

# Groton Daily Independent

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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. (Varsity match to be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM - Look for the link later today on the black bar)

### 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, 7:30 p.m.

## Homecoming Week Dress up days

Day	MS/HS	Elementary
Monday	Awkward Phase Day	Jersey Day
Tuesday	Twin Day	Animal OR Superhero Day
Wednesday	Halloween Costume Day	Twin/Matching Day
Thursday	Class color Day	Pajama Day
Friday	Spirit Day	Spirit Day



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

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

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#465 in a series

## Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We did it—passed 40 million cases on Sunday; that's the population of California, our most populous state. It's an unimaginable number, about one in eight of us. We have around four percent of the world's population and one of its highest standards of living, which generally tracks with success in fighting infectious disease; we also have just about 20 percent of the world Covid-19 cases. Turns out money doesn't necessarily compensate for poor decision-making, and we can't buy our way out of this pandemic. We've been racking up additional millions of cases at a pretty good clip just lately; you have to go back to the depths of winter to see intervals this short—and no one wants to go back there ever. Here's where that stands:

April 28, 2020 – 1 million – 98 days  
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days  
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days  
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days  
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days  
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days  
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days  
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days  
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days  
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days  
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days  
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days  
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days  
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days  
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days  
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days  
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days  
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days  
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days  
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days

January 5 – 21 million – 5 days  
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days  
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days  
January 18 – 24 million – 5 days  
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days  
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days  
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days  
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days  
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days  
March 24 – 30 million – 17 days  
April 8 – 31 million – 15 days  
April 24 – 32 million – 16 days  
May 18 – 33 million – 23 days  
July 16 – 34 million – 59 days  
July 31 – 35 million – 15 days  
August 11 – 36 million – 11 days  
August 17 – 37 million – 6 days  
August 23 – 38 million – 6 days  
August 30 – 39 million – 7 days  
September 5 – 40 million – 6 days

As of midday today, we were averaging 152,222 new cases per day, a number that is almost flat—first time since late June for that. Of our new cases, more than one in four are children—over a quarter-million in the week ending September 2. This represents a steep increase from the summer months. The good news about the high proportion of pediatric cases is it's likely to hold death rates down since children far less frequently become severely ill; the bad news is that some of these kids are getting really sick, being hospitalized, being placed on ventilation, and dying. Additionally, while the vast majority of infected children survive, we're seeing long-term impacts on the health of some of those survivors. We've had five million children infected since this thing started; it's important to remember that, although only a tiny percentage become very ill, a tiny percentage of five million is actually a whole lot of sick kids.

I'm expecting our numbers to get worse again for a while starting early next week as our Labor Day surge rolls in. We were advised to exercise caution over the holiday, the CDC recommending unvaccinated people refrain from travel and even vaccinated people think twice. Mayor Derek Kawakami of Kauai County, Hawaii, told CNN on Friday, "I know we're all looking forward to the long weekend," but pointing out health care workers would not be able to celebrate "because they're busy taking care of our sick people. Now what we choose to do over the next 72 to 96 hours is going to determine a lot of within the next two to

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three months, on whether we start to continue to burn our hospital systems, burn out our health care workers, keep our kids in school, keep our businesses running, and moving on with moving forward and coexisting with Covid-19."

Well, guess how we responded to these admonitions. The TSA reports 2.13 million folks moved through airports on Friday, not much short of the numbers in 2019—before the pandemic. I know. I'm not surprised either. Now that the backyard barbecues and traveling are done, we'll just have to suck it up and pay the price. Starting next week. So this leveling off we've been seeing? Don't look for that to last.

And, of course, even with our temporary leveling off in new cases, hospitalizations have continued to rise. Given hospitalizations lag new cases, this isn't surprising, but it does mean we're getting into some pretty scary territory. Labor Day last year had under 40,000 in hospitals; we're well ahead of that with an average today of 101,232. The peak of last winter's surge saw some 120,000 hospitalized at one time, and we're not too far from that now. This has the talk of "crisis standards" for care going around again—what you do to prioritize when you can't treat everyone who needs treatment. I see two health districts in northern Idaho are already there with more likely to follow. Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Director Dave Jeppesen told Boise State Public Radio, "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. This is a decision I was fervently hoping to avoid." Idaho, with one of the nation's lowest vaccination rates, has hospitalization rates exceeding those last winter. Kentucky's governor indicated on CNN today that their systems are "right at, or quickly approaching that point" too. If the expected Labor Day surge materializes, look for this number to follow within a week or two of the surge.

The limiting factor on hospital capacity, as was true last winter, is staff. You can build tent hospitals on parking ramps and bring in equipment; but you can't manufacture nurses and respiratory therapists and pulmonologists and critical care specialists. And the staffing problem is actually more acute now than it was last winter because a fair number of health care workers have walked away from their professions, burnt out and exhausted. Agency workers are in short supply.

Crisis standards give some flexibility about prioritizing care and give legal protection to workers who need to do that; they don't necessarily mean people will be denied care, but they could impact its quality. We might pile more patients on one nurse than is considered a safe workload; we might send folks home in a little worse shape than usual; we might prioritize who gets ICU beds based on their likelihood of survival. Patients are already waiting a long time in the emergency room before an ICU bed becomes available. People are working the phones, trying to find other hospitals to take patients. EMS response times are getting longer and longer. According to the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, some parts of the South are peaking, but we're not there yet, and systems are under great stress already in Hawaii, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Delaware, and Georgia. We'd better all hope this leveling off is a long-term thing; the system in many places is not equipped to absorb much more. And winter's still coming. This isn't over yet.

It's pretty easy to see how we ended up here even though we have an effective vaccine. After all, only 53 percent of us are fully vaccinated, most of us are being flagrantly careless, and we have a wildly transmissible virus rampaging around. It is the unvaccinated who are driving this surge and who are stacking up in hospitals, stretching them to their limits and burdening our beleaguered health care workers. Their contagion is spilling over on vaccinated people, and it is stuffing hospitals so full that people with other conditions are unable to receive the treatment they need.

The seven-day average for deaths is sitting at 1499 today. This number is still showing a 14-day increase

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on the order of 35 percent. Deaths lag hospitalizations so this is another number that will continue to rise for a while yet, even if new cases continue to decline. If we kept this up for the rest of the year there would be more than an additional 169,000 deaths before 2022. That seems like a lot for a country that has all it wants of three of the most effective vaccines ever made.

Today's CDC's ensemble forecast is projecting a possible increase in new cases with as many as 1.5 million in the week ending October 2; we've been averaging just over one million per week in the last month. The projection shows stable or uncertain trends in hospitalizations over that time. Deaths are projected to continue increasing; the new upper bound is 710,000 by October 2. We can hope we don't meet that.

Unfortunately, vaccination rates are tapering off again; we have an 18 percent drop from last week with an average of 356,662 people initiating vaccination each day and 810,715 doses going out daily. Just 53.5 percent of us are fully vaccinated, 73.3 percent of those eligible. We've given out 1.5 additional/booster doses since mid-August; not all of those were "authorized"—some folks are taking it upon themselves to sign up for a third dose despite not meeting the guidelines.

We're running our own controlled experiments in schools these days. North Carolina, for example, has 170 clusters in K-12 schools and day care centers. There's the Union County Public School system, which does not require masks and had 5200 of its 41,000 students in quarantine at the end of last week, whereas the Wake County Public School system, which requires masks, had 1300 of its 161,000 students quarantined. While Union County had 337 new cases last week among those 41,000 students, Durham County, which requires masks, reported 97 among its 31,000. Doesn't take a statistical genius to tell you that's a stark difference. That's also a whole lot of parents who can't go to work, even as unemployment benefits screech to a halt, and a whole lot of kids stuck back at home when the whole goal here was to get them back into the classroom.

Calls continue to pour into poison control centers across the country from people who've taken ivermectin in the hope of preventing or curing Covid-19. Not only are a whole lot of doctors writing prescriptions for the drug off-label, some of them in horrifyingly large and potentially dangerous doses, but people continue to strip veterinary supply stores of their stocks and consume formulations meant for animals that weigh hundreds and hundreds of pounds more than a human does. I understand there are stores in which you must show "proof of horse" before they'll sell the stuff to you; those are responsible vendors. Seems to be a lot of "altered mental status" and hallucinations turning up in these folks, among other symptoms, and there have been deaths. None of this really sounds like all that much fun.

I'll mention again, for all the good it will do, there have been zero reputable studies showing any evidence at all of benefit for the prevention or treatment of Covid-19. The only study that did show such benefit—and the results were startlingly good—was retracted when it was discovered those fantastic results had been falsified. There are still a few studies underway, but the preliminary results have not been at all promising. The folks running those studies are sort of expecting their work will confirm what we've already seen—no benefit. The NIH recommends the drug not be used for Covid-19 outside a clinical trial. And the maker, Merck—the company that stands to make boatloads of money on all this profligate use—is advising the public we should not be using it. Here's their statement:

"Company scientists continue to carefully examine the findings of all available and emerging studies of ivermectin for the treatment of COVID-19 for evidence of efficacy and safety. It is important to note that, to-date, our analysis has identified:

- "No scientific basis for a potential therapeutic effect against COVID-19 from pre-clinical studies;
- "No meaningful evidence for clinical activity or clinical efficacy in patients with COVID-19 disease, and;
- "A concerning lack of safety data in the majority of studies.

"We do not believe that the data available support the safety and efficacy of ivermectin beyond the

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doses and populations indicated in the regulatory agency-approved prescribing information.”

That means they recommend against off-label uses for Covid-19. One of the things I keep hearing from the Ivermectin Fan Club is about how Big Pharma is suppressing the proof this drug works because they want to make money. That does not explain why Merck isn't pushing the medication if, indeed, it was effective, because that's how Merck could make a lot of money. Human meds are far more lucrative than animal meds, so even though they can't advertise for off-label uses, I wouldn't think they'd be suppressing evidence of efficacy. Bottom line: As far as anyone, including the manufacturer, can tell, this stuff doesn't work, and it can have side effects, even when prescribed by a doctor. It's downright dangerous if you're taking horse medicine. Just don't.

We have a small study from an isolation dormitory at the University of Oregon conducted between January and May. The paper is available in pre-print and has not been peer-reviewed yet. The research team used active air sampling, passive air sampling, sampling of surfaces in the rooms, and swabs from students' noses and mouths throughout the isolation period for each student, using PCR testing to identify and quantify virus in each sample. One finding, not surprisingly, was that there was an association between the viral load in the student's upper respiratory tract and the amount of airborne virus in the room and that some symptoms like coughing "significantly impact environmental viral load," although even asymptomatic students were emitting fair quantities of virus. They also found that infected persons seem to shed virus intermittently during their infection, which might go some way to explaining why many infected persons don't seem to infect anyone else, but others act as superspreaders, transmitting the virus to numerous others.

The team also calculated the mechanical ventilation rate for each room and looked at natural ventilation by opening of windows. They found that "increased ventilation rate decreases the detectable aerosolized viral load within enclosed spaces" and that "[w]indows can dramatically increase the overall ACH [air exchanges per hour] within buildings and other enclosed spaces." Opening a window increases the efficiency of the mechanical ventilation system, and samples showed viral loads decreased by half or more when windows were open for more than 50 percent of the time. A study this small has some limitations, but this is, according to study authors (who undoubtedly did the homework on the point), the first real-world demonstration of the benefits of improved ventilation.

There is a little more relevant information about that new variant that first turned up in Colombia in January, B.1.621 or Mu. This is the one that has some concerning mutations which might indicate potential immune escape or increased lethality. The good news is that, although it looks to be more lethal, there are no signs it is more transmissible. I know, "more lethal" doesn't sound like good news—and I'd like it better if it wasn't; but given the choice between increased lethality and increased transmissibility, I'd take lethality any day. This is because in a face-off, the more transmissible virus wins every time. I wrote about this a while back; if you're interested, check out my Update #357 posted on February 14 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4436334386382933>. And here's the thing: While Mu has spread to 39 countries, including this one, it only accounts for 0.2% of infections in the US, and its prevalence worldwide is actually declining. That is a pretty good sign it's not set to take over the world. It's too early to say for sure, but Mu is not looking like a big threat at the moment. Of course, until we get a whole lot more people vaccinated globally, more variants will continue to emerge. Vaccination is how you tamp those down too.

That's all I have for you today. Be well, and we'll talk again.

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## Letter From Supt. Joe Schwan on COVID-19

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your help in getting the 2021-22 school year off to a good start. It is good to see our students every day again, and we hope you and your family are settling in to the new school year groove, too.

Fall is, as always, a very busy time for many families. Next week (September 13-17), we'll once again celebrate Homecoming Week in our District. We hope you're able to participate in some of the activities that'll be happening beginning with the Coronation of the 2021 Homecoming King and Queen on Monday, September 13 at 7:30 PM in the GHS Gymnasium. A full list of events can be found at [www.grotonarea.com](http://www.grotonarea.com). If you haven't already found it, check out the District app; It's free and available for Apple or Android devices; Search Groton Area Tigers, SD in your app store.

Earlier this week we were notified of the first positive cases of COVID-19 in the District during the 2021-22 school year. The parents of all students identified as close contacts have been contacted and advised to watch for symptoms or seek testing and evaluation by their primary care provider. The District maintains an accurate table of active COVID-19 cases for students and staff members on its COVID-19 webpage as a means to keep families and the community informed.

Every individual should monitor their symptoms and refrain from attending school or school activities when symptomatic with any contagious illness. While symptoms of COVID-19 can easily be symptoms of other conditions, we don't want individuals with any contagious illness attending school or school activities.

We encourage each family to actively monitor their symptoms, seek testing/evaluation when necessary, wash/sanitize your hands, eat and sleep well, and take good care of your physical, mental, and emotional health.

The District still has the ability to conduct rapid antigen tests for individuals with symptoms of COVID-19. This testing requires parental consent, takes place at school, and takes approximately 30 minutes. Please do not send sick children to school to be tested. Instead contact the school office to make appropriate arrangements.

Another option being provided by the Departments of Health and Education are Quidel QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test. Shipping issues have delayed implementation, but we believe we will be getting testing supplies within the next week to begin this program. There are a few ways these testing kits may be used including weekly surveillance testing or one-time at home testing. For example, an asymptomatic student identified as a close contact may want to test at home following exposure as a means of insurance they don't have COVID-19 or a student planning to visit an at-risk family member may want to be tested prior to the visit as another layer of protection for that at-risk family member.

All students will be receiving a copy of the QuickVue Testing Registration Form to complete and return. This is to help with planning and determining how many tests we should be receiving from the Department of Education. We are asking students to return these forms by Tuesday, September 14.

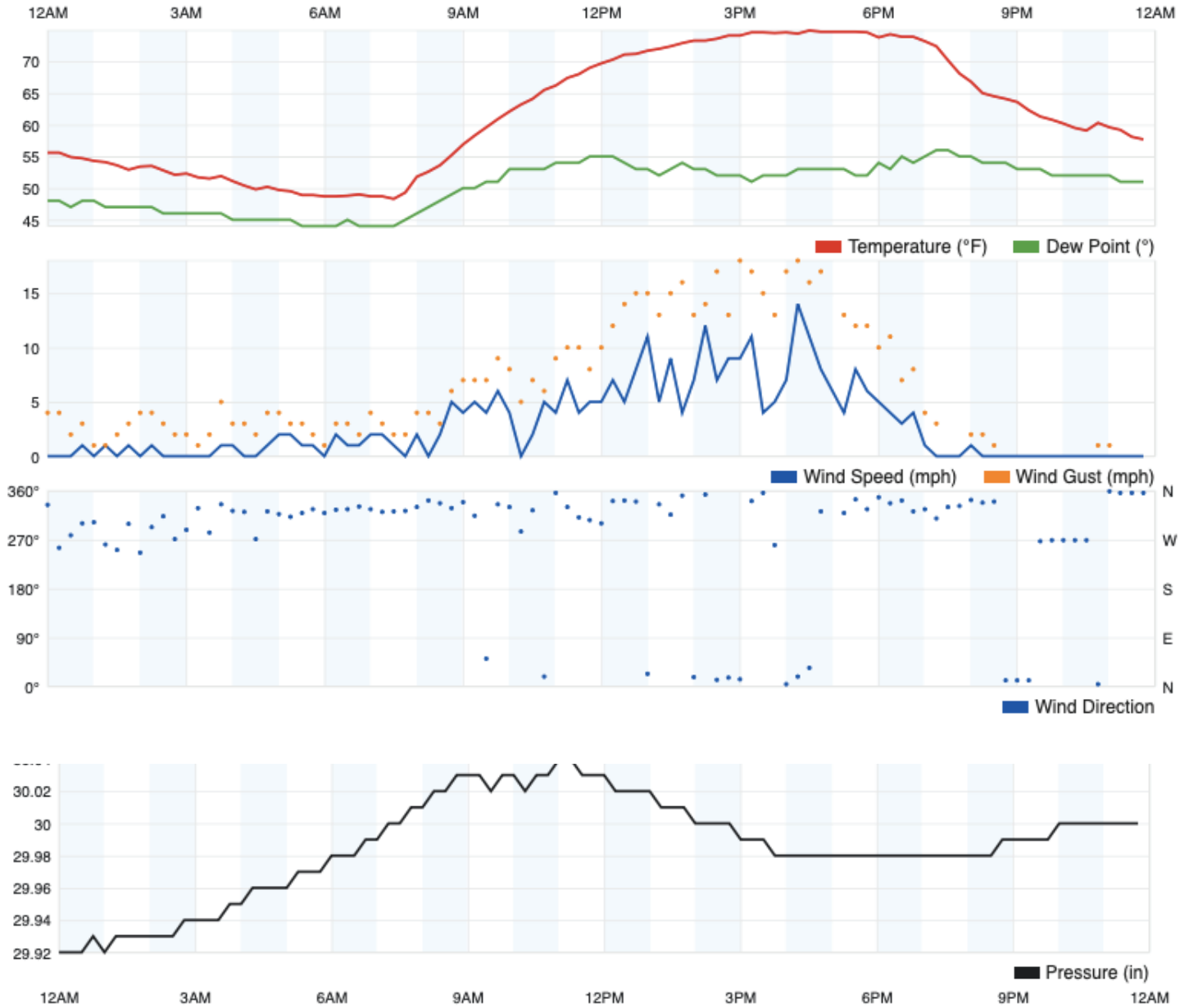
Thank you for your support. Best wishes for a great school year!

Joe Schwan  
Superintendent

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 80 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 53 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny

High: 87 °F

Friday  
Night



Partly Cloudy


Low: 58 °F

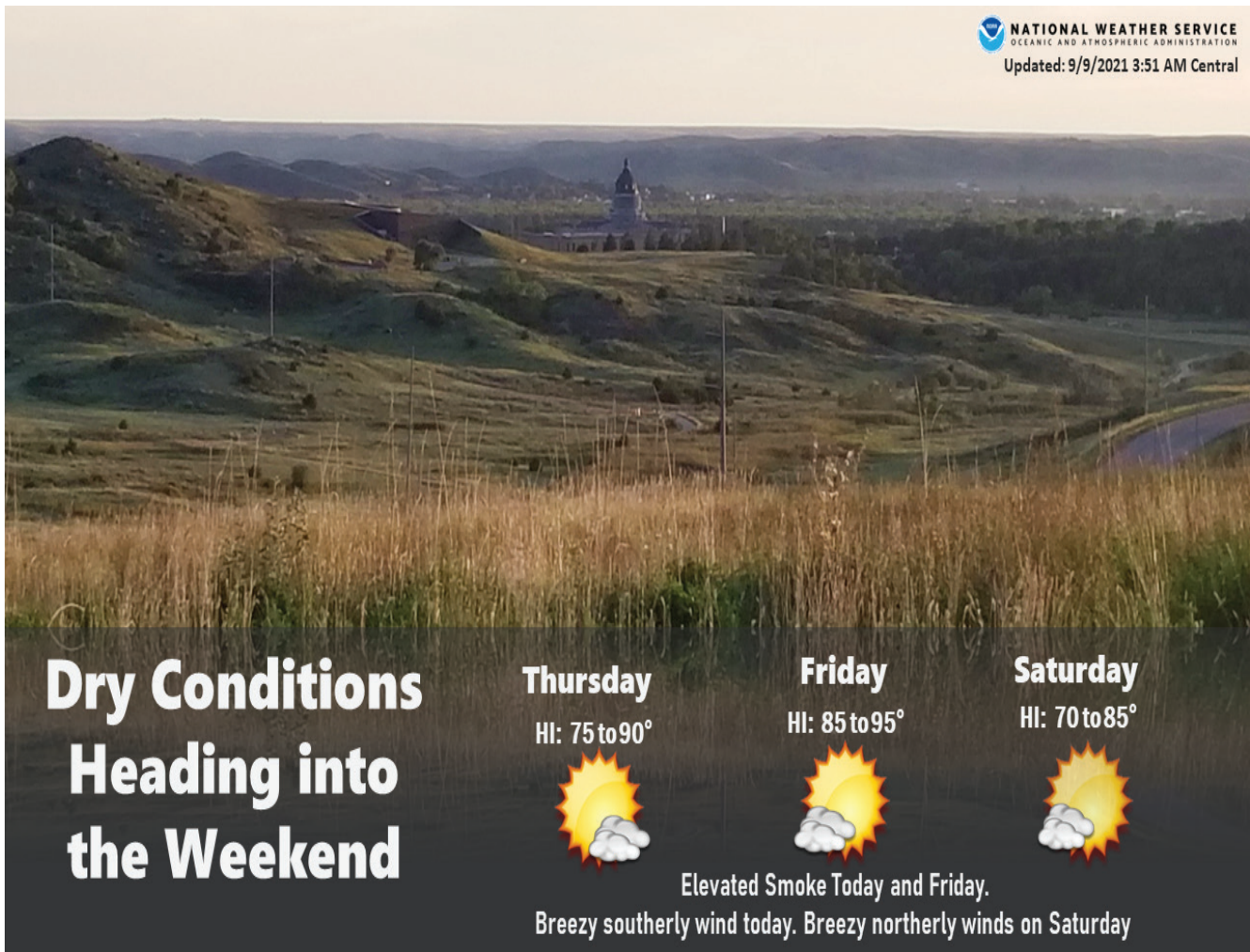
Saturday




Mostly Sunny


High: 74 °F


 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
Updated: 9/9/2021 3:51 AM Central



**Dry Conditions  
Heading into  
the Weekend**

**Thursday**  
HI: 75 to 90°  


**Friday**  
HI: 85 to 95°  


**Saturday**  
HI: 70 to 85°  


Elevated Smoke Today and Friday.  
Breezy southerly wind today. Breezy northerly winds on Saturday

Dry conditions with near to above normal temperatures can be expected over the next few days. Smoke will be noticeable in the sky today and Friday.



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## Today in Weather History

September 9, 1961: A young girl in Bullhead, Corson County, was killed by lightning on the afternoon while walking on the highway. Her little brother was slightly injured.

September 9, 1983: High winds from the late evening into the early morning hours of the 10th blew through east central South Dakota damaging crops, downing hundreds of trees, breaking windows, damaging roofs and buildings, downing power poles and damaging vehicles. Gusts to 75 mph in Huron moved a semi-trailer a half block. Scattered power outages of up to 24 hours were reported in numerous areas as branches fell across power and telephone lines. Thirty power poles were downed in Kingsbury County alone. Corn, beans, and sunflowers suffered extensive damage in many areas with up to 50 percent losses reported. Gusts up to 90 mph were reported at Lake Poinsett, Lake Norden, and Estelline, where roofs and shingles were ripped from buildings and numerous windows, were broken. At Lake Poinsett, extensive damage was done to boats, docks, and automobiles.

1775: The Independence Hurricane slammed into Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Many ships were sunk and buildings demolished. 4,000 people died in what is considered to be Canada's deadliest hurricane disaster.

1821: A tornadic outbreak affected the New England states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont on this day. Five tornadoes reportedly touched down from this event. One storm in New Hampshire had a path width of a half mile and tracked an estimated 23 miles. This tornado killed at least six individuals, which could be the deadliest tornado in New Hampshire history.

1921 - A dying tropical depression unloaded 38.2 inches of rain upon the town of Thrall in southeastern Texas killing 224 persons. 36.4 inches fell in 18 hours. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1944 - The "Great Atlantic Hurricane" ravaged the east coast. The storm killed 22 persons and caused 63 million dollars damage in the Chesapeake Bay area, then besieged New England killing 390 persons and causing another 100 million dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1965: Hurricane Betsy slammed into New Orleans on the evening of September 9, 1965. 110 mph winds and power failures were reported in New Orleans. The eye of the storm passed to the southwest of New Orleans on a northwesterly track. The northern and western eyewalls covered Southeast Louisiana and the New Orleans area from about 8 PM until 4 AM the next morning. In Thibodaux, winds of 130 mph to 140 mph were reported. The Baton Rouge weather bureau operated under auxiliary power, without telephone communication.

1971 - Hurricane Ginger formed, and remained a hurricane until the 5th of October. The 27 day life span was the longest of record for any hurricane in the North Atlantic Ocean. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the central U.S. Thunderstorms in West Texas spawned four tornadoes in the vicinity of Lubbock, and produced baseball size hail and wind gusts to 81 mph at Ropesville. Thunderstorms produced hail two inches in diameter at Downs KS and Harvard NE, breaking car windows at Harvard. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Florence became a hurricane and headed for the Central Gulf Coast Region. Florence made land-fall early the next morning, passing over New Orleans LA. Winds gusts to 80 mph were recorded at an oil rig south of the Chandeleur Islands. Wind gusts around New Orleans reached 61 mph. Total property damage from Florence was estimated at 2.5 million dollars. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - The first snow of the season began to whiten the mountains of Wyoming early in the morning, as for two days a moist and unusually cold storm system affected the state. By the morning of the 11th, a foot of snow covered the ground at Burgess Junction. Thunderstorms developing along a cold front crossing the Ohio Valley produced severe weather in Indiana during the late afternoon and early evening hours. Strong thunderstorm winds blew down a tent at Palestine injuring seven persons, and frequent lightning interrupted the Purdue and Miami of Ohio football game, clearing the stands. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) 2013: Historical rainfall occurred in northern Colorado from September 9 to September 16 and resulted in severe flash flooding along the northern Front Range of Colorado and subsequent river flooding downstream along the South Platte River and its tributaries. The heaviest rain fell along the Front Range northwest of Denver on September 11-12.

