

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Upcoming Events

### Friday, Sept. 10

Girls Soccer hosting West Central, 4 p.m.

Football vs. Deuel at Clear Lake, 7 p.m. (will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM)

### 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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## Leicht lites up as Netters beat Sisseton in three sets

Groton Area was on fire Thursday night as the Lady Volleyball team posted a 3-0 win over Sisseton. The match was played in Groton and was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc., and Bary Keith at Harr Motors.

After three lead changes and two ties, Groton area went on a four-point run in the first set to gain the upper hand. The Tigers led, 16-8, but Sisseton would come back and tie the set at 22 and 24, sending the game into extra points. The Tigers scored the last two points and won, 26-24. Sydney Leicht had four kills and three ace serves in that set, Madeline Fliehs had four kills and an ace serve, Emma Schinkel had three kills, Anna Fjeldheim had two ace serves and Elizabeth Fliehs had one ace serve.

The second set was tied twice early in the game before Groton Area took control the match as Sydney Leicht powered in eight kills and an ace serve to lead Groton Area to a 25-17 win. Madeline Fliehs had four kills while Aspen Johnson had two kills and a block, Elizabeth Fliehs had a kill and an ace serve and Anna Fjeldheim had two ace serves and a kill.

Groton Area jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the third set, but Sisseton battled back and took the lead, 13-11. The set was tied seven times, the last at 15, and there were four lead changes. The Tigers scored eight unanswered points to take a 22-15 lead and went on to win, 25-16. Anna Fjeldheim had five ace serves and a kill in that set while Madeline Fliehs had two kills, two blocks and an ace serve, Sydney Leicht had four kills, Elizabeth Fliehs had a kill and an ace serve and Aspen Johnson had a block.

Elizabeth Fliehs had 30 assists and Fjeldheim had one. Groton Area had 57 digs with Alyssa Thaler having 16 and Sydney Leicht and Elizabeth Fliehs each having eight.

Sisseton won the junior varsity match, 25-14, 20-25 and 15-8. Groton Area won the C match, 25-18 and 25-8. The eighth graders won, 25-8, 25-16 and 25-15. The seventh graders won, 25-16, 25-18 and 25-13.

## Boys Soccer team beats James Valley Christian

The Groton Area boys soccer team defeated James Valley Christian on Thursday, 6-2. The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the Zak Family.

Jacob Zak scored three goals while Jayden Zak and Brayden Hansen each had one. The other goal was accidentally hit in by one of the Viking players.

Kolby Vander Werff and Brennen Hood each scored a goal for James Valley Christian.

## Three Groton Area golfers medal at Groton Invite

The boys golf team placed third at the Groton Invitational meet held Thursday. Roncalli won the meet with 331 points followed by Sioux Valley with 332, Groton 360, Aberdeen Central 384, Milbank 392, Redfield 403 and Sisseton 431.

Brevin Fliehs led Groton Area, placing fourth with a score of 79. Logan Pearson placed 16th with a score of 92. Jackson Cogley also medaled at 19th with a score of 93. Other scores were Carter Simon 96, Cole Simon 101, Jayden Schwan 110 and Andrew Marzahn 115.

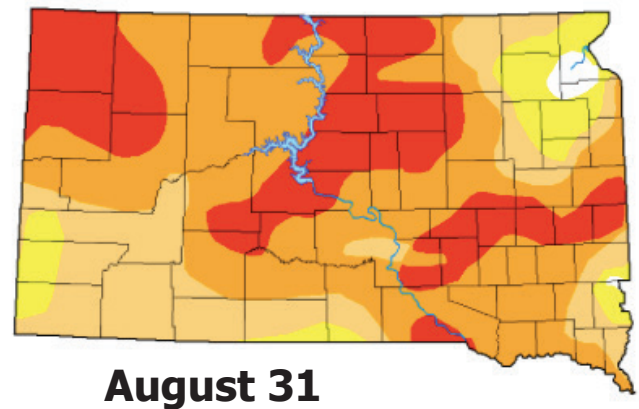
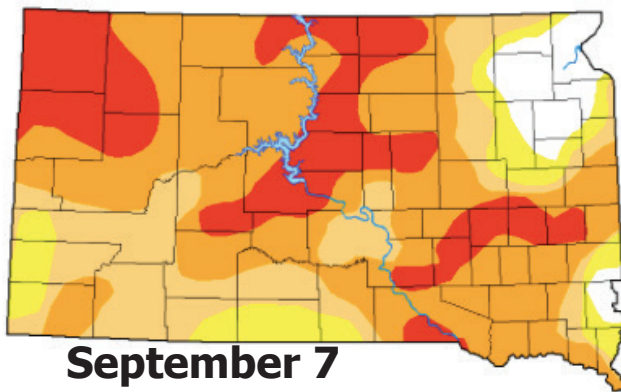
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## Drought Classification



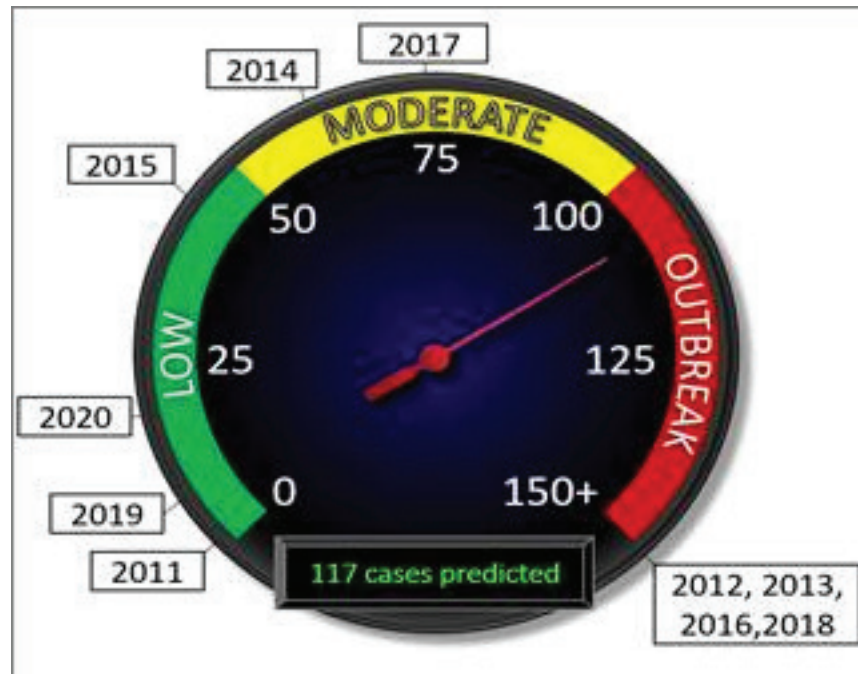
## Drought Monitor



## High Plains

On this week's map, areas of the region—including eastern portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas—saw isolated improvements in response to continued rainfall activity. The heaviest rainfall in the region was observed in eastern Kansas where accumulations ranged from 2 to 7 inches, while areas further to the north in Nebraska and the Dakotas received 1-to-4-inch accumulations in isolated areas. For the last 30-day period, the percentage of normal precipitation has ranged from 100 to 300% of normal across a widespread area of the Central and Northern Plains. However, isolated pockets of dryness have persisted—particularly in western portions of the region that have not benefited from the recent rainfall events. According to the USDA for the week ending September 5, the percentage of topsoil in North Dakota rated short to very short was 63%, while neighboring South Dakota was rated 66% short to very short.

## West Nile Update



SD WNV (as of September 8): 21 human cases reported (Brown, Clark, Davison, Day, Dewey, Douglas, Hamlin, Kingsbury, Lake, Minnehaha, Moody, Potter, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Stanley, Tripp, Union, Walworth, Yankton) and 1 death

Positive blood donors (as of September 8): 2 (Clark, Day)

8 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Hand, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of September 7): 210 cases (AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO, GA, ID, IL, IA, KS, LA, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, NE, NJ, NY, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT) and 9 deaths

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2021, South Dakota (as of September 6)

## Padfield chosen as Homecoming Parade Marshal

by Dorene Nelson



Chuck Padfield has been chosen as the 2021 homecoming parade marshal. There are few people who are as widely known in the Groton Area School District as Chuck. He has worn many "hats" to earn this distinction: head cook, bus driver, janitor, and groundskeeper just to name the main ones.

"I was surprised but very pleased when I was asked if I'd be the parade marshal," Padfield admitted. "I retired as the head cook in 2017, but still do some work for the school."

"I started my cooking career at home with my mother by helping her in the kitchen and learning the best ways to cook, plan, and prepare meals," he explained. "My first real cooking job was in 1971 when I was employed by the Country Kitchen (now the Millstone)."

"Following that job, I worked in two businesses in North Dakota before returning to Aberdeen where I worked at the Holiday Inn, the Lumber Company, and St. Luke's Hospital," Padfield listed.

"I worked here in Groton as the head cook for twenty-eight years when I decided to retire," he stated. "That decision was partly due to my wife Mickey's unexpected death in 2016 and to my son Randy's continuing health issues."

"Even though I retired from the kitchen, I did not want to just sit around so I asked if I could continue working as a groundskeeper," Padfield smiled. "I enjoy mowing the football and soccer fields, tending to the weed spraying and upkeep of the two facilities."

"In addition to the groundskeeping for the school, I also assist my son Randy and his family with the concession stand for the baseball games in Groton," he added. "We've done that together for several years."

"I have two sons Randy and Joey who both live in Aberdeen," he said. "Both are married, and I am blessed with one granddaughter."

## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

### School Board Meeting

September 13, 2021 – 6:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

#### AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

#### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

#### CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of August 9 school board meeting as drafted or amended.
2. Approval of August 2021 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
3. Approval of August 2021 School Lunch Report.
4. Approval of August 2021 School Transportation Report.

#### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Second reading and adoption of recommended policy amendments; BD School Board Meetings, JHCDE Administration of Medical Cannabis, JHCDE-E(1) Medical Cannabis Administration Plan, JFCH Alcohol and Other Drug Use by Students, JGD Student Suspension/Expulsion, GBEC Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs by Employees, JHCD Administering Medicines to Students
3. Continued discussion and necessary action on District response to COVID-19.
  - a. Local COVID-19 Update
4. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

#### NEW BUSINESS:

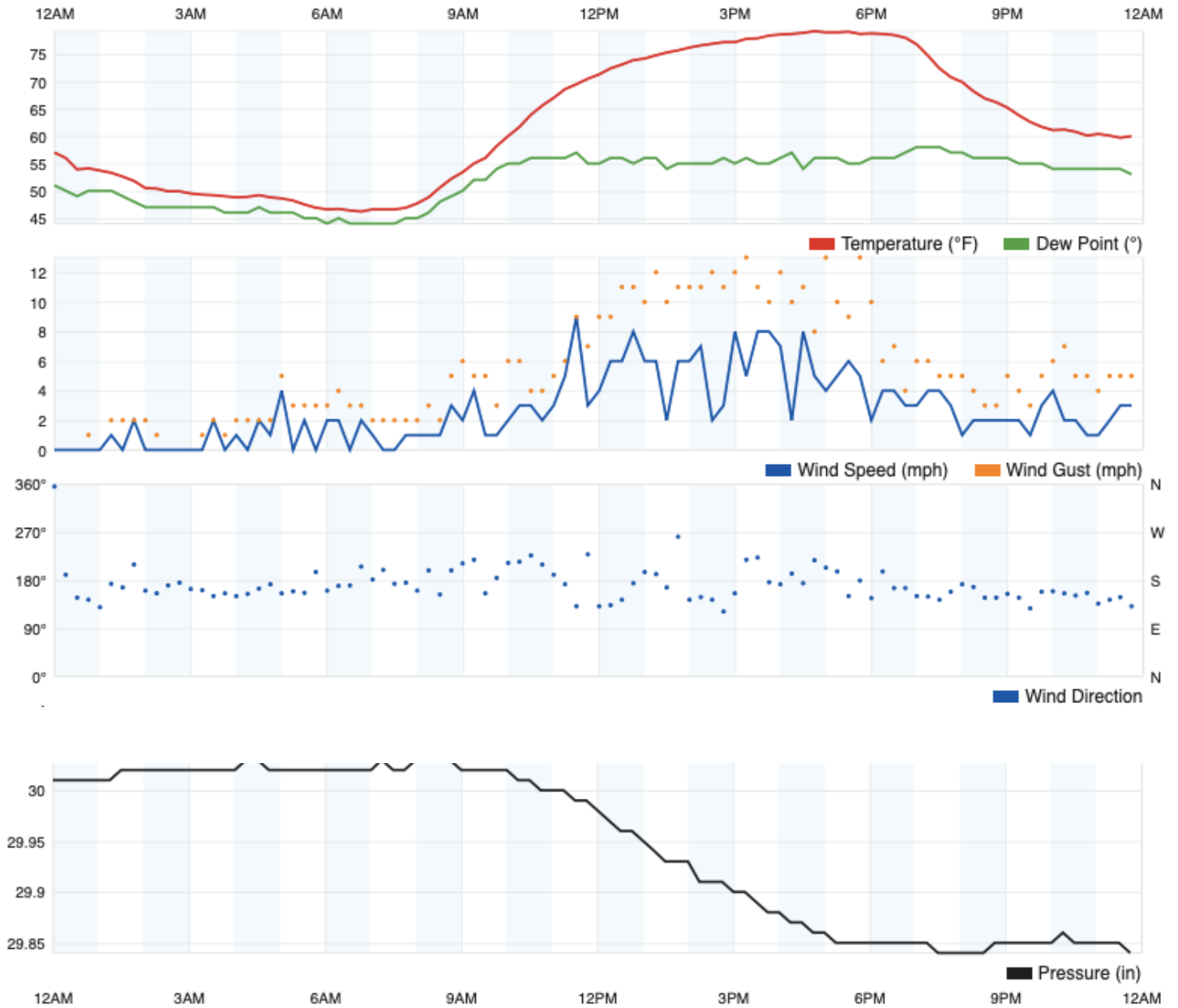
1. Declare 1994 Chevy Van w/ Lift surplus and for sale by sealed bid.
2. Discussion on Doney Field Improvement Committee.
3. Approve resignation of Melissa Ulmer.
4. Approve hiring Joann Donley, Bus Driver – PM Columbia Route.
5. Approve hiring Diane Kurtz as Senior Class Advisor at 1% of base.
6. Approve hiring Jennifer Gilchrist, MS/HS Special Education Paraprofessional, at \$12.10/hour.
7. Approve auxiliary staff assignment changes.
8. Approve lane changes.
  - a. Jordan Kjellsen from BS to BS+15 (+\$900)
9. Executive Session pursuant SDCL1-25-2(1) personnel.

#### ADJOURN

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 89 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 60 °F

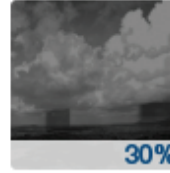
Saturday



Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy  
then Mostly  
Sunny

High: 78 °F

Saturday  
Night



Chance  
Showers


Low: 49 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 73 °F

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

*Today, warm. Highs in the mid 80s to the mid 90s.*

*Tonight, mostly cloudy. Lows in the 50s and low 60s. Becoming breezy.*

*Saturday, seasonal temps in the 70s to low 80s. Breezy northeast winds.*

Updated: 9/10/2021 4:51 AM Central

Warm and dry conditions can be expected today, with high temperatures reaching the 80s and 90s. A storm system will cross the area tonight, bringing cooler temperatures on Saturday.



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## Today in Weather History

September 10, 1961: In Webster between 1 and 2 am, a large farm implement was destroyed by a lightning-caused fire. Many farm implements, three cars, two trucks, as well as merchandise, were lost. Nearby buildings suffered damage from fire. The torrential rains helped reduce the spread of the fire.

September 10, 1975: Large hail up to the size of 2 inches in diameter damaged many acres of corn, flax, and millet fields during the evening. The area between Volga and Brookings received the most severe damage.

September 10, 1988: Lightning started fires in Todd County southwest of Mission that burned nearly 14,000 acres of grassland and 4000 acres of timber. The damages were more than 60,000 dollars.

1811: South Carolina was hit by a hurricane. The main highlight associated with the hurricane was a tornado that damaged downtown Charleston.

1919 - A hurricane struck the Florida Keys drowning more than 500 persons. (David Ludlum)

1960: The center of Hurricane Donna passed over the middle of the Florida Keys between 2, and 3 am on this day. Donna was a Category 5 hurricane over the Atlantic and a Category 4 at landfall. This storm caused the deaths of over 100 in Puerto Rico, 50 in the United States, and 63 in a jet crash. The plane crash occurred on August 29th as a French airliner was attempting to land at Dakar, Senegal during a "blinding rainstorm." The storm was likely a tropical disturbance at the time of the crash.

1961: On September 10th, the Television Infrared Observation Satellite observed an area of thunderstorms west-southwest of the Cape Verde Islands, suggesting a possible tropical cyclone. This storm is the first large tropical cyclone to be discovered on satellite imagery and would eventually become Hurricane Esther.

1987 - A late afternoon thunderstorm roared through Austin TX producing wind gusts to 81 mph, and 2.17 inches of rain in just sixty minutes. The high winds toppled six National Guard helicopters at the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport, and damaged or destroyed numerous other aircraft. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Cool air sweeping into the north central U.S. brought snow to some of the higher elevations of Montana. The town of Kings Hill, southeast of Great Falls, was blanketed with six inches of snow. Tropical Storm Gilbert strengthened to a hurricane over the eastern Caribbean. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Light snow fell in Montana overnight, with three inches reported at Fairfield. Billings MT reported a record low of 33 degrees. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the northeastern U.S., with record highs of 86 degrees at Caribou ME and 90 degrees at Burlington VT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: Tropical Storm Frances made landfall near Matagorda Bay, TX, causing the worst coastal flooding and beach erosion since Hurricane Carla in 1961. The storm's heavy rains ended a drought in East Texas but caused severe river flooding in parts of Texas and Louisiana. The highest rainfall total noted was 21.10 inches at Terrytown in southeast Louisiana. A major disaster declaration was issued for Cameron, Jefferson, Lafourche, and Terrebonne parishes in Louisiana.

2017: Hurricane Irma crossed the Florida Keys as a Category 4 storm.

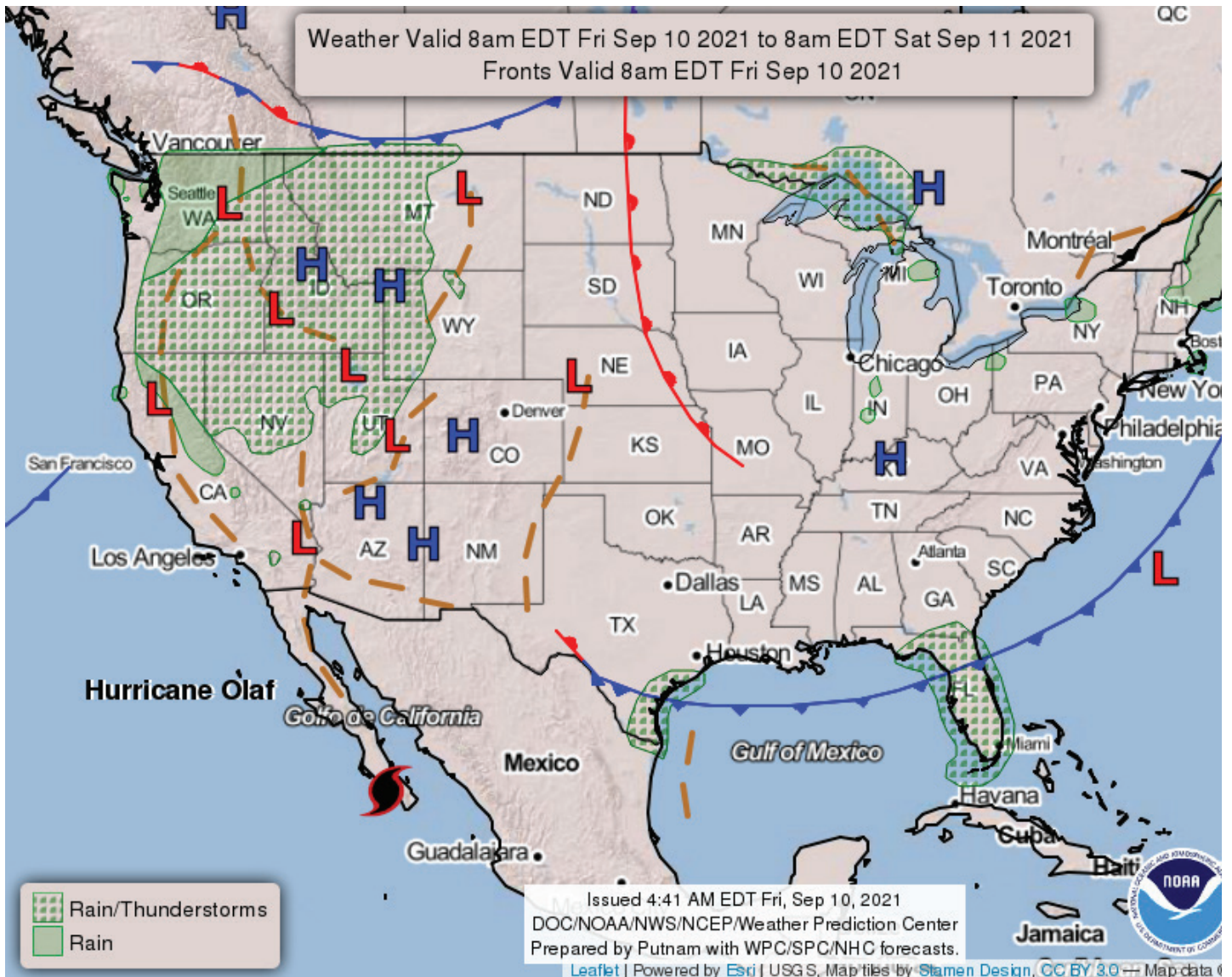
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 79 °F at 4:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 46 °F at 6:34 AM**  
**Wind: 14 mph at 1:17 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 107° in 1931**  
**Record Low: 27° in 1898**  
**Average High: 77°F**  
**Average Low: 49°F**  
**Average Precip in Sept.: 0.68**  
**Precip to date in Sept.: 1.77**  
**Average Precip to date: 17.02**  
**Precip Year to Date: 14.91**  
**Sunset Tonight: 7:54:24 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:05:12 AM**



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## HOPE WHEN WE NEED IT

There is a big difference between power and influence. Power comes from a position we have in a group or organization. We gain influence by what we know or are able to do. In our relationship with God, He has all the power, and He uses it to shape us into the plan He has for us. But we can go to Him in prayer and ask Him to grant us His power to overcome some sin or problem in our life and bring His hope, help, healing, and wholeness to us or our loved ones when we are sick or broken.

Our Psalmist reminds us of this important fact. When we feel alone or abandoned, depressed or have doubts about God's care or concern for us, he reminds us to look to God for help: "Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death."

Unfortunately, we do not know what was going on in the life of this writer. He may have been facing a life-threatening illness, grieving over the loss of a loved one, or perhaps facing financial disaster. He reminds us that "it" made no difference. Whatever problem he was facing or whatever disaster may have been on the horizon or whatever sickness may have stricken him, no one could have made a difference in his life but God.

"Unless the Lord...," he wrote. Not "unless I find someone" or "a friend helps me find" the right physician or the right attorney or the right banker. No. He realized his limitations and knew that it was beyond his power or ability to influence or change the situation. But he knew from experience that only God's hand could rescue him.

Prayer: What a blessed reality it is, Lord, to know that You have the power to solve any problem we have. But first, we must go to You for help. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. Psalm 94:17

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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

## Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Avon def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-20, 25-20, 21-25, 25-15

Bison def. Dupree, 21-25, 25-16, 25-19, 25-13

Brandon Valley def. Yankton, 25-12, 25-15, 25-16

Bridgewater-Emery def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-14, 25-8, 25-14

Burke def. St. Mary's, Neb., 25-21, 25-21, 24-26, 16-25, 15-11

Castlewood def. Lake Preston, 25-10, 25-22, 25-13

Colman-Egan def. Hamlin, 25-17, 25-22, 25-23

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Canistota, 25-7, 25-22, 25-11

Dell Rapids def. Tea Area, 25-16, 24-26, 25-19, 19-25, 15-12

Edgemont def. Guernsey-Sunrise, Wyo., 21-25, 24-26, 25-10, 25-9, 15-9

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Canton, 25-13, 15-25, 19-25, 25-14, 15-11

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-22, 24-26, 25-15, 25-10

Ethan def. Menno, 25-19, 25-15, 25-15

Faulkton def. Potter County, 26-24, 26-12, 25-23

Florence/Henry def. Langford, 25-18, 25-11, 25-19

Freeman def. Gayville-Volin, 29-27, 25-22, 25-17

Great Plains Lutheran def. Wilmot, 25-16, 25-11, 25-14

Groton Area def. Sisseton, 26-24, 25-17, 25-16

Harrisburg def. Mitchell, 26-24, 25-12, 25-21

Highmore-Harrold def. Iroquois, 25-18, 22-25, 25-13, 25-11

Hulett, Wyo. def. Harding County, 17-25, 25-23, 25-20, 25-11

Ipswich def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-11, 25-4, 25-14

Madison def. Lennox, 22-25, 25-22, 25-23, 25-13

Milbank def. Clark/Willow Lake, 25-16, 25-21, 25-20

Mobridge-Pollock def. Leola/Frederick, 25-18, 25-11, 25-11

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Hanson, 25-23, 25-19, 25-9

North Central Co-Op def. McLaughlin, 25-22, 25-11, 25-20

Philip def. Stanley County, 25-21, 25-20, 25-13

Platte-Geddes def. Bon Homme, 25-19, 25-21, 25-14

Rapid City Christian def. Faith, 25-14, 25-16, 25-16

Redfield def. Deuel, 24-26, 25-20, 25-19, 27-25

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Mitchell Christian, 25-5, 25-7, 25-9

Scotland def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-17, 25-15, 26-24

Sioux Falls Christian def. West Central, 25-2, 25-8, 25-14

Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 26-24, 21-25, 25-18, 19-25, 15-11

Vermillion def. Tri-Valley, 16-25, 25-16, 18-25, 25-16, 15-10

Wagner def. Gregory, 25-20, 25-19, 25-17

Warner def. Northwestern, 25-13, 25-13, 25-19

Waubay/Summit def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-21, 25-8, 25-5

Webster def. Britton-Hecla, 25-16, 25-21, 25-18

Big East Conference Tournament=

First Round=

Chester def. Beresford, 25-13, 25-16, 25-19

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Garretson def. Flandreau, 25-17, 25-12, 25-17

Second Round=

Beresford def. Sioux Valley, 25-16, 18-25, 25-19

Chester def. Baltic, 23-25, 25-20, 27-29, 25-16, 15-7

Semifinal=

Garretson def. McCook Central/Montrose, 20-25, 25-13, 27-25, 16-25, 15-13

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

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

## Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP FOOTBALL=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 26, Standing Rock, N.D. 14

Lyman 50, White River 0

New Underwood 56, Harding County 6

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

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

## Reno City Council backs ban on wildlife killing contests

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The Reno City Council is the latest to join the push to outlaw wildlife killing contests in Nevada.

The council approved a resolution on a 6-1 vote this week urging an end to the practice. Mayor Hillary Schieve called the contests that often target coyotes "heinous."

The Clark County Commission in Las Vegas urged an immediate ban earlier this year.

The state wildlife commission is scheduled to consider the matter at its Sept. 24 meeting.

Councilwoman Bonnie Weber was the lone vote against the Reno resolution on Wednesday, saying that it should not be the city's place to take a stance on the issue. Her ward stretching north of Reno into more rural areas includes Lemmon Valley, where a bar has sponsored past annual coyote hunts among the most prominent in northern Nevada.

The resolution the council approved honors the late Norm Harry, a member of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe who protested the competitions. His daughter Autumn, whose family grew up hunting, explained why she continued in her father's footsteps and spoke out against the coyote contests.

"It's really inhumane to see the treatment of these animals," Harry said. "The way that I grew up, I was always taught to be respectful towards all animals and if you're going to hunt, you use the animal whole and utilize every piece."

