

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Events

Tuesday, Sept. 7

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m., at City Hall
Cross Country at Britton, 4 p.m.
JV Football hosts Webster, 5 p.m.
Volleyball at Webster: C/7th at 5 p.m., JV/8th at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow.

Thursday, Sept. 9

Boys Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course, 10 a.m.
Boys Soccer at James Valley Christian, 4 p.m.
Volleyball hosts Sisseton: 7th/C at 5 p.m., 8th/JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow.

Friday, Sept. 10

Girls Soccer hosting West Central, 4 p.m.
Football vs. Deuel at Clear Lake, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 11

Groton City-Wide Rummage Sales, 8-3
Junior High Football Jamboree at Warner, 10 a.m.
Soccer at Sioux Falls Christian: Girls at 1 p.m., Boys at 3 p.m.



Sunday Sept. 12

Sunflower Classic Golf Tourney

Monday, Sept. 13

Cross Country at Webster, 4 p.m.
School Board Meeting, 6 p.m.
Homecoming Coronation, 8 p.m.



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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Week FOUR Soccer Coaches Poll

Boys AA

1. Sioux Falls Jefferson
2. Aberdeen Central
3. Yankton
4. Rapid City Stevens
5. Sioux Falls Washington

Receiving Votes: SF Lincoln, RC Central, O'Gorman, Spearfish

Girls AA

1. Aberdeen Central
- T2. Brandon Valley
- T2. Rapid City Stevens
4. Pierre T.F. Riggs
5. Harrisburg

Receiving Votes: SF Lincoln, SF Roosevelt, Watertown, O'Gorman

Boys A

1. Sioux Falls Christian
2. Tea Area
3. St. Thomas More
4. Belle Fourche
5. Vermillion

Receiving Votes: Groton Area, James Valley Christian

Girls A

1. West Central
2. Tea Area
3. Sioux Falls Christina
4. Groton Area
5. Vermillion

Receiving Votes: Dakota Valley, Garretson

Students Experience Big City, Learn About Cooperatives

By Toby Kane for South Dakota Farmers Union

Each year, several South Dakota Farmers Union youth take part in a Three Year Senior Achievement trip. The trip celebrates their hard work and leadership and offers an opportunity to visit Minneapolis and learn more about cooperatives.

This year's students departed for Minneapolis on July 26 where they visited Farmers Union Industries, Seward Cooperative food stores and Chateau Cooperative housing near the University of Minnesota.

Besides learning about different cooperatives, there was time for some fun, too. The three-year students enjoyed the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, a trip to an outlet mall and a full tour of Target Field followed by a Minnesota Twins game.

Education Director Rachel Haigh-Blume says the trip is not only about education and sightseeing, but also a chance to introduce students to a larger city. "They get to explore downtown and experience something different than where we're from."

Levi Nightingale of White Lake agrees. "It was cool to be in a big city and see how different it is from South Dakota," says Nightingale. He was also impressed from touring Farmers Union Industries in Redwood Falls. "I liked seeing how you can start from the bottom and work your way up and learn the business."

Farmers Union Industries operates a number of companies supplying specialized products and services for the ag industry and customer households.

Rachel Gerlach of Stickney was surprised by the different types of cooperatives she experienced. "I didn't know there were that many cooperatives out there like the housing and grocery stores." Gerlach also loved touring Target Field and taking in the Twins game.

The three-year group returned home on July 28 after an exciting couple days of cooperative tours and fun with friends.



South Dakota youth visited Farmers Union Industries in Redwood Falls, Minn. Back L to R: Tyler Hanson, Garrett Kruger, Chaz Blotsky, Kathryn Nightingale, Casey Tolsma, Rachel Gerlach, Jayda Walton. Front L to R: Hailey Monson, Levi Nightingale, Faith Schulte, Alyssa Fordham, Hannah Monson. (Photo Courtesy of SDFU)

Volunteer Firefighters Protect Their Friends, Neighbors & Community by Lura Roti for South Dakota Farmers Union

January's Windy Fire was an early and sad start to Fire Season 2021, and a reminder of the important role volunteer fire departments play in rural communities across South Dakota. So, who are the individuals who make up these volunteer departments? And why do they set aside time for trainings, meetings and fire emergencies? To find out answers, South Dakota Farmers Union reached out to three South Dakota cattle producers who also serve as volunteer firefighters on departments in Reliance, Grand River and Lemmon.

Shane Reis, Reliance



Shane Reis raises cattle on his family's Reliance ranch and works full time for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service as the Resource Unit Conservationist for the River Hills Region. In addition to serving as fire chief for the Reliance Volunteer Fire Department, Shane serves on the Reliance Town Board. He and his wife, Tessa, have a daughter, Arista. (Courtesy Photo)

Question: This is a volunteer position. With everything else you have going on each day, why do you make time for the hours of training, paperwork and emergencies that serving as a volunteer firefighter takes up?

Answer: I believe firefighting and farming and ranching are very intertwined. Most of my friends and neighbors serve as volunteer fire fighters and they would help me out if my family's ranch started on fire, so I am here to help them out. To me it feels like a partial responsibility I have raising livestock in western South Dakota.

I also like to see our small communities thrive. In my rural community and many rural communities across South Dakota, the volunteer fire department is the lead on several community projects. We are there to help with street dances or park clean up.

Volunteer firefighters are also among the first to arrive when tragedy happens. This may be the toughest part of our job. If there is a car or farm accident, in or near Reliance, there is a good chance you know, or are related to the person involved.

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Chad Odell, Thunderhawk

Chad Odell ranches full time. On Christmas Day 2016 his shop caught fire and the Grand River Volunteer Fire Department turned out to help. This was when he made the decision to join the department. He drives the 1,800-gallon tender truck for the Grand River Volunteer Fire Department. He and his wife, Lisa, have three children: James, Thadeus and Cheyanne. (Courtesy Photo)



Question: Do you think it helps that all the volunteers serving as firefighters are from the area?

Answer: Yes. In this community, most of us are volunteer firefighters so we can help our friends and neighbors. Everybody is always worried about everybody else.

And I'd like to point out that there are several volunteers who are the second or third generation in their family to serve on the department. Most of us grew up here. We know the family who owns the land where the fire is. More than likely, we have been on their place for brandings or to help move cattle. Out here there aren't roads everywhere, so it's important that we know how to get to the fire.

But there's another side to this, because it is our friends and neighbors, you see friends and neighbors lose cattle or all the feed for their cattle – I mean, that's just tragic and you feel their loss and pain too.

Shane Penfield, Lemmon



Shane Penfield raises cattle on his family's Lemmon ranch. He owns a law firm and serves as State's Attorney for Perkins, Corson and Ziebach Counties. He serves as Fire Marshal and Public Information Officer of the Lemmon Volunteer Fire Department. He and his wife, Kelli have four children: Nathan, Will, Shelby and Sloane. (Courtesy Photo)

Question: Due to the volunteer nature of your fire department, how do you make sure volunteer firefighters know how to fight fire and at the same time remain safe?

Answer: We rely upon our training. At least once a month our firefighters have training which includes drills.

When people think of a volunteer fire department, they often assume that because we are volunteers, the firefighters do not meet the same standard as paid firefighters. This simply is not true. We are serious about meeting the same standards. Each member of our volunteer department is required to have completed firefighter training courses and received Wildland Fire Fighting certification.

We also have training and equipment for extraction and grain bin rescue. Our department also has 13 certified divers trained in rescue and recovery. This is quite important when you have 5,000 surface acres of lake nearby.

Reflections on 9/11

Millions of Americans like me knew when they heard the news, that it would change everything. The radio newscast told us only that two planes had crashed into the World Trade Center, but I knew instantly what it was and what it meant. Terrorism and war.

It was a short trip from our rural home to town; I was driving past the school, my kids buckled in, when I heard the broadcast, but in the next few blocks on our way to daycare, I processed what it meant: things would change, and the world I grew up in, a more innocent world my kids would never know, was suddenly less innocent.

It was my birthday.

So many mistakes. We've just removed ourselves from Afghanistan, where a necessary mission to destroy Al Qaeda morphed into an impossible if well-intentioned, nation-building task, our exit a reminder that wars are unpredictable and messy. And sadly, seemingly, ongoing.

Amidst the fever of war, the Americans were sold on a war against Iraq under false pretenses and the concept of preemptive war. Maybe it's old-fashioned and irrelevant when it comes to military strategy, but Americans hadn't seen themselves as people who would throw the first punch. We thought of ourselves as angels of righteousness. Then came state-sanctioned torture. Incarceration without due process. Ongoing violations of the 4th Amendment protections against illegal search and seizure through electronic surveillance—mass data-gathering. Security screenings where there had been none before.

Perhaps it's naive to think that a constitution crafted 250 years ago can be so enlightened and sacrosanct that it transcends modern realities and shouldn't evolve, and hey, we do it with religious text. However, that we so blithely have gone along with it, in the name of patriotism, without a national conversation seems to me, well, unAmerican. When President Bush warned the rest of the world, "You're either with us or against us," I found it chilling. We'd become bullies or at best, an awakened beast reacting in anger and less so in logic.

As a journalist, I can remain objective and dispassionate about most things, however, the ignorance of so many Americans appalls me. As was intentioned, people believe today that Iraq attacked us on 9/11. No, those planes were loaded mostly with Saudis, the guys we arm and buy our oil from. H.L. Mencken, has been credited as saying "No one has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the masses..."

Such was the tone of my columns 20 years ago, and in an environment in which Bush's press secretary Ari Fleischer chillingly warned the press to "be careful what you say," numerous publishers of my columns dumped me. It was their right, but was it right? I rest easy knowing that I was right and that I was right for speaking unpopular truths to a country swept up in war fever.

One should always be suspicious of government-fueled patriotism. That's not because you don't love your country, but because you do. Waving a flag over a conflict like some kind of holy blessing doesn't make it right.

There was a sincere national unity we've not seen since—now we fight over basic common sense public health issues like it's a Medieval crusade—and that emotion and love of country can be used for good or evil. Check your history books.

I visited the Twin Towers site a couple of years after 9/11, and I remember talking to a bartender in Manhattan about the change in the city. "I think it's made everyone nicer," she said. For a time, it did



**That's
Life**
by Tony Bender

but look at us now.

The cause against bin Laden was righteous, and I grew frustrated by Bush's outward casual indifference to finding him, so when Barack Obama announce that the terrorist leader was dead, it became the only time I celebrated another human's death.

It felt like I had my birthday back.

Although I opposed the war in Iraq, I've reserved judgement about the evolving outcome. Ridding the country of Saddam Hussein was a righteous cause. Every war and political action of the past is connected to the present, sometimes for the best, often not. Likewise, I'm reserving judgement on Afghanistan. After all, Vietnam is now a trading partner. Things may well work out. Eventually, if clumsily, at a great cost of lives and national treasure.

What's done is done, but perhaps we can learn from it even as we remember and mourn those good people who died on 9/11 and those warriors who died or were forever damaged. Sadly, as a suicidal species, we need warriors, so God bless them. And God bless America.

I sincerely mean that.

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South Dakota Awarded Federal Funds Under the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program (Phase 38)

Sioux Falls, South Dakota (September 5, 2021) – The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has announced that \$250,002 has been awarded to South Dakota by the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) under Phase 37 of this program to supplement food, shelter, rent, mortgage, and utility assistance programs for people with non-disaster related emergencies.

Funding will be allocated to Local Recipient Organizations (LRO's) by the State Set-Aside Committee using a formula based on current unemployment, food insecurity and poverty data from the entire state. The Local Boards of each LRO will then determine how those funds will be distributed to qualified agencies in the counties that they oversee.

Public or private voluntary agencies interested in applying for Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds must: 1) be non-profit 2) have accounting capabilities 3) practice non-discrimination 4) demonstrate ability to deliver emergency food and/or shelter services 5) convene a voluntary board (if a private entity).

Agencies interested in applying for funding can contact Diane Briest, State Set-Aside Committee Member, at (605) 335-0364 for information on where to apply for funding. Current participating LRO's are not required to re-apply for funding during this phase but should notify the State Set-Aside committee if they are considering changing their status as an LRO.

Deadline for applications is no later than C.O.B. September 17, 2021.

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Week 3 - SDHSAA Coaches Poll

11AAA
Harrisburg (9) 2-0 69
Brandon Valley (6) 2-0 60
Sioux Falls Jefferson 1-1 32
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 1-1 24
Sioux Falls Washington 1-1 16
Others: Sioux Falls Roosevelt 12, Sioux Falls Lincoln 9

11AA
Tea Area (6) 2-0 72
Aberdeen Central (5) 2-0 58
Pierre TF Riggs (4) 1-1 50
Yankton 1-1 24
Watertown 1-1 24
Others: Brookings 22, Mitchell 3, Huron 1

11A
Canton (13) 2-0 74
Madison (1) 2-0 47
Lennox (1) 2-0 34
Sioux Falls Christian 2-0 32
Dell Rapids 1-1 16
Others: West Central 15, Tri Valley 9, Vermillion 7

11B
Winner (14) 3-0 72
Sioux Valley 2-1 39
Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 2-1 37
Elk Point-Jefferson 2-0 22
Aberdeen Roncalli 3-0 16
Others: McCook Central/Montrose 14, W/WS/SC 10, Mount Vernon/Plankinton 9

9AA
1 Platte-Geddes (19) 95 2-0
2 Hanson (1) 65 3-0
3 Florence/Henry (1) 40 3-0
4 Chester Area 36 3-0
5 Canistota/Freeman 21 1-2
Other Garretson 19, Ipswich 14, Lyman 12, Hamlin 8, Viborg-Hurley 5, Parkston 4, Timber Lake 4, Leola/Frederick Area 1

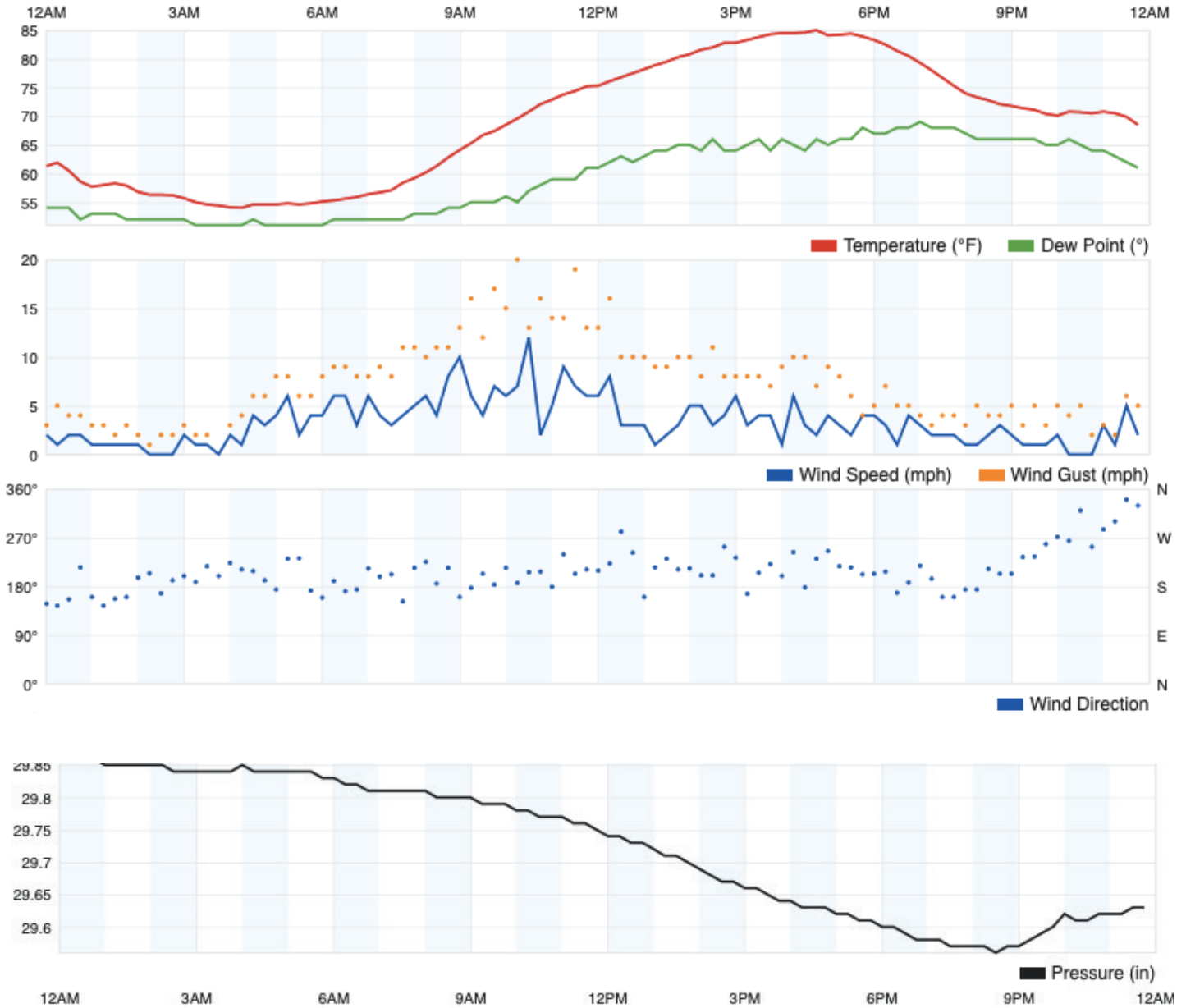
9A
1 DeSmet (14) 98 3-0
2 Howard (6) 77 3-0
3 Wolsey-Wessington 47 1-1
4 Herreid/Selby Area 44 3-0
5 Wall (1) 31 3-0
Other Castlewood 6, Gregory 5, Kimball/White Lake 4, Warner 3

9B
1 Avon (8) 67 2-0
2 Harding County/Bison (7) 60 1-1
3 Gayville-Volin (5) 59 2-0
4 Hitchcock-Tulare 43 3-0
5 Faulkton Area 36 2-1
Other Sully Buttes (1) 34, Potter Co 23, Alcester-Hudson 4, Dell Rapids St. Mary 3

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 78 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 47 °F

Wednesday



Sunny

High: 76 °F

Wednesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 47 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 79 °F

Mostly Dry and
Mild This Week



Windy

Today & Wednesday

Highs 70s to around 80°

This week looks mainly dry and mild. Gusty winds this afternoon will elevate the grassland fire danger over the Missouri valley. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

September 7, 1961: A tornado struck a farm near the McPherson-Brown county line, or about 10 miles east and 2 miles north of Leola, at around 825 pm CDT. All farm buildings were destroyed, including two chicken coops, granary, machine shop, and two trailer homes. The house was pushed about a foot off its foundation and had windows broken, plaster cracked, and part of the roof ripped. A farm truck and tractor were both blown about 500 feet and demolished. Rain up to 2.5 inches and hail accompanied the storm and caused minor damage.

1769: Considered one of the worst storms of the Eighteenth century, this hurricane passed over Williamsburg, Virginia.

1970: A lightning bolt struck a group of football players at Gibbs High School in St. Petersburg, FL. The lightning killed two people and injuring 22 others. All 38 players and four coaches were knocked off their feet.

1998: Two Derechos occurred on this day with one affecting most of Pennsylvania and New York City, the other impacting central New York.

