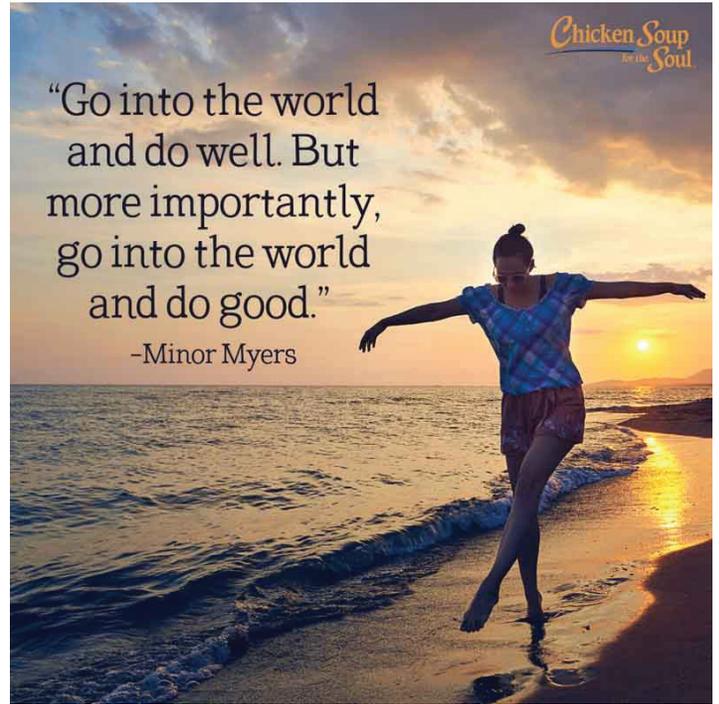


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Tonight on GDILIVE.COM Varsity Volleyball Action

Groton Area hosting Aberdeen Christian
Around 7:15 p.m.

GDI Subscribers (that's you) have free access to the livestream. The link is on the left hand side of the black bar when you are logged in.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Weekly Vikings Recap

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

The only thing hotter than the 90-degree temps in Kansas City tonight was all-pro quarterback Pat Mahomes. He leads the Chiefs on two consecutive 80-yard drives, passing for two touchdowns on 8 of 9 passing, and carries the Chiefs to a 28-25 victory.

1st half:

Pat Mahomes quickly set the tone, taking advantage of the reserve Viking defensive backs and ultimately hitting Tyreek Hill on a 35-yard fly pattern down the right sideline.

Kirk Cousins once again plays the first three series of the game. Trailing 7-0, the Vikings moved the ball well on their first drive, mixing up the run and pass only to stall inside the 10-yard line to settle for a 26-yard field goal.

While sitting many of the starters on defense, the Vikings were no match for the KC starters as Mahomes wasted no time, quickly taking the Chiefs back down the field, hitting Blake Bell on a 5-yard toss to make it 14-3.

The Chiefs sit Mahomes the rest of the game and finish the half with a touchdown throw over the middle to make 21-3 at halftime.

Jake Browning takes over for Cousins once again, struggles to put points on the board. Browning has had ample opportunity to prove he could be Cousins' backup, but at this point, he will be hoping to make the team.

2nd half:

Kellen Mond got the second half to himself once again. Looking a little shaky early, he settled down and started hitting some passes throughout the half.

The Vikings finally score an offensive touchdown in the preseason as AJ Rose Jr scampers 31-yards in the 3rd quarter. Strong blocking up-front springs the rookie to his first TD of his career. Rose, hoping his performance in the first game and tonight will earn him a roster spot or at least a shot at the practice squad.

Kansas City answers with a short screen pass that turns into a 56-yard touchdown.

Vikings finish out the scoring with a 10-yard pick-6 from linebacker Parry Nickerson and another short run by Rose to close the game within 3 points.

A bright spot in the 2nd half had to be the return of longtime Viking favorite Everson Griffen. Wearing #58 for the preseason Griffen, showing he still has his spin moves and records one of two of the Viking sacks of Friday night.

The Vikings finish 0-3 and look to the regular season starting on September 12th.

Preseason observations:

It's tough to get a read on this year's Vikings team. Most of their starters sat for these three games, struggling offensively to score a touchdown until tonight and not overwhelming anyone on the defensive side of the ball.

Fans will be expecting big production from Dalvin Cook, Justin Jefferson, Danielle Hunter, and Anthony Barr when the Vikings travel to Cincinnati to face Joe Burrows and Bengals in week #1. Winning on the road is tough, but luckily, the Vikings are going up against one of the lesser teams in the NFL.

Adding a veteran presence and longtime Viking favorite this past week in Everson Griffen is just what the team needed.

The Vikings will begin cutting players over the next few days and need to get down to 53 players for the regular season. The cuts will be tough as a player like KJ Osborn, who has impressed in camp and made a few nice catches tonight but is getting pushed hard by newcomer DeDe Westbrook and rookie Imir Smith-Marsette.

The Vikings still have a lot of questions to answer on the defensive side of the ball. In particular, the status of linebacker Anthony Barr. He has yet to dress for a game, and his last practice was the first week of August.

Next up: A full preseason recap and a preview of the upcoming 2021 NFL season.

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Fireman's Summer Bash in the GHS parking lot!

(Photos by Bruce Babcock)



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Community Events

Monday, August 30, 2021

Boys JV Football Game hosts Redfield, 5 p.m.

Volleyball Hosting Aberdeen Christian (7th grade at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

Volleyball at Ipswich (8th at 4:30 p.m., C at 5:15 p.m., JV at 6:15 p.m., Varsity to follow)

Boys golf at Lee Park Golf Course, Aberdeen, 10 a.m.

Thursday, September 2, 2021

Cross Country at Redfield Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Friday, September 3, 2021

NO SCHOOL

Football at Webster Area, 7 p.m.

Saturday, September 4, 2021

Soccer - Tea Area at Groton Area. Girls game at 1 p.m. followed by the boys game.

Monday, September 6, 2021

NO SCHOOL - LABOR DAY



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

Respect People's Choices

This summer I attended the celebration of life service for Dr. Rick Holm, the original Prairie Doc who founded this newspaper column, a radio show and a television show now entering its twentieth season. He died from pancreatic cancer in March of 2020 during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic and thus there was no public service at the time.



Andrew Ellsworth, MD

Many friends and family gathered to

celebrate Rick. We sat on lawn chairs, shared tales, and sang songs in a beautiful park on a gorgeous evening. We recalled stories of him being notoriously late, knocking over wine glasses with his large hand gestures, and mistakenly eating potpourri thinking it was trail mix. Themes emerged of Rick's amazing ability to accomplish so much in a day, his skill for active listening, and his passion for finding the best in people.

His children shared memories of their dad, including their family bedtime prayer "Help us to be kind and honest and respect people's choices, and help us to be better people tomorrow." Rick crafted that prayer from the Hippocratic Oath, the promise that doctors make when they complete their training and before they begin their careers. The oath emphasizes the medical ethics principles of beneficence (to do good), and nonmaleficence (to do no harm), and the importance of patient autonomy (to respect people's choices).

Listening to the Holm bedtime prayer, I realized how the oath had taken on new meaning for me this past year as I observed people choosing to get vaccinated for Covid-19, or not. As a primary care physician, I know Rick would have recommended vaccination for all who are eligible. He was a proponent of preventative care and vaccines help prevent disease. Rick would have listened with kindness to the concerns of each patient. He would have explained with honest science how the vaccine works and how the risk of a severe reaction from the vaccine is greatly outweighed by the benefits of being vaccinated, such as reducing the chance of serious illness and complications from Covid-19.

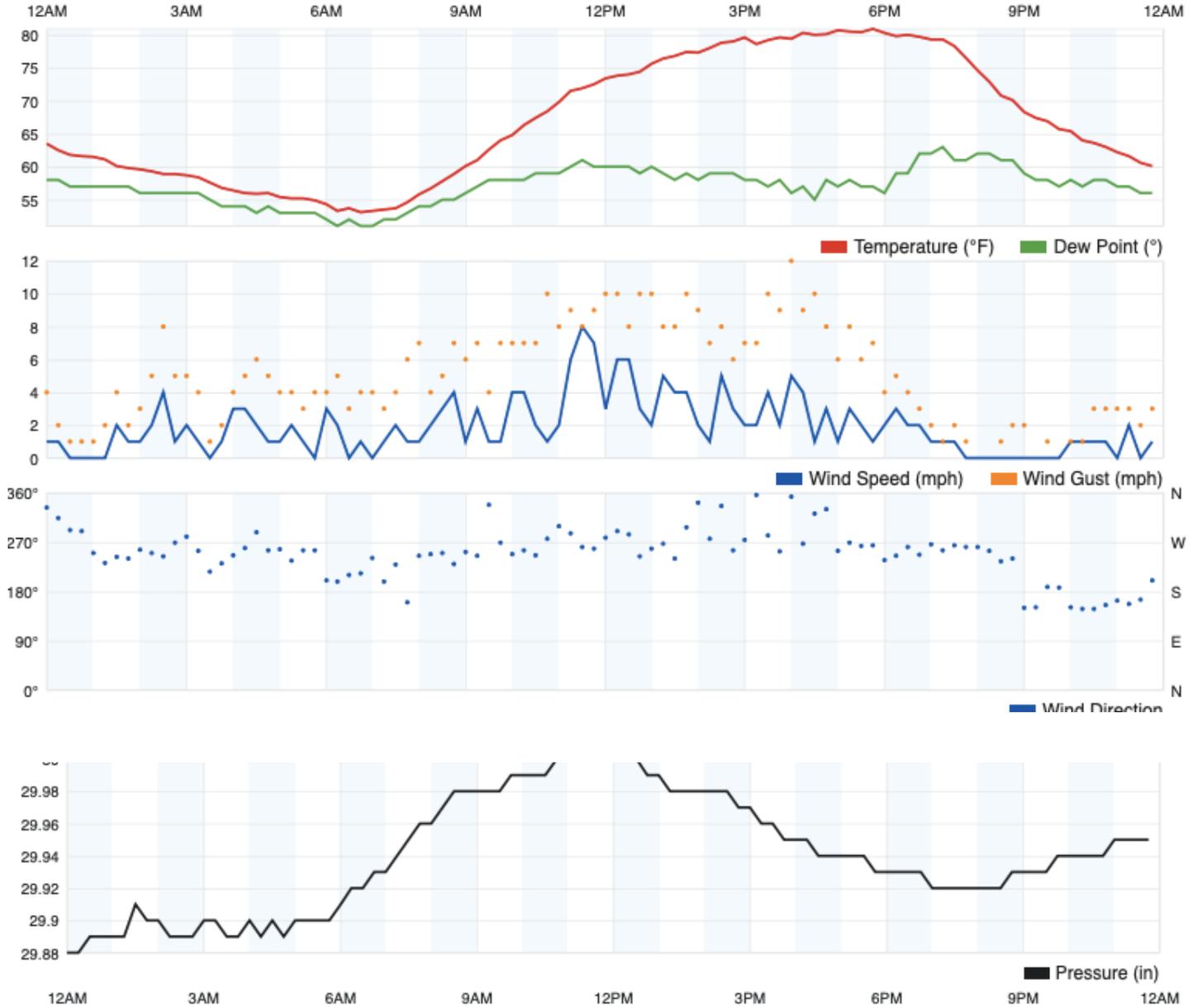
Just as my colleagues and I promise to do, Rick would have cared with beneficence for his patients that were sick with Covid-19, even if they refused the vaccine. He would have respected their choices and held their hand with no maleficence, no judgement, or condescendence. At the same time, he would have celebrated with a Snoopy dance those who choose to get vaccinated, those who choose to quit smoking, to start exercising, and to eat healthier. As we carry his legacy into another decade, we continue the message of The Prairie Doc, "Stay healthy out there, people!"

Andrew Ellsworth, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Sunny	Slight Chance T-storms 20%	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 81 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 79 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 81 °F

SLIGHT RISK of Severe T-Storms

ISSUED: 5:17 AM - Monday, August 30, 2021

WHEN

Mainly late this afternoon and evening.

WHAT

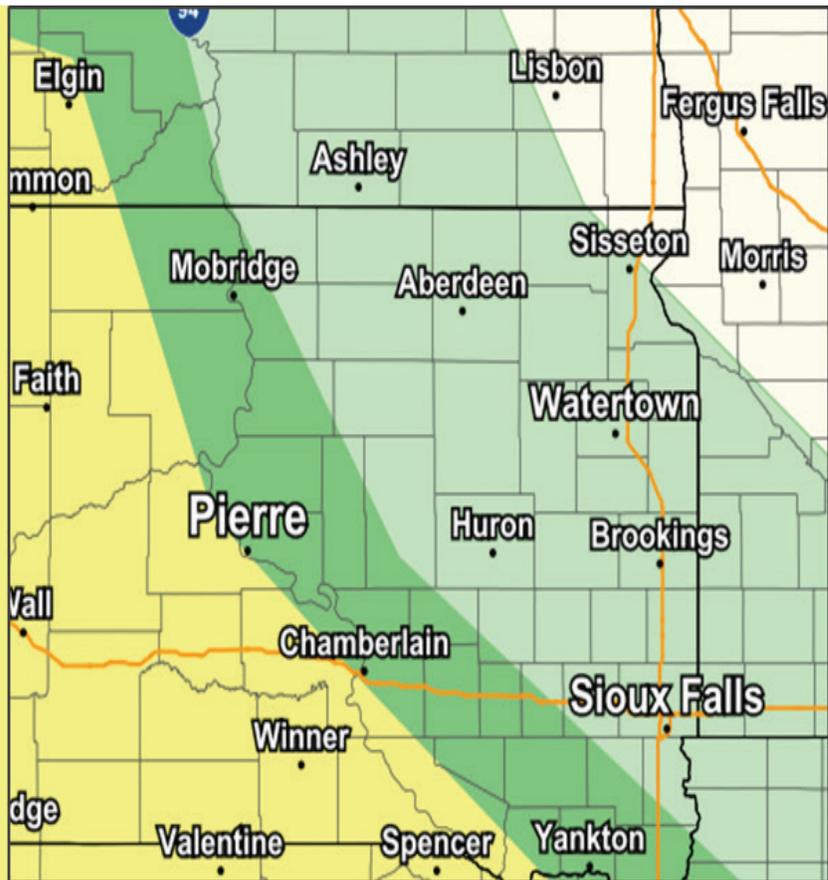
Scattered severe thunderstorms possible with large hail and damaging winds.

WHERE

Along and west of the Missouri River.

ACTION

Monitor the weather and have a plan of action if severe weather approaches your area.



MARGINAL	SLIGHT	ENHANCED	MODERATE
Isolated Severe Storms Possible	Scattered Severe Storms Possible	Numerous Severe Storms Possible	Widespread Severe Storms Likely

A few thunderstorms are possible this morning in central South Dakota with better chances late this afternoon and this evening. There is a slight risk of severe weather mainly west of the Missouri River.

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Today in Weather History

August 30, 1979: A thunderstorm rolled over Ellsworth Air Force Base bringing almost 60 mph winds to the area.

1776 - General Washington took advantage of a heavy fog to evacuate Long Island after a defeat. Adverse winds kept the British fleet from intervening. (David Ludlum)

1838: A major tornado, possibly the worst in Rhode Island history, passed south of Providence. It uprooted and stripped trees of their branches, unroofed or destroyed many houses, and sucked water out of ponds. The tornado barely missed a local railroad depot, where many people were waiting for a train. The tornado injured five people.

1839 - A hurricane moved from Cape Hatteras NC to offshore New England. An unusual feature of the hurricane was the snow it helped produce, which whitened the Catskill Mountains of New York State. Considerable snow was also reported at Salem NY. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A tropical depression brought torrential rains to portions of southern Texas. Up to twelve inches fell south of Houston, and as much as eighteen inches fell southeast of Austin. The tropical depression spawned fourteen tornadoes in three days. (David Ludlum) Record cold gripped the northeastern U.S. Thirty-one cities in New England reported record lows, and areas of Vermont received up to three inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Eight cities in California and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date, including Redding CA and Sacramento CA where the mercury hit 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms drenched Georgia and the Carolinas with heavy rain, soaking Columbia, SC, with 4.10 inches in three hours. Fresno CA was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 109 degrees. Duluth MN tied their record for the month of August with a morning low of 39 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail in Montana and North Dakota during the evening and early nighttime hours. Hail three inches in diameter was reported 20 miles south of Medora ND, and thunderstorms over Dawson County MT produced up to three inches of rain. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail at Roundup MT, Dazey ND and Protection KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002: Typhoon Rusa dumps torrential rains across South Korea, causing widespread flooding from the 30th through September 1st. Typhoon Rusa was the most powerful typhoon to hit South Korea since 1959. Nearly 90,000 people were evacuated. The province of Gangwon was hit the hardest, where an estimated 36 inches of rain fell in less than 48 hours. The torrential rains flooded nearly 36,000 homes. The Korean Defense Ministry reported flood waters submerged 16 jet fighters and 622 military buildings and facilities at Kangnung airbase.

