several airstrikes to aid its Afghan allies on the ground but they appear to have done little to stem the Taliban's advance. A B-52 bomber and other warplanes traversed the country's airspace Saturday, flight-tracking data showed.

The Taliban meanwhile released a video announcing the takeover of the main radio station in the southern city of Kandahar, which fell to the insurgents earlier this week, renaming it the Voice of Sharia, or Islamic law.

In the video, an unnamed insurgent said all employees were present and would broadcast news, political analysis and recitations of the Quran, the Islamic holy book. It appears the station will no longer play music.

It was not clear if the Taliban had purged the previous employees or allowed them to return to work. Most residents of Kandahar sport the traditional dress favored by the Taliban. The man in the video congratulated the people of Kandahar on the Taliban's victory.

The Taliban have used mobile radio stations over the years, but have not operated a station inside a major city since they ruled the country from 1996-2001. At that time, they also ran a station called Voice of Sharia out of Kandahar, the birthplace of the militant group. Music was banned.

The U.S. invaded shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks, which al-Qaida planned and carried out while being sheltered by Taliban. After rapidly ousting the Taliban, the U.S. shifted toward nation-building, hoping to create a modern Afghan state after decades of war and unrest.

Earlier this year, President Joe Biden announced a timeline for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops by the end of August, pledging to end America's longest war. His predecessor, President Donald Trump, had reached an agreement with the Taliban to pave the way for a U.S. pullout.

Biden's announcement set the latest offensive in motion. The Taliban, who have long controlled large parts of the Afghan countryside, moved quickly to seize provincial capitals, border crossings and other key infrastructure.

Tens of thousands of Afghans have fled their homes, with many fearing a return to the Taliban's oppressive rule. The group had previously governed Afghanistan under a harsh version of Islamic law in which women were largely confined to the home.

## Lithuanian migrant crisis enters new phase as influx ceases

By LIUDAS DAPKUS and DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — An influx of migrants from Iraq and elsewhere into Lithuania allegedly abetted by neighboring Belarus appears to have stopped, but with a pile of asylum applications to process and local communities angry about nearby migrant camps, the Lithuanian government faces an unfamiliar challenge.

The U.N. refugee agency's representative for the Baltic region said Friday that while the "emergency phase" of the mass arrivals seems to be over, Lithuania must now focus on the wellbeing of the people held in immigration detention centers and on assessing their claims for international protection.

So far this year, more than 4,000 asylum-seekers from 40 countries, most of them Iraqi, have illegally crossed from Belarus into Lithuania. That's 50 times more than during all of 2020.

UNHCR Representative Henrik M. Nordentoft said the influx was a "completely unique situation" for Lithuania, a European Union member with a population just under 3 million.

"So, in a way, there were no standby capacities to quickly mobilize," Nordentoft told The Associated Press, nonetheless voicing confidence that Lithuanian authorities could handle the situation. "I sense a drive, a declaration, a will."

"It is a bit of a race against time in terms of (the coming) winter and the cold months," he said.

Interior Minister Agne Bilotaite said Friday that some 1,500 asylum requests are being processed, and a few people have accepted voluntary repatriation to their home countries. Lithuania built temporary tent camps to house migrants and also is erecting a border fence.

Lithuania, like fellow EU members Latvia, Estonia and Poland, sees the entrance of so many migrants as resulting from retaliation by Belarus' authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko. The EU imposed increased sanctions after Belarus forced a Lithuania-bound passenger plane to land in Minsk in May and authorities arrested a dissident Belarusian journalist on board.

The recent border-crossers in Lithuania "include certain people (who) may have more of a migrant profile than a refugee profile," Nordentoft said.

Since Lukashenko's reelection to a sixth term in an August 2020 vote that the West had denounced as rigged, the longtime leader has cracked down on opposition protests in his country. Many Belarusians have sought shelter abroad; opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya fled to Lithuania days after the dispute presidential election.

Poland says its border is also under control following reports of Iraqis and Afghans seeking to enter from Belarus. Border guards have detained nearly 900 people this year trying to slip in from the neighboring country, according to Polish media – up from 122 last year.

Associated Press interviews with people in Lithuania's immigration camps over several weeks highlight their diverse backgrounds and reasons for attempting to enter the EU.

Juel Fomejuel came from Cameroon, where conflict has killed thousands and displaced at least 700,000 people. "I just pray that EU give me a protection," he told AP, saying that going back home "is like going back inside the fire."

Tamar Heidar, a 22-year-old Iraqi, said he sought a better life in the EU by transiting through Belarus. "Belarus not using me, I don't not care about Belarus," he said. "All these people here, they are doing this to get a better life. It's not because Belarus is using me. I'm using Belarus."

The countries bordering Belarus have denounced the crossings as a "hybrid war," a source of concern for the UNHCR's Nordentoft.

"Hybrid war involves the thoughts of soldiers, weapons," he said. "It was very important for the population not to see the persons (as) threats, but also in a way as victims."

Nevertheless, tensions have increased in recent weeks among communities near migrant camps, resulting in sometimes violent protests. Groups blocked roads for delivery vehicles and were removed after clashes with riot police. Residents of areas where camps were planned held demonstrations outside the Lithuanian government building in Vilnius and in several local municipalities.

On Wednesday evening, the AP followed a small group of villagers from Rudninkai near the border as they

patrolled the streets in high visibility jackets in search of escaped camp residents. Earlier, 20 migrants who had fled were detained by police the same night. Another 28 escaped another camp, police said Friday.

"Two weeks ago, Rudninkai was very quiet. But when a huge amount of migrants arrived, this calm was disturbed. These people have a completely different culture," local resident Kristina Slovenska said. "We are worried about our safety."

## Drought threatens Hungarian lake with environmental crisis

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

GARDONY, Hungary (AP) — Lake Velence, a shallow, freshwater lake in central Hungary, is a haven for over 100 types of birds, dozens of species of fish and throngs of tourists who come to bathe in its waters for relief from the hot summers.

But many of the lake's visitors, both animal and human, have disappeared as extreme heat has brought the water to dangerously low levels, something activists and environmental experts say threatens the country's third largest natural lake with an economic and ecological crisis.

They say climate change and insufficient infrastructure are colliding, with devastating effect. The lake has lost nearly half of its water in the past two years as hot, dry summers have led to accelerating evaporation and deteriorating water quality.

"We are talking about years of rainfall deficit, drought and a continuous water shortage," said environmental management engineer and activist Tibor Horanyi. "For years we've seen what role global warming is playing in our lives, and it's clearly connected to this low water level."

The optimal water level for Lake Velence (pronounced 'VEH-len-tseh) in August is 150 centimeters (5 feet), according to the local water authority.

But on Thursday, the water level stood at 80 centimeters (2 feet 7 inches), an amount of water that Horanyi called "critical."

Hot, dry weather can result in as much as 1 centimeter per day evaporating from Lake Velence, according to official measurements. Those decreased levels have meant water temperatures are rising faster, causing diminished oxygen content, increased proliferation of algae and reduced water quality.

Following a long, cold spring, Hungary experienced its third hottest June since 1901 and then the hottest July on record, according to the national meteorological service.

The extreme heat caused the water temperature in the lake to rise by 10 degrees Celsius (18 F) within a week in June, Horanyi said, resulting in the death of more than four tonnes (8,800 pounds) of fish that were then removed by volunteers.

Otto Balogh, a local fisherman, told The Associated Press that the conditions in the water were clearly visible, and had impacted his catch.

"There are no fish. In the last three weekends that I've come here, this is the first time I caught anything," Balogh said.

Shallow marshlands on the lake's western end have dried up completely, and many of the birds normally seen in the lake's bird sanctuary have disappeared.

"There aren't any water birds now. They've gone somewhere else to find food, I suppose," Balogh said.

In July, the local public health department ordered the closure of four beaches on Lake Velence, citing water quality samples that did not meet required standards.

While most of the beaches have since reopened, few bathers venture in the water, which due to the low levels scarcely reaches their waists even if they wade more than 100 meters (yards) out.

The low water levels, dying fish and closed beaches have led to a dramatic decrease in tourism at local restaurants, bars and hotels, said Peter Vas, a local resident and activist, threatening further hardship for a local economy already hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"A lot of money has been invested here by traders, restaurateurs and holidaymakers to make it a great place to enjoy themselves," Vas said. "This lake has to be saved."

Activists have urged Hungary's government to take action to protect the lake from further deterioration,



and to provide the resources necessary to bring the water back to minimum levels.

But continuing hot weather and infrastructural deficiencies have prevented a quick fix to the crisis.

Two reservoirs were built in the 1970s to provide water to the lake if levels dropped too low. But a spokesperson for the national water authority said that drought and extreme heat had caused low water levels in those reservoirs as well, leading to high algae content which makes the water unsuitable for remedying the lake's water deficit.

Zoltan Tessely, the government commissioner responsible for the development of Lake Velence, told local television station Fehervar TV last week that he had submitted a proposal to the government for replenishing the water in the lake — but that the government had rejected the \$133 million price tag, saying it needed the funds to support economic recovery after the pandemic.

Vas, the local activist, acknowledged that the lake has dried out before, noting that in 1863 the Hungarian hussars trained with their horses in the lake bed.

"But now it's the 21st century," he said. "We must have the ability to save this natural protected area."

With no immediate solution in sight and only warm, dry weather in the forecast, only political will can avert an environmental disaster at Lake Velence, he said.

## Back of the line: Charity only goes so far in world vaccines

By MARIA CHENG and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — An international system to share coronavirus vaccines was supposed to guarantee that low and middle-income countries could get doses without being last in line and at the mercy of unreliable donations.

It hasn't worked out that way. In late June alone, the initiative known as COVAX sent some 530,000 doses to Britain — more than double the amount sent that month to the entire continent of Africa.

Under COVAX, countries were supposed to give money so vaccines could be set aside, both as donations to poor countries and as an insurance policy for richer ones to buy doses if theirs fell through. Some rich countries, including those in the European Union, calculated that they had more than enough doses available through bilateral deals and ceded their allocated COVAX doses to poorer countries.

But others, including Britain, tapped into the meager supply of COVAX doses themselves, despite being among the countries that had reserved most of the world's available vaccines. In the meantime, billions of people in poor countries have yet to receive a single dose.

The result is that poorer countries have landed in exactly the predicament COVAX was supposed to avoid: dependent on the whims and politics of rich countries for donations, just as they have been so often in the past. And in many cases, rich countries don't want to donate in significant amounts before they finish vaccinating all their citizens who could possibly want a dose, a process that is still playing out.

"If we had tried to withhold vaccines from parts of the world, could we have made it any worse than it is today?" asked Dr. Bruce Aylward, a senior advisor at the World Health Organization, during a public session on vaccine equity.

Other wealthy nations that recently received paid doses through COVAX include Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, all of which have relatively high immunization rates and other means of acquiring vaccines. Qatar has promised to donate 1.4 million doses of vaccines and already shipped out more than the 74,000 doses it received from COVAX.

The U.S. never got any doses through COVAX, although Canada, Australia and New Zealand did. Canada got so much criticism for taking COVAX shipments that it said it would not request additional ones.

In the meantime, Venezuela has yet to receive any of its doses allocated by COVAX. Haiti has received less than half of what it was allocated, Syria about a 10th. In some cases, officials say, doses weren't sent because countries didn't have a plan to distribute them.

British officials confirmed the U.K. received about 539,000 vaccine doses in late June and that it has options to buy another 27 million shots through COVAX.

"The government is a strong champion of COVAX," the U.K. said, describing the initiative as a mechanism

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for all countries to obtain vaccines, not just those in need of donations. It declined to explain why it chose to receive those doses despite private deals that have reserved eight injections for every U.K. resident.

Brook Baker, a Northwestern University law professor who specializes in access to medicines, said it was unconscionable that rich countries would dip into COVAX vaccine supplies when more than 90 developing countries had no access. COVAX's biggest supplier, the Serum Institute of India, stopped sharing vaccines in April to deal with a surge of cases on the subcontinent.

Although the number of vaccines being bought by rich countries like Britain through COVAX is relatively small, the extremely limited global supply means those purchases result in fewer shots for poor countries. So far, the initiative has delivered less than 10% of the doses it promised.

COVAX is run by the World Health Organization, the vaccine alliance Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, a group launched in 2017 to develop vaccines to stop outbreaks. The program is now trying to regain credibility by getting rich countries to distribute their donated vaccines through its own system, Baker said. But even this effort is not entirely successful because some countries are making their own deals to curry favorable publicity and political clout.

"Rich countries are trying to garner geopolitical benefits from bilateral dose-sharing," Baker noted.

So far, with the exception of China, donations are coming in tiny fractions of what was pledged, an Associated Press tally of vaccines promised and delivered has found.

Dr. Christian Happi, an infectious diseases expert at Nigeria's Redeemer's University, said donations from rich countries are both insufficient and unreliable, especially as they have not only taken most of the world's supplies but are moving on to vaccinate children and considering administering booster shots.

Happi called on Africa, where 1.5 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, to increase its own vaccine manufacturing rather than rely on COVAX.

"We cannot just wait for them to come up with a solution," he said.

COVAX is well aware of the problem. During its last board meeting in late June, health officials conceded they had failed to achieve equitable distribution. But they still decided against blocking donor countries from buying up supplies themselves.

At a subsequent meeting with partners, Gavi CEO Dr. Seth Berkley said COVAX intended to honor the agreements it had made with rich countries but would ask them in the future to "adjust" their allocated doses to request fewer vaccines, according to a meeting participant who spoke about the confidential call on condition of anonymity.

Among the reasons Berkley cited for Gavi's reluctance to break or renegotiate contracts signed with rich countries was the potential risk to its balance sheet. In the last year, Britain alone has given more than \$860 million to COVAX.

Meeting notes from June show that Gavi revised COVAX's initial plan to split vaccines evenly between rich and poor countries and proposed that poor countries would receive about 75% of COVID-19 doses in the future. Without rich countries' involvement in COVAX, Gavi said "it would be difficult to secure deals with some manufacturers."

In response to an AP request for comment, Gavi said the initiative is aiming to deliver more than 2 billion doses by the beginning of 2022 and described COVAX as "an unprecedented global effort."

"The vast majority of the COVAX supply will go to low- and middle-income countries," Gavi said in an email about its latest supply forecast. For many countries, it said, "COVAX is the main, if not the only source of COVID-19 vaccine supply."

Spain's donation to four countries in Latin America – its first via COVAX – reflects how even rich countries with a lot of vaccines are donating a minimum. Spain, which has injected 57 million doses into its own residents, shipped 654,000 the first week in August. The delivery totals 3% of the 22.5 million doses Spain has promised, eventually, to COVAX.

Gavi said COVAX now has enough money and pledged donations to one day cover 30% of the population of the world's poorest countries. But it has made big promises before.

In January, COVAX said it had "secured volumes" totaling 640 million doses to deliver by July 2021, all of them under signed agreements, not donations. But by last month, COVAX had only shipped 210 million

doses, 40% of which were donated.

With COVAX sidelined, vaccine donations have become something of a political contest. China has already exported 770 million doses and last week announced its own goal of sending 2 billion doses to the rest of the world by the end of the year — exactly the same amount as COVAX's initial plan.

That's far ahead of the rest of the world, according to the AP tally of doses. Britain has delivered just 4.7 million, far short of the 30 million pledged, and the European Union has given 7.1 million and another 55 million through COVAX contracts.

"If the donors are not stepping forward, the people who continue to die are our people," Strive Masiyiwa, the African Union special envoy on COVID-19 vaccine procurement, said.

The United States has so far delivered 111 million doses, less than half of what was promised. Several U.S. lawmakers from both parties argued Wednesday that the government should seize the opportunity for diplomacy by more aggressively seeking credit for the doses it ships overseas.

"I think we should make vaccines available throughout the Middle East, but I also think we should have the American flag on every vial," said Rep. Juan Vargas, a Democrat from California, at a hearing on the state of the pandemic in the Middle East.

Even the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, recently decried Europe's lagging in donations in geopolitical terms as a loss to China. U.S. President Joe Biden, in announcing the U.S. donations that have finally come through, similarly described the doses as a way to counter "Russia and China influencing the world with vaccines." The White House said the United States has donated more than 110 million vaccine doses, some via COVAX.

In addition to its planned vaccine exports, China announced plans to donate \$100 million to COVAX to buy more doses for developing countries.

"The key to strengthening vaccine cooperation and building the Great Wall of immunization is to ensure equitable access," said Wang Xiaolong of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, speaking Friday after China hosted an online forum on fair vaccine distribution.

The COVAX board has agreed to go back to its basic assumptions about vaccinating the world before the end of the year. High on its list: "An updated definition of fair and equitable access."

## The Latest: Australia state reports record daily infections

By The Associated Press undefined

SYDNEY — Australia's most populous state reported a daily record 466 new locally acquired COVID-19 infections on Saturday and increased fines for breaches of pandemic restrictions.

The previous record tally in New South Wales, home to Sydney, was 390 reported on Friday.

Four people had died overnight, bringing the death toll in New South Wales from an outbreak of the delta variant first detected in Sydney in mid-June to 42.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said fines for breaking pandemic rules such as breaching quarantine orders had been increased from 1,000 Australian dollars (\$737) to AU\$5,000 (\$3,685).

Sydney residents will be restricted to within 5 kilometers (3 miles) of home, half the distance they were previously allowed.

The government later announced that all of New South Wales would be locked down from 5 p.m. until Aug. 22.

Deputy Premier John Barilaro tweeted that the stay-at-home orders were to minimize movement and protect regional communities from the evolving COVID-19 situation in Sydney.

Berejiklian said a positive note was that half the New South Wales population older than 16 had at least one vaccine dose.

"We know that the lockdown, coupled with a strong, targeted vaccination program, is what is going to get us out of this dire situation," Berejiklian said.

Police supported by the military will crack down on Sydney residents who breach stay-at-home orders



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from Sunday night.

Sydney has been in lockdown since June 26, 10 days after the first delta case was detected.

## MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- More U.S. cities requiring proof of vaccination to go places
- Biden admin backs Texas, Florida districts on mask mandates
- Canada to require those traveling by air and train to be vaccinated

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

## HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

**MONTGOMERY, Ala.** — Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on Friday issued a state of emergency as state hospitals face a surge in COVID-19 cases, an order that came the same day the state tied a record low for available intensive care unit beds.

Ivey issued a limited state of emergency aimed at giving medical providers flexibility on staffing and capacity decisions and easier shipment of emergency equipment and supplies. The Republican governor stressed she would not be issuing any closure orders or mask mandates.

"I want to be abundantly clear: there will be absolutely no statewide mandates, closures or the like. This state of emergency is strategically targeted at removing bureaucracy and cutting red tape wherever we can to allow our doctors, nurses and hospital staff to treat patients that come through their doors," Ivey said in a statement.

The order came as medical providers described a "tidal wave" of COVID-19 cases that is putting severe stress on Alabama hospitals. The state on Friday tied the record low for available intensive care unit beds with just 39 vacant beds statewide, said Dr. Don Williamson, the former state health officer who now heads the Alabama Hospital Association.

"The system is slowly becoming overwhelmed," Williamson said.

Of the state's 1,567 intensive care unit beds, 689 are filled with COVID-19 patients and just 39 are empty.

**HONOLULU** — A new wave of the coronavirus pandemic has Hawaii in "crisis" mode, with the state recording its highest single bump in cases and hospitals putting together overflow plans, Gov. David Ige said.

Nearly 1,170 new infections were reported Friday, he said at a news conference. That includes a small number of cases from previous days that were delayed because of a technical glitch, but still represents the largest single increase since the start of the pandemic.

"Friday the 13th has never been so frightening. It is real and it is terrifying," Ige said. "And tragically, it's preventable."

