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## Community Events

### 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

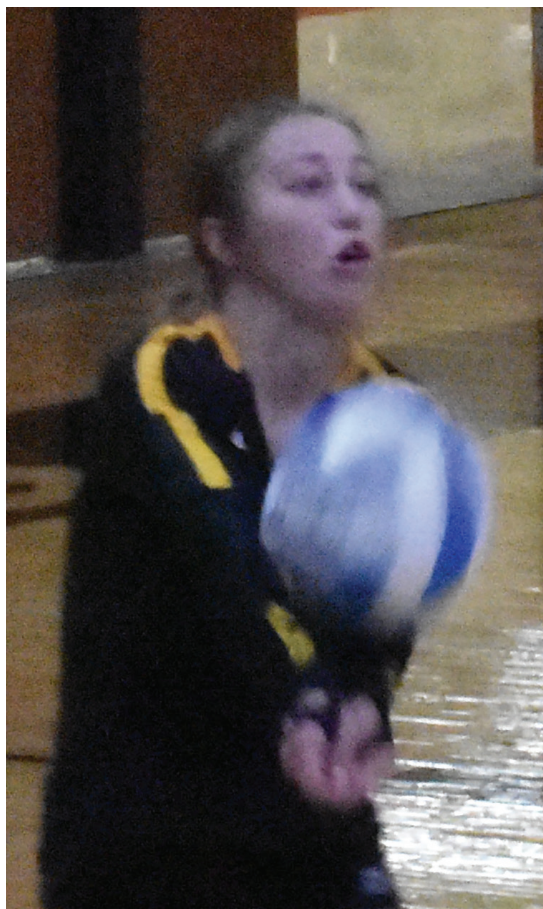


## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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**Alyssa Thaler**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



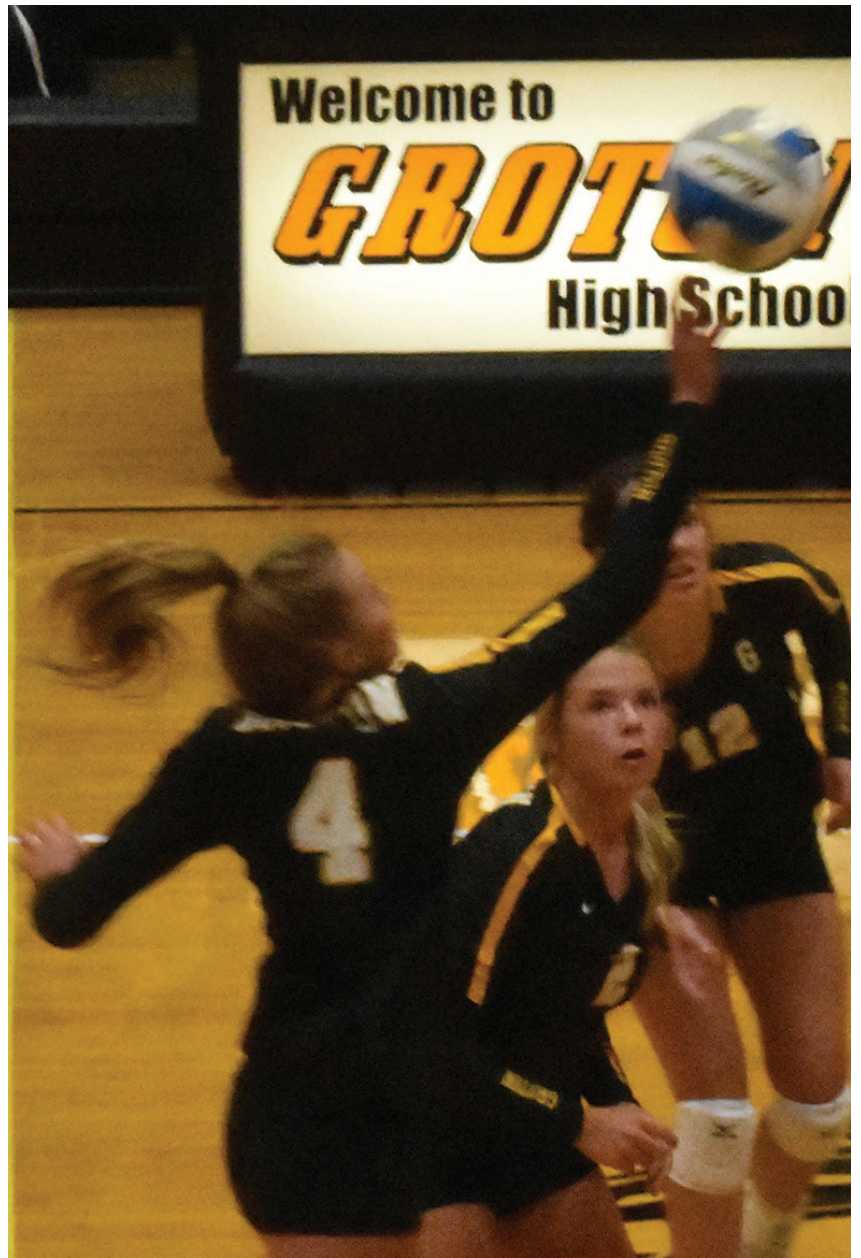
**Aspen Johnson**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**Madeline Flieds**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Sydney Leicht**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**Trista Keith**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Elizabeth Flihs sets for  
Madeline Flihs and  
Maddie Bjerke**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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**Allyssa Locke**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Anna Fjeldheim**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

## Selection Process for United States Senate Youth Program is Underway

Two South Dakota High School Students Will Be Selected for 2022 Washington, D.C., Program

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) today announced the annual statewide selection process for the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) has begun. Two South Dakota high school juniors or seniors will join student delegates from around the country to participate in the USSYP's 60th annual Washington Week, which will take place March 5-12, 2022, in Washington, D.C.

"The U.S. Senate Youth Program is an incredible opportunity for student leaders in South Dakota to learn firsthand about the inner workings of the U.S. government, policy making, and public service," said Thune. "This program is an opportunity of a lifetime, and I encourage all student leaders across the state to apply."

Each of the student delegates will receive a \$10,000 undergraduate college scholarship and an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C., for next year's program. During their trip to Washington, student delegates will potentially visit Capitol Hill, the White House, the Pentagon, and the Supreme Court, among other locations, and will meet with policymakers, which in the past have included members of Congress, the president, and cabinet secretaries.

Students interested in applying for next year's program can find more information by visiting the South Dakota Department of Education website or by contacting Mark Gageby ([mark.gageby@state.sd.us](mailto:mark.gageby@state.sd.us)), the South Dakota selection administrator, or their school's principal.

The deadline for submitting applications is Friday, September 24, 2021.

## Gov. Noem Statement on State Attorneys General Amicus Brief in Rushmore Fireworks Appeal

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, sixteen state attorneys general filed an amicus brief in the Kristi Noem, et. al. v. Deb Haaland appeal, which seeks to restore South Dakota’s annual Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration. Governor Noem thanked the attorneys general with the following statement:

“The Biden Administration’s arbitrary decision to cancel the Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration sets a bad precedent for other states who want honest and predictable federal processes,” said Governor Noem. “I am grateful for the sixteen attorneys general who are standing up with South Dakota so that we can return the Fireworks Celebration to Mount Rushmore and honor our nation’s birthday at America’s Shrine to Democracy for next year and in the future.”

The Amici States support Governor Noem’s challenge to the federal government’s unlawful decision denying South Dakota’s permit for the Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration. They argue that National Park Service’s decision-making was erratic, flimsy, and based on unsupported rationales. The denial itself was devoid of specifics, facts, data, and was internally inconsistent. The Amici States file this brief to defend a federal permitting process that is well-reasoned, consistent, and well-supported.

In particular, the Amici States criticize National Park Service’s contradictory rationale for using the COVID-19 pandemic as a purported reason to cancel the Fireworks Celebration. “Much of the letter refusing to grant South Dakota’s permit was focused on the COVID-19 pandemic,” write the attorneys general. “COVID-19 concerns did not prevent the National Park Service from holding a fireworks display on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. It was arbitrary and capricious to rely on the same concerns to refuse to allow a fireworks display at Mount Rushmore.”

The attorneys general are led by Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, who is joined by Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall, Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, Arkansas Attorney General Leslie Rutledge, Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita, Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry, Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch, Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt, Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen, Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, Oklahoma Attorney General John O’Connor, South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, Tennessee Attorney General Herbert Slatery III, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, and West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey.

## **Pandemic Intensifies Fight Over Ridesharing Worker Benefits Millions of Uber and Lyft drivers remain independent contractors without the safety net of benefits and labor protections.**

**Pinkston News Service**

WASHINGTON, DC-(Pinkston News Service)- A California judge recently struck down Proposition 22, a measure passed last year in the Golden State which would have exempted "gig" companies like Uber and Lyft from having to classify their drivers as employees. In 2020, Uber and Lyft spent more than \$200 million in support of Prop. 22 in an effort to keep their right to classify drivers as "independent contractors."

Today, an estimated 59 million of the nation's 157 million workers are in the gig economy, according to survey data from Statista. Gig workers are typically in the service sector, classified as independent contractors, and do not receive workplace benefits.

The gig-worker business model is well known for not providing a safety net for workers. Gig companies like Uber, Lyft, DoorDash and Instacart prefer to classify their drivers as independent contractors because it exempts them from offering traditional unemployment benefits, providing health insurance or contributing to their employees' Social Security or retirement plans.

Since the onset of the pandemic, some companies that use gig workers have tried to strike a middle ground by offering token benefits like discounts on car maintenance, healthcare subsidies, accident insurance and minimum pay while passengers are in their car. But many argue that these benefits simply don't go far enough, and still leave gig workers exploited and maltreated.

"Millions of gig workers are being denied basic workplace benefits that have formed the foundation of our country's labor laws for more than 100 years," said John H. Chuang, CEO of the workforce solutions and global staffing firm Aquent ([www.aquent.com](http://www.aquent.com)). "Now, with the rise of the gig economy, there is a corresponding rise in corporate greed as gig companies continue to defy the law by misclassifying their workers as independent contractors to avoid paying benefits. Gig workers should not have to choose between benefits and flexibility, and companies need to stop treating America's extended workforce as second-class citizens."

Many of these workers will face a new dilemma next week. According to a report from the Century Foundation, an estimated 4.2 million gig workers will lose federal benefits when the government ends Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) on Labor Day.

But plenty of gig workers already lost PUA (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance) after 19 states cut off benefits early, arguing that it disincentivized job seeking. The Century Foundation report, however, has found "no evidence" of increased hiring in those states. With the expiration of PUA across the country, gig workers have next to nothing left to fall back on.

Congress has extended pandemic unemployment benefits twice already, but there are currently no official plans from congressional leadership to extend the programs or introduce new legislation in time to avoid an interruption in relief.

In May, President Biden canceled a Trump-era rule supported by the gig companies that would have made it easier for them to classify workers as contractors. Biden's move was an attempt to apply a more open interpretation of what it means to be an employee.

But interpretations like Biden's will continue to be debated and challenged in the years to come. Stanford Law Professor and former chairman of the National Labor Relations Board, William Gould, said in a recent interview that "given the difficulties involved in reaching any kind of compromise, it's likely that they'll [gig companies] start over again and we'll have more of these ballots, more of these initiatives, more campaigns, more expenditures, more litigation."

As the debate over worker classification continues, it appears that a satisfying resolution to this issue is a long way off.



## Tax revenue scales to \$1.79 million at 2021 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally

PIERRE, S.D., -- The Department of Revenue's tax collections at the 2021 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally are currently at \$1,795,706.

The revenue sum from temporary vendors in the Black Hills is a 34 percent increase compared to 2020. The state sales tax accounted for the majority of the collections with \$1,038,561. At this time last year, the department collected \$785,251 in state sales tax. The department's 2021 collections also include \$334,661 in the state tourism tax and \$422,484 in municipal taxes.

"We had a banner year for tourism capped off by enthusiastic turnout for the Sturgis Rally," Revenue Supervisor Lori Haupt said. "These figures show that South Dakota is open for business and business is booming. Whether you operate a hotel, campground, or setup a temporary shop during the rally, it was a good year to be at Sturgis."

The 2021 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally featured an increase in temporary vendors compared to 2020. The 2021 rally topped at 1,014 temporary vendors, while the 2020 event had 784.

The Northern Black Hills, which includes Sturgis and all other communities in Meade and Lawrence counties, accumulated \$1,341,688 in tax from the 816 vendors present, a 36% increase from a year ago.

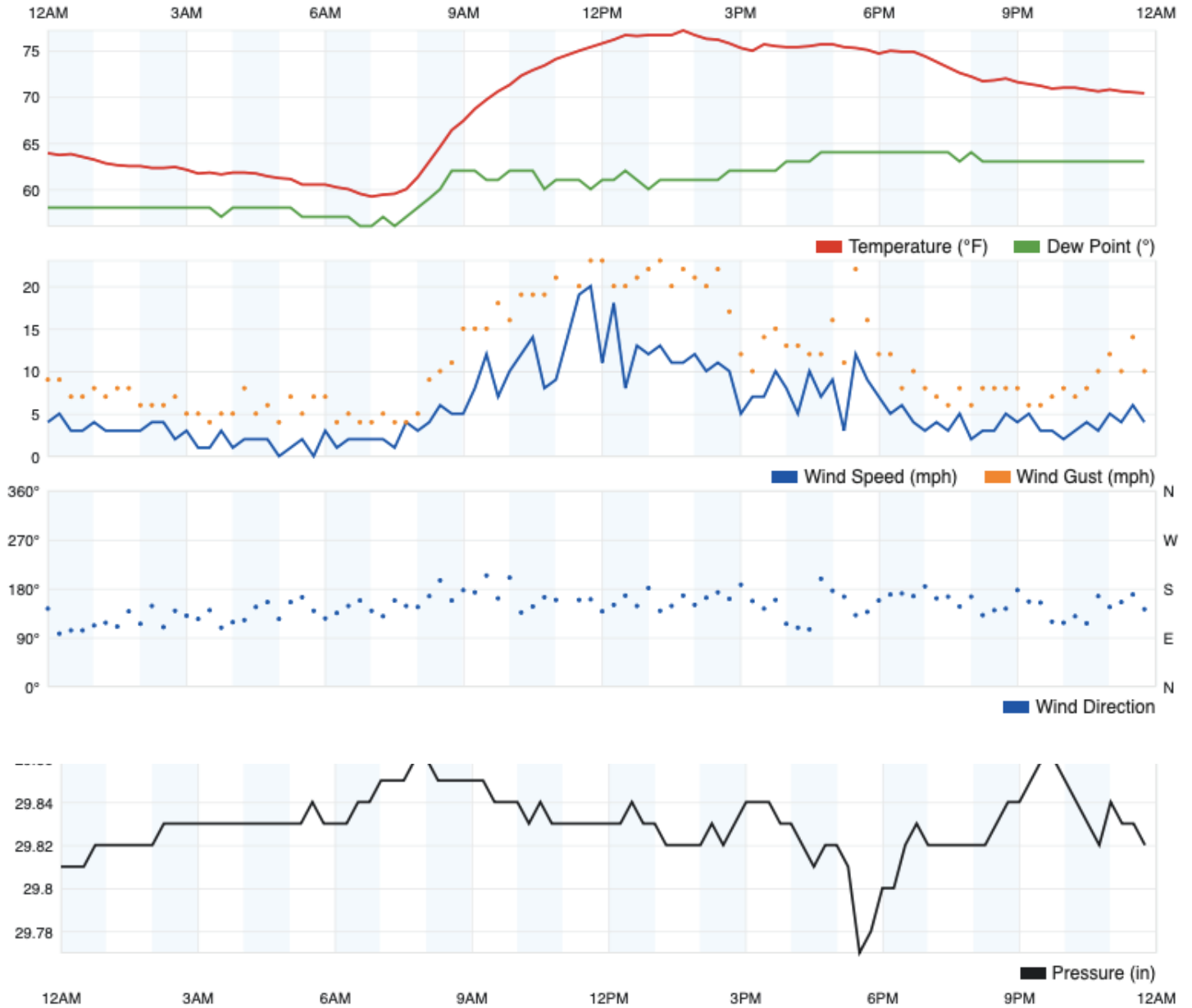
The Southern Black Hills, which includes Rapid City, Custer, Hill City, and Keystone, had 198 temporary vendors with \$454,019 in total tax collected, growing 27% from 2020.

Taxes collected at the 2021 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally included state sales, tourism, municipal sales, and municipal gross receipts.

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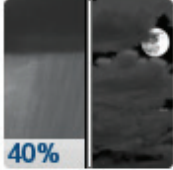



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
 90%	 40%		 30%	
Showers	Chance Showers then Mostly Cloudy	Decreasing Clouds	Chance Showers	Sunny
High: 68 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 73 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 75 °F

## Heavy Rain Spreading North

ISSUED: 1:55 AM - Thursday, September 02, 2021

### WHAT/WHEN

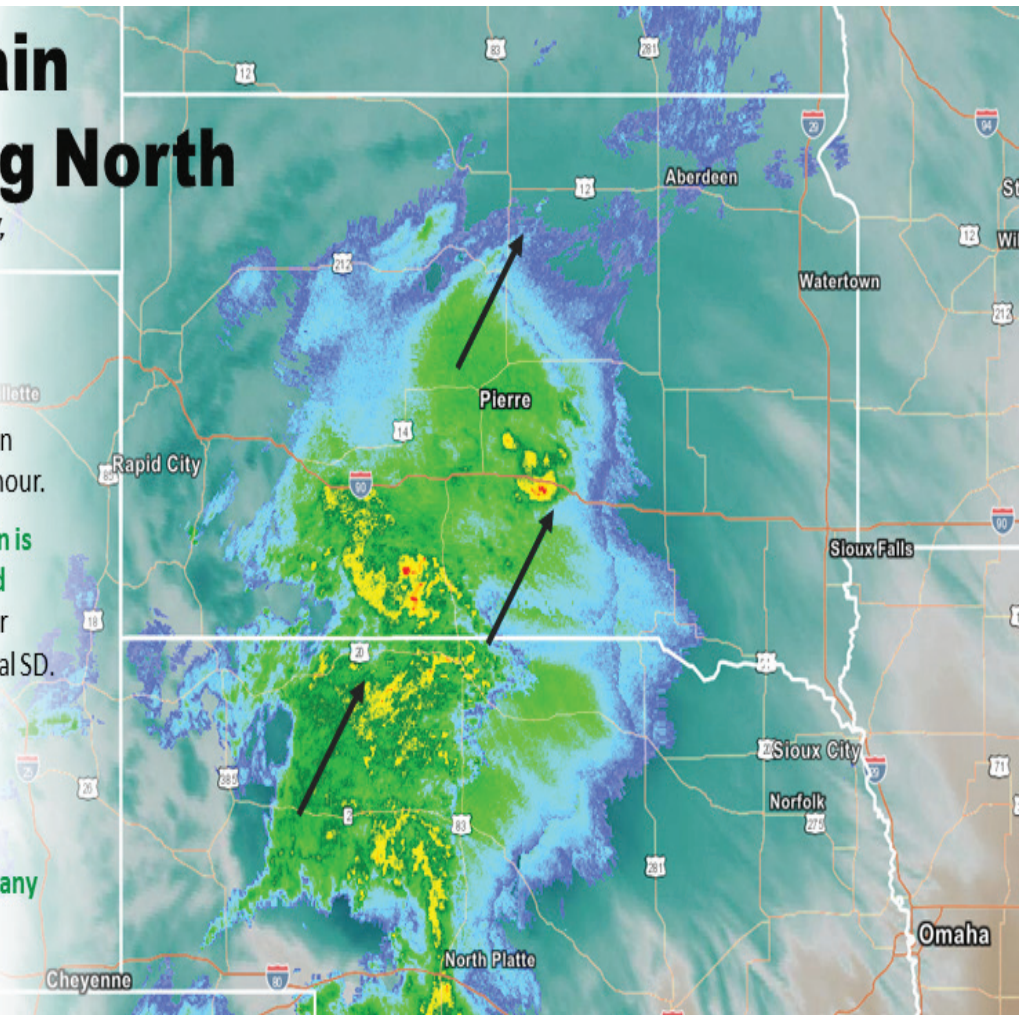
Showers and sub-severe thunderstorms are moving in from the southwest at this hour.

Rainfall totals of 1-3" of rain is expected across central and northeastern SD, with lesser amounts across north central SD.

Rain exits from west to east through the day Thursday.

### IMPACTS

Flooding is possible. Avoid any water-covered roadways!



A shield of steady showers and thunderstorms is tracking northeastward this early morning, and it will continue to do so through the day today. Appreciable rainfall amounts are anticipated for much of the area.

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## Today in Weather History

September 2, 1962: From 315 to 445 pm, hail fell in and around the Mobridge area. The hail ranged from 1 1/2 to 4 inches in diameter. The ground was covered up to 3 inches deep with drifts of 2-3 feet. At this time, the storm was one of the worst in recent history for damage.

September 2, 1983: A tornado touched down in the late afternoon 3 miles west and 1 mile south of Polo in Hand County damaging buildings, machinery, and trees. The roof of a hog house was torn off, and the north side of the building was destroyed. A barn was pulled several inches off of its foundation, and numerous trees were destroyed. At a nearby farm, two outbuildings were damaged, with two cows injured along with two calves killed.

September 2, 1985: Intense thunderstorms moved from south-central South Dakota to northeast South Dakota during the evening. Winds gusted to 60 to 70 mph over the area. Southwest of Presho, three small buildings were destroyed, and barns were damaged. Power lines and other property were damaged near Vayland, Miller, Wessington, Wolsey, Kimball, White Lake, Armour, and Castlewood. Large hail caused considerable damage to crops.

1775: The 1775 Newfoundland hurricane, also known as the Independence Hurricane, was a storm that hit the Colony of Newfoundland. It is believed to have killed at least 4,000 people, making it one of the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes of all time. The death toll in Virginia and North Carolina was 163 lives.

1882: Possibly the first photograph of a lightning strike was taken on this day by William Jennings in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1887: The U.S. Army Signal Service station in Greenville, SC reported a minimum temperature of 50°F. This observation at Greenville still stands as the record low for the day. Additional stations across the state recorded low temps in the low 50's.

1935 - Perhaps the most intense hurricane ever to hit the U.S. struck the Florida Keys with 200 mph winds. The hurricane produced a fifteen foot tide and waves thirty feet high. 400 persons perished in the storm on that Labor Day. The barometric pressure at Matecumbe Bay FL hits a record low for the U.S. of 26.35 inches. (David Ludlum)

1950 - The temperature at Mecca, CA, soared to 126 degrees to establish a U.S. record for the month of September. The low that morning was 89 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - After teasing residents along the Gulf of Mexico for two days, Hurricane Elena finally came ashore at Biloxi MS. The hurricane, packing winds of 127 mph, caused more than a billion dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Late evening thunderstorms in the Northern Plains Region produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Jordan MT, and a ""hot flash"" at Redig SD. The temperature at Redig rose from 66 degrees at 10 PM to 86 degrees at 11 PM as thunderstorm winds gusted to 36 mph. Nine cities in the Upper Ohio Valley, the Tennessee Valley and the Central Gulf Coast States reported record low temperatures for the date, including Elkins WV with a reading of 38 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably hot weather prevailed in the northwestern U.S. Afternoon highs of 98 degrees at Olympia WA, 98 degrees at Seattle WA, 105 degrees at Portland OR, and 110 degrees at Medford OR, established records for the month of September. Quillayute WA equalled their September record with an afternoon high of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Eight cities in the Gulf Coast Region reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the upper 90s. Houston TX and Port Arthur TX hit 99 degrees. Late evening thunderstorms, developing ahead of a cold front, produced wind gusts to 63 mph at Dickinson ND, and golf ball size hail in North Dakota and Nebraska. Winds along the cold front itself gusted to 62 mph at Buffalo SD. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002: An F3 tornado destroyed much of the downtown area of Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Overall damage was estimated at \$20 million, but there were no fatalities.