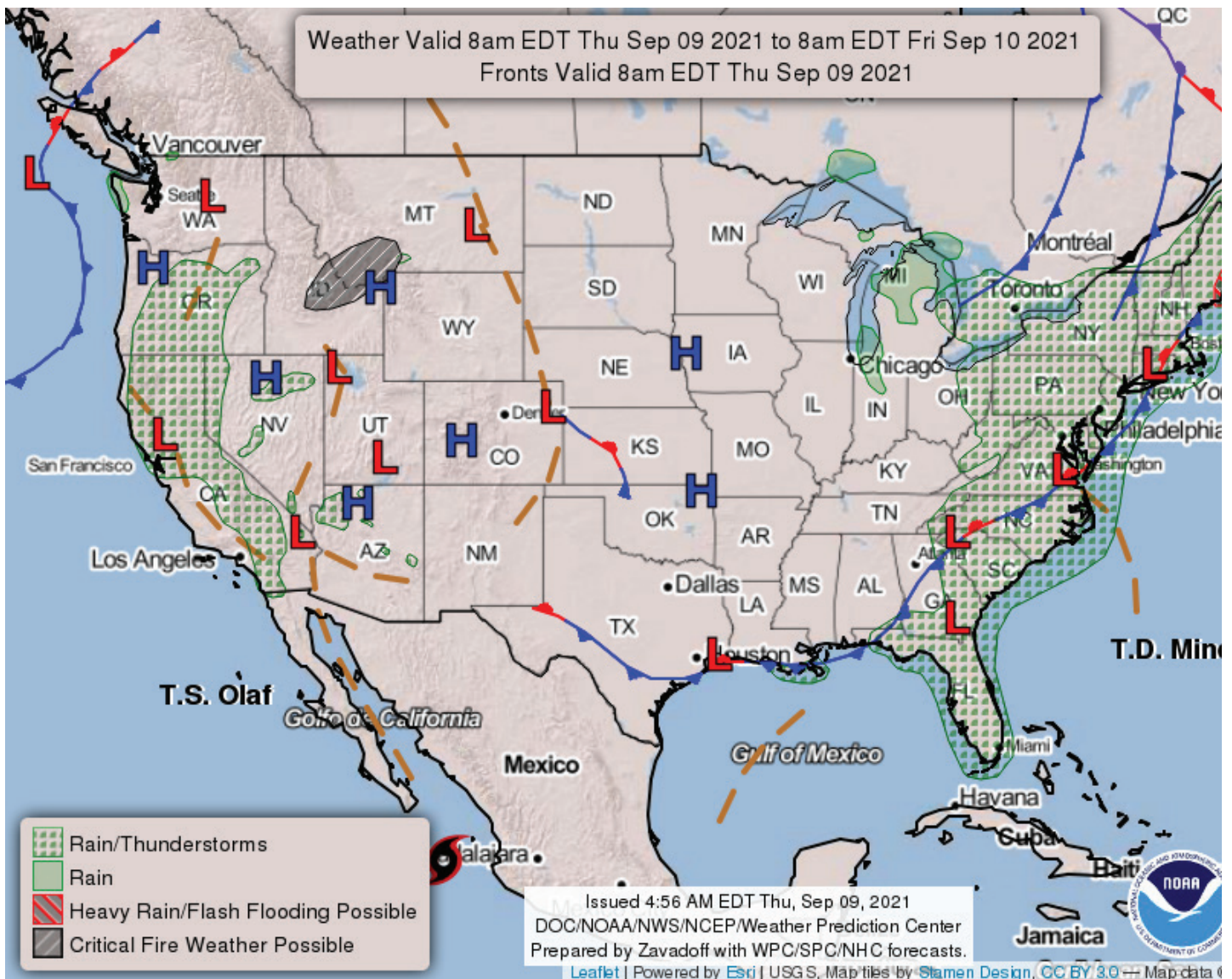
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 75 °F at 4:31 PM**  
**Low Temp: 48 °F at 7:25 AM**  
**Wind: 18 mph at 2:55 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 101° in 1931**  
**Record Low: 26° in 1898**  
**Average High: 78°F**  
**Average Low: 50°F**  
**Average Precip in Sept.: 0.61**  
**Precip to date in Sept.: 1.77**  
**Average Precip to date: 16.95**  
**Precip Year to Date: 14.91**  
**Sunset Tonight: 7:56:19 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:03:59 AM**



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## WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Not long ago I was stopped by a police officer who motioned to me to pull to the side of the street. When I looked up to see what was going on, I saw two large trucks coming toward me with a home that had been cut in half and placed on two trailers. The two halves were slowly being moved to a new location where they would be joined together, and the home would look the same as it had in the past.

It was almost unnerving as I waited patiently for them to pass by. For years it rested comfortably on a corner across from an elementary school. Soon it would have a new address in a new neighborhood and perhaps new owners.

How things have changed. Years ago, people rarely moved from one home to another. There was a certain permanence in life that brought a sense of security to families. Now, moving from one place to another is a routine part of life that seems to go with the turmoil in the world.

Everywhere we look, we see signs of instability. We awaken each morning wondering what devastating news awaits us. What once was a world that made sense and was stable is now a world that longs for the "good old days."

Psalm 93, however, gives comfort to the Christian. It begins with a burst of hope and assurance, a promise of peace and predictability: "The LORD reigns."

But more than the way it begins, is the way it ends. It concludes with a reminder and a promise of God's faithfulness: "Your statues stand firm...for endless days!"

Prayer: Thank You, Heavenly Father, that we can believe in Your Word and trust Your promises and power to protect us and give us hope! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure. Psalm 93:1

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## 2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)  
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)  
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS  
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.  
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament  
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon  
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament  
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament  
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton  
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament  
**Cancelled** Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/29/2021 Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day at GHS Parking Lot (4-5 p.m.)  
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)  
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)  
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/29/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)  
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/04/2021 Olive Grove Tour of Homes  
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-11-17-21-30

(one, eleven, seventeen, twenty-one, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$78,000

Lotto America

03-19-36-44-51, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 3

(three, nineteen, thirty-six, forty-four, fifty-one; Star Ball: three; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.75 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$368 million

Powerball

09-22-41-47-61, Powerball: 21, Power Play: 2

(nine, twenty-two, forty-one, forty-seven, sixty-one; Powerball: twenty-one; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$388 million

### Lower Brule man dies while in custody of Sioux Falls police

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a man died while he was being arrested by Sioux Falls police for allegedly breaking into a house.

Police said the incident happened Tuesday afternoon after a woman who was in the house was able to report that the man had a gun and was acting erratically. The woman told police she thought the man was hallucinating.

Officers were able to convince the man to come out of the house and leave the gun inside. Police said the man was making odd movements before he was handcuffed and collapsed on the way to a squad car.

Officers gave him emergency aid and called an ambulance. The 31-year-old man, of Lower Brule, was pronounced dead at a hospital, police said.

Authorities originally responded to the area for a report of gunshots and a burglary. Surveillance video from the area helped police identify a second man who was arrested for possession of stolen property.

The identities of the two men have not been released. The South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation is handling the case.

### COVID-19 surge in the US: The summer of hope ends in gloom

By MATTHEW PERRONE and DEE-ANN DURBIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The summer that was supposed to mark America's independence from COVID-19 is instead drawing to a close with the U.S. more firmly under the tyranny of the virus, with deaths per day back up to where they were in March.

The delta variant is filling hospitals, sickening alarming numbers of children and driving coronavirus deaths in some places to the highest levels of the entire pandemic. School systems that reopened their classrooms are abruptly switching back to remote learning because of outbreaks. Legal disputes, threats and violence have erupted over mask and vaccine requirements.

The U.S. death toll stands at more than 650,000, with one major forecast model projecting it will top 750,000 by Dec. 1.

"It felt like we had this forward, positive momentum," lamented Katie Button, executive chef and CEO

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at two restaurants in Asheville, North Carolina. "The delta variant wiped that timeline completely away."

It wasn't supposed to be this way. More than six months into the U.S. vaccination drive, President Joe Biden held a White House party on July Fourth to celebrate the country's freedom from the virus, and other political leaders had high hopes for a close-to-normal summer.

Then the bottom fell out.

The summer wave was fueled by the extra-contagious delta variant combined with stark resistance to vaccinations that formed along political and geographic lines, said Dr. Sten Vermund, of the Yale School of Public Health.

"The virus was more efficient in spreading among the unvaccinated so that you blunted the expected benefit of vaccines," Vermund said.

The crisis escalated rapidly from June to August. About 400,000 COVID-19 infections were recorded for all of June. It took all of three days last week to reach the same number.

The U.S. recorded 26,800 deaths and more than 4.2 million infections in August. The number of monthly positive cases was the fourth-highest total since the start of the pandemic.

The 2021 delta-driven onslaught is killing younger Americans at a much higher rate than previous waves of the pandemic in the Northeast last spring, the Sun Belt in the summer of 2020 and the deadly winter surge around the holidays.

During the peaks of those waves, Americans over 75 suffered the highest proportion of death. Now, the most vulnerable age group for death is 50 to 64, according to data from U.S. officials.

Overall, the outbreak is still well below the all-time peaks reached over the winter, when deaths topped out at 3,400 a day and new cases at a quarter-million per day.

The U.S. is now averaging over 150,000 new cases per day, levels not seen since January. Deaths are close to 1,500 per day, up more than a third since late August.

Even before the delta variant became dominant, experts say there were indications that larger gatherings and relaxed social distancing measures were fueling new cases.

"We had been cooped up for over a year and everyone wanted to get out," said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "In the face of that kind of strong change in behavior, even getting almost two-thirds of our adult population vaccinated wasn't enough."

The COVID-19 vaccines remain highly effective against hospitalization and death, but many tens of millions of eligible Americans remain unvaccinated. Nearly 40% of Americans 12 and older are not fully protected.

In Rapid City, South Dakota, school officials have recorded nearly 300 cases among students and staff since classes began less than two weeks ago. Still, the majority of school board officials voted this week 5-2 against a proposed two-week mask mandate.

"Nobody wanted to be here. Everyone wanted the personal freedom to be away from masks and free of illness," said Amy Policky, who introduced the proposal with one other member. "But we have to look at the facts: We're having illness rage through the school and the community, so what can we do?"

Still, Yale's Vermund sees reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the next few months. Cases in most states appear to be plateauing and are likely to decline in the fall, buying health authorities more time to vaccinate adults and teenagers before flu season.

"If we can continue making progress between now and Thanksgiving, we may be able to substantially blunt the coronavirus surge in flu season," Vermund said.

While the economy has been rebounding strongly over the past several months, hiring slowed sharply in August in a sign that the variant is discouraging Americans from flying, shopping or eating out.

And on Monday, unemployment benefits — including an extra \$300 a week from the federal government — ran out for millions of Americans.

Button, the North Carolina chef, was feeling great heading into the summer. Her team was mostly vaccinated in May and restrictions were loosening. But the crisis soon changed direction.

Button supports the mask mandate that was recently reinstated in her county but said her employees are exhausted by having to enforce it. And since she has no outdoor seating, some diners have been less comfortable coming in.

"It's hard to take a step forward and then take three steps back," she said.

Associated Press data journalist Nicky Forster contributed to this report from New York. Durbin reported from Detroit.

## **Noem appoints Pennington prosecutor as circuit court judge**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Wednesday appointed a Pennington County prosecutor to the 7th Judicial Circuit that covers the western region of the state.

Stacy Vinberg Wickre has been a deputy state's attorney in Pennington County since 2017 and currently supervises the office's Felony Department, the governor's office said in a statement. She will replace outgoing Circuit Court Judge Robert Mandel.

"Stacy has shown common sense and fortitude that will suit her well as she takes the bench," Noem said in a statement. "She has handled a wide variety of cases in her practice and will take a balanced approach."

Vinberg Wickre received her law degree from the University of Montana in 1994. She moved to South Dakota in 1999.

## **Sanford donating \$350 million toward virtual care center**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota-based Sanford Health said Wednesday it is giving \$350 million to a clinical initiative that aims to create a virtual care center to treat people in rural and underserved areas of the Midwest.

The center will serve people from across Sanford Health's network of hospitals, clinics and long-term care facilities. It will also house innovation, education and research initiatives to work on digital healthcare solutions for the future.

Sanford bills itself as one of the largest rural healthcare systems in the country. It has 46 hospitals, 1,500 physicians and more than 200 Good Samaritan Society senior care locations in 26 states and 10 countries. It is based in Sioux Falls and has major medical centers in Fargo and Bismarck, North Dakota, and Bemidji, Minnesota.

The gift comes on the heels of a \$300 million donation announced in March that included a significant expansion of graduate medical education and the addition of 18 new sports fields at the Sanford Sports Complex in Sioux Falls.

## **Sioux Falls caps medical marijuana retail licenses at five**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Sioux Falls City Council has capped the number of retail stores that can sell medical marijuana at five.

The council on Tuesday night signed off on a proposal coming from Mayor Paul TenHaken's office. But, council members halved the \$100,000 license fee that City Hall wanted and will allow the licenses to be sold on the secondary market.

"The Sioux Falls City Council, by making a license worth \$50,000 and transferrable, has just made dispensary licenses into liquor licenses," said Drew Duncan, a Sioux Falls attorney and lobbyist for clients in South Dakota's gambling and alcohol industry, via social media following the 7-1 vote, the Argus Leader reported.

A new liquor license in Sioux Falls costs about \$200,000, but a state-set cap on the number of them has driven up the price on the secondary market to \$300,000 or higher.

TenHaken and supporters of barring the transfer of dispensary licenses worry that allowing them to be sold on the secondary market will give them an artificial value, just like has happened with liquor licenses.

But the majority of the council decided without allowing a license to be owned outright, the city's medical marijuana rules would unduly restrict a retailer's ability to grow their business.

## School mask mandate draws a crowd in Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The issue of wearing masks at school to protect against COVID-19 drew a standing-room-only, boisterous crowd to a Rapid City school board meeting.

It was a scene that has similarly played out at many local school board meetings around the country. Parents and others on both sides of the issue demonstrated outside Rapid City High School before the meeting Tuesday night and then packed into the auditorium to weigh in on a mask mandate.

The board voted 5-2 not to impose a temporary two-week mask requirement, a mandate backed by board member Amy Policky who argued that there was currently a high volume of students absent from school due to COVID, and that there aren't enough staff to adequately supervise all classes let alone teach them, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"We all hoped to go back to normal this school year. We all hoped COVID was behind us this school year," Policky said. "We never anticipated that we would have this many cases at the beginning of school. So regardless of our hope, we have to look at our reality. And we heard from the doctors, the reality is the hospitals are full, our schools are taxed... we have to realize we can't stick with what we promised when we hoped that things were going to be different this year."

Several times throughout the meeting the crowd erupted into cheering, booing and heckling, prompting board members to ask for civility.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the school district had 35 coronavirus cases among staff and 254 student cases.

## Query.AI Ramps Up Go-To-Market Efforts to Drive Next Phase of Growth

BROOKINGS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep 8, 2021--

Query.AI, the provider of the market's only security investigations control plane for modern enterprises, today announced the expansion of its leadership team with the appointments of Rob Anderson as vice president of sales and Susan Vaillancourt as chief marketing officer (CMO). Anderson and Vaillancourt, both seasoned cybersecurity executives, are responsible for building and scaling go-to-market efforts to drive exponential revenue growth for Query.AI. Each will report directly to Andrew Maloney, the company's co-founder and chief operating officer (COO).

"Companies today have data everywhere – in the cloud, in SaaS applications, and on-prem – spread across a number of powerful technologies, platforms, and cloud providers like Azure, AWS, and Google. Everyone is looking for a way to accelerate efficiencies in their cybersecurity operations across these environments," said Maloney. "In a short time, Query.AI has completely disrupted conventional security operations thinking. We've brought to market a powerful, API-driven platform that provides a unified browser interface, which enables companies to access, investigate, and respond to threats detected across their cybersecurity systems without duplicating or transferring data."

Maloney continued, "With Rob and Susan on board, we are ready to help every business accelerate their cybersecurity investigations and responses. I am thrilled to welcome these skilled sales and marketing leaders to the team and am excited to partner with them to meet the unyielding demand for our one-of-a-kind solution."

Anderson is a cybersecurity industry sales veteran with a proven track record of building teams that create sustainable and scalable revenue growth. Prior to Query.AI, Anderson served as U.S. sales leader for the south central region for Varonis. Previously, he was vice president of sales at A10 Networks, where he built a three-tier channel strategy and established a strong, seasoned sales team that increased revenues nearly 50 percent quarter over quarter. Earlier in his career, Anderson established an exceptional track record of sales success at LightCyber, Riverbed Technology, and Neoteris, where he was instrumental in bringing each company from an early-stage startup to initial public offering (IPO) or acquisition.

Vaillancourt brings significant experience leading growth and executing strategic global marketing initiatives for cybersecurity companies. Prior to joining Query.AI, Vaillancourt was vice president of brand strategy



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for Mimecast. She previously held executive marketing roles at Optiv, where she was an integral part of a leadership team that grew the company nearly 20X, into a \$2.4B cybersecurity powerhouse. Earlier in her career, Vaillancourt owned and operated her own agency, where she managed strategic communications and marketing efforts for a portfolio of high-profile clients spanning multiple industries.

These executive appointments build on a momentous year for Query.AI. In May, the company officially launched with \$4.6 million Seed funding and was quickly recognized by two of the top industry analyst firms, being named a 2021 Gartner Cool Vendor in Security Operations, and included in the Forrester Research, Inc. "New Tech: Extended Detection and Response (XDR) Providers, Q3 2021" report.

About Query.AI

Query.AI provides the market's only security investigations control plane for modern enterprises. Its patented browser-based platform delivers real-time access and centralized insights across on-premises, multi-cloud, and SaaS applications, without duplicating data from its native locations.

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Black Hills Pioneer. September 4, 2021.

Editorial: AG Ravnsborg should resign now or Legislature should impeach

A tragedy occurred on Sept. 12, 2020 – Joe Boever, walking back to Highmore along side of the road, was struck and fatally killed by Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg returning home to Pierre from a Lincoln Day dinner in Redfield.

Another tragedy has occurred every day since then – Ravnsborg has not taken full responsibility for his actions. It is because of this that we call on him to resign immediately. Should he fail to do so, we call on the state Legislature to seek his impeachment.

The last thing Ravnsborg said he remembers before the impact was reaching down to turn the radio off. His eyes, allegedly averted from the road, allowed his Ford Taurus to veer out of the lane of travel and onto the shoulder striking Boever who was carrying a lit flashlight. Boever's head went through the windshield and his glasses were later found in the car. His flashlight, still lit, was found the next day along side of the road near where his body, stark white from blood loss, lay, just inches from the pavement.

"First and foremost, I am very sorry Joe Boever lost his life in this accident. I am sorry to the entire family for the loss of their loved one. They have had to deal with the pain, anger, and sadness of this accident," Ravnsborg said in a prepared statement Aug. 26 after his attorney, Tim Rensch, accepted a plea agreement on Ravnsborg's behalf. Ravnsborg didn't even show up in the courtroom to face his accusers or the family of the victim.

That's all there was for an apology, if you could call it that, was. The rest of the statement was how he cooperated with law enforcement and touted his accomplishments in office.

Now accidents happen. They happen every day. Sometimes people get hurt or are even killed in those crashes. That's not why we are calling for his resignation.

But when the top law enforcement officer in this state is the cause of one of those fatal crashes and then is utterly disingenuous and dishonorable in his subsequent actions, it is time for him to go.

He has eroded the trust and faith needed of his office.

Already, the South Dakota Sheriff's Association has called for his resignation.

The South Dakota Police Chiefs Association has called for his resignation.

The South Dakota Fraternal Order of Police has called for his resignation.

The Army Reserve placed Ravnsborg's promotion on hold recognizing the gravity of the matter.

Gov. Kristi Noem called on him to resign following the accident, and once again after he was found guilty of two of the three misdemeanors he was charged with. The other charge was dropped as part of his plea agreement in which he pleaded no contest.

"With today's plea, Jason Ravnsborg's legal proceedings have concluded. Like many South Dakotans, I am not only disappointed in how this process was handled by prosecutors, but outraged at the result

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of today's plea hearing and sentencing," Noem said. "Ravnsborg has not accepted responsibility for the death of Joseph Boever and did not even appear in court today to face the charges or the Boever family."

Craig Price, the secretary of the SD Department of Public Safety and former head of the South Dakota Highway Patrol, said in his opinion as a 24-year law enforcement officer, that Ravnsborg should be charged with 2nd-degree manslaughter, a felony.

He said the materials he was providing to House Speaker Spencer Gosch, consisting of evidence and investigators' conclusions, were challenged publically by Ravnsborg, and as such, "made a number of assertions that disparaged the work and reputation of the law enforcement agencies involved in this investigation."

Ravnsborg has continued to show his disregard for the law as four days before his trial, he received a speeding ticket – driving 57mph in a 35mph-zone. He also failed to have his driver's license on him. And it was his seventh ticket in seven years.

Attorney Rensch and some legislators cited Ravnsborg's military service in which he was awarded the Bronze Star.

"... He is an honorable man. He is not a coward. He has a Bronze Star defending our country," Rensch said.

But honorable actions taken in the past do not give you a free pass for less than honorable actions today.

The Army values include: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.

Ravnsborg certainly did not display personal courage when he was a no-show for his trial. He owed it to the family of the man he killed to stand up and face them, take his lumps, let them vent their anger and frustration. It's what should have happened.

He hasn't showed his integrity, failing to sincerely apologize or take responsibility for his actions.

He hasn't respected Boever or his family having tried to have Boever's medical records admitted in court proceedings as an attempt to shift the blame from himself causing a tragic accident, to Boever himself in perhaps, just maybe, he flung himself in front of the car in a suicide attempt.

He has clearly failed to live up to U.S. Army values. He has failed to live up to South Dakota values.

So we join the Yankton Press & Dakotan in calling for Ravnsborg to immediately resign. Should he not, we call on the state Legislature to impeach him.

END

## N. Korea shows off civil defense units in toned-down parade

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Civil defense forces carrying rifles and health workers wearing gas masks and red hazmat suits paraded in North Korea's capital in a celebration of the nation's 73rd anniversary that was a marked departure from past militaristic displays.

The parade late Wednesday — overseen by leader Kim Jong Un, wearing a cream suit and visibly slimmer than at the start of the year — centered around paramilitary organizations and public security forces protecting the capital, Pyongyang, instead of the military units that handle the most important weapons in Kim's nuclear and missile arsenal.

In January and last October, North Korea rolled out its most provocative strategic weapons, threatening Asian rivals and the American homeland, but there was no immediate indication the latest parade showcased ballistic weapons.

Thursday's state media coverage of the event that began late Wednesday indicated its message was aimed at a domestic audience.

Experts say the toned-down event reflected the harsh challenges facing North Korea as its broken, mismanaged economy is further strained by continuing U.S.-led sanctions, prolonged border closures because of the pandemic, and flooding that caused food shortages in recent years.

North Korean state television, which broadcast a recording of the event on Thursday evening, showed the performers and tens of thousands of spectators roaring as Kim appeared as the clock struck midnight.

Kim, flanked by senior officials and smiling widely, kissed the children who presented him with flowers and waved to the crowd before taking his spot at a balcony overlooking the brightly lit Kim Il Sung Square,

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named after his grandfather who founded the nation in 1948.

Paratroopers carrying North Korean flags jumped from planes, while fighter jets flew in formation, firing what appeared to be flares across the night sky. There also were fireworks and illuminated drones that formed the North Korean flag.

Kim apparently did not deliver a speech during the event.

There had been expectations that North Korea would show off missiles and other important weapons to pressure the Biden administration amid a diplomatic freeze with the U.S. after Kim failed to leverage his arsenal for economic benefits during the Trump years.

But the parade shows that North Korea is too preoccupied with its domestic problems to attempt to deliver provocative messages overseas, said Hong Min, an analyst at South Korea's Institute for National Unification.

"The parade shows that the government felt a need to build unity domestically — the population is clearly suffering amid the pandemic and social complaints are likely building up," said Hong. He said it was highly unusual for North Korea to showcase its civil defense units in a parade.

"North Korea needs to enforce military-like discipline while mobilizing its civilians in campaigns to rebuild the economy and areas damaged by floods. There aren't many ways for the leadership to encourage and motivate them, other than showcasing them on televised parades," he said.

Hong said it would be problematic for North Korea to flaunt provocative weapons and create diplomatic friction when it will need to rely on the outside world for coronavirus vaccines.

Choi Young-sam, spokesman of South Korea's Foreign Ministry, said the U.S. and South Korean militaries were closely monitoring North Korea over the parade but declined to give Seoul's assessment of the North's intent.

Seoul's Unification Ministry said 2013 was the last time North Korea held a parade of the Worker-Peasant Red Guards, a national civil defense organization consisting of millions of North Koreans between the ages of 17 and 60, which could loosely be compared to military reserve forces of other countries.

KCNA described Red Guard units from Pyongyang and other regions marching through the square and praised their contributions in rebuilding communities destroyed by natural disasters and efforts to improve the economy. The marchers also included anti-virus workers from the Ministry of Public Health, who paraded in bright red hazmat suits and masks. KCNA credited them with "firmly protecting the security of the country and its people from the worldwide pandemic."

It said Ri Il Hwan, a member of the ruling Workers' Party's Politburo, said in a speech that the government will continue to strengthen its defense capabilities and "firmly defend the dignity and fundamental interests of our people and solve everything our own way with our own efforts on the principle of self-reliance."

North Korea often celebrates major state anniversaries by displaying thousands of goose-stepping troops and its most advanced military hardware in parades at Kim Il Sung Square.

The event was the third straight parade held at night — timed for spectacle.

Amid the stalemate in diplomacy with the U.S., Kim and his powerful sister have emphasized that North Korea will boost its nuclear deterrent and preemptive strike capabilities while demanding that Washington abandon its "hostile" policies — a reference to the continuing U.S. economic sanctions and refusal to accept North Korea as a nuclear power.

But experts say Kim is facing perhaps his toughest moment as he approaches a decade in rule, with North Korea maintaining an indefinite border lockdown to keep out the coronavirus, and no prospect in sight for the ending of international sanctions.

## North Macedonia blaze in COVID-19 field hospital kills 14

By KONSTANTIN TESTORIDES Associated Press

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (AP) — North Macedonia's government was holding an emergency meeting Thursday over an overnight fire that ripped through a field hospital set up to treat COVID-19 patients, leaving 14 people dead.

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The blaze broke out late Wednesday in the western city of Tetovo, where the hospital had been set up following a recent spike in infections in the region that left local hospitals full.

The main prosecutor's office in the capital, Skopje, said 14 people had been killed in the blaze. There were no medical personnel among them.

Tetovo Mayor Teuta Arifi declared three days of mourning for the victims.

The prosecutor's office ordered forensic experts to identify the remains, with the process expected to take longer than usual due to special protocols required because the victims were COVID-19 patients.

About a dozen people were injured, though the exact figure wasn't immediately available.

"We saw the explosion and when we came here everything was in flames," said local resident Nexhmedin Haliti. " Firefighters arrived and started to put the fire out, it lasted for 15- 20 minutes. Everything burnt out."

Five prosecutors, from Tetovo and Skopje, are working on the investigation into the causes of the fire. Prime Minister Zoran Zaev said in a Facebook post that the blaze followed an explosion at the site. It was unclear what caused the blast, but there was speculation that it was linked to oxygen supplies.

"We are shocked. It is a tragedy that I can't even explain. Very sad," said local resident Idriz Brahimi. "Those were sick people who couldn't get out. It is a huge catastrophe."

Health Ministry officials said the bodies of those who died were transferred to hospitals in the capital Skopje, about 45 kilometers (30 miles) to the east.

With less than 30% of the country's roughly 2 million population fully vaccinated, North Macedonia has seen a significant spike in coronavirus infections and deaths since late August.

Zenel Zhinipotoku contributed to this report from Tetovo, North Macedonia.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:

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

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

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

## Mindy, now a tropical depression, dumps rain over Georgia

VALDOSTA, Ga. (AP) — Rain was pouring down on southeast Georgia and coastal South Carolina as Mindy, now a tropical depression, made its way across the state state early Thursday morning.

The storm made landfall in St. Vincent Island, Florida, on Wednesday night. Mindy was expected to cause as much as 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rainfall across the Florida Panhandle and portions of southern Georgia and South Carolina through Thursday morning, the National Hurricane Center said. Scattered flash, urban, and small-stream floods are possible.

