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Upcoming Events

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.



Tuesday, Sept. 14

Boys Golf at Redfield, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Sept. 16

Boys Golf at Dakota Magic Golf Course, 11 a.m.
Cross Country at Lee Park Golf Course, 4 p.m.
Volleyball hosting Mobridge-Pollock: 7th/C at 4 p.m., 8th/JV at 5 p.m., Varsity to follow

Friday, Sept. 17

Homecoming Parade, 1 p.m.
TigerPalooza at GHS Gym, 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Football hosting Mobridge-Pollock, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 18

Girls Soccer at Garretson, 1 p.m.
Boys Soccer at Freeman Academy, 5 p.m.
Groton Fly-In/Drive-In at Groton Airport

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Bearcats tame Tigers at the net

The Webster Area volleyball team defeated Groton Area in four sets with action being played in Webster on Tuesday.

Webster Area won the first set, 25-22. The set was tied four times with three lead changes before Webster Area took a 12-9 lead en route to the win. Anna Fjeldheim had a kill and two ace serves, Aspen Johnson had a block and Madeline Fliehs had four kills and an ace serve in that set.

The second set was close for the first half with the game being tied eight times and there were six lead changes. Groton held a 10-9 lead, but then the Bearcats went on a five point run and took control of the game, winning it 25-15. Sydney Leicht had an ace and a kill, Megan Fliehs had a kill and Madeline Fliehs had two kills in that set.

Webster Area had the early lead in the third set, jumping out to a 10-4 lead. The Tigers battled back and tied it at 14 and took a 15-14 lead. Webster Area tied it at 19 and 20 before Groton scored four straight points and then went on to win, 25-22. Anna Fjeldheim had a block, Emma Schinkel and Megan Fliehs each had a kill, Alyssa Thaler and Allyssa Locke each had an ace serve, Sydney Leicht had two kills and an ace serve and Madeline Fliehs had three kills.

Groton Area continued its rally into the fourth set, taking a 12-5 lead, but then the Bearcats got on fire and at one point, scored six straight points to take a 16-14 lead and they went on to win, 25-21. Anna Fjeldheim had a block, Emma Schinkel had a kill, Megan Fliehs had a kill and a block and Madeline Fliehs had two kills, an ace serve and a block.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-13, 24-26 and 15-11.

The Tigers lost the C match, 25-10 and 26-24. In that match, Emma Kutter had four kills, two blocks and an ace serve. Ava Wienk had three kills, Ashley Johnson had two kills, Carly Gilbert two ace serves, Cadence Feist and Abby Jensen each had an ace serve and Kayla Lehr and Tali Wright each had a kill.

Groton Area won the eight grade match, 25-23 and 25-17. The seventh graders also won, 25-17, 21-25 and 15-11.

Groton Area will host Sisseton on Thursday with a full slate of matches starting at 5 p.m.

The C match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the Groton Chiropractic Clinic. The varsity match was also broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc., and Bary Keith at Harr Motors.

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Aberdeen Gun Club summer trap league completed their season



Pictured above is the runner up in their division, Base Kamp Lodge team. L-R Lon Gellhaus, Bruce Babcock, Gentry Gauer, Brett Christianson, and Tom Mahan. (Not pictured is Greg Dennert.)

Summer Trap league Chairmen, Swede Hanson, congratulates Bruce Babcock as the league most improved.





GHS Homecoming Royalty Candidates

Front left: Maddie Bjerke, Madeline Flihs, Emilie Thurston, Megan Flihs, and Trista Keith
Back left: Seth Johnson, Jackson Cogley, Jordan Bjerke, Kaden Kurtz, and Pierce Kettering

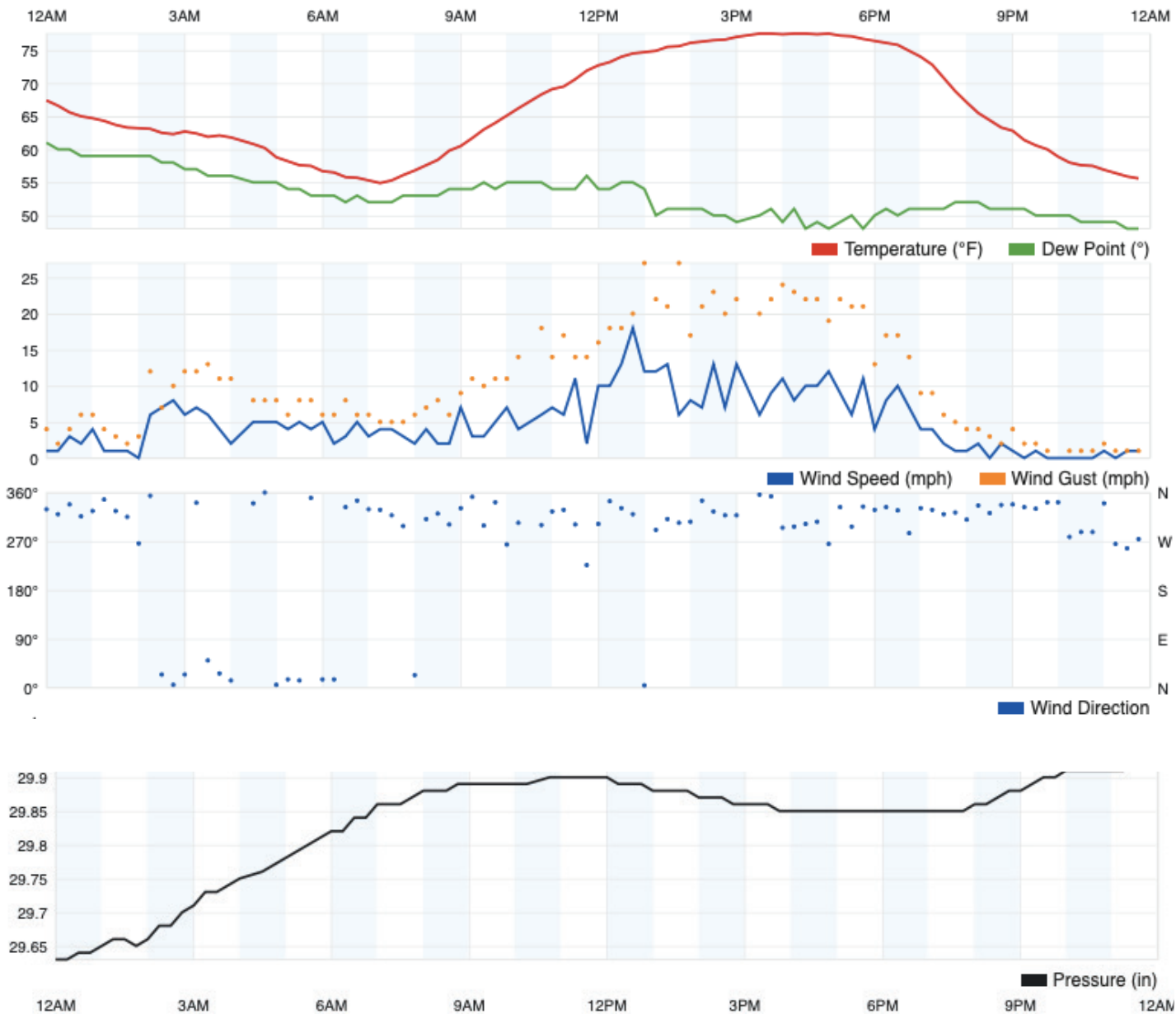
Coronation is at 7:00 on Monday, September 13, 2021

Homecoming Theme: Music-Genres

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 76 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 47 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 76 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 53 °F

Friday



Sunny

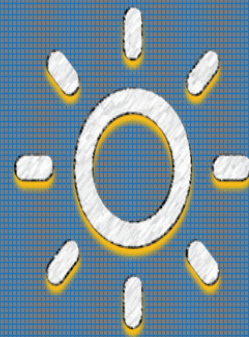
High: 83 °F

Today



Sunny and Mild
Highs: 70s to around 80°

Thursday



Mostly Sunny & Warmer
Highs: 74-92°

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



weather.gov/abr

9/8/2021 3:04 AM

A ridge of high pressure both aloft and at the surface will keep conditions dry and temperatures mild to warm. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

September 8, 1959:

High winds and areas of blowing dust occurred across parts of central South Dakota from Walworth to Mellette. During the evening, wind gusts of 40 to 50 mph affected the counties either side of the Missouri River. Low visibility in blowing dust was blamed for a four-car crash near Pierre, injuring five persons, another accident near Mobridge injured one person. Barn buildings were blown over or unroofed near Delmont in Douglas County. Lightning started grass fires and burned several thousand acres of rangeland in Mellette and Lyman counties. In the late afternoon, high winds associated with a cold front gusted to 70 mph and destroyed six buildings on a farm north and east of Reliance. At 500 pm, winds ripped a camper off a pickup truck 12 miles south of Pierre. Winds were measured at 68 mph at Pierre. At 6 pm CDT winds gusting to 70 mph damaged many trees in the Watertown area, power lines, and some buildings. A trailer and truck, twelve miles north of Watertown, were blown over while traveling on Interstate 29. A large oil tank was also destroyed.

1900 - The greatest weather disaster in U.S. records occurred when a hurricane struck Galveston TX. A tide fifteen feet high washed over the island demolishing or carrying away buildings, and drowning more than 6000 persons. The hurricane destroyed more than 3600 houses, and total damage was more than thirty million dollars. Winds to 120 mph, and a twenty foot storm surge accompanied the hurricane. Following the storm, the surf was three hundred feet inland from the former water line. The hurricane claimed another 1200 lives outside of the Galveston area. (8th-9th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1925: In September 1925, South Carolina was in the middle of one of the most widespread and disastrous droughts in the state's history. The NWS Co-op station in Calhoun Falls reported 11 days above 100°F with a maximum temperature of 111°F on this day.

1987 - A tropical depression off the coast of South Carolina brought another round of heavy rain to the Middle Atlantic Coast Region and the Upper Ohio Valley. Showers and thunderstorms produced extremely heavy rain in eastern Pennsylvania, where flooding caused more than 55 million dollars across a seven county area. The afternoon high of 97 degrees at Miami FL was a record for the month of September. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Eighteen cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Roanoke VA with a reading of 42 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced very heavy rain in the central U.S. Thunderstorms during the late morning and afternoon produced five to nine inches of rain around Lincoln NE, with an unofficial total of eleven inches near Holmes Park. Up to six and a half inches of rain soaked northern and western Iowa. Eighty to ninety percent of the homes in Shenandoah IA, where 5.89 inches of rain was received, reported basement flooding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: A severe thunderstorm developed over the southern end of the Las Vegas Valley in Nevada. The storm moved north bringing damaging winds and heavy rain mainly across the eastern half of the metro area. Henderson Executive Airport recorded wind gusts of 80 mph. Air traffic control personnel temporarily evacuated the airport tower. Approximately 15 homes and trailers in Moapa were severely damaged by thunderstorm winds estimated at 80 to 90 mph.

2012: Severe storms impacted the New York City area, forcing a delay of the United States Open. A tornado hit a beach club in Queens, and another brought damage to Canarsie, Brooklyn, New York.

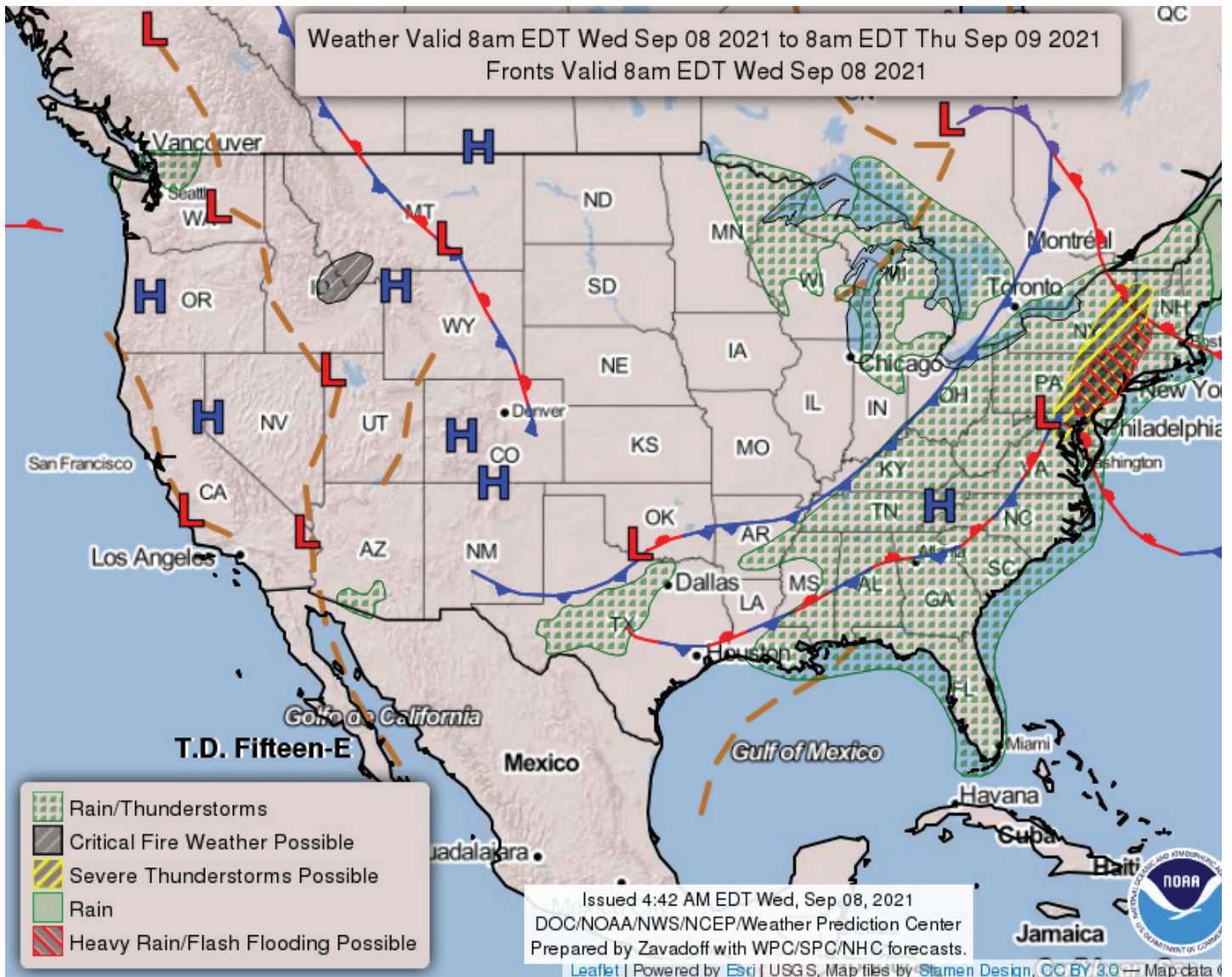
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 78 °F at 3:54 PM
Low Temp: 55 °F at 7:10 AM
Wind: 27 mph at 12:53 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 101° in 1933
Record Low: 32° in 1992
Average High: 78°F
Average Low: 50°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.54
Precip to date in Sept.: 1.77
Average Precip to date: 16.88
Precip Year to Date: 14.91
Sunset Tonight: 7:58:13 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:02:46 AM





PAIN MANAGEMENT

"This is going to hurt me more than it does you," said the father to his young son as he took him from the family room for interrupting our conversation. I'd heard that statement many times and always wondered what the parent wanted the child to understand when it was used. If it was used to redirect a child's behavior and teach him or her an important lesson about life, why not say so? That's what the author of Psalm 94 meant when he wrote, "If God disciplines you, consider yourself blessed" or "full of blessings!"

To "discipline" in Scripture means "to teach." Discipline is not punishment as we understand it - though it may involve suffering and loss, disappointment and feelings of rejection. When God disciplines us, it is His method to bring us back to live within His commandments and laws and the teachings of Jesus. It is about "getting our attention" when we are overcome by temptation and fall into sin. It's about being confronted by God when He corrects us for allowing the "things or the people or the attractions of this world" to take His place. It is about worshipping those things rather than the Creator of those things. It's about bringing us back to reality - God's reality

One of the blessings of discipline is that it has long term benefits for the Christian. If, in His mercy, He brings loss or suffering to teach us a lesson today, and if we are willing to learn from the loss or suffering when it happens, then we will be spared from greater losses or more suffering in the future - and bring more honor to Him.

Prayer: May we understand, Father, that when You discipline us, it is a sign of Your love and care for us. May we learn from You to live for You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord, the one you teach from your law; Psalm 94:12

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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

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Langford, 25-14, 25-8, 25-14

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Waubay/Summit, 25-16, 25-20, 25-18

Avon def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-19, 25-16, 25-18

Bridgewater-Emery def. Menno, 25-12, 25-12, 25-14

Britton-Hecla def. Wyndmere-Lidgerwood, N.D., 25-23, 25-23, 22-25, 27-25

Castlewood def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-10, 25-8, 25-6

Chester def. Baltic, 25-23, 25-22, 25-19

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte def. McLaughlin, 25-12, 25-14, 25-16

Colman-Egan def. Estelline/Hendricks, 25-18, 25-12, 25-11

Colome def. Lyman, 25-18, 26-24, 25-19

Dakota Valley def. Beresford, 25-12, 25-8, 25-6

DeSmet def. Deuel, 24-23, 18-25, 25-17, 25-11

Deubrook def. Flandreau, 25-14, 25-21, 21-25, 25-19

Elk Point-Jefferson def. West Central, 25-22, 25-13, 21-25, 25-17

Ethan def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 21-25, 25-20, 25-22, 25-19

Faulkton def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-16, 25-19, 25-15

Florence/Henry def. Wilmot, 25-11, 25-10, 25-8

Gayville-Volin def. Scotland, 26-24, 25-18, 25-19

Hankinson, N.D. def. Sisseton, 25-11, 25-13, 25-16

Harding County def. Bowman County, N.D., 25-17, 20-25, 25-22, 25-22

Highmore-Harrold def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-19, 25-16, 25-14

Hill City def. Douglas, 25-10, 25-5, 25-14

Hot Springs def. Red Cloud, 25-14, 25-15, 25-17

Howard def. Hanson, 25-14, 25-21, 25-17

Huron def. Watertown, 27-25, 25-19, 23-25, 25-19

Ipswich def. Sully Buttes, 25-17, 21-25, 25-16, 25-17

Lead-Deadwood def. Edgemont, 25-20, 25-17, 25-22

Lemmon def. McIntosh, 16-25, 14-25, 25-9, 25-13, 15-7

McCook Central/Montrose def. Sioux Valley, 26-24, 25-18, 25-20

Milbank def. Ortonville, Minn., 25-17, 25-14, 21-25, 24-26, 15-7

Mobridge-Pollock def. North Central Co-Op, 25-14, 25-7, 25-19

Parkston def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-12, 25-15, 25-6

Philip def. Jones County, 25-8, 16-25, 25-16, 25-23

Pierre def. Mitchell, 25-14, 25-17, 18-25, 25-27, 15-8

Platte-Geddes def. Wagner, 11-25, 25-20, 22-25, 25-20, 15-9

Potter County def. Timber Lake, 25-14, 25-19, 25-19

Rapid City Christian def. Spearfish, 25-12, 25-23, 25-13

Redfield def. Leola/Frederick, 25-15, 25-19, 25-20

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-23, 15-25, 25-14, 17-25, 15-6

Santee, Neb. def. Marty Indian, 25-17, 25-11, 25-10

Sioux Falls Christian def. Madison, 3-1

Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Brandon Valley, 25-19, 25-22, 25-20

Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Yankton, 16-25, 25-15, 25-14, 25-21

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Sioux Falls Washington def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-19, 25-15, 25-21
St. Thomas More def. Belle Fourche, 25-19, 25-15, 26-24
Sturgis Brown def. Custer, 25-16, 27-25, 25-22
Tea Area def. Lennox, 18-25, 25-8, 14-25, 25-21, 17-15
Vermillion def. Bon Homme, 25-22, 33-31, 25-17
Viborg-Hurley def. Canistota, 3-2
Warner def. Miller, 25-20, 25-10, 25-17
Webster def. Groton Area, 25-22, 25-15, 22-25, 25-21
Wessington Springs def. Mitchell Christian, 25-8, 25-14, 25-13

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

Information from: ScoreStream Inc., <http://ScoreStream.com>

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

15-17-25-32-53, Mega Ball: 12, Megaplier: 3

(fifteen, seventeen, twenty-five, thirty-two, fifty-three; Mega Ball: twelve; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$345 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$388 million

South Dakota governor orders restrictions on abortion meds

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Tuesday issued an executive order to restrict access to abortion medication and make it clear that medicine-induced abortions fall within state law requiring an in-person consultation with a physician.

Amid a nationwide push among Republicans to outlaw most abortions, Noem directed the state Department of Health to create rules that abortion-inducing drugs can only be prescribed or dispensed by a state-licensed physician after an in-person examination. South Dakota law already places that requirement on doctors, but the Republican governor's order was made in anticipation that the Food and Drug Administration later this year will allow abortion medications to be dispensed through the mail or virtual pharmacies.

Access to abortion medication has become a pressing issue after last week a Texas law took effect banning abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity, usually around six weeks and before many women know they're pregnant.

About 39% of abortions in South Dakota last year were done through medication, according to the Department of Health. The state has one clinic that regularly performs abortions. Opponents of bans on telemedicine abortions say the method is safe, and outlawing them would have a disproportionate effect on rural residents who face long drives to the nearest abortion clinic.

"Having an abortion is a private medical decision, one that is protected under the U.S. Constitution, and it's disappointing that Gov. Noem continues to insert herself into the patient-doctor relationship," said Janna Farley, the communications director of the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota. "It's clear that the attacks on our abortion rights are not letting up in South Dakota."

Noem argues in her order that medicine-induced abortions can be life-threatening and that she made the order in the interest of women's health and safety.

Physicians, under South Dakota law, are already required to meet with a pregnant woman and perform an

examination before scheduling a surgical or medical abortion. Women are required to wait 72 hours before the procedure. The law also requires abortions after the 12th week of pregnancy to be performed in a hospital and outlaws abortions entirely after the 22nd week of pregnancy unless it is a medical emergency.

Noem's order blocks the drugs from being delivered through the mail or other delivery services and outlaws the drugs from being provided in schools or on state property. It also requires licenses for any clinics that only prescribe medicine for abortions and require more stringent reporting on medicine-induced abortions and any health complications related to them.

Similar restrictions, such as an Ohio law that was passed this year, have been blocked by courts from taking effect.

In response to the Texas law taking effect last week, President Joe Biden has vowed to look at "what steps the federal government can take to ensure that women in Texas have access to safe and legal abortions."

Noem's order makes it clear she expects the Legislature to make her order into law next year. She charged that the Biden administration was moving to leverage telemedicine abortions to undermine state laws and make it easier to have an abortion.

"They are working right now to make it easier to end the life of an unborn child via telemedicine abortion," Noem said in a statement. "That is not going to happen in South Dakota."

Meat, farm workers to get \$600 grants in new \$700M aid plan

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Meatpacking workers and farm workers who were severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic will be eligible to get grants of up to \$600 per person as part of a new \$700 million aid program the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced Tuesday.

Officials said the grants are meant to defray some of the costs workers bore as many of them bought their own protective equipment or took unpaid leave as the virus tore through their industries even as they were required to keep showing up for work.

"While the rest of America could work from home, these brave men and women continued to show up for work every single day to ensure that we all food on our tables that we could eat," said Marc Perrone, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers union. "Meatpacking plants experienced some of the most deadly COVID-19 outbreaks when the pandemic first came around and there were workers that are deserving of our help, and our thanks and our support."

Last spring, the virus tore through meatpacking plants, where workers stand shoulder-to-shoulder on production lines. The UFCW union, which represents roughly 80% of the nation's beef and pork workers and 33% of its poultry workers, estimates that at least 132 meatpacking workers died of COVID-19 and at least 22,000 workers have been infected or exposed to the virus.