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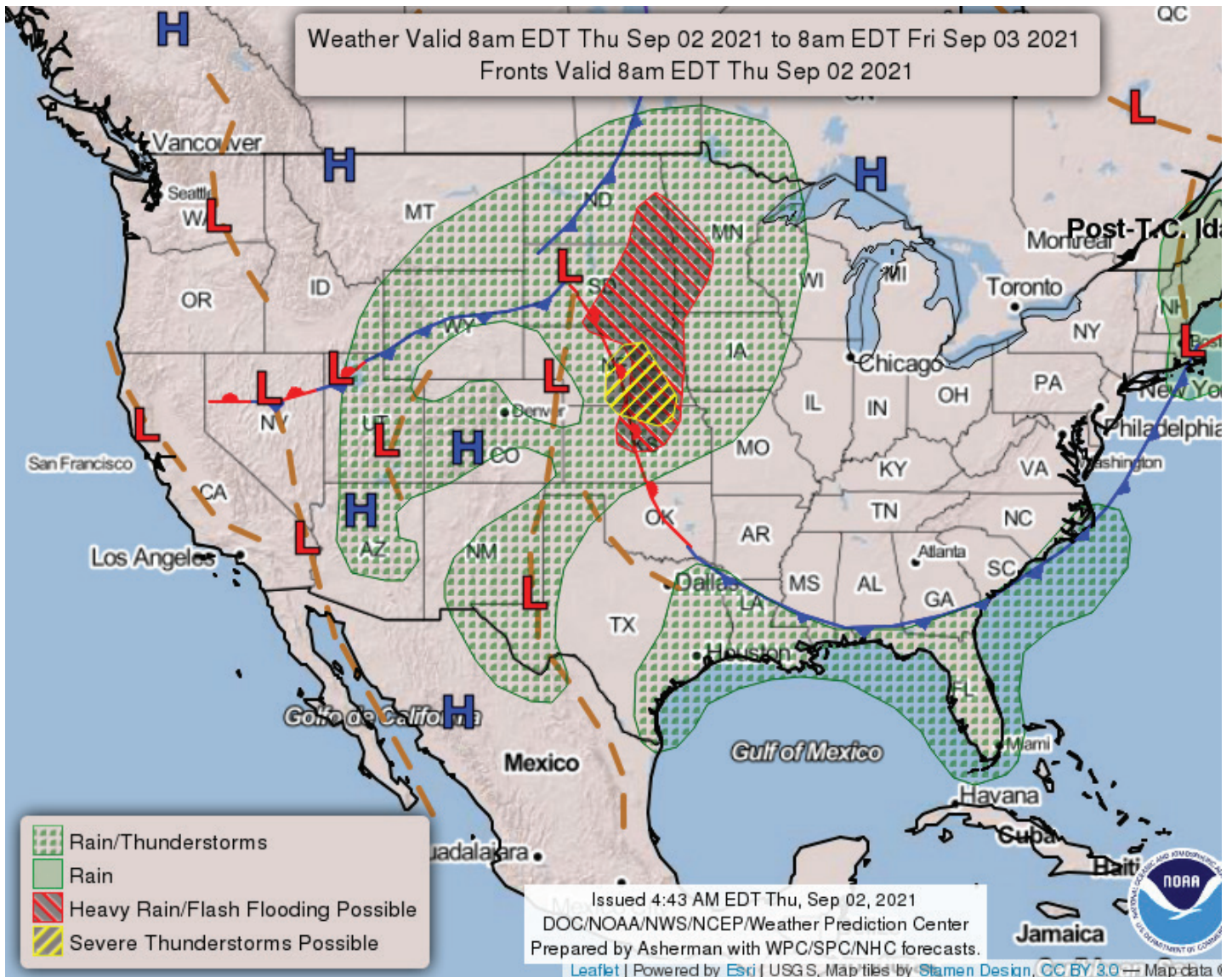
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 77 °F at 1:51 PM**  
**Low Temp: 59 °F at 7:04 AM**  
**Wind: 24 mph at 12:04 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 104° in 1913**  
**Record Low: 55° in 1994**  
**Average High: 80°F**  
**Average Low: 52°F**  
**Average Precip in Sept.: 0.14**  
**Precip to date in Sept.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 16.48**  
**Precip Year to Date: 13.14**  
**Sunset Tonight: 8:09 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:55 a.m.**



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## AGING IN GOD'S GRACE

Watching children grow into adulthood can be a marvelous experience. From crawling to walking, from uttering sounds that make no sense to carrying on an intelligent conversation is almost breathtaking. Growth is a gift of God and can bring blessings and happiness - especially when we grow into the likeness of Christ and share His love and grace with those around us.

The Amplified Bible provides a rich translation of Psalm 92:14. "Growing in grace," writes the Psalmist, "they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be full of spiritual vitality and rich in expressing trust, love and contentment."

Growth, for the Christian, is a lifelong journey. And those who grow in His grace and are filled with His mercy have much to live for and share with others. Imagine the satisfaction of having lived a life that honors God's Word, lives God's Good News and expresses His love. Can there be anything more important for the Christian than becoming stronger in our faith, clearer in our convictions, warmer in our love, purer in our thoughts and kinder in our words and deeds as we grow older and more mature in Christ?

We live in a broken world. Everywhere we look, we see people who have been betrayed by those whom they dearly loved and trusted. We see people writhing in pain and anguish as they search for someone to offer them hope and encouragement. We dare not let them down. We must honor them and help them heal with His hope!

What a wonderful opportunity God has given us.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to see the world as You see it and work with You to share Your love and grace. Open our hearts to share Your word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: [Growing in grace] they will still thrive and bear fruit and prosper in old age; They will flourish and be vital and fresh [rich in trust and love and contentment]. Psalm 92:14

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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

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-21-25-30-32

(one, twenty-one, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$67,000

Lotto America

10-15-43-47-49, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 5

(ten, fifteen, forty-three, forty-seven, forty-nine; Star Ball: six; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.65 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$323 million

Powerball

23-35-45-59-63, Powerball: 24

(twenty-three, thirty-five, forty-five, fifty-nine, sixty-three; Powerball: twenty-four)

Estimated jackpot: \$345 million

### South Dakota governor sends AG crash investigation to House

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Wednesday renewed her efforts to force the state's attorney general from office after he hit and killed a pedestrian last year, delivering to the House speaker an external hard drive containing the crash investigation file.

The House had indicated earlier this year that it might resume talks of impeachment after the trial against Attorney General Jason Ravensborg concluded. That happened last week when the Republican attorney general pleaded no contest to a pair of traffic misdemeanors for a crash last year that killed Joseph Boever, who walking on a rural highway on Sept. 12.

Ravnsborg avoided jail time but was sentenced to fines totaling over \$4,500 for making an illegal lane change and using a cellphone while driving. Investigators said his car had swerved onto the shoulder of the rural highway where Boever was walking and found that Ravensborg had been on his phone about a minute before the crash.

The Republican governor has applied maximum pressure on Ravensborg to step down, but so far he has resisted those calls and insisted he can carry forward in his office.

"The remarkable detail in this investigation file will assist the House in its important work of considering whether to proceed with impeachment articles for the Attorney General," Noem said in a statement.

House Speaker Spencer Gosch said he would be evaluating the investigation, but he had not determined the process in the House and what information would be publicly released.

Noem's secretary of public safety, Craig Price, said in a publicly-released letter to House Speaker Spencer Gosch that he believed the attorney general should have been charged with 2nd Degree Manslaughter.

"In my opinion as a 24-year law enforcement officer, and in the opinion of the highly trained highway patrol officers involved in this investigation, Mr. Ravensborg should have been charged with 2nd Degree Manslaughter," Price stated. "The prosecution team was well aware of that position."

Hyde County Deputy State's Attorney Emily Sovell, who brought the misdemeanor charges, said in February the evidence simply didn't support felony charges of vehicular homicide or manslaughter, which could have meant years of prison time.

The governor's office released a list of 65 items it was including in the investigation file, including cell-



phone data, interviews and crime scene mapping.

"Politics never entered into this investigation," Price said in his letter.

However, Ravensborg has charged that the investigation was exploited by "partisan opportunists." He did not name the governor, but his attorney, Tim Rensch, did. He said last week Ravensborg was not treated fairly by the governor, who oversaw the crash investigation.

## South Dakota lawmakers push to outlaw homegrown medical pot

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers looking to remake the state's voter-passed medical marijuana law previewed a coming battle in the Legislature Wednesday as they recommended outlawing growing medical marijuana in homes and allowing local governments to prohibit dispensaries.

A legislative subcommittee approved a spate of recommended changes to a ballot measure voters approved by 70% of voters last year. The law is set to take full effect in the coming months as the state government faces deadlines to issue medical marijuana identification cards and provide for the licensure of medical marijuana dispensaries.

However, the law will continue to be in flux. Republicans, who dominate the Legislature, are currently debating just how far to go in changing the law. The subcommittee Wednesday recommended changes that could potentially make it more difficult for people in rural areas to access medical marijuana — most significantly by striking all provisions allowing medical marijuana ID-card holders to grow cannabis plants in their homes and allowing local governments to prohibit dispensaries.

The recommendations will next face approval by the Marijuana Interim Study Committee before they can be passed to the full Legislature. The committee's recommendations will undoubtedly fall into a divide among Republicans on marijuana laws, with some pushing for tight restrictions while others reason that they risk defying the will of voters if they go too far. Gov. Kristi Noem's attempt to slow the medical marijuana bill from taking effect this year was halted by Senate Republicans who pushed less restrictive pot laws.

Republican Rep. Fred Deutsch predicted marijuana would be a hot topic once again in next year's legislative session, saying he was expecting a "wealth of marijuana legislation."

He said that allowing medical marijuana users to grow cannabis in their homes would result in a black market for the drug, especially if there is no cap on the number of plants allowed.

Deutsch argued that when voters passed the initiated measure last year, they were voting on whether they generally wanted the state to legalize medical marijuana, but the law also contains 95 sections that impact schools, local governments and law enforcement.

"I want medical marijuana to be accessible to anyone who qualifies for it," he said. "But I do want to put up guardrails and gutters to provide safety for South Dakotans that don't need it and don't need to be exposed to it, especially our children."

However, Democratic Rep. Linda Duba charged that the recommendations amount to gutting key provisions of a law that was "carefully crafted" and reflected the will of voters.

She said, "I'm tired of people saying they are following the will of the people, then they turn right around and say we know better what you meant, so we're going to restrict here, here and here."

## South Dakota hospitals bracing for monthlong virus surge

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's largest hospitals are bracing to receive a growing flow of COVID-19 patients over the next month, doctors for Avera Health and Sanford Health said Wednesday.

Top doctors for the health systems, alongside Sioux Falls Public Health Director Dr. Charles Chima, held their first public briefing in months as the state sees a wave of coronavirus cases spurred by the contagious delta virus strain. The state Department of Health has not held public briefings dedicated to the virus since June. At the time, coronavirus cases had reached one of their lowest levels since the pandemic began.

But over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has increased by 65% and

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one out of every 310 people in the state has tested positive for COVID-19 in the last week, according to Johns Hopkins researchers.

"We're seeing hospitals around us filling up with COVID patients," said Dr. Mike Wilde, the chief medical officer at Sanford Health.

The Department of Health reported 578 more coronavirus cases Wednesday. There were 229 people hospitalized with COVID-19 — marking the highest number of hospitalizations since January. Among COVID-19 hospitalizations, 78 were in intensive care, and 25 were on ventilators.

Wilde predicted cases and hospitalizations would peak in roughly one month, but Dr. David Basel, the vice president of clinical quality at Avera, added that there "are a lot of unknowns with the delta variant."

Both doctors said hospitals were ready to receive many more patients, but pressed for people to get vaccinated, wear a mask in public and take other precautions.

"Nobody wants to see the trying times we went through last year," Wilde said.

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Black Hills Pioneer. August 28, 2021.

Editorial: Use compassion concerning COVID-19 vaccine

The arguments for and against the COVID-19 vaccines run the gamut from pro- and anti-vaxxer camps to political affiliation.

But if all of us are to survive this pandemic, let's have a little compassion.

The back-biting makes calm, sensible discussion nearly impossible without being chastised. Could we just discuss the facts without making people ashamed to ask reasonable questions?

For months, South Dakota Department of Health officials have said COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective and the best hope of ending the pandemic.

Yet as of Friday, hundreds of thousands of South Dakotans who are eligible for the vaccine had not received one. The South Dakota Department of Health says 62% of South Dakotans have received at least one dose.

That is not because of a shortage of vaccine or a lack of places to get the free shots as was the case when the vaccines were first introduced.

Every eligible South Dakota who wants a shot can get one.

Heck, Gov. Kristi Noem even got one. And former President Donald Trump has encouraged people to get the shot.

Noem said time and again that she is not against getting vaccinated. She's against the government mandating that people get vaccinated.

Noem posted a video on her Facebook page this week encouraging every South Dakotan to choose to get vaccinated if they want to.

"That's your choice. And it should be your choice. Government shouldn't be mandating it to you," she said.

In the video, Noem goes on to say that she opposes President Biden's "illegal vaccine mandates."

Noem said she doesn't believe business owners should be mandating that their employees get vaccinated.

"If I start telling South Dakotans how to do business, it will destroy the freedom that made our state so strong in the first place," she said. "Frankly, I don't think that businesses should be mandating that their employees be vaccinated."

Some hesitate getting the vaccine because they believe there hasn't been enough research done on its effectiveness or side effects. However, on Monday the U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave full approval for the Pfizer vaccine.

There are still also pockets of folks that believe the whole COVID-19 pandemic is a hoax, or that it is blown out of proportion and not as deadly as the media says it is, or that the best way to achieve herd immunity is for everyone to get infected. These are not theories being promoted by the medical or research community.

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Local doctors, epidemiologists, and healthcare facility representatives have been consistently telling us over the last several months that the vaccine is the best line of defense against serious illness, hospitalization and death. Masking, social distancing, and avoiding large contained crowds also helps reduce the rapid spread of the virus.

It's up to each one of us to determine who and what information we think is valid, and then decide what to do with that information going forward. We are very fiercely independent people in this country, and many of us put a very high value on the right to make our own personal medical choices, without being told what to do. But we also need to admit that this is unlike any other virus we've dealt with in the past, and those same choices we claim we are making for ourselves, may very well negatively impact others in a serious way. They may even help this virus mutate and spread if we aren't careful.

Talk to your doctor. Do your research. Make the best choice for you, and maybe with a little compassion you will consider what's best for those around you also.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. August 30, 2021.

Editorial: Ravensborg Should Resign As AG

Based on what we now know, and perhaps on what we'll never know, South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravensborg should resign.

We now know Ravensborg's fate in the judicial process after his involvement in a traffic accident a year ago next month that killed a pedestrian in Hyde County. The attorney general took a plea deal last week just before his trial was to begin.

We have known about numerous details — ranging from the vague to the grisly — that have been tied to this case and have haunted our imaginations for months.

We know he faced charges only in regard to how he operated his vehicle, not in causing the death of Joseph Boever, who reportedly had been walking along the side of the road on the dark night of Sept. 12 when he was struck by Ravensborg's vehicle.

We know Ravensborg entered not-guilty pleas to the misdemeanor charges and, at one point, his lawyer attempted to make Boever's mental health the crux of the defense, an attempt that was dismissed by a judge.

We know that, shortly after that effort was scuttled, Ravensborg agreed to a plea deal that will keep him out of jail. He will pay \$500 plus \$3,742 in court costs. So, we'll never know how a jury would have weighed the evidence.

We know today that Ravensborg has pointed to "partisan opportunists" who have "manufactured rumors, conspiracy theories and made statements in direct contradiction to the evidence all sides agreed upon."

Thus, we know, as Gov. Kristi Noem pointed out last week in also calling for the AG's resignation, that Ravensborg has not accepted responsibility for this situation, despite the fact that he is both the top attorney and top law enforcement officer in South Dakota.

The attorney general has lost the respect of much of the public and, quite possibly, many of the law enforcement personnel under him.

Based on what we know of him when Ravensborg was a Yankton attorney, there can be little doubt that this incident has had a deep impact on him — how could it not? But his actions since the incident have seemingly focused much more on legal maneuvering and political calculus rather than a sense of public responsibility, humility and contrition.

His actions have not been those of an attorney general elected by the people, but as a defendant looking for any angle to save himself.

His actions also suggest his political ambitions are still intact.

He has shown little remorse, at least outwardly, as he strives to put all this behind him and, perhaps, to take control of the public narrative.

But it's not so easy. Among many other things, Ravensborg will still have to reckon with a civil lawsuit, and he may still face impeachment by the Legislature.

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And people will remember.

He has already lost the trust and the faith he needs to continue as attorney general.

Thus, he should not. He should resign.

END

## Midwest Economy: August state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for August:

Arkansas: The overall index for Arkansas declined to 69.3 in August from 71.2 in July. Components of the index were: new orders at 74.4, production or sales at 68.1, delivery lead time at 83.9, inventories at 53.7, and employment at 66.5. "Durable goods manufacturers in the state are expanding at a solid pace adding both jobs and hours worked, while Arkansas nondurable goods producers are experiencing more modest growth," Goss said.

Iowa: The state's overall index climbed to 68.2 from 67.9 in July. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 77.2, production, or sales, at 63.2, delivery lead time at 84.3, employment at 61.4, and inventories at 54.8. "Both durable goods and nondurable goods producers in the state are expanding at a solid pace. Metal products manufacturing and food producers are experiencing very healthy growth," Goss said.

Kansas: The Kansas economic index for August declined to 70.4 from 73.3 in July. Components of the index were: new orders at 74.5, production or sales at 71.2, delivery lead time at 84.4, employment at 67.1, and inventories at 55. "Both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state are advancing at a healthy pace. Nondurable goods producers are increasing the average hourly work week at a healthy pace," Goss said.

Minnesota: The August index for Minnesota dropped to 71.1 from July's 77.4. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 78.3, production or sales at 63.6, delivery lead time at 86.0, inventories at 58.7, and employment at 68.9. "Both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the states are expanding at a healthy pace. Durable goods producers are increasing the average hourly work week at a healthy pace with medical equipment manufacturers leading the way," Goss said.

Missouri: The overall index for Missouri rose to 75.2 from 71.3 in July. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 76.6, production or sales at 65.5, delivery lead time at 94.1, inventories at 61.6, and employment at 78.1. "Nondurable goods manufacturers in the state are growing at a solid pace while Missouri durable goods producers are experiencing more modest growth. Computer and related producers in the state are expanding at a healthy pace," Goss said.

Nebraska: The state's overall index for August dropped to 68.6 from 70.4 in July. Components of the index were: new orders at 74.7, production or sales at 63.4, delivery lead time at 85.4, inventories at 57.3, and employment at 62.3. "Both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state are expanding at a solid pace with food processors leading the way," Goss said.

North Dakota: The economic index for North Dakota fell to 63.6 from 74 in July. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 73.7, production or sales at 62.3, delivery lead time at 80.7, employment at 55.4, and inventories at 46.1. "Both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state are expanding at a healthy pace by expanding both employment and average hours worked," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The state's overall index remained in positive territory in August even though it declined from July's 72.7. Components of the overall August index were: new orders at 74.3, production or sales at 71.4,

delivery lead time at 83.6, inventories at 53.1, and employment at 59.3. "While expanding output at a solid pace, durable good manufacturers in the state are adding few jobs in the past several months while non-durable goods producers are expanding at a solid pace with food processors leading the way," Goss said.

South Dakota: South Dakota's economic index declined to 67.3 in August from 72.5 in July. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 74.1, production or sales at 62.8, delivery lead time at 82.8, inventories at 51.2, and employment at 65.2. "Nondurable goods manufacturers in South Dakota are expanding at a healthy pace, while durable goods producers are experiencing a much more modest expansion," Goss said.

## Defense attorney raises competency issue in fatal crash

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — The attorney for a Minnesota man accused of killing a Watertown woman in a traffic crash nearly two years ago is questioning the defendant's competency.

Defense attorney Tom Sannes asked Circuit Court Judge Carmen Means Wednesday for more time to obtain the medical records of 18-year-old Gage Stevenson. He's charged with first-degree murder in the 2019 death of 43-year-old Dawn Meyer.

Sannes also expressed concern that Stevenson's incarceration might be causing his mental health to deteriorate, KFGO reported. The Moorhead, Minnesota man appeared in court virtually from the Codington County Detention Center.

Sannes told the judge it was premature to enter a plea on Stevenson's behalf. Means granted a two-week continuance.

Watertown police say Stevenson intentionally swerved his fast-moving car into the path of Meyer's oncoming vehicle on Highway 212 in an attempt to take his own life.

Stevenson remains in jail on \$1 million bond or surety.

## Economy grows at healthy pace in nine Midwest, Plains states

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy keeps operating at a healthy pace in nine Midwest and Plains states, but supply delays and shortages of workers are limiting growth in the region, according to a new monthly survey of business leaders.

The overall economic index for the region slipped to 68.9 in August from July's surging 73.1, but it still indicates strong growth. Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests a shrinking economy.

"The region is adding manufacturing business activity at a healthy pace, and that regional growth will remain positive, but somewhat slower. Supply chain bottlenecks and labor shortages remain obstacles to growth," said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the monthly survey.

Businesses continue to report strong job growth although the hiring index slipped a bit in August to 64.6 from July's high of 67.2. Businesses say they are having trouble finding and hiring new workers.

Wholesale prices continue to remain high with that index registering 95 in August, down slightly from July's record 98.7.

So business leaders aren't exceptionally confident about the next six months. The confidence index slipped to 53.5 in August from July's 53.6.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

## Couple seeks to extend restraining order against Avon mayor

AVON, S.D. (AP) — An Avon couple is seeking to extend a temporary restraining order against their city's mayor which they accuse of fatally shooting one of their dogs.

Mathew and Ashley Counts have been granted a temporary restraining order against Mike Petrik which runs through Sept. 20. The couple is seeking to extend that order to keep the mayor away from their home for five years. The protection orders also including the Counts' five children, ages 3 to 8.

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Neither Petrik nor his attorney has filed a response to the temporary restraining order. A call to Petrik Wednesday seeking comment went unanswered.

The couple claims Petrik told them he shot the dog because it was aggressive, had been running loose around town and was a threat to the community's residents, the Press and Dakotan reported.

The Counts say they left their home in Avon the morning of Aug. 21 and returned later that night to find one of their three dogs which they left tied up the yard was missing.

The couple drove around looking for the dog, posted a message on Facebook and contacted Bon Homme County Sheriff Mark Maggs. The Counts said Petrik told the sheriff that he shot the dog and burned the body.

Circuit Judge Cheryle Gering has scheduled a hearing on the petition Sept. 20 at the Tyndall courthouse.

## **EXPLAINER: Congress asks tech companies for Jan. 6 records**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House committee investigating the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection has requested that telecommunications and social media companies preserve the personal communications of hundreds of people who may have somehow been connected to the attack. It's a sweeping public demand from Congress that is rare, if not unprecedented, in its breadth and could put the companies in a tricky position as they balance political and privacy interests.

The committee, which is just beginning its probe, did not ask the 35 companies to turn over the records — yet. In letters Monday, the panel asked them to confidentially save the records as part of the investigation into the violent mob of former President Donald Trump's supporters who stormed the building that day and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

Republicans immediately criticized the request, which includes Trump himself, along with members of his family and several Republican lawmakers, according to a person familiar with the confidential request and who requested anonymity to discuss it.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy, who is hoping to become speaker of the House if his party wins the majority in the 2022 elections, directly threatened the companies, tweeting that "a Republican majority will not forget" if they turn over information.

A look at what the panel is asking for, why lawmakers want it and the potential legal issues surrounding the request:

### **WHAT THE COMMITTEE WANTS**

The committee sent letters to the 35 companies Monday, part of its larger probe into what happened that day as the Trump supporters beat police, broke through windows and doors and sent lawmakers running for their lives. The letters request that the companies "preserve metadata, subscriber information, technical usage information, and content of communications for the listed individuals" from April 2020 to Jan. 31, 2021.

The request includes the "content of communications, including all emails, voice messages, text or SMS/MMS messages, videos, photographs, direct messages, address books, contact lists, and other files or other data communications."

The panel released the letters publicly but withheld the list of individuals, who Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said last week numbered in the "hundreds."

The companies that received the letters range from social media giants Facebook, Twitter and TikTok to telecommunications companies like AT&T and Verizon to conservative and far-right platforms Parler, 4chan and theDonald.win.

The panel has also requested that 15 social media companies provide records about misinformation, foreign influence and domestic extremism on their platforms related to the 2020 election. But the requests to preserve personal communications raise unique questions about the relationship between the technology companies and Congress.

### **WHY THEY WANT IT**

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Democrats have said they will examine all aspects of the attack — including what Trump was doing in the White House as it unfolded. Several Republican lawmakers talked to the president that day, and many of them have strongly supported his lies about widespread fraud in the election.

In the days immediately following the attack, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested that some Republican lawmakers might have been connected to the far-right supporters who stormed the building or were involved in the planning. There is no evidence that's true, but Democrats have said that they will look into all possible leads.

In the letters, the committee wrote that "the inclusion of any individual name on the list should not be viewed as indicative of any wrongdoing by that person or others."

## GOP PUSHBACK

McCarthy issued a blistering statement on Twitter Tuesday evening, saying the Democrats' efforts "would put every American with a phone or computer in the crosshairs of a surveillance state run by Democrat politicians."

He also said that if the companies turn over private information they "are in violation of federal law and subject to losing their ability to operate in the United States."

It is unclear what federal law the companies would be violating and how they would be subject to losing their ability to operate. McCarthy's office did not respond to a request for comment.

## TO COMPLY OR NOT TO COMPLY?

If the committee does eventually ask for records, the decision on whether to comply, even partially, could be difficult for companies that want to cooperate but are also wary of turning over private communications of lawmakers to their political rivals. And because the request would be from Congress, and not law enforcement, the issue becomes more complicated.

Telecommunications and technology companies field requests all the time from law enforcement and the courts to turn over private information, and they often comply. But even though the committee has the power to subpoena, the calculation on whether to cooperate with Congress is often as much of a political question as it is a legal one. Democrats are in the majority, but Republicans could take over with a favorable election map in 2022. There are also regulatory and public relations factors. It's highly likely that the issue could be tied up in courts.