1881 - The temperature soared to 101 degrees at New York City, 102 degrees at Boston MA, and 104 degrees at Washington D.C. (David Ludlum)

1888 - Much of the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast Region experienced freezing temperatures. Killer frosts resulted in a million dollars damage to crops in Maine. (David Ludlum)

1909 - Topeka, KS, was drenched with 8.08 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a record for that location. (6th- 7th) (The Weather Channel)

1970 - A lightning bolt struck a group of football players at Gibbs High School in Saint Petersburg FL, killing two persons and injuring 22 others. All the thirty-eight players and four coaches were knocked off their feet. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Showers and thunderstorms produced 4 to 8 inch rains in three to six hours in Virginia, with totals across the state for the Labor Day weekend ranging up to fourteen inches. The Staunton River crested at 34.44 feet at Altavista on the 8th, its highest level since 1940. Damage due to flooding was estimated at seven million dollars around Bedford, Henry, and Franklin. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Fifty cities across the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. The low of 56 degrees at Mobile AL was their coolest reading of record for so early in the season. The mercury dipped to 31 degrees at Athens OH, and to 30 degrees at Thomas WV. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms in the central U.S. produced four inches of rain at Texamah overnight, and up to six inches of rain in southwestern Iowa. Evening thunderstorms in eastern Colorado produced golf ball size hail at Clear Creek and at Nederland. Late evening thunderstorms in Iowa drenched Harlan with more than four inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

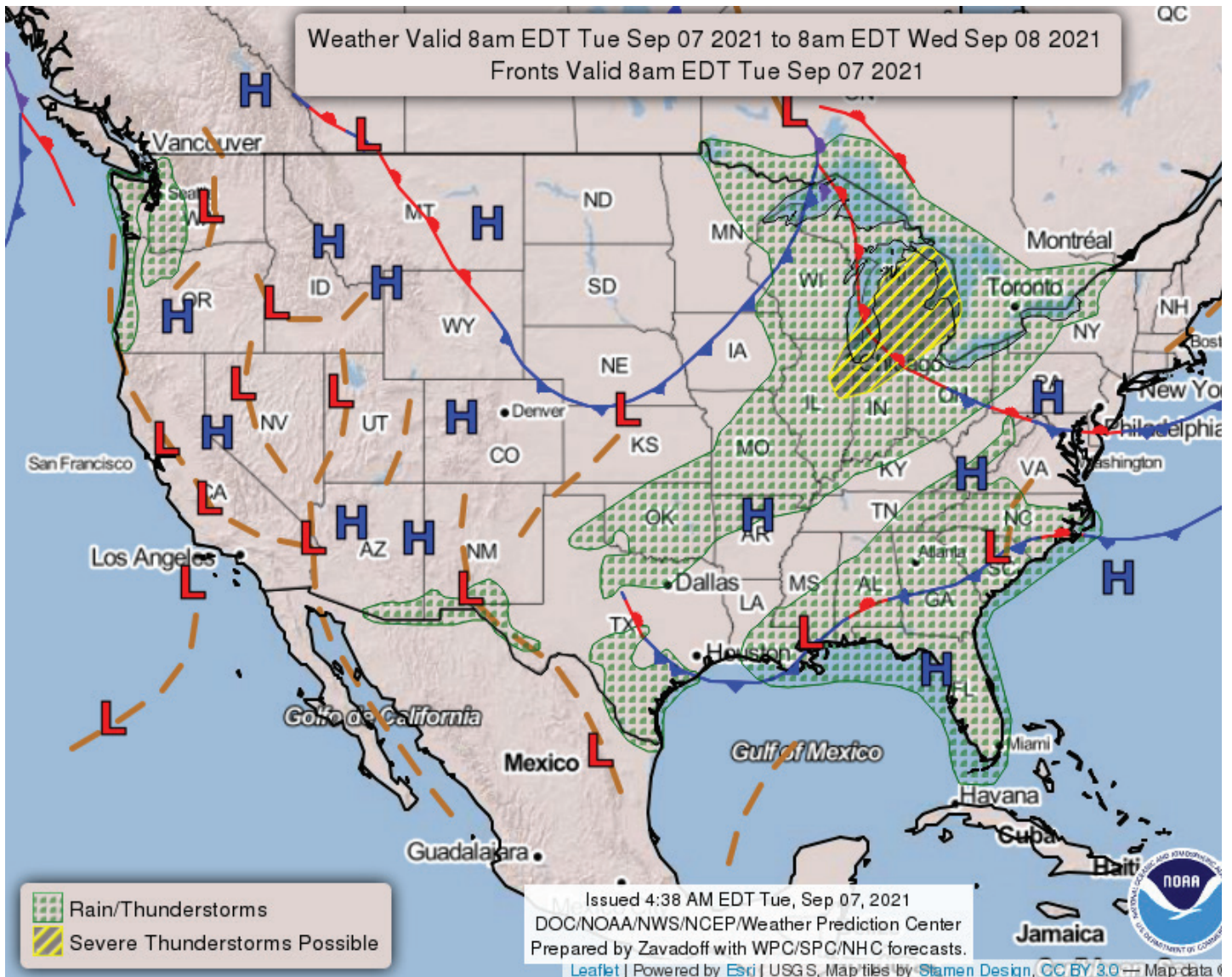
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:39 PM
Low Temp: 54 °F at 4:05 AM
Wind: 20 mph at 10:13 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 101° in 1897
Record Low: 29° in 1895
Average High: 78°F
Average Low: 50°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.47
Precip to date in Sept.: 1.77
Average Precip to date: 16.81
Precip Year to Date: 14.91
Sunset Tonight: 8:00:08 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:01:33 AM



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THE EYES HAVE IT!

Returning to earth after several orbital circles in outer space, a Russian cosmonaut proudly boasted, "I looked everywhere, but I didn't see God." That statement made me wonder what evidence would have been acceptable to him to prove that there is a God. Paul once wrote, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen."

The eye, our "window to the world," seems to be a very special part of God's creation. But before the eye was formed, in His unfathomable wisdom, a process was set in motion: "Let there be light!" He ordered. For us to see anything light must be reflected off an object to form a "picture" or the eye is useless.

Before God created our eyes, He prepared a special place for them: He formed the bones of the skull to give them a safe place to do their work. He then fashioned our eyelids to keep out dirt and dust and made eyebrows to keep glaring light from damaging them. Finally, He developed a lubricating process to keep our eyes moist and clean by causing tears to flow.

Finally, there is the cornea. It allows rays of light to pass through the iris and form a scene in our brain. And here the process becomes complete: Our brain takes what we see and enables us to make sense of God's creation, love, and salvation through His word.

"Seeing" God, however, takes more than the eye. "If you search for Me with all your heart, you'll find Me." What are you looking for?

Prayer: Open our hearts, Father, as well as our eyes to discover Your beauty and majesty, love and salvation. Thank You for giving us eyes to see! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Does he who formed the eye not see? Psalm 94:9

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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 Monday:

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$345 million

Powerball

11-20-22-33-54, Powerball: 24, Power Play: 2

(eleven, twenty, twenty-two, thirty-three, fifty-four; Powerball: twenty-four; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$375 million

Some question Rapid City vote on grant for English learners

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Some parents and teachers in Rapid City have been questioning why school board leaders decided not to apply for a \$30,000 grant that would help immigrant students learn to speak English.

One school board representative said that if the district accepted the federal grant, it would give the green light for more immigrants to move to Rapid City, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Without explanation, the Rapid City Area Schools Board of Education voted 5-2 on Aug. 9 not to seek the Title III Immigrant Grant, which is based on the number of immigrant students in a community. Rapid City is the only school district in the state that's eligible to qualify for the funds, the newspaper reported.

The grant would have gone toward teaching 22 current students who have lived in the United States for less than three years how to speak English conversationally.

Fred Meyer, a ninth-grade world history and geography teacher at Stevens High School, emailed each board member to question why they would turn down the funding opportunity, as the district is losing enrollment and revenue.

Board 1st Vice President Gabe Doney told Meyer in an email that by accepting the grant, the school district was implicitly giving the green light for more immigrants to move to Rapid City. He made similar comments to the Journal, saying that accepting a federal grant pertaining to immigration "could create a bigger problem down the road."

"Next year is it going to be 100 (students), or 300? Do we really want that in Rapid City? \$30,000 could turn into \$1 million," Doney told the Journal. He said one concern is whether immigrant students would be up to date on required vaccinations.

Doney said board members asked the superintendent find the \$30,000 elsewhere in the budget to help the students learn English.

Meyer said he's concerned that the decision makes the school system seem unsupportive of the immigrant community.

"We have people that come from all over that work at our businesses, who are professors at School of Mines, green card holders, et cetera. We are reliant on immigrants and they should be welcomed. This sends the wrong message," he said.

2 South Dakota tribes get funding for 911 call centers

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Department of Public Safety said two South Dakota tribes are getting funding for their 911 call centers.

A total of \$132,669 is being given to the tribes. The Oglala Sioux Tribe received \$86,240 from the state's 9-1-1 Coordination Board in March, and last week, the board approved another \$46,449 in funding for the Cheyenne River Tribal Department of Public Safety, the Rapid City Journal reported.

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"This one-time funding is available to 9-1-1 centers statewide for equipment upgrades and other infrastructure needs," Craig Price, Cabinet Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, said in a statement.

Lake Tahoe evacuation orders lifted, but fire threat remains

By SAM METZ AP/Report for America

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — The lifting of a mandatory evacuation order for South Lake Tahoe's 22,000 residents is a confident milestone in the fight against the Caldor Fire, but it remains only 48% contained and still threatens areas south of the resort town.

Firefighters are confronting aggressive winds and flames in some southeast sections of the Caldor Fire, which could still reach Meyers, a community more than a mile high known as the gateway to Lake Tahoe, and other areas including the Kirkwood ski resort.

And although the evacuation is no longer mandatory for the smoke-cloaked city on the lake's south shore, more than 5,000 personnel are still working to protect the surrounding resort communities and the homes of employees who staff casinos, restaurants and ski resorts.

"We're also looking long term — what's going to happen, four, five or six days down the road. We want to make sure we're planning and having stuff ready and completed" before more people can return home, Cal Fire official John Davis said. "And if it comes sooner, we are already in the planning process for the whole area that's still under evacuation order."

When the 338 square-mile (876 square-kilometer) wildfire gobbled up pine trees and crossed the Sierra Nevada last week, South Lake Tahoe transformed into a ghost town. The city appeared slightly rebounded on Monday, yet mostly empty compared to normal holiday weekends.

"I was honestly convinced this place was gonna go down," Lake Tahoe Community College student Dakota Jones said Monday upon his return. "It was nice to see that I was wrong."

The Caldor Fire erupted Aug. 14 and was burning as many as 1,000 acres an hour at its peak as it spread across dense forests, tree-dotted granite cliffs and scattered cabins and hamlets in the northern Sierra Nevada. Through tactics including bulldozing defense lines and air-dropping Lake Tahoe water onto the flames, crews successfully carved a perimeter around much of the wildfire.

Fire officials still expect hot spots, but hope to make enough progress to lift more evacuation orders in the coming days. Much depends on the wind, rain and lightning that coming thunderstorms may yield.

Winds have been easing, allowing firefighters to make progress containing the conflagration, but authorities remain concerned about southwest winds sparking spot fires. In Northern California, the weather is expected to cool slightly and the humidity to rise starting on Tuesday.

"We are drier than I have seen on my 20 days on this fire," Jim Dudley, incident meteorologist, said Monday. "There's a lot of potential weather-wise for little things to become maybe not so little."

California and much of the U.S. West have experienced dozens of wildfires in the past two months as the warming, drought-stricken region swelters under dry heat and winds drives flames through vegetation. More than 14,500 firefighters were battling 14 active fires in the state on Monday, and since the year began more than 7,000 wildfires have devoured 3,000 square miles (8,000 square kilometers).

No deaths have been reported specifically from the fires, which have shut down all national forests in the state.

Further south, the National Weather Service in Oxnard, California said hot dry weather was expected for interior valleys and deserts with elevated fire conditions through Friday.

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

Virginia is set to remove Richmond's Lee statue on Wednesday

By DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A towering statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia, will be taken down on Wednesday as a symbol of racial injustice, more than 130 years after it was erected in tribute to the South's Civil War leader.

While many other Confederate symbols across the South have been removed without public announcements beforehand to avoid unruly crowds, Gov. Ralph Northam's office is expecting a multitude and plans to livestream the event on social media.

"Virginia's largest monument to the Confederate insurrection will come down this week," Northam said in news release on Monday. "This is an important step in showing who we are and what we value as a commonwealth."

The imposing, 21-foot (6.4-meter) tall bronze likeness of Lee on a horse sits atop a granite pedestal nearly twice that high in the grassy center of a traffic circle on Richmond's famed Monument Avenue.

Gov. Ralph Northam announced plans to take down the statue in June 2020, 10 days after George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, sparking nationwide protests against police brutality and racism. The plans were stalled for more than a year by two lawsuits filed by residents opposed to its removal, but rulings last week by the Supreme Court of Virginia cleared the way for the statue to be taken down.

In Monday's news release, state officials said that preparations for the statue's removal will began 6 p.m. Tuesday when crews will install protective fencing.

Once the statue is hoisted off the pedestal, it's expected to be cut into two pieces for transport, although the final plan is subject to change, said Dena Potter, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of General Services.

After the statue is taken down Wednesday, crews on Thursday will remove plaques from the base of the monument and will replace a time capsule that is believed to be there.

In Richmond, a city that was the capital of the Confederacy for much of the Civil War, the Lee statue became the epicenter of last summer's protest movement. The city has removed more than a dozen other pieces of Confederate statuary on city land since Floyd's death.

As one of the largest and most recognizable Confederate statues in the country, the removal of the Lee statute is expected to draw large crowds.

Limited viewing opportunities will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis, state officials said in Monday's news release. The removal will also be livestreamed through the governor's Facebook and Twitter accounts, both of which have the handle of @governorVA.

The Lee statue was created by the internationally renowned French sculptor Marius-Jean-Antonin Mercié and is considered a "masterpiece," according to its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, where it has been listed since 2007.

When the statue arrived in 1890 from France, an estimated 10,000 Virginians used wagons to haul its pieces more than a mile to where it now stands. White residents celebrated the statue, but many Black residents have long seen it as a monument glorifying slavery.

The Northam administration has said it would seek public input on the statue's future. The 40-foot granite pedestal will be left behind for now amid efforts to rethink the design of Monument Avenue. Some racial justice advocates don't want it removed, seeing the graffiti-covered pedestal as a symbol of the protest movement that erupted after Floyd's killing.

Lawrence West, 38, member of BLM RVA, an activist group that's been occupying the transformed space at the Lee monument, said he believes the decision to remove the statue was fueled by the work of protesters.

"I mean, it hadn't come down before. They (Democrats in charge of state government) had all the opportunities in the world."

West said he would like to see the statue site turned into a community space "to cultivate all types of

connections between different people.”

EXPLAINER: Why is history repeating itself in Guinea’s coup?

By KRISTA LARSON Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Many hoped that Guinea’s landmark 2010 election would finally bring the West African country a democratic leader after decades of corrupt dictatorship.

Instead President Alpha Conde decided to stick around for a third term, modifying the constitution so that the term limits no longer applied to him.

His plan to extend his rule prompted violent street protests in the capital, Conakry, last year — and ultimately sealed Conde’s fate as vulnerable to a military coup.

Now soldiers in fatigues have once again crowded around a table this week to broadcast a statement — just as others have done so many times before in West Africa — decrying a corrupt president who they say wouldn’t have left office any other way. Here is a look at how the region has confronted military coups like this in the past, and what scenarios could unfold in the coming weeks.

HOW DID HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF IN GUINEA?

It started with an outburst of gunfire near Guinea’s presidential palace just like earlier coups. Guineans who had lived through two other takeovers and just as many assassination attempts stayed inside and waited to see who was really in control of the country. After hours of uncertainty and a group of little-known soldiers appeared on state television giving themselves a French acronym name. They spoke of reconciliation but made no promises on how long they would take to hand power back to civilians. And then came the video of the deposed Conde, disheveled in a half-buttoned shirt and blue jeans in the custody of mutinous soldiers.

If it feels all too familiar, it’s because a similar regime change unfolded in neighboring Mali just a little over a year ago. There too the junta decided President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita had overstayed his welcome even though his elected term was not yet completed. They eventually promised to organize elections in 18 months’ time to return the country to civilian rule but it increasingly looks like that target will be missed.

ARE PEOPLE GOING TO ACCEPT THIS COUP D’ETAT?

State television — now under the control of the junta — has carried images of jubilant Guineans taking to the streets to greet the military convoy. But the real test could be whether forces loyal to the ousted president ultimately accept the coup or instead potentially stage a counter-coup.

The West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS already has condemned the power grab, and everyone from the United States to Russia has expressed concern in varying degrees about where this all could head.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RETURN GUINEA TO DEMOCRATIC RULE?

The African Union typically suspends the membership of a country after a coup d’etat. And in West Africa, former colonizer France still carries a lot of economic clout and can also impose targeted sanctions.

But in Mali’s case it ultimately took the regional threat of economic sanctions to get the coup leaders to agree to transitional governments in both 2012 and 2020.

The West African regional bloc, though, has its own credibility problems. It allowed not only Conde but also Ivory Coast’s President Alassane Ouattara to seek third terms last year despite the constitutional wrangling needed.

And despite early threats, ECOWAS ultimately gave in to the Mali junta’s timeline for holding new elections, accepting an 18-month delay after earlier saying that democracy had to be restored within a year.

WILL THIS END BADLY FOR GUINEA AND WEST AFRICA?

Guinea’s mining industry already has taken a hit from the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns about political stability could cause foreign companies to reconsider their presence. Guinea’s junta leaders went to great lengths Monday to reassure the international community that they would honor all existing agreements, a gesture aimed at keeping the country’s essential mining revenues flowing.

The junta purports to be acting on behalf of the Guinean people, but already there are concerns about whether military rule could lead to human rights violations.

Security forces in Guinea come with a deeply tarnished record: In 2009 they opened fire on a group of demonstrators protesting then coup leader Moussa "Dadis" Camara's plans to run for president and stay in power. More than 150 people died and at least 100 women were raped in a soccer stadium, crimes that more than a decade later have yet to be tried in court.

The bigger concern could be what message this week's coup will send other West African leaders seeking to stay in power, analysts say. There are fears that the recent coups in Mali and Guinea could lead to more political instability in the region.

Even if the ruling juntas in both countries do eventually hold elections, will military leaders simply rebrand themselves as civilian candidates? For now, there's a more immediate concern in Guinea: Do others in the military think they should be steering the country's fate?

Myanmar resistance movement calls for nationwide uprising

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The main underground group coordinating resistance to Myanmar's military government called for a nationwide uprising on Tuesday.

The National Unity Government views itself as a shadow government composed of elected legislators who were barred from taking their seats when the military seized power in February.

The group's acting president Duwa Lashi La called for revolt "in every village, town and city in the entire country at the same time" and declared what he called a "state of emergency." A video of his speech was posted on Facebook.

The country has been wracked by unrest since the military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, with a low-level insurrection in many urban areas. There has been more serious combat in rural areas, especially in border regions where ethnic minority militias have been engaging in serious clashes with the government's troops.

The shadow government's prime minister, Mahn Winn Khaing Thann, said in a separate statement posted online that the move was taken due to "changing circumstances" that required the complete abolition of the ruling military government. He did not elaborate.

There were no immediate signs of heightened resistance activity, although some student groups and ethnic armed organizations expressed solidarity.

The National Unity Government is popular inside Myanmar, but its actual power and influence is hard to measure. It has frequently issued sweeping proclamations and policy statements declaring the military government and its actions invalid and illegal, but they've had little real-world effect. It controls no territory, does not directly control any armed force and has won no diplomatic recognition from foreign countries. Members of its shadow Cabinet are in hiding inside Myanmar and in exile.

Duwa Lashi La called on the ethnic militias, some of whom have declared themselves in alliance with the resistance, to "immediately attack" government forces and "fully control your lands." The ethnic armed forces, which have been fighting for decades for greater autonomy from Myanmar's central government, operate independently of the National Unity Government.

Duwa Lashi La called for a "people's revolution" and asked for all soldiers and police to join the "people's defense forces." He also warned civil servants against going to their offices.

He advised people to heed their personal safety and not travel unnecessarily, as well as to stock up on food and medicine, guidance it has offered on at least one past occasion when it warned of trouble ahead. He said people should help the defense forces where they can, including with information about government military forces.

The resistance movement against the military takeover had established "people's defense forces" in many areas, but they mostly operate locally and when active, carry out small-scale hit-and-run guerrilla operations.

Emotions raw before Paris trial for Islamic State carnage

By LORI HINNANT and NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — For the music lover, it was nearly three hours at gunpoint, wondering if he would become yet another body on the floor of the Bataclan concert hall in Paris.

For the grieving mother, the night of carnage robbed her of her son and tarnished her view of the vibrant neighborhood they both loved.

For the French president, a celebration of the national soccer team transformed into sleepless days of facing down a shocking extremist attack.

The survivors of the Islamic State group attack on Paris the night of Nov. 13, 2015, and those who mourn the 130 dead, are bracing for the long-awaited trial and hoping for justice.

It begins Wednesday in a secure modern complex embedded in Paris' original 13th-century courthouse. The main chamber and 12 overflow rooms can accommodate 1,800 victims, 330 lawyers and 141 accredited journalists for the nine-month trial.

Twenty men are going on trial, six of them in absentia. All but one of the absent men are presumed dead in Syria or Iraq. Most are accused of helping create false identities, transporting the attackers back to Europe from Syria, providing them with money and phones, and supplying explosives and weapons.

The attacks sent France into a state of emergency. For Stéphane Toutlouyan and the others held hostage inside the Bataclan, the transformation was intensely personal.

"The reaction to this, afterwards, was to try and take back control of our lives and do the things that maybe we'd not done before, because we had no time to lose," he told The Associated Press.

On that fateful Nov. 13, a cell of nine IS supporters armed with automatic rifles and explosive vests struck across French capital. Nearly all were from France or Belgium, as were the cell's 10th member and sole survivor, Salah Abdeslam.

Abdeslam, who ditched his car and malfunctioning explosives vest, is the only defendant facing murder charges in the trial. Another key defendant, Mohammed Abrini, reappeared months later in footage of the IS attack on the Brussels airport and subway.

Many of the dead attackers, along with Abdeslam and Abrini, were childhood friends from the Brussels neighborhood of Molenbeek. Some joined the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, including the Paris attack ringleader, Abdelhamid Abaaoud. Driving three rental cars, they took their "convoy of death" to the highway linking Brussels and Paris on Nov. 12, 2015, and scattered in reserved hotel rooms.

The next day, the German and French soccer teams faced off at the Stade de France, the country's national stadium just outside Paris.