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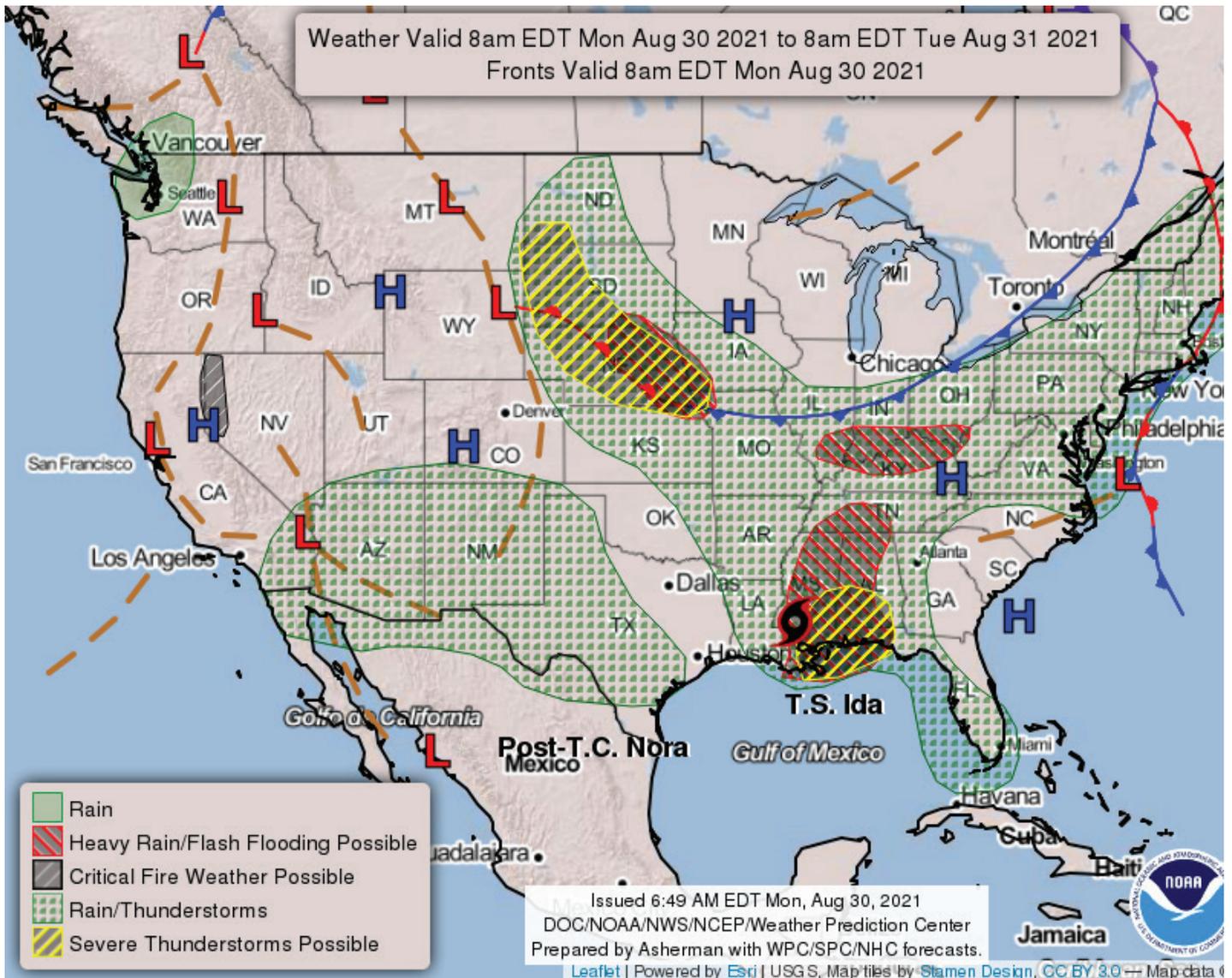
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 80.9 °F at 5:45 PM
Low Temp: 53.1 °F at 6:45 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 4:00 PM
Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 100° in 1898
Record Low: 61° in 1958
Average High: 80°F
Average Low: 53°F
Average Precip in Aug.: 2.17
Precip to date in Aug.: 5.87
Average Precip to date: 16.27
Precip Year to Date: 13.14
Sunset Tonight: 8:15 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:51 a.m.



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FINDING LIFE

A Roman soldier once asked his superior for the privilege of speaking to Julius Caesar. His request was granted and when he approached Caesar, he pled for permission to end his life. Looking at the man who stood before him the general saw a man who led a wretched and worthless life. After a moment's thought Caesar said to him in disgust, "Man, were you ever alive?"

God intended for each of us to enjoy a life that has meaning and is fulfilling, and satisfying. Man, created in the image of God, is to do the things of God and bring honor to his creator. Without God at the core of our life we will be, as the soldier was, living a wretched, worthless life.

The last verse of Psalm 91 presents a picture of a person who has God at the core of his or her life. It tells us that the goal of this God-centered person is to satisfy God - to live a life that can be blessed by, empowered by and honored by God Himself.

Recently I asked a student to share with the class what Romans 6:23 meant to him. Standing before us he said, "Let me tell you about this verse. For me it reads, 'The wages of sin is an empty life.' I know because I've been there, worked hard and felt like my needle was on empty. It did not matter how successful my life appeared to be to those around me, it did not matter how much land I owned or how many houses I had or how much money I earned. My life was on 'empty' because I could never fill it with enough things for the needle to move to 'satisfied.'"

Prayer: We ask You, Father, to help us live lives that are pleasing to You, knowing that if we do we will be satisfied. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 91:16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

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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

News from the Associated Press

Pandemic driving South Dakota demand for local food

By ARIANA SCHUMACHER KELO-TV

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Heikes Family Farms is a Community Support Agriculture program, which means community members can buy shares into the operation and get fresh produce weekly.

They serve 92 shareholders, consisting of both businesses and individuals, feeding about 500 people.

Every week, shareholders can come out and collect their produce, which ranges on everything from tomatoes, squash and even fresh fruits. Everything here is not only local, it's raised chemical-free.

"I've always been concerned about where my food is coming from and the farming practices associated with the food and its production. So coming here, it's just here. It's just a natural extension of going to the farmer's market," Carol Geu, Shareholder said.

"People want to know who's growing their food, how it's being grown. They want to know their farmer, know their food," Heidi Heikes, Farm Manager said. "They want to buy fresh, buy local. They are seeing shelves at stores empty and they are coming to us."

Heikes has seen people not only from Vermillion, but also areas like Sioux Falls, Sioux City and Yankton that travel to get her produce.

They started the CSA around ten years ago and became a food hub in 2012, meaning they outsource some products from other local farmers.

This summer, the drought did take a toll. Luckily, they have a drip line irrigation system to help them get through.

"So our garden this year was a little slow, starting to get things out and you know, some things did good and some things did bad," Heikes said.

Being a shareholder in a CSA comes with risks, but since they are also a food hub, that chance of losing everything is a little less.

"By being a food hub, you know, if we get a hail storm, or something happens to our garden, we have access to other produce and people know, and that's the risk they take," Heikes said.

You don't have to be a shareholder to purchase the local foods. The produce stand is also open for direct produce sales. Volunteering on the farm is another way to get your share of the fresh products. If you are interested in volunteering, you can connect with the farm through their website.

Storm downs power lines, trees in southeastern South Dakota

LENNOX, S.D. (AP) — Residents in a southeastern South Dakota town were cleaning up Sunday from a storm that toppled trees and power lines and damaged the roof of the high school, officials said.

The National Weather Service said it will survey the Lennox area to see what caused the damage Saturday night in the town of about 2,500 people located 20 miles southwest of Sioux Falls. No injuries have been reported.

"We do know that we have damage down in those areas and some indications on radar that this was caused by a tornado, but we really want to get some people down in the area to make sure of it," weather service meteorologist Matt Dux said.

Lennox resident Drew Sweeter said the storm lasted about 15 minutes.

"My four-year-old and I tried making a hightail run to my parents but as soon as we walked out the door we saw a wall of clouds and winds," Sweeter said. "As soon as I saw that, the sirens went off and it kind of got a little scary right away."

Lincoln County Emergency Manager Harold Timmerman said there was "major tree damage" to roofs, vehicles and other structures in town. A contractor was assessing the damage at the high school, he said.

Officials reported that two semi-trailer trucks were blown over on Interstate 29 in southeastern South Dakota.

Anxious tenants await assistance as evictions resume

By MICHAEL CASEY and MICHELLE LIU Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Six months after Congress approved spending tens of billions of dollars to bail out renters facing eviction, South Carolina was just reaching its first tenants. All nine of them.

Like most states, it had plenty of money to distribute — \$272 million. But it had handed out just over \$36,000 by June. The pace has since intensified, but South Carolina still has only distributed \$15.5 million in rent and utility payments as of Aug. 20, or about 6% of its funds.

“People are strangling on the red tape,” said Sandy Gillis, executive director of the Hilton Head Deep Well Project, which stopped referring tenants to the program and started paying overdue rent through its own private funds instead.

The struggles in South Carolina are emblematic of a program launched at the beginning of the year with the promise of solving the pandemic eviction crisis, only to fall victim in many states to bureaucratic hurdles, political inertia and unclear guidance at the federal level.

The concerns about the slow pace intensified Thursday, after the Supreme Court blocked the Biden administration from enforcing a temporary ban that was put in place because of the coronavirus pandemic. Some 3.5 million people in the U.S. as of Aug. 16 said they face eviction in the next two months, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey.

“The Supreme Court decision undermines historic efforts by Congress and the White House to ensure housing stability during the pandemic,” Diane Yentel, CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, said in a statement.

“State and local governments are working to improve programs to distribute emergency rental assistance to those in need, but they need more time; the Supreme Court’s decision will lead to many renters, predominantly people of color, losing their homes before the assistance can reach them.”

The Treasury Department said this week that just over \$5.1 billion of the estimated \$46.5 billion in federal rental assistance — only 11% — has been distributed by states and localities through July. This includes some \$3 billion handed out by the end of June and another \$1.5 billion by May 31.

Nearly a million households have been served and 70 places have gotten at least half their money out, including several states, among them Virginia and Texas, according to Treasury. New York, which hadn’t distributed anything through May, has now distributed more than \$156 million.

But there are 16 states, according to the latest data, that had distributed less than 5% and nine that spent less than 3%. Most, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, are red states, often with tough-to-reach rural populations. Besides South Carolina, they include Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Iowa, Indiana, Florida, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Mississippi and New Mexico.

There are myriad reasons for the slow distribution, according to the group. Among them is the historic amount of money — more than the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s annual budget — which required some 450 localities to create programs from scratch. Getting the money out is also complicated by the fact that checks aren’t sent directly to beneficiaries like, for example, the child tax credit.

States and localities have also struggled with technology and staffing, as well as reaching tenants without access to the internet, or small landlords unaware of the help. Some have applications so complicated they scare off prospective applicants or have income documentation and pandemic impact requirements that can be time-consuming.

Efforts to use coronavirus relief money for rental assistance last year faced similar challenges.

“A lot of states are lagging behind,” said Emma Foley, a research analyst with the National Low Income Housing Coalition. “The fact that this many states still have distributed so little is worrisome.”

In South Carolina, lawmakers were slow to roll out the state’s program, waiting until April to charge the state housing authority with distributing the money. It took weeks to set up its program, with the first help not going out until June.

Housing advocates have also criticized the reams of documentation required and the months of waiting

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for tenants to find out whether they qualify.

Shaquarryah Fraiser applied in May and is still waiting to hear whether she will get help paying months of back rent for the mobile home she rented with her mother for \$550 a month in Sumter, South Carolina. Fraiser's mother died of COVID-19 last year, and the 29-year-old fell behind after getting sick herself with pneumonia and losing her phone survey job.

"It'll take a lot of stress off of me. I won't be so anxious about this situation," said Fraiser of the prospect of getting the help.

In Arizona, delays have led to plenty of finger-pointing.

Arizona's House Democrats this month blamed the state for the delays in getting the money out — less than \$7 million of its \$900 million through July.

Arizona's Department of Economic Security points out the federal money has been allocated to 13 different jurisdictions, not just the state, and blames cities and counties for the slow rollout.

"We have offered to assist overwhelmed jurisdictions with their workloads," the department's director Michael Wisehart wrote in a response to lawmakers. "Regrettably, no jurisdiction has chosen to partner in this way."

Meanwhile, Arizona landlords and housing nonprofits blamed much of the problem on regulatory requirements tied to the money.

Mississippi, which has given out \$18.6 million of its \$200 million through Aug. 23, has struggled to reach smaller landlords and renters, many of whom live in rural areas without internet access. In addition, the state has no data base of renters — prompting it to hold events statewide to connect with potential applicants.

The Mississippi Home Corporation, which runs the program, also sent a letter to judges asking them not to allow an eviction if someone has applied for help and to inform landlords they won't get help if they evict after the moratorium ends. The agency also relaxed documentation requirements in 50 of its counties. But the program will still require proof of income and other documents in 32 other counties.

"You're trying to walk this line of speed and diligence," said Scott Spivey, executive director of the Mississippi Home Corporation. "We are trying to make sure there is no fraud, waste and abuse and that we're only giving assistance to the people who are entitled to it."

The Treasury Department has repeatedly tweaked its guidance to encourage states and local governments to streamline the distribution of funds. The Biden administration has also asked states to create eviction diversion programs that aim to resolve disputes before they reach the courts.

On Wednesday, Treasury released additional guidance to try to speed up the process. This includes allowing tenants to self-assess their income and risk of becoming homeless among other criteria. Many states and localities, fearing fraud, have measures in place that can take weeks to verify an applicant qualifies for help.

Treasury also said money can be distributed in advance of funds being approved as well as to tenants who have outstanding rental debt in collection, making it easier for them to find new housing.

"There is no question we are seeing a level of excessive caution in getting the money out that does not seem to reflect either the flexibilities Treasury has provided or the fact we are facing a true public health and eviction emergency," said Gene Sperling, who is charged with overseeing implementation of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package.

He said the new guidance is "going the extra mile to provide even more clarity and strong encouragement to put getting immediate relief out ahead of unnecessary and time-consuming paperwork."

Casey reported from Boston. Associated Press writers Anita Snow in Phoenix and Leah Willingham in Jackson, Mississippi, contributed to this report.

Rockets fired at Kabul airport amid US withdrawal hit homes

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Rocket fire apparently targeting Kabul's international airport struck a nearby neighborhood on Monday, the eve of the deadline for American troops to withdraw from the country's longest war after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. It wasn't immediately clear if anyone was hurt.

The rockets did not halt the steady stream of U.S. military C-17 cargo jets taking off and landing at Hamid Karzai International Airport in the Afghan capital. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Last week, the Islamic State group launched a devastating suicide bombing at one of the airport gates that killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members.

The airport has been a scene of chaos in the two weeks since the Taliban blitz across Afghanistan took control of the country, nearly 20 years after the initial U.S. invasion that followed the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. But since the suicide bombing, the Taliban have tightened their security cordon around the airfield, with their fighters seen just up to the last fencing separating them from the runway.

In the capital's Chahr-e-Shaheed neighborhood, a crowd quickly gathered around the remains of a four-door sedan used by the attackers. The car had what appeared to be six homemade rocket tubes mounted in place of backseats. The Islamic State group and other militants routinely mount such tubes into vehicles and quietly transport them undetected close to a target.

"I was inside the house with my children and other family members, suddenly there were some blasts," said Jaiuddin Khan, who lives nearby. "We jumped into the house compound and lay on the ground."

Some of the rockets landed across town in Kabul's Salim Karwan neighborhood, striking residential apartment blocks, witnesses said. That neighborhood is some 3 kilometers (1.86 miles) from the airport. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Five rockets targeted the airport, said U.S. Navy Capt. Bill Urban, a spokesman for the American military's Central Command. A defensive weapon known by the acronym C-RAM — a Counter-Rocket, Artillery and Mortar System — targeted the rockets in a whirling hail of ammunition, Urban said. The system has a distinct, drill-like sound that echoed through the city at the time of the attack.

In Washington, the White House issued a statement saying officials briefed President Joe Biden on "the rocket attack at Hamid Karzai International Airport" in Kabul, apparently referring to the vehicle-based rocket launch that morning.

"The president was informed that operations continue uninterrupted at HKIA, and has reconfirmed his order that commanders redouble their efforts to prioritize doing whatever is necessary to protect our forces on the ground," the statement said, using an acronym for Kabul's airport.

After the rocket fire, planes continued to land and taxi across to the northern military side of the airport. Planes took off roughly every 20 minutes at one point Monday morning. One C-17 landing Monday afternoon shot off flares as it approached the airport — a defensive maneuver to protect against heat-seeking missiles and a sign that the U.S. military remains concerned about surface-to-air missiles loose in the country.

Smoke from several fires along the airport's perimeter could be seen throughout Monday. It wasn't clear what was ablaze, though U.S. forces typically destroy material and equipment they won't take with them during the evacuation.

The airport had been one of the few ways out for foreigners and Afghans fleeing the Taliban takeover. However, coalition nations have halted their evacuations in recent days, leaving the U.S. military largely alone at the base with some remaining allied Afghan forces providing security.

The White House said Monday that over the last 24 hours, the American military carried out some 1,200 evacuees on 26 C-17 flights, while two coalition flights flew out 50 others. Since the end of July, U.S. forces have evacuated some 122,300 people, the White House said.

Ross Wilson, the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul now working out of the airport, insisted those evacuations remained ongoing in a message on Twitter.

"This is a high-risk operation," Wilson wrote. "Claims that American citizens have been turned away or denied access to HKIA by Embassy staff or US Forces are false." He did not elaborate.

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The U.S. State Department released a statement Sunday signed by around 100 countries, as well as NATO and the European Union, saying they had received "assurances" from the Taliban that people with travel documents would still be able to leave the country.

The Taliban have said they will allow normal travel after the U.S. withdrawal is completed on Tuesday and they assume control of the airport. However, it remains unclear how the militants will run the airport and which commercial carriers will begin flying in, given the ongoing security concerns there.

While the Taliban have honored a pledge not to attack Western forces so long as they evacuate by Tuesday, the threat from the Islamic State's local affiliate remains a danger. The group, known as the Khorasan Province after a historic name for the region, saw some of its members freed as the Taliban released prisoners across the country during their takeover.

