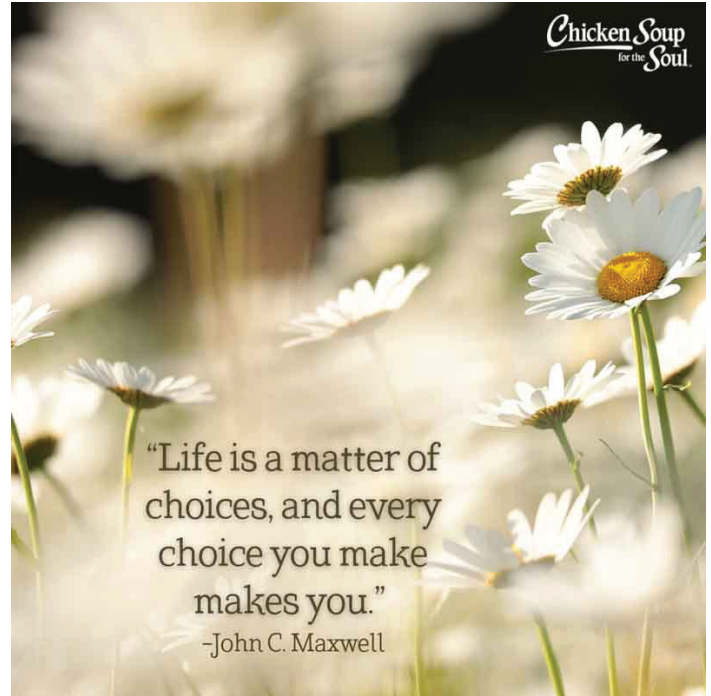


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Coming Up on GDILIVE.COM

**Groton Area
hosts
Redfield
Football
7 p.m.**

BRIDAL SHOWER

OPEN HOUSE BRIDAL Shower for Melynda Sletten, bride-to-be of Lance Larsen, will be held Sunday, Aug. 29, 2021, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton. No RSVP needed. Hosted by aunts of the groom. They are registered at Amazon, Target, Wayfair and Menards Gift Cards.

GDI Subscribers will have free access to the live feed. When you are logged in, look for the link in the horizontal black bar.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Pederson teaches JH Reading and seventh geography

by Dorene Nelson

The Groton School District is getting ready for a new school year with the hiring of five new teachers and one new paraprofessional. Three of the five are filling positions for teachers who retired at the end of last year.

Rachael Pederson is the new seventh and eighth grade reading teacher for the 2021-2022 school year. She will also teach geography to seventh graders.

"I am from the Minneapolis, MN, area and graduated from Eastview High School, Eagan, MN, a school with over 4000 students," Pederson said. "I continued my education in Grinnell, IA, having earned an academic scholarship for Grinnell College."



"I received my Bachelor's Degree in Education with a history major that included an emphasis on English," she explained. "I received a Master's Degree in Education at Northern State University with an emphasis on teaching and learning."

"Although I come from a huge metropolis, I firmly believe in rural schools, as proven by my educational experience," Pederson smiled. "In smaller schools, teachers are required to do more than just teach classes. I've coached oral interp, directed one-act plays, and supervised the yearbook!"

"I've taught in several schools beginning with teaching English, social studies, and computer to students in grades 7-12 in the African country of Lesotho, she stated. "Following that interesting and rewarding start to my teaching experience, I then taught at Timber Lake, SD; Sully Buttes, SD; and Gettysburg, SD; and now here in Groton, SD."

"My decision to become a teacher was probably started while I was in college," Pederson explained. "Volunteers from Grinnell College were asked to donate time teaching inmates in the local prison. I enjoyed this experience and started to understand that all kinds of people need help and an education."

Netters post season opening win

Groton Area's volleyball team posted a 3-1 win over Britton-Hecla Thursday night in Groton. The match was broadcast on GDILIVE.COM where GDI subscribers and ticket holders had access to the livestream.

Groton Area won the first game, 25-13. The game was tied at two and three before the Tigers took a 9-3 lead en route to the win.

Groton Area jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the second set and went on to win, 25-15.

Britton-Hecla challenged Groton Area in the third set as the lead changed hands six times and the game was tied six times before the Braves won the game, 25-23.

In the fourth set, the game was tied four times and there were two lead changes before Groton Area took over and went on for a 25-15 win.

Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with 13 kills, five ace serves and 11 digs. Madeline Flihs had 16 digs, seven kills, three blocks and two ace serves. Anna Fjeldheim had eight kills, five ace serves and two blocks. Aspen Johnson had seven kills and one block. Trista Keith had 11 digs and two assists. Allyssa Locke had five ace serves. Elizabeth Flihs had 35 assists, two kills and one ace serve. Megan Flihs had two blocks and one kill and Maddie Bjerke had one kill.

Chloe Furman had three ace serves for Britton-Hecla, Alyssa James had nine kills, Jenna Werner had 18 digs and four blocks.

Groton Area, now 1-0, will host Aberdeen Christian on Monday.

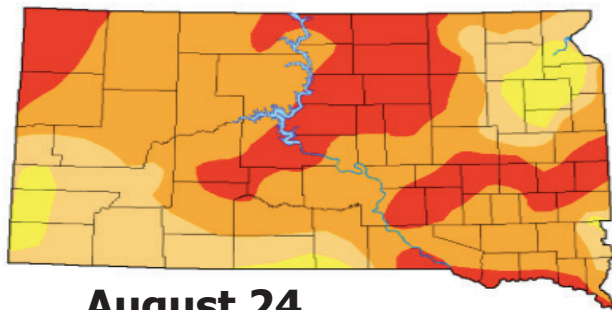
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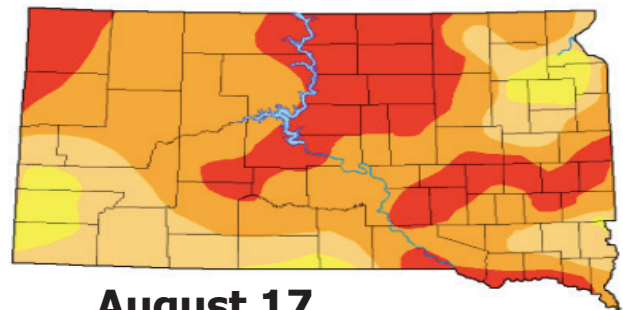
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



August 24



August 17

High Plains

In the High Plains region this week, temperatures were mostly below normal west of the Continental Divide in Colorado, in Wyoming, and in far western parts of South Dakota and North Dakota. Elsewhere, temperatures were generally above normal. Rain fell over wide areas of Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, and western Colorado, leading to some improvements in drought conditions. Parts of the Missouri River Valley in northeast Nebraska, northwest Iowa, and southeast South Dakota did not see much rain, however, and moderate, severe, and extreme drought expanded there. Heavy rain, with some areas seeing 5 or more inches, struck northeast Colorado and southwest Nebraska, though as is typical of warm season thunderstorm complexes, rainfall gradients were rather tight in some areas. Drought conditions improved in areas that saw heavy rain, while some expansion of severe drought occurred in areas of southwest Nebraska that missed out on the rain, where agricultural drought impacts and precipitation deficits have been mounting. Heavy rainfall in North Dakota led to some localized improvements to ongoing drought, though some short-term and especially long-term precipitation deficits remain in areas which received heavy rain. Ongoing drought also impacted the bee population in North Dakota.

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Community Events

Friday, August 27, 2021

Football hosts Redfield, 7 p.m.

Saturday, August 28, 2021

Soccer at Vermillion. Girls match at 1 p.m., Boys at 3 p.m.

CANCELLED: Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest, 9 a.m., Olive Grove Golf Course

Sunday, August 29, 2021

Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day at GHS Parking Lot (4-5 p.m.)



GROTON'S UPCOMING EVENTS

- ▶ **Fall City-Wide Rummage Sale**
September 11 • 8:00 am-3:00 pm
- ▶ **Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course**
September 12 • 12:00 pm
- ▶ **Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport**
September 18-19 (Weather Permitting)
- ▶ **Lake Region Marching Band Festival**
October 8 • 10:00 am
- ▶ **Pumpkin Fest at the City Park**
October 9 • 10:00 am-3:00 pm
- ▶ **Groton United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat**
October 29 • 5:30-7:00 pm
- ▶ **Downtown Trick or Treat**
October 29 • 4:00-6:00 pm
- ▶ **Front Porch 605 Christmas at the Barn**
November 12-14 • 10:00 am-5:00 pm
- ▶ **Legion Post #39 Turkey Party**
November 13 • 6:30 pm
- ▶ **Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center**
November 25 • 11:30 am-1:00 pm
- ▶ **Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services**
December 11 • 9:00 am-12:00 pm

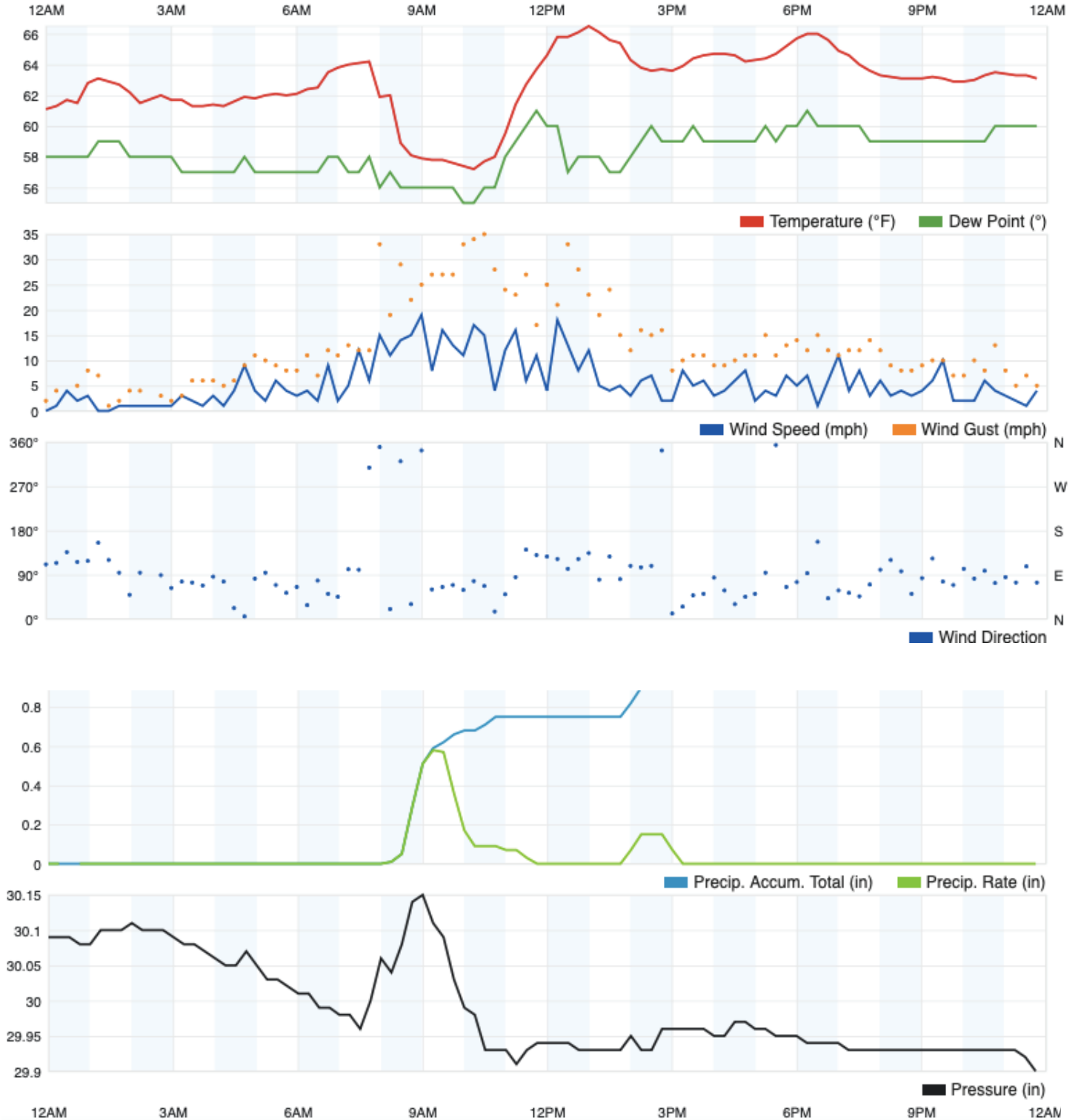
GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce

605.397.8422
120 N Main St,
Groton SD 57445
GrotonChamber.com

Groton Daily Independent






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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs







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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
60% → 30%	40%	40%		
T-storms Likely then Scattered T-storms	Scattered T-storms	Scattered T-storms	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 77 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 75 °F	Low: 54 °F	High: 77 °F

More Showers & Storms Ahead

Probability of Precipitation	Today	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
				
	74 to 84°	74 to 82°	74 to 84°	76 to 86°
	Strong to severe storms possible this evening/tonight	Strong to severe storms possible during the afternoon – eastern SD and west central MN	Dry and sunny	Shower and storm chances return
	6am 9am 12pm 3pm 6pm 9pm	12am 3am 6am 9am 12pm 3pm 6pm 9pm	12am 3am 6am 9am 12pm 3pm 6pm 9pm	12am 3am 6am 9am 12pm
Aberdeen	68 46 22 7 13 17	30 41 44 44 44 37 37 7	7 1 1 0 0 0 3 3	23 23 35 35 35
Miller	63 40 19 7 8 10	15 30 44 44 48 48 48 7	7 1 1 0 1 1 7 7	34 34 40 40 40
Mobridge	55 28 10 12 32 37	40 47 27 21 21 14 14 4	4 1 1 0 0 0 7 7	31 31 31 24 24
Pierre	45 18 8 4 8 10	18 26 26 26 26 19 19 4	4 1 2 2 2 2 12 12	38 38 38 29 29
Sisseton	47 47 40 22 13 13	22 26 49 49 58 58 58 16	16 2 2 0 0 0 2 2	12 12 28 28 29
Watertown	63 50 31 12 8 10	12 17 39 39 65 65 65 22	22 2 2 0 0 0 1 1	17 17 35 35 37

 National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

  Updated: 8/27/2021 5:56 AM Central

An active pattern will continue, with on and off chances for precipitation over the next several days. Thunderstorm activity could become severe at times as well - stay tuned to updates and have a way to receive warning information. Temperatures stay seasonable to below average for this time of year.

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Today in Weather History

August 27, 1983: High winds tore through Glenham and Wakpala, destroying several structures and damaging crops. The worst damage occurred in Glenham, in Walworth County, where two mobile homes were damaged, the roof of a school torn off, and trees limbs down. A tall TV antenna was blown over, and a boat was blown off a trailer. High winds also tore through the Bowdle area, downing power lines and tree limbs. Numerous roofs were also damaged.

August 27, 2013: Numerous severe thunderstorms brought large hail along with wind gusts from 60 to 90 mph to parts of north central and northeast South Dakota. Numerous trees were downed along with many structures damaged. Eighty mph winds near Polo in Hand County snapped off two large cottonwood trees. Ninety mph winds snapped numerous trees off at their base along with destroying a garage and tipping several campers over onto their side at Cottonwood Lake near Redfield.

1854: A tornado struck downtown Louisville around noon on Sunday, August 27th, 1854. It first touched down near 25th Street, southwest of downtown and lifted at the intersection of 5th and Main Streets. Although the tornado was only on the ground for a little over two miles, the twister claimed at least 25 lives. Many of those who perished were killed in the Third Presbyterian Church, where 55 people were gathered for Sunday church services. Straight-line winds that accompanied the tornado did significant damage to the Ohio River, where at least one boat sunk.

1881: A Category 2 Hurricane made landfall between St. Simons Island and Savannah, Georgia, on this day. Landfall coincided with high tide and proved very destructive. The hurricane killed 700 people, including 335 in Savannah, making it the sixth deadliest hurricane in the United States.

1883: Krakatoa Volcano exploded in the East Indies. The explosion was heard more than 2500 miles away, and every barograph around the world recorded the passage of the airwave, up to seven times. Giant waves, 125 feet high and traveling 300 mph, devastated everything in their path, hurling ashore coral blocks weighing up to 900 tons, and killing more than 36,000 persons. Volcanic ash was carried around the globe in thirteen days producing blue and green suns in the tropics, and vivid red sunsets in higher latitudes. The temperature of the earth was lowered one degree for the next two years, finally recovering to normal by 1888.

1893: An estimated Category 3 hurricane made landfall near Savannah, Georgia on this day. This hurricane produced a high storm surge of 16 to 30 feet which cost the lives of 1,000 to 2,000 people. As of now, this storm is one of the top 5, deadliest hurricanes on record for the USA.

2005: Hurricane Katrina reached Category 3 intensity in the Gulf of Mexico about 335 miles south-southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River with maximum sustained winds of 115 mph.

1893 - The first of three great hurricanes that year struck South Carolina drowning more than 1000 persons in a tidal surge at Charleston. (David Ludlum)

1964 - Hurricane Cleo battered Miami and the South Florida area. It was the first direct hit for Miami in fourteen years. Winds gusted to 135 mph, and the hurricane caused 125 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1970 - Elko, NV, was deluged with 3.66 inches of rain in just one hour, establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Washington D.C. soared to a record hot 100 degrees, while clouds and rain to the north kept temperature readings in the 50s in central and southeastern New York State. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Afternoon thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Thunderstorms in eastern New Mexico produced wind gusts to 75 mph near the White Sands Missile Range, and produced three inches of rain in two hours near the town of Belen. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in southeastern Nebraska, eastern Kansas and Missouri. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail south of Belleville KS, and tennis ball size hail south of Lincoln NE. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 70 mph at Saint Joseph MO. Thunderstorms in North Dakota deluged the town of Linton with six inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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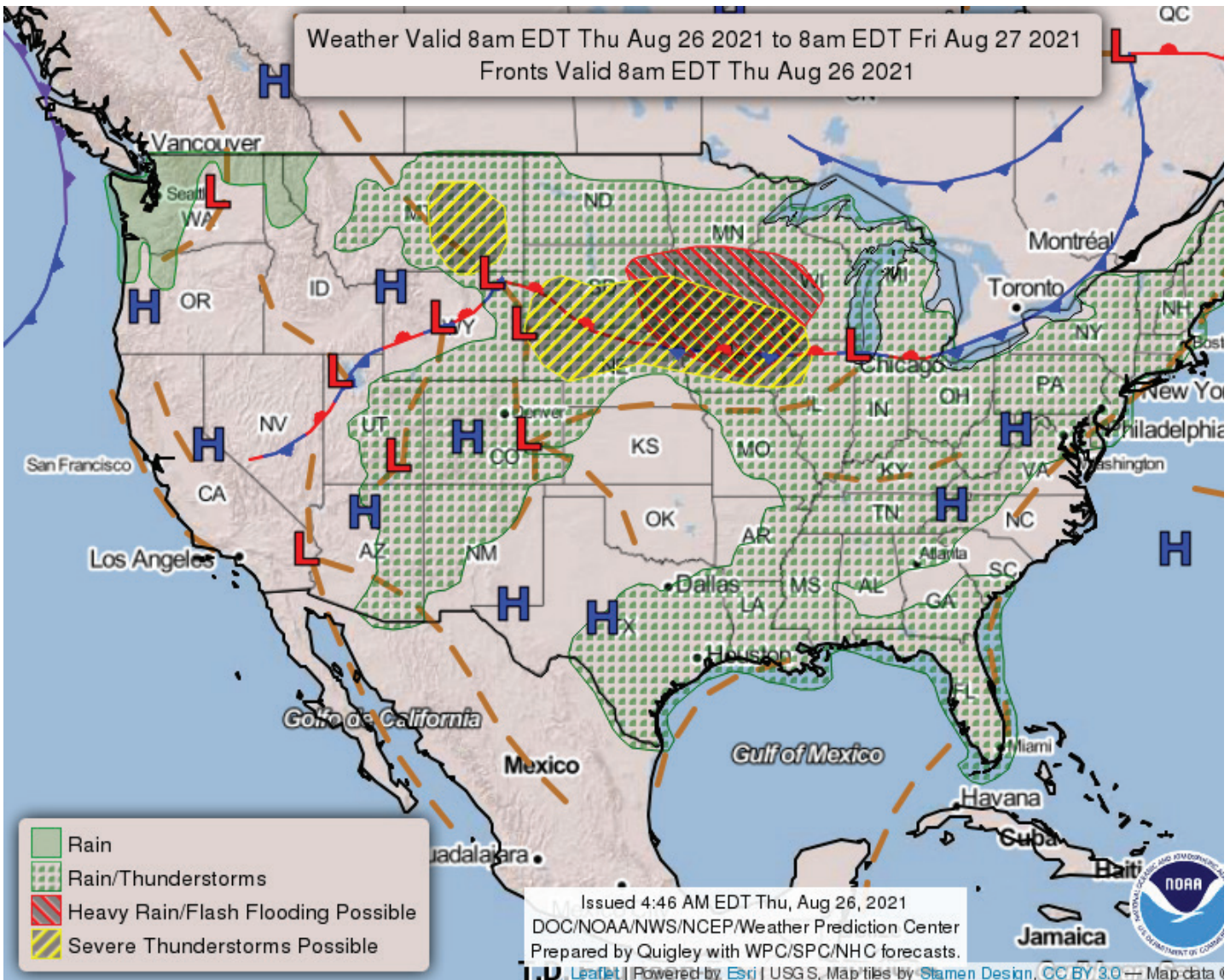
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 67 °F at 12:56 PM
Low Temp: 57 °F at 10:18 AM
Wind: 35 mph at 10:26 AM
Precip: 0.90 yesterday + .82 this morning = 1.72+

Today's Info

Record High: 106° in 1973
Record Low: 38° in 1957
Average High: 81°F
Average Low: 54°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 1.96
Precip to date in Aug.: 3.91
Average Precip to date: 16.06
Precip Year to Date: 11.18
Sunset Tonight: 8:20 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:48 a.m.



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SEMPER FI

"Check on me" was a familiar request that we heard every night as our youngest son, Byron, began walking to his bedroom. Even though we took every precaution to make certain that our home was safe from any threat or danger, there was nothing more comforting than a nightly visit before the lights were turned off. Knowing that someone was near by and readily available if an emergency arose made falling asleep much easier.

The need to know that we are safe and secure is important to each of us. Stripes divide streets and signs give important instructions to drivers. A checklist must be completed before an aircraft can take flight. Warnings about possible problems surround us wherever we go or whatever we do. Sometimes they seem to get in the way of life. But warnings are important to warn us of impending dangers.

Psalm 91 reminds us of the unpredictability, yet the certainty, of dangers that await us. But it does not do so to frighten us, but to give the assurance that we are safe at all times and in all situations because of the faithfulness of our God. Listen as the Psalmist assures of the safety and security we have in God: "You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that strikes at midday...if you make the Most High your dwelling!"

How gracious of our God to assure us that we do not need to ask Him to "check on us" - He does it constantly.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the promise of Your protection that gives us peace, security and hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 91:5-6 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

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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
Cancelled 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)
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

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Bon Homme def. Viborg-Hurley, 21-25, 25-18, 25-14, 26-28, 15-10

Brandon Valley def. Harrisburg, 25-20, 25-23, 25-12

Bridgewater-Emery def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-13, 25-16, 25-12

Burke def. Colome, 25-19, 25-11, 25-13

Castlewood def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-17, 25-14, 25-19

Chester def. Ethan, 25-17, 25-21, 25-12

Colman-Egan def. Baltic, 25-23, 19-25, 25-20, 25-15

Dakota Valley def. Yankton, 25-14, 15-25, 25-22, 21-25, 20-18

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Alcester-Hudson, 21-25, 25-17, 25-17, 25-23

Deubrook def. DeSmet, 25-21, 29-27, 25-18

Faulkton def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-8, 25-6, 25-9

Garretson def. Beresford, 25-19, 25-16, 25-14

Gregory def. Kimball/White Lake, 19-25, 25-20, 25-21, 25-15

Hamlin def. Clark/Willow Lake, 25-23, 25-12, 25-15

Howard def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-21, 17-25, 27-25, 20-25, 15-11

Ipswich def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-14, 25-21, 25-23

Irene-Wakonda def. Scotland, 24-26, 25-17, 24-26, 25-16, 15-8

Kadoka Area def. Little Wound, 25-7, 25-5, 25-20

Lake Preston def. Iroquois, 25-18, 25-22, 25-8

Madison def. Flandreau, 25-16, 25-15, 25-9

Menno def. Centerville, 25-18, 25-15, 11-25, 25-20

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Parker, 25-20, 25-18, 20-25, 25-20

Potter County def. North Central Co-Op, 25-17, 25-8, 25-13

Redfield def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-14, 25-10, 25-13

Sioux City, West, Iowa def. Elk Point-Jefferson, 25-20, 18-25, 22-25, 25-18, 15-4

Sioux Falls Christian def. Tea Area, 25-11, 25-7, 25-7

Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Parkston, 25-23, 25-21, 24-26, 23-25, 15-13

Valentine, Neb. def. Bennett County, 25-17, 25-17, 25-18

Wagner def. Vermillion, 25-10, 20-25, 25-19, 25-21

Warner def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-17, 25-12, 25-19

Waubay/Summit def. Leola/Frederick, 25-14, 25-20, 25-16

Webster def. Milbank, 25-16, 25-23, 25-18

Wilmot def. Waverly-South Shore, 27-25, 25-20, 25-20

Winner def. Miller, 25-19, 25-15, 20-25, 19-25, 15-11

Hanson Early Bird Tournament=

Championship=

Platte-Geddes def. Avon, 25-23, 21-25, 25-17

Third Place=

Wessington Springs def. Freeman, 25-20, 13-25, 25-22

Consolation Semifinal=

Hanson def. Freeman Academy, 25-4, 25-14

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-13, 25-16

Fifth Place=

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Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Hanson, 25-16, 25-21
Seventh Place=

Freeman Academy/Marion def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-13, 25-16

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Tiospaye Topa vs. McIntosh, ppd.

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

South Dakota AG gets fines, no jail time in pedestrian death

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

FORT PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravensborg pleaded no contest Thursday to a pair of misdemeanor traffic charges over a crash last year that killed a pedestrian, avoiding jail time despite bitter complaints from the victim's family that he was being too lightly punished for actions they called "inexcusable."

Circuit Judge John Brown had little leeway to order jail time. Instead, he fined the state's top law enforcement official \$500 for each count plus court costs of \$3,742. Brown also ordered the Republican to "do a significant public service event" in each of the next five years near the date of Joseph Boever's death — granting a request from the Boever family. But he put that on hold pending a final ruling after Ravensborg's attorney objected that it was not allowed by statute.

Ravnsborg said in a statement after the hearing that he plans to remain in office. The plea capped the criminal portion of a case that led Gov. Kristi Noem — a fellow Republican — and law enforcement groups around the state to call for his resignation. But he still faces a likely lawsuit from Boever's widow and a potential impeachment attempt.

Ravnsborg's statement accused "partisan opportunists" of exploiting the situation and said they had "manufactured rumors, conspiracy theories and made statements in direct contradiction to the evidence all sides agreed upon."

Noem, in a statement afterward, pushed the Legislature to consider impeachment and said she ordered the House speaker be given a copy of the investigative file. Impeachment proceedings halted in February after the judge barred state officials from divulging details of the investigation. Lawmakers indicated then that they might resume after the criminal case ended.

The attorney general was driving home to Pierre from a political fundraiser on Sept. 12 when he struck Boever, who was walking on the side of a highway. In a 911 call after the crash, Ravensborg was initially unsure about what he hit and then told a dispatcher it might have been a deer. He said he didn't realize he struck a man until he returned to the crash scene the next day and discovered the body of Boever, 55.

Ravnsborg pleaded no contest to making an illegal lane change and using a phone while driving, which each carried a maximum sentence of up to 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine. Prosecutors dropped a careless driving charge.

Ravnsborg didn't attend the hearing — he didn't have to and was represented by his attorney, Tim Rensch. That angered Boever's family.

"Why, after having to wait nearly a year, do we not have the chance to face him?" Boever's sister, Jane Boever, asked the court. She said "his cowardly behavior leaves us frustrated."

She said her brother was "left behind carelessly" the night he died. She accused Ravensborg of running down her brother and then using his position and resources to string the case along. She said he has shown no remorse, and only "arrogance toward the law."

Jane Boever called the punishment "a slap on the wrist."

"Our brother lay in the ditch for 12 hours," she said. "This is inexcusable."

Boever's widow, Jennifer Boever, said Ravensborg's "actions are incomprehensible and ... cannot be forgiven."

Rensch pushed back hard on the family's criticism, calling the attorney general an "honorable man."

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Rensch said Ravensborg had been consistent from the beginning that he simply did not see Boever. And he noted that the case was "not a homicide case, and it's not a manslaughter case."

"Accidents happen, people die. It should not happen. No one wants anybody to die," he said.