It was a balmy Friday evening, and the city's bars and restaurants were packed. Victor Muñoz, a 25-year-old native of Paris' 11th arrondissement, was with old friends. At the nearby Bataclan concert venue, the American band Eagles of Death Metal were playing to a full house, including Toutlouyan, an enthusiastic fan of live rock.

The sound of the first suicide bombing at 9:16 p.m. barely carried over the noise of the stadium's crowd. The second came four minutes later. French President François Hollande, at the soccer game with Germany's foreign minister, was told about the dead bombers outside.

"I stayed in my place for a few minutes to avoid a panic effect. People see me from their seats, and they can't make the link between the detonations and my departure, or there's the risk of stampede," Hollande told Le Parisien newspaper this month.

By then, a squad of gunmen including Abdeslam's brother and Abaaoud had opened fire at La Bonne Bière and other bars and restaurants in the neighborhood. Muñoz was among the dead.

That bloodshed outside came to an end at 9:41 p.m. at the Café Voltaire when Brahim Abdeslam detonated his explosives. The other two attackers fled.

Worse was to follow. At 9:47 p.m., three more gunmen burst into the Bataclan, firing indiscriminately. Ninety people died within minutes. The gunmen singled out a dozen people, including Toutlouyan. To this day, he doesn't know why they were spared.

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"We stood behind a window for 2½ hours, watching what was going on, all the while wandering whether they would shoot us in five minutes, in two hours or in two days. At that moment, and for 2½ hours, we weren't the masters of our own lives," he said.

Their instructions: To report on the locations of police, then to act as go-betweens during sporadic negotiations. Shortly after midnight, Hollande gave the order to move in. Two of the gunmen blew themselves up; the third was shot by police.

Now there are questions that only the men on the stand can answer.

Abdeslam's decision to abandon the Renault Clio in northern Paris and call Brussels for help is a puzzle. Two friends drove through the night to fetch him, and on the road back to Belgium he slipped through three police checkpoints.

Abdeslam was finally arrested in his Brussels neighborhood of Molenbeek in March, days before the IS network attacked the Brussels airport and subway, killing 32 more people.

Abrini's role is murky as well. He spent a night with the IS attackers, but left Paris on Nov. 12, hiring a driver to take him three hours back to Brussels because he had missed the last train. He popped up again in Brussels months later, accompanying two suicide bombers to the airport but walked away as the bloodshed started.

Two of the defendants are charged with plotting a simultaneous attack at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport in 2015 and went to the airport on Nov. 13, but returned to Brussels for unknown reasons. Abdeslam's car idled for a while that day at Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport as well.

The day after the murderous evening, a Frenchman in Syria claimed responsibility for the attacks in the name of IS.

Abaaoud and another attacker died days later in a police raid.

Abdeslam refused to speak to investigators or his lawyers in Belgium. But he did request a young attorney in France known for her eloquence, Olivia Ronen. She will be his primary lawyer.

For many victims, speaking out is the point. A month is dedicated to their testimonies.

"It's really the participation that is important for them," said Jeanne Sulzer, a lawyer representing 10 victims. "What they're seeking is the establishment of truth, justice."

Alex Turnbull contributed to this report.

China-to-Hong Kong travelers will no longer need quarantine

HONG KONG (AP) — Travelers arriving in Hong Kong from China will no longer need to quarantine, Hong Kong's top official said Tuesday, easing curbs imposed after summer outbreaks of the coronavirus on the mainland.

Starting Wednesday, people who haven't been to medium- or high-risk areas on the mainland or Macao can enter the city, capped at 2,000 travelers daily, chief executive Carrie Lam said in a news conference. Travelers will still need a negative COVID-19 test prior to arrival and must take several tests while in Hong Kong to ensure they're not infected.

Hong Kong halted quarantine-free travel in early August and imposed a mandatory quarantine period of seven or 14 days, depending on the traveler's vaccination status. Hong Kong's "zero-COVID" strategy has seen authorities impose strict border restrictions and ban flights from extremely high-risk countries, in the hopes that no local community spread would allow it to reopen borders with mainland China.

Currently, China has strict border restrictions that allow only Chinese nationals or those with valid residence permits and visas to enter the country, and all travelers are required to quarantine at least 14 days. Since the beginning of the pandemic, most Hong Kongers haven't been able to freely enter mainland China.

Restrictions will ease further next Wednesday, when mainland residents will be able to enter the city without quarantine via the Shenzhen Bay port and via the Hong Kong-Macau-Zhuhai Bridge, capped at 1,000 visitors each, Lam said. These visitors will also need to test negative before traveling.

The changes, part of the "Come2HK" plan announced Wednesday, are expected to boost the city's tour-

ism industry, which took a beating during months of political strife in 2019 and pandemic-related border restrictions. Tourist numbers fell by as much as 99% in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Two decades after 9/11, Muslim Americans still fighting bias

By MARIAM FAM, DEEPTI HAJELA and LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A car passed, the driver's window rolled down and the man spat an epithet at two little girls wearing their hijabs: "Terrorist!"

It was 2001, mere weeks after the twin towers at the World Trade Center fell, and 10-year-old Shahana Hanif and her younger sister were walking to the local mosque from their Brooklyn home.

Unsure, afraid, the girls ran.

As the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks approaches, Hanif can still recall the shock of the moment, her confusion over how anyone could look at her, a child, and see a threat.

"It's not a nice, kind word. It means violence, it means dangerous. It is meant to shock whoever ... is on the receiving end of it," she says.

But the incident also spurred a determination to speak out for herself and others that has helped get her to where she is today: a community organizer strongly favored to win a seat on the New York City Council in the upcoming municipal election.

Like Hanif, other young American Muslims have grown up under the shadow of 9/11. Many have faced hostility and surveillance, mistrust and suspicion, questions about their Muslim faith and doubts over their Americanness.

They've also found ways forward, ways to fight back against bias, to organize, to craft nuanced personal narratives about their identities. In the process, they've built bridges, challenged stereotypes and carved out new spaces for themselves.

There is "this sense of being Muslim as a kind of important identity marker, regardless of your relationship with Islam as a faith," says Eman Abdelhadi, a sociologist at The University of Chicago who studies Muslim communities. "That's been one of the main effects in people's lives ... it has shaped the ways the community has developed."

A poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research conducted ahead of the 9/11 anniversary found that 53% of Americans have unfavorable views toward Islam, compared with 42% who have favorable ones. This stands in contrast to Americans' opinions about Christianity and Judaism, for which most respondents expressed favorable views.

Mistrust and suspicion of Muslims didn't start with 9/11, but the attacks dramatically intensified those animosities.

Accustomed to being ignored or targeted by low-level harassment, the country's wide-ranging and diverse Muslim communities were foisted into the spotlight, says Youssef Chouhoud, a political scientist at Christopher Newport University in Virginia.

"Your sense of who you were was becoming more formed, not just Muslim but American Muslim," he says. "What distinguished you as an American Muslim? Could you be fully both, or did you have to choose? There was a lot of grappling with what that meant."

In Hanif's case, there was no blueprint to navigate the complexities of that time.

"Fifth-grader me wasn't naïve or too young to know Muslims are in danger," she later wrote in an essay about the aftermath of 9/11. "...Flashing an American flag from our first-floor windows didn't make me more American. Born in Brooklyn didn't make me more American."

A young Hanif gathered neighborhood friends, and an older cousin helped them write a letter to then-President George W. Bush asking for protection.

"We knew," she says, "that we would become like warriors of this community."

But being warriors often carries a price, with wounds that linger.

Ishaq Pathan, 26, recalls the time a boy told him he seemed angry and wondered if he was going to

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blow up their Connecticut school.

He remembers the helplessness he felt when he was taken aside at an airport for additional questioning upon returning to the United States after a college semester in Morocco.

The agent looked through his belongings, including the laptop where he kept a private journal, and started reading it.

"I remember being like, 'Hey, do you have to read that?'" Pathan says. The agent "just looks at me like, 'You know, I can read anything on your computer. I'm entitled to anything here.' And at that point, I remember having tears in my eyes. I was completely and utterly powerless."

Pathan couldn't accept it.

"You go to school with other people of different backgrounds and you realize ... what the promise of the United States is," he says. "And when you see it not living up to that promise, then I think it instills in us a sense of wanting to help and fix that."

He now works as the San Francisco Bay Area director for the nonprofit Islamic Networks Group, where he hopes to help a younger generation grow confident in their Muslim identity.

Pathan recently chatted with a group of boys about their summer activities. At times, the boys ate watermelon or played on a trampoline. At other moments, the talk turned serious: What would they do if a student pretended to blow himself up while yelling "Allahu akbar," or "God is great?" What can they do about stereotypical depictions of Muslims on TV?

"I had always viewed 9/11 as probably one of the most pivotal moments of my life and of the lives of Americans across the board," Pathan says. "The aftermath of it ... is what pushed me to do what I do today."

That aftermath has also helped motivate Shukri Olow to do what she is doing — run for office.

Born in Somalia, Olow fled civil war with her family and lived in refugee camps in Kenya for years before coming to the United States when she was 10.

She found home in a vibrant public housing complex in the city of Kent, south of Seattle. There, residents from different countries communicated across language and cultural barriers, borrowing salt from each other or watching one another's kids. Olow felt she flourished in that environment.

Then 9/11 happened. She recalls feeling confused when a teacher asked her, "What are your people doing?" But she also remembers others who "said that this isn't our fault... and we need to make sure that you're safe."

In a 2017 Pew Research Center survey of U.S. Muslims, nearly half of respondents said they experienced at least one instance of religious discrimination within the year before; yet 49% said someone expressed support for them because of their religion in the previous year.

Overwhelmingly, the study found respondents proud to be both Muslim and American. For some, including Olow, there were occasional identity crises growing up.

"Who am I?" — which I think is what many young people kind of go through in life in general," she says. "But for those of us who live at the intersection of anti-Blackness and Islamophobia ... it was really hard."

But her experiences from that time also helped form her identity. She is now seeking a seat on the King County Council.

"There are many young people who have multiple identities who have felt that they don't belong here, that they are not welcomed here," she says. "I was one of those young people. And so, I try to do what I can to make sure that more of us know that this is our nation, too."

After 9/11, some American Muslims chose to dispel misconceptions about their faith by building personal connections. They shared coffee or broke bread with strangers as they fielded myriad questions — from how Islam views women and Jesus to how to combat extremism.

Mansoor Shams has traveled across the U.S. with a sign that reads: "I'm Muslim and a U.S. Marine, ask anything." It's part of the 39-year-old's efforts to teach others about his faith and counter hate through dialogue.

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Shams, who served in the Marines from 2000 to 2004, was called names like "Taliban," "terrorist" and "Osama bin Laden" by some of his fellow Marines after 9/11.

One of his most memorable interactions, he says, was at Liberty University in Virginia, where he spoke in 2019 to students of the Christian institution. Some, he says, still call him with questions about Islam.

"There's this mutual love and respect," he says.

Shams wishes his current work wasn't needed but feels a responsibility to share a counternarrative he says many Americans don't know.

Ahmed Ali Akbar, 33, came to a different conclusion.

Shortly after 9/11, some adults in his community arranged for an assembly at his school in Saginaw, Michigan, where he and other students talked about Islam and Muslims. Akbar poured his heart into the research. But he recalls his confusion at some of the questions: Where is bin Laden? What's the reason behind the attacks?

"How am I supposed to know where Osama bin Laden is? I'm an American kid," he says.

That period left him feeling like trying to change people's minds wasn't always effective, that some were not ready to listen.

Akbar eventually turned his focus toward telling stories about Muslim Americans on his podcast "See Something Say Something."

"There's a lot of humor in the Muslim American experience as well," he says. "It's not all just sadness and reaction to the violence and...racism and Islamophobia."

He has also come to believe in building connections of a different type. "Our battle for our civil liberties (is) tied up with other marginalized communities," he says, stressing the importance of advocating for them.

For some, 9/11 brought a different kind of racial reckoning, says Debbie Almontaser, a Yemeni American educator and activist in New York.

She says many Arab and South Asian immigrants came to the U.S. seeking the American Dream as doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs. "Then 9/11 happens and they realize that they're brown and they realize that they're minorities -- that was a huge wake-up call," Almontaser says.

Some racial tensions play out today in U.S. Muslim communities. The racial justice protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd, for instance, brought many Muslims to the streets to condemn racism. But they also spurred an internal reckoning about racial equity among Muslims, including the treatment of Black Muslims.

"For me, as a Muslim African American, my struggle (in America) is still with race and identity," says imam Ali Aqeel of the Muslim American Cultural Center in Nashville, Tennessee.

"When we go to (Islamic) centers and we have to deal with the same pain that we deal with out in the world, it's kind of discouraging to us because we're under the impression that (in) Islam, you don't have that racial and ethnic divide."

Amirah Ahmed, 17, was born after the attacks and feels like she was thrust into a struggle not of her making — a burden despite being "just as American as anyone else."

She recalls how a few years ago at her Virginia school's 9/11 commemoration, she felt students' stares at her and her hijab so intensely that she wanted to skip the next year's event.

When her mother dismissed the idea, she instead wore her Americanness as a shield, donning an American flag headscarf to address her classmates from a podium.

Ahmed spoke about honoring the lives of those who died in America on 9/11 — but also of Iraqis who died in the war launched in 2003. She recalls defending her Arab and Muslim identities that day while displaying her American one and says it was a "really powerful moment."

But she hopes her future children don't feel the need to prove they belong.

"Our kids are going to be (here) well after the 9/11 era," she says. "They should not have to continue fighting for their identity."

Fam, who reported from Cairo, Egypt, covers Islam for the AP's global religion team. Henao covers faith & youth for the team; he is on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/LuisAndresHenao>. Hajela has covered New York City for 22 years, and is a member of the AP's team covering race and ethnicity. She's on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/dhajela>. AP video journalist Noreen Nasir also contributed to this report.

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Jill Biden heads back to classroom as a working first lady

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jill Biden is going back to her whiteboard.

After months of teaching writing and English to community college students in boxes on a computer screen, the first lady resumes teaching in person Tuesday from a classroom at Northern Virginia Community College, where she has worked since 2009.

She is the first first lady to leave the White House and log hours at a full-time job.

"There are some things you just can't replace, and I can't wait to get back in the classroom," she recently told Good Housekeeping magazine.

The first lady has been anxious to see her students in person after more than a year of virtual teaching brought on by a pandemic that continues to challenge the Biden administration.

A working first lady is a "big deal," said Tammy Vigil, a Boston University communications professor who wrote a book about first ladies Michelle Obama and Melania Trump.

The nation's early first ladies did not work outside the home, especially when home was the White House. They supported their husbands, raised children and performed the role of hostess.

Some first ladies acted as special ambassadors for their husbands. Eleanor Roosevelt was especially active, traveling around the U.S. and reporting back to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose activities were limited by polio. She advocated for the poor, minorities and other disadvantaged people, and began writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column from the White House.

More recent first ladies, like Laura Bush, who was an elementary school teacher and librarian, had stopped working outside the home after having children and were not employed when their husbands were elected. Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama were working mothers who decided against continuing their careers in the White House.

Jill Biden, 70, is forging a new path for herself and her successors.

The first lady has said she always wanted to be a career woman. She taught at the Virginia community college during the eight years that her husband was vice president and was not about to let the added responsibility of being first lady force her to give up a career she so closely identifies with.

"Teaching isn't just what I do. It's who I am," she says.

Women made up nearly half, or 47%, of the U.S. labor force in 2019, according to Catalyst, a women's workplace advocacy group.

Leaders of the nation's largest teachers' unions are pleased that one of their own is now in a position to help influence the administration's education policies and raise the profile of a profession in which many have long felt unappreciated.

"She sees it up close and personally and now, in the position as first lady, not only does she give voice to that from a place of understanding, she has an opportunity to create a platform and to have influence," said Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association.

President Joe Biden told teachers attending the NEA's annual meeting that he learned about what they were going through by watching his wife as she learned how to teach online.

"It gave me an appreciation firsthand that I thought I had, but I wouldn't have had had I not seen it," he said at the July meeting. "And then going out and teaching — she was working four or five hours a day, getting ready to teach, putting her lesson plans together ... a different way."

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In 1976, a year after she met and began dating then-U.S. Sen. Biden, Jill Biden started teaching English at a Roman Catholic high school in Wilmington, Delaware. She later taught at a psychiatric hospital and at Delaware Technical Community College.

She earned two master's degrees and a doctorate in educational leadership during those years.

After Joe Biden became vice president in 2009, she joined the faculty at Northern Virginia Community College. She continued to teach there after he left office and throughout his 2020 presidential campaign, including virtually after the pandemic hit.

Her virtual teaching continued as first lady, from her office in the White House East Wing or hotel rooms when she traveled to promote administration policies. She grades papers on flights.

"It shatters the norms of what first ladies do," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

Jill Biden tries to keep her political identity out of the classroom and has said that many of her former students in Virginia had no idea she was married to the vice president. She also did not talk about it. Secret Service agents accompanied her for security, but she had them dress casually and tote backpacks in an attempt to blend into the campus environment.

But being first lady, for which there is no job description or pay, comes with a much higher level of visibility, security and scrutiny.

First ladies make numerous public appearances — with or without the president — to promote their own or the president's issues, garnering coverage from national and local news media. Vogue magazine splashed the first lady on the cover of its August issue.

Jill Biden will teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with travel on days when she is not in the classroom. Her employer, the commonwealth of Virginia, requires everyone to wear face coverings indoors on Northern Virginia Community College campuses, regardless of vaccination status. The first lady is fully vaccinated.

The school is offering fall classes in a variety of formats, including fully remote, in-person on campus and a hybrid.

Anne M. Kress, president of Northern Virginia Community College, said she looked forward to welcoming the students and faculty, including Jill Biden, for the fall semester and expressed gratitude for their commitment to "excellence in instruction and equity in opportunity."

"Their belief in our students is deep, real, and transformational," Kress said.

US-built databases a potential tool of Taliban repression

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Over two decades, the United States and its allies spent hundreds of millions of dollars building databases for the Afghan people. The nobly stated goal: Promote law and order and government accountability and modernize a war-ravaged land.

But in the Taliban's lightning seizure of power, most of that digital apparatus — including biometrics for verifying identities — apparently fell into Taliban hands. Built with few data-protection safeguards, it risks becoming the high-tech jackboots of a surveillance state. As the Taliban get their governing feet, there are worries it will be used for social control and to punish perceived foes.

Putting such data to work constructively — boosting education, empowering women, battling corruption — requires democratic stability, and these systems were not architected for the prospect of defeat.

"It is a terrible irony," said Frank Pasquale, Brooklyn Law School scholar of surveillance technologies. "It's a real object lesson in 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions.'"

Since Kabul fell Aug. 15, indications have emerged that government data may have been used in Taliban efforts to identify and intimidate Afghans who worked with the U.S. forces.

People are getting ominous and threatening phone calls, texts and WhatsApp messages, said Neesha Suarez, constituent services director for Rep. Seth Moulton of Massachusetts, an Iraq War veteran whose office is trying to help stranded Afghans who worked with the U.S. find a way out.

A 27-year-old U.S. contractor in Kabul told The Associated Press he and co-workers who developed a

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U.S.-funded database used to manage army and police payrolls got phone calls summoning them to the Defense Ministry. He is in hiding, changing his location daily, he said, asking not to be identified for his safety.

In victory, the Taliban's leaders say they are not interested in retribution. Restoring international aid and getting foreign-held assets unfrozen are a priority. There are few signs of the draconian restrictions – especially on women – they imposed when they ruled from 1996 to 2001. There are also no indications that Afghans who worked with Americans have been systematically persecuted.

Ali Karimi, a University of Pennsylvania scholar, is among Afghans unready to trust the Taliban. He worries the databases will give rigid fundamentalist theocrats, known during their insurgency for ruthlessly killing enemy collaborators, "the same capability as an average U.S. government agency when it comes to surveillance and interception."

The Taliban are on notice that the world will be watching how they wield the data.

All Afghans — and their international partners — have an obligation together to ensure sensitive government data only be used for "development purposes" and not for policing or social control by the Taliban or to serve other governments in the region, said Nader Nadery, a peace negotiator and head of the civil service commission in the former government.

Uncertain for the moment is the fate of one of the most sensitive databases, the one used to pay soldiers and police.

The Afghan Personnel and Pay System has data on more than 700,000 security forces members dating back 40 years, said a senior security official from the fallen government. Its more than 40 data fields include birth dates, phone numbers, fathers' and grandfathers' names, fingerprints and iris and face scans, said two Afghan contractors who worked on it, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Only authorized users can access that system, so if the Taliban can't find one, they can be expected to try to hack it, said the former official, who asked not to be identified for fear of the safety of relatives in Kabul. He expected Pakistan's ISI intelligence service, long the Taliban's patron, to render technical assistance. U.S. analysts expect Chinese, Russian and Iranian intelligence also to offer such services.

Originally conceived to fight payroll fraud, that system was supposed to interface eventually with a powerful database at the Defense and Interior ministries modeled on one the Pentagon created in 2004 to achieve "identity dominance" by collecting fingerprints and iris and face scans in combat areas.