The vast majority of new cases are among unvaccinated people, officials said.

"Our behavior can save us," Ige said in urging people to get vaccinated and avoid gatherings. "The actions we take each and every day can make a difference in the battle against COVID."

Hawaii saw an average of 729 new cases over the past three days, Ige said. It has a population of nearly 1.5 million people. The seven-day state positivity rate is now 7.4%.

Ige said hospitals filling up and preparing for things to get worse.

"They are treating younger and younger people," the governor said. "Yesterday, tragically, we reported a death of a man in his 30s."

**PORTLAND, Ore.** -- Oregon's governor says she will deploy up to 1,500 National Guard troops to hospitals around the state to support healthcare workers as the COVID-19 surges amid the rapid spread of the Delta variant.

Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, says starting Aug. 20 she will send an initial 500 Guard members to serve as equipment runners in hospitals and help with COVID-19 testing, among other things.

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There are 733 people hospitalized with the virus in Oregon, including 185 in intensive care units. Hospitals have warned they are near capacity as the state endures a fourth wave of the outbreak.

**SALT LAKE CITY** -- Coronavirus patients are filling Utah hospitals beyond capacity.

Officials with the state's largest health care system said Friday that intensive care units are at 102% capacity.

Intermountain Healthcare doctors say about 90% of the hospitalized coronavirus patients are not vaccinated.

Infectious disease physicians say the surge driven by the highly contagious delta variant is especially concerning as the new school year begins without a mask mandate for children who cannot yet be vaccinated. Officials worry about school outbreaks that could spread to kids' families. The latest surge has also taken a heavy toll on healthcare workers' morale.

**NASHVILLE** — The Tennessee governor's office is pushing back on COVID-19 vaccine misinformation that goes as far as claiming cows are being vaccinated to inoculate unwitting people who eat meat.

The confusion over an assortment of outlandish claims illustrates the hurdles that face a state in the bottom 10 for vaccination rates amid a virus resurgence stretching hospitals thin.

In an email Thursday to lawmakers, a top deputy of Republican Gov. Bill Lee debunked "several conspiracy theories" about a recent executive order. The email says some components that are being most frequently misinterpreted were included in previous executive orders during the pandemic. Lee's office said lawmakers seeking information for constituents and constituents themselves have reached out about the claims.

The push to debunk shows how prevalently misinformation is swirling among unvaccinated circles, even as hospitals of all sizes have begun running out of staffed beds. Vanderbilt University Medical Center said its adult hospital and emergency department are "completely full," as it is limiting elective procedures and declining transfer requests from many hospitals. More than 90% of COVID-19 hospitalizations there are unvaccinated people, while vaccinated patients are also severely immunocompromised, the hospital said.

The rumors deemed "FALSE" in the governor's office email are that his executive order creates "quarantine camps"; that the National Guard will round up unvaccinated people and take them to locations to be quarantined or vaccinated, or forcibly vaccinate them in their homes; that the executive order lays the groundwork for permanent lockdowns; and that COVID-19 vaccines are being given to livestock to vaccinate people through meat consumption.

**HONOLULU** — Two visitors from U.S. mainland were arrested for allegedly using fake vaccine cards to travel to Hawaii.

Officials with the Hawaii attorney general's office arrested the visitors at Honolulu's international airport, a spokesman for the agency said in a statement.

Investigators said the two violated state rules requiring travelers to produce either a negative coronavirus test or proof of vaccination to avoid quarantine upon entering the state.

Violating the state's COVID-19 mandates, including falsifying a vaccination card, is a misdemeanor that can result in a fine of up to \$5,000, up to a year in prison or both.

The agency said this is the first time it has arrested someone for allegedly falsifying a vaccination card.

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** — A South Carolina health system is rescheduling surgeries and reassigning nurses after two of its hospitals topped 100% capacity as the delta variant spurred a new wave of coronavirus cases in the state.

Tidelands Health says it's also opening two temporary clinics to treat patients with COVID-19-like symptoms as a way to bring down emergency department volumes.

Elsewhere in the state, hospitals are limiting visitors and entire high school football teams are being quarantined as schools newly reopened for the fall semester grapple with outbreaks.

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In Pickens County, school board members called an emergency session Friday after 534 students and 28 staff members were quarantined two weeks into the school year. Kershaw County School District, which also began classes last week, quarantined 701 of its 11,033 students by Friday.

Coronavirus cases are soaring toward rates not seen since the height of the pandemic last winter, before vaccines became widely available. On Friday, health officials confirmed 3,585 new cases and 15 deaths, and total daily case counts have risen above 2,000 for the last 12 days.

PULLMAN, Wash. — Washington State University says students will soon no longer be able to cite a “personal or philosophical” exemption to the school’s requirement that all who attend get a COVID-19 vaccine.

The university says those exemptions would be nixed once the Food and Drug Administration grants full approval to vaccines now allowed under an emergency authorization.

It wasn’t immediately clear what effect the school’s new policy would have on football coach Nick Rolovich, who has opted not to get a vaccine. “Discussions also are underway about changes to the faculty and staff vaccination policy,” the university said.

The more strict vaccine requirements are being implemented because of the delta variant of the coronavirus, which has caused spikes in cases and hospitalizations throughout Washington state. Classes begin at WSU on Aug. 23.

## Secretive Israel-UAE oil deal endangers prized Eilat corals

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

EILAT, Israel (AP) — The Red Sea reefs off the Israeli resort of Eilat host some of the greatest coral diversity on the planet.

A symphony in splendid technicolor, the reefs are among the world’s most resilient coral colonies against warming seas. They have also become an unlikely battleground, caught between Israeli diplomatic and business interests, and ecological groups that fear this natural treasure could be in danger.

A clandestine oil deal struck last year as part of the historic agreement establishing formal diplomatic ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates is turning Eilat into a waypoint for Emirati oil headed for Western markets.

Initially hailed as a move that could cement fledgling diplomatic ties and further Israel’s energy ambitions, the deal is now in question after Israel’s new government opened a review. The decision has upset investors and risks a diplomatic spat with Israel’s Gulf allies.

The UAE and Israel, which normalized relations last year as part of the U.S.-brokered “Abraham Accords,” have since signed over \$830 million in trade deals and inked numerous trade and cooperation agreements.

But the deal between the Europe-Asia Pipeline Company, an Israeli government-owned corporation, and MED-RED Land Bridge, a joint Israel-Emirati venture, remains a secret.

Senior officials in former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government — including his former energy, foreign and environment ministers — said they didn’t know about the deal until it was announced last September, after the accords were signed at the White House.

The pipeline company, known as EAPC, was founded in the 1960s to bring Iranian oil to Israel when the countries had friendly relations. Its operations are shrouded in secrecy, ostensibly for security reasons.

Israeli environmental groups have asked the country’s Supreme Court to halt oil shipments, citing EAPC’s questionable safety record and the risk posed by parking supertankers alongside Eilat’s fragile coral ecosystems.

As for an oil spill, it’s “not a question of if it will happen, but when it will happen,” said Assaf Zvuloni, a Nature and Parks Authority ecologist in Eilat. Even a small rupture or human error would have disastrous consequences, he said.

Israel suffered its worst ecological disaster in February, when a spill in the eastern Mediterranean coated virtually all of its 270-kilometer (170-mile) coastline with oil. The petitioners — three Israeli environmental groups — argued that incident would “be dwarfed alongside a massive oil spill” off Eilat.



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Israel long lacked natural resources. But that began to change after the 2009 discovery of natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea and Israel's first exports.

The deal with the UAE would expand this fledgling energy sector, with oil shipped across Israel in a pipeline to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon and on to European markets.

Yona Fogel, executive of one of the Israeli partners in the project, told public broadcaster Kan in June that the UAE deal "will produce for EAPC earnings of hundreds (of millions) and perhaps billions of dollars" without "raising the risk to the environment whatsoever."

Ksenia Svetlova, an ex-lawmaker and director of Mideast relations with the Mitvim Institute, an Israeli think tank, said the project is especially appealing because it provides an alternative to the Suez Canal. The canal, the main waterway for Gulf exports to the West, was paralyzed early this year when a massive tanker ran aground there.

The Emiratis are gaining "a cheaper, alternative route, something that they can use in case they need to divert some of the tankers to this direction," she said.

But opponents say the potential cost is irreversible damage to a natural wonder.

The EAPC terminal dominates a stretch of Eilat shoreline a kilometer (half mile) north of Israel's Coral Beach Nature Reserve. Its cranes and pipes jut into the Red Sea's aquamarine and navy blue waters. The air reeks of petroleum.

For now, multitudes of corals still bloom on neighboring reefs, attracting fish in kaleidoscopic abundance.

A senior government official said Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office asked the Supreme Court for additional time to respond to the environmentalists' challenge. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

Israel's new environment minister has pledged to scrap the pipeline altogether and her ministry has frozen the company's planned expansion of operations, pending a government decision.

"The Gulf of Eilat is in real danger because of the Med-Red pipeline, and the state of Israel doesn't need to be the oil bridge for other countries," Tamar Zandberg said upon taking office in June. Her office declined interview requests.

No less important is a future spill's impact on tourism, Eilat's lifeblood. Meir Yitzhak Halevi, a freshman lawmaker who was Eilat's mayor from 2003 until June, said he was left in the dark about EAPC's operations and called for complete transparency.

An ecological disaster would also likely impact the ecosystems of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, all of which share the gulf's waters.

"We have a real potential loss to humanity and to global biodiversity," said Gidon Bromberg, head of the cross-border EcoPeace environmental group.

EAPC dismissed environmental concerns as unfounded, claimed "the inherent danger in the arrival of tankers is zero" and contended that hundreds of tankers docked at the adjacent Jordanian port of Aqaba in the past decade.

The company refused interviews, as did Emirati officials. But Hebrew daily Israel Hayom recently quoted unnamed Emirati officials as saying canceling the deal "is definitely a violation" of diplomatic agreements and could damage relations.

Meanwhile, EAPC has confirmed it has initiated operations. At least eight oil tankers moored in Eilat in 2021, up from an average of one every five years, according to the court petition, which contends the agreement could bring over 100 oil vessels each year.

EAPC has had a poor safety record. A 2014 pipeline rupture spilled millions of gallons of crude oil in a desert nature reserve. In the 1970s, a series of spills nearly eradicated Eilat's coral reefs.

Yossi Loya, a marine biology professor at Tel Aviv University, said the reefs managed to recover over the past decade — a rare exception to the deterioration of reefs worldwide.

"This is one of the diamonds in the crown, and therefore it's very important to protect them," he said.

## **EXPLAINER: Western water projects in infrastructure deal**

SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Included in the sweeping \$1 trillion infrastructure bill approved by the Senate is funding for Western water projects that farmers, water providers and environmentalists say are badly needed across the parched region.

The Senate voted this week in favor of the legislation that seeks to rebuild U.S. roads and highways, improve broadband internet access and modernize water pipes and public works systems. The bill's future in the House is uncertain.

The federal funding would come as the West bakes under a decadeslong drought that is straining water supplies.

A look at some ways the \$8.3 billion for water projects would help bring relief in coming years.

### **WATER STORAGE**

The plan would provide \$1.15 billion for improving water storage and transport infrastructure such as dams and canals. Groundwater storage projects, which replenish underground aquifers that aren't vulnerable to evaporation, would also get funding. Western states have for years over-pumped groundwater from wells during dry years, even causing land to sink in parts of California.

"California has to do more to store and otherwise stretch the use of water in wet years in order to have enough to sustain through the dry years," said California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat whose office helped get water provisions in the bill.

### **WATER RECYCLING**

To help stretch existing water supplies, \$1 billion would go toward projects that recycle wastewater for household and industrial use. Many states and cities already have or are developing programs that recycle storm water runoff and wastewater. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which manages water, dams and reservoirs in 17 Western states, would decide which projects are funded.

### **DROUGHT PLAN**

Prolonged drought, scorching temperatures and climate change are draining the Colorado River that supplies water to 40 million people and farmland in the West. The bill would provide \$300 million for drought measures, such as conservation and storage projects, to maintain water levels at the river's reservoirs and prevent additional water cuts.

Already, the first-ever shortage declaration at the river is expected next week. Some Arizona farmers will be among those to feel the effects next year.

### **DESALINATION**

The bill would add \$250 billion for studies and projects to make sea water and brackish water usable for agricultural, industrial and municipal use. Desalination plants send ocean water through filters that extract fresh water and leave behind salty water that's often returned to the ocean. The technology is expensive but increasingly viewed as a critical way to supplement water supplies in drought prone areas.

### **DAM SAFETY**

About \$800 million would fund improvements and repairs at dams that are used for drinking water, irrigation, flood control and hydropower. Scores of dams across the U.S. are in poor or unsatisfactory condition, according to state and federal agencies. In 2017, damage at California's Oroville Dam prompted evacuation orders covering nearly 200,000 people. Feinstein's office recently said that California alone has 89 dams that are "in less than satisfactory condition."

### **RURAL WATER**

Another \$1 billion would be dedicated for water projects in rural areas, where aging water treatment facilities and infrastructure are often in need of repair.

Taken together, the water projects funded by the infrastructure plan could make an impact in the West, said Dan Keppen, executive director of Family Farm Alliance, which lobbies for farmers, ranchers and irrigation districts.

"It's sort of an all-of-the-above approach and that's what's needed," he said.

## Western fires threaten thousands of homes, strain resources

By EUGENE GARCIA and DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

WESTWOOD, Calif. (AP) — A month-old wildfire burning through forestlands in Northern California lurched toward a small lumber town as blazes across the U.S. Western states strained resources and threatened thousands of homes with destruction.

Crews were cutting back brush and using bulldozers to build lines to keep the Dixie Fire from reaching Westwood east of Lake Almanor, not far from where the lightning-caused blaze destroyed much of the town of Greenville last week.

The entire town of about 1,700 people was placed under evacuation orders Aug. 5 as the blaze inched closer.

To the northwest, the Monument Fire — one of at least three large blazes sparked by lightning last month — continued to grow after destroying a dozen homes and threatened about 2,500 homes in a sparsely populated region. U.S. Forest Service officials said Friday that flying embers ignited spot fires as far as a mile ahead of the main blaze in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

They were among more than 100 large wildfires burning in a dozen Western states seared by drought and hot, bone-dry weather that has turned forests, brushlands, meadows and pastures into tinder.

The U.S. Forest Service said Friday it's operating in crisis mode, fully deploying firefighters and maxing out its support system.

The roughly 21,000 federal firefighters working on the ground is more than double the number of firefighters sent to contain forest fires at this time a year ago, and the agency is facing "critical resources limitations," said Anthony Scardina, a deputy forester for the agency's Pacific Southwest region.

More than 6,000 firefighters alone were battling the Dixie Fire, which has destroyed more than 1,000 homes, businesses and other structures and was the largest wildfire burning in the U.S. Its flames have ravaged more than 800 square miles (well over 2,000 square kilometers) — an area larger than the city of London.

There also was a danger of new fires erupting because of unstable weather conditions, including a chance of thunderstorms that could bring lightning to northern California, Oregon and Nevada, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

"Mother nature just kind of keeps throwing us obstacles our way," said Edwin Zuniga, a spokesman with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which was working with the Forest Service to tamp out the Dixie Fire.

In southeastern Montana, firefighters and residents were scrambling to save hundreds of homes as flames advanced across the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation.

The blaze was more than 50% contained. But its southern edge was still burning near the tribal headquarters town of Lame Deer, where a mandatory evacuation remained in place, and a second fire was threatening from the opposite direction.

The fires already had burned or threatened grasslands that many locals with cattle and horses depend upon for their livelihoods, Montana officials said.

Smoke from the blazes grew so thick Friday that the health clinic in Lame Deer was shut down after its air filters could not keep up with the pollution, Northern Cheyenne Tribe spokesperson Angel Becker said.

Smoke also drove air pollution levels to unhealthy or very unhealthy levels in parts of Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Northern California, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Hot, dry weather with strong afternoon winds also propelled several fires in Washington state, and similar weather was expected into the weekend, fire officials said.

In southeastern Oregon, two new wildfires started by lightning Thursday near the California border spread rapidly through juniper trees, sagebrush and evergreen trees.

Gov. Kate Brown declared an emergency for one of the fires to mobilize crews and other resources to the area of ranches, rural subdivisions and RV parks about 14 miles (23 kilometers) from the small town of Lakeview.



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Triple-digit temperatures and bone-dry conditions in Oregon, enduring a third day of extreme heat, could increase fire risks through the weekend.

Climate change has made the U.S. West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

Dozens of fires also are burning in western Canada and in Europe, including Greece, where a massive wildfire has decimated forests and torched homes.

## Census data puts target on rural, Rust Belt House districts

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

While suburban congressional districts are swelling with new residents, lawmakers in large swaths of rural America and some Rust Belt cities are in need of more people to represent.

In rural Illinois, Republican Rep. Mary Miller's district is short 73,000 people. In northeastern Ohio, Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan needs an additional 88,000 people. And the Detroit-area district of Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib lacks over 100,000 people — one of the biggest shortfalls in the country.

That makes them all potential targets for map makers — and possibly vulnerable to job loss — as their districts are redrawn in the coming months to rebalance the nation's shifting population.

The numbers come from an Associated Press analysis of new 2020 census data revealing the boom of urban and suburban America, at the expense of small towns. The emptying out of rural areas was particularly rough news for Republicans, who have increasingly relied on rural voters to win seats in Congress. Of the 61 U.S. House districts that lost population, 35 are held by Republicans.

The party needs to net just five seats to win control of the House in 2022. But it is guaranteed to lose a seat in West Virginia, and likely to take hits in Illinois and New York.

However, Republicans are well positioned to make up those seats -- and possibly more -- in the growing states of Texas, Florida and North Carolina, where they control the mapmaking process. Fast growing areas, such as Republican-held congressional districts in suburban Texas, are fertile ground for adding new districts or spreading surplus Democratic voters among neighboring districts.

That tactic is among those certain to be contested both in the legislatures and in courts. Democrats on Friday wasted no time filing a fresh lawsuit challenging the current maps in Wisconsin, anticipating a redistricting stalemate in the divided state government and arguing the courts should intervene.

The political parties will be battling not just over where they can gain seats but also where they can eliminate seats held by their opponents. That means some of the toughest battles for mapmakers will occur over districts that have fewer residents than a decade ago, like those in Illinois, Michigan and Ohio — all states that will be losing a U.S. House seat because of lagging population.

Ohio will drop from 16 to 15 U.S. House seats with redistricting. Among the 10 districts with the largest population shortfalls, three were in Ohio, according to the AP analysis, based on the number of residents required per district.

That included Ryan's district as well as Republican Rep. Bill Johnson's eastern Ohio district and the Cleveland-area district of former Democratic Rep. Marcia Fudge, who resigned to join President Joe Biden's administration. Fudge's district, where Democrat Shontel Turner recently won the primary, is on the hunt for 94,000 more people.

Ryan's district, though still voting for Democrats, has been trending toward Republicans in recent presidential elections.

Republicans, who control redistricting in Ohio, could "sort of dismember" Ryan's district and place its residents in other nearby districts, said Paul Beck, a retired political science professor from Ohio State University. "I think that district is going to be on the cutting boards."

Ryan has announced his plans to run for the U.S. Senate.

A lost Democratic district in Ohio wouldn't necessarily result in a Republican gain, because the GOP still would have to defend 12 seats that it already holds.

Republicans are guaranteed to lose a congressional seat in West Virginia. That's because they currently

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hold all three seats, and one must be eliminated in redistricting.