Rensch told reporters after the hearing that Ravensborg had cooperated fully with investigators by sitting down for two interviews and allowing his phones to be analyzed.

"Basically just take your shirt off and say, 'Here I am, bring it on.' I'll answer anything you've got, and that's what this guy did," Rensch said.

Beadle County State's Attorney Michael Moore, one of the prosecutors, agreed that the attorney general had been cooperative. He was also satisfied with Ravensborg's punishment and the crash investigation.

"Because of who it was and the high profile nature of the case, the investigation was a lot more thorough," he said.

After a months-long probe led to prosecutors charging Ravensborg with the three misdemeanors in February, Noem put maximum pressure on Ravensborg to resign, releasing videos of investigators questioning him. They revealed gruesome details, including that detectives believed Boever's body had collided with Ravensborg's windshield with such force that part of his eyeglasses were deposited in the backseat of Ravensborg's car.

Prosecutors said Ravensborg was on his phone roughly one minute before the crash, but phone records showed it was locked at the moment of impact. Ravensborg told investigators that the last thing he remembered before impact was turning off the radio and looking down at the speedometer.

A toxicology test taken roughly 15 hours after the crash showed no alcohol in Ravensborg's system, and people who attended the fundraiser said he was not seen drinking alcohol.

Ravnsborg adamantly denied doing anything wrong. He insisted he had no idea he hit a man until returning to the crash site and that he is worthy of remaining the state's top law enforcement officer.

"Joe's death weighs heavily on me and always will," Ravensborg said in his statement. "I've often wondered why the accident occurred and all the things that had to have happened to make our lives intersect."

Ravnsborg's insistence on remaining in office has opened a divide among Republicans, with him retaining support among some GOP circles. The attorney general has been spotted working booths for local Republican groups at county fairs in recent weeks.

But popular predecessor Marty Jackley is already running for his old job and has collected the support of most of the state's county prosecutors. Political parties will select candidates for attorney general at statewide conventions next year.

Ravnsborg built his political rise on personal connections in the party. It was his dutiful attendance at local GOP events like the one he was returning from when he struck Boever that propelled him from being a party outsider to winning the Republican nomination for attorney general in 2018.

Boever's family said they hope Ravensborg is driven from office one way or another.

"It is not too late for the state Legislature to resume impeachment proceedings," Jane Boever said. "And if they fail us, then it's left to the voters of South Dakota to remove him from the ballot box."

South Dakota attorney general says he'll remain in office despite no contest pleas in crash that killed pedestrian

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota attorney general says he'll remain in office despite no contest pleas in crash that killed pedestrian.

4 escape from SUV that plunged into river, driver arrested

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Four people escaped from an SUV that plunged into the Missouri River in Bismarck. Police say the driver, one of the four occupants, has been arrested on suspicion of driving drunk.

Officers responded to the river shortly before 2 a.m. Wednesday and found the four in a parking lot and the SUV floating down the river.

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Authorities say the 21-year-old driver from Interior, South Dakota, apparently confused drive for reverse and accelerated over an embankment and landed in the river.

All three passengers and the driver managed to escape through an open passenger window. The driver and one passenger were taken to a hospital for treatment of injuries. The driver was then taken to the Burleigh Morton County Detention Center and later released.

Police say the SUV was removed from the river with the help of the Burleigh County Dive Rescue and Recovery Team and a local towing company.

New urgency to airlift after Kabul blasts kill more than 100

By SAYED ZIARMAL HASHEMI, TAMEEM AKHGAR, KATHY GANNON and CARA ANNA Associated Press
KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Evacuation flights from Afghanistan resumed with new urgency on Friday, a day after two suicide bombings targeted the thousands of people desperately fleeing a Taliban takeover and killed more than 100. The U.S. warned more attacks could come ahead of the looming deadline for foreign troops to leave, ending America's longest war.

As the call to prayer echoed through Kabul along with the roar of departing planes, the anxious crowd outside the city's airport was as large as ever. Dozens of Taliban members carrying heavy weapons patrolled one area about 500 meters (1,600 feet) from the facility to prevent anyone from venturing beyond.

Thursday's bombings near the airport killed at least 95 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops, Afghan and U.S. officials said, in the deadliest day for American forces in Afghanistan since August 2011.

Afghan officials warned that the toll could rise, with morgues stretched to capacity and the possibility that relatives are taking bodies away from the scene. One official said as many as 115 may have died, with even more wounded. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

At least 10 bodies lay on the grounds outside Kabul's Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital, where relatives said the mortuary could take no more. Afghans said many of the dead are unclaimed because family members are travelling from distant provinces.

In an emotional speech Thursday night, President Joe Biden blamed the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate, which is far more radical than the Taliban militants who seized power less than two weeks ago in a lightning blitz across the country.

"We will rescue the Americans; we will get our Afghan allies out, and our mission will go on," Biden said. But despite intense pressure to extend Tuesday's deadline and his vow to hunt down those responsible, he has cited the threat of more terrorist attacks as a reason to keep to his plan — and the Taliban have repeatedly insisted he must stick to it.

The Taliban have wrested back control of Afghanistan two decades after they were ousted in a U.S.-led invasion following the 9/11 attacks, which were orchestrated by al-Qaida extremists being harbored in the country. Their return to power has terrified many Afghans, who fear they will reimpose the kind of repressive rule they did when they were last in control. Thousands have rushed to flee the country ahead of the American withdrawal as a result.

The U.S. said that more than 100,000 people have been safely evacuated from Kabul, but as many as 1,000 Americans and tens of thousands more Afghans are struggling to leave in one of history's largest airlifts. Gen. Frank McKenzie, the U.S. Central Command chief overseeing the evacuation, said about 5,000 people awaited flights at the airfield on Thursday.

And more continued to arrive Friday. The attacks led Jamshad to head to the airport in the morning with his wife and three small children, clutching an invitation to a Western country he didn't want to name. This was his first attempt to leave.

"After the explosion I decided I would try because I am afraid now there will be more attacks, and I think now I have to leave," said Jamshad, who like many Afghans uses only one name.

Others acknowledged that going to the airport was risky — but said they have few choices.

"Believe me, I think that an explosion will happen any second or minute, God is my witness, but we

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have lots of challenges in our lives, that is why we take the risk to come here and we overcome fear," said Ahmadullah Herawi, also seeking to flee.

In the wake of the attacks, McKenzie warned that more were possible, and Americans commanders were working with the Taliban to prevent them. Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde tweeted Friday that "we have renewed information about a high terrorist threat to the area around Kabul Airport," but offered no details.

Scenes of chaos, desperation and horror from the airport have transfixed the world. Images of people standing knee-deep in sewage and families thrusting documents and even young children toward U.S. troops behind razor wire have come to symbolize both the disarray of the last days of the American presence in the country and the fears Afghans have for their future.

But chances to help those hoping to flee are fading fast for many. Many American allies have already ended their evacuation efforts, in part to give the U.S. time to wrap up its own operations before getting 5,000 of its troops out by Tuesday.

Britain said Friday its evacuations from Afghanistan will end within hours, and the main British processing center for eligible Afghans has been closed. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace told Sky News there would be "eight or nine" evacuation flights on Friday. British troops will leave over the next few days.

The Spanish government said it has ended its airlift. Sweden's foreign minister said its evacuation was also over but not everyone got out. And the French European affairs minister, Clement Beaune, said on Europe 1 radio that the country will end its operation "soon" but may seek to extend it until after Friday night.

The Taliban have said they'll allow Afghans to leave via commercial flights after the U.S. withdrawal, but it remains unclear which airlines would return to an airport controlled by the militants.

They have asked Turkey to operate Kabul airport, but a decision will be made "after the administration (in Afghanistan) is clear," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday. Taliban leaders have been holding talks with former Afghan leaders, including former President Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, who headed the previous government's reconciliation council, tasked with negotiating a deal with the Taliban.

Untold numbers of Afghans, especially ones who had worked with the U.S. and other Western countries, are now in hiding, fearing retaliation despite the group's offer of full amnesty. The new rulers have sought to project an image of moderation in recent weeks — a sharp contrast to the harsh rule they imposed from 1996 to 2001, when they forced women to wear the all-encompassing burqa, required them to be accompanied by a male relative when they left home, banned television and music, and held public executions.

Despite the promises, Afghans in Kabul and elsewhere have reported that some Taliban members are barring girls from attending school and going door to door in search of people who worked with Western forces.

The bombings also raise questions about the Taliban's vows to bring security to Afghanistan. No one knows how effective they will be at combating the Sunni extremists of IS, who have carried out a series of brutal attacks in Afghanistan, mainly targeting its Shiite Muslim minority.

Akhgar reported from Istanbul, Gannon from Islamabad and Anna from Nairobi, Kenya. Associated Press writers around the world contributed.

More of AP's Afghanistan coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/afghanistan>

Supreme Court allows evictions to resume during pandemic

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court's conservative majority is allowing evictions to resume across the United States, blocking the Biden administration from enforcing a temporary ban that was put in place because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The court's action ends protections for roughly 3.5 million people in the United States who said they faced eviction in the next two months, according to Census Bureau data from early August.

The court said late Thursday in an unsigned opinion that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

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which reimposed the moratorium Aug. 3, lacked the authority to do so under federal law without explicit congressional authorization. The justices rejected the administration's arguments in support of the CDC's authority.

"If a federally imposed eviction moratorium is to continue, Congress must specifically authorize it," the court wrote.

The three liberal justices dissented. Justice Stephen Breyer, writing for the three, pointed to the increase in COVID-19 caused by the delta variant as one of the reasons the court should have left the moratorium in place. "The public interest strongly favors respecting the CDC's judgment at this moment, when over 90% of counties are experiencing high transmission rates," Breyer wrote.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the administration was "disappointed" by the decision and said President Joe Biden "is once again calling on all entities that can prevent evictions — from cities and states to local courts, landlords, Cabinet Agencies — to urgently act to prevent evictions."

Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., who had camped outside the Capitol as the eviction moratorium expired at the end of last month, said Congress must act to reinstate the protections.

"We are in an unprecedented and ongoing crisis that demands compassionate solutions that center the needs of the people and communities most in need of our help. We need to give our communities time to heal from this devastating pandemic," she said in a statement. "We didn't sleep on those steps just to give up now. Congress must act immediately to prevent mass evictions."

It was the second loss for the administration this week at the hands of the high court's conservative majority. On Tuesday, the court effectively allowed the reinstatement of a Trump-era policy forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their hearings. The new administration had tried to end the Remain in Mexico program, as it is informally known.

On evictions, President Joe Biden acknowledged the legal headwinds the new moratorium would likely encounter. But Biden said that even with doubts about what courts would do, it was worth a try because it would buy at least a few weeks of time for the distribution of more of the \$46.5 billion in rental assistance Congress had approved.

The Treasury Department said Wednesday that the pace of distribution has increased and nearly a million households have been helped. But only about 11% of the money, just over \$5 billion, has been distributed by state and local governments, the department said.

The administration has called on state and local officials to "move more aggressively" in distributing rental assistance funds and urged state and local courts to issue their own moratoriums to "discourage eviction filings" until landlords and tenants have sought the funds.

A handful of states, including California, Maryland and New Jersey, have put in place their own temporary bans on evictions. In a separate order earlier this month, the high court ended some protections for New York residents who had fallen behind on their rents during the pandemic.

The high court hinted strongly in late June that it would take this path if asked again to intervene. At that time, the court allowed an earlier pause on evictions to continue through the end of July.

But four conservative justices would have set the moratorium aside then and a fifth, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, said Congress would have to expressly authorize a new pause on evictions. Neither house of Congress has passed a new evictions moratorium.

The administration at first allowed the earlier moratorium to lapse July 31, saying it had no legal authority to allow it to continue. But the CDC issued a new moratorium days later as pressure mounted from lawmakers and others to help vulnerable renters stay in their homes as the coronavirus' delta variant surged. The moratorium had been scheduled to expire Oct. 3.

Landlords in Alabama and Georgia who challenged the earlier evictions ban quickly returned to court, where they received a sympathetic hearing. U.S. Judge Dabney Friedrich, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, said the new moratorium was beyond the CDC's authority.

But Friedrich said she was powerless to stop it because of an earlier ruling from the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C., that sits above her. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit likewise refused to put the CDC order on hold, prompting the landlords' emergency appeal to the Supreme Court.

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The earlier versions of the moratorium, first ordered during Trump's presidency, applied nationwide and were put in place out of fear that people who couldn't pay their rent would end up in crowded living conditions like homeless shelters and help spread the virus.

The new moratorium temporarily halted evictions in counties with "substantial and high levels" of virus transmissions and would cover areas where 90% of the U.S. population lives.

The Biden administration argued that the rise in the delta variant underscored the dangers of resuming evictions in areas of high transmission of COVID-19. But that argument did not win broad support at the high court.

Biden vows to finish Kabul evacuation, avenge US deaths

By ROBERT BURNS, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is vowing to complete the evacuation of American citizens and others from Afghanistan despite the deadly suicide bomb attack at the Kabul airport. He promised to avenge the deaths of 13 U.S. service members killed in the attack, declaring to the extremists responsible: "We will hunt you down and make you pay."

Speaking with emotion from the White House, Biden said the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate was to blame for the Thursday attacks that killed the Americans and many more Afghan civilians. He said there was no evidence they colluded with the Taliban, who now control the country.

Biden asked for a moment of silence to honor the service members, bowing his head, and ordered U.S. flags to half-staff across the country.

As for the bombers and gunmen involved, he said, "We have some reason to believe we know who they are ... not certain." He said he had instructed military commanders to develop plans to strike IS "assets, leadership and facilities."

Gen. Frank McKenzie, the U.S. Central Command chief, said more attempted attacks were expected.

The IS affiliate in Afghanistan has carried out many attacks on civilian targets in the country in recent years. It is far more radical than the Taliban, who seized power less than two weeks ago. The most heralded American attack on the group came in April 2017 when the U.S. dropped the largest conventional bomb in its arsenal on an IS cave and tunnel complex. The group more recently is believed to have concentrated in urban areas, which could complicate U.S. efforts to target them without harming civilians.

"We will respond with force and precision at our time, at the place of our choosing," Biden said. "These ISIS terrorists will not win. We will rescue the Americans; we will get our Afghan allies out, and our mission will go on. America will not be intimidated."

Biden said U.S. military commanders in Afghanistan had told him it is important to complete the evacuation mission. "And we will," he said. "We will not be deterred by terrorists."

Indeed, Gen. McKenzie, who is overseeing the evacuation operation from his Florida headquarters, told a Pentagon news conference shortly before Biden spoke, "Let me be clear, while we are saddened by the loss of life, both U.S. and Afghan, we are continuing to execute the mission," He said there were about 5,000 evacuees on the airfield Thursday awaiting flights.

As many as 1,000 Americans and many more Afghans are still struggling to get out of Kabul.

McKenzie said 12 U.S. service members had been killed and 15 were wounded. Later, his spokesman, Capt. William Urban, said the toll had risen to 13 dead and 18 wounded. Urban said the wounded were being evacuated from Afghanistan aboard Air Force C-17 transport planes equipped with surgical units.

The Marine Corps said 10 Marines were among those killed. Central Command did not identify the dead by service. It was the deadliest day for U.S. forces in Afghanistan since August 2011, when a helicopter was shot down by an insurgent armed with a rocket-propelled grenade, killing 30 American troops and eight Afghans.

In somber, sometimes halting remarks, Biden praised U.S. forces and asked for the moment of silence. Asked later about further actions, press secretary Jen Psaki said that personal calls to families would wait for notification of next of kin and that Biden might travel to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware when the

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remains of the fallen service members are returned.

They were the first U.S. service members killed in Afghanistan since February 2020, the month the Trump administration struck an agreement with the Taliban that called for the militant group to halt attacks on Americans in exchange for a U.S. agreement to remove all American troops and contractors by May 2021. Biden announced in April that he would have all forces out by September.

Thursday's attacks, came 12 days into the rushed evacuation and five days before its scheduled completion. Some Republicans and others are arguing to extend the evacuation beyond next Tuesday's deadline.

The administration has been widely blamed for a chaotic and deadly evacuation that began in earnest only after the collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan government and the Taliban's takeover of the country. More than 100,000 people have been evacuated so far, Afghans, Americans and others.

Thursday's attack was sure to intensify political pressure from all sides on Biden, who already was under heavy criticism for not beginning the pullout earlier. He had announced in April that he was ending the U.S. war and would have all forces out by September.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California called for Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to bring the chamber back into session to consider legislation that would prohibit the U.S. withdrawal until all Americans are out. Pelosi's office dismissed such suggestions as "empty stunts."

After the suicide bomber's attack at the airport's Abbey Gate, a number of ISIS gunmen opened fire on civilians and military forces, he said. There also was an attack at or near the Baron Hotel near that gate, he said.

"We thought this would happen sooner or later," McKenzie said, adding that U.S. military commanders were working with Taliban commanders to prevent further attacks.

As details of the day's attack emerged, the White House rescheduled Biden's first in-person meeting with Israel's new prime minister on Thursday and canceled a video conference with governors about resettling Afghan refugees arriving in the United States.

A number of U.S. allies said they were ending their evacuation efforts in Kabul, at least in part to give the U.S. the time it needs to wrap up its evacuation operations before getting 5,000 of its troops out by Tuesday.

Despite intense pressure to extend the deadline, Biden has repeatedly cited the threat of terrorist attacks against civilians and U.S. service members as a reason to keep to his plan.

In an interview with ABC News, Ross Wilson, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, said, "There are safe ways to get to" the airport for those Americans who still want to leave. He added that "there undoubtedly will be" some at-risk Afghans who will not get out before Biden's deadline.

The airlift continued Thursday, though the number of evacuees fell for a second day as the terror attack and further threats kept people from the airport and as other countries began shutting down their efforts. From 3 a.m. to 3 p.m., Washington time, about 7,500 people were evacuated, a White House official said. Fourteen U.S. military flights carried about 5,100, and 39 coalition flights carried 2,400.

The total compared to 19,000 in one 24-hour period toward the start of the week.

Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani, Lolita C. Baldor and Ellen Knickmeyer in Washington and James LaPorta in Boca Raton, Florida, contributed to this report.

Tropical Storm Ida a hurricane menace to New Orleans

MIAMI (AP) — Tropical Storm Ida prompted a hurricane watch for New Orleans and an emergency declaration for the state of Louisiana as it pushed across the Caribbean toward an anticipated strike on Cuba Friday.

Ida could be near major hurricane strength by the time it reaches the northern Gulf Coast, which forecasters predict may happen sometime late Sunday or early Monday.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Ida was expected to cross the tobacco-rich western stretch of Cuba as a tropical storm starting Friday afternoon, then strengthen over the southeastern and central

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Gulf of Mexico.

"Unfortunately, all of Louisiana's coastline is currently in the forecast cone for Tropical Storm Ida, which is strengthening and could come ashore in Louisiana as a major hurricane as Gulf conditions are conducive for rapid intensification," said Gov. John Bel Edwards.

"By Saturday evening, everyone should be in the location where they intend to ride out the storm," the governor added.

A hurricane watch was in effect from Cameron, Louisiana, to the Mississippi-Alabama border — including Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Maurepas and metropolitan New Orleans.

Dangerous storm surge was also possible for the Gulf Coast. Depending on the tide as Ida approached the coast, 7 to 11 feet (2.1 to 3.4 meters) of storm surge was forecast from Morgan City, Louisiana, to Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

"There is an increasing risk of life-threatening storm surge, damaging hurricane-force winds, and heavy rainfall Sunday and Monday, especially along the coast of Louisiana," the hurricane center said.

"Ida certainly has the potential to be very bad," said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

The mayor of Grand Isle, a Louisiana town on a narrow barrier island in the Gulf, called for a voluntary evacuation late Thursday ahead of Ida and said a mandatory evacuation would take effect Friday.

Friday morning, Ida had maximum sustained winds of 45 mph (75 kph) and was traveling northwest at about 15 mph (24 kph). It was centered about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north-northwest of Grand Cayman and 145 miles (230 kilometers) southeast of the Isle of Youth.

Tropical storm-force winds extended as far as 80 miles (130 kilometers) from the center.

The storm was forecast to drop anywhere from 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of rain over parts of Jamaica, Cuba and the Cayman Islands, with the potential for more in some isolated areas.

Forecasters warned of possible flash floods and mudslides and tidal storm surge of as much as 2 to 4 feet above normal, along with "large and destructive waves."

The Cayman Islands government said nonessential government offices closed early on Thursday and several shelters were opened.

This story has been corrected to show a hurricane watch was issued from Cameron, Louisiana, to the Mississippi-Alabama border, not a hurricane warning.

Alone in the sky, pilot and fiancée save 17 in Tenn. flood

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Nashville-based helicopter pilot Joel Boyers had just finished helping his fiancée earn her pilot's license on Saturday morning, and they were heading home to celebrate, when he received a frantic call from a woman in Pennsylvania. Her brother's home in Waverly, Tennessee, was underwater and he was trapped on a roof with his daughters. Could Boyers help?

"I thought, 'How would I feel if I told her I'm not even going to try?'" he said in a Thursday interview. "She just so happened to call the right person, because I'm the only person crazy enough to even try to do that."

The weather was terrible and Boyers had to contend with hills and high-voltage power lines on the way to Waverly, a small city about 60 miles (96 kilometers) west of Nashville. Just before reaching the town, he set down in a field to get his bearings and realized the internet was down, making it impossible to pinpoint the house he was looking for. He flew on anyway.

"As soon as I popped over the ridge, it was nothing but tan raging water below me," he said. "There were two houses that were on fire. There were cars in trees. There was tons of debris. Any way debris could get caught, it was. I knew no one was going to be able to swim in that."

A few people were out in boats, rescuing the stranded, and one person was helping with a jet ski, but

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Boyers was alone in the sky. He started flying up and down the flooded creek, grabbing anyone he could.

Boyers, who co-owns Helistar Aviation, said he ended up rescuing 17 people that day. He's proud of that, but said he's the one who should be thanking them. "I literally prayed just days before this that God would give me some meaning in my life, and then I end up getting this call," he said.

He has flown over disasters, including floods, before, but "the cops are usually there, and my hands are tied. This time there weren't any."

Saturday's flooding killed 20 people, taking out houses, roads, cellphone towers and telephone lines, with rainfall that more than tripled forecasts and shattered the state record for one-day rainfall. More than 270 homes were destroyed and 160 took major damage, according to the Humphreys County Emergency Management Agency.

To perform the rescues, Boyers had to maneuver around power lines, balance his skids on sloped rooftops, and hover over floodwaters. It took all the skills learned over 16 years flying, including for a television news station, for documentaries and for country music stars.

"I don't want to lie," he said. "It was almost a little fun for me."

It was also a powerful experience to go through with his fiancée, Melody Among, who acted as his co-pilot, spotting power lines, giving him sips of water and even taking the controls at times. "Her and I will be bonded to those people for life," he said.

At one point, he spotted four people on the ledge of a roof of a farm supply store where he was able to set down one skid, making three different trips to pick them all up. One was a woman who said she had watched her husband get swept away and had become separated from her daughter, who was on the roof of a nearby gas station. Boyers touched down and rescued the daughter too.

The rescues of four of those people were caught on video by Jeani Rice-Cranford, who lives on a nearby hilltop and helped shelter the victims in her home afterward. "I've never seen anything like that," Rice-Cranford said. "Not in real life."

Rice-Cranford and others had been lined up along the roadside — helplessly watching and listening to the screams — for more than two hours when Boyers showed up. During the rescue "there was a gust of wind, and the helicopter kind of shifted," Rice-Cranford said. "We all just held our breath. We were just watching with our mouths open, hoping and praying that he would be able to get them."

That rescue stands out in Among's mind. They got the mother first, "then we got the daughter and they reunited on the ground," she said. "They were both hugging each other. It was very emotional."

At another point, they saw a house on a rise, surrounded by floodwaters but not yet engulfed. Boyers touched down, picking up two men, and saw a girl in the window who refused to come out. He flew out, dropped off one of the men and Among, and brought the other man back with him to hoist the girl into the helicopter. When he landed again, he was able to rescue the girl and a woman who was with her.

"I'm in a little hole with power lines all around. It takes enormous energy to take off vertically like that," he said. So he left the man briefly and then came back for him. "I just kept doing that over and over again until I was low on fuel."

All the time, he knew he really was not supposed to be doing any of this.

"Every landing was pretty dangerous," he said. He's already had a conversation with the Federal Aviation Administration about it.

"I know the FAA can take my license away if they see me flying like that," he said. He assured them that he did not charge anyone for the rescue, no one was hurt, the helicopter was not damaged, and there were no law enforcement helicopters in the area. After he left Waverly, he stopped at an airport in the nearby town of Dickson to refuel and heard that the state police and National Guard still had not flown in because of the bad weather.

Boyers said he heard from the woman who originally called him in her desperate search for a helicopter anywhere near Waverly. She said her family was safe, but he doesn't even know if he rescued them or someone else did.

Pulling people from the floodwaters isn't the scariest thing he's ever done, Boyers said. That would have to be flying through clouds on instruments only, with some of those instruments out of order.

"Literally, it just felt like I was working," he said. "Obviously I tabled the feeling wrenching in everyone's stomach because of the devastation."

COVID-19 surge pummels Hawaii and its native population

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Kuulei Perreira-Keawekane could barely breathe when she went to a Hawaii emergency room. Nausea made it difficult for her to stand and her body throbbed with pain.

Like many Native Hawaiians, she was not vaccinated against COVID-19.

Perreira-Keawekane's situation highlights the COVID-19 crisis that is gripping Hawaii as hospitals are overflowing with a record number of patients, vaccinations are stagnating and Hawaiians are experiencing a disproportionate share of the suffering.

Hawaii was once seen as a beacon of safety during the pandemic because of stringent travel and quarantine restrictions and overall vaccine acceptance that made it one of the most inoculated states in the country. But the highly contagious delta variant exploited weaknesses as residents let down their guard and attended family gatherings after months of restrictions and vaccine hesitancy lingered in some Hawaiian communities.

Now, the governor is urging tourists to stay away and residents to limit travel, and leaders are re-imposing caps on sizes of social gatherings. And in an effort to address vaccine hesitancy, a group of businesses and nonprofits launched a public service campaign Thursday aimed at Native Hawaiians, many of whom harbor a deep distrust of the government dating back to the U.S.-supported overthrow of the monarchy in 1893.

The campaign reminds Hawaiians that they were nearly wiped out by disease in the 1800s and that the kingdom's rulers at the time pushed people to get vaccinated against smallpox.

About 20 Hawaiian leaders stood in rows 6 feet (1.8 meters) apart Thursday at a statue of Queen Lili'uokalani, the kingdom's last monarch, imploring people to wear masks and get vaccinated to ensure the survival of the Indigenous people of Hawaii.

"Not only was I afraid of the needles and just putting it off, putting it off, but I didn't have enough information about the vaccine and that distrust was just very real," said Perreira-Keawekane.

She now plans to get vaccinated. Still, she doesn't consider herself pro-vaccine, or anti-vaccine.

"Having to choose one or the other is the root of trauma for native people," she said. "You can shout data at the top of your lungs, but if it has nothing to do with people we know, it's not real."

Overall, 62.1% of Hawaii is fully vaccinated. But Hawaiians have among the lowest rates; estimates show it's at about 40%.

Native Hawaiians make up about 21% of the state's population, and from the start of the pandemic until July 10, 2021, they accounted for 21% of cases as well. But from July 11, 2021, to Aug. 16, 2021, that figured increased to 28%, according to state data.

Honolulu Emergency Services Department Director Jim Ireland said that on a recent morning, there were four COVID-19 patient 911 calls in a row for Nanakuli, a community that's home to many Native Hawaiians. He noted that vaccination rates are lower on the west side of Oahu.

The thought behind the campaign focusing on increasing Hawaiian vaccination rates is that messages to the public so far haven't been adequate, said Nā'ālehu Anthony, director of COVID Pau, a collaborative of businesses and nonprofit organizations delivering public health messages during the pandemic.

"We're telling people to get the vaccine 'til we're blue in the face," Anthony said. "But that's not necessarily all of the story as to why it's important to get a vaccine. And part of that is the relationship to who's asking you to do it."

At a Monday news conference, Gov. David Ige, who is not Hawaiian, acknowledged he's not the ideal messenger: "We do know that sometimes my making statements are not the most motivational for many others."

Earlier in the pandemic, Native Hawaiians had among the lowest rates of infection and embraced safety measures such as trading honi, a traditional forehead-to-forehead greeting, for elbow bumps or shakas

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from a distance.

That changed around May during the time of year when people celebrate graduations and weddings.

The irony is not lost on some that a popular reason for Hawaii family parties today originated during a time when Hawaiians would hold big celebrations for a baby's first birthday, which was a real feat in the face of measles until a vaccine was available.

"I do think that it's sad and kind of a little bit ironic that luau, in a lot of cases, have become places where people get sick," said state Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole.

Andria Tupola, a Hawaiian city councilwoman who represents west Oahu, said one way government leaders are out of touch with her constituents is not respecting people who want to make their own decisions.