At the height of the outbreaks last spring, the meat industry's production fell to about 60% of normal levels as a number of major plants were forced to close temporarily for deep cleaning and safety upgrades or were forced to work at slower speeds because of a shortage of workers.

For instance, more than 1,300 Smithfield workers were sickened and four died last year when the virus rampaged the company's Sioux Falls, South Dakota, plant. At a major pork plant in Waterloo, Iowa, more than 1,000 of the Tyson Foods plant's 2,800 workers were infected and at least six died.

"I think it's important that we recognize that doing this essential work has also come not only at a potential physical risk but also at a financial risk," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. "Many of these workers have had to out of their pocket pay for masks or personal protective equipment during the course of this pandemic. Some have had to take unpaid medical leave."

The grants to workers will be handed out by an assortment of nonprofit groups that apply to work with the government. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said he hoped to keep administrative costs and requirements to apply for the money to a minimum so more workers could be helped.

"I'm hopeful that we'll be able to provide as much help to as many people as possible," said Vilsack.

A small part of the aid package worth \$20 million will provide grants to grocery store workers as part

of a pilot program.

In addition to the grants to workers, Vilsack said the USDA would soon be announcing another \$700 million aid program to send money to food processors, farmers markets, distributors and other food vendors affected by the pandemic.

Avera Health requires vaccinations for employees, volunteers

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Health officials on Tuesday reported two additional deaths from COVID-19 and the largest number of infected people on ventilators at South Dakota hospitals since last year.

According to the state Department of Health, there are 453 new infections. Tuesday's report doesn't include Labor Day or results from weekend testing which will be reported on Wednesday.

The new cases bring the total number of positive test results to 134,308. One person who died was in his or her 50s and the other in the 70s. One was a resident of a long-term care facility.

Fifty-eight of 213 people hospitalized were in intensive care, and 45 were on ventilators. Twenty-nine of the patients on ventilators were at Monument Health's Rapid City hospital.

Meanwhile, Sioux Falls-based Avera Health announced Tuesday that it will require full vaccination for its physicians, employees and volunteers by Dec. 1. The policy also includes students with rotations at Avera, contracted workers and vendors.

"As a health care ministry, Avera is called upon to provide a safe and protective environment for our patients, their families and our employees. This is consistent with our mission and values," said David Erickson, chief medical and innovation officer in the news release.

The majority of Avera employees are already vaccinated for COVID-19, and a majority of employees support requiring vaccination, the regional health care system said.

Avera Health has more than 300 locations in 100 communities throughout five states, including South Dakota and North Dakota.

Silicon Valley finds remote work is easier to begin than end

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writers

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Technology companies that led the charge into remote work as the pandemic unfurled are confronting a new challenge: how, when and even whether they should bring long-isolated employees back to offices that have been designed for teamwork.

"I thought this period of remote work would be the most challenging year-and-a-half of my career, but it's not," said Brent Hyder, the chief people officer for business software maker Salesforce and its roughly 65,000 employees worldwide. "Getting everything started back up the way it needs to be is proving to be even more difficult."

That transition has been complicated by the rapid spread of the delta variant, which has scrambled the plans many tech companies had for bringing back most of their workers near or after Labor Day weekend. Microsoft has pushed those dates back to October while Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon and a growing list of others have already decided wait until next year.

Given how they set the tone for remote work, tech companies' return-to-office policies will likely have ripple effects across other industries. Employers' next steps could redefine how and where people work, predicts Laura Boudreau, a Columbia University assistant economics professor who studies workplace issues.

"We have moved beyond the theme of remote work being a temporary thing," Boudreau says. The longer the pandemic has stretched on, she says, the harder it's become to tell employees to come back to the office, particularly full time.

Because they typically revolve around digital and online products, most tech jobs are tailor made for remote work. Yet most major tech companies insist that their employees should be ready to work in the office two or three days each week after the pandemic is over.

The main reason: Tech companies have long believed that employees clustered together in a physical

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space will swap ideas and spawn innovations that probably wouldn't have happened in isolation. That's one reason tech titans have poured billions of dollars into corporate campuses interspersed with alluring common areas meant to lure employees out of their cubicles and into "casual collisions" that turn into brainstorming sessions.

But the concept of "water cooler innovation" may be overblown, says Christy Lake, chief people officer for business software maker Twilio.

"There is no data that supports that really happens in real life, and yet we all subscribe to it," Lake says. "You can't put the genie back in the bottle and tell people, 'Oh you have to be back in the office or innovation won't happen.'"

Twilio isn't bringing back most of its roughly 6,300 employees back to its offices until early next year at the earliest, and plans to allow most of them to figure how frequently they should come in.

This hybrid approach permitting employees to toggle between remote and in-office work has been widely embraced in the technology industry, particularly among the largest companies with the biggest payrolls.

Nearly two-thirds of the more than 200 companies responding to a mid-July survey in the tech-centric Bay said they are expecting their workers to come into the office two or three days each week. Before the pandemic, 70% of these employers required their workers to be in the office, according to the Bay Area Council, a business policy group that commissioned the poll.

Even Zoom, the Silicon Valley videoconferencing service that saw its revenue and stock price soar during the pandemic, says most of its employees still prefer to come into the office part of the time. "There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to returning to the office," Kelly Steckelberg, Zoom's chief financial officer, recently wrote in a blog post.

But the biggest tech companies, which have profited even more than Zoom as the pandemic that made their products indispensable for many workers, aren't giving employees much choice in the matter. Apple, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft have made it clear that they want most of their workers together at least a few days each week to maintain their culture and pace of innovation.

That well-worn creed sounds like backward thinking to Ed Zitron, who runs a public relations firm representing technology companies — and which has been fully remote since it launched in 2012.

The only reason to have an office, he says, is to satisfy managers with vested interests in grouping people together "so that they can look at them and feel good about the people that they own ... so that they can enjoy that power."

Switching to hybrid work is ideal for people like Kelly Soderlund, a mother of two young children who works in offices in San Francisco and Palo Alto, California, for travel management company TripActions, which has about 1,200 employees worldwide. She couldn't wait to return when the company partially reopened its offices in June, partly because she missed the built-in buffer that her roughly one-hour commute provided between her personal and professional life.

"When I don't have that, I wake up in the morning, I start doing work and I take my kids to their camp or their daycare," Soderlund says. "And then I come back and I work and then we pick them up, make dinner and then I go back to work. So, it feels like it's just work all the time."

Soderlund believes being together in an office leads to more collaboration, although she also learned from the pandemic that workers don't need to be there every day for teamwork to happen.

Camaraderie and the need to separate work from home are among the top reasons employees at business software maker Adobe Software cite for coming back to the office, said Gloria Chen, chief people officer for one of Silicon Valley's older companies. Working from home "is here to stay, but we also continue to value people coming together," she said.

The transition from the pandemic should enable smaller tech companies to adopt more flexible work-from-home policies that may help them lure away top-notch engineers from other firms more insistent on having people in the office, says Boudreau, the Columbia University scholar.

"Labor markets are relatively tight now, so employees have more bargaining chips than they have had in a while," Boudreau says.

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Ankur Dahiya, who launched his software startup RunX last year during the pandemic lockdowns, believes that remote work has helped him hire employees that otherwise may not have been candidates. The eight-worker startup rents a San Francisco office one day a week so Dahiya can meet with employees who live nearby, but other employees are in Canada, Nevada, and Oregon. The workers living outside of California have been flying in once every three months for "super productive" meetings and brainstorming, says Dahiya, who has previously worked at Facebook and Twitter.

"I've worked in offices for the last 10 years and I know there's just so much time lost," Dahiya says, recalling all the random conversations, lengthy meetings, aimless wandering, and other disruptions that seem to occur in those settings.

Twilio's Lake is hoping the remote-work experience will transform employee behavior in the office, too, once they come back. She hopes that the remote experience will have given employees a chance to better understand how their teams work.

"I think more than anything it is going to cause us to become more intentional about when, why and how we come together," she says.

Follow AP coverage of how the coronavirus pandemic is transforming the economy at: <https://apnews.com/hub/changing-economy>

9/11 artifacts share 'pieces of truth' in victims' stories

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For nearly six years, Andrea Haberman's ashen and damaged wallet lay mostly untouched in a drawer at her parents' Wisconsin home, along with a partly melted cell phone, her driver's license, credit cards, checkbook and house keys. Flecks of rust had formed on the rims of her eyeglasses, their lenses shattered and gone.

Those everyday items were the remnants of a young life that ended when a hijacked jetliner struck the north tower of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. Haberman was 25 and about to be married when she was killed while on a business trip from Chicago — her first visit to New York City.

Her belongings, still smelling of Ground Zero, evoked mostly sorrow for Haberman's family. To ease their pain, they donated the artifacts to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum.

"These are not the happy things you want to remember someone by," said Gordon Haberman, her father.

The collection of some 22,000 personal artifacts — some on display at the 9/11 museum, and others on display at other museums around the country — provide a mosaic of lost lives and stories of survival: wallets, passports, baseball gloves, shoes, clothes and rings.

"Each person who makes up part of that tally was an individual who lived a life," said Jan Ramirez, the museum's chief curator and director of collections.

"We knew that families — the people that have lost a loved one that day — were going to need to have a place, have a way, to remember the person that never came home from work, that never came home from a flight," Ramirez said.

Many of those personal effects were plucked from the ruins of what was once the Twin Towers. Other items were donated by survivors or by the families of those who perished.

A woodworking square, screwdriver, pry bar and a toolbelt represent Sean Rooney, a vice president at Aon Corp. who died in the South Tower. Rooney's essence was that of "a builder," his sister-in-law Margot Eckert said, making the carpenter's tools donated to the museum the "perfect antidote to the destruction."

Rooney had phoned his wife, Beverly Eckert, at their home in Stamford, Connecticut, after being trapped by fire and smoke on the 105th floor. He spent his last breaths recounting happier times, whispering, "I love you," as he labored for air.

His remains were never found.

Beverly died eight years later in a plane crash while traveling to her husband's high school in Buffalo, New York, to award a scholarship in his honor. Before she died, she had set aside the items she hoped

would help tell her husband's story, that of a weekend carpenter, handyman and volunteer with Habitat for Humanity.

"We have a gravesite for her, we don't have a gravesite for Sean," Eckert said. "Artifacts become very important. And artifacts are the facts that someone lived. They are the facts you can touch."

For Robert Chin's family, the story was about a love for playing softball. They recounted his first hit — a drive down the third-base line — playing for Fiduciary Trust International. To help savor the moment, his teammates scribbled congratulatory notes on the ball before presenting it to him.

Among the names on the ball were Pedro Francisco Checo and Ruben Esquilin Jr., who also died with Chin that day. That dusty softball Chin had kept at home is included among the trove of keepsakes in the 9/11 museum's collection.

Not all of the donated artifacts are on behalf of those who died. Some came from those who survived 9/11.

Linda Raisch-Lopez donated her bloodied patent leather heels to represent her will to survive on a day she ran for her life.

As she made her way down a stairwell from the 97th Floor of the South Tower, she slipped out of her heels. and walked through the debris in her bare feet, according to the museum's account. Somewhere on her way to a Hudson River pier, she had slipped back into her shoes, smearing blood on the tan leather from her cut and blistered feet.

Just a small part of the museum's collection of artifacts is ever on display because there are just too many to show at any one time. When not on display, the artifacts are stored in warehouses, including a hangar at JFK airport and across the Hudson River in New Jersey. Row after row of shelves are stacked with boxes filled with tragedy and remembrance.

"Each piece is a little part of a puzzle," Ramirez said. "Having those important, little pieces of truth, those palpable pieces of truth — those bridges to allow people to get engaged in the story — is why we do what we do and will continue to do what we do."

Associated Press journalists Carrie Antfinger in Milwaukee and Robert Bumsted in New York contributed to this report.

Bulgaria, EU's least vaccinated nation, faces deadly surge

By STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

VELIKO TARNOVO, Bulgaria (AP) — Standing outside the rundown public hospital in Bulgaria's northern town of Veliko Tarnovo, the vaccination unit's chief nurse voices a sad reality about her fellow citizens: "They don't believe in vaccines."

Bulgaria has one of the highest coronavirus death rates in the 27-nation European Union and is facing a new, rapid surge of infections due to the more infectious delta variant. Despite that, people in this Balkan nation are the most hesitant in the bloc to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Only 20% of adults in Bulgaria, which has a population of 7 million, have so far been fully vaccinated. That puts it last in the EU, which has an average of 69 % fully vaccinated.

"We are open every day," Yordanka Minekova, the chief vaccination nurse who has worked at the hospital for 35 years, told The Associated Press. "But people who want to be vaccinated are very few."

Krasimira Nikolova, a 52-year-old restaurant worker, has chosen not to get vaccinated, saying she has doubts over the effectiveness of the available vaccines.

"I don't believe vaccines work," she told the AP. "Hospitals are full of people who are vaccinated ... I already had the virus. I don't believe it's so dangerous. I have other health issues and if it was that dangerous, I would probably be dead already."

But Sibila Marinova, manager of Veliko Tarnovo's intensive care unit, says all 10 beds in its COVID-19 ICU ward are occupied and she feels angry that so many Bulgarians are refusing to get jabbed.

"100% of the ICU patients are unvaccinated," she told the AP, adding that staff shortages are only piling

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on more pressure.

Bulgaria has access to all four of the vaccines approved by the EU — Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, and Johnson&Johnson. But since the start of the pandemic, more than 19,000 people in Bulgaria have died of COVID-19, the EU's third-highest death rate, behind only the Czech Republic and Hungary. In the last week, an average of 41 people have died each day.

Bulgaria's largely failed inoculation campaign now risks putting the country's ailing health care system under serious strain.

In response, the government imposed tighter restrictions Tuesday. Restaurants and cafes must close at 11 p.m. and their tables are limited to six people. Nightclubs have been shuttered and cinemas and theaters are limited to half capacity. Outdoors sports arenas are limited to 30% capacity.

"The low vaccination rate forces us to impose these measures," Health Minister Stoycho Katsarov said.

Despite being in a vulnerable age group, 71-year-old retiree Zhelyazko Marinov doesn't want to get vaccinated.

"I think I'm healthy enough and have a good natural immunity," he said.

He gets most of his information about the vaccines from TV and Facebook, but said he could be persuaded to get vaccinated.

"If I were deprived of some rights and freedoms, I would get vaccinated," he said. "For example, if I cannot travel without a vaccine certificate."

Mariya Sharkova, a public health law specialist, believes that Bulgaria's worryingly low vaccine uptake is the result of residents' low trust in official institutions, along with fake news about the shots, political instability and a weak national vaccination campaign.

"In Bulgaria, we don't have good health literacy," she told the AP. "Many people choose to believe conspiracy theories and fake news."

Only vaccines that are mandatory in Bulgaria — such as measles, mumps and rubella — have a high uptake. Sharkova said some blame has to lie with the government's vaccination program.

"They didn't build any strategy on how to fight vaccine hesitancy," she said. "We didn't have any real information campaign for the vaccines. The ministry of health relies mainly on announcements on the ministry's website, and I don't think anyone actually goes on and reads it."

"The best policy for such hesitant countries and populations as ours are mandatory vaccines," said Sharkova, who is dismayed that national TV channels often invite vaccine-skeptic doctors to be on their programs.

But making COVID-19 vaccines mandatory could risk further polarizing the issue, she said.

Hriska Zhelyazkova, a 67-year-old military officer from the coastal city of Burgas, says she distrusts vaccines because "they were created so quickly."

"I think my body would do well if I contracted the virus," she said. "I get information from the internet, (and) read the opinions of virologists."

Still, she said she may get vaccinated if authorities slap tougher restrictions on unvaccinated people.

Back at the Veliko Tarnovo hospital, pro-vaccination drawings colored by children hang on the walls. "You are our superheroes," one caption read.

But Minekova, the vaccination nurse, isn't optimistic about the future.

"Somehow, I think it's too late," she said. "The right moment has been missed. I don't see a way right now to solve this."

Valentina Petrova contributed to this report from Burgas.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

This story has been corrected to show that Hriska Zhelyazkova is a woman, not a man.

The Latest: South Korea concerned about eroding vigilance

By The Associated Press undefined

SEOUL, South Korea – South Korea has reported more than 2,000 new cases of the coronavirus, approaching a one-day record set last month, as officials expressed concern about an erosion in citizen vigilance amid prolonged pandemic restrictions.

The 2,050 cases reported Wednesday was the sixth time the daily increase came over 2,000 in a span of a month, including a record 2,221 on Aug. 11.

The capital Seoul and the nearby metropolitan area have had the country's toughest social distancing rules short of a lockdown for nine consecutive weeks. The measures force night clubs and churches to close and prohibits private social gatherings of three or more people after 6 p.m. unless the participants are fully vaccinated.

The Health Ministry said people's exhaustion and frustration with virus restrictions are becoming an increasing challenge. Highway traffic, credit card usage and other indicators of activity and movement are all rising, said Park Hyang, a senior ministry official, during a briefing.

There's concern that transmissions would worsen during the Chuseok holidays, the Korean version of Thanksgiving that comes in two weeks.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- Bulgaria, EU's least vaccinated nation, faces deadly surge
- Idaho hospitals begin rationing health care amid COVID surge
- Read AP coverage of the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina health officials are reporting 170 ongoing COVID-19 clusters in K-12 schools or child care settings.

The state health department says school districts that don't require masks are seeing substantially more spread of the virus and hours of lost learning.

Union County Public Schools, the state's sixth largest district, had about one in eight of its more than 41,000 students under quarantine as of Friday, after the district voted down a mask requirement last month. The more than 5,200 students were placed under quarantine after 337 pupils tested positive for the virus last week.

Meanwhile, the Wake County Public School System, where masks are mandatory and which is four times larger than Union County Public Schools, has less than a fourth the number of students quarantined. Data from the Wake County district shows less than 1,300 of its more than 161,000 pupils were quarantined last week.

The weekly report state health officials updated on Tuesday shows the Union Academy Charter School in Monroe has the worst cluster in North Carolina, with 111 cases, including 98 among children. About one in 20 of the charter school's students were infected. Charter Day School in Brunswick County has the next highest cluster of 81 infected children.

ATLANTA — Another Georgia school district is switching to virtual learning, after three school bus employees died from COVID-19.

The 9,700-student Griffin-Spalding County school system made the announcement late Monday, citing a disruption in student transportation.

Districts across Georgia are struggling to line up enough drivers and monitors to keep buses running. In Savannah, some bus drivers staged a sickout for the second day on Tuesday after a similar protest Friday.

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At least 210,000 Georgia students in 54 districts and charter networks have had their school schedules disrupted because of COVID-19. Some districts have taken days off, some shifted to every-other-day schedules and some sent home individual schools or grades. That's more than 12% of Georgia's 1.7 million public school students.

The number of COVID-19 patients in Georgia hospitals remains above 6,000, the highest level since the start of the pandemic. The number of newly reported cases has decreased in recent days, although cases remain near all-time high levels.

More than 34,000 COVID-19 cases have been reported among Georgia children aged 5-17 in the two weeks ended Sept. 2, according to state data, with more than 125 infection clusters reported in K-12 schools during that period.

SEATTLE — Fans attending most pro sporting events in Seattle will soon be required to show proof they've been vaccinated against COVID-19 or that they've tested negative for the virus.

The NFL's Seahawks, MLS's Sounders, NHL's Kraken and MLB's Mariners, along with the University of Washington and Washington State University, all announced updated policies Tuesday for fans attending games this season.

The Seahawks will be the first to implement the requirements, starting with their Sept. 19 home opener against Tennessee. Fans will be required to show proof of vaccination or a negative test taken within 72 hours of the event to be granted entry.

Team president Chuck Arnold said in a statement that the measures will allow for a full stadium while keeping the experience safe.

Washington will begin an identical verification process for fans with its Sept. 25 home game against California. The Sounders will begin with their Oct. 3 match against Colorado. Washington State said its verification process will begin in October.

The Mariners said fans should plan to provide proof of vaccination for any potential postseason games the team hosts. The team also said all front office, event staff and Mariners employees at team operated facilities in the U.S. were told in late August they must be fully vaccinated by Oct. 4 as a condition of employment.

While the other Seattle teams are permitting a negative test to gain entry, the Kraken will only allow vaccinated fans at games.

Trial of 20 men accused in 2015 Paris attacks to begin

By LORI HINNANT and NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In a secure complex embedded within a 13th-century courthouse, France on Wednesday will begin the trial of 20 men accused in the Islamic State group's 2015 attacks on Paris that left 130 people dead and hundreds injured.

Nine gunmen and suicide bombers struck within minutes of each other at France's national soccer stadium, the Bataclan concert hall and Paris restaurants and cafes on Nov. 13, 2015. Survivors of the attacks as well as those who mourn their dead are expected to pack the rooms, which were designed to hold 1,800 plaintiffs and 350 lawyers.

The lone survivor of the extremist cell from that night, Salah Abdeslam, is the key defendant among those being tried for the deadliest attack in France since World War II. He is the only one charged with murder. The same IS network went on to strike Brussels months later, killing another 32 people.

Dominique Kielemoes, whose son bled to death at one of the cafes that night, said the month dedicated to victims' testimonies at the trial will be crucial to both their own healing and that of the nation.

"The assassins, these terrorists, thought they were firing into the crowd, into a mass of people. But it wasn't a mass — these were individuals who had a life, who loved, had hopes and expectations, and that we need to talk about at the trial. It's important," she said,

Twenty men are charged, but six of them will be tried in absentia. Abdeslam, who abandoned his rental

car in northern Paris and discarded a malfunctioning suicide vest before fleeing home to Brussels, has refused to speak with investigators. But he holds the answers to many of the remaining questions about the attack and the people who planned it, both in Europe and abroad.

The modern courtroom was constructed within the storied 13th-century Palais de Justice in Paris, where Marie Antoinette and Emile Zola faced trial, among others.

For the first time, victims can also have a secure audio link to listen from home if they want with a 30-minute delay.

The trial is scheduled to last nine months. The month of September will be dedicated to laying out the police and forensic evidence. October will be given over to victims' testimony. From November to December, officials including former French President François Hollande will testify, as will relatives of the attackers.

Abdeslam will be questioned multiple times. He has so far refused to talk to investigators.

None of the proceedings will be televised or rebroadcast to the public, but they will be recorded for archival purposes. Video recording has only been allowed for a handful of cases in France considered to be of historical value, including last year's trial for the 2015 attacks against the Charlie Hebdo newspaper in Paris and a kosher supermarket.

Fire kills 41 inmates, 80 hurt at crowded Indonesian prison

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A massive fire raged through an overcrowded prison near Indonesia's capital early Wednesday, killing at least 41 inmates, two of them foreigners serving drug sentences, and injuring 80 others.

Televised footage showed firefighters battling to extinguish orange flames while black smoke billowed from the compound. Indonesian Red Cross officials evacuated the victims to ambulances and dozens of bodies in orange bags were laid in a room of Tangerang prison on the outskirts of Jakarta.

Most of the 41 killed were drug convicts, including two men from South Africa and Portugal, but a terrorism convict and a murder were also killed, Indonesia's Justice and Human Rights minister Yasona Laoly told reporters.

He expressed his deep condolences for the family of the victims and pledged to provide the best treatment for injured victims.

"This is a tragedy that concerns all of us," Laoly said. "We are working closely with all relevant parties to investigate the causes of the fire."

The preliminary investigation into the cause of the fire that started around 1:45 a.m. pointed to a short circuit in one of 19 cells in prison Block C2, Jakarta Police Chief Fadil Imran said. Block C2 was stuffed full with 122 convicts.

After the fire was extinguished, hundreds of police and soldiers were deployed around the prison to prevent prisoners from escaping, Imran told reporters near the scene.

"The situation is now under control," Imran said, adding that at least 41 inmates were killed and 80 were injured.