Another blow may be awaiting Republicans in Illinois, which must trim its congressional delegation from 18 to 17. Democrats who control redistricting there are almost certain to try to eliminate a district in heavily Republican areas of central and southern Illinois. All five of Illinois' congressional districts held by Republicans lost population between 2010 and 2020, according to the census, giving Democrats the justification to get rid of one.

"I don't think there's going to be anything Republicans can do to stop that," said Alvin Tillery Jr., an associate professor of political science and director of the Center for the Study of Diversity and Democracy at Northwestern University.

A similar scenario could play out in New York, where Democrats also control redistricting and thus will hold sway over which seat must be eliminated.

The fight could be messier in Pennsylvania, where the state's congressional delegation currently is split 9-9 between Democrats and Republicans. The GOP controls the Legislature, which will draft a new map eliminating one seat, but Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf holds veto power.

The rural Pennsylvania district of Republican Rep. Glenn Thompson ranks among the top 10 nationally in population shortfalls, needing to pick up over 90,000 people to meet the redistricting target. It's one of six Pennsylvania districts that lost population in the 2020 census, all but one of which are held by Republicans.

Citizens' commissions will be responsible for deciding how to eliminate one district each in California and Michigan. After the 2010 census, Michigan's districts were drawn by a Republican-led Legislature and governor and provided the GOP one of the most enduring advantages in the nation, according to an AP analysis.

Michigan lost population in the 2020 census in some rural areas as well as in Detroit and Flint, which was scarred by a tainted water crises this past decade. The districts of Democratic Reps. Dan Kildee, who represents Flint, and Rashida Tlaib of Detroit each are more than 100,000 people short of the redistricting target — the largest gaps nationally outside of West Virginia.

If Republicans were still drawing the maps, one of those districts might be a likely target for elimination. But the state constitution says the citizens' redistricting commission can neither favor nor disfavor incumbents. That means the new map could look significantly different.

"The commission is very unlikely to just sort of start from the current map and make small adjustments," said Matt Grossmann, a political scientist who directs the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University. "I really think they're going to be closer to starting from scratch."

## Marine vanguard lands in Kabul as US speeds up evacuations

By ROBERT BURNS, MATTHEW LEE and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first forces of a Marine battalion arrived in Kabul at week's end to stand guard as the U.S. speeds up evacuation flights for some American diplomats and thousands of Afghans, spurred by a lightning Taliban offensive that increasingly is isolating Afghanistan's capital.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said "elements" of a battalion were now in Kabul, the vanguard of three Marine and Army battalions that the U.S. was sending to the city by the end of the weekend to help more Americans and their Afghan colleagues get out quickly.

The Taliban, emboldened by the imminent end of the U.S. combat mission in the country, took four more provincial capitals Friday, heightening fears they would move soon on the capital, which is home to millions of Afghans. "Clearly from their actions, it appears as if they are trying to get Kabul isolated," Kirby noted at a Pentagon briefing.

The Pentagon also was moving an additional 4,500 to 5,000 troops to bases in the Gulf countries of Qatar and Kuwait, including 1,000 to Qatar to speed up visa processing for Afghan translators and others who fear retribution from the Taliban for their past work with Americans, and their family members.

The remainder — 3,500 to 4,000 troops from a combat brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division — were bound for Kuwait. Kirby said the combat troops would be a reserve force on standby "in case we need

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even more" than the 3,000 going to Kabul.

The temporary buildup of troops for U.S. evacuations highlights the stunning pace of the Taliban takeover of much of the country, less than three weeks before the U.S. is set to officially end nearly 20 years of combat in Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden has remained adamant about ending the U.S. mission on Aug. 31, insisting the American and NATO mission that launched on Oct. 7, 2001, has done what it could to build up a Kabul-based Afghan government and military that could withstand the Taliban when Western troops finally withdrew.

Friday's latest significant blow was the Taliban capture of the capital of Helmand province, where American, British and other allied NATO forces fought some of the bloodiest battles in the past 20 years. Hundreds of Western troops died there during the course of the war, in fighting that often succeeded in knocking back Taliban fighters locally, only to have the Taliban move back in when a Western unit rotated out.

The State Department said the embassy in Kabul will remain partially staffed and functioning, but Thursday's decision to evacuate a significant number of embassy staff and bring in the thousands of additional U.S. troops is a sign of waning confidence in the Afghan government's ability to hold off the Taliban surge. The Biden administration has not ruled out a full embassy evacuation.

The U.S. had already withdrawn most of its troops, but had kept about 650 troops in Afghanistan to support U.S. diplomatic security, including at the airport.

The Biden administration warned Taliban officials directly that the U.S. would respond if the Taliban attacked Americans during the stepped-up deployments and evacuations.

Americans are preparing a military base abroad to receive and house large numbers of those Afghan translators and others as their visa applications are processed. The Biden administration has not identified the base, but earlier was talking with both Kuwait and Qatar about using U.S. bases there for the temporary relocations.

As of Thursday, the U.S. had flown 1,200 Afghans — former American employees and their families whose visas are farthest along in the approval process — to Fort Lee, Virginia.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. soon will have evacuation planes flying out daily, for those Afghan translators and others who manage to reach the Kabul airport despite the fighting.

The number of Afghans flown out under the special visa program is going to "grow very quickly in the coming days," Price said Thursday.

The viability of the U.S.-trained Afghan army was looking increasingly dim. A new military assessment says Kabul could come under Taliban pressure as soon as September and, if current trends hold, the country could fall to the Taliban within a few months.

Shortly before Price's announcement of the evacuation of some embassy staff, the embassy urged U.S. citizens to leave immediately — reiterating a warning it first issued Saturday.

The latest drawdown will further limit the ability of the embassy to conduct business, although Price maintained it would still be able to function. Nonessential personal had already been withdrawn from the embassy in April after Biden's withdrawal announcement that same month, and it was not immediately clear how many staffers would remain on the heavily fortified compound. As of Thursday, there were roughly 4,200 staffers at the embassy, but most of those are Afghan nationals, according to the State Department.

Apart from a complete evacuation and shuttering of the embassy, Price said other contingency plans were being weighed, including possibly relocating its operations to the airport.

Britain also was sending 600 troops to Afghanistan on a short-term basis to help its nationals leave the country.

Canada was sending special forces to help Canadian staff leave Kabul, a source familiar with the plan told The Associated Press. That official, who was not authorized to talk publicly about the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity, did not say how many special forces would be sent.



## New Mexico school year off to deadly start amid gun violence

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — It's only a few days into the new school year, but New Mexico's largest district is reeling from a shooting that left one student dead and landed another in custody.

The gunfire at Washington Middle School during the lunch hour Friday marked the second shooting in Albuquerque in less than 24 hours. With the city on pace to shatter its homicide record this year, top state officials said they were heartbroken by what they described as a scourge.

"These tragedies should never occur. That they do tells us there is more work to be done," Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said.

Albuquerque Police Deputy Commander Kyle Hartsock described the shooting as an isolated incident between two students who were believed to be about 13 years old. He said a school resource officer ran toward the two boys after gunfire erupted and prevented any other violence while tending to the boy who was shot.

Investigators were trying to determine how the student obtained the gun and what may have prompted the shooting, Hartsock said. Other students were being interviewed as detectives tried to piece together what happened, he said.

Dozens of fretful parents gathered outside the school Friday afternoon as they waited for their children to be released.

Friday marked the third day of classes for Albuquerque's public school district. While students won't return until Tuesday, Superintendent Scott Elder said the staff will be making preparations to ensure students have access to counseling and any other support services they need.

"Of course it's extremely difficult," he said of something like this happening so early in the school year. "There's a lot of pressure in the community. People are nervous. It was a terrible incident that happened between two people. It should have never happened. ... This shouldn't happen in the community. It certainly shouldn't happen at a school."

Police said more officers will be present when students return, hoping to provide a sense of security and in case students have any more information about the shooting they want to share.

Gunfire also rang out Thursday night at a sports bar and restaurant near a busy Albuquerque shopping district. Police said one person was killed and three were injured after someone pulled out a gun during a fight.

No arrests have been made in that case. Investigators were reviewing surveillance video and interviewing witnesses.

Authorities identified the man who was killed as Lawrence Anzures, a 30-year old boxer from Albuquerque. A makeshift memorial of flowers and candles grew Friday outside the restaurant, providing more evidence of the frustration that families having been feeling.

The shootings come as Mayor Tim Keller convened his latest session with other officials to talk about curbing violence and crime in the city. His administration is hoping to come up with recommendations for improving the criminal justice system and addressing the problem of repeat offenders. The mayor's office noted that for most Albuquerque homicides this year, more than 45% of charged offenders and nearly 60% of suspects have criminal records.

"For low-level offenders, we need to bolster diversion programs and real access to resources to change their lives," Keller said in a statement. "But for violent offenders, we have to stop the revolving door."

## Fred may regain tropical storm strength as it nears Florida

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Tropical depression Fred was moving along Cuba's northern coast and could regain tropical storm status as it moves towards the Florida Keys on Saturday and southwest Florida on Sunday, forecasters said.

Meanwhile, still east of the Caribbean Sea, forecasters were watching a tropical depression that they

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said would likely become Grace, the seventh named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season. A tropical storm warning was in effect for several islands including Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Saint Martin and Saint Barthelemy. A tropical storm watch was in effect for the British Virgin Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The Miami-based National Hurricane Center said Fred had maximum sustained winds of 35 mph (55 kph) and was dropping heavy rain over parts of Cuba, where the main threats were rain and flooding. A tropical storm warning was discontinued Friday night for a portion of the Florida Keys, including Florida Bay. The warning remained for the Florida Keys west of the Seven Mile Bridge to the Dry Tortugas.

Forecasters said little change in strength was expected in coming hours, though Fred could regain tropical storm status again on Saturday.

The hurricane center said 3 to 6 inches (7.5 to 15 centimeters) of rain were expected across the Florida Keys and southern peninsula by Monday, with isolated maximums of 8 inches (20 centimeters).

No evacuations are planned for tourists or residents in Monroe County, Keys officials said Friday. The county's emergency management officials are advising people in campgrounds, recreational vehicles, travel trailers, live-aboard vessels and mobile homes to seek shelter in a safe structure during the storm.

Once a tropical storm, Fred weakened back to a depression by its spin over Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where it knocked out power to some 400,000 customers and caused flooding that forced officials to shut down part of the country's aqueduct system, interrupting water service for hundreds of thousands of people. Local officials reported hundreds of people were evacuated and some buildings were damaged.

Fred's center was about 150 miles (245 kilometers) south-southeast of Key West, Florida, and about 45 miles (75 kilometers) southeast of Varadero, Cuba. It was headed west at 12 mph (19 kph).

The system was expected to produce 2 to 5 inches (5 to 12.5 centimeters) of rain across portions of Cuba, as well as 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.5 centimeters) across the Bahamas.

Fred became the sixth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season late Tuesday as it moved past the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

## Rush of troops to Kabul tests Biden's withdrawal deadline

By ROBERT BURNS and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last-minute decision to send 3,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan to help partially evacuate the U.S. Embassy is calling into question whether President Joe Biden will meet his Aug. 31 deadline for fully withdrawing combat forces. The vanguard of a Marine contingent arrived in Kabul on Friday and most of the rest of the 3,000 are due by Sunday.

Officials have stressed that the newly arriving troops' mission is limited to assisting the airlift of embassy personnel and Afghan allies, and they expect to complete it by month's end. But they might have to stay longer if the embassy is threatened by a Taliban takeover of Kabul by then. On Friday the Taliban seemed nearly within reach of contesting the capital.

"Clearly from their actions, it appears as if they are trying to get Kabul isolated," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said, referring to the Taliban's speedy and efficient takedown of major provincial capitals across the country in recent days.

Biden had given the Pentagon until Aug. 31 to complete the withdrawal of the 2,500 to 3,000 troops that were in Afghanistan when he announced in April that he was ending U.S. involvement in the war. That number has dropped to just under 1,000, and all but about 650 are scheduled to be gone by the end of the month; the 650 are to remain to help protect the U.S. diplomatic presence, including with aircraft and defensive weapons at Kabul airport.

But Thursday's decision to dispatch 3,000 fresh troops to the airport adds a new twist to the U.S. withdrawal. There is no discussion of rejoining the war, but the number of troops needed for security will depend on decisions about keeping the embassy open and the extent of a Taliban threat to the capital in coming days.

Having the Aug. 31 deadline pass with thousands of U.S. troops in the country would be awkward for

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Biden given his insistence on ending the 20-year U.S. war by that date. Republicans have already criticized the withdrawal as a mistake and ill-planned, though there's little political appetite by either party to send fresh troops to fight the Taliban.

Kirby declined to discuss any assessment of whether the Taliban are likely soon to converge on Kabul, but the urgent movement of extra U.S. troops into Afghanistan to assist the embassy drawdown is clear evidence of Washington's worry that after the rapid fall of major cities this week with relatively little Afghan government resistance, Kabul is endangered.

Kirby reiterated the Biden administration's assertion that Afghan security forces have tangible advantages over the insurgents, including a viable air force and superior numbers. The statement serves to highlight the fact that what the Afghan forces lack is motivation to fight in a circumstance where the Taliban seem to have decisive momentum.

Stephen Biddle, a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University, said in an interview the announcement that 3,000 U.S. troops are heading to Kabul to help pull out American diplomats and embassy staff likely made Afghan morale even worse.

"The message that sent to Afghans is: 'The city of Kabul is going to fall so fast that we can't organize an orderly withdrawal from the embassy,'" Biddle said. This suggests to Afghans that the Americans see little future for the government and that "this place could be toast within hours."

Kirby said lead "elements" of a Marine battalion arrived in Kabul on Friday as the U.S. speeds up evacuation flights for some American diplomats and thousands of Afghans. The rest of that battalion and two others are due in coming days.

The Pentagon also was moving an additional 4,500 to 5,000 troops to bases in the Gulf countries of Qatar and Kuwait, including 1,000 to Qatar to speed up visa processing for Afghan translators and others who fear retribution from the Taliban for their past work with Americans, and their family members.

The remainder — 3,500 to 4,000 troops from a combat brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina — were preparing Friday to depart for Kuwait "in very short order." Kirby said the combat troops would be a reserve force on standby for whatever mission might be required in Kabul.

The temporary buildup of troops for U.S. evacuations highlights the stunning pace of the Taliban takeover of much of the country.

Friday's latest significant blow was the Taliban capture of the capital of Helmand province, where American, British and other allied NATO forces fought some of the bloodiest battles in the past 20 years. Hundreds of Western troops died there during the course of the war, in fighting that often succeeded in knocking back Taliban fighters locally, only to have the Taliban move back in when a Western unit rotated out.

The State Department said the embassy in Kabul will remain partially staffed and functioning, but Thursday's decision to evacuate a significant number of embassy staff and bring in the thousands of additional U.S. troops is a sign of waning confidence in the Afghan government's ability to hold off the Taliban surge. The Biden administration has not ruled out a full embassy evacuation or possibly relocating embassy operations to the Kabul airport.

There are a little over 4,000 personnel still at the embassy; the State Department has not said how many are being pulled out in the next two weeks.

The Biden administration warned Taliban officials directly that the U.S. would respond if the Taliban attacked Americans during the stepped-up deployments and evacuations.

Americans are preparing a military base abroad to receive and house large numbers of those Afghan translators and others as their visa applications are processed. The Biden administration has not identified the base, but earlier was talking with both Kuwait and Qatar about using U.S. bases there for the temporary relocations. State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. soon will have evacuation planes flying out daily, for those Afghan translators and others who manage to reach the Kabul airport despite the fighting.



## 1 dies in New Mexico school shooting; student detained

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — One student was killed and another was taken into custody Friday after a shooting at a middle school near downtown Albuquerque during the lunch hour, police said.

The gunfire at Washington Middle School marked the second shooting in New Mexico's largest city in less than 24 hours. Albuquerque is on pace to shatter its homicide record this year, having already matched within the first eight months of the year the previous annual high of 80 homicides set in 2019.

Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Scott Elder said during a news conference with police that it was a terrible day for the district and the whole community.

"I want to send out my thoughts and prayers to all of our students, all of our families that are impacted by this horrible event," he said.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said she was heartbroken and noted more work needs to be done to address gun violence in the state.

Albuquerque police Deputy Commander Kyle Hartsock described the shooting as an isolated incident between the two students, who were believed to be about 13 years old. He said a school resource officer ran toward the two boys after gunfire erupted, and prevented any other violence.

Hartsock said investigators were trying to determine how the student obtained the gun and what may have prompted the shooting. He said other students will be interviewed as detectives try to piece together what happened.

The school was locked down, and parents were asked to pick up their children.

Friday marked just the third day of classes for Albuquerque's public school district. While students won't return until Tuesday, Elder said the school staff will be making preparations to ensure students have access to counseling and any other support services they need.

"Of course it's extremely difficult," he said of something like this happening so early in the school year. "There's a lot of pressure in the community. People are nervous. It was a terrible incident that happened between two people. It should have never happened. ... This shouldn't happen in the community. It certainly shouldn't happen at a school."

Police said more officers will be present when students return, hoping to provide a sense of security and in case students have any more information about the shooting.

Gunfire also rang out Thursday night at a sports bar and restaurant near a busy Albuquerque shopping district. Police said one person was killed and three were injured after someone pulled out a gun during a fight.

No arrests have been made in that case. Investigators were reviewing surveillance video and interviewing witnesses.

Authorities identified the man who was killed as Lawrence Anzures, a 30-year old boxer from Albuquerque.

"Any small piece of information can help in turning this into a prosecutable case so that the family and friends of Lawrence can get the justice they deserve," Hartsock said.

While standing at an intersection near the school, top police officials were asked by reporters about the ongoing violence in Albuquerque. The city for years has had problems with high crime rates, but the officials pointed to other cities across the U.S. that are now also seeing increases.

"I think it takes not only police, but the community as well to do something about this problem and address it head on," said Deputy Chief Eric Garcia. "Right now, this is a community issue. It's not just a police issue. We all have to work together."

## Multiracial boom reflects US racial, ethnic complexity

By ASTRID GALVAN and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

For the 2010 Census, René D. Flores, a Mexican American college professor, marked his race as "white." Since then, a genealogy test revealed he has 43% Native American ancestry. He is among millions more people who now identify as having two or more races, or being multiracial.

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"I hesitated before because I did not have the cultural upbringing when I was growing up. There are many millions of Americans that are feeling the same way," Flores said.

From McKenzie County, North Dakota, to St. Johns County, Florida, the growth in the number of people who identified as multiracial on 2020 census responses soared over the last decade, rising from under 3% to more than 10% of the U.S. population from 2010 and 2020.

The multiracial boom reflects the complex racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. It also may be the result of changes the U.S. Census Bureau made in processing responses that better capture diversity and how it asked about race and ethnicity in order to better reflect the nation's changing mosaic, experts say.

In an age of easily accessible DNA testing kits, the growth reflects a deepening of the way Americans think about themselves when it comes to racial identity, experts say.

Juan Manuel Pedroza, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, said the 2020 results should be regarded with some caution considering the hurdles the Census Bureau faced in getting responses and a history of undercounts in communities of color. Still, the increase in the percentage of people who identified as multiracial is significant and indicative of how the country is changing, Pedroza said.

Yes, the country is diversifying. But also, there's much less stigma attached to being multiracial, and there's more conversation about it. So someone who marked themselves as strictly white in 2010 may have chosen two or more races this time around in part because of societal changes, Pedroza said.

"As we talk more about multiracial identity, the boundaries around what it means to be of a single race, or just one race, I think those boundaries are changing," Pedroza said.

Pedroza pointed to a study from a group of sociologists at Stanford who looked into whether the popularity of ancestry tests can change how Americans respond to survey questions about race and ancestry.