Hunters in the coyote contests use dogs, scopes and rifles to kill the most animals, sometimes for prizes. Unlike predators such as gray wolves or prey species such as elk, coyotes have no species protections and can be killed without licenses.

Some states like Utah and South Dakota offer bounties for coyotes to control their population. Coyote killing contests have been banned in at least eight states since 2014, including Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico, which in the past rotated hosting the World Championship Coyote Calling Contest with Nevada.

KRNV-TV reported most of the public comment at the city council meeting backed the resolution and urged the Nevada Department of Wildlife to ban the contests.

Fanua Tomlinson, a representative for Project Coyote, a nonprofit that advocates to end the competitions, said there's no evidence the contests forward the goals of wildlife conservation.

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"There is not one state department that recognizes wildlife killing contests as a viable scientific management tool. Not even NDOW," she said. "They're just not ethical hunting ... It's wanton waste. Nobody uses these dead carcasses."

State wildlife commissioners acknowledged last month they were losing hope they could find a resolution to the matter that would appease people on both sides after surveying attendees at a meeting earlier this year.

The survey asked participants to rank priorities including "social perception of hunting," "wanton waste" and "tradition/heritage," and floated ideas like public notices, bag limits or licenses.

"I was optimistic that we could get different constituencies in to help us really dissect this and learn where there may be some common ground," Chairwoman Tiffany East said at a commission meeting last month. "But after today, I'm being honest, I don't know that we're any further along than I had hoped."

## Redistricting committees tackle city legislative boundaries

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers redrawing the state's political boundaries debated how to define the state's two largest urban areas Thursday, moving forward with a map of the area around Rapid City but holding off on a proposal for Sioux Falls.

The state's population has shifted toward cities over the last decade, and the most contentious political lines are likely to be in the cities. Heavily urban districts and tribal regions are some of the only places where Democrats have been able to find any political success in recent years.

As the Republican-dominated redistricting committees race to meet a November deadline to come up with a proposal for legislative districts based on new census data, they are carving out maps around the legislative districts of Sioux Falls and Rapid City to analyze the regions in greater detail.

While the senate committee chair, Republican Sen. Mary Duvall, downplayed the determination of the outer bounds of Rapid City and Sioux Falls legislative districts as a "housekeeping decision" on Thursday, it sets the foundation for drawing the legislative districts in those areas.

Currently, several legislative districts in Sioux Falls span from city neighborhoods and strip malls into expanses of farmland. Republican lawmakers who hail from several of those districts spoke in support of the current arrangement, but public commenters said it glops rural and urban voters together.

"The rural population has its own priorities," said Amy Scott-Stoltz, the president of the League of Women Voters of South Dakota. "The urban population has its own legislative priorities and deserves its own representation."

The irregular, winding shapes of several of those districts prompted Brian Birch, who spoke at Thursday's committee meeting, to malign them as "gerrymandered," referring to the centuries-old practice of drawing districts designed to pack opponents' voters into one place, or scatter them across districts to minimize their voting power.

The committees settled on three proposals for the Sioux Falls legislative boundaries and decided to gather more public input before settling on one.

However, lawmakers finalized a map around Rapid City legislative districts that stretches from Pactola Lake, a mountainous hiking area, in the west to the city of Box Elder in the east.

Kellen Returns From Scout, who was representing the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association, urged the lawmakers to recognize that the Native American population has grown in the northern part of Rapid City in recent years and to draw a district that allows them to have a voice in elections.

"We could substantially influence the outcome of an election in Rapid City," he said. "We expect to be able to elect representatives there who make decisions that are responsive to our concerns."

## Mankato professor named Minnesota's 1st Native poet laureate

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — A Dakota scholar, author and artist has been named Minnesota's poet laureate, the first time the honor has been bestowed upon a Native American, the governor's office announced

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Thursday.

Minnesota State University, Mankato English professor Gwen Nell Westerman is a citizen of her father's people, the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate in the Dakotas. Her mother's people are from the Flint District of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma.

Westerman has written about Dakota history and language. She has won two Minnesota Book Awards for her work about Dakota people called "Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota." Her poetry collection, "Follow the Blackbirds," was written in English and Dakota. Her poems and essays have been published in journals and anthologies across the country.

Westerman is also a fiber artist. She has works in the permanent collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, the Great Plains Art Museum, the University Art Galleries at the University of South Dakota and the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota.

Westerman's appointment is chance to "reflect on our shared history" and "imagine the future together," said Minnesota Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, a member of the White Earth Nation of Ojibwe.

"Native people are still here. We have always been here – before Minnesota was Minnesota. And we will continue to be here, long into Minnesota's future," Flanagan said.

## Sullivans Acquires Woodstock Chimes

SIOUX FALLS, S.D., Sept. 9, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Sullivans has acquired Woodstock Percussion, Inc., which will function as a subsidiary under Sullivan, Inc. After five decades of leadership in the industry, Woodstock Chimes founder Garry Kvistad has chosen Sullivans to lead his company into its next generation.

The GRAMMY award-winning musician and his wife, Diane, started the business in New York's picturesque Hudson Valley in 1979. Their commitment to precision-tuning and great-sounding wind chimes quickly attracted a large and loyal customer base. As they began to plan for the succession of Woodstock Chimes, the Kvistads searched for a well-established company with a market-leading position and a culture of product and customer service excellence. That search eventually led them to home décor industry leader Sullivans.

"Our legacy with Woodstock Chimes is rooted in musical quality and craftsmanship. The product is very, very important to all of us and Sullivans honors and respects what we have created. We found the perfect partner, as Sullivans is highly respected in the industry and they have the marketing expertise and reach to help take Woodstock Chimes to even greater heights," says Kvistad who will continue to be an ambassador for the company.

Sullivans was established by the Sullivan family in Sioux Falls, SD, in 1968. Today Sullivans designs and offers on-trend home décor for every style, season and occasion to more than 15,000 retail stores and countless consumers across the country.

"Sullivans' growth strategy led us to search for opportunities to extend our leadership position in indoor home décor to outdoor and garden decor. The alignment of our companies' cultures, award-winning product line, unwavering commitment to customer service and a talented, dedicated team at Woodstock Chimes makes this a very appealing addition to the Sullivans' portfolio," says Sullivans CEO Tom Russo.

Sullivans' Director of Marketing shares Tom Russo's enthusiasm. "We're excited to combine our leadership in home décor with Woodstock's excellence in sound quality. We plan to drive a décor-forward approach that has not historically been seen in the wind chime space, creating even more beautiful and serene spaces in holistic wellness and outdoor environments," adds Tawni Buhler.

Current Woodstock Chimes President, Stacey Bowers, will continue to lead operations as the Kvistads step away. "For decades we've focused on our core offerings and the musical elements of our chimes, but you look at a company like Sullivans that is truly very innovative and I can't help but get excited about the potential for growth and product development. Knowing that they have great product designers and a dedicated product development team, we think it will be a terrific partnership. I think there is a lot we can do to expand our product categories beyond wind chimes and suncatchers which is exciting," says Bowers.

In addition to the signature wind chimes, Woodstock Chimes also produces Swarovski® crystal suncatchers, bells, gongs, and musical instruments.



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"The businesses that carry Sullivans products are always looking for unique gift offerings. The Woodstock Chimes lines provide tremendous growth potential in areas like wedding gifts and memorials, and will strengthen our offerings in floristry, garden centers, hardware stores and more," says Sullivans Vice President of Sales Lisa Juul.

Enjoy the sounds of Woodstock Chimes wind chimes - the best, musically-tuned chimes in the market here. There you can also learn more about the product lines offered by both Woodstock Chimes and Sullivans.

The entire Woodstock Chimes product line can be found on their website, [www.chimes.com](http://www.chimes.com) and their wholesale site, [www.WoodstockChimes.com](http://www.WoodstockChimes.com).

As of September 1st, the acquisition was completed, finalizing the transition of the Woodstock brand to the Sullivans offering. Aramar Capital Group, LLC acted as exclusive financial advisor to Woodstock Chimes in the transaction.

About Sullivans Sullivans is a leader in the home décor and gift industry offering quality, versatile home décor for every style, season and occasion to retailers and consumers nationwide. Sullivans aims to create emotional connections with customers around the world through inspiring product design, award-winning customer service and focused consumer trend marketing and research. Headquartered in South Dakota, Sullivans also has showrooms in Atlanta, Dallas, Las Vegas and Sioux Falls; and a highly interactive virtual market to offer buyers a free, convenient way to browse and purchase products online.

For more information on Sullivans or to view their wide range of products, visit [sullivangift.com](http://sullivangift.com) or their new consumer website [SullivansHomeDecor.com](http://SullivansHomeDecor.com). In addition to its Sullivans brand, Sullivans, Inc. also operates and distributes Woodstock Chimes, The Darren Gygi Home Collection, Vance Kitira Candles, Candle Impressions and Mirage Flameless LED Candles. Combined they bring nearly 150 years of industry product and design experience and the ability to adapt to consumers' regularly changing needs.

About Woodstock Chimes Woodstock Chimes offers a unique variety of high quality, affordable musical gifts from around the world that inspire, entertain and bring pleasure to people of all ages. We design and sell the world-famous Woodstock Chimes and distribute a line of award-winning musical instruments and toys called the Woodstock Music Collection. Founder and professional musician Garry Kvistad's background in music explains the strong commitment to fine tuning and great sound—which is what makes our products appealing to everyone and unique to the gift industry. The entire collection can be found at [www.chimes.com](http://www.chimes.com).

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View original content: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/sullivans-acquires-woodstock-chimes-301372819.html>

SOURCE Sullivans

## South Dakota House leader renews call for AG impeachment

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers are being asked to call a special session to consider impeaching Attorney General Jason Ravensborg for his conduct in a car crash last year that killed a pedestrian.

In a joint statement released Thursday, the House Speaker, House Republican leader and House Democratic leader laid out a process to evaluate impeaching the Republican attorney general, but it would require two-thirds support from both the House and Senate to move forward.

House Republican leader Rep. Kent Peterson said he is proposing a special session in November. If that call receives the necessary support, House Speaker Spencer Gosch would then appoint a committee to investigate the conduct of the attorney general, whose term in office runs through 2022.

"The process will be fair, thorough, and transparent," Gosch said in a statement.

Gov. Kristi Noem, who has called for Ravensborg's resignation, last week delivered a hard drive containing the crash investigation to Gosch. The governor's office also released a letter from Secretary of Public Safety Craig Price saying he believed that Ravensborg should have faced manslaughter charges.

But Gosch said the House would not be retrying "criminal matters."

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The attorney general pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors last month, while a third misdemeanor was dropped by prosecutors. He avoided jail time but was sentenced to fines totaling over \$4,500 for making an illegal lane change and using a cellphone while driving. Investigators said his car veered onto the shoulder of the rural highway where the man was walking late on Sept. 12 last year and that Ravensborg had been on his cellphone about a minute before the crash.

Peterson, along with House Democratic leader Rep. Jamie Smith, supported a move to impeach Ravensborg in February, but that quickly stalled while Ravensborg's trial played out. They argued at the time that Ravensborg, the state's top law enforcement officer, should be removed from office for "his crimes or misdemeanors in office causing the death" of 55-year-old Joseph Boever.

A spokesman for Ravensborg did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The attorney general has repeatedly insisted he will not resign.

## Farmers restore native grasslands as groundwater disappears

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MULESHOE, Texas (AP) — Tim Black's cell phone dings, signaling the time to reverse sprinklers spitting water across a pie-shaped section of grass that will provide pasture for his cattle.

It's important not to waste a drop. His family's future depends on it.

For decades, the Texas Panhandle was green with cotton, corn and wheat. Wells drew a thousand gallons (3,785 liters) a minute from the seemingly bottomless Ogallala aquifer, allowing farmers to thrive despite frequent dry spells and summer heat.

But now farmers face a difficult reckoning. Groundwater that sustained livelihoods for generations is disappearing, which has created another problem across the southern plains: When there isn't enough rain or groundwater to germinate crops, soil can blow away — just as it did during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

"We wasted the hell out of the water," says Black, recalling how farmers irrigated when he was a kid — as if it would last forever. Water flooded furrows or sprayed in high arcs before farmers adopted more efficient center-pivot systems that gave the Southwest its polka-dot landscape.

His grandfather could reach water with a post-hole digger. Now, Black is lucky to draw 50 gallons (189 liters) a minute from high-pressure wells, some almost 400 feet (122 meters) deep. He buys bottled water for his family because the well water is salty.

### ENDANGERED AQUIFERS

The problem isn't unique to the Ogallala. Aquifers from California's Central Valley farm country to India and China are being depleted. But the 174,000-square-mile (450,658-square-kilometer) Ogallala — one of the world's largest — is vital to farmers and ranchers in parts of eight plains states from South Dakota southward.

The region produces almost one-third of U.S. commodity crops and livestock protein, which affects other agricultural industries, small businesses, land values and community tax bases, says Amy Kremen, project manager at the U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded Ogallala Water Coordinated Agriculture Project that supports water management.

But because water doesn't recharge easily in most areas, if it runs out, it could be gone for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Though groundwater in Texas can recharge to a degree, by percolating through playa lakes, many have been plowed over and no longer function.

And in Texas, along with parts of New Mexico and Oklahoma, water is disappearing more rapidly than elsewhere in the aquifer, also called the High Plains. Less-frequent rain linked to climate change means groundwater often is the only option for farmers, forcing tough choices.

Some are growing crops that require less water or investing in more efficient irrigation systems. Others, like Black, also are replacing cash crops with livestock and pastureland.

And more are returning land to its literal roots — by planting native grasses that green with the slightest rain and grow dense roots that hold soil in place.

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"There's a reason Mother Nature selected those plants to be in those areas," says Nick Bamert, whose father started a Muleshoe-based seed company specializing in native grasses 70 years ago. "The natives ... will persist because they've seen the coldest winters and the hottest dry summers."

Black, who once grew mostly corn, plants such grass on corners of his fields, as pasture for his growing herd of cattle and as a cover crop between rows of wheat and annual grass.

The transition to cattle, he hopes, will allow his oldest son, Tyler, to stay on the land Black's grandparents began plowing 100 years ago. His younger son, Trent, "could see the writing on the wall" and is a data analyst near Dallas.

"You want your kids to come back, but damn, there's better ways to make a living than what we're doing," says Black, maneuvering his pickup through a pasture. "It's just too hard here with no water."

## LOSING FARMLAND

Dry grass crackles underfoot as Jude Smith reaches an overlook at Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, established during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl to preserve native prairie and three spring-fed lakes.

It's mid-May and everything looks dead because there's been almost no rain for a year. The lakes — where the Ogallala should bubble up and tens of thousands of migrating Sandhill cranes gather in good years — are dry, too, save for muddy streaks darkening the lakebed. The water disappeared as nearby farmers struggled to pump enough groundwater to grow cotton.

Rain might not raise the water table much, says Smith, a biologist who manages the refuge. But the native prairie comes alive with even a trickle.

While nonnative grass dies during droughts, native grass goes dormant and the roots — up to 15 feet (5 meters) deep — hold soil.

Rain came this summer — about 16 inches (41 centimeters) so far — often in torrents. The refuge's lakes refilled from runoff and springs started running again, Smith says. Meanwhile, the native grasslands "look like Ireland."

The welcome rain hasn't allayed long-term worries about groundwater and droughts, says Black, the Muleshoe landowner. It came too late to help germinate spring crops, and farmers continued to irrigate.

The Texas Panhandle almost certainly will continue to be locked into extended periods of drought that have persisted across the Southwest for 20 years, says meteorologist Brad Rippey with the USDA.

"People that have been farming out there for a couple decades are concerned," he says, adding that drought could return this fall.

Already it billows off plowed fields during dry spells, including along the Texas-New Mexico border, where rippling piles of it — some 10-15 feet (3-5 meters) high — can clog fields, ditches and roadways. It blows off rooftops like snow, says Smith, who this spring found big mounds formed in his yard overnight.

Farmers have called him to ask if the wildlife refuge could buy their land, which it's not authorized to do.

"Everybody knows that ... the water's going away," he says, driving past abandoned farmhouses, tree stands that mark long-gone homesteads and rusted irrigation equipment. "Farmers do the best they can with what they've got, but I don't know how many more years we can do this."

There is reason for concern, experts say.

More than half the currently irrigated land in portions of western Texas, eastern New Mexico and the Oklahoma Panhandle could be lost by the end of the century — with 80% of those losses by 2060, according to a study published last year.

But areas throughout the aquifer also are vulnerable. The central part could lose up to 40% of irrigated area by 2100, with more than half the losses in the next 40 years.

Those losses might be slowed as farmers adapt to lower water levels, researchers say. But the projections underscore the need for planning and incentives in vulnerable areas.

## NEW DUST BOWL ZONE

The USDA has identified a "Dust Bowl Zone" that covers parts of Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas vulnerable to severe wind erosion and where grasslands conservation is a priority.

Already, reestablishing native vegetation in the sandy soil over the Ogallala has proven difficult where

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irrigation ceased on former Kansas farmland. The same is true on land outside the Ogallala previously irrigated by rivers, including in Colorado's Arkansas River Valley, where agricultural land dried out before native grasses could be established.

With less rainfall, farmers likely will need to use some remaining groundwater to reestablish native grasses to avoid Dust Bowl conditions, says study co-author Meagan Schipanski, an associate professor of soil and crop sciences at Colorado State University.

"In an ideal world, there would be some forethought and incentives available" to help farmers make the transition "before there's not enough water there," Schipanski says.

Chris Grotegrut already has planted 75% of his family's 11,000 acres (4,452 hectares) in native grasses; he uses it to graze cattle and sheep and plants wheat directly into native grass pastures.

The rest of the land, about an hour southwest of Amarillo, eventually will be planted in native grasses, too, says Grotegrut, who's seen water levels rise — though not enough to return to full irrigation of his land.

Most farmers aren't transitioning fast enough as the water table drops "from the Panhandle damn near to the Oklahoma line," he says. "Maybe they're using the latest and greatest of equipment and technology in the field, but (that) will not totally offset the change that's coming to them,"

## HELP FOR FARMERS

Many farmers will need incentives and help to transition to grasslands.

The federal crop insurance and conservation programs often work at cross purposes: Farmers sometimes plant crops even if they're likely to fail, because they're covered by insurance. And cultivating land often is more profitable than taking government payments to preserve or restore grasslands.

From 2016 through mid-2021, fewer than 328,000 acres (132,737 hectares) were enrolled in the USDA's Grasslands Conservation Reserve Program in Dust Bowl Zone counties, according to USDA data. Enrollment for 2021 ended last month, but the USDA has not released the most recent totals.

Although grasslands also can be enrolled in other programs, there was a big push this summer to enroll more in the CRP grasslands program, which allows grazing and was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, says Zach Ducheneaux, head of the USDA's Farm Service Agency.

In Texas, fewer than 32,000 acres (12,950 hectares) were enrolled in Dust Bowl counties over the past five years, and 60% of the Dust Bowl counties had no land enrolled.

So the agency sharply increased payments this summer, to a minimum \$15 per acre — higher in priority counties — after they were reduced by the Trump administration, Ducheneaux says.

In Bailey County, where Black lives and no land was enrolled in the grasslands program, payments went from \$4 to \$20 per acre.

But Black, who took a couple hundred acres (81 hectares) of native grasslands out of a federal conservation program last year to provide pasture for his cattle, says the higher payments won't convince him to enroll. "I can make more money without it" and won't be bound by any government restrictions, he says.

Bamert, from the seed company, says some farmers are planting native grasses on their own, rather than through government programs.

But the transition to grasslands and conservation also is hindered by an agricultural banking system that makes it difficult to obtain loans for anything other than conventional farming and equipment, as well as the need to pay off that equipment.

"If you give a producer a choice and flexibility, they're going to engage in soil health practices," says USDA's Ducheneaux, who is advocating for change. "They're not going to continue to stay stuck in that commodity cycle."

Among farmers, ranchers and even municipalities, "there seems to be a real connecting of the dots ... about water and soil stewardship," and it's driving cross-state conversations about solutions, says Kremen, from the Ogallala Water Coordinated Agriculture Project.

But farmers need programs that allow them to earn a living while they make the transition to grasslands over perhaps 15 years, she says.

"There's a hunger for action that wasn't there even five years ago," because of the severity of the water loss, Kremen says. "What's at stake is the vitality of communities that depend on this water and towns

drying up and blowing away.”

Follow Tammy Webber on Twitter: @twebber02

Read more of AP’s climate coverage at <http://www.apnews.com/Climate>

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **Feds, North Dakota to negotiate pipeline policing costs**

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Federal and state lawyers will meet in North Dakota next week to negotiate a settlement for money that the state claims it spent on policing protests against the Dakota Access oil pipeline.

North Dakota filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2019, seeking to recover more than \$38 million in damages from the monthslong pipeline protests almost five years ago.

State Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem and other state lawyers will meet with attorneys from the Corps and Justice Department at the federal courthouse in Bismarck on Sept. 16. U.S. Magistrate Judge Alice Senechal will preside over the negotiations, which are closed to the public.

“We will know on the 16th if they are serious in settling,” Stenehjem said.

It’s the first sit-down meeting with state and federal lawyers to work out a settlement, Stenehjem said. Federal judges handling the case have “strongly suggested” the negotiations, he said.

If no settlement can be reached, a trial is set for May 1, 2023.

Thousands of pipeline opponents gathered in southern North Dakota in 2016 and early 2017, camping on federal land and often clashing with police. Hundreds were arrested over six months.

Stenehjem has long argued that the Corps allowed and sometimes encouraged protesters to illegally camp without a federal permit. The Corps has said protesters weren’t evicted due to free speech reasons.

The Army Corps of Engineers had argued that it has “limited authority to enforce its rules and regulations” on land it manages.

The \$3.8 billion pipeline has been moving oil from the Dakotas through Iowa to Illinois since 2017 but remains mired in litigation.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe opposed the pipeline built by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners over fears it would harm cultural sites and the tribe’s Missouri River water supply — claims rejected by the company and the state.

One year ago, a federal judge issued a ruling allowing North Dakota to proceed in its effort to recoup money the state spent on policing protests against the pipeline.

The Department of the Army then asked the Department of Justice to enter into negotiations with the state for the protest costs “to avoid protracted and costly litigation, particularly in light of the harm that occurred in this case,” according to a letter obtained by The Associated Press.

Stenehjem said negotiations have stalled since then.

Then-President Donald Trump in 2018 denied a state-requested disaster declaration to cover the state’s costs. The Justice Department later gave the state a \$10 million grant for policing-related bills. The pipeline developer gave the state \$15 million to help with the costs that were funded from loans from the state-owned Bank of North Dakota.

Stenehjem has said that money doesn’t get the Corps off the hook for the state’s \$38 million total cost of policing.

## **Missouri man sought in 4 slayings found dead in South Dakota**

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ELK POINT, S.D. (AP) — A man accused of killing four people in Missouri, including a mother and her 11-year-old daughter, has been found dead in South Dakota, according to sheriff's officials.

J.T. McLean, 45, was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound early Thursday in a car parked at a motel near Dakota Dunes, Union County Sheriff Dan Limoges said. The U.S. Marshals Service says McLean had family in the area.

Deputies said investigators tracked McLean to the motel using the OnStar navigation system on a vehicle he stole from one of the victims.

McLean was charged with two counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of his girlfriend, Allison Abitz, 43, and her 11-year-old daughter, Jozee. Their bodies were found Aug. 22 at their home south of Columbia in Boone County.

Evidence indicated Abitz was strangled and her daughter was drowned in a bathtub, according to authorities in Boone County.

Miller County Sheriff Louie Gregoire said McLean was also suspected of killing 74-year-old Daniel Stephan and 64-year-old Pamela Stephan in Kaiser.

Deputies were sent to check on the couple's welfare Wednesday and found their bodies.

## **Pedestrian killed in highway crash from Alaska**

HARRISBURG, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Highway Patrol has identified the pedestrian who was killed along a highway near Harrisburg over the weekend.

According to the patrol, 24-year-old Bret Butcher, of Anchorage, Alaska, died Saturday night when he was struck by an SUV on Highway 115. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The SUV driver was not injured. The patrol says no charges are expected against the driver.

## **Lebanon forms new government, 1st in over a year**

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanese factions formed a new government on Friday, breaking a 13-month deadlock that saw the country slide deeper into financial chaos and poverty.

Lebanon has been without a fully empowered government since the catastrophic Aug. 4, 2020 explosion at Beirut port, which forced the resignation of then Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government. Rival political groups had been locked in disagreement over the make-up of a new government since then, hastening the country's economic meltdown.

The new Cabinet of 24 ministers headed by billionaire businessman Najib Mikati was announced by the president's office, and later by the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Mahmoud Makkieh. Ministers were handpicked by the same politicians who have ruled the country for the past decades and whose corruption and mismanagement many blame for the country's current crisis.

The new government announced Friday faces a mammoth task that few believe can be surmounted, including undertaking critically needed reforms. Among its first jobs will be overseeing a financial audit of the Central Bank, and resuming negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a rescue package to stem the country's collapse. The new Cabinet is also expected to oversee general elections scheduled for next year.

Mikati, a businessman tycoon from the northern city of Tripoli and one of the richest men in Lebanon, was tasked with forming a new government in July. He is widely considered to be part of the same political class that brought the country to bankruptcy. He served as prime minister in 2005 and from 2011 to 2013.

It was not immediately clear what last-minute compromise resulted in the breakthrough Friday. The announcement of a new government comes after recent U.S. and French pressure to form a Cabinet, after Lebanon's economic unraveling reached a critical point with crippling shortages in fuel and medicine threatening to shut down hospitals, bakeries and the country's internet.

The currency has lost 90 percent of its value to the dollar since October 2019, driving hyperinflation and plunging more than half the population in poverty.

Mikati became a favorite for the post after he was endorsed by most of Lebanon's political parties, in-

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cluding the powerful Iran-backed militant Hezbollah group and the other major Shiite party, Amal, led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri. Mikati was also endorsed by former Sunni prime ministers including former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who abandoned efforts to form a government earlier this year after failing to agree with President Michel Aoun on the Cabinet's makeup.

International calls have mounted for Lebanese leaders to form a new government, but the international community has refused to help Lebanon financially before wide reforms are implemented to fight widespread corruption and mismanagement.

## **Analysis: Biden's war on virus becomes war on unvaccinated**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — They're a source of frustration. A risk to their fellow citizens. A threat to the nation's economic recovery.

President Joe Biden is trying to concentrate the anger of the nation's inoculated majority against the stubborn 25% of eligible Americans who remain unvaccinated against COVID-19.

Nearly 8 months after declaring "war" on the coronavirus as he took office, Biden announced far-reaching new federal requirements Thursday that could force millions to get shots. In doing so, he embraced those who haven't rolled up their sleeves as a new foe amid a devastating surge in cases that is straining the nation's health system and constricting its economy.

"We've been patient, but our patience is wearing thin," Biden said from the State Dining Room. "And your refusal has cost all of us."

The unvaccinated minority, he added, "can cause a lot of damage, and they are."

The speech marked the starkest public airing of Biden's own frustrations over the direction of the COVID-19 pandemic and a striking departure from his familiar talk of national healing. In essence, he scolded a minority of the country for holding back the majority. And he had especially harsh words for public officials who have stoked or exploited vaccine fears for political gain.

"A distinct minority of Americans, supported by a distinct minority of elected officials, are keeping us from turning the corner," Biden said. "These pandemic politics are making people sick, causing unvaccinated people to die."

Biden's forceful posture reflected a calculus that far more Americans will support his action than will be drawn to the visceral anger that some on the right directed at his announcement — evidenced, in his view, by the fact that a supermajority of the country has already been vaccinated.

It was also driven by self-interest, as Biden tries to defend his own job performance on the issue most important to voters.

The resurgence of the virus has sent his poll numbers to the lowest point yet of his presidency. An AP-NORC poll conducted in August found that 54% of Americans approved of Biden's stewardship of the pandemic, down from 66% the month before, driven by a drop in support among Republicans and political independents.

The drop in approval has coincided with a summer backslide in the fight against the virus. Biden blamed the spiking cases for August's slower-than-expected job growth and warned the nation could continue to face economic penalty if it doesn't get the virus under control.