The storm on Thursday morning was about 80 miles (125 kilometers) south southeast of Valdosta, Georgia, and moving northeast at 20 mph (31 kmh) with maximum sustained winds of 35 mph (55 kph), forecasters said.

A slower east-northeastward motion is forecast Thursday night through Saturday. The center of Mindy is expected to move across southeastern Georgia Thursday morning, and over the western Atlantic by later in the day. Little change in strength is forecast through Thursday night. Gradual weakening is expected on Friday and Mindy is forecast to become a remnant low by Saturday.

The tropical storm warning is in effect from Mexico Beach, Florida, to the Steinhatchee River have been cancelled. That area is about 300 miles (500 kilometers) east of southern Louisiana, where Hurricane Ida made landfall late last month. The region is still recovering from the deadly and destructive Category 4 storm.

Mindy is the 13th-named storm of what has been another busy Atlantic hurricane season. According to a tweet from Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach, the average date for the 13th-named storm from 1991-2020 was Oct. 24.

## Japan extends virus emergency until end of September

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan announced Thursday it is extending a coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo and 18 other areas until the end of September as health care systems remain under severe strain, although new infections have slowed slightly.

The current state of emergency, which was to end on Sunday, was issued first in Okinawa in May and gradually expanded. Despite the prolonged emergency, the largely voluntary measures have become less effective as the exhausted public increasingly ignores them.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said serious cases remain high and are still overwhelming many hospitals. He called on the people to continue to work remotely and other social distancing measures “so that we can return to safe and prosperous daily lives.”

The extension will cover a period when Japan’s government is in transition. Suga has announced that he will not run in a Sept. 29 race for his party’s leadership, and his successor in that race will likely become the next prime minister.

His government has faced sharp criticism over virus measures seen as too late and too small to be effective and for holding the Olympics despite public opposition during the pandemic.

“We need to stabilize medical systems and make sure that infections are steadily decreasing,” Economy and Fiscal Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, who is in charge of COVID-19 measures, said earlier Thursday. He said tens of thousands of people are still recovering at home or in makeshift facilities with limited medical care.

The government, meanwhile, is studying a roadmap for easing restrictions around November when a large majority of the population is expected to be fully vaccinated, officials said. The easing of restrictions would allow fully vaccinated people to travel, gather for parties or attend mass events.

As of now, about 49% of the people have completed inoculations and the rate is expected to exceed 60% by the end of September, Nishimura said.

Japan has done much better than other developed countries in number of cases and deaths without having a lockdown, but the country has been struggling with new waves of infections propelled by more contagious new variants. Japan has reported about 1.65 million cases and 16,500 deaths.

## Analysis: Taliban hard-line path worsens Afghanistan dilemma

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Reminiscent of their previous harsh rule in the 1990s, the Taliban have already begun to wipe out some of Afghanistan’s gains of 20 years. They’ve denied women a seat at the Cabinet, beaten journalists into silence and enforced their severe interpretation of Islam, on occasion violently.

And yet there seems little the international community can do about it.

The world will need to engage with the Taliban to some extent, despite disappointment with the new all-Taliban Cabinet that defied earlier promises it would be inclusive.

The U.S. needs Taliban cooperation to evacuate the remaining Americans and to fight an increasingly brazen Islamic State affiliate, considered the greatest terrorist threat against America emanating from Afghanistan. In recent weeks, the IS flag has been seen flying from several districts of the eastern province of Nangarhar.

Meanwhile, a humanitarian disaster that threatens millions of Afghans has the world scrambling to respond. On most days, Qatar is flying in food and medical supplies. Pakistan has announced it is sending planeloads of aid to Afghanistan.

The United Nations has launched a \$606 million emergency appeal to help nearly 11 million people in Afghanistan, or nearly one-third of the population. They are deemed to be in desperate need as a result of drought, displacement, chronic poverty and a sharp increase in hostilities as the Taliban swept to power

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last month.

Even before the Taliban takeover, nearly half the population needed some humanitarian aid and more than half of all children under the age of 5 were expected to face acute malnutrition, according to the U.N. report that accompanied the emergency appeal.

The economic challenges are steep. Most Afghans live on less than \$2 a day, 80% of the country's budget was covered by international funds over the past 20 years, and no industries of note have emerged to provide employment to a mostly young population. Tens of thousands of Afghans have fled, most of them members of the educated elite.

Yet despite such dependence on international support, the Taliban sent a message with their Cabinet lineup this week that they intend to run Afghanistan on their terms. They named a government filled with veterans of their 1990s rule and the subsequent insurgency against a U.S.-led military coalition. Their Cabinet includes former Guantanamo Bay prisoners and — perhaps one of the most eyebrow-raising appointments — Sirajuddin Haqqani, wanted by the FBI for questioning in several deadly attacks, as interior minister.

They also forbade protests without prior authorization in a new attempt to silence dissent and reportedly banned some women's sports.

The Taliban would seem to want it both ways — to run Afghanistan according to their harsh interpretation of Islam, while maintaining some level of cooperation with the international community.

In portraying their Cabinet as a caretaker administration, the Taliban signaled there is still room for change and that other nations can do business with this government without recognizing it first.

In a three-page policy statement that accompanied the formation of the government, the Taliban also addressed concerns of the region and the larger world. They promised Afghanistan would not be used as a staging arena for attacks on other countries. They said they would not interfere in the affairs of other nations and demanded the same in return. And they pledged to allow Afghans to leave the country, provided they have the proper travel documents.

"I imagine the use of the term "caretaker" is very strategic," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center. "The idea is to create an impression that at some point the government will change and become more inclusive, and therefore more amenable to the West."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, directing his words at the Taliban, warned Wednesday that "any legitimacy, any support will have to be earned." He spoke after hosting a virtual meeting of ministers from 22 countries as well as NATO and the European Union.

It's unlikely, however, that the Taliban's top leadership will change anytime soon. Its tens of thousands of fighters will have to be brought under a single Afghan National Security Force banner, even integrating some of the previous military personnel into the mix. But that won't happen without the likes of Haqqani, the new interior minister, or the Taliban founder's son Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the defense minister.

In time, economic necessity might prompt the Taliban to loosen their grip and allow women and non-Taliban into the administration, but likely in secondary roles. For women, this might mean work in the traditional fields of health and education.

The Taliban "need to open the door and trust non-Taliban in governance. They need to bring technocrats ASAP to get the economy going," said Torek Farhadi, an adviser to previous Afghan governments.

The Taliban face a number of challenges to their rule.

Prolonged economic stagnation could lead to protests by the country's growing poor who might eventually decide they have little to lose by openly challenging the hard-line rulers. Afghans of 2021 are not the compliant population of 1996 — a time when the Taliban had little trouble imposing their uncompromising edicts.

There are also debates and differences within the movement and no one among the Taliban has absolute authority, unlike in the past, under the late founder Mullah Mohammad Omar who had the final word.

The West and Afghanistan's regional neighbors hope to use money and recognition as leverage to influence the Taliban.

Wednesday's ministerial meeting signaled that the U.S. and Europe will be watching the Taliban closely.

Kugelman, from the Wilson Center, said others, such as Pakistan, China and Russia, might eventually set a lower bar for formal recognition of a new Afghan government. China has already promised to stay engaged and mine Afghanistan's vast mineral resources while helping rebuild the war-ravaged nation. Still, Kugelman said, the Taliban badly need access to billions of dollars in foreign reserves that the West has denied them.

"The announcement of its very non-inclusive Cabinet will put those funds further out of reach," he said.

Gannon has covered Afghanistan for The Associated Press since 1988. She is the AP's news director for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Follow her on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/kathygannon](http://www.twitter.com/kathygannon).

## **Pentagon chief: al-Qaida may seek comeback in Afghanistan**

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

KUWAIT CITY (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Thursday the al-Qaida extremist group that used Afghanistan as a staging base to attack United States 20 years ago may attempt to regenerate there following an American withdrawal that has left the Taliban in power.

Austin spoke to a small group of reporters in Kuwait City at the conclusion of a four-day tour of Persian Gulf states. He said the United States is prepared to prevent an al-Qaida comeback in Afghanistan that would threaten the United States.

"The whole community is kind of watching to see what happens and whether or not al-Qaida has the ability to regenerate in Afghanistan," he said. "The nature of al-Qaida and (the Islamic State group) is they will always attempt to find space to grow and regenerate, whether it's there, whether it's in Somalia, or whether it's in any other ungoverned space. I think that's the nature of the organization."

The Taliban had provided al-Qaida with sanctuary while it ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The U.S. invaded and overthrew the Taliban after it refused to turn over al-Qaida leaders following the Sept. 11, 2001 attack on the United States. During the course of the 20-year U.S. war, al-Qaida was vastly diminished, but questions have arisen about its future prospects with the Taliban back in Kabul.

"We put the Taliban on notice that we expect them to not allow that to happen," Austin said, referring to the possibility of al-Qaida using Afghanistan as a staging base in the future.

In a February 2020 agreement with the Trump administration, Taliban leaders pledged not to support al-Qaida or other extremist groups that would threaten the United States. But U.S. officials believe the Taliban maintain ties to al-Qaida, and many nations, including Gulf Arab states, are concerned that the Taliban's return to power could open the door to a resurgence of al-Qaida influence.

Austin has asserted that the U.S. military is capable of containing al-Qaida or any other extremist threat to the United States emanating from Afghanistan by using surveillance and strike aircraft based elsewhere, including in the Persian Gulf. He also has acknowledged that it will be more difficult without U.S. troops and intelligence teams based in Afghanistan.

Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken appeared together in Qatar on Tuesday in a show of U.S. gratitude for that Gulf state's help with the transit of tens of thousands of Afghans and others evacuated from Kabul. Blinken also visited an evacuee transit site in Germany, and Austin visited Bahrain and Kuwait.

Together, the Austin and Blinken trips were meant to reassure Gulf allies that President Joe Biden's decision to end the U.S. war in Afghanistan in order to focus more on other security challenges like China and Russia does not foretell an abandonment of U.S. partners in the Middle East. The U.S. military has had a presence in the Gulf for decades, including the Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. Biden has not suggested ending that presence, but he — like the Trump administration before him — has called China the No. 1 security priority, along with strategic challenges from Russia.

Austin, a retired Army general, has a deep network of contacts in the Gulf region based in part on his years commanding U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq and later as head of U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. military operations in the Middle East. This week's trip, however, was his first to the Gulf since taking office in January.

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Austin had been scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia on Thursday as the final stop on his Gulf tour. But on Wednesday evening his spokesman, John Kirby, announced that the visit had been dropped due to "scheduling issues." Kirby offered no further explanation but said Austin looked forward to rescheduling.

Austin indicated that his visit was postponed at the Saudis' request. "The Saudis have some scheduling issues; I can't speak to exactly what they were," he said.

The Saudi stop notably was to happen two days before the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States that killed nearly 3,000 people. Fifteen of the men who hijacked commercial airliners and crashed them into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field on Sept. 11, 2001 were Saudis, as was Osama bin Laden, whose al-Qaida network plotted the attack from its base in Afghanistan. The attack prompted the U.S. invasion that became a 20-year war in Afghanistan.

U.S. relations with the Saudi government have been strained at times in the intervening years. In 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman oversaw an unprecedented crackdown against activists, rivals and perceived critics. The year culminated in the gruesome killing of Washington Post contributing columnist and dissident Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in the Saudi Consulate in Turkey.

Earlier this month, President Joe Biden directed the declassification of certain documents related to the 9/11 attacks, a gesture to victims' families who have long sought the records in hopes of implicating the Saudi government. Public documents released in the last two decades, including by the 9/11 Commission, have detailed numerous Saudi entanglements but have not proved government complicity.

The Saudi government denies any culpability. On Wednesday the Saudi Embassy in Washington released a statement welcoming the move to declassify and release more documents related to 9/11, saying, "no evidence has ever emerged to indicate that the Saudi government or its officials had previous knowledge of the terrorist attack or were in any way involved in its planning or execution."

## Subdued 9/11 remembrances reflect Boston's invisible scars

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Tucked in a grove of ginkgo trees, a glass cube at Logan International Airport pays tribute to those lost aboard the two jetliners that took off from Boston and were hijacked by terrorists who flew them into the World Trade Center towers.

But it's mostly silent homage. The memorial etched with the names of those who perished aboard American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 draws few visitors. And the airport's other nods to its role in the tragedy — American flags that fly above the jetways at the gates where the flights departed — go mostly unnoticed and unremarked.

It's reflective of the city's uneasy ties to the transcendent events of Sept. 11, 2001.

"It still feels surreal in a way, because it was just horrifying beyond anyone's ability to grasp," said Virginia Buckingham, who was CEO of the Massachusetts Port Authority, which operates Logan, on 9/11.

Five terrorists smuggled box cutters aboard American Flight 11 at Logan. Five others did the same with United Flight 175 at another terminal. "None of the checkpoint supervisors recalled the hijackers or reported anything suspicious regarding their screening," the government's 9/11 Commission said in its report.

On the day of the attacks, Buckingham was preparing to fly to Washington to meet with the Federal Aviation Administration about a new runway at Logan when she got a six-word message that still chills her: "Two planes are off the radar."

Six weeks after the attacks, then-Gov. Jane Swift pushed Buckingham to resign. Buckingham, who wrote a haunting 2020 memoir, "On My Watch," said it all nearly broke her — and she's only recently come around to the idea that it wasn't her fault.

"I have PTSD, both from the trauma of seeing what unfolded like all of us had to, but also being blamed for it caused terrible trauma, bad dreams, depression," she said. "I was held personally accountable for the deaths of thousands ... It's been a long road back, and it's nothing compared to what the families have gone through."

Underscoring Boston's uneasy attempts to distance itself from its role in the attacks, subdued 20th an-



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niversary remembrances are planned at the airport on Saturday, Sept. 11.

Massport spokesperson Jennifer Mehigan said nothing is planned apart from the usual TSA honor guards stationed at the airport's main checkpoints in the morning. American and United will have private ceremonies.

The agency was thrust into exhaustive legal battles after the developer of the World Trade Center sued it, American and United, claiming porous security at Logan ultimately was to blame for the toppling of the towers. It didn't end until 2017, when insurers for the two airlines agreed to pay \$95 million to World Trade Center Properties to close the case.

Massport, also named as a defendant in dozens of wrongful death lawsuits brought by families of 9/11 victims, maintained it had no legal responsibility for the attacks because it didn't control security checkpoints. Ultimately, a federal judge agreed.

Twenty years on, there is little to suggest that Boston has truly come to terms with its supporting role in the attacks.

Although a monument to victims in Boston Public Garden gets traffic, Logan's atmospheric memorial is rarely visited. On a recent weekday visit, an Associated Press photographer saw only two people enter the cube during a three-hour stay. That's in sharp contrast to the frequently crowded memorial downtown to victims of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, which killed three spectators, wounded more than 260 others and spawned the slogan "Boston Strong."

"I'm struck by the amnesia that's set in," said James Carroll, a former priest and retired Boston Globe columnist. "All we're left with is the mythology of 9/11. I would have expected better of Boston."

As the 20th anniversary approaches, the most poignant Boston-centric commemoration is a one-man operation. Retired flight attendant Paul Veneto, 62, a regular on United Flight 175's Boston to Los Angeles route who had taken 9/11 off, is pushing an airline beverage cart from Boston to New York City to honor the pilots and fellow crew members who died in the attacks.

"I turned my life around to be able to recognize these guys who were never recognized," said the Braintree, Massachusetts, resident, whose survivor's guilt triggered a 15-year prescription drug addiction.

Buckingham likens her own life to a piece of sea glass.

"It's been broken apart and is nothing like it used to be. But that doesn't mean it's not beautiful, doesn't mean it's not valuable," she said. "If you go through something very, very painful, you're going to carry that pain with you. You're going to be changed forever."

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Follow AP New England editor Bill Kole on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/billkole>.

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For more AP coverage of the 9/11 anniversary from New York and around the globe, visit our hub at <https://apnews.com/hub/9-11-a-world-changed>.

## Set down, Djokovic tops Berrettini at Open, nears year Slam

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Never fazed, rarely flummoxed, Novak Djokovic is so collected in best-of-five-set matches — even when falling behind, as he has done repeatedly at the U.S. Open.

No opponent, or the prospect of what's at stake, has been too much to handle. Not yet, anyway. And now he's two wins away from the first calendar-year Grand Slam in men's tennis since 1969, along with a men's-record 21st major championship overall.

Djokovic ceded the opening set for the third consecutive match at Flushing Meadows — and ninth time at a major in 2021 — but again it didn't matter, because he quickly corrected his strokes and beat No. 6 seed Matteo Berrettini 5-7, 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 in a quarterfinal that began Wednesday night and concluded after midnight Thursday.

During his on-court interview, Djokovic cut off a question, sensing where it was headed, and said: "Do not ask me anything about history. I know it's there."

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As he came back and improved to 26-0 in Grand Slam play this season, Djokovic found every angle, thwarted every big Berrettini shot and was so locked in he dove and dropped his racket during one exchange yet scrambled, rose and reinserted himself in the point. He lost it, but the message to his foe was unmistakable, essentially amounting to, "I will do whatever it takes."

After 17 unforced errors in the first set, Djokovic made a total of 11 the rest of the way.

"The best three sets I've played in the tournament, for sure," he said.

When Berrettini made one last stand, holding a break point while trailing 4-2 in the third set, Djokovic steadied himself. He let Berrettini put a backhand into the net, then conjured up a 121 mph ace and a forehand winner down the line to hold, then pointed his right index finger to his ear — one of many gestures asking the 20,299 in the Arthur Ashe Stadium stands for noise.

Four minutes later, that set was his. And 42 minutes later, the match was.

"He has this ability — and probably that's why he's the best ever — just to step up his game, his level, all the time," said Berrettini, who also lost to Djokovic after taking the first set of the Wimbledon final. "Doesn't matter how well I play, he just plays better."

Djokovic already earned trophies on the Australian Open's hard courts in February, the French Open's clay courts in June and Wimbledon's grass courts in July.

Djokovic has added five victories on the U.S. Open's hard courts and now faces 2020 runner-up Alexander Zverev in Friday's semifinals. If Djokovic can win that match and Sunday's final, he will join Don Budge (1938) and Rod Laver (1962 and 1969) as the only men to claim all four major tennis singles trophies in one season. (Three women have done it, most recently Steffi Graf in 1988; Serena Williams' bid in 2015 ended in the U.S. Open semifinals).

One more Slam title also will break the career mark Djokovic currently shares with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

Zverev goes into the semifinals on a 16-match winning streak, including a 1-6, 6-3, 6-1 semifinal triumph against Djokovic en route to the gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics.

"I'm pumped," Djokovic said, looking ahead to what awaits. "The bigger the challenge, the more glory in overcoming it."

The other men's semifinal is No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, a two-time major finalist, against No. 12 Felix Auger-Aliassime. They won their quarterfinals Tuesday.

The No. 4-seeded Zverev, a 24-year-old German, advanced Wednesday afternoon by beating Lloyd Harris 7-6 (6), 6-3, 6-4.

Hours later, both Djokovic and Berrettini showed signs of nerves on a muggy evening with the temperature at 75 degrees and the humidity at 80%. Applause, whistles and roars preceded the initial serve, a 124 mph ace by Djokovic, a three-time U.S. Open champion.

Banned from the tournament a year ago because of the coronavirus pandemic, fans are clearly enjoying being a part of all of this again.

They created a fugue of competing chants of Djokovic's nickname, "No-le! No-le!" and a shortened version of Berrettini's first name, "Mat-te! Mat-te!" Some greeted Djokovic's missed serves with claps, considered a no-no in this sport, and some — perhaps the same folks — lamented Berrettini's faults with a communal "Awwwww."

Djokovic's form was not at its finest early, with more mistakes than he could fathom — he rolled his eyes, put a palm to his forehead, muttered toward those in his entourage.

Berrettini uses his 6-foot-5, 209-pound frame to generate punishing power in serves and forehands; Djokovic called him the "Hammer of Tennis."

But if any player is equipped to dull that style, it's Djokovic, whose instincts, reflexes, agility and mobility are superior. So he, unlike most other players, can return a 131 mph serve and not merely get it in play but do so with enough intention to lead to a missed backhand by Berrettini, as happened when Djokovic broke to lead 3-1 in the second set.

Still, Berrettini did manage to grab the 77-minute opening set.

"Probably every other player out there, I would have felt like, 'OK, now I'm going to go. For sure he's

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going to be tired, too, a little bit. I can kind of like (take) over with my game, with my energy and everything," Berrettini said. "With him, it looks like he doesn't care."

Djokovic pretty much confirmed that, saying: "I managed to forget about it, move on."

He also lost the first set in the third round, against Kei Nishikori, and in the fourth, against Jenson Brooksby, before winning in four both times. Did that against Berrettini at Wimbledon, too.

"When I dropped the first set, I just went to a different level and I stayed there 'til the last point," Djokovic said about his latest victory. "That's something that definitely encourages me and gives me a lot of confidence."

He cleaned up his act by cutting down on errors, with three in the second set and three in the third, during which the retractable roof was shut because of expected rain.

Just holding serve became an ordeal for Berrettini, so much so that he let out a sigh of relief when he finally held after getting broken three times in a span of four games across the middle two sets. By then, though, he had given away the second and had fallen behind 3-0 in the third. The fourth also reached that score, and Djokovic was one step closer to his goals.

"Of course I'm aware of the history, of course it gives me motivation," Djokovic said at his news conference. "If I start to think about it too much, it burdens me mentally. I want to really go back to the basics and what really works for me mentally."

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More AP tennis: <https://apnews.com/hub/tennis> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## From election to COVID, 9/11 conspiracies cast a long shadow

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Korey Rowe served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and returned to the U.S. in 2004 traumatized and disillusioned. His experiences overseas and nagging questions about Sept. 11, 2001 convinced him America's leaders were lying about what happened that day and the wars that followed.

The result was "Loose Change," a 2005 documentary produced by Rowe and written and directed by his childhood friend, Dylan Avery, that popularized the theory that the U.S. government was behind 9/11. One of the first viral hits of the still-young internet, it encouraged millions to question what they were told.

While the attacks united many Americans in grief and anger, "Loose Change" spoke to the disaffected.

"It was the lightning rod that caught the lightning," Rowe recalls. He had hoped the film would prompt a sober reassessment of the attacks. Rowe, who lives in Oneonta, New York, doesn't regret the film, and still questions the events of 9/11, but says he's deeply troubled by what 9/11 conspiracy theories revealed about the corrosive nature of misinformation on the internet.

Twenty years on, the skepticism and suspicion first revealed by 9/11 conspiracy theories has metastasized, spread by the internet and nurtured by pundits and politicians like Donald Trump. One hoax after another has emerged, each more bizarre than the last: birtherism. Pizzagate. QAnon.

"Look at where it's gone: You have people storming the Capitol because they believe the election was a fraud. You have people who won't get vaccinated and they're dying in hospitals," Rowe says. "We've gotten to the point where information is actually killing people."

There were, of course, conspiracy theories before 9/11 happened – John F. Kennedy's assassination, the moon landing, a supposed 1947 UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico. And the country's interest in alternative, fringe theories was on the rise before 9/11, exemplified by the 1990s show "The X-Files," with its taglines of "The truth is out there" and "trust no one." But it was 9/11 that heralded our current era of suspicion and disbelief and revealed the internet's ability to catalyze conspiracy theories.

"Conspiracy theories have always been with us, and it's just the means of sharing them that has changed," says Karen Douglas, a psychology professor at the University of Kent in England who studies why people believe such explanations. "The internet has made conspiracy theories more visible and easy to share than ever before. People can also very quickly find like-minded others, join groups, and share their opinions."

Conspiracy theories about the attack and its aftermath also gave early exposure to some of the same

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people pushing hoaxes and unfounded claims about COVID-19, vaccines and the 2020 election, including Alex Jones, the Trump-supporting publisher of Infowars, who has accused the United States of plotting the attacks and has said the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting was a hoax. Jones was a co-producer of the third edition of "Loose Change."

Polls show belief in 9/11 conspiracy theories peaked in the years immediately following the attack, then subsided. Repeated surveys show a small percentage of Americans continue to harbor doubts about the official explanation of the attacks.

It's not surprising that such views persist, or that they have ebbed over time. Shocking, sudden events often spawn conspiracy theories as people collectively grapple with understanding them, says Mark Fenster, a University of Florida law school professor who has studied the history of conspiracy theories in America.

"A plane that runs into the World Trade Center? That runs into the Pentagon? It sounds like the stuff of films," Fenster says. "It just didn't seem like a real event, and it's when you have a major anomalous event like this that conspiracy theories sometimes come around."

Before the internet, conspiracy theorists relied on books, pamphlets and the occasional late night television show to espouse their beliefs. Now, they can swap theories on message boards like Reddit, post videos on YouTube, and win over new converts on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

The first known 9/11 conspiracy theory was put forward only hours after the attack, when an American software engineer emailed a post to an internet forum questioning whether the towers were toppled by a controlled detonation.

Twenty years on, a search on YouTube for content related to 9/11 turns up millions of hits.

Thousands of videos focus on conspiracy theories. That is a lot, but the grandfather of modern conspiracy theories has been outpaced by the upstarts: A Google search of "9/11 conspiracy theory" turns up more than 8 million results, while a search for "COVID conspiracy theory" turns up more than three times that.

Tech companies say they have done what they can to limit the spread of false information about 9/11. YouTube has added links to authoritative sources to some 9/11-related videos. Facebook says it has added fact checks to several viral hoaxes about 9/11, including one that the Pentagon was struck by a missile and not a plane.

For many younger Americans who came of age after 9/11, the internet is the first place they go for information on the event. Sept. 11 isn't taught consistently in schools; some districts require it while others brush over it or ignore it completely.

False claims about the attacks often come up at the National Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum, which offers educational services to visitors and school children across the country. Such instances are an opportunity to talk about the facts of what did happen, and the many investigations that followed, according to Megan Jones, senior director of educational programs at the memorial.

"We have a generation now with no memory of 9/11, so it's important to share the stories of what happened," Jones says.

Bogus claims about the Sept. 11 attacks never posed the threat now ascribed to misinformation about COVID-19 or the 2020 U.S. elections. But even proponents of 9/11 conspiracy theories say questions about what happened primed the pump for the distrust and anxiety behind today's conspiracy theories.

"The danger is, once you have that distrust of authority and government, it's a dangerous place to be," says Matt Campbell, a British citizen whose brother died in the World Trade Center on 9/11. Campbell believes the towers came down after a controlled demolition, and is seeking a new inquest in the UK that would review his brother's death.

"If you think everything they're telling you is a lie, then you just switch off: 'Could be true, might not be true, whatever,'" Campbell says.

On the grand scale, such the distrust the underlies such beliefs can become dangerous when they begin to divide a society, or when they are exploited by a political leader or an outside adversary.

"Usually it is the case that the people who feel they are being excluded from power who are committed to conspiracy theories," Fenster says. "What's different this time is that it was the party that was in

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power — the party that had the White House — that was the main broadcaster of conspiracy theories.”

Early on, conspiracy theories about Sept. 11 were popular with some liberals who disliked former President George W. Bush or who opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But after Barack Obama became president, bogus claims about 9/11 began growing in popularity among some conservatives who cite it as an example of the handiwork of the “Deep State.”

Two years before winning her seat in Congress in 2020, Georgia Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene said she doubted that a plane had actually hit the Pentagon. Last year she acknowledged that she had been wrong, and sought to deflect blame by saying it was the government’s fault that she spread misinformation.