But the homegrown Afghanistan Automated Biometric Identification Database grew from a tool to vet army and police recruits for loyalty to contain 8.5 million records, including on government foes and the civilian population. When Kabul fell it was being upgraded, along with a similar database in Iraq, under a \$75 million contract signed in 2018.

U.S. officials say it was secured before the Taliban could access it.

Before the U.S. pullout, the entire database was erased with military-grade data-wiping software, said William Graves, chief engineer at the Pentagon's biometrics project management office. Similarly, 20 years of data collected from telecommunications and internet intercepts since 2001 by Afghanistan's intelligence agency were wiped clean, said the former Afghan security official.

Among crucial databases that remained are the Afghanistan Financial Management Information System, which held extensive details on foreign contractors, and an Economy Ministry database that compiled all international development and aid agency funding sources, the former security official said.

Then there is the data — with iris scans and fingerprints for about 9 million Afghans — controlled by the National Statistics and Information Agency. A biometric scan has been required in recent years to obtain a passport or a driver's license and to take a civil service or university entrance exam.

Western aid organizations led by the World Bank, one of the funders, praised the data's utility for empowering women, especially in registering land ownership and obtaining bank loans. The agency was working to create electronic national IDs, known as e-Tazkira, in an unfinished project somewhat modeled on India's biometrically enabled Aadhaar national ID.

"That's the treasure chest," said a Western election assistance official, speaking on condition of anonym-

ity so as not to jeopardize future missions.

It is unclear whether voter registration databases — records on more than 8 million Afghans — are in Taliban hands, the official said. Full printouts were made during the 2019 presidential elections, though the biometric records used then for anti-fraud voter verification were retained by the German technology provider. After 2018 parliamentary elections, 5,000 portable biometric handhelds used for verification went inexplicably missing.

Yet another database the Taliban inherit contains iris and face scans and fingerprints on 420,000 government employees — another anti-fraud measure — which Nadery oversaw as civil service commissioner. It was eventually to have been merged with the e-Tazkira database, he said.

On Aug. 3, a government website touted the digital accomplishments of President Ashraf Ghani, who would soon flee into exile, saying biometric information on “all civil servants, from every corner of the country” would allow them to be linked “under one umbrella” with banks and cellphone carriers for electronic payment. U.N. agencies have also collected biometrics on Afghans for food distribution and refugee tracking.

The central agglomeration of such personal data is exactly what worries the 37 digital civil liberties groups who signed an Aug. 25 letter calling for the urgent shutdown and erasure, where possible, of Afghanistan’s “digital identity tool,” among other measures. The letter said authoritarian regimes have exploited such data “to target vulnerable people” and digitized, searchable databases amplify the risks. Disputes over including ethnicity and religion in the e-Tazkira database — for fear it could put digital bullseyes on minorities, as China has done in repressing its ethnic Uyghurs — delayed its creation for most of a decade.

John Woodward, a Boston University professor and former CIA officer who pioneered the Pentagon’s biometric collection, is worried about intelligence agencies hostile to the United States getting access to the data troves.

“ISI (Pakistani intelligence) would be interested to know who worked for the Americans,” said Woodward, and China, Russia and Iran have their own agendas. Their agents certainly have the technical chops to break into password-protected databases.

Biden to survey NY and NJ storm damage after deadly flooding

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will survey damage in parts of the northeast that suffered catastrophic flash flooding from the remnants of Hurricane Ida, and use the muddy backdrop to call for federal spending to fortify infrastructure so it can better withstand such powerful storms.

Biden is set to tour Manville, New Jersey, and the New York City borough of Queens on Tuesday.

At least 50 people were killed in six Eastern states as record rainfall last week overwhelmed rivers and sewer systems. Some people were trapped in fast-filling basement apartments and cars, or were swept away as they tried to escape. The storm also spawned several tornadoes.

More than half of those deaths, 27, were recorded in New Jersey. In New York City, 13 people were killed, including 11 in Queens.

Biden’s visit follows a Friday trip to Louisiana, where Hurricane Ida first made landfall, killing at least 13 people in the state and plunging New Orleans into darkness. Power is being slowly restored.

Manville, situated along New Jersey’s Raritan River, is almost always hard-hit by major storms. It was the scene of catastrophic flooding in 1998 as the remnants of Tropical Storm Floyd swept over New Jersey. It also sustained serious flooding during the aftermath of Hurricane Irene in 2011 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

Biden has approved major disaster declarations, making federal aid available for people in six New Jersey counties and five New York counties affected by the devastating floods.

Both New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy and New York Mayor Bill de Blasio spent part of Labor Day touring damaged communities. Deanne Criswell, the former city emergency management director who’s now in charge at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, joined the mayor.

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Biden used his appearance in Louisiana to pitch his plan, pending in Congress, to spend \$1 trillion on modernizing roads, bridges, sewers and drainage systems, and other infrastructure to make them better able to withstand the blows from more and more powerful storms.

"Hurricane Ida is another reminder that we need to be prepared for the next hurricane and superstorms that are going to come, and they're going to come more frequently and more ferociously," Biden said Friday in a hard-hit residential neighborhood in LaPlace.

Murphy said he would speak with Biden on Tuesday about adding other New Jersey counties to the disaster declaration.

Past presidents have been defined in part by how they handle such crises, and Biden has seen several weather-induced emergencies in his short presidency, starting with a February ice storm that caused the power grid in Texas to fail. He has also been monitoring wildfires in the West.

The White House has sought to portray Biden as in command of the federal response to these natural disasters, making it known that he is getting regular updates from his team and that he is keeping in touch with governors and other elected officials in the affected areas.

As president, Donald Trump casually lobbed paper towels to people in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria's devastation in 2017, generating scorn from critics but little damage to his political standing. Barack Obama hugged New Jersey Republican Gov. Chris Christie after Superstorm Sandy in 2012, a brief respite from partisan tensions that had threatened the economy. George W. Bush fell out of public favor due to a poor and unprepared response after Hurricane Katrina swamped New Orleans in 2005.

Scientists say climate change increases the frequency of extreme weather events, including large tropical storms that swirl into powerful hurricanes.

Ida was the fifth-most powerful storm to hit the U.S. when it made landfall in Louisiana on Aug. 29. The storm's remnants dropped devastating rainfall across parts of Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, causing significant disruption in major cities.

Andrea Constand writes of Cosby trial, #MeToo in new memoir

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Andrea Constand remained something of an enigma over the years her sexual assault allegations against Bill Cosby played out in Pennsylvania courts and the public square.

An athlete and spiritual seeker turned massage therapist, she lived a quiet life with her dogs in Toronto until the case burst open again in 2015. She had remained largely anonymous during the initial police investigation in 2005, when a local prosecutor declined to arrest Cosby. And she signed a nondisclosure agreement a year later when she settled her lawsuit against the wealthy entertainer for \$3.4 million.

However, after details of the settlement — including the amount she received — were aired in court, Constand decided to tell her story in a memoir out Tuesday called "The Moment." The book lands amid a stunning turn of events in the case.

Cosby, after spending nearly three years in prison, walked free in June when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his 2018 conviction. The court found that Cosby relied on an alleged promise from a district attorney that he would never be charged when he gave incriminating testimony in Constand's civil lawsuit — only to have it later used against him in two criminal trials.

Prosecutors in suburban Philadelphia must decide this month whether to appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. Cosby recently turned 84.

"Now that I have weathered yet another strange turn in this long saga, I realize that I cannot let reversals like the (Pennsylvania) Supreme Court decision defeat me. Life is unpredictable. Much is beyond our control. In the end, happiness is all that matters and I am determined to live a happy, purposeful life," Constand writes in a late addition to the book, describing her new work as an advocate for sexual assault victims.

She and Cosby first crossed paths at Temple University in Philadelphia, where Constand, who played professional basketball in Europe, worked for the women's basketball team and he was a trustee and famed alumnus.

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In a deposition, Cosby said he fell in love with Constand the moment he first saw her across the gym. Constand was half his age and dated women.

"I knew who he was, of course, but I had never watched 'The Cosby Show' and had no real idea how big a celebrity he was," she writes.

She took note, though, of the attention he commanded on campus: "His calls had to be returned immediately, his interest in our new locker room was promptly met with an offer to tour the facility."

She nonetheless found him to be "down-to-earth and affable."

She recounts the friendship and mentorship that followed, along with what she acknowledges were missed warning signs on her part, when Cosby made advances that his lawyers would later called evidence of an ongoing, consensual relationship.

Their talks included a shared interest in health and holistic medicine, which she said led her to take the pills he offered one night in January 2004, presuming they were herbal products.

She soon found her body going numb.

"My inability to control my own body was utterly terrifying. At six feet, I'm the opposite of petite. ... I had never before, even as a child, felt physically intimidated by anyone or anything. I was an athlete," she writes. "But now I had no control over my limbs."

Constand gave steady, unemotional testimony at both his first trial in 2017, which ended in a deadlock, and a second trial in 2018, when the jury convicted Cosby of drugging and violating her.

She refused to be rattled, even under a barrage of hostile questioning from the defense.

And she remained silent outside the courtroom, even as she emerged triumphant on April 26, 2018, when Cosby was convicted and a throng of cameras clicked at her.

But she offers a glimpse of her emotions in describing a secret meeting with jurors after Cosby's sentencing that fall.

"As we hugged, I heard the same words over and over: 'We always believed you, Andrea.' Of course their verdict told me they had come to the conclusion that my testimony was credible. But there was something about hearing the words ... that knocked the wind out of me," she writes.

Constand had never wavered in 2015 when asked to put her life on hold for a potential trial when Cosby's deposition testimony became public after a court fight by The Associated Press. And she agreed to do it again after the initial mistrial. It's not yet clear if she or prosecutors have the stamina for a third go-round.

Either way, she won't let a trial verdict define her, especially given the progress she sees in the #MeToo movement.

As she waited for the jury decision in 2018, she writes, "The outcome of the trial seemed strangely unimportant. It was as if the world had again shifted in some much more significant way."

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

Lake Tahoe residents relieved homes spared from wildfire

By SAM METZ and AMY TAXIN AP/Report for America

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — Connor Jones sunbathed with his dog on the otherwise empty beach at Ski Run Marina on Monday, as residents trickling back into town filled up their cars at a gas station behind him and employees of a water sports rental company docked jet skis and boats they had anchored away from the shores of Lake Tahoe to prevent them from igniting from wildfire.

He and others living in the resort city of South Lake Tahoe breathed a collective sigh of relief on Sunday when officials downgraded a mandatory evacuation order put in place a week ago to a warning.

"I figure they wouldn't take repopulation lightly and, if they made the decision to allow people to come back, then they were probably confident that they're not going to have any issues," he said.

When the Caldor Fire gobbled up pine trees and crossed the Sierra Nevada last week, South Lake Tahoe, a scenic community of 22,000 people on the California-Nevada state line, transformed into a smoke-choked ghost town.

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After worrying throughout all of last week about the fire approaching their homes and landmarks they hold dear, residents who returned on Monday said they were thankful firefighters had stopped the blazes on the town's doorstep. But it appeared most residents remained away and most shops remained closed in usually thriving Labor Day destination town.

While many large wildfires have ripped through large swaths of Northern California in recent years, it's the first time in more than a decade that South Lake Tahoe residents saw a blaze get this close. As of Monday evening, 5,072 firefighting personnel were battling the Caldor Fire, which had scorched roughly 338 square miles (876 square kilometers) and is 48% contained.

The threat to the region hasn't entirely vanished, with mandatory evacuation orders remaining for parts of unincorporated El Dorado County south of South Lake Tahoe, including Meyers and Christmas Valley. And questions remain about the smoke blanketing the region and how long it may take for the clean air and crystalline waters that draw millions of tourists to the area annually to return.

Authorities warned residents, that in the absence of humans, bears had gone to town, spreading trash. "The delicate balance between humans and bears has been upset," and anyone who thinks a bear may have entered their home should call law enforcement, El Dorado County Sheriff's Sgt. Simon Brown said.

Chirawat Mekrakseree said he had seen signs of bears sifting through the trash at his restaurant on Lake Tahoe Boulevard, My Thai Cuisine.

Mekrakseree plans to reopen and start serving curries and noodle dishes on Wednesday but worries the tourists he depends on may not come back while the smoke lingers. And he doesn't know what to tell his staff about when business will return to normal after an already uncertain year with the pandemic, he said.

"Everybody has expenses, rent, car payments," he said as he power-washed ash off outdoor picnic tables. "They're asking me how long (until they return to work) and I can't tell them how long."

California and much of the U.S. West have experienced dozens of wildfires in the past two months as the drought-stricken region swelters under hot, dry weather and winds drives flames through bone-dry vegetation. More than 14,500 firefighters were battling 14 active fires in the state on Monday, and since the year began more than 7,000 wildfires have devoured 3,000 square miles (8,000 square kilometers).

The lifting of mandatory evacuation orders for the Tahoe area marked a milestone in the fight against the Caldor Fire, which erupted Aug. 14 and spread across nearly 338 square miles (876 square kilometers) of dense national parks and forests, tree-dotted granite cliffs and scattered cabins and hamlets in the northern Sierra Nevada. As of Monday, it is 48% contained. At its peak, the fire was burning as many as 1,000 acres an hour and virtually razed the small community of Grizzly Flats.

In recent days, winds eased and firefighters took advantage of the better weather to hack, burn and bulldoze fire lines, managing to contain 44% of the perimeter by Monday. Authorities said containment lines were holding up but they were concerned about extremely low humidity and a slight increase in wind, which could spur spot fires up to half a mile (0.8 kilometers) away.

"We are drier than I have seen on my 20 days on this fire," Jim Dudley, incident meteorologist, said Monday. "There's a lot of potential weather-wise for little things to become maybe not so little."

In South Lake Tahoe, gas stations and grocery stores quickly reopened but eateries and a ski gear shops remained closed.

Dakota Jones returned Monday to his apartment with his roommates, who were in the process of moving when the fire approached, and a U-Haul full of their belongings. The Lake Tahoe Community College student said he worried he'd find buildings damaged and ashen, and was pleasantly surprised to see the town largely untouched.

"I was honestly convinced this place was gonna go down," said Jones, who is not related to Connor. "It was nice to see that I was wrong."

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the West much warmer and drier over the past 30 years. Scientists have said weather will continue to be more extreme and wildfires more frequent, destructive and unpredictable.

No deaths have been reported specifically from the fires, which have shut down all national forests in the state.

In Northern California, the weather is expected to cool slightly and the humidity to rise starting on Tuesday. Further south, the National Weather Service in Oxnard, California said hot dry weather was expected for interior valleys and deserts with elevated fire conditions through Friday.

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

Jobless Americans will have few options as benefits expire

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Millions of jobless Americans lost their unemployment benefits on Monday, leaving only a handful of economic support programs for those who are still being hit financially by the year-and-a-half-old coronavirus pandemic.

Two critical programs expired on Monday. One provided jobless aid to self-employed and gig workers and another provided benefits to those who have been unemployed more than six months. Further, the Biden administration's \$300 weekly supplemental unemployment benefit also ran out on Monday.

It's estimated that roughly 8.9 million Americans will lose all or some of these benefits.

While the White House has encouraged states to keep paying the \$300 weekly benefit by using money from the stimulus bills, no states have opted to do so. Many states even opted out of the federal program early after some businesses complained that they couldn't find enough people to hire. The data have shown minimal economic benefits from cutting off aid early in those states.

Economists Peter McCrory and Daniel Silver of JPMorgan found "zero correlation" between job growth and state decisions to drop the federal unemployment aid, at least so far. An economist at Columbia University, Kyle Coombs, found only minimal benefits.

The amount of money injected by the federal government into jobless benefits since the pandemic began is nothing short of astronomical. The roughly \$650 billion, according to the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, kept millions of Americans who lost their jobs through no fault of their own in their apartments, paying for food and gasoline, and keeping up with their bills. The banking industry has largely attributed the few defaults on loans this past 18 months to the government relief efforts.

"The end of the pandemic unemployment benefits will be an abrupt jolt to millions of Americans who won't find a job in time for this arbitrary end to assistance," Andrew Stettner with the Century Foundation said in a report.

The ending of these programs comes as the U.S. economy has recovered from the pandemic, but with substantial gaps in the recovery. The Labor Department says there are still 5.7 million fewer jobs than before the pandemic. Yet the department also estimated, last month, that there were roughly 10 million job openings.

These benefits are also ending sooner than during the previous crisis, the Great Recession. In that downturn, jobless benefits in various forms were extended from the start of the recession in 2008-2009 all the way until 2013. When those benefits finally ended, just 1.3 million people were still receiving aid.

Americans still financially struggling in the pandemic will find a smaller patchwork of social support programs, both at the state level and through the federal government.

The White House approved last month a 25% increase in food stamp assistance, also known as SNAP benefits. That increase will continue indefinitely for those 42.7 million Americans who receive those payments.

While the federal eviction moratorium has expired, roughly a dozen states — all controlled by Democrats — have extended their moratoriums, including California, New York, Washington, Illinois and Minnesota. New York's eviction moratorium was extended until Jan. 15.

The Biden administration also pushed the restart of federal student loan repayments until January. Those were supposed to have restarted this month.

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Those unemployed less than six months will still be able to collect their benefits, but the amount will fall back to the level that each state pays. The average weekly check is roughly \$387, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, but varies greatly state by state.

But none of these programs will have the flexibility or direct impact as unemployment benefits being paid directly to jobless Americans, wrote JPMorgan economists McCrory and Silver. They say the loss of benefits could lead to job losses that potentially could offset any of the job gains made as the economy recovers.

AP Economic Writers Chris Rugaber and Paul Wiseman contributed to this report from Washington.

Taliban say they took Panjshir, last holdout Afghan province

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban said Monday they seized the last province not in their control after their blitz through Afghanistan last month, overrunning forces who had opposed their takeover.

Thousands of Taliban fighters charged into eight districts of Panjshir province overnight, according to witnesses from the area who spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared for their safety. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed that the province, which is north of the capital, was now held by their fighters.

"We tried our best to solve the problem through negotiations, and they rejected talks and then we had to send our forces to fight," Mujahid told a news conference in Kabul later Monday.

The resisting forces were led by the former vice president, Amrullah Saleh, and also the son of the iconic anti-Taliban fighter Ahmad Shah Massoud. Experts had doubted that the holdout efforts could succeed long-term against the Taliban, whose rapid advance through Afghanistan met little resistance in the final days of America's 20-year war in the country.

The U.S. withdrew its last troops a week ago and ended a harrowing airlift to evacuate Western citizens and their Afghan allies that was marred by scenes of desperation and horrific violence.

During that evacuation, thousands of people descended on Kabul's airport, hoping to flee the country because they feared what the Taliban's rule might hold, given their history of repression, particularly of women. At one point, an Islamic State suicide bomber targeted the crowds, killing 169 Afghans and 13 American service members.

Many people are still hoping to leave the country, but with Kabul's airport not yet running international flights, their choices are few. In the country's north, officials said Sunday that at least four planes chartered to evacuate several hundred people have been unable to leave the country for days. But there were conflicting accounts about why.

The U.S. is under pressure to help the remaining Americans and green card holders leave the country, and it has promised to work with the new Taliban rulers to do that — but it has given no timeframe.

An Afghan official at the airport in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif said that the would-be passengers were Afghans, many of whom did not have passports or visas, and thus were unable to leave. Speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters, he said they had left the airport while the situation was being sorted out.

But the top Republican on the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee said that the group included Americans and that they had boarded planes but the Taliban were not letting them take off, effectively "holding them hostage." Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas told "Fox News Sunday" that American citizens and Afghan interpreters were being kept on six planes.

He did not say where that information came from, and it was not immediately possible to reconcile the two accounts. The State Department has said it has no reliable way to confirm information about such charter flights.

But the U.S. has helped a family of four American citizens to flee through an overland route, according to an American official. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly due to the sensitivity of the matter, would not give details of the evacuation or say which

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country they went to.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are traveling to the Persian Gulf and Europe this week to discuss Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden was asked Monday night as he returned to the White House whether he would recognize the Taliban government. "That's a long way off. That's a long way off," he said.

Meanwhile, the Taliban say they are working to repair Kabul's airport, where only domestic flights have resumed and just during the day for now. Mujahid, the group's spokesman, told reporters Monday that American soldiers destroyed equipment before departing, including the critical radar system. The U.S. has said troops destroyed military equipment but left equipment useful for running a civilian airport, like fire trucks.

Technical experts from Qatar and Turkey have begun repairs, though it's not clear when the airport will be up and running.

The Taliban have pledged to allow anyone with the proper legal documents to leave the country — and several countries have said they are watching closely to see if the new rulers make good on that pledge. The Taliban have generally promised to govern more moderately than when they were last in power in the late 1990s and became global pariahs for their harsh interpretation of Islamic law and restrictions on women.

Still, experts did not think the anti-Taliban fighters in Panjshir, the last holdout province, had much of a chance, even given the area's geographical advantage.

Nestled in the towering Hindu Kush mountains, the Panjshir Valley has a single narrow entrance. Local fighters held off the Soviets there in the 1980s and also, for a brief time, the Taliban a decade later under the leadership of Massoud.