It was just two months ago that Biden prematurely declared the nation's "independence" from the pandemic. Now, despite more than 75% of Americans having at least one dose of vaccine, the U.S. is seeing about 300% more new COVID-19 infections a day, about two-and-a-half times more hospitalizations, and nearly twice the number of deaths compared to the same time last year.

"We're in the tough stretch, and it could last for a while," Biden warned.

Still, he predicted, with most Americans vaccinated, the human toll won't exceed last winter's carnage.

Speaking directly to the fears of Americans who have received a dose, Biden said, "For the vast majority of you who've gotten vaccinated, I understand your anger at those who haven't gotten vaccinated. I understand the anxiety about getting a breakthrough case." He pledged that his administration was

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moving forward swiftly to secure booster doses of the mRNA vaccines as soon as this month to provide more durable protection against the more transmissible delta variant.

In announcing that the Transportation Security Administration will double fines on travelers who refuse to wear masks on planes, Biden was unforgiving, "If you break the rules, be prepared to pay."

White House officials maintain Biden isn't trying to stoke anger in a vacuum but said he hopes that reflecting the irritation of the nation's majority — combined with new vaccine requirements — will serve as a productive step toward putting the virus back in check. Defeating the virus, they argue, now requires defeating the reluctance of the 80 million people who have yet to get a shot.

It's a head-spinning change in tone from a White House that spent much of the year steadfastly avoiding any appearance of criticism of those who were waiting to be vaccinated.

Federal, state and local governments invested billions on education, advertising and outreach about the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. They gave away cash, cars, tuition, sports tickets and beer. Even as some Republicans criticized Biden's handling of the vaccination rollout, the White House for months held its tongue.

But as more Americans rolled up their sleeves, officials said, Biden grew more comfortable first taking on those his administration blames for spreading misinformation about the shots and now imposing the vaccination requirements his administration had previously avoided.

Even as his posture has stiffened, Biden has thus far held off on even more coercive requirements, such as requiring shots for domestic air travel.

Still, the reaction from Biden's opponents was swift.

Mississippi Republican Gov. Tate Reeves tweeted: "The vaccine itself is life-saving, but this unconstitutional move is terrifying. This is still America, and we still believe in freedom from tyrants."

Ronna McDaniel, the chairwoman of the Republican National Committee, called it an "unconstitutional, un-American federal decree." South Carolina Republican Gov. Henry McMaster responded without nuance: "Rest assured, we will fight them to the gates of hell to protect the liberty and livelihood of every South Carolinian."

The White House is gearing up for legal challenges and believes that even if some of the mandates are tossed out, millions of Americans will get a shot because of the new requirements — saving lives and preventing the spread of the virus.

Biden has found unusual allies in the business community, which is eager for a return to normalcy after 18 months of pandemic disruption. They may not like Biden's proposed tax increases, but they appear to have bought into his argument that the nation can ill afford to allow the unvaccinated to "undo" progress on strengthening the economy.

"Business Roundtable welcomes the Biden Administration's continued vigilance in the fight against COVID," said Joshua Bolten, the group's president and CEO.

"We look forward to working with the administration to ensure any vaccine requirements are structured in a way that does not negatively impact the operations of manufacturers that have been leading through the pandemic to keep Americans safe," said National Association of Manufacturers President and CEO Jay Timmons.

Despite the vehement reaction of Biden's opponents, the president can take comfort in certain data points.

An Axios/Ipsos poll conducted July 30-Aug. 2 found that 58% of Americans, including 79% of those who are vaccinated, said they blame the unvaccinated for rising COVID-19 cases and the spread of new variants in the U.S. The poll allowed multiple responses, but the share saying the unvaccinated were to blame was higher than those blaming other causes, including people from other countries traveling to the U.S. (32%) and Donald Trump (28%).

White House aides point to an even clearer metric — the more than 208 million Americans who have already gotten a shot.

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Emily Swanson, Associated Press director of polling in Washington, contributed to this report.



EDITOR'S NOTE — Zeke Miller has covered the White House since 2012.

## Post-9/11, Europe's weak spots make it a jihadist target

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — In the 20 years since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, a mixture of homegrown extremists, geography and weaknesses in counterterrorism strategies have combined to turn Europe into a prime target for jihadists bent on hurting the West.

Europe watched open-mouthed as the 9/11 attacks unfolded across the Atlantic. Life on the Old Continent, too, would be transformed by those events, with hundreds of people killed and thousands injured at the hands of Islamic extremists in the following years.

Since 9/11, Europe has witnessed many more jihadist attacks on its soil than the United States. Why? A variety of reasons, analysts say.

Over the past decade or so, "what we've seen in Western Europe is an unprecedented jihadist mobilization," says Fernando Reinares, director of the program on Violent Radicalization and Global Terrorism at the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid.

Evidence of that, he says, is not only the bombings, vehicle rammings and stabbings that have tormented Western Europe in recent times, but also the tens of thousands of European Muslims who felt compelled to join insurgent terrorist groups during recent wars in Syria and Iraq.

Western Europe has struggled to integrate significant Muslim populations into mainstream society. Many Muslims are disadvantaged and feel disenfranchised, and some harbor grievances against the countries where they live.

"There is a sense of alienation and a sense of frustration (that) jihadists are often latching onto," says Peter Neumann, a professor of Security Studies at King's College London.

"That's not the same in the United States," says Neumann, the principal adviser on security policy for candidate Armin Laschet in the current German election campaign. "American Muslims are much less hostile toward their own country than European Muslims, and they're much better integrated."

And in recent years, amid the growing influence of the Islamic State group propaganda and promises, the soldiers returning from Syria and Iraq have felt inspired to target their home countries in Europe, sowing alarm among European governments.

As it turned out, 2001 was a watershed year for jihadist terror activity in the United States and Europe. At the turn of the century, the United States "was the big prize for al-Qaida, not Europe," says Olivier Guitta, managing director of GlobalStrat, an international security and risk consultancy firm in London.

But once the United States toughened its security after 9/11, he says, al-Qaida went hunting for easier targets. In Europe, it took an opportunistic approach, recruiting networks of supporters in Muslim communities to stage spectacular attacks.

That strategy brought some grim milestones for Europe. In 2004, train bombings in Madrid killed 193 people and injured more than 2,000. A year later London bombings, sometimes referred to as 7/7, featuring coordinated suicide bomb attacks targeting the public transport system that killed 52 people and injured more than 700.

Later, the Islamic State group became the chief menace. It claimed responsibility for a string of notorious attacks, including one in Paris in 2015 that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds of others — France's deadliest violence since World War II. In 2016, nail bombs went off in Brussels, killing 32 people as well as the three perpetrators and injuring more than 300 people. Later the same year, a truck drove into crowds in Nice, France, killing 86 people and injuring 434.

Some critics have blamed that violence on weak links in the continent's defense. Intelligence capabilities differ widely among the European Union's 27 member countries.

Daniel Benjamin, formerly the senior counterterrorism adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and now president of the American Academy in Berlin, says that problem is hard to avoid in such a patchwork

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of countries of varying size and wealth.

"Inevitably," he says, "there are going to be stronger and weaker law enforcement and intelligence communities among such a varied a set of countries as you find in Europe, especially ones with such varied resources."

Even so, Guitta of GlobalStrat says that counterterrorism cooperation among EU countries has improved considerably since the 2015 Paris attacks.

That may prove precious in coming times. Reinares, of Spain's Elcano Royal Institute, predicts that al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, rivalling for prominence, "will compete to stage large attacks in the West." And Europe must be on guard because it is an easier target than North America or Australia, he told an online conference Thursday.

The continent, Reinares says, lies closer to the jihadist bases and is more permeable, whether internally through the absence of border checks across 26 countries or through migrant routes used by tens of thousands of people each year.

## White House competition council seeks lower consumer prices

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

A new White House council on U.S. economic conditions plans to hold its first meeting Friday, with participants to highlight at least 18 actions taken to help consumers and potentially lower prices.

The council, an outgrowth of a July executive order by President Joe Biden, is aimed at refocusing the U.S. economy around the interests of consumers, workers and entrepreneurs. Details about the meeting were provided by two administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the gathering.

The goal is to foster a more dynamic economy in which competition among companies leads to more transparency, greater choice and potential savings for customers.

Biden's order has been criticized by some Republican lawmakers and business groups for its emphasis on regulation. The decision to convene the council in the Roosevelt Room carries a degree of symbolism: The room is named for the trust-busting President Theodore Roosevelt, a Republican.

Among the matters to be discussed by the council are a new report about airlines that wrongfully denied refunds to customers whose flights were changed or canceled; an inquiry into excessive fees charged by ocean carriers; and a nearly 20-fold increase in fines for hospitals that fail to disclose their prices to the public.

Other issues include corporate mergers, landlords who prevent renters from shopping around for internet services and removing requirements by companies such as John Deere that stop independent repair shops from fixing broken tractors and other machines.

The council is led by Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council. He was expected to ask each agency to come back to the council's next meeting with at least one new initiative.

Deese previewed efforts to improve transparency in the food sector at a Wednesday briefing with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

The Biden administration is providing \$500 million to help foster new competitors in food processing in order to counter the four companies that control the majority of the market for beef, poultry, and pork. It has also creating market reports for transparency in cattle markets, new rules on "Product of the USA" labeling and greater enforcement of the century-old Packers and Stockyards Act.

Other members of the council include the heads of eight Cabinet departments: Agriculture, Defense, Justice, Treasury, Transportation, Health and Human Services, Commerce and Labor. It also includes the leaders of seven independent agencies, including the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission, as well as the Securities and Exchange Commission and Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

## Hong Kong Tiananmen vigil leaders charged with subversion

HONG KONG (AP) — Three leaders of the group that organized an annual Tiananmen candlelight vigil

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were being held in custody Friday after they were charged with subversion under Hong Kong's national security law, as authorities intensify a crackdown on dissent in the city.

The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China's chairman Lee Cheuk-yan, as well as vice-chairs Albert Ho and Chow Hang-tung were charged with inciting subversion of state power under the national security law. The alliance itself was also charged with subversion.

Chow was denied bail, days after she was arrested for failing to comply with a police request for information. Lee and Ho are currently serving jail sentences for their roles in unauthorized assemblies in 2019. The next court hearing for the case is scheduled for Oct. 28.

For the past 30 years, the alliance organized the candlelight vigil that saw tens of thousands of people mass in the city's Victoria Park to commemorate China's bloody military crackdown against pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

It was the only large-scale public commemoration of the crackdown on Chinese soil, featuring crowds of people lighting candles and singing songs to support democracy.

Police have banned the vigils for the past two years citing the coronavirus pandemic, although critics believe the ban is part of the crackdown on dissent Beijing and Hong Kong's leaders have waged following months of anti-government protests in the territory in 2019.

Authorities have now characterized the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China as a foreign agent, and sought details about the group's operations and finances in connection with its alleged activities and links with democracy groups overseas.

Chow and four other leading members of the alliance had refused to cooperate with the police request for information, and were arrested this week for failing to comply.

The five pleaded not guilty Friday, and were denied bail. The next court hearing will take place Oct. 21.

Police on Thursday confiscated computers, documents and promotional materials from the closed June 4 museum, which was run by the alliance to commemorate the Tiananmen crackdown.

Police said 2.2 million Hong Kong dollars (\$280,000) worth of assets belonging to the alliance were also frozen.

On Friday, a Facebook post was posted on Chow's account urging Hong Kongers not to "accept their fate."

"Maybe the other party will crush the 'obstacle' that is us, but resistance is about gathering strength in exchange for some time and space, to allow more 'obstacles' the opportunity to grow," the post said.

"As long as we still have the will to fight, we have not lost."

Over the past year, dozens of pro-democracy activists have been arrested, others have left the city for exile abroad, and the city has amended electoral laws to increase the number of seats for pro-Beijing legislators while reducing those that are directly elected.

The national security law, imposed by Beijing on the city in June last year, criminalizes subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign collusion to interfere in the city's affairs.

Critics say the national security law, which has been used to arrest more than 100 people, rolls back freedoms promised to the former British colony when it was handed over to China in 1997. Hong Kong had been promised it could maintain freedoms not found on the mainland for 50 years, such as freedom of speech and assembly.

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This story has been corrected to show that Chow's Facebook post was made on Friday.

## **Pope Francis to visit impoverished Roma quarter in Slovakia**

By KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

KOSICE, Slovakia (AP) — Pope Francis is paying a visit next week to a neighborhood in Slovakia most Slovaks would not even think about going, which until recently even the police would avoid after dark.

Francis will make the visit to the Roma community in the Lunik IX quarter of Slovakia's second largest city of Kosice one of the highlights of his pilgrimage to "the heart of Europe."

Francis will be the first pontiff to meet the most socially excluded minority group in Slovakia. A fitting

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place to go for the "pope of the peripheries," Lunik XI is the biggest of about 600 shabby, segregated settlements where the poorest 20% of the country's 400,000 Roma live.

Most lack basics such as running water or sewage systems, gas or electricity.

"It's a huge honor for us," said Lunik IX mayor Marcel Sana, who has been a local resident since he was 2. "Even if he says just a few words, his presence will be a big boost for all those living here, the socially disadvantaged and poor people who need such support."

For Peter Zatkulak, one of four priests who belong to the Salesians of Don Bosco, a Catholic congregation that moved to Lunik IX in 2008, the pope's arrival is a chance to restart relations between the Roma and the rest of the population.

Roma have long suffered racism and discrimination in Slovakia and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, and continue to face huge hurdles in employment and education.

"The Roma have been segregated from the majority many times in the past and we didn't want to see it," Zatkulak said. "But we needed to integrate them and that's what's happening now. Through a prayer, we'd like to seek reconciliation between the Slovaks and the Roma, and also the Church, because we have harmed each other and that has to end. It's time to say sorry and start all over again."

He said Francis is key in the process.

"We, the people from Kosice, need to remind the world that every big city has a dark side that we don't want to see. And Francis' greatness is that he's turning our attention to it," he said. "Let's be ashamed about our past wrongdoings but let's try to fix them."

Andrea Buckova, the Slovak government envoy for Roma issues, said she hoped Francis' trip will give the area a boost "for the following days and months, and not just a one-time step."

The news about the pope's visit has quickly spread to every corner of Lunik IX, raising expectations of its estimated 6,000 inhabitants.

"I've heard about him, that he tends to visit the poorest, which might be the reason why he decided to come because this is the poorest neighborhood in Slovakia," Monika Gulasova said. The 19-year-high school student leads a choir at Sunday Masses at a church established by the Salesians.

"It means for me he will bring a new light and hope to our neighborhood," she said.

She and several members of her choir, whose singing to the beat of drums creates an unusual sound for a Mass in this Roman Catholic stronghold, will be among those chosen to sing for Francis.

"It's wonderful he's coming. It's (a gift) from the Lord, it comes from the Lord that he'll be at Lunik IX," said Anna Turtakova, 67.

Sana, the first local Roma mayor with a university degree, took charge in 2014. That sparked a host of improvements in the communist-era concrete apartment blocks. Gone are the notorious heaps of garbage, and uninhabitable buildings have been demolished. Streetlights are in place again while dozens of surveillance cameras help ensure safety and order. The local school is well-regarded, and playgrounds have opened for local children.

But from the stage to be built for Francis in front of the Salesians' center, it will be obvious that despite the mayor's effort and recent improvements poverty still rules here.

On the edge of Lunik IX, the most impoverished occupy a slum consisting of improvised shacks spread among trees and bushes.

Jan Horvath, who lives there with his wife and four children, was planning to go to see the Pope with his family but didn't expect much.

"We'll see what it brings to us but nobody is going to help us," the 41-year-old said. "We have to rely on ourselves."

With the warm summer days coming to an end soon, he is worried about keeping warm in the freezing winter months.

One of his neighbours, Dyoniz Horvath, 56, was more positive about the papal trip.

"Hopefully, at least something will change for us. He's after all the second hand of the Lord, or of the Jesus Christ. Who else should we trust than him?"

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Francis arrives in Slovakia after a brief stay in Hungary on Sunday. While in the country until Wednesday, he will also visit the capital, Bratislava, as well as Presov and Sastin.

The last papal visit to Slovakia was made in 2003 by Pope John Paul II.

## Brady throws for 379 yards, 4 TDs, Bucs beat Cowboys 31-29

By FRED GOODALL AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers didn't flinch.

Down one point with 1:24 to go in the kickoff to the NFL season, the defending Super Bowl champions were confident their 44-year-old quarterback would find a way to win again Thursday night.

It's simply what Brady, who threw for 379 yards and four touchdowns in a 31-29 win over the Dallas Cowboys, does.

"There was no doubt that we're going to win the game with him," coach Bruce Arians said. "It's just who's going to make plays."

With seats in a NFL stadium filled to full capacity for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Ryan Succop won it with a 36-yard field goal with 2 seconds remaining. Brady set it up with a last-minute drive directed on the same field where the Bucs became the first team to play and win a Super Bowl in its home stadium seven months ago.

It was the 49th game-winning the three-time NFL MVP has led in the fourth-quarter or overtime during regular season. That's third on the all-time list behind Peyton Manning (54) and Drew Brees (53), who are both retired.

"There's obviously a lot to clean up," Brady said after completing 32 of 50 passes with two interceptions.

The Bucs, hoping to become the first team to repeat as champions since Brady led the 2003 and 2004 New England Patriots to consecutive titles, turned the ball over four times.

"We won," the quarterback said, "but we know it was far from perfect."

For Brady, a seven-time champion, it was the 300th regular-season start in a sparkling 22-year career — a record for a quarterback. The 44-year-old also joined Drew Brees as the only players to throw for 300-plus yards in a game 100 times.

Chris Godwin, Rob Gronkowski and Antonio Brown caught first-half touchdown passes, and the Bucs (1-0) extended their winning streak to nine games dating to last December. Brady's second TD pass of the night to Gronkowski put the defending champs up 28-19. Succop's field goal came after Greg Zuerlein put the Cowboys ahead with a 48-yarder with 1:24 to go.

"As I told our guys, I learned a long time ago we don't learn anything more from losing than you do from almost losing. We've got a lot to learn," Bucs coach Bruce Arians said. "Obviously not pleased with the start of the game, Loved the finish. Our guys are winners, They're going to finish."

Dak Prescott threw for 403 yards and three TDs for Dallas in his first game since suffering a severe injury ankle that ended his 2020 season after just five games. The sixth-year pro didn't play in the preseason after straining his right shoulder early in training camp, and limitations on his throwing weren't lifted until about two weeks before the opener.

"I thought Dak played well," Cowboys coach Mike McCarthy said. "I really like the way our team played, the preparation coming into it. ... We had tough looks, particularly some of the things they did defensively. I thought our guys did a good job adjusting, did a good job distributing the ball on the perimeter."

The Cowboys have never beaten Brady, who improved to 6-0 against them, with five of the victories coming during his historic 20-year run with the New England Patriots.

But Prescott, with help from a revamped Dallas defense that forced a fumble and intercepted a pass that glanced off Leonard Fournette's hands to set up a touchdown and field goal, pushed the defending champs to the limit before a mostly mask-less crowd of 65,566.

Ultimately, though, Brady made the Cowboys pay for kicking woes that contributed to Dallas only scoring 16 points in the opening half. In addition to missing a 31-yard field goal, Zuerlein had an extra point clank off the left upright in the second quarter.

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Seven of the Cowboys' first eight possessions either started or ended in Tampa Bay territory, yet Prescott still faced a nine-point deficit before Dallas pulled within 28-26 on Amari Cooper's 21-yard scoring reception with less than a minute remaining in the third quarter.

Cooper finished with 13 catches for 139 yards, including a 5-yard TD catch in the second quarter. CeeDee Lamb had a 22-yard scoring reception for the Cowboys, who finished 6-10 with Prescott missing the final 11 games of last season.

Brady was intercepted twice, once on a desperation pass at the end of the first half. Ronald Jones and Chris Godwin also lost fumbles, with the latter's mistake preventing the Bucs from putting away the game in the closing minutes.

Brown had five receptions for 121 yards, including a 43-yard TD before halftime. Godwin had nine catches for 105 yards, but fumbled at the Cowboys 1 to stop a potential clinching drive before Prescott drove Dallas to Zuerlein's go-ahead field goal.

## FANS ON HAND

Due to attendance restrictions imposed because of the pandemic, the largest crowd for any NFL game last season was 24,845 for the Super Bowl played at Raymond James Stadium in February.

Fans arrived early Thursday night for a brief pregame ceremony celebrating Tampa Bay's second championship — first in nearly two decades. They roared when co-owner Bryan Glazer stepped to the microphone and reminded them that the Bucs are the only franchise that's claimed a crown on its home turf.

"There was one thing missing," Glazer said. "All of you."

Earlier, the teams stood on their respective goal lines for the playing of Alicia Keys' version of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the national Black anthem.

## INJURIES

Cowboys: Played without RG Zack Martin, who tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this week.

Buccaneers: CB Sean Murphy-Bunting left with an elbow injury suffered trying to stop Lamb from scoring in the first quarter. The secondary was already playing without starting S Jordan Whitehead (hamstring).

## UP NEXT

Cowboys: at Los Angeles Chargers on Sept. 19.

Buccaneers: Remain home against NFC South rival Atlanta on Sept. 19

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

## Palestinian teen describes brutal attack by Israeli settlers

By JACK JEFFERY and IMAD ISSEID Associated Press

SILAT AL-DHAHR, West Bank (AP) — More than two weeks after the attack, Tareq Zubeidi still spends most of his time in bed, too scared to leave home even if the wounds on his feet allowed him to walk normally.

The 15-year-old is haunted by the memory of what he describes as a brutal attack by Israeli settlers, who he says beat him with clubs, tied him to a tree and burned the soles of his feet.

"When I sit by myself I start thinking about all of them, and then I start sweating and my heart rate starts to increase," Zubeidi said.

While there were no witnesses to corroborate Zubeidi's account, the Aug. 17 incident took place in an area that sees frequent violence between hard-line Jewish settlers and local Palestinians.

B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights group that monitors settler violence, said it was not able to verify all the details of Tareq's account but that "it is clear that the boy was physically and mentally abused."

The group documented at least seven settler attacks on Palestinians and their property in the area around Zubeidi's village in the last two years. It says that when the Israeli military intervenes, it often sides with the settlers. The Palestinians claim the West Bank, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war, as the main part of a future independent state.

The Israeli military says troops were dispatched to Homesh, a nearby settlement that was forcefully evacuated in 2005, after reports of Palestinians throwing rocks. When the soldiers arrived they found set-

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tlers chasing a Palestinian teenager who was later returned to his family, the military said in a statement.

Settler groups with links to Homesh declined to comment or said they were unaware of the incident.

Zubeidi said he and some friends took some snacks up to the hilltop where the settlement once stood and found a place to relax. At around 9:30 a.m. they heard people shouting in Hebrew and looked up to see a small group of settlers coming toward them.

He denied he or his friends threw rocks, saying "I don't know anything about that."

Instead, he said, they fearfully ran down the hill toward their village of Silat al-Dhahr. Zubeidi said an earlier knee injury slowed him down, allowing another group of settlers in a car to catch up with him and knock him over as he descended the gravelly street that connects Homesh with the main road.

"Four settlers got out of the car and there were two others who were traveling by foot," he said. "One of them had a gun."

The settlers beat him with wooden clubs before blindfolding him and tying him to the hood of the car, he said. They drove for about five minutes, back up the hill, before the car came to a sudden halt, sending him tumbling to the ground. "Then they started to hit me, spit on me and swear at me," he said.

He said the settlers tied him to a tree and whipped him with a belt. Then they took him down, cut his legs with a knife and burned the soles of his feet with a car cigarette lighter. In the end, they hit him over the head with a club, knocking him unconscious, he said.

When he came to, he was in an army jeep with an Israeli soldier who he says immediately began threatening him. "He told me that if anything happens in the settlement we will arrest you, and if there is any stone-throwing, you will take full responsibility," Zubeidi said.

His father, Abdul Razek Zubeidi, said his son was taken to a hospital that afternoon and spent the night there. A medical report said he had bruising on his shoulder and cuts on his feet. Photos taken shortly after the incident appear to show two dark wounds on the soles of his feet.

Abdul Razek Zubeidi said he immediately reported the incident to the Palestinian police, who said they contacted the Israeli army. Abdul Razek said he has heard nothing from Israeli authorities. The family says it has not filed a complaint to Israeli police, fearing it would be a waste of time.

Palestinians in the West Bank live under Israeli military law, giving them few avenues for legal recourse, while the nearly 500,000 Jewish settlers in the territory have full Israeli citizenship.

Homesh was one of four settlements in the West Bank that were evacuated as part of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005. But settlers from another nearby settlement still go the hilltop to study and pray, according to Israeli media.

In addition to the more than 130 settlements authorized by Israel, there are dozens of unauthorized settlement outposts. Israel is reluctant to evacuate them because doing so risks igniting clashes between settlers and soldiers.

The Palestinians and most of the international community view all settlements as a violation of international law, as well as an obstacle to peace, because they threaten the territorial contiguity and viability of any future Palestinian state.

The U.N. envoy to the Middle East, Tor Wennesland, raised Tareq's case at a meeting of the Security Council last month, describing the incident as a "heinous act" and calling on Israeli authorities to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Tareq's mother, Hanan Zubeidi, fears it could have been much worse.

"Imagine, my son tells me that he was beaten up by them," she said. "I did not expect to see him alive."

## Post-Ida recovery in New Orleans: Beer and beignets are back

By STACEY PLAISANCE and JAY REEVES Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Supply trucks are once again delivering beer on Bourbon Street and the landmark Cafe Du Monde is serving beignets, fried pastries covered with white sugar, even though there aren't many tourists or locals around to partake of either.

With almost all the power back on in New Orleans nearly two weeks after Hurricane Ida struck, the city

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is showing signs of making a comeback from the Category 4 storm, which is blamed for more than two dozen deaths in the state. More businesses are opening daily, gasoline is easier to find and many roads are lined with huge debris piles from cleanup work.

Thousands are still struggling without electricity and water outside the metro area, and officials say oppressive heat is contributing to both health problems and the misery. It could still be weeks before power is restored in some areas, and many residents who evacuated haven't returned.

"It is not lost on anybody here at the state level and certainly not on our local partners just how many people continue to suffer," Gov. John Bel Edwards said Thursday. "While things are getting better and we can be thankful for that ... this is going to be a very long-term recovery."

Around New Orleans, residents are seeing signs that life is getting back to normal after Ida. Philip Palumbo, who lives in the French Quarter and works at a bar that remains shuttered, said the citywide curfew being lifted should help restaurants and bars struggling to reopen get more customers.

"There's not a lot around yet, but they'll be back," he said.

Power crews reached a "major milestone" in the New Orleans area by restoring electricity to the vast majority of customers, Phillip May, chief executive of the state's largest power provider, Entergy Louisiana, said in a conference call with reporters Thursday. About 201,000 of Entergy's 205,000 customers, or 98% percent, now have power, the company said, and those that don't had more severe damage.

But more than 270,000 homes and businesses remained without power, according to the Louisiana Public Service Commission. In Jefferson Parish, 46,000 homes and businesses are still without electricity, May said, but progress is being made in hard-hit places including LaPlace, a town in St. John the Baptist Parish where service has been restored to a hospital.

Other parts of the state's health care network, which was slammed with COVID-19 cases even before Ida, are struggling. Executives of Ochsner Health System, Louisiana's largest care provider, estimate it will take about four weeks to get two of its damaged hospitals fully operational.

Across the system, "heat illness is a big concern," said Dr. Robert Hart, Ochsner's chief medical officer. Hart said emergency rooms have also seen several patients stricken by carbon monoxide, a common problem after big storms as people use gas-powered generators for electricity, sometimes indoors.

"Many of those have not had to be admitted, thank goodness. But it certainly is a good reason to keep reminding people that they've got to be careful with their generators," he said. "We had one family say they put the generator in their house because they were afraid it would get stolen."

In one bright spot, Ochsner said the number of people being treating for COVID-19 is down significantly. Ochsner had 486 COVID-19 patients Thursday, down from 1,074 a month ago, chief executive Warner Thomas said.

"We've continued to see a decline pretty much every day over the past couple of weeks," Thomas said.

Around New Orleans, progress is showing up both in lights that are back on and piles of debris that line multiple streets. As residents return home they are stacking up wet mattresses, fractured lumber, tree limbs and other storm refuse along curbs. In the French Quarter, a big pile sat beneath balconies with decorative ironwork.

