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Upcoming Events

Monday, Sept. 13

- Cross Country at Webster, 4 p.m.
- School Board Meeting, 6 p.m. (Broadcast on GDLIVE.COM)
- JH Boys Golf (H - Olive Grove Golf Course) 3:30 PM
- Homecoming Coronation, 7:30 p.m. (Broadcast on GDILIVE.COM)

Tuesday, Sept. 14

- Boys Golf at Redfield, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Sept. 16

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

Friday, Sept. 17

- Homecoming Parade, 1 p.m.
- FFA Pork Loin Supper @ Football Field 5:30 PM
- TigerPalooza at GHS Gym, 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Football hosting Mobridge-Pollock, 7 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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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

Fans were back in the stands in full force as the Vikings traveled to Cincinnati to visit the Bengals. It was Mike Zimmer's first time in Cincinnati since being the Bengals' defensive coordinator, but this was not the outcome that Zimmer was looking for as the Vikings fall to the Bengals, 27-24.

First Half:

The first half felt like two teams that hadn't played a game in eight months. The Vikings offense committed 11 penalties, starting the game with four penalties on the very first drive. Both teams traded three punts each, and the first quarter ended at 0-0.

The game started to heat up as the Vikings scored the first touchdown on a nice 90-yard drive, culminating with a 5-yard toss to Adam Theilen. Not to be outdone, second-year quarterback Joe Burrow, coming off an injury late last season, drove the Bengals 49 yards for a short 2-yard touchdown to his wide receiver Tee Higgins. Burrow later followed that up with a 50-yard bomb to rookie Ja'Marr Chase to end the half. Bengals lead 14-7.

Second Half:

The Bengals began the second half firing on all cylinders. Burrow led his team on an 11 play, 75-yard drive to put the Bengals up 21-7. After another Vikings punt, the Bengals attempted to put the Vikings away by going for it on 4th down from their own 30-yard line. However, the Vikings defense stepped up and stopped Joe Mixon short of the 1st down marker, thus giving the Vikings the ball with great field position. Needing to score a touchdown to stay in the game, the Vikings decided to go for it on 4th down. With the Bengals defense playing the run, Cousins was able to hit Theilen on a short slant and touchdown from 24-yards out. The Bengals countered with a 53-yard field goal, making it the score 24-14 going into the 4th quarter.

The Vikings' offense was now starting to click. After starting at their own 30, Cousins hits Justin Jefferson over the middle. Jefferson appeared to score, but the referee called him just short at the 1-yard line. Coach Zimmer quickly threw the red challenge flag, however the call on the field stood and the Vikings ended up burning a timeout. Nonetheless, Dalvin Cook was able to punch it in on first down from the 1, cutting the Bengals' lead to 24-21. After trading punts, the Vikings got the ball back with 1:48 left and no timeouts. They went nine plays and tied the game on a 53-yard field goal from Greg Joseph as time expired.

Overtime:

After the Vikings lost the coin toss, the Bengals got the ball to start overtime. However, they couldn't put much together on their first possession. In turn, the Vikings, on their first possession, punted the ball back to the Bengals deep in Bengal territory. After forcing a three and out, the Vikings then used four plays to get within field goal range. On their fifth play of the drive, Dalvin Cook fumbled on a controversial call, giving the Bengals the ball back. Despite it appearing that Cook's butt was down before he lost control of the ball, the call on the field stood. The Bengals, playing for the win and not the tie, decided to go for it on fourth down from the 50-yard line. With the help of play-action, Burrow was able to throw a beautiful pass over the top to his wide-open tight end, which ultimately put them in field goal range. As the overtime clock expired, the Bengals hit a 33-yard field goal to give the Vikings their first loss of the season.

Statistical leaders:

Kirk Cousins 36 for 49, 351 yards, 2 TDs

Adam Theilen 9 for 92 yards receiving, 2 TDs

Dalvin Cook 20 for 62 yards rushing, 6 for 43 yards receiving, 1 TD

The highlight of the day: It appears the Vikings pass rush has returned as they sacked Joe Burrow five times, with newcomer Michael Pierce tallying two sacks. The Vikings only recorded 23 sacks total last season.

The irony of the Day: Despite having 17 total penalties for the game, the Vikings had zero penalties on their three touchdown drives.