She recently disclosed that she wasn't vaccinated because she had tested positive while visiting Utah, but felt healthy enough to go running every day. She has also been instrumental in organizing vaccination clinics.

The backlash she faced over her vaccination status isn't helping convince people in her community to get vaccinated, she said.

"If you have to crucify me and make an example out of me in front of my community ... if you think somehow that's going to make people want to do it, it's like that's the opposite because people trust others and they respect others in our community," she said.

Keawe'aimoku Kaholokula, chair of the Department of Native Hawaiian Health at the University of Hawaii's medical school, said he didn't expect some Hawaiians to shun the vaccine. "It's very American, which is ironic — very individualistic — to behave this way," he said.

"I think our people need to remember that a part of our culture is protecting each other over our own self-interest," he said.

Keoni Payton, a clothing designer on the Big Island, is not vaccinated, but supports those who choose to get vaccinated. "I'm pro-choice on what you put in your body and body autonomy," he said.

The messages about how kingdom rulers mandated the smallpox vaccine in the 1850s doesn't resonate with him.

"As Hawaiians, we haven't been treated fairly with the U.S. government," he said. "They stole our land and now they're stealing our bodies."

AP reporters Audrey McAvoy and Caleb Jones contributed to this report.

US soldier loses 1 Afghan translator; fights to save another

By JULIE WATSON and ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

BREMEN, Germany (AP) — The two men risked their lives together nearly a decade ago trying to eliminate the Taliban, dodging bullets and forever bonding in a way that can only be forged in war.

Now the American soldier and his Afghan translator were together again in Germany shopping for a suit. Abdulhaq Sodais's future hinges on an asylum hearing in a German court after he was denied a U.S. visa, and U.S. Army Veteran Spencer Sullivan was there to help him prepare.

Together, they watched videos from Sodais' hometown: The crackle of gunfire, dead bodies being carted off as black smoke billowed. Once U.S. troops withdrew, the fragile government built over years by people like Sodais and Sullivan collapsed in just days.

"I couldn't stop crying," Sodais said. "My father said the Taliban were knocking on every single door in Herat looking for guys who worked for the coalition forces."

Sullivan already lost another translator, Sayed Masoud, who was killed by the Taliban while waiting for a U.S. visa. It's a scar Sullivan carries deeply, the realization that the U.S. government is capable of the one thing he never believed: betrayal.

Sullivan was determined not to let Sodais, who used smugglers to get to Europe, suffer the same fate.

So he flew from California to Germany to help Sodais pick out something to wear for his Sept. 6 asylum hearing.

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In a world of hurt and uncertainty, buying a suit was the one thing Sullivan could control. It offered a small hope of making a difference.

A professional appearance just might convince a judge to help keep Sodais safe and uphold the sacred vow that America was unable to keep.

"I made a promise to him just as America made a promise to him to protect him and save his life," Sullivan said. "I mean how can you turn your back on that promise? I don't think the answer is more complicated than that. I think it's actually very simple."

Sullivan is among scores of U.S. combat veterans working on their own to rescue the Afghans who served alongside them.

Their efforts started long before this month's chaotic rush to evacuate Afghans after the Taliban's swift takeover of Afghanistan as U.S. forces withdraw from America's forever war.

Thousands of Afghans who aided US troops have spent years stuck in a backlogged and beleaguered U.S. Special Immigrant Visa program, while frantic messages of the Taliban hunting them down have been pinging the phones of the American soldiers they helped on the battlefield.

The program was meant to award Afghans for their support by giving them and their families a pathway to the United States. But it has fallen far short, with Congress failing to approve enough visas each year, while the former Trump administration added new security requirements and bureaucratic hurdles that turned the average wait time from a few months into nearly three years.

Others have been denied over what immigration attorneys say were minor or unjust discrepancies in their performance records. Many now fear that the time they were marked as late to work, unfairly or accidentally even, may cost them their escape, and possibly their life.

Sodais and Masoud stood out among the dozen interpreters who worked with the platoon Sullivan led in Afghanistan from 2012 to 2013.

Both interpreters went with his platoon on dozens of missions into villages controlled by the Taliban, taking on fire while unarmed.

In 2013, Masoud applied for a special immigrant visa after receiving death threats for his work. His application included a letter of recommendation from Sullivan who described him as "punctual and professional, an exemplary linguist and trustworthy friend."

"Granting him a special immigration visa is the least that can be done in order to express America's gratitude for his services," Sullivan wrote.

Two years later, Masoud's application was denied. The U.S. embassy said he had not worked for the U.S. government or its military. In fact, Masoud was hired by a U.S. firm that had a contract with the Department of Defense to provide linguistic services to troops in Afghanistan.

Masoud appealed and Sullivan wrote another letter to the Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy, Kabul, providing more details of his work, but he got no response.

Sullivan reached out to other veterans to see what he could do. He learned he could pay \$20,000 to get Masoud smuggled out, but he didn't want to support a criminal network. Instead, he hoped the U.S. government would come through on its end.

Meanwhile, Masoud's texts to Sullivan became more sporadic as the threats escalated, forcing him to move from house to house.

"He was becoming increasingly frantic and afraid," Sullivan said.

Sullivan got the last one in the summer of 2017.

"Hello sir. I am so sorry to reply you late. I got a problem," Masoud wrote, apologizing for not keeping in better touch with his friend.

"Hey Said it's OK!" Sullivan texted back. "Are you safe?"

Sullivan never got a reply.

Weeks later, Masoud's brother answered an email Sullivan sent to Masoud's account: Masoud had been

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shot by the Taliban after returning home for a relative's funeral and was dead.

Sullivan was consumed by sadness and guilt. He felt partly responsible since he had posted Facebook pictures of them and wondered if he had put his friend at risk. He wondered, too, if he could have done more to protect him.

"I felt helpless," he said. "I didn't know what else I could have done. Maybe I should have spent the \$20,000 to pay seedy smugglers."

A year and 1/2 after his death, Sullivan got an email from the U.S. embassy in Kabul informing him that the Afghanistan Special Immigrant Visa Unit had received his recommendation letter for Masoud.

The official wanted to know if the letter was legitimate and if Sullivan would still recommend the applicant so they could begin the process. It included a photo of Masoud with his thick red hair and thin moustache.

Sullivan wrote back to the embassy to inform them that Masoud had been killed while waiting more than four years for his application to be processed.

After Masoud's death, Sullivan texted Sodais to tell him what had happened to his fellow translator. But he got no reply.

Like Masoud, Sodais also had applied for a special immigrant visa in 2013 and was denied. He applied again in 2015 and 2016. Sullivan sent the U.S. embassy in Kabul letters to support his case.

His last rejection came in 2017. After Sodais' uncle was beheaded, and his neighbor, who worked as a fuel truck driver for coalition forces, was gunned down by the Taliban while standing in his front doorway, Sodais, who taught himself English using library books because he admired America and believed in its mission, decided he had to find another way out.

His plan would be to go to Europe by land. His brother, who knew someone in a travel agency, helped him get a tourist visa to Iran, and his family knew an Afghan man living there who would end up connecting Sodais to the first of a long line of smugglers.

Sodais left with a backpack full of clothes, and \$100 worth of Iranian rials.

Along the way, he met other Afghans who worked for coalition forces also now turning to smugglers to find safe refuge.

Sodais was crammed into cars with refugees stacked on top of each other on the floors. They hiked through the mountains in a snowstorm at night and dodged gunfire from Turkish border guards. He was beaten and abandoned by smugglers and jailed and beaten by police.

Meanwhile, his family back in Afghanistan was forced to move because of the Taliban's growing presence in the area, and urged him to get to safety. He decided to head to Germany since Turkey and Greece were deporting Afghans at the time. His family sold their small general store in Afghanistan to fund his journey.

In the end, it took him seven months and would cost his family \$15,000 to get to Germany. Once there, he applied for asylum but was lacking sufficient photos or documentation to support his claims and was immediately denied.

He called Sullivan, who he had not spoken to in more than a year.

"I was like 'oh my God, he's alive!'" Sullivan recounted, feeling overjoyed.

Four months later, Sullivan went to see him in Germany and offered to help his case.

Sullivan wrote a transcript for the German court. He sent him photos of his time with his platoon and wrote to the U.S. government to get his record, which showed his contract was terminated in 2013 due to "job abandonment."

Sodais says he overextended his 30-day leave after going home to deal with a back injury from the blast of an improvised explosive device during a mission.

He was rehired in 2014 by the U.S. military but his contract was administered by a civilian contractor who terminated it in 2016 due to poor job performance.

Sullivan contacted the civilian defense contractor who fired Sodais in 2016 to ask what happened since he had found his work exemplary, but she refused to help him or provide an explanation. The paperwork she signed stated only that he was being released due to "incompatible skill set with the unit's mission."

She also would not answer questions about whether she remembered Sodais or had a security concern

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when contacted by The Associated Press.

Sodais said she falsely accused him of checking his personal Facebook page on the job.

Sodais fell into a deep depression after two years of waiting for a decision by the German courts. The fear of being deported was overwhelming, and he suffered headaches, back aches and other ailments from injuries from the IED blast.

In March of 2020, he tried to end his life, overdosing on pain medication. He spent nearly two months in a psychiatric ward after being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

When he got out, he messaged Sullivan.

"I'm alive right now because of Spencer, because of him," Sodais said later.

Sullivan said he's just keeping the promise he made on the battlefield. He is helping Sodais write a book to shed light on the experience of Afghan refugees.

For now, Sodais is safe. On Aug. 11, Germany temporarily halted the deportation of all Afghans due to the upheaval but did not specify how long the order would last.

"Germany is filling our moral void," Sullivan said of the U.S. government's failure to help.

But Sodais worries his luck will run out once deportations resume.

"Really sometimes, it's really hard for me to fight against this life," he said on a Zoom call with Sullivan as he rattled off his fears over what's happening in Afghanistan, his guilt over not being able to save his family there, and his anxiety over whether he will ever have a future.

And how will he ever get to the United States, where he wants to live? he asks.

Sullivan interrupts, stopping his downward spiral, and reminds him to stay focused on the Sept. 6 asylum hearing.

"Step one is we keep you alive," he said. "We get you asylum in Germany and everything else will follow."

Sullivan had to stay focused, too. Sodais was the one U.S. ally he felt he could possibly save. Days later, he would get an email from Masoud's brother, who worked for a U.S. military base, pleading for help. He included photos of his mother and uncle who were recently killed.

Sullivan knew there was little he could do since they had never worked together.

At the suit store in Bremen, on Sullivan's second visit, Sodais exited the dressing room in a black suit.

"Nice! Do a spin," Sullivan joked, twirling his finger and patting his friend on back as they look in mirror. "You're looking sharp."

Sodais chuckled.

It is a moment of lightness after talking about what they've been through and what's to come.

Before Sullivan leaves, Sodais breaks down, and Sullivan embraces him as he sobs.

"It's OK," Sullivan says. "You're going to make it."

Watson reported from San Diego.

Latino city in Arizona grew, but census says it shrank

By ASTRID GALVAN and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

SOMERTON, Ariz. (AP) — It's a Thursday evening in Somerton, Arizona, and parents and students packed inside a middle school gym are roaring for the school's wrestling team at decibels that test the eardrum.

The young wrestlers are seventh and eighth graders who will be among the first to attend this town's first public high school, which was approved just weeks ago after years of lobbying by local officials. The overwhelmingly Hispanic community has grown enough over the last decade that it's also building a new elementary school.

But the Census Bureau says Somerton actually lost 90 residents during the that time, putting its official population at 14,197 people, not the 20,000 that the mayor expected.

"So we're trying to make sense of where these numbers are coming from, because they do not make sense whatsoever," said City Manager Jerry Cabrera, who cited 853 new homes over the past decade as evidence of growth.

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An accurate census is crucial for the distribution of hundreds of billions of federal dollars, and it determines how many congressional seats each state gets. But a review by The Associated Press found that in many places, the share of the Hispanic and Black populations in the latest census figures fell below recent estimates and an annual Census Bureau survey, suggesting that some areas were overlooked.

For the share of the Black population, the trend was most visible in southeastern and Mid-Atlantic states, including Alabama, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. For the Hispanic population, it was most noticeable in New Mexico and Arizona.

In Somerton, about 200 miles southwest of Phoenix near the Mexico border, community leaders were incredulous.

"This is not true. This is not real numbers, you know. They don't know our community. They did not do what needed to be done to count our people, and it's just ridiculous. It can't be," said Emma Torres, executive director of Campesinos Sin Fronteras, an organization that advocates for farmworkers. The group was heavily involved in promoting the census.

Most Somerton residents use post office boxes. A majority are Spanish-speaking farmworkers, and many lack reliable internet access.

Community leaders say they are used to an undercount, but the notion that they lost residents is unfathomable.

Here, where an annual tamale festival to raise money for college students attracts thousands of visitors, local schools are over capacity as enrollment grew by nearly 12% from 2010 to 2019. And after years of having to bus students at least 10 miles north to Yuma, Somerton finally met the threshold for its own high school.

While there is nothing new about undercounts, and no census is perfect, there is "strong evidence" that undercounts in the 2020 census are worse than in past decades, said Paul Ong, a public affairs professor at UCLA, whose own analysis of Los Angeles County this month concluded that Hispanics, Asians and other residents were undercounted.

"The big-picture implication is it will skew the redistricting process, our undercounted neighborhoods will be underrepresented and populations that are undercounted will be shortchanged when it comes to the allocation of federal spending," Ong said.

The AP analysis comes with caveats. The Census Bureau says the census figures should be considered more accurate than the agency's American Community Survey or vintage population estimates. Additionally, the American Community Survey has margins of error, and the population estimates are edited in a way that pushes some people who identified as "some other race" in the 2010 count into more traditional racial categories such as white, Black and Asian.

Bureau officials say it's too soon to speculate on whether individual communities were undercounted. The full extent of whether the statistical agency missed certain populations, or overcounted others, won't be known until early next year, when it releases results of a survey used to measure how good a job it did counting every U.S. resident.

Black and Hispanic communities historically are undercounted, and there was greater concern about an undercount in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which made people afraid to interact with strangers, and natural disasters, which made it difficult for census takers to reach some residents. There were also attempts at political interference by the Trump administration, including a failed attempt to add a citizenship question to the census form.

The AP review revealed figures that suggest some communities were overlooked.

Outside Baton Rouge, in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, for instance, the 2020 census figures show the share of the Black population to be 23.4%, but 2020 population estimates and the 2019 American Community Survey placed it at 44%. The area is home to the 5,500-inmate Louisiana State Penitentiary, and group housing like prisons, dorms and nursing homes were among the toughest places to count people during the census because of COVID-19-related restrictions.

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In counties along the Colorado and New Mexico border, the share of the Hispanic population in the census was lower than those in the estimates and survey, anywhere from 4 to 7 percentage points.

The Census Bureau said in a statement that tribal, state and local governments can ask for a review of the numbers if they think they census figures are inaccurate, but that will not change the numbers used for redistricting or congressional seats.

"Despite facing a pandemic, natural disasters and other unforeseen challenges, the 2020 census results thus far are in line with overall benchmarks," the statement said.

Cabrera said the city is pulling data to show that the 2020 count was off and plans to appeal.

Somerton Mayor Gerardo Anaya worries about the city's share of state revenues. He says Somerton's sales tax revenue, school enrollment and building permits have gone up in the past few years. Developers continue to build.

As it did in many Latino communities, the pandemic had an outsized effect in Somerton. Latinos were almost twice as likely to become infected and more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than whites, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In Somerton, few people have jobs they can do from home. Anaya says there was a point last summer when the Somerton zip code had the highest infection rate in Arizona.

"This time it was just chaotic here during the summer. We all had family members that were in the hospital or dying or infected with COVID. So it was very scary," Anaya said.

Back at the home of the Somerton Middle School Cobras, Principal Jose Moreno bragged about his city's tight-knit community, where wrestling is a source of pride. Moreno paced around the gym and joined the cheering as the young boys battled the San Luis Scorpions.

Moreno said finally meeting the threshold for a high school means local educators get to keep working with kids they have taught from kindergarten through eighth grade.

"I accept the challenge, I really do, in trying to continue the traditions that we have here at the middle school, in the city, in the things we value. And so you have that small-time feeling here, and you know we definitely want to keep that going," Moreno said.

As for the match, the Cobras gave the Scorpions a whooping, beating them 90 to 6.

Schneider reported from Orlando, Florida. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>
Galván covers issues impacting Latinos in the U.S. for the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/astridgalvan>

Couple hopeful for children's future after escape from Kabul

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — An Afghan couple who arrived in Philadelphia this week navigated the streets of Taliban-controlled Kabul with their six children repeatedly before making it onto a rescue flight on the third day.

The 36-year-old father, Mohammad, who asked to be identified only by his first name to protect relatives still there, had worked for a security company at the U.S. Embassy and then for a defense contractor since 2004. He first applied for an American visa in 2018. By the time the visa came through on Aug. 8, the Taliban was making its way toward Kabul, and would move on the city a week later.

When they did, Mohammad's relative near Philadelphia — where the family is now staying — urged him to hurry to the airport, even though he had not yet booked a flight.

The family made it within 55 yards (50 meters) of the U.S. military on their first attempt, on Aug. 16, only to be pushed back by the crowd and return home. They soon learned at least two people had died that day trying to cling to the departing U.S. aircraft.

The next day's journey proved equally futile, and their children grew frightened seeing Taliban forces fire their weapons into the air. The youngest of the children, ages 3 to 16, wanted to give up.

"I was scared myself. I didn't want to show it to my kids," said Mohammad's wife, also 36, who asked

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that her name not be used for her family's safety.

"At the end, I was thinking, 'We might get hurt. It will be a little hard to get there. But we'll have a future,'" she said through a cousin, who translated for the family and has taken them in.

The cousin, who asked to be identified only as Khan, also to protect relatives back home, has made three airport runs this week for family arriving from Afghanistan, some of them U.S. residents or citizens who had been visiting when Kabul fell.

His family has had as many as 22 people fill their suburban home this past week, with the smell of qabli, a chicken and rice dish, and green tea wafting through the first floor on Thursday, as the newly arrived youngsters — the 3-year-old in a bright red Tommy Hilfiger T-shirt — squealed and ran up and down the center hall staircase.

Their mother had enjoyed running their busy household in Kabul, where the couple said their children could have gone to college or even graduate school given the progress they saw during the U.S.-led occupation over the past 20 years.

"People got educated, places got built, it helped our economy," Mohammad said. "The way of life was getting better in Afghanistan. We could have benefitted if they extended their stay."

The mood on the plane when they had boarded in Kabul for their first-ever flight, they said, was "happiness" that no one could hide.

"People like us who made it to the airport and then to the plane were very happy thinking about the bright future," they said, "but also, looking back to the city, they were sad because they lost everything. The country was in chaos. Dark days were coming."

Follow Maryclaire Dale on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/Maryclairedale>

Israeli PM aims to push Biden away from Iran nuclear deal

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is aiming to dissuade President Joe Biden from returning to the Iran nuclear deal when the two leaders meet at the White House Friday.

The meeting, originally scheduled for Thursday, was postponed for one day as Biden focused his attention on dealing with the aftermath of a suicide bomb attack at the Kabul airport that killed at least 13 U.S. troops.

"On behalf of the people of Israel, I share our deep sadness over the loss of American lives in Kabul," Bennett said in a statement posted on social media. "Israel stands with the United States in these difficult times, just as America has always stood with us. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the United States."

Before arriving in Washington, Bennett made clear that he would push against the Iran deal, arguing Tehran has already advanced in its uranium enrichment, and sanctions relief would give Iran more resources to back Israel's enemies in the region.

The Israeli leader met separately Wednesday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to discuss Iran and other issues. The visit is his first to the U.S. as prime minister.

Bennett told his Cabinet before the trip that he would tell the American president "that now is the time to halt the Iranians, to stop this thing" and not to reenter "a nuclear deal that has already expired and is not relevant, even to those who thought it was once relevant."

Biden has made clear his desire to find a path to salvage the 2015 landmark pact cultivated by Barack Obama's administration but scuttled in 2018 by Donald Trump's. But U.S. indirect talks with Iran have stalled and Washington continues to maintain crippling sanctions on the country as regional hostilities simmer.

Trump's decision to withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal led Tehran to abandon over time every limitation the accord imposed on its nuclear enrichment. The country now enriches a small amount of uranium up to 63%, a short step from weapons-grade levels, compared with 3.67% under the deal. It also spins far more advanced centrifuges and more of them than were allowed under the accord, worrying nuclear

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nonproliferation experts even though Tehran insists its program is peaceful.

Bennett's Washington visit comes weeks after Ebrahim Raisi was sworn in as Iran's new president.

Raisi, 60, a conservative cleric with close ties to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has suggested he'll engage with the U.S. But he also has struck a hard-line stance, ruling out negotiations aimed at limiting Iranian missile development and support for regional militias — something the Biden administration wants to address in a new accord.

Administration officials acknowledged that Iran's potential "breakout" — the time needed to amass enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon — is now down to a matter of months or less.

But a senior administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the scheduled talks, said the administration sees the maximum pressure campaign employed by the Trump administration as having emboldened Iran to push ahead with its nuclear program.

Bennett is also looking to turn the page from his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu had a close relationship with Trump after frequently clashing with Obama. Biden, who has met with every Israeli prime minister since Golda Meir, had his own tensions with Netanyahu over the years.

During his latest White House campaign, Biden called Netanyahu "counterproductive" and an "extreme right" leader.

Texas GOP advances voting bill after Democrats' holdout ends

By PAUL J. WEBER and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Republicans advanced new voting restrictions Thursday night after months of protests by Democrats, who after returning from a 38-day walkout are now all but out of ways to stop a bill that includes a ban on drive-thru voting and would empower poll watchers.

The nearly 50-page bill passed the Texas House on a 79-37 mostly party-line vote, moving fast a week after Democrats ended their holdout. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott says he will sign the measure that is on track to reach his desk by early September, if not sooner.

In what is now the GOP's third try at passing the bill since May, the atmosphere was charged. For more than 12 hours Republicans defended the changes as safeguards while Democrats, who offered a raft of rejected attempts to soften the bill, continued to say it would disproportionately impact people of color. At one heated point Republican Dade Phelan, the House speaker, interrupted lawmakers to tell them not to accuse each other of racism — or even say the word.

But in the end, the bill easily passed, just as Democrats knew it would once they returned.

Texas is now set to become the last big GOP state to pass tighter voting laws driven by former President Donald Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was stolen. When one exchange Thursday turned to the violent Jan. 6 Capitol riot, Republican Kyle Biedermann, who was in Washington, D.C., that day, downplayed the attack and rejected that it was an insurrection.

In seeking to stop the bill, more than 50 Democrats had gone to Washington D.C., a destination they chose to press Congress on voting rights legislation. On Wednesday, the U.S. House passed federal voting rights legislation that congressional Democrats say is progress in their quest to fight back against voting restrictions advanced in states such as Texas. But Democrats do not have the votes to overcome opposition from Senate Republicans.

"As much as you might decry our need to go to Washington, I really beg for federal protection," Democratic state Rep. Rafael Anchia said.

Some Republicans did not hide their frustration with Democrats' refusal to return until now.

"I think you could care a little more, and should have been here," Republican J.M. Lozano said during one exchange with Anchia.

The bill now goes back to the state Senate, which already signed off on a similar version this month following a 15-hour filibuster by Democrat Carol Alvarado.

That was another last-ditch gambit by Texas Democrats who have virtually no legislative means left to stop new voting measures in the state — which already has some of the nation's toughest election laws.

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Abbott, who is up for reelection in 2022, has demanded the bill and swiftly vetoed paychecks for 2,100 legislative staffers after Democrats first blocked the legislation by walking out of the state Capitol in May.

Abbott then had to call a special session to take up voting restrictions. Democrats again walked out in July, with dozens boarding private jets to the nation's capital.

Without a quorum of 100 legislators necessary to do business, Republicans were left waiting, frustrated by Democrats, but knowing time was on their side. After the 30-day special session wound down, Abbott called another one — and this time Republicans enlisted the help of law enforcement.

In the end, the bill closely resembled the same one Democrats walked out on more than a month ago. It includes a raft of tweaks and changes to the state's election code, which when taken as a whole would make it harder to cast a ballot in Texas.

Among other things, it prohibits drive-thru voting and threatens local elections officials with felony charges if they send mail-in voting applications to voters who don't request one. Many of the provisions take aim at Harris County — which includes Houston and is a major Democratic stronghold — after leaders there expanded ways to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It also states that poll watchers, who are appointed by campaigns and political parties, cannot be denied "free movement" and makes it a crime for elections judges to obstruct them. Concerns raised by Democrats about voter intimidation and disruption were met with Republicans pointing to oaths and training that poll watchers are required to take.

For months, Texas Republicans accuse Democrats of exaggerating the bill's impact and maintain it's not driven by Trump's loss, even as some have dodged questions about whether they believe the election was stolen. Republicans point out that the latest version would require another extra hour daily of early voting, and result in more counties offering at least 12 hours of early voting on weekdays.

"Texas affords an immense amount of opportunity to vote," said Republican state Rep. Andrew Murr, who is carrying the bill in the House.

The bill must reach Abbott's desk by Labor Day weekend. Otherwise, Republicans will have to start over for a fourth time.

Acacia Coronado is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Bernie Sanders sets out to sell big government in red states

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bernie Sanders has long argued, but not proved, that his big government populism can win over voters in the largely white, rural communities that flocked to Republican Donald Trump in recent elections.

Now as the chief Senate shepherd of a \$3.5 trillion budget proposal, Sanders believes he has another chance to test the theory.

The Vermont senator is embarking on two-stop swing through Trump country this weekend, promoting a budget plan packed with progressive initiatives and financed by higher taxes on top earners. He's specifically targeting two congressional districts where Trump's vote totals increased between 2016 and 2020.

"What we are doing is precisely what working-class families, Republican, Democrat, independent, want," Sanders, who helped negotiate the proposal as chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, said in an interview. "And we're going to pay for it by demanding that the wealthiest people, and largest corporations that are doing phenomenally well, start paying their fair share of taxes."

Sanders will hold town halls in West Lafayette, Indiana, on Friday night and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on Sunday. He says he'll highlight the difference between the two parties since congressional Republicans in years past approved tax cuts for wealthy Americans but are expected to universally oppose a plan Sanders calls "the most consequential piece of legislation" since Frank Delano Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s.

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It could be a tough sell for the face of the progressive movement. Republicans have already begun using Sanders — along with fellow democratic socialist and New York Rep Alexandria Ocasio Cortez — in ads warning voters that the country is edging toward socialism.

Sanders saw his political star first rise to national prominence by nearly winning the 2016 Democratic Iowa caucus, and he won that year's Indiana Democratic primary over Hillary Clinton. As he pushed his party to the left and drew in voters frustrated by mainstream Democrats, Sanders and his supporters advocated for reaching beyond the traditional base by making appeals to the white, working class that can attract Republicans or nonvoters.

"He has a lot of credibility with a lot of audiences that aren't just progressive," said Maurice Mitchell, national director of the progressive advocacy group the Working Families Party. "He an outsider. He's a populist. And, in fact, the thing that we've always said works best against rightwing populism is progressive populism."

But evidence that Sanders has particular sway with Trump voters is limited. According to data from the Pew Research Center, only about 3% percent of people who consistently supported Sanders during 2016 the primary season, and were confirmed to have voted in the general election, said they ultimately supported Trump, compared to 81% who reported voting for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll in February 2020 found that 17% of Republicans had a favorable view of Sanders, roughly the same share of Republicans who had a favorable view of Biden.

Sanders next chance to make his case is a budget proposal that promises universal pre-kindergarten and tuition-free community college, while increasing federal funding for child care, paid family leave and combating climate change. It also expands health care coverage through Medicare, creates pathways to citizenship for millions of immigrants in the country illegally and encourages states to adopt labor-friendly laws.

Republicans say the plan is loaded with unnecessary spending and tax increases. But Democrats, as long as they stay united, can use their narrow advantage in each congressional chamber to muscle it through anyway.

Sanders says his trip could increase pressure on Republicans who oppose measures that are broadly popular with working-class Americans, regardless of ideology.

"This is the peoples' budget. This is the budget that will impact tens of millions of lives in this country: the elderly, the children, the working families, the middle class," Sanders said. "So it is appropriate to me that the chairman of the budget committee get out and around the country, hear what people have to say. Explain what we're trying to do."

Although Sanders is heading to red states, his trip isn't exactly into hostile territory. His 2016 and 2020 presidential bids were popular with college students and West Lafayette is home to Purdue University. He similarly remains popular in Iowa, which means his Cedar Rapids event may attract far more longstanding Sanders supporters than potentially persuadable Republicans.

Still Sanders scoffed at suggestions that his presidential campaigns were more successful at energizing liberals, many of them wealthy, than at growing his party's appeal with crossover voters.