Massoud's son Ahmad called for an end to the fighting on Sunday. The young British-schooled Massoud said his forces were ready to lay down their weapons but only if the Taliban agreed to end their assault. Late on Sunday dozens of vehicles loaded with Taliban fighters were seen swarming into the Panjshir Valley.

In a second statement Monday, a now-defiant Massoud accused the Taliban of attacking even as they were ready to agree to a cease-fire. He vowed to fight on, urged Afghans to join in their battle against the Taliban and chastised the international community for giving the Taliban a platform by opening negotiations with them.

There has been no statement from Saleh, Afghanistan's former vice president who had declared himself the acting president after President Ashraf Ghani fled the country on Aug. 15 as the Taliban reached the gates of the capital.

The whereabouts of Saleh and the young Massoud were not immediately known Monday.

Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, sought to assure residents of Panjshir that they would be safe — even as scores of families reportedly fled into the mountains ahead of the Taliban's arrival.

"There is no need for any more fighting," Mujahid said at the news conference. "All Panjshir people and those who live in Panjshir are our brothers and they are part of our country."

The Taliban had stepped up their assault on Panjshir on Sunday, tweeting that their forces overran Rokha district, one of the largest in the province.

Mujahid also told reporters that the Taliban would announce a new government "within days" — one that would be inclusive, he said, without elaborating. Once the government is formed, members of the former Afghan army and security forces would be asked to return to work to form an army with Taliban fighters, he added.

Asked what rights women would have under the Taliban, Mujahid promised all women would eventually be "asked to return" to their jobs.

The Taliban have claimed unspecified "security reasons" are behind the current slow pace of return of Afghan women to their workplaces and also behind restricting women to their homes, unless accompanied by a male guardian. But many who remember their previous rule are skeptical.

Associated Press writers Rahim Faiez in Istanbul and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

New Orleans: Seniors left in dark, hot facilities after Ida

By KEVIN MCGILL and JEFF MARTIN undefined

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Officials in New Orleans will thoroughly inspect senior living apartments in the city in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida after finding people living in buildings without working generators, which left residents trapped in wheelchairs on dark, sweltering upper floors, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said Monday.

Hundreds were evacuated Saturday and the city later said five people had died in the privately run buildings in the days after the storm. The coroner's office is investigating whether the deaths will be attributed to the hurricane, which struck land nine days before.

The managers of some of the homes for seniors evacuated out of state without making sure the residents would be safe after the storm, New Orleans City Council member Kristin Palmer said at a news conference.

"They're hiding under the loophole of 'independent living,'" Palmer said. "It's not independent living if there's no power and you're in a wheelchair on the fourth floor."

The city is creating teams of workers from the health, safety and permits, code enforcement and other departments. Their first focus is to make sure the senior homes are safe and evacuate people if necessary, Cantrell said.

But after that, management will be held accountable, and the city will likely add requirements that include facilities having emergency agreements in place with contractors who will make sure generator power is available at the sites, the mayor said.

Crews in Louisiana have restored power to nearly 70% of greater New Orleans and nearly all of Baton Rouge after Hurricane Ida, but outside those large cities, getting lights back on is a complex challenge that will last almost all of September, utility executives said Monday.

It's going to involve air boats to get into the swamps and marshes to string lines and repair the most remote of about 22,000 power poles that Ida blew down when it came ashore on Aug. 29 as one of the most powerful hurricanes to hit the U.S. mainland, Entergy Louisiana President and CEO Phillip May said.

More than 530,000 customers still don't have power in Louisiana, just under half of the peak when Ida struck eight days ago. In five parishes west and south of New Orleans, at least 98% of homes and businesses don't have power, according to the state Public Service Commission.

"It's going to be a rebuild, not a repair," May said.

The struggles in rural Louisiana shouldn't keep people from forgetting the "near miraculous" speed of the repairs in New Orleans, Entergy New Orleans President and CEO Deanna Rodriguez said.

"I am so proud of the team and I think it's a fabulous good news story," she said.

But things aren't normal in New Orleans. An 8 p.m. curfew remains in effect and numerous roads are impassable. Pickup of large piles of debris residents and businesses have been leaving on curbs will begin Tuesday, officials said.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said Monday that he's taken steps to help make the people doing the hard work of recovery have places to stay. He signed a proclamation ordering hotels and other places of lodging to give priority to first responders, health care workers and those working on disaster-related infrastructure repairs. The proclamation also suspended various state court legal deadlines until Sept. 24.

"People all over the state of Louisiana are spending this week assessing the damages done to their homes and communities and are putting their lives back together after the ravages of Hurricane Ida. We need for them to be focused on recovery and not whether they will be held to a court deadline," Edwards said in a news release.

Ida killed at least 13 people in Louisiana, many of them in the storm's aftermath. Its remnants also brought historic flooding, record rains and tornados from Virginia to Massachusetts, killing at least 50 more people.

In the Gulf of Mexico, divers have located the apparent source of a continuing oil spill that appeared after Ida moved through the area about 2 miles (3 kilometers) south of Port Fourchon, Louisiana.

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The owner of the pipeline hasn't been discovered. Talos Energy, the Houston-based company currently paying for the cleanup, said it does not belong to them. The company said it is working with the U.S. Coast Guard and other state and federal agencies to find the owner.

It remains the peak of hurricane season and forecasters are watching a cluster of storms near the Yucatán Peninsula.

It's not an organized tropical storm at the moment and is expected to move slowly to the north or northeast over the Gulf of Mexico, the National Hurricane Center said in a Monday update.

Forecasts don't show any significant strengthening over the next several days, but even heavy rain could cause more pain in Louisiana.

"Unfortunately, it could bring a lot of rain to our already saturated region. If we are impacted, this could challenge our restoration," said John Hawkins, vice president of distribution operations for Entergy Louisiana.

Martin reported from Marietta, Georgia.

Ex-Marine held without bond in shooting of Florida family

By TERRY SPENCER and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A former Marine sharpshooter accused of invading the home of apparent strangers in Florida and fatally shooting a woman, her 3-month-old baby and two others was ordered held without bail during his first court appearance Monday.

Authorities did not give a motive for the grisly attack, but they said Bryan Riley may have a mental illness and that he told investigators said he was high on methamphetamines at the time. His girlfriend said had been saying for weeks that he could communicate directly with God.

At this court appearance Monday, Riley, 33, said that he intended to hire a lawyer, but one will be appointed for him in the meantime.

Riley surrendered on Sunday morning after a furious gunbattle with authorities who brought in at least one armored vehicle during their standoff. After it was over, an officer rushed into the home and rescued an 11-year-old girl, who was still conscious despite being shot seven times. She was in critical condition on Monday, the sheriff's office said.

According to Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd, Riley told interrogators that the victims "begged for their lives, and I killed them anyway."

Judd said Riley told detectives, "You know why I did this." But Brian Haas, the local prosecutor, said investigators don't.

"The big question that all of us has is, 'Why?'" Haas said. "We will not know today or maybe ever."

On Saturday evening, hours before the attack began, Riley stopped by the victims' home in Lakeland, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) from Tampa, where he lives, Judd said. Authorities have found no connection between Riley and the victims.

At the time, Justice Gleason, 40, was outside mowing his lawn, and Riley told him that God had sent him there to prevent a suicide by someone named Amber. Gleason and another person Judd described as one of the victims told Riley no one by that name lived at the house and told him to leave. They called the police, but when authorities arrived, Riley was gone.

Riley returned around 4:30 a.m. Sunday, arranging glowsticks to create a path leading to the house in what Judd said may have been an attempt to draw officers "into an ambush."

Shooting began shortly thereafter — and when an officer in the area heard popping noises, he sounded the alarm, bringing state and local law enforcement officers to the scene. When the first ones arrived, they found an apparently unarmed Riley outside, dressed in camouflage, and his truck ablaze.

But Riley then ran back into the house, where authorities heard more gunfire, "a woman scream and a baby whimper," Judd said.

Officers tried to enter the house, but the front door was barricaded. Judd said when they went around to the back, they saw Riley, who appeared to have on full body armor.

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Riley and the officers exchanged heavy gunfire, with dozens "if not hundreds of rounds" fired, before Riley retreated back into the home, Judd said.

Everything fell silent, until a helicopter unit noticed that Riley was coming out, the sheriff said. He had been shot once and was ready to surrender. Authorities did not say where he was shot.

Officers heard cries for help inside the home but were unsure whether there were additional shooters and feared the home was booby-trapped. Still, one officer rushed in and grabbed the wounded girl, who told authorities there were three dead people inside.

Officers sent robots into the home to check for explosives and other traps. They eventually found the bodies of Gleason; a 33-year-old woman; and her baby. The baby's 62-year-old grandmother was found was in another home on the property. It's not clear when she was shot.

Authorities released only Gleason's name, and did not say if or how he was related to the other victims, but on a Facebook page for a woman who identified herself as Gleason's girlfriend, friends posted comments lamenting her death. From the page, it was evident that she recently had a baby.

Pansy Mincey Smith, who told The Ledger that she went to school with Gleason's father, said that the last time she saw the younger man he had just had a baby.

"RIP Justice Gleason. The last time I saw you, you were getting on the elevator at the hospital," Smith wrote on Facebook. "You were smiling from ear to ear about your new little baby boy, you had that big teddy bear for him. This is so heartbreaking, son."

The sheriff's office declined to say how many times the victims had been shot, but said they had all been huddling in fear, with the boy dying in his mother's arms. Even the family dog was shot to death.

Authorities said Riley's girlfriend told investigators he was never violent but had become increasingly erratic. She said he claimed to be on mission from God, stockpiling supplies for Hurricane Ida victims including \$1,000 worth of cigars.

Riley's vehicle had also been stocked with bleeding control kits and other supplies for a gunfight, authorities said.

He worked as a private security guard and had no criminal history, the sheriff said.

"Prior to this morning, this guy was a war hero. He fought for his country in Afghanistan and Iraq," said Judd. "And this morning he's a cold-blooded killer."

While being treated at the hospital, Riley remained aggressive, at one point trying to grab an officer's gun. He was ultimately tied down and medicated.

Officers took Riley to jail in a white jumpsuit later Sunday. He appeared downcast, hanging his head and hardly opening his eyes, as reporters asked why he killed the family.

Associated Press reporter Kelli Kennedy contributed from Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The Latest: More U.S. first responders are dying of COVID-19

By The Associated Press undefined

UNDATED -- The resurgence of COVID-19 this summer and the national debate over vaccine requirements have created a fraught situation for the United States' first responders, who are dying in larger numbers but pushing back against mandates.

It's a stark contrast from the beginning of the vaccine rollout when first responders were prioritized for shots.

The mandates affect tens of thousands of police officers, firefighters and others on the front lines across the country, many of whom are spurning the vaccine. That is happening despite mandates' consequences that range from weekly testing to suspension to termination — even though the virus is now the leading cause of U.S. law enforcement line-of-duty deaths.

According to the Officer Down Memorial Page, 132 members of law enforcement agencies are known to have died of COVID-19 in 2021. In Florida alone last month, six people affiliated with law enforcement died over a 10-day period.

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Despite the deaths, police officers and other first responders are among those most hesitant to get the vaccine and their cases continue to grow. No national statistics show the vaccination rate for America's entire population of first responders but individual police and fire departments across the country report figures far below the national rate of 74% of adults who have had at least one dose.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- European Union regulator pondering whether to recommend Pfizer booster shots for 16 and older
- Two anchors of COVID safety net ending, affecting millions in US
- Volunteers help poorest survive Thailand's worst COVID surge yet
- Hospitals in crisis in Mississippi, the least-vaccinated US state
- Want to attend Hamilton? Not unless you meet virus protocols

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

AMSTERDAM — The European Medicines Agency says it has started an expedited evaluation on whether to recommend use of a booster dose of the coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech.

In a statement Monday, the EU drug regulator says it is considering whether a third dose of the vaccine should be given six months after people over age 16 have received two doses "to restore protection after it has waned."

EMA's experts are carrying out an "accelerated assessment" of data submitted by Pfizer and BioNTech, including results from an ongoing research trial in which about 300 healthy adults received a booster dose about six months after their second dose.

Pfizer has already submitted an application to the U.S. Food and Drug Administer for authorization of a third dose and the U.S. government said last month boosters would likely be available in late September. Israel has already started administering booster doses and the plan is under consideration in other countries for vulnerable populations, including France and Germany.

The Amsterdam-based agency said it expects to make a decision in the next few weeks.

DETROIT — Five federal courthouses in eastern Michigan will fully reopen Tuesday for the first time since COVID-19 restrictions were put in place in March 2020.

Lawyers, news reporters, jurors and court spectators will be required to answer questions about their health and have their temperature checked at courthouse entrances. Masks will be required.

Courthouse employees who have not been vaccinated will be required to share the results of two weekly COVID-19 tests at their own expense.

"The court is doing everything in its power to make sure that everyone who uses our facilities are protected," said Chief U.S. District Judge Denise Page Hood.

The main courthouse is in downtown Detroit, but there are other federal courthouses in Flint, Bay City, Ann Arbor and Port Huron. Remote video access will be provided for some hearings in civil lawsuits. But nearly all criminal cases will be conducted in person at the courthouses.

SANTIAGO, Chile — Chile's Public Health Institute has approved the Chinese-developed Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine for children older than 6, though the health minister must approve the plan before shots enter arms.

The panel of senior physicians, including presidents of the associations of pediatrics and infectology, analyzed a Chinese study of 500 children aged 3 to 17, all of whom produced antibodies. A similar study of 4,000 children is being organized in Chile.

Brazil's health regulatory agency, however, recently rejected a similar request by Sinovac, and asked for data involving a larger study.

Chile already had authorized vaccinations for children as young as 12, though only with the Pfizer vac-

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cine. Supply shortages have stalled that effort.

Chilean officials plan to vaccinate 15.2 million of the country's 19 million people. So far they have given a full double dose regimen to 86% of those now eligible. The country last month also began giving AstraZeneca booster shots to fully vaccinated people older than 55.

ROME — Life expectancy for men in some of Italy's worst-hit provinces in the pandemic dropped by more than four years.

ISTAT, Italy's national statistics bureau, in a report on Monday said that compared with 2019, nationwide life expectancy for those born in 2020 dropped by 1.2 years.

"In 2020, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sharp increase in the risk of mortality that derived from it abruptly interrupted the increase of life expectancy at birth that had marked a trend up to 2019," ISTAT said.

The pandemic first erupted outside Asia in northern Italy, and much of the north reeled with confirmed COVID-19 deaths in the initial wave of cases. In the northern provinces of Bergamo, Cremona and Lodi, life expectancy for men decreased by some 4.3 to 4.5 years. For women in those provinces, the reduced expectancy ranged from 3.2 to 2.9 years.

For a child born in 2020, male life expectancy nationwide is 79.7 and female life expectancy is 84.4, ISTAT said.

PHOENIX -- A program announced by Arizona's Republican governor last month giving private school vouchers to students whose parents object to school mask requirements has seen a surge of applications.

More than 2,700 applications have been started or completed in less than two weeks. That's twice as many as can be funded with the \$10 million in federal coronavirus relief cash earmarked for the program.

Gov. Doug Ducey's plan will give \$7,000 a year to each student to pay for private school tuition.

School voucher opponents worry they will permanently get vouchers and some Republican lawmakers say they hope that's the case.

ROME — Italy's health minister says a two-day meeting of his G-20 counterparts yielded resolve to help poor nations obtain more COVID-19 vaccines.

Minister Roberto Speranza told reporters in Rome on Monday that achieving that includes vaccine production in less developed nations. The goal is "to bring vaccines to every corner of the world," said Speranza. He described the meeting's unanimous final document as a "departure point."

Stronger nations, starting with the G-20, are committing to more resources and to sending vaccines to the more vulnerable countries, he said, adding that efforts like COVAX need to be strengthened.

"We want to build on conditions so that production can be brought to the countries. It's not enough merely to transfer doses," Speranza said.

COVAX is an international mechanism created in part to share vaccines so that poorer wouldn't have to rely on donations. But in some cases, wealthy nations have received doses through COVAX.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Danish health authorities say they are offering jabs in supermarkets as they are aware of differences in the vaccination pattern even though more than 80% of people over 12 have had two shots of vaccine.

"It is especially young people who have not received the first jab," said Soeren Brostroem, head of the Danish Health Agency.

On Saturday, vaccines will be offered in two of Denmark's largest supermarket chains, Bilka and Foetex. No appointments are needed.

"We want to ensure that the offer of vaccination is as accessible as possible, so that, for example, it is possible to get a shot while shopping," Brostroem said, adding there are many young people working in retail.

Denmark has a target of reaching 90% of people above the age of 12 by Oct. 1.

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As of Sept. 10, the digital pass — a proof of vaccination or a negative test which was required to enter nightclubs — becomes the last COVID-19 safeguard to fall.

PRISTINA, Kosovo --- Kosovo's Health Ministry said it has received half a million Pfizer vaccines Monday sent from the United States.

Kosovo's 1.8 million people have faced a surge in new infections during the last month. On Monday there were 28 deaths and 489 new cases.

The ministry said it had received 503,100 Pfizer shots from the United States through the COVAX program. It strongly called on people older than 16 years old to take the jabs as the only way to prevent further spread of the coronavirus.

About 17% of Kosovo's people have gotten both shots of the vaccine so far.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's daily increase in coronavirus infections has exceeded 1,000 for the 62nd consecutive day as officials are raising concerns about another viral spike during this month's Chuseok holidays, the Korean version of Thanksgiving.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said more than 940 of the 1,375 new cases reported Monday were from Seoul and the nearby metropolitan region, where a rise in infections have been linked to the reopening of schools and people returning from summer vacations.

While the virus has slowed outside the capital area in recent weeks, KDCA official Kim Ki-nam said transmissions could worsen nationwide during the Chuseok break, which starts on Sept. 20, a time when millions usually travel across the country to meet relatives.

Officials are enforcing the country's strongest social distancing rules in the greater capital area, where private social gatherings of three or more are banned after 6 p.m. unless all are fully vaccinated.

A slow vaccine rollout has left less than 35% of South Koreans fully vaccinated as of Monday.

HANOI — About 23 million Vietnamese students have started a new school year, most of them in virtual classrooms, amid a COVID-19 lockdown to contain a virus surge in the country.

Since April, when the latest wave of the virus spread in the country, Vietnam closed down schools and education institutes in pandemic areas and move learning activities to online platforms.

Millions of students spent their summer break at home as more than half of the country is in lockdown. In hard-hit provinces, schools have been converted into quarantine facilities and field hospitals.

In Ho Chi Minh city, the epicenter of Vietnam's worst virus outbreak, teachers and students observed a minute of silence to pay tribute to those who died of COVID-19 and honor front-liners before opening classes Monday.

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Most of New Zealand will move out of lockdown Tuesday except for the largest city of Auckland, which will remain in the strictest type of lockdown until at least next week, the government announced Monday.

The nation has been battling an outbreak of the delta variant of the coronavirus since last month. All recent cases have been found in Auckland, including 20 that were found on Monday.

There have been a total of 821 cases found in the outbreak. The government is pursuing an unusual strategy of trying to eliminate the virus entirely.

JERUSALEM -- Israel says it will soon reopen its gates to foreign tour groups — even as it battles one of the world's highest rates of coronavirus infections.

The country's Tourism Ministry on Sunday said it will begin allowing organized tour groups into the country beginning Sept. 19.

Tourists will have to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, present a negative PCR test before their flight and undergo both PCR and serological testing upon arrival. Visitors would have to quarantine in their

hotels until the test results come back -- a process expected to take no more than 24 hours.

Tourists from a handful of "red" countries with high infection rates -- including Turkey and Brazil -- will not be permitted to visit for the time being.

Israel launched a similar program in May after vaccinating most of its population early this year. But the program was suspended in August as the delta variant began to spread.

In recent weeks, the country has begun administering booster shots to anyone who was vaccinated over five months ago.

Belarus court gives opposition activists lengthy sentences

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A court in Belarus on Monday sentenced two leading opposition activists to lengthy prison terms, the latest move in the relentless crackdown that Belarusian authorities have unleashed on dissent in the wake of last year's anti-government protests.

Maria Kolesnikova, a top member of the opposition Coordination Council, has been in custody since her arrest last September. A court in Minsk found her guilty of conspiring to seize power, creating an extremist organization and calling for actions damaging state security and sentenced her to 11 years in prison.

Lawyer Maxim Znak, another leading member of the Coordination Council who faced the same charges, was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the convictions were unjust, adding "we call for their immediate, unconditional release and for that of all other political prisoners held by the Lukashenko regime." Western European officials also denounced the sentences.

Kolesnikova, who helped coordinate monthslong opposition protests that erupted after an August 2020 presidential vote, resisted authorities' attempts to force her to leave the country.

Kolesnikova and Znak went on trial behind closed doors, with their families only allowed to be present at the sentencing hearing on Monday.

"For many, Maria has become an example of resilience and the fight between good and evil. I'm proud of her," Kolesnikova's father, Alexander, told The Associated Press on Monday. "It's not a verdict, but rather the revenge of the authorities."