“The problem is our government lies to us so much to protect the Deep State, it’s hard sometimes to know what is real and what is not,” she tweeted.

Ben Crew is a screenwriter who has produced a video debunking many popular 9/11 conspiracy theories. He’s also started a project in which he travels the country collecting personal accounts of 9/11, with the goal of getting at least one story from all 50 states.

Crew hears lots of conspiracy theories — claims about a missile hitting the Pentagon, claims that the airliners that hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania were empty.

He says that almost everyone he interviews considers 9/11 to be a pivotal point in American history, the start of a wave of anxiety and fear that for many people still hasn’t crested.

“It seems like there’s an opportunity for everything to just catch fire now,” Crew says. “Nine-eleven ignited that.”

David Klepper covers misinformation for The Associated Press. Follow him on twitter: <https://twitter.com/davidklepper>

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.

## Confederate statue’s 1887 time capsule set to be removed

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Now that an iconic statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee has been taken down from its perch above Richmond’s Monument Avenue, crews plan to remove a piece of history from its gigantic pedestal.

A time capsule from 1887 that state officials believe is tucked inside the statue’s base is set to be removed Thursday. It will be replaced with a new time capsule that contains items reflective of current times, including an expired vial of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, a Black Lives Matter sticker and a photograph of a Black ballerina with her fist raised near the Lee statue after racial justice protests erupted following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis last year.

Historical records and imaging tests helped state officials pinpoint the capsule’s location in the cornerstone of the 40-foot tall concrete pedestal.

A newspaper article from 1887 suggests that the copper time capsule contains mostly memorabilia, including a U.S. silver dollar and a collection of Confederate buttons. But one line from that article has piqued the interest of historians. Listed among the artifacts is a “picture of Lincoln lying in his coffin.”

It is unclear what kind of a picture it is, but the article says it was donated by “Miss Pattie Leake,” who was a school principal from a prominent local family.

Harold Holzer, a historian and Lincoln scholar, told The Associated Press earlier this year that he believes it’s highly doubtful that the picture is an actual photograph of Lincoln in his coffin because the only known photo of Lincoln in death was taken by photographer Jeremiah Gurney in City Hall in New York on April 24, 1865.

Holzer said it’s more likely it could be a popular Currier & Ives lithographic print of Lincoln lying in state in New York or a sketch done by someone who may have witnessed Lincoln’s body during a two-week

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tour the president's body was taken on before his burial in Springfield, Illinois.

The bronze equestrian statue of Lee was one of five enormous Confederate tributes along Richmond's Monument Avenue and the only one that belonged to the state. The four city-owned statues were taken down last summer, but the Lee statue removal was blocked by two lawsuits until a ruling from the Supreme Court of Virginia last week cleared the way for it to be taken down on Wednesday.

After the time capsule is removed, it will be brought to a state Department of Historic Resources lab, where historians will immediately open it and begin to preserve the approximately 60 items believed to be inside.

Gov. Ralph Northam said the original time capsule reflects Virginia in 1890, but the 39 items contained in the new capsule reflect "who we are as a people in 2021."

"The past 18 months have seen historic change, from the pandemic to protests for racial justice that led to the removal of these monuments to a lost cause. It is fitting that we replace the old time capsule with a new one that tells that story," Northam said in a news release.

## Beatings, buried videos a pattern at Louisiana State Police

By JIM MUSTIAN and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

MONROE, La. (AP) — The most violent videos languished for years, lost or ignored in a digital vault. Louisiana State Police troopers and top brass alike would often look the other way, even as officers took to official messaging channels to banter about their brutality.

In one video, white troopers can be seen slamming a Black man against a police cruiser after finding marijuana in his car, throwing him to the ground and repeatedly punching him — all while he is handcuffed.

In another, a white trooper pummels a Black man at a traffic stop 18 times with a flashlight, leaving him with a broken jaw, broken ribs and a gash to his head. That footage was mislabeled and it took 536 days and a lawsuit for police to look into it.

And yet another video shows a white trooper coldcocking a Hispanic drug trafficking suspect as he stood calmly by a highway, an unprovoked attack never mentioned in any report and only investigated when the footage was discovered by an outraged federal judge.

As the Louisiana State Police reel from the fallout of the deadly 2019 arrest of Ronald Greene — a case blown open this year by long-withheld video of troopers stunning, punching and dragging the Black motorist — an Associated Press investigation has revealed it is part of a pattern of violence kept shrouded in secrecy.

An AP review of internal investigative records and newly obtained videos identified at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which Louisiana State Police troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct.

AP's review — coming amid a widening federal investigation into state police misconduct — found troopers have made a habit of turning off or muting body cameras during pursuits. When footage is recorded, the agency routinely refuses to release it. And a recently retired supervisor who oversaw a particularly violent clique of troopers told internal investigators this year that it was his "common practice" to rubber-stamp officers' use-of-force reports without reviewing body-camera video.

In some cases, troopers omitted uses of force such as blows to the head from official reports, and in others troopers sought to justify their actions by claiming suspects were violent, resisting or escaping, all of which were contradicted by video footage.

"Hyper-aggressiveness is winked upon and nodded and allowed to go on," said Andrew Scott, a former Boca Raton, Florida, police chief and use-of-force expert who reviewed videos obtained by AP. "It's very clear that the agency accepts that type of behavior."

Most of those beaten in the cases AP found were Black, in keeping with the agency's own tally that 67% of its uses of force in recent years have targeted Black people — double the percentage of the state's Black population. AP reporting revealed that a secret panel the state police set up this year to determine whether troopers systematically abused Black motorists was just as secretly shut down, leaving the agency

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blind to potential misconduct.

The revelations come as civil rights and Black leaders urge the U.S. Justice Department to launch a broader, "pattern and practice" investigation into potential systemic racial profiling by the overwhelmingly white state police, similar to other probes opened in recent months in Minneapolis, Louisville and Phoenix.

"These things are racially motivated," said Alanah Odoms, executive director of the ACLU of Louisiana. "It doesn't seem you could have this level of criminality going on without it being something much more sinister."

It's not clear how the Louisiana State Police rate of force against Black people compares to that of other states because there is no national benchmark and definitions of uses of force differ between jurisdictions. Activists, however, say it points to a clear problem.

"Driving while Black is still a crime in Louisiana," said Eugene W. Collins, president of the Baton Rouge branch of the NAACP, adding that the numbers "prove our assertion that our communities are woefully over-policed."

Col. Lamar Davis, the state police superintendent, declined requests for an interview but said in a statement that the agency has completely revised its excessive force policies and practices and implemented numerous reforms in the 11 months since he took office.

"No instance of excessive force is acceptable," he said, "and when the department learns of such misconduct, an immediate review is launched leading to administrative and/or potential criminal investigations."

Davis said transparency is a priority but "ongoing criminal and civil litigation prevents the immediate release of videos and investigative details in many of these incidents."

He said he doesn't believe a federal pattern and practice investigation is needed "at this time." The Justice Department did not answer questions about whether it's considering one.

The state police have been under intense scrutiny since May when the AP published previously unreleased body camera footage of Greene's May 10, 2019, arrest at the end of a high-speed chase near Monroe. It showed white troopers stunning, beating and dragging Greene as he pleaded for mercy. One clip that a supervisor denied having for two years showed troopers leaving the heavysset Greene prone and shackled facedown for more than nine minutes. Among the 49-year-old's last words: "I'm your brother. I'm scared! I'm scared!"

It was a jarring rush of images in a death that troopers initially blamed on a car crash and that took 474 days to prompt an internal investigation. Gov. John Bel Edwards was among the officials who repeatedly rebuffed requests to release the video.

"These are tactics they've been using forever and we're tired of it," said Terrance Key, an Army veteran who grew up with Greene in northern Louisiana. "They've been getting away with this s--- for so long."

Recently, a federal investigation into Greene's death was broadened to include allegations of obstruction of justice involving Louisiana State Police brass. Among the incidents under scrutiny is the shutdown of the secret panel state police set up to investigate possible systemic abuse of Black motorists.

The seven-member panel had been focused on reviewing thousands of hours of body camera footage from about a dozen specific troopers in northern Louisiana's Troop F, including some of those involved in the beatings of Greene and three other Black motorists.

But according to several people familiar with the matter who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity, the panel was abruptly disbanded in July after just a few months' work following leaks about its existence. State police did not immediately act on the panel's recommendations, but Davis said the agency has since referred some of the problematic incidents to internal investigators. He did not identify those incidents.

Among the cases identified by AP's review is a March 2019 arrest in northeastern Louisiana's Ouachita Parish where a trooper was caught on dash-camera video grabbing Black marijuana suspect Deshawn Washington by his hair and slamming the 20-year-old into the hood of a police cruiser, a use of force omitted from the police report. At one point, Washington's friend, Shomari King, a 21-year-old who was also arrested, asked, "Why y'all being so rough?"

In another case from August 2019, Darrell Smith, a white motorist who fled a traffic stop near Baton

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Rouge, contended in a lawsuit that troopers caught up with him and beat him beyond recognition, causing him to be hospitalized with temporary kidney failure. A use-of-force report leaves unchecked whether body-camera video exists and lists Smith's injuries as "nonincapacitating." Smith's lawsuit says troopers shared a photo of him after the beating with his eyes swollen shut and the caption: "This is what happens when you run from the police."

Sometimes, videos have been left out of materials turned over to state prosecutors. That was the case last year after a high-speed chase ended near a Franklin Parish cornfield, where body cameras captured troopers beating Black motorist Antonio Harris and hoisting him to his feet by his hair braids.

Afterward, the troopers bragged about it in LOL-peppered group text messages, saying Harris is "gonna have nightmares" and is "still digesting that ass whoopin'."

Capt. John Peters, the regional troop commander, recently retired after acknowledging he approved troopers' use-of-force reports that glossed over Harris' beating without reviewing their body-camera video, disciplinary records show. Peters, who was also among the commanders to sign off on the use-of-force reports in the Ronald Greene case, told investigators that approving such documents without watching the video was his "common practice." He declined to comment to AP.

"The ultimate responsibility is mine," records show Peters wrote in an internal email about the approvals last year. "I failed."

One former trooper, Jacob Brown, was perhaps the agency's most prolifically violent officer in recent years. Records show he tallied 23 uses of force dating to 2015 — 19 on Black people — and he faces charges in three separate beatings.

Video and police records show he beat Aaron Larry Bowman 18 times with a flashlight after deputies pulled him over for a traffic violation near his Monroe home in May 2019. State police didn't investigate the attack until 536 days later, and only did so after a lawsuit from Bowman, who was left with a broken jaw, ribs and wrist, as well as a gash to his head that required six staples to close.

"I thought I was going to die that night," Bowman told AP.

Brown, who resigned in March, failed to report his use of force and mislabeled his body-camera footage in what investigators described in internal records as "an intentional attempt to hide the video." He did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Another video obtained by the AP involving Brown shows the 2019 arrest of Morgan Blake, who was handcuffed by the side of a Louisiana interstate after troopers found 13 pounds of marijuana in his car.

When Blake repeatedly begged Brown to adjust the cuffs, saying they were irritating an old elbow injury, the trooper refused and slammed Blake twice against a police cruiser and then hurled him to the ground.

Two more troopers jumped on Blake, who was still handcuffed, in the roadside grass. "Stop resisting," one of them yelled. Footage shows Trooper Randall "Colby" Dickerson punching Blake five times and kneeling him in the side. Dickerson, who faces state charges in the case, declined to comment.

After the beating, Brown told another trooper that Blake's right handcuff hadn't been on, that he was resisting and, "Hell, he's trying to get away" — all statements investigators concluded were false.

AP also obtained previously unreleased footage of a state trooper hitting a Hispanic truck driver in 2010 along Interstate 12 in Tangipahoa Parish, north of New Orleans.

The driver, Alejandro Soliz, had been transporting more than 20 kilograms of cocaine and waited on the side of the road as troopers searched his tractor-trailer. Trooper Jason LaMarca can be seen approaching Soliz and, without provocation, delivering a blow to the head that sent the man crumbling to the ground.

"There is absolutely no legitimacy in that type of force," policing expert Scott said after viewing the footage.

LaMarca, reached by phone, referred questions to a police spokesman, who did not respond.

The federal judge who sentenced Soliz on drug charges five months after the arrest was so troubled by the video that he wrote letters to federal prosecutors and Col. Mike Edmonson, then-superintendent of the state police. The use of force had not been documented in any reports, the judge wrote, adding the video also showed "three other troopers laughing at this act."



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Edmonson ultimately suspended LaMarca for 12 hours, saying the punishment was tempered by what he considered an "outstanding" seizure of \$2 million worth of cocaine.

At a disciplinary hearing, Edmonson talked about wanting to send LaMarca a message that striking Soliz was "not why we wear this badge."

The trooper's suspension was overturned on appeal.

Video journalist Stacey Plaisance in New Orleans contributed to this report.

## From election to COVID, 9/11 conspiracies cast a long shadow

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Korey Rowe served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and returned to the U.S. in 2004 traumatized and disillusioned. His experiences overseas and nagging questions about Sept. 11, 2001 convinced him America's leaders were lying about what happened that day and the wars that followed.

The result was "Loose Change," a 2005 documentary produced by Rowe and written and directed by his childhood friend, Dylan Avery, that popularized the theory that the U.S. government was behind 9/11. One of the first viral hits of the still-young internet, it encouraged millions to question what they were told.

While the attacks united many Americans in grief and anger, "Loose Change" spoke to the disaffected.

"It was the lightning rod that caught the lightning," Rowe recalls. He had hoped the film would prompt a sober reassessment of the attacks. Rowe, who lives in Oneonta, New York, doesn't regret the film, and still questions the events of 9/11, but says he's deeply troubled by what 9/11 conspiracy theories revealed about the corrosive nature of misinformation on the internet.

Twenty years on, the skepticism and suspicion first revealed by 9/11 conspiracy theories has metastasized, spread by the internet and nurtured by pundits and politicians like Donald Trump. One hoax after another has emerged, each more bizarre than the last: birtherism. Pizzagate. QAnon.

"Look at where it's gone: You have people storming the Capitol because they believe the election was a fraud. You have people who won't get vaccinated and they're dying in hospitals," Rowe says. "We've gotten to the point where information is actually killing people."

There were, of course, conspiracy theories before 9/11 happened – John F. Kennedy's assassination, the moon landing, a supposed 1947 UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico. And the country's interest in alternative, fringe theories was on the rise before 9/11, exemplified by the 1990s show "The X-Files," with its taglines of "The truth is out there" and "trust no one." But it was 9/11 that heralded our current era of suspicion and disbelief and revealed the internet's ability to catalyze conspiracy theories.

"Conspiracy theories have always been with us, and it's just the means of sharing them that has changed," says Karen Douglas, a psychology professor at the University of Kent in England who studies why people believe such explanations. "The internet has made conspiracy theories more visible and easy to share than ever before. People can also very quickly find like-minded others, join groups, and share their opinions."

Conspiracy theories about the attack and its aftermath also gave early exposure to some of the same people pushing hoaxes and unfounded claims about COVID-19, vaccines and the 2020 election, including Alex Jones, the Trump-supporting publisher of Infowars, who has accused the United States of plotting the attacks and has said the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting was a hoax. Jones was a co-producer of the third edition of "Loose Change."

Polls show belief in 9/11 conspiracy theories peaked in the years immediately following the attack, then subsided. Repeated surveys show a small percentage of Americans continue to harbor doubts about the official explanation of the attacks.

It's not surprising that such views persist, or that they have ebbed over time. Shocking, sudden events often spawn conspiracy theories as people collectively grapple with understanding them, says Mark Fenster, a University of Florida law school professor who has studied the history of conspiracy theories in America.

"A plane that runs into the World Trade Center? That runs into the Pentagon? It sounds like the stuff of films," Fenster says. "It just didn't seem like a real event, and it's when you have a major anomalous

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event like this that conspiracy theories sometimes come around.”

Before the internet, conspiracy theorists relied on books, pamphlets and the occasional late night television show to espouse their beliefs. Now, they can swap theories on message boards like Reddit, post videos on YouTube, and win over new converts on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

The first known 9/11 conspiracy theory was put forward only hours after the attack, when an American software engineer emailed a post to an internet forum questioning whether the towers were toppled by a controlled detonation.

Twenty years on, a search on YouTube for content related to 9/11 turns up millions of hits.

Thousands of videos focus on conspiracy theories. That is a lot, but the grandfather of modern conspiracy theories has been outpaced by the upstarts: A Google search of “9/11 conspiracy theory” turns up more than 8 million results, while a search for “COVID conspiracy theory” turns up more than three times that.

Tech companies say they have done what they can to limit the spread of false information about 9/11. YouTube has added links to authoritative sources to some 9/11-related videos. Facebook says it has added fact checks to several viral hoaxes about 9/11, including one that the Pentagon was struck by a missile and not a plane.

For many younger Americans who came of age after 9/11, the internet is the first place they go for information on the event. Sept. 11 isn’t taught consistently in schools; some districts require it while others brush over it or ignore it completely.

False claims about the attacks often come up at the National Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum, which offers educational services to visitors and school children across the country. Such instances are an opportunity to talk about the facts of what did happen, and the many investigations that followed, according to Megan Jones, senior director of educational programs at the memorial.

“We have a generation now with no memory of 9/11, so it’s important to share the stories of what happened,” Jones says.

Bogus claims about the Sept. 11 attacks never posed the threat now ascribed to misinformation about COVID-19 or the 2020 U.S. elections. But even proponents of 9/11 conspiracy theories say questions about what happened primed the pump for the distrust and anxiety behind today’s conspiracy theories.

“The danger is, once you have that distrust of authority and government, it’s a dangerous place to be,” says Matt Campbell, a British citizen whose brother died in the World Trade Center on 9/11. Campbell believes the towers came down after a controlled demolition, and is seeking a new inquest in the UK that would review his brother’s death.

“If you think everything they’re telling you is a lie, then you just switch off: ‘Could be true, might not be true, whatever,’” Campbell says.

On the grand scale, such the distrust the underlies such beliefs can become dangerous when they begin to divide a society, or when they are exploited by a political leader or an outside adversary.

“Usually it is the case that the people who feel they are being excluded from power who are committed to conspiracy theories,” Fenster says. “What’s different this time is that it was the party that was in power — the party that had the White House — that was the main broadcaster of conspiracy theories.”

Early on, conspiracy theories about Sept. 11 were popular with some liberals who disliked former President George W. Bush or who opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But after Barack Obama became president, bogus claims about 9/11 began growing in popularity among some conservatives who cite it as an example of the handiwork of the “Deep State.”

Two years before winning her seat in Congress in 2020, Georgia Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene said she doubted that a plane had actually hit the Pentagon. Last year she acknowledged that she had been wrong, and sought to deflect blame by saying it was the government’s fault that she spread misinformation.

“The problem is our government lies to us so much to protect the Deep State, it’s hard sometimes to know what is real and what is not,” she tweeted.

Ben Crew is a screenwriter who has produced a video debunking many popular 9/11 conspiracy theories. He’s also started a project in which he travels the country collecting personal accounts of 9/11, with the goal of getting at least one story from all 50 states.

Crew hears lots of conspiracy theories — claims about a missile hitting the Pentagon, claims that the airliners that hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania were empty.

He says that almost everyone he interviews considers 9/11 to be a pivotal point in American history, the start of a wave of anxiety and fear that for many people still hasn't crested.

"It seems like there's an opportunity for everything to just catch fire now," Crew says. "Nine-eleven ignited that."

David Klepper covers misinformation for The Associated Press. Follow him on twitter: <https://twitter.com/davidklepper>

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.

## Can kids get 'long COVID' after coronavirus infections?

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

Can kids get "long COVID" after coronavirus infections?

Yes, but studies indicate they're less likely than adults to be affected by symptoms that persist, recur or begin a month or more after infection.

Estimates vary on how often the symptoms known as long COVID-19 occur in kids. A recently published U.K. study found about 4% of young children and teens had symptoms more than a month after getting infected. Fatigue, headaches and loss of smell were among the most common complaints and most were gone by two months.

Coughing, chest pain and brain fog are among other long-term symptoms sometimes found in kids, and can occur even after mild infections or no initial symptoms.

Some studies have found higher rates of persisting symptoms than in the U.K. study, but kids are thought to be less commonly affected than adults. About 30% of adult COVID-19 patients develop long-term symptoms, according to some estimates.

Experts aren't sure what causes the long-term symptoms. In some cases, it could reflect organ damage caused by the initial infection. Or it could be a result of the virus and inflammation lingering in the body.

Kids can develop other rare problems after an initial coronavirus infection, including heart inflammation or a condition known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome. That involves fever and inflammation affecting different body parts, among other possible symptoms. Affected kids generally need to be hospitalized but most recover. A similar condition can occur in adults.

The rapid spread of the highly contagious delta variant has some doctors worrying about the potential for higher numbers of children being at risk for long COVID-19 and these other conditions.

Because of the potential for long-term consequences, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends follow-up doctor visits after children recover from an initial coronavirus infection.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: [FactCheck@AP.org](mailto:FactCheck@AP.org). Read more here:

What is the mu variant of the coronavirus?

What can employers do if workers avoid COVID-19 vaccines?

Do I need a booster if I got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?

## Police planning to reinstall Capitol fence ahead of rally

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Law enforcement officials concerned by the prospect for violence at a rally in the nation's capital next week are planning to reinstall protective fencing that surrounded the U.S. Capitol for

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months after the Jan. 6 insurrection, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

Though no specific measures have been announced, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi hinted during her weekly press conference Wednesday at extra safety precautions for the Sept. 18 rally by saying: "We intend to have the integrity of the Capitol be intact." Briefings for lawmakers, including congressional leaders, are expected in coming days.

A security plan that is being finalized calls for a fenced perimeter on the streets immediately surrounding the Capitol building and the Supreme Court, though not around the congressional office buildings nearby, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity ahead of an official announcement.

The Capitol Police formally requested the fence to the board that oversees it, and it is likely to be approved, according to a House Democratic aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about private discussions.

Police continue to track intelligence indicating far-right extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers are planning to attend next week's rally, which is designed to demand "justice" for the hundreds of people who have been charged in connection with January's insurrection. Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, however, has said he doesn't expect his membership to attend.

On Wednesday, meanwhile, the FBI released new information in hopes of catching the person suspected of leaving behind two pipe bombs on Capitol Hill the night before the riot, one of the enduring, unsolved mysteries of that chaotic week.

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

Those charges include allegations that they conspired to block the certification of Biden's victory. Several Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges and are cooperating with investigators in the case against their fellow extremists, who authorities say came to Washington ready for violence and willing to do whatever it took to stop the certification of the Electoral College vote.

The fence had been a stark symbol of the fear many in the Capitol felt after the mob pushed its way past overwhelmed police officers, broke through windows and doors and ransacked the Capitol as Congress was voting to certify Joe Biden's electoral win.

The planned Sept. 18 rally comes as a jittery Washington has seen a series of troubling one-off incidents — including, most recently, a man who parked a pickup truck near the Library of Congress and said he had a bomb and detonator.

Perhaps the most concerning: A series of unexploded pipe bombs placed near the Capitol on Jan. 5 remain unexplained and no suspect has been charged.

The FBI released a new video of that suspect on Wednesday and a digital map showing the person circling the offices of the Democratic and Republican national committees, where the bombs were placed. The FBI also said, for the first time, that agents believe the suspect is not from the Washington area but may have been "operating" out of a location near the Capitol.

"Based upon the suspect's route of travel to the DNC and from the DNC to the RNC, and the manner in which the suspect carries the backpack after placing the pipe bomb at the DNC, the FBI believes the suspect had a location in the vicinity of Folger Park from which the person was operating," the FBI said in a news release. "Reviews of the suspect's behavior in video footage and interviews with residents in the Capitol Hill neighborhood have led the FBI to believe the suspect is not from the area."

Some lawmakers and top union officials were expected to be briefed on the fence plan later this week and another more expansive briefing for the leaders of the House and Senate was planned for Monday.

On Capitol Hill, the politics around fencing in the iconic building and its grounds proved challenging for lawmakers after the January insurrection. Many said they disliked closing off access, even as they acknowledged the increased level of security it provided. The fencing finally came down with a promise to re-erect it if necessary. But the question of what deserves fencing is tricky.

In an interview Wednesday, the district's Democratic representative, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, said

she had not yet been briefed on the security plans, but understood if the fence needs to be reinstalled as a precaution ahead of the upcoming rally.

"I would hope that we wouldn't have to fence in the Capitol every time there's a demonstration," Norton said. But she added, "If they go with the fence, I'm not going to criticize them."

Norton suggested that in the aftermath of Jan. 6 there would be more robust security preparations ahead of this rally out of an abundance of caution — even though it is scheduled for a Saturday before the House returns to session, a typically sleepy summertime afternoon when few lawmakers or staff would be at work.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see the fence go up," she said. "The preparations are certainly going to be more than they were on Jan. 6."

Associated Press writers Colleen Long, Nomaan Merchant and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

## Fighting Texas abortion law could be tough for federal gov't

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Foes of the new Texas law that bans most abortions have been looking to the Democratic-run federal government to swoop in and knock down the most restrictive abortion law in effect in the country. But it's nowhere near that simple.

President Joe Biden, who denounces the law as "almost un-American," has directed the Justice Department to try to find a way to block its enforcement. And Attorney General Merrick Garland says his prosecutors are exploring all possible options. But legal experts warn that while the law may ultimately be found unconstitutional, the way it's written means it'll be an uphill legal battle.

Known as SB8, the new state law prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity — usually around six weeks, before some women know they're pregnant. Courts have blocked other states from imposing similar restrictions, but Texas' law differs significantly because it leaves enforcement to private citizens through civil lawsuits instead of criminal prosecutors.

Pressure is mounting not only from the White House but also from Democrats in Congress, who want Garland to somehow take action. Nearly two dozen lawmakers wrote to him Tuesday calling for the "criminal prosecution of would-be vigilantes attempting to use the private right of action established by SB8."

But what action can the Justice Department take? How?

So far, the attorney general has said only that federal officials will not tolerate violence against anyone who is trying to obtain an abortion in Texas. At the forefront of that plan is enforcement of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

That law, commonly known as the FACE Act, normally prohibits physically obstructing access to abortion clinics by blocking entrances or threatening to use force to intimidate or interfere with someone. It also prohibits damaging property at abortion clinics and other reproductive health centers.

Garland says that while his department is still urgently exploring options to challenge the state law, Justice will enforce the federal law "in order to protect the constitutional rights of women and other persons, including access to an abortion."

However, that federal action could be limited by the fact that the act is geared more toward physical acts of intimidation or violence than lawsuits, said Mary Anne Franks, a constitutional scholar and professor at University of Miami School of Law.

"The nefarious cleverness" of the Texas law is that "you can't do anything until someone actually attempts to use this law," she said. "And that's really late in the game."

And even if an abortion provider — or people who help a woman get an abortion — should successfully defend a lawsuit, that wouldn't block a stack of future suits. A Texas judge's decision last week temporarily shielding some abortion clinics from being sued by the state's largest anti-abortion group, for example, didn't affect any other groups.

"That raises real concerns about any efficacy of any of the actions DOJ could take," Franks said.

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Still, there are tools the federal government could use, she said. Prosecutors could bring criminal charges under civil rights measures originally written to root out the Ku Klux Klan. Those say that private citizens working with the state to deprive people of their constitutional rights could face criminal violations.