Eight are hospitalized with severe burns and nine with light injuries are being treated at a prison clinic, the Justice and Human Rights ministry said. Another 64, many suffering smoke inhalation, were evacuated to a mosque in the compound.

Tangerang prison was designed to house 1,225 inmates but has more than 2,000, said Rika Aprianti, spokesperson for the corrections department at the Justice Ministry.

She said 15 prison officers guarding the cell block were unhurt.

Laoly vowed to make efforts to prevent a similar tragedy, including to fix electricity problems at 477 prisons across the vast archipelago nation.

Jailbreaks and riots that led to fire are common in Indonesia, where overcrowding has become a problem in prisons that are struggling with poor funding and large numbers of people arrested in a war on illegal drugs.

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In April last year, inmates angered by restrictions on family visits and the early release of 115 other inmates to curb the spread of the coronavirus set fire to a prison on Sulawesi island. Earlier in 2020, inmates set fire to a prison in Banda Aceh during a riot.

No deaths were reported from those fires.

They were some of 9/11's biggest names. Where are they now?

By JERRY SCHWARTZ Associated Press

Rudolph Giuliani was a hero before he was a punchline. Lisa Beamer was a wife and mother before she became a symbol of Sept. 11 — and though her celebrity passed, her widowhood cannot.

In the aftermath of the planes falling from the sky, America and the world were introduced to an array of personalities. Some we had known well, but came to see in different ways. Others were thrown into public consciousness by unhappy happenstance.

Some, like Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar, are dead. But others have gone on to lead lives that are postscripts to Sept. 11, 2001. Here are a few of the boldface names of that tumultuous time — what they were then, and what has happened to them since.

RUDOLPH GIULIANI

THEN: Mayor of New York City, he was a hero of the moment -- empathetic, determined, a focus of the nation's grief and a constant presence at ground zero. "The number of casualties will be more than any of us can bear ultimately," he said on Sept. 11. Oprah Winfrey pronounced him "America's Mayor"; Time magazine declared him "Person of the Year."

SINCE: After suggesting that his expiring term be extended due to the 9/11 emergency -- an idea that was roundly dismissed -- Giuliani went into private life, but not all that private. He launched a profitable security firm and ran abortively for the Republican nomination for president in 2008. His adventures as a supporter of and agent for President Donald Trump are well documented, and resulted in the suspension of his law license in his home state.

BERNARD KERIK

THEN: New York City's police commissioner. Bald and stocky, he never left Giuliani's side in the days after Sept. 11 -- and followed the mayor after he left office, joining the Giuliani security firm.

SINCE: President George W. Bush appointed Kerik as Iraq's interim minister of the interior in 2003 during the Iraq war, and nominated him to head the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in 2004. He withdrew from consideration when it was revealed that he had employed an undocumented worker as a nanny and housekeeper; there followed a series of legal troubles, including convictions for ethics violations and tax fraud. He was pardoned by President Donald Trump in 2020.

GEORGE W. BUSH

THEN: The 43rd president of the United States, Bush was informed of the 9/11 attacks while reading "The Pet Goat" to second graders in Sarasota, Florida. He spoke to the nation that night and visited ground zero three days later, grabbing a bullhorn to declare: "I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." His support in the polls reached 85 percent.

SINCE: The War on Terrorism begat the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Bush's demand that the Taliban "hand over the terrorists, or ... share in their fate." He had long retired to oil painting in Texas when Navy SEALs killed bin Laden, and when President Joe Biden pulled U.S. forces from Afghanistan. In August, he said he was watching developments there "with deep sadness."

RICHARD CHENEY

THEN: While the Secret Service played "hide the president" with Bush on Sept. 11 — he was shuttled to military bases in Louisiana and Nebraska, for fear of terrorist attacks — his vice president hunkered down in a "secure, undisclosed location," a bunker inside the White House where he helped direct the government's actions. Cheney became a fierce advocate of an unbridled response to the attacks, using "any means at our disposal." He pushed for the 2003 war in Iraq. The interrogation technique known as

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waterboarding was a proper way to get information from terrorists, he said -- not torture, as its critics have long insisted.

SINCE: After five heart attacks and a 2012 heart transplant, Cheney has lived to see his daughter, Liz, win his old congressional seat in Wyoming and become GOP persona non grata because of her criticism of Donald Trump.

COLIN POWELL

THEN: A former head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell was confirmed unanimously as secretary of state in 2001. He would go on to make a persuasive case before the United Nations for military action against Iraq, claiming that Saddam Hussein was building weapons of mass destruction. The war was waged, Saddam was toppled and killed, Iraq was destabilized; no such weapons were found.

SINCE: Powell has consistently defended his support of the Iraq War. But the lifelong Republican had little use for Trump, endorsing Hillary Clinton in 2016 and speaking in support of Biden at the 2020 Democratic convention. He left the Republican party after the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE

THEN: National security adviser to Bush. In the summer of 2001, she met with CIA Director George Tenet at his request to discuss the threat of al-Qaida attacks on American targets. The CIA reported that "There will be significant terrorist attacks against the United States in the coming weeks or months." Rice would later say that the information was old.

SINCE: Rice succeeded Powell as secretary of state and has since returned to Stanford University as provost, then as a faculty member. In 2012, she also became one of the first two women allowed to join the Augusta National Golf Club.

JOHN ASHCROFT

THEN: Attorney general during Bush's first term. In the wake of 9/11, he was the administration's prime advocate of the USA PATRIOT Act, which gave the government broad powers to investigate and prosecute those suspected of terrorism. But in 2004, while lying in an intensive care unit with gallstone pancreatitis, he refused the administration's entreaties to overrule a Justice Department finding that the Bush domestic intelligence program was illegal.

SINCE: After leaving office in 2005, Ashcroft became a lobbyist and consultant. His appearances as a gospel singer (and songwriter — his tune "Let the Eagle Soar" was performed at the second Bush inauguration) have tailed off.

JOHN YOO

THEN: As deputy assistant attorney general in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, Yoo provided much of the legal underpinning for the War on Terrorism. He argued that "enemy combatants" captured in Afghanistan need not be given prisoner of war status; that the president could authorize warrantless wiretaps of U.S. citizens on American soil; that the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" like waterboarding was within the power of the president during wartime.

SINCE: Yoo is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. He remains a strong supporter of presidential prerogatives; in 2020, his book "Defender in Chief: Donald Trump's Fight for Presidential Power" argued that Trump's vision of the presidency was in line with that of Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton.

KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED

THEN: Leading propagandist of al-Qaida, labeled the "principal architect of the 9/11 attacks" by the 9/11 Commission. He was captured in 2003 by the CIA and Pakistan's secret police, then spirited to CIA prisons in Poland and Afghanistan and finally to Guantanamo. Under duress — some called it torture — he confessed to involvement in nearly every major al-Qaida operation, including the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the killing of journalist Daniel Pearl, the 2001 attacks and others.

SINCE: His trial date has been postponed again and again. He remains at Guantanamo, indefinitely.

HAMID KARZAI

THEN: Interim leader and then elected president of Afghanistan in the wake of Sept. 11, he managed the

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delicate balancing act of remaining on friendly terms with the United States and the West while unifying his country's many factions — at least for a time. More than once, he called the Taliban "brothers," and the later years of his presidency were marked by friction with the United States.

SINCE: Karzai has survived numerous assassination attempts, but when his second term expired in 2014, the passage of power to his successor, Ashraf Ghani, was peaceful. Ghani would lead the country for almost seven years, until he fled in the face of the Taliban's triumphant return.

HOWARD LUTNICK

THEN: The chairman of the stock trading company Cantor Fitzgerald would have been in the company's offices at the top of One World Trade Center, but he took his son Kyle to the first day of kindergarten. A total of 658 of the company's employees — two thirds of its New York City workforce, including Lutnick's brother Gary — perished. Within three days, Lutnick had established the Cantor-Fitzgerald Relief Fund for his company's victims.

SINCE: The fund has disbursed more than a quarter of a billion dollars, including money for other victims of terrorism and disasters. Twenty years later, Lutnick remains the company's chairman.

LISA BEAMER

THEN: After 9/11, Lisa Beamer became the face of the day's mourners, and a reminder of the day's heroism. Her husband, Todd, a former college baseball and basketball player, is believed to have led other passengers in an attack on the hijackers of United Airlines Flight 93 that brought the plane down before it could crash in Washington. His exhortation of "Let's roll!" became a rallying cry. His widow made 200 public appearances in the six months after the attacks.

SINCE: Lisa Beamer co-wrote a book, "Let's Roll! Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage," and established a foundation in her husband's memory. Donations dwindled, and Beamer receded from public view. The couple had three children, and all attended Wheaton College, where their parents met. All are athletes, like their dad: Dave, 3 years old when his father died, was a football quarterback; Drew, who was 1, played soccer, as has Morgan, born four months after the attacks. Morgan was her father's middle name.

Jerry Schwartz, editor at large for The Associated Press, wrote the AP's main story on Sept. 11, 2001. He has written extensively about the aftermath of that day, and also served as an editor on the Iraqi War desk.

For an in-depth look at AP's coverage of 9/11 and the events that followed, read "September 11: The 9/11 Story, Aftermath & Legacy," available now.

'Varsity Blues' trial promises fresh insights in old scandal

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The first trial in the "Operation Varsity Blues" college admissions bribery scandal will begin this week, with the potential to shed light on investigators' tactics and brighten the spotlight on a secretive school selection process many have long complained is rigged to favor the rich.

Jury selection is beginning Wednesday in federal court in Boston in the case against two parents — former casino executive Gamal Abdelaziz and former Staples and Gap Inc. executive John Wilson — who are accused of paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to help get their kids into the University of Southern California by falsely presenting them as athletic recruits.

Though they were among dozens of prominent parents, athletic coaches and others arrested across the country when the case exploded into the headlines over two years ago, theirs is the first to go trial.

Defense attorneys are expected to argue that they believed their payments were legitimate donations and that USC's treatment of their kids was routine for parents with deep pockets.

"The government appears to want to present its one-sided evidence that the 'school wasn't okay' with granting preferential admissions treatment for donations while at the same time blocking the defendants' evidence that, in fact, the school was okay with this arrangement," the two executives' lawyers wrote in a court filing.

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Prosecutors say the defense is merely trying to muddy the waters in a clear-cut case of lying and fraud. Since March 2019, a parade of wealthy parents have pleaded guilty to paying big bucks to help get their kids into school with rigged test scores or bogus athletic credentials. The group — including TV actresses Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin and Loughlin's fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli — have received punishments ranging from probation to nine months behind bars.

Now, prosecutors face the challenge of convincing a jury that two of the few remaining parents still fighting are guilty.

Abdelaziz, of Las Vegas, is accused of paying \$300,000 to the sham charity run by the scheme's mastermind — admissions consultant Rick Singer — to get his daughter into USC as a basketball recruit. Prosecutors say Abdelaziz signed off an athletic profile that touted the girl as a star, even though she didn't even make the cut for her high school varsity team.

Wilson, who heads a Massachusetts private equity firm, is charged with paying \$220,000 to have his son designated as a USC water polo recruit and an additional \$1 million to buy his twin daughters' ways into Harvard and Stanford.

Prosecutors say Singer told Wilson he couldn't secure spots for both girls on Stanford's sailing team because Singer said the coach "has to actually recruit some real sailors so that Stanford doesn't...catch on."

An attorney for Abdelaziz declined to comment ahead of the trial, and a lawyer for Wilson didn't respond to messages seeking comment.

Defense attorneys have argued in court documents that their clients had no knowledge of any false information submitted about their children. They say USC can't be a victim of fraud because the school regularly rewarded donors by giving their kids special treatment in admissions.

Prosecutors have accused the defense of trying to turn the case into a trial on USC's admissions policies instead of whether the parents agreed to lie and trump up their kids' athletic credentials. USC has said it wasn't aware of Singer's scheme until 2018 when it began cooperating with investigators.

The judge told the defense at a recent hearing that "USC is not on trial." The parents' attorneys would be allowed to introduce evidence that the school admitted other unqualified students whose parents donated, the judge said, only if the defendants were aware of it at the time they paid the alleged bribes.

Opening statements are expected on Monday. Among issues likely to influence jury selection is the wealth of the defendants.

Defense attorneys had sought to block prosecutors from introducing evidence about their incomes, wealth, spending or lifestyles, saying it would do nothing other than "unfairly prejudice the jury."

But U.S. District Judge Nathaniel Gorton said such evidence could show the parents were motivated "to have their children admitted to elite universities so they could maintain or improve their status in the community."

Singer, the admissions consultant who began cooperating with the FBI in 2018 and recorded his phone calls with parents, has pleaded guilty and was long expected to be a key witness for the government. But prosecutors have not yet said whether they intend to call him to the stand.

Defense attorneys have seized on notes revealed in court documents last year in which Singer claimed investigators told him to lie to get parents to make incriminating statements. In the notes Singer took on his phone in 2018, Singer said the agents instructed him to say he told the parents the payments were bribes.

The agents have denied pressuring Singer to lie, but putting Singer on the stand could present the defense with an opportunity to attack his credibility.

"He can be directly confronted on statements suggesting that he may have in fact been pressured in saying certain things ... which could be devastating to the prosecution if the jury believes that," said Brad Bailey, a former federal prosecutor in Massachusetts who isn't involved in the case.

But at the same time, not calling Singer could be even more problematic for prosecutors by allowing the defense "to raise more questions that really could result in reasonable doubt," said Bailey, now a defense attorney.

Wilson is also fighting another legal battle after filing a defamation lawsuit against Netflix in April over its portrayal of him in its "Operation Varsity Blues" documentary.

Wilson's lawyers wrote that Singer deceived him and insist that his son was not a fake athlete, but "an invited member of the United States Olympic water polo development program" with grades and test scores that "were more than sufficient to gain admission to USC."

Another parent who was supposed to go on trial with Abdelaziz and Wilson pleaded guilty last month to paying \$500,000 to get her son into the USC as a football recruit though he wouldn't really play on the team. Marci Palatella, the chief executive officer of a California liquor distribution company, was the 33rd parent to plead guilty in the case.

Three other parents are scheduled to go to trial in January.

The sprawling Varsity Blues case has been prosecuted out of Boston since authorities there began investigating the scheme years ago thanks to a tip from an executive targeted in a securities fraud probe.

Lee statue in Richmond set to be removed, sent to storage

By DENISE LAVOIE and SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Crews are set to remove one of the country's largest remaining monuments to the Confederacy, a towering statute of Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia.

The 21-foot-tall (6.4-meter) bronze likeness of Lee on a horse will be hoisted off its 40-foot (12-meter) pedestal Wednesday, 131 years after it was erected in the former capital of the Confederacy as a tribute to the Civil War leader.

While many saw the statue as an offensive glorification of the South's slave-holding past, public officials had long resisted its removal, along with residents of Virginia who argued moving the monument would be akin to erasing history.

Democratic 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.

"This is an important step in showing who we are and what we value as a commonwealth," Gov. Ralph Northam said in a news release announcing final plans for the removal.

The work is slated to begin early Wednesday. A large crane will be used to hoist the 12-ton (11 metric-ton) statue off its pedestal. The sculpture is 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, crews on Thursday will remove plaques from the base of the monument and will replace a time capsule that is believed to be inside.

In Richmond, a city that was the capital of the Confederacy for most 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.

Given that the statue is one of the largest and most recognizable Confederate monuments in the country, its removal is expected to draw a crowd and a heavy law enforcement presence.

Limited viewing opportunities from an area nearby will be available on a first-come, first-served basis, state officials said. The removal also will be livestreamed through the governor's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

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 monument arrived in 1890 from France, an estimated 10,000 Virginians used wagons and rope to haul its pieces more than a mile to where it now stands. The statue was the first of five Confederate

monuments to be erected on Richmond's Monument Avenue, at a time when the Civil War and Reconstruction were over, but Jim Crow racial segregation laws were on the rise.

The Northam administration has said it would seek public input on the statue's future. The 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.

Powerful earthquake near Mexico's Acapulco kills at least 1

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A powerful earthquake struck near the Pacific resort city of Acapulco on Tuesday night, killing at least one person and causing buildings to rock and sway in Mexico City hundreds of kilometers away.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake had a preliminary magnitude of 7 and was centered 17 kilometers (about 10 miles) northeast of Acapulco.

Guerrero state Gov. Hector Astudillo told Milenio Television late Tuesday night that one person had been killed by a falling post in the town of Coyuca de Benitez near Acapulco.

"We heard loud noise from the building, noise from the windows, things fell inside the house, the power went out," said Sergio Flores, an Acapulco resident reached by phone. "We heard leaking water, the water went out of the pool and you heard people screaming, very nervous people."

Flores said all he could do when it started shaking was hug his wife. He saw people leaving hotels around the bay and some running into parking decks to remove their cars, fearing a collapse.

"We were all worried about some change in the sea, but so far authorities have not said anything about a tsunami alert," he said.

Astudillo said the tsunami alert center had not registered any variations in the sea level. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center later said the threat of potential waves had passed.

The mayor of Acapulco, Adela Román, said in statement to the television news outlet Milenio that "there is no really serious situation" so far and no reports of casualties.

"There are nervous breakdowns; people are worried because there have been aftershocks," she said, adding that there are "many gas leaks in many places" as well as some landslides and fallen walls.

Before the first death was reported, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said via Twitter that authorities in the four states that most felt the earthquake told him there were no victims or serious damage beyond some collapsed walls and falling rocks.

"Fortunately there is not serious damage," he said.

Mexico's National Civil Defense said it was conducting reviews in 10 states, but had not received reports of victims nor serious damage.

In Mexico City, more than 320 kilometers (nearly 200 miles) away, the ground shook for nearly a minute in some parts of the capital, but the quake was less evident in other parts. Some people evacuated their buildings briefly, but most quickly went back inside on a rainy night.

"I was at home with my mom and my dogs and the seismic alert started to sound," said Claudia Guarneros, a makeup artist. "My mother was in another room and I started to call her. The house started moving and in the last part of the earthquake the power went out and we couldn't see anything, we just saw some things falling."

Mexico City authorities said there were no early reports of significant damage in the city, though electricity was knocked out in some neighborhoods. Some broken windows in a downtown high rise covered the sidewalk in glass.

Arturo Hernández stood outside the relatively new apartment building he moved into just three years ago. Beside it stood a taller building abandoned since the magnitude-7.1 earthquake of Sept. 19, 2017, in neighboring Puebla state that caused major damage in the capital.

Hernández heard the seismic alarm and made it outside before the ground began to shake. The abandoned building next to his continued to crack and moan for three minutes after the shaking stopped, he

said. Asked if he had worried about the damaged building next door, he said, "Always, always."

Tuesday's earthquake occurred four years to the day after a magnitude-8.2 earthquake that struck off the coast of Mexico's southern state of Chiapas, largely destroying the town of Juchitan in neighboring Oaxaca state and killing dozens.

California fire threat high despite progress near Tahoe

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — California could be on track for one of its worst fire seasons ever as hotter, drier conditions across the north raise the threat of new fires or existing ones flaring into dangerous life, officials said.

Crews on Tuesday cut miles of new containment line around the Caldor Fire, which was 50% contained after burning up and over the crest of the mountain range and threatening South Lake Tahoe.

Evacuation orders for 22,000 residents were lifted Sunday and more orders were reduced to warnings on Tuesday. But elsewhere, some existing large fires continued to grow.

New evacuations were ordered for some areas of Trinity and Siskiyou counties as the River Complex of three wildfires spread. One blaze driven by strong winds jumped a creek, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire).

Since Monday, the fires had grown by more than 20 square miles (52 square kilometers). It was 19% contained.

More than 15,500 personnel were working on 14 active large wildfires in the state and new or existing fires could flare up this week as the weather turns more dangerous, said Tony Scardina, the U.S. Forest Service's deputy regional forester for California.

California's energy grid operator issued a statewide call for voluntary electricity conservation from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday because of expected higher demand for air conditioning because of high temperatures.

Temperatures could top 100 degrees in the Sierra foothills, according to the National Weather Service.

Meanwhile, the entire state showing the potential for extreme fire danger in the next three months, Cal Fire Chief Thom Porter said.

"We're right smack in the middle of wildfire peak season," he said. "And so everybody needs to remain vigilant."

About 3,125 square miles (8,094 square kilometers) of land have burned so far this year, similar to the record 2020 fire season, Porter said.

"We are on par with where we were last year. That's sobering, and that is the new reality," he said.

California has experienced increasingly larger and deadlier wildfires in recent years as climate change has made the U.S. 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.

The good news was near the Nevada state line, where the Caldor Fire was practically stopped in its tracks a few miles outside of South Lake Tahoe. While the fire that began Aug. 14 burned nearly 800 homes and gutted the mountain hamlet of Grizzly Flats but hadn't burned any homes on its eastern edges.

Crews had largely been able to keep the flames away from populated areas. Some sections of the perimeter were a concern but on much of the blaze, the work turned to mopping up, pulling miles of fire hose out of the forest and knocking down dangerously weakened trees.

However, trees and other vegetation in the area remain tinder-dry and southwest winds are expected to pick up that could make for larger fire growth, authorities said.

North of the Caldor Fire was the Dixie Fire, the second-largest in the state's recorded history, which also has burned through rural, forested communities.

The fire's western side showed increased activity on Tuesday but crews "continue to aggressively hold the fires edge with aircraft, a 10-blade dozer line" and fire retardant sprayers that protected buildings, Cal Fire reported.

However, for the first time in days, there was little fire growth in the eastern zone, where firefighters in the past two weeks had built about 25 miles (40 kilometers) of containment line, Cal Fire said.

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The blaze, which started in mid-July, was 59% surrounded after burning more than 1,400 square miles (3,626 square kilometers) in five counties and burning nearly 700 homes. It could become the largest wildfire in state history, fire officials said.

They were some of 9/11's biggest names. Where are they now?

By JERRY SCHWARTZ Associated Press

Rudolph Giuliani was a hero before he was a punchline. Lisa Beamer was a wife and mother before she became a symbol of Sept. 11 — and though her celebrity passed, her widowhood cannot.

In the aftermath of the planes falling from the sky, America and the world were introduced to an array of personalities. Some we had known well, but came to see in different ways. Others were thrown into public consciousness by unhappy happenstance.

Some, like Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar, are dead. But others have gone on to lead lives that are postscripts to Sept. 11, 2001. Here are a few of the boldface names of that tumultuous time — what they were then, and what has happened to them since.

RUDOLPH GIULIANI

THEN: Mayor of New York City, he was a hero of the moment -- empathetic, determined, a focus of the nation's grief and a constant presence at ground zero. "The number of casualties will be more than any of us can bear ultimately," he said on Sept. 11. Oprah Winfrey pronounced him "America's Mayor"; Time magazine declared him "Person of the Year."

SINCE: After suggesting that his expiring term be extended due to the 9/11 emergency -- an idea that was roundly dismissed -- Giuliani went into private life, but not all that private. He launched a profitable security firm and ran abortively for the Republican nomination for president in 2008. His adventures as a supporter of and agent for President Donald Trump are well documented, and resulted in the suspension of his law license in his home state.

BERNARD KERIK

THEN: New York City's police commissioner. Bald and stocky, he never left Giuliani's side in the days after Sept. 11 -- and followed the mayor after he left office, joining the Giuliani security firm.

SINCE: President George W. Bush appointed Kerik as Iraq's interim minister of the interior in 2003 during the Iraq war, and nominated him to head the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in 2004. He withdrew from consideration when it was revealed that he had employed an undocumented worker as a nanny and housekeeper; there followed a series of legal troubles, including convictions for ethics violations and tax fraud. He was pardoned by President Donald Trump in 2020.

GEORGE W. BUSH

THEN: The 43rd president of the United States, Bush was informed of the 9/11 attacks while reading "The Pet Goat" to second graders in Sarasota, Florida. He spoke to the nation that night and visited ground zero three days later, grabbing a bullhorn to declare: "I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." His support in the polls reached 85 percent.