On Sunday, a U.S. drone strike blew up a vehicle carrying IS suicide bombers before they could attack the ongoing military evacuation at Kabul's airport, American officials said. However, the Taliban said the strike killed at least 10 people — including civilians and three children, sparking anger over the civilian casualties.

Urban acknowledged the reports of civilian casualties.

"We would be deeply saddened by any potential loss of innocent life," he said in a statement.

The U.S. carried out another drone strike elsewhere in the country on Saturday; it said two IS members were killed.

On Tuesday, the U.S. is set to conclude a massive two-week-long airlift of more than 114,000 Afghans and foreigners and withdraw the last of its troops, ending America's longest war with the Taliban back in power.

However, Afghans remain fearful of the Taliban returning to the oppressive rule for which it was once known. There have been sporadic reports of killings and other abuses in the sweep across the country.

Meanwhile, a cross-border shooting across the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan killed two Pakistani soldiers, the military said. Pakistani troops "responded in a befitting manner" after the attack in the district of Bajur of the country's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military said.

Associated Press writers Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Rahim Faiez in Istanbul, Munir Ahmed in Islamabad and Robert Burns and Lou Kesten in Washington contributed to this report.

Ida weakens as rescues begin and damage checked in Louisiana

By REBECCA SANTANA, KEVIN MCGILL and JANET MCCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Hurricane Ida became a tropical storm as its top winds slowed over Mississippi on Monday, while across southeast Louisiana residents waited for daylight to be rescued from floodwaters and see how much damage was caused by one of the most powerful hurricanes ever to strike the U.S. mainland.

All of New Orleans lost power right around sunset Sunday, leading to an uneasy night of pouring rain and howling winds. The weather died down shortly before dawn and people began carefully walking around neighborhoods with flashlights, dodging downed light poles, pieces of roofs and branches.

Levees failed or were overtopped in the maze of rivers and bayous south of New Orleans, threatening hundreds of homes. On social media, people posted their addresses and locations — directing search and rescue teams to their attics or rooftops.

Officials promised to start the massive rescue effort as the weather broke and the sun rose.

The torrential rains mostly moved into Mississippi on Monday as the storm slowly moved north. Destructive winds and water already had a catastrophic impact along the southeast coast of Louisiana, and life-threatening river flooding continued well inland, the National Hurricane Center said.

Ida made landfall on the same day 16 years earlier that Hurricane Katrina ravaged Louisiana and Mississippi, and its 150 mph (230 kph) winds tied it for the fifth-strongest hurricane to ever hit the mainland. It was already blamed for one death, someone hit by a falling tree in Prairieville, outside Baton Rouge, deputies with the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office confirmed on Sunday.

More than a million customers in Louisiana and Mississippi were without power according to PowerOutage.

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US, which tracks outages nationwide, increasing their vulnerability to flooding and leaving them without air conditioning and refrigeration in sweltering summer heat.

Entergy confirmed that the only power in New Orleans was coming from generators, the city's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness tweeted, citing "catastrophic transmission damage." The city relies on Entergy for backup power for the pumps that send storm water over the city's levees. The system is much-improved since Katrina, but Ida is posing its biggest test since that disaster.

The 911 system in Orleans Parish also experienced technical difficulties early Monday. Anyone needing emergency assistance was urged to go to their nearest fire station or approach their nearest officer, the New Orleans Emergency Communications Center tweeted.

Ida finally became a tropical storm again 16 hours after making landfall in Louisiana as a Category 4 hurricane. Its top sustained wind were 60 mph (97 kph) early Monday, and forecasters said it would rapidly weaken while still dumping torrential rain over a large area. The storm was centered about 95 miles (155 kilometers) south-southwest of Jackson, Mississippi, moving north at 8 mph (13 kmh).

The rising ocean swamped the barrier island of Grand Isle and roofs on buildings around Port Fourchon blew off as Ida made landfall. The hurricane then churned through the far southern Louisiana wetlands, swirled over the state's petrochemical corridor and threatened the more than 2 million people living in and around New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Officials said Ida intensified into an extremely powerful hurricane too quickly over the Gulf of Mexico to organize a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans' 390,000 residents. Many didn't have enough gas and hotel money, transportation or other resources needed to flee. Hospitals also had no choice but to hunker down, counting on generators to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

In Baton Rouge, 27-year-old Robert Owens watched the sky in his neighborhood light up as transformers blew up all around him.

"Never in my life have I encountered something this major," he said as giant gusts rattled his home's windows.

Significant flooding was reported late Sunday night in LaPlace near Lake Pontchartrain and in places like Lafitte, where a barge struck a swinging bridge in town.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said rescue crews would not be able to immediately help those who were stranded as the storm raged. And he warned his state to brace for potentially weeks of recovery.

"Many, many people are going to be tested in ways that we can only imagine today," the governor told a news conference Sunday.

But he added, "There is always light after darkness, and I can assure you we are going to get through this."

In New Orleans, wind tore at awnings and caused buildings to sway and water to spill out of Lake Pontchartrain. The Coast Guard office there received more than a dozen reports of breakaway barges, said Petty Officer Gabriel Wisdom.

Ida pushed so much water from the Gulf inland that engineers detected a "negative flow" on the Mississippi River as a result of storm surge, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spokesman Ricky Boyette said,

Ida was churning in one of the nation's most important industrial corridors — home to a large number of petrochemical sites.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality was in contact with more than 1,500 oil refineries, chemical plants and other sensitive facilities and will respond to any reported pollution leaks or petroleum spills, agency spokesman Greg Langley said.

Comparisons to the Aug. 29, 2005, landfall of Katrina weighed heavily on residents. Katrina was blamed for 1,800 deaths as it caused levee breaches and catastrophic flooding in New Orleans. Now facing Ida more than a decade and a half later, officials emphasized that the city's levee system has been massively improved.

Monday would likely reveal if that was the case.

Associated Press writers Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi; Seth Borenstein in Kensington,

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Maryland; Michael Biesecker in Washington; and Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta contributed to this report.

White House: US has capacity to evacuate remaining Americans

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States has the capacity to evacuate the approximately 300 U.S. citizens remaining in Afghanistan who want to leave before President Joe Biden's Tuesday deadline, senior administration officials said, as rocket fire in Kabul and another U.S. drone strike against suspected Islamic State militants underscored the grave threat in the war's final days.

"This is the most dangerous time in an already extraordinarily dangerous mission these last couple of days," America's top diplomat, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, said Sunday not long before confirmation of the drone strike in Kabul.

The steady stream of U.S. military jets taking off and landing at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Afghanistan's capital continued Monday even after rocket fire targeted the airport. No one claimed responsibility for the rockets, which hit a nearby neighborhood. U.S. Central Command spokesman Bill Urban said five rockets targeted the airport and a U.S. defensive system on the airfield known as a Counter Rocket, Artillery and Mortar System, or C-RAM, was employed against them. He said there were no U.S. casualties and the airfield continued to operate. Further details were not immediately available. The White House said President Joe Biden had been briefed on the rocket attack.

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said Sunday that for those U.S. citizens seeking immediately to leave Afghanistan by the looming deadline, "we have the capacity to have 300 Americans, which is roughly the number we think are remaining, come to the airport and get on planes in the time that is remaining."

Sullivan said the U.S. does not currently plan to have an ongoing embassy presence after the final U.S. troop withdrawal. But he pledged the U.S. "will make sure there is safe passage for any American citizen, any legal permanent resident" after Tuesday, as well as for "those Afghans who helped us." But untold numbers of vulnerable Afghans, fearful of a return to the brutality of pre-2001 Taliban rule, are likely to be left behind.

Blinken said the U.S. was working with other countries in the region to either keep the Kabul airport open after Tuesday or to reopen it "in a timely fashion."

He also said that while the airport is critical, "there are other ways to leave Afghanistan, including by road and many countries border Afghanistan." The U.S., he said, is "making sure that we have in place all of the necessary tools and means to facilitate the travel for those who seek to leave Afghanistan" after Tuesday.

There also are roughly 280 others who have said they are Americans but who have told the State Department they plan to remain in the country or are still undecided. According to the latest totals, about 114,000 people have been evacuated since the Taliban takeover Aug. 14, including approximately 2,900 on military and coalition flights during the 24 hours ending at 3 a.m. Sunday.

Members of Congress criticized the chaotic and violent evacuation.

"We didn't have to be in this rush-rush circumstance with terrorists breathing down our neck," said Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah. "But it's really the responsibility of the prior administration and this administration that has caused this crisis to be upon us and has led to what is without question a humanitarian and foreign policy tragedy."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said the U.S. policy in Afghanistan, with 2,500 troops on the ground, had been working. "We were, in effect, keeping the lid on, keeping terrorists from reconstituting, and having a light footprint in the country," he said.

U.S. officials said Sunday's American drone strike hit a vehicle carrying multiple Islamic State suicide bombers, causing secondary explosions indicating the presence of a substantial amount of explosive material. A senior U.S. official said the military drone fired a Hellfire missile at a vehicle in a compound between two buildings after individuals were seen loading explosives into the trunk.

The official said there was an initial explosion caused by the missile, followed by a much larger fireball,

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believed to be the result of the substantial amount of explosives inside the vehicle. The U.S. believes that two Islamic State group individuals who were targeted were killed.

In a statement, U.S. Central Command said it is looking into the reports of civilian casualties that may have been caused by the secondary explosions. An Afghan official said three children were killed in the strike. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

It was the second airstrike in recent days the U.S. has conducted against the militant group, which claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing Thursday at the Kabul airport gate that killed 13 U.S. service members and scores of Afghans struggling to get out of the country and escape the new Taliban rule. The Pentagon said a U.S. drone mission in eastern Afghanistan killed two members of IS' Afghanistan affiliate early Saturday local time in retaliation for the airport bombing.

In Delaware, Biden met privately with the families of the American troops killed in the suicide attack, and solemnly watched as the remains of the fallen returned to U.S. soil from Afghanistan. First lady Jill Biden and many of the top U.S. defense and military leaders joined him on the tarmac at Dover Air Force Base to grieve with loved ones as the "dignified transfer" of remains unfolded, a military ritual for those killed in foreign combat.

The 13 service members were the first U.S. troops killed in Afghanistan since February 2020, the month the Trump administration struck an agreement with the Taliban in which the militant group halted attacks on Americans in exchange for a U.S. agreement to remove all troops and contractors by May 2021. Biden announced in April that the 2,500 to 3,000 troops who remained would be out by September, ending what he has called America's forever war.

The White House has rescheduled Biden's meeting with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, from Monday to Wednesday as the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan enters its tense final hours.

Sullivan appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation," CNN's "State of the Union" and "Fox News Sunday." Blinken was interviewed on ABC's "This Week" and NBC's "Meet the Press." McConnell was on Fox and Romney was on CNN.

Associated Press writers Matthew Lee and Hope Yen in Washington, Aamer Madhani at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, and Kathy Gannon in Kabul, Afghanistan, contributed to this report.

US aims start to Bali bombing war crimes case at Guantanamo

By BEN FOX Associated Press

NAVAL STATION GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba (AP) — Three prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention center are expected to get their first day in court after being held for 18 years in connection with the deadly 2002 Bali nightclub bombings and other plots in Southeast Asia.

Indonesian prisoner Encep Nurjaman, known as Hambali, and two Malaysians are to be arraigned Monday before a military commission on charges that include murder, conspiracy and terrorism. It is merely the first step in what could be a long legal journey for a case that involves evidence tainted by CIA torture, the same issue that is largely responsible for causing other war crimes cases to languish for years at Guantanamo.

The hearing also comes as the Biden administration says it intends to close the detention center, where the U.S. still holds 39 of the 779 men seized in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and invasion of Afghanistan.

The three men charged in connection with the nightclub bombings were held in secret CIA confinement for three years, followed by 15 more at the isolated U.S. base in Cuba.

The decision to charge them was made by a Pentagon legal official at the end of the Trump administration, complicating the effort to close the detention center, said Brian Bouffard, a lawyer for Mohammed Nazir bin Lep, one of the Malaysian men.

That made it more difficult for the new administration to add any to the list of those who could potentially be transferred out of Guantanamo or even sent home. "It will even be harder after an arraignment," Bouffard said.

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Whether the arraignment would actually take place was not certain. Lawyers have sought to put the case on hold for a number of reasons, including what they have said is insufficient access to interpreters and other resources to mount a defense. The accused were still expected to show up for the hearing.

The Navy judge presiding over the case in the commission, a hybrid of military and civilian law, is expected to consider that question before the charges can be formally presented in a secure courtroom surrounded by coils of razor wire on the base.

Nurjaman was a leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian militant group with ties to al-Qaida. The U.S. government says he recruited militants, including bin Lep and the other Malaysian charged in the case, Mohammed Farik bin Amin, for jihadist operations.

Among the plots that al-Qaida and Jemaah Islamiyah carried out were the October 2002 suicide bombings of Paddy's Pub and the Sari Club in Bali, Indonesia, and the August 2003 suicide bombing of the J.W. Marriott in Jakarta, Indonesia. The attacks together killed 213 people, including seven Americans, and injured 109 people, including six Americans. Dozens of victims were foreign tourists, mostly Australians.

Prosecutors allege bin Lep and the other Malaysian, Mohammed Farik bin Amin, served as intermediaries in the transfer of money used to fund the group's operations.

All three were captured in Thailand in 2003 and transferred to CIA "black sites," where they were brutalized and subjected to torture, according to a Senate Intelligence Committee report released in 2014. In 2006, they were moved to Guantanamo.

It's unclear why it's taken so long to charge them before the military commission. Military prosecutors filed charges against the men in June 2017, but the Pentagon legal official who oversees Guantanamo cases rejected the charges for reasons that haven't been publicly disclosed.

The case has many elements that make it complex, including whether statements the men made to authorities can hold up in court because of the abuse they experienced in CIA custody, the fact that people have already been convicted, and in some cases executed, in Indonesia for the attack, and the long time it has taken to even bring charges — much less get to a trial at some point in the future.

Some of these same issues have come up in the case against five Guantanamo prisoners charged for planning and aiding the Sept. 11 attacks. They were arraigned in May 2012 and remain in the pretrial phase, with no trial date yet scheduled.

Bin Amin's lawyer, Christine Funk, predicted a lengthy period of defense investigation that will require extensive travel, once the pandemic is over, to interview witnesses and look for evidence. Still, she said, her client is "anxious and eager to litigate this case and go home."

No cash or gas to run from Ida: 'We can't afford to leave'

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press/Report for America

Robert Owens felt defeated and helpless Sunday as he waited in Louisiana's capital city for landfall by one of the most powerful hurricanes ever to strike the U.S.

The 27-year-old had spent days anxiously watching long lines of cars evacuating from Baton Rouge, bound for safer locations out of state as Hurricane Ida approached. He had hoped he and his wife, his mother-in-law, roommate and four pets would be among them. But leaving would have required money for gas and a hotel room — something they didn't have.

Out of desperation, Owens went to ACE Cash Express on Saturday and submitted documents for a payday loan. He was denied, told he didn't have enough credit history.

By Sunday, it was clear they would be riding out the storm at home in his family's duplex apartment.

"Our bank account is empty — we can't afford to leave," he said.

Owens said the majority of people in his low-income neighborhood are in the same predicament. They want to leave to protect families, but have no choice but to stay.

"A lot of us here in my neighborhood have to just hunker down and wait, not knowing how bad it's going to get. It's a terrifying feeling," he said.

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"There people who have funds to lean on are able to get out of here, but there's a big chunk of people that are lower-income that don't have a savings account to fall on," he continued. "We're left behind."

By Sunday night at 9 p.m., Owens said his family and all others in his neighborhood had lost power. The sky was lighting up green from transformers blowing up all around them, he said.

Several trees had collapsed on neighbor's properties, but it was too dark to see the full extent of the damage. Owens said they were trying to use a flashlight to survey the street, but were wary of jeopardizing their safety.

"Never in my life have I encountered something this major," he said as giant gusts rattled his home's windows.

More than 1 million customers in Louisiana lost power overnight Sunday into Monday, according to PowerOutage.US, which tracks outages nationwide.

Owens said there were a few times when it sounded like the roof of his duplex might come off. He said his wife was packing a bag of clothes and essentials, just in case.

"We'll shelter in the car if we lose the house," he said. The family all share his wife's Toyota Avalon, a vehicle "not nearly big enough" to shelter four people, three dogs and a cat.

Earlier in the day, Owens said he was hurriedly placing towels under leaking windows in his duplex and charging electronics. He tried to go to Dollar General and Dollar Tree to pick up food, but they were closed. His family has lights glued around the walls of the house. They planned to hide in the laundry room or the kitchen when the storm hits — places without windows.

"There's a general feeling of fear in not knowing what's going to be the aftermath of this," he said. "That's the most concerning thing. Like, what are we going to do if it gets really bad? Will we still be alive? Is a tree going fall on top of us?"

Owens said his mother-in-law is on disability. His roommates both work for Apple iOS tech support. His wife works scheduling blood donations. All of them rely on the internet to work from home, and if it goes out, they won't be able to bring in any money.

"We might be without work, and rent, power, water, all of those bills will still be needing to get paid," he said. "We are a little bit concerned about losing our utilities or even our house — if it's still standing — because we're not going to have the money for any other bills."

He said it's hard to feel so vulnerable, like his family is getting left behind.

"The fact that we are not middle class or above, it just kind of keeps coming back to bite us over and over again, in so many different directions and ways — a simple pay-day advance being one of them," he said. "It's like we're having to pay for being poor, even though we're trying to not be poor."

Leah Willingham 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.

EU set to recommend reinstating restrictions on US travelers

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union plans to recommend that its member states reinstate restrictions on tourists from the U.S. because of rising coronavirus infection levels in the country, EU diplomats said Monday.