"Poll after poll shows that the American people want the wealthiest people, large corporations, to pay their fair share. This is not wealthy liberals, this is working class Americans," Sanders said, adding of his ability to sell the budget proposal to independents and Republicans, "I think it's part of my job and I think I'll do OK."

There is some bipartisan support for key parts of the budget proposal. A July AP-NORC poll found that 62% of Republicans backed funding for caregivers for the elderly. At least 4 in 10 Republicans said they supported funding for free preschool, affordable housing, broadband internet, and local transit, and close to 3 in 10 said they supported funding for free community college.

Sanders' trip follows President Joe Biden and his allies traveling the country to promote the administration's efforts to strengthen the post-coronavirus pandemic economy. Sanders said he's confident in Biden's support for the proposal.

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There are no plans for the two former rivals to travel together to promote the proposed budget, though he wouldn't be opposed to doing so, Sanders said.

The administration's economic agenda has been overshadowed in recent days by violence and chaos in Afghanistan. But Sanders says Americans from across the political spectrum understand that what's occurring there and with their pocketbooks back home "are separate issues."

Still, the budget process has not gone entirely smoothly even within Sanders' own party. A group of moderate House Democrats threatened to derail the budget blueprint, and only dropped their opposition after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi promised that a vote on a separate, \$1 trillion public works package which has already passed the Senate would come late next month.

Mitchell called such moderate Democrats "obstructionists."

"That small but loud crew, they don't have a popular base," Mitchell said. "People want to get this passed."

Sanders, however, will be in the territory of moderate Iowa Democratic Rep. Cindy Axne, whose staff says she doesn't plan to attend his Sunday event. Republicans believe Sanders hitting the road could ultimately hurt his party during next year's midterms, when control of Congress is at stake.

"Democrats' embrace of socialism helped us pick up seats in 2020, and will continue to help us in the midterms," said National Republican Congressional Committee spokesman Mike Berg.

Sanders countered that he's not worried about his visit making things politically uncomfortable for Axne, saying, "This is the right thing to do for America, I think in her district, or in any other district in this country."

"If I had the time, I'd love to go to 50 states in this country," Sanders said. "So we'll pick and choose and get out there when we can."

AP Director of Public Opinion Research Emily Swanson contributed to this report.

Tropical Storm Ida prompts hurricane watch for New Orleans

MIAMI (AP) — Tropical Storm Ida formed in the Caribbean on Thursday and forecasters said its track was aimed at the U.S. Gulf Coast, prompting Louisiana's governor to declare a state of emergency and forecasters to announce a hurricane watch for New Orleans.

"Unfortunately, all of Louisiana's coastline is currently in the forecast cone for Tropical Storm Ida, which is strengthening and could come ashore in Louisiana as a major hurricane as Gulf conditions are conducive for rapid intensification," Gov. John Bel Edwards said.

"By Saturday evening, everyone should be in the location where they intend to ride out the storm," the governor added.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Ida was expected to cross the tobacco-rich western stretch of Cuba as a tropical storm starting Friday afternoon and then strengthen, reaching the Gulf Coast by Sunday.

"There is an increasing risk of life-threatening storm surge, damaging hurricane-force winds, and heavy rainfall Sunday and Monday, especially along the coast of Louisiana," the Hurricane Center said.

"Ida certainly has the potential to be very bad," said Brian McNoldy, a hurricane researcher at the University of Miami.

A hurricane watch was in effect for Cameron, Louisiana, to the Mississippi-Alabama border — including Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Maurepas and metropolitan New Orleans

Late Thursday night, Ida had sustained maximum winds of 40 mph (65 kph) and was traveling northwest at about 12 mph (19 kph). It was centered about 65 miles (105 kilometers) southeast of Grand Cayman and 365 miles (585 kilometers) southeast of the western tip of Cuba.

Tropical storm-force winds extended as far as 70 miles (110 kilometers) from the center.

The storm was forecast to deliver anywhere from 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of rain over parts of Jamaica, Cuba and the Cayman islands, with the potential for more in some isolated areas.

Forecasters warned of possible flash floods and mudslides and tidal storm surge of as much as 2 to 4 feet above normal, along with "large and destructive waves."

The Cayman Islands government said nonessential government offices closed at 2:30 p.m. Thursday

and four shelters were activated.

New Zealand wages high-stakes effort to halt virus outbreak

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — By early next week, New Zealanders should know if their government's strict new lockdown is working to stamp out its first coronavirus outbreak in six months.

A successful effort could again make the nation's virus response the envy of the world. A failure could expose flaws in its health system, including a shortage of hospital beds and a slow vaccine rollout.

The high-stakes campaign hinges on whether new infections, which have risen for the past 10 days, begin to drop.

Last week, the government put the nation into the full lockdown after only a single community case was detected in the city of Auckland.

"It's counterintuitive," said epidemiologist Michael Baker. "When there's a threat, you usually increase the response as it gets more dangerous. Here, we're doing the opposite, with the maximum response when the threat is tiny."

It's a strategy that has worked incredibly well for New Zealand but faces its biggest test against a tougher enemy: the highly contagious delta variant of the virus. Baker, a professor at the University of Otago, said the strategy was the best approach and he was optimistic it would succeed again.

Since the pandemic began, New Zealand has reported only 26 deaths from the virus in a population of 5 million. The death rate per capita in Britain and the U.S. is about 400 times higher. Remarkably, life expectancy for New Zealanders actually rose in 2020 as virus measures helped reduce other seasonal ailments like the flu.

The U.S. is in the grip of a wave of infection powered by the delta variant, which has sent cases, deaths and hospitalizations soaring again, wiping out months of progress.

New Zealanders lived virus-free in the six months leading up to the latest outbreak, going to workplaces, stores and sports stadiums without needing to wear masks, while children attended school.

Then a traveler returning from Sydney brought the delta variant and it somehow escaped from a quarantine hotel. The outbreak has grown to about 350 known cases and is straining New Zealand's contact-tracing system as workers try to track down 30,000 other people who might have been exposed.

New Zealand has a large diaspora of Pacific Island people. The outbreak has hit this community particularly hard after spreading at a Samoan church event that drew hundreds. That led to some racist attacks on social media.

"This is disappointing and, frankly, gutless," said Ashley Bloomfield, the director-general of public health. "I'm asking everyone in the country to be kind."

The lockdown prevents most people from leaving home other than to exercise, or to buy groceries or medicine. Retail stores are closed, as are restaurants — including takeout — schools and most businesses.

While much of the world is learning to live with the virus and has moved away from hard lockdowns, most New Zealanders still embrace them.

"Fortunately, there's a great team spirit," said Lesley Gray, a public health specialist at the University of Otago. "It's quite obvious to me that the country would rather keep this out. We want to stamp it out, keep it out."

Among the handful of other places that have successfully pursued virus elimination strategies are China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Nearby Australia stamped out previous outbreaks but leaders say they can't get rid of the delta variant, which has continued to spread in Sydney despite a two-month lockdown. New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian says she'll ease restrictions for vaccinated adults next month, despite record infection numbers reaching more than 1,000 a day.

George Williams, a constitutional law expert at the University of New South Wales, said that while he supports the Sydney lockdown, he also sees risks in the government getting too comfortable in using its

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extraordinary powers.

"They're pretty draconian, quite authoritarian measures, which would be unthinkable outside a pandemic," he said, noting that unlike in many democracies, Australians aren't protected by a Bill of Rights.

Some Australians also are tiring of lockdowns. Hundreds have been arrested and given heavy fines this month for defying health orders at protests.

In New Zealand, where the lockdown is even stricter, Police Commissioner Andrew Coster said about 70 protesters and other rule-breakers have been arrested since it began, but he's happy with the overall level of compliance.

With little else to do, many New Zealanders watch daily news conferences held by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and others. Like a slow-moving forensic drama, the briefings outline the latest infections, places those people visited and genome-sequencing results.

There have been moments of levity, such as when COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins misspoke about exercising outdoors, saying people could go "spread their legs" — a comment quickly mocked on social media.

But there will be serious consequences if the lockdown fails.

New Zealand's vaccine rollout has been the slowest of any developed nation, with only 39% of people having gotten at least one shot and 22% fully vaccinated. The country chose to use only the Pfizer vaccine and didn't approve its use until two months after U.S. regulators first approved it for emergency use.

The government blames the initial slowness of the rollout on Pfizer's delivery schedule.

But opposition lawmaker Chris Bishop said the government's "negligent execution of the rollout has left New Zealand a sitting duck for the delta variant."

Vaccinations have sped up rapidly since the outbreak began, with health workers now giving doses to nearly 2% of the population every day.

Another challenge is a lack of intensive-care hospital beds. A recent report by a group of experts noted that at the pandemic's start, New Zealand had fewer than one-third the number than the average in developed nations, and little had changed since then.

"The New Zealand health system is still poorly resourced to deal with any large outbreak of a disease such as COVID-19," the report found.

Many New Zealanders are desperate to visit relatives abroad and want to know when the lockdowns will end and the borders will reopen. Ardern, the prime minister, has promised a cautious reopening early next year but has given few specifics.

"For now, while we vaccinate, elimination is the goal," she said. "And we can do it."

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

Widower's death extends mourning tied to El Paso massacre

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — A man who drew worldwide sympathy and support after his wife was killed in a mass shooting at a Walmart store in El Paso will be laid to rest Friday.

Antonio Basco died Aug. 14, just over two years after his wife, Margie Reckard, was fatally shot along with 22 other people by a lone gunman who authorities say targeted Latinos in an attack that stunned the U.S. and Mexico.

Reckard's August 2019 funeral drew thousands of people from as far away as California, after Basco announced that he was alone with almost no family left and invited the world to join him in remembering his companion of 22 years. Few in attendance had ever met Reckard.

Basco — a wiry, weathered man in his early 60s — embraced one visitor after another with open arms. Flowers poured in, and an SUV was donated to Basco, who made a modest living at washing cars and other odd jobs.

Adrie Gonzalez, an El Paso native who was inside the Walmart during the Aug. 3, 2019 attack, said she

saw Basco deteriorate mentally and physically in the months after the funeral, amid struggles with alcohol consumption.

Basco was arrested and jailed in late-2019 for driving under the influence.

"He said he missed his wife, and he wasn't the same," Gonzalez said.

No cause of death has been listed by the funeral home.

Basco lived to see the dedication of a memorial to the 2019 shooting victims — a plaque and metal tower evoking a candle that stands outside store where the attack occurred.

The state's capital murder case against Patrick Wood Crusius is pending trial in the mass shooting that claimed Reckard's life. Crusius also has been charged in federal court with more than 90 counts under federal hate-crime and firearms laws.

The shooting happened on a busy, weekend day at a Walmart that is typically popular with shoppers from Mexico and the U.S.

Authorities say Crusius aimed to scare Latinos into leaving the United States, driving from his home near Dallas to target Mexicans after posting a racist screed online. Crusius has pleaded not guilty, and his lawyers said their client has been diagnosed mental disabilities.

Gonzalez fears consciousness about the shooting, its racist intent and traumatic impact on witnesses has faded amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"We forgot that 23 lives were gone, completely," she said. "There hasn't been anything fixed."

Associated Press writer Jamie Stengle contributed from Dallas.

Apple loosens app store payment rules in lawsuit settlement

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) — Apple has agreed to let developers of iPhone apps email their users about cheaper ways to pay for digital subscriptions and media by circumventing a commission system that generates billions of dollars annually for the iPhone maker.

The concession announced late Thursday, which covers emailed notifications but does not allow in-app notifications, is part of a preliminary settlement of a nearly 2-year-old lawsuit filed on behalf of iPhone app developers in the U.S. It also addresses an issue raised by a federal court judge who is expected to soon rule on a separate case brought by Epic Games, maker of the popular video game Fortnite.

Apple announced the news in a "background" briefing with reporters in which it insisted on anonymity for participating executives and would not allow any direct quotations.

Under long-standing Apple rules, makers of iPhone apps were forbidden to email users with information on how to pay for services outside the app, which would circumvent Apple commissions of 15% to 30%.

The concession now opens one way for app developers to more aggressively encourage its users to pay in other ways, so long as the companies obtain consumer consent.

Apple will also set up a \$100 million fund to pay thousands of app developers covered in the lawsuit sums ranging from \$250 to \$30,000. App developers will get more flexibility to set different prices within their apps, expanding the options from about 100 to 500 choices.

The compromise addresses a concern that U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers repeatedly raised while presiding over the high-profile Epic-Apple trial. She openly wondered why Apple couldn't allow developers to display a range of payment options within their apps, much like brick-and-mortar retailers can show a range of different credit cards they accept in addition to cash.

Apple still isn't allowing developers to use in-app notifications to prod consumers to explore different payment options.

But just being able to email users to explain why they should pay outside the app is a breakthrough for developers who have complained about Apple's commissions as a form of price gouging for years.

Richard Czeslawski, one of the app developers that filed the lawsuit Apple is settling, hailed the freedom to email users as a "game changer" in a declaration filed with the court in Oakland, California. App developers "will take full advantage of this change in customer communications as a way to further reduce the

commissions paid to Apple," predicted Czeslawski, CEO of Pure Sweat Basketball.

Apple already has been tinkering with its app store commission system in response to legal pressure and mounting scrutiny among lawmakers and regulators around the world taking a harder look whether the company ironclad control of the store is stifling competition and innovation.

Earlier this year, Apple lowered its in-app commissions from 30% to 15% for developers with less than \$1 million in annual revenue — a move covering most of the apps in its store. As part of the settlement announced Thursday, Apple is guaranteeing the lower commission for small developers will be extended for at least three more years.

But the lower commissions don't help the largest app makers like Epic and Spotify, which are the leaders in a coalition trying to topple Apple's so-called walled garden that prevents outsiders from offering other options. Apple maintains it prevents alternative stores from offering apps on its iPhone to protect its own customers' security and privacy while its critics contend the company is simply trying to protect a cash cow that generates billions of dollars in profit annually.

Those tensions are likely to come to a boil when Gonzalez Rogers issues her ruling in the Epic case.

Gonzalez Rogers will also approve or disapprove the proposed settlement announced Thursday. A hearing on that is scheduled Oct. 12

Deadliest days for U.S. troops in Afghanistan

The Associated Press undefined

Some of the deadliest days for U.S. troops in Afghanistan:

—Aug. 26, 2021: Two suicide bombers and gunmen attack crowds of Afghans flocking to Kabul's airport in the waning days of an airlift for those fleeing the Taliban takeover. The attacks kill at least 60 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops.

—Dec. 21, 2015: A suicide attacker rams an explosives-laden motorcycle into a joint NATO-Afghan patrol, killing six American troops. The soldiers were targeted as they moved through a village near Bagram Airfield.

—Oct. 2, 2015: 11 people, including six U.S. service members, are killed when a U.S. Air Force C-130J transport plane crashes.

—Dec. 17, 2013: Six U.S. service members are killed when a helicopter crashes.

—May 4, 2013: Seven U.S. soldiers and a member of the NATO-led coalition are killed as the Taliban continued attacks as part of their spring offensive.

—March 11, 2013: A helicopter crash in southern Afghanistan kills five American service members. Two U.S. special operations forces were gunned down hours earlier in an insider attack by an Afghan policeman in eastern Afghanistan

—Aug. 6, 2011: A helicopter is shot down by an insurgent armed with a rocket-propelled grenade, killing 30 American troops and eight Afghans.

—May 26, 2011: Nine NATO service members are killed, including seven U.S. troops who died when a bomb exploded in a field where they were patrolling on foot.

—April 19, 2011: An Afghan officer kills eight U.S. airmen and one U.S. civilian during a routine meeting at an Afghan air force headquarters compound in Kabul.

—Sept. 21, 2010: A helicopter crashed in a rugged section of southern Afghanistan, killing nine. The Defense Department said three were Navy SEALs and one was assigned to the Naval Special Warfare unit. Five were soldiers from the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, at Fort Campbell, Ky.

—Aug. 27, 2010: Homemade bombs kill three U.S. troops in southern and eastern Afghanistan.

—June 8, 2010: Seven American troops, two Australians and a French Legionnaire are killed. A U.S. contractor training Afghan police also died in a suicide attack.

—Oct. 27, 2009: Eight American troops die in two separate bomb attacks in southern Afghanistan.

—Oct. 26, 2009: 11 American soldiers are killed in separate helicopter crashes. One chopper goes down in western Afghanistan, killing seven soldiers and three civilians working for the U.S. government. In a separate incident in the south, two other U.S. choppers collide while in flight, killing four American troops.

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—Oct. 3, 2009: Eight U.S. soldiers are killed when their outpost in Kamdesh, Nuristan, is attacked by as many as 300 militants. Another soldier dies in Wardak province when a bomb detonates while he attempts to disarm it.

—July 13, 2008: Nine American soldiers are killed when their remote outpost in Wanat, Nuristan, is attacked by small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades. Another soldier dies in Kajaki Sofla when his vehicle strikes a roadside bomb.

—Feb. 18, 2007: A U.S. helicopter crashes in the Shahjoi district of Zabul province, killing eight American troops.

—May 5, 2006: 10 American soldiers die in a CH-47 Chinook helicopter crash during combat operations in eastern Afghanistan.

—June 28, 2005: 16 U.S. troops on a special forces helicopter are killed when their MH-47 Chinook helicopter is shot down by insurgents. Three U.S. sailors also die the same day.

—April 6, 2005: 15 U.S. service members and three American civilians are killed when their helicopter goes down in a sandstorm while returning to the main U.S. base at Bagram.

—Jan. 29, 2004: An explosion at a weapons cache kills eight U.S. soldiers.

—March 23, 2003: A U.S. Air Force helicopter on a mercy mission to help two injured Afghan children crashes in southeastern Afghanistan, killing all six people aboard.

—March 4, 2002: Seven American soldiers are killed when two helicopters come under fire.

—Jan. 9, 2002: A U.S. military refueling plane that was resupplying troops in Afghanistan crashes in Pakistan, killing all seven Marines aboard.

With wildfire threatening, Lake Tahoe prepares for emergency

By SAM METZ and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — The decision to flee their home Thursday in the mountains above Lake Tahoe became clear when Johnny White and Lauren McCauley could see flames on the webcam at their local ski resort.

Even as ash rained down under a cloud of heavy smoke, the couple wasn't panicked because they had an early warning to leave their home near Echo Summit, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) south of the lake, and wanted to avoid last-minute pandemonium if the wildfire continued its march toward the tourist destination on the California and Nevada border.

"You don't want everyone in the basin panicking and scrambling to try and leave at the same time," McCauley said.

Firefighters were facing changing weather conditions that could push the fire closer to the Tahoe Basin, a home to thousands and recreational playground for millions of tourists who visit the alpine lake in summer, ski at the many resorts in winter and gamble at its casinos year-round.

Winds and temperatures were expected to pick up in coming days while humidity drops, said Daniel Berlant, assistant deputy director of the state firefighting agency.

"That's what's closing the window of opportunity we've had to make progress and really get hold of the fire," Berlant said.

Echo Summit, a mountain pass where cliff-hanging U.S. Route 50 begins its descent toward Lake Tahoe, is where firefighters plan to make their stand if the Caldor Fire keeps burning through dense forest in the Sierra Nevada.

"Everything's holding real good along Highway 50," said Cal Fire Operations Section Chief Cody Bogan. "The fire has been backing down real slowly ... we've just been allowing it to do it on its own speed. It's working in our favor."

The fire is one of nearly 90 large blazes in the U.S. There were more than a dozen big fires in California, including one that destroyed 18 homes in Southern California, which has so far escaped the scale of wildfires plaguing the north all summer.

A new fire broke out Thursday in the Sierra foothills forcing evacuations near the historic Gold Rush town

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of Sonora, just dozens of miles from Yosemite National Park.

Fires in California have destroyed around 2,000 structures and forced thousands to evacuate while also blanketing large swaths of the West in unhealthy smoke.

Climate change has made the 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.

The Caldor Fire has been the nation's top firefighting priority because of its proximity to Lake Tahoe, where its tourist economy should be in full swing this time of year.

"This is the week before Labor Day weekend — a busy weekend, normally," South Lake Tahoe City Manager Joe Irvin said. "That is not going to be the case this year."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency noted in a report on the fire that "social, political, and economic concerns will increase as the fire progresses toward the Lake Tahoe Basin." The agency did not immediately respond to a request to elaborate beyond that statement.

Visitors are still crowding the highway that loops the massive lake and riding bikes and walking the beaches, but many are wearing masks. The lake, known for its water clarity and the granite peaks that surround it, has been shrouded in dense smoke that has reached hazardous levels.

The Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority reversed its advice from earlier in the week and recommended tourists postpone their travel. Previously the group that promotes tourism on the south side of the lake advised letting visitors decide whether to cancel their trips amid smoke and approaching fire.

Carol Chaplin, the president and CEO, said hotels and lodges were in lockstep with public safety officials. "They understand that this is not the experience that their guests are used to or look forward to," she said.

Irvin issued an emergency proclamation Thursday so the city that's home to Heavenly Ski Resort can be better prepared if evacuation orders come and be reimbursed for related expenses.

The last time the city declared a wildfire emergency was during the 2007 Angora Fire, which destroyed nearly 250 homes in neighboring Meyers and was the last major fire in the basin.

Not far from the neighborhood that was largely wiped out in that fire, residents hurried to clear pine cones and needles from their roofs and gutters to prepare for the possibility of fire.

The Angora Fire, which was driven by strong winds and took residents by surprise, burned just 3,100 acres, fewer than 5 square miles.

The Caldor Fire has burned over 139,000 acres — or 218 square miles (565 square kilometers) — and was only 12% contained Thursday.

Retired fire district captain Joe McAvoy, who lost his own home in the fire, said wildfires larger than 100,000 acres were once-in-a-lifetime events in his career. Not anymore.

"Now it seems like they're all 100,000 acres," McAvoy said. It's way more extreme. ... Now (fires) are 100,000 acres and it's like, 'Oh, yeah, big deal.' You know, it's every fire."

Melley reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press reporters Christopher Weber and John Antczak contributed from Los Angeles.

Sam Metz is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Supreme Court allows evictions to resume during pandemic

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court's conservative majority is allowing evictions to resume across the United States, blocking the Biden administration from enforcing a temporary ban that was put in place because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The court's action late Thursday ends protections for roughly 3.5 million people in the United States

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who said they faced eviction in the next two months, according to Census Bureau data from early August.

The court said in an unsigned opinion that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which reimposed the moratorium Aug. 3, lacked the authority to do so under federal law without explicit congressional authorization. The justices rejected the administration's arguments in support of the CDC's authority.

"If a federally imposed eviction moratorium is to continue, Congress must specifically authorize it," the court wrote.

The three liberal justices dissented. Justice Stephen Breyer, writing for the three, pointed to the increase in COVID-19 caused by the delta variant as one of the reasons the court should have left the moratorium in place. "The public interest strongly favors respecting the CDC's judgment at this moment, when over 90% of counties are experiencing high transmission rates," Breyer wrote.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the administration was "disappointed" by the decision and said President Joe Biden "is once again calling on all entities that can prevent evictions — from cities and states to local courts, landlords, Cabinet Agencies — to urgently act to prevent evictions."

It was the second loss for the administration this week at the hands of the high court's conservative majority. On Tuesday, the court effectively allowed the reinstatement of a Trump-era policy forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their hearings. The new administration had tried to end the Remain in Mexico program, as it is informally known.

On evictions, Biden acknowledged the legal headwinds the new moratorium would likely encounter. But Biden said that even with doubts about what courts would do, it was worth a try because it would buy at least a few weeks of time for the distribution of more of the \$46.5 billion in rental assistance Congress had approved.

The Treasury Department said Wednesday that the pace of distribution has increased and nearly a million households have been helped. But only about 11% of the money, just over \$5 billion, has been distributed by state and local governments, the department said.

The administration has called on state and local officials to "move more aggressively" in distributing rental assistance funds and urged state and local courts to issue their own moratoriums to "discourage eviction filings" until landlords and tenants have sought the funds.

A handful of states, including California, Maryland and New Jersey, have put in place their own temporary bans on evictions. In a separate order earlier this month, the high court ended some protections for New York residents who had fallen behind on their rents during the pandemic.

The high court hinted strongly in late June that it would take this path if asked again to intervene. At that time, the court allowed an earlier pause on evictions to continue through the end of July.

But four conservative justices would have set the moratorium aside then and a fifth, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, said Congress would have to expressly authorize a new pause on evictions. Neither house of Congress has passed a new evictions moratorium.

The administration at first allowed the earlier moratorium to lapse July 31, saying it had no legal authority to allow it to continue. But the CDC issued a new moratorium days later as pressure mounted from lawmakers and others to help vulnerable renters stay in their homes as the coronavirus' delta variant surged. The moratorium had been scheduled to expire Oct. 3.

Landlords in Alabama and Georgia who challenged the earlier evictions ban quickly returned to court, where they received a sympathetic hearing. U.S. Judge Dabney Friedrich, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, said the new moratorium was beyond the CDC's authority.

But Friedrich said she was powerless to stop it because of an earlier ruling from the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C., that sits above her. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit likewise refused to put the CDC order on hold, prompting the landlords' emergency appeal to the Supreme Court.

The earlier versions of the moratorium, first ordered during Trump's presidency, applied nationwide and were put in place out of fear that people who couldn't pay their rent would end up in crowded living conditions like homeless shelters and help spread the virus.

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The new moratorium temporarily halted evictions in counties with “substantial and high levels” of virus transmissions and would cover areas where 90% of the U.S. population lives.

The Biden administration argued that the rise in the delta variant underscored the dangers of resuming evictions in areas of high transmission of COVID-19. But that argument did not win broad support at the high court.

Al Capone’s favorite gun, personal items head to auction

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Al Capone is infamous for having been a ruthless mob boss, but one of his granddaughters says his softer side will shine through when the family auctions the Prohibition-era gangster’s personal items — including diamond-encrusted jewelry with his initials, family photographs and his favorite handgun.

Capone’s three granddaughters will also auction a letter he wrote to their father and his only child, Albert “Sonny” Capone, from Alcatraz, where the mobster served an 11-year sentence following his 1934 tax evasion conviction. In the letter written in pencil, Al Capone refers to Sonny as “son of my heart.”

He was called Public Enemy No. 1 after the 1929 “Valentine’s Day Massacre” of seven members of a rival bootlegger gang in Chicago by his associates.

But his granddaughter Diane Capone describes him differently.

“He was very loving, very devoted to family, very generous, and the letter that we have is such a poignant, beautiful letter from a father to his son. These are things that the public doesn’t know about,” said Diane Capone, 77.

Diane Capone and her two surviving sisters will sell 174 items at the Oct. 8 auction titled “A Century of Notoriety: The Estate of Al Capone” hosted by Witherell’s Auction House in Sacramento.

Among the pieces are gold-rimmed porcelain fine china, ornate furniture, artwork and Dresden figurines that once decorated the Palm Island, Florida, villa where the Chicago mobster lived after his release from prison and until his death in 1947.

Also up for sale is the Colt .45-caliber pistol Capone always carried with him and used several times to protect himself, Diane Capone said.

“That particular .45 was used in self-defense, and it probably saved his life on a few occasions and so, he referred to it as his favorite,” she said.

Diane Capone said she didn’t know if the gun was used to commit any crimes and said her grandfather, who she called Papa, was never charged with killing anyone.

“He was accused of doing that, but he was never found guilty of shooting anyone,” she said.

The pistol with elaborate etchings and a wooden grip will be the centerpiece of the auction and is valued at up to \$150,000, said Brian Witherell, founder of Witherell’s Auction House.

“When you think about Al Capone, you don’t think ‘Gosh, I wonder what his German porcelain figurine looks like,’ you wonder what his cigar humidor looks like, what his Colt .45 looks like,” he said.

The sisters are also selling a diamond-encrusted pocket watch, an 18k gold and platinum belt buckle and a gold initialed “AC” money clip and home movies featuring Al Capone and his associates.

Witherell said he had no reservations about helping the Capone sisters and that he expects the auction to draw international attention because of the items’ historical significance.

“We want to handle things that aren’t objectionable to a lot of people, but we still can’t rewrite history,” he said. “He was a legendary figure. I think his judgment comes from somebody other than me.”

Sonny Capone’s daughters lived quietly for decades in Northern California after moving here from Florida in 1961 following their parents’ breakup. That changed in 2019 when Diane Capone published a book titled “Al Capone: Stories My Grandmother Told Me” using her maiden name.

She said her father faced constant challenges because of his last name, including men picking fights with him for no reason and not being able to find a job. In the mid-1960s, he dropped Capone as a last name and went by Albert Francis. He died in obscurity in 2004 in Northern California, where he had lived

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for decades, his daughter said.

The sisters decided to sell their grandfather's personal belongings because they are all in their 70s, they are the only people who know the stories behind the memorabilia, and they are worried about a wildfire destroying the collection, Diane Capone said.

"We were very fortunate that even after my grandfather died, we were very close to my grandmother and so, for years we've heard her talk about my grandfather and about their lives, and about a lot of these items that are going to be auctioned off," she said.