Belarus was rocked by months of protests fueled by President Alexander Lukashenko's being awarded a sixth term after the August 2020 presidential vote that the opposition and the West denounced as a sham. He responded to the demonstrations with a massive crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested and thousands beaten by police.

Kolesnikova, 39, has emerged as a key opposition activist, appearing at political rallies and fearlessly walking up to lines of riot police and making her signature gesture — a heart formed by her hands. She spent years playing flute in the nation's philharmonic orchestra after graduating from a conservatory in Minsk and studying Baroque music in Germany.

In 2020, she headed the campaign of Viktor Babariko, the head of a Russian-owned bank who made a bid to challenge Lukashenko, but was barred from the race after being jailed on money laundering and tax evasion charges that he dismissed as political. Babariko was sentenced to 14 years in prison two months ago.

Kolesnikova then joined forces with former English teacher Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was running in place of her jailed husband Sergei, an opposition blogger, as the main candidate standing against Lukashenko, and Veronika Tsepkalo, wife of another potential top contender who had fled the country fearing arrest.

The three appeared together at colorful campaign events that were in stark contrast to Lukashenko's Soviet-style gatherings.

Shortly after the election, Tsikhanouskaya left Belarus under pressure from the authorities and is currently in exile in Lithuania.

In September 2020, as Belarus was shaken by mass protests, the largest of which drew up to 200,000

people, KGB agents drove Kolesnikova to the border between Belarus and Ukraine in an attempt to expel her. In the neutral zone between the two countries, Kolesnikova managed to rip up her passport, broke out of the car and walked back into Belarus, where she was immediately arrested.

Just before the start of her trial last month, Kolesnikova said in a note from prison that authorities offered to release her from custody if she asks for a pardon and gives a repentant interview to state media. She insisted that she was innocent and rejected the offer.

Speaking to the AP on Monday, Tsikhanouskaya described Kolesnikova's ripping up her passport as "a historic deed."

"Along with it (her passport), she tore apart all the plans of the regime," Tsikhanouskaya said.

"The regime would want to see Maxim and Maria broken and weakened. But we see our heroes and strong and free inside. They will be free much earlier. Prison terms invented for them shouldn't scare us — Maxim and Maria wouldn't want that. They would want us to remember how Maria smiles, and to listen to Maxim singing," Tsikhanouskaya added.

In London, U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said "the sentencing of Maria Kolesnikova and Maxim Znak shows the Belarusian authorities continuing their assault on the defenders of democracy and freedom."

"Locking up political opponents will only deepen the pariah status of the Lukashenko regime," Raab said.

In Brussels, European Commission spokesman Peter Stano said that "the EU ... reiterates its demands for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus (now numbering more than 650)," including Kolesnikova and Znak.

The verdicts Monday are "a symbol of the ruthless methods, the repression and intimidation by the Belarusian regime of opposition politicians and civil society," German Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Andrea Sasse said in Berlin.

Associated Press writers Lorne Cook in Brussels, Geir Moulson in Berlin and Danica Kirka in London contributed.

Biden directs federal aid to NY, NJ after deadly flooding

LAMBERTVILLE, N.J. (AP) — President Joe Biden approved major disaster declarations Monday greenlighting federal aid for people in six New Jersey counties and five New York counties affected by devastating flooding last week from the remnants of Hurricane Ida.

At least 50 people were killed in six Eastern states as record rainfall last Wednesday overwhelmed rivers and sewer systems. Some people were trapped in fast-filling basement apartments and cars, or swept away as they tried to escape. The storm also spawned several tornadoes.

Biden is scheduled to visit New Jersey and New York City on Tuesday to survey storm damage, the White House said. The storm killed at least 27 people in New Jersey and 13 in New York City.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, touring flood-damaged areas of Lambertville on Labor Day, said Biden's major disaster declaration will allow individuals to receive assistance, including grants for temporary housing and home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses.

An existing emergency declaration issued last week enabled state, county and local governments to get reimbursed for disaster spending, Murphy said.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said an initial assessment found that the storm damaged more than 1,200 homes and caused about \$50 million in damage to public infrastructure and property. Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop said damage to city infrastructure was estimated at \$35 million.

In the Hudson Valley, Metro-North said commuter rail service will return for Tuesday morning's rush hour after crews removed several feet of mud from the tracks and restoring washed out slopes and ballast. Two of the four tracks on the Hudson line remain out of service for repairs between Riverdale and Tarrytown.

Biden's disaster declarations cover Bergen, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Passaic, and Somerset counties in New Jersey and allow for individual assistance for people in Bronx, Queens, Kings, Richmond

and Westchester counties in New York.

Murphy said he would be talking to Biden during his visit to about adding other counties to the major disaster declaration.

Murphy joined state and local officials on a walking tour of Lambertville, passing homes with belongings piled outside as residents spent their Labor Day clearing flood debris, aided at one point by a bulldozer.

The major disaster declaration could help people like Nick Cepparulo, who told Murphy all of his family's first-floor possessions were washed away soon after they got in their car and raced for higher ground.

"We'll be all right," Cepparulo told reporters after speaking with Murphy. "We need a little help getting there."

In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio, Sen. Chuck Schumer and U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez spent part of the morning touring of storm damage in Queens with Deanne Criswell, the former city emergency management chief who's now administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

One resident greeted de Blasio with an arm on his shoulder and a quip about their flooded homes.

"Welcome to Woodside," she said. "We have swimming pools in each house. So you can get your bathing suit on and take a dip with us."

Actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, star of 'Breathless,' dies at 88

By THOMAS ADAMSON and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Jean-Paul Belmondo, star of the iconic French New Wave film "Breathless," whose crooked boxer's nose and rakish grin went on to make him one of the country's most recognizable leading men, has died at 88.

His death was confirmed Monday by the office of his lawyer, Michel Godest. No cause of death was given.

Belmondo's career spanned half a century. In the 1960s, he embodied a new type of male movie star, one characterized by pure virility rather than classic good looks. He went on to appear in more than 80 films and worked with a variety of major French directors, from Francois Truffaut to Claude Lelouch and Jean-Luc Godard, whose 1960 movie "Breathless" ("Au Bout de Souffle" in its original French title) brought both men lasting acclaim.

Belmondo's career choices were equally varied, from acclaimed art house films to critically lukewarm action and comedy films later in his career.

His unconventional looks — flattened nose, full lips and muscular frame — allowed him to play roles from thug to police officer, thief to priest, Cyrano de Bergerac to an unshakable secret agent. Belmondo was also a gifted athlete who often did his own stunts.

French President Emmanuel Macron called the actor a "national treasure" in an homage on Twitter and Instagram, recalling the actor's panache, his laugh and his versatility. Belmondo was at once a "sublime hero" and "a familiar figure," Macron wrote. "In him, we all recognize ourselves."

France bounded into Belmondo mode at news of his death, with praise from politicians of all stripes pouring in. The media played old movie clips that caught the athletic Belmondo in the heart-stopping acrobatics he was known to love, from sliding down a rooftop to climbing up a rope ladder from a moving convertible.

"I'm devastated," an emotional Alain Delon, another top cinema star, said of the death of his longtime friend on CNews.

Even Paris police headquarters offered its condolences for Belmondo, who played a police officer in numerous films, tweeting that "a great movie cop has left us."

Belmondo, affectionately known as Bebel, was born on April 9, 1933, in the Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine into an artistic family. His father was renowned sculptor Paul Belmondo and his mother, Sarah Rainaud-Richard, was a painter.

Belmondo played soccer and trained as a boxer before quitting school at 16. He took up acting in the 1950s at the Paris Conservatory, where one of his teachers, Pierre Dux, famously told him that his career as a leading man was doomed because of his looks. People would burst into laughter if they saw an actress in Belmondo's arms, Dux said, according to biographer Bertrand Tessier.

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French theater critic Jean-Jacques Gautier wasn't impressed either, once saying: "Mr. Belmondo will never enjoy success with his ruffian's mug."

At his final conservatory competition, the jury failed to give him the recognition he thought he deserved — so he gave the judges an obscene parting gesture.

The star began acting in small provincial theaters and caught the eye of aspiring filmmaker Godard in Paris in 1958, who asked him to appear in a short film. At first, Belmondo didn't take Godard seriously.

"I spoke to my wife about it, and she said, 'Go ahead. If (Godard) hassles you, punch him,'" Belmondo told the Liberation newspaper in 1999.

Belmondo was given his first important role by director Claude Sautet in "Classe tous risques" (Consider All Risks) in which he starred alongside Lino Ventura in 1960. The same year, Godard called Belmondo back to appear in "Breathless" — which became one of the breakthrough films of the French New Wave. The movement, which included Truffaut, grouped filmmakers of the late 1950s and 1960s who abandoned traditional narrative techniques and were known for their mood of youthful iconoclasm.

Belmondo played opposite American actress Jean Seberg, who appeared as the street-smart aspiring reporter who, in the film's key moment, sold the International Herald Tribune on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

Belmondo sometimes said he acted in Godard's first film and would act in his last. But he didn't link his name exclusively with one director and worked with most of France's top filmmakers — and many of Europe's most well-known actresses, including Jeanne Moreau and Sophia Loren.

Following the huge success of "Breathless," Belmondo showed the vast array of his talent and his versatility in dramas ("Leon Morin, pretre"), arthouse movies ("Moderato Cantabile") and blockbusters ("Cartouche").

In "Un Singe en hiver," a French classic directed by Henri Verneuil in 1962, Belmondo impressed the legendary Jean Gabin.

"You won't tell me anymore: 'If only I had a young Gabin.' You have him!" Gabin told the director about Belmondo.

In Truffaut's 1969 "Mississippi Mermaid," Belmondo played a tobacco farmer and starred opposite Catherine Deneuve. Belmondo and Danish-born Anna Karina played a couple on the run in Godard's 1965 "Pierrot le Fou." Belmondo also won a Cesar — the French equivalent of an Oscar — for his role in Lelouch's 1988 film "Itinerary of a Spoiled Child," his final big success.

During the second half of his career, Belmondo opted for high-paying roles in commercially successful action films. He played a tough detective in "Cop or Hooligan," and a World War II ace in "Champion of Champions."

In the 1980s, Belmondo returned to the stage, his first love, and won back the doubting critics. His comeback role was in a 1987 Paris production of "Kean," about an actor famous for his uncontrollable temper and genius.

Belmondo, who had recovered from a stroke in 2001, is survived by three children, Florence, Paul, and Stella Eva Angelina. Another daughter, Patricia, died in 1994.

Funeral arrangements weren't immediately known.

Elaine Ganley contributed to this report.

Hundreds pay their respects to Greek composer Theodorakis

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Hundreds of people, some carrying flowers, gathered Monday at Athens Cathedral to pay their final respects to Greek composer and politician Mikis Theodorakis, who was an integral part of the Greek political and musical scene for decades.

Theodorakis, who died Thursday at 96, is lying in state in a cathedral chapel for three days ahead of his burial on the southern island of Crete. His body arrived Monday after a nearly two-hour delay amid a dispute over burial details.

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Over the weekend, his family reportedly lifted their objections to him being buried on Crete in accordance with his last wishes. A court had temporarily halted burial plans pending a resolution of the dispute.

Theodorakis' daughter had said earlier that he would be buried near Corinth in the village of Vrahati, where he maintained a holiday home. But a 2013 letter Theodorakis had written to the mayor of the town of Chania in Crete was made public, in which the composer said he wanted to be buried in the nearby cemetery of Galatas, despite his family's disagreement.

Theodorakis was as well-known in Greece for his political activism as for his musical career. He penned a wide range of work, from somber symphonies to popular TV and film scores, including for "Serpico" and "Zorba the Greek."

He is also remembered for his opposition to the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974, a time during which he was persecuted and jailed and his music outlawed.

Greece's Communist Party said over the weekend that Theodorakis' body will lie in state beginning Monday, and a "farewell ceremony" will be held Wednesday, before the late composer is flown to Crete. The church service and burial will be on Thursday.

Theodorakis had a tumultuous relationship with the Communist Party, known by its Greek acronym KKE, leaving it in the late 1960s, rejoining in the late 1970s and getting elected as a lawmaker with the conservative New Democracy party in 1990.

But he wrote a letter in October to Communist Party Secretary-General Dimitris Koutsoumbas, essentially entrusting him with the funeral arrangements.

"Now, at the end of my life, at the time of taking stock, details are erased from my mind and the 'Big Things' remain. So, I see that I spent my most crucial, forceful and mature years under KKE's banner. For this reason, I want to depart this world as a communist," Theodorakis wrote.

Do ATVs belong on roads? Towns are abuzz on perks, drawbacks

By LISA RATHKE Associated Press

MORRISTOWN, Vt. (AP) — Tom and Cynthia Cloutier treasure spending time on their porch, eating dinner on their deck with a view of the mountains, and generally just enjoying the quiet of living in rural Vermont in the home they bought in 2018 after retirement.

That all changed the following year, when a section of road that abuts their property was opened to all-terrain vehicles that previously were not permitted on roads. Frequently, when they'd go outside, noisy ATVs would be coming down the road, he said.

"Overnight our Silver Ridge (Road) became a superhighway of ATVs," Tom Cloutier said. "We could hear these machines inside our home, but when we went outside we could not have a conversation, sit on our front porch quietly with our coffee, or eat dinner on our deck or enjoy watching the sunset."

What started as a trial run in Morristown in 2019 ended last year after a complaint, a town official said. Now, an ATV group is asking the town to again open up a section of the road and parts of other roads so that riders can get gas, stay or park at a local motel and eat at local restaurants. The access would connect them to a neighboring community where ATVs are legal on roads.

Their town has joined a small but growing list of rural communities across the country that have opened or are considering whether to open up their roads to ATVs, with some taking advantage of the economic benefits that come with outdoor tourism.

ATV interest has only intensified as more people got outdoors during the pandemic. But their popularity has sometimes pitted riders against residents, with communities struggling to balance the perks with a loss of tranquility.

"Our vision for our town should be for everybody," said ATV rider Lisa Desjardins at a July public meeting about the Morristown proposal. "It shouldn't just be for people who are riding bikes, who are runners. It should be for everybody, whether you like ATVs or not."

Last year, sales of ATVs rose over 33%, according to Scott Schloegel, senior vice president for government relations for the Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association, which opposes on-road use of ATVs

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unless they are trail connectors. That jump in sales creates more interest in access to public lands where trails exist and additional demand for new trails and for trail maintenance, he said.

Even though it was closed for two months last year during the pandemic, the 1,000-mile Hatfield-McCoy Trails in West Virginia last year sold its highest number of annual trail permits at nearly 65,000, according to the office of Gov. Jim Justice, and ATV permits for Maine residents jumped 6%, officials said.

It's a great economic driver for those communities, Schloegel said of the Hatfield-McCoy trail network, "It's everything from the mom-and-pop gas stations to the motels and hotels to the fast food joints and the power sports dealerships and service locations that they've got across the state."

Officials with the Open Space & Trails Department in Summit County, Colorado, have noticed an increase in off-highway vehicle use of trails in recent years. ATV trails are also accessible to hikers, bikers and equestrians, the department said.

In northern New Hampshire, Gorham opened some roads to ATVs about eight years ago, and on summer weekends the town of under 3,000 is bustling with the machines.

On a Friday in July, riders from as far away as North Carolina had rented machines and were touring the trails. Others from Connecticut and Rhode Island, their ATVs in tow, were staying at a local motel.

John Bates Jr., who doesn't have trails near his home in Epsom, New Hampshire, visits frequently. He drove 2 1/2 hours and was staying at a motel. Friends were renting machines the following day and together they planned to hit the more than 1,000-mile Ride the Wilds trail network, "which is absolutely fantastic," he said.

Some residents near roads open to ATVs are annoyed.

"This little town was the cutest little town, quiet, everybody was friendly. Now it's a nightmare," said Sandy Lemire, a longtime resident of Gorham, which sits on the edge of the White Mountains. She complained about the noise and smell of exhaust.

"Outside is unbelievable," she said. "You can't hear yourself think; sometimes I can't even hear my lawn mower, especially when there's a festival going on and they're all traveling this way."

Residents of Morristown, Vermont, are expected to vote on the ATV proposal this fall. In July, riders testified that opening up sections of certain roads would boost the economy and give them access to food and fuel, while other residents raised concerns about safety, noise and the environment.

"We're not asking to drive through town, all your other roads right now. Probably won't," said rider Mike Putvain. "Have you ever paid for four-wheeler tires? We don't want to ride blacktop. We'd rather be on a dirt road or a trail and hopefully we get more."

Plea and a trial loom in next month for Giuliani associates

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The October illegal campaign contribution trial of an associate of Rudy Giuliani — and a guilty plea set to occur this week by a second associate — puts a spotlight on Giuliani as a criminal probe of the former mayor and his dealings with Ukraine move closer to a decision on whether he'll face arrest.

A judge last week refused to delay the Oct. 12 trial of Lev Parnas and Andrey Kukushkin on charges that they made illegal campaign contributions to U.S. politicians. Both have pleaded not guilty.

Meanwhile, a review of electronics materials seized in raids on Giuliani continues before prosecutors decide whether his dealings with Ukrainian officials while he worked as a personal lawyer for then-President Donald Trump required him to register as a foreign agent.

A decision on whether to charge Giuliani with a crime is unlikely to occur before a former federal judge finishes the court-appointed task of separating privileged materials from other data pulled from 18 phones taken during raids of Giuliani's home and law office earlier this year. Some phones belonged to employees of the former New York mayor's firm.

Igor Fruman, a Soviet-born Florida businessman who assisted Giuliani in seeking damaging information about Joe Biden in Ukraine when Biden was running for president, is scheduled to plead guilty on Friday in the illegal campaign contribution case.

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Fruman and Parnas worked with Giuliani to try to convince Ukraine to open an investigation into Biden's son, Hunter, over his connection to a Ukrainian energy company. When Parnas was arrested in October 2019, Democrats in the U.S. House were seeking his testimony about his involvement with Giuliani's Ukrainian effort.

Giuliani, a Republican, has acknowledged working extensively with the pair in connection with Ukrainian figures but said he had no knowledge of any illegal campaign contributions.

Giuliani, who was widely praised for his actions as New York City's mayor after the Sept. 11 attacks, has insisted his Ukrainian activities were conducted on behalf of Trump, not a foreign entity or person.

Trump's efforts to press Ukraine for an investigation of the Bidens led the House to impeach Trump, though he was acquitted by the Senate.

On Thursday, U.S. District Judge J. Paul Oetken in Manhattan rejected a request by lawyers for Parnas and Kukushkin to postpone next month's trial, set to start October 12, until February.

Oetken noted that the trial was set to occur a year after it had been first scheduled and two years after the charges were brought.

"Further delay would potentially prejudice the Government in its ability to prosecute this case at trial, and it would undermine the public's significant interest in timely resolution of these charges," he wrote.

Parnas, a Soviet-born Florida businessman who came to the U.S. as a young child, and Kukushkin, a Ukrainian-born U.S. citizen, face trial in a scheme to make illegal campaign donations to local and federal politicians in New York, Nevada and other states to try to win support for a new recreational marijuana business.

Goodbye Columbus: Mexico statue to be replaced by Indigenous

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Christopher Columbus is getting kicked off Mexico City's most iconic boulevard. Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum announced that the Columbus statue on the Paseo de la Reforma, often a focal point for Indigenous rights protests, would be replaced by a statue honoring Indigenous women.

"To them we owe ... the history of our country, of our fatherland," she said.

She made the announcement on Sunday, which was International Day of the Indigenous Woman.

The Columbus statue, donated to the city many years ago, was a significant reference point on the 10-lane boulevard, and surrounding traffic circle is — so far — named for it.

That made it a favorite target of spray-paint-wielding protesters denouncing the European suppression of Mexico's Indigenous civilizations.

It was removed last year supposedly for restoration, shortly before Oct. 12, which Americans know as Columbus Day but Mexicans call "Dia de la Raza," or "Day of the Race" — the anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas in 1492.

When the statue was removed last year, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador noted that "it is a date that is very controversial and lends itself to conflicting ideas and political conflicts."

This year is the 700th anniversary of the founding of Tenochtitlan — what is now Mexico City — as well as the 500th anniversary of its fall to the Spanish conquistadores, and the 200th anniversary of Mexico's final independence from Spain.

Most Mexicans have some indigenous ancestry and are well aware that millions of Indigenous people died from violence and disease during and after the conquest.

Sheinbaum said the new statue, "Tlali," might be ready near the date of Dia de la Raza this year.

The Columbus statue isn't being discarded, but will be moved to a less prominent location in a small park in the Polanco neighborhood. Sheinbaum referred to Columbus "a great international personage."

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Justice Department will 'protect' abortion seekers in Texas

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department said Monday that it will not tolerate violence against anyone who is trying to obtain an abortion in Texas as federal officials explore options to challenge a new state law that bans most abortions.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said the Justice Department would "protect those seeking to obtain or provide reproductive health services" under a federal law known as the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

Garland said in a statement that federal prosecutors are still urgently exploring options to challenge the Texas law. He said the Justice Department would enforce the federal law "in order to protect the constitutional rights of women and other persons, including access to an abortion."