"It's as much about the law as it is about the optics," says G.S. Hans, a law professor at Vanderbilt University who specializes in First Amendment law and technology policy. He says the companies are likely "talking about this from the general counsel's office but also from their lobbying arms, because I think it's both things at once."

The sweeping preservation request from Congress, he says, is "a new situation" for many of them.

Most of the companies on the list contacted by The Associated Press did not respond or declined to comment on the request — including AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Twitch, Twitter and TikTok.

Two companies, Reddit and Facebook, sent short statements saying they will comply with the committee's requests.

## At least 8 deaths as Hurricane Ida's remnants hit Northeast

By DAVID PORTER and MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At least eight deaths were reported in New York City and New Jersey as relentless rain from the remnants of Hurricane Ida sent the New York City area into a state of emergency early Thursday and the storm carried into New England with threats of more tornadoes.

Police in New York City reported seven deaths, including a 50-year-old man, a 48-year-old woman and a 2-year-old boy who were found unconscious and unresponsive late Wednesday inside a home. They were pronounced dead at the scene, police said. One death was confirmed in New Jersey.

New York's FDR Drive, a major artery on the east side of Manhattan, and the Bronx River Parkway were under water by late Wednesday evening. Subway stations and tracks became so flooded that the

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Metropolitan Transportation Authority suspended all service. Videos posted online showed subway riders standing on seats in cars filled with water.

Other videos showed vehicles submerged up to their windows on major roadways in and around the city and garbage bobbing down the streets.

"We're enduring an historic weather event tonight with record breaking rain across the city, brutal flooding and dangerous conditions on our roads," New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said while declaring a state of emergency in New York City late Wednesday.

Gov. Kathy Hochul also declared a state of emergency for New York state.

Firefighters rescued a man from a car stuck in deep floodwaters in New York City. Video shot by New York TV station WABC-TV showed firefighters carry a man from his vehicle to dry ground. The man's SUV was one of a number of vehicles stuck in the water on the Bronx River Parkway.

The National Weather Service office in New York declared its first-ever set of flash flood emergencies in the region Wednesday night, an alert level that is reserved for "exceedingly rare situations when a severe threat to human life and catastrophic damage from a flash flood is happening or will happen soon."

New York City put in place a travel ban until 5 a.m. ET Thursday for all non-emergency vehicles, and a travel advisory was in effect after it expired. All non-emergency vehicles were advised to stay off of streets and highways.

The National Weather Service recorded 3.15 inches (8.91 centimeters) of rain in New York's Central Park in one hour Wednesday night, far surpassing the 1.94 inches (4.92 centimeters) that fell in one hour during Tropical Storm Henri on the night of Aug. 21, which was believed at the time to be the most ever recorded in the park.

Earlier Wednesday, the storm blew through the mid-Atlantic states with at least two tornadoes, heavy winds and drenching rains that collapsed the roof of a U.S. Postal Service building in New Jersey and threatened to overrun a dam in Pennsylvania.

Social media posts showed homes reduced to rubble in a southern New Jersey county just outside Philadelphia, not far from where the National Weather Service confirmed a tornado Wednesday evening. Authorities did not have any immediate information on injuries.

The roof collapsed at the Postal Service building in Kearny, New Jersey, with people inside, police Sgt. Chris Levchak said. Rescue crews were on scene into the night, with no immediate word on the number of people or severity of injuries.

Gov. Phil Murphy declared a state of emergency in all of New Jersey's 21 counties, urging people to stay off the flooded roads. Meteorologists warned that rivers likely won't crest for a few more days, raising the possibility of more widespread flooding.

At least one death was reported in the state as floodwaters rushed through city streets, trapping motorists. Passaic Mayor Hector Lora said a 70-year-old man was swept away. "His family was rescued, they were all in the same car. Unfortunately, the car was overtaken by the waters, and the firefighters who were being dragged down under the vehicle were unable to get him out," Lora told WCBS-TV. The mayor said there was an unconfirmed report of another death in the city.

All Amtrak service between Philadelphia and Boston with an initial departure before 9 a.m. ET Thursday was canceled. More than 61,000 homes and businesses in New Jersey were without electricity by 6 a.m.

Among the other deaths reported in New York City, a 48-year-old woman and a 66-year-old man died after being found at separate residences, and a 43-year-old woman and a 22-year-old man both died after being found inside a home. Causes of death and identifications were pending.

Soaking rains prompted the evacuations of thousands of people after water reached dangerous levels at a dam near Johnstown, a Pennsylvania town nicknamed Flood City. An official said later Wednesday that the water levels near the dam were receding.

Utilities reported hundreds of thousands of customers without power in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

In Rockville, Maryland, water had almost reached the ceilings of basement units Wednesday when crews arrived at an apartment complex. A 19-year-old was found dead, another person was missing and about



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200 people from 60 apartments near Rock Creek were displaced, Montgomery County Fire Chief Scott Goldstein said Wednesday.

A tornado was believed to have touched down along the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

"In many years I have not seen circumstances like this," Goldstein said.

The National Weather Service had predicted flooding from what remained of Hurricane Ida, saying steep terrain and even city streets were particularly vulnerable to a band of severe weather that extended to Massachusetts, where tornado warnings were issued early Thursday.

Tropical Storm Henri hit the region a little more than a week ago, causing flooding and leaving the region saturated and more vulnerable to this week's torrents.

Tropical Storm Larry was strengthening and moving quickly westward after forming off the coast of Africa earlier Wednesday. Forecasters predicted it would rapidly intensify in a manner similar to Ida, becoming a major hurricane with top wind speeds of 120 mph (193 kph) by Saturday.

## Merkel prepares to step down with legacy of tackling crises

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Angela Merkel will leave office as one of modern Germany's longest-serving leaders and a global diplomatic heavyweight, with a legacy defined by her management of a succession of crises that shook a fragile Europe rather than any grand visions for her own country.

In 16 years at the helm of Europe's biggest economy, Merkel did end military conscription, set Germany on course for a future without nuclear and fossil-fueled power, enable the legalization of same-sex marriage, introduce a national minimum wage and benefits encouraging fathers to look after young children, among other things.

But a senior ally recently summed up what many view as her main service: as an anchor of stability in stormy times. He told Merkel: "You protected our country well."

"All the major crossroads you had to navigate ... we never mapped out in any election program — they came overnight and you had to govern well," Bavarian governor Markus Soeder said.

Merkel passed her first test in 2008, pledging at the height of the global financial crisis that Germans' savings were safe. Over the following years, she was a leading figure in the effort to save the euro currency from the debt crisis that engulfed several members, agreeing to bailouts but insisting on painful spending cuts.

In 2015, Merkel was the face of a welcoming approach to migrants as people fleeing conflicts in Syria and elsewhere trekked across the Balkans. She allowed in hundreds of thousands and insisted that "we will manage" the influx, but ran into resistance both at home and among European partners.

And in the twilight of her career — she announced in 2018 that she wouldn't seek a fifth term — she led a COVID-19 response that saw Germany fare better than some of its peers.

On the international stage, Merkel insisted on seeking compromises and pursuing a multilateral approach to the world's problems through years of turbulence that saw the U.S. drift apart from European allies under President Donald Trump and Britain leave the European Union.

"I think Ms. Merkel's most important legacy is simply that, in such a time of worldwide crises, she provided for stability," said Ralph Bollmann, a biographer of Merkel and a journalist with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung newspaper.

There was "a constant succession of crises that were really existential threats and raised questions over the world order we are used to, and her achievement is that she led Germany, Europe and perhaps to some extent the world fairly safely through that, for all that you can criticize details," Bollmann said.

Before winning the top job in 2005, he noted, Merkel campaigned as "a chancellor of change, who wanted to make Germany more modern," seeking deeper economic reforms and a more socially liberal approach than her center-right party had previously taken.

But she ditched much of her economic agenda after almost blowing a huge poll lead by turning off voters with talk of far-reaching reforms, instead embracing what she called an approach of "many small

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steps." Along with a pragmatic willingness to jettison conservative orthodoxy such as conscription when opportune, it enabled her to dominate the center ground of German politics.

Crises consumed so much energy that "not much time was left to deal with other issues," Bollmann said. There is plenty of unfinished business: Merkel has conceded that "the lack of digitization in our society" is a problem, ranging from notoriously patchy cell phone reception to many health offices using faxes to transmit data during the pandemic.

Merkel's political longevity is already historic. Among democratic Germany's post-World War II leaders, she lags only Helmut Kohl, who led the country to reunification during his 1982-98 tenure. She could overtake even him if she is still in office on Dec. 17. That's feasible if parties are slow to form a new government after the Sept. 26 election.

Merkel, 67, insists that others must judge her record. Still, she highlighted a few achievements at a rare campaign appearance last month, starting with the reduction of the number of unemployed in Germany from over 5 million in 2005 to under 2.6 million now.

Predecessor Gerhard Schroeder, whose welfare-state trims and economic reforms were beginning to kick in when he left office, arguably deserves part of the credit.

Merkel also inherited a plan to exit nuclear power from Schroeder, but abruptly accelerated it following the meltdowns at Japan's Fukushima plant in 2011. More recently, she set in motion Germany's exit from coal-fueled power.

The chancellor pointed to progress on renewable energy, saying its share of the German energy mix has risen from 10% to well over 40%. Merkel was often referred to as the "climate chancellor" in her early years, but also has drawn criticism for moving too slowly; her government this year moved forward the date for reducing German greenhouse gas emissions to "net zero" to 2045, after the country's top court ruled that previous plans place too much of the burden on young people.

Merkel praised her government's drive to improve Germany's public finances, which enabled it to stop running up new debt from 2014 until the coronavirus pandemic pushed it into huge rescue packages. Opponents argue that it skimmed on necessary investments in infrastructure.

"I could talk about how we saved the euro," she said, adding that "our principle of combining the affected countries' own responsibility with solidarity was exactly the right method to give the euro a future." Merkel's austerity-heavy approach was resented deeply in parts of Europe and controversial among economists, but allowed her to overcome reluctance at home to bail out stragglers.

Whatever the ultimate verdict, Merkel can celebrate a unique end to her tenure: she is set to become the first German chancellor to leave power when she chooses.

## **The Latest: Man arrested after New Zealand quarantine escape**

By The Associated Press undefined

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — A man in New Zealand who had tested positive for the coronavirus faces criminal charges after he escaped from an Auckland quarantine hotel and returned home, according to authorities.

In New Zealand, people who test positive for the virus are routinely required to isolate in hotels run by the military. Authorities believe the man escaped early Thursday and was on the run for about 12 hours before police — dressed in full protective gear — arrested him about 10 kilometers (6 miles) away.

COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins told reporters it wasn't yet clear how the man escaped the hotel, although closed circuit cameras showed a man hiding in a bush when a security guard walked past.

Under a new COVID-19 law passed last year, the man could face a fine or up to six months in jail if found guilty of failing to comply with a health order. New Zealand is currently battling an outbreak of the delta variant in Auckland.

**MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:**

— Indian schools cautiously reopen even as COVID warnings grow

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- WHO launches hub in Berlin to help prevent future pandemics
- Vaccinations in rural India increase amid supply concerns
- Sound bite 'pandemic of the unvaccinated' captures part of story

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

## HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

**KATHMANDU, Nepal** — Authorities have ended many of the restrictions imposed in the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu, and surrounding districts, allowing movie theaters, gymnasiums and sporting venues to open up for the first time since the pandemic hit last year.

The notice by Kathmandu District Administration Thursday said schools and colleges would, however, remain closed until further notice.

Restaurants will be allowed to have guests dining in and stores can now open late. There will also be no restriction on the movement of vehicles.

The latest lockdown was imposed in April when cases of COVID-19 spiked to a record high, causing shortages of hospital spaces, medicine, oxygen and medicines. There are still thousands of new cases reported daily and only about 15 percent of the population of have been fully vaccinated even though the inoculation campaign began in January.

The health ministry said there are so far 848,209 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nepal and 10,770 people have died.

**BRUSSELS** — Belgium's king and queen are partially confining themselves after a member of the royal family tested positive for the coronavirus.

The Royal Palace said Thursday that King Philippe and Queen Mathilde "decided, as a precautionary measure, to limit their contacts in the days to come, in line with the health regulations in force."

The palace statement provided no details about exactly who might have tested positive.

**TOKYO** — Moderna Inc. and its Japanese partner are recalling more than 1 million doses of the U.S. drug maker's coronavirus vaccine after confirming that contamination reported last week was tiny particles of stainless steel.

Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. is in charge of sale and distribution in Japan of the Moderna vaccine. The two companies said an investigation at a Spanish factory that produced the vials in question concluded the contamination occurred in the process of putting stops on the vials.

The companies on Aug. 26 announced suspension of 1.63 million doses produced at the line after reports of contamination. Japanese officials said about a half million people had received shots from the Moderna vials before the problem surfaced.

The trouble comes at a time Japan is pushing to accelerate vaccinations amid rising infections that are straining the Japanese health care system.

Pharmaceutical and health ministry officials say they do not believe the high-grade stainless steel poses health risks.

**TAIPEI, Taiwan** — Taiwan has received its first Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine after a prolonged purchasing process that gave rise to a political blame game with China.

Taiwan had been unable to buy the vaccine itself directly from BioNTech, the German company that partnered with U.S.-based Pfizer to develop the vaccine.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen accused China of blocking the deal while China denied any interference.

Two private companies and a Buddhist organization stepped in to buy the vaccine doses and donate them to Taiwan. The doses that arrived Thursday will be given to 12- to 17-year-olds.

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Taiwan has been using AstraZeneca, Moderna and the domestically made Medigen vaccine to give 43% of its population at least one dose.

**TORONTO** — Ontario is the fourth Canadian province to announce residents will have to show proof of vaccination against the coronavirus to enter restaurants, theaters, gyms and other indoor public venues.

Premier Doug Ford said Wednesday that the vaccination certificate program will take effect Sept. 22.

Initially, residents will show a PDF or printout of the vaccination receipt they received when they got the shots, along with a government-issued piece of ID such as a photo health card or driver's license.

The province is expected to launch a system in late October that will send everyone a QR code to accompany their vaccination receipt. It will also launch an app that will allow service providers to scan the QR codes as proof of vaccination.

British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba have also implemented some form of vaccine certificate program.

**OKLAHOMA CITY** — An Oklahoma judge on Wednesday said she will temporarily block a state law banning public school mask mandates, but students or their parents can opt-out of the requirement if they choose.

Judge Natalie Mai said she will issue a temporary injunction that will go into effect next week when she issues a written order detailing her ruling.

Mai said she is blocking the law because it applies only to public, not private, schools and that schools adopting a mask mandate must provide an option for parents or students to opt out of the requirement.

The ruling drew praise from Gov. Kevin Stitt, who signed the law and opposes mask mandates without exemptions, and Dr. Mary Clarke, president of the Oklahoma State Medical Association, which joined the lawsuit brought by four parents who oppose the law.

**BERLIN** — The head of the World Health Organization says he opposes "widespread use of boosters" for healthy people for now, underscoring the need to get doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to poorer countries.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus spoke in Berlin on Wednesday. He says the U.N. health agency last week witnessed the first decline in new global cases in more than two months.

He says that "this is obviously very welcome but it doesn't mean much," since many countries are still seeing steep increases and "shocking inequities" in access to vaccines.

Tedros says he is calling for a moratorium on booster shots at least until the end of September "to allow those countries that are furthest behind to catch up."

He says "third doses may be necessary for the most at-risk populations, where there is evidence of waning immunity against severe disease and death."

**LONDON** — Britain is offering a third dose of a coronavirus vaccine to up to half a million people who have severely weakened immune systems to give them additional protection.

The government's vaccine advisers says people over 12 years old with conditions such as leukemia, advanced HIV and recent organ transplants will be offered a third jab.

Professor Wei Shen Lim of the official Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunization says the move aims to reduce the risks of hospitalization and death for the severely immuno-suppressed, a population estimated at 400,000 to 500,000 people, or less than 1% of the total population.

The offer is separate to decisions on a wider vaccine booster program, details of which haven't been confirmed. Health Secretary Sajid Javid says that booster program, which prioritizes older age groups, is still planned to start this month.

More than 78% of Britain's population over age 16 have received both doses of the vaccine. The government's vaccine advisory committee hasn't decided whether to include all healthy teens age 12 to 15.

**MADRID** — Spain has reached its initial goal of fully vaccinating 70% of its population for the coronavirus, according to the health ministry.

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Despite a slow rollout of vaccines at the start of the year, Spain's public health care system has fully vaccinated more than 33 million people. Over 92% of those over 40 years old are fully covered.

Health Minister Carolina Darias says vaccinations will continue because of the coronavirus, which is forcing certain health restriction to remain in place.

Also, Spain's board of vaccine experts has recommended a third shot of vaccine be administered to those people with weak immune systems, such as transplant recipients. Its national and regional health authorities will take up the issue on Sept. 8 when they hold their weekly meeting on the pandemic.

**BERLIN** — The World Health Organization has inaugurated a new "hub" in Berlin meant to better prepare the globe for future pandemics.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday launched the new WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn says it's part of an effort to build "a world safer from upcoming pandemics in the future." The German government is investing \$100 million in the facility.

It aims to promote better information-sharing and analysis, leading to better coordinated decision-making after the patchy global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief, says "the faster we identify new infectious disease risks, the faster we can respond."

**NEW DEHLI** — More students in India can return to a classroom for the first time in nearly 18 months.

Authorities have given approval to partially reopen more schools despite apprehension from some parents and signs that infections are rising.

Schools and colleges in at least six more states will reopen in a gradual manner with health measures in place throughout September. Activities have been slowly returning in India after the trauma of a ferocious coronavirus surge this year brought daily life in the country to a halt, sickened tens of millions and left hundreds of thousands dead.

A number of states returned last month to in-person learning for some age groups.

Daily new infections have fallen sharply since their peak of more than 400,000 in May. On Saturday, India recorded 46,000 new cases, the highest in nearly two months.

Meanwhile, India has dramatically increased vaccination rates in its vast rural areas, where around 65% of its nearly 1.4 billion people live in villages served by fragile health care systems. Even though demand for vaccines has been increasing in villages, supply constraints continue for the world's largest maker of vaccines. Experts say it's unlikely the country will reach its objective of vaccinating all adults by the end of 2021.

**WARSAW, Poland** — Poland's health minister says rising coronavirus cases mean citizens should remain vigilant.

Adan Niedzielski commenting Wednesday on latest figures that show 366 new infections, compared to 234 a week ago, and five deaths from COVID-19.

"It's a 50% increase, and maybe it's good because it's a sign that will remind us about the need for discipline because the pandemic is still with us," Niedzielski said on radio RMF FM.

He says almost half of the 38-million nation has been fully vaccinated and should reduce the number of hospitalizations and deaths.

"Vaccinations are a gift for us from the science and we should use it as a precaution," Niedzielski said. Poland has registered nearly 2.9 million infections and 75,300 confirmed deaths.

**PARIS** — France has started administering coronavirus booster shots to people over 65 and those with underlying health conditions.

The move is meant to shore up their vaccine protection against the highly contagious delta variant. People can get the shot on the condition a minimum six-month period has passed since they got fully vaccinated

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with the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

The Health Ministry says about 18 million people are eligible for the booster shot.

France has been facing increased cases since July, with a slight decrease in recent weeks — from 23,000 per day around mid-August to the current 17,000. Health officials are concerned about a reversal of the trend as children return to school on Thursday.

Almost 44 million people, or 65% of the French population, are fully vaccinated.

**TIRANA, Albania** — Albanian health authorities started compulsory vaccination for the medical staff, teachers, professors, and students on Wednesday.

They are obliged to hand over the vaccination passport until the end of the month or show results from periodical coronavirus tests. Those who decline will be fined (\$29-\$48).

The month of September is open for anyone 18 and older to get a shot. With the end of the tourist season comes the return of those entering the country to show a vaccination passport or negative virus test in the last 72 hours.

Albania has seen a significant surge of the daily virus cases in August. About one-fourth of the 2.8 million population has been fully vaccinated.

**ATHENS, Greece** — Staff at public hospitals have held protests around Greece on the deadline to comply with a vaccination mandate for health care workers or face suspension without pay.

The government says the measure is needed to safeguard hospitals amid a third major surge in COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic. But health care unions say it is unnecessary, noting that an estimated 95% of doctors and 90% of other staff at the country's largest hospitals are fully vaccinated.

Infection levels spiked in August to the highest level recorded in the country, and pressure on hospitals has been building in recent weeks.

Nearly 64% of Greece's adult population is fully vaccinated, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, while the European Union average reached 70% Tuesday.

Health care unions in Greece say they support the government's vaccination campaign but oppose mandates. A three-hour work stoppage at public hospitals is planned Thursday.

**ISTANBUL** — A Turkish family that lost eight members to COVID-19 over a five-month period is calling on scientists to examine their genetic make-up to determine if they are more prone to the virus.

Burak Genc, 24, was the first in the family to die, in early November last year, followed by his father Muhammet six days later. Within six weeks they were followed by four other relatives, who are believed to have contracted the virus at the funerals or during visits to pay their condolences.

Two more members of the family died in February and April. After alerting the authorities, the remaining 25 members of the family were vaccinated and they have not suffered a loss since.

According to Turkish Health Ministry data, 60% of over-18s have received two doses of vaccine. However, the country has experienced rising case numbers since restrictions were relaxed in July, and daily infections hover around 20,000. Some 21,900 cases were recorded on Tuesday and there were 252 confirmed deaths.

## High court divides 5-4 to leave Texas abortion law in place

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — A deeply divided Supreme Court is allowing a Texas law that bans most abortions to remain in force, for now stripping most women of the right to an abortion in the nation's second-largest state.

The court voted 5-4 to deny an emergency appeal from abortion providers and others that sought to block enforcement of the law that went into effect Wednesday. But the justices also suggested that their order likely isn't the last word on whether the law can stand because other challenges to it can still be brought.

The Texas law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, prohibits abortions once medical profes-

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sionals can detect cardiac activity, usually around six weeks and before many women know they're pregnant.

It is the strictest law against abortion rights in the United States since the high court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 and part of a broader push by Republicans nationwide to impose new restrictions on abortion. At least 12 other states have enacted bans early in pregnancy, but all have been blocked from going into effect.

The high court's order declining to halt the Texas law came just before midnight Wednesday. The majority said those bringing the case had not met the high burden required for a stay of the law.

"In reaching this conclusion, we stress that we do not purport to resolve definitively any jurisdictional or substantive claim in the applicants' lawsuit. In particular, this order is not based on any conclusion about the constitutionality of Texas's law, and in no way limits other procedurally proper challenges to the Texas law, including in Texas state courts," the unsigned order said.

Chief Justice John Roberts dissented along with the court's three liberal justices. Each of the four dissenting justices wrote separate statements expressing their disagreement with the majority.

Roberts noted that while the majority denied the request for emergency relief "the Court's order is emphatic in making clear that it cannot be understood as sustaining the constitutionality of the law at issue."

The vote in the case underscores the impact of the death of the liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg last year and then-president Donald Trump's replacement of her with conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Had Ginsburg remained on the court there would have been five votes to halt the Texas law.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor called her conservative colleagues' decision "stunning." "Presented with an application to enjoin a flagrantly unconstitutional law engineered to prohibit women from exercising their constitutional rights and evade judicial scrutiny, a majority of Justices have opted to bury their heads in the sand," she wrote.

Texas lawmakers wrote the law to evade federal court review by allowing private citizens to bring civil lawsuits in state court against anyone involved in an abortion, other than the patient. Other abortion laws are enforced by state and local officials, with criminal sanctions possible.

In contrast, Texas' law allows private citizens to sue abortion providers and anyone involved in facilitating abortions. Among other situations, that would include anyone who drives a woman to a clinic to get an abortion. Under the law, anyone who successfully sues another person would be entitled to at least \$10,000.

In her dissent, Justice Elena Kagan called the law "patently unconstitutional," saying it allows "private parties to carry out unconstitutional restrictions on the State's behalf." And Justice Stephen Breyer said a "woman has a federal constitutional right to obtain an abortion during" the first stage of pregnancy.

After a federal appeals court refused to allow a prompt review of the law before it took effect, the measure's opponents sought Supreme Court review.

In a statement early Thursday after the high court's action, Nancy Northup, the head of the Center for Reproductive Rights, which represents abortion providers challenging the law, vowed to "keep fighting this ban until abortion access is restored in Texas."

"We are devastated that the Supreme Court has refused to block a law that blatantly violates *Roe v. Wade*. Right now, people seeking abortion across Texas are panicking — they have no idea where or when they will be able to get an abortion, if ever. Texas politicians have succeeded for the moment in making a mockery of the rule of law, upending abortion care in Texas, and forcing patients to leave the state — if they have the means — to get constitutionally protected healthcare. This should send chills down the spine of everyone in this country who cares about the constitution," she said.

Texas has long had some of the nation's toughest abortion restrictions, including a sweeping law passed in 2013. The Supreme Court eventually struck down that law, but not before more than half of the state's 40-plus clinics closed.

Even before the Texas case arrived at the high court the justices had planned to tackle the issue of abortion rights in a major case after the court begins hearing arguments again in the fall. That case involves the state of Mississippi, which is asking to be allowed to enforce an abortion ban after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

## As Ida hit, homeless, other vulnerable people left behind

BY LEAH WILLINGHAM and JAY REEVES Associated Press

HOUMA, La. (AP) — With Hurricane Ida's winds screaming and only a tent and tarp for shelter, Angelique Hebert clung to her husband under a bridge where the couple had sought refuge.