SINCE: The War on Terrorism begat the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Bush's demand that the Taliban "hand over the terrorists, or ... share in their fate." He had long retired to oil painting in Texas when Navy SEALs killed bin Laden, and when President Joe Biden pulled U.S. forces from Afghanistan. In August, he said he was watching developments there "with deep sadness."

RICHARD CHENEY

THEN: While the Secret Service played "hide the president" with Bush on Sept. 11 — he was shuttled to military bases in Louisiana and Nebraska, for fear of terrorist attacks — his vice president hunkered down in a "secure, undisclosed location," a bunker inside the White House where he helped direct the government's actions. Cheney became a fierce advocate of an unbridled response to the attacks, using "any means at our disposal." He pushed for the 2003 war in Iraq. The interrogation technique known as waterboarding was a proper way to get information from terrorists, he said -- not torture, as its critics

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have long insisted.

SINCE: After five heart attacks and a 2012 heart transplant, Cheney has lived to see his daughter, Liz, win his old congressional seat in Wyoming and become GOP persona non grata because of her criticism of Donald Trump.

COLIN POWELL

THEN: A former head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell was confirmed unanimously as secretary of state in 2001. He would go on to make a persuasive case before the United Nations for military action against Iraq, claiming that Saddam Hussein was building weapons of mass destruction. The war was waged, Saddam was toppled and killed, Iraq was destabilized; no such weapons were found.

SINCE: Powell has consistently defended his support of the Iraq War. But the lifelong Republican had little use for Trump, endorsing Hillary Clinton in 2016 and speaking in support of Biden at the 2020 Democratic convention. He left the Republican party after the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE

THEN: National security adviser to Bush. In the summer of 2001, she met with CIA Director George Tenet at his request to discuss the threat of al-Qaida attacks on American targets. The CIA reported that "There will be significant terrorist attacks against the United States in the coming weeks or months." Rice would later say that the information was old.

SINCE: Rice succeeded Powell as secretary of state and has since returned to Stanford University as provost, then as a faculty member. In 2012, she also became one of the first two women allowed to join the Augusta National Golf Club.

JOHN ASHCROFT

THEN: Attorney general during Bush's first term. In the wake of 9/11, he was the administration's prime advocate of the USA PATRIOT Act, which gave the government broad powers to investigate and prosecute those suspected of terrorism. But in 2004, while lying in an intensive care unit with gallstone pancreatitis, he refused the administration's entreaties to overrule a Justice Department finding that the Bush domestic intelligence program was illegal.

SINCE: After leaving office in 2005, Ashcroft became a lobbyist and consultant. His appearances as a gospel singer (and songwriter — his tune "Let the Eagle Soar" was performed at the second Bush inauguration) have tailed off.

JOHN YOO

THEN: As deputy assistant attorney general in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, Yoo provided much of the legal underpinning for the War on Terrorism. He argued that "enemy combatants" captured in Afghanistan need not be given prisoner of war status; that the president could authorize warrantless wiretaps of U.S. citizens on American soil; that the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" like waterboarding was within the power of the president during wartime.

SINCE: Yoo is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. He remains a strong supporter of presidential prerogatives; in 2020, his book "Defender in Chief: Donald Trump's Fight for Presidential Power" argued that Trump's vision of the presidency was in line with that of Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton.

KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED

THEN: Leading propagandist of al-Qaida, labeled the "principal architect of the 9/11 attacks" by the 9/11 Commission. He was captured in 2003 by the CIA and Pakistan's secret police, then spirited to CIA prisons in Poland and Afghanistan and finally to Guantanamo. Under duress — some called it torture — he confessed to involvement in nearly every major al-Qaida operation, including the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the killing of journalist Daniel Pearl, the 2001 attacks and others.

SINCE: His trial date has been postponed again and again. He remains at Guantanamo, indefinitely.

HAMID KARZAI

THEN: Interim leader and then elected president of Afghanistan in the wake of Sept. 11, he managed the delicate balancing act of remaining on friendly terms with the United States and the West while unifying

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his country's many factions — at least for a time. More than once, he called the Taliban "brothers," and the later years of his presidency were marked by friction with the United States.

SINCE: Karzai has survived numerous assassination attempts, but when his second term expired in 2014, the passage of power to his successor, Ashraf Ghani, was peaceful. Ghani would lead the country for almost seven years, until he fled in the face of the Taliban's triumphant return.

HOWARD LUTNICK

THEN: The chairman of the stock trading company Cantor Fitzgerald would have been in the company's offices at the top of One World Trade Center, but he took his son Kyle to the first day of kindergarten. A total of 658 of the company's employees — two thirds of its New York City workforce, including Lutnick's brother Gary — perished. Within three days, Lutnick had established the Cantor-Fitzgerald Relief Fund for his company's victims.

SINCE: The fund has disbursed more than a quarter of a billion dollars, including money for other victims of terrorism and disasters. Twenty years later, Lutnick remains the company's chairman.

LISA BEAMER

THEN: After 9/11, Lisa Beamer became the face of the day's mourners, and a reminder of the day's heroism. Her husband, Todd, a former college baseball and basketball player, is believed to have led other passengers in an attack on the hijackers of United Airlines Flight 93 that brought the plane down before it could crash in Washington. His exhortation of "Let's roll!" became a rallying cry. His widow made 200 public appearances in the six months after the attacks.

SINCE: Lisa Beamer co-wrote a book, "Let's Roll! Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage," and established a foundation in her husband's memory. Donations dwindled, and Beamer receded from public view. The couple had three children, and all attended Wheaton College, where their parents met. All are athletes, like their dad: Dave, 3 years old when his father died, was a football quarterback; Drew, who was 1, played soccer, as has Morgan, born four months after the attacks. Morgan was her father's middle name.

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Texas GOP bets on hard right turn amid changing demographics

By WILL WEISSERT and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Republicans in America's largest conservative state for years racked up victories under the slogan "Keep Texas Red," a pledge to quash a coming blue wave that Democrats argued was inevitable given shifting demographics.

Now, those population transformations have arrived, with the 2020 census confirming that the state got bigger, more suburban and far more diverse. Yet a more apt state GOP rallying cry for today might be "Make Texas Even Redder."

Faced with increasingly dire demographic threats to their party's dominance, Texas Republicans have championed a bevy of boundary-pushing conservative policymaking that dramatically expands gun rights, curbs abortions and tightens election laws — steering a state that was already far to the right even more so.

Far from tiptoeing toward the middle to appease the Democratic-leaning Texans driving population growth, the party is embracing its base and vowing to use a new round of redistricting to ensure things stay that way through 2030 — becoming a national model for staying on the offensive no matter how political winds may eventually shift.

"Texas, obviously, is a national leader as it concerns the laws that we pass and other states follow," Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who is fond of vowing to make Texas the "freedom capital of America," said Tuesday.

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Abbott, who is up for reelection next year and often mentioned as a possible 2024 presidential contender, signed voting legislation Tuesday that empowers partisan poll watchers and prohibits a host of measures that made casting ballots easier in heavily Democratic cities amid the coronavirus pandemic. Republicans argue that the new rules boost election security and charged ahead to pass them, even as Democratic state lawmakers fled the state for weeks to block them.

The voting law was nearly overshadowed by national debate over another new Texas law — the nation's toughest set of abortion restrictions. By banning the procedure in most instances and leaving no exceptions for cases of rape and incest, the state has mounted perhaps the strongest threat yet to *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision establishing a woman's right to an abortion.

Another new law allows virtually any Texan age 21 and older to carry guns without licenses. Other legislation banned schools from teaching about institutional racism and limited the state's own cities from making decisions on police funding, environmental budgeting and mask mandates. And on Tuesday, Abbott instructed lawmakers to once again try passing restrictions on transgender student athletes when the Legislature convenes later this month to begin drawing new voting maps.

These policy victories are poised to become cemented for the foreseeable future. Because Republicans control both chambers of the Legislature, the party will decide new congressional and statehouse districts based on 2020 census figures — seeking to make the boundaries as favorable as possible so the GOP can hold statehouse majorities for the next decade and beyond.

The new maps will have to counteract what looks to be unfavorable census data for Texas Republicans. The state's Hispanic population grew by nearly 2 million, according to 2020 census figures, accounting for half of Texas' total population increase. Even as the GOP made gains with Hispanic voters, about 6 in 10 Hispanics in Texas chose Democrat Joe Biden over Republican Donald Trump in November, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate.

Republicans also see warning signs in the suburbs. The state is home to four of the nation's 10 fastest-growing cities, fueled by booming communities outside Houston, Dallas and Austin. After years of GOP advantages in these places, Biden split suburban voters in Texas with Trump, AP VoteCast found, and won the state's five largest counties.

Democrats blame the unfettered conservatism on Trumpism. The former president ushered in "a new Republican Party that is more feisty. It's more fringe," said Democratic state Rep. Ron Reynolds, vice chair of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus.

"The cow's left the barn, and it's hard to put it back," said Reynolds, whose district includes booming suburban Houston. "They have to entertain and they have to appease because these are the people that are excited about voting in Republican primaries."

Democrats like Reynolds warn there will be voter backlash. But they have little history to back that up: Republicans haven't lost a statewide race in 27 years and say it is a fierce commitment to conservatism, not pragmatic compromise, that has preserved the nation's longest electoral winning streak.

"If anyone expected that, their head is way too far up their, uh, philosophy," Corbin Casteel, the Trump campaign's Texas director in 2016, joked about any notion that census figures might make the state's Republicans move to the center.

Even more moderate Texas Republicans say past pronouncements about changing demographics helping Democrats were overblown. "The rumors of our demise have been greatly exaggerated," said state Rep. Travis Clardy of Nacogdoches in east Texas.

"We keep winning with really strong numbers," Clardy added. "I don't think we've had strident, extreme, right-wing positions. I think we've governed conservatively."

Still, the party has shown a capacity for moderation in the not-too-distant past. After a Democratic wave swept Texas and the nation in 2018, the GOP had an exceedingly quiet legislative session, focusing on traditional issues like property tax cuts and public education.

It was only after the party held the Legislature and gained seats in Congress last November that it turned hard right — anticipating that its members' biggest electoral threat going forward is primary challenges rather than being unseated by Democrats.

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"I've heard that all this demographic change is going to catch up to the party of the old white people, but I don't think it's happened," Clardy said. "The numbers may be changing, but they may not be trending the way they think that they are."

The move to the right is perhaps best illustrated by Abbott, a former state Supreme Court justice who was once considered to have a more measured and deliberative, business-friendly approach to the job but has lately gone even further right than the Legislature — particularly on immigration.

The governor recently ordered state police to arrest people suspected of being in the country illegally and directed a state agency to pony up \$25 million for 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) of wall along Texas' nearly 1,200-mile (1,930-kilometer) border with Mexico.

No major Democrat has yet announced a candidacy against Abbott, though former presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke — who came within 3 percentage points of upsetting Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in 2018 — still might. The governor has already drawn a primary challenge from former congressman Allen West, a one-time tea party darling known for likening Democrats to Nazis.

Casteel said doubling down on conservative values is working for Republicans in Texas and beyond. He pointed to Abbott and another governor and possible 2024 presidential candidate, Republican Ron DeSantis of Florida. Both have gained national followings by being willing to combat unpopular policies like universal mask mandates. That's despite Democrats in both states insisting the governors' failure to more strenuously battle the pandemic could ultimately jeopardize their aspirations for reelection — not to mention the White House.

"He's faced circumstances that few governors have, with the pandemic and all sorts of other things that put conservatives in a tough bind," Casteel said of Abbott. "It's safety versus liberty and he — and folks like Gov. DeSantis — they've threaded that needle very nicely. And I think the results are speaking for themselves."

Weissert reported from Washington.

Evacuees plead for action: 'We are in some kind of jail'

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, MATTHEW LEE and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Americans trying to evacuate hundreds of Afghans and American citizens — including one Afghan who worked as a U.S. military translator and says he is anticipating his beheading by the Taliban — pleaded for action from the Biden administration to get the would-be evacuees aboard charter flights that are standing by to fly them from Afghanistan.

"Unfortunately we are left behind now," the former translator said quietly in the pre-dawn darkness Wednesday in Afghanistan. "No one heard our voice."

The man, whose identity The Associated Press withheld for his security, said he was running out of money to keep his family housed in a hotel in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, after waiting a week for Taliban permission for the chartered evacuation flights to leave the airport there.

U.S. Army veterans working to help the man, an interpreter for U.S. forces for 15 years, called the effort more grinding than their months of deployment in Afghanistan. They tried and failed to get their old interpreter on the earlier airlifts that ended with the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan Aug. 30.

"I hope we can help them out, and get them out of this mess," said a retired Army colonel, Thomas McGrath, one of the veterans trying to help his former interpreter.

Hundreds of vulnerable Afghans are waiting for permission from Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to board prearranged charter flights standing by at the airport in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The group includes dozens of American citizens and green card holders and their families, the Afghans and their American advocates say.

"We think we are in some kind of jail," said one Afghan woman among the would-be evacuees gathered at one large hotel in Mazar-e-Sharif.

She described the Americans and green-card holders in their group as elderly parents of Afghan-American

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citizens in the United States.

Taliban leaders, who named a new Cabinet Tuesday in the wake of their lightning takeover of most of the country last month, say they will allow people with proper documents to leave the country. Taliban officials insist they are currently going through the manifests, and passenger documents, for the charter flights at Mazar-e-Sharif.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday the U.S. was working with the Taliban to resolve the standoff over the charter flights.

He rejected an assertion from a Republican lawmaker, Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, over the weekend that the standoff at Mazar-e-Sharif was turning into a "hostage situation" for American citizens in the group.

"We've been assured all American citizens and Afghan citizens with valid travel documents will be allowed to leave," Blinken said in Doha, Qatar, a major transit point for last month's frantic U.S. military-led evacuations from Afghanistan.

Later Tuesday, 12 Democratic lawmakers added to the pressure for evacuees, in a letter urging the administration to disclose its plans for getting out all of the hundreds of at-risk people remaining in Afghanistan, and not just American citizens.

"Our staff have been working around the clock responding to urgent pleas from constituents whose families and colleagues are seeking to flee Afghanistan, and they urgently require timely, post-withdrawal guidance to best assist those in need," Reps. Jerrold Nadler, Zoe Lofgren, Gerald Connolly and nine other lawmakers from President Joe Biden's party wrote.

Blinken, in Doha, said the Taliban had told U.S. officials that the problem in Mazar-e-Sharif was that passengers with valid travel documents were mixed in with those without the right travel papers.

The Afghan woman contacted at the hotel — an employee of a U.S.-based nonprofit, Ascend, that works with Afghan women and girls — also spoke Tuesday on condition of anonymity for her security. She said those in her group have proper passports and visas, but the Taliban are blocking them from entering the airport.

Like the interpreter, she said she has been waiting for eight days.

At one point last week, alarm spread through the women's side of her hotel in the city when warnings came that the Taliban were searching the would-be evacuees on the men's side, and had taken some away.

"I am scared if they split us and not let us leave," she said. "If we can't get out of here, something wrong will happen. And I am afraid of that."

The former U.S. military interpreter, at the hotel with his family of eight children and wife, said he would expect beheading by the Taliban given his work with the U.S. military, and based on what rights groups say are past Taliban attacks on Afghan civilians who have worked with U.S. forces.

"They'll probably kill him," McGrath agreed, expressing fear for the man's children as well.

The interpreter had always told his American comrades that he believed his work with them was in service of his own country, the retired colonel said. "He put a lot on the line by lining up with us," McGrath said.

An array of Americans -- many of them with some past experience in Afghanistan, or other ties -- have been working for weeks to try to help evacuate at-risk Afghans. Much of that effort is focused now on the planes in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Some of those Americans pushing for U.S. action said Tuesday they fear the Biden administration will help out American citizens and leave behind green card holders, Afghans who used to work with Americans, and others whose work has left them vulnerable, including journalists, women's advocates and rights workers.

"The game changed partway through," said Marina LeGree, the American head of Ascend.

Private organizers of the flights complain the State Department and other U.S. agencies have been slow or outright unresponsive to pleas for help despite assurances that Washington would work with the Taliban and others to get people out.

On Monday, the State Department said it had helped a family of four U.S. citizens escape Afghanistan via a land route.

Alex Plitsas, a representative of a group called Digital Dunkirk, which is serving as an umbrella group for several organizations arranging the private evacuation efforts since the completion of the U.S. military

withdrawal, welcomed Blinken's words.

"Our men and women in uniform and diplomats on the ground in Kabul did a fantastic job" with the military-run evacuation last month, Plitsas said. "Now it's time to bring the last remaining folks home."

Knickmeyer contributed from Oklahoma City and Burns from Doha.

China chases 'rejuvenation' with control of tycoons, society

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — An avalanche of changes launched by China's ruling Communist Party has jolted everyone from tech billionaires to school kids. Behind them: President Xi Jinping's vision of making a more powerful, prosperous country by reviving revolutionary ideals, with more economic equality and tighter party control over society and entrepreneurs.

Since taking power in 2012, Xi has called for the party to return to its "original mission" as China's economic, social and cultural leader and carry out the "rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation."

The party has spent the decade since then silencing dissent and tightening political control. Now, after 40 years of growth that transformed China into the world's factory but left a gulf between a wealthy elite and the poor majority, the party is promising to spread prosperity more evenly and is pressing private companies to pay for social welfare and back Beijing's ambition to become a global technology competitor.

To support its plans, Xi's government is trying to create what it deems a more wholesome society by reducing children's access to online games and banning "sissy men" who are deemed insufficiently masculine from TV.

Chinese leaders want to "direct the constructive energies of all people in one laser-focused direction selected by the party," Andrew Nathan, a Chinese politics specialist at Columbia University, said in an email.

Beijing has launched anti-monopoly and data security crackdowns to tighten its control over internet giants, including e-commerce platform Alibaba Group and games and social media operator Tencent Holdings Ltd., that looked too big and potentially independent.

In response, their billionaire founders have scrambled to show loyalty by promising to share their wealth under Xi's vaguely defined "common prosperity" initiative to narrow the income gap in a country with more billionaires than the United States.

Xi has yet to give details, but in a society where every political term is scrutinized for significance, the name revives a 1950s propaganda slogan under Mao Zedong, the founder of the communist government.

Xi is reviving the "utopian ideal" of early communist leaders, said Willy Lam of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "But of course, huge question marks have arisen, because this will hurt the most creative and lucrative parts of the economy."

Alibaba, Tencent and others have pledged tens of billions of dollars for job creation and social welfare initiatives. They say they will invest in developing processor chips and other technologies cited by Beijing as priorities.

The party's anti-monopoly enforcement and crackdown on how companies handle information about customers are similar to Western regulation. But the abrupt, heavy-handed way changes have been imposed is prompting warnings that Beijing is threatening innovation and economic growth, which already is declining. Jittery foreign investors have knocked more than \$300 billion off Tencent's stock market value and billions more off other companies.

"I expect that over the next year or two we are likely to see a very rocky relationship develop between the political elite and the business elite," Michael Pettis, a finance professor at Peking University's Guanghua School of Business, said in a report.

Chinese officials say the public, consumers and entrepreneurs will benefit from higher incomes and more regulatory oversight of corporate giants. Parents welcome curbs announced last month that limit children under 18 to three hours of online games a week and only on weekends and Friday night.

"I feel this is a good rule," said Li Zhanguo, the father of an 8-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl in the central city of Zhengzhou. "Games still have some addictive mechanisms. We can't count on children's

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self-control.”

The crackdowns reflect party efforts to control a rapidly evolving society of 1.4 billion people.

Some 1 million members of mostly Muslim ethnic groups have been forced into detention camps in the northwest. Officials deny accusations of abuses including forced abortions and say the camps are for job training and to combat extremism.

A surveillance initiative dubbed Social Credit aims to track every person and company in China and punish violations ranging from dealing with business partners that violate environmental rules to littering.

“Our responsibility is to unite and lead the entire party and people of all ethnic groups, take the baton of history and to work hard to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” Xi said when he and the six other members of the new party Standing Committee appeared in public for the first time in November 2012.

The party Central Committee shifted its economic emphasis “from efficiency to fairness” in late 2020, a researcher at a Beijing think tank wrote in August in Caixin, China’s most prominent business magazine.

The party moved from “early prosperity for some to ‘common prosperity’” and “from capital to labor,” wrote Luo Zhiheng of Yuekai Securities Research Institute. He said leaders are emphasizing science, technology and manufacturing over finance and real estate.

Prominent economists have tried to reassure entrepreneurs.

“It is impossible to achieve common prosperity through ‘robbing the rich and helping the poor,’” the dean of the school of economics at Shanghai’s Fudan University, Zhang Jun, told the news outlet The Paper on Aug. 4.

The 1979 launch of market-style economic reform under then-leader Deng Xiaoping prompted predictions abroad that China would evolve into a more open, possibly even democratic society.

The Communist Party allowed freer movement and encourages internet use for business and education. But leaders reject changes to a one-party dictatorship that copied its political structure from the Soviet Union and watch entrepreneurs closely. Beijing controls all media and tries to limit what China’s public sees online.

As the previous decade’s economic boom fades, “Xi sees himself as the only person capable of recreating the momentum,” said June Teufel Dreyer, a Chinese politics specialist at the University of Miami.

Party members who worry reforms might weaken political control appear to have decided China’s rise is permanent and liberalization is no longer needed, said Edward Friedman, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin.

That means “anti-totalitarian elements of the reform agenda could be rolled back,” Friedman said in an email. “That is what Xi is doing, as manifest in his attack on purportedly gay and girlie culture as a supposed threat to a so-called virile militarism.”

An Aug. 29 commentary by an obscure writer, Li Guangman, described “common prosperity” as a “profound revolution.” Writing on the WeChat message service, Li said financial markets would “no longer be a paradise for capitalists to get rich overnight” and said the party’s next targets might include high housing and health care costs.

The commentary was reposted on prominent state media websites including the ruling party newspaper People’s Daily. That prompted questions about whether Beijing might veer into an ideological campaign with echoes of the violent 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, when some 5 million people were killed.

Hu Xijin, the editor of the Global Times, a newspaper published by People’s Daily that is known for its nationalist tone, responded by criticizing Li’s commentary. Hu warned in a blog post against a return to radicalism.

“The Cultural Revolution was a period of chaos, purposely unleashed by Mao because he felt comfortable in chaos,” Nathan said.

“This is almost the exact opposite,” he said. “It is an effort to create tightly structured orderliness.”

AP researcher Chen Si in Shanghai contributed to this report.

California recall vote offers test of Biden political clout

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has been beset by public health, military and climate crises in the past month. Not much time has been left for a potential political disaster brewing for his party in California.

With a week to spare, the White House is diving into the California gubernatorial recall election, coming to Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom's aid with visits from Vice President Kamala Harris and then Biden himself to try to alleviate lingering concerns about Democratic turnout in the unusual September vote.

Harris will campaign in the state with Newsom on Wednesday after a previously planned visit was nixed due to the chaos surrounding the Afghanistan withdrawal. And Biden himself is expected to visit the state early next week, ahead of Tuesday's election.

For Biden it's a chance to flex his political muscle in a state where both he and Harris remain popular. The outcome also will provide a test of Biden's clout after a difficult August and in advance of the 2022 midterms, when control of Congress and more than half of the nation's governorships are up for grabs.

Harris and Biden are hoping to help bolster Newsom's chance to survive an unpredictable recall effort in a state that remains key to advancing Biden's agenda at the state and national level.

"It's simply too big a state to lose an election in," said Joel Benenson, a former pollster for President Barack Obama's campaigns. "You've got more to risk by not showing up than by showing up."

Benenson noted that beyond the political implications for the Democratic Party of losing a gubernatorial seat, the outcome of the recall could have an effect on the makeup of the Senate, if Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein's seat opens up — leaving her replacement to be appointed by the governor.