Next game: The Vikings travel to Arizona next week to play the Cardinals, who just went into Tennessee and beat the Titans 38-13. The Vikings will have to contend with speedy and elusive QB Kyler Murray, who threw for four touchdowns and ran for another. Starting on the road with back-to-back games is tough, and these first two for the Vikings may determine where they stand for the entire season.

Prevention is the Best Treatment

What I remember most is the silence.

She was 19 years old, just starting her first semester of college. She had been transferred to our level 1 trauma center, intubated and in a medically induced coma. I was a third-year medical student, being introduced to the realities of medicine. Our team was clustered around her in the procedure room adjacent to the ICU while my senior resident inserted the central line we would use to quickly administer large volumes of medicine and fluids.

ICUs can be busy, noisy places. This ICU was a large open room, with rows of beds surrounded by all the equipment needed to care for critically ill and injured patients. The sounds of machines whirring and beeping, of doctors and nurses and all the support staff, accompanied us in that little windowless procedure room.

The neurosurgery team solemnly filed through the door, eyes grim. They'd reviewed her CT scan. The pressure of the blood accumulating inside her skull had forced the base of her brain downward, into the space usually occupied only by the top of the spinal cord. We stared at each other in silence. We'd already lost the battle.

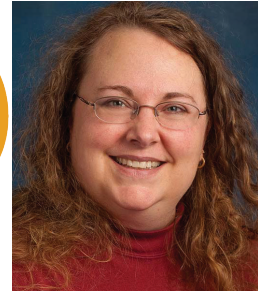
During the next few days, I watched her 20-year-old sister support their parents as we walked through the process of declaring brain death and deciding on organ donation. Other than the silence, the sister's grief, and her courage, are my most potent memories.

Over the years, I've seen many lives irrevocably altered by brain injuries. Children thrown from their bicycles. Soldiers caught in blasts. Women battered by their partners. Seniors who slip and fall. Some patients fight to regain skills that were once effortless. Some succumb to their injuries or the consequences. The lucky ones sometimes don't even realize how close they came to having their lives upended.

Our ability to help has improved significantly in the nearly 30 years since I stood at that young woman's bedside. People survive injuries that would have previously been fatal. People recover enough to rejoin the community, instead of finishing their days in nursing homes. Nevertheless, too many still die, over 50,000 Americans every year. Nevertheless, survivors spend months relearning basic skills with the help of skilled therapists. Nevertheless, millions live with varying degrees of disability, despite aggressive rehabilitation.

As with so many things, the best treatment is prevention. Buckle your children into their car seats. Use your seatbelt. Wear your helmet. Keep the guns locked up. Learn how to reduce the risk of falls, especially for the young, and the old. It's much better to protect that fragile brain, than to try to put it back to rights.

Debra Johnson, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Debra Johnston, MD

#466 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We have a somewhat briefer report today; there hasn't been a great deal of news lately—which these days I'll take for mostly good news. At midday today, we were at 40,988,382 total cases in the US and sure to break 41 million overnight. I'll report those details next time we get together. We are averaging 146,790 new case reports daily, which really does appear to have sort of plateaued. In this current surge, we had one day that went over 280,000 reported new cases and a seven-day average that hit 166,000, but we've been on this more level course for most of a week now. If we don't see a sharp upward turn in the next few days, I'll be inclined to think we dodged a Labor Day bullet. It's still too soon to tell, but so far, things are looking pretty good nationwide for pulling through the holiday weekend in relatively good order. There are, of course, still some significant trouble spots; even those that are trending downward now started out in such bad shape that they still have a ways to go. Nearly the entire country, with the exception of a patch in the Northeast, is still showing unchecked transmission, and that's not OK.

Hospitalizations are still high too; these will take longer to decline once new cases do so. Right now, we're pretty much flat at a 14-day average of 100,687, but only a couple of percentage points off our latest peaks. Hospitals in the South, Mountain West, and Plains continue to see significant stresses on capacity with patients who've had heart attacks or strokes sometimes dying before a transfer can be effected to a hospital with the capacity to care for them. This is probably a really great time to take particular care of your own general health and safety; there's more than one way Covid-19 can have a deleterious effect on your well-being.