"We're gonna die in this hurricane," Angelique told him. But he said: "Just hang on, baby. It's gonna be over."

So she hung on, and she prayed.

It wasn't that the couple wanted to ride out a major hurricane exposed to the elements. Homeless and with few options in the bayous and small communities of southern Louisiana, they said they simply couldn't afford to get out of Ida's path. With no car, they walked more than 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the coastal hamlet of Montegut to Houma to try to catch an evacuation bus. They missed it.

Despite mandatory and voluntary evacuation orders in south Louisiana parishes, many residents who wanted to flee were left to fend for themselves as the fifth-strongest hurricane to ever hit the U.S. mainland ravaged Louisiana. For homeless people, those on fixed or low incomes, and others in the state's most vulnerable groups, staying wasn't a matter of choice — it was the only choice.

"People will say, 'Well, I'm just going to ride it out,'" said Craig Colten, a professor emeritus at Louisiana State University who studies community resilience and adaptation to changing environments in coastal Louisiana. "But a lot of the time, people will ride it out because they don't have the means to escape, and that, in large measure, means an automobile and enough money to buy gas."

Experts have long been concerned that the increasing intensity and frequency of hurricanes — especially in Louisiana, where many residents return even after major storms — put people of lower means at higher risk. Even those who can scrape together resources to leave temporarily often return to find damaged or destroyed homes, jobs that no longer exist, and little immediate assistance.

"There's a real concern among people who keep an eye on equity issues," said Colten, who's particularly worried that Ida — like Katrina — fell at the end of the month, when those who rely on retirement or government checks have already used most of their money.

"Their funds are pretty close to exhausted, these people who live hand-to-mouth, and so they didn't have much choice but to stay," he said. "They can't go get a motel room. They can't even buy a bus ticket. ... Many of them have infirm relatives or family members, they have pets."

The Heberts used a two-person dome tent, settled in by a concrete pillar under a bridge that crosses the Intracoastal Waterway and hoped for the best. The tent collapsed, letting rain inside.

"It was the most terrifying thing I've ever been through," said Angelique Hebert, 53. Wilfred Hebert said he wanted to do more to protect his wife, but he couldn't.

The couple has been staying at a shelter since the storm passed, but they don't know what will come next. Broke, they panhandled along a road, with a sign: "Hurricane took everything."

Also in hard-hit Houma, mother of two Kaylee Ordoyne, 26, said her family couldn't afford to evacuate. Her truck — the family's only vehicle — broke down days before the storm. She spent her last \$30 on water, juice, cans of Chef Boyardee and soup, bread and sandwich meat. They left their trailer behind and took refuge in a relative's apartment.

By Monday morning, that apartment would be in ruins.

As the storm ripped through the roof, Ordoyne held her kids, 2 and 4, singing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and whispering nursery rhymes. The ceiling collapsed, and they were trapped in a corner of the kitchen with water up to their ankles.

"If I would have had the money to evacuate, I would have — for my babies," Ordoyne said. "I cried once, and then had to hold my tears in after, no matter how bad I wanted to break down."

They survived, but the family's troubles are far from over. The \$11,000 trailer Ordoyne spent her savings on was destroyed by the storm. She had lived there just two months and has no insurance. She also has no paycheck — she reviews and approves phone applications for a wireless company, a job she can't do without internet or power.



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"I'm so worried sick about what will be next," she said.

In New Orleans, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said roughly half the population evacuated ahead of Ida. The other half — 200,000 people — remained. For them and those who'd returned to a city with a shattered power grid, officials opened cooling stations and gave out meals Wednesday.

At one center, Barbara Bradie, a work-from-home agent for Walgreens, and Rita Richardson, a research coordinator at Tulane Medical Center, enjoyed their hot meal: pork, peas and bread. They said they couldn't have evacuated; neither has a car.

Richardson said she evacuated once, for Hurricane Gustav in 2008: "I was out of town 10 days, and I was broke by the time I got home. ... I'd rather just stay here and deal with it."

Bradie added: "People think you just get up and go. You've got to have a car, put gas in the car, got to have a hotel."

After Hurricane Katrina, the city partnered with a nonprofit to put together a "City-Assisted Evacuation Plan" where people would meet at designated neighborhood pickup spots — marked with 12-foot stainless steel sculptures— for a shuttle to shelters. But in Ida — a storm intensifying so fast the mayor said mandatory evacuation wasn't possible — the system was not utilized, Colten said.

Even for families who were able to evacuate, the financial impact will be long-lasting and painful. Some spent their last dollars to get their families to safety.

Lesl Bell and her husband were already living paycheck to paycheck before they both tested positive for COVID-19 a month ago. They had to stay home and were soon behind on bills. Then Ida hit.

"We couldn't work for that whole month, and now this?" Bell said.

They packed their car and left with their 3-year-old and their remaining cash for a Florida hotel. They were too scared to stay in Louisiana; Bell's pregnant, and she worried for their toddler's safety.

But the family started running out of money and was forced to make the drive home Tuesday, even as officials advised people to stay away.

"It's crazy how they tell you to stay out when the cheapest hotel room is almost \$200 a night," she said. "How we going to afford to be out for so long?"

## Vintners despair after French wildfire ravaged grapevines

By DANIEL COLE Associated Press

LE CANNET-DES-MAURES, France (AP) — After a wildfire blazed through a once-picturesque nature reserve near the French Riviera, winemakers who grow the region's celebrated crop are taking stock of the damage.

Rows of charred grapevines stand next to a vast expanse of steaming black vegetation devastated by the fire, which raged for a week in late August. The blaze left two people dead, injured 27 and forced some 10,000 people to evacuate around the Var region, not far from the famed coastal resort of Saint-Tropez.

At least one small wine estate saw its vines completely destroyed. And the grapes that survived may be too smoke-damaged to produce a sellable wine.

Pierre Audemard of the Domaine de la Giscle vineyard lost his cellar full of stock and his equipment in the fire. "We're receiving hundreds of messages from people who want to buy our wine, but we have nothing left," he told local broadcaster France-Bleu.

The MDCV wine group, which owns several vineyards in the region affected, considers itself relatively lucky, but is still facing losses.

Some 15% of the vines at the group's Chateau des Bertrands vineyard burned down. A couple of rows of burnt grape vines separate the rest of the lush and untouched vineyard from the blackened forest beyond.

Because of efforts by firefighters and the layout of the vineyards, the fire was stopped in its tracks.

"The vineyards act like a natural firefighting wall, they separate the winds and prevent the fire from moving from one plot to another," said Maxime Mathon, head of communications for MDCV.

Others were not so fortunate. A smaller wine estate across the road, nestled in a dense section of trees and vegetation, was completely consumed by the fast-moving fire.

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As firefighters descended onto one vineyard that was becoming cornered by the smoky fire, a family that had stayed behind instead of evacuating tried to put out smaller flames with garden shovels.

For the winemakers lucky enough not to have lost their crops, their attention now shifts to the lingering effects that could threaten their wine production during the upcoming harvest.

"Even if a vineyard has not been directly touched by the fire, the smoky winds can actually affect the taste of the wine," said Mathon.

Winemakers will only know if they have a sellable product during the vinification process, where they ferment the grape juice, turning it into wine.

In an industry that prizes the consistent quality and style of wine hailing from the Var region, the concern is that the fire could have tainted the crop too much for its traditional attributes to come to full fruition.

"We will have to have very strict tasting sessions for this harvest to ensure that the product we are creating is as usual high quality," said Mathon.

It's been a particularly difficult year for French wine, after a surprise April frost killed off vines and caused 2 billion euros in industry losses. A study later by World Weather Attribution said the frost was made more likely by climate change.

Winemakers in the Var region have long dealt with hot summers and the risk of fires, and the latest blaze was among several to hit the Mediterranean region this summer. Scientists say that the world will see more and more such extreme weather events, driven by climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

Today, the grounds of Chateau des Bertrands are empty, except for a group of well-kept horses that slowly graze next to a section of grapevine. While firefighters battled the wildfire, the horses had been hurriedly rushed into trailers for evacuation as the growing flames approached.

## Changing winds provide hope in California wildfire battle

By SAM METZ, JANIE HAR and CHRIS WEBER undefined

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — With winds finally turning in their favor, firefighters are throwing all their resources into boxing a California blaze that was scant miles from Lake Tahoe and neighboring Nevada.

Three days of fiercely gusting winds had driven the Caldor Fire east through the rugged Sierra Nevada, forcing tens of thousands of people from the region of forests, mountain hamlets, resorts and alpine lakes.

The winds were expected to calm heading into the weekend, although the humidity remained low and the eastern side of the vast wildfire was still burning trees and running through explosively dry grasslands into rugged areas hard for firefighters to reach, authorities said.

The blaze was also throwing sparks that caught trees and created spot fires up to a mile ahead of the main wall of flames.

"We're battling what we can battle and waiting for those winds to subside," said Stephen Vollmer, a fire behavior analyst for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Even so, the forecast made fire officials cautiously optimistic.

The change could allow fire crews to get into densely forested areas to begin clearing toppled trees and branches that had blocked routes to remote communities, thus making it safer for evacuees to return, Vollmer said.

Fire crews from around the country were being thrown into the fight against the fire, which was just 23% contained after destroying at least 700 homes and other buildings since breaking out Aug. 14.

Climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable, scientists say.

The Caldor Fire threatened at least 33,000 more homes and structures. On Wednesday, firefighters were ferried by boat to protect cabins at Echo Lake, a few miles south of Tahoe.

Heavenly Mountain Resort, Tahoe's largest ski area, was being used as a staging area by firefighters. The resort also brought out its big guns — snow-making devices that were being used to hose down buildings.

One spur of the fire was roughly 3 miles (5 kilometers) south of the recently evacuated city of South

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Lake Tahoe, moving northeast toward the California-Nevada state line, authorities said.

Crews worked to keep flames away from urban communities, where houses are close together and shopping centers, hotels and other structures would provide even more fuel.

Thick smoke has enveloped the city of South Lake Tahoe, which is all but deserted at a time when it would normally be swarming with tourists.

After casinos and stores closed on the Nevada side on Wednesday morning, evacuation holdouts lacking cars lined up outside the Montbleu resort and casino in Stateline, awaiting a bus to Reno.

Kevin O'Connell, a disabled plumber from South Lake Tahoe, planned on staying and riding out the evacuation order. But he went to the 7-11 down the street in Stateline and saw even stores there had closed.

"I called 911 and told them I need to get out of here — I have no food, no cigarettes and I'm disabled. And within a couple hours, the police came and picked me up in my apartment and brought me here," he said, wearing ski goggles to protect his eyes from the blowing ash.

On Wednesday, President Joe Biden issued a federal emergency declaration and ordered federal assistance to supplement state and local resources for firefighting efforts and relief for residents in four counties affected by the fire.

More than 15,000 firefighters, with help from out-of-state crews, were battling dozens of California blazes, including another monstrous blaze in the same area.

Maj. Gen. David Baldwin, adjutant general of California, said the state has also deployed more than 1,000 National Guard soldiers, airmen and sailors and 10 other states have sent around 1,250 additional Guard members. Many of those are providing air support, including 23 aircraft, some equipped with water buckets, others with systems that can drop fire retardant.

About 65 miles (105 kilometers) north of the Lake Tahoe-area blaze, the Dixie Fire is the second-largest wildfire in state history at about 1,320 square miles (3,415 square kilometers). The weeks-old fire prompted new evacuation orders and warnings this week and was just over 50% contained.

## Hurricane Ida's aftermath, recovery uneven across Louisiana

By REBECCA SANTANA, MELINDA DESLATTE and JANET MCCONAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — In New Orleans, an ongoing power outage after Hurricane Ida is making the sweltering summer unbearable. But in some areas outside the city, that misery is compounded by a lack of water, flooded neighborhoods and severely damaged homes.

Four days after Hurricane Ida struck, the storm's aftermath — and progress in recovering from it — are being felt unevenly across affected communities in Louisiana.

In New Orleans, power was restored Wednesday to a small number of homes and businesses, city crews had some streets almost completely cleared of fallen trees and debris and a few corner stores reopened. A revamped levee system protected the city from catastrophic flooding after Ida struck on Sunday with 150 mph (230 kph) winds that tied it for the fifth-strongest hurricane to ever hit the mainland U.S.

Outside New Orleans, neighborhoods remained flooded and residents were still reeling from damage to their homes and property. More than 1,200 people were walking through some of Ida's hardest-hit communities to look for those needing help, according to the Louisiana Fire Marshal's office. President Joe Biden was scheduled to visit Louisiana on Friday to survey the damage, the White House said.

Gayle Lawrence lost two cars, refrigerators and almost everything in her garage to floodwaters in southern Louisiana's Plaquemines Parish. The garage was filled with marsh grass and dead fish. Scores of other homes in the neighborhood were also flooded.

"The house is solid. It didn't even move. But when the water came up, it destroyed everything," she said.

In Jefferson Parish, authorities on Wednesday were still waiting for floodwaters to recede enough for trucks carrying food, water and repair supplies to begin moving into Lafitte and other low-lying communities. The parish neighbors New Orleans and saw widespread destruction from Ida.

Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng said a gas shortage was hampering hospital staff, food bank employees and other critical workers.

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"Today, we're a broken community," Sheng told a news conference. "It won't always be that way."

Emergency officials in nearby Terrebonne Parish took to Twitter to caution evacuees considering returning home that "there are no shelters, no electricity, very limited resources for food, gasoline and supplies and absolutely no medical services."

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said he was pleased that power had returned for some people, saying it was "critically important to show progress" after the storm. But he also acknowledged that much more work lay ahead. Roughly 2,600 people remained in shelters, he said.

"I'm very mindful that it's a start, and only a start," he told a news conference.

The death toll rose to at least six after a coroner confirmed a 65-year-old woman had drowned in her Louisiana home and police in Maryland said a 19-year-old man was found dead in an apartment complex flooded by heavy rain from Ida's remnants. And the staggering scope of the disaster began to come into focus, with a private firm estimating that total damage from Ida could exceed \$50 billion, making it among the costliest U.S. hurricanes.

Power was restored Wednesday to about 11,500 homes and businesses in eastern New Orleans, according to the electric company Entergy. The company also said it restored power to Ochsner's main hospital campus in Jefferson Parish and several hospitals near Baton Rouge.

But about 989,000 homes and businesses — 44% of all state utility customers in southeast Louisiana, from the New Orleans area to Baton Rouge — were without power, according to the state Public Service Commission. More than 600,000 people were without water.

In neighboring Mississippi, more than 30,000 customers had no electricity.

Hard-hit areas in southeast Louisiana were under a heat advisory Thursday, with forecasters warning combined heat and humidity could make some areas feel like 106 degrees Fahrenheit (41 degrees Celsius).

New Orleans officials opened seven places where people could get a meal and sit in air conditioning. The city was also using 70 transit buses as cooling sites, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said.

Karen Evans charged electronic devices at a New Orleans gym where four tall fans stirred the air. Her home in the city was not damaged, but she was struggling without power.

"The great challenge is living a life in a sweltering place without air conditioning," she said.

## Effort underway to rescue girls soccer team from Afghanistan

By ALEX SANZ and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

They move from place to place at a moment's notice in a desperate bid to evade the Taliban — girls whose lives are in danger simply because they chose to play a sport they loved.

An international effort to evacuate members of the Afghanistan national girls soccer team, along with dozens of family members and soccer federation staff, suffered a crushing setback last week after a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members during a harrowing airlift.

Now, frightened and desperate, the girls worry whether a far-flung coalition of former U.S. military and intelligence officials, congressmen, U.S. allies, humanitarian groups and the captain of the Afghanistan women's national team can get them and their loved ones to safety.

"They're just unbelievable young ladies who should be playing in the backyard, playing on the swing set, playing with their friends, and here they're in a very bad situation for doing nothing more than playing soccer," said Robert McCreary, a former congressional chief of staff and White House official under President George W. Bush who has worked with special forces in Afghanistan. "We need to do everything that we can to protect them, to get them to a safe situation."

The airport suicide bombing was carried out by Islamic State militants who are sworn rivals of the Taliban. The U.S. military has acknowledged that during the airlift, it was coordinating to some extent with the Taliban who set up checkpoints around the airport for crowd control and in the final days facilitated the evacuation of American citizens.

The Taliban have tried to present a new image, promising amnesty to former opponents and saying they would form an inclusive government. Many Afghans don't trust those promises, fearing the Taliban

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will quickly resort to the brutal tactics of their 1996-2001 rule, including barring girls and women from schools and jobs. The Taliban have been vague on their policy toward women so far, but have not yet issued sweeping repressive edicts.

Most members of the Afghan women's team, formed in 2007, were evacuated to Australia last week.

But the girls, ages 14-16, and their families also could be targeted by the Taliban — not just because women and girls are forbidden to play sports, but because they were advocates for girls and active members of their communities, said Farkhunda Muhtaj, who is captain of the Afghanistan women's national team and lives in Canada.

"They are devastated. They're hopeless, considering the situation they're in," said Muhtaj, who keeps in contact with the girls and urges them to stay calm.

There have been at least five failed attempts to rescue the girls in recent days, as they were moved around for their safety, McCreary and Muhtaj said. They were "footsteps from freedom" when the suicide bombing occurred, Muhtaj said.

Complicating the rescue effort is the size of the group — 133 people, including the 26 youth team members as well as adults and other children, including infants. Many don't have passports or other necessary documentation to board flights from Kabul.

McCreary said the mission — called Operation Soccer Balls — is working with other countries, with the hope the girls will eventually settle in the U.S. He said Australia, France and Qatar have expressed interest in helping. He also urged the Taliban to ease the exit for the group, saying it would create goodwill.

"If we can put a protective bubble around these women and young girls ... I really believe the world will stand up and and take notice and have a lot of offers to take them in and host them," McCreary said.

Former U.S. women's national soccer team captain Julie Foudy, a two-time World Cup champion and two-time Olympic gold medalist, said the rescue efforts "raise the visibility of these young women and their importance to equality and democracy and all these things that we value in this country."

"As many of us who can stand up as female athletes — as humans — and say, 'This is a moment we need to come together and do what's right,' then we absolutely should," she said.

Nic McKinley, a CIA and Air Force veteran who founded Dallas-based DeliverFund, a nonprofit that's secured housing for 50 Afghan families, said he understood that the U.S. was focused on relocating Afghans who helped American forces, but that others need help, too.

"What about the little girl who just wants to kick a ball around a field and wants to do that well, and has worked hard to do that at a world class level who finds herself suddenly in jeopardy only because she just wanted to play a sport and had a passion for playing that sport?" he said. "The only thing that they had done wrong in the eyes of the Taliban ... is the fact that they were born girls and they had the audacity to dream of doing something."

McCreary said the rescue team feels personally responsible because the U.S. helped the girls go to school and play soccer.

"We need to protect them now," he said. "They should not be in harm's way for things that we helped them do."

## Those left in Afghanistan complain of broken US promises

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Even in the final days of Washington's chaotic airlift in Afghanistan, Javed Habibi was getting phone calls from the U.S. government promising that the green card holder from Richmond, Virginia, his wife and their four daughters would not be left behind.

He was told to stay home and not worry, that they would be evacuated.

Late Monday, however, his heart sank as he heard that the final U.S. flights had left Kabul's airport, followed by the blistering staccato sound of Taliban gunfire, celebrating what they saw as their victory over America.

"They lied to us," Habibi said of the U.S. government. He is among hundreds of American citizens and

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green card holders stranded in the Afghan capital.

Victoria Nuland, undersecretary of state for political affairs, would not address individual cases but said all U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents who could not get evacuation flights or were otherwise stranded had been contacted individually in the past 24 hours and told to expect further information about routes out once those have been arranged.

"We will communicate directly to them personalized instructions on what they should do, when they should do it, and how the United States government feels we are best positioned to help them do that," added State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken praised the evacuation effort despite the scenes of thousands of people jammed outside the gates at Kabul's airport. He said between 100 and 200 remained in Afghanistan, promising that any American who wants to leave Afghanistan would be taken out.

For some of those who remain, however, the trauma of trying for nearly two weeks to get onto a U.S. plane is still harrowing.

Habibi, an electrician who has lived in Richmond since 2015 on a special immigration visa, had returned to Afghanistan for a visit on June 22 — the first time his family had been back since 2019. Their return flight was to have been Aug. 31.

About Aug. 18, Habibi said he got an email from the U.S. government saying that his family — all green card holders except for their youngest, who has a U.S. passport — would be evacuated.

Subsequent emails said he should take his family to the airport. He obeyed, but the mad crush of people prevented him from getting near the gate on his first two attempts.

His daughter, Madina, who at 15 has flawless English and serves as the family spokesperson, said she and her younger sister were almost trampled at the airport. The family wrote back, "It's too dangerous. We can't go into the crowd," she said.

The emails kept arriving, saying they should go to the airport, she said.

By Aug. 25, the emails had been replaced by phone calls from Arlington, Virginia, Madina said. The callers, who identified themselves as being from the U.S. Embassy, told the family to stay at home and that the government was aware of their location, she said, speaking for her father.

Habibi said he still made four or five more attempts, even recruiting friends and relatives to wade into the crowd with the family, forming a kind of protective cordon. The youngest of the four girls, Dunya, is 2 and was born in the U.S.

Habibi said that on at least two occasions, he got close enough to the gate that his passport was scanned but was refused entry. He shouted at the U.S. soldiers, waving his documents.

"What does this green card even mean? Nothing. They did nothing," he said.

Madina, who spoke to most of the callers from Virginia, said she told them the family was from Richmond. Even as the evacuations came to an end, Madina said one caller promised, "We are going to get you out. You are not going to get stuck. Don't worry. We know where you are."

Habibi said they even pledged to pick them up in a car.

"They lied. They did nothing," he said.

Habibi says he hasn't been threatened by the Taliban and that no one has bothered him but he is still afraid. News stories and horrifying posts on social media have him convinced that the Taliban will kill him, he said, although he admitted he doesn't know of anyone being targeted.

"I'm just afraid. I follow the news," he said.

He said he knows of many families, some with U.S. green cards, who remain in Afghanistan.

Madina said Marcia Vigar Perez, a teacher at Dumbarton Elementary, her former school, started a prayer chain for her safe return.

"Every day they call me," she said.

Another Afghan native who asked to be identified only as Ajmal, fearing retribution, said he, his two brothers and their families — 16 people in all — were granted emergency immigrant visas to be evacuated after another brother in Virginia submitted the paperwork.

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Ajmal displayed emails from the U.S. government that said "please make your way to the Hamid Karzai International Airport" and use the Camp Sullivan Gate, not the civilian entrance, although he also was warned that the gate could change daily.

He said he and his relatives went to the airport, but heavy gunfire by the Taliban and the crush of thousands of people sent them back home. On one occasion, he said he received an email telling him and his family they would be picked up at a spot near the airport at 3 a.m. He and his family waited on the street until 9 a.m., but no one came, he said.

His brother Wais, a U.S. citizen living in Virginia, said he had petitioned senators and filled out paperwork to get his family to America.

"I am frustrated and angry" at U.S. officials, Wais said. "All the time they say, 'We are working on it, we are working on it,' but then — nothing."

## Lake Tahoe wildfire seemed controllable, then it wasn't

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Just last week, managers overseeing the fight against the massive wildfire scorching California's Lake Tahoe region thought they could have it contained by the start of this week.

Instead, the Caldor Fire crested the Sierra Nevada on Monday, forcing the unprecedented evacuation of all 22,000 residents of South Lake Tahoe and tens of thousands of tourists who would otherwise be winding down their summers by the alpine lake straddling the California-Nevada state line.

That drastic move might never have been needed if authorities could have thrown more firefighters at the blaze when it was small. That didn't happen because the Dixie Fire was simultaneously raging across the mountain range 100 miles (161 kilometers) to the north, on the way to becoming the second-largest wildfire in California history.

"I do think the Dixie and the way that it's burned and its magnitude did impact the early response to the Caldor," said Scott Stephens, a professor of wildland fire science at the University of California, Berkeley. "It really drew resources down so much that the Caldor got very few for the first couple days."

By the time Caldor approached Lake Tahoe two weeks later, there were 4,000 fire personnel, dozens of water-dropping aircraft and hundreds of fire engines and bulldozers.

But all that manpower and equipment were overmatched by tinder dry conditions, whipping downslope winds and an overgrown forest ripe to burn, a half-dozen fire experts said. And with resources already stretched across the West and internationally, they said the long-term situation will only worsen as exhausted firefighters battle bigger blazes that start earlier and last longer.

"Mother Nature is calling the cards on our hubris that we can conquer and control wildfires during these extreme conditions," said Timothy Ingalsbee, a former federal firefighter who now heads Oregon-based Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology, which advocates for working with wildfires instead of reflexively putting them out.

The Caldor Fire ignited from an unknown cause on Aug. 14 in the steep wooded foothills east of California's capital city of Sacramento. In the first few days, about 240 firefighters were dispatched, compared to the 6,550 firefighters battling the Dixie Fire at the time.