The study examined 100,000 adults in the U.S. who were registered as potential bone marrow donors and who, as a part of their registration, had been asked how much they knew about their ancestry, and how they came to learn it. The Stanford researchers analyzed those responses and found that people who have taken ancestry tests are more likely to identify as multiracial.

Still, that's highly unlikely to account on its own for the dramatic jump in the numbers.

Flores, an assistant professor of sociology at The University of Chicago, said younger people might also be more open to identifying as multiracial.

"Of course, it's not an easy conversation," Flores said. But being multiracial "is part of my heritage as well."

According to 2020 census data the Census Bureau, the number of people who identify as multiracial went from 9 million in 2010 to 33.8 million in 2020, if Hispanics are included. If Hispanics are taken out of the calculation, the multiracial numbers went from 5.9 million to 13.5 million people.

The largest combination of people identifying as multiracial was white and some other race, followed by white and American Indian and Alaska Native; white and Black; and white and Asian.

The highest growth rates over the decade for people identifying as multiracial were in states that had a low multiracial share of the population to start with — Arkansas, Alabama and New Hampshire — which in 2020 was less than 5%.

In West Virginia, the multiracial population reached 4%, surpassing the Black population as the second-most prevalent group behind white people.

In states with already a large share of multiracial people, the growth was much slower than the rest of the nation. Among those states, 20% of the population identified as multiracial in Hawaii, and just under 10% did the same in Alaska and Oklahoma.

At the local level, the biggest growth rates over the past decade were in relatively small communities, places like Mackenzie, North Dakota, that saw rapid growth to the overall population. Mackenzie was the nation's fastest-growing county over the decade due to an energy boom in North Dakota.

Since the first census in 1790, the U.S. government has collected data on race and started gathering information on Hispanic ethnic background during the 1970 census. Respondents have only been given the option of putting more than a single race on the census form since 2000, and further changes are

likely in the 2030 census.

The Census Bureau says it improved the 2020 race question by adding space for respondents to write in further details about their race, so someone who marked "Black" could also write "African American" or "Jamaican." When crunching the numbers, Census Bureau statisticians expanded numeric codes in order to better capture a wider range of how people self-identify in the write-in answers.

"The results that we see over time, we want to reflect and acknowledge the changes in both the social and political constructs in our nation's history," said Nicholas Jones, director and senior advisor of Race and Ethnic Research at the U.S. Census Bureau.

## Forest Service maxed out as wildfires break across US West

By EUGENE GARCIA and DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

WESTWOOD, Calif. (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service said Friday it's operating in crisis mode, fully deploying firefighters and maxing out its support system as wildfires continue to break out across the U.S. West, threatening thousands of homes and entire towns.

The roughly 21,000 federal firefighters working on the ground is more than double the number of firefighters sent to contain forest fires at this time a year ago, and the agency is facing "critical resources limitations," said Anthony Scardina, a deputy forester for the agency's Pacific Southwest region.

An estimated 6,170 firefighters alone are battling the Dixie Fire in Northern California, the largest of 100 large fires burning in 14 states, with dozens more burning in western Canada.

The fire began a month ago and has destroyed more than 1,000 homes, businesses and other structures, much of it in the small town of Greenville in the northern Sierra Nevada.

The fire had ravaged more than 800 square miles (well over 2,000 square kilometers) — an area larger than the city of London — and continued to threaten more than a dozen rural and forest communities.

Containment lines for the fire held overnight, but it was just 31% surrounded. Gusty and erratic winds were threatening to spread the fire to Westwood, a lumber town of 1,700. Lightning could spark new blazes even as crews try to surround a number of other forest fires ignited by lightning last month.

"Mother nature just kind of keeps throwing us obstacles our way," said Edwin Zuniga, a spokesman with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, working together with the Forest Service to tamp out the blaze.

Meanwhile, firefighters and residents were scrambling to save hundreds of homes as flames advance across the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana.

The blaze was still burning near the tribal headquarters town of Lame Deer, where a mandatory evacuation remained in place and a second fire was threatening from the opposite direction.

Smoke from the blazes grew so thick Friday morning that the health clinic in Lame Deer was shut down after its air filters could not keep up with the pollution, Northern Cheyenne Tribe spokesperson Angel Becker said.

Smoke drove air pollution levels to unhealthy or very unhealthy levels in portions of Montana, Idaho, Oregon Washington and Northern California, according to Environmental Protection Agency air quality monitoring.

An air quality alert covering seven Montana counties warned of extremely high levels of small pollution particles found in smoke, which can cause lung issues and other health problems if inhaled.

The fires near Lame Deer combined have burned 275 square miles (710 square kilometers) this week, so far sparing homes but causing extensive damage to pasture lands that ranchers depend on to feed their cows and horses.

Gusts and low humidity were creating extremely dangerous conditions as flames devoured brush, short grass and timber, fire officials said.

Hot, dry weather with strong afternoon winds also propelled several fires in Washington state, and similar weather was expected into the weekend, fire officials said.

In southeastern Oregon, two new wildfires started by lightning Thursday near the California border were spreading through juniper trees, sagebrush and evergreen trees.



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Gov. Kate Brown declared an emergency for one of the fires to mobilize crews and other resources to the area of ranches, rural subdivisions and RV parks about 14 miles (23 kilometers) from the small town of Lakeview.

The blaze grew from a lightning strike to 11 square miles (28 square kilometers) in less than 24 hours, said Tamara Schmidt, a U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman.

Authorities Thursday evening ordered the evacuation of an RV park that stood in the path of the Oregon's Patton Meadow Fire.

The fires are near the area torched Oregon's Bootleg Fire which started July 6 and burned an area more than half the size of Rhode Island before crews gained the upper hand. The fire is not yet fully contained and was the nation's largest until being eclipsed by the Dixie Fire.

Triple-digit temperatures and bone-dry conditions in Oregon, enduring a third day of extreme heat, could increase fire risks through the weekend.

Climate change has made the U.S. West warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make the weather more extreme and wildfires more destructive, according to scientists.

More than 6,000 square miles (almost 16,000 square kilometers) have been burned in the U.S. so far this year. That's well ahead of the amount burned by this point last year, but below the 10-year average, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Parts of Europe also are burning, including in Greece, where where a massive wildfire has decimated forests and torched homes, and was still smoldering 10 days after it started.

## US allows extra COVID vaccine doses for some. Now what?

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writers

Americans at high risk from COVID-19 because of severely weakened immune systems are now allowed to get a third vaccination in hopes of better protection, a policy change endorsed Friday by influential government advisers.

The Food and Drug Administration ruled that transplant recipients and other similarly immune-compromised patients can get a third dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. But the decision offers an extra dose only to those high-risk groups — not the general public.

These patients have been clamoring for months for better protection, some of them traveling across state lines or lying to get another dose. About 1.1 million people already have gotten at least a third dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines on their own, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed, although it's not clear how many did so because they had weakened immune systems.

Advisers to the CDC grappled with exactly who qualifies before unanimously endorsing the FDA's decision.

It's "an important step in ensuring everyone, including those most vulnerable to COVID-19, can get as much protection as possible from COVID-19 vaccination," CDC director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a statement after signing off on the recommendation.

Here are some things to know:

### WHY DO SOME PEOPLE NEED AN EXTRA DOSE?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines offer powerful protection for otherwise healthy people, but many who take immune-suppressing medications or have diseases that tamp down their immune systems generally get less benefit from the standard two doses. The CDC cited one study suggesting about 40% to 44% of people hospitalized for a so-called breakthrough case — infection after vaccination — are among the immune-compromised.

Those hospitalized patients "did all the right things -- they're just suffering from a lack of good vaccine protection," said Dr. Camille Kotton of Massachusetts General Hospital, one of CDC's advisers.

### WHO QUALIFIES?

Roughly 7 million American adults are classified as immune-compromised, but the FDA singled out transplant recipients and others with similar levels of immune suppression. The FDA didn't spell out exactly who falls into those other categories, but in new guidance to doctors issued Friday, the CDC listed several categories of people who could qualify, including people with advanced or untreated HIV infections and

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those with cancers who are receiving certain chemotherapies.

## ARE THERE AGE RESTRICTIONS?

For now, the new policy allows a third dose of the Pfizer vaccine for children as young as 12 who also meet the high-risk requirement, but adults only for a third Moderna dose. That's because the Pfizer vaccine currently is the only authorized option for Americans under 18. That could change if Moderna's vaccine eventually is allowed for teens.

## WILL I NEED A DOCTOR'S NOTE OR A BLOOD TEST?

The government isn't requiring either — patients will just need to tell the vaccine provider why they're seeking another dose. "We would want to make that as easy as possible," said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University.

## WHAT WILL A THIRD DOSE COST?

Shots given under FDA's emergency use authorization are free.

## IS MIX-AND-MATCH ALLOWED?

The government encourages the third dose to be the same as the first two, but doesn't mandate it.

## HOW WELL DOES A THIRD DOSE WORK?

It helps at least some people. Canadian researchers this week reported 55% of transplant recipients given a third dose two months after standard vaccination had good antibody levels compared to 18% who were given a dummy third shot for comparison. Health experts urged these high-risk patients to continue masking and taking other precautions since there's no guarantee a third dose will work.

## WHAT IF A THIRD DOSE STILL DOESN'T WORK?

It's not a substitute for vaccination, but the FDA has authorized an antibody treatment as a preventive treatment if high-risk patients are exposed to the virus. And it's critical for family members and others close to fragile patients to be vaccinated.

More research is underway to better tease out whether some immune-compromised patients need still other options, such as carefully monitored changes to their medications.

## WHAT IF I HAD THE SINGLE-DOSE JOHNSON & JOHNSON VACCINE?

There's little data on how another dose works in high-risk people who received that vaccine, although it's likely a small number since fewer than 14 million Americans overall have received the J&J shot. Still, CDC counts at least 90,000 who have gotten another dose on their own.

FDA vaccines chief Dr. Peter Marks said the agency is working to get more information about immune-suppressed J&J patients but that for now, the evidence only backs a recommendation of extra doses for Pfizer and Moderna recipients with fragile immune systems.

## IS THIS A BOOSTER?

Not really, because boosters are for people whose immunity wanes over time and these high-risk groups didn't get enough protection to begin with. They now will qualify for a third dose at least 28 days after their second shot — making a third dose part of their initial prescription. That's similar to how France has handled vaccinations for the immune-compromised since April.

## WHAT ABOUT BOOSTERS FOR EVERYONE ELSE?

U.S. health authorities insist it's not yet time for booster doses for the general population.

"We believe sooner or later you will need a booster for durability of protection" -- but not yet, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious diseases expert, told reporters this week.

The CDC is closely monitoring rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, as well as long-running studies of how often vaccinated health workers experience breakthrough infections, especially with the contagious delta variant. That evidence will drive any decision.

## More US cities requiring proof of vaccination to go places

By MELINDA DESLATTE and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

Hold on to that vaccination card. A rapidly growing number of places across the U.S. are requiring people to show proof they have been inoculated against COVID-19 to teach school, work at a hospital, see a

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concert or eat inside a restaurant.

Following New York City's lead, New Orleans and San Francisco will impose such rules at many businesses starting next week, while Los Angeles is looking into the idea.

The new measures are an attempt to stem the rising tide of COVID-19 cases that has pushed hospitals to the breaking point, including in the Dallas area, where top officials warned they are running out of beds in their pediatric intensive care units.

Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins said the situation is so dire that if a parent is seeking care for a sick or injured child, "your child will wait for another child to die. Your child will just not get on a ventilator. Your child will be care-flighted to Temple or Oklahoma City or wherever we can find them a bed, but they won't be getting one here unless one clears."

Earlier this week, Jenkins ordered that masks be worn inside schools, county buildings and businesses after a judge blocked Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's ban on such rules. The county is not requiring people to show proof of vaccination.

On Friday, the Chicago school system, the nation's third-largest district, with more than 360,000 students, announced it will require all its teachers and other employees to be fully vaccinated by mid-October unless they qualify for a medical or religious exemption.

Philadelphia has decreed that health care workers and college students and staff members must get their shots by mid-October.

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell called proof of vaccination the best way to protect businesses. She said she is not imposing capacity limits or contemplating a shutdown similar to the one that devastated businesses in 2020.

"Unlike this time last year, we have a tool that we did not have," she said, referring to vaccines.

Over the past two weeks, Louisiana has set daily records for the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19, reaching 2,907 patients on Friday. Ninety-one percent of those hospitalized are unvaccinated, according to state data.

Louisiana's Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards sounded the alarm about the risks of overloaded facilities with too few staff to handle the crush of people with the coronavirus illness on top of the car crash victims, heart attack patients and others.

"We are rapidly getting to the point where we could have a major failure of our health care delivery system," he said.

Officials hope the proof-of-vaccination requirement will translate into significant numbers of people getting the shots, something cash prizes and scholarships were unable to do.

Only 38% of Louisiana's population is fully vaccinated. But the numbers of people seeking their first shot have increased dramatically over the past month, with nearly 46% of Louisiana's residents starting the vaccine series.

In Oregon, Democratic Gov. Kate Brown plans to start deploying up to 1,500 National Guard troops next week to hospitals across the state to support health care workers dealing with spiraling cases driven by the spread of the more transmissible delta variant.

Critics say that requiring people to be vaccinated to enter a business violates their rights and their privacy.

At least 18 states led by Republican governors or legislatures prohibit the creation of so-called vaccine passports or ban public entities from demanding proof of vaccination. Several of those — including Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Montana, North Dakota and Texas — also bar most businesses from denying service to those who aren't vaccinated.

In Salt Lake City, restaurant owner Mark Alston decided to require vaccination when he reopened in May. He thought his decision would draw "a little bit of publicity," but the backlash came quickly in the form of hundreds of nasty phone calls, Facebook comments and emails.

"People were literally wishing death upon our family, our staff, everyone we knew," Alston said. "They were cheering for our inevitable failure."

Although his staff has had to turn away about 20% of patrons, Alston said he has no regrets: "I would

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personally feel like an incredible hypocrite to be running a restaurant that I knew was unsafe, that was contributing to the spread.”

President Joe Biden has urged cities to adopt proof-of-vaccination requirements for restaurants and other businesses.

New York City’s policy, which applies to restaurants, bars and other such venues, will go into effect on Monday, but inspections and enforcement won’t begin until Sept. 13 — the week schools reopen. Customers will have to produce proof they have had at least one vaccine dose.

The city is also demanding that all of its municipal workers — including teachers and police officers — get vaccinated by mid-September or face weekly testing.

San Francisco went one step further than New York, requiring patrons at indoor restaurants, bars, gyms and entertainment venues to show they are fully vaccinated. The rule will take effect Aug. 20.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issues people paper cards when they get their shots. California is among a few states that have established an online record with a barcode that people can use to prove their status. San Francisco’s mayor said a photo of the CDC card will suffice.

Los Angeles is considering a vaccine requirement at indoor businesses. Leaders there voted Wednesday to direct city attorneys to work out the details.

Also Wednesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom said all employees at public and private schools in California will have to show proof of vaccination or face weekly testing.

## **Cuomo resigns: What we know, what we don’t and what’s next**

By MALLIKA SEN The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After months of holding on to power amid sexual harassment allegations and defying calls to resign, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo abruptly did just that Tuesday. With Cuomo on his way out, Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul is ascendant. She’ll be handed a state roiled by scandal and contending with the delta variant and pandemic-related housing crises.

We take you through the major players, what’s happened this week and what’s next for Cuomo, Hochul and the state of New York:

REMIND ME — WHAT WAS CUOMO ACCUSED OF?

Cuomo was under investigation for several things, but the prevailing issue leading to his resignation concerned sexual harassment allegations that ranged from inappropriate comments to groping. An investigative report released last week said he sexually harassed 11 women, many of whom had worked for him or the state. Other issues in play: how his administration handled data on COVID-19-related deaths in nursing homes, his \$5 million pandemic leadership book deal and whether friends and relatives were given special access to COVID-19 tests early in the pandemic.

CUOMO SAID HE WASN’T GOING ANYWHERE. WHY DID HE RESIGN NOW?

Cuomo has denied the most serious allegations against him and acknowledged Tuesday that his “instinct is to fight.” But he said the impeachment process would take months and consume resources that should go toward “managing COVID, guarding against the delta variant, reopening upstate, fighting gun violence and saving New York City.”

SO WHO’S THE GOVERNOR OF NEW YORK NOW?

Still Cuomo. His resignation won’t take effect for two weeks. But Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul is on deck to replace Cuomo.

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE HOCHUL?

Rhymes with “local.”

QUICK: WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT KATHY HOCHUL?

In sum: Buffalo-area native. Age 62. Democratic ex-congresswoman. Once had a good rating from the National Rifle Association and threatened to jail unauthorized immigrants who tried to legally apply for driver’s licenses. Now supports gun control and letting unauthorized immigrants drive. Unknown quantity to much of the state, but popular among party leaders. Oh — and the first female governor of New York



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(well, in two weeks).

WHAT'S CUOMO AND HOCHUL'S RELATIONSHIP LIKE?

As Hochul told it Wednesday, "it's very clear that the governor and I have not been close, physically or otherwise." Hochul spent much of her time crisscrossing New York as part of her duties as lieutenant governor. Cuomo chose her as his running mate while pursuing his second term, in 2014, but she was never part of his inner circle — and isn't mentioned in the report.

WHY IS CUOMO WAITING 14 DAYS TO LEAVE?

Cuomo said he wanted to ensure a "seamless" transition to the new administration. He declared Hochul could be caught up to speed in a timely fashion.

CAN CUOMO STILL BE IMPEACHED?

That legal question is murky, but the bottom line: He won't be impeached. Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said Friday that lawyers advised the Legislature's judiciary committee that it wouldn't be constitutional to impeach Cuomo once he's no longer governor.

BUT WOULD HE HAVE BEEN IMPEACHED?

Who's to say! But a majority of the Assembly would have voted to advance impeachment, according to an AP poll conducted last week. And Heastie did say the "credible" evidence the committee amassed "could likely have resulted in articles of impeachment had he not resigned." But he did resign, so it's moot.

SO WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL THAT EVIDENCE?

Heastie says he's asked the committee chair to pass the evidence on to the appropriate authorities still investigating. It's unclear if the public will get to see any of it at this point.

WHAT WOULD THE POINT OF IMPEACHMENT EVEN HAVE BEEN?

Staving off a Cuomo comeback. If Cuomo had been impeached, he could have been barred from ever holding elected office in New York again.

OK, WITH HOCHUL REPLACING CUOMO, WHO'S GOING TO BE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR?

Hochul will appoint her replacement. She wouldn't reveal her pick for the job, but nodded to the need for diversity and inclusion and said she would "name someone that I believe the state will be familiar with." Until her pick is in place, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins would be next in the line of succession if Hochul had to leave office.

HOW POWERFUL IS A LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR?

Not very. Think of the role more as second-in-line rather than second-in-command.

IS HOCHUL GOING TO KEEP CUOMO'S STAFF AND ADVISERS OR WILL SHE CLEAN HOUSE?

This is a key question, as the investigative report alleged that Cuomo's office that created a toxic workplace culture. Without naming names, Hochul said that no one the report identified as doing anything unethical will be sticking around. Some major Cuomoworld figures, like top aide Melissa DeRosa, have already tendered resignation. Hochul said Wednesday she'd meet with Cabinet members in the next day before making any decisions on that front.

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE NURSING HOMES INVESTIGATION?

The U.S. Department of Justice has been investigating how the state handled data related to nursing home deaths during the coronavirus pandemic. The state's official tally left out many people who had died at hospitals. An aide said Cuomo's administration worried the true numbers would be "used against us" by President Donald Trump's administration. Families of the people who died in nursing homes — more than 15,000 — are still calling for accountability.