There's also a tool on the civil side, called a Section 1983 action, that allows people to sue someone else who is blocking them from exercising their constitutional rights. Those civil lawsuits must be filed by the person under attack rather than the government, but federal attorneys could join suits already filed, she said.

Those actions, she said, could have their own chilling effect on abortion foes: People opposed to abortion who might want to sue providers might reconsider if they could potentially face federal criminal charges.

As for more direct action against the Texas law, legal experts say the Justice Department will likely work to help overturn it with a so-called friend-of-the-court brief, which could help bolster an already existing lawsuit challenging the state law.

Jonathan Turley, a constitutional law professor at George Washington University Law School, sees the law as likely to be eventually struck down in court, since it prohibits abortion long before the fetus is viable outside the womb.

"It's very likely it will be found unconstitutional. The framers, the drafters themselves understood that ... they have set a line well below existing case law for banning abortions," he said. "Courts are likely to make fast work of the Texas law."

But if Democrats take action in Congress aimed at preserving access to abortion on the federal level, as some are calling for, he warned it could end up backfiring since there's existing case law establishing that states can make laws related to the procedure.

Such a federal law, if passed by Congress, would almost certainly end up in court and could ultimately lose ground for abortion-rights supporters if a ruling is made that strengthens the states' ability, he said.

Meanwhile, the Texas law's citizen-enforcement mechanism is something Democrats may not want to see limited widely either, since the concept is also a key piece of enforcing environmental laws. Courts have limited people's ability to file civil suits before, as in defamation suits that could run afoul of freedom of speech.

The Supreme Court declined to block the Texas law in a 5-4 decision, though it did not rule on whether the law itself was constitutional.

Turley argues a graver threat to abortion access is an upcoming case on the Supreme Court docket: Mississippi is asking to be allowed to enforce an abortion ban after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

By taking up that single question, the justices will be considering whether states can impose limitations on abortion before the fetus is viable outside the womb. There are no other questions at play, no other ways the case could be more narrowly decided. If the high court sides with Mississippi, that would open the door to other states passing similar laws.

"That is a more important threat," he said.

Whitehurst reported from Salt Lake City.

## **Biden, Dems push Civilian Climate Corps in echo of New Deal**

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inspired by the New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corps, President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats are pushing for a modern counterpart: a Civilian Climate Corps that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs building trails, restoring streams and helping prevent catastrophic wildfires.

Building on Biden's oft-repeated comment that when he thinks of climate change, he thinks of jobs, the White House says the \$10 billion program would address both priorities as young adults find work installing solar panels, planting trees, digging irrigation ditches and boosting outdoor recreation.

"We must seize this opportunity to build a big, bold pathway to critical careers, for a diverse generation of Americans ready to take on this existential crisis that we face," said Ali Zaidi, deputy White House

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climate adviser. "It's national service meets family-supporting careers meets the moment."

The effort comes as the White House and many Democrats are intensifying their focus on climate change after a series of devastating storms recently battered much of the nation. Touring neighborhoods in New York and New Jersey this week that were devastated by flooding from the remnants of Hurricane Ida, Biden said climate change has become "everybody's crisis."

"The threat is here. It is not getting any better," Biden said. "The question is can it get worse?"

The proposed climate corps was not included in a bipartisan infrastructure bill approved by the Senate, but it is a key part of an emerging \$3.5 trillion package backed by Democrats to help families and address climate change. A vote in the House on both bills could occur by the end of the month.

Rep. Joe Neguse, a Colorado Democrat who has co-sponsored a climate corps bill, said it's important to train the next generation of U.S. land managers, park rangers and other stewards of our natural resources.

"This bold investment is a necessary response to the climate crisis and prioritizes the maintenance and upkeep of public lands," he said.

While the jobs should pay at least \$15 an hour, those likely to join the climate corps "are not doing it for the compensation," Neguse said. "They know it's important to connect to nature and do important work for their state and the nation."

Details are still being worked out, but Neguse and other Democrats say the program should pay "a living wage" while offering health care coverage and support for child care, housing, transportation and education.

David Popp, a professor of public administration at Syracuse University, said a key distinction between the original Civilian Conservation Corps and the new climate contingent is that the U.S. economy is not in a depression — great or otherwise — as it was during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency.

While U.S. employers added just 235,000 jobs in August, the unemployment rate decreased slightly to 5.2% as the economy continues to recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

Most of those being targeted for the new climate corps "could find employment elsewhere," Popp said, noting a proliferation of help-wanted signs at retail businesses across the nation.

"I don't know that an unemployed coal worker in West Virginia is going to move to Montana to take a minimum-wage job to restore streams," he said.

On the other hand, some of his own students are highly motivated by the climate crisis and may want to spend a year or two on an outdoor job that helps address an existential threat to the planet, Popp said.

"Many young people are very passionate about the environment, and they may see this as an opportunity to do something about the environment and still get paid for it," he said.

Republicans largely dismiss the climate corps as a do-gooder proposal that would waste money and could even take away jobs from workers displaced by the pandemic and the push for so-called green jobs.

"My grandfather worked for the CCC, and I remember him telling me how terrible it was, how back-breaking the work was," said Arkansas Rep. Bruce Westerman, the top Republican on the House Natural Resources Committee.

"We don't need another FDR program, and the idea that this is going to help land management is a false idea as well," Westerman said.

At a committee meeting last week, Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ore., called the proposed climate corps "delusional," adding: "Why would we think people are going to suddenly jump at doing really, really hard, dirty, dangerous work because we offer them \$15 an hour? That's not going to happen."

In a widely circulated piece, the conservative Wall Street Journal editorial page said Democrats want to "expand government into every corner of American life. It isn't enough to lecture Americans about the supposed perils of climate change. Now they also want to tax you and other Americans to pay your children to spend years lecturing you."

Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., a prominent supporter of the climate corps, said such criticism overlooks important benefits.

The program will help communities recover from climate disasters such as Hurricane Ida and Western wildfires while creating "good-paying jobs that can turn into clean-economy careers," Markey said. In the

process, the climate corps will "make the country a safer, healthier place that can compete in the global economy," he added.

"As the West Coast fights fires and the East Coast fights storms and smoke, the editorial board fights straw men," Markey said in a letter to the newspaper.

The urgency of the climate crisis "recalls past chapters of national mobilization," Neguse said. "In standing up the Civilian Climate Corps, we will build on that legacy and existing infrastructure to meet the challenges of today."

## **Crushed by pandemic, conventions mount a cautious return**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

In pre-COVID times, business events \_\_\_ from small academic conferences to giant trade shows like CES \_\_\_ routinely attracted more than 1 billion participants each year. The pandemic brought those global gatherings to a sudden halt, emptying convention centers and shuttering hotels.

More than a year later, in-person meetings are on the rebound. In late August, 30,000 masked attendees gathered in Las Vegas for ASD Market Week, a retail trade show. In Chicago, the Black Women's Expo recently held the largest event in its history, with 432 vendors and thousands of masked attendees.

"People are cautious, but they're glad to be able to get out and network with other people," said Dr. Barbara Hall, whose company, JBlendz Communications, was among the exhibitors at the expo.

Still, it could be several years \_\_\_ if ever \_\_\_ before conferences attract the crowds they did before the pandemic. Many countries and businesses are still restricting travel, pinching attendance at big events like the Canton Trade Fair in China, which required 26,000 vendors to pitch their wares virtually in April.

Health concerns also remain. The industry is keen to avoid another black eye like the Biogen leadership conference, a February 2020 event in Boston that was eventually linked to 300,000 COVID cases.

The New York Auto Show, which regularly attracts more than 1 million people, was canceled two weeks before its August start date because of concerns about the delta variant. A construction machinery trade show in Beijing, which normally attracts 150,000 visitors, has been delayed for two months until November.

Experts say one of the big lessons of 2020 is that much of what happens at conferences and trade shows can happen virtually, lessening the need for big in-person events.

Jaiprit Viridi, an assistant professor at the University of Delaware, said moving events online made them more accessible to the disabled and those who can't afford to travel. Viridi, who is deaf, said she's relieved that in-person conferences are requiring masks for safety. But masks create serious barriers for her, since she relies on lip-reading.

"We don't need to go back to the way things were pre-COVID, but rather embrace the lessons from the past year-and-a-half to improve how we conduct these spaces for everyone," Viridi said in an email.

Paddy Cosgrave, the CEO of the Web Summit, a tech conference aimed at startups, said last year's virtual-only event was less expensive \_\_\_ people paid just \$100 to attend, versus \$700 previously \_\_\_ and drew in more participants from developing countries. But attendees also felt something was lacking.

"In-person meetings provide a quality of interaction that no amount of technology as of yet can replicate," Cosgrave said.

This year, the Web Summit expects 40,000 attendees when it convenes in Lisbon, Portugal, in November. Vaccines or a negative COVID-19 test will be required to attend, but masks are optional.

The Render-Atlanta software engineering conference, scheduled for mid-September, is also requiring vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test to enter. To make attendees feel even safer, the conference cut a deal with a sponsor to provide daily testing for its 400 attendees. Masks \_\_\_ which can be personalized at a decorating station \_\_\_ will be required. Attendees can also wear black-and-white bracelets showing their level of comfort with social interaction. Dots mean they're okay with it, stripes mean "stay away."

Justin Samuels, Render-Atlanta's chief experience officer, said it's worth the extra hoops to gather in person. Render-Atlanta is the only Black-owned software engineering conference, with an emphasis on culture that doesn't translate to a Zoom screen, Samuels said.



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"The actual art of human interaction has to happen in person," Samuels said.

A lot is riding on the revival of in-person meetings. Prior to the pandemic, conferences and trade shows generated more than \$1 trillion in direct spending and attracted 1.5 billion attendees annually around the world, according to the Events Industry Council, a trade group.

The group hasn't yet calculated the impact of the virus globally. But the Center for Exhibition Industry Research, which studies the economic impact of U.S. business-to-business trade shows, said those events alone were expected to generate \$105 billion in direct and indirect spending in 2020. Instead, that plunged to \$24 billion. CEIR doesn't expect a return to growth for the industry until 2023.

Chicago's McCormick Place, the largest convention center in the U.S., laid off 90% of its 2,800 workers last year after 234 events were canceled, said Larita Clark, the CEO of the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority. One of the complex's two hotels, the Marriott Marquis Chicago, was temporarily closed; the other, the Hyatt Regency Chicago, saw occupancy drop as low as 10%.

The economic losses extend far beyond exhibition complexes. Fern, a 112-year-old Cincinnati company, builds exhibits and other infrastructure for 1,400 events in a normal year. But for most of last year and the beginning of this year, its revenue dropped well over 90%, said Aaron Bludworth, Fern's president and CEO.

"This was much more brutal than anything I have experienced in my career," Bludworth said.

Bludworth doesn't expect his business to fully recover until 2023. But he has been surprised by the demand he's seeing for fall, when his company will be mounting several hundred shows. He's had some requests for help with virtual presentations, he said, but demand for in-person events is stronger.

"Maybe you can do education virtually, but when a buyer and seller connect and go out and have dinner, that cannot happen virtually," he said. "Our community realizes we've got to get together and sell products and make this commerce happen."

Steve Hill, CEO and president of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, said 2022 is shaping up to be a good year for the industry. But he acknowledges a lot will depend on the situation around COVID-19 and whether international travel restrictions are lifted. Foreigners can account for 20% to 30% of attendees at the city's major events, he said.

Hill thinks virtual convention elements are here to stay. They give shows another revenue stream and help them develop followers, he said. But Hill thinks enough people will continue to visit in person that hybrid events won't hurt hotels and restaurants in convention cities.

"The shows will get back to 100% attendance. People need the in-person aspect of a show," he said.

But Sherrif Karamat, the president and CEO of the Professional Convention Management Association, is not so sure, particularly as more convention attendees question the environmental impact of travel. Karamat is excited about the prospect of virtual conferencing bringing the world closer.

"Learning should not be limited to any one channel. Business networking should not be limited to any one channel," he said.

Karamat says the pandemic is already reshaping the convention industry. Organizers are thinking more deeply about why their conferences matter and the outcomes they want to achieve, he said, which will lead to more meaningful gatherings.

"I'm very bullish," he said. "I feel we're going to take this much more seriously."

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AP Writers Kelvin Chan in London, David Koenig in Dallas, Joe McDonald in Beijing and Teresa Crawford in Chicago contributed.

## Idaho patients in hospital halls amid COVID rationed care

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Amid the Idaho coronavirus surge that prompted officials to authorize hospitals to ration health care, Army soldiers sent to one hospital have traded their fatigues for personal protective equipment to help treat a flood of infected patients.

The conference center at Kootenai Health hospital in the city Coeur d'Alene has been converted into

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a field hospital of sorts — with some of its classrooms filled with hospital beds where patients receive oxygen or get monoclonal antibody treatment, hospital officials said.

At the nearby main hospital building in the city of about 50,000, some emergency room patients receive care in a converted lobby and others get it in hallways. Urgent surgeries have been put on hold and some patients in critical condition are facing long waits for intensive care beds.

The hospital is licensed for 200 regular medical beds — not including the ones designed for children, women giving birth and people experiencing a mental health crisis — and on Wednesday had 218 “med surge” patients, said Jeremy Evans, the hospital’s COVID-19 incident commander.

Meanwhile, about 500 of its roughly 3,600 clinical and staff positions are empty, he said, forcing managers to ask administrative staffers and others to take on additional work like cleaning hospital rooms.

The overwhelmed hospital is at the epicenter of a coronavirus crisis for the northern part of the state — and where state officials this week authorized “crisis standards of care” status.

That allowed Kootenai Health, where an entire floor has been turned into a makeshift COVID-19 unit, and other hospitals in the region to ration health care during the surge.

Public health officials are warning the health care rationing could soon spread statewide, forcing already traumatized doctors and nurses to make gut-wrenching decisions about who will get life-saving care.

Newly confirmed coronavirus infection cases in Idaho are surging and the state is now averaging more than 950 new cases every day, according Johns Hopkins University — an increase of more than 41% over the past two weeks.

Idaho is also last among U.S. states with only about 45% of residents having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Just under 40% of residents are fully vaccinated, making Idaho 48th the nation compared to other states and Washington, D.C.

“For the rest of the state, we remain dangerously close to crisis standards of care,” Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Director Dave Jeppesen warned Tuesday, when there were just nine available intensive care unit beds in the entire state.

The crush of patients has forced Kootenai Health into “doing things that were not normal — way outside of normal — at times,” said hospital chief of staff Dr. Robert Scoggins.

“Almost every day at this point we are having cardiac arrest from patients when their oxygen levels dip too low and we can’t supply them with enough oxygen,” he said.

Kootenai Health recently installed a larger oxygen tank in an effort to treat all the patients. If the hospital’s caseload grows, Scoggins said, the hospital’s oxygen delivery infrastructure — the actual pipes that run through the walls — may not be able to handle the demand.

While many of northern Idaho’s smaller, rural hospitals have not been forced to ration health care, they frequently have no place to send their critically ill patients who would normally be transferred to Kootenai Health.

Hospitals in neighboring Washington state would normally help with the overflow, but they are also full of patients, Jeppesen said.

Peter Mundt, the spokesman for Gritman Medical Center in the Idaho city of Moscow said the institution is struggling to find hospital destinations to transfer patients with serious heart problems and other conditions unrelated to COVID-19.

“Our ability to accommodate non-COVID patients are very strained at this point,” Mundt said. “Even though we’re all different hospitals, we normally work together as collaborative colleagues and peers. We need it to work as a giant system and that system is just under severe strain right now.”

In the city of Lewiston, St. Joseph Regional Medical Center is also operating “at the very edge of our capacity,” spokeswoman Sam Skinner said.

“Our current situation is worse than it’s ever been,” Skinner said. “As we continue to see the COVID-19 surge in our community, the impact on one hospital can quickly have this rippling effect. Our low community vaccination rates are putting an incredible burden on our community.”

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare moved northern and north-central Idaho into the crisis

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designation Monday evening, giving hospitals a legal and ethical template to use while rationing care.

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 patients.

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.

Jeppesen stressed Tuesday that vaccines are the best way to reduce the demand on hospitals. 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.

State health officials have also asked people should not go to emergency rooms for asymptomatic coronavirus tests or other matters that can be handled in doctor’s offices, but said no one should hold off emergency room visits for potentially serious conditions. They warned people people to be prepared to wait for care.

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.

## **Tropical Storm Mindy makes landfall on Florida Panhandle**

MIAMI (AP) — A swath of the Florida Panhandle was under a tropical storm warning after Tropical Storm Mindy made landfall Wednesday night.

The storm touched down over St. Vincent Island, about 10 miles (15 km) west southwest of Apalachicola, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Mindy could cause as much as 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rainfall across the Florida Panhandle and portions of southern Georgia and South Carolina through Thursday morning, the National Hurricane Center said. Scattered flash, urban, and small-stream floods are possible.

Mindy’s arrival occurred only a few hours after it had strengthened into a tropical storm Wednesday evening. The storm had maximum sustained winds of 45 mph (75 km/h) and was moving northeast at 21 mph (33 km/), forecasters said.

The tropical storm warning is in effect from Mexico Beach, Florida, to the Steinhatchee River to the east. That area is about 300 miles (500 kilometers) east of southern Louisiana, where Hurricane Ida made landfall late last month. The region is still recovering from the deadly and destructive Category 4 storm.

Mindy is the 13th-named storm of what has been another busy Atlantic hurricane season. According to a tweet from Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach, the average date for the 13th-named storm from 1991-2020 was Oct. 24.

## **Texas man gets execution delay over pastor’s touch request**

By JUAN A. LOZANO and MICHAEL GRACZYK Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) — A Texas death row inmate won a reprieve Wednesday evening from execution for killing a convenience store worker during a 2004 robbery that garnered \$1.25 after claiming the state was violating his religious freedom by not letting his pastor lay hands on him at the time of his lethal injection.

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The U.S. Supreme Court blocked John Henry Ramirez's execution about three hours after he could have been executed. He is condemned for fatally stabbing 46-year-old Pablo Castro, who worked at a Corpus Christi convenience store.

Ramirez was in a small holding cell a few feet from the Texas death chamber at the Huntsville Unit prison when he was told of the reprieve by Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokesman Jason Clark.

"He was quiet when I let him know," Clark said. "He shook his head and said: 'Thank you very much. God bless you.'"

In its brief order, the court directed its clerk to establish a briefing schedule so Ramirez's case could be argued in October or November.

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.

Seth Kretzer, Ramirez's lawyer, had argued the Texas Department of Criminal Justice was violating the death row inmate's First Amendment rights to practice his religion by denying his request to have his pastor touch him and vocalize prayers when he was executed. 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.

Lower appeals courts had rejected Ramirez's argument.

The request by 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.

In recent years, the Supreme Court has granted stays halting several executions in Texas and Alabama over the presence of clergy or spiritual advisers in the death chamber. The only execution stays the Supreme Court has granted in recent years have been related to issues of religious practice or discrimination.

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. That inmate, Patrick Murphy, remains on death row.

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.

Texas prison officials say direct contact poses a security risk and the vocal prayer could be disruptive and would go against maintaining an orderly process. Aside from some prison officials, an inmate's final statement and a doctor who announces the time of death, no one else usually formally speaks during an execution.

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

Moore and Kretzer say the laying of hands is a symbolic act in which religious leaders put their hands on someone in order to offer comfort during prayer or confer a spiritual blessing at the moment of someone's death.

"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 should 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

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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.

Six more executions are scheduled for later this year in Texas, the nation's busiest capital punishment state.

Lozano reported from Houston.

## Ida deaths rise by 11 in New Orleans; Louisiana toll now 26

By KEVIN MCGILL and MELINDA DESLATTÉ Associated Press

HOUMA, La. (AP) — The death toll in Louisiana from Hurricane Ida rose to 26 Wednesday, after health officials reported 11 additional deaths in New Orleans, mostly older people who perished from the heat. The announcement was grim news amid signs the city was returning to normal with almost fully restored power and a lifted nighttime curfew.

While New Orleans was generally rebounding from the storm, hundreds of thousands of people outside the city remained without electricity and some of the hardest-hit areas still had no water. Across southeastern Louisiana, 250,000 students were unable to return to classrooms 10 days after Ida roared ashore with 150 mph (240 kph) winds.

The latest deaths attributed to Ida happened between Aug. 30 and Monday, but were just confirmed as storm-related by the Orleans Parish coroner, the Louisiana Department of Health said in a statement. Nine of the New Orleans deaths — of people ages 64 to 79 — came from "excessive heat during an extended power outage," while the two others were from carbon monoxide poisoning, the department said.

More than a million people were left without power, including the entire city of New Orleans, when Ida struck on Aug. 29. The state's largest power company, Entergy, said it expected to have electricity in the city restored to 90% by Wednesday evening.

Meanwhile, the New Orleans Police Department and Mayor LaToya Cantrell lifted an 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew they had imposed two days after the hurricane hit.

Across New Orleans and southeastern Louisiana, families are still waiting to hear when their children can return to school, as districts assessed hurricane damage. Prior to Ida, schools around Louisiana had been open despite widespread cases of COVID-19, although under a statewide mask mandate for all indoor locations.

"We need to get those kids back with us as soon as we possibly can," said Superintendent of Education Cade Brumley.

In New Orleans, School Superintendent Henderson Lewis Jr. said damage to schools appeared to be mostly minimal, but power needs to be restored to all buildings, and teachers, staff and families need to return to the city to get schools up and running.

"Now more than ever, our children stand to benefit from the comfort that structured and routine daily schooling can bring," Lewis said in a statement Wednesday. "So, let's all come together to reopen our schools quickly and safely."

Lewis said he expects classes for some will resume as early as next week and that all students will be back a week after that.

No school reopening estimates have been provided for the five parishes that were hardest hit by Hurricane Ida and which are home to about 320,000 people: Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. James, St. Charles and St. John the Baptist. In those parishes, 96% of utility customers were still without power Wednesday.

Bucket trucks and heavy power equipment were ubiquitous, but the task facing linemen remained daunting. Downed power poles and slack or snapped lines were still evident on long stretches of U.S. Highway 90 in St. Charles Parish. Heavy equipment trucks could be seen ferrying new poles to the area.

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Farther south, in the Terrebonne Parish city of Houma, trucks with linemen were on every street, and as the day progressed there were signs of progress: Traffic lights started flickering on, although sporadically, on busy Grand Caillou road by early afternoon.

Linemen also were working south of Houma, in rural Terrebonne along Bayou Grand Caillou. But many of the homes were in no shape to connect. Coy Verdin was staying at his son's house in Houma. The home the 52-year-old fisherman shares with his wife, Pamela, near the bayou was a soggy, smelly mess, all but destroyed in the storm.

"All the ceilings fell. You can see daylight through the roof," Verdin said. "All we have is basically a shell."

Ida scattered most of his 200 crab traps to parts unknown. "The only thing I have left is my boat and some of my commercial fishing rigging," he said.

The St. John the Baptist Parish School System website said all schools and offices will be closed "until further notification." Lafourche Parish Schools Superintendent Jarod Martin indicated a "long and extensive road to recovery" on that school system's website, with no timeline for a return in sight.

"Until power is restored to our facilities and we're able to obtain further information regarding damage to the infrastructure of our schools, we're unable to provide an estimated date for a return to in-person learning," the St. James Parish public school system said in an update posted Wednesday.

Statewide, about 342,000 homes and businesses remained without power Wednesday, according to the Louisiana Public Service Commission.

Access to fuel also remained difficult, with the website GasBuddy.com reporting about 48% of gas stations in Baton Rouge had no gasoline. About 56% of stations in New Orleans were also dry.

About 44,000 people were still without running water in Louisiana, the state health department reported. That's significantly lower than the hundreds of thousands of people who had no water immediately after Ida's landfall. Still, more than 570,000 people were being told to boil their water for safety.

In many neighborhoods, homes remain uninhabitable. 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.

Louisiana's secretary of state announced that fall elections will be pushed back by more than a month because of the storm.

In addition to the death and destruction Ida caused in Louisiana, the storm's remnants brought historic flooding, record rains and tornados from Virginia to Massachusetts, killing at least 50 more people.

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Deslatte reported from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Associated Press Writer Jeff Martin contributed to this story from Marietta, Georgia.

## **A U.S. Marine, a curious Afghan boy, an unfathomable moment**

By JAMES LAPORTA Associated Press

One day not long ago, I watched my soon-to-be 3-year-old son jump up and down to the sound of "ho" and "hey."

It's a song by the Lumineers, an American folk-rock band. The lyrics and stomp reverberate throughout the kitchen and into the house. My son jumps on each verse that ends with a shout.

"So show me, family. Hey!" He jumps.

"All the blood that I will bleed. Ho!" He jumps.

"I don't know where I belong. Hey!" He jumps.

"I don't know where I went wrong. Ho!"

He jumps. And then, so do I.

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This is a story about a curious boy with no name — at least, no name that I ever came to know. It was 2013, more than a decade after the 9/11 attacks. I was a Marine then, back in Afghanistan for a second time.

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At the time, I was working to stop a Taliban cell that specialized in making improvised explosive devices. In that effort, a video emerged. I watched it.

I remember him. I cannot forget him. I remember watching a minute-long video showing a static video camera aimed down a narrow path between two mud hut walls, common in the small hamlets often surrounded by opium-poppy fields. On the screen, not much was moving.

I remember the wind from the east kicking up the moon-like dust to the west. The tree and its shadow moved across the ground as the branches and leaves broke up the rays of sunlight to make abstract art patterns on the desert floor.

I remember the boy, full of energy and life, running into the frame and then out of it. From left to right. With little boys like him — with little boys like mine — the curiosities of life can be palpable. And so the curious boy with no name wandered slowly back into the frame. From right to left.

He is an Afghan and, given the province we're in — Helmand, to be exact — he maybe speaks Pashto. His small size places him somewhere between 3 and 5 years old. Maybe he's 6, a feat in itself; it's said one in 10 children in Afghanistan die before they turn 5.

As his curiosity runs rampant, I know what he does not. When he ran into the frame and then out of it, he had stepped on a soft spot in the ground — a patch different from the rest of the hard-packed dirt. He wanted to know why. I did not.

Slowly he walks back to mid-frame, studying the ground closely. Like a newly discovered toy, he starts to stomp on the soft spot in the dirt. Over and over again, he stomps. I wait, knowing what I know.

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Victim-operated improvised explosive devices, known as VOIEDs, have various switches known as pressure plates. The idea is that the bomb is detonated by an unsuspecting individual by completing the circuit when pressure is applied or removed to the switch.

A power source supplies electricity between the switch and the detonator and by completing the circuit, the main charge explodes. Gas heats up and expands rapidly under pressure sending shock waves and shrapnel outward.

In short: Step on the IED and, if you weigh enough, the bomb goes off.

None of this is known to the curious boy with no name who continues to stomp on the bomb that won't go off — the bomb that he does not know is a bomb.

The reason for this is perhaps even more insidious than the bomb itself: He is too malnourished and does not weigh enough to set off the bomb that will surely kill him. So he continues to stomp.

I remember all of it. I remember wanting to yell at him through the computer screen to stop being a curious 5-year-old boy, to stop, to PLEASE STOP stomping on that soft spot in the ground. I remember wanting to scream. I remember standing silent and watching the screen. I remember being powerless.

The curious boy with no name jumps one last time. He disappears into a dust cloud of fire and ripped flesh.

The video ends with a simple question: "Replay?"

Inside my head, I have no control over the answer.

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My mental replays of the video continue, year after year, as if in perfect harmony with the Afghan war itself. In many ways, the war became a monster in my life. Everything was defined by who I was before it and who I was after.