While reliable polling has been scarce in the race, a recent survey from the Public Policy Institute of California, conducted in late August, showed more likely voters would vote no than yes on removing Newsom, 58% to 39%.

Among all likely voters, whether they would keep Newsom or not, about half say they do not have a preference on a replacement candidate or do not know their preference.

Barring the polls, the main concern for Newsom remains getting Democratic base voters engaged and aware that they need to turn out for an unusually timed election, according to Kyle Kondick, a nonpartisan political analyst at the University of Virginia.

"The main problem for Newsom is making sure that Democratic turnout is robust enough to save him," Kondick said.

"One way to do that is to bring in high-profile surrogates who will get a lot of news coverage, and will help spread the word about the fact that the recall is happening. And from a Democratic perspective, it's hard to find two people better than Vice President Kamala Harris, who's from California herself, and, of course, the president."

Biden has already campaigned for Virginia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe, who faces election in November. In Ohio's 11th Congressional District Democratic primary for a special House election this November, winner Shontel Brown painted opponent Nina Turner as anti-Biden to pull out a surprise victory.

White House officials say to expect both Biden and Harris to keep a robust campaign schedule when the midterm elections heat up next year.

But the outcome of the California gubernatorial recall will offer an early test of whether Biden maintains his political potency after a tough August, during which his national poll numbers took a hit after the rocky U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and rising COVID-19 rates drew headlines.

It's hard to overstate Biden's popularity in California — he won the state with nearly 64% of the vote in 2020. And according to the PPIC poll, 58% of Californians approve of Biden's job as president. Harris, meanwhile, remains one of the highest-profile Democrats in California, where she still maintains a home.

But Biden and Harris have faced criticism from some within the progressive Democratic base, a subset

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of the party that also remains somewhat disenchanted with Newsom. And even if Newsom wins, a tight race could signal trouble ahead for Biden in next year's midterms.

Every voter in California has already received a ballot, and they'll have to answer two questions: First, whether they believe the governor should be recalled, and then, who should replace him. Voters will choose from a list of 46 replacement candidates — many of them unknown, but others with some recognition, including conservative talk show host Larry Elder, who has emerged as the GOP frontrunner. With so many candidates dividing those ballots, if the recall effort succeeds, it's possible a candidate could win with 25% or less of the vote.

Republicans have gone after Newsom for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the state's economy, with business owners and parents expressing frustration over long-lasting restrictions on businesses, mask mandates and school closures. In contrast, Newsom has sought to nationalize the recall campaign, tying the effort to restrictive voting laws passed by Republican legislatures and warning during a campaign event last weekend that "we did not defeat Trumpism" in 2020.

Aside from an endorsement for Newsom in mid-August, the White House largely stayed on the sidelines of the race during the initial months. Early on, when concerns about Newsom's fate were a bit more urgent, Bill Carrick, a California Democratic strategist and longtime Feinstein aide, said "there was a little bit of a whisper campaign" about what some in California Democratic circles perceived as a lack of engagement from the White House.

"There's a little bit of a game that goes on about, you know, you're not helping enough — because everyone wants to get help," he said.

About three weeks ago, Newsom himself sounded the alarm that Democrats "up and down the state haven't taken this seriously," pointing to an "enthusiasm gap" between Republicans and Democrats.

At the time, Newsom said he had requested visits from Harris and Biden, and more engagement from national Democrats — and he got it. Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent, have appeared in anti-recall ads, while Warren and Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota campaigned with Newsom over the Labor Day weekend.

With Harris' and Biden's arrivals over the next few days, Newsom will have the biggest names in the Democratic Party behind him, plus millions of dollars invested in turnout efforts from the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Governors' Association.

Mark Mellman, a Democratic pollster who's done extensive work in California, also noted that the visits will offer Harris and Biden the opportunity to shift the focus after a disastrous August back to his infrastructure agenda and a potential victory in a deep-blue state.

"For the president, the ability to be able to go and be part of and help generate a victory for the governor isn't a bad decision," Mellman said. "He probably welcomes the opportunity to get away for a moment from hurricanes and flooding and everything else that he has faced this last 30 days or so."

AP polling writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

Texas death row inmate seeks pastor's touch at execution

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A Texas death row inmate set to be executed Wednesday for killing a convenience store worker more than 17 years ago in a robbery that garnered \$1.25 is asking that his pastor be allowed to lay hands on him as he dies by lethal injection.

The request by John Henry Ramirez, 37, is the latest clash between death row inmates and prison officials in Texas and other states over the presence of spiritual advisers in the death chamber.

Ramirez was condemned for the 2004 killing of 46-year-old Pablo Castro as he took out the trash from a Corpus Christi convenience store. Prosecutors say Ramirez stabbed Castro 29 times during a series of robberies in which the inmate and two women sought money following a three-day drug binge. Ramirez fled to Mexico but was arrested 3½ years later. He is set to be executed Wednesday evening at the state

penitentiary in Huntsville.

Ramirez's request to have his spiritual adviser touch him and vocalize prayers when he is executed has been turned down by Texas prison officials, who have argued that direct contact poses a security risk and the vocal prayer could be disruptive.

A federal judge in Houston and the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals have denied Ramirez's request to stay his execution over the issue. An appeal is pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

In April, the Texas prison system reversed a two-year ban on allowing spiritual advisers in the death chamber. The ban came after the U.S. Supreme Court in 2019 halted the execution of another Texas inmate who had argued his religious freedom was being violated because his Buddhist spiritual adviser wasn't allowed to accompany him.

Texas previously allowed state-employed clergy to accompany inmates into the chamber, but its prison staff included only Christian and Muslim clerics. The new policy allows an inmate's approved spiritual adviser to be in the chamber but the two cannot have any contact and vocal prayers during the execution are not allowed.

Seth Kretzer, Ramirez's lawyer, has argued the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is violating the death row inmate's First Amendment rights to practice his religion. He called the ban on vocal prayer a spiritual "gag order."

"It is hostile toward religion, denying religious exercise at the precise moment it is most needed: when someone is transitioning from this life to the next," Kretzer said in court documents.

Dana Moore, Ramirez's spiritual adviser the last four years, said the request is about letting the inmate practice his Christian faith and treating him "with a certain amount of dignity."

"John's sentence wasn't death and you can't have any meaningful contact," said Moore, who is pastor at Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi. "He is paying for his crime. I guess the question that would come up, is that not enough?"

But Mark Skurka, the lead prosecutor at Ramirez's 2008 trial, said while he believes a death row inmate should have a spiritual adviser at the time of execution, there have to be limitations based on security concerns.

"Pablo Castro didn't get to have somebody praying over him as this guy stabbed him 29 times. Pablo Castro didn't get afforded such niceties and things like to have a clergyman present," said Skurka, now retired after later serving as Nueces County district attorney.

Castro, who had nine children, had worked at the convenience store for more than a decade when he was killed.

"He was a good guy. He would help people out in the neighborhood. Everybody liked him," Skurka said.

Two women who took part in the robberies and were convicted on lesser charges remain in prison.

If Ramirez is executed, he would be the third inmate put to death this year in Texas and the sixth in the U.S.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/juanlozano70>

Taliban form all-male Afghan government of old guard members

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban on Tuesday announced an all-male interim government for Afghanistan stacked with veterans of their hard-line rule from the 1990s and the 20-year battle against the U.S.-led coalition, a move that seems unlikely to win the international support the new leaders desperately need to avoid an economic meltdown.

Appointed to the key post of interior minister was Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is on the FBI's most-wanted list with a \$5 million bounty on his head and is believed to still be holding at least one American hostage. He headed the feared Haqqani network that is blamed for many deadly attacks and kidnappings.

The announcement came hours after Taliban fired their guns into the air to disperse protesters in the

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capital of Kabul and arrested several journalists, the second time in less than a week that heavy-handed tactics were used to break up a demonstration.

Drawn mostly from Afghanistan's dominant Pashtun ethnic group, the Cabinet's lack of representation from other ethnic groups also seems certain to hobble its support from abroad.

As much as 80% of Afghanistan's budget comes from the international community, and a long-running economic crisis has worsened in recent months. Near daily flights from Qatar bring in humanitarian aid, but the needs are massive, and the Taliban can hardly afford isolation.

In announcing the Cabinet, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid emphasized that the appointments were temporary. He did not say how long they would serve and what would be the catalyst for a change.

Since taking over Afghanistan in mid-August after U.S. troops withdrew, the Taliban have shown no indications they will hold elections.

The U.S. State Department in a statement expressed concern that the Cabinet included only Taliban, no women and personalities with a troubling track record, but said the new administration would be judged by its actions. The carefully worded statement noted the Cabinet was interim, but said the Taliban would be held to their promise to give safe passage to both foreign nationals and Afghans, with proper travel documents, and ensure Afghan soil would not be used as to harm another.

"The world is watching closely," the statement said.

The interim prime minister, Mullah Hasan Akhund, also headed the Taliban government in Kabul during the last years of its rule. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who had led talks with the U.S. and signed the deal that led to the withdrawal, will be one of two deputies to Akhund.

A policy statement accompanying the Cabinet announcement sought to allay fears of Afghanistan's neighbors and the rest of the world, but was unlikely to calm the fears of women, who didn't get a single post.

"Our message to our neighbors, the region and the world is that Afghanistan's soil will not be used against the security of any other country," the statement said.

It urged foreign diplomats, embassies, consulates and humanitarian organizations to return to Afghanistan. "Their presence is the need of our country," it said.

The statement spoke of protecting the rights of minorities and the underprivileged, and it promised education "to all countrymen within the framework of Sharia." Women were not mentioned in the three-page statement.

Abdul Salam Hanafi, an ethnic Uzbek, was named as second deputy to Hasan Akhund. A long-time Taliban member, he is unlikely to satisfy demands for inclusivity and minority representation.

Besides Haqqani as head of the police, the other top security post of defense minister went to Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of Taliban founder and near mythic figure Mullah Mohammad Omar.

The Haqqani network, which dominates most of eastern Afghanistan, has been blamed for dramatic attacks in Kabul in the past two decades and for orchestrating kidnappings, often of Americans. Washington believes it still holds Mark Frerichs, a civilian contractor, who was abducted in January 2020 and hasn't been heard from since.

The new foreign minister will be Amir Khan Muttaqi, another prominent figure from the Taliban's last time in power. He faces a difficult task, given the Cabinet's lack of diversity.

The Cabinet selection defied the many voices that had urged inclusivity and moderation. Instead, it seemed to be a bow to the Taliban's tens of thousands of fighters, who would have struggled to accept figures from previous governments that they see as corrupt and that they believe they were called upon to oust.

"The fighters made the sacrifices. ... They are the decision makers, not the politicians," said analyst and author Fazelminallah Qazizai, who has written extensively about the Taliban.

Yet even with a Cabinet dominated by ethnic Pashtuns, the Taliban's fighting force would appear to have already attained some diversity, with their ranks bolstered considerably by ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks. That may have helped hand the Taliban a surprising win in the mostly Tajik province of Badakhshan, which they overran with hardly a fight. When they last ruled, the province was the only one they failed to control.

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At Tuesday's demonstration that was broken up by gunfire, protesters had gathered outside the Pakistani Embassy to accuse Islamabad of aiding the Taliban's assault on northern Panjshir province. The Taliban said Monday they seized the province — the last one not in their control — after their lightning advance through Afghanistan last month.

Afghanistan's previous government routinely accused neighboring Pakistan of aiding the Taliban, a charge Islamabad has denied.

Dozens of women were among the protesters, and some carried signs bemoaning the killing of their sons by Taliban fighters that they say were aided by Pakistan. One sign read: "I am a mother. When you kill my son, you kill a part of me."

At one point, a Taliban fighter responded: "We have announced amnesty to everyone who has killed our sons."

The Taliban moved quickly and harshly to end the protest as demonstrators arrived near the presidential palace. They fired their weapons into the air and arrested several journalists covering the demonstration. At one point, a Taliban member waving a Kalashnikov rifle took a microphone from a journalist and began beating him with it. The journalist was later handcuffed and detained for several hours.

"This is the third time I have been beaten by the Taliban covering protests," the journalist told The Associated Press, speaking on condition he not be identified because he feared retaliation. "I won't go again to cover a demonstration. It's too difficult for me."

A journalist from Afghanistan's popular TOLO News was detained for three hours by the Taliban before being freed. He was given back his equipment and his video of the demonstration was intact.

On Saturday, Taliban special forces in camouflage fired their weapons into the air to end a protest march in Kabul by women demanding equal rights.

Associated Press writers Tameem Akhgar and Rahim Faiez in Istanbul contributed to this report.

In NYC after Ida, Biden calls climate 'everybody's crisis'

By AAMER MADHANI and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden declared climate change has become "everybody's crisis" on Tuesday as he toured neighborhoods flooded by the remnants of Hurricane Ida, warning it's time for America to get serious about the "code red" danger or face ever worse loss of life and property.

Biden spoke after walking streets in New Jersey and then Queens in New York City, meeting people whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged by flooding when Ida barreled through. The storm dumped record amounts of rain onto already saturated ground and was blamed for more than a dozen deaths in the city.

The president said he thinks the damage everyone is seeing, from wildfires in the West to hurricane havoc in the South and Northeast, is turning climate-change skeptics into believers, but years of unheeded warnings from scientists, economists and others mean time for action is short.

"The threat is here. It is not getting any better," Biden said in New York. "The question is can it get worse. We can stop it from getting worse."

Biden sounded a similar theme before he toured Manville, New Jersey, also ravaged by severe flooding caused by Ida.

"Every part of the country, every part of the country is getting hit by extreme weather," Biden said during a briefing with officials in Somerset County, including Gov. Phil Murphy.

He said the threat from wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding and other extreme weather must be dealt with in ways that will lessen devastating effects of climate change.

"We can't turn it back very much, but we can prevent it from getting worse," he said. "We don't have any more time."

The natural disasters have given Biden an opening to push Congress to approve his plan to spend \$1 trillion to fortify infrastructure nationwide, including electrical grids, water and sewer systems, to better

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defend against extreme weather. The legislation has cleared the Senate and awaits a House vote.

Biden also talked up a side benefit of the plan, the "good-paying jobs" he said it will create.

On Tuesday, the White House asked Congress for an additional \$24 billion in disaster aid to cover the costs of Ida and other destructive weather events.

In New Jersey, Biden walked along a street in the Lost Valley neighborhood of Manville, where flooding is common and the cleanup continues after the Raritan River overflowed its banks. Many front lawns were covered with waterlogged couches, broken pianos, crumbled plaster and other debris.

One home displayed a hand-painted sign that said, "Manville will be back better."

Biden, wearing a mask, spoke to adults and children, including Meagan Dommar, a new mother whose home was destroyed by fire as the flood occurred. She told him that she and her husband, Caesar, had left with the baby before the flooding, then returned to find destruction.

"Thank God you're safe," Biden replied. She said afterward she hoped the visit would speed help "along a little bit" and said she was grateful for the visit.

Not everyone was so welcoming. As he walked the route, the Democratic president was taunted by supporters of Republican former President Donald Trump, who yelled that Biden was a "tyrant" and worse. Biden did not look in their direction.

At the briefing, Biden focused on the personal calamities, saying: "The losses that we witnessed today are profound. My thoughts are with all those families affected by the storm and all those families who lost someone they love."

Before he arrived, Cristel Alvarez said she expected losses at her home to climb as high as \$45,000. She has lived in Manville for a decade and the flood was her family's second.

"Let him see everything that we're going through and hopefully we can get the help that we need because there's a lot of loss," she said.

Lou DeFazio, a contractor and three-decade Manville resident, sat on his porch with a small Trump flag waving beside him and said the town needed better planning instead of presidential visits.

"I think their efforts could be better spent in other areas," he said of Biden and other elected officials who were coming. "I don't know what they're gonna do for us."

In all, 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 the deaths, 27, were recorded in New Jersey. In New York City, 13 people were killed, including 11 in Queens.

Biden's visit followed his Friday trip to Louisiana, where Hurricane Ida first made landfall on Aug. 29, killing at least 15 people in the state.

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. He is open to applying the declaration to other storm-ravaged New Jersey counties, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

Superville reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Michael Catalini in Manville, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Evacuees plead for action: 'We are in some kind of jail'

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, MATTHEW LEE and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Americans trying to evacuate hundreds of Afghans and American citizens — including one Afghan who worked as a U.S. military translator and says he is anticipating his beheading

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by the Taliban — pleaded for action from the Biden administration to get the would-be evacuees aboard charter flights that are standing by to fly them from Afghanistan.

"Unfortunately we are left behind now," the former translator said quietly in the pre-dawn darkness Wednesday in Afghanistan. "No one heard our voice."

The man, whose identity The Associated Press withheld for his security, said he was running out of money to keep his family housed in a hotel in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, after waiting a week for Taliban permission for the chartered evacuation flights to leave the airport there.

U.S. Army veterans working to help the man, an interpreter for U.S. forces for 15 years, called the effort more grinding than their months of deployment in Afghanistan. They tried and failed to get their old interpreter on the earlier airlifts that ended with the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan Aug. 30.

"I hope we can help them out, and get them out of this mess," said a retired Army colonel, Thomas McGrath, one of the veterans trying to help his former interpreter.

Hundreds of vulnerable Afghans are waiting for permission from Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to board prearranged charter flights standing by at the airport in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The group includes dozens of American citizens and green card holders and their families, the Afghans and their American advocates say.

"We think we are in some kind of jail," said one Afghan woman among the would-be evacuees gathered at one large hotel in Mazar-e-Sharif.

She described the Americans and green-card holders in their group as elderly parents of Afghan-American citizens in the United States.

Taliban leaders, who named a new Cabinet Tuesday in the wake of their lightning takeover of most of the country last month, say they will allow people with proper documents to leave the country. Taliban officials insist they are currently going through the manifests, and passenger documents, for the charter flights at Mazar-e-Sharif.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday the U.S. was working with the Taliban to resolve the standoff over the charter flights.

He rejected an assertion from a Republican lawmaker, Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, over the weekend that the standoff at Mazar-e-Sharif was turning into a "hostage situation" for American citizens in the group.

"We've been assured all American citizens and Afghan citizens with valid travel documents will be allowed to leave," Blinken said in Doha, Qatar, a major transit point for last month's frantic U.S. military-led evacuations from Afghanistan.

Later Tuesday, 12 Democratic lawmakers added to the pressure for evacuees, in a letter urging the administration to disclose its plans for getting out all of the hundreds of at-risk people remaining in Afghanistan, and not just American citizens.

"Our staff have been working around the clock responding to urgent pleas from constituents whose families and colleagues are seeking to flee Afghanistan, and they urgently require timely, post-withdrawal guidance to best assist those in need," Reps. Jerrold Nadler, Zoe Lofgren, Gerald Connolly and nine other lawmakers from President Joe Biden's party wrote.

Blinken, in Doha, said the Taliban had told U.S. officials that the problem in Mazar-e-Sharif was that passengers with valid travel documents were mixed in with those without the right travel papers.

The Afghan woman contacted at the hotel — an employee of a U.S.-based nonprofit, Ascend, that works with Afghan women and girls — also spoke Tuesday on condition of anonymity for her security. She said those in her group have proper passports and visas, but the Taliban are blocking them from entering the airport.

Like the interpreter, she said she has been waiting for eight days.

At one point last week, alarm spread through the women's side of her hotel in the city when warnings came that the Taliban were searching the would-be evacuees on the men's side, and had taken some away.

"I am scared if they split us and not let us leave," she said. "If we can't get out of here, something wrong will happen. And I am afraid of that."

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The former U.S. military interpreter, at the hotel with his family of eight children and wife, said he would expect beheading by the Taliban given his work with the U.S. military, and based on what rights groups say are past Taliban attacks on Afghan civilians who have worked with U.S. forces.

"They'll probably kill him," McGrath agreed, expressing fear for the man's children as well.

The interpreter had always told his American comrades that he believed his work with them was in service of his own country, the retired colonel said. "He put a lot on the line by lining up with us," McGrath said.

An array of Americans -- many of them with some past experience in Afghanistan, or other ties -- have been working for weeks to try to help evacuate at-risk Afghans. Much of that effort is focused now on the planes in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Some of those Americans pushing for U.S. action said Tuesday they fear the Biden administration will help out American citizens and leave behind green card holders, Afghans who used to work with Americans, and others whose work has left them vulnerable, including journalists, women's advocates and rights workers.

"The game changed partway through," said Marina LeGree, the American head of Ascend.

Private organizers of the flights complain the State Department and other U.S. agencies have been slow or outright unresponsive to pleas for help despite assurances that Washington would work with the Taliban and others to get people out.

On Monday, the State Department said it had helped a family of four U.S. citizens escape Afghanistan via a land route.

Alex Plitsas, a representative of a group called Digital Dunkirk, which is serving as an umbrella group for several organizations arranging the private evacuation efforts since the completion of the U.S. military withdrawal, welcomed Blinken's words.

"Our men and women in uniform and diplomats on the ground in Kabul did a fantastic job" with the military-run evacuation last month, Plitsas said. "Now it's time to bring the last remaining folks home."

Knickmeyer contributed from Oklahoma City and Burns from Doha.

At Brazil rallies, Bolsonaro deepens rift with Supreme Court

By DÉBORA ÁLVARES and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Tens of thousands of supporters of embattled right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro heeded his call and turned out at rallies Tuesday as he stepped up his attacks on Brazil's Supreme Court and threatened to plunge the country into a constitutional crisis.

Bolsonaro has been locked in a feud with the high court, in particular a justice who has jailed several of the president's supporters for allegedly financing, organizing or inciting violence or anti-democratic acts, or disseminating false information.

In calling on his followers to take to the streets on Brazil's Independence Day in protest, Bolsonaro stirred fears among his foes that the demonstrations could erupt in violence akin to the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump. But by late afternoon, there were no reports of any serious violence.

Bolsonaro got a rousing reception from demonstrators in the capital, Brasilia, and in Sao Paulo, as he lit into the Supreme Court and Justice Alexandre de Moraes for making what he characterized as political arrests.

He declared he will no longer abide by rulings from de Moraes, who will assume the presidency of the nation's electoral tribunal next year, when Bolsonaro will seek reelection.

"Any decision from Mr. Alexandre de Moraes, this president will no longer comply with. The patience of our people has run out," Bolsonaro said. "For us, he no longer exists."

He also told the cheering crowd in Sao Paulo: "I want to tell those who want to make me unelectable in Brazil: Only God removes me from there."

"There are three options for me: be jailed, killed or victorious. I'm letting the scoundrels know: I'll never be imprisoned!" he declared.

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Thomas Traumann, a political analyst, said Bolsonaro "crossed the Rubicon" on Tuesday.

"He escalated the crisis. You can't have a president who says, 'I won't accept rule of law,' or says, 'I will only accept the laws I like.' That's not a democracy," Traumann said.

Bolsonaro spent almost two months calling on supporters to take part in Independence Day rallies around the country that could show his continuing political appeal despite slumping poll ratings and a string of setbacks.

Bolsonaro had predicted 2 million people would turn out in Sao Paulo; state security officials estimated the crowd at 125,000, crammed into the city's broad Avenue Paulista. Supporters also massed outside Brasilia's government buildings and gathered alongside Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach. All three cities also featured smaller protests against the president.

Some of his supporters carried signs and banners calling on the military to secure Bolsonaro's hold on power or demanding Congress and the Supreme Court be shut down.

Bolsonaro has called on the Senate to impeach de Moraes and said he might reject the 2022 presidential election results if he loses. He has also spoken nostalgically of the nation's past military dictatorship.

On the eve of Tuesday's protests, he signed a provisional measure sharply limiting social media networks' ability to remove or block content.

Brazil's Supreme Court said Chief Justice Luiz Fux planned to address Bolsonaro's comments at the beginning of Wednesday's session.

Former justice Celso de Mello, widely regarded as still very influential in the court, told the magazine *Veja* that Bolsonaro's statements show "a sad figure" and a "mediocre politician" with a "distorted autocratic mindset."