A decision to remove the U.S. from a safe list of countries for nonessential travel would reverse advice from June, when the 27-nation bloc recommended lifting restrictions on U.S. travelers before the summer tourism season.

The guidance could come as early as this week, according to the EU diplomats. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the review process was still ongoing.

Any decision would be nonbinding, however. The EU has no unified COVID-19 tourism policy and national governments have the authority to decide whether they keep their borders open to U.S. tourists.

The European Council updates the list based on criteria relating to coronavirus infection levels. It gets reviewed every two weeks.

The threshold for being on the EU list is having not more than 75 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 inhabitants over the last 14 days. Coronavirus cases have surged in the U.S. in recent weeks, running at more than 1,100 a day, the highest level since mid-March.

Last week, new cases per day averaged over 152,000, turning the clock back to the end of January, and the number of people in the hospital with the coronavirus was around 85,000, a number not seen since early February.

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Records rebut claims of unequal treatment of Jan. 6 rioters

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

It's a common refrain from some of those charged in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol and their Republican allies: The Justice Department is treating them harshly because of their political views while those arrested during last year's protests over racial injustice were given leniency.

Court records tell a different story.

An Associated Press review of court documents in more than 300 federal cases stemming from the protests sparked by George Floyd's death last year shows that dozens of people charged have been convicted of serious crimes and sent to prison.

The AP found that more than 120 defendants across the United States have pleaded guilty or were convicted at trial of federal crimes including rioting, arson and conspiracy. More than 70 defendants who've been sentenced so far have gotten an average of about 27 months behind bars. At least 10 received prison terms of five years or more.

The dissonance between the rhetoric of Capitol rioters and their supporters and the record established by courts highlights both the racial tension inherent in their arguments — the pro-Donald Trump rioters were largely white and last summer's protesters were more diverse — and the flawed assessment at the heart of their claims.

"The property damage or accusations of arson and looting from last year, those were serious and they were dealt with seriously, but they weren't an attack on the very core constitutional processes that we rely on in a democracy, nor were they an attack on the United States Congress," said Kent Greenfield, a professor at Boston College Law School.

To be sure, some defendants have received lenient deals.

At least 19 who have been sentenced across the country got no prison time or time served, according to the AP's review. Many pleaded guilty to lower-level offenses, such as misdemeanor assault, but some were convicted of more serious charges, including civil disorder.

In Portland, Oregon — where demonstrations, many turning violent, occurred nightly for months after a white Minneapolis police officer killed Floyd — about 60 of the roughly 100 cases that were brought have been dismissed, court records show.

Most of those defendants received deferred resolution agreements, under which prosecutors promise to drop charges after a certain amount of time if the defendant stays out of trouble and completes things like community service. Some Jan. 6 defendants have complained it's unfair they aren't getting the same deals.

But President Joe Biden's Justice Department has continued the vast majority of the racial injustice protest cases brought across the U.S. under Trump and has often pushed for lengthy prison time for people convicted of serious crimes. Since Biden took office in January, federal prosecutors have brought some new cases stemming from last year's protests.

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Conservatives have sought to equate the attack on the Capitol with the Black Lives Matter protests, accusing Democrats of being hypocrites for not denouncing the violence after Floyd's death as loudly as the Jan. 6 insurrection. And some Republicans have seized on the handling of the protest cases in Portland to suggest that the Jan. 6 defendants are being politically persecuted.

That has not been borne out when comparing the sentences that federal judges have given to Jan. 6 defendants and those who are accused of crimes during the protests against police brutality across the country.

Only a handful of the nearly 600 people who've been charged in the insurrection have received their punishments so far, and just three people have been sentenced to time behind bars. The vast majority of the most serious cases — involving those accused of assaulting police officers or conspiring to block the certification of Biden's victory — remain unresolved.

The catalysts for the riot and the demonstrations for racial justice were also fundamentally different.

The mob of Trump supporters whipped up by the former president's lies about the election descended on the Capitol and pushed past police barriers, assaulted officers, smashed windows and sent lawmakers running in a stunning attempt to overturn the presidential election.

The demonstrations after Floyd's death were largely peaceful calls to address racial inequality and police brutality that occasionally turned violent. In some cities, protests descended into chaos after dark, with people smashing windows, looting stores, setting fires and assaulting officers.

William Barr, who as attorney general led the Justice Department last year under Trump, pushed federal prosecutors to aggressively go after protesters who caused violence. Defense lawyers complained that many of the cases belonged in state court — punishments are typically lighter there — and accused Justice Department officials of carrying out a politically motivated effort to stymie the demonstrations.

Just this month, a man was sentenced to four years behind bars and ordered to pay what his attorney said is likely to exceed \$1.5 million in restitution after pleading guilty to inciting a riot last spring in Champaign, Illinois.

Shamar Betts, who was 19 at the time, posted a flyer on Facebook on May 31, 2020, that said "RIOT @ MarketPlace Mall" at 3 p.m. and instructed people to bring "friends & family, posters, bricks, bookbags etc." He participated in the looting, went live on Facebook during the riot and bragged about starting it, authorities said. More than 70 stores were looted, and the riot caused \$1.8 million in damage, prosecutors said.

Betts' lawyer, Elisabeth Pollock, said Betts was frustrated about police brutality across the U.S., had lost his job because of the coronavirus outbreak and never intended to hurt anyone. Prosecutors pushed for the maximum punishment of five years in prison and the maximum restitution amount for Betts, who had no criminal history, she said.

"They took into account not a single mitigating factor: nothing about how he grew up, nothing about how the George Floyd protests had affected the community, nothing about how the pandemic had affected Shamar personally and the community. There was absolutely no quarter given to him at all," his attorney said in an interview.

In another case this month, an Illinois man was sentenced to nearly nine years behind bars for lighting a Minneapolis cellphone store on fire in June 2020. A Charleston, South Carolina, man who livestreamed himself looting a store downtown was sentenced to two years in prison.

In the Capitol riot, dozens of defendants have been charged only with misdemeanors, and a standard plea deal has allowed many to plead guilty to a single count of demonstrating in the Capitol.

An Indiana woman who admitted illegally entering the Capitol but didn't participate in any violence or destruction avoided jail time, and two other misdemeanor defendants got one and two months of home confinement. Two other people who were locked up pretrial were released after pleading guilty to misdemeanors and serving the maximum six-month jail sentence.

Only one defendant convicted of a felony has received his punishment so far. Paul Hodgkins, who breached the U.S. Senate chamber carrying a Trump campaign flag, was ordered to serve eight months behind bars.

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The political fighting over the cases comes as some Republicans in Washington have tried to downplay the attack on the Capitol, with many of them portraying the siege as a mostly peaceful protest despite the shocking violence that unfolded on live TV.

In a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland in June, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and four other Republican senators expressed concern about "potential unequal administration of justice" in how prosecutors have responded to the Jan. 6 riot and the Black Lives Matter protests.

Despite "numerous examples of violence" during last year's protests, they said "it appears that individuals charged with committing crimes at these events may benefit from infrequent prosecutions and minimal, if any, penalties" and claimed the Justice Department's "apparent unwillingness" to punish them stands in "stark contrast to the harsher treatment" of the Capitol defendants.

One Jan. 6 defendant has similarly accused the Justice Department of selective prosecution based on different political viewpoints, comparing his case with how the department has handled charges stemming from the Portland protests.

Garrett Miller, of Texas, was wearing a T-shirt that said, "I Was There, Washington D.C., January 6, 2021," when he was arrested. Prosecutors say Miller posted threatening messages on Twitter directed at Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a New York Democrat, after the riot. His lawyer said Miller isn't trying to excuse his actions.

"Nevertheless, Mr. Miller should not be treated differently based upon the political views he espoused viz-a-viz the political views espoused by the Portland rioters," his attorney, F. Clinton Broden, wrote in recent court papers.

Federal prosecutors say Miller hasn't presented any evidence that his case was politically motivated.

They also rejected comparisons between Miller's actions and those of the Portland defendants, "who — despite committing serious offenses — never entered the federal courthouse structure, impeded a congressional proceeding, or targeted a specific federal official or officer for assassination."

One Portland defendant who recently received a deferred resolution agreement was accused of using a wooden shield and hoses to hit an officer in the head. Another was accused of punching an officer in the side of her face. Other cases were dismissed after defendants agreed to plead guilty to similar charges in state court, records show.

"Our approach depends on the circumstances of the charged offense and unique characteristics of each defendant, rather than on any across-the-board standard being applied to all cases," said Kevin Sonoff, spokesman for the Oregon U.S. attorney's office.

Meanwhile, in Utah this month, a federal judge sentenced 25-year-old Lateesha Richards to nearly two years in prison for tossing a pair of basketball shorts onto an overturned, burning patrol car and hurling a baseball bat toward police officers during a May 2020 protest in Salt Lake City. There's no evidence that the bat struck anybody.

Richards initially was charged with an arson count that carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison, but she avoided that possibility with a deal under which she pleaded to a charge of civil disorder.

The judge said Richards' actions were dangerous and put hundreds of peaceful protesters in harm's way. Richards didn't start the fire that engulfed the police vehicle, but she did "add fuel to the flames," he added.

Defense attorney Alexander Ramos, who had pushed for the judge to sentence Richards to the one year in jail she has already served, said the Floyd protesters appear to be getting even more scrutiny than comparable "run-of-the mill" cases.

"If it didn't have this political background, I think more people would have been let out," Ramos told the AP.

On the same day in May, Kelsey Donnel Jackson traveled to downtown Charleston, South Carolina, with a cousin to join a protest over Floyd's killing. Hours later, as other protesters began flipping tables and taunting police officers, Jackson lighted a shirt on fire and tossed it onto the trunk of a vandalized police car.

Jackson also vandalized businesses and public property, assaulted two people and streamed a video

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of himself on Facebook Live in which he held a handgun and made threatening statements about police, according to prosecutors.

He was sentenced this summer to two years in prison after pleading guilty to maliciously damaging a police vehicle with fire.

Jackson's lawyer wrote in court documents before his sentencing that many people who stormed the Capitol "with the clear intent to disrupt a session of Congress and overturn a lawful election" were charged only with misdemeanor offenses.

"We do not make reference to unrelated conduct in other jurisdictions in order to minimize (Jackson's) conduct and culpability, but rather to point out that similar (and more egregious) conduct that was very obviously intended to intimidate law enforcement and interfere with government operations has been treated in a less heavy-handed manner elsewhere," his attorney wrote.

Richer reported from Boston, Kunzelman from College Park, Maryland, and Billeaud from Phoenix.

Qatar emerges as key player in Afghanistan after US pullout

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Qatar played an outsized role in U.S. efforts to evacuate tens of thousands of people from Afghanistan. Now the tiny Gulf Arab state is being asked to help shape what is next for Afghanistan because of its ties with both Washington and the Taliban, who are in charge in Kabul.

Qatar will be among global heavyweights on Monday when U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken hosts a virtual meeting to discuss a coordinated approach for the days ahead, as the U.S. completes its withdrawal from Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover of the country. The meeting will also include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, Turkey, the European Union and NATO.

Qatar has also reportedly been asked by the Taliban to provide civilian technical assistance at Kabul's international airport, once the U.S. military withdrawal is complete on Tuesday. Authorities in Qatar have not commented on the reports.

Meanwhile, international U.N. agencies are asking Qatar for help and support in delivering aid to Afghanistan.

Qatar's role was somewhat unexpected. The nation, which shares a land border with Saudi Arabia and a vast underwater gas field in the Persian Gulf with Iran, was supposed to be a transit point for a just a few thousand people airlifted from Afghanistan over a timeline of several months.

After the surprisingly swift Taliban takeover of Kabul on Aug. 15, the United States looked to Qatar to help shoulder the evacuations of tens of thousands in a chaotic and hurried airlift.

In the end, nearly 40% of all evacuees were moved out via Qatar, winning its leadership heaps of praise from Washington. International media outlets also leaned on Qatar for their own staff evacuations. The United States said Saturday that 113,500 people had been evacuated from Afghanistan since Aug. 14. Qatar says a little more than 43,000 had transited through the country.

Qatar's role in the evacuations reflects its position as host of the Middle East's biggest U.S. military base, but also its decision years ago to host the Taliban's political leadership in exile, giving it some sway with the militant group. Qatar also hosted U.S.-Taliban peace talks.

Assistant Qatari Foreign Minister Lolwa al-Khater acknowledged the political gains scored by Qatar in the past weeks, but rebuffed any suggestion that Qatar's efforts were purely strategic.

"If anyone assumes that it's only about political gains, believe me, there are ways to do PR that are way easier than risking our people there on the ground, way easier than us having sleepless nights literally for the past two weeks, way less complicated than spending our time looking after every kid and every pregnant woman," she told The Associated Press.

For some of the most sensitive rescue efforts in Afghanistan, Qatar conducted the operation with just a few hundred troops and its own military aircraft. Qatar evacuated a girls' boarding school, an all-girls robotics team and journalists working for international media, among others. Qatar's ambassador accom-

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panied convoys of buses through a gauntlet of Taliban checkpoints in Kabul and past various Western military checkpoints at the airport, where massive crowds had gathered, desperate to flee.

In all, al-Khater said Qatar secured passage to the airport for some 3,000 people and airlifted as many as 1,500 after receiving requests from international organizations and vetting their names.

Al-Khater said Qatar was uniquely positioned because of its ability to speak to various parties on the ground and its willingness to escort people through Taliban-controlled Kabul.

"What many people don't realize is that this trip is not a phone call to Taliban," she said. "You have checkpoints by the U.S. side, by the British side, by the NATO side, by the Turkish side ... and we have to juggle with all of these variables and factors."

The Taliban have promised amnesty to all those who remain Afghanistan. Still, many of those desperate to get out — including civil society activists, those who had worked for Western armies and women afraid to lose hard-won rights — say they do not trust the militants. In addition, other armed groups pose a growing threat. Last week, an attack by an Islamic State suicide bomber killed more than 180 people outside Kabul airport.

The U.S.-led evacuation process has been marred by miscalculation and chaos, and that spilled over to the al-Udeid base in Qatar.

The hangars at al-Udeid were so crammed that the United States halted flights from Kabul for several hours during the peak of evacuation efforts on Aug. 20. Nearby countries, like Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, accepted several thousand evacuees to alleviate pressure on the American base.

At al-Udeid, Afghan families evacuated by the U.S. waited for hours in poorly ventilated, humid hangars in the middle of the desert with inadequate cooling. A video posted by The Washington Post showed hundreds of evacuees in one such hangar with only one lavatory and people sleeping on the ground.

Qatar built an emergency field hospital, additional shelters and portable washrooms to help plug the gaps. In addition to what the U.S. military is distributing, the Qatari military is handing out 50,000 meals a day, and more still by local charities. Qatar Airways has also provided 10 aircraft to transport evacuees from its capital, Doha, to other countries.

Around 20,000 evacuees remain in Qatar, some expecting to leave in a matter of weeks and others in months to come as they await resettlement elsewhere. Seven Afghan women have delivered babies since their arrival in Qatar.

Qatar is absorbing only a very small number of evacuees, among them a group of female students who will be offered scholarships to continue their education in Doha. Qatar is also hosting some evacuees in furnished apartment facilities built for the FIFA World Cup, which will be played in Doha next year.

The energy-rich nation is a tiny country with a little more than 300,000 citizens, where expatriate foreign workers on temporary visas far outnumber the local population.

The White House says President Joe Biden personally expressed his appreciation to Qatar's 41-year-old Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani by phone and noted that the U.S.-led airlift would not have been possible without Qatar's support facilitating the transfer of thousands of people daily.

It's the kind of positive publicity that millions of dollars spent by Gulf Arab states on lobbying and public relations could scarcely guarantee.

Follow Aya Batrawy on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ayaelb

Evacuated Afghan activist dreams of going back home one day

By LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

GOLEM, Albania (AP) — Ghazaal Habibyar is in an Albanian tourist resort, safe with her husband and three children after being evacuated from Afghanistan. But her mind is not at rest, for many others she knows are still in danger from the Taliban.

Habibyar, 38, is concerned about her extended family and distraught about the over 180 people killed at Kabul airport just one hour before her chaotic takeoff.

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Her family, including a 2-month-old daughter, and other human rights activists drove in a bus for 36 hours trying to find an entrance to Kabul's Hamid Karzai Airport. Just before boarding the plane on Thursday, they heard "so much noise in the air" they were told the flight could be canceled. After 40 minutes, they were hustled aboard the plane, which took off in a frightening vertical way to avoid being shot at.

Thursday's suicide bombing at the airport by an Islamic State group affiliate killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members.

"There are times in your life when you feel guilty for being alive. That could have been us, definitely," she told The Associated Press on Sunday. "Those people who have lost their lives, they have families, they're very young people."

She and her family are among 457 Afghans being housed in Albania since Friday.

Now an activist with the Open Society Foundation, Habibyar couldn't graduate from school at home when she was young, fearing the Taliban's attitude toward women and education, so she graduated in Australia. Despite opportunities abroad, she returned to Kabul in 2006. Since then she has worked in many public positions, including being a deputy minister of mines and gasoline, "trying to make a difference, maybe small, but whatever I could to make that place a better place."

She says Afghanistan has changed for the better in the past two decades, declaring "it's not the Afghanistan of 1996." But in the provinces governed by the Taliban, "girls' schools were closed. Women were not allowed to work."

"If that is a testimony to what is going to happen to the whole country, we had to leave," she said.

Still, she is critical of how the U.S. and NATO left the country.

"This disaster, this human disaster that is happening right now, could have been prevented. This whole evacuation process could have been managed much better," she said.