It wasn't until four days later that Cal Fire Chief Thom Porter said fire managers diverted 30 fire engines from the Dixie Fire to the Caldor Fire. Overnight, the number of engines and firefighters nearly tripled. But by then the fire had already burned through Grizzly Flats, destroying dozens of homes in the town of about 1,200 people.

"We are moving resources around as needed, sharing among the incidents," Porter told reporters on Aug. 18. But he acknowledged that "we are having a very difficult time" because resources were so stretched across the West.

Officials couldn't say how many firefighters would have been ideal and when, but Cal Fire was candid that there initially was a shortage, said Ken Pimlott, who retired as the agency's director in 2018 and lives a few miles from the fire's origin.

"Early on, this was not the highest priority because there were other threats on other fires that were

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higher," Pimlott said.

As the fire marched toward Lake Tahoe and its crystal clear waters that attract visitors from around the world, it destroyed hundreds of homes and other structures and left a firefighter with serious burns.

Still, officials predicted as recently as last weekend that they could hold the fire outside the Lake Tahoe Basin. They feverishly expanded fire lines to take advantage of the barren granite that caps the mountain chain which has formed an impenetrable barrier to flames in the past. This time, their optimism merely lulled residents into a false sense of security, leaving many scrambling to pack their lives in bags when evacuation orders came Monday.

Chad Hanson of the John Muir Project said fire managers were foolish to think they could stop the flames based on the expected winds.

"It is 100% predictable that under those conditions the fire will continue to move in that direction. So it's hard for me to imagine why anyone would conclude otherwise," said Hanson, a frequent critic of forest management efforts.

Firefighters had thought they made good progress during favorable conditions going into the weekend, said Jason Hunter, a spokesman for Caldor Fire managers. But then came the changing weather pattern with "incredibly gusty winds" that pushed burning embers over the crest.

"The weather, is what it boils down to, is what changed," Hunter said. Containment projections are a "constantly moving target" based on evolving conditions, he said. The Caldor Fire's containment projection has since been pushed back to Sept. 13.

Experts agreed conditions are grim because drought has been worsened by consecutive climate change-driven heat waves that sap humidity before dry winds whip flames and ferry embers sometimes a mile or more ahead of the main blaze.

"These embers are leapfrogging over fire lines and rivers, ridges and roads and other things that typically stop wildfire spread, and so you have these fires kind of hopscotching across the landscape," Ingalsbee said.

Firefighters were outflanked by a shift in localized winds that funneled flames into the Tahoe basin, said John Battles, a University of California, Berkeley professor of forest ecology.

Fire managers have become adept at projecting the weather and how fuels will burn, but still lack the ability to predict localized winds at fires — some caused by the fires themselves — with 10 different computer models offering as many conflicting outcomes, he said.

"They're trying to predict winds at a mountain pass. That is the most complex topography we have," Battles said. "That's why you have this feeling like they didn't know what they're doing."

He added: "When you're fighting a fire the size of the Caldor, you make your best guess."

The Caldor Fire is just the second in modern history to have traversed the Sierra. The first was the Dixie Fire that started in mid-July near the town of Paradise and has grown to 1,300 square miles (3,367 square kilometers), more than four times as large as Caldor.

Such monster fires typically come later in the year when conditions are their driest but also when cooler days, rising humidity and ultimately rain and snow have aided the firefight, said Char Miller, a professor at Pomona College who has written extensively about wildfires.

But California has received far less precipitation than normal the last two years and there's no guarantee more will arrive this fall to aid firefighters. "This may burn through October," Miller said.

Yet the fire experts said the biggest challenge is neither drought nor climate change, but the overgrown forests that could actually benefit from fire — so long as it is set or allowed to burn at a low intensity during the spring or fall before it can explode out of control.

Firefighters still quickly contain about 95% of fires, but it's the ones that escape that do the major damage, Pimlott said. Once fires spread, firefighters may need to start prioritizing communities that can be protected while letting the flames burn around them, he said.

"It's a hard pill to swallow for all of us in the firefighting community, because we want to put these fires to bed," he said. "We just may not be able to do that on every one of these fires, because of the conditions we're facing."



## **Milley: US coordination with Taliban on strikes 'possible'**

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said it's "possible" the United States will seek to coordinate with the Taliban on counterterrorism strikes in Afghanistan against Islamic State militants or others.

Milley did not elaborate, and his comment Wednesday did not appear to suggest immediate plans to work with the Taliban.

U.S. military commanders coordinated daily with Taliban commanders outside the Kabul airport over the past three weeks to facilitate the evacuation of more than 124,000 people. But that was a matter of convenience for both parties and not necessarily a sign that they will pursue, or even want, a regular relationship in the future.

The U.S. military ousted the Taliban from power in the fall of 2001 and fought against them for the 19 years that followed.

The extent and nature of a U.S.-Taliban relationship, now that the war is over, is one of the key issues to be worked out. The U.S. diplomatic presence in Kabul has been moved to Doha, Qatar. President Joe Biden has noted several times recently that the Taliban are avowed enemies of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, suggesting a shared interest with the United States.

At a Pentagon news conference with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Milley called the Taliban "ruthless" adding, "Whether or not they change remains to be seen." He suggested that the recent cooperative arrangement with the Taliban at Kabul airport was not necessarily a model for the future.

"In war you do what you must in order to reduce risk to mission and force, not what you necessarily want to do," Milley said.

Biden has promised further targeting of the IS group in Afghanistan in response to the IS suicide bombing last week at a Kabul airport gate that killed scores of Afghans and 13 American service members. On Saturday the U.S. military carried out a drone strike in Afghanistan that it said killed two IS planners. On Tuesday, Biden said, "To ISIS-K: We are not done with you yet," referring to the IS group.

Targeting Islamic State militants or other extremist groups, such as al-Qaida, will be more difficult with no U.S. military forces on the ground and no friendly government forces with which to share intelligence on extremist networks. But the Biden administration asserts that it can contain these groups by monitoring and potentially striking with assets based elsewhere in the region.

Although the Taliban oppose IS, it's far from clear that they will be inclined to work with the U.S. military or the Central Intelligence Agency now that they have regained power in Kabul. Milley has recent experience with Taliban leaders; twice last year, most recently in December, he met face-to-face with them in an attempt to slow their attacks on the U.S.-backed Afghan government, which collapsed in mid-August, triggering the frantic U.S.-led evacuation.

Austin sounded at least as skeptical as Milley regarding the possibility that the coordination in recent days at the Kabul airport suggests a future relationship with the Taliban.

"I would not make any leaps of logic to broader issues," said Austin.

Both Austin and Milley commanded troops in Afghanistan during the 20-year war and their comments at Wednesday's news conference largely focused on tributes to those who served in Afghanistan, including those who died or were wounded. They also thanked all who contributed to the final airlift, which Austin called the largest evacuation of civilians in American history.

Milley and Austin urged war veterans to view their service as worthwhile and appreciated by the American public, while acknowledging that the memories can be painful.

"War is hard. It's vicious. It's brutal. It's unforgiving," Milley said. "Yes, we all have pain and anger. When we see what has unfolded over the last 20 years and over the last 20 days, that creates pain and anger."

With the U.S. involvement in the war over and all American military out of the country, Biden is grappling with the prospects of a new relationship with the Taliban. He has tasked Secretary of State Antony Blinken with coordinating with international partners to hold the Taliban to their promise of safe passage

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for Americans and others who want to leave in the days ahead.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, has described the U.S. relationship with the Taliban during the evacuation as "very pragmatic and very businesslike," saying they helped secure the airport. But other reports from people in Afghanistan described shootings, violence and Taliban moves to block desperate Afghans from getting through the gates.

Biden in an address to the nation Tuesday defended his decision to end America's longest war and withdraw all U.S. troops by an Aug. 31 deadline.

"I was not going to extend this forever war," Biden declared from the White House. "And I was not going to extend a forever exit."

Biden is coming under heavy criticism, particularly from Republicans, for his handling of the evacuation. But he said it was inevitable that the final departure from two decades of war, first negotiated with the Taliban for May 1 by former President Donald Trump, would have been difficult, with likely violence, no matter when it was planned and conducted.

"To those asking for a third decade of war in Afghanistan, I ask, 'What is the vital national interest?'" Biden said. He added, "I simply do not believe that the safety and security of America is enhanced by continuing to deploy thousands of American troops and spending billions of dollars in Afghanistan."

## **AP sources: Intel shows extremists to attend Capitol rally**

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, ERIC TUCKER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Far right extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers are planning to attend a rally later this month at the U.S. Capitol that is designed to demand "justice" for the hundreds of people who have been charged in connection with January's insurrection, according to three people familiar with intelligence gathered by federal officials.

As a result, U.S. Capitol Police have been discussing in recent weeks whether the large perimeter fence that was erected outside the Capitol after January's riot will need to be put back up, the people said.

The officials have been discussing security plans that involve reconstructing the fence as well as another plan that does not involve a fence, the people said. They were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The planned Sept. 18 rally at the Capitol comes as a jittery Washington has seen a series of troubling one-off incidents — including, most recently, a man who parked a pickup truck near the Library of Congress and said he had a bomb and detonator. Among the most concerning events: A series of unexploded pipe bombs placed around the U.S. Capitol ahead of the Jan. 6 insurrection remain unexplained and no suspect has been charged.

On Capitol Hill, the politics around fencing in the iconic building and its grounds were extremely difficult for lawmakers after the Jan. 6 insurrection. Many said they disliked closing off access, even as they acknowledged the increased level of security it provided.

The decision on whether or not to erect the fence again will likely be considered by the Capitol Police Board, according to a House aide familiar with the matter and granted anonymity to discuss it. No decisions have been made. The board consists of the Sergeant at Arms of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeeper of the U.S. Senate, and the Architect of the Capitol.

The deadly riot overwhelmed the police force that was left badly prepared by intelligence failures and has resulted in internal reviews about why law enforcement agencies weren't better equipped. More than 100 police officers were injured and the rioters did more than \$1 million in damage.

The planned presence of the extremist groups is concerning because, while members and associates of Oath Keepers and Proud Boys make up just a fraction of the nearly 600 people who have been charged so far in the riot, they are facing some of the most serious charges brought so far.

Those charges include allegations that they conspired to block the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. Several Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges and are cooperating with investigators in the case against their fellow extremists, who authorities say came to Washington ready for

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violence and willing to do whatever it took to stop the certification of the Electoral College vote.

As officials prepare for this month's rally, Yogananda Pittman, the Capitol Police official who led intelligence operations for the agency when the rioters descended on the building, has been put back in charge of intelligence.

In a statement to the AP, Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger said the department was "closely monitoring September 18 and we are planning accordingly."

"After January 6, we made Department-wide changes to the way we gather and share intelligence internally and externally. I am confident the work we are doing now will make sure our officers have what they need to keep everyone safe," Manger said.

Still, law enforcement officials are increasingly concerned about the rally and the potential for violence. The Metropolitan Police Department will activate its entire force for that day and has put specialized riot officers on standby, law enforcement officials said.

But for federal officials, the person who planted the pipe bombs also remains a serious concern. Many of the leads in the investigation have come up dry and investigators working on the case haven't even been able to figure out whether the suspect is a man or a woman, people familiar with the case said.

The FBI has released grainy surveillance video of the person they believe left the bombs and have said the person wore a gray hooded sweatshirt and a face mask and had a backpack and distinct Nike Air Max Speed Turf sneakers in yellow, black and gray.

The FBI had asked Nike for information about the shoes and sought to analyze information from purchasers, according to law enforcement documents obtained by The Associated Press. Agents also looked into a tip that someone had placed an ad on Facebook Marketplace with someone selling nearly identical shoes, the documents said.

The bombs — each about a foot long with end caps and wiring that appeared to be attached to a timer — had contained components that were unique and specific enough that agents reached out to companies like Walmart and other vendors and asked to review information about recent purchases, the documents said.

The explosive devices were placed outside the headquarters of the Republican and Democratic national committees between 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Jan. 5, the night before the riot. But they were not located by law enforcement until the next day, shortly before thousands of pro-Trump rioters stormed into the Capitol.

It is not clear whether that means the pipe bombs were unrelated to the next day's riot or were part of the riot planning. Both buildings are within a few blocks of the Capitol.

## 'It looked apocalyptic': Crew describes Afghan departure

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It looked like a zombie apocalypse.

For the U.S. military pilots and aircrew about to make their final takeoffs out of Afghanistan, the sky was lit up with fireworks and sporadic gunfire and the airfield littered with battered shells of airplanes and destroyed equipment. Stray dogs raced around the tarmac. And Taliban fighters, visible in the darkness through the green-tinged view of night vision goggles, walked the airfield waving an eerie goodbye.

Lined up on the runway at the Kabul airport Monday night were the five last C-17s to leave the country after a chaotic and deadly airlift evacuation that marked the end of America's involvement in the Afghanistan war. In the final hours, there were no more rocket defense systems to protect them on the runway, and no one in the airport control center to direct them out.

"It just looked apocalyptic," said Air Force Lt. Col. Braden Coleman, who was in charge of monitoring the outside of his aircraft for artillery fire and other threats. "It looked like one of those zombie movies where all the airplanes had been destroyed, their doors were open, the wheels were broken. There was a plane that was burned all the way. You could see the cockpit was there, and the whole rest of the plane looked like the skeleton of a fish."

In interviews Wednesday with The Associated Press, members of the Air Force's 816th Expeditionary

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Airlift Squadron who flew out on the last military flights detailed their final fraught hours in what has been a dark, emotional and divisive U.S. exit from a war that now leaves the country in the hands of the same Taliban enemy it once ousted from power.

"It was just definitely very tense, and we were definitely all on edge watching everything going on to make sure that we were ready," said Air Force Capt. Kirby Wedan, pilot of MOOSE81, who led the final formation of five aircraft out.

Adding to the stress, she said, was that their planes were parked in an area of the airport that had been attacked and breached in the past. At one point during the night, a group of civilians got onto the airfield and tried to get to the aircraft, but they were stopped by Army troops securing the plane, said Wedan, who is the squadron's mission planning cell chief.

Right behind her C-17 was MOOSE92, where Coleman, the director of operations for the 816th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, was going through his own checklists for takeoff. When he was told to taxi up a bit farther, he stepped out of the plane to help direct the crew where to go.

"I had my NVG's on, my night vision goggles, and I had a Raven behind me following me out, making sure that I was, you know, safe," said Coleman, referring to a member of the specially trained security forces who protect Air Force aircraft. "It was a bit tense, I'm not going to lie. But I guess you don't really think of it at the time. You just ... do what you're trained to do."

For more than three hours, they methodically went through about 300 items on their checklists, packing up the last four Little Bird helicopters, and ensuring they had all their troops and equipment.

From Scott Air Force Base in Illinois, Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovest, commander of Air Mobility Command, watched on video screens as the aircraft lined up for takeoff. One screen showed a scroll of the mIRC chat stream — the online message application that the military uses to communicate. And she could hear the orders from Lt. Col. Alex Pelbath, a pilot who was serving as the mission commander for the final departure.

One by one, each C-17 was told to "clamshell" — or close up the ramp. Then Pelbath's final order: "Flush the force." With that, Wedan began to move her C-17 down the runway.

"It was definitely different. I've never been on an airfield where I didn't really have permission to take off," said Wedan, noting the absence of air traffic control in the tower.

As they lifted off in rapid succession, cheers broke out from the troops on board — most of them special operations forces and soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division.

"It was a visible relief," said Wedan. "You could tell that they had been working really hard. Many of them hadn't showered in a couple of weeks. They were all incredibly tired. ... You could tell that they were just relieved to be out of there and that their mission was accomplished."

As the last C-17 cleared Kabul airspace, Pelbath's delivered a welcome message: "MAF Safe" — shorthand for saying that the Mobility Air Forces were out of harm's way.

Maj. Gen. Chris Donahue, commander of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division, had been the last soldier to walk up the ramp on the final C-17 to depart. He had been in charge of security for the evacuation mission. Soon after the aircraft were in the air, he sent his own message: "Job well done. Proud of you all."

Crammed onto the floor of the aircraft, exhausted troops found places to sleep. "Everyone was kind of sitting on top of each other — whatever we could do to have them get them on the aircraft and get them out," said Wedan.

Within 30 minutes, she said, most on her plane were asleep. Coleman agreed.

"I walked downstairs and they warned me not to go to the bathroom because there were too many people in front of the lav door," said Coleman. "There was one guy who had a box of water bottles that he was using for a pillow. I don't know how that could have been comfortable. But, hey, he was fast asleep."

Their flight to Kuwait was about four hours long. Coleman said his plane was lucky enough to have extra toilets. Wedan's had just one — but her crew passed out candy.

"They're tired and they're resting now. But I think, for two and a half weeks, you really saw why it was that a lot of us joined," said Coleman, who enlisted in 2001 after the Sept. 11 attacks that triggered the U.S. invasion into Afghanistan. "To see everybody step up to make this happen in the amount of time that

it took to happen, to move 124,000 people out in less than three weeks. I mean, I couldn't be prouder to be a C-17 pilot today."

## After voters embraced mail ballots, GOP states tighten rules

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

A monthslong campaign by the Republican Party, fueled in part by the false narrative of widespread fraud in last year's presidential election, has led to a wave of new voting laws that will tighten access to the ballot for millions of Americans.

The restrictions especially target voting methods that have been rising in popularity across the country, erecting hurdles to mail balloting and early voting that saw explosive growth during the pandemic. More than 40% of all voters last fall cast mail ballots, a record.

Texas is the latest state to crack down, after the Republican-controlled Legislature passed a bill Tuesday taking aim at Democratic-leaning counties that have sought to expand access to the ballot.

"Regardless of motives, these bills hurt voters," said Isabel Longoria, the election administrator of Harris County, which includes Houston. "Voters are going to feel this the next time they go vote, and that's what I'm most worried about."

Republican lawmakers and their allies say the new laws are meant to ensure election integrity, but Democrats and voting rights activists say they instead will end up disenfranchising voters, especially young people and minorities. In Texas, the bill prompted Democratic lawmakers to flee to the nation's capital to prevent a legislative quorum, a protest that ended when a handful of lawmakers returned after more than a month away from home.

The Texas bill, expected to be signed soon by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, follows similar legislation this year in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa and some other GOP-controlled states. Restrictions also are being pushed in Ohio, where Republicans control the Legislature and governor's office.

Among the most consistent targets of Republican lawmakers this year have been mail ballots and early in-person voting, after many states expanded those options to make voting safer amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Roughly a quarter of all voters cast mail ballots in 2016 and 2018. That jumped to just over 43% in 2020, according to a recent report by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. It was the first time in the history of the survey that a majority of voters did not cast their ballots in person on Election Day.

Almost 13 million people voted by mail in the November election in states that have newly enacted legislation that restricts mail voting procedures, according to the report.

Some of the more contentious aspects of the Texas bill are measures banning 24-hour polling places and drive-thru voting. Those options were used successfully last year, especially in Houston, which is heavily Democratic and has a significant number of Black and Latino voters. The legislation also makes it a felony for a local election official to send unsolicited mail ballot applications and bans the use of drop boxes for mail ballots.

Harlan Williams, an instructional designer who voted at a drive-thru center in the last presidential election, described the process as fast and well-organized.

"It really just doesn't make any sense to take it away from us," he said. "I think it's clearly voter suppression. It's a way for a party that's losing influence and power to try and stay in power."

Texas Republicans defend the law as a way to ensure that only eligible voters cast ballots, even though there has been no evidence of widespread fraud there or in any other state. They also say the law takes steps to help voters — for example, allowing those who cast a mail ballot to fix mistakes rather than having it automatically rejected.

Republicans have tightened voting rules as former President Donald Trump and his allies continue to baselessly claim his loss was due to widespread fraud. Critics of the new GOP laws have said the concerns are based on conspiracy theories and should not be used to restrict voting access.

"We're starting from the point of view, it's not broke, why are we trying to change it?" said Michigan

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Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat.

Many of the changes this year would have faced federal scrutiny before being implemented had the U.S. Supreme Court not weakened a core provision of the Voting Rights Act in 2013. Under that provision, Arizona, Georgia, Texas and other states and counties with a history of discrimination would have had to submit their proposed legislation to either the federal court for the District of Columbia or the Justice Department.

Critics of the new restrictions have for months urged Democrats in Congress to pass federal legislation to establish minimum voting standards to neutralize some of the new laws. But Democrats have been unable to unite behind a strategy that could overcome near-unanimous opposition from Senate Republicans.

With most of the Republican restrictions already in place and the midterm elections approaching, the Democratic National Committee has pledged \$25 million for voter education, registration and other efforts as a way to combat the new laws.

Democrats also have countered with laws that broaden voting access in states they control politically, taking steps such as expanding drop-off locations for mailed ballots and making it easier to register and vote on college campuses.

Few states will have a brighter spotlight next year than Georgia, which has emerged as one of the nation's hottest political battlegrounds. Republicans this year passed restrictions around absentee balloting and increased legislative oversight of election officials.

One provision in Georgia's new law would reduce the number of ballot drop boxes in metro Atlanta from 94 last year to no more than 23 for future elections, based on a formula of one drop box per 100,000 registered voters. Georgia Republicans said they were focused on making sure drop boxes were written into the law, available for future elections with strong security measures in place.

Democrats see something more sinister at work, after President Joe Biden beat Trump by a little more than 12,000 votes in the state, largely on the strength of Black and left-leaning voters in Atlanta and some of its suburbs.

The state's new rules also shorten the amount of time voters can request an absentee ballot, from 180 days to 78, and add an ID requirement for requesting and returning mail ballots.

Florida Republicans also established new rules around ballot drop boxes, requiring them to be guarded and only available when election offices and early voting sites are open. Election supervisors could face a \$25,000 fine if a ballot drop box is accessible outside early voting hours or is left unsupervised.

Arizona Republicans passed a law that purges infrequent voters from a list of those who automatically get a mail ballot each election.

In Iowa, voters will have less time to vote early, after Republicans narrowed the window from 29 days to 20. The state's new election law also requires most mail ballots to be received by Election Day, as opposed to being postmarked then. County election officials are banned from sending out absentee ballot request forms unless a voter asks for one.

"It's going to be harder for people to vote," said Sylvia Albert, voting and elections director for Common Cause, which advocates for expanded voter access. "It means that states have to put more money and time and energy into educating the voting population in how to go about being able to vote in spite of these burdens."

## Ida remnants pound Northeast with rain, flooding, tornadoes

By DAVID PORTER and MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The remnants of Hurricane Ida blew through the mid-Atlantic states Wednesday with at least two tornadoes, heavy winds and drenching rains that collapsed the roof of a U.S. Postal Service building, left cars and roads underwater and sent garbage floating through the streets of New York.

Social media posts showed homes reduced to rubble in a southern New Jersey county just outside Philadelphia, not far from where the National Weather Service confirmed a tornado Wednesday evening. Authorities did not have any immediate information on injuries.

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Other video showed water rushing through Newark Liberty International Airport as the storm moved into New York on Wednesday night.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates the airport, tweeted at 10:30 p.m. that all flights were suspended and all parking lots were closed due to severe flooding. All train service to the airport also was suspended.

The National Weather Service recorded 3.15 inches of rain in New York's Central Park in one hour, far surpassing the 1.94 inches that fell in one hour during Tropical Storm Henri on the night of Aug. 21, which was believed at the time to be the most ever recorded in the park.

New York's FDR Drive, a major artery on the east side of Manhattan, was underwater by late evening and subway stations and tracks became so flooded that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority suspended all service. Videos posted online showed subway riders standing on seats in cars filled with water.

Other videos showed vehicles submerged up to their windows on major roadways in and around the city and garbage floating down a street in Queens.

At the U.S. Open tennis tournament in Queens, television footage showed fans who had watched matches under the Arthur Ashe Stadium's retractable roof slogging through several inches of water as they left.

Few parts of the region were untouched, and residents huddled inside and endured the anxiety brought on by tornado warnings that gradually moved north and east with the storm.

The roof collapsed at the Postal Service building in Kearny, New Jersey, with people inside, police Sgt. Chris Levchak said. Rescue crews were on scene into the night, with no immediate word on the number of people or severity of injuries.

Gov. Phil Murphy declared a state of emergency in all of New Jersey's 21 counties, urging people to stay off the flooded roads. Meteorologists warned that rivers likely won't crest for a few more days, raising the possibility of more widespread flooding.

Soaking rains prompted the evacuations of thousands of people after water reached dangerous levels at a dam near Johnstown, a Pennsylvania town nicknamed Flood City.

Ida caused countless school and business closures in Pennsylvania. About 150 roadways maintained by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation were closed and many smaller roadways also were impassable. Several thousand customers were still without power late Wednesday night.

Some areas near Johnstown, whose history includes several deadly floods, saw 5 inches or more of rain by mid-afternoon, an inundation that triggered an evacuation order for those downstream from the Wilmore dam. Nearby Hinckston Run Dam was also being monitored but appeared stable by late afternoon.

Both dams were considered high-hazard dams that are likely to kill someone were they to fail.

Evacuees were taken to a nearby high school with help from the Red Cross, National Guard, local transit authority and school transportation services, he said.

The 1889 Johnstown flood killed 2,200 people, a disaster blamed on poor maintenance on the South Fork Dam on the Little Conemaugh River. It sent a 36-foot wall of water roaring into a populated area at 40 mph (65 kph).