Nina Salarno, president of the advocacy group Crime Victims United of California, said it is undisputed that Brooklyn, New York-born Capone headed Chicago's mob during Prohibition and orchestrated the deaths of many people. She called the sale of his personal belongings an insult to his victims.

"Those victims also have surviving family members, and now we're glorifying what he did to them by selling his memorabilia," Salarno said.

She added: "They say it was part of history, I would agree with that so, donate (his belongings) to a museum, but don't profit off of the back of victims."

Diane Capone acknowledges her grandfather led a criminal life but says that was not the person she knew. What she remembers is a doting grandfather.

"My grandfather certainly did some bad things during his life. That was part of his public life," she said. "He went to jail, he served his time, he paid his debt to society and after he was released, in the last years of his life, he did everything to make peace with God and with his family, and with everybody," she said.

James Finckenauer, a criminal justice professor at Rutgers University who has written extensively about organized crime, said the fascination with mobsters and organized crime in the U.S. started with Al Capone after his crimes attracted intense media coverage.

"The average person didn't know 99.9% of the people that might be involved in this, but they knew Al Capone. He became the poster boy for organized crime," he said.

Finckenauer said some people are fascinated with real and fictional mobsters because they think of them as having exciting lives.

"Most people, from their perspective, live humdrum lives and they see these guys and their portrayal in shows like 'The Sopranos,' as people who demand respect and live their lives as they please," he said.

Kabul airport attack kills 60 Afghans, 13 US troops

By SAYED ZIARMAL HASHEMI, RAHIM FAIEZ, LOLITA C. BALDOR and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press
KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Two suicide bombers and gunmen attacked crowds of Afghans flocking to Kabul's airport Thursday, transforming a scene of desperation into one of horror in the waning days of an airlift for those fleeing the Taliban takeover. The attacks killed at least 60 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops, Afghan and U.S. officials said.

The U.S. general overseeing the evacuation said the attacks would not stop the United States from evacuating Americans and others, and flights out were continuing. Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, said there was a large amount of security at the airport, and alternate routes were being used to get evacuees in. About 5,000 people were awaiting flights on the airfield, McKenzie said.

The blasts came hours after Western officials warned of a major attack, urging people to leave the airport. But that advice went largely unheeded by Afghans desperate to escape the country in the last few days of an American-led evacuation before the U.S. officially ends its 20-year presence on Aug. 31.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the killings on its Amaq news channel. The IS affiliate in Afghanistan is far more radical than the Taliban, who recently took control of the country in a lightning blitz. The Taliban were not believed to have been involved in the attacks and condemned the blasts.

In an emotional speech from the White House, U.S. President Joe Biden said the latest bloodshed would not drive the U.S. out of Afghanistan earlier than scheduled, and that he had instructed the U.S. military to develop plans to strike IS.

"We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," Biden said.

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U.S. officials initially said 11 Marines and one Navy medic were among those who died. Another service member died hours later. Eighteen service members were wounded and officials warned the toll could grow. More than 140 Afghans were wounded, an Afghan official said.

One of the bombers struck people standing knee-deep in a wastewater canal under the sweltering sun, throwing bodies into the fetid water. Those who moments earlier had hoped to get on flights out could be seen carrying the wounded to ambulances in a daze, their own clothes darkened with blood.

Emergency, an Italian charity that operates hospitals in Afghanistan, said it had received at least 60 patients wounded in the airport attack, in addition to 10 who were dead when they arrived.

"Surgeons will be working into the night," said Marco Puntin, the charity's manager in Afghanistan. The wounded overflowed the triage zone into the physiotherapy area and more beds were being added, he said.

The Afghan official who confirmed the overall Afghan toll spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said one explosion was near an airport entrance and another was a short distance away by a hotel. McKenzie said clearly some failure at the airport allowed a suicide bomber to get so close to the gate.

He said the Taliban has been screening people outside the gates, though there was no indication that the Taliban deliberately allowed Thursday's attacks to happen. He said the U.S. has asked Taliban commanders to tighten security around the airport's perimeter.

Adam Khan was waiting nearby when he saw the first explosion outside what's known as the Abbey gate. He said several people appeared to have been killed or wounded, including some who were maimed.

The second blast was at or near Baron Hotel, where many people, including Afghans, Britons and Americans, were told to gather in recent days before heading to the airport for evacuation. Additional explosions could be heard later, but Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said some blasts were carried out by U.S. forces to destroy their equipment.

A former Royal Marine who runs an animal shelter in Afghanistan says he and his staff were caught up in the aftermath of the blast near the airport.

"All of a sudden we heard gunshots and our vehicle was targeted, had our driver not turned around he would have been shot in the head by a man with an AK-47," Paul "Pen" Farthing told Britain's Press Association news agency.

Farthing is trying to get staff of his Nowzad charity out of Afghanistan, along with the group's rescued animals.

He is among thousands trying to flee. Over the last week, the airport has been the scene of some of the most searing images of the chaotic end of America's longest war and the Taliban's takeover, as flight after flight took off carrying those who fear a return to the militants' brutal rule. When the Taliban were last in power, they confined women largely to their home and widely imposed draconian restrictions.

Already, some countries have ended their evacuations and begun to withdraw their soldiers and diplomats, signaling the beginning of the end of one of history's largest airlifts. The Taliban have insisted foreign troops must be out by America's self-imposed deadline of Aug. 31 — and the evacuations must end then, too.

Even so, the airlift continued Thursday, though the number of evacuees fell for a second day as the terror attack and further threats kept people away. From 3 a.m. to 3 p.m., Washington time, about 7,500 people were evacuated, a White House official said. Fourteen U.S. military flights carried about 5,100, and 39 coalition flights carried 2,400.

The total compared to 19,000 in one 24-hour period toward the start of the week.

In Washington, Biden spent much of the morning in the secure White House Situation Room where he was briefed on the explosions and conferred with his national security team and commanders on the ground in Kabul.

Overnight, warnings emerged from Western capitals about a threat from IS, which has seen its ranks boosted by the Taliban's freeing of prisoners during its advance through Afghanistan.

Shortly before the attack, the acting U.S. ambassador to Kabul, Ross Wilson, said the security threat

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at the Kabul airport overnight was “clearly regarded as credible, as imminent, as compelling.” But in an interview with ABC News, he would not give details.

Late Wednesday, the U.S. Embassy warned citizens at three airport gates to leave immediately due to an unspecified security threat. Australia, Britain and New Zealand also advised their citizens Thursday not to go to the airport.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied that any attack was imminent at the airport, where the group’s fighters have deployed and occasionally used heavy-handed tactics to control the crowds. After the attack, he appeared to shirk blame, noting the airport is controlled by U.S. troops.

Before the blast, the Taliban sprayed a water cannon at those gathered at one airport gate to try to drive the crowd away, as someone launched tear gas canisters elsewhere.

Nadia Sadat, a 27-year-old Afghan, carried her 2-year-old daughter with her outside the airport. She and her husband, who had worked with coalition forces, missed a call from a number they believed was the State Department and were trying to get into the airport without any luck. Her husband had pressed ahead in the crowd to try to get them inside.

“We have to find a way to evacuate because our lives are in danger,” Sadat said. “My husband received several threatening messages from unknown sources. We have no chance except escaping.”

Aman Karimi, 50, escorted his daughter and her family to the airport, fearful the Taliban would target her because of her husband’s work with NATO.

“The Taliban have already begun seeking those who have worked with NATO,” he said. “They are looking for them house-by-house at night.”

The Sunni extremists of IS, with links to the group’s more well-known affiliate in Syria and Iraq, have carried out a series of brutal attacks, mainly targeting Afghanistan’s Shiite Muslim minority, including a 2020 assault on a maternity hospital in Kabul in which they killed women and infants.

The Taliban have fought against Islamic State militants in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have wrested back control nearly 20 years after they were ousted in a U.S.-led invasion. The Americans went in following the 9/11 attacks, which al-Qaida orchestrated while being sheltered by the group.

Amid the warnings and the pending American withdrawal, Canada ended its evacuations, and European nations halted or prepared to stop their own operations.

The Taliban have said they’ll allow Afghans to leave via commercial flights after the deadline next week, but it remains unclear which airlines would return to an airport controlled by the militants. Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said talks were underway between his country and the Taliban about allowing Turkish civilian experts to help run the facility.

Faiez reported from Istanbul, Baldor reported from Washington and Krauss from Jerusalem. Associated Press writers Jill Lawless in London; Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Sylvie Corbet in Paris; Jan M. Olsen from Copenhagen, Denmark; Rahim Faiez, Tameem Akhgar and Andrew Wilks in Istanbul; James LaPorta in Boca Raton, Florida; Mike Corder at The Hague, Netherlands; Philip Crowther in Islamabad; Colleen Barry in Milan; and Aamer Madhani, Matthew Lee and Robert Burns in Washington contributed to this report.

Biden vows to finish Kabul evacuation, avenge US deaths

By ROBERT BURNS, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden vowed Thursday to complete the evacuation of American citizens and others from Afghanistan despite the day’s deadly suicide bomb attack at the Kabul airport. He promised to avenge the deaths of 13 U.S. service members killed in the attack, declaring to the extremists responsible: “We will hunt you down and make you pay.”

Speaking with emotion from the White House, Biden said the Islamic State group’s Afghanistan affiliate was to blame for the attacks that killed the Americans and many more Afghan civilians. He said there was no evidence they colluded with the Taliban, who now control the country.

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He asked for a moment of silence to honor the service members, bowing his head, and ordered U.S. flags to half-staff across the country.

As for the bombers and gunmen involved, he said, "We have some reason to believe we know who they are ... not certain." He said he had instructed military commanders to develop plans to strike IS "assets, leadership and facilities."

Gen. Frank McKenzie, the U.S. Central Command chief, said more attempted attacks were expected.

The IS affiliate in Afghanistan has carried out many attacks on civilian targets in the country in recent years. It is far more radical than the Taliban, who seized power less than two weeks ago. The most heralded American attack on the group came in April 2017 when the U.S. dropped the largest conventional bomb in its arsenal on an IS cave and tunnel complex. The group more recently is believed to have concentrated in urban areas, which could complicate U.S. efforts to target them without harming civilians.

"We will respond with force and precision at our time, at the place of our choosing," Biden said. "These ISIS terrorists will not win. We will rescue the Americans; we will get our Afghan allies out, and our mission will go on. America will not be intimidated."

Biden said U.S. military commanders in Afghanistan had told him it is important to complete the evacuation mission. "And we will," he said. "We will not be deterred by terrorists."

Indeed, Gen. McKenzie, who is overseeing the evacuation operation from his Florida headquarters, told a Pentagon news conference shortly before Biden spoke, "Let me be clear, while we are saddened by the loss of life, both U.S. and Afghan, we are continuing to execute the mission,." He said there were about 5,000 evacuees on the airfield Thursday awaiting flights.

As many as 1,000 Americans and many more Afghans are still struggling to get out of Kabul.

McKenzie said 12 U.S. service members had been killed and 15 were wounded. Later, his spokesman, Capt. William Urban, said the toll had risen to 13 dead and 18 wounded. Urban said the wounded were being evacuated from Afghanistan aboard Air Force C-17 transport planes equipped with surgical units.

The Marine Corps said 10 Marines were among those killed. Central Command did not identify the dead by service. It was the deadliest day for U.S. forces in Afghanistan since August 2011, when a helicopter was shot down by an insurgent armed with a rocket-propelled grenade, killing 30 American troops and eight Afghans.

In somber, sometimes halting remarks, Biden praised U.S. forces and asked for the moment of silence. Asked later about further actions, press secretary Jen Psaki said that personal calls to families would wait for notification of next of kin and that Biden might travel to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware when the remains of the fallen service members are returned.

They were the first U.S. service members killed in Afghanistan since February 2020, the month the Trump administration struck an agreement with the Taliban that called for the militant group to halt attacks on Americans in exchange for a U.S. agreement to remove all American troops and contractors by May 2021. Biden announced in April that he would have all forces out by September.

Thursday's attacks, came 12 days into the rushed evacuation and five days before its scheduled completion. Some Republicans and others are arguing to extend the evacuation beyond next Tuesday's deadline.

The administration has been widely blamed for a chaotic and deadly evacuation that began in earnest only after the collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan government and the Taliban's takeover of the country. More than 100,000 people have been evacuated so far, Afghans, Americans and others.

Thursday's attack was sure to intensify political pressure from all sides on Biden, who already was under heavy criticism for not beginning the pullout earlier. He had announced in April that he was ending the U.S. war and would have all forces out by September.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California called for Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to bring the chamber back into session to consider legislation that would prohibit the U.S. withdrawal until all Americans are out. Pelosi's office dismissed such suggestions as "empty stunts."

After the suicide bomber's attack at the airport's Abbey Gate, a number of ISIS gunmen opened fire on civilians and military forces, he said. There also was an attack at or near the Baron Hotel near that gate, he said.

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"We thought this would happen sooner or later," McKenzie said, adding that U.S. military commanders were working with Taliban commanders to prevent further attacks.

As details of the day's attack emerged, the White House rescheduled Biden's first in-person meeting with Israel's new prime minister on Thursday and canceled a video conference with governors about resettling Afghan refugees arriving in the United States.

A number of U.S. allies said they were ending their evacuation efforts in Kabul, at least in part to give the U.S. the time it needs to wrap up its evacuation operations before getting 5,000 of its troops out by Tuesday.

Despite intense pressure to extend the deadline, Biden has repeatedly cited the threat of terrorist attacks against civilians and U.S. service members as a reason to keep to his plan.

In an interview with ABC News, Ross Wilson, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, said, "There are safe ways to get to" the airport for those Americans who still want to leave. He added that "there undoubtedly will be" some at-risk Afghans who will not get out before Biden's deadline.

The airlift continued Thursday, though the number of evacuees fell for a second day as the terror attack and further threats kept people from the airport and as other countries began shutting down their efforts. From 3 a.m. to 3 p.m., Washington time, about 7,500 people were evacuated, a White House official said. Fourteen U.S. military flights carried about 5,100, and 39 coalition flights carried 2,400.

The total compared to 19,000 in one 24-hour period toward the start of the week.

Associated Press writers Amer Madhani, Lolita C. Baldor and Ellen Knickmeyer in Washington and James LaPorta in Boca Raton, Florida, contributed to this report.

US closing troubled NYC jail where Epstein killed himself

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. government said Thursday it is shutting down a federal jail in New York City after a slew of problems that came to light following disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein's suicide there two years ago.

The federal Bureau of Prisons said the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan will be closed at least temporarily to address issues that have long plagued the facility, including lax security and crumbling infrastructure.

The facility, which has held inmates such as Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán and Mafia boss John Gotti, currently has 233 inmates, down from a normal population of 600 or more. Most are expected to be transferred to a federal jail in Brooklyn.

The decision to close the MCC — billed as one of the most secure jails in America — comes weeks after Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco toured it and saw the conditions firsthand.

Until recently, the facility had been recruiting new staff. Now, employees are being sent letters notifying them of a force reduction.

"In an effort to address the issues at MCC NY as quickly and efficiently as possible, the Department has decided to close the MCC, at least temporarily, until those issues have been resolved," the Justice Department said.

The department did not give a timetable for the closure, saying planning is underway.

"The Department of Justice is committed to ensuring that every facility in the federal prison system is not only safe and secure, but also provides people in custody with the resources and programs they need to make a successful return to society after they have served their time," the statement said.

Epstein's death a month after his arrest on child sex trafficking charges has been a lingering shadow over the jail, which was since marred by the rampant spread of the coronavirus, inmates' complaints about squalid conditions, a smuggled gun, an inmate's death and a revolving door of wardens.

Inmates and lawyers have complained that the jail was infested with mice, rats and roaches and that multiple inmates were forced to share dirty sinks and toilets that leaked water, urine and feces. Water

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leaks across multiple floors have been blamed for structural issues.

Jack Donson, a former longtime official at the Bureau of Prisons, said given all the remediation needed, it could be years before the Metropolitan Correctional Center reopens — if at all.

“It’s been a long time coming addressing the infrastructure issues,” Donson said in a telephone interview. “Is it coincidental with the recent publicity of the Epstein suicide and the rampant corruption in that facility? It makes sense to maybe start anew.”

Over the years, the jail’s inhabitants have included several close associates of Osama bin Laden and Wall Street swindler Bernard Madoff. Guzmán, famous for his prison escapes, was held at the jail while on trial in Brooklyn in 2019, prompting closures of the Brooklyn Bridge each day as he was taken to and from court.

The Metropolitan Detention Center, the Brooklyn jail that will absorb Metropolitan Correctional Center inmates, has also drawn scrutiny for problems including sexual assault allegations against correctional officers, a weeklong power failure in January 2019, and an inmate’s death last year after he was sprayed with pepper spray.

Donson said the larger Brooklyn facility, which currently has about 1,500 inmates including Epstein’s longtime confidante Ghislaine Maxwell and singer R. Kelly, has the capacity to permanently replace the Manhattan jail.

“Do they really need MCC?” Donson said. “They don’t really need it right now in my opinion — bed wise, capacity wise.”

The Justice Department’s inspector general has yet to complete an investigation into lapses at the Metropolitan Correctional Center that allowed Epstein to end his life. Two officers responsible for monitoring him that night have pleaded guilty to charges they lied on prison records because they were sleeping and browsing the internet instead of doing their jobs.

In March 2020, just before the pandemic prompted federal prisons to halt visitation, the jail went on a weeklong lockdown after officials got a tip that a gun may have been smuggled inside. Investigators found a handgun and turned up other banned items, such as cellphones, narcotics and homemade weapons, sparking an ongoing probe into guard misconduct.

After the gun was discovered, then-Attorney General William Barr launched a task force to address criminal misconduct by officers at several correctional facilities.

As the coronavirus took hold, Metropolitan Correctional Center employees weren’t able to get masks. Staff restrooms ran out of soap. Workers in charge of refilling the dispensers were pressed into duty as correctional officers because of staffing shortages. Early in the crisis, more than 25% of staff positions were vacant.

A few months later, a court-authorized inspection found inmates with coronavirus symptoms were neglected and social distancing was almost nonexistent, with some inmates sleeping within arm’s reach of each other.

Earlier this year, a lawyer alleged that an inmate with the mental capacity of a child was left in a holding cell for 24 hours while awaiting a competency evaluation.

On Twitter, follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak and Michael Balsamo at twitter.com/mikebalsamo1

Illinois requires educators, health workers to get vaccine

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois health care workers and educators from kindergarten through college will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or submit to weekly testing, Gov. J.B. Pritzker said Thursday in announcing new safety protocols that also include a fresh statewide mandate for masks to be worn indoors.

The mandates, which overlap in several places with existing rules, are a response to a spike in COVID-19 infections fueled by the highly contagious delta variant, particularly in southern and central Illinois.

“Our current vaccination levels are not enough to blunt the ferocity of the delta variant hospitalization

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surges," Pritzker, a first-term Democrat, said at a Chicago news conference. "In some regions, hospital administrators are asking for more help to manage the sheer number of incoming patients who, I'll emphasize again, are almost exclusively individuals who have chosen not to have gotten the life-saving vaccine."

Pritzker said the requirements are designed to better protect more vulnerable populations, including young children who do not yet qualify for vaccines. Pritzker said that 98% of Illinois' COVID-19 infections from January to July were among the unvaccinated.

The mask order, which begins Monday, applies to everyone age 2 and older, regardless of vaccination status. It's similar to an order issued in May 2020, which was later relaxed for vaccinated people. First doses of the vaccine are required by Sept. 5 for health care workers, including nursing home employees, K-12 educators and support staff and higher education teachers, staff and students. Those who don't comply will have to undergo weekly COVID-19 testing.

Other cities and states have made similar requirements. Earlier this month, California required all teachers and school staff to be vaccinated or undergo weekly testing.

The surge in Illinois, with more than 4,400 cases reported Wednesday, has started overwhelming hospitals in less populated areas in the state where vaccination rates are low and there are fewer health care facilities. For instance, in southern Illinois fewer than half of the residents are vaccinated and earlier this week there was only one available intensive care unit hospital bed available, according to state health officials.

In August, public health departments statewide have reported more than two dozen COVID-19 outbreaks at schools, according to Pritzker's office.

Illinois already has a mask requirement for all schools and two of the largest education systems, Chicago Public Schools and the University of Illinois, already require educator vaccinations. The U of I system also already requires student vaccinations. A large number of hospital systems have also required employee vaccines.

Teachers unions have voiced support of the vaccine and masking rules, but some schools have failed to enforce them and there have been complaints from some private schools and conservative lawmakers.

Follow Sophia Tareen on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sophiatareen>.

RFK assassin Sirhan seeks parole; DA won't challenge release

By JULIE WATSON and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Sirhan Sirhan faces his 16th parole hearing Friday for fatally shooting U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, and for the first time no prosecutor will be there to argue he should be kept behind bars.

Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón, a former police officer who took office last year after running on a reform platform, says he idolized the Kennedys and mourned RFK's assassination but is sticking to his policy that prosecutors have no role in deciding whether prisoners should be released.

That decision is best left to California Parole Board members who can evaluate whether Sirhan has been rehabilitated and can be released safely, Gascón told The Associated Press earlier this year. Relitigating a case decades after a crime should not be the job of prosecutors, even in notorious cases, he said.

"The role of a prosecutor and their access to information ends at sentencing," Alex Bastian, special advisor to Gascón, said in a statement Thursday.

The 77-year-old Sirhan has served 53 years for the first-degree murder of the New York senator and brother of President John F. Kennedy. RFK was a Democratic presidential candidate when he was gunned down at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles moments after delivering a victory speech in the pivotal California primary.

Gascón said he admired Kennedy while Sirhan is "the kind of individual that we all like to hate."

"I can get very emotionally wrapped around my personal feelings (about) someone that killed someone that I thought could have been an incredible president for this country," Gascón said. "But that has no place in this process. Just like it doesn't for the person nobody knows about."

Sirhan's new defense attorney, Angela Berry, said she couldn't agree more.

She plans to argue that the board's decision should be based on who Sirhan is today and not about past events, which is what the board has based its parole denials on before. She said she plans to focus on his exemplary record in prison and show that he poses no danger.

"We can't change the past, but he was not sentenced to life without the possibility of parole," Berry told the AP on Thursday. "To justify denying it based on the gravity of the crime and the fact that it disenfranchised millions of Americans is ignoring the rehabilitation that has occurred and that rehabilitation is a more relevant indicator of whether or not a person is still a risk to society."

Sirhan's hearing will be presided over by a two-person panel that usually announces its decision the same day. After that, the Parole Board staff has 90 days to review the decision, and then it is handed over to the governor for consideration.

The Parole Board would not say if the Kennedy family or anyone else submitted statements opposing Sirhan's release. Attempts to reach the Kennedy family for comment were unsuccessful.

Sirhan was sentenced to death after his conviction, but that sentence was commuted to life when the California Supreme Court briefly outlawed capital punishment in 1972. At his last parole hearing in 2016, commissioners concluded after more than three hours of intense testimony that Sirhan did not show adequate remorse or understand the enormity of his crime.

Berry said California laws approved since 2018 support her case. One she plans to point out to the board favors releasing certain older prisoners who committed crimes at a young age when the brain is prone to impulsivity. Sirhan was 24 at the time of the assassination.

Sirhan has in the past stuck to his account that he doesn't remember the killing. However, he has recalled events before the crime in detail — going to a shooting range that day, visiting the hotel in search of a party and returning after realizing he was too drunk to drive after downing Tom Collins cocktails.

Just before the assassination, he drank coffee in a hotel pantry with a woman to whom he was attracted. The next thing he has said he remembered was being choked and unable to breathe as he was taken into custody. At his 2016 hearing, he said he felt remorse for any crime victim but couldn't take responsibility for the shooting.

Sirhan told the panel then that if released, he hoped he would be deported to Jordan or live with his brother in Pasadena, California.

After 15 denials for his release, Berry said it's difficult to predict how much of an impact the prosecution's absence will have on the outcome.

"I like to think it'll make a difference. But I think everybody is not impervious to the fact that this is political," she said.

Melley reported from Los Angeles.

2 dead, 1 hurt in shooting outside Illinois courthouse

KANKAKEE, Ill. (AP) — Two men were killed and another was injured on Thursday in shootings outside a northern Illinois courthouse stemming from a long-running internal gang dispute, authorities said.

The shootings occurred after one of the victims, Victor Andrade, emerged from the Kankakee County Courthouse and was fatally shot by Antonio Hernandez, Kankakee Police Chief Robin Passwater said during a news conference.

Miguel Andrade then went to his car and retrieved a gun and engaged in a running gun battle with Hernandez outside the courthouse and into a parking lot in which Hernandez was killed, Passwater said.

Miguel Andrade was taken into custody, Passwater said. Charges are pending.

The relationship between the two Andrades was not clear.

A 20-year-old male also was shot and underwent surgery, Passwater said.

"They're all members of the same gang. So there was some kind of internal feud with them... a long ongoing feud between them," Passwater said.

Officers recovered "multiple" firearms, including one long gun, at the scene, the police chief said..

Kankakee is a community of about 26,000 people located about 60 miles (100 kilometers) south of Chicago.

Capitol Police officers sue Trump, allies over insurrection

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Capitol Police officers who were attacked and beaten during the Capitol riot filed a lawsuit Thursday against former President Donald Trump, his allies and members of far-right extremist groups, accusing them of intentionally sending a violent mob on Jan. 6 to disrupt the congressional certification of the election.

The suit in federal court in Washington alleges Trump “worked with white supremacists, violent extremist groups, and campaign supporters to violate the Ku Klux Klan Act, and commit acts of domestic terrorism in an unlawful effort to stay in power.”

The suit was filed on behalf of the seven officers by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. It names the former president, the Trump campaign, Trump ally Roger Stone and members of the extremist groups the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers who were present at the Capitol and in Washington on Jan. 6.

Two other similar cases have been filed in recent months by Democratic members of Congress. The suits allege the actions of Trump and his allies led to the violence siege of the Capitol that injured dozens of police officers, halted the certification of Democrat Joe Biden’s electoral victory and sent lawmakers running for their lives as rioters stormed into the seat of American democracy wielding bats, poles and other weapons.

A House committee has started in earnest to investigate what happened that day, sending out requests Wednesday for documents from intelligence, law enforcement and other government agencies. Their largest request so far was made to the National Archive for information on Trump and his former team.

Trump accused the committee of violating “long-standing legal principles of privilege,” but his team had no immediate comment on Thursday’s lawsuit.

“Executive privilege will be defended, not just on behalf of my Administration and the Patriots who worked beside me, but on behalf of the Office of the President of the United States and the future of our Nation,” Trump said in a written statement.

Also Thursday, a Capitol Police officer who fatally shot an unarmed Trump protester told “NBC Nightly News” in an interview that he had no other choice but to shoot.

“I tried to wait as long as I could,” Lt. Michael Byrd said. “I hoped and prayed no one tried to enter through those doors. But their failure to comply required me to take the appropriate action to save the lives of members of Congress and myself and my fellow officers.”

He was cleared of any wrongdoing in the shooting of Ashli Babbitt, 35. His name had been withheld by authorities over safety concerns, but he came forward publicly on NBC. Byrd said they were trapped, barricaded inside with lawmakers he was sworn to protect. He heard the mob coming and his anxiety worsened. He said he yelled repeatedly for the rioters to get back.

On the other side of the door, video showed the moment he fired the single shot, after rioters screamed at police to get out of the way and broke through the glass door leading to the doors of the House chamber. Byrd fired one shot, striking Babbitt as she was trying to climb through the jagged opening in the window. She was unarmed.

“I know that day I saved countless lives,” Byrd said. “I know members of Congress, as well as my fellow officers and staff, were in jeopardy and in serious danger. And that’s my job.”

At least 140 officers were injured. The lawsuit names as defendants several people who have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. They are alleged to have “conspired to use force, intimidation, and threats to prevent Joe Biden and Kamala Harris from taking office, to prevent Congress from counting the electoral votes, and to prevent the Capitol Police from carrying out their lawful duties.”

The filing provides vivid accounts of the injuries the officers sustained while trying to fend off the mob as rioters pushed past lines of overwhelmed law enforcers and barged into the Capitol. One officer, Jason DeRoche, was hit with batteries and sprayed with mace and bear spray until his eyes were swollen shut.

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A second officer, Governor Latson, was inside the Senate chamber when the rioters broke through the doors and beat him as they shouted racial slurs, according to the suit.

"We joined the Capitol Police to uphold the law and protect the Capitol community," the group of officers said in a statement released by their lawyers. "On Jan. 6 we tried to stop people from breaking the law and destroying our democracy. Since then our jobs and those of our colleagues have become infinitely more dangerous. We want to do what we can to make sure the people who did this are held accountable and that no one can do this again."

The documents requested by the House committee this week are just the beginning of what is expected to be a lengthy, partisan and rancorous congressional investigation into how the mob was able to infiltrate the Capitol and disrupt the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's presidential victory, inflicting the most serious assault on Congress in two centuries.