On Tuesday, a record 2396 children were hospitalized, and almost 400 pediatric patients were admitted to hospitals each day last week. The number of children who have died, while still low, is increasing. The number of pediatric cases is accelerating: While over 750,000 pediatric cases have been identified in total, 252,000 of these—one-third—were added in just the last week. The more children who are diagnosed, the more who will be hospitalized, placed in ICUs, and ventilated, and no one wants that. This has all blown up since school got back underway, and now we have about three times the hospitalizations in children we've seen in this pandemic, even over the winter peaks. These are not just kids with predisposing conditions; these include kids who were completely healthy previously. We are seeing an increase in cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), that dangerous inflammatory condition seen in children who've been infected, often asymptotically. Some children who were infected develop long-Covid, even when their disease was mild or asymptomatic. And children who had moderate or severe Covid-19 appear to be at increased risk for heart disease. While death rates remain low for children, it is important to recognize that more kids are dying of Covid-19 than die from flu in a typical year. This is not a small matter; no one's really safe. The way to protect these kids is to surround them with vaccinated people and to vaccinate them if they are eligible.

We're still seeing sizeable increases in deaths. We had one day over 3000 and several very near that number, but we're averaging 1642 at midday today and still climbing. I don't expect these to decline until hospitalizations have dropped; the simple fact is that, the more Covid-19 patients you have in the hospital, the more deaths you're going to see, and we have a whole lot of people hospitalized at the moment.

West Virginia, with one of the lowest vaccination rates in the nation also is in deep trouble with Covid-19. The numbers of patients in ICUs and on ventilators are at record levels for the pandemic. There are 68 school outbreaks in 31 counties. An entire county and 10 schools were closed on Wednesday.

Florida, despite sharply decreasing new-case numbers, still has 43 percent of its ICU beds occupied by

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Covid-19 patients. This compares with a nationwide number of 31 percent. Colorado's governor told CNN on Friday that, "We actually have the lowest ICU available rate that we've had since the start of this crisis." In some hospitals, these numbers are worse: St. Anthony's Hospital in St. Petersburg, according to hospital president Scott Smith who also spoke with CNN, has Covid-19 patients in 27 of their 28 ICU beds. That doesn't leave much room for your random car accident or heart attack patient, does it?

A news release from North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services indicates that by September 2, not long after school got underway for the new year, 45 percent of the Covid-19 clusters in schools in the state have been in sports teams and that the numbers have shown a "sharp increase" among teams. The 42 clusters associated with sports involved 340 cases. The Department made several recommendations to reduce the incidence of sports-related outbreaks. There's nothing here you haven't heard before: vaccination, masking indoors, social distancing where possible, disinfection, workouts in pods to limit exposure.

Last time we talked, we discussed the northern Idaho counties which were going on crisis standards for care due to clogged-up hospitals. Well, things haven't gotten better since then. There are 10 counties with a roughly 35 percent vaccination rate, nowhere near enough to meaningfully inhibit transmission of this virus. There are at least 10 hospitals in this region of the state on crisis standards; that means care is being rationed. People are being warned not to engage in risky behaviors—not with respect to the virus, but any risky behaviors at all—because there is no assurance a hospital will have a bed for you if you need surgery on your broken leg or your fractured skull or your ripped-up arm. The ethos in these communities also dismisses the seriousness of the pandemic, balks at wearing masks, doesn't believe in social distancing, and doesn't trust anything the government or its agencies tells them. That means things will quite likely get worse—lots worse—before they get better.

At the largest hospital in the region, Kootenai Health, 97 percent of the Covid-19 patients hospitalized are unvaccinated. All of the ICU beds are occupied. Eighteen people have died in the region in the past week. Hospitals are short of resources, particularly staff. Vaccination rates have been flat for three weeks. Not much we're going to do with that.

I've read a preprint (not peer-reviewed) of an analysis of data up from January 1 through July 24 from the CDC showing that the risk of hospitalization or death for vaccinated people is much higher in older adults and those with multiple underlying conditions. We knew that, but there are some numbers to go with this. The analysis of the 12,908 breakthrough cases resulting in hospitalization or death reported so far in the US represents a smaller than one in 13,000 risk of a severe breakthrough, 70 percent of which involving hospitalization and 87 percent of which involving death were in people 65 or older. Those with three or more underlying conditions were at even higher risk than others in the age group. The median age in vaccinated adults with breakthrough was 73 with 71 percent having three or more underlying conditions, whereas the median age in unvaccinated adults with infections was 59 with 56 percent having three or more underlying conditions; the elderly with underlying conditions and those in long-term care were also overrepresented among the most severe cases.