Habibyar is not sure of what her immediate future holds, saying it will "take a long time for us to recover psychologically, mentally, emotionally from everything that we have been through." She misses the Afghan capital, Kabul, already, "the fruits on the side of the street I used to cross when I went to office" and the sounds of birds in the morning.

Habibyar made a pledge to her son when the plane took off. Hamza, 6, was crying and did not want to leave.

"I told him that you will make a promise to me: to study, be someone and come back," she said.

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Abbas, Israel's Gantz hold new high-level talks, urged by US

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's defense minister has held talks with the Palestinian president in Ramallah, the first high-level meeting between the two sides in years, officials said.

Sunday's meeting between Benny Gantz and Mahmoud Abbas signaled a possible shift of direction after the near-complete breakdown of communication between Abbas and Israeli leaders in recent years.

It came two days after President Joe Biden urged Israel's new prime minister during a White House meeting to take steps toward improving the lives of Palestinians.

Gantz's office said he told Abbas that Israel will take new measures to strengthen the Palestinian economy. It said they also discussed security issues and agreed to remain in touch. It was believed to be the highest level public meeting between the sides since 2014.

A Palestinian official said Gantz and Abbas discussed possible steps toward improving the atmosphere. He said this included Palestinian demands for a halt in Israeli military operations in Palestinian areas of the occupied West Bank, allowing unification of families with relatives inside Israel and allowing more Palestinian workers into Israel. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the late-night meeting.

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Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is a hard-liner who opposes Palestinian independence, as do key partners in his diverse, ruling coalition. But Bennett has said he supports building up the Palestinian economy and expanding autonomy for Palestinians. He also is interested in bolstering Abbas in his rivalry with the ruling Hamas militant group in Gaza.

While Biden supports a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, his administration is focused on interim confidence-building measures. Israel's former prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, pursued a hard-line policy toward the Palestinians, backed by former President Donald Trump.

The Trump administration took a number of steps, including moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to contested Jerusalem. Abbas halted most contacts with the U.S. and Israel in return.

Netanyahu had repeatedly claimed Abbas was not a reliable partner for negotiating a peace deal, a portrayal dismissed by Netanyahu critics as a pretext for avoiding making concessions.

Hussein Sheikh, a top Abbas aide, confirmed the meeting in a statement on Twitter. It took place on Sunday night in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where Abbas maintains his headquarters.

Some Indonesian students return to schools, at a distance

By NINIEK KARMINI and FADLAN SYAM Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — School bells in some parts of Indonesia's capital have rung again after classes closed by the coronavirus for more than a year were allowed to start reopening on Monday now that the daily count of new COVID-19 cases continues to decline.

A total of 610 schools that have passed the required tests by the Jakarta Education Agency reopened their doors for the first time since the pandemic started, though with many precautions still in place.

The city administration had initially planned to reopen schools in June, but the plan was postponed as another wave of infections triggered by the highly contagious delta variant engulfed the country.

"We had been past the peak of the second wave of COVID-19 infections," Jakarta Vice Governor Ahmad Riza Patria told reporters on Monday, adding that they hope to reopen all schools in January.

There are about 5,341 schools in Jakarta, ranging from elementary to high school, according to government data.

"I feel nervous," said Akila Malawa, a 12-year-old student going to class for the first time in more than a year at the Suluh junior high school. "But I'm so happy to see my friends again."

"I hope that coronavirus in Indonesia will end, so, I can go to school and meet friends every day," said her classmate, Amalwin Harjodisastra.

Schools in several other cities outside Jakarta were also to reopen on Monday.

Even as schools reopen, government guidelines for school facilities have changed many class traditions. Chatting in class is not allowed, facemasks must be worn at all times and no one can leave class for recess. Schools must slash class capacity to 50% by holding classes in two shifts. Teachers must be vaccinated.

In person schooling will be blended with remote learning and gradually increase based on the government's evaluation of the situation.

Indonesia's Health Ministry reported 7,427 new infections in the past 24 hours on Sunday, the lowest daily total since June 9. There has been a steady decline since the peak on July 15, when more than 56,000 cases were recorded in a single day.

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country, has recorded more than 4 million infections since the pandemic began.

Once the country's COVID-19 epicenter, Jakarta has been seeing declines in both active cases and new cases since mid-July, from more than 100,000 active cases per day to below 8,000 a day and from more than 10,000 new cases per day to below 500.

Also, patients are not being turned away from hospitals like in the past as the bed occupancy rate has declined in several regions. The Central Jakarta Health Service says the bed occupancy rate in several hospitals in Jakarta is now below 30%.

Restrictions on public activities, which the government credits with helping to ease pressure on hospitals,

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are being eased in the capital. Authorities in Jakarta have reopened malls, places of worship and outdoor sport venues since mid-August with certain capacity limits, and people must show they've been vaccinated.

Last month, Indonesia began vaccinating those aged between 12 and 18.

Indonesia began vaccinating earlier than many other countries in Southeast Asia. The country aims to inoculate more than 208 million of its 270 million people by March 2022, but authorities have only fully vaccinated 34.8 million people and partially vaccinated another 26.7 million so far.

Lake Tahoe threatened by massive fire, more ordered to flee

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — Fire officials ordered more evacuations around the Tahoe Basin as a two-week old blaze encroached on the threatened mountain towns surrounding glimmering Lake Tahoe.

By nightfall, all residents on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin were warned to evacuate the region, after fire officials had stressed for days that protecting the area was their top firefighting priority.

"Today's been a rough day and there's no bones about it," Jeff Marsoleis, forest supervisor for El Dorado National Forest, said Sunday evening. A few days ago, he thought crews could halt the Caldor Fire's eastern progress, but "today it let loose."

Flames churned through mountains just a few miles southwest of the Tahoe Basin, where thick smoke sent tourists packing at a time when summer vacations would usually be in full swing ahead of the Labor Day weekend.

"To put it in perspective, we've been seeing about a half-mile of movement on the fire's perimeter each day for the last couple of weeks, and today, this has already moved at 2.5 miles (4 kilometers) on us, with no sign that it's starting to slow down," said Cal Fire Division Chief Erich Schwab.

Some areas of the Northern California terrain are so rugged that crews had to carry fire hoses by hand from Highway 50 as they sought to douse spot fires caused by erratic winds.

The forecast did not offer optimism: triple-digit temperatures were possible and the extreme heat was expected to last several days. A red flag warning for critical fire conditions was issued for Monday and Tuesday across the Northern Sierra.

The blaze that broke out August 14 was 19% contained after burning nearly 245 square miles (635 square kilometers) — an area larger than Chicago. More than 600 structures have been destroyed and at least 18,000 more were under threat.

The Caldor Fire has proved so difficult to fight that fire managers pushed back the projected date for full containment from early this week to Sept. 8. But even that estimate was tenuous.

In Southern California, a section Interstate 15 was closed Sunday afternoon after winds pushed a new blaze, dubbed the Railroad Fire, across lanes in the Cajon Pass northeast of Los Angeles.

Further south, evacuation orders and warnings were still in place for remote communities after a wildfire broke out and spread quickly through the Cleveland National Forest on Saturday. A firefighter received minor injuries and two structures were destroyed in the 2.3-square-mile (5.9-square-kilometer) Chaparral Fire burning along the border of San Diego and Riverside counties, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. It was 10% contained Sunday.

Meanwhile, California's Dixie Fire, the second-largest in state history at 1,193 square miles (3,089 square kilometers) was 48% contained in the Sierra-Cascades region about 65 miles (105 kilometers) north of the Caldor Fire. Nearly 700 homes were among almost 1,300 buildings that have been destroyed since the fire began in early July.

Containment increased to 22% on the 12-day-old French Fire, which covered more than 38 square miles (98 square kilometers) in the southern Sierra Nevada. Crews protected forest homes on the west side of Lake Isabella, a popular recreation area northeast of Bakersfield.

More than a dozen large fires are being fought by more than 15,200 firefighters across California. Flames have destroyed around 2,000 structures and forced thousands to evacuate this year while blanketing large swaths of the West in unhealthy smoke.

The California fires are among nearly 90 large blazes in the U.S. Many are in the West, burning trees and

brush desiccated by drought. Climate change has made the region 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 Department of Defense is sending 200 U.S. Army soldiers from Washington state and equipment including eight U.S. Air Force C-130 aircraft to help firefighters in Northern California, the U.S. Army North said in a statement Saturday. The C-130s have been converted to air tankers that can dump thousands of gallons of water on the flames.

IAEA: N Korea appears to have resumed nuke reactor operation

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea appears to have restarted the operation of its main nuclear reactor used to produce weapons fuels, the U.N. atomic agency said, as the North openly threatens to enlarge its nuclear arsenal amid long-dormant nuclear diplomacy with the United States.

The annual report by the International Atomic Energy Agency refers to a 5-megawatt reactor at the North's main nuclear complex in Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang. The reactor produces plutonium, one of the two key ingredients used to build nuclear weapons along with highly enriched uranium.

"Since early July 2021, there have been indications, including the discharge of cooling water, consistent with the operation of the reactor," said the IAEA report dated Friday.

The report said there were indications of the operation of Yongbyon's radiochemical laboratory from mid-February to early July this year. It said this period of operation is consistent with previous reprocessing campaigns announced by North Korea of irradiated fuel discharged from the reactor. The laboratory is a facility where plutonium is extracted by reprocessing spent fuel rods removed from reactors.

"(North Korea's) nuclear activities continue to be a cause for serious concern. Furthermore, the new indications of the operation of the 5-megawatt reactor and the radiochemical laboratory are deeply troubling," the IAEA said.

The IAEA has not had access to Yongbyon or other locations in North Korea since the country kicked out IAEA inspectors in 2009. The agency said it uses satellite imagery and open source information to monitor developments in North Korea's nuclear program.

The Yongbyon complex also produces highly enriched uranium, the other key nuclear fuel. The IAEA report said "there were indications, for a period of time, that the reported centrifuge enrichment facility was not in operation" though regular vehicular movements were observed.

The complex, which North Korea calls "the heart" of its nuclear program and research, has been at the center of international concerns for decades. It's not clear exactly how much weapons-grade plutonium or highly enriched uranium has been produced at Yongbyon and where North Korea stores it.

In early 2019, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un offered to dismantle the entire complex if he won extensive sanctions relief during a summit with then-President Donald Trump. But the Americans rejected Kim's offer because it would only be a partial surrender of his nuclear capability.

North Korea is believed to be running multiple other covert uranium enrichment facilities. According to a South Korean estimate in 2018, North Korea might already have manufactured 20-60 nuclear weapons as well.

In recent months, North Korea has warned it would expand its nuclear program if the United States doesn't withdraw its "hostile" policy on the North, in an apparent reference to U.S.-led sanctions and regular U.S.-South Korean military drills. Earlier this month, Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, said North Korea would bolster "absolute deterrence" to cope with intensifying U.S. threats.

Lee Jong-joo, spokesperson of South Korea's Unification Ministry, said Monday that South Korea was closely monitoring North Korea's nuclear and missile activities along with the United States. But she declined to comment on whether Seoul was seeing signs that the North was reactivating its nuclear facilities.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung contributed to this report.

Afghans killed outside airport were seeking new lives abroad

By KATHY GANNON, RAHIM FAIEZ and SAYED ZIARMAL HASHEMI Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Mohammed Jan Sultani had clutched his national Taekwondo championship certificates as he waded through the multitudes pushing to get into Kabul airport late last week.

The 25-year-old athlete wasn't on any evacuation lists. Yet he had hoped his achievements would make him and his young family special enough to be let into the gate and onto one of the flights rescuing foreigners and Afghans fleeing the Taliban.

As he forged ahead, an Islamic State suicide bomber detonated two dozen pounds of explosives in the crowd just before nightfall Thursday, killing 169 Afghans, including Sultani, and 13 U.S. service members.

His wife and two children, 4-year-old Zahid and 2-year-old Zahra, survived; he had told them to stay back a bit as he advanced toward the gate.

Three days later, Zahid remains in shock. He cries, but doesn't speak.

The athlete's father, Ali, said his son had expected a bleak future under the Taliban.

"He didn't know where he would go," the bereaved man, who goes by the last name Rahmani, said Sunday. "The United States, Europe, it didn't matter," Rahmani said, holding some of his son's medals, his voice laced with sadness.

"Everyone in the country seemed to be escaping," he said.

Najma Sadeqi was also among those trying to get out that afternoon. The 20-year-old, who was in her last semester in journalism school, feared the Taliban's return to power would bring a harsh version of Islamic rule in which women would largely be confined to their homes.

Getting through those airport gates held the promise of career somewhere else, far away from all the threats and judgement.

Thursday's blast killed Najma, as well as her brother and a cousin who had escorted her to the airport to ensure her safety.

Najma had gotten her start in journalism with a YouTube channel a few years back and eventually went to work for a couple of private broadcasters, said her older sister, Freshta.

In the two decades since the U.S.-led invasion drove the Taliban from power, women have made gains in education, politics and business — but it hasn't been easy. Afghanistan remains a deeply conservative country, especially outside urban areas. Many of Najma's own relatives objected to her nascent career, with some even cutting off contact.

Freshta said her sister received threatening phone calls and text messages from unknown men who objected to her appearing in public.

"I was the only one she told about her security concerns," Freshta said. "She didn't want to share it with the family because they might prevent her from working with media."

But as the Taliban rapidly advanced, capturing most of the country in a matter of days and rolling into the capital earlier this month, Najma decided to join the exodus, fearing that the takeover would spell the end of a career that was only just beginning. She compiled the threatening text messages and brought them to the airport, hoping they would help her convince the Americans to put her on a plane.

Najma planned to restart her YouTube channel from her new home — wherever that might be — and document the lives of Afghan migrants, Freshta said. "She dreamed of building a career in media despite the challenges she faced."

Najma and tens of thousands of others outside the airport gate have not been swayed by Taliban promises to allow women in public life and girls to attend schools.

Ali Reza Ahmadi, a 34-year-old who had worked as a journalist for nearly a decade, was so desperate to get out that he went to the airport just months after getting engaged. He and his younger brother, who had hoped to travel with him, were both killed, according to Khadim Karimi, a close friend and colleague.

He said Ahmadi was already struggling with depression and financial problems before the Taliban swept in. "He was so distraught, so he decided to go to the airport and stay there until he could get an airlift from whatever country would take him," Karimi said.

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Hurricane Ida lashes Louisiana, knocks out New Orleans power

By REBECCA SANTANA, KEVIN MCGILL and JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Hurricane Ida blasted ashore Sunday as one of the most powerful storms ever to hit the U.S., knocking out power to all of New Orleans, blowing roofs off buildings and reversing the flow of the Mississippi River as it rushed from the Louisiana coast into one of the nation's most important industrial corridors.

The hurricane was blamed for at least one death: a person found dead following a report of a fallen tree on a home in Prairieville, the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office said on Facebook. The person, who was not identified, was pronounced dead. Prairieville is a suburb of Baton Rouge, Louisiana's capital city.

The power outage in New Orleans heightened the city's vulnerability to flooding and left hundreds of thousands of people without air conditioning and refrigeration in sweltering summer heat.

Ida — a Category 4 storm — hit on the same date Hurricane Katrina ravaged Louisiana and Mississippi 16 years earlier, coming ashore about 45 miles (72 kilometers) west of where Category 3 Katrina first struck land. Ida's 150-mph (230 kph) winds tied it for the fifth-strongest hurricane to ever hit the mainland U.S. It dropped hours later to a Category 1 storm with maximum winds of 95 mph (155 kph) as it crawled inland, its eye about 45 miles (70 kilometers) northwest of New Orleans.

Significant flooding was reported late Sunday night in LaPlace, a community adjacent to Lake Pontchartrain, meteorologists in New Orleans said. Many people took to social media, pleading for boat rescues as the water rose.

The rising ocean swamped the barrier island of Grand Isle as landfall came just to the west at Port Fourchon. Ida made a second landfall about two hours later near Galliano. The hurricane was churning through the far southern Louisiana wetlands, with the more than 2 million people living in and around New Orleans and Baton Rouge under threat.

"This is going to be much stronger than we usually see and, quite frankly, if you had to draw up the worst possible path for a hurricane in Louisiana, it would be something very, very close to what we're seeing," Gov. John Bel Edwards told The Associated Press.

People in Louisiana woke up to a monster storm after Ida's top winds grew by 45 mph (72 kph) in five hours as the hurricane moved through some of the warmest ocean water in the world in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

The entire city of New Orleans late Sunday was without power, according to city officials. The city's power supplier — Entergy — confirmed that the only power in the city was coming from generators, the city's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness said on Twitter. The message included a screen shot that cited "catastrophic transmission damage" for the power failure.

The city relies on Entergy for backup power for the pumps that remove storm water from city streets. Rain from Ida is expected to test that pump system.

More than 1 million customers were without power in Louisiana, and over 40,000 were in the dark in Mississippi, according to PowerOutage.US, which tracks outages nationwide.

In New Orleans, wind tore at awnings and caused buildings to sway and water to spill out of Lake Pontchartrain. The Coast Guard office in New Orleans received more than a dozen reports of breakaway barges, said Petty Officer Gabriel Wisdom. In Lafitte about 35 miles (55 km) south of New Orleans, a loose barge struck a bridge, according to Jefferson Parish officials.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spokesman Ricky Boyette said engineers detected a "negative flow" on the Mississippi River as a result of storm surge. And Edwards said he watched a live video feed from around Port Fourchon as Ida came ashore that showed that roofs had been blown off buildings in "many places."

"The storm surge is just tremendous," Edwards told the AP.

Officials said Ida's swift intensification from a few thunderstorms to a massive hurricane in just three days left no time to organize a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans' 390,000 residents. Mayor LaToya Cantrell urged residents remaining in the city on Sunday to "hunker down."