ONCE CUOMO LEAVES OFFICE, WILL HE BE SAFE FROM CHARGES?

Prosecutors in several counties have already said their investigations into whether Cuomo committed any crimes will continue. Cuomo might be hoping that prosecutors or the women who complained about his behavior might lose interest in pursuing a case now that he's out of office.

WHAT ABOUT CIVIL PENALTIES?

The women who have accused Cuomo could still file lawsuits, and at least one — Lindsey Boylan — has said she will.

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WHAT OTHER CONSEQUENCES COULD BE COMING CUOMO'S WAY?

New York's attorney general is still scoping out his book deal. And the state's ethics commissioners are eyeing similar issues as state and federal authorities. Those folks could fine Cuomo.

DOES CUOMO HAVE REGRETS?

He "deeply, deeply" apologized to the "11 women who I truly offended." But he continued to deny the most serious allegations outlined in the report and again blamed the allegations as misunderstandings attributed to "generational and cultural differences." Last week, he personally said sorry to two accusers — ex-aide Charlotte Bennett and a wedding guest he was photographed kissing, Anna Ruch. On Tuesday, he added the unnamed New York State Police trooper who said he inappropriately touched her to the list.

CAN CUOMO RUN AGAIN?

Sure. There's nothing precluding him from throwing his hat in the ring for 2022, especially now that he's eluded impeachment. And although his donations dipped in the wake of the initial allegations, he had amassed an \$18 million war chest as of mid-July.

2022? IS THERE AN ELECTION NEXT YEAR?

Indeed. Cuomo would have been up for a fourth term next year. Hochul confirmed this week she would indeed run for the top job, but no other high-profile Democrats have declared their candidacy. U.S. Rep. Lee Zeldin and Andrew Giuliani — yes, son of Rudy and another New York political scion named "Andrew" — are among the Republican contenders.

WHAT CAN CUOMO ACTUALLY DO IN HIS LAST TWO WEEKS?

It's unclear how engaged he'll be in public policy in his final days, but the state is dealing with a soaring number of COVID-19 cases and has been struggling to get aid to tenants who fell behind on rent because of the pandemic.

IS CHRIS CUOMO GOING TO TALK ABOUT THIS?

We're not expecting an appearance — let alone, a comment — from Chris Cuomo on his primetime CNN show this week, as he's currently on vacation. The younger Cuomo brother's role advising the governor was detailed in last week's report, and he didn't comment on that, either. The sons of the late Gov. Mario Cuomo were known for their on-air fraternal banter during the early days of the pandemic, but CNN eventually put the kibosh on the anchor covering his own brother.

WHERE WILL CUOMO LIVE?

He only moved to the governor's mansion in Albany in 2019. He previously lived with his ex-girlfriend, TV chef Sandra Lee, in the New York City suburbs. Lee owned that house. It remains to be seen where the now-single Cuomo — and his dog, Captain — will crash.

## DC military base locked down until armed man detained

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A military base in the nation's capital was locked down for about two hours Friday, after an armed man ran onto the grounds during a local police investigation of gunshots on the streets surrounding the base.

A statement from Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling said the man's firearm was discovered after the intrusion, and the intruder himself was detained around 2:45 p.m. during "a thorough sweep of the installation."

The individual, who was not named, was transferred to Washington's Metropolitan Police Department.

The naval support facility at the north end of the base is used by Marine Helicopter Squadron One, the fleet of green helicopters that carry the president and vice president.

Col. Mike Zuhlsdorf, the base commander, credited the "thorough and coordinated response" among multiple agencies, including MPD and the Secret Service, with helping to swiftly control the situation.

"I remain confident in our security posture," Zuhlsdorf said in a statement.

The lockdown was lifted around 3 p.m. and cars slowly started moving on and off the base. No injuries were immediately reported.

The 905-acre base in southeast Washington houses Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard units,

along with the Washington field office of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the headquarters of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

The installation is in an area that occasionally has local police activity nearby. Over the years there have been a few incidents where that activity filtered onto the base, including one where a suspect being sought by police scaled a fence and was taken into custody by Defense Department authorities.

The lockdown caused a brief panic.

"If you encounter the individual and have a safe route, RUN," base officials posted on Facebook in the first moments of the lockdown. "If you do not have a safe route to run, HIDE. Barricade your door, turn off the lights and your cell phone ringer, and remain silent. If you are hiding, prepare to FIGHT."

Just last week, a Pentagon police officer was stabbed to death after a burst of violence at a transit center outside the building. A suspect was shot by law enforcement and died at the scene. After that violence, the Pentagon, the headquarters of the U.S. military, was temporarily placed on lockdown.

## **Pelosi faces new threat from moderate Democrats over budget**

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi faced a fresh hurdle Friday to passing President Joe Biden's multitrillion-dollar domestic policy aspirations, as nine moderate Democrats threatened to derail a budget blueprint crucial to opening the door to much of that spending.

In a letter to Pelosi, D-Calif., the nine said they "will not consider voting" for a budget resolution mapping Democrats' ambitious fiscal plans until the House approves a separate, Senate-passed package of road, broadband and other infrastructure projects and sends it to Biden.

"We simply can't afford months of unnecessary delays and risk squandering this once-in-a-century, bipartisan infrastructure package," the centrists wrote.

That's the opposite of Pelosi's current strategy as party leaders plot how to steer Biden's agenda through a Congress the divided party runs by paper-thin margins. She's repeatedly said her chamber won't vote on the bipartisan, \$1 trillion infrastructure measure that moderates covet until the Senate sends the House a companion, \$3.5 trillion bundle of social safety net and environmental initiatives favored by progressives.

Progressives have applied their own pressure, saying many would vote against the infrastructure measure until the Senate approves the \$3.5 trillion social and environment bill. That larger measure is unlikely to be ready until autumn.

Democrats have too much at stake to let internal turmoil sink their domestic ambitions, but it was initially unclear how leaders would untie the knot. With Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., facing a similar moderates-vs.-progressives balancing act in his chamber, Biden may eventually need to play a more forceful role and prod rank-and-file lawmakers into line.

Seeming to take middle ground, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday that officials believe House Democrats will approve "both key elements of the President's economic agenda," as the Senate has.

"Both are essential, and we are working closely with Speaker Pelosi and the leadership to get both to the President's desk," Psaki said in a written statement.

Biden consulted with his legislative affairs team about his economic plan's pathway in the House, the White House said.

Together, the infrastructure and social and environment bills make up the heart of Biden's governing goals, and their enactment would likely stand as one of his legacy achievements as president. But neither wing of his party in Congress fully trusts the other to back both packages, so leaders want to sequence votes in a way that gives neither faction an edge.

In a measured statement, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., said anyone opposing the \$3.5 trillion measure "is voting against the President's and the Democrats' agenda." Jayapal chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus, which has nearly 100 House members.

Democrats control the House by just three votes, giving virtually all 220 of the party's lawmakers tremendous leverage. They run the 50-50 Senate only with Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote.

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The House returns to Washington from its summer recess on Aug. 23 to vote on the budget resolution and perhaps other legislation, giving Biden, Pelosi and other leaders time to decide their next move.

Pelosi, first elected to Congress in 1987 and her party's House leader since 2003, is a seasoned crisis manager and vote counter who Friday was showing no signs of backing down.

Asked about Pelosi's next move, a senior House Democratic aide said the party doesn't have enough votes to pass the infrastructure bill this month. The aide contrasted the nine moderates with the dozens of progressive Democrats who would vote against that measure unless it comes after the House gets the Senate's \$3.5 trillion social and environmental bill.

The aide was not authorized to publicly discuss the party's internal dynamics and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Congressional passage of the budget resolution ultimately seems certain because it's a necessity for Democrats. Without it, Senate Republicans would be able to use a filibuster, or procedural delays, to kill the follow-up \$3.5 trillion bill.

The Senate approved the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill Tuesday with a bipartisan, 69-30 vote. Hours later, the chamber approved the budget resolution on a party-line 50-49 roll call, telegraphing the partisan pathway the subsequent \$3.5 trillion social and environmental bill faces.

Moderates, including many who represent swing districts and face competitive reelection races next year, are leery of that huge bill because of its massive price tag. Democrats plan to pay for much of it with tax boosts on the wealthy and large corporations and want it to include provisions crafting a pathway to citizenship for millions of immigrants in the U.S. illegally, which also worry centrist Democrats.

Two of the Senate's most moderate Democrats, Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have already said they consider \$3.5 trillion too expensive.

The measure would renew tax credits for children, mandate paid family leave, expand Medicare coverage and provide free pre-Kindergarten and community college. There would be increased spending to encourage a shift from carbon to clean energy fuels and for housing and home care, and the government would negotiate pharmaceutical prices to drive down prescription drug costs.

Republicans are certain to use campaign ads accusing Democrats who back that huge measure of voting for proposals that will fuel inflation, raise taxes and cost jobs.

The moderates' letter was signed by Reps. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey; Carolyn Bourdeaux of Georgia; Filemon Vela, Henry Cuellar and Vicente Gonzalez of Texas; Jared Golden of Maine; Ed Case of Hawaii; Jim Costa of California; and Kurt Schrader of Oregon.

## Evidence presented to grand jury in Durham's Russia probe

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Durham, the federal prosecutor tapped to investigate the origins of the Russia investigation, has been presenting evidence before a grand jury as part of his probe, a person familiar with the matter said Friday.

The development is a potential sign that Durham may be mulling additional criminal charges beyond the one he brought last year against a former FBI lawyer who admitted altering an email about a Trump campaign aide who'd been under FBI surveillance. Durham is also expected to complete a report at some point.

A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment, citing an ongoing investigation.

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier Friday that Durham was presenting evidence to a grand jury and contemplating possible charges against some FBI employees and others outside government. A person familiar with the matter, who was not authorized to discuss it by name and spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed Durham's use of the grand jury to The Associated Press.

Durham was appointed to the position in 2019 by then-Attorney General William Barr, with a mandate to examine how the FBI and intelligence community set about investigating Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election and potential coordination with Donald Trump's presidential campaign. His team has



interviewed a broad swath of officials across the Justice Department and intelligence community, including former CIA Director John Brennan.

Durham's investigation is in addition to a separate inquiry by the Justice Department's inspector general, which issued a December 2019 report finding significant errors and omissions in FBI applications to monitor the communications of former Trump campaign aide Carter Page. The report did not find evidence that any actions by FBI or Justice Department officials were motivated by partisan bias.

Weeks before he resigned as attorney general, Barr appointed Durham — who for years served as the U.S. attorney in Connecticut — as a special counsel, a move designed to give him extra protection to complete his work under the Biden administration.

One area of focus in Durham's inquiry has been the FBI's reliance on anti-Trump research that was conducted by former British spy Christopher Steele, and which U.S. officials cited in applications to a secretive surveillance court for warrants to monitor Page's communications.

The Brookings Institution has confirmed that it received a subpoena from Durham last Dec. 31 for records and other information related to a former employee — a Russia analyst who functioned as a source of information for Steele and who was later interviewed by the FBI.

Durham has also been examining whether anyone presented the U.S. government with information that they knew to be false about potential connections between Alfa Bank, a privately-owned, commercial bank in Russia, and a Trump campaign server, according to the person familiar with the matter. The FBI investigated but concluded that there were no cyber links, according to the inspector general report.

Alfa Bank has, meanwhile, alleged in a lawsuit in Florida state court that it was the target of "highly sophisticated cyberattacks" in 2016 and 2017, and that it was victimized by a disinformation campaign aimed at publicly and incorrectly linking the bank to the Trump campaign. Durham's line of inquiry resembles the claims in that suit, the person said.

Last August, Durham reached a plea deal with Kevin Clinesmith, a former FBI lawyer who admitted doctoring an email about Page as the FBI was renewing its applications to eavesdrop on Page under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Clinesmith was sentenced to probation. He is the only person charged so far by Durham.

## **Taliban sweep across Afghanistan's south, take 4 more cities**

By TAMEEM AKHGAR, RAHIM FAIEZ and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban completed their sweep of Afghanistan's south on Friday, taking four more provincial capitals in a lightning offensive that brought them closer to Kabul just weeks before the U.S. is set to officially end its two-decade war.

In the last 24 hours, the country's second- and third-largest cities — Herat in the west and Kandahar in the south — have fallen to the insurgents, as has the capital of the southern province of Helmand, where American, British and NATO forces fought some of the bloodiest battles of the conflict.

The blitz through the Taliban's southern heartland means the insurgents now hold half of Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals and control more than two-thirds of the country. The Western-backed government in the capital, Kabul, still holds a smattering of provinces in the center and east, as well as the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

While Kabul is not directly under threat yet, the resurgent Taliban were battling government forces in Logar province, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the capital. The U.S. military has estimated that Kabul could come under insurgent pressure within 30 days and that the Taliban could overrun the rest of the country within a few months. They have already taken over much of the north and west of the country.

In the south, insurgents swept through three provincial capitals on Friday.

The Taliban captured Lashkar Gah following weeks of heavy fighting and raised their white flag over governmental buildings, said Attaullah Afghan, the head of the provincial council in Helmand. He said that three army bases outside of the city remain under government control.

In Tirin Kot, the capital of the southern Uruzgan province, Taliban fighters paraded through a main square,

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driving a Humvee and a pickup seized from Afghan forces. Local officials confirmed that the Taliban also captured the capitals of Zabul province in the south and Ghor in the west.

With security rapidly deteriorating, the United States planned to send in 3,000 troops to help evacuate some personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. Britain and Canada are also sending forces to aid their evacuations. Denmark said it will temporarily close its embassy, while Germany is reducing its embassy staff to the "absolute minimum."

The United Nations chief urged the Taliban to immediately halt the offensive and negotiate "in good faith" to avert a prolonged civil war. In his strongest appeal to the Islamic militant group, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply disturbed" by indications that the Taliban were "imposing severe restrictions in the areas under their control, particularly targeting women and journalists."

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have fled their homes amid fears the Taliban will return the country to the sort of brutal, repressive rule it imposed when it was last in power at the turn of the millennium. At that time, the group all but eliminated women's rights and conducted public executions as it imposed an unsparing version of Islamic law. An early sign of such tactics came in Herat, where insurgents paraded two alleged looters through the streets on Friday with black makeup smeared on their faces.

There are also concerns that the fighting could plunge the country into civil war, which is what happened after the Soviets withdrew in 1989.

"We are worried. There is fighting everywhere in Afghanistan. The provinces are falling day by day," said Ahmad Sakhi, a resident of Kabul. "The government should do something. The people are facing lots of problems."

The U.N. refugee agency said nearly 250,000 Afghans have been forced to flee their homes since the end of May, and 80% of those displaced are women and children. In all, the agency said, some 400,000 civilians have been displaced since the beginning of the year, joining millions who have fled previous rounds of fighting in recent decades.

Peace talks in Qatar between the Taliban and the government remain stalled, though diplomats are still meeting, as the U.S., European and Asian nations warned that battlefield gains would not lead to political recognition.

"We demand an immediate end to attacks against cities, urge a political settlement, and warn that a government imposed by force will be a pariah state," said Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. envoy to the talks.

But the Taliban advance continued.

Fighting was still underway inside Puli-e Alim, with government forces holding the police headquarters and other security facilities, said Hasibullah Stanikzai, the head of the Logar provincial council. He spoke by phone from his office, and gunfire could be heard in the background. The Taliban, however, said they had captured the police headquarters and a nearby prison.

The onslaught represents a stunning collapse of Afghan forces after the United States spent nearly two decades and \$830 billion trying to establish a functioning state. U.S. forces toppled the Taliban in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, which al-Qaida planned and executed while being sheltered by the Taliban government.

With only weeks remaining before the U.S. plans to withdraw its last troops, the fighters now advancing across the country ride on American-made Humvees and carry M-16s pilfered from Afghan forces.

Bill Roggio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said the Afghan army has rotted from within due to corruption and mismanagement, leaving troops in the field poorly equipped and with little motivation to fight. The Taliban, meanwhile, have spent a decade taking control of large swaths of the countryside.

That allowed them to rapidly seize key infrastructure and urban areas once President Joe Biden announced the timeline for the U.S. withdrawal, saying he was determined to end America's longest war.

"Whatever forces are left or remaining that are in the Kabul area and the provinces around them, they're going to be used for the defense of Kabul," Roggio said. "Unless something dramatically changes, and I don't see how that's possible, these provinces (that have fallen) will remain under Taliban control."

A day earlier, in Herat, Taliban fighters rushed past the Great Mosque in the historic city — a structure

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that dates to 500 BC and was once a spoil of Alexander the Great — and seized government buildings. Herat had been under militant attack for two weeks.

In Kandahar, insurgents seized the governor's office and other buildings, and officials fled, witnesses said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the defeat has yet to be acknowledged by the government, which has not commented on the latest advances.

Civilians were likely wounded and killed in airstrikes, Nasima Niazi, a lawmaker from Helmand, said Thursday. U.S. Central Command has acknowledged carrying out several strikes in recent days, without providing details.

Meanwhile in neighboring Pakistan, the country's national security adviser urged Afghan leaders to seek a negotiated settlement with the Taliban to avoid further violence. Moeed Yusuf made the appeal Friday while speaking to reporters in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

## Global sizzling: July was hottest month on record, NOAA says

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Earth sizzled in July and became the hottest month in 142 years of recordkeeping, U.S. weather officials announced.

As extreme heat waves struck parts of the United States and Europe, the globe averaged 62.07 degrees (16.73 degrees Celsius) last month, beating out the previous record set in July 2016 and tied again in 2019 and 2020. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Friday. The margin was just .02 degrees (.01 Celsius),

The last seven Julys, from 2015 to 2021, have been the hottest seven Julys on record, said NOAA climatologist Ahira Sanchez-Lugo. Last month was 1.67 degrees (0.93 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 20th century average for the month.

"In this case first place is the worst place to be," NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad said in a press release. "This new record adds to the disturbing and disruptive path that climate change has set for the globe."

"This is climate change," said Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann. "It is an exclamation mark on a summer of unprecedented heat, drought, wildfires and flooding."

Earlier this week, a prestigious United Nations science panel warned of worsening climate change caused by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas and other human activity.

Warming on land in western North America and in parts of Europe and Asia really drove the record-setting heat, Sanchez-Lugo said. While the worldwide temperature was barely higher than the record, what shattered it was land temperature over the Northern Hemisphere, she said.

Northern Hemisphere temperatures were a third of a degree (.19 degrees Celsius) higher than the previous record set in July 2012, which for temperature records is "a wide margin," Sanchez-Lugo said.

July is the hottest month of the year for the globe, so this is also the hottest month on record.

One factor helping the world bake this summer is a natural weather cycle called the Arctic Oscillation, sort of a cousin to El Nino, which in its positive phase is associated with more warming, the NOAA climatologist said.

Even with a scorching July and a nasty June, this year so far is only the sixth warmest on record. That's mostly because 2021 started cooler than recent years due to a La Nina cooling of the central Pacific that often reduces the global temperature average, Sanchez-Lugo said.

"One month by itself does not say much, but that this was a La Nina year and we still had the warmest temperatures on record ... fits with the pattern of what we have been seeing for most of the last decade now," said University of Illinois meteorology professor Donald Wuebbles.

While the world set a record in July, the United States only tied for its 13th hottest July on record. Even though California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington had their hottest Julys, slightly cooler than normal months in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, Alabama, Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire kept the nation from approaching record heat levels.

The last time the globe had a July cooler than the 20th century average was in 1976, which was also

the last year the globe was cooler than that normal.

"So if you're younger than 45 you haven't seen a year (or July) where the mean temperature of the planet was cooler than the 20th century average," said Princeton University climate scientist Gabriel Vecchi.