In Brasilia, at least 100 military police with riot shields stood in front of Congress, and several dozen formed two lines behind barricades on the road leading to the Supreme Court. About 10,000 officers were scattered around the area for the demonstrations, security officials said.

At least three times — once soon after Bolsonaro's second speech of the day — groups of demonstrators in Brasilia tried to get past police barriers, but officers repelled them with pepper spray.

"The risk we see scenes of violence and an institutional crisis that's unprecedented in Brazil's recent history still remains and is considerable," said Paulo Calmon, a political science professor at the University of Brasilia.

Regina Pontes, 53, stood atop a flatbed that advanced toward the barriers in Brasilia. She said the Brazilian people have every right to enter the area.

"You can't close the door to keep the owner out," she said.

The world's second-highest COVID-19 death toll, a drumbeat of accusations of wrongdoing in the government's handling of the pandemic, and surging inflation have dragged down Bolsonaro's approval ratings.

A sign of disapproval came in the evening, when many people in different cities banged on pots in a traditional method of protest.

Polls show Bolsonaro's nemesis, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, could trounce him in a runoff if he enters the race.

A 69-year-old farmer from Minas Gerais state, Clever Greco, came to Brasilia with a group of more than 1,000 other Bolsonaro supporters.

"I don't know what day I'll go back. I'm prepared to give my blood, if needed," Greco said. "We're no longer asking; the people are ordering."

Billier reported from Rio de Janeiro. AP videojournalist Tatiana Pollastri and reporter Mauricio Savarese contributed from Sao Paulo.

Britney Spears' father files to end court conservatorship

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears' father filed Tuesday to end the court conservatorship that has

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controlled the singer's life and money for 13 years.

James Spears filed his petition to terminate the conservatorship in Los Angeles Superior Court.

"As Mr. Spears has said again and again, all he wants is what is best for his daughter," the document says. "If Ms. Spears wants to terminate the conservatorship and believes that she can handle her own life, Mr. Spears believes that she should get that chance."

Judge Brenda Penny, who oversees the case, will need to approve the move.

Britney Spears attorney Matthew Rosengart said in an email the filing "represents another legal victory for Britney Spears — a massive one — as well as vindication for Ms. Spears."

James Spears had been the target of much of the anger surrounding the conservatorship from both his daughter and the public.

A petition from Britney Spears' attorney to remove him was to be heard at the next hearing in the case on Sept. 29.

James Spears said in a filing on Aug. 12 that he was planning to step down as the conservator of her finances, but offered no timetable. He gave up his control over her life decisions in 2019, keeping only his role overseeing her money.

He has repeatedly said there is no justification for his removal, and he has acted only in his daughter's best interest.

The conservatorship was established in 2008 when Britney Spears' began to have very public mental struggles as media outlets obsessed over each moment, hordes of paparazzi aggressively followed her everywhere, and she lost custody of her children.

Tuesday's filing cites how Britney Spears' "impassioned plea" to end the legal arrangement in a June 23 speech in court gave a jolt to those who wanted to see her freed from it, quoting from the transcript of that afternoon.

"I just want my life back," Britney Spears said. "And it's been 13 years and it's enough. It's been a long time since I've owned my money. And it's my wish and my dream for all of this to end without being tested."

Tuesday's filing notes that Spears said she did not know she could file a petition to end the conservatorship, which she has yet to do. It says that Penny's decision to allow her to select Rosengart as her attorney demonstrates that the court trusts her with major choices. And it says evidence shows she has apparently "demonstrated a level of independence" by doing things like driving herself around Southern California.

It also cites her desire to make her own decisions on therapy and other medical care.

Spears had said in her June 23 speech that she was being compelled under the conservatorship to take certain medications and to use an intrauterine device for birth control against her will.

James Spears called for a court investigation of these and other allegations, saying they were issues that were beyond his control because he had stepped down as conservator of his daughter's person, handing the role off to court-appointed professional Jodi Montgomery.

Rosengart said when he was hired in July that he intended to help end the conservatorship, and questioned whether it needed to be established in the first place, though he had not yet filed to terminate it.

He said instead that his first priority was getting rid of James Spears, whom he challenged to resign on the spot in his first appearance before the court.

In his email responding to the request to terminate, Rosengart indicated that his tactics wouldn't change.

"It appears that Mr. Spears believes he can try to avoid accountability and justice," Rosengart said, "including sitting for a sworn deposition and answering other discovery under oath, but as we assess his filing (which was inappropriately sent to the media before it was served on counsel) we will also continue to explore all options."

Spears gave the conservatorship's initial existence credit for keeping her career afloat, though she has now put her work entirely on hold for more than two years.

Fans objecting to her circumstances and seeing what they believed were pleas for help in the pop star's Instagram posts began calling online to #FreeBritney, and began appearing outside her court hearings to protest.

Famous names from Miley Cyrus to Britney Spears' ex Justin Timberlake have joined the outcry in recent

months, especially after Spears' pair of passionate speeches to the court in June and July.

Penny, the judge with the ultimate power over the conservatorship, has not appeared inclined to end it before, but she has also never been presented with such a clear opportunity.

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>

Early stumble as El Salvador starts Bitcoin as currency

By MARCOS ALEMAN Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — El Salvador became the first country to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender Tuesday, but the rollout stumbled in its first hours and President Nayib Bukele said the digital wallet used for transactions was not functioning.

For part of the morning, El Salvador's president became tech support for a nation stepping into the world of cryptocurrency. Bukele marshaled his Twitter account — with more than 2.8 million followers — to walk users through what was happening.

Bukele explained that the digital wallet Chivo had been disconnected while server capacity was increased.

The president said it was a relatively simple problem. "We prefer to correct it before we connect it again," Bukele said. He encouraged followers to download the app and leave comments about how it was going.

Meanwhile, the value of Bitcoin plummeted early Tuesday, dropping from more than \$52,000 per coin to \$42,000, before recovering about half of that loss — an example of the volatility that worries many.

The government has promised to install 200 Chivo automatic tellers and 50 Bitcoin attention centers.

The Associated Press visited one of the automatic tellers in San Salvador's historic center, where attendants waited to help citizens, who initially didn't show much interest.

Asked if he had downloaded the Chivo app, Emanuel Ceballos, said he had not. "I don't know if I'm going to do it, I still have doubts about using that currency."

José Martín Tenorio said he was interested in Bitcoin, but had not downloaded the app either. "I'm running to work. Maybe at home tonight."

In Santa Tecla, a San Salvador suburb, young attendants were waiting to assist people at a help center.

Denis Rivera arrived with a friend because they had been trying to download the digital wallet app without success.

He said he didn't understand why some people "have been scandalized" by Bitcoin. "We've been using debit and credit cards for years and it's the same, electronic money," he said.

He was in favor of it and planned to use the \$30 offered by the government as an incentive to try it out. "I'm going to see how efficient it is and practical it can be and based on that decide if I keep using it or not."

José Luis Hernández, owner of a barbershop in the area, came looking for information.

"I have a small business and I want to know how to use the application and how are the rates and all of that," Hernández said.

The AP confirmed that at least three international fast food chain restaurants were accepting Bitcoin payments.

David Gerard, author of "Attack of the 50 Foot Blockchain," said Tuesday's Bitcoin volatility likely had little to nothing to do with El Salvador. "My first guess was shenanigans, because it's always shenanigans," Gerard said via email.

"Bitcoin basically doesn't respond to market forces or regulatory announcements," Gerard said. "That sort of price pattern, where it crashes hugely in minutes then goes back up again, is usually one of the big guys burning the margin traders."

Because Bitcoin is so thinly traded, it could also have been a big holder making a large sale to have cash, thus sending the market for a ride, Gerard said.

Three face-to-face public opinion surveys performed recently showed that most Salvadorans did not agree with the government's decision to make Bitcoin legal currency. Bitcoin joins the U.S. dollar as El Salvador's official currencies.

In June the Legislative Assembly enacted the Bitcoin law, and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration is providing the government with technical assistance.

The law says that Bitcoin can be used for any transaction and any business with the technological capacity to do so must accept payment in the cryptocurrency.

The government will back Bitcoin with a \$150 million fund. To incentivize Salvadorans to use it, the government offered \$30 worth of credit to those who use Chivo.

Critics have warned that the currency's lack of transparency could attract increased criminal activity to the country and its wild swings in value could quickly wipe out users' savings.

Opposition groups marched in El Salvador to demand the derogation of the law that allows Bitcoin use.

Bukele has said the cryptocurrency — originally created to operate outside government controlled financial systems — would help attract investment and save Salvadorans money when they transfer earnings in the United States back home to relatives in El Salvador. But its use would be voluntary.

AP writer Christopher Sherman contributed from Mexico City.

Texas GOP bets on hard right turn amid changing demographics

By WILL WEISSERT and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Republicans in America's largest conservative state for years racked up victories under the slogan "Keep Texas Red," a pledge to quash a coming blue wave that Democrats argued was inevitable given shifting demographics.

Now, those population transformations have arrived, with the 2020 census confirming that the state got bigger, more suburban and far more diverse. Yet a more apt state GOP rallying cry for today might be "Make Texas Even Redder."

Faced with increasingly dire demographic threats to their party's dominance, Texas Republicans have championed a bevy of boundary-pushing conservative policymaking that dramatically expands gun rights, curbs abortions and tightens election laws — steering a state that was already far to the right even more so.

Far from tiptoeing toward the middle to appease the Democratic-leaning Texans driving population growth, the party is embracing its base and vowing to use a new round of redistricting to ensure things stay that way through 2030 — becoming a national model for staying on the offensive no matter how political winds may eventually shift.

"Texas, obviously, is a national leader as it concerns the laws that we pass and other states follow," Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who is fond of vowing to make Texas the "freedom capital of America," said Tuesday.

Abbott, who is up for reelection next year and often mentioned as a possible 2024 presidential contender, signed voting legislation Tuesday that empowers partisan poll watchers and prohibits a host of measures that made casting ballots easier in heavily Democratic cities amid the coronavirus pandemic. Republicans argue that the new rules boost election security and charged ahead to pass them, even as Democratic state lawmakers fled the state for weeks to block them.

The voting law was nearly overshadowed by national debate over another new Texas law — the nation's toughest set of abortion restrictions. By banning the procedure in most instances and leaving no exceptions for cases of rape and incest, the state has mounted perhaps the strongest threat yet to Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision establishing a woman's right to an abortion.

Another new law allows virtually any Texan age 21 and older to carry guns without licenses. Other legislation banned schools from teaching about institutional racism and limited the state's own cities from making decisions on police funding, environmental budgeting and mask mandates. And on Tuesday, Abbott instructed lawmakers to once again try passing restrictions on transgender student athletes when the Legislature convenes later this month to begin drawing new voting maps.

These policy victories are poised to become cemented for the foreseeable future. Because Republicans control both chambers of the Legislature, the party will decide new congressional and statehouse districts

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based on 2020 census figures — seeking to make the boundaries as favorable as possible so the GOP can hold statehouse majorities for the next decade and beyond.

The new maps will have to counteract what looks to be unfavorable census data for Texas Republicans. The state's Hispanic population grew by nearly 2 million, according to 2020 census figures, accounting for half of Texas' total population increase. Even as the GOP made gains with Hispanic voters, about 6 in 10 Hispanics in Texas chose Democrat Joe Biden over Republican Donald Trump in November, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate.

Republicans also see warning signs in the suburbs. The state is home to four of the nation's 10 fastest-growing cities, fueled by booming communities outside Houston, Dallas and Austin. After years of GOP advantages in these places, Biden split suburban voters in Texas with Trump, AP VoteCast found, and won the state's five largest counties.

Democrats blame the unfettered conservatism on Trumpism. The former president ushered in "a new Republican Party that is more feisty. It's more fringe," said Democratic state Rep. Ron Reynolds, vice chair of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus.

"The cow's left the barn, and it's hard to put it back," said Reynolds, whose district includes booming suburban Houston. "They have to entertain and they have to appease because these are the people that are excited about voting in Republican primaries."

Democrats like Reynolds warn there will be voter backlash. But they have little history to back that up: Republicans haven't lost a statewide race in 27 years and say it is a fierce commitment to conservatism, not pragmatic compromise, that has preserved the nation's longest electoral winning streak.

"If anyone expected that, their head is way too far up their, uh, philosophy," Corbin Casteel, the Trump campaign's Texas director in 2016, joked about any notion that census figures might make the state's Republicans move to the center.

Even more moderate Texas Republicans say past pronouncements about changing demographics helping Democrats were overblown. "The rumors of our demise have been greatly exaggerated," said state Rep. Travis Clardy of Nacogdoches in east Texas.

"We keep winning with really strong numbers," Clardy added. "I don't think we've had strident, extreme, right-wing positions. I think we've governed conservatively."

Still, the party has shown a capacity for moderation in the not-too-distant past. After a Democratic wave swept Texas and the nation in 2018, the GOP had an exceedingly quiet legislative session, focusing on traditional issues like property tax cuts and public education.

It was only after the party held the Legislature and gained seats in Congress last November that it turned hard right — anticipating that its members' biggest electoral threat going forward is primary challenges rather than being unseated by Democrats.

"I've heard that all this demographic change is going to catch up to the party of the old white people, but I don't think it's happened," Clardy said. "The numbers may be changing, but they may not be trending the way they think that they are."

The move to the right is perhaps best illustrated by Abbott, a former state Supreme Court justice who was once considered to have a more measured and deliberative, business-friendly approach to the job but has lately gone even further right than the Legislature — particularly on immigration.

The governor recently ordered state police to arrest people suspected of being in the country illegally and directed a state agency to pony up \$25 million for 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) of wall along Texas' nearly 1,200-mile (1,930-kilometer) border with Mexico.

No major Democrat has yet announced a candidacy against Abbott, though former presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke — who came within 3 percentage points of upsetting Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in 2018 — still might. The governor has already drawn a primary challenge from former congressman Allen West, a onetime tea party darling known for likening Democrats to Nazis.

Casteel said doubling down on conservative values is working for Republicans in Texas and beyond. He pointed to Abbott and another governor and possible 2024 presidential candidate, Republican Ron

DeSantis of Florida. Both have gained national followings by being willing to combat unpopular policies like universal mask mandates. That's despite Democrats in both states insisting the governors' failure to more strenuously battle the pandemic could ultimately jeopardize their aspirations for reelection — not to mention the White House.

"He's faced circumstances that few governors have, with the pandemic and all sorts of other things that put conservatives in a tough bind," Casteel said of Abbott. "It's safety versus liberty and he — and folks like Gov. DeSantis — they've threaded that needle very nicely. And I think the results are speaking for themselves."

Weissert reported from Washington.

Idaho hospitals begin rationing health care amid COVID surge

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho public health leaders announced Tuesday that they activated "crisis standards of care" allowing health care rationing for the state's northern hospitals because there are more coronavirus patients than the institutions can handle.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare quietly enacted the move Monday and publicly announced it in a statement Tuesday morning — warning residents that they may not get the care they would normally expect if they need to be hospitalized.

The move came as the state's confirmed coronavirus cases skyrocketed in recent weeks. Idaho has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the U.S.

The state health agency cited "a severe shortage of staffing and available beds in the northern area of the state caused by a massive increase in patients with COVID-19 who require hospitalization."

The designation includes 10 hospitals and healthcare systems in the Idaho panhandle and in north-central Idaho. The agency said its goal is to extend care to as many patients as possible and to save as many lives as possible.

The move allows hospitals to allot scarce resources like intensive care unit rooms to patients most likely to survive and make other dramatic changes to the way they treat patients. Other patients will still receive care, but they may be placed in hospital classrooms or conference rooms rather than traditional hospital rooms or go without some life-saving medical equipment.

At Kootenai Health — the largest hospital in northern Idaho — some patients are waiting for long periods for beds to open up in the full intensive care unit, said Dr. Robert Scoggins, the chief of staff. Inside the ICU, one critical care nurse might be supervising up to six patients with the help of two other non-critical care nurses. That's a big departure from the usual one ICU nurse for one ICU patient ratio, he said.

On Monday, the Coeur d'Alene hospital started moving some coronavirus patients into its nearby conference center. A large classroom in the center was converted into a COVID-19 ward, with temporary dividers separating the beds. Some emergency room patients are being treated in a converted portion of the emergency room lobby, and the hospital's entire third floor has also been designated for coronavirus patients.

Urgent and elective surgeries are on hold, Scoggins said, and Kootenai Health is struggling to accept any of the high-level trauma patients that would normally be transferred from the smaller hospitals in the region.

Other states are preparing to take similar measures if needed. Hawaii Gov. David Ige quietly signed an order last week releasing hospitals and health care workers from liability if they have to ration health care.

The unfolding crush of patients to Idaho hospitals has been anticipated with dread by the state's health care providers. Medical experts have said that Idaho could have as many as 30,000 new coronavirus cases a week by mid-September if the current rate of infections lasts.

"Crisis standards of care is a last resort. It means we have exhausted our resources to the point that our healthcare systems are unable to provide the treatment and care we expect," Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Director Dave Jeppesen said in a statement.

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He added: "This is a decision I was fervently hoping to avoid. The best tools we have to turn this around is for more people to get vaccinated and to wear masks indoors and in outdoor crowded public places. Please choose to get vaccinated as soon as possible – it is your very best protection against being hospitalized from COVID-19."

The designation will remain in effect until there are enough resources — including staffing, hospital beds and equipment or a drop in the number of patients — to provide normal levels of treatment to all.

More than 500 people were hospitalized statewide with COVID-19 on Sept. 1 and more than a third of them were in intensive care unit beds.

Idaho's hospitals have struggled to fill empty nursing, housekeeping and other health care positions, in part because some staffers have left because they are burned out by the strain of the pandemic and because others have been quarantined because they were exposed to COVID-19.

Late last month, Little called in 220 medical workers available through federal programs and mobilized 150 Idaho National Guard soldiers to help hospitals cope with the surge.

Two hundred of the federal workers are medical and administrative staffers available through a contract with the U.S. General Services Administration. The U.S. Department of Defense agreed to send a 20-person medical response team to northern Idaho. The Idaho National Guard soldiers will help with logistical support such as screenings and lab work.

On Tuesday, the governor called the move to limit care "an unprecedented and unwanted point in the history of our state" and urged residents to get vaccinated against coronavirus.

Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that full vaccination with any of the currently available coronavirus vaccines dramatically reduces the risk of requiring hospitalization for a coronavirus infection.

"More Idahoans need to choose to receive the vaccine so we can minimize the spread of the disease and reduce the number of COVID-19 hospitalizations, many of which involve younger Idahoans and are preventable with safe and effective vaccines," said Little, who is a Republican.

When the pandemic first came to Idaho at the start of 2020, Little ordered a partial shutdown of the state — ordering some businesses to temporarily close or shift to take-out style services, banning some large gatherings and asking residents to stay home as much as possible.

The move was aimed at ensuring that hospitals wouldn't become overwhelmed by patients. Idaho was on the verge of enacting crisis standards of care during a major coronavirus surge last winter, but narrowly avoided doing so — making this the first time the state has taken the drastic measure.

Little reopened the state in stages over a period of several months and has not reimposed restrictions limiting gatherings. Businesses are mostly operating as normal.

The state's crisis guidelines are complex, and give hospitals a legal and ethical template to use while rationing care.

Under the guidelines, patients are given priority scores based on a number of factors that impact their likelihood of surviving a health crisis.

Those deemed in most in need of care and most likely to benefit from it are put on priority lists for scarce resources like ICU beds.

Others in dire need but with lower chances of surviving will be given "comfort care" to help keep them pain-free whether they succumb to their illnesses or recover.

Other patients with serious but not life-threatening medical problems will face delays in receiving care until resources are available.

"I hope that your takeaway from this is that the vaccines work. They are the best tool by far that we have," to keep people from getting seriously sick from the coronavirus, said Jeppesen, the state health department director.

The demand on hospitals is likely to increase in coming weeks as case numbers continue to climb, Jeppesen said, so everyone should take steps to avoid needing any emergency care if possible by wearing seatbelts, taking medication as prescribed and reconsidering activities like riding bikes that can lead to accidents.

"Just be a little more careful," he said.

Hurricane Ida power outages, misery persist 9 days later

By KEVIN MCGILL and MELINDA DESLATTE Associated Press

LaPLACE, La. (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses in Louisiana, most of them outside New Orleans, still didn't have power Tuesday and more than half the gas stations in two major cities were without fuel nine days after Hurricane Ida slammed into the state, splintering homes and toppling electric lines.

There were also continuing signs of recovery, however, as the total number of people without electricity has fallen from more than a million at its peak, while hundreds of thousands of people have had their water restored.

State health officials, meanwhile, announced that they are revoking the licenses of seven nursing homes that evacuated to a warehouse where seven residents died amid deteriorating conditions after the hurricane.

The disparity in power restoration between New Orleans, where nearly 3/4 of the city had electricity again, and other communities where almost all residents were still in the dark prompted frustration and finger-pointing.

State Rep. Tanner Magee, the House's second-ranking Republican who lives in the devastated city of Houma in Terrebonne Parish, said he's convinced his region is being shortchanged in favor of New Orleans.

"It's very infuriating to me," Magee said.

Though water was running again in his area, most hospitals in the region remained shuttered and the parish was in desperate need of temporary shelter for first responders and others vital to the rebuilding effort, he said.

Warner Thomas, president and CEO of the state's largest hospital system Ochsner Health warned that it would be "some time" before two Ochsner hospitals — one in Terrebonne Parish and the other in Lafourche Parish — fully reopen. Emergency rooms at the two hospitals, however, were operating.

Carnival Cruise Line announced Tuesday that it will keep one of its ships, Carnival Glory, docked in New Orleans through Sept. 18 to serve as housing for first responders.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said while there had been much progress in restoring water and power, "there's an awful lot of work to be done."

Without power, the Louisiana heat is the hardest thing to cope with, said Kim Bass, who lives in St. John the Baptist Parish. She and her husband are using a generator to keep food refrigerated but have no air conditioning. Water service is intermittent.

"So you may have water one minute, then you may not have water for the next two days," Bass said.

In many neighborhoods, homes were uninhabitable. State and federal officials said about 3,200 people are in mass shelters around Louisiana while another 25,000 people whose houses have been damaged are staying in hotel rooms through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's transitional sheltering program. FEMA already has approved more than 159,000 household applications for disaster assistance, according to Louisiana's emergency preparedness office.

Shontrece and Michael Lathers looked on despondently as workers wrestled a billowing blue tarp into place over what was left of the roof of their home in the St. John the Baptist Parish town of LaPlace. Ida's floodwaters had risen to about 3 feet (1 meter) inside their home and rain that had poured in through the wind-damaged roof obliterated most of the drywall ceilings.

The house will have to be gutted floor to ceiling, Michael Lathers said, adding that he had no idea how much the repairs will cost.

Fuel shortages also persisted across hard-hit areas of the state. More than 50% of gas stations in New Orleans and Baton Rouge remained without gasoline Tuesday afternoon, according to GasBuddy.com.

The power situation has improved greatly since Ida first hit. In the first hours after the storm, nearly 1.1 million customers were in the dark, but that number was down to about 430,000 on Tuesday. With the help of tens of thousands of workers from power companies in numerous states, the state's biggest

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energy provider, Entergy, has been able to slowly bring electricity back, leaving only 19% of its customers in the region without power as of Tuesday.

For residents in the state's five hardest-hit parishes in southeastern Louisiana, however, that number is little comfort. Fully 98% of those residents are still without power more than a week after Ida slammed onshore with 150 mph winds (240 kph) on Aug. 29.

Power probably won't be widely restored to St. John the Baptist and St. James parishes until Sept. 17 and until Sept. 29 to Lafourche, St. Charles and Terrebonne parishes, Entergy said Tuesday. The parishes are home to about 325,000 people.