Committee members are also considering asking telecommunications companies to preserve phone records of several people, including members of Congress, to try to determine who knew what about the unfolding riot and when they knew it. With chants of "hang Mike Pence," the rioters sent the then-vice president and members of Congress running for their lives and did more than \$1 million in damage, and wounded dozens of police officers.

The demands were made for White House records from the National Archives, along with material from the departments of Defense, Justice, Homeland Security and Interior, as well as the FBI and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The committee so far has heard from police officers who were at the Capitol on Jan. 6. In emotional testimony, those officers spoke of how afraid and frustrated they were by the failure of law enforcement leaders to foresee the potential for violence and understand the scope of planning by the Trump backers.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Gunmen release students in northern Nigeria 3 months later

By CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Gunmen have released some of the children kidnapped from a school in northern Nigeria back in May, some of whom were as young as 5 years old, the school's head teacher said late Thursday.

Abubakar Garba Alhassan told The Associated Press that the freed students were on their way to the state capital, Minna, but added he could not confirm the exact number freed.

Authorities have said that 136 children were abducted along with several teachers when gunmen on motorcycles attacked the Salihu Tanko Islamic School in Niger state. Other preschoolers were left behind as they could not keep pace when the gunmen hurriedly moved those abducted into the forest.

Alhassan did not provide details of their release, but parents of the students have over the past weeks struggled to raise ransoms demanded by their abductors. There was no immediate comment from police of the Niger governor's office.

The release, though, came a day after local media quoted one parent as saying six of the children had died in captivity.

More than 1,000 students have been forcibly taken from their schools during those attacks, according to an AP tally of figures previously confirmed by the police. Although most of those kidnapped have been released, at least 200 are still held by their abductors.

The government has been unable to halt the spate of abductions for ransom. As a result, many schools have been forced to close due to the concerns about the kidnapping risk.

After one abduction at a university in Kaduna state earlier this year, gunmen demanded hundreds of thousands of dollars in ransom. They killed five other students to compel the students' parents to raise the money, and later released 14 others.

Explainer: How dangerous is Afghanistan's Islamic State?

By KATHY GANNON and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

The Islamic State offshoot that Americans blame for Thursday's deadly suicide attacks outside the Kabul airport coalesced in eastern Afghanistan six years ago, and rapidly grew into one of the more dangerous terror threats globally.

Despite years of military targeting by the U.S.-led coalition, the group known as Islamic State Khorasan has survived to launch a massive new assault as the United States and other NATO partners withdraw from Afghanistan, and as the Taliban return to power.

President Joe Biden cited the threat of Islamic State attacks in sticking with a Tuesday deadline for pulling U.S. forces out of Afghanistan. Biden blamed the group for Thursday's attacks, which included a suicide bomber who slipped into the crowds of Afghans outside airport gates controlled by U.S. service members.

The group has built a record of highly lethal attacks in the face of its own heavy losses. A look at a deadly group influencing the course of the Kabul airlifts and U.S. actions:

WHAT IS ISLAMIC STATE KHORASAN?

The Islamic State's Central Asia affiliate sprang up in the months after the group's core fighters swept across Syria and Iraq, carving out a self-styled caliphate, or Islamic empire, in the summer of 2014. In Syria and Iraq, it took local and international forces five years of subsequent fighting to roll back the caliphate.

The Afghanistan affiliate takes its name from the Khorasan Province, a region that covered much of Afghanistan, Iran and central Asia in the Middle Ages.

The group is also known as ISK, or ISIS K.

WHO ARE THE ISLAMIC STATE KHORASAN'S FIGHTERS?

The group started as several hundred Pakistani Taliban fighters, who took refuge across the border in Afghanistan after military operations drove them out of their home country. Other, like-minded extremists joined them there, including disgruntled Afghan Taliban fighters unhappy with what they — unlike the West — saw as the Taliban's overly moderate and peaceful ways.

As the Taliban pursued peace talks with the United States in recent years, discontented Taliban increasingly moved to the more extremist Islamic State, swelling its numbers. Most were frustrated that the Taliban was pursuing negotiations with the U.S. at a time when they thought the movement was on the march to a military win.

The group also has attracted a significant cadre from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, from a neighboring country; fighters from Iran's only Sunni Muslim majority province; and members of the Turkistan Islamic Party comprising Uighurs from China's northeast.

Many were attracted to the Islamic State's violent and extreme ideology, including promises of a caliphate to unite the Islamic world, a goal never espoused by the Taliban.

WHAT MAKES THEM A LEADING THREAT?

While the Taliban have confined their struggle to Afghanistan, the Islamic State group in Afghanistan and Pakistan has embraced the Islamic State's call for a worldwide jihad against non-Muslims.

The Center for International and Strategic Studies counts dozens of attacks that Islamic State fighters have launched against civilians in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including minority Shiite Muslims, as well as hundreds of clashes with Afghan, Pakistani and U.S.-led coalition forces since January 2017. Though the group has yet to conduct attacks against the U.S. homeland, the U.S. government believes it represents a chronic threat to U.S. and allied interests in South and Central Asia.

WHAT IS THEIR ROLE WITH THE TALIBAN?

They are enemies. While intelligence officials believe al-Qaida fighters are integrated among the Taliban, the Taliban, by contrast, have waged major, coordinated offensives against the Islamic State group in Afghanistan. Taliban insurgents at times joined with both the U.S. and U.S.-backed Afghan government forces to rout the Islamic State from parts of Afghanistan's northeast.

A U.S. Defense Department official, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was working covertly, said previously that the Trump administration had sought its 2020 withdrawal

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deal with the Taliban partly in hopes of joining forces with them against the Islamic State affiliate. The administration saw that group as the real threat to the American homeland.

WHAT IS THE RISK NOW?

Even when the United States had combat troops, aircraft and armed drones stationed on the ground in Afghanistan to monitor and strike the Islamic State, Islamic State militants were able to keep up attacks despite suffering thousands of casualties, Amira Jadoon and Andrew Mines note in a report for West Point's Combating Terrorism Center.

The withdrawal is depriving the United States of its on-the-ground strike capacity in Afghanistan, and threatens to weaken its ability to track the Islamic State and its attack planning as well. Biden officials say the Islamic State group is only one of many terror threats it is dealing with globally. They insist they can manage it with so-called over-the-horizon military and intelligence assets, based in Gulf states, on aircraft carriers, or other more distant sites.

One of the United States' greatest fears about pulling out its combat forces after two decades is that Afghanistan under Taliban rule again becomes a magnet and base for extremists plotting attacks on the West.

That threat, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN last weekend, was something "we're focused on, with every tool in our arsenal."

Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City and Gannon from Islamabad.

Israeli PM and Biden postpone meeting because of Afghanistan

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett have postponed their White House meeting as Biden focused his attention on dealing with the aftermath of deadly explosions near the Kabul airport that targeted U.S. troops and Afghans seeking to flee their country after the Taliban takeover.

Biden and Bennett were scheduled to meet late Thursday morning for their first face-to-face conversation since Bennett became Israel's prime minister in June. The two will instead meet on Friday.

"On behalf of the people of Israel, I share our deep sadness over the loss of American lives in Kabul," Bennett said in a statement posted on social media. "Israel stands with the United States in these difficult times, just as America has always stood with us. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the United States."

Before arriving in Washington, Bennett made clear the top priority of the visit was to persuade Biden not to return to the Iran nuclear deal, arguing Tehran has already advanced in its uranium enrichment, and that sanctions relief would give Iran more resources to back Israel's enemies in the region.

The Israeli leader met separately Wednesday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to discuss Iran and other issues. The visit is his first to the U.S. as prime minister.

Bennett told his Cabinet before the trip that he would tell the American president "that now is the time to halt the Iranians, to stop this thing" and not to reenter "a nuclear deal that has already expired and is not relevant, even to those who thought it was once relevant."

Biden has made clear his desire to find a path to salvage the 2015 landmark pact cultivated by Barack Obama's administration but scuttled in 2018 by Donald Trump's. But U.S. indirect talks with Iran have stalled and Washington continues to maintain crippling sanctions on the country as regional hostilities simmer.

Trump's decision to withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal led Tehran to abandon over time every limitation the accord imposed on its nuclear enrichment. The country now enriches a small amount of uranium up to 63%, a short step from weapons-grade levels, compared with 3.67% under the deal. It also spins far more advanced centrifuges and more of them than were allowed under the accord, worrying nuclear nonproliferation experts even though Tehran insists its program is peaceful.

Bennett's Washington visit comes weeks after Ebrahim Raisi was sworn in as Iran's new president.

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Raisi, 60, a conservative cleric with close ties to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has suggested he'll engage with the U.S. But he also has struck a hard-line stance, ruling out negotiations aimed at limiting Iranian missile development and support for regional militias — something the Biden administration wants to address in a new accord.

Administration officials acknowledged that Iran's potential "breakout" — the time needed to amass enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon — is now down to a matter of months or less.

But a senior administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the scheduled talks, said the administration sees the maximum pressure campaign employed by the Trump administration as having emboldened Iran to push ahead with its nuclear program.

Bennett is also looking to turn the page from his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu had a close relationship with Trump after frequently clashing with Obama. Biden, who has met with every Israeli prime minister since Golda Meir, had his own tensions with Netanyahu over the years.

During his latest White House campaign, Biden called Netanyahu "counterproductive" and an "extreme right" leader.

Biden waited nearly a month after his election before making his first call to Netanyahu, raising concerns in Jerusalem and among some Netanyahu backers in Washington that the two would have a difficult relationship. The president called Bennett just hours after he was sworn in as prime minister in June to offer his congratulations.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of the liberal Jewish advocacy group J Street, said Bennett is intent on building a positive working relationship with the Biden administration. But Ben-Ami, whose group supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, noted that the two leaders are out of sync on several issues in addition to Iran. Bennett opposes the creation of a Palestinian state and supports expansion of settlements in the West Bank, which Biden opposes.

In an interview with The New York Times ahead of his visit, Bennett declined to comment on whether he would move to block Biden administration plans to reopen a U.S. consulate for Palestinians in Jerusalem.

"The warmth that is going to be projected and the good solid working relationship cannot fully mask the fact that the agenda that Prime Minister Bennett comes to Washington with and the agenda that the Biden administration is pursuing on some of the core issues are still almost as different as they could possibly be," Ben-Ami said.

California looking to pay drug addicts to stay sober

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Frustrated by out-of-control increases in drug overdose deaths, California's leaders are trying something radical: They want the state to be the first to pay people to stay sober.

The federal government has been doing it for years with military veterans and research shows it is one of the most effective ways to get people to stop using drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine, stimulants for which there are no pharmaceutical treatments available.

It works like this: People earn small incentives or payments for every negative drug test over a period of time. Most people who complete the treatment without any positive tests can earn a few hundred dollars. They usually get the money on a gift card.

It's called "contingency management" and Gov. Gavin Newsom has asked the federal government for permission to use tax dollars to pay for it through Medicaid, the joint state and federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled that covers nearly 14 million people in California.

Meanwhile, a similar proposal is moving through California's Democratic-controlled Legislature. It's already passed the Senate with no opposition and is pending in the Assembly, where it has a Republican co-author.

"I think there is a lot in this strategy for everyone to like," said state Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from San Francisco and author of the bill. "Most important of all, it works."

How much it would cost depends on how many people participate. A program covering 1,000 people could cost as much as \$286,000, a pittance in California's total operating budget of more than \$262 billion.

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The San Francisco AIDS Foundation, a nonprofit agency, runs a small, privately-funded contingency management program. It's where Tyrone Clifford, who was addicted to meth, enrolled because they promised to pay him for every negative test over 12 weeks.

His first payment was \$2. That increased slightly with each subsequent negative test for a total of about \$330.

"I thought, I can do 12 weeks. I've done that before when my dealer was in jail," he said. "When I'm done I'll have 330 bucks to get high with."

Clifford did make it through the program without a positive test. But instead of using the money to buy more drugs, he bought a laptop computer so he could go back to school. He says he hasn't used methamphetamine in 11 years and now works as a counselor at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, helping people who had the same addiction problems he did.

Clifford, 53, said earning the money didn't matter much. Unlike some who struggle with drug addiction, Clifford always had a job and a house and was never much in danger of losing either. But he said watching his account grow with each negative test motivated him more than any other treatment program did.

"You watch those dollar values go up, there is proof right there that I am doing this," he said. "By no means is anyone getting rich off this program."

There is "clear and convincing evidence" that the treatment works to keep people sober from drugs like methamphetamine and cocaine, according to an analysis by the California Health Benefits Review Program. However, while research shows it is effective in keeping people sober during the program, the effect doesn't last much beyond six months after treatment concludes.

Clifford acknowledged the program doesn't work for everybody, but added his treatment included extensive group and individual counseling sessions that kept him accountable and made him feel part of a community.

Clifford said he considers the treatment a success even if people don't make it without a positive test.

"They are trying something," he said.

If California starts paying for contingency management treatment through Medicaid, Clifford said he thinks it would mean an explosion in similar programs across the state.

California, like most of the country, has struggled with opioid abuse, including drugs like prescription painkillers and heroin. But overdose deaths from stimulants in California nearly quadrupled between 2010 and 2019, and the problem has gotten even worse since.

Preliminary data from the first nine months of 2020 — when much of the state was locked down because of the coronavirus— shows stimulant overdose deaths jumped 42% compared to 2019.

While opioids have several pharmaceutical treatments available to help people get sober, there are none for stimulants like methamphetamine and cocaine, often leaving people to their willpower to kick the habit.

"There is a clear kind of hole in regards to treatment services for individuals who have a stimulant use disorder," said Jacey Cooper, director of California's Medicaid program. "At this point (contingency management) is the only thing people are pointing to that has been effective."

Contingency management is not widely used because it's not clear if state and federal law allow Medicaid money to pay for it. California has a law prohibiting people from profiting or receiving "kickbacks" from treatment programs. Wiener's law would clarify contingency management is legal under state law.

Whether it violates federal law is still a question.

"We don't think it does," Wiener said, noting the Biden administration has signaled its interest in the treatment.

Wiener's bill would require California's Medicaid program to pay for the treatment while Newsom's plan would let counties choose whether to participate.

This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Jacey Cooper.

Virus surge breaks hospital records amid rising toll on kids

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By SUDHIN THANAWALA and JAY REEVES Associated Press

Kentucky and Texas joined a growing list of states that are seeing record numbers of hospitalized COVID-19 patients in a surge that is overwhelming doctors and nurses and afflicting more children.

Intensive care units around the nation are packed with patients extremely ill with the coronavirus — even in places where hospitalizations have not yet reached earlier peaks.

The ICU units at Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital in Georgia typically have room for 38 patients, and doctors and nurses may have only two or three people who are very sick, said Dr. Jyotir Mehta, medical director of the ICU. On Wednesday, the ICU had 50 COVID-19 patients alone, roughly half of them relying on ventilators to breathe.

“I don’t think we have experienced this much critical illness in folks, so many people sick at the same time,” Mehta said.

He said talking to family members is difficult. “They are grasping for every hope and you’re trying to tell them, ‘Look, it’s bad,’” he said. “You have to tell them that your loved one is not going to make it.”

In New Mexico, top health officials warned Wednesday that the state is about a week away from rationing health care. The number of coronavirus patients needing care at hospitals jumped more than 20% in a day.

“We’re going to have to choose who gets care and who doesn’t get care,” state Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. David Scrase warned. “And we don’t want to get to that point.”

In Idaho, state leaders called on residents to volunteer to help keep medical facilities operating.

Texas and Kentucky on Wednesday reported more COVID-19 patients in their hospitals than at any other time since the pandemic began, 14,255 and 2,074, respectively. The Texas record is based on U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data.

At least six other states — Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Hawaii, Mississippi and Oregon — have already broken their hospitalization records.

In Texas, nearly 47% of the population is fully vaccinated — below the national average of almost 52% — and Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has banned mask and vaccine mandates. Many counties and school districts have defied his mask ban.

In Kentucky, just under 48% of the population is fully vaccinated, and public health officials have blamed the lag in part for the state’s surge. Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear’s COVID-19 restrictions expired in June, and the GOP-controlled legislature has blocked him from issuing new mask requirements or capacity limits.

Nationwide, COVID-19 deaths are running at more than 1,100 a day, the highest level since mid-March, and new cases per day are averaging over 152,000, turning the clock back to the end of January. As of early this week, the number of people in the hospital with the coronavirus was around 85,000, a level not seen since early February.

The surge is largely fueled by the highly contagious delta variant among people who are unvaccinated. In areas where vaccination rates are particularly low, doctors have pleaded with their communities to get inoculated to spare overburdened hospitals.

They have also sounded the alarm about the growing toll of the variant on children and young adults.

Children now make up 36% of Tennessee’s reported COVID-19 cases, marking yet another sobering milestone in the state’s battle against the virus, Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey said Wednesday. She said the state had 14,000 pediatric cases in the last seven days — a 57% increase over the previous week.

In South Carolina, students will again be required to wear masks on school buses starting Monday as COVID-19 cases among children and students rise rapidly.

Nearly 30% of new cases in South Carolina in the past two weeks have been in people 20 and under. During the same time in 2020, about 17% of cases were in children and teens, according to state officials.

Anderson Lopez Castillo, a nurse who cares for seriously ill COVID-19 patients at UAB Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama, said treating people as young as 16 in critical care has become an additional strain on top of a nearly yearlong ordeal that left him questioning his choice of a profession.

“Initially we saw a lot of older people getting it. It was like, ‘OK, we can tackle this. Even if it is stressful, even if it’s a dangerous virus, it’ll probably not be that bad on us as nurses taking care of these older patients,’” he said.

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Castillo, 24, said he now sees the virus making young people very sick, and it makes him and other young nurses think of their own mortality.

"There's definitely a little subconscious thought in the back of all of our heads going, "You know, that could be us,"" he said.

This story has been corrected to reflect that nearly 47% of Texas' population is fully vaccinated, below the national average.

Associated Press reporters around the country contributed to this report.

That's the ticket: Move from paper to digital divides fans

By ERIC OLSON AP College Football Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — John Fey was rummaging through a box of old scrapbooks this summer when he came upon a couple lost treasures.

At the bottom of the box, detached from the page they were once glued to, were ticket stubs from Nebraska's 1971 "Game of the Century" win against Oklahoma and the Cornhuskers' 1984 Orange Bowl loss to Miami.

Those games are still regarded among the greatest in college football history and those stubs were proof Fey was at both.

"I had flashbacks. Big-time flashbacks," the 68-year-old from Plattsmouth, Nebraska, said.

For people who keep them, ticket stubs can spark memories of being at a big game in person, cheering on a favorite team or, for a guy like Fey, nearly total recall of time spent with friends and family at a stadium. They are treasured mementos — and they are not going away even as schools transition to cashless transactions for everything from game tickets to food and drink.

Nearly every Football Bowl Subdivision school has gone to mobile ticketing this season, but in a spot check of 30 schools, only Notre Dame said it would refuse to print tickets for fans requesting them.

The other 29? They are willing to print, though most do not publicly offer that option. Illinois was among schools that did give fans a choice, and 74% picked paper. That figure was 64% at Nebraska and 50% at Texas A&M.

Customer service is critical during the transition, said Maureen Andersen of Palm Springs, California, president and CEO of the International Ticketing Association industry group.

"I have to presume a college-aged kid doesn't want anything printed ever, so a push on digital is going to be a completely different conversation than it is with an alumnus who graduated college in 1942," Andersen said. "It takes constant communication and working through a process and talking to the fans. You get pushback when you do an all-or-nothing proposition."

Traditional tickets on cardstock began fading away in the last decade with the advent of print-at-home tickets and digital, or mobile, ticketing systems where fans have a barcode on their smartphones scanned at the gate.

Digital tickets are eco-friendly, a safeguard against stolen or counterfeit tickets, and they can be transferred online from one person to another. They also allow schools to save hundreds of thousands of dollars in mailing costs. In the pandemic, cashless transactions are more popular than ever for safety reasons.

Nebraska fan Tom Reischlein of Omaha said he has used mobile ticketing at venues with no problem but chose paper football tickets at the suggestion of his wife, who said they might want them as a souvenir if they see a memorable game.

"I think it's a good idea that they're kind of easing into it and giving people the choice," said Reischlein, 58. "I've seen a lot of the older folks, either they don't have a cell phone or they have trouble navigating through it when there's a bunch of people lined up behind them."

Another Nebraska fan, Katherine Crawford of Lincoln, said her family has owned season tickets for three generations and will go digital this year.

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"We had a huge discussion," said Crawford, 27. "My grandma was very much against it, but she's not a huge technology person so it would have been quite difficult for her. My mom and I agreed it would be a nice option to have, a convenience."

Mark Townsend of Columbia, Maryland, a collector who runs the website TicketsFromThePast.com, said paper tickets bring about a sense of nostalgia.

Stubs from historic NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball games have the most monetary value, Townsend said, noting that a less-than-mint condition stub from Jackie Robinson's first game with the Brooklyn Dodgers recently was sold for \$40,000.

College football ticket stubs tend to hold greater sentimental value, Townsend said, because of the strong emotional connection of alumni and fans.

Without paper tickets, he said, "You lose that piece of history and memory of where you've been, where grandpa's been, or 'Me and my dad went to the ballgame and we've got our ticket stub still,'" he said. "It's more your moment in time and the pleasure that the game gave you. It ignites things in your head that makes you remember things."

In Fey's case, his '71 Game of the Century stub leads him to reminisce about his surprise when his dad told him he was able to get hold of the tickets, the flight to Norman, Oklahoma, in a small private plane that needed its tires pumped before takeoff, and Johnny Rodgers' 72-yard punt return for a touchdown that was the signature play of the Cornhuskers' 35-31 win.

"He was 10 yards in front of me when he crossed the 5-yard line," Fey said. "I swear to God if I would have had a cell phone I would have taken a picture."

Fey said he had stuffed the ticket stub in his pocket after he went through the turnstile, put it in his scrapbook when he got home and forgot he had it until he was going through some boxes last month.

Same with the stub from the '84 Orange Bowl. The husband of a woman Fey worked with had an extra ticket and asked if Fey wanted to join him and three others on a guys' trip to Miami.

Fey remembered the long van ride from Omaha to Miami, with a stop in Jacksonville to watch Iowa play Florida in the Gator Bowl, and unexpectedly bumping into his parents in a concession line at the Orange Bowl stadium.

"What are you doing here?" Fey remembered his dad asking.

Most memorable, of course, was one of the defining plays of Nebraska coach Tom Osborne's career — the late failed two-point conversion pass that left the Huskers with a 31-30 loss when an extra-point kick probably would have secured his first national championship. Fey watched the play unfold from the opposite end of the field.

In the moment, Fey said, he was inclined to throw away that ticket stub.

"But I must have thought, 'Well, someday I might want to look back on this,'" he said. "Now if they get blown out 48-0, that's one thing. They were behind and it was a hell of a comeback and had that pass not been tipped, maybe he would have got it."

"I'm glad I didn't throw it away."

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/Collegefootball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Migrant children spend weeks at US shelters as more arrive

By AMY TAXIN and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

Five months after the Biden administration declared an emergency and raced to set up shelters to house a record number of children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border alone, kids continue to languish at the sites, while more keep coming, child welfare advocates say.

More than 700 children spent three weeks or longer at the government's unlicensed sites in mid-July, according to declarations filed with a federal court overseeing custody conditions for immigrant youth. Advocates say children should be released quickly to their relatives in the U.S. or sent to a licensed facility.

In one of the filings, a 16-year-old Salvadoran boy said children were served raw meat. It took more than a month for the boy, who said he speaks with both his parents each week, to be released to his

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father in Georgia.

"When I wake up every day, I feel really frustrated. Of the youth that I arrived with, I am the last one here," the boy said in his declaration. "I would like to be home with my dad right now."

When the Biden administration erected the emergency sites in March to ease dangerous overcrowding at border stations, they were meant to be a temporary fix. But months later, some wonder whether that's still the case.

Border crossings by children without an adult in July neared the same levels they did in March despite the summer heat.

"If you have a dinner party that you plan to have for three people, and 30,000 people show up, you're going to have a problem," U.S. District Judge Dolly M. Gee, who oversees the decades-old settlement agreement that governs custody conditions for the children, said at a recent hearing.

"The infrastructure is not set up for tens of thousands of people coming in at one time, and somehow the paradigm has to shift to figure out how to deal with these types of numbers."

U.S. border authorities reported more than 18,000 encounters with unaccompanied immigrant children in July, up 24% from a month earlier. The rise comes in the busiest month yet for the Biden administration on the border, with a total of nearly 200,000 encounters even though crossings are typically expected to slow during the summer.

According to a government report in early August, the Department of Health and Human Services had nearly 15,000 children in its care but only 11,000 licensed shelter beds for the immigrant children. Using large-scale facilities can fill this gap, though advocates said the government would do better by expanding licensed shelters where children are given case workers, recreation and six hours of education on each weekday.

The Department of Health and Human Services is tasked with caring for the children until they can be sent to live with relatives or other sponsors in the United States while they wait for an immigration judge to decide whether they can stay in the country legally. While the agency has a broad network of state-licensed shelters that could be expanded, ample space in foster care programs and large, so-called influx care facilities that adhere to specific standards for staffing and conditions, it continues to turn to these emergency sites.

Advocates say the emergency intake sites adhere to none of the agency's existing standards and are an inadequate and expensive option, especially for young, vulnerable children already coping with the trauma of leaving home and making the dangerous trip north.

"There are other ways to do this. They kind of stick their head in the sand and act like the emergency intake sites are the only game in town, and it's just so far from the truth," said Leecia Welch, senior director of legal advocacy and child welfare at the National Center for Youth Law and one of the attorneys representing children in the federal court case. "When you start at horrifying, and better is still awful, that's just not OK."

Advocates have asked Gee to order the administration to follow standards at emergency sites like it does for its influx care facilities, which also aim to offset an increase in arrivals. For example, a Carrizo Springs, Texas, facility for up to 1,000 children must provide a care worker for every eight children while they're awake and at least one individual counseling session each week for each child. A hearing on the issue is scheduled for Oct. 1.

A Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson said licensed youth shelters remain near capacity, and the emergency intake sites provide critical care to children who are waiting to be sent to live with a parent or other sponsor. The spokesperson said caring for these kids is a priority, and the agency is working to expand the capacity of licensed sites.

The Obama and Trump administrations also opened temporary facilities when there was a jump in children crossing the border alone, but the numbers were not near what the Biden administration has seen.

Once the coronavirus appeared, the Trump administration largely shut down the Southwest border to asylum seekers under a pandemic-related measure, turning away many immigrants. Then, in November, a federal judge ordered the administration to stop expelling unaccompanied children under the policy.

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Two months later, President Joe Biden took office and the number of immigrant children seeking to cross began to rise. Shelters for immigrant youth were still running at reduced capacity due to coronavirus concerns, and the Department of Health and Human Services was suddenly strapped for space to house them.

In recent months, the average length of stay at the emergency intake sites has declined and the Department of Health and Human Services has shut down some sites and worked to improve conditions in others. But at one point, some children were so desperate to get out of the government's largest emergency facility at Fort Bliss Army Base, in Texas, that they tried to escape, according to declarations filed with the court.

After getting caught, some children were sent to a more restrictive youth shelter in New York. A 16-year-old from Honduras said that was an improvement since they received pizza and other good food instead of the raw, bloody chicken served at the Army base. They also had teachers, while there was no class before.

"If anything, it paid off to misbehave," the teen, who would spend the day in bed at Fort Bliss feeling like a hostage, said in a declaration. "I am so grateful that I tried to escape from that hellhole. It was horrible, and I could never sleep."

Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, said U.S. policies are making the problem worse. He believes parents are sending their children to the border knowing they have a better chance of getting in alone than with a relative.

Biden has maintained public health rules implemented by the Trump administration that have barred people from seeking asylum at the border, but he exempted children who cross alone.

If the U.S. let families apply to enter the country legally, authorities could manage the flows, eliminating the need for these emergency shelters, he said.

"We are still in an emergency — the numbers are still high — but this absolutely is not the way to deal with it," Nowrasteh said. "We have the capacity to process enormous numbers of asylum claims if we want to. It is only whether the government wants to."

'Was it worth it?' A fallen Marine and a war's crushing end

By CLAIRE GALOFARO and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SPRINGVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — She was folding a red sweater when she heard a car door slam, went to the window and realized that a moment she always imagined would kill her was about to be made real: three Marines and a Navy chaplain were walking toward her door, and that could only mean one thing.

She put her hand on the blue stars she'd stuck next to the front door, a symbol meant to protect her son, Marine Lance Cpl. Alec Catherwood, who had left three weeks before for the battlefields of Afghanistan.

And then, as she recalls it, she lost her mind. She ran wildly through the house. She opened the door and told the men they couldn't come inside. She picked up a flower basket and hurled it at them. She screamed so loud and for so long the next day she could not speak.

"I just wanted them not to say anything," said Gretchen Catherwood, "because if they said it, it would be true. And, of course, it was."

Her 19-year-old son was dead, killed fighting the Taliban on Oct. 14, 2010.