## **Afghan women fear return to 'dark days' amid Taliban sweep**

By ZEINA KARAM and AHMAD SEIR Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — It was early evening and Zahra, her mother and three sisters were on their way to dinner at another sister's home when they saw people running and heard gunshots on the street.

"The Taliban are here!" people screamed.

In just a few minutes, everything changed for the 26-year-old resident of Herat, Afghanistan's third-largest city.

Zahra grew up in a mostly Taliban-free Afghanistan, where women dared to dream of careers and girls got an education. For the past five years, she has been working with local nonprofit organizations to raise awareness for women and press for gender equality.

Her dreams and ambitions came crashing down Thursday evening as the Taliban swept into the city, planting their white flags emblazoned with an Islamic proclamation of faith in a central square as people on motorcycles and in cars rushed to their homes.

Like most other residents, Zahra, her parents and five siblings are now hunkering indoors, too scared to go out and worried about the future. The Associated Press chose not to identify her by her full name to avoid making her a target.

"I am in big shock," said Zahra, a round-faced, soft-spoken young woman. "How can it be possible for me as a woman who has worked so hard and tried to learn and advance, to now have to hide myself and stay at home?"

Amid a lightning offensive over the past several days, the Taliban now control more than two-thirds of the country, just two weeks before the U.S. plans to withdraw its last troops. And they are slowly closing in on the capital, Kabul.

The U.N. refugee agency says nearly 250,000 Afghans have fled their homes since the end of May amid fears the Taliban would reimpose their strict and ruthless interpretation of Islam, all but eliminating women's rights. Eighty percent of those displaced are women and children.

The fundamentalist group ruled the country for five years until the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. During that time, it forbade girls an education and women the right to work, and refused even to let them travel outside their homes without a male relative to accompany them. The Taliban also carried out public executions, chopped off the hands of thieves and stoned women accused of adultery.

There have been no confirmed reports of such extreme measures in areas the Taliban fighters recently seized. But militants were reported to have taken over some houses and set fire to at least one school.

At a park in Kabul, transformed since last week into a shelter for the displaced, families told the AP on Friday that girls riding home in a motorized rickshaw in the northern Takhar province were stopped and lashed for wearing "revealing sandals."

A schoolteacher from the province said no one was allowed to go out to the market without a male escort. Some 3,000 families mainly from northern provinces recently taken over by the Taliban now live in tents inside the park, some on the sidewalks.

Zahra stopped going to the office about a month ago as the militants approached Herat, and she worked remotely from home. But on Thursday, Taliban fighters broke through the city's defensive lines, and she has been unable to work since.

Her eyes welled up with tears as she considered the possibility that she will not be able to return to work; that her 12-year-old sister will be unable to continue going to school ("She loves learning"); that her older brother will not be able play football; or that she won't be able to freely play the guitar again. The instrument hung on a wall behind her as she spoke.

She listed some of the achievements made by women in the past 20 years since the Taliban's ouster —



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incremental but meaningful gains in what is still a deeply conservative, male-dominated society: Girls are now in school, and women are in Parliament, government and business.

Marianne O'Grady, Kabul-based deputy country director for CARE International, said the strides made by women over the past two decades have been dramatic, particularly in urban areas, adding she cannot see things going back to the way they were, even with a Taliban takeover.

"You can't uneducate millions of people," she said. If women "are back behind walls and not able to go out as much, at least they can now educate their cousins and their neighbors and their own children in ways that couldn't happen 25 years ago."

Still, a sense of dread appears to be omnipresent, particularly among women, as Taliban forces take more territory each day.

"I feel we are like a bird who makes a nest for a living and spends all the time building it, but then suddenly and helplessly watches others destroy it," said Zarmina Kakar, a 26-year-old women's rights activist in Kabul.

Kakar was a year old when the Taliban entered Kabul the first time in 1996, and she recalled a time when her mother took her out to buy her ice cream, back when the Taliban ruled. Her mother was whipped by a Taliban fighter for revealing her face for a couple of minutes.

"Today again, I feel that if Taliban come to power, we will return back to the same dark days," she said.

## Heat wave edges higher in southern Europe, fuels wildfires

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Intense heat baking Italy pushed northward towards the popular tourist destination of Florence Friday while wildfires charred the country's south, and Spain appeared headed for an all-time record high temperature as a heat wave kept southern Europe in a fiery hold.

Italy saw temperatures in places upwards of 40 C (104 F), and Rome broiled. By late afternoon Friday, the heat in Florence reached 39 C (102 F). That city and Bologna also were issued alerts for Saturday by the health ministry.

Giancarlo Penza, of the Rome-based Catholic charity Sant'Egidio Community, reminded viewers of state TV that the most vulnerable in such weather are elderly people living alone and the homeless.

"(The latter) are the persons who are invisible, who live on the street," Penza said. "Knock on the door of an older person" who lives alone, next door, or "stop someone on the street" without a home and ask if they need help, he urged Italians.

Many southern European countries have suffered days of intense heat, accompanied by deadly wildfires in Algeria, Turkey, Italy and Greece.

While the area is known for its sunny, hot summers, scientists voice little doubt that climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving extreme events such as heat waves, droughts and wildfires. Such hardships are likely to happen more frequently as Earth continues to warm, they say.

Wildfire problems will only worsen because of abandonment of rural areas and climate change, the environment minister of Cyprus said. The eastern Mediterranean, where the island nation is located, is a "global climate change hot spot," where biodiversity and forest ecosystems are "intensely negatively impacted," Minister Costas Kadis told The AP Friday.

Unworked agricultural land is being overrun by wild growth, making it easy terrain for fires, which are ever "more intense, destructive and frequently occurring" as a result of more frequent and longer heat-waves and droughts, the minister said.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi sent his emergency chief to Calabria in the south, where blazes burning for days in the rugged Aspromonte forest have claimed four lives.

Draghi pledged government aid for those losing property or businesses and an "extraordinary plan of reforestation."

Wildfires on the Italian island of Sardinia were reported largely contained, but a blaze early Friday near Tivoli in the countryside east of Rome forced the evacuation of 25 families. Tivoli's 16th-century Villa d'Este and the ancient ruins of Hadrian's Villa are tourist attractions.

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Italian firefighters were also battling blazes near Mount Etna, the volcano in Sicily which for months has been belching flames and lava. Authorities said fires erupted in separate locations in the woods, raising suspicions they were caused by people, either deliberately or by accident.

On Greece's second-largest island of Evia, where devastating blazes in the wake of an exceptional heat wave this summer have been described as the nation's worst ecological disaster in decades, a fresh fire broke out on Friday.

Spain's state meteorological agency registered 45 C (113 F) at Granada airport at 3 p.m.

Elsewhere in Spain's sizzling south, in the city of Malaga, Juan Villodres was doing a brisk trade selling cold drinks from a kiosk. "The heat wave this year is getting more intense, and the last one this strong was in 2019," Villodres said.

Spain was bracing for even hotter weather. Temperatures as high as 47 C (116.60 F) are forecast in the south on Saturday. That would break a national record of 46.9 C (116.4 F), set in Cordoba in July 2017.

On Wednesday, the Italian town of Florida near the city of Syracuse in Sicily reported a temperature reading of 48.8 C (119.8F) .

On Friday, a World Meteorological Organization official said at a briefing in Geneva that it could take a month or two to verify the reading and determine if it's indeed a record for continental Europe, topping the previous 48 C set in Athens in 1977.

France's national weather agency warned of temperatures as high as 40 C on Friday and Saturday in the Provence region, near the border with Italy.

Temperatures in Portugal on Saturday and Sunday were forecast to climb into the 40s C. In much of the country, with a significantly increased risk for wildfires, the public has been barred from entering forested areas and is banned from using fireworks or farm machinery that could cause sparks.

In Serbia, the army has deployed water tanks and authorities have appealed to residents to avoid watering gardens. A weeks-long drought is worrying cattle owners, particularly in remote villages in hilly areas.

## **NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week**

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Claim that \$2.5 billion has been allocated to immigrant 'welcoming center' is unfounded

CLAIM: \$2.5 billion of American tax dollars has been allocated toward a welcoming center for immigrants coming to the country illegally.

THE FACTS: The conservative blogging duo Diamond and Silk falsely claimed that American tax dollars are set to fund a multi-billion dollar welcoming center for immigrants arriving to the U.S. illegally. "Shame on any Republican who's working with the Biden regime to completely destroy the Infrastructure of America," the pair posted on Twitter and Facebook. "The 2.5 Billion allocated towards a 'Welcoming Center for Illegal Aliens' should be allocated towards LEGAL Americans only. After all, it is American tax dollars!" It wasn't clear to what the duo's claim referred, but the closest match in federal legislation is the bipartisan infrastructure bill approved by the Senate on Tuesday. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act gives the General Services Administration about \$3.4 billion for "construction and acquisition, and repairs and alterations of border stations and land ports of entry," with \$2.5 billion of that going toward items in U.S. Customs and Border Protection's five-year plan. CBP confirmed these projects did not include any "welcoming center." CBP sent the AP a statement noting, "There is no truth to that rumor." Instead, the bill funds a range of infrastructure improvement projects at land ports of entry, including repairs, expansion and modernization of border facilities that, in some cases, have not been updated in decades. A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers from Arizona last week urged congressional leaders to support the funding for land port of entry projects. They wrote in a letter that fixing the aging infrastructure at Arizona facilities

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would help the U.S. maintain trade with Mexico, crack down on the transport of illegal substances and accommodate border traffic. Diamond and Silk told the AP they never claimed the bipartisan infrastructure bill provided funding for a welcoming center, but did not immediately respond to a request to identify another basis for their claim.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report with additional reporting by Associated Press writer Jude Joffe-Block in Phoenix.

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Posts mislead on recalled COVID-19 test

CLAIM: A COVID-19 PCR test recently recalled for having too many false positive results was the only COVID-19 test available last spring, so its false results exaggerated the scope of the pandemic and fooled Americans into losing their businesses and their livelihoods.

THE FACTS: The recently recalled COVID-19 test featured in a widely shared video on Instagram and TikTok is a rapid antigen test, not a PCR test, and it was not the only test in use last spring. In fact, it was never authorized by the Food and Drug Administration for commercial distribution. The video falsely suggests that Innova Medical Group's recall of its own test is evidence the coronavirus pandemic is exaggerated. The video shows a narrator in front of a screenshot of an FDA notice about the June recall of the test. She claims the test is a PCR test that "started the pandemic" and tricked people into losing their businesses and livelihoods "because of a lie." However, the FDA notice makes clear the test is an antigen test, not a PCR test. PCR tests detect the genetic material of the virus and are considered the most sensitive type of test. Antigen tests are rapid tests that are less sensitive and look for proteins called antigens on the surface of the virus. Innova Medical Group's recalled antigen test also was never authorized by the FDA, while many other antigen tests and PCR tests have been. Innova Medical Group recalled the test after the FDA found there was a risk it could give false results and said the test had been improperly distributed without the federal agency's approval. FDA spokesperson Jim McKinney told the AP that a different test, the Quidel Sofia 2 SARS Antigen FIA, was the first antigen COVID-19 test it authorized for emergency use, on May 9, 2020. The agency had already given emergency use authorization to PCR tests to detect the virus months before that. The COVID-19 pandemic has claimed more than 600,000 lives in the United States and more than 4 million globally, according to Johns Hopkins University.

— Ali Swenson

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No, airline flight delays in Florida were not related to vaccine mandates

CLAIM: Flights across the U.S. are backed up because pilots and crew are walking off boarded flights and refusing to take the mandated vaccine.

THE FACTS: Social media users are sharing a photo of a Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport arrival and departure board with numerous flight delays and cancellations, falsely stating it reveals that pilots are walking off flights in protest of having to get COVID-19 vaccines. The posts say that pilots and crew are refusing to "take the jab." The photo with the false claim began circulating recently after weather and operational challenges resulted in delayed and canceled flights. The board showed cancellations for Spirit Airlines, American Airlines and JetBlue Airways. All three airlines contacted by the AP confirmed that the delays and cancellations were a result of weather. The AP reported last week that more than 227 Spirit flights had been canceled and 58 other flights were delayed on August 2. The Air Line Pilots Association said in a statement that Spirit was also experiencing operational issues that did not include a pilot strike. "Any such rumor or report is false," the association said in a statement. "Spirit's pilots are working diligently with other employee groups to safely and professionally return to full operations as soon as possible." Erik Hofmeyer, communications director for Spirit, told the AP in an email that the post was not true. American Airlines also confirmed that weather caused the delays last week. The airline is offering an incentive — an extra day off in 2022 and \$50 from a recognition program — to employees who get the COVID-19 vaccine, officials said. United Airlines and Frontier Airlines will require their employees in the U.S. to be vaccinated against COVID-19 around October. JetBlue officials also confirmed there was

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no connection between vaccination among pilots and delays or cancellations, citing weather in the North-east and the accelerated ramp up in travel as responsible. "We are continuing to evaluate a vaccination requirement for all JetBlue crew members, and in the meantime, we continue to highly recommend our crewmembers get a shot to protect themselves and those around them," Derek Dombrowski, JetBlue's manager of corporate communications, said in an email.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

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Alberta did not lift COVID-19 restrictions because of 'freedom fighter'

CLAIM: The Canadian province of Alberta lifted all COVID-19 restrictions after health officials couldn't provide evidence in court that the virus exists.

THE FACTS: Alberta relaxed its COVID-19 restrictions because the province hit predetermined vaccination goals, not because of a court case. Due to a misrepresentation of what happened in a court case involving Patrick King, a Canadian resident, King is being falsely credited on social media with driving the change. Court records show King was fined in December for violating COVID-19 measures, specifically for gathering in a large group while protesting masks and pandemic restrictions. King, who represented himself in court, sought to challenge the validity of Alberta's public health rules and requested that the province's chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, present papers that discuss the isolation of SARS-CoV-2 "directly from a sample taken from a diseased patient." In July, the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta quashed the subpoena. The court said the health agency "has no material evidence" that pertains to King's fine. Multiple social media users, including King, misrepresented the language used by the court, falsely suggesting it proved there is no evidence that COVID-19 exists. During an interview with conservative podcaster Stew Peters, King falsely stated: "They knew this whole time that this was never isolated," later adding that restrictions were made to "bankrupt our country under the guise of a false pandemic." The AP has previously debunked the false claim that coronavirus has never been isolated. Chinese authorities first isolated the virus on Jan. 7, 2020 and Canadian scientists did so in March of 2020. "The Court decision regarding the subpoena was a preliminary technical matter," Brett Boyden, a spokesperson for the chief medical officer of health, told the AP in an email. "It was argued that Dr. Hinshaw did not have any material evidence to provide that would be relevant to the matters to be decided at trial. The Court decided to quash the subpoena." Social media users referred to King as a "freedom fighter" who "forced the government to admit" that COVID-19 doesn't exist, and falsely claimed that Alberta lifted all restrictions because of King's case. Alberta recently eased COVID-19 restrictions but the decision had nothing to do with King, according to the health agency. The province entered the final phase of its Open for Summer Plan after at least 70% of residents over the age of 12 received at least one dose of the vaccine. "It is false to claim there is any relationship between the decision on the subpoena and the lifting of public health measures," Boyden said. He added, "Mr. King was ultimately found guilty of the offence at trial and sentenced to pay a fine." King did not respond to a request for comment.

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

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Photo shows Sen. Rand Paul getting a hepatitis A booster shot, not a COVID-19 vaccine

CLAIM: A photo shows Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

THE FACTS: The photo was taken in February 2015 and shows the Republican senator receiving a hepatitis A booster shot. Paul has not received the COVID-19 vaccine. The falsely identified photo circulated widely on Twitter with a video Paul posted Sunday criticizing enforced vaccines, mask mandates and lockdown measures. "We have either had COVID, had the vaccine or been offered the vaccine," Paul said in the video. "We will make our own health choices." The photo of Paul receiving the hepatitis A booster was taken at the Capitol physician's office. Reporter Jeremy W. Peters captured the photo for The New York Times on Feb. 3, 2015. "Ironic: Today I am getting my booster vaccine. Wonder how the liberal media will misreport this?" Paul tweeted at the time, sharing a photo of him getting the shot. In May, the AP reported that Paul said he didn't plan on getting the COVID-19 vaccine, claiming he had "natural immunity." He said he might change his stance depending on whether those who had COVID-19 get reinfected at a greater rate than



the vaccinated. Paul tested positive for the virus in March 2020. In an email to the AP, Paul said he based his decision not to get the COVID-19 vaccine now on an Israeli study that showed natural immunity is quite protective against reinfection. "But I keep an open mind and will continue to monitor the reinfection data," Paul said. Public health officials are urging people to get vaccinated even if they've already been infected with the virus. A recent CDC study found people who recovered from COVID-19 and ignored the advice were more than twice as likely to get reinfected compared to survivors who got shots.

## Federal judge leaves CDC evictions moratorium in place

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Friday refused landlords' request to put the Biden administration's new eviction moratorium on hold, though she ruled that the freeze is illegal.

U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich said her "hands are tied" by an appellate decision from the last time courts considered the evictions moratorium in the spring.

Alabama landlords who are challenging the moratorium, which is set to expire Oct. 3, are likely to appeal her ruling.

In discussing the new moratorium imposed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention because of COVID-19, President Joe Biden acknowledged last week there were questions about its legality. But he said a court fight over the new order would buy time for the distribution of some of the more than \$45 billion in rental assistance that has been approved but not yet used. The Treasury Department has said that only about \$3 billion of the first slice of \$25 billion had been distributed through June.

As of Aug. 2, roughly 3.5 million people in the United States said they faced eviction in the next two months, according to the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement Friday that the administration believes the CDC moratorium is legal. "We are pleased that the district court left the moratorium in place, though we are aware that further proceedings in this case are likely," Psaki said.

Friedrich, who was appointed by President Donald Trump, wrote that the CDC's new temporary ban on evictions is substantially similar to the version she ruled was illegal in May. At the time, Friedrich put her ruling on hold to allow the Biden administration to appeal.

This time, she said, she is bound to follow a ruling from the appeals court that sits above her, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. A panel of three judges appointed by President Barack Obama rejected the landlords' plea to enforce Friedrich's ruling and allow evictions to resume, saying it believes the CDC moratorium falls within a 1944 law dealing with public health emergencies.

If the D.C. Circuit doesn't give the landlords what they want now, they are expected to seek Supreme Court involvement.

In late June, the high court refused by a 5-4 vote to allow evictions to resume. Justice Brett Kavanaugh, part of the slim majority, said he agreed with Friedrich, but was voting to keep the moratorium in place because it was set to expire at the end of July.

Kavanaugh wrote in a one-paragraph opinion that he would reject any additional extension without a new, clear authorization from Congress, which has not been able to take action.

Biden and his aides initially said they could not extend the evictions ban beyond July because of what Kavanaugh wrote. But facing pressure from liberals in Congress, the administration devised a new order that it argued was sufficiently different.

The old moratorium applied nationwide. The current order applies in places where there is significant transmission of the coronavirus.

But Friedrich noted the moratorium covers "roughly ninety-one percent of U.S. counties," citing the CDC's COVID-19 data tracker.

"The minor differences between the current and previous moratoria do not exempt the former from this Court's order," that the CDC lacks authority to order a temporary ban on evictions, she wrote.

She also noted that Kavanaugh's opinion and decisions by other courts that either questioned or also

found the earlier moratorium illegal raise doubts about the D.C. Circuit's decision.

"For that reason, absent the D.C. Circuit's judgment, this Court would vacate the stay" and allow evictions to resume, Friedrich said. But she said she was not free to do that.