Marco Apostolico said he felt confident riding out the storm at his home in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward, one of the city's hardest-hit neighborhoods when levees failed and released a torrent of floodwater

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during Katrina.

His home was among those rebuilt with the help of actor Brad Pitt to withstand hurricane-force winds. But the memory of Katrina still hung over the latest storm.

"It's obviously a lot of heavy feelings," he said. "And yeah, potentially scary and dangerous."

The region getting Ida's worst includes petrochemical sites and major ports, which could sustain significant damage. It is also an area that is already reeling from a resurgence of COVID-19 infections due to low vaccination rates and the highly contagious delta variant.

New Orleans hospitals planned to ride out the storm with their beds nearly full, as similarly stressed hospitals elsewhere had little room for evacuated patients. And shelters for those fleeing their homes carried an added risk of becoming flashpoints for new infections.

Forecasters warned winds stronger than 115 mph (185 kph) threatened Houma, a city of 33,000 that supports oil platforms in the Gulf.

The hurricane was also threatening neighboring Mississippi, where Katrina demolished oceanfront homes. With Ida approaching, Claudette Jones evacuated her home east of Gulfport, Mississippi, as waves started pounding the shore.

"I'm praying I can go back to a normal home like I left," she said. "That's what I'm praying for. But I'm not sure at this point."

Comparisons to the Aug. 29, 2005, landfall of Katrina weighed heavily on residents bracing for Ida. Katrina was blamed for 1,800 deaths as it caused levee breaches and catastrophic flooding in New Orleans. Ida's hurricane-force winds stretched 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the storm's eye, or about half the size of Katrina, and a New Orleans' infrastructure official emphasized that the city is in a "very different place than it was 16 years ago."

The levee system has been massively overhauled since Katrina, Ramsey Green, deputy chief administrative officer for infrastructure, said before the worst of the storm hit. While water may not penetrate levees, Green said if forecasts of up to 20 inches (50 centimeters) of rain prove true, the city's underfunded and neglected network of pumps, underground pipes and surface canals likely won't be able to keep up.

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality was in contact with more than 1,500 oil refineries, chemical plants and other sensitive facilities and will respond to any reported pollution leaks or petroleum spills, agency spokesman Greg Langley said. He said the agency would deploy three mobile air-monitoring laboratories after the storm passes to sample, analyze and report any threats to public health.

Louisiana's 17 oil refineries account for nearly one-fifth of the U.S. refining capacity and its two liquefied natural gas export terminals ship about 55% of the nation's total exports, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Government statistics show that 95% of oil and gas production in the Gulf Coast region was shut down as Ida made landfall on Sunday, according to energy company S&P Global Platts.

Louisiana is also home to two nuclear power plants, one near New Orleans and another about 27 miles (about 43 kilometers) northwest of Baton Rouge.

President Joe Biden approved emergency declarations for Louisiana and Mississippi ahead of Ida's arrival. He said Sunday the country was praying for the best for Louisiana and would put its "full might behind the rescue and recovery" effort once the storm passes.

Edwards warned his state to brace for potentially weeks of recovery.

"Many, many people are going to be tested in ways that we can only imagine today," the governor told a news conference.

Associated Press writers Stacey Plaisance in New Orleans; Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi; Jay Reeves in Gulfport, Mississippi; Jeff Martin in Marietta, Georgia; Seth Borenstein in Kensington, Maryland; Frank Bajak in Boston; Michael Biesecker and Martin Crutsinger in Washington; Pamela Sampson and Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta; and Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report.

Ida slams Louisiana hospitals brimming with virus patients

REBECCA SANTANA and MELINDA DESLATTE Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Southern Louisiana's hospitals, already packed with coronavirus patients from a fourth surge of the virus, were dealing Sunday with another challenge — the howling Category 4 hurricane pounding the coast.

Lady of the Sea General Hospital in Lafourche Parish, near where Ida made landfall, reported extensive roof damage. "All patients and staff are fine at this time without injury; although, our hospital has sustained significant damage," hospital CEO Karen Collins said in a message relayed via Facebook. The hospital's phone system was down.

"Once it is safe to do so they will evacuate their small number of patients," state health department spokeswoman Aly Neel said in an email. Details on the number of patients involved were not immediately available.

Another Lafourche Parish hospital, Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, reported a partial generator failure to the state. Christina Stephens, a spokesperson for Gov. John Bel Edwards, said the facility "had not lost all critical power." She said some patients were moved to another part of the facility and the state health department was working with the hospital.

Ida struck as hospitals and their intensive care units were filled with patients from the fourth surge of the COVID-19 pandemic, sparked by the highly contagious delta variant and low vaccination rates across Louisiana.

Daily tallies of new cases in Louisiana went from a few hundred a day through much of the spring and early summer to thousands a day by late July. Gov. John Bel Edwards told The Associated Press on Sunday that more than 2,400 COVID-19 patients are in Louisiana hospitals, saying the state was in a "very dangerous place with our hospitals."

The governor also said 22 nursing homes and 18 assisted living facilities have been evacuated, though evacuating the largest hospitals was not an option because there simply aren't other places to send them. Anticipating that power could be out for weeks in places, Edwards said a big focus will be on making sure there is enough generator power and water at hospitals so they can keep up with vital patient needs such as providing oxygen or powering ventilators.

"I hate to say it this way, but we have a lot of people on ventilators today and they don't work without electricity," he said.

Officials at Ochsner Health, which runs the largest hospital network in Louisiana, said roughly 15 of the network's hospitals are in areas potentially affected by Ida. The network evacuated some patients with particular medical needs from small, rural hospitals to larger facilities.

Warner Thomas, president and CEO of Ochsner Health, said Sunday that the system decided preemptively to evacuate a smaller hospital in St. Charles Parish when the storm's track shifted a bit east.

He said 35 patients were moved to other hospitals in the region over a little less than three hours. When it comes to power at their facilities, Mike Hulefeld said, they are in pretty good shape. Three of their facilities in areas affected by Ida were moved to generator power in anticipation of losing city power.

Later Sunday the hospital system said they planned to evacuate all patients at two other hospitals in the system on Monday as soon as conditions allowed. One hospital, with 21 patients in Raceland, suffered roof damage while the other facility with 45 patients in Houma had roof damage and power issues. Other facilities have suffered roof damage, water leaks and some damage to windows that required moving patients. At the hospital's main campus just outside of New Orleans, Thomas said they'd had problems with water leaks but no structural issues and had performed some surgeries Sunday. They've had no injuries reported.

"We'll know a lot more tomorrow morning when we have daylight," he said.

Hulefeld said the hospital network ordered 10 days of supplies for facilities in areas that might be affected by Ida, and everything arrived Saturday. Each facility has backup power that was tested and a backup fuel truck on-site. Many of the chain's hospitals also have water wells in case city water goes out.

With people evacuating and potentially going to stay with relatives or in shelters, medical officials said

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they are concerned the hurricane could translate into more coronavirus infections in coming days just as hospitalization numbers are going down. Thomas said the hospital system has seen a decline in almost 200 coronavirus patients over the past week across all their facilities.

Officials said Sunday they have been making the rounds and talking to staff in the hospitals — often referred to as the “A Team” because they’re the ones that go into lockdown when a hurricane arrives and work until the storm passes and they can be relieved. The hurricane comes on top of the year and a half long pandemic that has been an amazing stress on health care workers, and many are sad and frustrated.

“Folks realize they got a job to do. There are people who need to be cared for,” Thomas said. “But it does take a toll.”

Dr. Jeff Elder, medical director for emergency management at LCMC Health, said the system’s six hospitals went into lockdown mode Sunday. Employees were going to stay at the hospitals for the duration of the storm arrived Saturday and early Sunday and would sleep there.

Elder said one of the first things their hospitals do when storms arrive is discharge patients who are able to leave. However, the patient load is high because of the pandemic so they’re not able to reduce by much. He said the hospitals in the system are more robust since 2005’s Hurricane Katrina.

“We’ve learned a lot since 2005,” he said. Key pieces of infrastructure are now raised to keep them out of flooding. For example, at University Medical Center in New Orleans, which was built after Katrina, the generator is raised, diesel supplies are protected and the first floor doesn’t have essential services so even if flood waters get that high nothing essential is lost.

All hospitals in the system have generator backup power, Elder said. He also stressed that communication is now much better between hospitals in the hospital system as well as with various levels of government.

US says drone kills IS bombers targeting Kabul airport

By KATHY GANNON, LOLITA C. BALDOR, TAMEEM AKHGAR and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press
KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A U.S. drone strike blew up a vehicle carrying “multiple suicide bombers” from Afghanistan’s Islamic State affiliate on Sunday before they could attack the ongoing military evacuation at Kabul’s international airport, American officials said. An Afghan official said three children were killed in the strike.

The strike came just two days before the U.S. is set to conclude a massive two-week-long airlift of more than 114,000 Afghans and foreigners and withdraw the last of its troops, ending America’s longest war with the Taliban back in power.

A statement from U.S. Central Command said that the U.S. is aware of reports of civilian casualties and is assessing the results of the strike. Navy Capt. William Urban, spokesman for Central Command, said that “substantial and powerful” subsequent explosions resulted from the destruction of the vehicle, which may have caused additional casualties.

The U.S. State Department released a statement signed by around 100 countries, as well as NATO and the European Union, saying they had received “assurances” from the Taliban that people with travel documents would still be able to leave the country. The Taliban have said they will allow normal travel after the U.S. withdrawal is completed on Tuesday and they assume control of the airport.

The Afghan official spoke on condition of anonymity because of security concerns. Witnesses to the drone strike said it targeted two cars parked in a residential building near the airport, killing and wounding several civilians. Officials had initially reported a separate rocket attack on a building near the airport, but it turned out to be the same event.

According to a senior U.S. official, the U.S. military drone fired a Hellfire missile at a vehicle in a compound between two buildings after individuals were seen loading explosives into the trunk. The official said there was an initial explosion caused by the missile, followed by a much larger fireball, believed to be the result of the substantial amount of explosives inside the vehicle. The U.S. believes that two Islamic State group individuals who were targeted were killed.

The official said it appears that the secondary explosion did significant damage to one of the buildings

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next to the vehicle. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss information about a military operation.

Dina Mohammadi said her extended family resided in the building and that several of them were killed, including children. She was not immediately able to provide the names or ages of the deceased.

Karim, a district representative, said the strike ignited a fire that made it difficult to rescue people. "There was smoke everywhere and I took some children and women out," he said.

Ahmaduddin, a neighbor, said he had collected the bodies of children after the strike, which set off more explosions inside the house. Like many Afghans, the two men each go by one name.

"We would be deeply saddened by any potential loss of innocent life," said Urban.

Earlier in the day, Urban said in a statement that the U.S. was confident that the missile successfully hit the target. And he said that the large secondary explosions indicated the presence of "a substantial amount of explosive material" in the vehicle.

The strike came two days after an Islamic State suicide attack outside the airport killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members. The U.S. carried out a drone strike elsewhere in the country on Saturday that it said killed two IS members.

President Joe Biden had vowed to keep up the airstrikes, saying Saturday that another attack was "highly likely." The State Department called the threat "specific" and "credible."

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 attacks, mainly targeting Afghanistan's Shiite Muslim minority, including a 2020 assault on a maternity hospital in Kabul that killed women and newborns.

The Taliban have fought against the IS affiliate in the past and have pledged to not allow Afghanistan to become a base for terror attacks. The U.S.-led invasion in 2001 came in response to the 9/11 attacks, which al-Qaida planned and executed while being sheltered by the Taliban.

The Taliban increased security around the airport after Thursday's attack, clearing away the large crowds that had gathered outside the gates hoping to join the airlift.

Britain ended its evacuation flights Saturday, and most U.S. allies concluded theirs earlier in the week. But U.S. military cargo planes continued their runs into the airport Sunday, ahead of a Tuesday deadline set by President Joe Biden to withdraw all American troops.

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said the U.S. has the capacity to evacuate the estimated 300 Americans who remain in the country and wish to leave. He said the U.S. does not currently plan to have an ongoing embassy presence after the withdrawal but will ensure "safe passage for any American citizen, any legal permanent resident" after Tuesday, as well as for "those Afghans who helped us."

In interviews with Sunday talk shows, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. was working with other countries to ensure that the airport functions normally after the withdrawal and that the Taliban allow people to travel freely.

The Taliban have given similar assurances in recent days, even as they have urged Afghans to remain and help rebuild the war-ravaged country.

Tens of thousands of Afghans have sought to flee the country since the Taliban's rapid takeover earlier this month, fearing a return to the harsh form of Islamic rule the group imposed on Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001. Others fear revenge attacks or general instability.

The Taliban have pledged amnesty for all Afghans, even those who worked with the U.S. and its allies, and say they want to restore peace and security after decades of war. But many Afghans distrust the group, and there have been reports of summary executions and other human rights abuses in areas under Taliban control.

The shooting of a folk singer in a tense region north of Kabul was bound to contribute to such fears. Fawad Andarabi's family said the Taliban shot him for no reason, just days after they had searched his home and drank tea with him.

"He was innocent, a singer who only was entertaining people," his son, Jawad, said. "They shot him in the head on the farm."

The shooting happened in the Andarabi Valley, for which the family is named, some 100 kilometers (60

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miles) north of Kabul, where the Taliban battled local fighters even after seizing the capital. The Taliban say they have retaken the region, which is near mountainous Panjshir, the only one of Afghanistan's 34 provinces not under Taliban control.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said his group would investigate the shooting, without providing any further information. The Taliban banned music as un-Islamic when they last ruled the country.

Andarabi played the ghichak, a bowed lute, and sang traditional songs about his birthplace, his people and the country. A video online showed him at one performance, sitting on a rug with the mountains behind him.

"There is no country in the world like my homeland, a proud nation," he sang. "Our beautiful valley, our great-grandparents' homeland."

Karima Bennoune, the United Nations special rapporteur on cultural rights, said she had "grave concern" over Andarabi's killing. "We call on governments to demand the Taliban respect the #humanrights of #artists," she tweeted.

Agnes Callamard, the secretary-general of Amnesty International, also decried the killing.

"There is mounting evidence that the Taliban of 2021 is the same as the intolerant, violent, repressive Taliban of 2001," she tweeted. "Nothing has changed on that front."

Baldor reported from Washington, Akhgar from Istanbul and Krauss from Jerusalem. Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed.

EXPLAINER: Ida similar to Katrina, but stronger, smaller

By SETH BORENSTEIN Science Writer

Hurricane Ida is looking eerily like a dangerous and perhaps scarier sequel to 2005's Hurricane Katrina, the costliest storm in American history. But there's a few still-to-come twists that could make Ida nastier in some ways, but not quite as horrific in others.

"The main story with Katrina was storm surge damage, and over a vast area. The main story with Ida will be a combination of wind, storm surge, and fresh water flooding damage," said meteorologist Jeff Masters, who flew hurricane missions for the government and founded Weather Underground.

Ida made landfall on the same calendar date, Aug. 29, as Katrina did 16 years ago, striking the same general part of Louisiana with about the same wind speed, after rapidly strengthening by going over a similar patch of deep warm water that supercharges hurricanes.

What could be different is crucial though: direction, size and strength.

"Ida will most definitely be stronger than Katrina, and by a pretty big margin," said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy. "And, the worst of the storm will pass over New Orleans and Baton Rouge, which got the weaker side of Katrina."

Ida was a strong Category 4 storm with 150 mph (241 kph) winds when it made landfall, "a sneeze away from becoming the fifth Category 5 landfall on the continental U.S.," McNoldy said.

Katrina weakened quite a bit before landfall, striking Louisiana as a Category 3 storm with 127 mph (204 kph) winds.

Katrina hit Louisiana from due south, while Ida is coming to the same part of the state from southeast. On Sunday, Ida's hurricane-force winds extended 37 miles (about 60 kilometers) from the center, compared to Katrina's hurricane-force winds that spread 98 miles (158 kilometers) from the center when it made landfall, McNoldy said.

"This has the potential to be more of a natural disaster whereas the big issue in Katrina was more of a man-made one" because of levee failures, said McNoldy. Levee failures pushed Katrina's death toll to 1,833 and its overall damage to about \$176 billion in current dollars, and experts don't expect Ida to come near those totals.

DIFFERENT DIRECTION

Ida came to the same general place from a slightly different direction. Several hurricane experts fear that

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difference in angle may put New Orleans more in the dangerous storm quadrant — the right front part of a hurricane — than it was in Katrina, when the city was more devastated by levee failure than storm surge. Katrina's northeast quadrant pushed 28-foot (8.5-meter) storm surges in Mississippi not New Orleans.

Ida's "angle is potentially even worse," McNoldy said. Because it is smaller "it's not going to as easily create a huge storm surge ... but the angle that this is coming in, I think is more conducive to pushing water into the lake (Pontchartrain)."

That northwestern path of Ida not only puts New Orleans more in the bullseye than it did in Katrina, but it also more targets Baton Rouge and crucial industrial areas, Masters said. He said Ida is forecast to move through "the just absolute worst place for a hurricane."

"It is forecast to track over the industrial corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, which is one of the key infrastructure regions of the U.S., critical to the economy," Masters said. "You're probably going to shut down the Mississippi River for barge traffic for multiple weeks."

Meteorologist Steve Bowen, head of global catastrophe insight at the risk and consulting firm Aon, said the impact will be felt beyond coastal areas.

"We're certainly looking at potential losses well into the billions," Bowen said.

SIZE MATTERS

The difference in size is not just physically huge, but it matters for damages. Storms that are bigger in width have larger storm surge because of the broader push of the water.

Ida "is not going to generate the huge storm surge like Katrina did, it'll have more focused storm surge like (1969's) Camille," Masters said.