The risk of hospitalization for unvaccinated adults over the entire time period of the study is 17 times the risk for the vaccinated, even more for those under 65 and without comorbidities; it decreased to 10 times the risk in the weeks since B.1.617.2 or Delta, the variant first identified in India, became dominant. This risk from Delta grew greater in all age groups, but the risk gap before and after is largest for those under 50. Delta has lowered the age of risk; before it was dominant, the median age of patients with severe disease was 80. Half of the hospitalized people in the study were asymptomatic and were in the hospital for some other condition, only being identified as infected upon routine Covid-19 testing, we need to be clear that these people were not hospitalized because of that infection.

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Another CDC study also released today looked at incidence of infection, hospitalization, and death in vaccinated and unvaccinated people in 13 states. One way to look at vaccine effectiveness is a figure called percentage of vaccinated persons among cases (PVC), that is, the percentage of all the cases of infection that are in vaccinated people. That gets sort of complicated once you have a substantial share of the population vaccinated because, as more people get vaccinated, you're going to see more cases in vaccinated people—just because there are so many of them. In this case, rising numbers of infections in vaccinated people don't necessarily mean the vaccine isn't working; an increasing PVC could mean your vaccine is losing effectiveness, or it could just be a reflection that you have more vaccinated people—hard to sort that out. What you can use instead to give you a reasonable assessment of vaccine effectiveness is something called case incidence rate ratio (IRR), which shows the ratio of cases seen in the unvaccinated, adjusted for the numbers of unvaccinated, to cases seen in the vaccinated, adjusted for the numbers of vaccinated. That covers the problem with the rising numbers of vaccinated people.

The research team saw "continued vaccine effectiveness against severe COVID-19," even after Delta became the dominant variant. Between January and June, four percent of hospitalized people were vaccinated. We should note that, between April 4 and July 17, the weekly prevalence of the Delta variant increased from less than one percent to 90 percent of specimens sequenced, so it was possible to track how things changed as Delta came to account for an ever increasing proportion of cases. So while vaccines showed sharply decreased case IRRs with Delta (from 11.1 to 4.6), which suggests reduced effectiveness in preventing infections, the ratios decreased much less against the worst outcomes (from 13.3 to 10.4 for hospitalizations and from 16.6 to 11.3 for deaths). This computes to a reduction in vaccine effectiveness, according to the authors, "from 91% to 78% for infection, from 92% to 90% for hospitalization, and from 94% to 91% for death." Just four percent of those hospitalized with Covid-19 were fully vaccinated. Much of the reduction in case IRR in every category was driven by larger decreases in people 65 years or older. The researchers noted "persons not fully vaccinated having >10 times higher COVID-19 mortality risk" and concluded, "Getting vaccinated protects against severe illness from COVID-19, including the Delta variant."

The New England Journal of Medicine published a study from the CDC on vaccination outcomes in pregnant persons, and the findings were that "neonatal outcomes in persons vaccinated against Covid-19 who had a completed pregnancy were similar to incidences reported in studies involving pregnant women that were conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic." In other words, there were no obvious safety signals in pregnant persons who received these vaccines. Given pregnancy outcomes are highly adversely affected by infection with SARS-CoV-2, vaccination is accepted as a desirable choice for those who are pregnant. This conclusion is strengthened by a letter to the Journal of the American Medical Association Network about a study done based on cases in the Vaccine Safety Datalink which affirms that finding with data from eight health systems over seven four-week surveillance periods between mid-December and the end of June. Of 105,000 pregnancies, in 7.8 percent of which the parent received a Covid-19 vaccine, there was no increased incidence of spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) in the vaccinated group. The bottom line for pregnant people contemplating vaccination is that the vaccine does not increase the risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, and it will avert infection which has been associated with those adverse outcomes. It's safer to be vaccinated than not if you're pregnant.

In addition to that, we know antibodies pass through the placenta to the fetus and later in breast milk to the newborn, which should provide protection for the first few months of life. This may be important given vaccine trials currently only go to six months of age, so those transferred antibodies may be the only kind of protection available to newborns for a long time to come. Of the two modes of transfer, transplacental transfers tend to involve higher quality antibodies. There is a large new study just getting underway that hopes to assess the quality and duration of these antibodies in the child. Don't expect results too soon; the plan is to follow the subjects for a year.