The monster took my friends in gun battles — or later, via their own hands. I could blame it for my anger and depression. My sleepless nights and unhealthy eating habits and weight gain. My failed marriage. The pills from the VA. The ringing in my ear and shortness of breath in my lungs. How long until cancer develops from toxic burn pits, I wonder.

Afghanistan is my sucking chest wound, and always will be because — despite what we've seen these recent weeks — wars do not end with a withdrawal or retreat or retrograde or the signing of a peace treaty.

Instead, they ebb and flow within the memories of those who were there and the ones who received

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an unfortunate knock on the door one day from people in uniforms. On those battlegrounds, there is a permanent shattering. It's the real "forever war."

The skepticism about America's longest running war — and, now, its chaotic and bloody conclusion — is bolstered by recent history. It reminds us that President Trump said he would have the troops home by Christmas, and how that didn't happen. Less than a year before I would watch the curious boy live through his final moments, President Obama tweeted out then-Vice President Biden's words: "We are leaving in 2014. Period." We did not.

After years of statements from Washington about "turning a corner" in Afghanistan, Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in December that the United States had only achieved a "modicum of success" after nearly two decades of war that have left both American and Afghan families permanently devastated.

I look around me. What do my people know of this war, of its blood spilled and treasure lost, of me?

In 2009, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates said, "Whatever their fond sentiments for men and women in uniform, for most Americans the wars remain an abstraction, a distant and unpleasant series of news items that do not affect them personally."

Around me, around you, America's newest generation of combat veterans transition to civilian life. They look for jobs, and only find them sometimes. They look for healthcare, and find they need more.

They are sometimes noticed, sometimes ignored — combatants still, this time in a deepening divide between the small slice of Americans who bore the brunt of war, and those for whom the wars are only, as Gates said, "an abstraction."

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I am in my house again, far from Helmand province, far from my jumbled days in Afghanistan, far from the anguish that is unfolding right now. It is years after the curious boy jumped on the soft patch of Afghan earth one final time. In my house, The Lumineers sing. My son dances.

"All the blood that I will bleed. Ho!" He jumps.

"I don't know where I belong. Hey!" He jumps.

"I don't know where I went wrong. Ho!"

He jumps once more. And keeps on dancing.

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James LaPorta is a reporter on the AP's Global Investigations Team, covering national security and military affairs. He is a former U.S. Marine infantryman and a veteran of the Afghanistan War. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/Jimlaporta>

## Yankees star Derek Jeter inducted into Baseball Hall of Fame

By JOHN KEKIS AP Sports Writer

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. (AP) — Derek Jeter was simply Derek Jeter on his special day — smooth as silk.

On a Wednesday afternoon that turned cloudy with the temperature in the 70s and a few sprinkles in the air and adoring fans chanting his name, the former New York Yankees star shortstop and captain was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame after a long wait necessitated by the pandemic.

Greeted by raucous cheers in a crowd estimated at 20,000 that included NBA luminaries Michael Jordan and Patrick Ewing, several of his former teammates, and Hall of Fame Yankees manager Joe Torre on the stage behind him, Jeter took his turn after fellow inductees from the class of 2020 Ted Simmons, Larry Walker and the late Marvin Miller were honored. Jeter was touched by the moment and acknowledged how different the ceremony seemed in the wake of the recent deaths of 10 Hall of Famers.

"I'm so honored to be inducted with you guys and linked to you forever," he said. "The Hall of Fame is special because of those who are in it. We've lost way too many Hall of Famers over the last 20 months. These are all Hall of Famers who would have or could have been here, so for that reason it's not the same."

What was the same was the adoration displayed by the fans, who always marveled at his consistency.

"I had one goal in my career, and that was to win more than everyone else, and we did that, which



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brings me to the Yankee fans," Jeter said as the fans erupted again. "Without question, you helped me get here today as much as any individual I've mentioned."

He gave much of the credit to his parents, who were in the audience with Jeter's wife, Hannah, and their two young daughters.

"Mom, you taught me any dream is attainable as long as you work harder than everyone else. You drilled that in my head over and over and over and you led me to believe it," Jeter said. "You told me never to make excuses, you wouldn't allow me to use the word can't. Dad, you've been the voice of reason. You taught me to be patient, to listen and think before I speak. You've always been there for advice and to this day you're the first person I go to. I know when I retired you said you played every game with me and I know you recall from time to time telling me, 'You keep building that resume.' Look where it's gotten us today."

The ceremony was delayed a year because of the coronavirus pandemic and it didn't matter much to Walker, the second Canadian elected to the Hall of Fame. He gave up hockey when he was 16 to focus on baseball. He was selected in his 10th and final year on the writers' ballot after a stellar career with Montreal, Colorado and St. Louis that included 383 homers and three batting titles.

"It's taken a little longer to reach this day (but) for all your support I've received throughout the years from my home country, I share this honor with every Canadian," said Walker, who retired in 2005. "I hope that all you Canadian kids out there that have dreams of playing in the big leagues, that see me here today gives you another reason to go after those dreams. To my adopted home, the United States, I thank you for allowing this Canadian kid to come into your country to live and play your great pastime. I think we're all pretty fortunate to have two amazing countries side by side."

The 72-year-old Simmons, who starred in a 21-year career with the St. Louis Cardinals, Milwaukee and Atlanta, punctuated his speech to thank four pioneers of free agency — Curt Flood, Catfish Hunter, Andy Messersmith and Marvin Miller — "who changed the lives of every player on this stage today by pushing the boundaries of player rights."

"Marvin Miller made so much possible for every major league player from my era to the present and the future," the former catcher said. "I could not be more proud to enter this great hall with this great man. Even though my path has been on the longer side, I wouldn't change a thing. However we get here, none of us arrives alone. I'm no exception."

Miller, who transformed baseball on the labor front by building a strong players union and led the charge for free agency in the mid-1970s, was honored posthumously. Four years before he died at 95 in 2012, Miller respectfully asked to be removed from consideration for the Hall of Fame after being passed over several times.

"One thing a trade union leader learns to do is how to count votes in advance. Whenever I took one look at what I was faced with, it was obvious to me it was not gonna happen," Miller, head of the Major League Baseball Players Association from 1966-83, wrote in 2008. "If considered and elected, I will not appear for the induction if I'm alive. If they proceed to try to do this posthumously, my family is prepared to deal with that."

The family didn't. Instead, Don Fehr, who was hired by Miller to be the union's general counsel in 1977 and succeeded him eight years later, had the honor.

"Of all the players I had the privilege to represent, I want to thank you Marvin," said Fehr, now the head of the National Hockey League Players Association. "Baseball was not the same after your tenure as it was before. It was and is much better for everyone. You brought out the best of us and you did us proud."

The virus forced the Hall of Fame to cancel last year's ceremony and this year's was moved from its customary slot on a Sunday in late July to a midweek date.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/J/hub/MLB> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Biden ousts 18 Trump military academy board appointees

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Wednesday removed 18 appointees named to U.S. military academy boards by Donald Trump in the final months of the Republican president's term in office, according to the White House.

Cathy Russell, director of the White House Presidential Personnel Office, sent letters to 18 people named to the boards of visitors for the Air Force Academy, Military Academy and Naval Academy calling on them to resign by close of business on Wednesday or face termination.

Among those Biden ousted are some high-profile Trump administration officials, including White House counselor Kellyanne Conway (Air Force Academy), press secretary Sean Spicer (Naval Academy), national security adviser H.R. McMaster (Military Academy) and Office of Management and Budget director Russell Vought (Naval Academy).

White House press secretary Jen Psaki confirmed that the former Trump officials were asked to resign or face firing. It was not immediately clear if any of those asked to tender their resignations did so before a 6 p.m. deadline set by the White House.

"I will let others evaluate whether they think Kellyanne Conway and Sean Spicer and others were qualified, or not political, to serve on these boards," Psaki said. "But the president's qualification requirements are not your party registration. They are whether you're qualified to serve and whether you are aligned with the values of this administration."

Several of those called on to resign pushed back. Conway jabbed at Biden and said, "I'm not resigning but you should." She went on in a statement to call it a "disappointing but understandable" effort to distract from the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, a rise in COVID-19 cases and a disappointing August jobs report.

Vought on Twitter posted the letter he received from Russell and responded: "No. It's a three year term." Jonathan Hiler, a Navy academy alumnus who served as director of legislative affairs for Vice President Mike Pence, said he was "not resigning."

"As an alum and former naval officer, I believe developing leaders capable of defending our country's interests at sea — USNA's mission — is not something that should be consumed by partisan politics. Apparently, President Biden feels differently. @WhiteHouse," Hiler posted on Twitter.

Spicer, who works for the conservative news channel Newsmax, in his own social media posting criticized Biden for trying to terminate Trump appointees instead of "focusing on the stranded Americans left in #Afghanistan."

Later on Newsmax, Spicer accused Psaki of minimizing his military service and that of other veterans appointed by Trump to the boards. He said he intended to take legal action against the decision.

## Fighting Texas abortion law could be tough for federal gov't

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Foes of the new Texas law that bans most abortions have been looking to the Democratic-run federal government to swoop in and knock down the most restrictive abortion law in effect in the country. But it's nowhere near that simple.

President Joe Biden, who denounces the law as "almost un-American," has directed the Justice Department to try to find a way to block its enforcement. And Attorney General Merrick Garland says his prosecutors are exploring all possible options. But legal experts warn that while the law may ultimately be found unconstitutional, the way it's written means it'll be an uphill legal battle.

Known as SB8, the new state law prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity — usually around six weeks, before some women know they're pregnant. Courts have blocked other states from imposing similar restrictions, but Texas' law differs significantly because it leaves enforcement to private citizens through civil lawsuits instead of criminal prosecutors.

Pressure is mounting not only from the White House but also from Democrats in Congress, who want Garland to somehow take action. Nearly two dozen lawmakers wrote to him Tuesday calling for the "criminal prosecution of would-be vigilantes attempting to use the private right of action established by SB8."

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But what action can the Justice Department take? How?

So far, the attorney general has said only that federal officials will not tolerate violence against anyone who is trying to obtain an abortion in Texas. At the forefront of that plan is enforcement of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

That law, commonly known as the FACE Act, normally prohibits physically obstructing access to abortion clinics by blocking entrances or threatening to use force to intimidate or interfere with someone. It also prohibits damaging property at abortion clinics and other reproductive health centers.

Garland says that while his department is still urgently exploring options to challenge the state law, Justice will enforce the federal law "in order to protect the constitutional rights of women and other persons, including access to an abortion."

However, that federal action could be limited by the fact that the act is geared more toward physical acts of intimidation or violence than lawsuits, said Mary Anne Franks, a constitutional scholar and professor at University of Miami School of Law.

"The nefarious cleverness" of the Texas law is that "you can't do anything until someone actually attempts to use this law," she said. "And that's really late in the game."

And even if an abortion provider — or people who help a woman get an abortion — should successfully defend a lawsuit, that wouldn't block a stack of future suits. A Texas judge's decision last week temporarily shielding some some abortion clinics from being sued by the state's largest anti-abortion group, for example, didn't affect any other groups.

"That raises real concerns about any efficacy of any of the actions DOJ could take," Franks said.

Still, there are tools the federal government could use, she said. Prosecutors could bring criminal charges under civil rights measures originally written to root out the Ku Klux Klan. Those say that private citizens working with the state to deprive people of their constitutional rights could face criminal violations.

There's also a tool on the civil side, called a Section 1983 action, that allows people to sue someone else who is blocking them from exercising their constitutional rights. Those civil lawsuits must be filed by the person under attack rather than the government, but federal attorneys could join suits already filed, she said.

Those actions, she said, could have their own chilling effect on abortion foes: People opposed to abortion who might want to sue providers might reconsider if they could potentially face federal criminal charges.

As for more direct action against the Texas law, legal experts say the Justice Department will likely work to help overturn it with a so-called friend-of-the-court brief, which could help bolster an already existing lawsuit challenging the state law.

Jonathan Turley, a constitutional law professor at George Washington University Law School, sees the law as likely to be eventually struck down in court, since it prohibits abortion long before the fetus is viable outside the womb.

"It's very likely it will be found unconstitutional. The framers, the drafters themselves understood that ... they have set a line well below existing case law for banning abortions," he said. "Courts are likely to make fast work of the Texas law."

But if Democrats take action in Congress aimed at preserving access to abortion on the federal level, as some are calling for, he warned it could end up backfiring since there's existing case law establishing that states can make laws related to the procedure.

Such a federal law, if passed by Congress, would almost certainly end up in court and could ultimately lose ground for abortion-rights supporters if a ruling is made that strengthens the states' ability, he said.

Meanwhile, the Texas law's citizen-enforcement mechanism is something Democrats may not want to see limited widely either, since the concept is also a key piece of enforcing environmental laws. Courts have limited people's ability to file civil suits before, as in defamation suits that could run afoul of freedom of speech.

The Supreme Court declined to block the Texas law in a 5-4 decision, though it did not rule on whether the law itself was constitutional.

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Turley argues a graver threat to abortion access is an upcoming case on the Supreme Court docket: Mississippi is asking to be allowed to enforce an abortion ban after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

By taking up that single question, the justices will be considering whether states can impose limitations on abortion before the fetus is viable outside the womb. There are no other questions at play, no other ways the case could be more narrowly decided. If the high court sides with Mississippi, that would open the door to other states passing similar laws.

"That is a more important threat," he said.

Whitehurst reported from Salt Lake City.

## Police planning to reinstall Capitol fence ahead of rally

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Law enforcement officials concerned by the prospect for violence at a rally in the nation's capital next week are planning to reinstall protective fencing that surrounded the U.S. Capitol for months after the Jan. 6 insurrection there, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

Though no specific measures have been announced, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi hinted during her weekly press conference Wednesday at extra safety precautions for the Sept. 18 rally by saying: "We intend to have the integrity of the Capitol be intact." Briefings for lawmakers, including congressional leaders, are expected in coming days.

A security plan that is being finalized calls for a fenced perimeter on the streets immediately surrounding the Capitol building and the Supreme Court, though not around the congressional office buildings nearby, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity ahead of an official announcement.

The Capitol Police formally requested the fence to the board that oversees it, and it is likely to be approved, according to a House Democratic aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about private discussions.

Police continue to track intelligence indicating far-right extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers are planning to attend next week's rally, which is designed to demand "justice" for the hundreds of people who have been charged in connection with January's insurrection. Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, however, has said he doesn't expect his membership to attend.

On Wednesday, meanwhile, the FBI released new information in hopes of catching the person suspected of leaving behind two pipe bombs on Capitol Hill the night before the riot, one of the enduring, unsolved mysteries of that chaotic week.

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

Those charges include allegations that they conspired to block the certification of Biden's victory. Several Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges and are cooperating with investigators in the case against their fellow extremists, who authorities say came to Washington ready for violence and willing to do whatever it took to stop the certification of the Electoral College vote.

The fence had been a stark symbol of the fear many in the Capitol felt after the mob pushed its way past overwhelmed police officers, broke through windows and doors and ransacked the Capitol as Congress was voting to certify Joe Biden's electoral win.

The planned Sept. 18 rally comes as a jittery Washington has seen a series of troubling one-off incidents — including, most recently, a man who parked a pickup truck near the Library of Congress and said he had a bomb and detonator.

Perhaps the most concerning: A series of unexploded pipe bombs placed near the Capitol on Jan. 5 remain unexplained and no suspect has been charged.

The FBI released a new video of that suspect on Wednesday and a digital map showing the person

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circling the offices of the Democratic and Republican national committees, where the bombs were placed. The FBI also said, for the first time, that agents believe the suspect is not from the Washington, D.,C. area but may have been "operating" out of a location near the Capitol.

"Based upon the suspect's route of travel to the DNC and from the DNC to the RNC, and the manner in which the suspect carries the backpack after placing the pipe bomb at the DNC, the FBI believes the suspect had a location in the vicinity of Folger Park from which the person was operating," the FBI said in a news release. "Reviews of the suspect's behavior in video footage and interviews with residents in the Capitol Hill neighborhood have led the FBI to believe the suspect is not from the area."

Some lawmakers and top union officials were expected to be briefed on the fence plan later this week and another more expansive briefing for the leaders of the House and Senate was planned for Monday.

On Capitol Hill, the politics around fencing in the iconic building and its grounds proved challenging for lawmakers after the January insurrection. Many said they disliked closing off access, even as they acknowledged the increased level of security it provided. The fencing finally came down with a promise to re-erect it if necessary. But the question of what deserves fencing is tricky.

In an interview Wednesday, the district's Democratic representative, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, said she had not yet been briefed on the security plans, but understood if the fence needs to be reinstalled as a precaution ahead of the upcoming rally.

"I would hope that we wouldn't have to fence in the Capitol every time there's a demonstration," Norton said. But she added, "If they go with the fence, I'm not going to criticize them."

Norton suggested that in the aftermath of Jan. 6 there would be more robust security preparations ahead of this rally out of an abundance of caution — even though it is scheduled for a Saturday before the House returns to session, a typically sleepy summertime afternoon when few lawmakers or staff would be at work.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see the fence go up," she said. "The preparations are certainly going to be more than they were on Jan. 6."

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Associated Press writers Colleen Long, Nomaan Merchant and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

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Associated Press writers Colleen Long, Nomaan Merchant and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

## Elizabeth Holmes drawn as villain, underdog as trial begins

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Prosecutors and defense attorneys sketched dueling portraits of fallen Silicon

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Valley star Elizabeth Holmes as her trial got underway Wednesday, alternatively describing her as a greedy villain who faked her way to the top and as a passionate underdog whose spent years trying to shake up the health care industry.

The two sides are now expected to spend the next three months trying to sway a 12-person jury impaneled to hearing the evidence in a case airing allegations that Holmes used her startup, Theranos, as a scheme to realize her dreams of becoming rich and as famous as one of her role models, late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.

Once hailed as a billionaire on paper, Holmes is now facing a sentence of up to 20 years if convicted of the felony charges.

Holmes' rise and fall has already been the subject of documentaries, books and podcasts, feeding the fervor that has built up around a trial that has been delayed twice since she was indicted nearly three years ago. With roughly only 75 spots available for the media and general public to observe the proceedings, people began to line up outside the San Jose, California, courthouse before 5 a.m. Wednesday.

After the jury was seated and U.S. District Judge Edward Davila gave his preliminary instructions, federal prosecutor Robert Leach wasted little time vilifying Holmes.

He cast Holmes in a dark light, depicting her as a conniving entrepreneur who duped investors, customers and patients for years, even though she knew her startup, Theranos, was nearly bankrupt and its much-hyped blood-testing technology was a flop.

"This case is about fraud, about lying and cheating to get money," Leach said during his roughly 45-minute opening statement.

He said the evidence would show that Theranos was already in deep trouble as far back as 2009, about six years after Holmes founded the Palo Alto, California, company. At that point, Leach said, Holmes resorted to a pattern of lying and hyperbole in an effort to fool major media outlets, wealthy investors such as media mogul Rupert Murdoch, well-connected Theranos board members such as former U.S. Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, and customers such as Walgreens.

Some of the most damning evidence may be presented by a former top finance officer at Theranos who will testify that the company only had \$650,000 in revenue from 2011 through 2014, according to Leach. Yet Holmes was telling investors and other people that Theranos would generate \$140 million in revenue in 2014, Leach said.

Holmes, 37, is also accused of promising that Theranos would be able to quickly test small vials of blood in a small company-designed machine named after the famed inventor Thomas Edison. Leach said the samples were actually sent out to outside parties for testing using standard-issue machines he described as "big" and "clunky."

Theranos eventually failed in 2018, a few years after a series of explosive stories in The Wall Street Journal exposed serious flaws in its technology and spurred regulatory investigations that shut down the testing.

The fraud committed by Holmes "is a fraud on Main Street and it's a fraud in Silicon Valley," Leach told the jury.

Holmes' defense team countered with a more heroic narrative describing her as a tireless worker who poured more than 15 years of her life in pursuit of a faster, cheaper and less invasive way to test blood samples and screen for disease.

Defense attorney Lance Wade, argued that Holmes was simply trying to wrest control of the blood-testing technology market from two dominant laboratories, Quest Diagnostics and Labcorp. "She did her best day in and day out to make Theranos successful," Wade said of Holmes as he began a roughly 90-minute presentation.

Although she didn't succeed, Wade insisted that Holmes never stopped believing she was on the verge of a breakthrough that would realize her ambitions. Many investors thought she would too, one of the reasons that Theranos once was valued at \$9 billion — with half that amount belonging to Holmes.

"Failure is not a crime," Wade said. "Trying your hardest is not a crime. A failed business does not make a CEO a criminal."

In court documents unsealed just before the trial started, Holmes' lawyers also disclosed that she may

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take the witness stand to assert some of her statements and actions while running Theranos were the result of "intimate partner abuse" inflicted by the company's chief operating officer and her secret lover, Ramesh "Sunny" Balwani.

Without going into specifics, Wade told the jury that she believed she was bringing in "the best businessman she knew" when she hired Balwani but now realizes it was one of her biggest mistakes.

"You will learn that Mr. Balwani did not take well to people who disagreed with him," Wade said while asserting Balwani's tempestuous behavior caused many Theranos employees to leave the company.

Balwani also was responsible for overseeing the Theranos lab that the government alleges provided misleading results of blood tests that endangered some people's lives, Wade noted.

"If what government is trying to show is that Theranos' clinical lab was well run from 2013 to 2016, we will likely agree with what they have to say," Wade said. "Poor operations in the lab was one of Theranos' biggest failures, but it wasn't fraud."

Balwani faces multiple fraud charges in a separate trial scheduled to begin next year. His attorney has denied Holmes' allegations.

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This story has been corrected with the official names of Quest Diagnostics and Labcorp and Elizabeth Holmes' current age, which is 37.

## Half of US offers legal sports betting as NFL season begins

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — More than half of the United States now offers legal sports betting, just three years after it was allowed by the U.S. Supreme Court.

When the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Dallas Cowboys kick off the NFL season Thursday night, gamblers in 26 states plus the District of Columbia are expected to be able to wager on it legally, according to the American Gaming Association, with as many as five additional states offering such bets before the season ends in February with the Super Bowl.

That's up from 18 states with legal sports betting at the start of last year's football season. And some of the biggest markets in the U.S., including California and Florida, are moving toward legalization, with New York planning to adopt mobile sports betting at some point.

The explosive growth of the industry comes as more and more companies join the fray, making it more challenging to gain and hold onto market share and profits.

And it is making things worse for some people with gambling problems, as the industry is coming up with new ways to bet on sports, including live micro-betting on the outcome of things like the next possession in a football game.

"There's no question this will be a huge year, and it will be a record," said Eric Hession, co-president of Caesars Digital, whose parent company bought the William Hill brand this year and renamed it Caesars Sportsbook.

Jerry Arnold, a supervisor at the FanDuel sportsbook at the Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey, just outside New York City, said one trend is clear.

"A lot of people having a lot more money," he said. "They're getting unemployment or stimulus checks and they want to double or triple their money. They say that all the time: 'I just got a check and I'm going to make it double.'"

FanDuel is the official odds provider for The Associated Press.

More than 45 million Americans say they plan to bet on the NFL season this year, according to the American Gaming Association, the casino industry's national trade group. That's an increase of 36% from last year.

Sean Williams, who is from New London, Connecticut, but now lives in New Jersey, was at the Meadowlands recently to bet \$1,000 on the New England Patriots to win the Super Bowl. He won a sports bet three years ago and has been coming back ever since.

"I came here and won a thousand, so I'm gonna keep flipping those tickets 'til I get a million," he said.



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"That's my goal. Play with their money. Confidence! I came here to win."

Mobile betting accounts for more than 80% of sports betting revenue, much of it occurring live as games are underway.

The NFL, which along with other professional leagues once strenuously fought against the legalization of sports betting, now allows seven sports betting companies to advertise during games, and teams in various sports have inked deals with companies to become official sports betting partners, including deals announced Wednesday involving the Baltimore Ravens and the New York Jets.

Media companies continue to tie the knot with gambling firms, seeking synergies among gamblers who want to bet but also read and watch as much as they can about sports. Sports Illustrated has launched a sportsbook and the Wall Street Journal reports that ESPN is considering a \$3 billion deal to license its brand to one or more sportsbooks. Even sports merchandise retailer Fanatics plans to launch a sports betting app.

The ever-increasing competition is making it more difficult to win or hold onto a piece of the pie for sports betting companies.

"Market share will be harder and harder to retain over time as more entrants come in," said Matt Prevost, chief revenue officer for BetMGM. "But more states have come online in the last 12 months and are (new) markets for us."

"Competition is fierce," added Johnny Avello, head of sportsbook for DraftKings. "There's a lot of players in the game now."

Said David Schwartz, a gambling historian with UNLV: "The cost of entry is going up as it becomes harder to displace established entities, which have first-mover advantage as well as the benefits of strategic partnerships. But, if the product is good, bettors will respond to it."

Jay Kornegay, vice president of the Westgate SuperBook in Las Vegas, said the coronavirus pandemic still figures prominently into the sports betting equation this year, particularly as the highly contagious delta variant surges.

"A lot of people still don't want to travel and be in crowds, and sports betting from their couch is very attractive to them," he said. "You can bet 10 bucks and be entertained for three hours."

There are those who bet much more than that. Earlier this year, a study by the National Council on Problem Gambling found an increase in "problematic" gambling, particularly among young online sports bettors.

"This spike in problems related to gambling reflects both the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of the massive increases in sports betting and online gambling availability in more than half the country, accessibility through mobile devices and widespread advertising," said Keith Whyte, the group's executive director.

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Follow Wayne Parry at <http://twitter.com/WayneParryAC>

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This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Keith Whyte's name and to show he is the group's executive director, not president.

## Report: Solar could power 40% of US electricity by 2035

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Solar energy has the potential to supply up to 40% of the nation's electricity within 15 years — a 10-fold increase over current solar output, but one that would require massive changes in U.S. policy and billions of dollars in federal investment to modernize the nation's electric grid, a new federal report says.

The report by the Energy Department's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy says the United States would need to quadruple its annual solar capacity — and continue to increase it year by year — as it shifts to a renewable-dominant grid in order to address the existential threat posed by climate change.

The report released Wednesday is not intended as a policy statement or administration goal, officials

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said. Instead, it is "designed to guide and inspire the next decade of solar innovation by helping us answer questions like: How fast does solar need to increase capacity and to what level?" said Becca Jones-Albertus, director of the Energy Department's solar energy technologies office.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a statement that the study "illuminates the fact that solar, our cheapest and fastest-growing source of clean energy, could produce enough electricity to power all of the homes in the U.S. by 2035 and employ as many as 1.5 million people in the process."

The report comes after President Joe Biden declared climate change has become "everybody's crisis" during a visit to neighborhoods flooded by the remnants of Hurricane Ida. Biden warned Tuesday that it's time for America to get serious about the "code red" danger posed by climate change or face increasing loss of life and property.

"We can't turn it back very much, but we can prevent it from getting worse," Biden said before touring a New Jersey neighborhood ravaged by severe flooding caused by Ida. "We don't have any more time."

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

The U.S. installed a record 15 gigawatts of solar generating capacity in 2020, and solar now represents just over 3% of the current electricity supply, the Energy Department said.