But larger in size storms are often weaker, Bowen said. There's a trade off of intense damage in a smaller area versus less damage, but still bad, in a wider area. Bowen and Princeton University's Gabriel Vecchi said they don't know which scenario would be worse in this case.

RAPID INTENSIFICATION

Ida late Saturday and early Sunday feasted on an eddy of what's called the Loop Current, going from 105 mph winds to 150 mph winds (169 kph winds to 241 kph winds) in just eight hours. The Loop Current is this deep patch of incredibly warm water. It takes warm water off the Yucatan Peninsula does a loop in the Gulf of Mexico and spins up the eastern edge of Florida into the Gulf Stream. Water above 79 degrees (26 degrees Celsius) is hurricane fuel.

Normally when a storm intensifies or stalls it takes up all of the region's warm water and then hits colder water that starts to weaken the storm or at least keeps it from further strengthening. But these warm water spots keep fueling a storm. Katrina powered up this way and so did Ida, gaining power over an area with hurricane fuel more than 500 feet (150 meters) deep, "just a hot tub," McNoldy said.

"Running over these Loop Current (eddys) is a very big deal. It's really dangerous," said climate and hurricane scientist Kossin of The Climate Service.

In the past 40 years more hurricanes are rapidly intensifying more often and climate change seems to be at least partly to be blame, Kossin and Vecchi said. Hurricane Grace already rapidly intensified this year and last year Hanna, Laura, Sally, Teddy, Gamma and Delta all rapidly intensified.

"It has a human fingerprint on it," said Kossin, who with Vecchi was part of a 2019 study on recent rapid intensifications.

NEW EYEWALL

After a hurricane rapidly intensifies it becomes so strong and its eye so small that it often can't quite keep going that way, so it forms an outer eyewall and the inside eyewall collapses, Kossin said. That's called eyewall replacement.

When a new eyewall forms, often a storm becomes larger in size but a bit weaker, Kossin said. So key for Ida is when and if that happens. It happened for Katrina, which steadily weakened in the 12 hours before it made landfall.

Ida has started the process of eyewall replacement, but McNoldy said he doesn't think it matters.

"It has run out of time to do anything that would make a difference."

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HISTORY

Meteorologists have improved forecasts and they hope that Louisiana is better prepared than in 2005 with a stronger levee system. However, Bowen said Ida is coming a year after Hurricane Laura smacked Louisiana in 2020 with 150 mph winds.

"No U.S. state since 1851 has ever recorded back-to-back years of 150+ mph hurricanes making landfall," Bowen said. "Following Laura's landfall in 2020, Louisiana is about to make unfortunate history."

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears.

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Messi era begins as PSG beats Reims; Mbappe scores 2

By JEROME PUGMIRE AP Sports Writer

The Lionel Messi era has begun at Paris Saint-Germain, without a goal for the Argentine superstar but plenty of adulation and fanfare.

Messi made his debut for PSG on Sunday after coming off the bench midway through the second half in a 2-0 win at Reims in the French league.

Messi replaced his friend and former Barcelona teammate Neymar in the 66th minute and they shared a hug.

After years of glory for Messi at the 99,000-capacity Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona, the record six-time Ballon d'Or winner and four-time Champions League victor made his first PSG appearance at the modest 20,000-seater Stade Auguste Delaune.

Such is Messi's star factor that the home fans chanted "Messi, Messi" while a smiling Reims goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic took a photo of Messi holding a child after the game.

PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino was touched by the reception for Messi, pointing out that supporters of both teams were delighted to see him play.

"The welcome he got was something beautiful to see and hear, on the part of our fans but also the Reims fans," Pochettino said. "Messi was very happy about it. His presence generates more enthusiasm, everyone can feel it and it has an effect on the other players."

Before the match, hundreds of fans gathered for a glimpse of Messi as he descended the team bus and he waved back at them.

They wanted to see one of the all-time greats, along with Pele and the late Diego Maradona, who Messi adored.

Messi's incredible skill, close control, grace, vision, dancing feet, astute passing, speed of thought and execution have thrilled fans for years.

He netted 672 goals for Barca and won 35 trophies for the Spanish giant, including the 2015 Champions League alongside Neymar.

That was the last time Messi won Europe's elite trophy and, somewhat ironically, his last goal for Barca in the Champions League was a brilliant strike away to PSG last season in the round of 16.

The 34-year-old Messi, who led his nation to the Copa America title last month, joined PSG three weeks ago after his new contract with Barcelona fell through.

Striker Kylian Mbappe was named in the starting lineup as Real Madrid tries to sign him before the end of the summer transfer window.

Mbappe had already scored both goals before Messi came on.

He headed in Angel Di Maria's cross in the 15th minute and then turned in Achraf Hakimi's cross in the 63rd for his 135th goal since joining PSG in 2017.

"No, I wasn't surprised by his enthusiasm," said Pochettino, who did not comment on Mbappe's immediate future.

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For it remains to be seen whether it's his last for PSG, which has started the season with four straight wins and has 12 points.

OTHER MATCHES

French champion Lille and Monaco finally won their first games of the season.

Yusuf Yazici and Jonathan David scored as Lille beat Montpellier 2-1, and Sofiane Diop grabbed both goals as Monaco bounced back with a 2-1 win at Troyes.

Angers remains unbeaten and has 10 points after beating Rennes 2-0 at home.

Also, it was: Lens 2, Lorient 2; Strasbourg 3, Brest 1; Clermont 2, Metz 2.

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Actor Ed Asner, TV's blustery Lou Grant, dies at 91

By MARCELA ISAZA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ed Asner, the burly and prolific character actor who became a star in middle age as the gruff but lovable newsman Lou Grant, first in the hit comedy "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and later in the drama "Lou Grant," died Sunday. He was 91.

Asner's representative confirmed the actor's death in an email to The Associated Press. Asner's official Twitter account included a note from his children: "We are sorry to say that our beloved patriarch passed away this morning peacefully. Words cannot express the sadness we feel. With a kiss on your head—Goodnight dad. We love you."

Built like the football lineman he once was, the balding Asner was a journeyman actor in films and TV when he was hired in 1970 to play Lou Grant on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." For seven seasons he was the ruffled boss to Moore's ebullient Mary Richards (He called her "Mary," she called him "Mr. Grant") at the fictional Minneapolis TV newsroom where both worked. Later, he would play the role for five years on "Lou Grant."

Asner's character had caught on from the first episode of "Mary Tyler Moore," when he told Mary in their initial meeting, "You've got spunk. ... I hate spunk!" The inspired cast included Ted Knight as Ted Baxter, the dimwitted news anchor; Gavin MacLeod as Murray Slaughter, the sarcastic news writer; and Betty White as the manipulative, sex-obsessed home show hostess Sue Ann Nivens. Valerie Harper and Cloris Leachman, playing Mary's neighbors, both saw their characters spun off into their own shows.

Asner is the third "Mary Tyler Moore" alum to die in recent months. Leachman died in January and MacLeod died in May.

The 99-year-old White is the lone surviving main cast member from "Mary Tyler Moore."

"Mary Tyler Moore" was still a hit when the star decided to pursue other interests, and so it was brought to an end in the seventh season with a hilarious finale in which all of the principals were fired except for the bumbling Baxter.

Asner went immediately into "Lou Grant," his character moving from Minneapolis to Los Angeles to become city editor of the Tribune, a crusading newspaper under the firm hand of Publisher Margaret Pynchon, memorably played by Nancy Marchand.

Asner won three best supporting actor Emmys on "Mary Tyler Moore" and two best actor awards on "Lou Grant." He also won Emmys for his roles in the miniseries "Rich Man, Poor Man" (1975-1976) and "Roots" (1976-1977).

He had more than 300 acting credits and remained active throughout his 70s and 80s in a variety of film and TV roles. In 2003, he played Santa Claus in Will Ferrell's hit film "Elf." He was John Goodman's father in the short-lived 2004 CBS comedy "Center of the Universe" and the voice of the elderly hero in the hit 2009 Pixar release, "Up." More recently, he was in such TV series as "Forgive Me" and "Dead to Me."

Nonetheless, Asner told The Associated Press in 2009 that interesting roles were hard to come by.

"I never get enough work," he said. "It's the history of my career. There just isn't anything to turn down, let me put it that way."

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"I'd say most people are probably in that same boat, old people, and it's a shame," he said.

As Screen Actors Guild president, the liberal Asner was caught up in a political controversy in 1982 when he spoke out against U.S. involvement with repressive governments in Latin America. "Lou Grant" was canceled during the furor that followed and he did not run for a third SAG term in 1985.

"There have been few actors of Ed Asner's prominence who risked their status to fight for social causes the way Ed did," said actor Gabrielle Carteris, who is SAG-AFTRA's president. She noted that his advocacy "did not stop with performers. He fought for victims of poverty, violence, war, and legal and social injustice, both in the United States and around the globe."

Asner discussed his politicization in a 2002 interview, noting he had begun his career during the McCarthy era and for years had been afraid to speak out for fear of being blacklisted.

Then he saw a nun's film depicting the cruelties inflicted by El Salvador's government on that country's citizens.

"I stepped out to complain about our country's constant arming and fortifying of the military in El Salvador, who were oppressing their people," he said.

Former SAG President Charlton Heston and others accused him of making un-American statements and of misusing his position as head of their actors union.

"We even had bomb threats at the time. I had armed guards," Asner recalled.

The actor blamed the controversy for ending the five-year run of "Lou Grant," although CBS insisted declining ratings were the reason the show was canceled.

Although the show had its light moments, its scripts touched on a variety of darker social issues that most series wouldn't touch at the time, including alcoholism and homelessness. Asner remained politically active for the rest of his life and in 2017 published the book "The Grouchy Historian: An Old-Time Lefty Defends Our Constitution Against Right-Wing Hypocrites and Nutjobs."

Asner, born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1929, almost became a newsman in real life. He studied journalism at the University of Chicago until a professor told him there was little money to be made in the profession.

He quickly switched to drama, debuting as the martyred Thomas Becket in a campus production of T.S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral."

He eventually dropped out of school, going to work as a taxi driver and other jobs before being drafted in 1951. He served with the Army Signal Corps in France.

Returning to Chicago after military service, he appeared at the Playwrights Theatre Club and Second City, the famed satire troupe that launched the careers of dozens of top comedians.

Later, in New York, he joined the long-running "The Threepenny Opera" and appeared opposite Jack Lemmon in "Face of a Hero."

Arriving in Hollywood in 1961 for an episode of television's "Naked City," Asner decided to stay and appeared in numerous movies and TV shows, including the film "El Dorado," opposite John Wayne; and the Elvis Presley vehicles "Kid Galahad" and "Change of Habit." He was a regular in the 1960s political drama series "Slattery's People."

He was married twice, to Nancy Lou Sykes and Cindy Gilmore, and had four children, Matthew, Liza, Kate and Charles.

This story has been corrected to reflect that Gavin MacLeod died in May, not March.

Late Associated Press writer Bob Thomas contributed biographical information to this report.

US airlifts aid to Haiti to reach areas hardest hit by quake

By BEN FOX Associated Press

JEREMIE, Haiti (AP) — U.S. military aircraft are now ferrying food, tarps and other material into southern Haiti amid a shift in the international relief effort to focus on helping people in the areas hardest hit by the recent earthquake to make it through the hurricane season.

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Aircraft flying out of the capital, Port-au-Prince, arrived throughout the day Saturday in the mostly rural, mountainous southern peninsula that was the epicenter of the Aug. 14 earthquake. In Jeremie, people waved and cheered as a Marine Corps unit from North Carolina descended in a tilt-rotor Osprey with pallets of rice, tarps and other supplies.

Most of the supplies, however, were not destined for Jeremie. They were for distribution to remote mountain communities where landslides destroyed homes and the small plots of the many subsistence farmers in the area, said Patrick Tiné of Haiti Bible Mission, one of several groups coordinating the delivery of aid.

"They lost their gardens, they lost their animals," Tiné said as he took a break from helping unload boxes of rice. "The mountains slid down and they lost everything."

At the request of the Haitian government, getting as much help to such people as fast as possible is now the focus of the \$32 million U.S. relief effort, said Tim Callaghan, a disaster response team leader for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In the immediate aftermath of the magnitude 7.2 earthquake, which killed more than 2,200 people and damaged or destroyed more than 100,000 homes, the focus was on search and rescue.

That was complicated by heavy rain from Tropical Storm Grace as well as earthquake damage to roads and bridges, in an area where the infrastructure was in bad shape to begin with. The threat of gangs, in a country still reeling from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moise, also made it hard to distribute aid. As a result, many Haitians had grown increasingly impatient with relief efforts.

"We're just trying to get as much material out to the most affected areas as fast as we can. If you do that, then the frustration level goes down," Callaghan said over the roar of helicopters at the Port-au-Prince airport, where U.S. troops and civilian aid workers labored to load aircraft with pallets in the hot sun.

That is where the U.S. military comes into play. Troops under the direction of Miami-based U.S. Southern Command have so far delivered more than 265,000 pounds of relief assistance.

Among those troops is the unit from North Carolina, known as the Fighting Griffins and based at the New River Marine Corps Air Station, which allowed Associated Press journalists to come along as they delivered emergency supplies.

Two crews took off from Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, flew to Port-au-Prince to pick up supplies, and then made multiple trips across the mountainous southern peninsula to deliver their loads. They stopped only to refuel on board the USS Arlington off the coast of Haiti.

It was an upbeat mission, with the flight crew and pilots helping the Haitian aid workers unload the aircraft, then shaking hands as they said their goodbyes.

One crew, which delivered more than 8,500 pounds of goods on Saturday alone, brought along a Marine of Haitian descent from New York City as their interpreter. "It really means a lot to me to do something like this," said Lance Cpl. Lunel Najac.

The U.S. effort is expected to continue at least for several more weeks, though whether it will be enough to get people through the rest of the hurricane season remains to be seen.

"People need food, water, tents, tarps," said Wilkens Sanon of Mission of Hope Foundation, another of the groups working with the U.S. to channel aid to people who need it most.

"It is very, very bad right now," he said.

Biden pays respects to US troops killed in Afghanistan

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. (AP) — In hushed reverence, President Joe Biden stood witness with grieving families Sunday under a gray sky as, one by one, the remains of 13 U.S. troops killed in the Kabul suicide bombing were removed with solemnity from a military aircraft that brought them home.

The only sounds that could be heard during the mournful ritual of the "dignified transfer" were the quiet commands of the honor guards in battle dress who carried the flag-draped cases, the hum of the C-17 aircraft that had transported the fallen and the periodic sob of the sorrowful.

Biden and his wife, Jill, met privately with family members of those killed in the suicide attack near the

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Kabul airport before the president became the fourth commander in chief over two decades of war to stand at attention at Dover Air Force Base as the remains of the fallen from Afghanistan returned home.

The dead ranged in age from 20 to 31, and came from California and Massachusetts and states in between. Five were just 20 — born not long before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, that spurred the United States to invade Afghanistan in order to topple al-Qaida and dismantle their Taliban hosts who ruled the country.

They include a 20-year-old Marine from Wyoming who had been expecting his first child in three weeks and a 22-year-old Navy corpsman who in his last FaceTime conversation with his mother assured her that he would stay safe because “my guys got me.”

At their deaths, the 13 young service members were on the ground for the U.S. coda to its longest war, assisting a chaotic evacuation of Americans and of Afghans who helped the U.S. war effort and are now fleeing the Taliban after their return to power.

“The 13 service members that we lost were heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of our highest American ideals and while saving the lives of others,” Biden said in a statement Saturday. “Their bravery and selflessness has enabled more than 117,000 people at risk to reach safety thus far.”

Biden held his hand over his heart and appeared to shut his eyes in prayer as each transfer case was taken off the military aircraft and placed in an awaiting vehicle.

Family members of the fallen often travel to Dover to be present for the return of the remains of their loved ones to American soil. Thursday’s attack left so many casualties that military officials said the Dover Fisher House, which the Defense Department provides for families of the fallen, was not large enough to accommodate all the grieving families, so some loved ones stayed off base.

Biden was joined by several top aides, including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Eleven of the fallen service members’ families chose to allow their transfers to be open to media coverage. Two others took place out of view, but Biden was present for those as well.

Biden’s three most recent predecessors as presidents all attended such dignified transfers. It was Biden’s first time taking part in the ritual as president, but he has been here before.

Later Sunday, while getting a Hurricane Ida briefing at the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Washington, the president opened his remarks by telling workers that he had just come from Dover. “We met with the families of 13 fallen heroes in Afghanistan who lost their lives in their service of our country and while we’re praying for the best in Louisiana, let’s keep them in our prayers as well.”

Biden attended a dignified transfer for two U.S. soldiers killed in a suicide blast at Bagram Airfield in the final months of his vice presidency in 2016. In 2008, while a senator and at the request of the grieving family, he attended one for a soldier killed in a car bombing in Iraq. Biden told CBS’ “Face the Nation” that he had to get permission from the Pentagon to attend the transfer.

The 13 troops who died in Kabul were the first U.S. service members killed in Afghanistan since February 2020. That was when the Trump administration reached an agreement with the Taliban that called for the militant group to halt attacks on Americans in exchange for a U.S. commitment to remove all American troops and contractors by May 2021. Biden announced in April that he would have all forces out by September.

Eleven of the 13 Americans killed were Marines. One was a Navy sailor and one an Army soldier.

Associated Press writers Lolita C. Baldor, Robert Burns and Matt Sedensky contributed to this report.

Flames consume high-rise in Milan; residents evacuated

MILAN (AP) — Italian firefighters on Sunday battled a high-rise blaze in Milan that spread rapidly through a 20-story residential building and poured black smoke into the air. Residents were hurriedly evacuated.