In the New Orleans suburb of Gretna, Tiffany Scott and her family had a long pile of debris along the sidewalk outside her home. Scott said it has slowly gotten easier to get gas, ice and other supplies that were scarce immediately after the hurricane.

"We've been through this before, so most of us are used to knowing that we have to go drive and sit in a line," she said. "But it's a lot easier to find the things you need."

Still, there is evidence the city has a ways to go before it is fully recovered.

Sid Padil, visiting from San Francisco to check on gas stations and convenience stores he owns in Louisiana and Mississippi, said he was surprised by the devastation and swaths of blue-tarped roofs visible upon landing in New Orleans on Monday. He had a hard time finding a place to eat, and when he did, it was mostly locals and what appeared to be recovery workers, said Padil.

"I don't see many tourists right now," he said.



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Reeves reported from Birmingham, Alabama. Associated Press reporters Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Jeff Martin in Marietta, Georgia, contributed to this report.

## As flights resume, plight of Afghan allies tests Biden's vow

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER, JULIE WATSON, BERNARD CONDON and PADMANANDA RAMA Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Evacuation flights have resumed for Westerners, but thousands of at-risk Afghans who had helped the United States are still stranded in their homeland with the U.S. Embassy shuttered, all American diplomats and troops gone and the Taliban now in charge.

With the United States and Taliban both insisting on travel documents that may no longer be possible to get in Afghanistan, the plight of those Afghans is testing President Joe Biden's promises not to leave America's allies behind.

An evacuation flight out of Kabul on Thursday, run by the Gulf state of Qatar and the first of its kind since U.S.-led military evacuations ended Aug. 30, focused on U.S. passport and green card holders and other foreigners.

For the U.S. lawmakers, veterans groups and other Americans who've been scrambling to get former U.S. military interpreters and other at-risk Afghans on charter flights out, the relaunch of evacuation flights did little to soothe fears that the U.S. might abandon countless Afghan allies.

A particular worry are those whose U.S. special immigrant visas — meant for Afghans who helped Americans during the 20-year war — still were in the works when the Taliban took Kabul in a lightning offensive on Aug. 15. The U.S. abandoned its embassy building that same weekend.

"For all intents and purposes, these people's chances of escaping the Taliban ended the day we left them behind," said Afghanistan war veteran Matt Zeller, founder of No One Left Behind. It's among dozens of grassroots U.S. groups working to get out Afghan translators and others who supported Americans.

An estimated 200 foreigners, including Americans, left Afghanistan on the commercial flight out of Kabul on Thursday with the cooperation of the Taliban. Ten U.S. citizens and 11 green-card holders made Thursday's flight, State Department spokesman Ned Price said. Americans organizing charter evacuation flights said they knew of more U.S. passport and green-card holders in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif and elsewhere awaiting flights out.

In the U.S., National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said Thursday's flight was the result of "careful and hard diplomacy and engagement" and said the Taliban "have shown flexibility, and they have been businesslike and professional in our dealings with them in this effort."

But many doubt the Taliban will be as accommodating for Afghans who supported the U.S. In Mazar-e-Sharif, a more than weeklong standoff over charter planes at the airport there has left hundreds of people — mostly Afghans, but some with American passports and green cards — stranded, waiting for Taliban permission to leave.

Afghans and their American supporters say the Taliban are blocking all passengers in Mazar-e-Sharif from boarding the waiting charter flights, including those with proper travel papers.

Zeller pointed to the Taliban appointment this week of a hard-line government. It includes Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is on the FBI's most-wanted list with a \$5 million bounty for alleged attacks and kidnappings, as interior minister, a position putting him in charge of granting passports.

The Trump administration all but stopped approval of the Afghan special immigrant visas, or SIVs, in its final months. The Biden administration, too, was criticized for failing to move faster on evacuating Afghans before Kabul fell to the Taliban.

The U.S. had also required some visa-seekers to go outside the country to apply, a requirement that became far more dangerous with the Taliban takeover last month.

"There are all of these major logistical obstacles," said Betsy Fisher of the International Refugee Assistance Project, which provides legal services to SIV applicants. "How will people leave Afghanistan?"

She said with no clear plan in place, the U.S. government could wind up encouraging people to go on

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risky journeys.

In July, after Biden welcomed home the first airlift, he made clear the U.S. would help even those Afghans with pending visa applications get out of Afghanistan "so that they can wait in safety while they finish their visa applications."

Since the military airlifts ended on Aug. 30, however, the Biden administration and Taliban have emphasized that Afghans needed passports and visas. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Thursday the administration was looking at steps like electronic visas.

Hundreds of Afghans who say they are in danger of Taliban reprisals have gathered for more than a week in Mazar-e-Sharif, waiting for permission to board evacuation flights chartered by U.S. supporters.

Among them was an Afghan who worked for 15 years as a U.S. military interpreter. He has been moving from hotel to hotel in Mazar-e-Sharif and running out of money as he, his eight children and his wife waited for the OK from the Taliban to leave.

"I'm frightened I will be left behind," said the man, whose name was withheld by The Associated Press for his safety. "I don't know what the issue is — is it a political issue, or they don't care about us?"

The interpreter's visa was approved weeks before the last U.S. troops left the country, but he could not get it stamped into his passport because the U.S. Embassy shut down.

He said Thursday that he doesn't trust Taliban assurances that they will not take revenge against Afghans who worked for the Americans.

Biden, already criticized for his handling of the evacuation, is being pushed by Democrats and also on both sides by Republicans, with some saying he's not doing enough to help America's former allies and others that he's not doing enough to keep potential threats out of the U.S.

Sen. Lindsey Graham and Rep. Mike Waltz, both Republicans, said in a statement that hundreds of those at-risk Afghans and U.S. residents remain "trapped behind enemy lines." The Biden administration "must provide Congress and the American people ... with a plan to get them safely out of Afghanistan."

The Association of War Time Allies estimates tens of thousands of special immigrant visa applicants remain in Afghanistan.

An American citizen in New York is trying to get two cousins out of the country who applied for SIVs late last year and were still waiting for approval when the U.S. Embassy shut down. She said both cousins worked for a U.S. aid group for a combined eight years and are frightened the Taliban will find them.

"They're scared, they feel abandoned. They put their entire lives at risk, and when the U.S. was exiting, they were told they would get out," said the American, Fahima, whose last name and the name of the aid group are being withheld to protect her cousins. "Where is the helping hand?"

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Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City; Watson from San Diego and Condon from New York.

## Wyoming troop deaths 20 years apart bookend Afghanistan war

By MEAD GRUVER and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — When news came that a 20-year-old Wyoming soldier was one of the last casualties of the two-decade-long U.S. war in Afghanistan, it arrived as a tragic bookend: A 20-year-old soldier from Wyoming was among the first to die in the same war.

Army Ranger Spc. Jonn Edmunds, of Cheyenne, was one of the war's first two casualties when a Black Hawk helicopter on a search-and-rescue mission crashed in Pakistan on Oct. 19, 2001.

Last month, the family of Marine Lance Cpl. Rylee McCollum, of Bondurant just outside Jackson, got word he was among 13 U.S. soldiers killed in a suicide bombing Aug. 26 at the Kabul airport.

Edmunds and McCollum were both killed on their first deployments. In between, almost 2,500 U.S. troops died in the Afghanistan war, most with far less attention than the two Wyoming men got.

As with Edmunds' death in the chaotic aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, McCollum's strikes an especially sad chord as Americans struggle to process what good — if any — has come from their nation's longest war.

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"That was a totally senseless death," Edmunds' father, Donn Edmunds, said of McCollum. "Seeing the other people losing their loved ones, all that does is bring back bad memories for my family."

A 25-year U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam, Edmunds remembers how two officers knocked on his door on the outskirts of Cheyenne before sunrise on Oct. 20, 2001, bringing word of his son's death.

"I looked out the window, I saw them standing there and all I could think was 'Oh my God, I know what they're here for.' I've done notifications so I knew," said Edmunds, who as a military police officer participated in telling relatives of loved ones' deaths. He got choked up and quiet while looking at a display of his son's medals and the folded American flag presented to him and other families of fallen soldiers.

"They came in and gave us the 'Regret to inform you' speech. My wife had been up by then, and I watched her melt into this carpet right here on the floor," Edmunds recalled. "And they asked, 'Is there anything we can do?' and we said, 'No, just let us absorb this, and we have to be able to accept this.'"

Wyoming is the least populated state and one that values tradition: rodeo and county fairs in summer, elk hunting in fall, calving season in spring and military service.

Jon Edmunds and his friends grew up playing with water guns, then laser tag in the family's big yard. Eventually the honors student moved up to paintball, Donn Edmunds recalled.

"We used to have the guys from the Air Force come out here. And they'd knock on the door and say, 'Can Jon come out and play paintball with us?'" he said.

On the opposite side of Cheyenne, F.E. Warren Air Force Base has overseen nuclear missiles in silos beneath the Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska plains since the 1960s. Each July, the city hosts its massive Cheyenne Frontier Days rodeo festival but Cheyenne has always been a military town at heart.

Like Edmunds, McCollum seemed born with soldiering in his blood.

He grew up in the Jackson Hole area, a region of rugged, forested mountains and big-time outdoors culture on the other side of Wyoming from Cheyenne. Even as a toddler, McCollum played with toy rifles, pretending he was a soldier or hunter, relatives said.

As a high school wrestler, he distinguished himself by training intensely. At school, in 2017, he and his father spoke out publicly when a multiple-choice quiz for a reading assignment facetiously offered "shooting at Trump" as an answer.

Jackson, where McCollum graduated from high school, is a wealthy ski and summer tourism enclave near Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks that many in Wyoming view as socioeconomically out of step and politically more moderate than the rest of the state.

Yet the town of 10,000 has shown no less respect for veterans and military service, especially over the past 20 years, said Joseph Burke, commander of the local American Legion post.

"It was around 9/11 that people started to recognize veterans, the sacrifices they and their families really made," Burke said. "We've got kids who go in the service from here all the time."

McCollum's widow, Jiannah Crayton, is due to deliver a baby in a couple of weeks and the family plans a memorial service sometime after. Meanwhile, three online fundraising efforts have brought in over \$900,000 for Crayton and the child's education.

After Jon Edmunds' death, television trucks lined up outside the family's home. Reporters gathered at their daughter's school, Donn Edmunds recalled, and the family lived like "hermits" for a few weeks.

At a memorial service that filled a 4,500-seat gym, Jon Edmunds' commanding officer remembered him as a gritty soldier who still had "that intense look on his face" even after other soldiers looked tired.

Such crowds wouldn't always show up, however, at services for soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq over the next two decades.

"Yeah, people got numb. But the families that were affected never got numb," Edmunds said.

The Edmunds family received about \$24,000 in donations which they gave away to causes including the Wounded Warrior Project, a charity for troops wounded since 2001, Edmunds said.

He has spent the years since his son's death riding his Harley-Davidson with the Patriot Guard Riders, a biker group that helps maintain decorum at military funerals, running unsuccessfully for the Wyoming Legislature and trying to raise interest in establishing a veterans memorial park. Now he's thinking about

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suings the U.S. government over its withdrawal from Afghanistan, which he criticized as poorly organized. "All of these people's sons were great. Every one of them was a traumatic loss for their family. And the thing about it is, what for?" Edmunds said. "We have abandoned their mission."

The work of consoling and counseling grief-stricken relatives, however, was therapeutic both for him and for relatives, said Edmunds, 72, who runs a security business.

A woman once asked at an event held by the Army's Survivor Outreach Services family support group whether losing a loved one ever got easier, Edmunds recalled.

"I said 'Ma'am, it will never get easier. The only thing that will happen to you is time will separate you from the event,'" Edmunds said.

Amy Beth Hanson in Helena, Montana, contributed to this report.

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

## Federal mandate takes vaccine decision off employers' hands

By BARBARA ORTUTAY Associated Press

Larger U.S. businesses now won't have to decide whether to require their employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Doing so is now federal policy.

President Joe Biden announced sweeping new orders Thursday that will require employers with more than 100 workers to mandate immunizations or offer weekly testing. The new rules could affect as many as 100 million Americans, although it's not clear how many of those people are currently unvaccinated.

Large swaths of the private sector have already stepped in to mandate shots for at least some of their employees. But Biden said Thursday that "many of us are frustrated with the nearly 80 million Americans who are not fully vaccinated."

The U.S. is still struggling to curb the surging delta variant of the coronavirus, which is killing thousands each week and jeopardizing the nation's economic recovery.

Per Biden's order, the millions who work as employees of the executive branch and contractors who do business with the federal government won't have the option to get tested instead of taking the vaccine. The order also requires large companies to provide paid time off for vaccination.

The Associated Press reached out to a wide range of companies on Thursday. Many didn't have immediate responses while others noted that they already require vaccinations. Walmart, the nation's largest private employer, was one of the first major companies to mandate vaccines for some of its workers. Walmart said in late July that it was requiring that all workers at its headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, as well as its managers who travel within the U.S.; be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 4.

But the vaccine mandate excluded frontline workers such as cashiers, who according to the company have a lower vaccination rate than management.

CVS Health said in late August it will require certain employees who interact with patients to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 by the end of October. That includes nurses, care managers and pharmacists.

Airlines, meanwhile, have tried to reassure customers about the safety of flying during a pandemic, and have pushed steps such as mandatory masking before they were required by the government.

United Airlines announced last month that it would require employees to be vaccinated. The airline said Wednesday that workers who don't comply will be placed on leave Oct. 2 and will be terminated unless they can demonstrate a medical or religious reason for not getting vaccinated. The airline says more than half its workers who weren't vaccinated have gotten the shots since the company announced the requirement.

Other airlines have encouraged workers to get the shots but haven't required it, although Delta Air Lines plans to hit unvaccinated workers on its health plan with a \$200 monthly surcharge starting in November. Delta's chief health officer said the prospect of that fee has led about 20% of the airline's unvaccinated workers to get shots.

The tech industry has largely been at the forefront of vaccine requirements, making the sector in general a likely supporter of Biden's policy on the issue. In late July, Google became one of the first major

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U.S. employers to decide all its workers needed to be vaccinated before returning to the office. Facebook quickly adopted a similar policy a few hours after Google took its hard stand on vaccines.

Google left it an open question whether the minority of employees who will still be allowed to work remotely will be required to get vaccinated to remain on its payroll. The Mountain View, California, company employs more than 130,000 workers worldwide, with a significant number based in the U.S. The heaviest concentrations are in the San Francisco Bay area and New York.

Apple, which employs both tech workers in its offices and tens of thousands of workers in its retail stores throughout the world, has been encouraging people to get vaccinated without announcing a formal mandate. The Cupertino, California, company didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about Biden's vaccine order.

General Motors stopped short of endorsing Biden's requirements, but said in a statement that it supports vaccines.

"We are strongly encouraging our employees to get vaccinated given the broad availability of safe and highly efficacious vaccines, which data consistently show is the best way to protect yourself and those around you," the automaker said.

Half of American workers are in favor of vaccine requirements at their workplaces, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Such mandates have already been gaining traction following the Food and Drug Administration's full approval of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines from Moderna and Johnson & Johnson are available under emergency authorization, but haven't been formally approved.

About 59% of remote workers said they favor vaccine requirements in their own workplaces, compared with 47% of those who are currently working in person. About one-quarter of workers — in person and remote — said they are opposed.

More than 177 million Americans are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, but confirmed cases of the virus have shot up in recent weeks. They've now reached an average of about 140,000 cases per day. On average, about 1,000 Americans dying from the virus daily, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some businesses and workers are likely to challenge the orders in court, but many more companies will "appreciate having the cover," said Dorit Reiss, a professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law who has studied vaccine mandates for nearly a decade.

"It helps them increase vaccine rates and they can blame the government," she said. "Vaccine mandates work because for most people, even if they have a position against it, it's not strong enough to sacrifice their jobs."

Those who don't work for federal contractors and are afraid of the vaccine can choose weekly testing instead, but Reiss said many people who are simply hesitant are more likely to get immunized.

"The testing is sufficiently burdensome that most of them would prefer just to be vaccinated," she said.

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Associated Press Writers Anne D'Innocenzio, Michael Liedtke, David Koenig, Tom Krisher, Matt O'Brien, Alex Veiga and Zeke Miller contributed to this story.

## Justice Department sues Texas over state's new abortion law

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and PAUL WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Justice Department has sued Texas over a new state law that bans most abortions, arguing that it was enacted "in open defiance of the Constitution."

The lawsuit, filed Thursday in federal court in Texas, asks a federal judge to declare that the law is invalid, "to enjoin its enforcement, and to protect the rights that Texas has violated."

"The act is clearly unconstitutional under long-standing Supreme Court precedent," Attorney General Merrick Garland said at a news conference announcing the suit.

The Justice Department argues the law unlawfully infringes on the constitutional rights of women and violates the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution, which says federal law supersedes state law. Federal

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officials are also concerned other states could enact similar laws that would “deprive their citizens of their constitutional rights,” he said.

“It is settled constitutional law that ‘a State may not prohibit any woman from making the ultimate decision to terminate her pregnancy before viability,’” the lawsuit reads. “But Texas has done just that.”

The Texas law, known as SB8, 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 had been mounting on the Justice Department not only from the White House — President Joe Biden has said the law is “almost un-American” — but also from Democrats in Congress, who wanted Garland to take action. Earlier this week, Garland vowed the Justice Department would step in to enforce a federal law known as 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.

The lawsuit filed on Thursday seeks an immediate injunction to prohibit enforcing the law in Texas. Under the statute, someone could bring a lawsuit — even if they have no connection to the woman getting an abortion — and could be entitled to at least \$10,000 in damages if they prevail in court.

“The statute deputizes all private citizens, without any showing of personal connection or injury, to serve as bounty hunters authorized to recover at least \$10,000 per claim from individuals who facilitate a woman’s exercise of her constitutional rights,” Garland said. “The obvious and expressly acknowledged intention of this statutory scheme is to prevent women from exercising their constitutional rights by thwarting judicial review.”

The attorney general also argued the Texas law could expose some federal employees at different agencies across the government to civil liability for doing their jobs.

The Texas law is the nation’s biggest curb to abortion since the Supreme Court affirmed in the landmark 1973 decision *Roe v. Wade* that women have a constitutional right to an abortion.

Abortion providers have said they will comply, but already some of Texas’ roughly two dozen abortion clinics have temporarily stopped offering abortion services altogether. Clinics in neighboring states, meanwhile, have seen a surge in patients from Texas.

Texas Right to Life, the state’s largest anti-abortion group and a driver of the new law, said Thursday in anticipation of the lawsuit that it was already working with other states to pass similar measures.

“The Biden administration’s ploy represents a desperate attempt to stop the life-saving law by any means necessary,” the group said in a statement.

Rena Eze, a spokesperson for Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, said his office was confident the courts would uphold the law.

“The most precious freedom is life itself. Texas passed a law that ensures that the life of every child with a heartbeat will be spared from the ravages of abortion,” Eze said.

The law provides no exceptions in cases of rape or incest, which Abbott on Tuesday defended by falsely asserting that women still have “at least six weeks” to get an abortion. A woman who has regular periods and is carefully tracking her cycle could know of a positive result no earlier than about four weeks into a pregnancy.

Abbott also said Texas would strive to “eliminate all rapists from the streets.” Recent surveys by the U.S. Department of Justice found that most rapes go unreported to police, including a 2019 survey that found that only about 1 in 3 victims reported they were raped or sexually assaulted.

The Center for Reproductive Rights, which is representing Texas abortion clinics suing over the law, welcomed the Biden administration stepping in.

“It’s a gamechanger that the Department of Justice has joined the legal battle to restore constitutionally protected abortion access in Texas and disarm vigilantes looking to collect their bounties,” said Nancy

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Northup, the group's president.

Brigitte Amiri, deputy director of the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, said in a statement that the lawsuit is a critical first step "to righting this injustice for the people of Texas, and to prevent this catastrophe from playing out in other states that have pledged to follow Texas' lead."

Amiri said in an interview that she expected the lawsuit to move quickly, possibly reaching the Supreme Court within weeks.

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Balsamo reported from New York City.

AP reporter Jessica Gresko contributed to this report.

## Sweeping new vaccine mandates for 100 million Americans

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In his most forceful pandemic actions and words, President Joe Biden ordered sweeping new federal vaccine requirements for as many as 100 million Americans — private-sector employees as well as health care workers and federal contractors — in an all-out effort to curb the surging COVID-19 delta variant.

Speaking at the White House Thursday, Biden sharply criticized the tens of millions of Americans who are not yet vaccinated, despite months of availability and incentives.

"We've been patient. But our patience is wearing thin, and your refusal has cost all of us," he said, all but biting off his words. The unvaccinated minority "can cause a lot of damage, and they are."

Republican leaders — and some union chiefs, too — said Biden was going too far in trying to muscle private companies and workers, a certain sign of legal challenges to come.

Gov. Henry McMaster of South Carolina said in a statement that "Biden and the radical Democrats (have) thumbed their noses at the Constitution," while American Federation of Government Employees National President Everett Kelley insisted that "changes like this should be negotiated with our bargaining units where appropriate."

On the other hand, there were strong words of praise for Biden's efforts to get the nation vaccinated from the American Medical Association, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable — though no direct mention of his mandate for private companies.

The expansive rules mandate that all employers with more than 100 workers require them to be vaccinated or test for the virus weekly, affecting about 80 million Americans. And the roughly 17 million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid also will have to be fully vaccinated.

Biden is also requiring vaccination for employees of the executive branch and contractors who do business with the federal government — with no option to test out. That covers several million more workers.

Biden announced the new requirements in a Thursday afternoon address from the White House as part of a new "action plan" to address the latest rise in coronavirus cases and the stagnating pace of COVID-19 shots.

Just two months ago Biden prematurely declared the nation's "independence" from the virus. Now, despite more than 208 million Americans having at least one dose of the vaccines, the U.S. is seeing about 300% more new COVID-19 infections a day, about two-and-a-half times more hospitalizations, and nearly twice the number of deaths compared to the same time last year. Some 80 million people remain unvaccinated.

"We are in the tough stretch and it could last for a while," Biden said.

After months of using promotions to drive the vaccination rate, Biden is taking a much firmer hand, as he blames people who have not yet received shots for the sharp rise in cases killing more than 1,000 people per day and imperiling a fragile economic rebound.

In addition to the vaccination requirements, Biden moved to double federal fines for airline passengers who refuse to wear masks on flights or to maintain face covering requirements on federal property in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

He announced that the government will work to increase the supply of virus tests, and that the White

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House has secured concessions from retailers including Walmart, Amazon and Kroger to sell at-home testing kits at cost beginning this week.

The administration is also sending additional federal support to assist schools in safely operating, including additional funding for testing. And Biden called for large entertainment venues and arenas to require vaccinations or proof of a negative test for entry.

The requirement for large companies to mandate vaccinations or weekly testing for employees will be enacted through a forthcoming rule from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that carries penalties of \$14,000 per violation, an administration official said.

The rule will require that large companies provide paid time off for vaccination.

Meanwhile, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services will extend a vaccination requirement issued earlier this summer — for nursing home staff — to other healthcare settings including hospitals, home-health agencies and dialysis centers.

Separately, the Department of Health and Human Services will require vaccinations in Head Start Programs, as well as schools run by the Department of Defense and Bureau of Indian Education, affecting about 300,000 employees.

Biden's order for executive branch workers and contractors includes exceptions for workers seeking religious or medical exemptions from vaccination, according to press secretary Jen Psaki. Federal workers who don't comply will be referred to their agencies' human resources departments for counseling and discipline, to include potential termination.

An AP-NORC poll conducted in August found 55% of Americans in favor of requiring government workers to be fully vaccinated, compared with 21% opposed. Similar majorities also backed vaccine mandates for health care workers, teachers working at K-12 schools and workers who interact with the public, as at restaurants and stores.

Biden has encouraged COVID-19 vaccine requirements in settings like schools, workplaces and university campuses. On Thursday, the Los Angeles Board of Education voted to require all students 12 and older to be fully vaccinated in the the nation's second-largest school district.

Walmart, the nation's largest private employer, said in late July it was requiring all workers at its headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, as well as its managers who travel within the U.S., to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 4. But the company had stopped short of requiring shots for its frontline workers.

CVS Health said in late August it would require certain employees who interact with patients to be fully vaccinated by the end of October. That includes nurses, care managers and pharmacists.

In the government, several federal agencies have previously announced vaccine requirements for much of their staffs, particularly those in healthcare roles like the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Pentagon moved last month to require all servicemembers to get vaccinated. Combined, the White House estimates those requirements cover 2.5 million Americans. Thursday's order is expected to affect nearly 2 million more federal workers and potentially millions of contractors.

Biden's measures should help, but what's really needed is a change in mindset for many people, said Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, vice dean at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

"There is an aspect to this now that has to do with our country being so divided," said Sharfstein. "This has become so politicized that people can't see the value of a vaccination that can save their lives. Our own divisions are preventing us from ending a pandemic."

More than 177 million Americans are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, but confirmed cases have shot up in recent weeks to an average of about 140,000 per day with on average about 1,000 deaths, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Most of the spread — and the vast majority of severe illness and death — is occurring among those not yet fully vaccinated. So-called breakthrough infections in vaccinated people occur, but tend to be far less dangerous.

Federal officials are moving ahead with plans to begin administering booster shots of the mRNA vaccines to bolster protection against the more transmissible delta variant. Last month Biden announced plans to



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make them available beginning Sept. 20, but only the Pfizer vaccine will likely have received regulatory approval for a third dose by that time.

Officials are aiming to administer the booster shots about eight months after the second dose of the two-dose vaccines.

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This story corrects the organization of the union official in the 5th paragraph.

Associated Press writers Anne D'Innocenzio, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Hannah Fingerhut contributed.

## **Biden calls Xi as US-China relationship grows more fraught**

By AAMER MADHANI and JOE McDONALD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden spoke with China's Xi Jinping on Thursday amid growing frustration on the American side that high-level engagement between the two leaders' top advisers has been largely unfruitful in the early going of the Biden presidency.

Biden initiated the call with Xi, the second between the two leaders since Biden took office. It comes at a moment when there is no shortage of thorny issues between the two nations, including cybersecurity breaches originating from China, Beijing's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and what the White House has labeled as "coercive and unfair" trade practices by the Chinese.

But Biden's aim with the 90-minute call was less focused on any of those hot-button issues and instead centered on discussing the way ahead for the U.S.-China relationship after it got off to a decidedly rocky start in his tenure.

The White House said in a statement the "two leaders had a broad, strategic discussion in which they discussed areas where our interests converge, and areas where our interests, values, and perspectives diverge."

The White House is hopeful the two sides can work together on issues of mutual concern —including climate change and preventing a nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula — despite growing differences.

Beijing, however, has pushed back against U.S. pressure and increasingly has suggested it could remain broadly uncooperative until Biden dials down criticism on what it deems Chinese internal matters.

Xi in the call appeared to echo some of the complaints, telling Biden that U.S. government policy toward China caused "serious difficulties" in relations, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

"This is not in the basic interests of the two peoples," the Chinese leader said, according to Xinhua.

"Chinese-U.S. confrontation will bring disaster to both countries and the world," Xi added.

Xi said the two sides should cooperate on climate change, epidemic prevention, economic recovery and other issues, Xinhua reported.

Ahead of the call, a senior administration official said the White House has been unsatisfied with early engagements with the Chinese.

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said White House officials were hopeful that Xi hearing directly from Biden could prove beneficial.

The White House official said Biden made clear to Xi that he had no intention of moving away from his administration's policy of pressing China on human rights, trade and other areas where it believes China is acting outside international norms.

High-level engagement in the early going has been most notable for each side blasting the other with recriminations.

Last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned Biden climate envoy John Kerry that deteriorating U.S.-China relations could undermine cooperation on climate change. Wang told Kerry, who was visiting Tianjin for climate talks with his Chinese counterparts, by video link that such cooperation cannot be separated from the broader relationship and called on the U.S. to take steps to improve ties, according to the Foreign Ministry.

In July, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman faced a long list of demands and complaints, including accusations that the U.S. was trying to contain and suppress China's development. Vice Foreign Minister

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Xie Feng urged the U.S. "to change its highly misguided mindset and dangerous policy."