High water drove some from their homes in Maryland and Virginia. The storm killed a teenager, two people were not accounted for and a tornado was believed to have touched down along the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

The National Weather Service had predicted flooding from what remained of Hurricane Ida, saying steep terrain and even city streets were particularly vulnerable to a band of severe weather that extended from the Appalachians into Massachusetts.

Flash flooding knocked about 20 homes off their foundations and washed several trailers away in Virginia's mountainous western corner, where about 50 people were rescued and hundreds were evacuated. News outlets reported that one person was unaccounted for in the small mountain community of Hurley.

Water had almost reached the ceilings of basement units when crews arrived at an apartment complex in Rockville, Maryland, on Wednesday. A 19-year-old was found dead, another person was missing and about 200 people from 60 apartments near Rock Creek were displaced, Montgomery County Fire Chief

Scott Goldstein said Wednesday.

"In many years I have not seen circumstances like this," Goldstein said.

Tropical Storm Larry was strengthening and moving quickly westward after forming off the coast of Africa earlier Wednesday. Forecasters predicted it would rapidly intensify in a manner similar to Ida, becoming a major hurricane with top wind speeds of 120 mph (193 kph) by Saturday. Kate remained a tropical depression and was expected to weaken without threatening land.

## After Ida, small recovery signs amid daunting destruction

By REBECCA SANTANA, MELINDA DESLATTE and JANET MCCONAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Lights came back on for a fortunate few, some corner stores opened their doors and crews cleared fallen trees and debris from a growing number of roadways Wednesday — small signs of progress amid the monumental task of repairing the damage inflicted by Hurricane Ida.

Still, suffering remained widespread three days after Ida battered Louisiana and parts of Mississippi as the fifth-most-powerful hurricane to strike the U.S. Some low-lying communities remained largely underwater. Roughly a million homes and businesses still had no electricity, and health officials said more than 600,000 people lacked running water.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said he was pleased that power had returned for some people, saying it was "critically important to show progress" after the storm. But he also acknowledged that much more work lay ahead.

"I'm very mindful that it's a start, and only a start," he told a news conference.

The death toll rose to at least six after a coroner confirmed a 65-year-old woman had drowned in her Louisiana home and police in Maryland said a 19-year-old man was found dead in an apartment complex flooded by heavy rain from Ida's remnants. And the staggering scope of the disaster began to come into focus, with a private firm estimating total damage from Ida could exceed \$50 billion.

In southern Louisiana's Plaquemines Parish, Gayle Lawrence lost two cars, refrigerators and almost everything in her garage to floodwaters. Her garage was filled with marsh grass and dead fish. Scores of other homes in the neighborhood were also flooded.

"The house is solid. It didn't even move. But when the water came up, it destroyed everything," she said.

In Jefferson Parish, hospital staff, food bank employees and other critical workers were hampered by a gas shortage, said parish president Cynthia Lee Sheng. The parish neighbors New Orleans and saw widespread destruction from Ida. Authorities were still waiting for floodwaters to recede enough for trucks carrying food, water and repair supplies to begin moving into Lafitte and other low-lying communities.

"Today we're a broken community. It won't always be that way," Sheng said after meeting with Edwards.

Emergency officials in nearby Terrebonne Parish took to Twitter to caution evacuees considering returning home that "there are no shelters, no electricity, very limited resources for food, gasoline and supplies and absolutely no medical services."

With all of New Orleans blacked out except for those running generators, Byron Lambert woke up startled about 1:30 a.m. when light suddenly came on down the hall from where he slept. He first thought it was a burglar, then realized his home had electricity.

Lambert's house in eastern New Orleans was among more than 11,000 homes and businesses that had power restored early Wednesday, according to the electric company Entergy. The company also said it restored power to Ochsner's main hospital campus in Jefferson Parish and several hospitals near Baton Rouge.

"When it came on it startled me. I'm like 'All right! We got power,'" Lambert said, his enthusiasm tempered by the knowledge of what others were going through. "I'm fortunate, but they have a lot of people that aren't as fortunate as me, and I pray for them because it's rough."

There were still 989,000 homes and businesses without power, or 44% of all state utility customers in southeast Louisiana, from the New Orleans area to Baton Rouge, according to the state Public Service Commission. Phillip May, president and CEO of Entergy Louisiana, told reporters Wednesday that he predicts "a



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lot more progress" in coming days. Still, he said full recovery will be slow, with thousands of power poles and transformers knocked out by the storm.

In neighboring Mississippi, 32,000 customers had no electricity.

Hard-hit areas in southeast Louisiana were under a heat advisory Wednesday, with forecasters warning combined heat and humidity could make some areas feel like 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42 degrees Celsius). Officials scrambled to offer food, water and places to cool off.

National Guard troops had handed out more than 141,000 meals, 143,000 liters (37,777 gallons) of water and more than 500 tarps in Louisiana as of Wednesday morning, according to Edwards' office. In New Orleans, officials opened seven places where people could get a meal and sit in air conditioning. The city was also using 70 transit buses as cooling sites, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said.

Meanwhile, more than 1,200 people were walking through some of Ida's hardest-hit communities to look for those needing help, according to the Louisiana Fire Marshal's office.

Search and rescue missions were tapering off, but continued in four parishes that still had floodwaters, Brig. Gen. Lee W. Hopkins of the Louisiana National Guard said on a Zoom call. That's compared to 31 parishes in the hours immediately after the storm.

President Joe Biden was to visit Louisiana on Friday to survey the damage, the White House said.

In New Orleans, where the mayor estimated roughly half the population had evacuated, there were additional signs of recovery. Flags hung from dangling power lines to help drivers avoid them, and in one neighborhood, someone decorated the downed lines with strands of tinsel in an echo of Mardi Gras.

City crews removing debris from roads and cutting up fallen trees had some streets almost completely cleared, while others remained cluttered with obstacles.

A few corner stores were open, many taking cash only, though some had working ATM machines. In many areas, National Guard troops or law enforcement stood posted at pharmacies and gas stations, where drivers waited in long lines for fuel.

Louisiana's transportation department announced that all interstate systems across the state had reopened and been cleared of debris. AT&T, which faced widespread cellphone outages after Ida, said it was currently operating at more than 90% of normal capacity.

As a clearer picture of Ida's devastation emerged, the hurricane likely caused \$50 billion to \$60 billion in total damage, estimated Karen Clark, who has calculated catastrophic risk since 1987. Her risk modeling company, Karen Clark and Company, figured just \$18 billion of those losses would be insured.

Those estimates would rank Ida anywhere from the fifth- to seventh-costliest U.S. hurricane based on data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Katrina, Harvey, Maria and Sandy were well over that amount. NOAA says 2017's Irma incurred about \$55 billion in damage and 1992's Andrew about \$53 billion in 2019 dollars.

## Judge conditionally approves Purdue Pharma opioid settlement

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

A federal bankruptcy judge gave conditional approval Wednesday to a sweeping settlement that will remove the Sackler family from ownership of OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma and devote potentially \$10 billion to fighting the opioid crisis that has killed a half-million Americans over the past two decades.

If it withstands appeals, the deal will resolve a mountain of 3,000 lawsuits from state and local governments, Native American tribes, unions and others that accuse the company of helping to spark the overdose epidemic by aggressively marketing the prescription painkiller.

Under the settlement, the Sacklers will have to get out of the opioid business altogether and contribute \$4.5 billion. But they will be shielded from any future lawsuits over opioids.

The drugmaker itself will be reorganized into a new charity-oriented company with a board appointed by public officials and will funnel its profits into government-led efforts to prevent and treat addiction.

Also, the settlement sets up a compensation fund that will pay some victims of drugs an expected \$3,500 to \$48,000 each.

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After an all-day hearing in which he analyzed the plan's pros and cons for a nonstop 6 1/2 hours, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert Drain said he would approve it as long as two relatively small changes were made. If so, he said, he will formally enter the decision on Thursday.

He said that while he does not have "fondness for the Sacklers or sympathy for them," collecting money from them through lawsuits instead of a settlement would be complicated.

The deal comes nearly two years after the Stamford, Connecticut-based company filed for bankruptcy under the weight of the lawsuits.

Under the settlement, the Sacklers were not given immunity from criminal charges, though there have been no indications they will face any.

State and local governments came to support the plan overwhelmingly, if grudgingly in many cases. But nine states and others had opposed it, largely because of the protections granted to the family.

The attorneys general of Connecticut, the District of Columbia and Washington state immediately announced they will either appeal the ruling or explore the possibility of doing so.

The Sacklers "should not be allowed to manipulate bankruptcy laws to evade justice and protect their blood money," Connecticut's William Tong said.

Some families who lost loved ones to drugs also came out against the settlement, including Ed Bisch, of Westampton, New Jersey, whose 18-year-old son died of an overdose nearly 20 years ago. "The Sacklers are buying their immunity," he said.

But other families said they did not want to risk losing the money that will go toward treatment and prevention.

"If they gave me a million dollars, would it help bring back my son?" said Lynn Wencus, of Wrentham, Massachusetts. "Let's help the people who are really struggling with this disease."

In a statement, members of the Sackler family said: "While we dispute the allegations that have been made about our family, we have embraced this path in order to help combat a serious and complex public health crisis."

Purdue chairman Steve Miller said the settlement averts "years of value-destructive litigation" and "ensures that billions of dollars will be devoted to helping people and communities who have been hurt by the opioid crisis."

The bankruptcy judge, based in White Plains, New York, had urged the holdouts to work out an agreement for the same reason.

"Bitterness over the outcome of this case is completely understandable," Drain said. "But one also has to look at the process and the issues and risks and rewards and alternatives of continued litigation versus the settlement laid out in the plan."

Some of the opioid deaths over the past two decades have been attributed to OxyContin and other prescription painkillers, but most are from illicit forms of opioids such as heroin and illegally produced fentanyl. Opioid-linked deaths in the U.S. continued at a record pace last year, hitting 70,000.

The crisis devastated the reputation of the Sackler family, major philanthropists whose name was once emblazoned on the walls of museums and universities around the world. With the settlement, family members who have owned the company will still be worth billions. Another branch of the Sackler family has had no involvement with Purdue for decades.

Whether the deal holds the Sacklers sufficiently accountable was the most contentious question through the proceedings. Those suing succeeded in boosting the amount the Sacklers would pay from a likely \$3 billion.

David Sackler, a former Purdue board member, had testified that family members would not accept the agreement unless it protected them from lawsuits. Otherwise, he said, the family would defend itself in litigation that could drag on for years and eat up the company's and the family's assets in lawyers' fees.

His father, Richard Sackler, a former Purdue president and board chairman, said under questioning that he, his family and the company did not bear responsibility for the opioid crisis.

Drain noted that none of the four Sacklers who testified offered an explicit apology. "A forced apology

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is not really an apology, so we will have to live without one," he said.

The judge requested two somewhat technical changes to the plan: one clarifying that Sackler family members would be protected only from lawsuits involving opioids, and one on the procedure for bringing non-opioid claims against them.

One projection commissioned by a group of attorneys general found that the family's wealth could rise from the current estimate of \$10.7 billion to more than \$14 billion by 2030 despite the required payments. That's because the family could continue to benefit from investment returns and interest as they make their gradual contributions over a decade under the deal.

Lawyers for Purdue and branches of the Sackler family disputed the assumptions used in the projection.

The settlement also requires members of the Sackler family, who are scattered across the U.S., Britain and elsewhere in Europe, to get out of the opioid business worldwide.

Several attorneys general won another provision that will create a massive public repository of company documents, including ones that normally would be protected by attorney-client privilege.

Purdue has said the settlement overall will be worth about \$10 billion, which includes the value of addiction treatment and overdose antidote drugs it is developing.

The bankruptcy case is not the first time Purdue had faced legal trouble over the marketing of its pain-killers.

The company pleaded guilty in 2007 to federal charges it misled regulators and others about the addiction dangers of OxyContin and agreed to pay more than \$600 million in penalties.

Last November, as part of a settlement with the U.S. Justice Department, Purdue pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the United States and violating anti-kickback laws.

Purdue's bankruptcy has been the highest-profile case in a complicated universe of opioid litigation.

Drugmaker Johnson & Johnson and the three largest U.S. drug distribution companies recently announced a settlement that could be worth up to \$26 billion if state and local governments agree.

Individual trials also remain, including one scheduled to start in October in Cleveland over the role pharmacies played in the crisis. Other trials have been held this year in California, New York and West Virginia, though verdicts have yet to be reached.

## Trails where California family died closed to the public

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Federal officials closed a portion of trails at a national forest in Northern California where a family and their dog mysteriously died last month, citing pending toxicology reports on nearby water.

There was no clear cause of death, prompting authorities to treat the area as a hazmat scene.

Investigators are considering whether toxic algae blooms or other hazards may have contributed to the deaths and are awaiting the results of water tests taken from the area where the family was found.

The area north of Fresno in the Sierra National Forest will be closed until Sept. 26 to "provide for public safety due to unknown hazards found in and near the Savage Lundy Trail," according to the order. Rangers can reopen the trails if conditions change, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Tuesday.

John Gerrish, his wife, Ellen Chung, their 1-year-old daughter, Miju, and their dog were all found dead on Aug. 17 on a hiking trail near the national forest's Hite's Cove. A family friend had reported them missing.

The remote area where the bodies were found had no cellphone service. The FBI is trying to access Gerrish's cell phone, which was found in his pocket, the newspaper reported.

"We are uncertain of the causes of death. We still haven't gotten the results from the case," said Leak Pen, assistant recreation officer at the Bass Lake Ranger District, which oversees that portion of the Sierra National Forest. "So, as a precaution, let's go ahead and close it because we know there's some form of hazard to the public."

Toxicology reports are still pending, leading investigators to wait to list a cause of death, but last week they ruled out any weapons being used or dangerous gases from a mine along the trail.

Pen said one water test has come back positive for harmful algae bloom. Others have turned up no

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toxic substances and still other tests are outstanding. Officials had already warned hikers of such blooms a month before the deaths along the south fork of the Merced River, so that result is not a surprise. Such freshwater blooms are not known to kill humans.

"Because of the heat there's a chance they may have drunk the water or tried to treat the water, but we don't know," Pen said. "It's very mysterious, and we're all just waiting for the results."

The closure affects nine trails, six picnic sites and the dirt Forest Road that leads to the Hites Cove trailhead. The district took two weeks to close the trail to figure out the logistics of shuttering such a large area and when they realized answers for the deaths were still far off, Pen said.

The Sierra National Forest closure coincides with a statewide shutdown of all 20 million acres of national forestlands in California through Labor Day due to dangerous fire conditions and taxed firefighting crews.

## Photos show black slick in water near Gulf oil rig after Ida

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and GERALD HERBERT Associated Press

PORT FOURCHON, La. (AP) — Photos show what appears to be a miles-long oil slick near an offshore rig in the Gulf of Mexico after Hurricane Ida, according to aerial survey imagery released Wednesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and reviewed by The Associated Press.

The government imagery, along with additional photos taken by the AP from a helicopter Tuesday, also show Louisiana port facilities, oil refineries and shipyards in the storm's path where the telltale rainbow sheen typical of oil and fuel spills is visible in the water of bays and bayous.

Both state and federal regulators said Wednesday that they had been unable to reach the stricken area, citing challenging conditions in the disaster zone.

The NOAA photos show a black slick floating in the Gulf near a large rig with the name Enterprise Offshore Drilling painted on its helipad. The company, based in Houston, did not respond to requests for comment by phone or email Wednesday.

Aerial photos taken by NOAA on Tuesday also show significant flooding to the massive Phillips 66 Alliance Refinery along the bank of the Mississippi River, just south of New Orleans. In some sections of the refinery, rainbow sheen is visible on the water leading toward the river.

Asked about reports of levee failures near the refinery Monday, Phillips 66 spokesman Bernardo Fallas said there was "some water" in the facility and stressed that operations were shut down in advance of the storm. Asked Tuesday about potential environmental hazards emanating from the facility, Fallas referred a reporter to a statement on the company's website saying its response is focused "on ensuring the safety and well-being of our employees and our surrounding communities."

After the AP sent Phillips 66 photos Wednesday showing extensive flooding at its refinery and what appeared to be petroleum in the water, Fallas conceded by email that the company could confirm it had "discovered a sheen of unknown origin in some flooded areas of Alliance Refinery."

"At this time, the sheen appears to be secured and contained within refinery grounds," Fallas said Wednesday evening. "Clean-up crews are on site. The incident was reported to the appropriate regulatory agencies upon discovery."

Fallas did not respond when asked whether the leak was reported after the AP sent the company photos four hours earlier.

Phillips listed the Alliance Refinery for sale last week, before the storm hit, citing poor market conditions.

All told, seven Louisiana refineries remained shuttered Wednesday. Combined, they account for about 9% of all U.S. refining capacity, according to the U.S. Energy Department. Some refineries on the Mississippi River reported damage to their docks from barges that broke loose during the storm.

Jennah Durant, spokesman for the Environmental Protection Agency, said Wednesday that the agency had received no reports of significant spills or other environmental threats after the Category 4 storm made landfall Sunday at Port Fourchon with 150 mph (240 km/h) winds

Three days after the storm moved through, Durant said Wednesday that no EPA personnel had yet deployed to the devastated region south of New Orleans. Asked if EPA staff had been reviewing the aerial photos taken by federal aircraft over the disaster zone, Durant said the imagery had not been provided

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to the agency.

The aerial imagery reviewed by the AP is readily available to the public on the NOAA website.

After the AP sent photos of the oil slick to EPA on Wednesday, agency press secretary Nick Conger said the National Response Center hotline operated by the U.S. Coast Guard had received 26 calls reporting leaks or spills in the storm zone but none had warranted an EPA response.

Conger reiterated that any person or organization responsible for a sizable release or spill of pollutants is required to notify the federal government.

The AP also provided photos of the oil slick to the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, which regulates offshore drilling in state waters. Spokesman Patrick Courreges confirmed the agency had received an informal report of petroleum sheen in the waters south of Port Fourchon but said regulators "currently don't have capabilities to get out there yet."

The U.S. Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, which regulates offshore oil and gas platforms, announced before the hurricane arrived that about half of the 560 staffed rigs in the Gulf had been evacuated. Those crews had only started to trickle back out by Wednesday and it was unclear whether the Enterprise Offshore rig was staffed.

The bureau's public affairs staff did not respond Wednesday after the AP sent photos of the black slick in the Gulf and asked if there were any reports of a spill.

Both state and federal environmental regulators said the emergency response to Ida had been hampered by blocked roads, washed-out bridges, electrical outages and a lack of communications. Both telephone landlines and mobile phone service in much of the region remained offline Wednesday.

"I think most agencies are kind of caught up in the whole 'fog of war' thing at the moment, with far more places we need to be than we can be," Courreges wrote in an email. "It's not as easy to respond to things right now."

Port Fourchon, which took a direct hit from the storm, is the primary service hub for hundreds of oil and gas rigs offshore. The port also contains oil terminals and pipelines that account for about 90% of the oil and gas production from the Gulf.

Photos taken by the AP from a chartered helicopter Tuesday, as well as the NOAA imagery, show extensive damage to the sprawling facility, including sunken vessels, collapsed structures and more than a dozen large overturned fuel storage tanks.

Ida's winds, equivalent to an EF3 tornado, peeled the roofs off large steel buildings in the harbor and toppled metal light poles. Trucks, cranes and shipping containers were piled into jumbled heaps.

Chett Chiasson, the executive director of Greater Lafourche Port Commission, told the AP late Tuesday that the companies based at Port Fourchon were entering what would likely be a lengthy recovery phase. A top priority, he said, will be clearing roads and removing sunken vessels so boats can safely navigate the harbor.

## **Afghans face hunger crisis, adding to Taliban's challenges**

By KATHY GANNON, RAHIM FAIEZ and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The United Nations' stockpiles of food in Afghanistan could run out this month, a senior official warned Wednesday, threatening to add a hunger crisis to the challenges facing the country's new Taliban rulers as they try to restore stability after decades of war.

About one third of the country's population of 38 million doesn't know if they will have a meal every day, according to Ramiz Alakbarov, the U.N.'s humanitarian chief in Afghanistan.

The U.N.'s World Food Program has brought in food and distributed it to tens of thousands of people in recent weeks, but with winter approaching and a drought ongoing, at least \$200 million is needed urgently to be able to continue to feed the most vulnerable Afghans, he said.

"By the end of September, the stocks which the World Food Program has in the country will be out," Alakbarov told reporters at a virtual news conference. "We will not be able to provide those essential food items because we'll be out of stocks."

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Earlier, U.N. officials said that of the \$1.3 billion needed for overall aid efforts, only 39% has been received. The Taliban, who seized control of the country ahead of the withdrawal of American forces this week, now must govern a nation that relies heavily on international aid and is in the midst of a worsening economic crisis. In addition to the concerns about food supplies, civil servants haven't been paid in months and the local currency is losing value. Most of Afghanistan's foreign reserves are held abroad and currently frozen.

Khalid Payenda, Afghanistan's former acting finance minister, on Wednesday detailed a country existing in a dangerously fragile state.

Speaking at Georgetown University in Washington, Payenda said the Afghan currency had yet to crash because money exchanges had been shuttered. But its value could plunge by more than 100%, said Payenda, who described former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as withdrawn and paranoid ahead of the Taliban takeover.

"I think the war had a toll on his psyche and he saw everything with suspicion," Payenda said.

Part of the chaos reflects the speed at which the Taliban took control of the country, with Payenda saying he thought the prior government could have been sustained for two or three more years because of commitments by international donors.

"I did not expect it to be this quickly," Payenda said. "Nobody actually did."

Mohammad Sharif, a shopkeeper in the capital of Kabul, said shops and markets there have supplies, but a major concern is rising food prices.

"If the situation continues like this and there is no government to control the prices, that will cause so many problems for local people," he said.

In the wake of the U.S. pullout, many Afghans are anxiously waiting to see how the Taliban will rule. When they were last in power, before being driven out by the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, they imposed draconian restrictions, refusing to allow girls to go to school, largely confining women to their homes and banning television, music and even photography.

But more recently, their leaders have sought to project a more moderate image. Schools have reopened to boys and girls, though Taliban officials have said they will study separately. Women are out on the streets wearing Islamic headscarves — as they always have — rather than the all-encompassing burqa the Taliban required in the past.

The president of the United Nations Security Council said Wednesday that "the real litmus test" for the new Taliban government will be how it treats women and girls. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason of Ireland, which holds the council's rotating presidency, said the protection and promotion of human rights for women "must be at the very heart of our collective response to the crisis."

The challenges the Taliban face in reviving the economy could give Western nations leverage as they push the group to fulfill a pledge to form an inclusive government and guarantee women's rights. The Taliban say they want to have good relations with other countries, including the United States.

Many Afghans fear the Taliban won't make good on those pledges and are concerned that the nation's economic situation holds little opportunity. Tens of thousands sought to flee the country as a result in a harrowing airlift.

But thousands who had worked with the U.S. and its allies, as well as up to 200 Americans, remained in the country after the efforts ended with the last U.S. troops flying out of Kabul international airport just before midnight Monday.

President Joe Biden later defended his handling of the chaotic withdrawal and evacuation efforts, which saw spasms of violence, including a suicide bombing last week that killed 13 American service members and 169 Afghans. He said it was inevitable that the final departure from two decades of war would be difficult.

He said he remains committed to getting the Americans left behind out if they want. The Taliban have said they will allow people with legal documents to travel freely, but it remains to be seen whether any commercial airlines will be willing to offer service.

Bilal Karimi, an official member in the Taliban spokesman's office, said Wednesday that a team of Turkish

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and Qatari technicians arrived in Kabul to help get the airport up and running again. Alakbarov, the U.N. humanitarian official, said the United Nations is asking for access to the airport so it can deliver food and other supplies directly to the capital.

The Taliban also have to contend with the threat from the Islamic State group, which is far more radical and claimed responsibility for the bombing at the airport. The Taliban have pledged they won't allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for attacks on other countries — a key U.S. demand since the militants once harbored the al-Qaida leaders who orchestrated the 9/11 attacks.

In the wake of last week's bombing, American officials said drone strikes targeted the Islamic State group's affiliate in Afghanistan, and Biden vowed to keep up airstrikes.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Wednesday it was "possible" that the U.S. will have to coordinate with the Taliban on any counterterrorism strikes in Afghanistan in the future.

## Texas bans most abortions, with high court mum on appeal

By JESSICA GRESKO, PAUL J. WEBER and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

The nation's most far-reaching curb on abortions since they were legalized a half-century ago took effect Wednesday in Texas, with the Supreme Court silent on an emergency appeal to put the law on hold.

If allowed to remain in force, the law, which bans most abortions, would be the strictest against abortion rights in the United States since the high court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973.

The Texas law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity, usually around six weeks and before most women know they're pregnant.

It's part of a broader push by Republicans across the country to impose new restrictions on abortion. At least 12 other states have enacted bans early in pregnancy, but all have been blocked from going into effect.

What makes the Texas law different is its unusual enforcement scheme. Rather than have officials responsible for enforcing the law, private citizens are authorized to sue abortion providers and anyone involved in facilitating abortions. Among other situations, that would include anyone who drives a woman to a clinic to get an abortion. Under the law, anyone who successfully sues another person would be entitled to at least \$10,000.