The federal law, commonly known as the FACE Act, prohibits physically obstructing or using the threat of force to intimidate or interfere with a person seeking reproductive health services. The law also prohibits damaging property at abortion clinics and other reproductive health centers.

The new Texas law prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity, usually around six weeks — before some women know they're pregnant. Courts have blocked other states from imposing similar restrictions, but Texas' law differs significantly because it leaves enforcement up to private citizens through lawsuits instead of criminal prosecutors.

Justice Department officials have also been in contact with U.S. attorneys in Texas and the FBI field offices in the state to discuss enforcing the federal provisions.

"The department will provide support from federal law enforcement when an abortion clinic or reproductive health center is under attack," Garland said. "We will not tolerate violence against those seeking to obtain or provide reproductive health services, physical obstruction or property damage in violation of the FACE Act."

First responders nationwide resist COVID vaccine mandates

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

March 11, 2021. It was supposed to be a turning point in the coronavirus pandemic for Erin Tokley, a longtime Philadelphia police officer, Baptist minister and 47-year-old father of three. It was supposed to be the day of his vaccine appointment.

Instead it was the date of his funeral.

Tokley — "Toke" to his friends and family — died on March 3, becoming the Philadelphia Police Department's sixth confirmed COVID-19 death.

Philadelphia officers first became eligible for their shots in late January and Tokley was eager to get it as soon as he could. But he fell ill in early February, before it was his turn to roll up his sleeve.

The resurgence of COVID-19 this summer and the national debate over vaccine requirements have created a fraught situation for the nation's first responders, who are dying in larger numbers but pushing back against mandates.

It's a heartbreaking situation for Tokley's widow, Octavia, as the 21st anniversary of their first date approaches on Sept. 10. She said she has moved beyond her anger at other police officers who are refusing the vaccine, and is now disappointed. Her husband's life couldn't be saved, but theirs still can.

"I don't want to have to be there to support your family for this," she said. "Nobody deserves this, especially when it can be prevented."

Her husband is one of 132 members of law enforcement agencies who are known to have died of COVID-19 in 2021, as of Monday, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page. In Florida alone last month, six people affiliated with law enforcement died over a 10-day period.

In the first half of 2021, 71 law enforcement officials in the U.S. died from the virus — a small decrease compared to the 76 who died in the same time period in 2020, per data compiled by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. Last year, the total figure was 241 — making the virus the the leading cause of law enforcement line-of-duty deaths.

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Despite the deaths, police officers and other first responders are among those most hesitant to get the vaccine and their cases continue to grow. No national statistics show the vaccination rate for America's entire population of first responders but individual police and fire departments across the country report figures far below the national rate of 74% of adults who have had at least one dose.

Frustrated city leaders are enacting mandates for their municipal employees — including police officers and firefighters — as the delta variant surges. The mandates' consequences range from weekly testing to suspension to termination. It's a stark contrast from the beginning of the vaccine rollout when first responders were prioritized for shots.

"It makes me sad that they don't see it as another safety precaution," Octavia Tokley said. "You wear masks, you wear bulletproof vests. You protect each other. That's what you do, you protect and you serve."

Nearly 3,000 miles (4,828 kilometers) away, San Francisco firefighter Christopher Salas offers his condolences to Tokley's family. "I feel for her, I feel for her husband," he said.

Salas, 58, has nearly 28 years on the job — 21 of them in the city's tough Tenderloin district. He wears a mask and washes his hands and sanitizes himself. But he stops short at getting the shot — and plans to retire early instead of acquiescing to the city's ultimatum of get vaccinated or get terminated.

"I'm not an anti-vaxxer," he said. "I have all my other vaccines. I'm just not taking this one."

He considered it, just to be able to finish out his career with three decades of service. But after praying about it with his wife, he remains concerned about the efficacy and side effects of the vaccine.

"I don't think I'd be comfortable with myself if I did something that went against my belief," he said of getting the vaccine. "It's about liberty and having your own choice to be your own person."

Public health professionals and elected officials, however, contend that it's bigger than that.

Dr. Jennifer Bryan, a family physician and member of the Mississippi State Medical Association's Board of Trustees, says she's working to change minds a half-hour appointment at a time in a state with one of the lowest vaccination rates in the country. With first responders, she reminds them that they can become patients, too.

"It's harder when you want to protect those who are on the front lines," she said. "When you share air with someone, there's a risk. If you share more air with sick people and your job is more public-facing, then you are at risk."

"This vaccine really is about not just protecting yourself but protecting your coworkers, your community, people who go to your church, people in your kids' school," said Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, whose city requires all employees to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 18 or face termination.

Unions across the country are fighting back. Shon Buford, president of San Francisco Firefighters Local 798, is urging city leaders to delay their Oct. 13 vaccinate-or-terminate deadline.

Twenty workers who did not disclose whether they had received a shot by a previous deadline may receive 10-day unpaid suspensions. One firefighter has sued San Francisco, which was the first major U.S. city to adopt a vaccine mandate for its workers. The overwhelming majority of the city's workforce of 36,000 is vaccinated, according to The San Francisco Chronicle.

Buford, who is vaccinated, says he needs more time to educate his hesitant members, and he's disappointed that San Francisco took such a harsh stance from the beginning. Firefighters like Salas have threatened to retire, and others say they will risk termination.

"To me, they deserve more than an ultimatum," Buford said.

In Los Angeles, over 3,000 employees in the police department have been infected by the virus and the numbers continue to climb. Ten LAPD workers have died, as well as three spouses.

The Los Angeles Police Protective League, the union that represents rank-and-file officers, has proposed required weekly testing for cops— like the New York City Police Department — in lieu of the mandate signed by Mayor Eric Garcetti on Aug. 20 that makes vaccinations part of city workers' job conditions.

LAPD Chief Michel Moore said 51% of the department has been vaccinated as of Aug. 31 and more than 100 personnel got their shots in the last week and a half.

In California's state prisons, a federal judge could order all correctional employees and inmate firefight-

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ers to be vaccinated under a class-action lawsuit. In mid-July, 41% of correctional officers statewide had at least one dose of a vaccine, compared to 75% of inmates.

Officials fear a repeat of last summer's outbreak at San Quentin State Prison north of San Francisco, which sickened 75% of the prison's incarcerated population. Twenty-nine people, including a correctional officer, died.

"Every minute, every day, every week we delay, it's putting our clients at greater and greater risk," said Rita Lomio, a staff attorney at the nonprofit Prison Law Office, which is representing the state's incarcerated people in the lawsuit.

Octavia Tokley, the 41-year-old Philadelphia widow, got her first dose just three days after her husband died, collapsing in a stranger's arms in grief as they waited in line. Her 5-year-old daughter, Amethyst, constantly asks why her father didn't get one, too.

He tried, her mother says, but the shot wasn't ready for him yet.

Every night, their child struggles to fall asleep.

"I miss Daddy, I miss Daddy," she cries. "I feel so lonely, I miss Daddy."

Associated Press Writer Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia contributed.

Prized trout streams shrink as heat, drought grip US West

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

SARATOGA, Wyo. (AP) — The North Platte River in southern Wyoming has been so low in places lately that a toddler could easily wade across and thick mats of olive-green algae grow in the lazy current.

Just over two years ago, workers stacked sandbags to protect homes and fishing cabins from raging brown floodwaters, the highest on record.

Neither scene resembles the proper picture of a renowned trout fishing destination, one where anglers glide downstream in drift boats, flinging fly lures in hope of landing big brown and rainbow trout in the shadow of the Medicine Bow Mountains.

But both torrent and trickle have afflicted storied trout streams in the American West in recent years amid the havoc of climate change, which has made the region hotter and drier and fueled severe weather events. Blistering heat waves and extended drought have raised water temperatures and imperiled fish species in several states.

In the Rocky Mountains, the attention is on trout fishing, a big part of both the United States' \$1-billion-a-year fly fishing industry and the region's over \$100-billion-a-year outdoor recreation industry.

"It seems the extremes are more extreme," said Tom Wiersema, who's fished the upper North Platte as a guide and trout enthusiast for almost half a century.

Some years, Wiersema has been able to put in and float a section of river about 10 miles (16 kilometers) north of the Colorado line all summer. This year, Wiersema hasn't bothered to float that stretch since late June, lest he have to drag a boat over wet, algae-covered rocks.

"That's what the river is at that point. Round, slippery bowling balls," he said.

In nearby Saratoga, population 1,600, leaping trout adorn light posts and the sign for Town Hall. The North Platte gurgles past a public hot spring called the Hobo Pool, and trout fishing, along with the fall elk hunt, are big business.

Phil McGrath, owner of Hack's Tackle & Outfitters on the river, said low flows haven't hurt his business of guided fishing trips on drift boats, which launch from deeper water in town. The fishing has been excellent, he said.

"You want to go easy on the little guys in the afternoon," he urged a recent group of customers who asked where they could wet a line before a guided trip the next morning.

It's basic trout fishing ethics when temperatures get as high as they were that day, 85 degrees (29 Celsius), and water temperatures aren't far enough behind.

The problem: Water above 68 degrees (20 C) can be rough on trout caught not for dinner but sport —

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and release to fight another day. Low water warms up quickly in hot weather, and warm water carries less oxygen, stressing fish and making them less likely to survive catch-and-release fishing, especially when anglers don't take several minutes to release fish gently.

As air temperatures soared into the mid 80s and beyond this summer, Yellowstone National Park shut down stream and river fishing from 2 p.m. until sunrise for a month. Montana imposed similar "hoot owl" restrictions — so called because owls can be active early in the morning — on fabled trout rivers including the Madison flowing out of Yellowstone.

Low, warm water prompted Colorado for a time to impose voluntary fishing restrictions on the Colorado River's upper reaches — even as spasms of flash floods and mudslides choked the river and closed Interstate 70.

In rivers like the upper North Platte, which flows north out of Colorado, low water runs not only warm but slow and clear, cultivating algae. Mats of algae can collect insects while offering trout shade and cover from predators, but they're also a symptom of warm and stressful conditions, said Jeff Streeter, who guided on the upper North Platte before becoming a local representative for the fishing-oriented conservation group Trout Unlimited.

"Where that threshold is, I'm not sure. I worry about it a little bit," he said.

Like Colorado, Idaho and Wyoming didn't order anglers to stop fishing. Such an order was unlikely to have much benefit, Idaho officials decided.

Wyoming's rivers would be difficult to monitor for enforcing closures because temperatures fluctuate widely throughout the day and from riffle to hole, said David Zafft, fish management coordinator for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Drought and heat — beneath skies smudged by wildfire smoke — also have varying effects from one big Western river to the next. Many are dammed, including the North Platte as it begins a 100-mile-wide (160-kilometer-wide), 180-degree loop through a series of reservoirs that serve farmers and ranchers in Wyoming and Nebraska.

The largely predictable, cold flows out of Seminoe Reservoir make the North Platte's "Miracle Mile" section just upstream of Pathfinder Reservoir a trout fishing paradise.

Upstream of Seminoe, however, the river is more subject to the vagaries of nature. For trout fishing, mountain snows are at least as important as rain patterns in warmer months but expectations based on decades of snowpack records have come under doubt.

"Things have changed too much and too rapidly," said Zafft. "We are in the midst of figuring out how this climate is going to impact our snow, our runoff and temperatures. I don't think we can really answer those questions yet."

Records going back to 1904 back up Wiersema's suspicions about extremes on the upper North Platte.

In 2011, high flows smashed all previous monthly averages for June and July. The 2019 flood was the worst by a more than 20% margin over the 1923 runner-up.

Yet since 2000, the river has had eight of its lowest-flowing Augusts on record. They included the sixth-lowest in 2012, 12th lowest in 2018, and third-lowest in 2020.

August 2021 verges on the 10 lowest on average. Mountain snow last winter and spring was about normal, but the ground was so dry from last year that much of this year's melt soaked in without contributing to the flow.

The pattern is becoming more common in the West, said David Gochis, a hydrometeorologist with the Boulder, Colorado-based National Center for Atmospheric Research.

"A greater fraction of the snowpack, even if it's an average snowpack year, is just going into replenishing the water in the landscape — in the shallow aquifer, in the soils — versus that water fully filling up the soils and then filling up the streams," Gochis said.

Yet no heavy rain might not be all bad for the river's trout, given a massive 2020 wildfire that charred a vast area just east of the upper North Platte, in Medicine Bow National Forest.

In July, a mudslide in a burn area just 50 miles (80 kilometers) away in Colorado killed three people and clogged the Cache la Poudre River with silt. That hasn't happened on the North Platte, but the West's ever-hotter wildfire seasons are a threat to trout populations, said Helen Neville, senior scientist with Trout

Unlimited.

"Fire is of course a natural process and something to which Western trout and salmon are well-adapted to, but the scale and intensity of recent fires may be pushing beyond their natural resilience in some cases," Neville said by email.

Climate change is especially worrisome for cutthroat trout, which unlike brown, rainbow and brook trout are native to the Rockies, according to Neville.

What's in store for the North Platte will depend on future rain, snow and melt patterns, not to mention ever-growing human demand for water. McGrath, the fly-fishing guide and tackle store owner, didn't doubt climate change is at work and that it's human caused. But he didn't seem to be losing sleep over it.

"If the world continues to get warmer, is trout fishing going to get worse? Yeah, of course. Trout is a cold-water animal, right?" said McGrath. "But is this going to happen tomorrow? No."

Follow Mead Gruver at <https://twitter.com/meadgruver>

Follow AP's complete drought coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/droughts>.

EXPLAINER: What are some key decisions in fighting fires?

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Thousands of wildfires ignite in the U.S. each year, and each one requires firefighters to make quick decisions, often in difficult conditions like high winds and lightning.

Crews and managers must determine when to bring in aircraft, what time of day is best to battle flames, whether to evacuate residents and even if certain fires should be extinguished at all.

In the West, which sees many of the country's largest fires, they do all this amid the backdrop of prolonged drought and other climate change-induced conditions that have made wildfires more destructive. Other challenges include a century of reflexive wildfire suppression and overgrown forests, experts say, and communities that have crept into fire-prone areas.

Russ Lane, fire operations chief for the Washington state Department of Natural Resources, explains how some key firefighting decisions are made:

WHY DO FIRE MANAGERS LET SOME WILDFIRES BURN?

Sometimes fires fit a beneficial land management goal, like when they burn in a wilderness area or national park.

Fires are part of the natural forest cycle, and "at times that's the right approach," said Lane, who is in his 35th season as a firefighter, much of that spent in western Oregon. He joined Washington's natural resources agency in 2019.

Also, wildfires sometimes burn in areas where it is unsafe to put firefighters.

WHEN DO FIRE MANAGERS DEPLOY AIRCRAFT?

Planes or helicopters are used if a wildfire is burning too intensely to send in ground forces, or if aircraft are the best way to deliver water or retardant, Lane said.

"You want to hit a fire quick so it stays small," Lane said.

The goal is to keep them from erupting into megafires. Cal Fire, California's firefighting agency, keeps an average of 95% of blazes to 10 acres (4 hectares) or less.

But Lane said aircraft alone are usually not enough to extinguish a fire. "It takes boots on the ground."

Aircraft also can face numerous visibility limitations when trying to make water drops on a wildfire.

HOW HAS TECHNOLOGY HELPED?

When it comes to early detection, one innovation is replacing fire lookout towers staffed by humans with cameras in remote areas, many of them in high-definition and armed with artificial intelligence to discern a smoke plume from morning fog. There are 800 such cameras scattered across California, Nevada and Oregon.

Fire managers also routinely summon military drones to fly over fires at night, using heat imaging to

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map their boundaries and hot spots. They can use satellite imagery to plot the course of smoke and ash.

WHAT IS THE BEST TIME OF DAY TO ATTACK A BLAZE?

Generally the heat of a summer day is not the best time to fight wildfires.

"We are pretty successful in the morning, late evening or overnight," Lane said.

ARE WILDFIRES HARDER TO BATTLE IN TIMBER OR GRASSLANDS?

Dry lightning puts dozens of fires on the landscape, Lane said, and weather is a major factor in their spread.

Wildfires in grassland tend to grow more quickly, and are more susceptible to expanding when there are high winds, Lane said. Fires in timberlands don't grow as fast, but they are more difficult to extinguish.

"With grass, a little rain and it goes out," Lane said.

HOW TO SAVE HOUSES WHEN FIRES ARE CLOSE?

Lane said the building material used on a house, and the nearby vegetation, are big factors in determining if a house can be saved when fire approaches.

Houses with wooden roofs and lots of flammable vegetation around them are hardest to save. Usually a fire crew will spray water around a house to protect it.

Sometimes they will burn out the vegetation around a house to starve an approaching wildfire. If the homeowner keeps brush well away from a home prior to a fire that is a big help, Lane said.

WHERE DO FIRE NAMES COME FROM?

Usually a fire is named by the first unit of firefighters on the scene. Most of the time the name reflects a nearby geographic feature, such as a creek or valley.

California's massive Dixie Fire, for instance, was named after the road where it started on July 14.

WHY DO FIREFIGHTERS SPEND SO MUCH TIME DIGGING LINES?

"Every fire has to have a dirt trail around it," Lane said. "That's to separate the fuel from the fire."

Firefighters also get help when the flames burn toward a river, a rocky area or a road. "Separating fuel from fire is what stops them," he said.

WHO LEADS A PARTICULAR FIREFIGHTING EFFORT?

Wildfires get one of five ratings, with Type 5 the least dangerous and Type 1 the most dangerous. More than 95% of all fires are smaller Type 4 or 5 wildfires and are quickly put out by local firefighters.

Larger fires, like the ones the Washington state Department of Natural Resources responds to, are assigned an incident commander, said Janet Pearce, agency spokeswoman.

The commander creates a set of objectives, which guides the command and general staff. An operations section chief then devises the strategy for the operational firefighting effort.

WHEN DO YOU ORDER RESIDENTS TO IMMEDIATELY EVACUATE?

Emergency managers consider fire behavior, predicted weather and the amount of time it will take to evacuate, when making the decision to order people to leave, Lane said.

They also consider the availability of shelters and the potential for harm or loss of human life.

Occasionally, an order is given to "shelter in place." This is typically done when there is either no time to escape an oncoming fire, or it would be more hazardous to evacuate than remain in place, he said.

"A childless father": MH-17 families speak of deep trauma

SCHIPHOL, Netherlands (AP) — Since her father and stepmother died in the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17, Ria van der Steen has been dealing with feelings of hate, revenge, anger and fear.

She is not alone. Seven years later, Sander Essers still feels guilty about the death of his brother. And for Peter van der Meer, Father's Day has become the one of the most horrible days of the year, following the loss of his three daughters aged 12, 10 and 7 in the crash.

"I'm a father without children, a childless father," he said in an emotional speech. "It has been so for seven years, and for all the years to come."

Finally, relatives of the 298 passengers and crew killed on July 17, 2014, when a Buk missile blew the Boeing 777 heading from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur out of the sky above conflict-torn eastern Ukraine,

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are having their say in court.

Under Dutch law, the relatives are allowed to make a victim impact statement to the court, without being asked questions. About 90 people plan to do so over the next three weeks, some speaking via live video links from other countries.

"I think probably next to the verdict, it is one of the most important days for the family members, because they can speak to the court, but through speaking to the court, they speak to the suspects and also to the responsible people wherever they are hiding," said Peter Langstraat, a lawyer representing victims' relatives. "So this is a form of communication with the people who are responsible for this disaster."

Van der Steen was the first to speak Monday, telling the court about the psychological consequences of the tragedy on her life.

All dressed in black in the courtroom at Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam, van der Steen spoke at length about the nightmares that woke her up screaming and of the impossible goodbye to her loved ones.

"I had to say my goodbye to them so often," she said. "The question is: How many times can you say goodbye? And when is goodbye forever?"

Van der Steen said she began to have nightmares soon after learning about the death of her relatives, who had been on their way to holidays to Borneo. In her dreams, she walked across fields in Ukraine looking for her father to let him know he had died.

"I saw the wreckage, bodies, personal effects," she recalled, "I could not stop crying until I woke up screaming."

After first being told it would not be possible to identify the bodies of her loved ones, van der Steen finally learned that her father had been identified thanks to a tiny piece of bone of his hand.

"Happily, we received news soon after that a small piece of bone of (my stepmother) Neeltje was found and that she, too, was identified," said van der Steen, recalling how shocked she was when presented with the two small bags of bones.

"I knew it was them, but emotionally I did not want to accept it," she told the court.

Essers said his brother Peter called him about 20 minutes before boarding the plane.

"In a gloomy voice he said to me, literally: 'Sander I'm afraid that I'm not going to come back alive.' Later he said: 'We're flying over a war zone.' He was dead scared and asked me urgently whether or not he should board the plane."

Essers said he felt he should reassure his brother.

"I often suddenly feel that I am partly to blame for his death," he said.

The trial opened in March 2020 and progressed through a long series of preliminary hearings before lawyers began discussing the merits of the case in June. The complex case is expected to continue into next year.