As she watched the news over the last two weeks, it felt like that day happened 10 minutes ago. The American military pulled out of Afghanistan, and all they had fought so hard to build seemed to collapse in an instant. The Afghan military put down its weapons, the president fled and the Taliban took over. Then suicide bombers killed several U.S. military members, including at least 11 Marines, in attacks Thursday at the Kabul airport, where thousands have been trying desperately to escape.

Gretchen Catherwood felt like she could feel in her hands the red sweater she'd been folding the moment she learned her son was dead.

Her phone buzzed with messages from the family she's assembled since that horrible day: the officer who'd dodged the flowerpot; the parents of others killed in battle or by suicide since; her son's fellow fighters in the storied 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, nicknamed the Darkhorse Battalion, that endured the highest rate of casualties in Afghanistan. Many of them call her "Ma."

Outside of this circle, she'd seen someone declare "what a waste of life and potential" on Facebook.

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Friends told her how horrible they'd felt that her son had died in vain. As she exchanged messages with the others who'd paid the price of war, she worried its end was forcing them to question whether all they had seen and all they had suffered had mattered at all.

"There are three things I need you to know," she said to some. "You did not fight for nothing. Alec did not lose his life for nothing. I will be here for you no matter what, until the day I die. Those are the things I need you to remember."

In the woods behind her house, the Darkhorse Lodge is under construction. She and her husband are building a retreat for combat veterans, a place where they can gather and grapple together with the horrors of war. There are 25 rooms, each named after one of the men killed from her son's battalion. The ones who made it home have become their surrogate sons, she said. And she knows of more than a half-dozen who have died from suicide.

"I am fearful of what this might do to them psychologically. They're so strong and so brave and so courageous. But they also have really, really big hearts. And I feel that they might internalize a lot and blame themselves," she said. "And oh God, I hope they don't blame themselves."

The 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment deployed in the fall of 2010 from Camp Pendleton, California, sending 1,000 U.S. Marines on what would become one of the bloodiest tours for American service members in Afghanistan.

The Darkhorse Battalion spent six months battling Taliban fighters in the Sangin district of Helmand province. An area of green fields and mud compounds, Sangin remained almost entirely in the Taliban's control nearly a decade into the U.S.-led war. Fields of lush poppies used in narcotics gave the militants valued income they were determined to hold.

When the Marines arrived, white Taliban flags flew from most buildings. Loudspeakers installed to broadcast prayers were used to taunt U.S. forces. Schools had closed.

The Marines came under fire as soon as a helicopter dropped them outside their patrol base.

"When the bird landed, we were already getting shot at," recalled former Sgt. George Barba of Menifee, California. "We run, we get inside and I remember our gunnery sergeant telling us: 'Welcome to Sangin. You just got your combat action ribbon.'"

Snipers lurked in the trees. Fighters armed with rifles hid behind mud walls. Homemade bombs turned roads and canals into deathtraps.

Sangin was Alec Catherwood's first combat deployment. He had enlisted in the Marines while still in high school, went to boot camp shortly after graduation, then was assigned to a 13-man squad led by former Sgt. Sean Johnson.

Johnson was impressed by Catherwood's professionalism — physically fit, mentally tough and always on time.

"He was only 19, so that was extra special," Johnson said. "Some are still just trying to figure out how to tie their boots and not get yelled at."

Catherwood also made them laugh. He carried around a small, stuffed animal he used as a prop for jokes.

Barba recalled Catherwood's first helicopter ride during training, and how he was "smiling ear-to-ear and he's swinging his feet like he's a little kid on a highchair."

Former Cpl. William Sutton of Yorkville, Illinois, swore Catherwood would crack jokes even during a firefight.

"Alec, he was a shining light in that darkness," said Sutton, who was shot multiple times fighting in Afghanistan. "And then they took it from us."

On Oct. 14, 2010, after a late night standing watch outside their patrol base, Catherwood's squad headed out to assist fellow Marines under attack, who were running low on ammunition.

They crossed open fields, using irrigation canals for cover. After sending half his squad safely ahead, Johnson tapped Catherwood on the helmet and said: "Let's go."

After running just three steps, he said, gunfire from ambushing Taliban fighters sounded behind them. Johnson looked down and saw a bullet hole in his pants where he had been shot in the leg. Then came a

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deafening explosion — one of the Marines had stepped on a hidden bomb. Johnson blacked out momentarily, waking up in the water.

Another explosion followed. Looking to his left, Johnson saw Catherwood floating facedown. It was obvious, he said, that the young Marine was dead.

Explosions during the ambush killed another Marine, Lance Cpl. Joseph Lopez of Rosamond, California, and badly wounded another.

Back in the United States, Staff Sergeant Steve Bancroft began an excruciating two-hour drive toward Catherwood's parents' house in northern Illinois. He'd served seven months in Iraq before he became a casualty assistance officer, tasked with notifying families of a death on the battlefield.

"I'd never wish that on anybody, I can't express that enough: I do not wish looking a mom and dad in the face and telling them their only son is gone," said Bancroft, who is now retired.

He was stoic when he had to be, as he escorted families to Dover, Delaware, to watch coffins be rolled out of a plane. But when he was alone, he cried. And he still weeps when he thinks about the moment he arrived at the home of Gretchen and Kirk Catherwood.

They laugh now about the hurled flowerpot. He still regularly talks to them and other sets of parents he notified. Though he never met Alec, he feels like he knows him.

"Their son was such a hero, it's hard to explain, but he sacrificed more than 99% of the people in this world would ever think of doing," he said.

"Was it worth it? We lost so many people. It's hard to think about how many we've lost," he said.

Gretchen Catherwood keeps the cross her son was wearing on a chain around her bedpost with his dog tags.

Alongside it hangs a glass bead, blown with the ashes of another young Marine: Cpl. Paul Wedgewood, who made it home.

The Darkhorse Battalion returned to California in April 2011. After months of intense fighting, they'd largely seized Sangin from the Taliban's grip. Leaders of the provincial government could move about safely. Children, including girls, returned to school.

It came at a heavy price. In addition to the 25 who perished, more than 200 returned home wounded, many with lost limbs, others with scars harder to see.

Wedgewood had trouble sleeping when he finished his four-year enlistment and left the Marine Corps in 2013. As he slept less, he drank more.

A tattoo on his upper arm showed a sheet of scroll paper bearing the names of four Marines who died in Sangin. Wedgewood considered reenlisting, but told his mother: "If I stay, I think it'll kill me."

Instead, Wedgewood enrolled in college back home in Colorado, but soon lost interest. A welding program at a community college proved a better fit.

Wedgewood had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. He was taking medication, participating in therapy.

"He was very engaged in working on his mental health," said the Marine's mother, Helen Wedgewood. "He was not a neglected veteran."

Still, he struggled. On the Fourth of July, Wedgewood would take his dog camping in the woods to avoid fireworks. He quit a job he liked after a backfiring machine caused him to dive to the floor.

Five years after Sangin, things appeared to be looking up. Wedgewood was preparing for a new job that would take him back to Afghanistan as a private security contractor. He seemed to be in a good place.

After a night of drinking with his roommates, Wedgewood didn't show up for work on Aug. 23, 2016. A roommate later found him dead in his bedroom. He had shot himself. He was 25 years old.

He left a short note.

"He basically said that he loved us, but he was tired," Helen Wedgewood said.

She considers her son and others who took their own lives to be casualties of war every bit as much as those killed in action.

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When the Taliban swept back into control of Afghanistan just before the fifth anniversary of her son's death, she felt relief that a war that left more than 2,400 Americans dead and more than 20,700 wounded had finally come to an end. But there was also sadness that gains made by the Afghan people — especially women and children — may be temporary.

"As a mom, this kind of stabs you, because would he still be around, would any of these young men still be around if this whole war hadn't happened?" she said. "But I try to gently correct people when they say this was a waste or this was all for nothing. Because that's not true. We don't know what impacts it's had on the safety of our country, on the safety of the Afghan people."

Some who served with the Darkhorse Battalion are having a hard time seeing it any way other than that their efforts, their blood and the lives of their fallen friends were all for nothing.

"I'm starting to feel like how the Vietnam vets felt. There was no purpose to it whatsoever," said Sutton, 32, who now works in the veterans services office of a county outside Chicago, helping military vets get care.

"We were able to hold our head up high and say we went to the last Taliban stronghold and we gave them hell," Sutton said, "only for it all to be taken away. In the blink of an eye."

Barba, 34, works as a private security guard near Los Angeles. He and his wife are expecting their first child. He said he's had trouble sorting his feelings about the bleak news from Afghanistan. His wife recently woke to Barba screaming in his sleep. "I think your nightmares are back," she told him.

"It really is weird," Barba said. "I've seen my guys get mad. I've seen my guys get frustrated. But not like this. This is like somebody spit in their face."

Johnson, 34, works as a commercial diver in Florida. He said the U.S. should have acknowledged years ago that the Afghan security forces Americans trained and equipped would never be able to defend the country on their own.

"My personal opinion, yeah, we probably should have pulled out years and years ago," Johnson said. "If you're not going to win the damn thing, what are you doing there?"

A few months ago, Gretchen Catherwood was painting the cabins that will become the Darkhorse Lodge. It was dark, still without electricity and no cell service, so it was quiet. She felt suddenly like she could feel her son and his 24 fallen comrades. She could almost see their faces.

"It's a place where I can feel like they're together," she said, "and that they are still caring for their brothers."

The Catherwoods moved out of their home in Illinois. Every time she walked to the front door, Gretchen remembered those four men arriving with the news. She couldn't bear it anymore.

The gold star pins she wore everyday on her chest kept breaking. She'd always disliked tattoos and hassled her son when he got one as a Marine. But then she found herself at a tattoo parlor. She had his name inked on her arm, and the shape of a gold star pin put permanently on her chest, just above her heart, so she'd never take it off again.

She could no longer care for her son, she said, but she could for those who made it home. She and her husband moved to the woods in Tennessee and got to work on the Darkhorse Lodge.

They fashioned their logo after the battalion's mascot, a fierce-looking horse, facing left, its mane sharp like a serrated knife and its eyes squinted for battle. The artist who drew theirs softened its edges and turned it to the right, facing toward a future after war.

They raised a million dollars, mostly in small donations. One woman sends a check for \$2 every month. Bancroft, the officer who notified her of her son's death, donates every year. The obituary for one soldier who died by suicide asked for donations to the Darkhorse Lodge in his memory, and checks flooded the Catherwoods' mailbox.

They hope to open next summer and offer free stays for any combat veteran from any war or branch of the military who might benefit from time in the woods, where the only conflict is among the dozens of

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hummingbirds fighting over the feeders on her front porch.

She is hopeful that the American withdrawal from Afghanistan means no one else will die on a battlefield there. But she also worries that it might rattle the vets who made it home, and who might already be struggling to make sense of what happened there and why.

"That's a constant fear, it's been my fear since they got back but now it's even worse," she said. "They experienced things that 99% of the country never will. I've never watched a friend die. I've never fought to the death. We are losing these people at a frightening, frightening rate to suicides, and we can't afford to lose one more."

She and her husband don't believe that the chaotic end honors their son's service, and are particularly troubled that some of the Afghan interpreters and others who helped the military for years might not make it out alive. But they also can't imagine how it might have ended any other way, had the United States stayed in Afghanistan another year or five or 20.

Part of Alec Catherwood remains there, and for a while that bothered his mother.

When he was alive, she loved to touch his face. He had baby soft skin and when she put her hands on his cheeks, this big tough Marine felt like her little boy. The military did an honorable job making him look whole, she said. But when she touched his cheek as he laid in the casket, she touched a part that had been reconstructed - it wasn't really him.

"That used to be much harder than it is now," she said. "Now, it's like, damn straight, he's still there. He's always going to have a presence there, flipping off the Taliban."

Good things will grow where he is, she likes to think.

"He's part of their dirt, their soil, he's part of the Earth there, he is forever there."

Bynum reported from Savannah, Georgia.

Afghanistan's top high school graduate fears for her future

By TAMEEM AKHGAR and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Salgy Baran got the highest score in all of Afghanistan on her university entrance exams this year, but she has no answers for what comes next.

The 18-year-old wants to stay and become a doctor, but as with so many other Afghans, those plans were plunged into doubt when the Taliban rolled into the capital of Kabul earlier this month, capping their stunning takeover of the country.

Taliban leaders say women and girls will be able to attend school and work in accordance with Islamic law — without providing specifics — even as other prominent members of the militant group have sneered at the idea of coed classrooms and hinted at more reactionary measures.

"I am not afraid right now, but I am concerned about my future," Baran told The Associated Press in a video interview from Kabul. "Will they allow me to get an education or not?"

The Taliban say the mass evacuation of foreigners and Afghans fearful of their rule must end on Aug. 31, the date the U.S. set for withdrawing its last troops after 20 years of war. They have accused Western countries of luring away doctors, engineers and other professionals whose skills will be needed to rebuild the war-ravaged country.

If that's the case, they should hope Baran stays.

She grew up in a middle-class family in rural, eastern Afghanistan, where medical care is still lacking despite two decades of international development aid. When she was 7, her diabetic father died after a doctor gave him an overdose of insulin, she said.

That made her want to be the kind of doctor who doesn't make mistakes.

The family moved to Kabul in 2015, where there are fewer social restrictions on women. Her family pooled their resources to support her studies. They describe her as a quiet kid who would spend long hours reading and studying math.

This year's exams — Afghanistan's version of the SAT — were held before the takeover. She got the

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highest score of anyone in the country, out of about 174,000 boys and girls, according to the National Examination Authority. That secured her a spot at the Kabul University of Medical Sciences, the country's top school of medicine.

An entire generation of Afghan women have benefited from the Western-backed order established after the 2001 U.S.-led invasion drove the Taliban from power.

When the militants last ruled the country, women were forbidden to attend school or work outside the home. They could only go outside if accompanied by a male relative, and even then they had to wear the all-encompassing burqa.

Progress since 2001 has been incremental and largely confined to urban areas. The U.N. children's agency estimates that 3.7 million Afghan children are out of school, 60% of them girls, and 17% of girls are forced into marriage before their 15th birthday.

But on the eve of the Taliban takeover, girls were attending school, particularly in Kabul and other cities, and women could be found in parliament, government and business. Many fear the Taliban will roll back the clock.

Abdul Baqi Haqqani, a Taliban official supervising higher education, said women will be able to continue their studies in "proper facilities," without elaborating. But another Taliban official, Mohammad Khalid, addressing a conference of Muslim clerics earlier this week, expressed disgust at the idea of boys and girls studying in the same classroom.

Interpretations of Sharia, or Islamic law, vary widely across the Muslim world, but in most countries, women work and study relatively freely. The Taliban could simply require a Muslim headscarf or insist on separate classrooms for boys and girls.

But no one really knows — not yet.

Baran and her family have no immediate plans to join the exodus of Afghans, but they are worried about what comes next.

"I had goals under the past government, I had planned everything out for several years," she said. "But under this government, I can't say anything. Even tomorrow is uncertain."

Akhgar reported from Istanbul and Krauss from Jerusalem.

Japan suspends 1.63M doses of Moderna over contamination

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan suspended use of about 1.63 million doses of Moderna vaccine Thursday after contamination was found in unused vials, raising concern of a supply shortage as the country tries to accelerate vaccinations amid a COVID-19 surge.

The health ministry said contamination was reported from multiple vaccination sites. Some doses might have been administered, but no adverse health effects have been reported so far, officials said.

Takeda Pharmaceutical Co., a Japanese drugmaker in charge of sales and distribution of the vaccine in Japan, said it decided to suspend use of doses manufactured in the same production line as a safety precaution.

It asked Moderna to conduct an emergency investigation and told medical institutions and organizers to stop using the vaccine produced in Spain and shared the production numbers that may be affected.

The Spanish manufacturer, Rovi, said it is conducting an investigation into the matter and is also cooperating with authorities.

"The detection of this particulate matter refers to certain vials of one product lot distributed exclusively in Japan," the company said in a statement from Madrid.

"The origin of this manufacturing incident may be in one of ROVI's manufacturing lines," the statement noted.

It said that as a precaution, the batch in question and two adjacent lots have been put on hold.

Neither the companies nor authorities gave details on the possible type of contamination.

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The Moderna vaccine problem came just as Japan struggles with surging infections, with daily new cases hitting new highs in many parts of the country and severely straining the health care system.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told reporters the government and Takeda are discussing ways to minimize the impact on Japan's vaccination progress.

"We will do utmost in order to avoid any impact on vaccination progress, especially at worksites and large-scale centers," Kato said.

Japan relies entirely on foreign-developed vaccines by Moderna, as well as Pfizer Inc. and AstraZeneca. Moderna has been since mid-June at large-scale centers and workplace inoculations and has helped speed up Japan's rollout.

About 43% of the Japanese population have been fully vaccinated, with daily doses of about 1 million.

Barry Hatton contributed to this report from Lisbon, Portugal.

U.S. voting rights events reflect multiracial reform agenda

AARON MORRISON Associated Press

A decades-old fight to expand and protect voting rights will intensify this weekend, when multiracial coalitions of civil, human and labor rights leaders hold rallies in Washington and across the nation to urge passage of federal voter protections eroded since the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It's a united front that rights advocates say hasn't been seen in two generations, back when the landmark federal legislation removed barriers keeping voters of color from easily accessing the ballot box.

Some progress was made this week, when the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives passed legislation Tuesday that would restore sections of historic voting legislation that allowed legal challenges to state voting laws. The Voting Rights Act also required states with a history of voter discrimination to get federal preclearance before changing laws.

True victory now hinges on the Senate, where Republicans have promised to block voting rights legislation and where Democrats don't have enough votes to overcome a filibuster rule that requires some GOP support for passage. And with midterm elections approaching next year, some fear the window of opportunity is closing to do away with the filibuster and beat back state-level voter suppression.

"I think this has given us a sense of urgency," said the Rev. Al Sharpton, whose "March On for Voting Rights" event with the families of Martin Luther King Jr. and the late Rep. John Lewis on Saturday will move from Washington's McPherson Square to the National Mall, with the U.S. Capitol as a rally backdrop.

"The Senate is now the battleground," Sharpton said. "And clearly the timing of this couldn't be better. Everything that we're concerned about — whether it's health care, whether it's student loans, whether it's educational equality, whether it's economic relief — none of it can happen if our votes are lessened."

The list of speakers, first shared with The Associated Press, includes Reps. Joyce Beatty, Terri Sewell, Sheila Jackson Lee and Mondaire Jones, along with civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump, the family of George Floyd, and American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten.

Sharpton's march and those in dozens of other cities, including Atlanta, Houston, Miami and Phoenix, cap a week of actions against a wave of proposals in conservative-leaning states to curb access to early voting, mail-in vote casting and ballot drop boxes used in pandemic-era elections.

Advocates say it's a reaction to shifting racial demographics, made clear in recently released 2020 census data, and a corresponding shift in the balance of power between the white majority and Black and Latino people, as well as rapidly growing Asian communities.

Prominent Republicans, who have criticized the Democratic proposals as a power grab, say they aren't opposed to election laws that expand voter access. And many of them support proposals to build trust among Americans who believe, albeit falsely, that the last presidential election was stolen from former President Donald Trump and other GOP candidates due to widespread voter fraud.

The Democratic proposals include the John Lewis Voter Advancement Act, which would restore and strengthen the weakened 1965 law and add protections against suppression tactics affecting Indigenous

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communities. The separate For the People Act would create a national standard for voter registration, mail-in balloting and early voting, as well as curb racial gerrymandering and institute campaign finance reforms.

Meanwhile, a wave of Republican-backed state initiatives could disproportionately disenfranchise voters of color at a time when they have turned out at the polls at historically high levels in states like Georgia and Missouri, said Carmen Perez, president and CEO of The Gathering for Justice, a nonprofit founded by legendary musician and activist Harry Belafonte.

"It's important that we create entry points for all people to get involved, especially when we're looking at voting rights being taken away from Black and brown communities, as well as Indigenous communities," said Perez, an organizer of the "Make Good Trouble Rally" in tribute to Lewis at the Lincoln Memorial Saturday.

The late civil rights icon was brutally beaten by a state trooper during the 1965 march from Montgomery to Selma, Alabama, that preceded passage of the Voting Rights Act that year. Perez's rally is in the same location as last year's commemorative March on Washington, where the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Jacob Blake urged support for federal policing reforms and voting rights legislation.

Tamika Mallory, co-founder of the social justice group Until Freedom, said voting rights are essential to electing leaders who support police reform.

"One reason we do not have the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act passed at this moment is because of the lack of support ... on both the Democratic side and the Republican party," Mallory said.

"That means we have to elect new folks to office," she said. "And we have to have the ability to go to the polls and not be suppressed."

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks laws restricting voter access, between January and mid-July at least 18 states enacted 30 suppressive laws. More than 400 bills with rules that reduce mail-in voting access, ballot drop boxes and other restrictions were introduced in 49 states this year.

The bills followed the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the nation's first Black and South Asian vice president, along with a diverse group of progressive candidates to the House and Senate. On the same day as the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, Georgia declared the winners of its runoff elections — Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, the state's first Black and Jewish senators.

An August poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 43% of Americans think the U.S. government is doing a good job protecting the right to vote, while nearly as many — 37% — say it's doing a poor job. By comparison, in December of 2015, 70% said it was doing a good job compared with 15% who said a poor job. The drop came across party lines and across racial and ethnic groups.

An AP-NORC poll in April found about half of Americans supported expanding access to early and mail-in voting, while about 3 in 10 were opposed and the rest had no opinion. Automatic voter registration was the most popular Democratic proposal in the survey, endorsed by 60% of Americans.

The Biden administration, which said it supports the voting rights legislation passed by the House, hasn't made getting it through the Senate a priority, critics and advocates say. Many see the biggest Senate hurdle as two Democratic senators, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who have said they oppose eliminating the filibuster to take up the voting rights legislation.

That's why the Rev. William Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, planned to confront Manchin with a mass motorcade from the Boone County Courthouse in Madison, West Virginia, to the statehouse in Charleston to call out the senator's obstruction on the filibuster.

"Democrats need to step up, because they ran on all this stuff," Barber said of the U.S. Senate. "Everybody said, if we get them the majority, they are going to do it. They're willing to pass infrastructure with 51 (Democratic) votes in the Senate. Why can't they pass voting rights laws with 51 votes?"

The Senate is set to recess ahead of the Labor Day holiday next month, making the prospects of action on the legislation unclear.

"The urgency of the moment dictates that we act now," said NAACP President Derrick Johnson, whose civil rights organization has partnered with several national labor unions in support of federal voting rights

legislation.

"In this moment, for the Senate to go home for recess without addressing the issue is a problem," Johnson said.

Polling editor Emily Swanson in Washington contributed.

Morrison is a member of the AP's Race & Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

100,000 more COVID deaths seen unless US changes its ways

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and NICKY FORSTER Associated Press

The U.S. is projected to see nearly 100,000 more COVID-19 deaths between now and Dec. 1, according to the nation's most closely watched forecasting model. But health experts say that toll could be cut in half if nearly everyone wore a mask in public spaces.

In other words, what the coronavirus has in store this fall depends on human behavior.

"Behavior is really going to determine if, when and how sustainably the current wave subsides," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, director of the University of Texas COVID-19 Modeling Consortium. "We cannot stop delta in its tracks, but we can change our behavior overnight."

That means doubling down again on masks, limiting social gatherings, staying home when sick and getting vaccinated. "Those things are within our control," Meyers said.

The U.S. is in the grip of a fourth wave of infection this summer, powered by the highly contagious delta variant, which has sent cases, hospitalizations and deaths soaring again, swamped medical centers, burned out nurses and erased months of progress against the virus.

Deaths are running at over 1,100 a day on average, turning the clock back to mid-March. One influential model, from the University of Washington, projects an additional 98,000 Americans will die by the start of December, for an overall death toll of nearly 730,000.

The projection says deaths will rise to nearly 1,400 a day by mid-September, then decline slowly.

But the model also says many of those deaths can be averted if Americans change their ways.

"We can save 50,000 lives simply by wearing masks. That's how important behaviors are," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle who is involved in the making of the projections.

Already there are signs that Americans are taking the threat more seriously.

Amid the alarm over the delta variant in the past several weeks, the slump in demand for COVID-19 shots reversed course. The number of vaccinations dispensed per day has climbed around 80% over the past month to an average of about 900,000.

White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Tuesday that in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, "more people got their first shots in the past month than in the prior two months combined."

Also, millions of students are being required to wear masks. A growing number of employers are demanding their workers get the vaccine after the federal government gave Pfizer's shot full approval earlier this week. And cities like New York and New Orleans are insisting people get vaccinated if they want to eat at a restaurant.

Half of American workers are in favor of vaccine requirements at their workplaces, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Early signs suggest behavior changes may already be flattening the curve in a few places where the virus raged this summer.

An Associated Press analysis shows the rate of new cases is slowing in Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana and Arkansas, some of the same states where first shots are on the rise. In Florida, pleas from hospitals and a furor over masks in schools may have nudged some to take more precautions.

However, the troubling trends persist in Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia

and Wyoming, where new infections continue to rise steadily.

Mokdad said he is frustrated that Americans "aren't doing what it takes to control this virus."

"I don't get it," he said. "We have a fire and nobody wants to deploy a firetruck."

One explanation: The good news in the spring — vaccinations rising, cases declining — gave people a glimpse of the way things used to be, said Elizabeth Stuart of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and that made it tough for them to resume the precautions they thought they left behind.

"We don't need to fully hunker down," she said, "but we can make some choices that reduce risk."

Even vaccinated people should stay vigilant, said Dr. Gaby Sauza, 30, of Seattle, who was inoculated over the winter but tested positive for COVID-19 along with other guests days after an Aug. 14 Vermont wedding, even though the festivities were mostly outdoors and those attending had to submit photos of their vaccination cards.

"In retrospect, absolutely, I do wish I had worn a mask," she said.

Sauza, a resident in pediatrics, will miss two weeks of hospital work and has wrestled with guilt over burdening her colleagues. She credits the vaccine with keeping her infection manageable, though she suffered several days of body aches, fevers, night sweats, fatigue, coughing and chest pain.

"If we behave, we can contain this virus. If we don't behave, this virus is waiting for us," Mokdad said. "It's going to find the weak among us."

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Pandemic windfall for US schools has few strings attached

By COLLIN BINKLEY, GEOFF MULVIHILL, CAMILLE FASSETT and LARRY FENN Associated Press

As the federal government releases historic sums of pandemic aid to the nation's schools, it's urging them to dream big, to invest in seismic changes that will benefit students for generations to come. But many districts say they have more urgent problems to tackle first.

In Detroit, that means fixing buildings with crumbling ceilings and mold infestations. Like other school systems, Detroit is caught between the Biden administration's lofty aspirations and bleak realities. The district is using some of the government money to hire tutors, expand mental health services and cut class sizes. But at least half of its \$1.3 billion windfall is being set aside to make long-neglected repairs.

"For decades, we have been inequitably funded to deal with the enormous needs that poverty and racial injustice have created in our city," Superintendent Nikolai Vitti told The Associated Press in an interview. "Now with the COVID relief, we're going to be able to put a significant dent into the challenge."

The administration has encouraged schools to take leaps, not steps, with the funding. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has called it a time for bold innovation that breaks down inequities and rethinks all aspects of schooling.

"This is our moment to ensure that we reopen, reinvest and reimagine our schools differently and better than ever before," Cardona said at a virtual education summit in June. "These next months and years will determine the trajectory of success for millions of students in our care."

Despite those lofty aspirations, many large, urban districts are putting much of their pandemic relief toward practical needs, such as hiring nurses, restocking libraries, fixing playgrounds and bringing back art classes.

So far, there's little evidence of major change, said Marguerite Roza, director of the Edunomics Lab, a school finance think tank at Georgetown University. Part of the problem, she said, is that the aid was given to schools with few strings attached.

"That's not a recipe for innovation," Roza said. "We sprinkled the dollars as blank checks to every one of these districts. And many are going to do what they already know how to do."

The infusion of pandemic relief is bigger than anything American schools have seen before. It totals \$190 billion, more than four times the amount the Education Department spends on K-12 schools in a typical year.

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Some districts will receive sums amounting to 50% or more of the cost to operate their schools for a year.

Congress has sent the funding in three waves since the start of the pandemic. The latest and largest round, which totals \$123 billion, is still being distributed and gives school enormous flexibility in how to spend it. While 20% must be used to address learning setbacks, the rest can be used on nearly any cost that school officials deem "reasonable and necessary."

Yet little is being done to track how schools are using the money. After the first wave of funding, the Education Department's internal watchdog warned that grant oversight has been a "persistent management challenge." It cautioned that internal weaknesses could limit the department's ability to monitor the funding. While states are required to submit spending plans to the federal government, some Republicans in Congress have pressed for new legislation that would ensure greater transparency around the spending.

The Associated Press, relying on data published or provided by states and the federal government, for the first time tallied how much money was granted to nearly every district in the country. The federal government has not released full data at that level of detail.