"Starting today, every unborn child with a heartbeat will be protected from the ravages of abortion," Abbott said in a statement posted on Twitter. "Texas will always defend the right to life."

But protests were quick.

President Joe Biden said in a statement that the law "blatantly violates the constitutional right established under *Roe v. Wade* and upheld as precedent for nearly half a century." He said the law "outrageously" gives private citizens the power "to bring lawsuits against anyone who they believe has helped another person get an abortion."

Likewise, the American Medical Association said it was deeply disturbed by "this egregious law" and disappointed by the Supreme Court's inaction.

The law "not only bans virtually all abortions in the state, but it interferes in the patient-physician relationship and places bounties on physicians and health care workers simply for delivering care," said a statement from Dr. Gerald E. Harmon, the AMA president.

In a phone call with reporters, Marc Hearn, a lawyer for the Center for Reproductive Rights, said the abortion providers his group represents were still hoping to hear from the Supreme Court but "as of now, most abortion is banned in Texas."

Clinics have said the law would rule out 85% of abortions in Texas and force many clinics to close. Planned Parenthood is among the abortion providers that have stopped scheduling abortions beyond six weeks from conception.

Abortion opponents who wrote the law also made it difficult to challenge in court, in part because it's hard to know whom to sue.

Abortion rights advocates say it will force many women to travel out of state for abortions, if they can

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afford to do so and also navigate issues including childcare and taking time off work. The Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights, says if legal abortion care in Texas shuts down, the average one-way driving distance to an abortion clinic for Texans would increase from 12 miles to 248 miles.

Already, abortion clinics beyond the Texas border are feeling the impact. At the Trust Women clinic in Oklahoma City, there had been 80 appointments scheduled over the past two days, more than double the typical number of patients, said Rebecca Tong, co-executive director of the clinic. Two-thirds of those patients were from Texas, another sharp increase, and the earliest opening was now three weeks out.

"Oklahoma has just barely enough clinics for the amount of people here," Tong said. "If anyone is thinking, 'Oh, they can just go out of state, it'll be so easy,' a lot of clinics in the Midwest and South, we don't do abortion care five days a week."

Late into the night Tuesday before the ban took effect clinics in Texas were filled with patients, said Amy Hagstrom Miller, CEO of Whole Women's Health, which has four abortion clinics in Texas.

Twenty-seven women were still in the waiting room after 10 p.m. at one clinic, leaving doctors crying and scrambling over whether they would see all of them in time, she said. The last abortion at one of her clinics finished at 11:56 p.m. in Fort Worth, where Hagstrom Miller said anti-abortion activists outside shined bright lights in the parking lot after dark looking for wrongdoing, and twice called police.

"This morning I woke up feeling deep sadness. I'm worried. I'm numb," she said.

The law is part of a hard-right agenda that Texas Republicans muscled through the statehouse this year ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, when Abbott is up for a third term as governor.

Another law taking effect Wednesday ended required firearm training and background checks to carry handguns in public in Texas, and GOP lawmakers on Tuesday approved election changes that will further tighten what are already some of the strictest voting laws in the nation.

Texas has long had some of the nation's toughest abortion restrictions, including a sweeping law passed in 2013. The Supreme Court eventually struck down that law, but not before more than half of the state's 40-plus clinics closed.

Lawmakers also are moving forward in an ongoing special session in Texas with proposed new restrictions on medication abortion, a method using pills that accounts for roughly 40% of abortions in the U.S.

Even before the Texas case arrived at the high court the justices had planned to tackle the issue of abortion rights in a major case that will be heard after the court begins hearing arguments again in the fall. That case involves the state of Mississippi, which is asking to be allowed to enforce an abortion ban after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

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## R. Kelly accuser says he kept gun nearby while berating her

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — One of R. Kelly's accusers testified on Wednesday that he kept a gun by his side while he berated her as a prelude to forcing her to give him oral sex in a Los Angeles music studio.

"He had a weapon, so I wasn't going to step out of line," the witness said while recounting the 2018 episode at the R&B singer's New York City sex-trafficking trial.

Later in the day, the jury also heard brief testimony from a pastor who secretly wed Kelly and budding musical artist Aaliyah when she was 15 years old. He described publicly for the first time how they wore matching "jogging suits" — each with one pant leg pulled up — for a 10-minute ceremony at a Chicago-area hotel.

The previous witness said that at the time she spotted Kelly with a gun, he demanded to know, "How many men have you seen naked?" He also instructed her to act "excited like a puppy" whenever she saw him, adding, "I still have a lot to teach you."

She testified the last time she saw Kelly at a New York City hotel suite, she resisted having sex with him. She said he responded by warning her not to defy him, saying, "I'm a f---ing legend."



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Kelly's alleged intimidation tactics were all part of an abusive sexual relationship that started when the woman was 19 and resulted in her getting herpes from him, she said. After she filed police reports and sued him for failing to disclose an STD, he and his supporters threatened that they would release nude photos and other compromising material about her if she persisted with her allegations, she said.

The woman testified while only using her first name to protect her privacy.

The pastor, Nathan Edmond, testified he was recruited to marry Kelly and Aaliyah in 1994 as a favor for a friend after he was shown a marriage license claiming she was 18. He said he didn't recognize the groom or the bride, who was wearing her hair down over her face.

"I didn't know it was anyone special," Edmond said.

Prosecutors say Kelly wanted to use the marriage, which was later annulled, to shield himself from criminal charges related to having sex with a minor and to prevent her from testifying against him.

Aaliyah, whose full name was Aaliyah Dana Haughton, worked with Kelly, who wrote and produced her 1994 debut album, "Age Ain't Nothing But A Number." She died in a plane crash in 2001 at age 22.

Kelly, 54, has repeatedly denied accusations that he preyed on victims during a 30-year career. His lawyers have portrayed his accusers as groupies who are lying about their relationships with him.

The trial has so far featured a steady stream of accusers claiming Kelly began sexually degrading them when they were still in their teens. They said he used his stardom to lure them into an insular world where he watched their every move and doled out perverse punishments, spanking them and isolating them in hotel rooms if they broke a vow to never speak about him to anyone else.

Kelly's personal physician has also testified, saying he treated him for herpes for several years.

The trial is unfolding under coronavirus precautions restricting the press and the public to overflow courtrooms with video feeds. That's made it difficult to discern the reactions of Kelly, who has been jailed since his federal indictment was announced in 2019.

## Officers, medics indicted in 2019 death of Elijah McClain

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Three suburban Denver police officers and two paramedics were indicted on manslaughter and other charges in the 2019 death of Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black man put into a chokehold and injected with a powerful sedative in a fatal encounter that provoked national outcry during racial injustice protests last year.

The grand jury indictments announced Wednesday by state Attorney General Phil Weiser are the latest chapter for the Police Department in the city of Aurora, which has been plagued by allegations of misconduct against people of color, including an officer charged this summer with pistol-whipping a Black man.

McClain's death helped inspire a sweeping police accountability law in Colorado, a ban on chokeholds and restrictions on the use of the sedative ketamine, both of which the indictment alleges contributed to his death. The charges were announced days after the second anniversary of when police stopped McClain on the street after a 911 caller reported a man who seemed "sketchy."

"What I set out to do is still not over, but I'm halfway there. I'm halfway there," McClain's mother, Sheene McClain, told The Associated Press of her efforts to hold police accountable.

Aurora Police Chief Vanessa Wilson, who took over last year and has pledged to work to restore public trust, said the department will continue to cooperate with the judicial process.

"I know this has been a long-awaited decision for Ms. McClain and her family. This tragedy will forever be imprinted on our community," she said in a statement.

Officers Randy Roedema, Nathan Woodyard and Jason Rosenblatt and fire department paramedic Jeremy Cooper and fire Lt. Peter Cichuniec were charged with manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide.

Roedema and Rosenblatt also were charged with second-degree assault with intent to cause bodily injury and one count of a crime of violence related to the assault charge. Cooper and Cichuniec also each face three counts of second-degree assault.

Lawyers for the defendants didn't immediately respond to calls and emails seeking comment.

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Marc Sears, president of Aurora's branch of the Fraternal Order of Police, which says it's the largest union representing police in the city, told the Sentinel Colorado newspaper that "our officers are innocent until proven guilty, and we stand by our brothers."

City Manager Jim Twombly said the officers were indefinitely suspended. One had previously been fired.

The indictment says police responding to a 911 call about a suspicious person confronted McClain on Aug. 24, 2019, as he walked home from a grocery store after buying iced tea. The encounter quickly escalated, with McClain initially losing consciousness as Woodyard applied a chokehold. McClain complained he couldn't breathe as three officers held him, handcuffed, on the ground, and he vomited several times.

Paramedics injected McClain with an amount of ketamine appropriate for someone 77 pounds (35 kilograms) heavier than his 143-pound (64-kilogram) frame, the indictment says, without determining if it was necessary and without monitoring him for side effects afterward.

McClain never regained consciousness and was later declared brain dead at a hospital.

Family and friends described McClain, a massage therapist, as a gentle and kind introvert who volunteered to play his violin to comfort cats at an animal shelter. His pleading words captured on police body camera video — "I'm just different" — painfully underscored his apparent confusion at what was happening.

In 2019, a district attorney said he could not charge the officers because an autopsy could not determine how McClain died. Democratic Gov. Jared Polis ordered Weiser to open a criminal investigation last year amid nationwide protests over racist policing, and the U.S. Justice Department and the FBI said they were looking at opening a civil rights investigation. Weiser's office is conducting a probe into the overall conduct of Aurora police, the first under the new police accountability law.

It's very rare for officers to face criminal charges in on-duty deaths, and it's almost unheard of for paramedics to be charged, said Alex Piquero, a criminologist at the University of Miami.

"It's a pretty big deal," he said. The fact that a grand jury saw the evidence and decided what charges to file is an indication of a strong case, Piquero said.

A family lawsuit alleges McClain died as a result of a dramatic increase of lactic acid in his blood caused by excessive force used by police over about 18 minutes, combined with the effects of ketamine. They claim police continued to "torture" McClain after he was restrained, a result of the department's history of "unconstitutional racist brutality."

A city review found no evidence to justify officers stopping McClain, who was wearing a ski mask because family said he had anemia that caused him to get cold easily.

Police body camera video shows an officer approaching McClain and saying, "I have a right to stop you because you're being suspicious."

"I'm just different. I'm just different, that's all," McClain exclaims as he's being restrained. "I'm so sorry. I have no gun. I don't do that stuff. I don't do any fighting. Why were you attacking me? I don't do guns. I don't even kill flies."

The indictment comes after three Aurora officers, including Rosenblatt, were fired and one resigned last year over photos mimicking the chokehold used on McClain.

The department also faced criticism when officers put four Black girls on the ground last year and handcuffed two of them next to a car that police suspected was stolen but turned out not to be.

And an officer was charged with assault in July after being captured on body camera video pistol-whipping and choking a Black man during an arrest. Another officer was charged with not intervening as required under the new police accountability law.

Deborah Richardson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado, said the indictment is one step to changing the "deeply embedded systemic failures of the city of Aurora."

"Historically, the internal culture of policing normalized the treatment Mr. McClain experienced and was callously written off. Hopefully, this law enforcement abuse will no longer be tolerated," Richardson said.

## Questioning a catchphrase: 'Pandemic of the unvaccinated'

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — This summer's coronavirus resurgence has been labeled a "pandemic of the unvaccinated" by government officials from President Joe Biden on down.

The sound bite captures the glaring reality that unvaccinated people overwhelmingly account for new cases and serious infections, with a recent study of government data showing that hospitalization rates among unvaccinated adults were 17 times higher than among those fully vaccinated.

But the term doesn't appear to be changing the hearts and minds of unvaccinated people. And it doesn't tell the whole story, with some breakthrough infections occurring among the fully vaccinated. That recent twist led health officials to recommend a return to masks and a round of booster shots.

"It is true that the unvaccinated are the biggest driver, but we mustn't forget that the vaccinated are part of it as well, in part because of the delta variant," said Dr. Eric Topol, professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research in La Jolla, California. "The pandemic clearly involves all people, not just the unvaccinated."

Topol points to Louisiana, where data from the state suggest that nearly 10% of hospitalized patients are vaccinated.

Branding it "a pandemic of the unvaccinated" could have the unintended consequence of stigmatizing the unvaccinated. "We should not partition them as the exclusive problem," Topol said.

Instead officials should call out vaccine disinformation, said Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. A sketchy stream of dubious arguments continues to undermine public confidence.

"We can say that the virus has reemerged in the southern United States, primarily among unvaccinated people, but it doesn't mean we have to blame the unvaccinated," Hotez said. "The people we have to target are the purveyors of disinformation, and we have to recognize that the unvaccinated themselves are victims of disinformation."

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has tried to call attention to the damage done by misinformation and disinformation. But for many vaccine opposition has become ingrained.

A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research in July found that 45% of adults who had not yet received a vaccine said they definitely would not get it. Nearly 2 in 3 (64%) unvaccinated adults said they had little to no confidence the shots are effective against mutations like the delta variant, although data show vaccination dramatically reduces the risk of serious illness, hospitalization and death. Just 3% of unvaccinated adults said they would definitely get vaccinated.

Calling it a "pandemic of the unvaccinated" is "just provocative," said Robert Blendon, who follows public opinion on health care at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "The unvaccinated have an opposition toward Washington, and the more you stir the opposition, the more it convinces them 'I'm not going to give in to those people,'" Blendon said.

Yet top officials don't seem to be ready to retire or amend a favored catchphrase.

"As I've said before, the pandemic of the unvaccinated is a tragedy that is preventable," Biden declared in a recent remarks on his administration's COVID-19 response.

Asked Wednesday whether the sound bite still accurately reflects the evolving pandemic, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said unvaccinated people continue to account for the "vast, vast majority" of those hospitalized. "So it hasn't changed our messaging," she added.

The term caught on before breakthrough infections among vaccinated people became a worry.

During a mid-July media briefing, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, underscored the troubling rise in cases and hospitalizations, saying "there is a clear message that is coming through: This is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated."

Until very recently, Biden's handling of the pandemic was seen as a solid strength. But the August edition of the AP-NORC poll found flashing warnings for the president. Approval of his COVID-19 response fell by 12 percentage points from July, down from 66% to 54%. It was the lowest COVID-19 approval rating for Biden, and the first time that his approval number on the pandemic was basically the same as his overall performance rating.

Among independents, there was a nearly 30 percentage point drop in approval.

Democratic pollster Geoff Garin, who tracks health care issues, says he sees no intent to divide in the

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Biden administration's "pandemic of the unvaccinated" rhetoric. "I think the very clear intention is to tell unvaccinated Americans that they are the ones that are at risk," he said.

But a mutating virus can outrun the smartest sound bites. "When you have a dynamic and fast-changing situation like this, it creates really significant challenges for communicators, who have to both maintain their credibility while staying ahead of the story," said Garin.

Republican pollster Bill McInturff, who collaborates with Garin's firm on some major polls, said, "Calling it a 'pandemic of the unvaccinated' is certainly not going to increase the compliance among the unvaccinated."

In a pandemic no one is an island, suggests Dr. Leana Wen, a former Baltimore health commissioner and commentator on public health issues.

"Stating it's a pandemic of the unvaccinated implies that if you are vaccinated, you are protected, and you should not care about those who are unvaccinated, and how that may impact you," said Wen. "That is not the case. The more infection there is around, the more likely you are to contract COVID and spread it to others, even if you are vaccinated."

## **Milley: US coordination with Taliban on strikes 'possible'**

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Wednesday that it's "possible" the United States will seek to coordinate with the Taliban on counterterrorism strikes in Afghanistan against Islamic State militants or others.

Milley did not elaborate, and his comment did not appear to suggest immediate plans to work with the Taliban.

U.S. military commanders coordinated daily with Taliban commanders outside the Kabul airport over the past three weeks to facilitate the evacuation of more than 124,000 people. But that was a matter of convenience for both parties and not necessarily a sign that they will pursue, or even want, a regular relationship in the future.

The U.S. military ousted the Taliban from power in the fall of 2001 and fought against them for the 19 years that followed.

The extent and nature of a U.S.-Taliban relationship, now that the war is over, is one of the key issues to be worked out. The U.S. diplomatic presence in Kabul has been moved to Doha, Qatar. President Joe Biden has noted several times recently that the Taliban are avowed enemies of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, suggesting a shared interest with the United States.

At a Pentagon news conference with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Milley called the Taliban "ruthless" adding, "Whether or not they change remains to be seen." He suggested that the recent cooperative arrangement with the Taliban at Kabul airport was not necessarily a model for the future.

"In war you do what you must in order to reduce risk to mission and force, not what you necessarily want to do," Milley said.

Biden has promised further targeting of the IS group in Afghanistan in response to the IS suicide bombing last week at a Kabul airport gate that killed scores of Afghans and 13 American service members. On Saturday the U.S. military carried out a drone strike in Afghanistan that it said killed two IS planners. On Tuesday, Biden said, "To ISIS-K: We are not done with you yet," referring to the IS group.

Targeting Islamic State militants or other extremist groups, such as al-Qaida, will be more difficult with no U.S. military forces on the ground and no friendly government forces with which to share intelligence on extremist networks. But the Biden administration asserts that it can contain these groups by monitoring and potentially striking with assets based elsewhere in the region.

Although the Taliban oppose IS, it's far from clear that they will be inclined to work with the U.S. military or the Central Intelligence Agency now that they have regained power in Kabul. Milley has recent experience with Taliban leaders; twice last year, most recently in December, he met face-to-face with them in an attempt to slow their attacks on the U.S.-backed Afghan government, which collapsed in mid-August, triggering the frantic U.S.-led evacuation.

Austin sounded at least as skeptical as Milley regarding the possibility that the coordination in recent

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days at the Kabul airport suggests a future relationship with the Taliban.

"I would not make any leaps of logic to broader issues," said Austin.

Both Austin and Milley commanded troops in Afghanistan during the 20-year war and their comments at Wednesday's news conference largely focused on tributes to those who served in Afghanistan, including those who died or were wounded. They also thanked all who contributed to the final airlift, which Austin called the largest evacuation of civilians in American history.

Milley and Austin urged war veterans to view their service as worthwhile and appreciated by the American public, while acknowledging that the memories can be painful.

"War is hard. It's vicious. It's brutal. It's unforgiving," Milley said. "Yes, we all have pain and anger. When we see what has unfolded over the last 20 years and over the last 20 days, that creates pain and anger."

With the U.S. involvement in the war over and all American military out of the country, Biden is grappling with the prospects of a new relationship with the Taliban. He has tasked Secretary of State Antony Blinken with coordinating with international partners to hold the Taliban to their promise of safe passage for Americans and others who want to leave in the days ahead.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, has described the U.S. relationship with the Taliban during the evacuation as "very pragmatic and very businesslike," saying they helped secure the airport. But other reports from people in Afghanistan described shootings, violence and Taliban moves to block desperate Afghans from getting through the gates.

Biden in an address to the nation Tuesday defended his decision to end America's longest war and withdraw all U.S. troops by an Aug. 31 deadline.

"I was not going to extend this forever war," Biden declared from the White House. "And I was not going to extend a forever exit."

Biden is coming under heavy criticism, particularly from Republicans, for his handling of the evacuation. But he said it was inevitable that the final departure from two decades of war, first negotiated with the Taliban for May 1 by former President Donald Trump, would have been difficult, with likely violence, no matter when it was planned and conducted.

"To those asking for a third decade of war in Afghanistan, I ask, 'What is the vital national interest?'" Biden said. He added, "I simply do not believe that the safety and security of America is enhanced by continuing to deploy thousands of American troops and spending billions of dollars in Afghanistan."

## **AP FACT CHECK: Biden's shaky claim of US readiness in Afghan**

By HOPE YEN, ROBERT BURNS and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden made dubious assertions that the U.S. was well-prepared for the sudden collapse of Afghanistan's government during the U.S. drawdown and glossed over his broken promise to keep U.S. troops there until the last Americans are out.

In his remarks Tuesday declaring an end to America's 20-year war in Afghanistan, Biden claimed "extraordinary success" in the mission. That defied the reality on the ground of a rushed and chaotic evacuation of Americans and their allies, including deadly violence around the airport.

Biden offered the faint assurance — even with the last U.S. planes gone — that it's never too late for U.S. citizens to leave.

But with its forces withdrawn, the U.S. is left with diplomatic persuasion instead of military muscle to get the Taliban extremists who've been fighting the U.S. to give remaining Americans safe passage out.

A look at the claims:

BIDEN, speaking of his decision in April to withdraw U.S. troops by Aug. 31 based on the "assumption" — later proven wrong — that 300,000 Afghan forces would be able to "hold on for a period of time" against the Taliban: "I still instructed our national security team to prepare for every eventuality — even that one. ... So, we were ready when the Afghan Security Forces, after two decades of fighting for their country and losing thousands of their own, did not hold on as long as anyone expected. We were ready when they and the people of Afghanistan watched their own government collapse and their president flee."

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THE FACTS: His claim of U.S. readiness for the sudden collapse of the Afghan government strains the truth.

By all accounts, the evacuation operation that began Aug. 14 was initially chaotic, with too few State Department officials available at the airport to process evacuees. Crowd control inside the airport and outside was problematic, and the U.S. had to execute an airlift in such a rush that large numbers of Afghans swarmed the airfield.

On Aug. 16, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said evacuation flights had been suspended for several hours in order to reestablish security following breaches on the civilian side of the airfield.

The flow of evacuees from Kabul also was slowed in the airlift's early days because the U.S. had nowhere to fly the evacuees to — the waystation in Qatar was filled to capacity and the State Department had yet to work out arrangements with other countries for additional waystations. Kuwait, Germany and other countries in Europe and elsewhere later agreed to provide those, and the pace of the evacuation accelerated rapidly.

About 2,500 U.S. troops were at the airport at the beginning of the evacuation, and eventually that number would grow to about 5,800. The State Department struggled to determine how many American citizens were in Afghanistan and how many wanted to be evacuated.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Wednesday that 124,334 Americans, Afghans and other allies from Afghanistan were evacuated in all — the most exact number offered thus far. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin called it the largest air evacuation of civilians in American history. But a suicide bombing outside the Kabul airport during the frenzied evacuations left 13 U.S. service members and 169 Afghans dead.

**BIDEN:** "The bottom line: 90% of Americans in Afghanistan who wanted to leave were able to leave. For those remaining Americans, there is no deadline. We remain committed to get them out, if they want to come out. Secretary of State Blinken is leading the continued diplomatic efforts to ensure safe passage for any American, Afghan partner or foreign national who wants to leave Afghanistan." — White House remarks.

THE FACTS: For the record, Biden vowed that he would get 100% of Americans out before withdrawing forces.

And his suggestions Tuesday that many of the remaining Americans are dual nationals who may be undecided about leaving do not reflect the full reality.

He contended 100 to 200 Americans are still there and have "some intention to leave," adding: "Most of those who remain are dual citizens, longtime residents, but earlier decided to stay because of their family roots in Afghanistan."

The White House later said actually 98% of Americans wishing to leave had been evacuated, without explaining how it came up with such a precise percentage in Afghanistan's tumult. White House press secretary Jen Psaki also said that Biden is telling those people that if they decide in two weeks that they want to go, "we will get you out."

Those comments may understate the desperation of Americans trapped in Afghanistan. Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, said Monday that Americans tried to get to the Kabul airport for the final evacuations but couldn't. No Americans, apart from military and government personnel, were on the last five jets to leave.

"We maintained the ability to bring them in up until immediately before departure, but we were not able to bring any Americans out," he said. "That activity ended probably about 12 hours before our exit, although we continue the outreach and would have been prepared to bring them on until the very last minute. But none of them made it to the airport, and were able to be — and were able to be accommodated."

Biden told ABC News unequivocally on Aug. 19 that the U.S. would not leave any Americans stranded. "Americans understand we're going to try and get it done before Aug. 31," Biden said then. "If we don't, we'll determine at the time, who's left."

And then? "And if there are American citizens left, we're going to stay until we get them all out."

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The last U.S. planes took off from the airport Monday night, Aug. 30, one minute before midnight in Kabul. U.S. officials estimated up to 200 Americans were left behind, along with unknown numbers of Afghans and others who were trying frantically to leave. By then, more than 100,000 people, mostly Afghans, had been flown to safety in the multinational evacuations.

Now that has become a matter for diplomacy,

U.S. officials said diplomats are in talks with neighboring countries and others to try to arrange non-U.S.-military evacuations for those remaining. Among the options, if the diplomacy works, are potential charter flights from the airport when it re-opens and overland routes.

## Louisiana man's personal levee no match for Ida's fury

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

DES ALLEMANDS, La. (AP) — Flooded out by Hurricane Katrina, Roy Comardelle wasn't going to let another hurricane beat him. He built a levee around his entire lot to protect his home, commercial fishing boats, cars and motorcycle.

Comardelle thought he was winning against Hurricane Ida until the Category 4 winds at its heart battered his house and sent water spilling over the grassy walls of his handmade levee, which includes a pump and a homemade flood gate for the driveway.