In March, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan had heated exchanges with Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi when they met with top Chinese officials in Anchorage. At that meeting, Yang accused the U.S. of failing to deal with its own human rights problems and took issue with what he said was American hypocrisy.

Administration officials suspect that some of the rhetoric in those high-profile meetings was more about playing to a domestic audience through the press than sending a message to the White House. With that in mind, Biden highlighted the importance of two leaders ability to have private conversations and be clear about their priorities, the administration official said.

Biden from the start of his presidency has sought to put greater focus on China, rallying allies to speak in a more unified voice about Beijing's human rights record, its trade practices and its military's increasingly assertive behavior that has unnerved U.S. allies in the Pacific. He sees Beijing as the most significant economic competitor to the United States and a growing national security concern.

But the president has also expressed hope that his long-running working relationship with Xi, one that dates back to when he served as Barack Obama's vice president, could pay dividends in the two nations cooperating on certain critical issues. The two spent time on the call reminiscing about their time traveling together when they were both vice presidents, the administration official said.

The White House said the leaders during the call agreed to engage "openly and straightforwardly" on issues where the nations are at odds and where there is agreement.

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McDonald reported from Beijing.

## **From 9/11's ashes, a new world took shape. It did not last.**

By CALVIN WOODWARD, ELLEN KNICKMEYER and DAVID RISING Associated Press

In the ghastly rubble of ground zero's fallen towers 20 years ago, Hour Zero arrived, a chance to start anew.

World affairs reordered abruptly on that morning of blue skies, black ash, fire and death.

In Iran, chants of "death to America" quickly gave way to candlelight vigils to mourn the American dead. Vladimir Putin weighed in with substantive help as the U.S. prepared to go to war in Russia's region of influence.

Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, a murderous dictator with a poetic streak, spoke of the "human duty" to be with Americans after "these horrifying and awesome events, which are bound to awaken human conscience."

From the first terrible moments, America's longstanding allies were joined by longtime enemies in that singularly galvanizing instant. No nation with global standing was cheering the stateless terrorists vowing to conquer capitalism and democracy. How rare is that?

Too rare to last, it turned out.

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Civilizations have their allegories for rebirth in times of devastation. A global favorite is that of the phoenix, a magical and magnificent bird, rising from ashes. In the hellscape of Germany at the end of World War II, it was the concept of Hour Zero, or Stunde Null, that offered the opportunity to start anew.

For the U.S., the zero hour of Sept. 11, 2001, meant a chance to reshape its place in the post-Cold War world from a high perch of influence and goodwill as it entered the new millennium. This was only a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union left America with both the moral authority and the financial and military muscle to be unquestionably the lone superpower.

Those advantages were soon squandered. Instead of a new order, 9/11 fueled 20 years of war abroad. In the U.S., it gave rise to the angry, aggrieved, self-proclaimed patriot, and heightened surveillance and suspicion in the name of common defense.

It opened an era of deference to the armed forces as lawmakers pulled back on oversight and let presidents give primacy to the military over law enforcement in the fight against terrorism. And it sparked

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anti-immigrant sentiment, primarily directed at Muslim countries, that lingers today.

A war of necessity — in the eyes of most of the world — in Afghanistan was followed two years later by a war of choice as the U.S. invaded Iraq on false claims that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction. President George W. Bush labeled Iran, Iraq and North Korea an “axis of evil.”

Thus opened the deep, deadly mineshaft of “forever wars.” There were convulsions throughout the Middle East, and U.S. foreign policy — for half a century a force for ballast — instead gave way to a head-snapping change in approaches in foreign policy from Bush to Obama to Trump. With that came waning trust in America’s leadership and reliability.

Other parts of the world were not immune. Far-right populist movements coursed through Europe. Britain voted to break away from the European Union. And China steadily ascended in the global pecking order.

President Joe Biden is trying to restore trust in the belief of a steady hand from the U.S. but there is no easy path. He is ending war, but what comes next?

In Afghanistan in August, the Taliban seized control with menacing swiftness as the Afghan government and security forces that the United States and its allies had spent two decades trying to build collapsed. No steady hand was evident from the U.S. in the harried, disorganized evacuation of Afghans desperately trying to flee the country in the first weeks of the Taliban’s re-established rule.

Allies whose troops had fought and died in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan expressed dismay at Biden’s management of the U.S. withdrawal, under a deal President Donald Trump had struck with the Taliban.

## THE ‘HOMELAND’

In the United States, the Sept. 11 attacks set loose a torrent of rage.

In shock from the assault, a swath of American society embraced the us vs. them binary outlook articulated by Bush — “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” — and has never let go of it.

You could hear it in the country songs and talk radio, and during presidential campaigns, offering the balm of a bloodlust cry for revenge. “We’ll put a boot in your ass, it’s the American way,” Toby Keith promised America’s enemies in one of the most popular of those songs in 2002.

Americans stuck flags in yards and on the back of trucks. Factionalism hardened inside America, in school board fights, on Facebook posts, and in national politics, so that opposing views were treated as propaganda from mortal enemies. The concept of enemy also evolved, from not simply the terrorist but also to the immigrant, or the conflation of the terrorist as immigrant trying to cross the border.

The patriot under threat became a personal and political identity in the United States. Fifteen years later, Trump harnessed it to help him win the presidency.

## THE OTHERING

In the week after the attacks, Bush demanded of Americans that they know “Islam is peace” and that the attacks were a perversion of that religion. He told the country that American Muslims are us, not them, even as mosques came under surveillance and Arabs coming to the U.S. to take their kids to Disneyland or go to school risked being detained for questioning.

For Trump, in contrast, everything was always about them, the outsiders.

In the birther lie Trump promoted before his presidency, Barack Obama was an outsider. In Trump’s campaigns and administration, Muslims and immigrants were outsiders. The “China virus” was a foreign interloper, too.

Overseas, deadly attacks by Islamic extremists, like the 2004 bombing of Madrid trains that killed nearly 200 people and the 2005 attack on London’s transportation system that killed more than 50, hardened attitudes in Europe as well.

By 2015, as the Islamic State group captured wide areas of Iraq and pushed deep into Syria, the number of refugees increased dramatically, with more than 1 million migrants, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, entering Europe that year alone.

The year was bracketed by attacks in France on the Charlie Hebdo magazine staff in January after it published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, and on the Bataclan theater and other Paris locations in November, reinforcing the angst then gripping the continent.

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Already growing in support, far-right parties were able to capitalize on the fears to establish themselves as part of the European mainstream. They remain represented in many European parliaments, even as the flow of immigrants has slowed dramatically and most concerns have proved unfounded.

## THE UNRAVELING

Dozens of countries joined or endorsed the NATO coalition fighting in Afghanistan. Russia acquiesced to NATO troops in Central Asia for the first time and provided logistical support. Never before had NATO invoked Article 5 of its charter that an attack against one member was an attack against all.

But in 2003, the U.S. and Britain were practically alone in prosecuting the Iraq war. This time, millions worldwide marched in protest in the run-up to the invasion. World opinion of the United States turned sharply negative.

In June 2003, after the invasion had swiftly ousted Saddam and dismantled the Iraqi army and security forces, a Pew Research poll found a widening rift between Americans and Western Europeans and reported that "the bottom has fallen out of support for America in most of the Muslim world." Most South Koreans, half of Brazilians and plenty more people outside the Islamic world agreed.

And this was when the war was going well, before the world saw cruel images from Abu Ghraib prison, learned all that it knows now about CIA black op sites, waterboarding, years of Guantanamo Bay detention without charges or trials — and before the rise of the brutal Islamic State.

By 2007, when the U.S. set up the Africa Command to counter terrorism and the rising influence of China and Russia on the continent, African countries did not want to host it. It operates from Stuttgart, Germany.

## THE SUCCESSES

Over the two decades, a succession of U.S. presidents scored important achievements in shoring up security, and so far U.S. territory has remained safe from more international terrorism anywhere on the scale of 9/11.

Globally, U.S.-led forces weakened al-Qaida, which has failed to launch a major attack on the West since 2005. The Iraq invasion rid that country and region of a murderous dictator in Saddam.

Yet strategically, eliminating him did just what Arab leaders warned Bush it would do: It strengthened Saddam's main rival, Iran, threatening U.S. objectives and partners.

Deadly chaos soon followed in Iraq. The Bush administration, in its nation-building haste, failed to plan for keeping order, leaving Islamist extremists and rival militias to fight for dominance in the security vacuum.

The overthrow of Saddam served both to inspire and limit public support for Arab Spring uprisings a few years later. For if the U.S. showed people in the Middle East that strongmen can be toppled, the insurgency demonstrated that what comes next may not be a season of renewal.

Authoritarian regimes in the Middle East pointed to the post-Saddam era as an argument for their own survival.

The U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq killed more than 7,000 American military men and women, more than 1,000 from the allied forces, many tens of thousands of members of Afghan and Iraqi security forces, and many hundreds of thousands of civilians, according to Brown University's Costs of War project. Costs, including tending the wars' unusually high number of disabled vets, are expected to top \$6 trillion.

For the U.S., the presidencies since Bush's wars have been marked by an effort — not always consistent, not always successful — to pull back the military from the conflicts of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The perception of a U.S. retreat has allowed Russia and China to gain influence in the regions, and left U.S. allies struggling to understand Washington's place in the world. The notion that 9/11 would create an enduring unity of interest to combat terrorism collided with rising nationalism and a U.S. president, Trump, who spoke disdainfully of the NATO allies that in 2001 had rallied to America's cause.

Even before Trump, Obama surprised allies and enemies alike when he stepped back abruptly from the U.S. role of world cop. Obama geared up for, then called off, a strike on Syrian President Bashar Assad for using chemical weapons against his people.

"Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong," Obama said on Sept. 11, 2013.

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## THE NEWISH ORDER

The legacies of 9/11 ripple both in obvious and unusual ways.

Most directly, millions of people in the U.S. and Europe go about their public business under the constant gaze of security cameras while other surveillance tools scoop up private communications. The government layered post-9/11 bureaucracies on to law enforcement to support the expansive security apparatus.

Militarization is more evident now, from large cities to small towns that now own military vehicles and weapons that seem well out of proportion to any terrorist threat. Government offices have become fortifications and airports a security maze.

But as profound an event as 9/11 was, its immediate effect on how the world has been ordered was temporary and largely undone by domestic political forces, a global economic downturn and now a lethal pandemic.

The awakening of human conscience predicted by Gadhafi didn't last. Gadhafi didn't last.

Osama bin Laden has been dead for a decade. Saddam was hanged in 2006. The forever wars — the Afghanistan one being the longest in U.S. history — now are over or ending. The days of Russia tactically enabling the U.S., and China not standing in the way, petered out. Only the phoenix lasts.

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Rising reported from Bangkok; Knickmeyer and Woodward from Washington. AP National Security Writer Robert Burns contributed to this report.

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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.

## **Virus claims Black morticians, leaving holes in communities**

By ADAM GELLER AP National Writer

MULLINS, S.C. (AP) — When the last mourners departed and funeral director Shawn Troy was left among the headstones, he wept alone.

For five decades, the closing words at countless funerals in this town of 4,400 had been delivered by his father, William Penn Troy Sr. Now the elder Troy was gone, one of many Black morticians claimed by a pandemic that has taken an outsized toll on African Americans, after months of burying its victims.

And as Shawn Troy stepped forward to speak in place of a man well known beyond his trade -- for his work in county politics and advocacy of its Black citizens -- the emptiness felt overwhelming. Not just his family, but his community, had lost an anchor.

"I walked over to his grave and I could hear him talking to me," Shawn Troy said, his own voice breaking as he recalled kneeling beside the plot last September, on a low rise near two palmetto trees. "And he said, 'You got it. You can do it. This is what you were built for.' He passed the baton on to me, so I've got to get running."

He is hardly alone. Since the start of the pandemic, about 130 Black morticians have died from COVID-19, according to the association that represents them.

Deaths of funeral workers are not closely tracked. But the National Funeral Directors Association, which represents the broader industry, said it has not seen a corresponding rise in COVID deaths among its members.

The deaths of Black morticians are particularly notable because of the prominent role they have long played in many communities. Often admired for their success in business, a number have been elected to political office, served as local power brokers, and helped fund civil rights efforts.

At the same time, the "homegoing" services they arrange have frequently served as communal touchstones, events as much about life as death, that draw mourners together with pageantry, preaching and song.

Black funerals are "more celebration, and that's no disrespect to my colleagues across the country. We're more, I should say, intimate," said Hari P. Close, president of the National Funeral Directors & Morticians

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Association and the operator of a Baltimore funeral home. The association represents Black morticians. When the pandemic hit, the very closeness and celebration that distinguish Black funerals put morticians at risk, Close said.

Their deaths have left some successors struggling to fill their role.

"It has really had an impact ... particularly in African American funeral homes," he said.

The deaths have come despite concerted efforts by morticians to protect themselves from the virus and limits imposed on the size and scope of burial gatherings to keep it from spreading.

"This year was unlike any other year I've ever lived through in the funeral service," said Edith Churchman, the fourth-generation owner of a mortuary in Newark, N.J. that serves a largely Black clientele.

Dealing with an onslaught of COVID deaths, at first with limited personal protective equipment, and later with shortages of caskets and prepared burial plots, put pressure on funeral directors that far exceeded the demands at the peak of the AIDS epidemic, she said.

"We were getting bombarded with COVID bodies," said Dr. Mary Gaffney, who stepped in to run her brother, Jeremiah's, funeral home in Inwood, New York after he died of the virus last May.

At least 95,000 Black Americans have died of COVID, according to an AP analysis of data from the National Center for Health Statistics, perishing at the highest rate of any racial group in the U.S.

Adjusting the figures to account for age differences shows that Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans are two to three times more likely to die of the virus than white people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Of course ... you feared for your own safety," Churchman said. "You're kind of dangling on that precipice, saying what if?"

In Mississippi, Luzern "Sonny" Dillon and employees at his two funeral homes worked for months to fulfill COVID safety protocols, restricting gatherings. But Dillon, a widely known former councilman, continued his routine of spending time in the community, engaging people in conversation.

"People would be like, 'You know, Mr. Sonny,' and they'd just begin to talk and share things with him. It was just like a given," his wife, Georgia Dillon, said.

In one of those conversations, early this year, a restaurant manager confided to Dillon that he'd lost three family members to COVID in a matter of weeks. The mortician extended his condolences, reassuring the man that, contrary to what some people said, the pandemic was very real. Those words proved prescient.

A few weeks later, a funeral home employee tested positive, followed soon after by both of the Dillons.

"Just in case I don't make it out of here, this is what I want you all to do," Sonny Dillon told his wife from a hospital bed in March. He died weeks later at 72.

Georgia Dillon, a nurse, had long helped keep financial ledgers for the business. But her husband was the unquestioned consoler-in-chief and she and other family members scrambled to keep the funeral homes, in McComb and Tylertown, running in his absence.

But there was little filling the role that Sonny Dillon occupied beyond the mortuary. In his 20s, he had been one of the first Black candidates elected to local political office. Later, he worked with the daughter of Martin Luther King Jr. to rename a boulevard for the slain civil rights leader. He pushed to get more Black citizens to vote.

Dillon's civic role fit a pattern common in many African American communities, where morticians have long been prominent, said Suzanne E. Smith, a professor at George Mason University who authored a book about the Black funeral business.

The best known include the Ford family of Memphis, Tennessee, funeral home operators who sent a father and son to Congress. In Detroit, funeral director Charles Diggs Sr. was a state legislator before his son won a seat in Washington and helped found the Congressional Black Caucus.

In cities throughout the South, funeral directors often supplied the limousines for visiting civil rights leaders when they came to rally supporters.

"There's all this stuff going on in (Black) funeral homes that is not about burying the dead, but servicing the living," Smith said.

By late this summer, Georgia Dillon was preparing to turn over the business to her daughter and son-

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in-law. Working together with employees at the funeral homes, the family is determined to maintain the business as Sonny Dillon would have run it.

"We talk and we cry and we try to build each other up. We tell each other we've got to keep his legacy going," she said.

In New York, Gaffney is trying to do much the same, but after years away from the funeral business.

During the first months of the pandemic, Gaffney said she warned her brother, who had some chronic health issues, to isolate himself and let employees at the funeral home care for the bodies of the dead. But that was not his character.

The funeral home, started by the Gaffneys' parents in the early 1970s, had long served mostly African American families in the city neighborhoods and suburban towns near John F. Kennedy International Airport.

But after the gregarious Jeremiah took over from his father, a staid retired Army officer, he worked to broaden the clientele, speaking French to some families and hiring staff who spoke Spanish and African languages to others.

"In the mortuary business you've got to really be in the community," Mary Gaffney said. "That was his thing. He was grass roots. He never met a stranger."

While Jeremiah Gaffney ran the family business, Mary Gaffney studied medicine, setting up a practice in Charlotte, North Carolina. After her brother fell ill over the Easter weekend of 2020 and then was diagnosed with COVID, she tried to ensure his care. But his death weeks later, at 65, confronted Mary Gaffney with responsibilities well beyond her expertise.

With deaths soaring, she rented a refrigerated trailer to handle the overload. In the New York City neighborhood a few blocks from the funeral home, COVID has killed more than 500 people, double the citywide average.

"I don't think it slowed. I think I just sped up," said Gaffney, who hired a second funeral director, supplementing one already working in New York, to help her coordinate operations from Charlotte. Every other week, Gaffney drove between the cities to take on the responsibilities her brother had left behind.

But she declined offers to sell, feeling that would betray the legacy of her parents and the grandparents who funded its founding. And she has embraced the role her brother once filled as the face of the business, taking calls from grieving families at all hours. Just getting through a year without her brother to tell her what to do feels like crossing a finish line, she said.

"We're going to see what the future holds," said Gaffney, who hopes younger family members might eventually seek a place in the business. "Needless to say, it's been an emotional journey."

South Carolina's Troy has faced somewhat different challenges, taking over the mortuary business founded by his father in 1973 after years of working alongside him.

"The thing about me and my dad was, we woke up together, we came to work together and then went home and ate together and talked late at night," he said.

The Troys had agreed that Shawn would take over the business during the next few years. But he had expected to do so with his father's counsel. The void left by the senior Troy's death extends well beyond the chapel.

Over the years, the elder Troy, known as Penn, had served as a county commissioner, local school board member and church treasurer. But those were just his official duties.

"If my mother didn't have enough to feed us, he'd help us out. When you're talking about Mr. Penn, he was the community," said Jessica Godbolt, a former neighbor whose family gathered recently for the funeral of her uncle.

Penn Troy used jokes and small talk to win people over and get things done, said Cynthia Leggette, a school board member and longtime friend.

When officials voted to close a school because of declining enrollment, Troy pushed to turn it into a science and technology academy that quickly drew more students, she said. Noting that a citizens committee lobbying for school improvements was overwhelmingly white, Troy made calls that brought Black parents into the fold.

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"Growing up in the 60s, Penn knew what struggle was," Legette said. "He would tell me, 'Cynthia, we have been blessed ... so it's up to us to lift the torch and light the way for our children'."

In recognition, officials gathered recently under a tent at Mullins' edge to name a stretch of U.S. 76 the William Penn Troy Highway. Directly across the road, a digital sign flashed a welcome to motorists: "For Your Safety and Ours, Please Wear a Mask."

Last summer, both Troys were diagnosed and hospitalized with COVID. The elder Troy never returned home. And two weeks after his father's burial, Shawn Troy presided over the first funeral without him.

The early months were the hardest. Penn Troy's charisma gave life to the business of death. Shawn Troy had mostly worked behind the scenes. He recently declined an invitation to get involved in civic affairs, at least for now, preferring to focus on his new role.

Standing in the chapel recently on the evening before a funeral, he greeted mourners by name, placing his arm around several shoulders.

"You doing all right?" he asked from behind his mask. "I haven't seen you in a while."

But returning again and again to run funerals at the cemetery where his father is buried is a constant reminder that he is doing so alone.

Near sunset recently, Troy paced down a row of headstones, planting tiny flags at an empty plot to mark it for a burial the following morning. Not 50 feet away, lengthening shadows stretched across his father's grave.

"I don't think I'll ever get over it," he said. "But I'll get through it."

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Associated Press reporters Allen G. Breed and Angeliki Kastanis contributed to this story.

## **Biden calls Xi as US-China relationship grows more fraught**

By AAMER MADHANI and JOE McDONALD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden spoke with China's Xi Jinping on Thursday amid growing frustration on the American side that high-level engagement between the two leaders' top advisers has been largely unfruitful in the early going of the Biden presidency.

Biden initiated the call with Xi, the second between the two leaders since Biden took office. It comes at a moment when there is no shortage of thorny issues between the two nations, including cybersecurity breaches originating from China, Beijing's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and what the White House has labeled as "coercive and unfair" trade practices by the Chinese.

But Biden's aim with the 90-minute call was less focused on any of those hot-button issues and instead centered on discussing the way ahead for the U.S.-China relationship after it got off to a decidedly rocky start in his tenure.

The White House said in a statement the "two leaders had a broad, strategic discussion in which they discussed areas where our interests converge, and areas where our interests, values, and perspectives diverge."

The White House is hopeful the two sides can work together on issues of mutual concern — including climate change and preventing a nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula — despite growing differences.

Beijing, however, has pushed back against U.S. pressure and increasingly has suggested it could remain broadly uncooperative until Biden dials down criticism on what it deems Chinese internal matters.

Xi in the call appeared to echo some of the complaints, telling Biden that U.S. government policy toward China caused "serious difficulties" in relations, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

"This is not in the basic interests of the two peoples," the Chinese leader said, according to Xinhua.

"Chinese-U.S. confrontation will bring disaster to both countries and the world," Xi added.

Xi said the two sides should cooperate on climate change, epidemic prevention, economic recovery and other issues, Xinhua reported.

Ahead of the call, a senior administration official said the White House has been unsatisfied with early engagements with the Chinese.



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The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said White House officials were hopeful that Xi hearing directly from Biden could prove beneficial.

The White House official said Biden made clear to Xi that he had no intention of moving away from his administration's policy of pressing China on human rights, trade and other areas where it believes China is acting outside international norms.

High-level engagement in the early going has been most notable for each side blasting the other with recriminations.

Last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned Biden climate envoy John Kerry that deteriorating U.S.-China relations could undermine cooperation on climate change. Wang told Kerry, who was visiting Tianjin for climate talks with his Chinese counterparts, by video link that such cooperation cannot be separated from the broader relationship and called on the U.S. to take steps to improve ties, according to the Foreign Ministry.

In July, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman faced a long list of demands and complaints, including accusations that the U.S. was trying to contain and suppress China's development. Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng urged the U.S. "to change its highly misguided mindset and dangerous policy."

In March, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan had heated exchanges with Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi when they met with top Chinese officials in Anchorage. At that meeting, Yang accused the U.S. of failing to deal with its own human rights problems and took issue with what he said was American hypocrisy.

Administration officials suspect that some of the rhetoric in those high-profile meetings was more about playing to a domestic audience through the press than sending a message to the White House. With that in mind, Biden highlighted the importance of two leaders ability to have private conversations and be clear about their priorities, the administration official said.

Biden from the start of his presidency has sought to put greater focus on China, rallying allies to speak in a more unified voice about Beijing's human rights record, its trade practices and its military's increasingly assertive behavior that has unnerved U.S. allies in the Pacific. He sees Beijing as the most significant economic competitor to the United States and a growing national security concern.

But the president has also expressed hope that his long-running working relationship with Xi, one that dates back to when he served as Barack Obama's vice president, could pay dividends in the two nations cooperating on certain critical issues. The two spent time on the call reminiscing about their time traveling together when they were both vice presidents, the administration official said.

The White House said the leaders during the call agreed to engage "openly and straightforwardly" on issues where the nations are at odds and where there is agreement.

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McDonald reported from Beijing.

## Flight takes about 200, including Americans, out of Kabul

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — An estimated 200 foreigners, including Americans, left Afghanistan on a commercial flight out of Kabul on Thursday with the cooperation of the Taliban — the first such large-scale departure since U.S. forces completed their frantic withdrawal over a week ago.

The Qatar Airways flight to Doha marked a breakthrough in the bumpy coordination between the U.S. and Afghanistan's new rulers. A dayslong standoff over charter planes at another airport has left hundreds of mostly Afghan people stranded, waiting for Taliban permission to leave.

A senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media, said the Taliban's foreign minister and deputy prime minister helped facilitate the flight. Americans, U.S. green card holders and other nationalities, including Germans, Hungarians and Canadians, were aboard, the official said.

Qatari envoy Mutlaq bin Majed al-Qahtani said another 200 passengers will leave Afghanistan on Friday. Ten U.S. citizens and 11 green-card holders made Thursday's flight, State Department spokesman Ned

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Price said. Americans organizing charter evacuation flights said they knew of more U.S. passport and green-card holders in Mazar-e-Sharif and elsewhere awaiting flights out.

The White House said before the flight that there were roughly 100 U.S. citizens left in Afghanistan. But several veterans groups have said that number is too low because many citizens never bothered to tell U.S. officials they were in the country. And they said the figure overlooks green-card-carrying permanent U.S. residents living in Afghanistan who want to leave.

Many thousands of Afghans remain desperate to get out, too, afraid of what Taliban rule might hold. The Taliban have repeatedly said foreigners and Afghans with proper travel documents could leave. But their assurances have been met with skepticism, and many Afghans have been unable to obtain certain paperwork.

U.S. lawmakers, veterans groups and others are pressing the Biden administration to ensure that former Afghan military interpreters and others who could be in danger of Taliban reprisals for working with the Americans are allowed to leave.

In the U.S., National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said that Thursday's flight was the result of "careful and hard diplomacy and engagement" and that the Taliban "have shown flexibility, and they have been businesslike and professional in our dealings with them in this effort."

"This is a positive first step," she said, adding that the U.S. will continue trying to extract Americans and Afghan allies who want to leave.

As Taliban authorities patrolled the tarmac, passengers presented their documents for inspection and dogs sniffed luggage laid out on the ground. Some veteran airport employees had returned to their jobs after fleeing during the harrowing chaos of the U.S.-led airlift.

Irfan Popalzai, 12, boarded the flight with his mother and five siblings. He said his family lives in Maryland.

"I am an Afghan, but you know I am from America and I am so excited" to leave, he said.

The airport was extensively damaged in the frenzied final days of the U.S. airlift that evacuated over 100,000 people. But Qatari authorities announced that it had been repaired with the help of experts from Qatar and Turkey and was ready for the resumption of international airline flights.

"I can clearly say that this is a historic day in the history of Afghanistan as Kabul airport is now operational," al-Qahtani said. He added: "Hopefully, life is becoming normal in Afghanistan."

The flight was the first to take off from the Kabul airport since American forces left the country at the end of August. The accompanying scenes of chaos, including Afghans plunging to their deaths from the sides of military aircraft on takeoff and a suicide bombing that killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members, came to define the end of America's two-decade war.

The airport is no longer the Hamid Karzai International Airport, but simply Kabul International Airport, with the name of the country's former president removed. Several Taliban flags flew from the terminal, which was emblazoned "The Islamic Emirate seeks peaceful and positive relations with the world."

Hundreds of other Afghans who say they are at risk for helping the Americans have gathered for more than a week in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, waiting for permission to board evacuation flights chartered by U.S. supporters. Many are believed not to have the necessary travel documents.

In Mazar-e-Sharif on Thursday, an Afghan who worked 15 years as an interpreter for the U.S. military was moving from hotel to hotel and running out of money as he, his eight children and his wife waited for the OK from the Taliban to leave.

"I'm frightened I will be left behind," said the man, whose name was withheld by The Associated Press for his safety.

The interpreter said he was one of many former U.S. employees whose special visas the United States approved in the last weeks of the American military presence in Afghanistan. But with the U.S. Embassy closed when the Taliban took Kabul on Aug. 15, it has become impossible to get the visa stamped into his passport.

He said he doesn't trust Taliban assurances that they will not take revenge against Afghans who worked for the Americans.

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"No, never," he said. "I never believe them, because they are lying."

Afghanistan war veteran Matt Zeller, who founded the organization No One Left Behind to help Afghans who supported American troops, said he does not believe it is possible for applicants to the special immigrant visa program to get a visa without an embassy in Kabul.