In contrast, nearly all power has been restored in the capital of Baton Rouge, and only 25% of homes and businesses are still suffering outages in New Orleans. Entergy said it expected to have the vast majority of New Orleans brought online by Wednesday. Once areas such as New Orleans have their power restored, Entergy is moving its crews into communities south and west of the city that saw more widespread damage, said Entergy Louisiana President and CEO Phillip May.

As Entergy worked to get the lights turned on everywhere, the Louisiana Department of Health reported that the number of people without water had fallen from a peak of 850,000 to 62,000, though about 580,000 people were being advised to boil their water for safety. And grocery stores reopened in some places.

Ida's death toll in Louisiana rose to 15 people Tuesday after the state Department of Health reported two additional storm-related fatalities: a 68-year-old man who fell off of a roof while making repairs to damage caused by Hurricane Ida and a 71-year-old man who died of a lack of oxygen during an extended power outage. The storm's remnants also brought historic flooding, record rains and tornados from Virginia to Massachusetts, killing at least 50 more people.

Deslatte reported from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Associated Press writers Rebecca Santana in New Orleans; Jeff Martin in Marietta, Georgia; Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta; and Lisa J. Adams Wagner in Evans, Georgia, contributed to this report.

UN nuke watchdog: Iran pressing on with uranium enrichment

By KIYOKO METZLER Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Iran has continued to increase its stockpile of highly enriched uranium that could be used to make nuclear weapons in contravention of a 2015 accord with world powers that was meant to contain Tehran's nuclear program, the U.N. atomic watchdog said Tuesday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency also told member states in its confidential quarterly report that its verification and monitoring activities have been "seriously undermined" since February by Iran's refusal to let inspectors access IAEA monitoring equipment.

The Vienna-based agency told members that its confidence in properly assessing Iran's activities — what it called the "continuity of knowledge" — was declining over time and that would continue "unless the situation is immediately rectified by Iran."

The IAEA said certain monitoring and surveillance equipment cannot be left for more than three months without being serviced. It was provided with access this month to four surveillance cameras installed at one site, but one of the cameras had been destroyed and a second had been severely damaged, the agency said.

Its director-general, Rafael Mariano Grossi, said he was willing to travel to Iran to meet the recently elected government for talks on the issue.

The agency said it estimates Iran's stock of uranium enriched to up to 60% fissile purity at 10 kilograms, an increase of 7.6 kilograms since May, while the country's stockpile of uranium enriched to up to 20% fissile purity is now estimated at 84.3 kilograms, up from 62.8 kilograms three months earlier.

Iran's total stock of uranium is estimated at 2,441.3 kilograms as of Aug. 30, down from 3241 kilograms on May 22, the agency said.

Tehran is only permitted to stockpile 202.8 kilograms of uranium under the nuclear deal known as the

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Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, which promises Iran economic incentives in exchange for limits on its nuclear program, and is meant to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear bomb.

The U.S. unilaterally pulled out of the nuclear deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump, but Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia have tried to preserve the accord.

Tehran's strategy of deliberately violating the deal is seen as an attempt to pressure Europe to give Iran incentives to offset the crippling American sanctions re-imposed after the U.S. pullout.

President Joe Biden has said he is open to rejoining the pact. The last round of talks in Vienna ended in June without a clear result.

In Tehran, Iranian news agencies quoted Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Kazem Gharibabadi, as saying in Vienna that all Iran's nuclear activities had been "carried out in the framework of Iran's nuclear rights and under nonproliferation treaty."

He claimed the agency was under pressure by some members and urged it to remain "independent, impartial and professional."

In a separate confidential report seen by The Associated Press, the agency expressed its deep concern at the presence of nuclear material at undeclared locations in Iran. "Even after some two years, the safeguards issues (...) in relation to the four locations in Iran not declared to the agency remain unresolved," the report stated.

Nasser Karimi in Tehran contributed to this report.

Photographer, his leg lost, seeks answers from Paralympians

By EMILIO MORENATTI Associated Press

When I last saw Freddie de los Santos, his mouth was ravaged -- his teeth had been blown away by the same blast that took his leg. And yet, he always smiled.

The year was 2009. We were both being treated at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center; I too had lost a leg in southern Afghanistan. We spent months together, the soldier and the photographer, and he would tell me of his exhaustion, his trauma and his nightmares.

A dozen years later, Freddie has a new life. He is a Paralympian, one of several American soldiers who rebounded from horrendous injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan to compete in the Tokyo games. And I have resumed my career with a camera, traveling the world, telling stories.

At times I think I would give it all away -- my life's work, the prizes and recognition, including the Pulitzer I was awarded this year -- just to walk on my own two legs again. But I also realize the role my disability has played in shaping who I am today.

And I wonder: Can disability actually give us more than it has taken?

I wanted to share these reflections with those soldiers wounded in combat, to speak amputee to amputee about the capabilities we have come to possess despite our disabilities. And so I crossed the United States to talk with five Paralympians.

I would not have the intimate conversation I was looking for with triathlete Melissa Stockwell, the kind shared only between two people who were both missing a limb; we connected mostly as parents, trying their best to raise their kids.

When sprinter Luis Puertas and I spoke of his life before an IED in Iraq which took both of his legs, he preferred to bury the past and to look ahead to the challenges life has yet to throw at him, "I like to be by myself, I want to be by myself" he told me again and again.

Cyclist Tom Davis assured me that his injuries changed his life and that of his family for the better -- he's a better person, a better husband and father, all because of the ambush which cost him his leg. He wouldn't give any of it up for the opportunity to walk again, he said.

Freddie De Los Santos feels differently. Now when he smiles his mouth opens up to a beautiful set of fake teeth; he has the physique of an athlete and he moves with ease. But he said he would burn everything he has -- his home, his race bike, his paintings, the new Tesla he just bought -- to get his leg back

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and leave behind the ghosts of a war that haunt him day and night.

Unlike the others, unlike me, swimmer Brad Snyder lost not a limb but his eyes. I had never photographed a story about a blind person before, and I decided to deactivate the silent mode of my camera so he was conscious of each photograph I made with the click of the shutter. My lenses focus on the retinas of my subjects; Brad has no retinas, so until I turned off the feature the camera often focused on the eyes of his guide dog, Timber.

Brad told me that before he lost his sight, he wanted to be a nobody, anonymous to the world like so many other people, to ride his motorcycle along the Pacific Coast away from his experiences in Afghanistan and toward a normal life with a normal job.

I turned off the lights in the kitchen we were sitting in without him noticing and for a short few moments Brad and I were speaking together in the darkness of his world.

I thought: We are, all of us, unlucky. But we are also blessed to have received treatments that allowed us to go on with our lives. There are untold numbers of Afghans who were similarly maimed and were not so fortunate.

And I thought: Yes, we would have been happy living anonymous lives. But because of that single accident of fate, our lives were turned upside down and we were set on different paths to become different people. We died that day, if only for a few seconds, and amid the grueling chaos of war we found peace and perhaps even happiness in death. We were brought back to lives not of our choosing, lives with disability as our constant companion.

Each of us must come to our own conclusions. But I look at my life, and I am happy.

AP Top 25: Georgia jumps to No. 2 behind Tide; UCLA moves in

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Georgia jumped three spots to No. 2 behind Alabama in The Associated Press Top 25 released Tuesday, giving the Southeastern Conference the top two teams in the country for the 30th time in the 85-year history of the college football poll.

It is the second time in the last three seasons and the third in the last five that the SEC is sitting 1-2 in the AP Top 25, which is presented by Regions Bank. Alabama and LSU had a four-week run as Nos. 1 and 2 in the 2019 season before they played each other.

The Crimson Tide strengthened its hold on No. 1 after it throttled Miami in the first full week of the regular season. Alabama received 59 first-place votes, up from the 47 it had in the preseason poll.

Georgia received four first-place votes after beating Clemson 10-3 in the opening weekend's biggest game.

Ohio State moved up to No. 3 and Oklahoma dropped two spots to No. 4. Texas A&M is fifth, giving the SEC three teams in the top five.

Clemson fell three spots to sixth, marking the first time the Tigers have been out of the top four since 2017. Clemson dropped as low as No. 7 that season before finishing fourth.

No. 7 Cincinnati and No. 8 Notre Dame moved up one spot each. Iowa State dropped two places to No. 9, one spot ahead of No. 10 Iowa, heading into their rivalry game on Saturday.

POLL POINTS

Alabama and Georgia finished 1-2 in the Top 25 in 2017, when the Tide beat the Bulldogs in overtime in the an all-SEC College Football Playoff game. Alabama and Georgia also spent two weeks in that regular season at Nos. 1-2.

One conference has held the top two spots 76 times since the AP poll started in 1936, none more than the SEC. The now-defunct Big Eight is next with 23.

IN

— No. 16 UCLA is ranked for the first time since a brief stay at No. 25 in 2017, Jim Mora's last season as coach of the Bruins. It has been a slow climb back for UCLA under Chip Kelly, but a 2-0 start and a 38-27 victory against LSU pushed the Bruins into the rankings. LSU dropped out of the rankings from No. 16.

- No. 19 Virginia Tech moved into the rankings after beating Atlantic Coast Conference rival North Carolina. This is the sixth straight season the Hokies have been ranked for at least one week, though Virginia

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Tech has not finished in the Top 25 since 2017. The Tar Heels fell 14 spots to No. 24.

- No. 20 Mississippi was not far outside of the rankings to start the season and earned their first poll appearance since early in the 2016 season by beating Louisville.

- No. 25 Auburn grabbed the final spot and has now been ranked for at least one week in nine straight seasons.

OUT

Eight Top 25 teams lost over the holiday weekend, though five were beaten by another ranked team.

— Indiana, ranked in the preseason for the first time since 1969, is unranked after getting blown out at Iowa.

— Washington dropped out after a 13-7 loss to FCS power Montana. The Huskies became just the fifth ranked team to lose to an FCS team in the history of the AP Top 25.

— Louisiana-Lafayette received its first preseason ranking in school history, but dropped out after losing decisively at Texas.

CONFERENCE CALL

SEC — 6 (Nos. 1, 2, 5, 13, 20, 25).

Pac-12 — 5 (Nos. 12, 14, 16, 21, 23).

ACC — 4 (Nos. 6, 19, 22, 24).

Big Ten — 4 (Nos. 3, 10, 11, 18).

Big 12 — 3 (Nos. 4, 9, 15).

American — 1 (No. 7).

Sun Belt — 1 (No. 17).

Independent — 1 (No. 8).

RANKED vs. RANKED

No. 12 Oregon at No. 3 Ohio State. The pandemic cost the Ducks their home game in this series last year. It's the teams' first regular-season meeting since 1987.

No. 10 Iowa at No. 9 Iowa State. The biggest Cy-Hawk game ever. No doubt.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at <https://twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP>. Listen at <http://www.APpodcasts.com>

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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.

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People are getting ominous and threatening phone calls, texts and WhatsApp messages, said Neesha Suarez, constituent services director for Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., 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 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 and could query fingerprints and iris and face scans stored in a different database with which it was integrated, 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

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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 anonymity 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.

The story clarifies that the Afghan Personnel and Pay system did not include biometric data but rather could query such information in a different database with which it was integrated.

Afghan officer rescued from Kabul starts new life in U.S.

By ALEX SANZ Associated Press

The dramatic rescue in Afghanistan happened under the cover of darkness. The Taliban were closing in, and Americans were running out of time to save Mohammad Khalid Wardak.

The high-profile Afghan national police officer spent years working alongside the U.S. military, and after the fall of Kabul, he went on the run, moving from safe house to safe house, at one point running barefoot to avoid capture. The U.S. and its allies had only minutes to get Khalid, as his friends call him, and his wife and their four young sons to the safety of a waiting helicopter.

As part of Operation Promise Kept, the family was whisked away to an undisclosed location in Kabul and then to Kuwait, where Khalid was treated for a wound from a mortar attack. Less than three weeks later, the warrior who once directed resistance against the Taliban from a hospital bed has settled with his family in the United States.

"I'm a free man," Khalid told The Associated Press through an interpreter after arriving at Dulles International Airport near Washington, D.C., aboard a U.S. military flight 15 days after his rescue. "It's like a dream for me."

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During a 90-minute conversation from a U.S. government official's home, Khalid, who left Afghanistan with a few important documents and the clothes he was wearing, recounted his final firefights with the Taliban, the brotherhood he developed with U.S. special forces and the prospect of a new life with no need for bodyguards, thanks to the generosity of friends and strangers.

"Every single minute I was, like, 'They're probably going to kidnap my children or my brothers and kill them,'" he said, still worried about relatives in Afghanistan. "Everybody was looking for me."

Khalid is one of the thousands of Afghans starting over in new countries after the American withdrawal. His friends said he had no intention of leaving and planned to defend his homeland after U.S. forces were gone. But the government collapsed with stunning speed, and the president fled the country.

He was widely known because of his position as police chief in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province and from television appearances, including one in which he challenged the Taliban to a fight, his friends said.

"There's no price in the world to be able to see Khalid and his family," said Robert McCreary, a former congressional chief of staff and White House official under President George W. Bush, who worked with U.S. special forces in Afghanistan. "You're talking about human lives and whether they live or die. We're so happy that we were able to get this done for them after everything they've done for us."

McCreary told the AP last month that Khalid originally sought protection only for his family while he kept fighting.

He said Khalid came to the rescue in March 2013, when a special forces detachment in eastern Afghanistan's Wardak province suffered an insider attack. Someone dressed in an Afghan National Security Forces uniform opened fire, killing two Americans.

When the outpost was almost simultaneously attacked from the outside, a U.S. commander called on Khalid, who within minutes raced into the valley with a quick-reaction force to defend his American partners.

In 2015, when Khalid lost part of his right leg in a rocket-propelled grenade attack, friends in the U.S. military helped get him medical care and a prosthetic leg outside the country. A month later, he was again leading special police operations alongside Americans, said Army Special Forces Sgt. Major Chris Green, who worked with Khalid in Afghanistan.

Along the way, he helped apprehend al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders. He went on to serve as police chief in Ghazni province and then Helmand province, where he was wounded in July in the mortar attack.

Khalid said he left a "very tough situation" and "returned from the dead."

"I served my country for 20 years. We had a government. We had a military. Everything is gone. Sometimes I cry about it," he said. "These brothers helped me. I wasn't expecting to be alive. But they saved my life and my family."

Khalid spent his first days in Washington walking around the city and spending time with his family at a park. The children of a government official baked his family dozens of cookies. He was taken over the weekend to Walmart to buy clothes.

He hopes to meet this week with Sen. Chris Coons who, with McCreary, helped lead the effort to rescue Khalid, McCreary said. He also plans to meet with immigration attorneys to begin the process of becoming an American citizen.

Khalid said he wants to learn English, pursue a degree in computer engineering and spend more time with his family, something he wasn't able to do in Afghanistan.

"I spent a lot of time at war," he said. "This is the first time that I'm home safe with my family."

Nic McKinley, a CIA and Air Force veteran who founded Dallas-based DeliverFund, a nonprofit that's secured housing for 50 Afghan families in the United States, said that Khalid's story, while dramatic, is not unusual among Afghans.

He helped find Khalid a host in Washington and made sure he and his family had clothes and food.

"Khalid is a very smart man, a very capable man," McKinley said. "The whole community is wrapping around him to make sure that he has the things that he needs and, more importantly, as new needs pop up in the future, he has a community that he can lean on."

McCreary said he planned to be there for Khalid every step of the way.

"This is a great way to show him how much we love him for everything that he's done with us and for

us and how many American lives he saved and his time working alongside us," McCreary said. "It's a true honor to keep that promise for him."

Follow Alex Sanz on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/alexsanz>

COVID-19 boosters are coming but who will get them and when?

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

COVID-19 booster shots may be coming for at least some Americans but already the Biden administration is being forced to scale back expectations — illustrating just how much important science still has to be worked out.

The initial plan was to offer Pfizer or Moderna boosters starting Sept. 20, contingent on authorization from U.S. regulators. But now administration officials acknowledge Moderna boosters probably won't be ready by then — the Food and Drug Administration needs more evidence to judge them. Adding to the complexity, Moderna wants its booster to be half the dose of the original shots.

As for Pfizer's booster, who really needs another dose right away isn't a simple decision either. What's ultimately recommended for an 80-year-old vaccinated back in December may be different than for a 35-year-old immunized in the spring — who likely would get a stronger immunity boost by waiting longer for another shot.

FDA's scientific advisers will publicly debate Pfizer's evidence on Sept. 17, just three days before the administration's target. If the FDA approves another dose, then advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will recommend who should get one.

That's tricky because while real-world data shows the vaccines used in the U.S. remain strongly protective against severe disease and death, their ability to prevent milder infection is dropping. It's not clear how much of that is due to immunity waning or the extra-contagious delta variant — or the fact that delta struck just as much of the country dropped masks and other precautions.

When to jump to boosters "becomes a judgment," said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former FDA vaccine chief. "And is that urgent or do we have time for the data to come in?"

Already the CDC is considering recommending the first boosters just for nursing home residents and older adults who'd be at highest risk of severe disease if their immunity wanes -- and to front-line health workers who can't come to work if they get even a mild infection.

Some other countries already have begun offering boosters amid an ethical debate about whether rich countries should get a third dose before most people in poor countries get their first round. Here's what we know about the biology behind booster decisions:

WHAT DO BOOSTER SHOTS DO?

Vaccines train the immune system to fight the coronavirus, including by producing antibodies that block the virus from getting inside cells. People harbor huge levels right after the shots. But just like with vaccines against other diseases, antibodies gradually drop until reaching a low maintenance level.

A booster dose revs those levels back up again.

Pfizer and Moderna have filed FDA applications for booster doses but the government will decide on extra Johnson & Johnson doses later, once that company shares its booster data with the agency.

HOW MUCH PROTECTION DOES THAT TRANSLATE INTO?

No one yet knows "the magic line" — the antibody level known as the correlate of protection below which people are at risk for even mild infection, said immunologist Ali Ellebedy of Washington University at St. Louis.

But vaccines' main purpose is to prevent severe disease. "It's a very high bar to really go and say we can completely block infection," Ellebedy noted.

Plus, people's responses to their initial vaccination vary. Younger people, for example, tend to produce more antibodies to begin with than older adults. That means months later when antibody levels have naturally declined, some people may still have enough to fend off infection while others don't.

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That initial variation is behind the FDA's recent decision that people with severely weakened immune systems from organ transplants, cancer or other conditions need a third dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine to have a chance at protection. In those people, it's not a booster but an extra amount they need up-front.

WON'T ANTIBODIES JUST WANE AGAIN AFTER A BOOSTER?

Eventually. "We don't know the duration of protection following the boosters," cautioned Dr. William Moss of Johns Hopkins University.

But antibodies are only one defense. If an infection sneaks past, white blood cells called T cells help prevent serious illness by killing virus-infected cells. Another type called memory B cells jump into action to make lots of new antibodies.

Those back-up systems help explain why protection against severe COVID-19 is holding strong so far for most people. One hint of trouble: CDC has preliminary data that effectiveness against hospitalization in people 75 and older dropped slightly in July -- to 80% -- compared to 94% or higher for other adults.

"It's much easier to protect against severe disease because all you need is immunologic memory. And I would imagine for a younger person that would last for a while," maybe years, said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

WHAT'S THE BEST TIME TO GET A BOOSTER?

For many other types of vaccines, waiting six months for a booster is the recommended timing. The Biden administration has been planning on eight months for COVID-19 boosters.

The timing matters because the immune system gradually builds layers of protection over months. Give a booster too soon, before the immune response matures, and people can miss out on the optimal benefit, said Dr. Cameron Wolfe, an infectious disease specialist at Duke University.

"Sometimes waiting a little bit extra time is in fact appropriate to gain the strongest response," he said.

Not everyone's waiting on a final decision. For example, Colorado's UHealth has opened boosters to certain high-risk people first vaccinated back in December and January. San Francisco is giving some people who had a single-dose J&J vaccine a second shot from Pfizer or Moderna.

WILL BOOSTER SHOTS CONTAIN THE ORIGINAL VACCINE, OR ONE TAILORED TO DELTA?

The boosters will be an extra dose of the original vaccine. Manufacturers still are studying experimental doses tweaked to better match delta. There's no public data yet that it's time to make such a dramatic switch, which would take more time to roll out. And independent research, including studies from Ellebody's team, shows the original vaccine produces antibodies that can target delta.

"I'm very, very confident that this vaccine will work against delta with a single booster of the same vaccine," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla told The Associated Press.

AP Medical Writer Carla K. Johnson contributed to this report.

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UK leader Johnson gambles on tax hike to pay for elder care

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced Tuesday how he plans to keep a key election promise to grapple with the rocketing cost of long-term care for Britain's growing older population. To do it, he broke another election vow: not to raise taxes.

Johnson told lawmakers in the House of Commons that his Conservative government had made the "difficult but responsible" decision to hike taxes in order to raise 36 billion pounds (\$50 billion) over three years for social care and the overstretched National Health Service. The NHS faces a backlog of millions of delayed appointments and procedures after 18 months of pandemic pressures.

Johnson said there would be no more "dither and delay" about reforming social care.

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"Governments have ducked this problem for decades," he said.

That burden of funding care for older, sick and disabled adults in Britain currently falls largely on individuals, who often have to deplete their savings or sell their homes to pay for it. One in seven people ends up paying more than 100,000 pounds (\$138,000), according to the government, which calls the cost of elder care "catastrophic and often unpredictable."

Meanwhile, funding care for the poor who can't afford it is placing a growing burden on overstretched local authorities.

Johnson announced a 1.25% increase in the National Insurance health payments made by working-age people and their employers, saying the move was "responsible, necessary and fair."

But it breaks Johnson's promise in the 2019 election campaign not to hike personal taxes. The increase, which takes effect in April, will cost someone paid 21,000 pounds (\$27,500) a year about 180 pounds (\$248) more on their annual tax bill. High-earners paid 67,000 pounds a year (\$92,000) will pay more than triple that.

Taxes on income from stock dividends will also rise 1.25% to defuse claims that the burden is falling only on working people.

Breaking promises is hardly novel for politicians, but those enshrined in British parties' election manifestos have long been considered binding on governments. Johnson's plan has alarmed many Conservative lawmakers — both because it involves breaking a firm election commitment and because the burden would fall primarily on workers.

Jake Berry, one of a crop of Conservative lawmakers representing northern England who won seats from the Labour Party with promises of investment and new jobs, said the proposed plan would help affluent, older voters at the expense of younger, poorer ones.

And William Hague, a former Conservative leader, said breaking an election promise would be a "loss of credibility when making future election commitments, a blurring of the distinction between Tory and Labour philosophies, a recruiting cry for fringe parties on the right, and an impression given to the world that the U.K. is heading for higher taxes."

Johnson said breaking an election promise was "not something I do lightly. But a global pandemic was in no-one's manifesto."

Under the government's plan, which must be approved by Parliament, the amount people have to pay in their lifetime for social care will be capped at 86,000 pounds (\$118,500) starting in 2023, and everyone with assets of less than 100,000 pounds (\$138,000) will get some state support.

Care organizations largely welcomed the announcement, but an employers' organization, the Institute of Directors, said it would add "additional burden to business and the cost of employing staff, just as it looks to recover from the pandemic."

Some analysts said the new tax would raise money but do little to the expensive, inefficient way care is delivered through a patchwork of largely private companies. The Institute for Public Policy Research, a center-left think tank, said the government announcement was "a first step on a long reform journey."

"Delivering quality and personalized care remain huge challenges for our care system, as does a fair deal for social care workers," said senior research fellow Chris Thomas.

Attempts to reform the care system have stymied British governments. Johnson's predecessor, Theresa May, another Conservative, campaigned in a 2017 election on a plan to cut benefits to retirees and change the way they pay for long-term care. The idea was quickly dubbed a "dementia tax" by opponents and May ended up losing her majority in Parliament.

The changes Johnson has proposed apply only in England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate arrangements for elderly and disabled care.

Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition Labour Party, said the government's reforms, coming after a decade of Conservative government austerity programs, did not go far enough.

"He's putting a sticking plaster on gaping wounds that his party inflicted," Starmer said.

From battlefield to Tokyo: Combat vets vie at Paralympics

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

FREMONT, Ind. (AP) — The bald, broad-shouldered cyclist has spent years remembering a nighttime road in a faraway city. He can still describe the city's narrow streets and crushing heat. He talks about the dead end that forced his convoy turn around.

And the explosion.

"It'll always be a part of me," said Tom Davis, sitting outside his family home in rural Indiana. Cicadas are screeching. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," says a tattoo on an immense forearm.

"But I can't continue to be that guy that got blown up in Ramadi," the city outside Baghdad where a hidden bomb threw his armored vehicle high into the air, costing the soldier much of his left leg.

Davis is no longer that guy. Tens of thousands of miles of training helped make him into someone else -- one of the fastest men alive.

Twenty years after the attacks of Sept. 11, and just days after the Taliban took control of Kabul, Davis is one of the small group of American combat veterans competing in the Tokyo Paralympics -- a corps of elite athletes who have triumphed over catastrophic injuries they suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There's the triathlete who lost a leg when her convoy was ambushed on the bomb-cratered road to Baghdad's airport. The swimmer who went blind after stepping on a land mine in rural Afghanistan. The sprinter who lost both legs in another Baghdad convoy.

There's the cyclist who remembers clutching his dismembered leg in the moments after an attack in Afghanistan, holding it to his chest as if it was a baby.

They are a disparate group. Some are relentlessly optimistic. Others spent years wrestling emotional demons. Some insist they emerged from their personal battlefields without emotional scarring. Others insist that's impossible. Their stories are tangles of adversity and redemption, loss and achievement.

What unites them is a fierce competitiveness and an ability to push past disabilities that can look insurmountable to an outsider. And, at times, a quiet anger at people who dismiss them.

"Sometimes, people look at us and they don't see real athletes," said Freddie De Los Santos, a hand-cyclist and Army veteran.

Those people are wrong.

De Los Santos is open about his own struggles.

There were the basement suicide attempts, when he'd take handfuls of painkillers and wash them down with liquor. There were the nightmares that sometimes awakened him, and still do. There was the time he was locked into a psychiatric ward after attacking a pharmacist, and the countless times he screamed at his wife and two kids.

He scoffs at disabled combat vets who say they're fine.

"It's not possible," he said. "There's always some kind of trauma there."

De Los Santos, 51, who grew up in a rough New York City neighborhood at the height of the crack cocaine epidemic, has created an idyllic small-town life north of the city. His family lives in a neighborhood of quiet streets and American flags, where young mothers push strollers and rockers sit on front porches. He loves the neighborhood's strict rules: Grass must be cut weekly; houses can only be painted in approved colors; Christmas decorations must come down after Jan. 1.

De Los Santos, who is Black, was furious when a neighbor put up a Black pride flag.

"That's about division," he grumbled, driving past the flag. "We have rules because we don't want things like that here."

A fierce cyclist, he was introduced to the sport by physical therapists at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the hospital outside of Washington where tens of thousands of injured American soldiers were treated after Sept. 11.

Now, he trains on twisting, hilly roads that go past centuries-old farmhouses. He regularly breaks speed limits.

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His life changed in 2009, when a rocket-propelled grenade ripped into his vehicle in an Afghan village. He remembers his beard burning, and grabbing his leg after it was ripped off by the blast.

But by then he'd already seen plenty of firefights in Afghanistan, and in an earlier combat tour in Iraq. He'd seen friends die, and children cut down. The scars on his psyche were deep before that ambush, he says.

Even after he began training as a Paralympian, he sometimes hid for days in his basement. It took him years to feel stable, and he says he's still recovering.

"I function pretty well right now, but it hasn't been easy," he said.

He credits psychotherapy, along with a deep Christian faith, a very patient family, and a love for painting -- his art expresses his pain.

And he credits cycling.

Combat, he said, taught him to thrive on pain, making him a relentless competitor.

"You enjoy the pain," he said. "Sometimes, that pain is your best enemy. When I'm racing and I start to feel the pain, I say 'How are you doing?'"

Combat also taught him to advance relentlessly.

It's easy to hear echoes of that today.

"I have days where you see me moving and laughing, but I'm not functioning very well," he said.

"But I'm still pushing forward."

Walking through his New Jersey neighborhood, Brad Snyder looks like just another guy with his dog. In his bright, spotless kitchen, he moves effortlessly, a man with no eyes navigating with a few quick touches on the marble countertop.

Losing his sight, he says, seems to matter more to other people.

If anything ties these combat veterans together, it's how casually many can dismiss their injuries.

"Everyone is really distraught about this blindness thing," said Snyder, who is 37.

"Society has this bizarre reaction to me when they realize I'm blind," he said a couple weeks before leaving for Tokyo. "Almost every person will say 'I'm sorry.'"

"Well, I'm not sorry," he continues. "It's who I am. I'm used to it. I have an awesome life, an awesome wife, a cool life here in Princeton. Don't pity me. Don't feel sorry for me."

Sports, he says, lets the rest of the world see that.

"The Paralympics turns that pity upside down."

A Navy explosives expert, Snyder stepped on hidden mine in Afghanistan in 2011 as he moved to help a group of Afghan commandos badly injured by another blast. In moments he went from thinking he was dead, to relief that he was alive, to confusion as he stood up with blood pouring from his face.

"How bad is it?" he asked a friend.

The answer wasn't very reassuring: "Well, your face is f----- up but you can walk."

And, it turned out, he could swim.

A top swimmer at the U.S. Naval Academy, Snyder won his first two Paralympic gold medals in London barely a year after losing his sight. He won three more in Rio De Janeiro in 2016, then switched to the triathlon.

Snyder, who discovered a love for the classroom after teaching ethics a few years ago at the Naval Academy, started a Ph.D. at Princeton last year. He's focusing on relationships between militaries and the people they serve.

He lives near campus with his wife, Sara; they met a few years ago through a friend.

She is, he says, the most beautiful woman in the world.

He has never seen her.

Luis Puertas says he's not lonely, though on most nights, dinner means one place-setting at the big kitchen table. He likes being alone. He says that repeatedly.

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His training keeps him busy, along with occasional visits from old Army buddies, and relentless worrying over his blades, the curved carbon prosthetics he uses for sprinting. He has dozens of them. He can tinker with them for hours.

But his world is small: a quiet house on a quiet street in Orlando, Florida.

His 7-year-old daughter, who he loves so much it almost hurts, only lives with him part-time. His relationship with her mother turned bad long ago. Much of his family lives far away.

Puertas, 34, lost both his legs in September 2006 as he patrolled a crowded Baghdad neighborhood. His legs were severed when a massive IED blasted through his armored vehicle.

He's matter of fact about his injuries -- "In the Paralympics everybody has a story. There's always some guy whose story is worse." But the first years were rough.

There was the time he destroyed a computer at Walter Reed. Then he destroyed another. There were rivers of vodka and rum.

But even as he struggled emotionally, he began working out. First it was 10-mile runs to get himself in shape. Later it was sprinting.

He stopped for a few years -- a time he doesn't want to talk about -- but came back to the sport a few years ago.

"It became a part of me. The training and the running. The ritual. Waking up. Going to the track," he said.

You can hear his joy as he talks about his daughter, Emilia. She's the fastest runner in her grade, he'll tell you. She beats the boys, he says.

Beyond her, he said, little else counts. Not the blast. Not the years of anger. Nothing.

"The other stuff is just coincidence," he said. "It's just what I did in my life."

Melissa Stockwell knows how she can come across.

She's the triathlete with the big smile, the beautiful family and the prosthetic leg decorated like an American flag.

"I've always been an optimistic person," she said -- cheerfully -- in a phone interview from Colorado Springs, where she lives and trains. "Probably annoyingly optimistic to lots of people."

There's a good chance you've seen Stockwell at some point.

Maybe it was in the TV commercial for Ritz Crackers, where she inspires a girl who has lost a leg. Maybe it was in the Modelo beer commercial, or the one for Chobani yoghurt.

Maybe it was recent the Toyota ad, with the announcer proclaiming: "Right now, you can win during our 'Driven To Be The Best Event!'"

She's a public figure who has done countless interviews and a sought-after speaker who knows to avoid controversy. Ask her about America's pullouts from Iraq and Afghanistan and she effortlessly shifts the conversation to patriotism and her family.

Stockwell, 41, said she's the target of occasional gentle teasing from fellow athletes for her success with sponsors ("I'm happy to take it") but her optimism is also at the core of her success. She's won a small mountain of medals over more than a decade of competing.

"I'm not saying it's all unicorns and rainbows every day all day," she said. But "I accepted the loss of my leg early on, and that acceptance propelled me."

It propels her still.

Just eight weeks before the games in Tokyo, Stockwell was training on a bike when she swerved to miss a fallen branch and slammed into a tree. She broke her back in three places. The pain was excruciating.

"If this would have happened to a non-athlete they'd have you do nothing for eight weeks," she said. "But that was not an option."

Two weeks after the accident she was back in the pool. Soon after she was training on a bicycle. But just days before leaving for Tokyo, her running was still limited to low-impact aqua-jogging in a pool.

The Paralympic triathlon includes a half-mile (750 meter) swim, a 12.4-mile (20-kilometer) bike ride and a 3.1-mile (5-kilometer) run.

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The run was the real worry.

"I need 3.1 miles -- that's it," she said. "I'm hoping for 3.1 fast miles."

By age 27, Tom Davis had been through a string of jobs, too many hangovers and a couple of DUI arrests. He was unemployed and living with his parents.

"Something's gotta change," he told himself. "If I stay here, I'm either going to be dead or in jail or in prison in 10 years."

An Army Ranger competition on TV grabbed his attention: He enlisted the next day.

A few weeks into his second Iraq tour, in 2006, Davis was in a patrol convoy in the city of Ramadi when they hit a dead end. Just after turning around, a bomb blew his armored Humvee high into the air. Militants opened fire. He regained consciousness upside down inside in the vehicle, his left leg badly mangled, gunfire blasting around him.

He was eventually transferred to Walter Reed, where a therapist pushed him to try a hand-cycle. For a former high school runner who had once dreamed of the Olympics, it was a gift.

"As soon as I got on that bike, just feeling that speed again of being a runner," he said, the pleasure evident so many years later. "I loved it."

Davis, 44, has emerged as one of the world's fastest hand-cyclists, going into the Tokyo competitions with three world championship silver medals and more marathon victories than he can easily count.

He struggled for a time, like so many other soldiers. He wrestled with PTSD. He'd explode at his family.

But he also had a strong, patient wife who wouldn't give up.

They grew up just 20 miles apart, but he and Jamie met online during his first tour of Iraq. They soon married.

First she got him to tone down his drinking. After he lost his leg, she dragged him to church.

That combination -- the bike, a growing family and a newfound, intense Christianity -- gave him discipline and purpose.

The ambush, he says, made him a better man.

If he hadn't lost his leg, "I would never have grown into the person I am now," he said. "Not even just racing a bike or whatever, but as a human being and as a husband and as a dad."

"I wouldn't give all that back," he said. "Just to walk?"

They had seen some of the worst places on Earth. They had suffered terribly. Some had killed. Many had buried friends.

But Tokyo wasn't about combat. Battlefield experience doesn't get you to the Paralympics. And in the end, the years of work and tens of thousands of miles of training often came down to a few seconds.

A few days after leaving New Jersey, Snyder -- tethered to another triathlete who guided him through the course -- took gold in his first Paralympic triathlon.

One by one, they competed. De Los Santos took home a bronze from a relay. Puertas pushed hard in his sprint but missed a medal and took fourth place. Davis, who had vowed not to focus solely on gold, silver and bronze, finished fifth in both his races.

And then there was Melissa Stockwell, who until her race had still been unable to do any serious running. Still, she ran.

Early one Saturday morning, she jogged toward the finish, pumping her arms in the air, a huge smile on her face.

She came in fifth.

London honors Muppets creator Jim Henson with blue plaque

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Kermit the Frog. Miss Piggy. Animal. Statler and Waldorf. The Swedish Chef. The list goes on and on.

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Everyone has their favorite Muppet. And everyone owes a debt of gratitude to one man for bringing them to life: Jim Henson.

The American creator of The Muppets was honored Tuesday in Britain with a blue plaque at his former home in north London, which he bought after 'The Muppet Show' was commissioned for British television — 50 Downshire Hill in Hampstead.

It's a very simple message: "Jim Henson 1936-1990 creator of The Muppets lived here."

Henson, who lived in London from 1979 until his death in 1990 at just 53, was also known for his work on "Sesame Street" and "Fraggle Rock" and as the director of the 1980s movies "The Dark Crystal" and "Labyrinth."

Dr. Rebecca Preston, blue plaques historian at English Heritage, which has been running the program since 1986, said Henson deserved his latest honor.

"His creations continue to influence popular culture globally," she said. "The immense body of work that he created and awards that he won are even more impressive considering his untimely death."

"The Muppet Show" was filmed at Elstree Studios, a few miles north of the British capital, and led to Henson making the U.K. a creative home for many of his subsequent projects. He even set up a workshop and office space on the same street as his home.

"My father moved to London to make "The Muppet Show," and then chose to stay because he was so impressed by the UK's many gifted artists and performers," said Brian Henson, his son who is the chairman of The Jim Henson Company.

"It's an honour to have Jim Henson's British home recognised with a blue plaque, knowing that he so admired and respected the talent in London, and that this is the place he called home when creating some of his most memorable productions," he added.

The renowned London blue plaque program began more than 150 years ago. The plaques commemorate people who achieved something worthwhile in their lives and who made London their home at some point. There are more than 900 official plaques in the capital.

The first plaque put up commemorated the poet Lord Byron at his birthplace, 24 Holles Street in Cavendish Square, in 1867. However, the house was demolished in 1889 so the oldest surviving plaque in London is the one commemorating France's final emperor, Napoleon III, on King Street, Westminster, which was also erected in 1867.

Some of the homes that they resided in are grander than others, including one for the great Victorian novelist Charles Dickens in the city's posh Bloomsbury neighborhood.

Others are in more surprising places. The early motion film horror actor, Boris Karloff, who was born William Henry Pratt, is honored above a fish and chips shop in southeast London.

In a playful tribute, Kermit the Frog told BBC radio that his "great friend" Jim Henson fully deserved to be the latest person commemorated.

"Jim was wonderful, and to tell you the truth I am not exactly sure what he did with us, but let me put it to you this way: he was always around to lend a helping hand," Kermit said.

"He may not be here in person but his heart and his silly sense of humor is part of everything that The Muppets do," he added.

Americans warier of US government surveillance: AP-NORC poll

By ERIC TUCKER and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks approaches, Americans increasingly balk at intrusive government surveillance in the name of national security, and only about a third believe that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were worth fighting, according to a new poll.

More Americans also regard the threat from domestic extremism as more worrisome than that of extremism abroad, the poll found.

The poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that support for surveillance tools aimed at monitoring conversations taking place outside the country, once seen as vital in

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the fight against attacks, has dipped in the last decade. That's even though international threats are again generating headlines following the chaotic end to the 20-year war in Afghanistan.

In particular, 46% of Americans say they oppose the U.S. government responding to threats against the nation by reading emails sent between people outside of the U.S. without a warrant, as permitted under law for purposes of foreign intelligence collection. That's compared to just 27% who are in favor. In an AP-NORC poll conducted one decade ago, more favored than opposed the practice, 47% to 30%.

The new poll was conducted Aug. 12-16 as the Taliban were marching toward their rapid takeover of the country. Since then, Afghanistan's Islamic State affiliate launched a suicide bombing that killed at least 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members, and experts have warned about the possibility of foreign militant groups rebuilding in strength with the U.S. presence gone.

In a marked turnabout from the first years after Sept. 11, when Americans were more likely to tolerate the government's monitoring of communications in the name of defending the homeland, the poll found bipartisan concerns about the scope of surveillance and the expansive intelligence collection tools that U.S. authorities have at their disposal.

The expansion in government eavesdropping powers over the last 20 years has coincided with a similar growth in surveillance technology across all corners of American society, including traffic cameras, smart TVs and other devices that contribute to a near-universal sense of being watched.

Gary Kieffer, a retired 80-year-old New Yorker, said he is anxious about the government's powers.

"At what point does this work against the population in general rather than try to weed out potential saboteurs or whatever?" asked Kieffer, who is a registered Democrat. "At what point is it going to be a danger to the public rather saving them or keeping them more secure?"

"I feel like you might need it to an extent," Kieffer said. But he added: "Who's going to decide just how far you go to keep the country safe?"

Eric McWilliams, a 59-year-old Democrat from Whitehall, Pennsylvania, said he saw surveillance as important to keeping Americans safe.

"I wasn't for the torture stuff, which is why they did it outside the country. I wasn't for that," McWilliams said, referring to the harsh interrogation techniques used by the CIA to question suspects. "But as far as the surveillance is concerned, you gotta watch them — or else we're gonna die."

Americans are also more likely to oppose government eavesdropping on calls outside the U.S. without a warrant, 44% to 28%. Another 27% hold neither opinion.

About two-thirds of Americans continue to be opposed to the possibility of warrantless U.S. government monitoring of telephone calls, emails and text messages made within the U.S. Though the National Security Agency is focused on surveillance abroad, it does have the ability to collect the communications of Americans as they're in touch with someone outside the country who is a target of government surveillance.

About half are opposed to government monitoring of internet searches, including those by U.S. citizens, without a warrant. About a quarter are in favor and 2 in 10 hold neither opinion. Roughly half supported the practice a decade ago.

The ambivalence over government surveillance practices was laid bare last year when the Senate came one vote short of approving a proposal to prevent federal law enforcement from obtaining internet browsing information or search history without seeking a warrant. Also last year, Democrats pulled from the House floor legislation to extend certain surveillance authorities after then-President Donald Trump and Republicans turned against the measure and ensured its defeat.

Despite general surveillance concerns, six in 10 Americans support the installation of surveillance cameras in public places to monitor potentially suspicious activity — although somewhat fewer support random searches like full-body scans for people boarding commercial flights in the U.S. Just 15% support racial and ethnic profiling to decide who should get tougher screening at airports, where security was fortified following the Sept. 11 attacks.

About 7 in 10 Black Americans and Asian Americans oppose racial profiling at airports, compared with about 6 in 10 white Americans.

As the U.S. this summer was ending the two-decade war in Afghanistan, most Americans, about 6 in 10,

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say that conflict — along with the war in Iraq — was not worth fighting. Republicans are somewhat more likely to say the wars were worth fighting.

When it comes to threats to the homeland, Americans are more concerned about U.S.-based extremists than they are international groups. FBI Director Chris Wray has said domestic terrorism, on display during the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, is “metastasizing” and that the number of arrests of racially motivated extremists has skyrocketed.

According to the poll, about two-thirds of Americans say they are extremely or very concerned about the threat from extremist groups inside the U.S. By contrast, about one-half say they are extremely or very concerned about the threat from foreign-based militants.

While Republicans and Democrats are generally aligned in their concerns about international extremism, the poll shows Democrats are more likely to be concerned than Republicans about the homegrown threat, 75% to 57%.

On other top national security matters, about half of Republicans and Democrats are concerned by North Korea’s nuclear program, and about 7 in 10 say the same about the threat of cyberattacks. Majorities of Republicans and Democrats also believe that the spread of misinformation is an extremely or very concerning threat to the U.S, though Democrats are slightly more likely to say so.

But there’s a much greater partisan divide on other issues. Democrats, for instance, are far more concerned than Republicans about climate change, 83% vs. 21%. But Republicans are much more strongly concerned about illegal immigration than Democrats, by a margin of 73% to 21%.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

The AP-NORC poll of 1,729 adults was conducted Aug. 12-16 using a sample drawn from NORC’s probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 8, the 251st day of 2021. There are 114 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Sept. 8, 1565, a Spanish expedition established the first permanent European settlement in North America at present-day St. Augustine, Florida.

On this date:

In 1504, Michelangelo’s towering marble statue of David was unveiled to the public in Florence, Italy.

In 1664, the Dutch surrendered New Amsterdam to the British, who renamed it New York.

In 1761, Britain’s King George III married Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz a few hours after meeting her for the first time.

In 1892, an early version of “The Pledge of Allegiance,” written by Francis Bellamy, appeared in “The Youth’s Companion.” It went: “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

In 1900, Galveston, Texas, was struck by a hurricane that killed an estimated 8,000 people.

In 1935, Sen. Huey P. Long, a Louisiana Democrat, was shot and mortally wounded inside the Louisiana State Capitol; he died two days later. (The assailant was identified as Dr. Carl Weiss, who was gunned down by Long’s bodyguards.)

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a “limited national emergency” in response to the outbreak of war in Europe.

In 1941, the 900-day Siege of Leningrad by German forces began during World War II.

In 1943, during World War II, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower announced Italy’s surrender; Nazi Germany

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denounced Italy's decision as a cowardly act.

In 1964, public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia, reopened after being closed for five years by officials attempting to prevent court-ordered racial desegregation.

In 1974, President Gerald R. Ford granted a "full, free, and absolute pardon" to former President Richard Nixon covering his entire term in office.

In 2019, Rafael Nadal held off a strong comeback bid to win his 19th Grand Slam title in a five-set U.S. Open final against Daniil Medvedev.

Ten years ago: Addressing a joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama challenged a reluctant Congress to urgently pass a larger-than-expected \$450 billion jobs plan to "jolt an economy that has stalled." Ten oil workers were forced to abandon a crippled 94-foot research vessel in the Gulf of Mexico and pile into a life raft during Tropical Storm Nate; by the time rescuers arrived three days after, three of the men had died, and a fourth died later at a hospital.

Five years ago: California and federal regulators fined Wells Fargo a combined \$185 million, alleging the bank's employees illegally opened millions of unauthorized accounts for their customers in order to meet aggressive sales goals. U.S. aviation safety officials took the extraordinary step of warning airline passengers not to turn on or charge a new-model Samsung smartphone, the Galaxy Note 7, during flights following numerous reports of the devices catching fire. Greta Zimmer Friedman, identified as the woman in an iconic photo seen kissing an ecstatic sailor in Times Square celebrating the end of World War II, died in Richmond, Virginia, at age 92.

One year ago: The Northern California foothill hamlet of Berry Creek was largely destroyed in what would be the deadliest of the wildfires burning through much of the state; it left 16 people dead. More than a dozen California firefighters trying to protect a fire station in rugged mountains were overrun by flames; several were hurt as they deployed emergency shelters. Students across the nation ran into computer glitches as they began the school year with online instruction at home because of the coronavirus. Britain's government banned gatherings of more than six people in England, as officials tried to keep a lid on daily new coronavirus infections.

Today's Birthdays: Ventriloquist Willie Tyler is 81. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., is 80. Actor Alan Feinstein is 80. Pop singer Sal Valentino (The Beau Brummels) is 79. Author Ann Beattie is 74. Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis is 71. Cajun singer Zachary Richard (ree-SHARD') is 71. Musician Will Lee is 69. Actor Heather Thomas is 64. Singer Aimee Mann is 61. Pop musician David Steele (Fine Young Cannibals) is 61. Actor Thomas Kretschmann is 59. Gospel singer Darlene Zschech (chehk) is 56. Alternative country singer Neko (NEE'-koh) Case is 51. TV personality Brooke Burke is 50. Actor Martin Freeman is 50. Actor David Arquette is 50. TV-radio personality Kennedy is 49. Rock musician Richard Hughes (Keane) is 46. Actor Larenz Tate is 46. Actor Nathan Corrdry is 44. R&B singer Pink is 42. Singer-songwriter Eric Hutchinson is 41. Actor Jonathan Taylor Thomas is 40. Rapper Wiz Khalifa is 34. Actor Gaten Matarazzo (TV: "Stranger Things") is 19.