On Tuesday, he cleaned up the muddy mess left by more than a foot of water that inundated his house. As he worked, Comardelle couldn't help but wonder when he might be able to get back out on the water to make a living catching crabs.

"I fought a losing battle. I thought I had it. But when the eye came, that's when it topped the levee," said Comardelle. "Can't fight nature."

Located about 35 miles (56 kilometers) southwest of New Orleans, Cormadelle's home is in unincorporated Des Allemands, a fishing community since German immigrants first settled it in the 1720s. Residents have been trying to keep their homes dry for generations, and the fight has only gotten tougher in recent decades as Louisiana's coastline shrank.

After Katrina hit 16 years to the day before Ida made landfall, Comardelle climbed atop a dirt-moving machine and built a berm that surrounds the property, roughly the size of a big suburban lot. A lean man with a thick accent, his torso bears tan lines from the tank top he often wears while outside working.

Comardelle planted grass on the slopes of his levee, and he rigged up a metal gate that he reinforces with sand bags to keep water from coming in over the driveway. For most storms, it keeps the house dry.

While two previous hurricanes overtopped the levee, he said, everything was working fine until Ida's eye arrived in Lafourche Parish. Once that happened, water began pouring in over a couple of low spots. Soon, his house was filled with about 18 inches (46 centimeters) of water; the workshop where his motorcycle was parked took on 22 inches (56 centimeters).

From the air, Comardelle's property looks like a green oasis surrounded by a sea of muck. On the ground, he grew quiet thinking about the possibility of having to use savings to sustain him and his wife until he can locate all his fishing gear and conditions are once again suitable for catching crabs.

"For Katrina and all that, it took us over two months to go ride down there to see what we even had left," said Comardelle.

## 'Last mile' solution for Brazilian favela born from pandemic

By TATIANA POLLASTRI and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Workers in Brazil's biggest city unloaded an air fryer, a gaming chair and a 40-inch television from a truck and carried them into a small distribution center where they'd soon be sent to nearby homes.

Their speedy dispatch would be nothing special in most of Sao Paulo. But these items were bound for homes in Paraisopolis, one of the sprawling, low-income neighborhoods known as favelas that have been largely left out of the global delivery revolution.

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Packages have just started reaching doorsteps there, thanks to a bespectacled 21-year-old with a degree in information technology.

Inspired by community-led distribution of food kits and donations during the pandemic, Giva Pereira founded a logistics startup to handle what retailers call "the last mile" in his hardscrabble community, which delivery drivers have been loath to enter.

Like others across the world, Brazilians quarantining during the pandemic started buying more online — not just food and pharmaceuticals, but also electronics and household goods.

But favela residents who fill out order forms with their zip codes are often informed companies don't deliver to their neighborhood.

Those who manage to place orders can receive excuses rather than products: notes with dubious claims they weren't home when the delivery came, or that their address wasn't located.

And indeed, identifying a specific house in the serpentine alleys is no small feat for an outsider, especially in favelas as densely populated as Paraisópolis, home to nearly 100,000 people. Mapping apps provide little help and, complicating matters further, some areas are dominated by heavily armed drug traffickers.

While Brazil's postal service delivers letters and bills to some streets in Paraisópolis, it often leaves them at shops, bars or collective mailboxes for residents to pick up later — a system that doesn't work for many e-commerce purchases.

Even brick-and-mortar stores charge more to deliver appliances or furniture to favelas, or leave shipments at waypoints like residents' associations.

Enter 21-year-old Pereira, a Paraisópolis resident who graduated college last year and sensed opportunity. Favela Brasil XPress was born.

His fledgling company got financing from a small, favela-focused lender, G10 Bank, and partnered with one of Brazil's biggest retailers, Lojas Americanas. He hired locals familiar with Paraisópolis's twists and turns. They started deliveries in April using compact trucks and bicycles, and have processed as many as 1,300 packages per day.

"It resolves the problem of mapping and this issue of breaking down the barrier of prejudice among people or logistics companies, who should deliver here inside, but don't," Pereira told The Associated Press. "Bringing companies from outside the favela into the favela totally breaks that paradigm that favelas only have bad things, and we show it is different."

In Sao Paulo's metropolitan region, more than 2 million people live in the crowded favelas. Paraisópolis has longstanding issues like water shortages and lack of basic sanitation, with open sewers in some isolated areas that have been recently populated. It's home to waiters and house cleaners, builders and bus drivers.

There are young people like Pereira, too, whose family moved from the poor northeastern state of Paraiba when he was 12, hoping for a better life.

"We came because of difficulties we went through in Paraiba. We had difficulty here, too," said Pereira. He began to think of ways to help the favela.

His project is reminiscent of another started several years ago in Rio de Janeiro's biggest favela, Rocinha. Former census takers mapped the hillside neighborhood and established a base to receive mail from the postal service. For a monthly fee, the company distributes letters and bills to residents, though they still have to retrieve parcels.

While Pereira's concept for deliveries isn't groundbreaking, the level of organization, planning and logistical infrastructure is, said Theresa Williamson, executive director of a favela advocacy group, Catalytic Communities.

"Residents find creative ways to meet that need in many communities, but it's never at the scale or quality that it needs to be, and it's often informal," Williamson said. Favela Brasil XPress "could pave the way for a model that can be followed around the country, creating small businesses around this."

Or, she said, it could show the government how to step up and meet the community's need.

At an event Tuesday to commemorate delivery of his company's 100,000th package, Pereira looked jubilant, if somewhat surprised by the sudden success. He said the company has set up distribution bases at six other favelas, including Sao Paulo's largest, Heliópolis. It has signed contracts to distribute for other



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retailers, too.

Gilson Rodrigues, Paraisopolis' community leader and president of the bank whose loan got Pereira's startup off the ground, said being able to receive a package at home after so many years of being boxed out provides a sense of freedom.

"They told us this wasn't possible in a favela," Rodrigues said. "This is an example, a slap in the face to society that excludes favelas, that wants to see favelas as needy, never as potent." \_\_\_\_ David Biller reported from Rio de Janeiro.

## Once green, prehistoric Arabia drew early humans from Africa

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Huw Groucutt passes rolling sand dunes as far as his eye can see when traveling to archaeological sites in the northern Arabian Peninsula. But the same desert regions were once intermittently lush and green, attracting early humans and large animals such as hippopotamuses migrating out of Africa to linger at ancient lakes, new evidence suggests.

Until a decade ago, the Arabian Peninsula was a blank spot on the map for scientists trying to reconstruct the story of early human evolution and movements out of Africa. Much more is known about early human settlements in the Levant region — modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and parts of Syria — where extensive archaeological research has been carried out for more than a century.

But the Arabian Peninsula may have also played an important role as a bridge between Africa and Eurasia, a study published Wednesday in the journal *Nature* suggests.

"Arabia has not been part of the story of early human migration because so little work was done there before," said co-author Michael Petraglia, a paleolithic archaeologist at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Jena, Germany. The research team included scientists from Germany, Saudi Arabia, Australia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

The impetus to look closely for archeological remains in the region came from satellite imagery that revealed traces of prehistoric lakes in now-arid regions. "We noticed color patterns made by ancient lakes — sand dunes are kind of orange-colored, while ancient lakes are tinted white or gray," said Groucutt, who is also based at the Max Planck Institute.

Extensive excavations over a decade revealed stone tools from multiple periods of prehistoric settlement by early human groups, the oldest 400,000 years ago. Analysis of sediment samples from the ancient lakes and remains from hippos and other animals revealed that during several periods in the distant past, the peninsula hosted year-round lakes and grasslands.

During these windows of hospitable climate, early humans and animals moved from northeast Africa into the Arabian Peninsula, the researchers say.

"Flowing rivers and lakes, surrounded by grasslands and savannah, would have attracted animals and then the early humans that were in pursuit of them," said Petraglia. Hippos require year-round water bodies several yards (meters) deep to live. Remains of other animals, including ostriches and antelopes, indicate "a strong biological connection to northeast Africa," he said.

"What this research group has done is really exquisitely combine archaeology and climate records going back 400,000 years to show that early humans moved across this landscape when the climate changed," said paleoanthropologist Rick Potts, who directs the Human Origins Program at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

"The episodic presence and absence of populations in the Arabian Peninsula was in tune with climate oscillations," said Potts, who was not involved in the new study.

## US faith groups unite to help Afghanistan refugees after war

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO, PETER SMITH and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

America's major religions and denominations, often divided on other big issues, have united behind the effort to help receive an influx of refugees from Afghanistan following the end of the United States' longest

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war and one of the largest airlifts in history.

Among those gearing up to help are Jewish refugee resettlement agencies and Islamic groups; conservative and liberal Protestant churches; and prominent Catholic relief organizations, providing everything from food and clothes to legal assistance and housing.

"It's incredible. It's an interfaith effort that involved Catholic, Lutheran, Muslim, Jews, Episcopalians ... Hindus ... as well as nonfaith communities who just believe that maybe it's not a matter of faith, but it's just a matter of who we are as a nation," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

The U.S. and its coalition partners have evacuated more than 100,000 people from Afghanistan since the airlift began Aug. 14, including more than 5,400 American citizens and many Afghans who helped the U.S. during the 20-year war.

The effort by faith groups to help resettle them follows a long history of religious involvement in refugee policy, said Stephanie Nawyn, a sociologist at Michigan State University who focuses on refugee issues.

Decades before the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program was created in 1980, faith organizations advocated for the resettlement of Jewish refugees during World War II. Religious groups also helped receive people who fled wars in Vietnam, the Balkans and elsewhere.

Besides helping distribute government resources, the groups mobilize private assets such as donations and volunteers and work with other private entities to provide supplies and housing, Nawyn said.

U.S. resettlement agencies were gutted under former President Donald Trump, who slashed refugee admissions yearly until they reached a record low. Now agencies are scrambling to expand capacity so they can handle the influx from Afghanistan.

"It's a historic effort, and there are and have been challenges — especially after rebounding from four years of what was a war on immigration, which decimated the refugee resettlement infrastructure," O'Mara Vignarajah said.

"Some of our local offices might have resettled 100 families throughout the entirety of last year, and they may now be looking at 100 families in the next few weeks," she said.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities and other agencies have been welcoming Afghan families at U.S. military bases where they're being housed temporarily.

A major challenge is finding affordable housing in areas where Afghans have typically resettled, including California and the Washington, D.C., region.

"I'm very concerned about children, getting them into schools," said Bill Canny, executive director of the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services program.

World Relief, a global Christian humanitarian organization, has helped resettle about 360 Afghans in the past month and is expecting many more, said Matthew Soerens, the group's U.S. director of church mobilization.

"These are individuals in many cases who have put their lives at risk and their families' lives at risk for the people of the United States of America," he said. "Now that they're facing the risk of retribution and retaliation from the Taliban ... I think most Americans of all religious traditions see it as a moral imperative for us to keep our promise."

Among the evacuees are Afghans who obtained special immigrant visas after working with the U.S. or NATO as interpreters or in some other capacity; people who have applied for the visas but not yet received them; and those who might have been particularly in danger under the Taliban.

But thousands of others who also qualified for visas have been left behind because of a backlog of applications, and faith-based groups have called on President Joe Biden's administration to get them safely to the U.S.

"Some of the cases we are involved with have gotten out, but many have not," said Mark Hetfield, president and CEO of the Jewish refugee agency HIAS, one of nine groups that contract with the State Department on resettlement.

"We have a girl who was literally shot by the Taliban and is now severely disabled who can't get out,"

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he said. "We are aware of many, many others who are trapped — and the U.S. has left them behind."

Biden says he has tasked Secretary of State Antony Blinken to coordinate with international partners to hold the Taliban to their promise of safe passage for those who want to leave in the days ahead.

The president has historically supported receiving refugees, co-sponsoring legislation that created the government's program in 1980. This June, for World Refugee Day, Biden said that "resettling refugees helps reunite families, enriches the fabric of America and enhances our standing, influence and security in the world."

Ardiane Ademi, director of the Refugee Resettlement Program for Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, said it recently resettled several families who left Afghanistan before the airlift and is bracing for hundreds more.

John Koehlinger, executive director of Kentucky Refugee Ministries, said his agency has received two families through the special immigrant visa program and has begun receiving additional evacuees. But other families the agency had been expecting have not yet arrived.

"Hopefully some or all of them are on a U.S. military base being processed," he said.

Ademi and Koehlinger said individuals and local congregations have volunteered to help with resettlement. Some have worked with refugees before, while others are newcomers motivated by the desperate news out of Afghanistan.

"It's a huge response," Ademi said.

The humanitarian arm of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been providing personal hygiene items, underwear, sandals and toys to refugees at an air base in Qatar, church spokesman Doug Anderson said.

Widely known as the Mormon church, it has also been distributing supplies to the thousands of Afghans temporarily sheltered at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. And it is working with the U.S. military to provide aid to the 10,000 refugees expected to arrive at Fort McCoy in Wisconsin, from where they will be relocated in communities across the country.

Hala Halabi, national director of refugee facilitation for the Islamic Circle of North America Relief USA, said Muslim Americans have been flooding the group with calls, emails and text messages offering to make donations, mentor refugees or prepare welcome boxes.

The nonprofit recently furnished three apartments in the Dallas area with everything from the "doormat to the food in the fridge," Halabi said, and is collecting supplies from pots and microwaves to pasta, sugar and cleaning agents as it prepares for additional arrivals.

Beyond the response from Muslim Americans, Halabi said she is heartened by how different faith groups have mobilized to help refugees: "It's amazing from everybody."

## **UN: Weather disasters soar in numbers, cost, but deaths fall**

By SETH BORENSTEIN and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Weather disasters are striking the world four to five times more often and causing seven times more damage than in the 1970s, the United Nations weather agency reports.

But these disasters are killing far fewer people. In the 1970s and 1980s, they killed an average of about 170 people a day worldwide. In the 2010s, that dropped to about 40 per day, the World Meteorological Organization said in a report Wednesday that looks at more than 11,000 weather disasters in the past half-century.

The report comes during a disaster-filled summer globally, including deadly floods in Germany and a heat wave in the Mediterranean, and with the United States simultaneously struck by powerful Hurricane Ida and an onslaught of drought-worsened wildfires.

"The good news is that we have been able to minimize the amount of casualties once we have started having growing amount of disasters: heatwaves, flooding events, drought, and especially ... intense tropical storms like Ida, which has been hitting recently Louisiana and Mississippi in the United States," Petteri Taalas, WMO's secretary-general, told a news conference.

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"But the bad news is that the economic losses have been growing very rapidly and this growth is supposed to continue," he added. "We are going to see more climatic extremes because of climate change, and these negative trends in climate will continue for the coming decades."

In the 1970s, the world averaged about 711 weather disasters a year, but from 2000 to 2009 that was up to 3,536 a year or nearly 10 a day, according to the report, which used data from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters in Belgium. The average number of yearly disasters dropped a bit in the 2010s to 3,165, the report said.

Most death and damage during 50 years of weather disasters came from storms, flooding and drought. More than 90% of the more than 2 million deaths are in what the U.N. considers developing nations, while nearly 60% of the economic damage occurred in richer countries.

In the 1970s, weather disasters cost about \$175 billion globally, when adjusted to 2019 dollars, the U.N. found. That increased to \$1.38 trillion for the period from 2010 to 2019.

What's driving the destruction is that more people are moving into dangerous areas as climate change is making weather disasters stronger and more frequent, U.N. disaster and weather officials said. Meanwhile, experts said, better weather warnings and preparedness are lessening the death toll.

Susan Cutter, director of the Hazards and Vulnerability Research Institute at the University of South Carolina, noted progress in learning to live with risk and protecting ourselves.

"On the other hand, we're still making stupid decisions about where we're putting our infrastructure," she said. "But it's OK. We're not losing lives, we're just losing stuff."

Samantha Montano, an emergency management professor at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy and author of the book "Disasterology," said she worries that death tolls may stop decreasing because of the increase in extreme weather from climate change especially hitting poorer nations.

"The disparity in which countries have had the resources to dedicate to minimizing disaster deaths is of huge concern," particularly due to climate change, she said.

Hurricane Ida is a good example of heavy damage and what will probably be less loss of life than past major hurricanes, Cutter said. This year, she added, weather disasters "seem to be coming every couple weeks," with Ida, U.S. wildfires and floods in Germany, China and Tennessee.

The five most expensive weather disasters since 1970 were all storms in the United States, topped by 2005's Hurricane Katrina. The five deadliest weather disasters were in Africa and Asia — topped by the Ethiopian drought and famine in the mid 1980s and Cyclone Bhola in Bangladesh in 1970.

## Julie Pace named new Associated Press executive editor

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Julie Pace, a longtime Washington journalist who managed coverage of the U.S. government during a period of historic tumult, was named Wednesday as the executive editor and senior vice president of The Associated Press.

The 39-year-old Pace has been the AP's Washington bureau chief since 2017, guiding reporting on the Trump administration, national security, politics and the new Biden White House. She rose to the newsroom's top leadership spot with a promise to accelerate the AP's digital transformation.

Pace succeeds Sally Buzbee, who became executive editor of The Washington Post in June, and is the third consecutive woman to lead the AP's worldwide news operation. Her appointment is effective immediately and was announced by Gary Pruitt, AP president and CEO, and Daisy Veerasingham, executive vice president and chief operating officer. Veerasingham will become president and chief executive at the end of the year.

"This is a very exciting time for the AP — we're a 175-year-old news organization with a new CEO and a new executive editor," Pruitt said. "Julie Pace has a vision for AP's future that is in line with our long-standing values but also forward-thinking. She will do an excellent job."

As she assumes her new role, Pace said it was important to push all of the AP's journalists — text reporters, video, still photographers, fact checkers and graphics producers — out of individual silos to work

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together in presenting compelling stories.

"We are in a position where we have an opportunity to really modernize our news report," Pace said in an interview. "We have an opportunity to take all of the fantastic journalism that we do across formats and think of ways we can make it more digital-friendly, to make it more social-friendly."

Breaking news will remain the backbone of the AP's report, but journalists will quickly move to provide analysis, context and fact-checking to those stories, she said.

In some ways Pace is herself a symbol of the AP's transition: She joined the organization in Washington in 2007 as a video producer and rose to chief White House correspondent. A frequent on-air analyst at networks including CNN, ABC and Fox, she's comfortable talking publicly, representing a company that is often overlooked despite stationing journalists in 250 locations in 100 countries.

That's a legacy of the AP's history primarily as a wholesaler of news disseminated through other outlets. A smaller AP has placed a greater emphasis on impact journalism, becoming a more consumer-facing organization rather than a bland utility. The AP won two Pulitzer Prizes this year and was a finalist for three others.

"We play this incredibly vital role in how people around the world get their information, and I think sometimes we don't get enough credit for that," she said. "There are millions — upwards of a billion people — who get news from the AP every day. There's real power behind the work that we do."

Pace's background as a public communicator was a plus moving forward, as the company looks to take a leadership role in the industry where appropriate, Veerasingham said in an interview.

There's been a raft of leadership changes at national news organizations in the past several months. Besides Buzbee and Pace, Kevin Merida was named top editor at The Los Angeles Times, Kim Godwin is ABC News president, Wendy McMahon and Neeraj Khemlani share the same job at CBS News, Rashida Jones is president of MSNBC and Alessandra Galloni is editor-in-chief at Reuters.

What they all have in common is that none are white men in an era in which the industry has signaled the importance of diversity. That probably wasn't as pressing an issue for the AP, compared to other places, since its newsroom has been led by a woman since 2002, when Kathleen Carroll became executive editor, Veerasingham said.

"The best person for the job happens to be a woman," she said.

Pace has proved to be a strong and collaborative leader who has consistently demonstrated strong news judgment and a deep understanding of the AP's mission and place in the news industry, Veerasingham said.

The steady downturn in news circulation and advertising that led to the closure of hundreds of newspapers over the last two decades has also affected the AP; its revenues are down more than 25% over the last decade. The company is increasingly turning toward overseas markets for growth opportunities.

Journalism is also facing a politically fueled crisis in confidence. The Pew Research Center said this week that the number of Republicans who said they have at least some trust in national news organizations has been cut in half, from 70% in 2016 to 35% this year.

With readers and viewers often confused about where the lines are drawn between news and opinions, Pace said it made the AP's mission of providing fact-based journalism even more important.

"Fact-based journalism does not mean that all sides of an issue get an airing," she said. "That means we are going to be really clear with people about what the facts are. If that lines up on one side of an issue, we are going to be really clear about that. We're not going to be intimidated in these circumstances."

The AP has been bolstering its fact-checking operations, sending out more frequent stories examining the truth behind issues, and Pace said more will be done in this area. Fact-checks and explainers for news stories are consistently among AP's most-used fixtures.

Pace said the AP will continue to seek out grants and foundation funding that enable the organization to hire more people to examine specific issues. It has gone this route in recent years to bolster coverage of religion, philanthropy and health and science.

Some 50 candidates, both internal and external, were interviewed for the job. The AP's complexity and its unique position in the industry tend to give an edge to people familiar with the organization, Veerasingham

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said. But the company is also interested in people who can offer different perspectives and ideas, she said.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 2, the 245th day of 2021. There are 120 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 2, 1969, in what some regard as the birth of the Internet, two connected computers at the University of California, Los Angeles, passed test data through a 15-foot cable.

On this date:

In 1666, the Great Fire of London broke out.

In 1789, the United States Treasury Department was established.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union Gen. William T. Sherman's forces occupied Atlanta.

In 1944, during World War II, Navy pilot Lt. (jg) George Herbert Walker Bush was shot down by Japanese forces as he completed a bombing run over the Bonin Islands. (Bush was rescued by the crew of the submarine USS Finback; his two crew members, however, died.)

In 1945, Japan formally surrendered in ceremonies aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, ending World War II.

In 1960, Wilma Rudolph of the United States won the first of her three gold medals at the Rome Summer Olympics as she finished the 100-meter dash in 11 seconds.

In 1963, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace prevented the integration of Tuskegee High School by encircling the building with state troopers. "The CBS Evening News" with Walter Cronkite was lengthened from 15 to 30 minutes, becoming network television's first half-hour nightly newscast.

In 1998, a Swissair MD-11 jetliner crashed off Nova Scotia, killing all 229 people aboard.

In 2005, a National Guard convoy packed with food, water and medicine rolled into New Orleans four days after Hurricane Katrina.

In 2008, Republicans assailed Barack Obama as the most liberal, least experienced White House nominee in history at their convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, and enthusiastically extolled their own man, John McCain, as ready to lead the nation.

In 2018, Sen. John McCain was laid to rest on a grassy hill at the U.S. Naval Academy, after a horse-drawn caisson carrying the senator's casket led a procession of mourners from the academy's chapel to its cemetery.

In 2019, a fire swept a boat carrying recreational scuba divers that was anchored near an island off the Southern California coast; the captain and four other crew members were able to escape the flames, but 34 people who were trapped below died.

Ten years ago: In a dramatic reversal, President Barack Obama scrubbed a proposed clean-air regulation aimed at reducing smog, yielding to bitterly protesting businesses and congressional Republicans who complained the rule would kill jobs in America's ailing economy.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama departed for China on his final official trip to Asia. Tropical Storm Hermine hit Florida as a Category 1 hurricane, wiping away beachside buildings and toppling trees onto homes. Samsung Electronics recalled all of its Galaxy Note 7 smartphones after finding batteries in some of the flagship gadgets exploded or caught fire.

One year ago: The family of Daniel Prude released a video and records showing that Prude had died of asphyxiation after a group of police officers in Rochester, New York, put a hood over his head and pressed his face into the pavement for two minutes. (Prude, a Black man, died after being taken off life support in March, seven days after the encounter with police.) The German government said Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny had been poisoned with the same type of Soviet-era nerve agent that British authorities identified in a 2018 attack on a former Russian spy; experts say the findings pointed strongly to Russian state involvement in the poisoning of Navalny, who was recovering in a German hospital.

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Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Alan K. Simpson, R-Wyo., is 90. Former United States Olympic Committee Chairman Peter Ueberroth is 84. Singer Jimmy Clanton is 83. R&B singer Sam Gooden (The Impressions) is 82. R&B singer Rosalind Ashford (Martha & the Vandellas) is 78. Singer Joe Simon is 78. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Terry Bradshaw is 73. Basketball Hall of Famer Nate Archibald is 73. Actor Mark Harmon is 70. Former Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., is 70. International Tennis Hall of Famer Jimmy Connors is 69. Actor Linda Purl is 66. Rock musician Jerry Augustyniak (10,000 Maniacs) is 63. Country musician Paul Deakin (The Mavericks) is 62. Pro Football Hall of Famer Eric Dickerson is 61. Actor Keanu Reeves is 57. International Boxing Hall of Famer Lennox Lewis is 56. Actor Salma Hayek is 55. Actor Tuc Watkins is 55. Actor Kristen Cloke is 53. Actor Cynthia Watros is 53. R&B singer K-Ci is 52. Actor-comedian Katt Williams is 48. Actor Nicholas Pinnock is 48. Actor Michael Lombardi is 47. Actor Tiffany Hines is 44. Rock musician Sam Rivers (Limp Bizkit) is 44. Actor Jonathan Kite is 42. Actor Joshua Henry is 37. Actor Allison Miller is 36. Rock musician Spencer Smith is 34. Electronic music DJ/producer Zedd is 32.