Mayor Giuseppe Sala said there were no reports of injuries or deaths, but that firefighters were kicking down doors, apartment by apartment, to make sure there were no victims.

“We are sure that there was time to get out, but until the controls are finished, we cannot be entirely sure,” Sala told reporters at the scene. He said about 20 people were evacuated without incident.

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The 60-meter (nearly 200-foot) tall building, part of a recent development project, was designed to look like the keel of a ship and included an aluminum sail on its roof, which burned and fell to the street in pieces.

A huge plume of black smoke rose from the reinforced concrete building named the Torre dei Moro and was visible for kilometers (miles). Flames continued to burn inside nearly 3 hours after a dozen fire trucks and ambulances responded to the alarm.

One firefighter told the Corriere della Sera newspaper that the blaze was still limited when they arrived and firefighters were able to get residents out. Within an hour, the flames had spread from the 15th floor, where the fire appears to have started, quickly devouring the entire facade of the building.

Unidentified residents told Corriere that the panels on the facade were supposed to have been fire-resistant.

Firefighters say the fire involved a 20-story building. Plans for the project say it has 16 residential floors plus two underground.



Smoke billows from a building in Milan, Italy, Sunday, Aug. 29, 2021. Firefighters were battling a blaze on Sunday that spread rapidly through a recently restructured 60-meter-high, 16-story residential building in Milan. There were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)

Blake, paralyzed in police shooting, hopeful he'll walk soon

CHICAGO (AP) — A Black man who was left paralyzed from the waist down after he was shot by a white police officer in Wisconsin expects to be walking soon, an accomplishment he says is tempered by fears of it happening again.

Jacob Blake Jr. was shot seven times by a Kenosha police officer in August 2020, three months after George Floyd was killed by police in Minnesota. Blake's shooting set off days of violent protests in the city of about 100,000 people located midway between Chicago and Milwaukee.

Blake tells CNN he was able to take a few steps during his son's birthday celebration this past week, which he compared to sliding his legs through a woodchipper. Although he was "so geeked" by the moment that followed months of physical rehabilitation, he is not claiming victory.

"Yeah, I'm here, and yeah I'm about to be walking, but I really don't feel like I have survived because it could happen to me again," Blake told the network. "I have not survived until something has changed."

Blake said he continues to relive not only his own shooting, but other gun violence in the Black community. Last month, during Fourth of July fireworks when Blake was in Chicago with family, he called 911 over what he later realized was an anxiety attack.

"I'm hearing these booms (fireworks) and it's not scaring me because I got shot, it's scaring me because all of those people have gotten shot so every time a boom went off, I'm kind of imagining people dying," Blake said.

Blake was shot by Kenosha police Officer Rusten Sheskey after he and two other Kenosha officers tried to arrest Blake on an outstanding warrant. A pocketknife fell from Blake's pants during a scuffle. He said he picked it up before heading to a vehicle to drive away with two of his children in the back seat. He said

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he was prepared to surrender once he put the knife in the vehicle. Sheskey, who was not charged, told investigators that he feared for his own safety.

The shooting touched off chaotic protests in the Kenosha area, during which time an Illinois man allegedly shot and killed two demonstrators and wounded another. Kyle Rittenhouse faces two charges of felony murder and one charge of attempted felony murder in the attack that left Blake "furious" and "angry."

"For the reasons they said they shot me, they had every reason to shoot him, but they didn't," Blake said. "Honestly if his skin color was different, and I'm not prejudiced or a racist, he probably would have been labeled a terrorist."

After census, citizens panels seek sway in redistricting

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

The Indiana Citizens Redistricting Commission held numerous public hearings. It produced a report prioritizing redistricting criteria. Soon, the bipartisan panel will cap its work by drafting new voting maps for Indiana's nine U.S. House seats and 150 state legislative districts based on the latest census data.

Despite all that work and its official-sounding name, the commission created by a coalition of advocacy groups has no official role in Indiana's redistricting process. The actual line-drawing is being done by the Republican-led Legislature, which could ignore the commission entirely and use its overwhelming majorities to create districts that help the GOP continue to win elections for years to come.

Rather than amounting to a mere exercise in futility, advocates for redistricting reform hope the Indiana commission and similar efforts elsewhere can draw public attention to partisan gerrymandering and pressure the real mapmakers to temper their political inclinations. If that doesn't work, they hope their alternative maps ultimately could be implemented by judges resolving redistricting lawsuits.

"We think our process will produce better maps -- maps that better serve the interests of voters and communities," said Julia Vaughn, executive director of Common Cause Indiana, which helped form the citizens commission.

The once-a-decade redistricting process has ramped up with the recent release of 2020 census data showing how populations have changed in neighborhoods, cities and counties since 2010. U.S. House and state legislative districts must be redrawn to rebalance their populations. But mapmakers can create an advantage for their political party in future elections by packing opponents' voters into a few districts or spreading them thin among multiple districts — a process known as gerrymandering.

Redistricting can have significant consequences. Republicans need to net just five seats in 2022 to flip control of the U.S. House. After the 2010 census, Republicans who wielded mapmaking power in more states than Democrats used their ensuing edge in state capitols to reduce taxes, restrict abortion and pare back union bargaining powers.

Some redistricting reform advocates believe states can cut down on gerrymandering by shifting the task to independent commissions. Since the last redistricting, voters in Colorado, Michigan, New York, Utah and Virginia have created redistricting commissions — nearly doubling the number of states with them.

Ohio voters approved constitutional amendments that will require majority Republican lawmakers and executive officials to gain support from minority Democrats for new maps to last a full decade. But that didn't go far enough for some advocacy groups.

A coalition of left-leaning organizations formed the Ohio Citizens' Redistricting Commission, which launched a website, held public hearings and plans to draft maps that prioritize opportunities for minority voters and competitive races. Republicans currently hold a 12-4 advantage in Ohio's U.S. House seats and overwhelming majorities in both legislative chambers.

"This commission is modeling what we believe the official process should have done," said Jeniece Brock, vice-chair of the citizens commission and advocacy director for the nonprofit Ohio Organizing Collaborative.

State Senate President Matt Huffman, a Republican, said earlier this month that he was unfamiliar with the citizens commission. Huffman is a member of the official Ohio Redistricting Commission, which held its own series of public hearings last week about new state House and Senate districts.

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When the Indiana citizens commission hosted its hearings, retired software developer Rob Albrecht-Mallinger was eager to testify about his belief that Indiana's districts have stifled competition between political parties — resulting in primaries in which candidates try to appeal to fringe voters.

"We've got the technology of slicing and dicing voters down so well that you can have the appearance of compact reasonable lines," Albrecht-Mallinger told The Associated Press. "Yet you are really tricking everybody into making the primaries one-party partisanship contests, rather than an open election where both parties actually have to appeal to the most number of people."

Republicans held a consistent partisan advantage in Indiana's congressional and state House elections this past decade, according to an AP analysis that identified states where parties won more seats than expected based on their percentage of votes. Albrecht-Mallinger lives in the state's northwestern 1st Congressional District, a Democratic-held seat that will have to expand geographically because the census showed it is nearly 22,000 residents short of the new population target.

State Rep. Tim Wesco, the Republican chair of the House redistricting committee, didn't directly address an AP question about the extent to which his panel will weigh the recommendations of the citizens commission. But he said in an email that his committee will "consider all feedback" and added that "many citizens shared insightful information" during its hearings.

Dan Vicuna, national redistricting manager for Common Cause, said there are efforts underway across the country "trying to shame the legislature into doing the right thing."

But if lawmakers don't adopt citizens' redistricting suggestions, "we think it could be more powerful to judges, who have less of a partisan stake in how these districts are drawn," Vicuna said.

Though redistricting commissions are viewed by some as a way to reduce partisanship, that has not always been the case in states that have formally adopted them.

In Missouri, a bipartisan commission responsible for redrawing state House districts deadlocked repeatedly this month over who should be chair. Virginia's new bipartisan commission couldn't agree on a single consultant to help draft maps. Arizona's commission was criticized in May by Democrats for hiring consultants who they asserted had aligned with Republicans and disfavored Latino communities. And a recent decision by Michigan commissioners to hire a law firm that defended Republican-drawn maps elsewhere was denounced by Voters Not Politicians, the group that sponsored the ballot initiative creating the commission.

Faced with legislatures controlled by opposing political parties, Republican Gov. Larry Hogan of Maryland and Democratic Gov. Tony Evers of Wisconsin each formed their own citizens commissions to make recommendations to lawmakers responsible for redistricting. Maryland's Democratic-dominated U.S. House districts and Wisconsin's largely Republican state Assembly districts often are cited as some of the most gerrymandered nationally.

But lawmakers in those states are under no legal obligation to heed the commissions' recommendations.

When the Wisconsin panel was announced, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, a Republican, criticized it as a "fake, phony, partisan process." But Vos recently told the AP in an email that the Legislature is open to suggestions from anyone, "and if the Governor or his commission submit a plan, we will take a close look at it."

Maryland's top lawmakers appointed themselves to a separate advisory commission that will hold a dozen meetings. Senate President Bill Ferguson, a Democrat, said voters "instilled their trust in this institution" to conduct redistricting.

Howard Community College President Kathleen Hetherington, an independent voter who is co-chair of the citizens commission created by the governor, said she hopes lawmakers will embrace the panel's recommendations for new maps.

"What we've heard so far from Marylanders is that they want districts that are compact instead of looking like flying dragons or ketchup spills," she said. "And they also want districts that avoid breaking up counties into a lot of little pieces where that isn't necessary."

Hostile school board meetings have members calling it quits

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

A Nevada school board member said he had thoughts of suicide before stepping down amid threats and harassment. In Virginia, a board member resigned over what she saw as politics driving decisions on masks. The vitriol at board meetings in Wisconsin had one member fearing he would find his tires slashed.

School board members are largely unpaid volunteers, traditionally former educators and parents who step forward to shape school policy, choose a superintendent and review the budget. But a growing number are resigning or questioning their willingness to serve as meetings have devolved into shouting contests between deeply political constituencies over how racial issues are taught, masks in schools, and COVID-19 vaccines and testing requirements.

In his letter of resignation from Wisconsin's Oconomowoc Area School Board, Rick Grothaus said its work had become "toxic and impossible to do."

"When I got on, I knew it would be difficult," Grothaus, a retired educator, said by phone. "But I wasn't ready or prepared for the vitriolic response that would occur, especially now that the pandemic seemed to just bring everything out in a very, very harsh way. It made it impossible to really do any kind of meaningful work."

He resigned Aug. 15 along with two other members, including Dan Raasch, who wondered if his car and windshield would be intact after meetings.

The National School Boards Association's interim executive director, Chip Slaven, said there isn't evidence of widespread departures, but he and several board members reached by The Associated Press said the charged political climate that has seeped from the national stage into their meetings has made a difficult job even more challenging, if not impossible.

In Vail, Arizona, speakers at a recent meeting took turns blasting school board members over masks, vaccines and discussions of race in schools — even though the board had no plans to act on, or even discuss, any of those topics. "It's my constitutional right to be as mean as I want to you guys," one woman said.

The board moved on after more than an hour, only to be interrupted by more shouting. Board member Allison Pratt recalled thinking that if she weren't already on the board, she wouldn't aspire to be.

"There is starting to be an inherent distrust for school boards, that there's some notion that we are out to indoctrinate children or to undermine parents or things like that, when we are on the same team," said Pratt, who has been on the board six years. "We are here to help children."

Pratt said she strives to view issues from the perspective of even the most extreme members of the community, and she has no plans to resign. But she has stepped up security at her home.

Police have been called to intervene in places including Vail, where parents protesting a mask mandate pushed their way into a board room in April, and in Mesa County, Colorado, where Doug Levinson was among school board members escorted to their cars by officers who had been unable to de-escalate a raucous Aug. 17 meeting. "Why am I doing this?" Levinson asked himself.

Kurt Thigpen wrote in leaving the Washoe County, Nevada, school board that he considered suicide amid relentless bullying and threats led by people who didn't live in the county, let alone have children in the schools. "I was constantly looking over my shoulder," he wrote in July.

Susan Crenshaw resigned from the Craig County, Virginia, school board this month with more than a year left in her term after being "blindsided," she said, by her board's decision to defy the state's mask mandate in a move that she said felt more driven by political than educational considerations.

"This is something that's come into play against government overreach and tyranny and other things that have absolutely nothing to do with the education of children," said Crenshaw, who taught for 31 years and whose district has just 500 students. "It's a bigger issue than the mask. I just feel like the mask is the spark or trigger that got this dialogue started."

While experts say the widespread use of masks can effectively limit virus transmission in school buildings, opponents say they restrict breathing and the ability of children to read social cues. Conflicts over masks have put some boards in Florida, Texas and Arizona at odds with their Republican governors.

In several states, embattled board members who do not resign are facing recall efforts. Ballotpedia lists

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59 school board recall efforts against 147 board members in 2021.

Vail board President Jon Aitken is among them, targeted by critics who say the mental and physical health of students has declined under pandemic restrictions. The Arizona board has faced contentious issues in recent years, including the Red for Ed movement three years ago, when 50,000 people rallied at the state Capitol for increased education funding. But he said this is different.

"That was a very real issue, with legitimate concerns on both sides," Aitken said. Much of what is said today, is false or simply made up, he said.

Even so, Slaven said many sitting board members are more enthusiastic than ever because their work, amid a public health crisis, has taken on new importance.

"You actually now know what you do is important. The decisions you make as an elected official have ramifications," he said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Aug. 30, the 242nd day of 2021. There are 123 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 30, 1967, the Senate confirmed the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as the first Black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

On this date:

In 1861, Union Gen. John C. Fremont instituted martial law in Missouri and declared slaves there to be free. (However, Fremont's emancipation order was countermanded by President Abraham Lincoln.)

In 1905, Ty Cobb made his major-league debut as a player for the Detroit Tigers, hitting a double in his first at-bat in a game against the New York Highlanders. (The Tigers won, 5-3.)

In 1945, U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur arrived in Japan to set up Allied occupation headquarters.

In 1983, Guion (GY'-un) S. Bluford Jr. became the first Black American astronaut to travel in space as he blasted off aboard the Challenger.

In 1987, a redesigned space shuttle booster, created in the wake of the Challenger disaster, roared into life in its first full-scale test-firing near Brigham City, Utah.

In 1992, the television series "Northern Exposure" won six Emmy Awards, including best drama series, while "Murphy Brown" received three Emmys, including best comedy series.

In 1993, "The Late Show with David Letterman" premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1997, Americans received word of the car crash in Paris that claimed the lives of Princess Diana, her boyfriend, Dodi Fayed (DOH'-dee FY'-ehd), and their driver, Henri (AHN'-ree) Paul. (Because of the time difference, it was August 31 where the crash occurred.)

In 2005, a day after Hurricane Katrina hit, floods were covering 80 percent of New Orleans, looting continued to spread and rescuers in helicopters and boats picked up hundreds of stranded people.

In 2007, in a serious breach of nuclear security, a B-52 bomber armed with six nuclear warheads flew cross-country unnoticed; the Air Force later punished 70 people.

In 2012, Mitt Romney launched his fall campaign for the White House with a rousing, personal speech to the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida, proclaiming that America needs "jobs, lots of jobs."

In 2015, the White House announced that President Barack Obama would change the name of North America's tallest mountain peak from Mount McKinley to Denali, bestowing the traditional Alaska Native name on the eve of a historic presidential visit to Alaska.

Ten years ago: National Guard helicopters rushed food and water to a dozen cut-off Vermont towns after the rainy remnants of Hurricane Irene washed out roads and bridges in a deluge that had taken many people in the landlocked New England state by surprise. Libyan rebels said they were closing in on Moammar Gadhafi and issued an ultimatum to loyalists in his hometown of Sirte (surt), his main remaining bastion: Surrender, or face attack.

Five years ago: Republican U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio and Democratic U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy each easily

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won their Florida Senate primaries; Rubio won the election the following November. U.S. Sen. John McCain beat back an Arizona primary challenge from a Republican tea party activist, Kelli Ward, to win the right to seek a sixth Senate term in November (McCain went on to defeat Democrat Ann Kirkpatrick and Green Party candidate Gary Swing).

One year ago: President Donald Trump praised supporters who clashed with Black Lives Matter protesters in Portland, Oregon, calling them "great patriots"; Trump and Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler blamed each other for the violence. A tally kept by Johns Hopkins University found that the number of confirmed coronavirus cases globally had topped 25 million; the U.S. led the count with 5.9 million cases. Lady Gaga won multiple honors at the MTV Video Music Awards, most of them for her hit with Ariana Grande, "Rain on Me," while The Weeknd took home the top prize.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elizabeth Ashley is 82. Actor Ben Jones is 80. Actor John Kani is 79. Cartoonist R. Crumb is 78. Olympic gold medal skier Jean-Claude Killy (zhahn-KLOHD' kee-LEE') is 78. Comedian Lewis Black is 73. Actor Timothy Bottoms is 70. Actor David Paymer is 67. Jazz musician Gerald Albright is 64. Actor Michael Chiklis is 58. Actor Michael Michele is 55. Country singer Sherrie Austin is 50. Rock singer-musician Lars Frederiksen (Rancid) is 50. Actor Cameron Diaz is 49. TV personality Lisa Ling is 48. Rock singer-musician Aaron Barrett (Reel Big Fish) is 47. Actor Raúl Castillo is 44. Actor Michael Gladis is 44. MLB pitcher Adam Wainwright is 40. Former tennis player Andy Roddick is 39. Singer Rachael Price (Lake Street Dive) is 36. Rock musician Ryan Ross is 35. Actor Johanna Braddy is 34. Actor Cameron Finley is 34.