## Man kills 5, himself in UK's first mass shooting in decade

By KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A young man who killed five people, including his mother, and then took his own life in Britain's first mass shooting in over a decade had complained online about difficulties meeting women and being "beaten down" by life.

Police said Friday the motive for the shootings was unclear but there were no immediate signs that the crime was an act of terrorism or the 22-year-old gunman had connections to extremist groups.

They identified the shooter as Jake Davison, 22, and said he had a gun license, but revealed few other details. Witnesses reported that he used a pump-action shotgun, police said, though they wouldn't confirm what type of weapon it was and whether it was the one Davison was licensed to use.

Gun crimes are rare in Britain, which has strict firearm control rules.

Police responded to multiple emergency calls at 6:11 p.m. Thursday arrived six minutes later at an address in Plymouth's Keyham neighborhood, where Davison had shot and killed his mother, 51-year-old Maxine Davison, also known as Maxine Chapman.

According to police accounts, Davison left the house and immediately shot and killed a 3-year-old girl, Sophie Martyn, and her father, Lee Martyn, 43. He then shot and wounded two other people down the street whom police haven't identified.

Police said Davison moved on to a park where he shot Stephen Washington, 59, who died at the scene, and then to a nearby street, where he shot Kate Shepherd, 66 on a nearby street. She died later in hospital.

Eyewitnesses reported that Davison shot himself before police arrived. He was licensed to use a gun last year and police are checking whether he had the license before then.

Shaun Sawyer, chief constable for Devon and Cornwall police, told reporters that investigators are not sure what Davison's motive was and keeping open minds but do not think extremist ideology prompted the attack.

"Let's see what's on his hard drive, let's see what's on his computer, let's see what's on social media," Sawyer said.

"We believe we have an incident that is domestically related that has spilled into the street and seen several people of Plymouth lose their lives in an extraordinarily tragic circumstance," he added.

Davison appeared to post on YouTube under the name Professor Waffle in an account that has now been taken down, replaced by a notice saying it violated the site's community guidelines. In a final 11-minute clip posted before the killings, "Professor Waffle" talks about how he was "beaten down and defeated by...life."

He talks about struggling to stay motivated at working out and losing weight, working as a scaffolder when he was 17-18, and hinted at his lack of a love life by referring to "people who are incels" — shorthand for "involuntarily celibate."

The "incel" movement justifies violence against women as revenge for men who are rejected as sexual partners, and believes society unjustly denies men sexual or romantic attention. The online subculture has been linked to deadly attacks in California, Toronto and Florida. Davison said that while he wouldn't describe himself as an "incel," they are "people similar to me, they've had nothing but themselves, and then they've socially had it tough."

He compared himself to a businessman struggling to break even despite working long hours but who has a wife and kids supporting him.

"Does an incel virgin get that? No," he said.

Britain's last mass shooting was in 2010, when a taxi driver killed 12 people in Cumbria in northwest England before taking his own life.

## Experts: False claims on voting machines obscure real flaws

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The aftermath of the 2020 election put an intense spotlight on voting machines as supporters of former President Donald Trump claimed victory was stolen from him. While the theories were unproven — and many outlandish and blatantly false — election security experts say there are real concerns that need to be addressed.

In Georgia, for example, election security expert J. Alex Halderman says he's identified "multiple severe security flaws" in the state's touchscreen voting machines, according to a sworn declaration in a court case.

Halderman told The Associated Press in a phone interview that while he's seen no evidence the vulnerabilities were exploited to change the outcome of the 2020 election, "there remain serious risks that policymakers and the public need to be aware of" that should be addressed immediately to protect future elections.

Trump loyalists — pushing the slogan "Stop the Steal" — held rallies, posted on social media and filed lawsuits in key states, often with false claims about Dominion Voting Systems voting machines. Almost all of the legal challenges casting doubt on the outcome of the election have been dismissed or withdrawn and many claims of fraud debunked. State and federal election officials have said there's no evidence of widespread fraud. And Dominion has fought back forcefully, filing defamation lawsuits against high-profile Trump allies.

As an election security researcher, it's been frustrating to watch the proliferation of misinformation, said Matt Blaze, a professor of computer science and law at Georgetown University. For years, he said, concerns raised by election security experts were dismissed as unimportant.

"All of a sudden, people are going the other way, saying the existence of a flaw not only is something that should be fixed, it means the election was actually stolen," he said. "That's not true either."

David Cross is an attorney for plaintiffs in a long-running lawsuit filed by proponents of hand-marked paper ballots. His clients' concerns about Georgia's electronic voting machines long preceded the 2020 election, but he says they're now grappling with how to expose vulnerabilities and advocate for changes without fueling conspiracy theories.

It's also frustrating, he said, to watch the state "try to dismiss actual scientific, rigorous examination of the voting equipment by just saying we're no different from the 'Stop the Steal' people when we're relying on the most respected election integrity experts in the country."

Halderman, a voting technology specialist and director of the University of Michigan's Center for Computer Security and Society, serves as an expert witness in the lawsuit, which was filed by individual voters and the Coalition for Good Governance.

In declarations submitted as part of the case in federal court in Atlanta, Halderman wrote that he had identified vulnerabilities that attackers could exploit to "install malicious software, either with temporary physical access (such as that of voters in the polling place) or remotely from election management systems." Once installed, he wrote, such malware "could alter voters' votes while subverting all the procedural protections practiced by the State."

He detailed his findings in a report filed under seal last month as part of the lawsuit, which challenges the election system Georgia bought in 2019.

State officials have consistently argued that the Dominion machines have been thoroughly vetted and that security measures are in place to prevent problems.

"In an ever-changing threat environment, there are always new evolving threats to any kind of election system," Ari Schaffer, a spokesman for Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, said in an email. "That is why we are vigilant to the challenges that arise to the integrity of our elections. We are constantly in touch with federal and state security partners to protect our elections and keep them secure and reliable."

The state paid more than \$100 million for the new Dominion system, replacing the outdated equipment it had been using since 2002. First used statewide during last year's primary election, it includes touchscreen voting machines that produce paper ballots with barcodes tallied by scanners.

Halderman said his 25,000-word report was the result of 12 weeks of intensive testing of Dominion

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equipment from Fulton County. All voters in Georgia use those machines, and at least some voters in 11 other states also use the same voting machines, according to data compiled by Verified Voting.

Because it was filed under seal, The Associated Press hasn't seen Halderman's report or any specifics of the alleged vulnerabilities. It was also designated "attorneys' eyes only," meaning even the actual parties to the lawsuit cannot see it.

For that reason, no one in the secretary of state's office has seen the report, but Deputy Secretary of State Jordan Fuchs said, "We are familiar with these contentions. They are not new and Halderman's report is only possible because the judge gave him unrestricted access to equipment that he could not otherwise get."

Halderman, who has long argued that the touchscreen machines are vulnerable, said the access allowed him to identify for the first time specific vulnerabilities and the ways they could be exploited. He believes the information should force the state and Dominion to address the issues.

"That's just standard security practice," he said.

Halderman was tasked with evaluating the machines, not with looking for evidence that potential vulnerabilities had been exploited in a past election.

During a conference call with the parties last month, U.S. District Judge Amy Totenberg, who's presiding over the case, said she wasn't ready to unseal his report. But she did say she's "concerned enough about the information contained in it," according to a transcript.

"I have seen how this can blow up," she added. Totenberg's past opinions in the case, which were critical of Georgia's election system, have been cited by people pushing conspiracy theories.

Because of its confidential designation, the report hasn't been shared with Dominion. Halderman wrote that he's been trying since January, through the plaintiffs' lawyers, to arrange a meeting with Dominion but the company has not agreed to meet.

"Despite continued defamatory attacks against our company and its systems, Dominion has emerged from the 2020 election cycle with arguably the most-tested, most-scrutinized, and most-proven voting technology in recent history. Our company welcomes feedback that is provided in good faith by researchers," Dominion said in a statement.

In response to Halderman's report, the state filed a rebuttal declaration from one of its own expert witnesses, Juan Gilbert.

Gilbert, chair of the computer and information science and engineering department at the University of Florida, wrote that "any computer can be hacked with enough access and knowledge of a determined malicious actor." He added that while he believes electronic ballot-marking devices can be improved upon, that "does not mean I believe they are so insufficiently secure as to be unconstitutional or otherwise impermissibly vulnerable."

While Halderman says he has tested various methods of hacking that he says are generally undetectable, Gilbert wrote, "I am not aware that Dr. Halderman has provided equipment marred by 'un-detectable' hacks to any other independent researcher to test his theory that it is, in fact, un-detectable and not correctable."

Halderman countered in a declaration filed with the court that the declaration from Gilbert doesn't dispute the existence of the vulnerabilities he detailed or the steps that could be taken to alter individual votes and election outcomes. Nothing in Gilbert's declaration indicates that state officials understand how serious the problems are or have taken any steps to address them, Halderman wrote.

He argued that state election officials "urgently need to engage with the findings in my report and address the vulnerabilities it describes before attackers exploit them."

## **Biden made 'Obamacare' cheaper, now sign-up deadline is here**

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the Obama health care law undergoing a revival under President Joe Biden, this Sunday is the deadline for consumers to take advantage of a special sign-up period for private coverage made more affordable by his COVID-19 relief law.



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A strong close would bolster Biden's case that Congress needs to make permanent the temporary boost in health insurance subsidies provided by the COVID legislation. His campaign promise to build on existing programs to move the U.S. toward coverage for all may also gain credence.

The government says more than 2.5 million people have signed up since Biden ordered the HealthCare.gov marketplace to reopen Feb. 15 to account for health insurance needs in the pandemic. Then, starting in April, the cost of coverage came down due to sweeter subsidies in the COVID law, which attracted more enrollment. Officials at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, are hoping that this deadline weekend in mid-August will surprise skeptics.

"We've seen even in the last couple of weeks increased interest in enrollment," Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure said in an interview. "When you make coverage more affordable, people buy it. What we need to do is to make coverage more affordable."

Biden's special enrollment period ends at midnight local time Sunday around the country. The regular annual sign-up season won't start again until Nov. 1.

Interest has been high in a couple of states feeling the scourge of the delta variant. Nearly 490,000 people have signed up in Florida, and more than 360,000 have done so in Texas.

At a nonprofit service center in Austin, Texas, more than 500 people have enrolled so far with the help of staff and volunteers. Foundation Communities health program director Aaron DeLaO said the schedule is booked and they're working to clear the waiting list.

"Especially with the delta variant, people are thinking about their health a little more," he said.

The application process can be complicated, requiring details about citizenship or legal immigrant status, income, and household members. That's before a consumer even picks a health insurance plan. People can apply online, via the HealthCare.gov call center, or through programs like the one in Austin.

About 9 in 10 customers at Foundation Communities have selected standard "silver" plans, which cost somewhat more but offer better financial protection when illness strikes. "That to me says that people are really interested in having comprehensive coverage," said DeLaO.

The Obama-era Affordable Care Act offers subsidized private insurance to people who don't have job-based coverage, available in every state. The ACA also expanded Medicaid for low-income adults, an option most states have taken. The two components cover about 27 million people, according to the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

"Obamacare's" place among government health programs seems secure now, after more than a decade of fruitless efforts by Republicans to repeal it or get the Supreme Court to overturn it. Earlier this year by a vote of 7-2 the conservative-leaning court dismissed the latest challenge.

The subsidy increases in Biden's COVID law have made a tangible difference. The average premium paid by new customers dropped from \$117 a month to \$85 a month, or 27%, with the more generous aid. According to CMS, the median — or midpoint — deductible went from \$450 to \$50, a reduction of nearly 90%. People who already had ACA coverage can also get the increased aid by going back to the insurance marketplace. People who've had a spell of unemployment are eligible for added breaks.

But the enhanced subsidies are good only through 2022, and Biden is pressing Congress to make them permanent. An extension seems likely to be included in the Democrats' \$3.5 trillion domestic policy package, however it isn't guaranteed to be permanent, with so many other priorities competing for money.

About 30 million people remain uninsured, and a clear majority would be eligible for ACA plans or some other type of coverage. "If you build it they won't necessarily come," said Karen Pollitz, a health insurance expert with the Kaiser Foundation. "People still need to be made aware that there is coverage out there."

The Biden administration may make progress, but "this can't be the end of the story," said health economist Katherine Baicker of the University of Chicago.

It remains way too complicated for people who juggle low-paying jobs to get and keep coverage, Baicker explained. "There is both a need to expand access to affordable insurance and to better inform people about the options available to them," she said.

## Mexico City marks fall of Aztec capital 500 years ago

By MARIA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Walking for hours through the gritty streets in the center of Mexico City, you can hear the daily urban soundtrack: Car engines, the call of the man who buys scrap metal and the handbells that announce the passing of a garbage truck.

It's hard to imagine that some of these streets trace the outline of what was, five centuries ago, Tenochtitlan, a sophisticated city on an island in a bridge-studded lake where a great civilization flourished.

The Aztec emperors who ruled much of the land that became Mexico were defeated by a Spanish-led force that seized the city on August 13, 1521.

Despite all that was lost in the epic event 500 years ago — an empire and countless Indigenous lives — much remains of that civilization long after its collapse. Vestiges lie beneath the streets, in the minds of the people, and on their plates.

Then, as now, the city's center was dedicated to commerce, with vendors laying out wares on blankets or in improvised stalls, much as they would have done in 1521.

Artists, intellectuals and the government are trying to show what it was all like and what remains, in novel forms: they plan to paint a line on the streets of the city of 9 million to show where the boundaries of the ancient city of Tenochtitlan ended. The drying up of lakes that once surrounded the city long ago erased that line.

Officials have also built a near life-size replica of the Aztecs' twin temples in the capital's vast main plaza.

It is part of a project to rescue the memory of the world-changing event, which for too long has been mired in the old and largely inaccurate vision of Indigenous groups conquered by the victorious Spaniards.

"What really was the Conquest? What have we been told about it? Who were the victors, and who were the defeated?" asks Margarita Cossich, a Guatemalan archaeologist who is working with a team from the National Autonomous University. "It is much more complex than simply talking of the good versus the bad, the Spaniards against the Indigenous groups."

For example, expedition leader Hernán Cortés and his 900 Spaniards made up only about one percent of the army of thousands of allies from Indigenous groups oppressed by the Aztecs.

But the official projects pale in comparison to the real-life surviving elements of Aztec life. The line delimiting the old city boundaries will run near where women sell corn tortillas, whose ingredients have varied not at all since the Aztecs.

Other stands sell amaranth sweets mixed with honey or nuts; in Aztec times, the amaranth seeds were mixed with blood of sacrificed warriors and molded into the shapes of gods. And then eaten, as historian Hugo García Capistrán, explains, but with a sense of ritual.

Not everything ended on Aug. 13, 1521, when the last leader of the Aztec resistance, the Emperor Cuauhtemoc, was taken prisoner by the Spaniards.

There is only a simple plaque marking the spot, in the tough neighborhood of Tepito.

"Tequipeuhcan: 'The place where slavery began.' Here the Emperor Cuauhtemotzin was taken prisoner on the afternoon of Aug. 13, 1521," reads the plaque on a church wall.

A few blocks away, Oswaldo González sells figurines made of obsidian, the dark, glass-like stone prized by the Aztecs.

"Everything the Spaniards couldn't see and couldn't destroy, remains alive," González says.

There also remain traces of Cortés, though they're neither very public or prominent; Mexicans have learned at school for generations to view him as the enemy. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has promoted telling the Indigenous side of the story, and has asked Spain to apologize for the murder, disease and exploitation of the Conquest. Spain hasn't, and the Spanish ambassador was not invited to the 500th anniversary ceremonies scheduled for Friday.

Archaeologist Esteban Mirón notes that there isn't a single statue to Moctezuma — the emperor who welcomed Cortés — in the city.

Nor are there any statues of Cortés. As Mirón traces the route that the Spaniard took into the city in 1519 — welcomed at first, the Conquistadores were later expelled — there is a stone plaque commemo-

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rating the first meeting between Cortés and the Aztec emperor.

Inside a nearby church, another plaque marks the niche where Cortés' bones are believed to lie.

It was said he wanted to be buried here, near the site of his greatest victory, made possible by feats like constructing a fleet of wooden warships to assault the lake-ringed island city.

Tenochtitlan was completely surrounded by a shallow lake crossed by narrow causeways, so the Spaniards built attack ships known as bergantines — something akin to floating battle platforms — to fight the Aztecs in their canoes.

A street nearby marks the place where Cortés docked those ships, but again, there is no monument.

Tenochtitlan also marked some terrible defeats for the Spaniards. They had entered the city in 1519, but had been chased out with great losses a few months later, leaving most of their plundered gold behind.

On June 30, 1520, the so-called "Sad Night," now re-dubbed "The Victorious Night," Cortés was forced to flee, leaving many dead Spaniards behind. "The historical record says that they left walking through the lake, which was not very deep, on top of the bodies of their own comrades," Mirón notes.

In 1981, a public works project in the area unearthed a bar of melted Aztec gold — a small part of the loot that the Spanish soldiers dropped in their retreat.

But it's not just artifacts; the spirit of ancient Mexico remains very much alive.

Mary Gloria, 41, works making embroidery in a squatter's settlement near the edge of the old city.

Gloria just finished embroidering a figure of "Mictlantecuhtli," the Aztec god of death, to mark the city's huge toll in the coronavirus pandemic.

Similar plagues — smallpox, measles and later cholera — nearly wiped out the city's Indigenous population after the conquest. Survival, above all, was the main Indigenous victory from 1521.

Now, Gloria wants to redeem Malinche, the indigenous woman who helped the Spaniards as a translator. Long considered a traitor, Malinche ensured the survival of her line.

"It is up to us rewrite the script," Gloria says.

## Prospects ever fainter for bipartisan policing overhaul deal

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prospects seem increasingly faint for a bipartisan Senate deal on overhauling policing practices as deadlocked lawmakers have fled the Capitol for August recess and political pressure for an accord eases with each passing week.

Bargainers insist they're still talking and haven't abandoned hope, though they've repeatedly blown past self-imposed deadlines. This spring, President Joe Biden pumped momentum into talks with a nationally televised address telling Congress to "get it done" by May 25, the anniversary of a Minneapolis police officer's killing of George Floyd, a Black man.

That didn't happen.

Now, Washington's focus is shifting to Biden's drive to spend trillions on social, environmental and public works programs, one of many budget showdowns that will clog Congress' autumn calendar. With next year's elections for House and Senate control edging closer, both parties are increasingly compelled to stock up on issues they can use against their rivals, weakening the political will for compromise.

"We all have to make sure we don't lose this moment," Ben Crump, an attorney representing the families of Floyd and other Black victims of police shootings, said in an interview Thursday.

"Time right now is an enemy of a deal," said James Pasco, executive director of the Fraternal Order of Police, the police union.

The slow fadeout from top-tier concern to background noise illustrates how contentious issues sometimes die in Washington — not with clamorous showdown votes but a gradual realization that hey, people simply aren't talking about this any more.

Former President Donald Trump's frequent promises for highway and other infrastructure projects and former President Barack Obama's efforts to close the U.S. military prison for detained terrorism suspects at Guantanamo in Cuba both just ebbed away.

The Senate's policing talks are aimed at writing compromise legislation curbing law enforcement agen-

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cies' use of force and making them more accountable for abuses.

For months, bargainers have been stymied over Democrats' demands to make individual police officers accused of abuses liable for civil penalties. It's currently difficult to pursue such actions in all but the most egregious cases. Republicans and law enforcement groups like the Fraternal Order of Police have resisted easing those limitations.

Negotiators are also divided over whether to ease the standards for bringing criminal cases against officers for excessive use of force.