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We've known for quite some time that pregnant people and those who've recently given birth have a higher risk for severe illness from Covid-19; the risk for hospitalization, needing intensive care, and requiring a ventilator are all higher in this group. We've also known there is an increased risk for pre-term birth in those with Covid-19. Now we're seeing, in an announcement from Mississippi State Health Officer, a rate of fetal death after 20 weeks gestation in unvaccinated, infected pregnant people which is twice the normal background rate. There have been 72 such in the state, apparently half of which would today be preventable with vaccination.

We've discussed data from Israel on third doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, but these data were in preprint at the time. Now they've been peer-reviewed and will be published in the New England Journal of Medicine next week before the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee meeting on the 17th. Third doses were started on August 1 in Israel and have been administered to 2.8 million people so this study is consequential to the decision this Committee will make. To review, more than a million Israelis over 60 received a third dose between July 30 and August 22, and 12 or more days after that dose was administered, the relative risk of infection had decreased more than 11 times and the relative risk of severe disease had decreased more than 10 times from the pre-third-dose risk level.

A second study from Israel, also due to be published in the same publication and also before the meeting, seems to indicate that in people over 60 protection from the vaccine does, indeed, wane with time. People who received their second dose in March were 60 percent more protected against infection than those who received it in January; they were 70 percent more protected against severe Covid-19. This would appear to indicate a need for third doses in this age group; whether this warrants a third dose as a routine matter is what the Committee will need to sort out.

We have an outbreak in non-human primates again, this one in the lowland gorillas at Zoo Atlanta. The animals presented with coughing, nasal discharge and changes in appetite. The rest of the zoo's gorillas are being tested, and the infected gorillas are being treated with monoclonal antibodies. Arrangements are being made to vaccinate the zoo's gorilla population after they've recovered; the orangutans, tigers, lions, and leopards are being vaccinated sooner. I should mention the vaccines and treatments in use here are not those approved for use in humans; they are receiving products formulated for veterinary use. Unlike humans, these critters are not raiding the supplies of drugs meant for other species.

And there we are for today. Take care and be well. We'll talk in a few days.



Yard of the Week

The Arlys Kluess yard at 401 N. 5th St. was chosen as last week's Yard of the Week. The Yard of the Week is picked by members of the Groton Garden Club. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Seniors painting up the town!

Well, just the street in downtown Groton. Groton Area will be celebrating homecoming week and the seniors were out in full force painting Main Street Sunday evening.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Seniors Painting
Main Street**
(Photos by Paul Kosel)