"For all intents and purposes, these people's chances of escaping the Taliban ended the day we left them behind," he said.

Price said the United States is looking at such steps as electronic visas to overcome the lack of an embassy in Afghanistan.

The organization War Time Allies estimates as many as 20,000 special visa applicants remain in the country, not counting those eligible under a more liberal rule change made in July. Add their families to that and the total amounts to more than 80,000 people, according to the group.

Associated Press writers Ellen Knickmeyer in Oklahoma City, Julie Watson in San Diego and Bernard Condon in New York contributed to this report.

## Oil-soaked birds found near oil spill at refinery after Ida

By MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Louisiana wildlife officials say they have documented more than 100 oil-soaked birds after crude oil spilled from a refinery flooded during Hurricane Ida.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries said Thursday that a growing number of oiled birds had been observed within heavy pockets of oil throughout the Phillips 66 Alliance Refinery in Belle Chasse, Louisiana, as well as nearby flooded fields and retention ponds along the Mississippi River.

Jon Wiebe, a biologist running the state restoration program, said 10 oiled birds have been captured and transported to a rehabilitation location for cleaning. Five additional dead birds were recovered and bagged as evidence, he said.

Wiebe said efforts to capture and save more birds are ongoing. The affected species include black-bellied whistling ducks, blue-winged teal and a variety of egrets. Other animals were also seen covered in oil, include alligators, nutria and river otters.

A summary issued Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency said it had received 43 notifications of significant inland oil spills and chemical releases in its jurisdiction after Ida. The agency's compliance arm has issued 10 requests to facility operators seeking information to determine whether federal environmental laws were violated during the storm, potentially triggering penalties and fines.

That is a small fraction of the 1,539 reports of pollution a U.S. Coast Guard hotline has received since the Category 4 storm made landfall Aug. 29 at Port Fourchon, the primary port for the offshore oil and gas industry. The Coast Guard said Thursday it was actively supervising the cleanup and mitigation efforts at 564 sites. Another 197 reports were listed as unverified because there was no remaining evidence of pollution.

The Associated Press first reported the spill at the Alliance Refinery on Sept. 1 after reviewing aerial images captured by a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration aircraft. In the days after the hurricane, Phillips 66 repeatedly sought to downplay reports of damage at the company's sprawling refinery.

Asked about reports of levee failures near the refinery the day after Ida hit, Phillips 66 spokesman Bernardo Fallas told AP there was "some water" in the facility and stressed that operations were shut down in advance of the storm.

Asked two days after the storm about potential environmental hazards emanating from the facility, Fallas referred a reporter to a statement on the company's website saying its response is focused "on ensuring the safety and well-being of our employees and our surrounding communities."

On Day Three, after the AP sent Phillips 66 aerial photos showing extensive flooding at the refinery and what appeared to be petroleum in the water, Fallas conceded the company could have "discovered a sheen of unknown origin in some flooded areas" of the refinery and that all pollution had been "secured

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and contained within refinery grounds" at that time.

A Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality assessment team sent to the refinery last week reported a sizable spill of heavy crude oil at the site was being addressed with booms and absorbent pads. A levee meant to protect the plant had breached, allowing floodwaters to flow in during the storm and then back out as the surge receded.

Despite the gap in the levee remaining open for days after the storm, Fallas once again asserted Thursday no oil spilled beyond the land owned by Phillips 66.

"The breach has been secured," Fallas said Thursday. "Clean-up crews continue to remove oil and sheen contained within some flooded areas of the refinery. There has been no offsite impact. We continue to work with all appropriate regulatory agencies."

No estimate for how much oil might have spilled from the refinery has yet been made public by state or federal regulators. When fully operational, the Alliance Refinery can process more than 255,000 barrels of crude oil per day into gasoline and other petroleum products.

The company listed the aging refinery for sale last month, before the storm hit, citing poor market conditions. The facility remained shut down Thursday, with no timetable to reopen.

Following inquiries from AP, Fallas also confirmed Thursday that a Phillips 66 pipeline in an uninhabited area outside Paradis, Louisiana, leaked during Ida. Records show the company reported to the Coast Guard on Aug. 31 that 2,700 barrels of isobutane, a liquified flammable gas often used to fuel camping stoves, had spilled.

"The site was isolated and brought under control last week," Fallas said Thursday. "The product vaporized to the atmosphere when it was released; there was no impact to soil or water. The pipeline remains shut down while repairs are underway."

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## **Sweeping new vaccine mandates for 100 million Americans**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In his most forceful pandemic actions and words, President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered sweeping new federal vaccine requirements for as many as 100 million Americans — private-sector employees as well as health care workers and federal contractors — in an all-out effort to curb the surging COVID-19 delta variant.

Speaking at the White House, Biden sharply criticized the tens of millions of Americans who are not yet vaccinated, despite months of availability and incentives.

"We've been patient. But our patience is wearing thin, and your refusal has cost all of us," he said, all but biting off his words. The unvaccinated minority "can cause a lot of damage, and they are."

Republican leaders — and some union chiefs, too — said Biden was going too far in trying to muscle private companies and workers, a certain sign of legal challenges to come.

Gov. Henry McMaster of South Carolina said in a statement that "Biden and the radical Democrats (have) thumbed their noses at the Constitution," while American Federation of Government Employees National President Everett Kelley insisted that "changes like this should be negotiated with our bargaining units where appropriate."

On the other hand, there were strong words of praise for Biden's efforts to get the nation vaccinated from the American Medical Association, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable — though no direct mention of his mandate for private companies.

The expansive rules mandate that all employers with more than 100 workers require them to be vaccinated or test for the virus weekly, affecting about 80 million Americans. And the roughly 17 million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid also will have to be fully vaccinated.

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Biden is also requiring vaccination for employees of the executive branch and contractors who do business with the federal government — with no option to test out. That covers several million more workers.

Biden announced the new requirements in a Thursday afternoon address from the White House as part of a new “action plan” to address the latest rise in coronavirus cases and the stagnating pace of COVID-19 shots.

Just two months ago Biden prematurely declared the nation’s “independence” from the virus. Now, despite more than 208 million Americans having at least one dose of the vaccines, the U.S. is seeing about 300% more new COVID-19 infections a day, about two-and-a-half times more hospitalizations, and nearly twice the number of deaths compared to the same time last year. Some 80 million people remain unvaccinated.

“We are in the tough stretch and it could last for a while,” Biden said.

After months of using promotions to drive the vaccination rate, Biden is taking a much firmer hand, as he blames people who have not yet received shots for the sharp rise in cases killing more than 1,000 people per day and imperiling a fragile economic rebound.

In addition to the vaccination requirements, Biden moved to double federal fines for airline passengers who refuse to wear masks on flights or to maintain face covering requirements on federal property in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

He announced that the government will work to increase the supply of virus tests, and that the White House has secured concessions from retailers including Walmart, Amazon and Kroger to sell at-home testing kits at cost beginning this week.

The administration is also sending additional federal support to assist schools in safely operating, including additional funding for testing. And Biden called for large entertainment venues and arenas to require vaccinations or proof of a negative test for entry.

The requirement for large companies to mandate vaccinations or weekly testing for employees will be enacted through a forthcoming rule from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that carries penalties of \$14,000 per violation, an administration official said.

The rule will require that large companies provide paid time off for vaccination.

Meanwhile, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services will extend a vaccination requirement issued earlier this summer — for nursing home staff — to other healthcare settings including hospitals, home-health agencies and dialysis centers.

Separately, the Department of Health and Human Services will require vaccinations in Head Start Programs, as well as schools run by the Department of Defense and Bureau of Indian Education, affecting about 300,000 employees.

Biden’s order for executive branch workers and contractors includes exceptions for workers seeking religious or medical exemptions from vaccination, according to press secretary Jen Psaki. Federal workers who don’t comply will be referred to their agencies’ human resources departments for counseling and discipline, to include potential termination.

An AP-NORC poll conducted in August found 55% of Americans in favor of requiring government workers to be fully vaccinated, compared with 21% opposed. Similar majorities also backed vaccine mandates for health care workers, teachers working at K-12 schools and workers who interact with the public, as at restaurants and stores.

Biden has encouraged COVID-19 vaccine requirements in settings like schools, workplaces and university campuses. On Thursday, the Los Angeles Board of Education voted to require all students 12 and older to be fully vaccinated in the the nation’s second-largest school district.

Walmart, the nation’s largest private employer, said in late July it was requiring all workers at its headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, as well as its managers who travel within the U.S., to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 4. But the company had stopped short of requiring shots for its frontline workers.

CVS Health said in late August it would require certain employees who interact with patients to be fully vaccinated by the end of October. That includes nurses, care managers and pharmacists.

In the government, several federal agencies have previously announced vaccine requirements for much

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of their staffs, particularly those in healthcare roles like the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Pentagon moved last month to require all servicemembers to get vaccinated. Combined, the White House estimates those requirements cover 2.5 million Americans. Thursday's order is expected to affect nearly 2 million more federal workers and potentially millions of contractors.

Biden's measures should help, but what's really needed is a change in mindset for many people, said Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, vice dean at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

"There is an aspect to this now that has to do with our country being so divided," said Sharfstein. "This has become so politicized that people can't see the value of a vaccination that can save their lives. Our own divisions are preventing us from ending a pandemic."

More than 177 million Americans are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, but confirmed cases have shot up in recent weeks to an average of about 140,000 per day with on average about 1,000 deaths, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Most of the spread — and the vast majority of severe illness and death — is occurring among those not yet fully vaccinated. So-called breakthrough infections in vaccinated people occur, but tend to be far less dangerous.

Federal officials are moving ahead with plans to begin administering booster shots of the mRNA vaccines to bolster protection against the more transmissible delta variant. Last month Biden announced plans to make them available beginning Sept. 20, but only the Pfizer vaccine will likely have received regulatory approval for a third dose by that time.

Officials are aiming to administer the booster shots about eight months after the second dose of the two-dose vaccines.

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This story corrects the organization of the union official in the 5th paragraph.

Associated Press writers Anne D'Innocenzio, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Hannah Fingerhut contributed.

## 'Paradise': Australian states free of COVID resist opening

By TRISTAN LAVALETTE and ROD MCGUIRK Associated Press

PERTH, Australia (AP) — It can seem like Australia's west coast has almost entirely avoided COVID-19.

A mask-free nightlife is thriving and huge crowds are turning out for sporting events, including 53,000 rugby fans who crammed into a Perth stadium to watch New Zealand's All Blacks defeat Australia's Wallabies on a recent sunny Sunday.

"We are in paradise," said one of those fans, Andrea Williams, who is all for the region continuing to defy the federal government and maintain strict border restrictions that keep it separated from the pandemic raging in large parts of the rest of Australia.

While the cities of Sydney and Melbourne in the east have been in strict lockdown with a surge of virus cases, the Western Australia state capital of Perth has largely remained open for business — behind its shut borders.

But the relish with which many are enjoying themselves in the west might be tinged with a sense that their COVID-free lifestyle could be coming to an end.

States that remain virtually COVID-free, including Western Australia and Queensland, face growing pressure to open their borders, with the national government arguing that internal border restrictions are a drag on the national economy.

Industry groups complain that border closures create critical shortages of labor and supplies, impede trade, inflate construction costs and constrain business opportunities. Damage to companies' bottom lines also translates to less tax revenue for the federal government.

Yet because Australia has one of the lowest vaccination rates of any wealthy country, reopening could mean soaring COVID-19 cases in the west and unwelcome restrictions.

At the Perth stadium, bottles of sanitizer were among the few reminders of the delta variant that is overtaking parts of eastern Australia and much of the world.

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Williams said she's for the border closures even if that means she can't be together with her daughters in Sydney and Auckland, New Zealand.

"We want this to be over with, of course, but I don't think we should be opening up any time soon," she said.

The federal government is impatient to end policies such as tough international border restrictions that have largely kept COVID-19 at bay since March 2020. But its vaccination goal for opening borders — 80% of those 16 and older — remains elusive with 40% fully vaccinated.

And since that goal was set in July, infections have shot up, clouding any debate about reopening.

In mid-June an unvaccinated limousine driver tested positive for delta after he was infected while transporting a U.S. cargo aircrew from Sydney's airport. In the months since, more than 30,000 infections have been recorded in New South Wales and Victoria, Australia's two most populous states, home to half the nation's population. Daily infections have gone from a handful to more than 1,500 and rising.

Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan has said that his state will likely be months behind the rest of the country in opening its borders.

"Why are they on this mission to bring COVID into Western Australia, to infect our public?" McGowan asked, referring to the federal government.

"By knowingly letting the virus in, it would mean we'd have hundreds of people die, have to wind back our local freedoms, introduce restrictions and shut down large parts of our economy," he added.

The federal government has responded with frustration, saying it is carrying much of the financial burden of supporting businesses in sectors such as tourism that are in danger of failing without interstate travelers.

"Every other country around the world is learning to live with COVID, and it seems that in Queensland and Western Australia there's a denial of the reality that we need to do that," Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said.

Many of those out west say they have been doing just fine with things the way they are.

Sergio Guazzelli, a west coast coffee shop owner, has only endured three state-ordered lockdowns, for a total 12 days. By comparison, Melbourne has had more than 220 days of lockdown.

Guazzelli said his business in the port city of Fremantle on Perth's fringe is "flat out" as locals relish their freedom.

"People are heading out more because of what's happening in Sydney and Melbourne. They want to enjoy life because we don't know what's ahead," Guazzelli said.

While there's some frustration in Western Australia over hassles from the border restrictions such as not being able to see family elsewhere, the premier's pandemic response has earned him record approval ratings and a celebrity status within his state that is extraordinary in Australian politics.

Some supporters have even gotten tattoos of the image of McGowan. His appeal is particularly strong with the young, many of whom are enjoying a thriving bar and nightclub scene.

"You have to feel sorry for young people in other parts of the world who have missed out on the night-life, so I feel lucky to have been able to live my life," said Sean McDonald, a 23-year-old college student.

A lack of concern about the virus in Western Australia is reflected in the lowest vaccination rate in the country, at 36.3%, followed by Queensland at 36.4%. The national vaccination rate is 40.4%.

Western Australia and Queensland blame their late rollouts on the federal government's failure to provide more vaccines earlier.

The federal government has warned that while the country's High Court last year rejected a billionaire's challenge to the legality of Western Australia's border restrictions, the state might not be so lucky against a second challenge now that vaccines are available.

But the federal government hasn't mentioned the option of passing a law that overrules Western Australia's and other states' border controls.

Constitutional lawyer George Williams suspects the government doesn't want to take that step because it faces re-election by May and needs votes in Western Australia.

Perth doctor Omar Khorshid, national president of the Australian Medical Association, said keeping the state border closed is popular among many of his patients. But they should understand it's not possible

to keep delta out, he said.

"It is coming to Western Australia like it is to the rest of this country, and it's critical that we get ourselves ready," he said.

McGuirk reported from Canberra, Australia.

## **FACT FOCUS: AZ canvass report draws nonsensical conclusions**

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

A report released this week in Arizona's largest county falsely claims to have uncovered some 173,000 "lost" votes and 96,000 "ghost votes" in a private door-to-door canvassing effort, supposedly rendering the 2020 election in Maricopa County "uncertifiable."

But its conclusions aren't supported by any evidence, according to county election officials and outside election experts, who called the report's methods "quasi-science" and its findings inaccurate.

Still, the 11-page document — which is separate from an ongoing partisan audit in the county — has been shared widely in conservative media and by Republican politicians, including state Rep. Mark Finchem, who is campaigning to be Arizona's secretary of state — the state's top election official.

Report author Liz Harris, an unsuccessful Republican legislative candidate and a real estate agent in the Phoenix suburb of Chandler, declined to respond to specific questions but said a more comprehensive version of the report would be released soon.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

**CLAIM:** An estimated 173,104 "missing or lost" votes and an estimated 96,389 "ghost" votes cast by people who didn't appear to live at their voter registration addresses indicate that the 2020 election in Maricopa County included irregularities and is "uncertifiable."

**THE FACTS:** The report doesn't provide evidence for these far-fetched claims, and the county's election results have been certified for months.

The "Grassroots Canvass Report" that gained traction on social media on Wednesday weaves a narrative of hundreds of thousands of voting errors in Maricopa County, but it bases those allegations on interactions with a fraction of that number of votes, analyzing data on just 4,570 voters in a handful of voting precincts.

Harris claims in the report that these smaller-scale findings can be extrapolated out to the entire county "at a scientifically correlated confidence level of 95%," but Stanford University political science professor Justin Grimmer said that's inaccurate.

"From the description in the report, it is clear that this was not a random sample," Grimmer said. Even if it was random, he said, certain areas were oversampled, and the authors didn't take into account that the people who responded to the canvassers were likely different than those who didn't respond.

"Their sample simply cannot justify their inference to the entire county," Grimmer said.

Harris' initial report offered just one specific example out of nearly 270,000 alleged ballot irregularities.

It claimed on the cover that an address in Goodyear, Arizona, was a "vacant lot" from which voters cast illegal ballots. But that claim was quickly debunked on Twitter by a local ABC15 reporter and county officials.

In fact, the address is a legitimate place of residence, according to Maricopa County Assessor Eddie Cook. In 2020, it housed three registered voters who cast general election ballots, according to Megan Gilbertson, spokeswoman for the Maricopa County Elections Department.

After the error was pointed out, Harris released a new version of the report with a different example on the cover. But the new example, an allegedly vacant lot in Tempe, Arizona, also wasn't evidence of any foul play.

The address is vacant now but used to be a mobile home park, according to Gilbertson. In 2020, one person who cast a mail-in ballot listed it as his permanent address. He requested his ballot be sent to a temporary address elsewhere, which is legal.

And there are other concerns to be aware of when it comes to sweeping claims of "lost" votes and "ghost" votes, according to Tammy Patrick, a senior adviser at the Democracy Fund and a former Mari-



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copa County elections official.

Claims of "lost" votes — or votes cast but never counted — are problematic because research shows when people are asked if they voted months later, some will lie and say they did.

"Voters will over-report their participation in light of social pressure to demonstrate actions that they perceive as socially desirable," Patrick said.

Meanwhile, claims of "ghost" votes — or votes cast from addresses where people don't seem to live — don't consider the fact that military and overseas voters are legally allowed to vote from their last domiciled address, Patrick said.

In an email to the AP, she called the report "yet another example of individuals who do not understand elections in Arizona using quasi-science to justify a preconceived position and further set a narrative."

Called for comment, Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer said he was happy to address questions about potential errors but that "so far, no actual problems have been identified." He said he asked Harris for specific examples of irregularities in March and she never followed up.

Harris declined to answer most specific questions about the report, but said the first specific claim about a vacant lot was a "typo." She said that she was confident in her findings and that a more comprehensive report would be released soon.

Finchem, the secretary of state candidate who shared the report on social media, declined to comment.

This is part of AP's effort to address widely shared misinformation, including work with outside companies and organizations to add factual context to misleading content that is circulating online. Learn more about fact-checking at AP.

## Can Larry Elder build 'movement' from California recall?

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In two months, Larry Elder went from conservative talk radio host to leader of the Republican field in the California recall election that could remove Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom from office, drawing national headlines, attracting enthusiastic fans to his rallies and quickly banking millions for his first campaign.

Voting concludes Tuesday, and polling suggests Newsom has a solid edge to hold his job. Yet, win or lose, Elder's star turn within his party is prompting chatter about his political future in the strongly Democratic state, where long-suffering Republicans have been looking for a breakthrough candidate after failing to win a statewide race in 15 years.

Elder, seeking to become the state's first Black governor, has managed to outshine his GOP rivals in the polls by hewing to a conservative-libertarian message that does not appeal to many moderate or liberal voters. He has run as an outsider and given no sign he intends to shift his strategy in the contest's closing days while alarming groups across the Democratic spectrum, including environmentalists, women's rights advocates and fellow Blacks.

On Wednesday, Elder conspicuously didn't answer directly when asked if he would consider a 2022 rematch against Newsom, should the Democratic incumbent survive the recall. Newsom already has said he plans to seek a second term.

"A lot of people have invested their hopes and dreams in me," Elder told reporters in Los Angeles on Wednesday after predicting he would win. "A lot of people feel that I can make California better."

The direction he takes ultimately will be influenced by what happens in the election -- an upset win would vault him into the national spotlight, a weaker-than-expected showing could dampen talk about his influence in the party and future prospects.

The 69-year-old lawyer and author emerged as a GOP luminary of the moment by employing an aggressive style honed during decades on talk radio. He relentlessly attacked Newsom and his handling of the pandemic and progressive policies on immigration, climate change and other issues.

Elder called the race a longshot from the start -- Democrats hold every statewide office, dominate the Legislature and congressional delegation, and boast a nearly 2-to-1 edge in registered voters.

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Republican consultant John Peschong said "I think he's building a movement."

Peschong, who advised rival GOP candidate Doug Ose before the former congressman withdrew for health reasons, said Elder's campaign has "a grassroots component to it that signifies he's going to be continuing to run, no matter what happens next week."

Republican fundraiser Charles Moran said Elder brought an energy to the contest that has been absent for the GOP in high-profile races in California for years — perhaps dating to the tenure of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was elected governor in a 2003 recall election.

"He's reignited an excitement and passion and a hope for California Republicans that we have not seen in a while," Moran said. "That's why I think there is something more to this. ... It's been a rocket launch for him."

Elder hasn't wavered in his positions during the campaign. He is still a staunch supporter of former President Donald Trump, a reviled figure in California outside his conservative base. He is critical of the landmark Roe v. Wade decision on abortion and supports expanding oil extraction, positions out of step with a majority of voters in the state.

He has spoken in opposition to the minimum wage, is critical of gun control and has promised to erase state vaccine and mask mandates.

Elder's campaign has drawn support from his 2 million followers on social media, remnants of the Trump coalition and evangelicals, although that together represents a modest slice of California's 22 million voters. Elder, an Ivy Leaguer who grew up in a LA's rough South Central neighborhood, also made efforts to build support within the state's growing Asian and Latino communities that typically lean Democratic.

Part of his appeal is he's different: A first-time candidate and Black man in a party that is largely older and white, who isn't afraid to challenge the state's dominant Democratic orthodoxy. He also benefitted from a lackluster GOP field that includes former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, who is still trying to raise his name recognition outside his home city, and businessman John Cox, who lost a landslide to Newsom in 2018.

However, Elder's campaign also came with controversy.

A former fiancée said Elder was emotionally abusive in their relationship. Elder disputes the notion of systemic racism in America and is critical of Black Lives Matter, positions that have put him in conflict with many other Blacks.

In a July interview with conservative political commentator Candace Owens, Elder said "you could make an argument" that slave owners as well as slaves were owed reparations after the Civil War. His reasoning was that the government took away the owners "property."

This week, his walking tour of homeless encampments in LA's Venice Beach neighborhood was cut short after a woman bicyclist wearing a gorilla mask threw an egg toward Elder and then took a swing at a member of his entourage.

The confrontation set off strong reactions on Twitter, with conservatives charging the incident wasn't immediately branded a racist attack because Elder is a conservative. "A white woman dressed as a gorilla threw an egg at Larry Elder today, accusing him not of being a 'true black person.' Democrats are racist," tweeted Charlie Kirk, president of the conservative group Turning Point USA.

Elder is doing a bus tour of the state in the campaign's final days. His challenge is expanding his support beyond those who voted for Trump. The former president won 6 million votes in California last November — more than any Republican presidential candidate before him but just over 34% of the statewide vote share in Joe Biden's landslide win.

Recent polling by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California on the critical first question in the recall — whether to remove Newsom — found those supporting his ouster at just 39%. That figure is roughly in line with the vote share for GOP candidates in recent statewide races — in 2018, no Republicans seeking top offices were able to break 40% of the vote -- suggesting that represents a ceiling for Republicans and conservative-leaning moderates and independents.

In a deeply divided electorate "the challenge for Republican candidates ... is how do you appeal to enough moderates and independent voters to make up the difference in a state that is heavily Democratic?" said

pollster Mark Baldassare, president of the policy institute.

## Los Angeles requires COVID-19 vaccine for students 12 and up

By AMY TAXIN and JOHN ANTCZAK Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Los Angeles board of education voted Thursday to require students 12 and older to be vaccinated against the coronavirus to attend in-person classes in the nation's second-largest school district.

The move makes Los Angeles by far the largest of a very small number of districts with a vaccine requirement. Nearby Culver City imposed a similar policy last month for its 7,000 students.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, which has more than 600,000 mostly Latino students, already tests all students and employees every week, requires masking indoors and outdoors and has ordered employees to be vaccinated. Under the vaccination plan, students 12 and up who participate in sports and other extracurricular activities need to get their two-shot sequence completed by the end of October. Others have until Dec. 19.

"It is easy to wait for someone to tell us what to do. LA Unified is leading because we must. Our communities cannot wait," Mónica García, a board member, said before the vote.

"This action is not about violating anybody's rights. This action is about doing our job to be able to offer public schools that children can come to school and be safe," she said.

Los Angeles Unified was among the last of the nation's largest districts to reopen to classroom instruction last spring. The teachers union opposed the move for months, citing health concerns.

The district's student population is nearly three-quarters Latino and many are poor. Among adults, poor Latinos are vaccinated at a lower rate than the state average.

Los Angeles County saw an increase in coronavirus case rates in children from mid-July to mid-August but these have since declined, said Barbara Ferrer, director of the county's Department of Public Health. The shift coincided with the reopening of many schools with safety measures such as masking and testing, she said, adding that bringing so many children to school could lead to more exposures and officials will be monitoring closely.

Los Angeles school board members overwhelmingly supported the plan, calling it a sound public health measure and a critical step to keep classrooms open for the in-person learning so essential for students. Board member Jackie Goldberg recalled when polio ripped through her school and her friend in third grade lost his arm.

"It is our moral, ethical, religious, political — pick a word — it's our responsibility to protect the children under 12 who cannot get protected any other way," she said.

There are not yet any vaccines against the coronavirus authorized for children under 12.

Under LA Unified's plan, all students age 12 and up will be fully vaccinated by the time they return to class following winter break on Jan. 11. Those who are participating in sports and other activities need to receive a first dose of vaccine by Oct. 3 and a second dose by Oct. 31, while other students need to get their first dose by Nov. 21 and a second dose no later than Dec. 19.

Some parents are eager to see all eligible students vaccinated. Lucy Rimalower, who has a kindergartener in the district, said she is relieved officials are taking steps to try to protect her son until he is old enough to get his shot, and that also helps protect her parents, who are in their 60s and 70s and help her with child care.

"This feels like following the precedent of all the other vaccines over time that have helped us to have a safer school environment, that lets us feel like it's safe to send our kids to school without getting chickenpox, polio, the mumps, measles, rubella, you name it," she said.

Other parents oppose the move and believe it should be up to parents, not the board, to decide what is best for their children. They noted coronavirus has been far less lethal for children than for older adults.

"We don't understand why you are so rushed," Diana Guillen, chair of the district's English learner advisory committee, told the board in Spanish. "This decision should be ours, a family decision."

United Teachers Los Angeles urged the district to provide public education and outreach to families and

access to the shot to increase vaccination numbers in school communities. The teachers' union had urged the board to mandate student vaccinations once teachers were required to get the shots and applauded the move on Thursday.

So did the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. Between Aug. 15 and Sept. 7, nearly 8,000 student cases and more than 1,200 staff cases of coronavirus were reported in the county, most of them in Los Angeles Unified, which conducts weekly testing, Ferrer said. She said that doesn't mean the infections spread through the schools, and many in fact occurred elsewhere.

She added that more than half the county's residents between 12 and 17 are already fully vaccinated. "Increasing these numbers is a critical part of our strategy for keeping schools open," she said. "Widespread vaccination can dramatically reduce transmission in all settings, especially and particularly at schools."

Taxin reported from Orange County, California. Associated Press writer Jeff Amy in Atlanta contributed.

## **Witness says R. Kelly kept her locked up before sex assault**

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — She was an unsuspecting radio station intern in 2003 when she pursued what she thought would be a career-making interview with a R&B superstar — R. Kelly.

Instead, she had a horrific experience while locked in a darkened room for days, she's now testified years later in lurid detail. She said she still lives with a strong belief she was drugged and violated by Kelly while she was unconscious.