The "Solar Futures Study," prepared by DOE's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, shows that, by 2035, the country would need to quadruple its yearly solar capacity additions and provide 1,000 gigawatts of power to a renewable-dominant grid. By 2050, solar energy could provide 1,600 gigawatts on a zero-carbon grid — producing more electricity than consumed in all residential and commercial buildings in the country today, the report said. Decarbonizing the entire energy system could result in as much as 3,000 gigawatts of solar by 2050 due to increased electrification in the transportation, buildings, and industrial sectors, the report said.

The report assumes that clean-energy policies currently being debated in Congress will drive a 95% reduction from 2005 levels in the grid's carbon dioxide emissions by 2035, and a 100% reduction by 2050.

But even without aggressive action from Congress — an outcome that is far from certain in an evenly divided House and Senate — installed solar capacity could still see a seven-fold increase by 2050, relative to 2005, the report said.

"Even without a concerted policy effort, market forces and technology advances will drive significant deployment of solar and other clean energy technologies as well as substantial decarbonization," the report said, citing falling costs for solar panels and other factors.

To achieve 40% solar power by 2035, the U.S. must install an average of 30 gigawatts of solar capacity per year between now and 2025 — double its current rate — and 60 gigawatts per year from 2025 to 2030, the report said.

Those goals far exceed what even the solar industry has been pushing for as the Biden administration and Congress debate climate and clean-energy legislation. The Solar Energy Industries Association has urged a framework for solar to achieve 20% of U.S. electricity generation by 2030.

Abigail Ross Hopper, the group's president and CEO, said the DOE study "makes it clear that we will not achieve the levels of decarbonization that we need without significant policy advances."

The solar group sent a letter to Congress Wednesday from nearly 750 companies spelling out recommended policy changes. "We believe with those policies and a determined private sector, the Biden administration's goals are definitely achievable," Hopper said.

## COVID-19 surge in the US: The summer of hope ends in gloom

By MATTHEW PERRONE and DEE-ANN DURBIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The summer that was supposed to mark America's independence from COVID-19 is instead drawing to a close with the U.S. more firmly under the tyranny of the virus, with deaths per day back up to where they were in March.

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The delta variant is filling hospitals, sickening alarming numbers of children and driving coronavirus deaths in some places to the highest levels of the entire pandemic. School systems that reopened their classrooms are abruptly switching back to remote learning because of outbreaks. Legal disputes, threats and violence have erupted over mask and vaccine requirements.

The U.S. death toll stands at more than 650,000, with one major forecast model projecting it will top 750,000 by Dec. 1.

"It felt like we had this forward, positive momentum," lamented Katie Button, executive chef and CEO at two restaurants in Asheville, North Carolina. "The delta variant wiped that timeline completely away."

It wasn't supposed to be this way. More than six months into the U.S. vaccination drive, President Joe Biden held a White House party on July Fourth to celebrate the country's freedom from the virus, and other political leaders had high hopes for a close-to-normal summer.

Then the bottom fell out.

The summer wave was fueled by the extra-contagious delta variant combined with stark resistance to vaccinations that formed along political and geographic lines, said Dr. Sten Vermund, of the Yale School of Public Health.

"The virus was more efficient in spreading among the unvaccinated so that you blunted the expected benefit of vaccines," Vermund said.

The crisis escalated rapidly from June to August. About 400,000 COVID-19 infections were recorded for all of June. It took all of three days last week to reach the same number.

The U.S. recorded 26,800 deaths and more than 4.2 million infections in August. The number of monthly positive cases was the fourth-highest total since the start of the pandemic.

The 2021 delta-driven onslaught is killing younger Americans at a much higher rate than previous waves of the pandemic in the Northeast last spring, the Sun Belt in the summer of 2020 and the deadly winter surge around the holidays.

During the peaks of those waves, Americans over 75 suffered the highest proportion of death. Now, the most vulnerable age group for death is 50 to 64, according to data from U.S. officials.

Overall, the outbreak is still well below the all-time peaks reached over the winter, when deaths topped out at 3,400 a day and new cases at a quarter-million per day.

The U.S. is now averaging over 150,000 new cases per day, levels not seen since January. Deaths are close to 1,500 per day, up more than a third since late August.

Even before the delta variant became dominant, experts say there were indications that larger gatherings and relaxed social distancing measures were fueling new cases.

"We had been cooped up for over a year and everyone wanted to get out," said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "In the face of that kind of strong change in behavior, even getting almost two-thirds of our adult population vaccinated wasn't enough."

The COVID-19 vaccines remain highly effective against hospitalization and death, but many tens of millions of eligible Americans remain unvaccinated. Nearly 40% of Americans 12 and older are not fully protected.

In Rapid City, South Dakota, school officials have recorded nearly 300 cases among students and staff since classes began less than two weeks ago. Still, the majority of school board officials voted this week 5-2 against a proposed two-week mask mandate.

"Nobody wanted to be here. Everyone wanted the personal freedom to be away from masks and free of illness," said Amy Policky, who introduced the proposal with one other member. "But we have to look at the facts: We're having illness rage through the school and the community, so what can we do?"

Still, Yale's Vermund sees reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the next few months. Cases in most states appear to be plateauing and are likely to decline in the fall, buying health authorities more time to vaccinate adults and teenagers before flu season.

"If we can continue making progress between now and Thanksgiving, we may be able to substantially blunt the coronavirus surge in flu season," Vermund said.

While the economy has been rebounding strongly over the past several months, hiring slowed sharply in August in a sign that the variant is discouraging Americans from flying, shopping or eating out.

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And on Monday, unemployment benefits — including an extra \$300 a week from the federal government — ran out for millions of Americans.

Button, the North Carolina chef, was feeling great heading into the summer. Her team was mostly vaccinated in May and restrictions were loosening. But the crisis soon changed direction.

Button supports the mask mandate that was recently reinstated in her county but said her employees are exhausted by having to enforce it. And since she has no outdoor seating, some diners have been less comfortable coming in.

"It's hard to take a step forward and then take three steps back," she said.

Associated Press data journalist Nicky Forster contributed to this report from New York. Durbin reported from Detroit.

## **AP FACT CHECK: Biden overstates UAW support of electric cars**

By HOPE YEN and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — President Joe Biden glossed over important details and oversimplified the facts in his boast about support from the United Auto Workers union for his effort to dramatically increase sales of electric vehicles by decade's end.

In his remarks Wednesday, Biden failed to say that UAW did not endorse the EV targets he set in an executive order signed last month. The union's support is also dependent in part on robust government support for union-made cars in the form of tax credits in legislation pending in Congress — something that is far from guaranteed to happen.

A look at the claim:

BIDEN, praising the work of UAW members: "The main 'Big Three' (automakers) have decided along with the support of those unions on building, going electric, so we own that market."

THE FACTS: Not exactly. While UAW has expressed general support for more EV sales, it has repeatedly declined to back goals urged by Biden as part of his ambitious plan to combat climate change, including the 40% to 50% target agreed to by the largest automakers.

Biden last month announced his plan to "own" the EV market over foreign competitors, signing an order setting a goal that half of all new vehicles sold in 2030 will be zero-emissions vehicles, which environmental groups say is needed to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That would be a seismic shift in the U.S. from internal combustion engines to battery-powered vehicles.

Transportation is the single biggest U.S. contributor to climate change.

The United Auto Workers union, in fact, has voiced concerns about being too hasty with an EV transition because of the potential impact on industry jobs. Since electric vehicles generally have 30% to 40% fewer parts and are simpler to build, fewer workers will be needed to assemble them. That will likely mean a reshuffling of jobs, as workers who once made engines, transmissions and other components for gas-powered cars have to switch to electric motors and batteries.

At the signing of Biden's order, UAW did not endorse a target, pointedly saying it stands behind the president to "support his ambition not just to grow electric vehicles but also our capacity to produce them domestically with good wages and benefits."

Both UAW and the "Big Three" automakers — Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler — have made clear that a "dramatic shift" can only happen with incentives for electric vehicle purchases, adequate government funding for charging stations and money to expand electric vehicle manufacturing and the parts supply chain.

In a bipartisan infrastructure bill awaiting congressional passage, there is \$7.5 billion for grants to build charging stations, about half of what Biden originally proposed. He also had wanted \$100 billion for tax credits and rebates to entice people into buying electric vehicles. At least some of that money was expected to be incorporated in a \$3.5 trillion spending bill that is facing resistance in Congress.

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Krisher is an Associated Press auto writer.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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## **EXCERPT: On morning of 9/11, 'What's happening to my city?'**

By HOWIE RUMBERG Associated Press

The following account from Howie Rumberg, now deputy sports editor for The Associated Press, is excerpted from the book "September 11: The 9/11 Story, Aftermath and Legacy," an in-depth look at AP's coverage of 9/11 and the events that followed. On that day, Rumberg, working the overnight in AP Sports, came up out of a lower Manhattan subway and found himself in the middle of chaos.

Seventeen minutes. Twenty years later, unraveling the morning of Sept. 11, it feels like an eternity.

About 17 minutes passed between the time I stepped out of the subway station at Canal Street to rush-hour shouts of disbelief and horror seconds after American Airlines flight 11 struck the north tower, and the shocking boom of United Airlines flight 175 crashing into the south tower as I stood one block north of the World Trade Center complex.

Just off an overnight shift in the AP Sports department, a night that began by catching a glimpse of Michael Jackson emerging from Madison Square Garden into a shower of flashing strobe lights from fans and photographers, all I could think of was sleep — until I saw the jagged, burning hole in Tower One.

The explanation seemed implausible: A plane had flown right into the building. It had just happened. I didn't even hear sirens yet, just the chorus of "Oh, my God!" from people instantly halted in their morning hustle.

I sprinted the 100 yards or so home, woke my girlfriend and breathlessly told her to look out the window. I then took her cell phone — I didn't even have one then — and called the office. Did they need help?

"Yes. Go!" I was told by a voice I didn't know.

I sprinted down Hudson Street, shouting at stunned people looking up at the building that we took for granted each day as it loomed over our neighborhood, "Did anyone see what happened?" A construction worker tried to describe the white bottom of a low-flying plane, but he was too shaken to focus.

The closer I got to the scene, the more intense the emotion got. Groups of gawkers formed on corners. Others raced away at the urging of just-arriving police. People on phones trying to explain where they were and what was happening.

As I approached the World Trade Center, it became apparent that it wasn't debris falling from the higher floors but people overcome by the smoke and heat. It was shattering. But I focused on what I felt I needed to do.

Remembering the pictures from the first attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993, I ran for West Street, the western edge of the Trade Center and a large thoroughfare where many emergency vehicles gathered during those attacks. And there it was: a growing hive of flashing lights a few blocks south. I didn't think it was a smart place to be if I wanted to remain close by, with all the police around, so I turned to walk back toward a more pedestrian-focused area.

Then an explosion jerked my attention back up to the sky. The building was not in view, but you could see the flames, black cloud and debris bursting out from what was certainly the south tower.

In an instant, the tone changed.

The shock — a plane hit the World Trade Center! — turned to terror and chaos once that emphatic strike made it obvious that New York City was under attack. Commuters turned scared gawkers became sprinters. One woman ran right out of her shoes. A man in a suit and tie dropped his briefcase and took off. I thought, "Why'd he have to leave the briefcase?" The silver case sat on Greenwich Street as people

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scrambled for safety. I'm not sure anything felt safe in that moment, in a place most likely crushed not too much later by the debris of the collapsed north tower.

On a corner just two blocks north of the towers, a woman paused. Through sobs, she screamed: "What's happening to my city?" Then she ran off.

Twenty years later, with almost an entire generation gone by, I'm still not sure whether I have her answer.

## Ida and COVID-19: 'Twin-demic' slams Louisiana hospitals

By JULIET LINDERMAN and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

HOUMA, La. (AP) — The wind ripped chunks off the hospital's roof and the entire building rumbled. One nurse said the cement pounding into the walls sounded like the loudest bowling alley she could imagine. Another felt like she was inside a meteor shower.

One of the most powerful hurricanes in the nation's history was barreling into south Louisiana. Fifty miles (80 kilometers) southwest of New Orleans, the staff at Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center in Houma was already weary from a year and a half of caring for patients with COVID-19.

Now water was pouring from the ceiling tiles. A giant metal beam tore off the building and thumped into a glass door, over and over, like a battering ram. The medical staff prepared to keep patients on ventilators alive by hand if the worst were to happen.

Hurricane Ida was colliding with the country's out-of-control pandemic. Hospitals facing a Category 4 storm typically either evacuate or discharge as many patients as possible. But this time, amid the community's fourth, brutal surge of COVID, many of Chabert Medical Center's patients were too sick to be sent home. And hospitals that lay outside the hurricane's most destructive path were too full of COVID patients to absorb any more. So here they stayed — nurses, doctors, paramedics — exhausted from battling one catastrophe, watching through the windows as a second one tore into town with 150 mph (240 kph) winds.

"The mental stress on our employees is much worse now than it's ever been," said Richard Zuschlag, the owner of Acadian Ambulance Service, the state's largest emergency medical outfit. "COVID set us up for that. And the hurricane is the icing on the cake."

Some nurses wept. The staff stood in a hallway, held hands and asked God to protect them. They feared any minute the building might collapse.

Across town, huge sections of the roof blew off Terrebonne General Health System, the largest hospital in Terrebonne Parish, whose bayous brimming with sinewy cypress trees run through the region like veins. Water poured in so quickly it looked like it was raining inside. The windows shattered, the walls shook and it sounded like a freight train.

As the hours passed, some nurses began asking the same question about the storm that they'd been pondering about the pandemic for months: "When is this ever going to end?"

By the time the sun came up, both hospitals in Houma had endured so much damage, they had to coordinate a massive evacuation.

Dr. Chuck Burnell, the chief medical officer of Acadian Ambulance, was in the basement of Terrebonne General sorting out how to move more than 100 patients, many of them infected with COVID, some on ventilators.

Burnell has been an emergency physician for almost 30 years, and he said this is among the worst storms he's been through, arriving as it did just as the state's COVID deaths soared and its vaccination rate remained among the lowest in the country.

"We have the perfect twin-demic going on," Burnell said. "This could not have happened at a worse time. Mother Nature was not kind to us."

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"Are there happy moments here at all?"

In the spring of 2020, as Louisiana became one of the first places in the U.S. to be crushed by a COVID surge, Shayna Boudreaux worked 18-hour shifts for 33 days straight. As a paramedic for Acadian for 13 years, she's used to handling seriously ill and injured patients in unforgiving conditions. On a good day the

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hours are long, she said, the work physically demanding and sometimes dangerous: She's been attacked, assaulted and confronted with a gun. But nothing prepared her for this pandemic.

She raced panicked people gasping for breath to emergency rooms already teeming with sick patients. Many didn't survive. It nearly broke her.

"I cried for days just thinking about how we're the last thing people see or talk to. We tell their family members, 'Hey, they're going to be all right' to console them," she said. "But then reality sets in that they weren't all right. It wasn't OK."

Boudreaux and hundreds of other paramedics wore respirator masks and two pairs of gloves to try to keep the virus away from their bodies. They worked in blazing heat and stifling humidity, and through two hurricanes last year. Many stayed away from their families for months to avoid infecting loved ones, or stripped down naked outside their homes after each shift to keep from bringing the virus inside.

"We have a metal box where everything's flying around at you," said Burnell, the medical director. "It is a cesspool of COVID. I tell people there is a COVID fog in every ambulance."

South Louisiana hospitals were stretched to their limits long before Ida brought her screaming winds and pelting rain.

Intensive care units filled to capacity, with some hospitals creating overflow units to accommodate patients so sick they couldn't survive without extraordinary medical intervention. To keep up, nurses and doctors pulled extra hours, filling in for colleagues who'd caught the virus or simply had enough.

"You couldn't even have a patient pass away before the room needed to be used," said Phyllis Peoples, president and chief executive officer of Terrebonne General. "And some of our docs in there said, 'Are there happy moments here at all?'"

Chabert hospital's chief nursing officer, Jana Semere, said some nurses are burning out and leaving the profession after grueling 60-hour weeks filled with an unrelenting flow of COVID patients. Of Chabert's eight ICU beds, they can only staff six: They simply don't have the staff power amid a nationwide shortage of nurses.

Health care workers are now seeing whole families fall critically ill due to the highly communicable nature of the delta variant and the region's low vaccination rate.

In recent weeks, Semere has watched patients in their 20s and 30s go on ventilators and die. A few weeks ago, a man and his mother were admitted to the ICU at a neighboring hospital. They died within five hours of each other. Semere was on the phone with a nurse at that hospital, and could hear the man's wife wailing through the receiver.

"After 41 years of being a nurse, hearing it through the phone, I got goose bumps," she said, "because it's so sad."

Acadian Ambulance dispatcher Bart Savoy answers calls from those frantically seeking medical assistance.

"They're so out of breath trying to talk to you, and they're just crying for help," he said. "And I was the last guy they were talking to."

Often that burden falls on nurses when families can't visit sick loved ones because of infection risk.

"It's a difficult time for the nurses," said Chabert's house supervisor, Jeanie Songe, a longtime nurse who is in charge of logistics such as shift changes and hospital transfers. Nurses are now so busy, so stressed, so emotionally drained that some feel they have little left to give, she said.

"And then this freaking storm," she said. "It was a nightmare here."

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"The walls were breathing"

The power went out at Terrebonne General around 3 p.m. the Sunday the storm rolled in and for 10 seconds the staff stood in darkness. Nurses ran toward the intensive-care beds, where the worst COVID patients depended on ventilators to breathe. The back-up batteries were fully charged, but still they prayed.

Then with a pop, the generators roared to life, and they sighed in relief.

The hospital anticipated flooding but now water was coming from above. Parts of the roof had flown off, and the pounding rain flooded the fifth floor. It then gushed down to the fourth floor, then the third.

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Peoples, the hospital executive, put her hand against a wall and it was shaking. The windows blew out. The staff scrambled to move patients to the middle of the rooms, and then to the hallways. The wild wind created a sucking force, and it took Peoples and two others to push open a fire exit. They lost water.

Before the storm, they'd discharged as many patients as they could, but still had 120.

Other hospitals around the region had already evacuated, and Terrebonne General is the largest acute care facility there. In 65 years, the hospital has never fully evacuated, Peoples said. If they closed their doors, some patients would be 50 miles from the closest hospitals in the middle of dueling disasters.

But then she thought: Without water, there was no air conditioning, and it was pushing 100 degrees. Downed electrical lines were scattered outside, and if something caught fire, they wouldn't be able to put it out. Peoples didn't think she could keep her patients and staff safe.

"I said, 'I hate to say it, but I think we're going to have to say that we need to evacuate,'" she recalled, "which everyone knows is a major, major thing. We don't take it lightly."

Admitting defeat to the storm was agonizing for those who work in this hospital and have cared for their community for generations.

"It's our home. It's our home," Peoples said. "And to say we can't do it anymore just makes you very emotional."

Burnell, the ambulance company's medical officer, coordinated the evacuation from the hospital's basement. They had no radio communication and no cell reception. To tell each other anything, they had to run. Nurses, doctors, medics and administrators sprinted across floors wet and slippery from the rain and the sweat. They worked off printed papers to choreograph who would go where and when, to make sure patients positive for COVID didn't cross with those who weren't.

Ambulances darted around the region's shredded buildings and overturned utility poles to deliver patients to other hospitals that were also overwhelmed by the coronavirus and rushing to make room.

Paramedics are used to working grueling hurricane seasons, Burnell said.

"It's three or four months normally," he said. "Now they've been going 18, 19 months without a break."

Across town, Chabert hospital had made the same excruciating choice to evacuate.

The smaller hospital had just over 40 patients, 17 with COVID and five on ventilators in the ICU. The nurses there had prepared the equipment they might need to keep these patients alive if the generators failed, and stacked it on the beds.

The generators held, but like Terrebonne General, the hospital lost water and air conditioning. As the storm raged, a bleeding man arrived to drop off his fiancée, who had been sucked out of their wrecked home a few blocks away. The emergency room staff got to work mending her wounds as water poured from the ceiling.

Several nurses learned that their own homes had been destroyed, but kept working.

The staff was too scared to trust the elevators so they ran up and down the stairs, five flights, slippery from water and howling in the wind. They had no working bathrooms. It was torturously hot under their face masks, and sweat dripped into their eyes.

Songe, the house manager, watched the walls pulsating. She suspected she might be delirious because she was so tired. She took her glasses off, refocused her eyes, and it was true: "The walls were breathing," she said.

The staff watched from the windows as the top of a doctor's SUV peeled away. Tiny twisters rose up out of the wind.

"I was like, 'Is this building falling apart?'" said physician's assistant Erin Kinnard. She's lived in Houma most of her life, and has been through many hurricanes.

"But I've never been this scared," she said. "Never, ever, ever."

Ceiling tiles collapsed onto the head nurse, Jana Semere.

"I had COVID patients with no air conditioning. And it's already hard for them to breathe. Imagine how that must have felt," she said. "The floor was soaked, it was sweating."

The hospital decided to evacuate but had to wait until the sun came up.



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When Semere heard the sirens in the distance at dawn, she went to the loading dock and watched a parade of ambulances pull into the lot. She wept.

"It was like hope showed up."

"It didn't go away. It's not going to go away."

Early in the morning after the hurricane, emergency medical technician Caitlyn Rappé raced up the stairs of a storm-battered house. It was still dark but the humidity hung heavy in the air over a New Orleans suburb.

Beads of sweat ran down her forehead and her back, and moistened the mask strapped and sticky over her face. They found a woman splayed across the floor. She was COVID positive.

Rappé reached down to feel her neck — still warm — and the team intubated her, started chest compressions and gave her IV medication and fluids. Rappé and her partners loaded the woman onto a stretcher and trudged through the mud toward the truck, parked a football field away. By the time they made it to a hospital 15 minutes later, the woman was dead.

"All of us, you could see us sink," she said. "All three of us slumped onto the hospital floor."

As soon as the crew got back to headquarters, Rappé's 24-year-old partner turned white and collapsed from exhaustion and dehydration. When he came to, he begged Rappé to call his wife, and asked if he was going to die too.

The morning had been so hectic, it would be hours before Rappé had a chance to wonder: What happened to my house? She'd later learn that a tree crashed through the roof of her bedroom. She moved into a supply closet in the Acadian warehouse in New Orleans so she could keep working.

EMTs and paramedics fanned across south Louisiana in the days after Ida struck, responding to everything from heart attacks to scrapes and bruises to low blood sugar.

"Now is the time people start to crack," Burnell, the Acadian medical director, said several days after the storm.

Burnell has been tarping roofs of employees whose homes were flooded, tracking down medications and treating patients in the field. A man showed up with a severe dog bite to his face — an injury that would normally need stitches — and Burnell dressed it as best he could. He found two precious doses of antibiotics for an EMT whose children were suffering from ear infections so she could stay on the ambulance and work.

"Right now, they're not just scared of infection and miserable. They're working extra hours. They're also hot. They may not have a house. Some of them haven't seen their family in days," he said.

Terrebonne General was so badly damaged it remains closed, save a makeshift emergency room set up in tents across the street. The ER at Chabert has reopened, but the generator still trips every so often, briefly leaving the hospital in darkness. Medical staff are trying to patch the holes, sweep up the debris, wipe down the floors and begin the process of recovery. But what awaits them on the other side is grim.

During physician assistant Kinnard's 12-hour shift a few days after the storm, patients came in seeking help for issues unrelated to the virus. Some were diabetic and hadn't been able to take insulin for days. Four tested positive for COVID.

After so many in their community were forced to shelter through the hurricane wherever they could, it's almost inevitable some were exposed to people who were infected.

"It didn't go away. It's not going to go away," Kinnard said.

When Semere finally left the hospital, she was stunned by the state of her town: crumbled buildings, blown out windows, twisted metal strewn in the street.

"I haven't let it hit me yet, the devastation," she said. "I've just been basically trying to take it one step: what's next, what's right after this."

She's heard some of her staff pondering if they should retire because they're not sure they can keep going.

Nurses are frustrated that people in their own community, whom they've known for years, are refusing to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. When the pandemic began, nurses were hailed as heroes and

sent pizzas for lunch. But as the months have worn on, many now feel unappreciated because people refuse to trust them when they say to get the shot. The state's vaccination rate is only around 43%. And the relentlessness of the virus won't end when the power comes back on.

"It's daunting, it's very daunting," said Semere. "When we get this hospital up and running again, we're still going to be in a crisis."

## Paris terror trial opens for 20 accused in 2015 attacks

By LORI HINNANT and NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The trial of 20 men accused in a series of coordinated attacks on Paris in 2015 that spread fear across Europe and transformed France opened Wednesday in a custom-built complex embedded within a 13th-century courthouse.

Nine Islamic State group gunmen and suicide bombers struck within minutes of one another at several locations around Paris on Nov. 13, 2015, leaving 130 people dead and hundreds wounded. It was the deadliest violence to strike France since World War II and among the worst terror attacks to hit the West.

The worst carnage was at the Bataclan concert hall, where three men, dressed in black and armed with assault rifles, gunned down scores of people and grabbed a handful of hostages. Others targeted the national soccer stadium, where the president was attending a game, as well as cafes filled with people on a mild autumn night.

The lone surviving attacker from that night, Salah Abdeslam, is the key defendant — but he has so far refused to speak to investigators, denying them answers to many of the remaining questions about the attacks and the people who planned them.

Abdeslam, whose brother was among the suicide bombers, appeared intent on provoking those assembled to see justice done Wednesday. Dressed all in black, mask included, he declared his profession to be "fighter for Islamic State" and later burst out with complaints about treatment in prison.

Abdeslam, who fled the night of the attacks after ditching his car and a malfunctioning suicide vest, is the only defendant charged with murder. The other defendants present face lesser terrorism charges.

The presiding judge, Jean-Louis Peries, acknowledged the extraordinary nature of the attacks — which changed security in Europe and France's political landscape — and the trial to come. France only emerged from the state of emergency declared in the wake of the attacks in 2017, after incorporating many of the harshest measures into law.

"The events that we are about to decide are inscribed in their historic intensity as among the international and national events of this century," he said.

Dominique Kielemoes, whose son bled to death at one of the cafes, said hearing 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.

Of the 20 men charged, six will be tried in absentia. Abdeslam will be questioned multiple times — but it remains to be seen if he will break his silence beyond the sort of allegiance he offered Wednesday to Islamic State groups.

"We were expecting it, and we were prepared for it and in fact, we're not expecting anything from him," Kielemoes said after Abdeslam first appeared.

The same IS network that hit Paris went on to strike Brussels months later, killing another 32 people.

Authorities have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure security at the trial, building an entirely new courtroom within the storied 13th-century Palais de Justice in Paris, where Marie Antoinette and Emile Zola faced trial, among others.

Survivors of the attacks as well as those who mourn their dead on Wednesday packed the complex's rooms, which were designed to hold 1,800 plaintiffs and over 300 lawyers.

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

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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 then-French President François Hollande — who was at the Stade de France on the night of the assaults — will testify, as will relatives of the attackers.

In the wake of the attacks, France changed: Authorities immediately declared a state of emergency and now armed officers constantly patrol public spaces. The assaults sparked soul-searching among the French and Europeans more broadly since most of the perpetrators were born and raised in France or Belgium. And they transformed forever the lives of all those who suffered losses or bore witness to the violence.

"Our ability to be carefree is gone," Kielemoes said. "The desire to go out, travel — all of that's gone. Even if we still do a number of things, our appetite for life has disappeared."

For Jean-Luc Wertenschlag, who lives above the cafe where his son died and who rushed downstairs soon after the first gunshots to try to save lives, it has even changed the way he moves around the city where he was born and raised. He never leaves home without the first aid gear he lacked that night, when he ripped off his shirt to stanch the bleeding of a victim.