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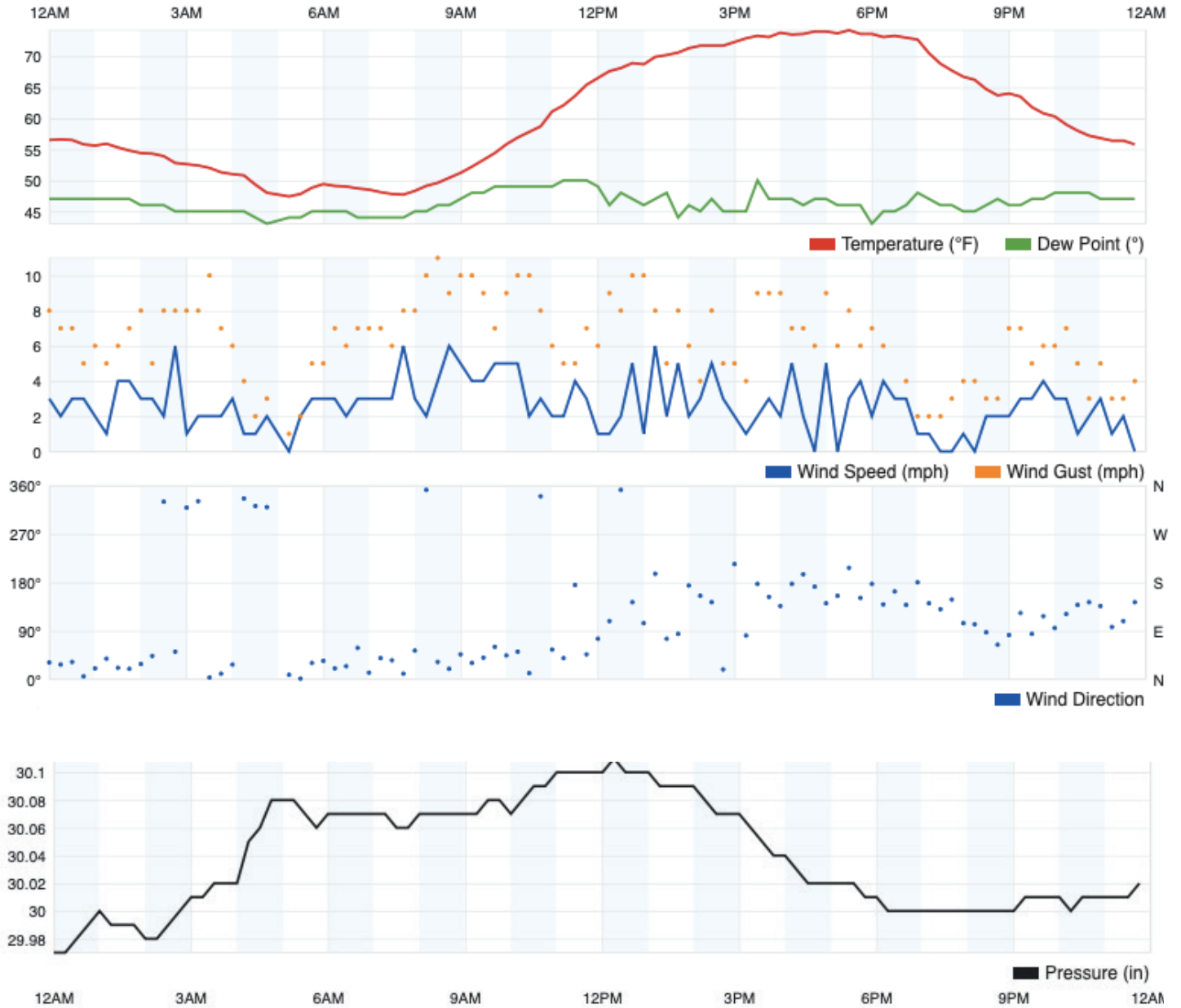
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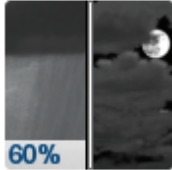



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
20% → 80%	60%			
Slight Chance Showers then Showers	Showers Likely then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy
High: 69 °F	Low: 51 °F	High: 72 °F	Low: 48 °F	High: 79 °F

MARGINAL RISK of Severe T-Storms

ISSUED: 4:50 AM - Monday, September 13, 2021

WHEN

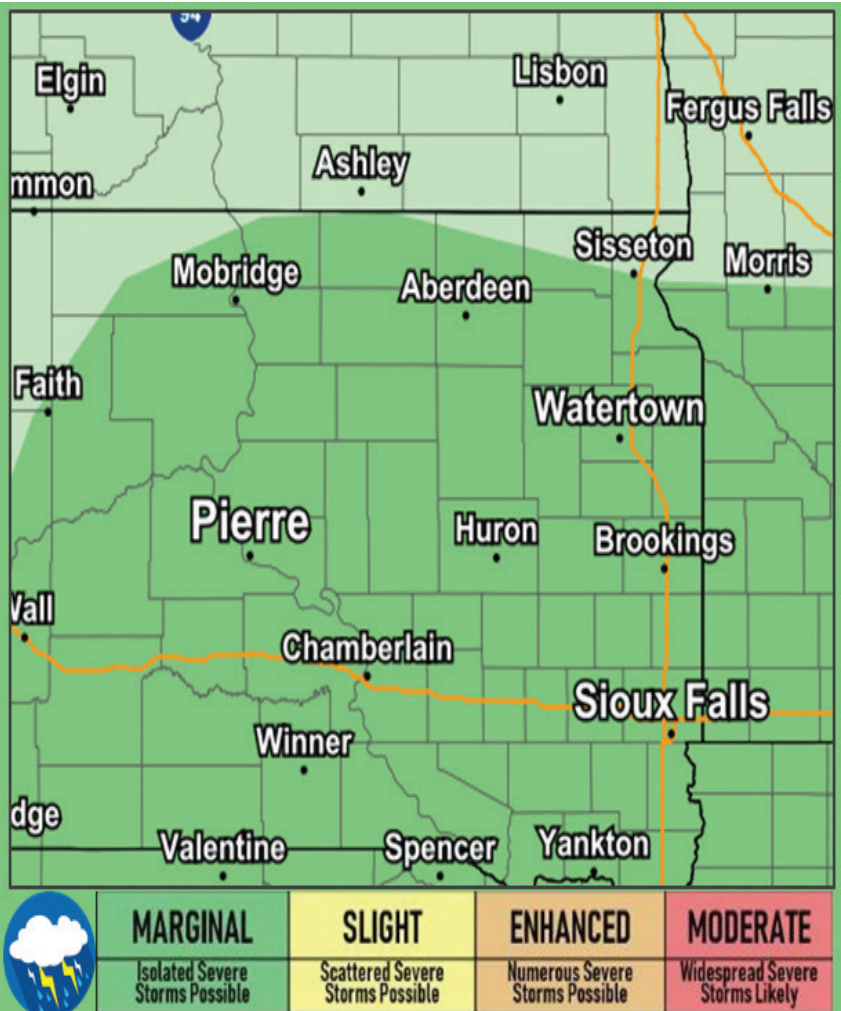
This morning through late this afternoon.