The AP tracked more than \$155 billion sent to states to distribute among schools since last year, including general pandemic relief that some states shared with their schools.

The median aid allocated to districts was about \$2,800 per student, but it varies widely by district and state, according to the AP's analysis. The median for districts in Louisiana and the District of Columbia was about \$6,000 per student, for example, while in Utah it was \$1,300.

Nationwide, high-poverty areas received much more. Detroit received the highest rate among big districts, at more than \$25,000 per student. It was followed by Philadelphia, with \$13,000 per student, and Cleveland, at more than \$12,000.

Schools have three years to spend the latest round, a window that districts say is short for such a large amount of money. In many areas, school officials are reluctant to take on costs they may not be able to sustain after the federal aid is gone.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, the public school system is getting \$321 million in total funding, an amount that Superintendent Joe Gothard calls "jaw-dropping." But he said the time frame limits his spending options. The district has hired some new teachers, but it's mostly focusing on one-time costs such as building renovations and replacing library books.

"Three years will come very fast," Gothard said. "It's about managing expectations, honestly, and it starts with myself. We really have to be careful about avoiding a financial cliff."

Detroit is taking a similar approach. The district plans to add mental health services in dozens of schools, but it's being done through a contractor. Even the building improvements will only be temporary if the district does not get additional funding to maintain them, Vitti said.

Vitti's plan has the support of the school board. Deborah Hunter-Harvill, a board member who graduated from a district high school in 1973, recalled being a student when "the infrastructure was not crumbling, and everything was clean."

"We want our students of today to have that same feeling and opportunity we had when we attended DPS back in the day," Hunter-Harvill said.

But some in the community say the district should focus on other priorities, including improving online classes. Ida Byrd-Hill, chief executive of Detroit-based reskilling firm Automation Workz, said students from economically disadvantaged families have struggled to learn through remote instruction that mostly relied on worksheets and online lectures.

"In the past, school infrastructure meant brick-and-mortar buildings, alone," Byrd-Hill said. Now it must include high-quality virtual learning systems.

Either way, the federal funding could end up saving local taxpayers. Before the pandemic, the district was planning to request a local tax increase to cover \$1.5 billion in building repairs. It would have been a tough sell in a district with a troubled financial history. But with the new funding, Detroit might cancel its plans to request a tax hike.

Districts across the U.S. have spent the summer debating how to spend the new money, in some cases facing pressure from competing groups of parents, teachers and activists.

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Some families want more money to go to special education. Others have demanded teacher training to address racial bias. Some activists have pushed back against plans to pay for building repairs, saying the relief should be spent directly on students.

At the same time, districts face mounting pressure to increase teacher salaries.

Eyeing the district's \$300 million in pandemic aid, the teachers union in Sacramento, California, called for smaller class sizes, which would mean hiring new teachers, along with pay increases. And while the union is not asking to tap into federal money for raises, the mere existence of the windfall bolsters the contention that raises are affordable.

The American Federation of Teachers says the federal relief should focus on infrastructure and academic support, but President Randi Weingarten said raises also will be needed to stop waves of teachers from quitting after a stressful year.

"This is the time to create an environment to recruit and retain teachers, and part of that is salary increases," she said.

In Detroit, federal money will be used to continue hazard pay and teacher bonuses that the district started offering last year. Vitti said teaching is harder in the city because of its deep poverty, and he wants teacher pay to reflect that.

"They should be paid more. We just haven't always had the revenue to do it," he said.

Another source of concern for schools is state funding. While the worst fears of education cuts have not come to pass, there's worry that the infusion of federal money will provide a reason to slash future state budgets.

In Holyoke, Massachusetts, one of the state's poorest areas, the pandemic aid helped offset a \$4 million reduction in state funding the district faced last school year. But with future funding still uncertain, the district is avoiding taking on big cost increases.

So far, the district has made plans for only a small share of its \$53 million in total relief. It's hiring 32 math and reading teachers, and adding art and music classes in schools where those subjects have long been absent, among other spending decisions.

Without more time and guarantees of sustained funding, Superintendent Anthony Soto said it feels like districts are "just throwing money at an issue and thinking that these real systemic issues are going away. And they're not."

In Detroit, Vitti sees a chance to make the case for more state funding. He hopes to prove that even the one-time funding will help boost graduation rates, cut absenteeism and lead to tangible improvements for students. If he can do that, he hopes lawmakers in Lansing will offer him a continued lifeline to keep up the success.

"We're looking forward to show clear outcomes from this investment," he said, to make the case that similar funding "should be continued in an equitable way."

Associated Press Writer Corey Williams in Detroit contributed to this report.

Dilemma for Fed chief: High inflation and a surging virus

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Not long ago, anticipation was high that Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell might begin to sketch out a plan this week for the Fed to start pulling back on its support for an economy that has been steadily strengthening.

That was before COVID-19 cases began accelerating across the country. Now, the decision of how and when the Fed should begin dialing back its help for the economy has become a more complicated one.

Yet in outlining his view of the economy and the threats it faces in a high-profile speech Friday, Powell may provide important clues to the timing of changes in the Fed's ultra-low-interest rate policies.

The big question has been when the Fed will begin to slow its purchases of Treasury and mortgage bonds. The Fed has been buying \$120 billion in bonds each month since the pandemic erupted in March

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2020 to try to keep longer-term rates low and encourage borrowing and spending. It has also pegged its short-term benchmark interest rate at nearly zero since then.

Powell will be speaking Friday at an annual conference of academics and central bankers. The conference, sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and normally held in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, will instead be a virtual-only event for a second straight year. A surge of COVID-19 cases near the Wyoming resort delivered a direct impact on the Fed itself by forcing a last-minute cancellation of its in-person plans.

The hasty shift to an online event reflects the rapid rebound of the pandemic, led by the delta variant, particularly in the South and Northwest. It follows a sharp decline in confirmed cases earlier in the summer that had raised hopes that the coronavirus and its economic impact might be fading.

Just a few weeks ago, many Fed officials were signaling that the economy was making solid progress toward the central bank's twin goals of maximum employment and annual inflation at just above 2% for a sustained period. Several presidents of regional Federal Reserve Banks said they wanted to announce a reduction, or taper, of the bond purchases at the Fed's next meeting in September.

Yet some economists have been slashing their forecasts for economic growth in the current July-September quarter. Restaurant traffic has declined slightly. Last week, Powell said it wasn't yet clear what the delta strain's impact on the economy would be. But he emphasized that the pandemic was far from over and was still "casting a shadow on economic activity."

With the economic picture hazier now, economists will be listening carefully for clues Powell may provide about the Fed's intentions.

"I'll be watching how he characterizes current conditions and the outlook he has for the economy," said Ellen Gaske, an economist at PGIM Fixed Income. "That will give us a sense of how soon the tapering will occur."

The uncertainties raised by the delta variant make it likelier that the Fed will announce a tapering in November or later, economists said, rather than in September. That would allow Fed officials to consider two additional months of data on inflation and jobs to gauge the delta variant's impact.

The resurgence of the virus is hardly the only complicating factor facing the Fed. Inflation has surged to a three-decade high as a sharp rebound in consumer spending and shortages in many commodities and parts, such as semiconductors, have sent prices rising for airline tickets, hotel rooms, new and used cars and restaurant meals. The Fed's preferred inflation gauge jumped 3.5% in June compared with a year earlier, the biggest such rise since 1991.

Higher inflation has, in turn, intensified pressure on Powell and the Fed to rein in their stimulus policies. Powell, though, has consistently expressed confidence that higher inflation will prove temporary, even if it persists for several more months. Many economists and Wall Street investors agree. Some, in fact, are more concerned about the opposite problem: That inflation will decline too far from its current level.

At the same time, growth could slow. Government stimulus is set to fade next year. No more stimulus checks are in the pipeline, and a \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement is set to expire in two weeks. Gaske noted that the price jumps have caused consumers to reduce their spending on things like cars and furniture, which over time reduces inflation pressures.

That's in contrast to the late 1970s, the last time the United States faced rapid inflation, when rising prices encouraged a "buy it while you can" mentality, Gaske said. Ongoing spending at that time drove costs even higher.

As a result, any pullback in the Fed's low-rate policies could help pull inflation below its 2% annual target in a year or two.

It's also getting harder for the Fed to define its other policy goal of "maximum employment." Initially Powell and other officials, including Vice Chair Richard Clarida, defined it as a "broad and inclusive" goal that included sharply reducing unemployment for Black Americans and Latinos and restoring the job market to its pre-pandemic health.

Yet the number of older Americans who are retiring has accelerated since the pandemic struck, and it's far from clear that low interest rates would induce many of them to return to work. A smaller workforce

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could make it harder to restore the job market to pre-pandemic levels.

Many economists were surprised by remarks from Clarida this month suggesting that a return to an unemployment rate of 3.8% would meet the Fed's goal of maximum employment and justify a rate hike by the end of 2022, earlier than Fed officials had projected in June.

Even if the jobless rate falls that low — it is now 5.4% — millions of Americans could remain on the sidelines, no longer looking for work and therefore not counted as unemployed. Black and Latino Americans would likely have much higher unemployment rates. Fed officials had previously made clear that they would take those concerns into account, but Clarida did not mention them.

"They've certainly not reinforced their commitment to broad and inclusive gains," Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said on a conference call with reporters. "They could have stuck with it much more than they did."

Fed officials had expected much more clarity around the economy and job market by early fall. As the pandemic faded, more Americans would return to work, instead of shying away out of fear of viral infection. Now the delta variant could prolong that fear and postpone the point at which the Fed can get a clear read on the job market.

"It's really hard for Powell to signal much here," said William English, a former senior official at the Fed and now a finance professor at the Yale School of Management. "They're in a world with a lot of uncertainty."

US slightly upgrades GDP estimate for last quarter to 6.6%

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy grew at a robust 6.6% annual rate last quarter, slightly faster than previously estimated, the government said Thursday in a report that pointed to a sustained consumer-led rebound from the pandemic recession. But worries are growing that the delta variant of the coronavirus is beginning to cause a slowdown.

The report from the Commerce Department estimated that the nation's gross domestic product — its total output of goods and services — accelerated slightly in the April-June quarter from the 6.5% it had initially reported last month. The economy's expansion last quarter followed a solid 6.3% annual growth rate in the January-March period.

In recent weeks, many economists have been downgrading their estimates of GDP growth for this quarter, and for 2021 as a whole, as the now-dominant delta variant has sent confirmed COVID-19 cases rising throughout the country.

New reported cases are now topping 150,000 a day, the highest level since late January. As a consequence, real-time tracking of consumer activities, notably for airline travel and restaurant dining, has weakened in recent weeks.

The government's upgraded estimate for growth in the April-June quarter fell somewhat shy of expectations. Some economists had predicted a 7% annual rate or more. They based that view on a belief that consumer spending had accelerated even faster than the sizzling 11.8% rate first reported. Thursday's revised estimate for consumer spending, which drives about 70% of economic activity, was upgraded by 0.1 percentage point to 11.9%.

The slight rise in the government's estimate for April-June growth reflected, in part, stronger business investment, which grew at a solid 9.3% rate, and export sales, which were up at a 6.6% rate after falling in the first quarter. Offsetting that strength was a bigger drag from cutbacks in businesses inventory restocking and weaker home building, which fell at an 11.5% annual rate. This sector has been hurt by surging prices for materials and a shortage of construction workers.

Goldman Sachs has cut its forecast for annual growth in the current July-September quarter from 9% to 5.5%, citing the effects of the delta variant. Likewise, Wells Fargo economists have downgraded their third quarter GDP forecast from an 8.8% annual rate to 6.8%, also because of the surge in COVID cases.

Some forecasters have also reduced their outlook for the full year, thought by smaller amounts, in anticipation that the economy could re-accelerate in the final three months of 2021 if COVID cases ease as

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vaccines are increasingly administered. But uncertainty remains.

"The real question is how well spending will hold up against the current delta wave," said Leslie Preston, senior economist at TD Economics. "Some high-frequency indicators are pointing to a loss in momentum in spending as consumer caution creeps in."

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, said he had downgraded his forecast for annual GDP growth this quarter from 8.4% to 6.5%. But he predicted that GDP will expand at a strong 6.4% annual rate in the final three months of the year.

That would leave growth for the full year at a brisk 6.1%, which would be the fastest calendar-year expansion since a 7.2% gain in 1984. Last year, the economy shrank 3.4% as the pandemic-triggered recession wiped out tens of millions of jobs.

At the same time, Zandi cautioned that COVID remains in his mind the most serious economic risk.

"The economy is linked at the hip to the pandemic," he said. "So long as the pandemic is raging, that will drive a lot of what happens in the economy."

The uncertainty surrounding COVID is complicating the work of the Federal Reserve. The Fed is caught between the risks posed by COVID, which would normally call for continued economic support from the central bank, and rising inflation, which creates pressure on the Fed to consider dialing back its ultra-low-interest rate policies.

The GDP report Thursday showed prices rising at a 6.5% annual rate in the second quarter, the fastest such pace since a 6.8% quarterly increase in 1981, when the Fed was fighting high inflation by raising interest rates to historic highs.

Financial markets will be listening closely when Fed Chair Jerome Powell gives a high-profile speech Friday morning as part of an annual conference of central bankers. The conference, sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and normally held in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, will instead be a virtual-only event for a second straight year because of rising COVID cases in Wyoming.

In its GDP report Thursday, the government said that purchases of durable goods, which include vehicles, appliances, furniture and electronic gear, among other longer-lasting items, rose at an 11.3% rate in the second quarter. That was a strong figure, though well below the 50% jump in the first quarter, when consumers went on a pent-up buying spree as the economy increasingly reopened.

In the revised data, consumer spending on services — air travel, restaurant meals, entertainment events and the like — grew at an 11.3% annual rate, below the initial estimate of 12% but well above the 3.9% growth rate in the first quarter. The increase in services spending in the second quarter reflected a shift away from the goods purchases that many people had made while hunkered down at home to spending on services, from haircuts to sporting events to vacation trips.

Report: Evidence of extensive corrosion in collapsed condo

MIAMI (AP) — Video released by a team of federal investigators shows more evidence of extensive corrosion and overcrowded concrete reinforcement in a Miami-area condominium that collapsed in June, killing 98 people.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology also announced Wednesday it will conduct a five-pronged investigation into the Champlain Towers South collapse, which will be led by Judith Mitrani-Reiser. She is a Cuban-born engineer who grew up in Miami.

"We are going into this with an open mind and will examine all hypotheses that might explain what caused this collapse," Mitrani-Reiser said. "Having a team with experience across a variety of disciplines, including structural and geotechnical engineering, materials, evidence collection, modeling and more, will ensure a thorough investigation."

The video shows densely packed steel reinforcement in various sections of the building, along with extensive corrosion where one column met the building's foundation.

"The corrosion on the bottom of that column is astronomical," Dawn Lehman, a professor of structural engineering at the University of Washington, told the Miami Herald. She said that amount of corrosion

should have been obvious and documented as part of the 40-year inspection that was ongoing when the building in Surfside, Florida, collapsed June 24.

"If there's that amount of corrosion, this should have been fixed," she said.

The images show beams, walls and columns that appear to be overcrowded with steel reinforcement, which suggests potential weaknesses, she explained.

"There is no reason there should be that kind of bar congestion," Lehman said.

The risk posed by "congested" vertical rebar in columns would have been even worse in spots where the rebar overlapped, which is known as "lap splice" regions, Abieyuwa Aghayere, a Drexel University engineering researcher who also reviewed the video, told the newspaper.

While it's already congested with rebar, at the splice regions, it would have been "even further congested," Aghayere told the Herald.

He said he was struck by how "powdery" and white the concrete in columns appeared in the newly released video. Stone-like aggregates used to strengthen concrete during construction typically remain visible but they were not in the images from the collapse site.

"The white color just stuns me," Aghayere told the newspaper. He added that instead of seeing aggregate material mixed into the concrete, "it's just homogenous," which is likely indication of saltwater damage.

He said it is impossible to tell from just the images whether the concrete used in original construction was weaker than the designs called for, or whether the apparent weakness was due to damage over time.

"It doesn't look like normal concrete to me. What's going on?" Aghayere said.

What is a COVID-19 vaccine passport, and do I need one?

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

What is a COVID-19 vaccine passport, and do I need one?

"Vaccine passports" are digital or paper documents that show you were vaccinated against COVID-19, and could help you get into a growing number of places.

What they look like and why you might want one depend on where you live, but more private venues, workplaces and governments are requiring proof of vaccination in public settings.

Europe and U.S. states like California and New York created official digital credentials that let you verify your COVID-19 immunization record and convert it into a scannable QR code you can pull up on your cellphone.

Most places that require vaccination proof also accept simpler options, such as the paper card noting the dates of your shots from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the U.S., showing a photo of that card on your phone will usually suffice.

Denmark, Greece, France, Italy, some Canadian provinces and the U.S. cities of New Orleans, New York and San Francisco are among the places that have vaccination requirements to get into places like indoor restaurants or theaters. Enforcement varies and many places also accept a recent negative test for the virus, a partial vaccination or proof that you previously recovered from the disease.

Even without government mandates, more businesses in countries where vaccines are readily available are starting to ask for proof that you got the shots, so long as their local governments haven't blocked them from doing so.

Officials around the world were initially reluctant to mandate vaccines, but some now hope doing so will persuade more people to get the shots. Businesses requiring proof of vaccination say they are trying to make customers and employees feel safe.

Protesters in France and elsewhere have criticized vaccine mandates as invasive and restricting freedom of movement. Privacy advocates have raised concerns about getting people in the habit of having their phones scanned wherever they go, and generally favor options that won't be tracked, such as a paper record or a digital copy in your phone that can be shown at the door.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: FactCheck@

AP.org. Read more here:

What is being done to distribute COVID-19 vaccines globally?

Do the COVID-19 vaccines affect my chances of pregnancy?

Can I get 'long COVID' if I'm infected after vaccination?

US jobless claims rise by 4,000 to 353,000

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose for the first time in five weeks even though the economy and job market have been recovering briskly from the coronavirus pandemic.

Jobless claims edged up by 4,000 to 353,000 from a pandemic low 349,000 a week earlier, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week volatility, fell by 11,500 to 366,500 — lowest since mid-March 2020 when the coronavirus was beginning to slam the United States.

The weekly count has fallen more or less steadily since topping 900,000 in early January as the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines has helped the economy — encouraging businesses to reopen or expand hours and luring consumers out of their homes to restaurants, bars and shops.

"We expect jobless claims to remain on a downward path as the labor market continues to recover, but progress will be more fitful as claims get closer to pre-pandemic levels," economists Nancy Vanden Houten and Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said in a research note.

A resurgence of cases linked to the highly contagious delta variant has also clouded the economic outlook. And claims already remain high by historic standards: Before the pandemic tore through the economy in March 2020, the weekly pace amounted to around 220,000 a week.

Filings for unemployment benefits have traditionally been seen as a real-time measure of the job market's health. But their reliability has deteriorated during the pandemic. In many states, the weekly figures have been inflated by fraud and by multiple filings from unemployed Americans as they navigate bureaucratic hurdles to try to obtain benefits. Those complications help explain why the pace of applications remains comparatively high.

The job market has been rebounding with vigor since the pandemic paralyzed economic activity last year and employers slashed more than 22 million jobs in March and April 2020. The United States has since recovered 16.7 million jobs. And employers have added a rising number of jobs for three straight months, including a robust 943,000 in July. They have been posting job openings — a record 10.1 million in June — faster than applicants are lining up to fill them.

Some employers blame labor shortages on supplemental unemployment benefits from the federal government — including \$300 a week on top of regular state aid — for discouraging some of the jobless from seeking work. In response, many states have withdrawn from the federal programs, which expire nationwide next month anyway.

Economists point to other factor that have kept out of the job market — difficulty finding or affording child care, fear about becoming infected by the virus at work and the hope of some people to find better jobs than they had before the pandemic.

Whatever the causes, the economy remains 5.7 million jobs shy of what it had in February 2020.

Including federal programs, 12 million people were receiving some type of jobless benefit the week of Aug. 7, down from 27.5 million a year before.

Half of US workers favor employee shot mandate: AP-NORC poll

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Half of American workers are in favor of vaccine requirements at their workplaces, according to a new poll, at a time when such mandates gain traction following the federal government's full approval of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine.

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The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that about 59% of remote workers favor vaccine requirements in their own workplaces, compared with 47% of those who are currently working in person. About one-quarter of workers — in person and remote — are opposed.

The sentiment is similar for workplace mask mandates, with 50% of Americans working in person favoring them and 29% opposed, while 59% of remote workers are in favor.

About 6 in 10 college graduates, who are more likely to have jobs that can be done remotely, support both mask and vaccine mandates at their workplaces, compared with about 4 in 10 workers without college degrees.

Christopher Messick, an electrical engineer who is mostly working from home in Brunswick, Maryland, said he wrote to his company's human resources department to ask that employees be required to get vaccinated before they are recalled to the office.

Messick, who is vaccinated, said he doesn't just worry about his own health. He said he also doesn't want to worry about getting a breakthrough infection that could land an unvaccinated co-worker in the hospital.

"I don't want sit an office for eight hours a day with someone who is not vaccinated," said Messick, 41. "The people who are anti-vax, I see them as selfish."

So far, many vaccine requirements are coming from private companies with employees who have mostly been able to work from home during the pandemic. The companies, including major tech companies and investment banks, have workforces that are already largely vaccinated and consider the requirement a key step toward eventually reopening offices. Goldman Sachs joined that trend Tuesday, telling employees in a memo that anyone who enters its U.S. offices must be fully vaccinated starting Sept. 7.

In contrast, few companies that rely on hourly service workers have imposed vaccine mandates because the companies are concerned about losing staff at a time of acute labor shortages and turnover. Exceptions include food processing giant Tyson Foods and Walt Disney World, which reached a deal this week with its unions to require all workers at its theme park in Orlando, Florida, to be vaccinated.

The AP-NORC poll was conducted before the FDA granted full approval of Pfizer's vaccine, which some experts and employers are hoping will persuade more people to get the shot and support mandates.

Drugstore chain CVS said this week that pharmacists, nurses and other workers who have contact with patients will have to be inoculated, but the company stopped short of requiring the vaccine for other employees such as cashiers.

The AP-NORC poll showed high support for vaccine mandates among those who say they work in person in a health care setting, with 70% approving of vaccine requirements at their workplace.

The poll also showed divisions along racial lines.

Seventy-three percent of Black workers and 59% of Hispanic workers — who are more likely than white workers to work in front-line jobs — support mask mandates at their workplaces, compared with 42% of white workers. In addition, 53% of Black and Hispanic workers support vaccine mandates at their workplaces, as do 44% of white workers.

Despite mixed support for mandates among in-person employees, 71% of those workers said they themselves are vaccinated.

Mike Rodriguez, a maintenance worker at an auto dealership in Florida, said he got the vaccine in the spring after a diabetes diagnosis gave him a sense of urgency. But he said he leans against supporting a vaccine mandate at his job and does not mind that masks are not required.

"I don't like being told what to do. Never have," said Rodriguez, 54. "I'm going to wear mine no matter what. Just like whenever I go into a store. That's my choice."

Many large retailers, grocery store chains, food manufacturers and other companies have aggressively encouraged vaccinations with bonuses, time off, information campaigns and on-site vaccination access.

Janet Haynes of Topeka, Kansas, an education consultant who works part time as a package handler at a warehouse, said she struggled in March to get an appointment, putting herself on various waiting lists before she finally got a call. Now that vaccines are widely available, Haynes said she is frustrated with people who are reluctant to get them and she would support a requirement at her warehouse, where she dodges co-workers who flout a mask rule.

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"We get so hung up on democracy and freedom, but the reality is that your freedom can't exist at the expense of someone else's loss," said Haynes, adding that she recently had a breakthrough case of COVID-19 and credits the vaccine for her swift recovery. "We are not going to be free until we get vaccinated."

The AP-NORC poll of 1,729 adults was conducted Aug. 12-16 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Aug. 27, the 239th day of 2021. There are 126 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 27, 1776, the Battle of Long Island began during the Revolutionary War as British troops attacked American forces who ended up being forced to retreat two days later.

On this date:

In 1859, Edwin L. Drake drilled the first successful oil well in the United States, at Titusville, Pa.

In 1883, the island volcano Krakatoa erupted with a series of cataclysmic explosions; the resulting tidal waves in Indonesia's Sunda Strait claimed some 36,000 lives in Java and Sumatra.

In 1949, a violent white mob prevented an outdoor concert headlined by Paul Robeson from taking place near Peekskill, New York. (The concert was held eight days later.)

In 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson accepted his party's nomination for a term in his own right, telling the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, "Let us join together in giving every American the fullest life which he can hope for."

In 1967, Brian Epstein, manager of the Beatles, was found dead in his London flat from an accidental overdose of sleeping pills; he was 32.

In 1979, British war hero Lord Louis Mountbatten and three other people, including his 14-year-old grandson Nicholas, were killed off the coast of Ireland in a boat explosion claimed by the Irish Republican Army.

In 1998, two suspects in the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Kenya were brought to the United States to face charges. (Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-'Owhali (moh-HAH'-mehd rah-SHEED' dah-ood ahl-oh-WAHL'-ee) and Mohammed Sadiq Odeh (sah-DEEK' oh-DAY') were convicted in 2001 of conspiring to carry out the bombing; both were sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2001, Israeli helicopters fired a pair of rockets through office windows and killed senior PLO leader Mustafa Zibri.

In 2005, coastal residents jammed freeways and gas stations as they rushed to get out of the way of Hurricane Katrina, which was headed toward New Orleans.

In 2006, a Comair CRJ-100 crashed after trying to take off from the wrong runway in Lexington, Ky., killing 49 people and leaving the co-pilot the sole survivor.

In 2008, Barack Obama was nominated for president by the Democratic National Convention in Denver.

In 2009, mourners filed past the closed casket of the late Sen. Edward Kennedy at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston. Jaycee Lee Dugard, kidnapped when she was 11, was reunited with her mother 18 years after her abduction in South Lake Tahoe, California.

Ten years ago: Hurricane Irene, after striking Puerto Rico and the Bahamas, pushed up the U.S. east coast, prompting evacuations in New York City and leaving major flood damage in Vermont.

Five years ago: Republican Donald Trump warned of a "war on the American farmer," telling a crowd in Iowa that rival Hillary Clinton wanted "to shut down family farms" and implement anti-agriculture policies; Trump's speech at the annual "Roast and Ride" fundraiser for GOP Sen. Joni Ernst came hours after Clinton received her first national security briefing as the Democratic presidential nominee.

One year ago: Speaking on the White House South Lawn, President Donald Trump accepted his party's

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renomination, blasting Joe Biden as a hapless career politician who would endanger Americans' safety and painting a grim portrait of violence in American cities run by Democrats; Trump spoke for more than an hour to a tightly-packed and largely maskless crowd. Hurricane Laura roared ashore as a Category 4 storm near Cameron, Louisiana, bringing 150 mile-an-hour winds, torrential rains and a storm surge as high as 15 feet; the storm, one of the strongest ever to strike the U.S., would leave more than 20 people dead in Louisiana and Texas. A white supremacist who slaughtered 51 worshippers at two New Zealand mosques, Brenton Tarrant, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole; it was the first time that maximum available sentence had been imposed in New Zealand.

Today's Birthdays: Author Lady Antonia Fraser is 89. Actor Tommy Sands is 84. Bluegrass singer-musician J.D. Crowe is 84. Actor Tuesday Weld is 78. Actor G.W. Bailey is 77. Actor Marianne Sagebrecht is 76. Country musician Jeff Cook is 72. Actor Paul Reubens is 69. Rock musician Alex Lifeson (Rush) is 68. Actor Peter Stormare is 68. Actor Diana Scarwid is 66. Rock musician Glen Matlock (The Sex Pistols) is 65. Golfer Bernhard Langer is 64. Country singer Jeffrey Steele is 60. Gospel singer Yolanda Adams is 60. Movie director Tom Ford (Film: "Nocturnal Animals") is 60. Writer-producer Dean Devlin is 59. Rock musician Mike Johnson is 56. Rap musician Bobo (Cypress Hill) is 54. U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines is 52. Country singer Colt Ford is 52. Actor Chandra Wilson is 52. Rock musician Tony Kanal (No Doubt) is 51. Rapper Mase is 46. Actor Sarah Chalke is 45. Actor RonReaco Lee is 45. Actor-singer Demetria McKinney is 43. Actor Aaron Paul is 42. Rock musician Jon Siebels (Eve 6) is 42. Actor Shaun Weiss is 42. Contemporary Christian musician Megan Garrett (Casting Crowns) is 41. Actor Kyle Lowder is 41. Actor Patrick J. Adams is 40. Actor Karla Mosley is 40. Actor Amanda Fuller is 37. Singer Mario is 35. Actor Alexa PenaVega is 33. Actor Ellar Coltrane is 27. Actor Savannah Paige Rae is 18.