"I was sexually assaulted," the woman told jurors on Thursday at Kelly's sex-trafficking trial. "It wasn't something I invited."

The witness, who testified without using her real name, became the latest in a string of accusers to take the witness stand against Kelly since the trial began in New York City on Aug. 18.

Kelly, 54, has repeatedly denied accusations that he led a criminal enterprise that sexually exploited women, girls and even boys during a 30-year career highlighted by his anthem "I Believe I Can Fly." His lawyers have portrayed his accusers as groupies who are lying about their relationships with him.

Publicly recounting her experience with Kelly for the first time, the former radio intern said she was a 21-year-old single mother from Salt Lake City when she got up the nerve to approach Kelly's entourage about an interview.

"It would have been my very first huge celebrity interview," said the witness, now 39. "I thought it would kickstart my career."

She was invited to fly to Chicago and meet Kelly at his "Chocolate Factory" music studio, all paid for by the Grammy-winning recording artist. There, she was greeted by someone who made her sign a non-disclosure agreement, demanded personal information about her family and surprised her by asking if she "needed protection" — specifically, a condom, she testified.

"No, I'm not here for that," she responded.

She was told to wait alone for Kelly in a windowless room. When she tried to step out, she discovered that the door was locked from the outside and that, after banging on the door with no response, she needed permission from Kelly to go to the bathroom or anywhere else, she said.

"I was scared. I was ashamed. I was embarrassed," she said.

The witness claimed two days passed before she was finally given something to eat — Chinese takeout and a soda. After only a few bites and sips from her meal, she passed out on a couch, she said.

She awoke to find that someone had taken off all her clothes and felt "wet stuff" between her legs and on her thighs, she said. She also spotted Kelly in the corner pulling up his pants, she said, making clear to her he had assaulted her.

Kelly left the room, saying he would be back soon, she said, the last time she saw him. What felt like another few days had passed before she was given a flight home, she said.

She said on the way out of the studio, an employee warned her to keep her mouth shut about what

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had happened. The way it was put: "Don't f--- with Mr. Kelly." She took it as a potential threat against her child and family.

As he has with other accusers, defense attorney Deveraux Cannick pressed the witness on why it took several years for her to come forward with her accusations. He noted too her admission that she had a cell phone when she alleges she was locked in the room.

"Did you call 911? After you were raped, according to you, you didn't call 911?" Deveraux asked on cross-examination.

"That's correct," she responded.

The woman's allegations resulted in a kidnapping charge listed in a sweeping racketeering indictment against Kelly that's kept him in jail since 2019. It alleges he "together with others, did knowingly and intentionally secretly confine an individual" that the document identified only as a "Jane Doe."

Another woman who testified on Thursday was someone who appeared on a sequel to a widely watched documentary series — "Surviving R. Kelly" — that portrayed him as a sexual predator. She has described having a tumultuous relationship with him but hasn't directly accused him of any crimes.

The government instead was seeking to use her to corroborate testimony from other accusers that Kelly used spankings and other discipline to make women he was allegedly exploiting stay in line over months or years.

"It was fun in the beginning," she said of her time with him. However, she said, it later became "controlling."

## Spain arrests Venezuelan spymaster wanted on US drug charges

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and ARITZ PARRA Associated Press Writers

MADRID (AP) — Police in Madrid on Thursday arrested a former Venezuelan spymaster wanted on U.S. narcoterrorism charges, capturing him in a hideout apartment nearly two years after he defied a Spanish extradition order and disappeared.

Gen. Hugo Carvajal, who for over a decade was late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez's eyes and ears in the Venezuelan military, was arrested in the small apartment in which he had been holed up.

"He lived totally enclosed, never going outside or getting close to the window, always protected by people he trusted," Spain's police said in a statement on social media in which they posted a short video the moment heavily-armed officers put handcuffs on Carvajal.

Spain's leftist government last year approved Carvajal's extradition to the U.S., where he faces federal charges for allegedly working with guerrillas from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia to "flood" the U.S. with cocaine.

The extradition order followed a back-and-forth legal battle in which Spain's National Court reversed an earlier ruling by a high court magistrate throwing out the U.S. warrant for being politically motivated. In the interim, Carvajal was released and never heard from again except when he said last year that he was going underground to protest what he viewed as political interference in his case.

He resurfaced on social media earlier this month, posting with little notice what could be a preview of his eventual defense: a statement accusing former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe, who was for years the U.S.' main caretaker in the war on drugs, of "fabricating" evidence against him and the Chávez government even as it was cooperating with U.S. prosecutors to arrest Colombian narcos hiding inside Venezuela.

"It's a lie that will eventually collapse," Carvajal wrote. "I've always trusted that the truth will prevail."

It's not clear when Carvajal could be sent to the U.S. But his extradition may be slowed down by an asylum request he previously submitted to Spanish authorities.

"I'm prepared for either situation, the good or the bad," Carvajal's wife, Angélica Flores, told The Associated Press when contacted by phone with the news. "It's up to him and others to give statements. This case will continue and we'll see how it ends."

Nicknamed "El Pollo" ("The Chicken"), Carvajal has bete noire of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration for over a decade.

First indicted in 2011, he narrowly escaped extradition when he was arrested in Aruba in 2014 while serv-

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ing as Venezuela's consul general to the Dutch Caribbean island. President Nicolás Maduro's government successfully applied pressure on Aruba, which sits just miles off Venezuela's coast, to release Carvajal and when it did he received a hero's welcome upon his return to Caracas.

But he was never a confidant of Maduro and in the complicated internal politics of Venezuela's ruling socialist party was relegated to a minor role as a backbench parliamentarian.

In 2019, after opposition leader Juan Guaidó led a street uprising and quickly won the U.S.' recognition as Venezuela's legitimate leader, Carvajal then openly rejected the government, urging members of the military to break with Maduro.

While on the run, both from the DEA and Maduro, Carvajal traveled to the Spanish capital from the Dominican Republic under a disguised identity. He was greeted at Madrid's airport by two Spanish intelligence officials, the AP has previously reported.

From Europe, Carvajal had hoped to leverage contacts and knowledge of the Venezuelan deep state to mount a military-backed rebellion against Maduro.

But to the frustration of many in Venezuela's opposition who have secretly tried to flip senior members of the military, he was arrested on the U.S. warrant days before a failed barracks rebellion on April 30, 2019.

There was no immediate comment from Maduro's government.

The case against Carvajal in New York centers on a DC-9 jet from Caracas that landed in southern Mexico in 2006 with 5.6 tons of cocaine packed into 128 suitcases. Carvajal said that judicial probes in Venezuela and Mexico never linked him to the incident and that the alleged plane owner backs his alibi.

But he faces incriminating evidence from phone records, drug ledgers and the testimony of at least 10 witnesses, according to an affidavit from a DEA special agent. Those witnesses include members and associates of the "Cartel of the Suns," former high-ranking Venezuelan officials, according to the affidavit.

The U.S. indictment also repeats an accusation that Carvajal provided Colombian rebels with weapons and protection inside Venezuela.

The former general has scoffed at the allegations. He says his contacts with the FARC — designated by the U.S. as a terrorist organization — were authorized by Chávez and limited to securing the release of a kidnapped Venezuelan businessman and paving the way for peace talks with the Colombian government.

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Goodman reported from Miami.

## House Dems begin moving parts of Biden \$3.5T domestic plans

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats began pushing plans for providing paid family and medical leave, easing climate change and bolstering education through House committees Thursday as they battled Republicans and among themselves over President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion vision for reshaping federal priorities.

Five committees worked on their slices of the 10-year proposal, early steps in what looms as a fraught autumn for Democrats hoping to enact a remarkable range of major policy changes. They face not only solid GOP opposition but internal divisions among progressives and moderates in a Congress they control so narrowly that they can afford only three House defections, none in the Senate.

"We have a once-in-a-generation chance to make transformative, beneficial change," said House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., as his tax-writing panel debated its pivotal chunk of the voluminous legislation. "This is our moment to lay a new foundation of opportunity for the American people."

Republicans cast the still-evolving measure as an economy killer that would raise taxes, cost jobs, worsen federal debt and make people increasingly reliant on government. In a signal of the broad political potency they believe the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan offers, they repeatedly conjured that image to belittle Democrats' economic plans.

"Following the humiliating Afghanistan surrender, now President Biden is leading America on an economic

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surrender to China, Russia, Europe and the Middle East," said the top Republican on Ways and Means, Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas.

At a sixth committee, Democrats controlling the House Energy and Commerce panel unveiled new details supporting Biden's push to wean power plants off climate-damaging fossil fuels by 2035. That included \$150 billion in grants for utilities investing in cleaner energy sources plus millions of dollars in penalties for companies that don't boost clean electricity output by at least 4% annually.

They also released their blueprint for retooling Medicare, Medicaid, children's health insurance and the 2010 health care law. There were few surprises, but the proposals, which face votes next week, underscored Democrats' intent to reinforce the pillars of the nation's health care system with new benefits, lower costs and expanded insurance coverage.

In an early manifestation of unrest, one Democrat on the Ways and Means panel voted against the first two sections of her party's bill after complaining that lawmakers lacked information on its cost and hadn't been shown key portions dealing with taxes and prescription drug prices.

Moderate Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., is co-chair of the House Blue Dog Coalition, a centrist group whose members include some of Congress' most conservative Democrats. On one of those votes, outgoing moderate Rep. Ron Kind, D-Wis., joined her in voting "no."

"I don't know how much we're spending, how much we're raising, how we're spending some of the money and how we're raising any of the money," Murphy told her colleagues.

Democrats have said they will pay for much of the overall bill by raising taxes on the rich and corporations. They've said no one earning under \$400,000 annually would face higher levies.

By Thursday afternoon Neal had not released details of any revenue proposals, including the tax boosts or some tax cuts his party wants to use to help ease people's costs for health care and other needs.

Also not provided were Neal's plans to let Medicare save money by negotiating prices they pay for prescription drugs, another way they hope to raise money for the bill's priorities.

Moderate Democrats — most prominently Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona — have said the bill's proposed \$3.5 trillion cost is too high. Congressional Democratic leaders have conceded that the price tag may have to fall to retain moderate votes, causing anger among progressives who want the package to spend as much as possible.

House and Senate Democrats also must still reach agreements on many issues, including key questions about overall spending and revenues. Democrats in the more moderate Senate have been concerned about the price tags of some House spending proposals.

The Ways and Means portion of the measure is to contain many of Biden's top priorities. These include creation of up to 12 weeks per year of family and medical leave for all workers beginning in 2023. The benefit would pay the lowest-earning workers up to 85% of their wages, a percentage that would fall for higher earners.

Democrats on the committee batted down Republican amendments. One by Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Pa., would have delayed the paid leave program from taking effect until six months after the Treasury Department would certify that the government had enough expertise to start it.

The Energy and Commerce panel would limit price increases for medications. It would roughly halve Biden's request for \$400 billion to expand home and community-based long-term care services, an apparent bow to constraints Democrats face to live within their self-imposed \$3.5 trillion price tag.

Funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, which covers nearly 10 million kids, would be made permanent. And money would be provided to cover 4 million low-income adults in states that have not expanded their Medicaid programs.

Energy and Commerce would also spend billions to upgrade the power grid, create an electric vehicle charging network, replace lead drinking water pipes and help minority communities most affected by pollution and climate change.

Separately, the House Education and Labor Committee worked on a proposed \$761 billion to create free pre-school and community college and increase funds for job training, nutrition programs and modern-

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izing public school buildings.

The House Natural Resources Committee was working on \$30 billion for addressing climate change and other environmental issues. This includes money to protect coastlines from rising seas and create Biden's proposed Civilian Climate Corps, which would employ hundreds of thousands of people on environmental projects.

Other panels were working on provisions for small business and science programs.

Top Democrats want to quickly assemble the overall bill, which 13 House committees are crafting, by late September in hopes of moving it through the full House and Senate. That may well prove overly ambitious.

Associated Press reporters Matthew Daly and Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar contributed to this report.

## Research on beards, wads of gum wins 2021 Ig Nobel prizes

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

Beards aren't just cool and trendy — they might also be an evolutionary development to help protect a man's delicate facial bones from a punch to the face.

That's the conclusion of a trio of scientists from the University of Utah who are among the winners of this year's Ig Nobel prizes, the Nobel Prize spoofs that honor — or maybe dishonor, depending on your point of view — strange scientific discoveries.

The winners of the 31st annual Ig Nobels being announced Thursday included researchers who figured out how to better control cockroaches on U.S. Navy submarines; animal scientists who looked at whether it's safer to transport an airborne rhinoceros upside-down; and a team that figured out just how disgusting that discarded gum stuck to your shoe is.

For the second year in a row, the ceremony was a roughly 90-minute prerecorded digital event because of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, said Marc Abrahams, editor of the *Annals of Improbable Research* magazine, the event's primary sponsor.

While disappointing in many ways because half the fun of a live ceremony is the rowdy audience participation, the ceremony retained many in-person traditions. Those included real Nobel laureates announcing the prizes, and the world premiere of a mini opera called "A Bridge Between People," about children who literally build tiny suspension bridges to join two angry adults.

No faces were punched for the beard study published in the scientific journal *Integrative Organismal Biology*.

Instead, University of Utah scientists Ethan Beseris, Steven Naleway and David Carrier used a fiber epoxy composite to simulate human bone, and sheepskin to act as the human skin — sometimes with the fleece still on, sometimes sheared. They then dropped weights on them.

The sample with the fleece still attached absorbed more energy than the sheared samples.

"If the same is true for human facial hair, then having a full beard may help protect vulnerable regions of the facial skeleton from damaging strikes, such as the jaw," they said. "Presumably, full beards also reduce injury, laceration, and contusion to the skin and muscle of the face."

It's obvious that those wads of discarded chewing gum found on sidewalks around the world are pretty revolting.

But just how revolting?

Researchers from a Spanish university determined the already-chewed gum that has been stuck to the sidewalk for three months is teeming with nasty bacteria.

It sounds like a silly study, but as usual, there was some method to the madness.

"Our findings have implications for a wide range of disciplines, including forensics, contagious disease control, or bioremediation of wasted chewing gum residues," Leila Satari, Alba Guillén, Ángela Vidal-Verdú, and Manuel Porcar from the University of Valencia wrote in their paper, which was published at *Nature.com*.

A team of U.S. Navy researchers won for figuring out a cheaper and more effective way to control cockroaches on submarines. The 1971 study that appeared in *Journal of Economic Entomology* found that tra-



ditional methods such as carboxide fumigation and use of the pesticide malathion were not good enough. They found that using the pesticide dichlorvos was less expensive and more effective.

The goal is to return next year's ceremony to its traditional home at Harvard University's Sanders Theatre, Abrahams said, but much depends on whether the pandemic is under control and what kind of travel restrictions are in place around the world.

## **Report: Air Force women, minorities face harassment and bias**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — About a third of the female service members in the Air Force and Space Force say they've experienced sexual harassment and many can describe accounts of sexism and a stigma associated with pregnancy and maternity leave, a study released Thursday has found.

The review, done by the Air Force inspector general, also concluded that minorities and women are underrepresented in leadership and officer positions, particularly at the senior levels, and get promoted less frequently. It echoed many of the findings of an initial review, released last December, which found that Black service members in the Air Force are far more likely to be investigated, arrested, face disciplinary actions and be discharged for misconduct.

The two reviews into racial, ethnic and gender disparities across the Air Force and Space Force broadly confirm that biases exist, but the data does not fully explain why. The studies also reflect broader campaigns within the Defense Department and the Biden administration to root out extremism and racism.

President Joe Biden has declared domestic extremism an urgent national security threat and the Defense Department is working to identify extremist behavior and eliminate it from the force. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, earlier this year, ordered military leaders to spend a day talking to their troops about extremism in the ranks, after a number of former and current military members took part in the assault on the U.S. Capitol in January.

In addition, the Defense Department late last year endorsed a slate of initiatives to more aggressively recruit, retain and promote a more racially and ethnically diverse force.

"There are a lot of disparities within the Air Force," said Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall in a call with reporters. "This includes things like promotions, how people are treated in their careers, how they're treated in assignments, other areas under the judicial system, if you will, and also about perceptions that people have."

In the latest study, about half of all female respondents said maintaining work/life balance and taking care of family commitments adversely affect them, while only 18% of men responding to the survey shared that view.

It also found that about 25% of female Air Force and Space Force civilians said they had experienced sexual harassment during their careers. And it said some women across the force didn't trust their chain of command to address the bad behavior, and feared retribution.

Women and minorities also said they believe they have to work harder to prove their competency.

While the first study looked at disparities for Black service members, the latest one involved women, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latino personnel in active duty, the National Guard, Reserves and civilian workforce.

As a result, the report said, thousands of female and minority Air and Space Force members reported instances of bias, discrimination and sexual harassment that contribute to the racial, ethnic and gender disparities laid out in the document.

Lt. Gen. Sami Said, the inspector general, told reporters that some of the largest gaps are in operational jobs, which include pilots and other combat-related posts. As an example, in 2020, nearly 84% of the pilots in the active duty Air Force were white, and more than 92% were male. In contrast, 7.7% were female, 3% were Hispanic/Latino, 2.7% were Asian American, 2% were Black, 0.5% were Native American and 0.3% were Pacific Islander.

The problem, according to Said, starts with recruiting. A common theme in surveys and group discus-

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sions, he said, was that women and minorities believe there is a "lack of people that look like us that can mentor us and advise us."

Because they aren't brought in to key operational jobs at decent rates, they are at a disadvantage when competing with others for promotions and better jobs.

In addition, the report found that Native Americans were 113% more likely to face a court-martial than their White peers, and that they and Hispanic/Latino Air Force members were 33% more likely to face criminal investigations.

The second report released Thursday laid out some of the ongoing efforts to address shortfalls found in the December review on bias against Blacks. It also found they were less likely to be promoted and that one-third believed they don't get the same opportunities as their white peers.

It said the Air Force is working to increase diversity awareness among recruiters and expand partnerships with institutions that have large minority populations to beef up recruiting. That effort would include directing more minorities to key career fields that have a greater opportunity for advancement.

The Air Force also has set up new policies to track administrative actions based on age, rank, gender and race, and it recommended more training for commanders and other key leaders on unconscious bias.

Said told reporters that he is "100% convinced" that senior leaders are focused on the diversity issue. "It's not a shiny object of the moment that fades," he said.

More than 100,500 individuals participated in the anonymous survey for the latest gender and minority study. The participants also turned in more than 16,900 single-spaced pages of other comments and were involved in 122 small-group discussions.

## **FDA delays decision on e-cigarettes from vaping giant Juul**

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health officials on Thursday delayed a high-stakes decision on whether to permit bestselling vaping brand Juul to stay on the market, while banning the sale of thousands of other electronic cigarettes.

The Food and Drug Administration said it rejected applications for nearly 950,000 e-cigarettes and related products, mainly due to their potential appeal to underage teens. Some of the products are currently being sold while many others were only proposed by manufacturers. But the agency didn't rule on Juul, the most popular brand with adult smokers and many teens.

Parents, politicians and anti-tobacco advocates have pressured the FDA for years to ban Juul's high-nicotine devices, which many blame for the recent spike in underage vaping. But the agency said it would need more time to rule on that company's products.

"There's more work to be done to complete our remaining reviews and ensure that we continue taking appropriate action to protect our nation's youth from the dangers of all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes," the agency said in a statement. The agency noted 80% of teens and children who vape use flavored products.

Thursday's action is part of a sweeping review by the FDA to bring scientific scrutiny to the multibillion-dollar vaping industry after years of regulatory delays. The agency has yet to authorize any vaping product as a less harmful option for smokers.

The FDA faced a court deadline Thursday to issue decisions on marketing applications from Juul and hundreds of other companies. The date was set by a federal judge after anti-tobacco groups successfully sued the FDA to speed up its review.

To stay on the market, companies must show that their e-cigarettes benefit public health. In practice, that means proving that adult smokers who use the products are likely to quit or reduce their smoking, while teens are unlikely to get hooked on them.

FDA regulators previously said they would prioritize Juul and a handful of other key players, but none were included in the agency's announcement.

The delay was immediately panned by anti-vaping groups.

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"This is an outrageous move by FDA," said Meredith Berkman, co-founder of Parents Against Vaping E-cigarettes. "Millions of families whose kids' lives have been upended by the youth vaping epidemic created by Juul have waited long enough for action."

The FDA didn't indicate when it might rule on Juul and other major manufacturers. Matthew Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said his group will go back to court if the FDA doesn't clarify its timeline for the remaining decisions.

E-cigarettes first appeared in the U.S. more than a decade ago with the promise of providing smokers with a less harmful alternative to smoking traditional tobacco cigarettes. The devices heat a nicotine solution into a vapor that's inhaled.

But there has been little rigorous study of whether the e-cigarettes truly help smokers quit. And efforts by the FDA to begin vetting vaping products and their claims were repeatedly slowed by industry lobbying and competing political interests.

Today, the vaping market includes hundreds of companies selling an array of devices and nicotine solutions in various flavors and strengths. But the vast majority of the market is controlled by a few companies including Juul Labs Inc. — which is partially owned by tobacco giant Altria — and Vuse, part of cigarette maker R.J. Reynolds.

Juul accounts for nearly half of the \$4 billion U.S. market but sales have fallen sharply from when the company controlled more than 75%. In 2019, the company was pressured into halting all advertising and pulling all of its flavors except for menthol and tobacco.

The FDA received applications for more than 6 million vaping products. The agency said Thursday it has taken action on 93% of those applications, including for 4.5 million products that were immediately rejected because they were missing key information.

It is still reviewing a smaller number of applications for other non-traditional tobacco products like hookahs, pipes and mini cigars. Those products weren't covered by the original 2009 law that first gave the FDA authority to oversee some parts of the industry, including the review of new products. Also awaiting review: larger vaping devices with refillable tanks that are mainly popular with adults and sell at specialty vape shops.

The vaping issue took on new urgency in 2018 when Juul's high-nicotine, fruity-flavored cartridges became a nationwide craze among middle and high school students, leading the FDA to declare an "epidemic" of underage vaping. Last year, the FDA limited flavors in those small vaping devices to just tobacco and menthol, and teen vaping dropped. But the question of whether e-cigarettes should be sold at all remained.

Most experts agree the chemicals contained in e-cigarette vapor are less harmful than tobacco smoke, which contains thousands of cancer-causing chemicals.

"E-cigs and other reduced harm products present a fantastic opportunity to replace cigarettes with far less dangerous products," said Jonathan Foulds, an addiction and public health specialist at Penn State University. "But I'm concerned this may be the start of an overly aggressive regulation for e-cigarettes — especially compared to how we treat regular cigarettes."

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## **In COVID-slammed Idaho, schools risk buckling hospitals**

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — When Idaho public health officials announced this week that northern hospitals were so crowded with coronavirus patients that they would be allowed to ration health care, roughly 11,000 kids in Coeur d'Alene were packing lunches, climbing on buses or grabbing backpacks for their first day of school.

Very few of them — maybe 2% or 3%, based on one district spokesman's estimate — were wearing masks.

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Kootenai Health, the hospital at the epicenter of the region's COVID-19 health care crisis, is just a 10-minute walk from the Coeur d'Alene School District's headquarters. It has 200 beds for medical or surgical patients, but on Wednesday — the second day of school — Kootenai Health's doctors and nurses were caring for 218 medical and surgical patients, aided by military doctors and nurses called in to help with the surge.

On Thursday — the third day of school — the hospital tallied 109 COVID-19 patients, including 37 requiring critical care. The hospital normally has just 26 intensive care unit beds.

Meanwhile, Idaho's vaccination rates remain among the lowest in the U.S., and coronavirus cases have grown by 44% in the last two weeks as the highly contagious delta variant burns through the population. It's basically a math problem that adds up to a potential disaster.

"We're at risk of getting more patients," Dr. Robert Scoggins, Kootenai Health's chief of staff, said during a news conference Wednesday afternoon. "There's no mitigation in place in our school systems at this point, and I'm concerned about what's going to happen ... and how that will affect the care of COVID patients and non-COVID patients."

School outbreaks have been a problem in other states with much higher vaccination rates than Idaho. More than 80 people at Kamiakin Middle School in Kirkland, Washington, were told this week to stay home until notified because they came in contact with two students who tested positive for COVID-19. More than 85% of the eligible people in the area east of Seattle are fully vaccinated, according to local health officials.

And in Oregon's Lake Oswego school district, more than 40 students are in quarantine because they were exposed to COVID-19 on a school bus. About 67% of adults are fully vaccinated in Clackamas County, where the school is located, according to state health officials.

In Kootenai County, which includes Coeur d'Alene, only 41% are fully vaccinated. Still, like the vast majority of school districts in northern Idaho, Coeur d'Alene is not requiring masks or other steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Many in the extremely conservative region have been adamantly opposed to mask mandates since the pandemic began. During one Coeur d'Alene school board meeting last month, some attendees held signs, booing or cheering the speakers. Three of the five school board members said they preferred to recommend wearing masks as a personal choice.

"We are highly concerned. I mean, we're already seeing the effects of the delta variant," said Panhandle District Health spokeswoman Katherine Hoyer on Thursday. "This is really going to take our community being responsible to protect each other and our health care facilities. We never wanted to reach crisis standards of care, yet here we are."

During last winter's surge, the Panhandle Health District worked with schools on contact tracing. Hoyer said the Coeur d'Alene School District was especially helpful for cases involving students.

But this year, the public health district has jettisoned traditional contact tracing after the case backlog became hopelessly huge. Now the agency does smaller investigations for priority populations only: health care providers, long-term care facility residents and workers, and students and school staffers.

Coeur d'Alene School District spokesman Scott Maben said the school system has also ended contact tracing.

"We don't have the resources to do it this year," Maben said. "We are definitely relying on people to self-report to us."

That could be a problem. Hoyer's agency has run into several families that refuse to say which school their COVID-19-positive child attends. Last school year, Maben saw families knowingly send kids with COVID-19 to school and extracurricular activities.

The school district can send the child home for mandatory quarantine if it knows about a positive coronavirus test, but again, relies on families to disclose the information.

"We're urging people to stay home until it's safe to be around others, but we also know that a lot of families believe that a lot of these concerns are exaggerated and their kids need to be in school," Maben said. "That's an ongoing frustration with us."

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Kids are far less likely than adults to become seriously ill from coronavirus. Roughly 188 children statewide have been hospitalized with the virus since the pandemic first came to Idaho, according to numbers from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. But kids, like adults, can easily pass the virus to others, and in a state where only half of the residents are fully vaccinated, a schoolhouse outbreak could quickly become a major problem, said Dr. David Peterman, a pediatrician and CEO of Primary Health Group in southwestern Idaho.

"We have evidence all over the world that when children go to school and masks are not required, that coronavirus spreads among those children and into the community," Peterman said.

Most schools in the region where Primary Health runs 21 urgent care and family medicine clinics started two or three weeks ago, and many districts in the area didn't require everyone to wear masks.

"We are now reporting out on a regular basis two to three hundred new cases or more," Peterman said, compared to about 10 new cases a week at his clinics in early July. "There is no question that this has coincided with children being back in school.

In southwestern Idaho, the state's largest school district started classes a couple of weeks ago requiring masks but allowing parents to "opt out." More than one-third of the West Ada School District's 40,000 students opted out.

On Wednesday, a popular high school history teacher at the school district died of COVID-19. At a scheduled meeting later that day, the West Ada School Board said the district would temporarily require masks for everyone, regardless of whether they opted out, until at least Sept. 24, the Idaho Statesman reported.

"As one of the largest organizations in the Treasure Valley, as well as state, we believe that we have a public health obligation," Superintendent Derek Bub said. "Implementing a mask requirement for students and staff is one way that West Ada can make a positive contribution to the community."

## Senate opposition leads White House to withdraw ATF nominee

By MIKE BALSAMO and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House said Thursday it would withdraw the nomination of a gun-control advocate to lead the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives after nominee David Chipman ran into bipartisan opposition in the Senate.

Chipman's nomination had stalled for months and he was widely seen as one of the administration's most contentious nominees. The White House and top Democrats had been pushing to save his nomination for weeks but could not secure the necessary votes, with some Democrats saying privately they would not vote for him.