"What we did that evening with other people, to provide assistance to the people wounded during the attack, was a way to stand against what these monsters had tried to do to us," he said.

Among those scheduled to testify is Hollande, who in addition to being present at one of the scenes of attack gave the final order to police special forces to storm the Bataclan.

Hollande said Wednesday he would speak "not for the sake of French politics, but for the victims of the attacks." He said he keenly felt the weight of responsibility that night and for the days and weeks after it.

"When the cameras are turned off, you go back to the solitude of the Elysée (presidential palace)," Hollande told France-Info. "You ask what can I do? ... Is what just happened going to change society?"

Wednesday's hearing paused briefly after one of the defendants appeared to have a medical issue. When it resumed, Abdeslam burst out in fury.

"We should be treated like human beings. We're not dogs," he said, before being ordered to be silent.

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.

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Associated Press journalists Angela Charlton, Alex Turnbull and Catherine Gaschka contributed to this report.

## What is the mu variant of the coronavirus?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

What is the mu variant?

It's a version of the coronavirus that was first identified in Colombia in January and has since caused isolated outbreaks in South America, Europe and the United States.

The World Health Organization last month listed it as a "variant of interest" because of concerns it may make vaccines and treatments less effective, though more evidence is needed.

Scientists monitor emerging COVID-19 variants based on suspicious genetic changes and then look for evidence to determine whether the new version is more infectious or causes more severe illness. Viruses evolve constantly and many new variants often fade away.

So far, the mu variant doesn't seem to be spreading quickly: It accounts for fewer than 1% of COVID-19 cases globally. In Colombia, it may be responsible for about 39% of cases. Most countries remain concerned about the highly contagious delta variant; it is the dominant variant in almost all of the 174 countries where it's been detected.

Officials have been tracking the mu variant in Europe, where it has been seen in about a dozen countries.

The French Ministry of Health recently said the mu variant “does not seem to have increased recently” across Europe.

A report from England’s public health agency last month suggested the mu variant might be as resistant to vaccines as the worrisome beta variant first seen in South Africa, but said more real-world data was needed.

WHO officials said the mu variant appears to be rising in some countries in South America, but that the delta variant still spreads far more easily.

The mu variant “is of interest to us because of the combination of mutations it has,” said WHO’s Maria Van Kerkhove. “But it doesn’t seem to be circulating.”

The U.S. is “paying attention to it,” but it isn’t considered an immediate threat, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: [FactCheck@AP.org](mailto:FactCheck@AP.org). Read more here:

What can employers do if workers avoid COVID-19 vaccines?

What is a vaccine passport, and do I need one?

What does full approval of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine mean?

## WHO chief urges halt to booster shots for rest of the year

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Rich countries with large supplies of coronavirus vaccines should refrain from offering booster shots through the end of the year and make the doses available for poorer countries, the head of the World Health Organization said Wednesday, doubling down on an earlier appeal for a “moratorium” on boosters that has largely been ignored.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also said he was “appalled” after hearing comments Tuesday from a top association of pharmaceutical manufacturers that vaccine supplies are high enough to allow for both booster shots for people in well-supplied countries and first jabs in poorer countries that face shortages. He said that’s already been the case.

“I will not stay silent when companies and countries that control the global supply of vaccines think the world’s poor should be satisfied with leftovers,” he told a news conference. “Because manufacturers have prioritized or been legally obliged to fulfill bilateral deals with rich countries willing to pay top dollar, low income countries have been deprived of the tools to protect their people.”

Tedros had previously called for a moratorium on boosters through the end of September. But wealthy countries — including Britain, Denmark, France, Greece, Germany, and Spain — have begun or are considering plans to offer third shots of two-dose vaccines to their vulnerable people such as the elderly or those with compromised immune systems.

Israel has been providing third doses to a wide swath of people who already received a full two-dose regimen months earlier. And last month, United States health officials recommended that all Americans get boosters to shore up their protection amid evidence that the vaccines’ effectiveness is falling. WHO officials insist the scientific justification for boosters remains unclear.

Tedros acknowledged that third doses might be necessary for at-risk groups, but said: “We do not want to see widespread use of boosters for healthy people who are fully vaccinated.”

Responding to the WHO calls on booster shots, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the U.S. has donated and shared about 140 million doses with over 90 countries, “more than all other countries combined.”

She added: “From Senegal to South Africa to India, we’ve made significant investments in boosting global productions of COVID vaccines. At the same time, the President and this administration has a responsibility to do everything we can to protect people in the United States.”

U.S. health officials are continuing to assess the science and utility of boosters, and there are growing

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indications that the U.S. may miss the Biden administration's Sept. 20 target date for a wide rollout of extra shots for vaccinated people.

The WHO chief said he received a message of "clear support" from health ministers at a meeting of the influential Group of 20 countries this week for a commitment to help hit a WHO target that all countries vaccinate at least 40% of their people by year's end.

"A month ago, I called for a global moratorium on booster doses, at least until the end of September to prioritize vaccinating the most at risk people around the world who are yet to receive their first dose," Tedros said. "There has been little change in the global situation since then."

"So today, I'm calling for an extension of the moratorium until at least the end of the year to enable every country to vaccinate at least 40% of its population," he said.

The WHO says 5.5 billion coronavirus vaccine doses have been administered so far, but 80% of those have been to upper- and middle-income countries. Rich countries have also offered to donate 1 billion doses to other countries, but fewer than 15% of those doses have "materialized," Tedros said.

He noted that manufacturers have pledged to prioritize the U.N.-backed COVAX program, which aims to get vaccines to the neediest people in the world — no matter how wealthy the country.

"We don't want any more promises. We just want the vaccines," the WHO chief said.

Earlier Wednesday, COVAX managers again scaled back their target to ship doses this year, projecting about 1.4 billion doses will be available through the program by year-end — down from about 1.8 billion previously. They had originally hoped to ship 2 billion doses this year.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which co-runs the program, said COVAX has faced setbacks including export restrictions from hard-hit India — a key producer of vaccines — as well as regulatory hurdles for some vaccine candidates and manufacturing troubles elsewhere. But it also said deliveries are ramping up strongly, and another 1.1 billion doses are expected to be available by year-end through the program, up from 330 million so far. Most of those doses have gone to or are destined for poorer countries.

The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations said Tuesday that about 1.5 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses are now being produced every month, and cited projections that a total of 12 billion will have been produced by year-end.

Dr. Bruce Aylward, a top adviser to Tedros, acknowledged that "some countries may be going ahead with decisions" to widely administer boosters, but that the WHO call for a moratorium "makes a real difference." He said some countries — which he did not identify — have approached the WHO about whether booster policies could be delayed.

But admittedly, the WHO's first call for a moratorium through September has not fixed the gaping imbalance in access to vaccines.

"(O)ur role is to make sure that we put forward the strongest possible arguments and way out of this pandemic — and the way out of that is a moratorium and to extend it," Aylward said. "Because since the last time we called for it, the equity gap has gotten greater, the amount of vaccine available to low-income countries has gone down."

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Aamer Madhani in Washington DC contributed to this report.

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Follow all AP stories on the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

## **Shrine to replace church destroyed on 9/11 nears completion**

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

The domed sanctuary rising in Lower Manhattan, where workers are busy installing translucent Greek marble in time for a ceremonial lighting on Sept. 10, bears little resemblance to the modest parish church that John Katsimatides had discovered years ago.

He often visited the old St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church to say a prayer and light a candle as he went to or from work nearby on the 104th floor of the World Trade Center's north tower. The church stood

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as a quiet oasis amid the soaring financial district.

John Katsimatides "was thrilled that there was a Greek church right across the street from where he worked," recalled his sister, Anthoula Katsimatides. "St. Nicholas was very special to him."

In the immediate aftermath the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, John's relatives held on to hope that he might have survived. They put up missing-person posters in Lower Manhattan and searched the streets and hospitals for him. But as the days stretched into weeks, "our priest insisted that we, for the sake of his soul, read the prayer rites" marking his death, Anthoula said. John, 31, a corporate bonds broker at Cantor Fitzgerald, was among the nearly 3,000 people killed on 9/11.

The old St. Nicholas church was also destroyed that day. While no one was killed in the building, it was crushed beneath the falling south tower — the only house of worship destroyed in the attacks.

"When we discovered ... that St. Nicholas was also lost, we thought that there was some kind of a message there, that the victims did not die alone," Anthoula Katsimatides said. "I remember my mom saying that ... John and the other victims were being cradled by St. Nicholas."

This Sept. 10, the eve of the date 20 years after the nation's deadliest terrorist attack, she'll attend the ceremonial lighting of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine, being built to replace the parish church and to honor those who were lost.

The ceremony will be a milestone in a project long beset with bureaucratic tangles and financial woes but now on track for completion next year.

"St. Nicholas brings me close to my brother," Anthoula Katsimatides said. "Being able to come and worship at the site of my brother's death, in a beautiful chapel that not only honors John but all the victims that died that day and is a symbol of this rebirth, is unbelievably important to me now."

The lighting of the church will come from within. Through an innovative process, interior lights are being designed to illuminate thin panels of marble, mined from the same Pentelic vein in Greece that sourced the Parthenon, the ancient temple in Athens.

The church is being built in a small, elevated park overlooking the World Trade Center memorial plaza, close to the reflecting pools that mark where the twin towers once stood. A huge, bronze sphere that once stood between the towers now stands, dented and damaged, in the park just beyond the chapel's doors. Tour and school groups often gather on a flight of steps leading to the shrine.

The shrine's concrete shell, passed daily by streams of tourists, has been one of the most visible signs of the unfinished work of the ground zero rebuilding effort. Work to install its marble cladding has proceeded at a fast pace in recent weeks in time for the ceremonial lighting, though the church isn't slated to be completed until next year.

The church is designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, with its dome, windows and iconography inspired by historic former Byzantine churches, including the world-renowned Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. A Greek iconographer is integrating traditional designs with imagery from 9/11, including tributes to slain rescue workers.

"The translucent areas of the facade are intended to give the church a dim light, like a beacon of hope, during the night," Calatrava said. "Building the church with Pentelic stone adds another level of symbolism, because ... I consider Hagia Sophia the Parthenon of Orthodoxy."

Given its prominent location near the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, the shrine is destined to become a signature American expression of Eastern Orthodoxy, an ancient Christian communion that still predominates in Greece and much of Eastern Europe but has a slender share of the U.S. Christian population.

In addition to its sanctuary, the shrine will have a separate space for meditation and reflection for people of all faiths.

"It's going to have a rich liturgical life" as a church, said Michael Psaros, vice chairman of the Friends of St. Nicholas, the private entity overseeing the project in cooperation with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. "But this beautiful shrine we're building belongs to New York, it belongs to the U.S., and it belongs to the world."

That inclusiveness "is carrying on what St. Nicholas was in the past," said Olga Pavlakos, vice president of the parish. She was baptized in the old church, where her parents were married and her grandparents

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worshiped.

"Whoever stepped in to St. Nicholas, whether they were Greek, non-Greek, any race, religion, we accepted everybody," she said. If "they were poor, they needed something to eat, they wanted soup, everybody was accepted."

Greek immigrants founded St. Nicholas on Lower Manhattan's Cedar Street in 1916, converting a former tavern into a church and topping it with a small belfry and cross. According to parish lore, newly arrived Greek immigrants came there to offer thanks to St. Nicholas, patron of seafarers.

"Whatever we did in St. Nicholas was all volunteer," said Pavlakos. "It was a poor parish."

Over the decades, even as the church was islanded by a parking lot and dwarfed by the World Trade Center, parish leaders refused to sell to land-hungry developers. By the turn of the century, its small core of members were still coming in from surrounding boroughs and communities to worship.

Since 9/11, parishioners have worshipped at various parishes in the region. "We kept waiting" to return, Pavlakos said. "We never thought that it would take 20 years."

The archdiocese always intended to rebuild, but the question was where, given all the components involved in reconstruction at ground zero. The archdiocese and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the trade center, ended up in litigation in 2011 before settling on a site on Liberty Street, near the old church. Officials ceremonially broke ground in 2014.

But a new crisis arose.

Costs soared beyond projections, and construction halted in late 2017 after the archdiocese fell behind on payments. The archdiocese, which had financial woes of its own, used \$3.5 million in funds dedicated to the shrine for its own operating deficit and had to repay it.

The archdiocese appointed an investigating committee that attributed the St. Nicholas cost overruns to expensive change orders. Those architectural enhancements "may have been made with the best of intentions" for a shrine of such significance, but they pushed the cost far above the archdiocese's public disclosures, the committee said in 2018.

The archdiocese also implemented the committee's recommendation of turning the project management over to a separate entity. That entity, Friends of St. Nicholas, led by a core of wealthy Greek-Americans, has completed fundraising for the church, with estimated costs of close to \$85 million, and is now raising an endowment for maintenance and security.

"The archdiocese is good at a lot of things, but building a national shrine in the most expensive place in the history of Western civilization was not exactly its forte," Psaros said.

Archbishop Elpidophoros, who assumed leadership of the nationwide archdiocese in 2019, said the symbolism of the shrine is important.

"Ground zero is worldwide known as a place of religious hatred and violence, and the results of this religious hatred and violence," he said. "Part of our responsibility was to restore the reputation of religion ... as a factor of uniting people."

The project is one of the final components in reconstruction in the section of Lower Manhattan devastated on 9/11. A performing arts center is under construction, due to open in 2023, and an additional office building and apartment complex are planned.

"One of the top priorities has been to move the World Trade Center campus toward completion, and one of the most important aspects of that is the national shrine," Port Authority Executive Director Rick Cotton said. The church project is bringing to completion "those aspects of the site which are really dedicated to the spiritual memory of the those who were killed in the attack."

The project has personal significance for the Rev. Alex Karloutsos, longtime vicar-general for the archdiocese. In the hours and days after the 9/11 attacks, he was among clergy offering spiritual support to recovery workers.

"People at that point were looking for something sacred, because they had just experienced that which is evil," he said.

Among the surviving artifacts from St. Nicholas was a paper icon of St. Dionysius of Zakynthos — the patron of forgiveness for having forgiven his brother's murderer.

"That icon was very poignant, because at the end of the day, for us to go outside of our hatred, we even had to forgive those who destroyed our brothers and sisters," Karloutsos said.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

## 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 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 Area 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,



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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 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.

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.

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An earlier version of this story incorrectly referred to the name of the software company Adobe

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

## Secure Paris attacks courtroom nestled within storied site

By ARNO PEDRAM and NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The November 2015 Paris attacks trial is taking place in the Palais de Justice, a national monument whose walls date back to the 13th century and King Louis IX.

In the heart of Paris, on the same island that holds Notre Dame Cathedral and the city's police headquarters, it has been a center of power for France for generations and was built on ancient Roman ruins. It also is home to Louis' famed Gothic Sainte-Chapelle.

The palace was expanded through the ages by French kings, many of whom lived in the same wing that now houses the secure complex of rooms specially constructed for the nine-month terror trial. The wing has a statue of Louis IX, known as Saint Louis, standing beneath an oak tree administering justice.

According to historians H el ene Bellanger and Marc Renneville, at the end of the 13th century, King Philippe the Fair remodeled the palace to also host courts.

The palace then hosted the Revolutionary Court during the Reign of Terror, and in 1793 famously tried Marie-Antoinette and others before they were guillotined.

It has burned repeatedly, most notably during the "semaine sanglante" (bloody week) of 1871, when the Versailles government repressed the Communards and a fire ravaged most of the court buildings.

French novelist Emile Zola also faced trial in the building during the Dreyfus affair at the end of the 19th century. And the walls still bear scars from bullets fired in street battles to retake Paris from the Germans in World War II.

Paris moved the bulk of the court proceedings to a more modern building in the city's north in 2018. In January 2020, the French government decided to use the structure's cavernous side hall for the exceptional needs of the November 2015 Paris attacks trial, the biggest trial in French history.

Working with cultural authorities and the architect in charge of protected national monuments, construction finished over the summer.

Twenty men are accused in the Islamic State group's 2015 attacks on Paris that left 130 people dead and hundreds injured. The new chamber, which has pale wood and enormous screens, can house 550 people, all the defendants and multiple cameras. Overflow rooms carry live broadcasts of the proceedings.

Among the plaintiffs are nearly 1,800 victims, including survivors and families whose loved ones died that night. A total of 330 lawyers are representing them and the defendants.

## Ethel Kennedy: RFK assassin Sirhan Sirhan shouldn't be freed

BOSTON (AP) — Ethel Kennedy, the wife of the late Robert F. Kennedy, says assassin Sirhan Sirhan should not be released from prison, further roiling a family divide over whether the man convicted of killing her husband in California in 1968 should be freed on parole.

In a brief statement released on Twitter by her daughter, lawyer and activist Kerry Kennedy, Ethel Kennedy said bluntly Tuesday: "He should not be paroled."

"Bobby believed we should work to 'tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of the world,'" Kennedy, 93, wrote.

"He wanted to end the war in Vietnam and bring people together to build a better, stronger country. More than anything, he wanted to be a good father and loving husband," she wrote, adding: "Our family and our country suffered an unspeakable loss due to the inhumanity of one man. We believe in the gentleness that spared his life, but in taming his act of violence, he should not have the opportunity to terrorize again."

Ethel Kennedy founded the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. Her statement came a week after former U.S. Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II, RFK's oldest son, also denounced the possible parole of Sirhan, 77.

Two other RFK offspring, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Douglas Kennedy, have said they support the release.

The California Parole Board found last month that Sirhan no longer poses a threat to society, noting that he had enrolled in more than 20 programs including anger management classes, tai chi and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Sirhan has served 53 years of a life sentence.

The ruling will be reviewed over the next four months by the board's staff. Then it will be sent to Gov. Gavin Newsom, who will have 30 days to decide whether to grant it, reverse it or modify it.

Robert F. Kennedy was a U.S. senator from New York and the brother of President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963. RFK was seeking the Democratic presidential nomination when he was gunned down at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles moments after delivering a victory speech in the pivotal California primary. Five others were wounded.

## 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," Margot 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 too many to show at any one time. When not in public view, the artifacts are kept offsite, most in a facility across the Hudson River in New Jersey and others stored in a warehouse near Albany, New York. 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 Antlfinger 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 vaccines' effectiveness, even though the shots have been shown to be highly effective in preventing serious illness and deaths.

"I don't believe vaccines work," she told the AP. "I already had the virus. I don't believe it's so dangerous."

But Sibila Marinova, manager of Veliko Tarnovo's intensive care unit, says the full COVID-19 ICU ward in her hospital shows that's simply not true.

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

And she said she's angry that so many Bulgarians are refusing to get jabbed.

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.

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.

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"I think I'm healthy enough and have a good natural immunity," he said, adding that he could be persuaded to get vaccinated if he couldn't 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" -- apparently unaware that years of research laid the groundwork for the vaccine shots, which now have been used in hundreds of millions of people with exceedingly rare serious side effects.

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."

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Valentina Petrova contributed to this report from Burgas.

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Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:

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

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

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

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

## '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.

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"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.

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.

## 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.

Firefighters battled through the early morning hours to extinguish the flames as black smoke billowed from the compound of the Tangerang prison on the outskirts of Jakarta.

After the blaze was extinguished, ambulance after ambulance filled with body bags containing the victims were driven by Red Cross workers to the morgue of a local hospital, where they were stacked wall-to-wall on the floor of a room awaiting transport to a larger facility for identification.

Relatives of prisoners trickled in to the prison throughout the day to check and see whether their loved ones were among those killed.

Most of the 41 killed were drug convicts, including a man from South Africa and a man from Portugal, while other victims included a terrorism convict and a murderer, Indonesia's Law and Human Rights minister Yasona Laoly told reporters.

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

"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 fire broke out at 1:45 a.m. in Block C2 of the prison, where the 19 cells that were built to hold 40 inmates were stuffed full with more than triple that number. The cause of the blaze appears to have been an electrical short circuit, according to initial findings, Jakarta Police Chief Fadil Imran said.

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

Problems are rampant in Indonesia's prisons, largely due to overcrowding. More than half of the system's inmates are being held on narcotics offenses; a product of the country's war on drugs.

As of July, there were a total of 268,610 inmates in Indonesia's prisons, which were built to hold 132,107 people.

Tangerang prison, located in the heart of Tangerang city in Jakarta's neighboring province of Banten, was designed to house 900 inmates but has more than 2,000, Laoly said. Officials had earlier said it was built to accommodate 1,225 inmates.

The government has acknowledged the problem, and is planning to refocus its approach toward drug offenders to start looking at them as addicts who need treatment, rather than criminals, in the hope of

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dramatically reducing the number incarcerated.

Reynhard Silitonga, the head of corrections at the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, told The Associated Press in an e-mail that if there isn't a change in policy, the number of inmates could top 400,000 within five years.

With the new approach, "the spirit of handling drug offenders, especially users, is directed at the health aspect, no longer imprisonment," he said.

He did not say how long it would take to implement the changes.

In addition to those who died in the Tangerang fire, eight inmates were hospitalized with severe burns and nine with light injuries were treated at a prison clinic, the Ministry of Law and Human Rights said. Another 64, many suffering smoke inhalation, were evacuated to a mosque in the compound for observation.

The 15 corrections officers guarding the cell block were unhurt, said Rika Aprianti, spokesperson for the corrections department.

Agus Toyib, who heads the Banten provincial law and human rights office, which oversees Tangerang, said understaffing at the prison led to delays in rescuing inmates from their locked cells.

"Most victims caught fire as they didn't have enough time to get out of their cells and the fire was growing rapidly," he said.

## **AP PHOTOS: 20 images that documented the enormity of 9/11**

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

It was a day of indelible images — apocalyptic, surreal, violent, ghostly, both monumental and profoundly personal. Wrenching to remember. Impossible to forget.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were captured in countless pictures by news photographers, bystanders, first responders, security cameras, FBI agents and others. Even an astronaut on the International Space Station took some.

Twenty years later, The Associated Press has curated 20 of its photographers' frames from Sept. 11, 2001, when hijackers used commercial planes as missiles and crashed into New York's World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field. The attacks killed nearly 3,000 people and toppled the trade center's 110-story twin towers.

These photos document the enormity, chaos and emotion of 9/11 on every scale, from panoramic views of smoke rising over New York's skyline to a close-up of the anxious, smudged face of a woman hastening down a street blanketed with ashen dust.

Street scenes chart escalating horror as people stare and weep at the burning skyscrapers, then run from the dust cloud billowing through lower Manhattan after one of them crumbles. Flames shoot from the windows of the Pentagon, a global symbol of military might that proved vulnerable to an attack by a handful of Islamic militants. A falling human form, almost silhouetted against one of the trade center towers, shows one of the most agonizing horrors of all.

Some show more intimate views of pain, but also humanity — an injured firefighter's screaming face; a woman walking through the eerie blizzard of trade center debris with her arm around someone else's shoulder; the then-deputy chief of the Army Reserve, Col. Malcolm Bruce Westcott, holding a comforting hand to Pentagon employee Racquel Kelley's brow while assessing her for shock. There are images of determination, including firefighters working amid the smoky rubble and a shopkeeper sweeping up the dust of catastrophe.

Finally, as night falls, people gaze across New York Harbor at the smoke, trying to make sense of what happened in front of their eyes. As we still are today.

## **Today in History**

By The Associated Press undefined  
Today in History



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Today is Thursday, Sept. 9, the 252nd day of 2021. There are 113 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 9, 1850, California became the 31st state of the union.

On this date:

In 1776, the second Continental Congress made the term "United States" official, replacing "United Colonies."

In 1893, Frances Cleveland, wife of President Grover Cleveland, gave birth to a daughter, Esther, in the White House; it was the first (and, to date, only) time a president's child was born in the executive mansion.

In 1919, some 1,100 members of Boston's 1,500-man police force went on strike. (The strike was broken by Massachusetts Gov. Calvin Coolidge with replacement officers.)

In 1932, the steamboat Observation exploded in New York's East River, killing 72 people.

In 1948, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) was declared.

In 1956, Elvis Presley made the first of three appearances on "The Ed Sullivan Show."

In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the first civil rights bill to pass Congress since Reconstruction, a measure primarily concerned with protecting voting rights and which also established a Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Department of Justice.

In 1960, in the first regular-season American Football League game, the Denver Broncos defeated the Boston Patriots, 13-10.

In 1971, prisoners seized control of the maximum-security Attica Correctional Facility near Buffalo, New York, beginning a siege that ended up claiming 43 lives.

In 1991, boxer Mike Tyson was indicted in Indianapolis on a charge of raping Desiree Washington, a beauty pageant contestant. (Tyson was convicted and ended up serving three years of a six-year prison sentence.)

In 2005, Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Michael Brown, the principal target of harsh criticism of the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina, was relieved of his onsite command.

In 2015, Queen Elizabeth II became the longest reigning monarch in British history, serving as sovereign for 23,226 days (about 63 years and 7 months), according to Buckingham Palace, surpassing Queen Victoria, her great-great-grandmother. New York became the first U.S. city to require salt warnings on chain-restaurant menus.

Ten years ago: New Yorkers and Washingtonians shrugged off talk of a new terror threat as intelligence officials scrambled to nail down information on a possible al-Qaida strike timed to coincide with the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

Five years ago: Defying the White House, Congress sent President Barack Obama legislation giving the families of victims of the September 11 attacks the right to sue Saudi Arabia. (Obama vetoed the bill, but Congress overrode his veto.) Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, speaking at an LGBT fundraiser in New York City, described half of Republican Donald Trump's supporters as "a basket of deplorables," a characterization for which she ended up expressing regret. Shaquille O'Neal and Allen Iverson were among those inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

One year ago: The top U.S. general for the Middle East, Gen. Frank McKenzie, said the Trump administration would pull thousands of troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan by November. President Donald Trump acknowledged that he had downplayed the coronavirus in the weeks after it emerged, saying he was trying to be a "cheerleader" for the country and avoid causing panic. Officials said the wildfires burning in Oregon's forested valleys and along the coast had destroyed hundreds of homes; in Washington state, flames devoured buildings and huge tracts of land. A federal report said vaping by U.S. teenagers had fallen dramatically, especially among middle schoolers.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Topol is 86. Singer Inez Foxx is 79. Singer Dee Dee Sharp is 76. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL player Joe Theismann is 72. Rock musician John McFee (The Doobie Brothers) is 71. Actor Tom Wopat is 70. Actor Angela Cartwright is 69. Musician-producer Dave Stewart is 69. Actor Hugh Grant is 61. Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., is 58. Actor-comedian Charles Esten (formerly

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Chip) is 56. Actor Constance Marie is 56. Actor David Bennent is 55. Actor Adam Sandler is 55. Rock singer Paul Durham (Black Lab) is 53. Actor Julia Sawalha (suh-WAHL'-hah) is 53. Model Rachel Hunter is 52. Actor Eric Stonestreet is 50. Actor Henry Thomas is 50. Actor Goran Visnjic (VEEZ'-nihch) is 49. Pop-jazz singer Michael Buble' (boo-BLAY') is 46. Latin singer Maria Rita is 44. Actor Michelle Williams is 41. Actor Julie Gonzalo is 40. Neo-soul singer Paul Janeway (St. Paul & the Broken Bones) is 38. Actor Zoe Kazan is 38. Author-motivational speaker-businessman Farrah Gray is 37. Actor Kelsey Asbille is 30. Contemporary Christian singer Lauren Daigle is 30. Country singer-songwriter Hunter Hayes is 30.