After a years-long painstaking international investigation, prosecutors charged four suspects — Russians Igor Girkin, Sergey Dubinskiy and Oleg Pulatov as well as Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko — with multiple counts of murder for their alleged involvement in shooting down the flight.

"To the perpetrators, seven years ago, you broke up my family in the worse way imaginable," said Vanessa Rizk, testifying remotely from Australia. Vanessa and her brother James lost their parents in the crash.

"Seven years on, I am determined that you will never, ever break my spirit and capacity to live and love, just as my parents would have wanted me to," she said.

Prosecutors say the plane was shattered in mid-air when it was hit by a Buk missile system trucked into Ukraine from a Russian military base. Russia denies any involvement in the downing.

None of the suspects has appeared in court and only one — Pulatov — has lawyers representing him at the trial. They have said he denies the charges.

"They are lying, we know they are lying and they know that we know that they are lying," said van der Steen, saying that she was quoting the late Soviet dissident novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Last week, investigators appealed to Russians to come forward with information about the deployment of the missile that investigators say downed the plane.

Labor shortage leaves union workers feeling more emboldened

By BEN FINLEY and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — When negotiations failed to produce a new contract at a Volvo plant in Virginia this spring, its 2,900 workers went on strike.

The company soon dangled what looked like a tempting offer — at least to the United Auto Workers local leaders who recommended it to their members: Pay raises. Signing bonuses. Lower-priced health care.

Yet the workers overwhelmingly rejected the proposal. And then a second one, too. Finally, they approved a third offer that provided even higher raises, plus lump-sum bonuses.

For the union, it was a breakthrough that wouldn't likely have happened as recently as last year. That was before the pandemic spawned a worker shortage that's left some of America's long-beleaguered union members feeling more confident this Labor Day than they have in years.

With Help Wanted signs at factories and businesses spreading across the nation, in manufacturing and in service industries, union workers like those at the Volvo site are seizing the opportunity to try to recover some of the bargaining power — and financial security — they feel they lost in recent decades as unions shrank in size and influence.

"We were extremely emboldened by the labor shortage," said Travis Wells, a forklift driver at the Volvo plant in Dublin, Virginia, near Roanoke. "The cost of recruiting and training a new workforce would've cost Volvo 10 times what a good contract would have."

In addition to 12% pay raises over the six-year contract, the Volvo deal provided other sweeteners: Many of the union workers will be phased out of an unpopular two-tier pay scale that had left less-senior workers with much lower wages than longer-tenured employees. All current workers will now earn the top hourly wage of \$30.92 after six years. And by holding out as long as they did, the workers achieved a six-year price freeze on health care premiums.

Volvo conceded that it's had difficulty finding workers for the Virginia plant but says it offers a strong pay and benefits package "that also safeguards our competitiveness in the market."

The improvements achieved by the Volvo workers in Virginia provided a case study of how union workers may be gaining leverage as companies scramble to find enough workers to meet customer demand in an economy that's been steadily recovering from the pandemic recession.

The growing demand for labor has also benefited lower-paid workers at restaurants, bars and retailers. But the financial gains for union workers mean that a category of jobs that have long been seen as supportive of a middle-class lifestyle may now be moving closer to that reality.

Chris Tilly, a labor economist at UCLA, said the shortages among burger-flippers and cashiers is notable "because those low-end jobs more typically have a labor surplus."

"But there are also shortages," Tilly noted, "at higher skill levels — including jobs where there are chronic shortages like nurses, machinists and teachers."

In Ventura County, California, 37 transit workers voted in July to join the Teamsters. They plan to negotiate with management to seek higher pay and eliminate split work shifts. Ruby McCormick, a bus driver who voted to join, said the booming job market was a big factor in her decision.

"Several years ago, before I came on to the company, there was an attempt to have the union, but it was voted down," she noted. "This time, we actually passed by a landslide."

For years, companies in most unionized industries have commanded an upper hand. During the slow, grinding economic recovery that followed the 2008-2009 Great Recession, they negotiated concessions and held down pay raises. Rising health care costs further diluted wages.

By contrast, this recovery has produced an unexpected labor shortage and given many workers more bargaining power than they've had since the 1980s, when the Reagan administration set a tone of hostility toward unions, and manufacturers began moving many jobs overseas, said Susan J. Schurman, who teaches labor studies at Rutgers University.

Schurman noted that the current worker shortage has compelled many employers to raise pay.

"Typically, when they have to do that to hire somebody, they kind of have to do it to keep the people

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they have," she said. "So you get kind of an across-the-board wage effect."

Unions may also be benefiting from frustration among working class Americans over wages that, adjusted for inflation, have been stagnant for decades. That discontent helped drive President Donald Trump's 2016 election victory, particularly in states in which auto and steel industries once thrived — as well as the outside support for Sen. Bernie Sanders, who ran for president as a Democrat.

"They simply have not benefited from the economy over the last three decades," Schurman said of many American workers. "That anger is going to go somewhere. And if I were a union organizer right now, I'd be really excited."

During the contract talks with Volvo Trucks, workers felt more confident about demanding a better contract because other jobs were open, noted Mitchell Smith, regional director for the UAW in the South.

President Joe Biden, who has frequently vowed to help create "good-paying union jobs," has also appointed a more worker-friendly National Labor Relations Board to settle disputes with employers.

An expanded footprint could help unions organize in places where they haven't been welcome before. Citing growing interest in membership, the 1.4 million-member Teamsters union says its organizing unit is eyeing Amazon's vast warehouse and distribution operations. Much is at stake for the Teamsters. Amazon is expanding its own distribution network, striking at the union's heart — transportation and package workers — and relying less on United Parcel Service, the largest employer of Teamsters' members.

Martin Rosas, a union leader for the United Food and Commercial Workers in Kansas and parts of Missouri and Oklahoma, said that meat packing workers seized the opportunity created by the labor shortage and the dangers of COVID to negotiate pay increases for some skilled positions.

Still, to gain major victories on a widespread scale, unions will need much more time. Last year, there were only eight strikes involving 1,000 or more workers, said Joseph A. McCartin, a Georgetown University history professor who studies labor unions. From 1960 to 1980, a period when organized labor commanded far more influence, the average annual total, McCartin said, was 282.

The Labor Department reported in January that the percentage of workers who were union members rose 0.5 percentage point last year to 10.8%. And that was due mainly to fewer union workers losing jobs during the pandemic than nonunion workers. Union membership has fallen from 20% of the work force in 1983, the last year for which comparable data is available.

Lagging wages have been a sore point for unions for years. Worker productivity has grown faster than average pay for four decades, McCartin noted, with the benefits going disproportionately to executives and corporations, not rank-and-file employees.

"The very emergence of organizing efforts," he said of unions, "is likely to prod employers to try to get ahead of the curve by offering incentives intended to take the wind out of organizing efforts."

That said, some experts say it's far from clear that any leverage that workers may now be gaining will endure. As the economy began to emerge from the pandemic, businesses were opening faster than people were returning to work. But Tilly, the UCLA professor, suggested that the job market is likely to slow in the coming months — and once it does, workers may lose some bargaining power.

"As long as the economy is growing — and growing at a relatively vigorous pace — that's going to continue helping workers, and for that matter dealing unions a better hand, too," Tilly said. "But we are not necessarily in a new era that's going to look exactly like it has for the last few months."

Krisher reported from Detroit.

Follow AP coverage of how the coronavirus pandemic is transforming the economy at: <https://apnews.com/hub/changing-economy>

Shortages of supplies and workers will delay Gulf rebuilding

By PAUL WISEMAN and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Joe Sobol, owner of Big Easy Construction in New Orleans, has bad news for homeowners who've been calling about roofs damaged by Hurricane Ida or to get an update on renovations that were scheduled before the storm ripped through the area.

The job will cost a lot more than usual — and take much longer, too.

Ida slammed into the Gulf Coast — then took its destruction to the Northeast — at a time when building contractors were already grappling with severe shortages of workers and depleted supply chains. The damage inflicted by Ida has magnified those challenges.

The struggle to find enough skilled workers and materials will likely drive up costs, complicate planning and delay reconstruction for months.

"My expectation," said Ali Wolf, chief economist at the real estate research firm Zonda, "is that it only gets worse from here."

Consider that Lake Charles, Louisiana, 200 miles west of New Orleans, still hasn't recovered from the damage left when Hurricane Laura tore through the area a year ago.

The challenges facing construction companies stem from what happened after the nation endured a brutal but brief recession when the viral pandemic erupted in March 2020: The economy rebounded far faster and stronger than anyone expected. Businesses of all kinds were caught off-guard by a surge in customer demand that flowed from an increasingly robust economic recovery.

Workers and supplies were suddenly in short supply. For months now across the economy, businesses have been scrambling to acquire enough supplies, restock their shelves and recall workers they had furloughed during the recession.

Construction companies have been particularly affected. Among building executives Zonda surveyed last month, 93% complained of supply shortages. Seventy-four percent said they lacked enough workers.

And that was before Ida struck.

"Natural disasters do cause a strain on building materials, reconstruction materials and on labor," Wolf said. "The difference today is that the entire supply chain has been battered even before Ida's occurrence. You really have all these things hitting at the exact same time. Frankly, the last thing the supply chain needed was extra strain."

A result is that the cost of materials and supplies has been surging. Combined prices for windows, doors, roofing and other building products jumped 13% in the first six months of this year, according to Labor Department data. Before 2020, by contrast, such aggregate prices would typically rise a bit more than 1% annually, on average, in the first six months of a year.

Prices for steel mill products were up more than twofold in July from a year earlier. Gypsum products, which are needed for drywall, partitions, ceiling tiles and the like, were up 22%.

Henry D'Esposito, who leads construction research at the real estate services company JLL, said the toughest challenge in rebuilding now is the delays in acquiring drywall, glass, steel, aluminum and other materials.

"A lot of the materials that you would need for any project and especially something this urgent — you're not able to get on site for weeks or months," D'Esposito said.

Sobol, in the course of his career, has ridden out some of the biggest hurricanes to strike Louisiana, including Betsy in 1965, Camille in 1979, Katrina in 2005 and Ida last week. On Friday, he received a text from a client who had hired Big Easy for home renovations. The client wanted to know whether the initial cost estimate still stood.

"I said, 'You can probably add 10%,'" Sobol said.

And now the project will likely take nine months instead of six.

"We're having to jump through hoops," said Robert Maddox, owner of Hahn Roofing in Boyce, Louisiana, 200 miles northwest of New Orleans. "We're having to pay more for labor. We're having to pay more for supplies. We're having to bring supplies in."

The insurance companies that are footing the bill for many of the hurricane repairs, Maddox said, can

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pose an additional burden.

"I've spent more time fighting with insurance companies over prices than I did roofing houses," he said. Jacob Hodges, co-owner of a family roofing business in Houma, Louisiana, complains that shingles are in such short supply that it's hard to buy them in the same color consistently. One day, they're available only in black; the next day, only gray.

Hodges takes what he can get. So do his customers, who are desperate to have their roofs patched up or replaced after the storm.

Then there's the labor shortage.

Among workers in short supply are framers, who build, install and maintain foundations, floors and door and window frames; carpenters; electricians; plumbers; and heating and air-conditioning specialists.

"Workers — they have the power," said Wolf, the economist at Zonda. "They can go where they can make the most money. So if you need access to workers, you're going to have to pony up."

Maddox said typical pay for roofers has soared 20% over the past year or so. Some can earn \$400 a day.

"If you don't pay them," he said, "someone else will."

In normal times, demand for their services was so uneven that roofers often split their time working for different contractors.

"Now, we all need them," Hodges said.

Making matters worse, the power is still out in many places, gasoline is in short supply and the Gulf Coast weather is sweltering.

With nowhere to stay, workers involved in reconstruction have to drive in from afar. Maddox said he has roofers commuting in from Lake Charles, a three-hour drive from the hurricane zone.

"We're losing half our time driving," he said.

He wishes that hotels that have running water would reopen — even without electricity — so that workers would have a place to stay.

"Those guys don't mind cold showers," he said.

Weighing the magnitude of the hurricane damage against the shortage of supplies and workers, Hodges envisions a prolonged, grinding period of reconstruction from Ida.

"To get everything back like it was," he said, "you're talking ... well, we'll probably be working on this this time next year."

Wiseman reported from Washington, Veiga from Los Angeles.

Florida gunman killed 4, including mom still holding baby

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

A man wearing full body armor fatally shot four people, including a mother and the 3-month-old baby she was cradling, and engaged in a massive gunfight with police and deputies before he was wounded and surrendered in Lakeland, Florida, a sheriff said Sunday. An 11-year-old girl who was shot seven times survived.

Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd said during a press conference that even after 33-year-old Bryan Riley was arrested Sunday morning, he was so aggressive that he tried to wrestle a gun from police as he lay on his hospital gurney.

Judd said Riley, a former Marine who served as a sharpshooter in both Iraq and Afghanistan, seemed to have targeted his victims at random and appeared to be suffering from mental health issues. Judd said Riley's girlfriend told authorities Riley had been slowly unraveling for weeks and repeatedly told her that he could communicate directly with God.

"They begged for their lives and I killed them anyway," Judd said Riley told them during an interrogation.

Investigators said preliminary evidence shows 40-year-old Justice Gleason just happened to be an unlucky stranger out mowing his lawn Saturday night when Riley drove by his home in Lakeland, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) east of Tampa, saying God told him to stop because Gleason's daughter was going

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to commit suicide.

A second, unidentified person also confronted Riley, telling him that story wasn't true and warned they'd call police if he didn't leave, Judd said. He referred to the person as a victim but declined to clarify which one.

Authorities responded to the scene but never found Riley.

About nine hours later, around 4:30 a.m. Sunday, Riley returned to the home, laying out glowsticks to create a path leading to the house to draw officers "into an ambush," Judd said.

Randomly, a lieutenant far in the distance heard popping noises and immediately put the agency on active-shooter mode, bringing all state and local law enforcement in the area to the scene.

Following the sounds of gunfire, authorities arrived at the home and found Riley's white truck ablaze and an unarmed Riley outside, dressed in camouflage.

Riley immediately ran inside, where authorities heard another round of gunfire, "a woman scream and a baby whimper," Judd said.

Officers tried to enter the front of the house, but it was barricaded. When they circled to the back, they encountered Riley, who appeared to have put on full body armor including head and knee coverings and a bulletproof vest.

Authorities exchanged heavy gunfire, with dozens "if not hundreds of rounds" fired, before Riley retreated back into the home, according to the sheriff.

Everything fell silent, Judd said, until a helicopter unit alerted authorities on the ground that Riley was coming out. He had been shot once and was ready to surrender.

Meanwhile, officers heard cries for help inside the home, but were unsure whether there were additional shooters and feared the home was booby-trapped. A brave sergeant rushed in and grabbed the 11-year-old girl who had been shot at least seven times.

She told deputies there were three dead people inside, Judd said, adding that she was rushed into surgery and was expected to survive.

Deputies sent robots into the home to check for explosives and other traps. When it was clear, they found the bodies of Gleason; the 33-year-old mother; the baby; and the baby's 62-year-old grandmother, who was in a separate home nearby. Authorities released only Gleason's name, and did not say if or how he was related to the other victims.

Authorities declined to say how many times the victims had been shot or where they were in the home, but said they were all hiding and huddling in fear. The family dog also was shot to death.

Authorities said Riley's girlfriend of four years, whom he lived with, had been cooperative and was shocked, saying he was never violent but suffered from PTSD and had become increasingly erratic.

She said he'd spent the previous week on what he called a mission from God, stockpiling supplies that he said were for Hurricane Ida victims, including \$1,000 worth of cigars.

"Prior to this morning, this guy was a war hero. He fought for his country in Afghanistan and Iraq," said Judd. "And this morning he's a cold-blooded killer."

Riley, who had no criminal history, also told authorities he was on methamphetamines. His vehicle had also been stocked with supplies for a gunfight, authorities said, including bleeding control kits.

While being treated at the hospital, Riley jumped up and tried to grab an officer's gun.

"They had to fight with him again in the emergency room," Judd said, adding that Riley was ultimately tied down and medicated.

He is expected to recover and will be transferred to jail to face charges.

"The big question that all of us has is, 'Why?'" State Attorney Brian Haas said. "We will not know today or maybe ever."

This story corrects a reference to the number of people killed. There were four, not three. It also clarifies a reference to one of victims. The infant's grandmother was 62 years old and lived in a nearby home.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 7, the 250th day of 2021. There are 115 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 7, 1977, the Panama Canal treaties, calling for the U.S. to eventually turn over control of the waterway to Panama, were signed in Washington by President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian leader Omar Torrijos (toh-REE'-hohs).

On this date:

In 1812, the Battle of Borodino took place as French troops clashed with Russian forces outside Moscow. (The battle, ultimately won by Russia, was commemorated by composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky with his "1812 Overture.")

In 1936, rock-and-roll legend Buddy Holly was born Charles Hardin Holley in Lubbock, Texas.

In 1940, Nazi Germany began its eight-month blitz of Britain during World War II with the first air attack on London.

In 1972, the International Olympic Committee banned Vince Matthews and Wayne Collett of the U.S. from further competition for talking to each other on the victory stand in Munich during the playing of the "Star-Spangled Banner" after winning the gold and silver medals in the 400-meter run.

In 1986, Desmond Tutu was installed as the first Black clergyman to lead the Anglican Church in southern Africa.

In 1996, rapper Tupac Shakur was shot and mortally wounded on the Las Vegas Strip; he died six days later.

In 2005, police and soldiers went house to house in New Orleans to try to coax the last stubborn hold-outs into leaving the city shattered by Hurricane Katrina.

In 2007, Osama bin Laden appeared in a video for the first time in three years, telling Americans they should convert to Islam if they wanted the war in Iraq to end.

In 2008, troubled mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were placed in government conservatorship.

In 2015, Hillary Clinton, interviewed by The Associated Press during a campaign swing through Iowa, said she did not need to apologize for using a private email account and server while at the State Department because "what I did was allowed."

In 2017, one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded in Mexico struck off the country's southern coast, toppling hundreds of buildings and killing at least 90 people. (A deadlier quake would strike central Mexico nearly two weeks later.)

In 2019, President Donald Trump said he had canceled a secret weekend meeting at Camp David with Taliban and Afghan leaders, just days before the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, after a bombing in Kabul that killed 12 people, including an American soldier.

Ten years ago: The latest in a series of Republican presidential debates brought together Mitt Romney, Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Jon Huntsman, Ron Paul, and Rick Santorum in Simi Valley, California. A private Russian jet carrying a top ice hockey team slammed into a riverbank moments after takeoff from the airport near the western city of Yaroslavl, killing 44 people. (Investigators blamed pilot error.)

Five years ago: In back-to-back appearances, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton confronted their perceived weaknesses during a national security forum in New York, with Clinton, who went first, arguing that her email practices did not expose questionable judgment while Trump defended his preparedness to be commander in chief. President Barack Obama, during a visit to Laos, pledged to help to clear away the 80 million unexploded bombs the U.S. dropped on the Southeast Asian country decades earlier.

One year ago: Many big Labor Day gatherings were canceled across the U.S. as health authorities pleaded with people to keep their distance from others so as not to cause another surge in coronavirus cases like the one that followed Memorial Day. The mayor of Louisville, Kentucky, announced that Yvette Gentry

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would serve as interim police chief; she was the first Black woman to lead the department, which had been heavily criticized since officers fatally shot Breonna Taylor in March. India's increasing coronavirus caseload made the Asian giant the world's second-worst-hit country behind the United States. About 80% of the small eastern Washington farming town of Malden was leveled by flames from a fast-moving wildfire.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz musician Sonny Rollins is 91. Singer Gloria Gaynor is 78. Singer Alfa Anderson (Chic) is 75. Actor Susan Blakely is 73. Rock musician Dennis Thompson (MC5) is 73. Actor Julie Kavner is 71. Rock singer Chrissie Hynde (The Pretenders) is 70. Rock musician Benmont Tench (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers) is 68. Actor Corbin Bernsen is 67. Actor Michael Emerson is 67. Pianist Michael Feinstein is 65. Singer/songwriter Diane Warren is 65. Singer Margot Chapman is 64. Actor J. Smith-Cameron is 64. Actor W. Earl Brown is 58. Actor Toby Jones is 55. Actor-comedian Leslie Jones (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 54. Model-actor Angie Everhart is 52. Actor Diane Farr is 52. Country singer Butter (Trailer Choir) is 51. Actor Monique Gabriela Curnen is 51. Actor Tom Everett Scott is 51. Rock musician Chad Sexton (311) is 51. Actor Shannon Elizabeth is 48. Actor Oliver Hudson is 45. Actor Devon Sawa (SAH'-wuh) is 43. Actor JD Pardo is 42. Actor Benjamin Hollingsworth (TV: "Code Black") is 37. Actor Alyssa Diaz (TV: "Ray Donovan"; "Zoo") is 36. Singer-musician Wes Willis (Rush of Fools) is 35. Actor Evan Rachel Wood is 34. Actor Jonathan Majors is 32. Actor Ian Chen (TV: "Fresh Off the Boat") is 15.