Despite that, President Joe Biden blamed only Republicans. "He would have been an exemplary director of the ATF," Biden said in a statement. "Unfortunately, Republicans in Congress have made clear that they intend to use gun crime as a political talking point instead of taking serious steps to address it. That's why they've moved in lockstep to block David Chipman's confirmation."

Chipman is a former federal agent and adviser at the gun control group Giffords. He won praise from advocates for his work pushing for greater regulation and enforcement on ghost guns, overhauling the background check system and moves to reduce the trafficking of illegal firearms.

But that same advocacy drew opposition from moderate Republicans such as Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, as well as independent Sen. Angus King of Maine, dooming his prospects for confirmation in the 50-50 divided Senate.

In a statement, Chipman said he remained committed to addressing the issue of violent crime and domestic terrorism.

"I knew this confirmation process would be difficult, and while ultimately we weren't successful, it remains essential that ATF is led by a confirmed director who is accountable to the public and places no special interests before the safety of our children and our communities," he said.

The withdrawal continues a pattern for Republican and Democratic administrations who have failed to get nominees through the politically fraught process since the director's position was made confirmable

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in 2006. Since then, only one nominee, former U.S. Attorney B. Todd Jones has been confirmed. Jones made it through the Senate in 2013 but only after a six-month struggle. Jones was acting director when then-President Barack Obama nominated him in January 2013.

The nomination of Chuck Canterbury, a former president of the Fraternal Order of Police, by then-President Donald Trump was withdrawn in 2020 over Republican concerns about his gun rights stance.

The withdrawal of Chipman's nomination leaves the chief firearm and explosive investigation agency without a confirmed leader at a time when the Biden Administration has made gun violence enforcement a priority, but with limited resources.

Earlier this year Biden announced a series of executive actions aimed at what he called an "epidemic and an international embarrassment" of gun violence in America.

The actions amounted to a fraction of the ambitious gun control agenda he proposed as a candidate and underscored his limited power to act alone on guns with difficult politics impeding legislative action on Capitol Hill.

Biden has urged Congress to tackle a number of issues, including expanded background checks and banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

But with an evenly-divided Senate — and any gun control legislation requiring 60 votes to pass — Democrats would have to keep every member of their narrow majority on board while adding 10 Republicans.

A person with knowledge of discussions with Chipman said he had been offered a position at Justice but turned it down. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak on the record.

## Michael Constantine of 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding' dies at 94

By The Associated Press undefined

Michael Constantine, an Emmy Award-winning character actor who reached worldwide fame playing the Windex bottle-toting father of the bride in the 2002 film "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," has died. He was 94.

Constantine died Aug. 31 at his home in Reading, Pennsylvania, of natural causes, his family said. The news was confirmed to The Associated Press on Thursday by his agent, Julia Buchwald.

Constantine made appearances on such TV shows as "My Favorite Martian," "The Twilight Zone," "Bonanza," "Hogan's Heroes," "The Dick Van Dyke Show," "The Fugitive," "Quincy, M.E.," "The Love Boat," "Remington Steele," "MacGyver" and "Murder, She Wrote." His big break came in the role of a principal on "Room 222," an ABC comedy-drama set in a racially diverse Los Angeles high school, for which he won an Emmy for outstanding performance by an actor in a supporting role in 1970.

But he became best known for his work in the indie comedy "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," which centered on a middle-class Greek American woman who falls in love with an upper-middle-class White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Constantine reprised his role on the TV series "My Big Fat Greek Life" and in the 2016 film, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2."

"My Big Fat Greek Wedding" became the highest-grossing romantic-comedy of all time with a \$241.4 million domestic gross. It was based on writer-star Nia Vardalos' one-woman play and produced by Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson for just \$5 million.

"Michael was always the kindest person," Wilson wrote on Instagram. "He had time for everyone, and when you were with him he made you feel like you were the only person in the room. He will be with us forever in our hearts and for future generations who will watch his work."

Constantine initially auditioned for the part of Gus and told The Hollywood Reporter that he was anxious to read Vardalos' script, leery about how it might represent the Greek American experience.

"I was anxious about someone writing some Greek thing. Was it going to be baloney or was it going to be something by somebody who really knows Greeks? So I read the script and I said, 'Yes, this person obviously knows Greeks,'" he said.

Vardalos paid tribute to Constantine on Twitter, writing: "Acting with him came with a rush of love and fun. I will treasure this man who brought Gus to life. He gave us so much laughter and deserves a rest now."

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Constantine was the son of Greek immigrants. He started his career on stage and was on Broadway in the late 1950s and early '60s in such shows as "Arturo Ui," "The Miracle Worker" and "Inherit the Wind."

He made his big-screen debut alongside Mickey Rooney in "The Last Mile" and had roles in "The Hustler," "Don't Drink the Water," "Prancer," "The Reivers," "My Life" and "The Juror."

Constantine was married and divorced twice. Survivors include his sisters, Patricia Gordon and Chris Dobbs.

## Magnet milestones move distant nuclear fusion dream closer

By FRANK JORDANS, SETH BORENSTEIN and DANIEL COLE Associated Press

SAINT-PAUL-LES-DURANCE, France (AP) — Teams working on two continents have marked similar milestones in their respective efforts to tap an energy source key to the fight against climate change: They've each produced very impressive magnets.

On Thursday, scientists at the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor in southern France took delivery of the first part of a massive magnet so strong its American manufacturer claims it can lift an aircraft carrier.

Almost 60 feet (nearly 20 meters) tall and 14 feet (more than four meters) in diameter when fully assembled, the magnet is a crucial component in the attempt by 35 nations to master nuclear fusion.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology scientists and a private company announced separately this week that they, too, have hit a milestone with the successful test of the world's strongest high temperature superconducting magnet that may allow the team to leapfrog ITER in the race to build a 'sun on earth.'

Unlike existing fission reactors that produce radioactive waste and sometimes catastrophic meltdowns, proponents of fusion say it offers a clean and virtually limitless supply of energy. If, that is, scientists and engineers can figure out how to harness it — they have been working on the problem for nearly a century.

Rather than splitting atoms, fusion mimics a process that occurs naturally in stars to meld two hydrogen atoms together and produce a helium atom — as well as a whole load of energy.

Achieving fusion requires unimaginable amounts of heat and pressure. One approach to achieving that is to turn the hydrogen into an electrically charged gas, or plasma, which is then controlled in a donut-shaped vacuum chamber.

This is done with the help of powerful superconducting magnets such as the 'central solenoid' that General Atomics began shipping from San Diego to France this summer.

Scientists say ITER is now 75% complete and they aim to fire up the reactor by early 2026.

"Each completion of a major first-of-a-kind component — such as the central solenoid's first module — increases our confidence that we can complete the complex engineering of the full machine," said ITER's spokesman Laban Coblentz.

The ultimate goal is to produce ten times more energy by 2035 than is required to heat up the plasma, thereby proving that fusion technology is viable.

Among those hoping to beat them to the prize is the team in Massachusetts, which said it has managed to create magnetic field twice that of ITER's with a magnet about 40 times smaller.

The scientists from MIT and Commonwealth Fusion Systems said they may have a device ready for everyday use in the early 2030s.

"This was designed to be commercial," said MIT Vice President Maria Zuber, a prominent physicist. "This was not designed to be a science experiment."

While not designed to produce electricity itself, ITER would also serve as the blueprint for similar but more sophisticated reactors if it is successful.

Proponents of the project argue that even if it fails, the countries involved will have mastered technical skills that can be used in other fields, from particle physics to designing advanced materials capable of withstanding the heat of the sun.

All nations contributing to the project — including the United States, Russia, China, Japan, India, South Korea and much of Europe — share in the \$20 billion cost and benefit jointly from the scientific results and intellectual property generated.

The central solenoid is just one of 12 large U.S. contributions to ITER, each of which is built by American companies, with funds allocated by Congress going toward U.S. jobs.

"Having the first module safely delivered to the ITER facility is such a triumph because every part of the manufacturing process had to be designed from the ground up," said John Smith, director of engineering and projects at General Atomics.

The company spent years developing new technologies and methods to make and move the magnet parts, including coils weighing 250,000 pounds, across their facility and then around the globe.

"The engineering know-how that was established during this period is going to be invaluable for future projects of this scale," said Smith.

"The goal of ITER is to prove that fusion can be a viable and economically practical source of energy, but we are already looking ahead at what comes next," he added. "That's going to be key to making fusion work commercially, and we now have a good idea of what needs to happen to get there."

Betting on nuclear energy — first fission and then fusion — is still the world's best chance drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050, said Frederick Bordry, who oversaw the design and construction of another fiendishly complex scientific machine, the Large Hadron Collider at CERN.

"When we speak about the cost of ITER, it's peanuts in comparison with the impact of climate change," he said. "We will have to have the money for it."

Frank Jordans reported from Berlin, and Seth Borenstein reported from Kensington, Maryland.

Follow AP's coverage of climate change issues at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-change>

## **Sheriff: Florida family massacre followed random encounter**

By CURT ANDERSON AP Legal Affairs Writer

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — A chance encounter with a former Marine beset by delusions of child sex trafficking ultimately led to the massacre of four members of a Florida family, including a mother holding her baby boy, a sheriff said Thursday.

Bryan Riley, who faces murder and other charges in Sunday's killings, stopped by the slain family's Lakeland home briefly the day before after going to a nearby friend's house to pick up a first aid kit, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd said at a news conference.

Riley had told acquaintances he was headed for Hurricane Ida relief work and the friend offered the kit for the purported trip. A short distance away, Riley saw Justice Gleason mowing his lawn with his 11-year-old daughter in the yard, Judd said.

That provided the trigger that led to the slayings, Judd said: Riley saw the girl, believing she was an imaginary child named Amber who was suicidal and being held by a supposed sex trafficking ring that God had told him to confront. In fact, no one named Amber lived at the home and Gleason repeatedly told Riley that before asking him to leave their initial encounter.

"This was all fiction, all made up by him," Judd said. "There were no victims of sex trafficking in that house."

Judd provided numerous new details about Sunday's slayings, including that Riley, wearing body armor, had three weapons with him and fired at least 100 shots in the main home and a smaller one in back where Catherine Delgado, 62, was the first to be killed.

Law enforcement officers fired about 60 shots in a gun battle that left Riley with a gunshot wound to the abdomen that is not life-threatening, Judd said. Riley surrendered after that.

"He was a coward. An absolute coward. He looks like a man, but he's not a man. He's a sniveling coward," Judd told reporters.

The 11-year-old girl survived the attack despite being shot multiple times and has undergone four surgeries so far, Judd said.

She told investigators that her family huddled in a bathroom after Riley shot his way into the home, killed



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their dog and then attacked everyone hiding there. Riley repeatedly asked about Amber and then counted down — three, two, one — before shooting her and eventually leaving her for dead, she told authorities.

Judd said the girl played dead and was able to survive despite wounds to her legs, hand and abdomen. "That's the reason she's alive today," the sheriff said.

The victims are Gleason, 40; his 33-year-old girlfriend, Theresa Lanham; their baby boy, Jody, who was born in May; and Delgado, who was Lanham's mother and owned the property. They possessed no weapons.

Riley, 33, served as a Marine in Iraq and Afghanistan and was working as a security guard in the Lake-land area, including at a church. After that recent job, his girlfriend of four years told investigators, Riley began talking about communication with God but not about violence.

"No one has told us they knew anything about violence," Judd said.

Riley is recovering from his gunshot wound and is being held without bond on murder, attempted murder and other charges. An Oct. 12 arraignment date is set for him to enter a plea. Judd said he has already confessed to the crimes, which could bring the death penalty.

Investigators also have not yet verified Riley's post-arrest statement to officers that he was high on methamphetamines at the time of the shooting. No evidence of that drug has been found, although Judd said illegal steroids were found at Riley's home in Brandon and hospital blood tests could reveal more.

"This investigation is not near over. This is going to go on for weeks and weeks and weeks," the sheriff said. "This mass murder is exceptionally horrible."

## **EXCERPT: 20 years on, 'The Falling Man' is still you and me**

By RICHARD DREW Associated Press

The following account from Associated Press photographer Richard Drew 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, Drew made one of the most indelible — and harrowing — images of the 21st century. It accompanies this story, but not as the main image.

My family calls it "the picture that won't go away." Most newspaper editors refused to print it. Those who did, on the day after the World Trade Center attacks, received hundreds of letters of complaint.

The photograph was denounced as coldblooded, ghoulish and sadistic. Then it vanished.

Yet 20 years later, I still get asked about it. I've been invited on national talk shows, interviewed by foreign TV crews and asked to speak about it at universities across the country. Esquire magazine published a 7,000-word essay that hailed it as an icon, a masterpiece and a touching work of art. Entertainer and photo collector Sir Elton John called it "probably one of the most perfect photographs ever taken."

All this for a single frame out of hundreds shot in haste before I was pulled to safety as the second tower of the World Trade Center tumbled toward me.

My fellow photographers called it "the most famous picture nobody's ever seen." But, in fact, it was seen. Whenever it's mentioned, people say, "Oh, that's the one where the guy looks like he's swan-diving." Or, "That's the one where the guy's body is lined up perfectly with the lines of the World Trade Center." And then there is: "I know — it's the one where, if you turn it upside down, it looks like the guy is sitting on a chair."

I find that ironic. Here's a photograph that was considered too upsetting for readers to look at. Yet people were turning it upside down to take a second look from a different angle.

I look at it from my own angle. I was below the north tower that morning, on the corner of West and Vesey streets. The smoke was so thick, it was tough to see and tougher to breathe. Rubble was falling, and when I heard the first of a series of loud cracks, I thought it was the sound of concrete debris striking the ground. But I was wrong. It was the sound of human beings hitting the pavement.

I focused on one person falling through the air, and shot eight frames. Then there was a huge noise, like an explosion. I just kept shooting; I thought maybe the roof had collapsed. I had no idea the whole building was falling, because I was too close.

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An emergency technician saved my life; he yanked me away. The tower leaned toward us as we ran, and I stopped and shot nine more frames.

Stupid, probably, but when you're in shock, it's like you're on automatic pilot.

Watching the tragedy unfold messed me up for a long time. I still take note of every plane I hear flying overhead, wondering if it's friend or foe. But neither the photograph nor the initial reaction to it disturbs me. People ask how I could cold-bloodedly photograph someone dying. I never saw it that way. I made a photographic record of someone living the last moments of his life. And every time I look at it, I see him alive.

I have photographed dying. As a 21-year-old rookie photographer on a supposedly routine assignment, I was standing behind Robert F. Kennedy when he was assassinated. That time, there was no telephoto lens to distance me. I was so close that his blood spattered onto my jacket. I saw the life bleed out of him, and I heard Ethel's screams. Pictures that, shot through my tears, still distress me after 35 years. But nobody refused to print them, as they did the 9/11 photo. Nobody looked away.

It's hard to say why not. The RFK assassination changed the fabric of American history. But then, so did the destruction of the World Trade Center. The Kennedy pictures were more graphic and, in one sense, more personal. We knew him, as a public figure, a brother, a father and a husband.

It took me the better part of a year after Sept. 11 to even address the question. I was fending off post-traumatic stress syndrome, and I didn't want to think about it. Then The Associated Press sent me to a camp run by former British special forces for training in how to survive in a hostile situation. You'd think simulating being attacked or kidnapped would have increased my anxieties. But I found it comforting. Knowing how to take even a few preventive measures gave me back a sense of control over my destiny.

As my anxieties abated, I continued to wonder why people reacted so differently to the photos of RFK and the World Trade Center.

One editor who objected to my photo said, "Americans don't want to look at pictures of death and dying over their morning cornflakes." I disagree. I think they're fine with it, as long as the victims aren't American.

During the Vietnam War, my friend and colleague Nick Ut took a photograph of a girl who'd been napalmed, running down the road in flames. The picture became an instant icon and won the Pulitzer Prize. But no one in the States worried about getting napalmed. The photo evoked sympathy, not empathy.

In the World Trade Center photo, it's about personal identification. We felt we knew Bobby Kennedy, but we didn't identify with him. We weren't wealthy scions of a political dynasty or presidential candidates. We were just ordinary people who had to show up for work, day after day, more often than not in tall office buildings.

Just like the guy at the World Trade Center.

That's what unsettles people about the picture. We look at it and we put ourselves in the jumper's place. And we ask, "Which option would I choose? Would I wait and pray for help as the flames licked at me, or jump through fresh air and sunlight, to certain death?"

You see, the girl in Nick Ut's picture was on fire. You can see the agony on her face. It's horrifying, but it is not the face of America. The man in my picture is uninjured. He does not look like he's in pain. But you know he is moments from death. And you can't help but think, "That could have been me."

Tom Junod, who wrote the article for Esquire, interviewed the families of several victims trying to identify the man he called "9/11's Unknown Soldier." He found their reactions varied according to their own feelings about mortality.

Some were insulted at the suggestion that their relative might have chosen death when he had a family at home (ignoring the fact that death was certain in any case). Others praised his decision to jump as an act of courage (ignoring the possibility that the man might have been forced to leap from the smoke-filled tower in order to breathe).

Though his quest proved fruitless, Junod eventually concluded, as I did, that the point was moot. For we already knew the identity of the man in the picture.

He was you and me.

## After Ida, small businesses face uncertainty on many fronts

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A week or more after Ida, business owners from Louisiana to Connecticut are still adding up the financial losses and assessing the physical and emotional toll, grappling to find a way forward.

Many say it's difficult to figure out the future when they're unsure of the answers to some immediate questions: When will the power come back on? How long before I get new supplies? When can my business be rebuilt?

"There's no more anxious situation to a business owner than a complete lack of clarity in how to plan," said Pike Howard, director of finance and development for New Orleans-based Felipe's Mexican Taqueria restaurants. Many businesses have already dealt with a long stretch of uncertainty due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The amount that we've been tested the past 18 to 24 months it's hard to imagine the roller coaster," Howard said. "If you didn't have a cash reserve going into this situation, I don't know what you would do."

Some help is being made available. On Monday, President Joe Biden approved major disaster declarations for six New Jersey counties and five New York counties. That follows similar announcements for Mississippi and Louisiana, the initial targets of the hurricane.

Disaster declarations are key for small businesses because that opens the door for federal disaster assistance loans.

By Wednesday evening, crews in Louisiana had restored power to nearly 90% of New Orleans and all of Baton Rouge. But hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses in Louisiana, most of them outside New Orleans, still don't have power. And about half of the gas stations in two major cities were without fuel as of Wednesday.

Rebuilding from storm damage will be a challenge. Building contractors were already facing worker shortages and supply constraints. Ida made those challenges even worse and will lead to higher prices and longer building delays.

Michael Gulotta, who owns two restaurants in New Orleans, said there is little they can do when facing the extensive power outages that Ida wrought.

"We were preparing for the storm, down here, we get them so often, you try to pack coolers with ice and hope the power is out for 20 minutes," he said. "Once it is, 'Oh, the power is out indefinitely,' there's not a whole lot you can do, at that point, the planning is out the window."

He organized food giveaways at his restaurants, Mopho and Maypop, to help get food to those who need it. Power has been restored and he planned on opening Mopho Thursday, but Maypop will remain closed for a few weeks. He said it's harder to get loans and insurance when the problem is business interruption rather than physical damage.

"The hard part is I just took a huge loss and no one is getting me money," he said. "At this point I'm out thousands and thousands of dollars and there's nothing I can do about it."

Some who aren't counting on insurance have started fundraising. In the Northeast, a tornado spawned in Ida's wake left Wellcrest Farms, a New Jersey dairy farm owned by Marianne and Wally Eachus, nearly demolished. They have counted about 14 dead cows, and 100 are still missing as of Wednesday. A GoFundMe started by fellow farmer Hillary Stecher reached nearly \$90,000 by Thursday. The goal is \$1 million. The farm has insurance, but Marianne Eachus says she has no idea if it will cover what's been lost.

Howard, who runs three Felipe's Mexican restaurants in New Orleans, said his lights were back on and he reopened his three restaurants about noon on Wednesday. But supply disruptions remain. His biggest supplier, Performance Food Group, is in the heavily-damaged city of Houma, and told him it would be at least three weeks before they're out delivering key limes, chicken, and other items again.

"I'm concerned about ability to capitalize on when the power comes back on because of supply chain issues and team members still scattered about," he said. He estimates that with food spoilage and at least two weeks of lost operations he could lose as much as \$250,000.

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Nicole Dorignac, co-owner of Dorignac's Food Center, said the 70-year old grocery store had minor roof and fencing damage. The bigger problem was making sure her staff of about 175 were okay.

"Many evacuated," she said. "Many are coming home to a lot of destruction to their houses. A lot of water damage and roof damage."

About 55 employees have come back for limited hours since the store reopened last Wednesday. Many employees are still dealing with storm damage and power outages and stuck at home waiting for insurance adjusters or tarps for their roofs. The store is only open limited hours until more employees can return.

"We had a disaster crew skeleton crew," she said. "We have some that live nearby that come literally hell or high water."

Krista Pouncy-Dyson, owner of digital media marketing company Performance 1st Digital Media, said her five staffers were already working from home before the storm so they knew how to communicate remotely. But multiple crises take a toll.

"There's an emotional component to all of this, we are in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic and we have to navigate that on top of a category 4 hurricane," she said. "It's immensely difficult."

Dyson is also the chairwoman of New Orleans Regional Black Chamber of Commerce. "Surveying minority and black owned businesses, there's a distinct need for working capital micro loans, access to fuel, just the basics," she said.

There's also the fear that people, or potential customers, will leave the area. After Katrina, "a lot of people just didn't come back," she said. The city's population shrank from half a million to less than half of that. Now, it is around 390,000.

"What is this going to look like a month from now, are people going to start canceling contracts because people relocated?" she asked. "Those are concerns business owners are thinking about."

## 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, dozens of the 2,997 memorial flags planted there ahead of Saturday's anniversary were uprooted by vandals overnight.

Logan's atmospheric memorial, meanwhile, 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>.

## US jobless claims reach a pandemic low as economy recovers

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell last week to 310,000, a pandemic low and a sign that the surge in COVID-19 cases caused by the delta variant has yet to lead to widespread layoffs.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that jobless claims dropped from a revised total of 345,000 the week before. And at their current pace, weekly applications for benefits are edging toward their pre-pandemic figure of roughly 225,000.

But the spread of the delta variant this summer has put renewed pressure on the economy and the job market. On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve reported that U.S. economic activity "downshifted" in July and August, in part because of a pullback in dining out, travel and tourism related to concerns about the delta variant.

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Still, the ongoing drop in applications for unemployment aid — six declines in the past seven weeks — indicates that most companies are holding onto their workers despite the slowdown. That trend should help sustain the economic rebound through the current wave of infections.

The pace of hiring, though, has weakened — at least for now. Last week, the government reported that hiring slowed dramatically in August, with employers adding just 235,000 jobs after having added roughly a million in both June and July. Hiring plummeted in industries that require face-to-face contact with the public, notably restaurants, hotels and retail. Still, some jobs were added in other areas, and the unemployment rate actually dropped to 5.2% from 5.4%.

“While the August jobs report showed employers may have hit the pause button on hiring amid renewed concerns about the pandemic, the claims data suggest a reluctance to lay off workers amid a record number of job openings,” said Nancy Vanden Houten, an economist at the consulting firm Oxford Economics.

The steady fall in weekly applications for unemployment benefits coincides with a scaling-back of aid for jobless Americans. This week, more than 8 million people lost all their unemployment benefits with the expiration of two federal programs that covered gig workers and people who have been jobless for more than six months. Those emergency programs were created in March 2020, when the pandemic first tore through the economy.

That cutoff isn’t yet reflected in the weekly jobless claims report. The report’s data on the emergency programs is delayed by two weeks. As of Aug. 21, 8.8 million people were receiving benefits from these two programs.

An additional 2.6 million people were receiving regular state unemployment aid. These recipients have just lost a \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement, which also expired this week.

Those cutoffs could also be a reason why applications for jobless aid are declining, said Eliza Forsythe, an economist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Many of the unemployed may now believe they aren’t eligible for aid.

Some business owners had complained that the federal supplement made it harder to fill open jobs. Those pleas led governors in about 25 states to cancel the \$300 payment early and to shut off the two emergency programs in most of those states as well. But academic research has found that so far, the early cut-offs in jobless benefits have led to only a small increase in hiring in those states.

Many economists express concern that the cut-off will lead to financial hardship because the resurgence of the pandemic will make it harder for some of the unemployed to find work. After previous recessions, emergency expansions of jobless aid ended at a time when far fewer people were still receiving benefits.

## Minnesota’s Klobuchar says she had breast cancer; doing well

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar announced Thursday that she has been treated for breast cancer that was found in February and the treatment “went well.”

Klobuchar, 61, tweeted that the cancer was detected during a routine mammogram, and eventually she had a lumpectomy to remove it. She said she completed radiation therapy in May amid a busy hearing schedule, including one treatment two days after her father died. A checkup in August found she was doing well. She told ABC’s “Good Morning America” that she’s “feeling much better” now.

For Democrats, Klobuchar’s health update was a fresh reminder of their fragile hold on the Senate, which they control by a single vote. Klobuchar’s announcement made no explicit statement on her future, but said the cancer “gave me renewed purpose to my work.”

Klobuchar said her cancer was stage 1A, meaning it had not spread beyond the breast. She said she felt fortunate to have caught it early because she had delayed her mammogram because of the pandemic.

“Now they tell me that my chances of getting cancer again are the same as any other person, which is great,” Klobuchar said on ABC. “But I learned a lot through this year ... about the importance of getting those exams and also the gratitude for all others that surrounded me and my family, my husband.”

She also issued a plea for Americans not to delay their health screenings and noted that thousands of

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women have undetected breast cancer. She said her advice was to “get those screenings, go in, get a mammogram, get whatever health checkup that you should normally be getting.”

Klobuchar is early in her third term. She was first elected in 2006 and easily won reelection twice against little-known opponents. She’s the daughter of well-known Minneapolis newsman Jim Klobuchar, who died in May, and Rose, a schoolteacher who died in 2010. Her grandfather was an iron miner in northern Minnesota.

Klobuchar long cultivated an image as a straight-shooting, pragmatist willing to work across the aisle with Republicans, making her one of the Senate’s most productive members at passing legislation.

The senator ran for president but dropped out before the 2020 Democratic convention as moderates lined up behind Joe Biden. She memorably announced her campaign during a snowstorm in 2019, at a park along the Mississippi River with the Minneapolis skyline in the background.

Klobuchar, a lawyer and the former chief prosecutor in Minnesota’s largest county, currently chairs the powerful Senate Rules Committee, which is examining the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol.

Associated Press writers Doug Glass in Minneapolis and Tom Strong in Washington contributed to this story.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Sept. 10, the 253rd day of 2021. There are 112 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Sept. 10, 1963, 20 Black students entered Alabama public schools following a standoff between federal authorities and Gov. George C. Wallace.

On this date:

In 1608, John Smith was elected president of the Jamestown colony council in Virginia.

In 1813, an American naval force commanded by Oliver H. Perry defeated the British in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. (Afterward, Perry sent the message, “We have met the enemy and they are ours.”)

In 1919, New York City welcomed home Gen. John J. Pershing and 25,000 soldiers who’d served in the U.S. First Division during World War I.

In 1935, Sen. Huey P. Long died in Baton Rouge two days after being shot in the Louisiana state Capitol, allegedly by Dr. Carl Weiss.

In 1960, Hurricane Donna, a dangerous Category 4 storm eventually blamed for 364 deaths, struck the Florida Keys.

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the University of Mississippi to admit James Meredith, a Black student.

In 1984, a revival of the TV game show “Jeopardy!” hosted by Alex Trebek premiered in syndication.

In 1987, Pope John Paul II arrived in Miami, where he was welcomed by President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan as he began a 10-day tour of the United States.

In 1991, the Senate Judiciary Committee opened hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1998, President Clinton met with members of his Cabinet to apologize, ask forgiveness and promise to improve as a person in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

In 2005, Cadaver dogs and boatloads of forensic workers fanned out across New Orleans to collect the corpses left behind by Hurricane Katrina; cleanup crews towed away abandoned cars and even began readying a hotel for reopening.

In 2015, New York State approved gradually raising the minimum wage for fast-food workers to \$15 an hour — the first time any state had set the minimum that high.