"I had hoped that we'd be done by now, but we are still trading paper and making incremental progress," South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, the chief Republican negotiator, told reporters this week.

Scott, who in May set a "June or bust" goal that never materialized, declined to say whether an agreement would be reached this year. He said ongoing violence like this month's slaying of a Chicago police officer "has made this a more important process, in my opinion, and a longer process."

Scott's Democratic counterpart, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, would say little.

"I'm just putting my head down and getting the work done as quickly as we can," he told reporters recently.

As the Senate began a brief break in June, bargainers announced they'd reached a bipartisan "framework" for an agreement. They provided no detail and never produced evidence that their outline, whatever it was, was meaningful.

The Democratic-controlled House approved a sweeping measure in March that's stalled in the evenly divided Senate. Last year, Democrats derailed a Senate GOP bill they said was too timid.

Police in the U.S. fatally shoot nearly 1,000 people annually, including a disproportionately high number of Black people, according to a database compiled by The Washington Post. Some slayings like Floyd's have sparked nationwide protests, even as many communities have revamped police procedures.

The issue played prominently in congressional campaigns last fall, with Democrats appealing to voters who want restraints on police practices while Republicans focused on fear of rising crime.

Booker was involved in a brief Senate flareup this week that illustrated the issue's ample political potency.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., offered an amendment to budget legislation suggesting cuts in federal aid to municipalities that vote to "defund the police," a loosely defined term from which all but the most progressive Democrats have distanced themselves. Hoping some Democrats would vote against his measure, Tuberville said opponents would be turning their backs on "the men and women in blue."

But the measure passed 99-0 after Booker delivered an impassioned, sarcastic speech saying he wanted to "hug my colleague" for giving Democrats a vote showing they opposed police defunding.

Both parties have voiced suspicions that their opponents are less interested in reaching a policing deal than they are in preserving the issue for next year's political campaigns.

The talks have been complicated by some outside groups refusing to give ground on key issues. That's led some organizations like the bipartisan Justice Action Network, which backs criminal justice reforms, to push for an initial, less ambitious deal addressing areas of agreement, like some increased police reporting of data on use of force.

"The longer this drags on, the more concerned we are getting," said Inimai Chettiar, the network's federal affairs director.

To intensify pressure on bargainers, Crump said advocates should heed the example of progressive Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo. Her all-night vigils outside the Capitol helped pressure Biden recently to temporarily extend a federal moratorium against evicting renters during the pandemic.

"You do any and everything possible to make them pay attention," said Crump.

Asked if Biden should be more engaged to prompt a deal, Crump said, "Hopefully, all of us can do more."

Tezlyn Figaro, senior adviser to the George Floyd Foundation, founded by the Floyd family, cited Democrats' control of the White House and Congress and expressed disappointment with bargainers' failure to meet Biden's May 25 deadline for action.

"It hasn't been done," she said. "Definitely not encouraging."



## **EXPLAINER: Why Ethiopia's war crisis is deepening by the day**

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The United States says it is sending a special envoy to Ethiopia as the fast-moving conflict in the Tigray region has spread into neighboring regions and Ethiopia's government this week called on all able citizens to stop the resurgent Tigray forces "once and for all."

The widening war in Africa's second-most populous country, with 110 million people, is also a growing humanitarian crisis. Millions of people in Tigray remain beyond the reach of food and other aid as the United Nations and U.S. say Ethiopian authorities allow just a small fraction of what's needed. And hundreds of thousands of people in the Amhara and Afar regions are displaced as Tigray forces move in, vowing to go to the capital, Addis Ababa, if needed to stop the fighting and remove the blockade on their region of 6 million people.

"It's one of these cases where we've run out of words to describe the horror of what civilians are being inflicted," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters this week. "More conflict can only lead, sadly, to more civilian pain."

Here's a look at the latest in the nine-month war and what pressure the U.S. special envoy might apply.

### **WHAT IS THE U.S. SEEKING IN ETHIOPIA?**

The U.S. announced overnight that special envoy Jeffrey Feltman would travel to Ethiopia, neighboring Djibouti and the United Arab Emirates, a key Ethiopia ally, starting on Sunday. This is a "critical moment," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan tweeted. "Months of war have brought immense suffering and division to a great nation, that won't be healed through more fighting. We call on all parties to urgently come to the negotiating table."

That seems highly unlikely. Ethiopia's government this year declared the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which dominated the government for nearly three decades before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018, a terrorist group. The Tigray forces have set several preconditions for talks and say Abiy no longer has the legitimacy to govern. They retook much of the Tigray region in June in a dramatic turn in the war as Ethiopia's military retreated.

What began as a political dispute has now killed thousands of people.

Discussing what pressure the U.S. could apply to encourage negotiations, a congressional aide told The Associated Press that "I understand all options are on the table, from Global Magnitsky (sanctions over human rights violations) to an executive order on sanctions, to removal from (the African Growth and Opportunity Act), to more restrictive measures on assistance," as well as ways to block Ethiopia's efforts to get cash from international financial institutions. The aide spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly on policy discussions.

Officials and lawmakers in Washington have signaled impatience as Ethiopian officials deny widespread human rights abuses such as gang-rapes and forced expulsions of ethnic Tigrayans or blame the Tigray forces.

The Ethiopian government's prickly dismissal of a new Amnesty International report on shocking sexual violence against Tigrayan women during the war "reflects the tone-deafness with which the government is handling the multiple conflicts and humanitarian crises across the country," Senate Foreign Relations Committee ranking member Sen. Jim Risch tweeted on Thursday.

### **WHAT DOES ETHIOPIA'S GOVERNMENT SAY?**

Ethiopia's government has repeatedly expressed frustration, alleging without evidence that the U.S., U.N. and others are taking the side of the Tigray forces or supporting the fighters with aid. It has asserted that disproportionate attention is paid to the Tigray people and not enough is done to address alleged abuses by Tigray forces in the Amhara and Afar regions.

The most urgent allegation was raised by the U.N. children's agency, which cited "credible information from partners" about deadly attacks last week on a camp for newly displaced people in Afar. A U.N. team plans to assess the scene as soon as security allows, the agency said Thursday. Ethiopia's government has blamed the Tigray forces, whose spokesman Getachew Reda denied it but said they're willing to cooperate in an independent investigation.

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In the Amhara region, humanitarian groups are having trouble reaching their colleagues in Woldiya, one center of the fighting, amid a communications blackout. Now the Tigray forces have formed a military alliance with the Oromo Liberation Army, also designated by Ethiopia as a terrorist group.

On Thursday the prime minister's spokeswoman, Billene Seyoum, told reporters that the government's call to arms this week, signaling an end to a unilateral cease-fire, meant that Ethiopians are urged to stop the Tigray forces by "all means necessary." She said this is not a result of the military's inability to take on the Tigray forces, and asserted that "in the millions, people are taking this call."

WHAT ABOUT THE FATE OF EVERYDAY PEOPLE?

Caught in the middle are civilians, and efforts to reach them with aid are increasingly challenging because of the Ethiopian government's concern that it will end up helping the Tigray forces.

Just 10% of the aid needed for Tigray reached the region in recent weeks, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Samantha Power, told reporters after a brief Ethiopia visit last week in which the prime minister did not meet her. USAID has estimated that up to 900,000 people in Tigray face "man-made" famine conditions while phone, internet and banking services remain cut off.

The U.N. World Food Program on Friday said at least 30 trucks a day must enter the region to address the need and what has arrived so far is a "drop in the ocean."

Meanwhile, Ethiopia's government has suspended the operations of two major international aid groups, the Dutch section of Doctors Without Borders and the Norwegian Refugee Council, accusing them of spreading "misinformation." This has further deterred many humanitarian workers from speaking openly, worried about retaliation. It also means efforts to respond to the crises in the Amhara and Afar regions could be affected.

"Some humanitarian organizations may now alter their public messaging campaigns or self-censor to avoid facing suspension. This would further contribute to Ethiopia's closing civic space," the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies wrote on Thursday.

That means even less knowledge about conditions on the ground as many journalists face government-imposed restrictions, it said, adding that "civilians will suffer."

## Hydrogen-powered vehicles: A realistic path to clean energy?

By MARK GILLISPIE and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

CANTON, Ohio (AP) — Each morning at a transit facility in Canton, Ohio, more than a dozen buses pull up to a fueling station before fanning out to their routes in this city south of Cleveland.

The buses — made by El Dorado National and owned by the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority — look like any others. Yet collectively, they reflect the cutting edge of a technology that could play a key role in producing cleaner inter-city transportation. In place of pollution-belching diesel fuel, one-fourth of the agency's buses run on hydrogen. They emit nothing but harmless water vapor.

Hydrogen, the most abundant element in the universe, is increasingly viewed, along with electric vehicles, as one way to slow the environmentally destructive impact of the planet's 1.2 billion vehicles, most of which burn gasoline and diesel fuel. Manufacturers of large trucks and commercial vehicles are beginning to embrace hydrogen fuel cell technologies as a way forward. So are makers of planes, trains and passenger vehicles.

Transportation is the single biggest U.S. contributor to climate change, which is why hydrogen power, in the long run, is seen as a potentially important way to help reduce carbon emissions.

To be sure, hydrogen remains far from a magic solution. For now, the hydrogen that is produced globally each year, mainly for refineries and fertilizer manufacturing, is made using natural gas or coal. That process pollutes the air, warming the planet rather than saving it. Indeed, a new study by researchers from Cornell and Stanford universities found that most hydrogen production emits carbon dioxide, which means that hydrogen-fueled transportation cannot yet be considered clean energy.

Yet proponents of hydrogen-powered transportation say that in the long run, hydrogen production is destined to become more environmentally safe. They envision a growing use of electricity from wind and

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solar energy, which can separate hydrogen and oxygen in water. As such renewable forms of energy gain broader use, hydrogen production should become a cleaner and less expensive process.

Within three years, General Motors, Navistar and the trucking firm J.B. Hunt plan to build fueling stations and run hydrogen trucks on several U.S. freeways. Toyota, Kenworth and the Port of Los Angeles have begun testing hydrogen trucks to haul goods from ships to warehouses.

Volvo Trucks, Daimler Trucks AG and other manufacturers have announced partnerships, too. The companies hope to commercialize their research, offering zero-emissions trucks that save money and meet stricter pollution regulations.

In Germany, a hydrogen-powered train began operating in 2018, and more are coming. French-based Airbus, the world's largest manufacturer of airliners, is considering hydrogen as well.

"This is about the closest I've seen us get so far to that real turning point," said Shawn Litster, a professor of mechanical engineering at Carnegie Mellon University who has studied hydrogen fuel cells for nearly two decades.

Hydrogen has long been a feedstock for the production of fertilizer, steel, petroleum, concrete and chemicals. It's also been running vehicles for years: Around 35,000 forklifts in the United States, about 4% of the nation's total, are powered by hydrogen. Its eventual use on roadways, to haul heavy loads of cargo, could begin to replace diesel-burning polluters.

No one knows when, or even whether, hydrogen will be adopted for widespread use. Craig Scott, Toyota's head of advanced technology in North America, says the company is perhaps two years from having a hydrogen truck ready for sale. Building more fueling stations will be crucial to widespread adoption.

Kirt Conrad, CEO of Canton's transit authority since 2009, says other transit systems have shown so much interest in the technology that SARTA takes its buses around the country for demonstrations. Canton's system, which bought its first three hydrogen buses in 2016, has since added 11. It's also built a fueling station. Two California transit systems, in Oakland and Riverside County, have hydrogen buses in their fleets.

"We've demonstrated that our buses are reliable and cost-efficient, and as a result, we're breaking down barriers that have slowed wider adoption of the technology," Conrad said.

The test at the Port of Los Angeles started in April, when the first of five semis with Toyota hydrogen powertrains began hauling freight to warehouses in Ontario, California, about 60 miles away. The \$82.5 million public-private project eventually will have 10 semis.

Hydrogen fuel is included in President Joe Biden's plans to cut emissions in half by 2030. The infrastructure bill the Senate approved passed this week includes \$9 billion for research to reduce the cost of making clean hydrogen, and for regional hydrogen manufacturing hubs.

The long-haul trucking industry appears to be the best bet for early adoption of hydrogen. Fuel cells, which convert hydrogen gas into electricity, provide a longer range than battery-electric trucks, fare better in cold weather and can be refueled much faster than electric batteries can be recharged. Proponents say the short refueling time for hydrogen vehicles gives them an edge over electric vehicles for use in taxis or delivery trucks, which are in constant use.

That advantage was important for London-based Green Tomato Cars, which uses 60 hydrogen fuel cell-powered Toyota Mirai cars in its 500-car zero emission fleet to transport corporate customers. Co-founder Jonny Goldstone said his drivers can travel over 300 miles (500 kilometers) on a tank and refuel in three minutes.

Because drivers' earnings depend on fares, Goldstone said, "if they have to spend 40, 50 minutes, an hour, two hours plugging a car in in the middle of the working day, that for them is just not acceptable."

For now, Green Tomato is among the largest operators of hydrogen vehicles in what is still a tiny market in Europe, with about 2,000 fuel cell cars, garbage trucks and delivery vans on the roads.

About 7,500 hydrogen fuel cell cars are on the road in the U.S., mostly in California. Toyota, Honda and Hyundai produce the cars, which are priced thousands more than gasoline-powered vehicles. California has 45 public fueling stations, with more planned or under construction.

Unlike with buses and heavy trucks, experts say the future of passenger vehicles in the U.S. lies mainly

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with electric battery power, not hydrogen. Fully electric vehicles can travel farther than most people need to go on a relatively small battery.

And for now, hydrogen production is adding to rather than reducing pollution. The world produces about 75 million tons a year, most of it in a carbon emission-creating processes involving steam reformation of natural gas. China uses higher-polluting coal.

So-called "blue" hydrogen, made from natural gas, requires an additional step. Carbon dioxide emitted in the process is sent below the earth's surface for storage. The Cornell and Stanford study found that manufacturing blue hydrogen emitted 20% more carbon than burning natural gas or coal for heat.

That's why industry researchers are focused on electrolysis, which uses electricity to separate hydrogen and oxygen in water. Hydrogen mixes with oxygen in a vehicle's fuel cell to produce power. The amount of electricity generated by wind and solar is growing worldwide, making electrolysis cleaner and cheaper, said Joe Cargnelli, director of hydrogen technologies for Cummins, which makes electrolyzers and fuel cell power systems.

Currently, it costs more to make a hydrogen truck and produce the fuel than to put a diesel-powered truck on the road. Hydrogen costs about \$13 per kilogram in California, and 1 kilogram can deliver slightly more energy than a gallon of diesel fuel. By contrast, diesel fuel is only about \$3.25 per gallon in the U.S.

But experts say that disparity will narrow.

"As they scale up the technology for production, the hydrogen should come down," said Carnegie Mellon's Litster.

While a diesel semi can cost around \$150,000 depending on how it's equipped, it's unclear how much fuel cell trucks would cost. Nikola, a startup electric and hydrogen fuel cell truck maker, estimated last year that it would receive about \$235,000 for each hydrogen semi it sells.

Clean electricity might eventually be used to make and store hydrogen at a rail yard, where it could refuel locomotives and semis, all with zero emissions.

Cummins foresees the widespread use of hydrogen in the U.S. by 2030, sped by stricter diesel emissions regulations and government zero-emissions vehicle requirements. Already, Europe has set ambitious green hydrogen targets designed to accelerate its use.

"That's just going to blow the market open and kind of drive it," Cargnelli said. "Then you'll see other places like North America kind of follow suit."

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Aug. 14, the 226th day of 2021. There are 139 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 14, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law.

On this date:

In 1848, the Oregon Territory was created.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter, a statement of principles that renounced aggression.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced that Imperial Japan had surrendered unconditionally, ending World War II.

In 1948, the Summer Olympics in London ended; they were the first Olympic games held since 1936.

In 1973, U.S. bombing of Cambodia came to a halt.

In 1975, the cult classic movie musical "The Rocky Horror Picture Show," starring Tim Curry, Susan Sarandon and Barry Bostwick, had its world premiere in London.

In 1980, workers went on strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk (guh-DANSK'), Poland, in a job action that resulted in creation of the Solidarity labor movement.

In 1992, the White House announced that the Pentagon would begin emergency airlifts of food to So-



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malia to alleviate mass deaths by starvation.

In 1995, Shannon Faulkner officially became the first female cadet in the history of The Citadel, South Carolina's state military college. (However, Faulkner quit the school less than a week later, citing the stress of her court fight, and her isolation among the male cadets.)

In 1997, an unrepentant Timothy McVeigh was formally sentenced to death for the Oklahoma City bombing. (McVeigh was executed by lethal injection in 2001.)

In 2009, Charles Manson follower Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, 60, convicted of trying to assassinate President Gerald Ford in 1975, was released from a Texas prison hospital after more than three decades behind bars.

In 2015, the Stars and Stripes rose over the newly reopened U.S. Embassy in Cuba after a half century of often-hostile relations; U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry celebrated the day, but also made an extraordinary, nationally broadcast call for democratic change on the island.

Ten years ago: Syria used gunboats for the first time to crush the uprising against Bashar Assad's regime, hammering parts of the Mediterranean coastal city of Latakia after thousands marched there to demand the president's ouster. Keegan Bradley won the PGA Championship after staging an amazing comeback to force a three-hole playoff and beat Jason Dufner at Atlanta Athletic Club.

Five years ago: At the Rio Olympics, U.S. swimmer Ryan Lochte and three teammates reported being robbed at gunpoint; police later said the men were not robbed, and instead vandalized a gas station bathroom. (Lochte was charged with filing a false robbery report, but a Brazilian court dismissed the case.) Usain Bolt of Jamaica became the first person to win three straight Olympic 100-meter titles, blowing down the straightaway in 9.81 seconds. Actor Fyvush Finkel, 93, died in New York City.

One year ago: India's coronavirus death toll overtook Britain's to become the fourth-highest in the world after another single-day record increase in cases. New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said the state would move to a nearly all-mail election in November, following the model it used in its July primary. Former Illinois Gov. James Thompson, the state's longest-serving chief executive, died at the age of 84. The U.N. Security Council resoundingly defeated a U.S. resolution to indefinitely extend the U.N. arms embargo on Iran.

Today's Birthdays: Broadway lyricist Lee Adams ("Bye Bye Birdie") is 97. College Football Hall of Famer John Brodie is 86. Singer Dash Crofts is 83. Rock singer David Crosby is 80. Country singer Connie Smith is 80. Comedian-actor Steve Martin is 76. Movie director Wim Wenders is 76. Actor Antonio Fargas is 75. Singer-musician Larry Graham is 75. Actor Susan Saint James is 75. Author Danielle Steel is 74. Rock singer-musician Terry Adams (NRBQ) is 73. "Far Side" cartoonist Gary Larson is 71. Actor Carl Lumbly is 70. Olympic gold medal swimmer Debbie Meyer is 69. Actor Jackee Harry is 65. Actor Marcia Gay Harden is 62. Basketball Hall of Famer Earvin "Magic" Johnson is 62. Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn., is 62. Singer Sarah Brightman is 61. Actor Susan Olsen is 60. Actor-turned-fashion/interior designer Cristi Conaway is 57. Rock musician Keith Howland (Chicago) is 57. Actor Halle Berry is 55. Actor Ben Bass is 53. Actor Catherine Bell is 53. Rock musician Kevin Cadogan is 51. Actor Scott Michael Campbell is 50. Actor Lalanya Masters is 49. Actor Christopher Gorham is 47. Actor Mila Kunis is 38. Actor Lamorne Morris is 38. TV personality Spencer Pratt is 38. NFL player Tim Tebow is 34. Actor Marsai Martin is 17.