WHAT

Isolated severe storms possible. These storms could produce large hail up to quarter size and wind gusts up to 60 mph. Locally heavy rainfall will be possible.

ACTION

Monitor the weather and have a plan of action if severe weather approaches your area.



 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Showers and storms are expected to spread across the area throughout the day and into this afternoon. A few of these storms could become strong to severe. Dry conditions are expected on Tuesday.

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Today in Weather History

September 13, 1928: An estimated F4 tornado traveled across Yankton and Turner County. An entire farm was swept away just as the family was about to enter the storm cellar. A man and his daughter were killed. A woman was killed in the town of Davis, in Turner County. Nine homes were destroyed, 52 were damaged, and 13 people were injured in Davis.

823: A strong category 1 or low category 2 hurricane struck near New Orleans, Louisiana and went toward Baton Rouge. Its strongest impacts occurred west of New Orleans.

1944: The destroyer USS Warrington was sunk by the Great Atlantic Hurricane 300 miles east of Cape Canaveral, Florida. 247 men were lost in the tragedy.

1978: Little Rock, Arkansas saw 8.10 inches of rain which caused major flash flooding. Ten people were killed.

1988: Hurricane Gilbert smashed into the Cayman Islands, and as it headed for the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico strengthened into a monster hurricane, packing winds of 175 mph. The barometric pressure at the center of Gilbert reached 888 mb, a record for any hurricane in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, or the Atlantic Ocean until Hurricane Wilma in 2005. Gilbert covered much of the Gulf of Mexico, producing rain as far away as the Florida Keys.

2008: Hurricane Ike made landfall as a Category 2 storm near Galveston, Texas.

2017: The NWS Office in Reno, Nevada, issued their first tornado warning since July 21st, 2014.

1922 - The temperature at El Azizia in Libya soared to 136 degrees to establish a world record. To make matters worse, a severe ghibi (dust storm) was in progress. (The Weather Channel)

1928 - Hurricane San Felipe crossed Puerto Rico resulting in the highest winds, the heaviest rains, and the greatest destruction in years. The hurricane produced much damage in the Virgin Islands, and later hit the Bahamas and Florida. (David Ludlum)

1984 - Hurricane Diana, after making a complete loop off the Carolina coast, made landfall and moved across eastern North Carolina. Diana deluged Cape Fear with more than eighteen inches of rain, and caused 78 million dollars damage in North Carolina. (Storm Data)

1987 - Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the northeastern U.S. Flooding was reported in Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Greenwood NY received 6.37 inches of rain. A dike along a creek at Prattsburg NY gave way and a two million dollar onion crop left on the ground to dry was washed away. The prolonged rains in the eastern U.S. finally came to an end late in the day as a cold front began to push the warm and humid airmass out to sea. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Hurricane Gilbert smashed into the Cayman Islands, and as it headed for the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico strengthened into a monster hurricane, packing winds of 175 mph. The barometric pressure at the center of Gilbert reached 26.13 inches (888 mb), an all-time record for any hurricane in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, or the Atlantic Ocean. Gilbert covered much of the Gulf of Mexico, producing rain as far away as the Florida Keys. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably cool weather prevailed over the Central Plains Region, with a record low of 29 degrees at North Platte NE. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the Pacific Northwest, with a record high of 96 degrees at Eugene OR. Thunderstorms over south Texas produced wind gusts to 69 mph at Del Rio, and two inches of rain in two hours. (National Weather Summary)

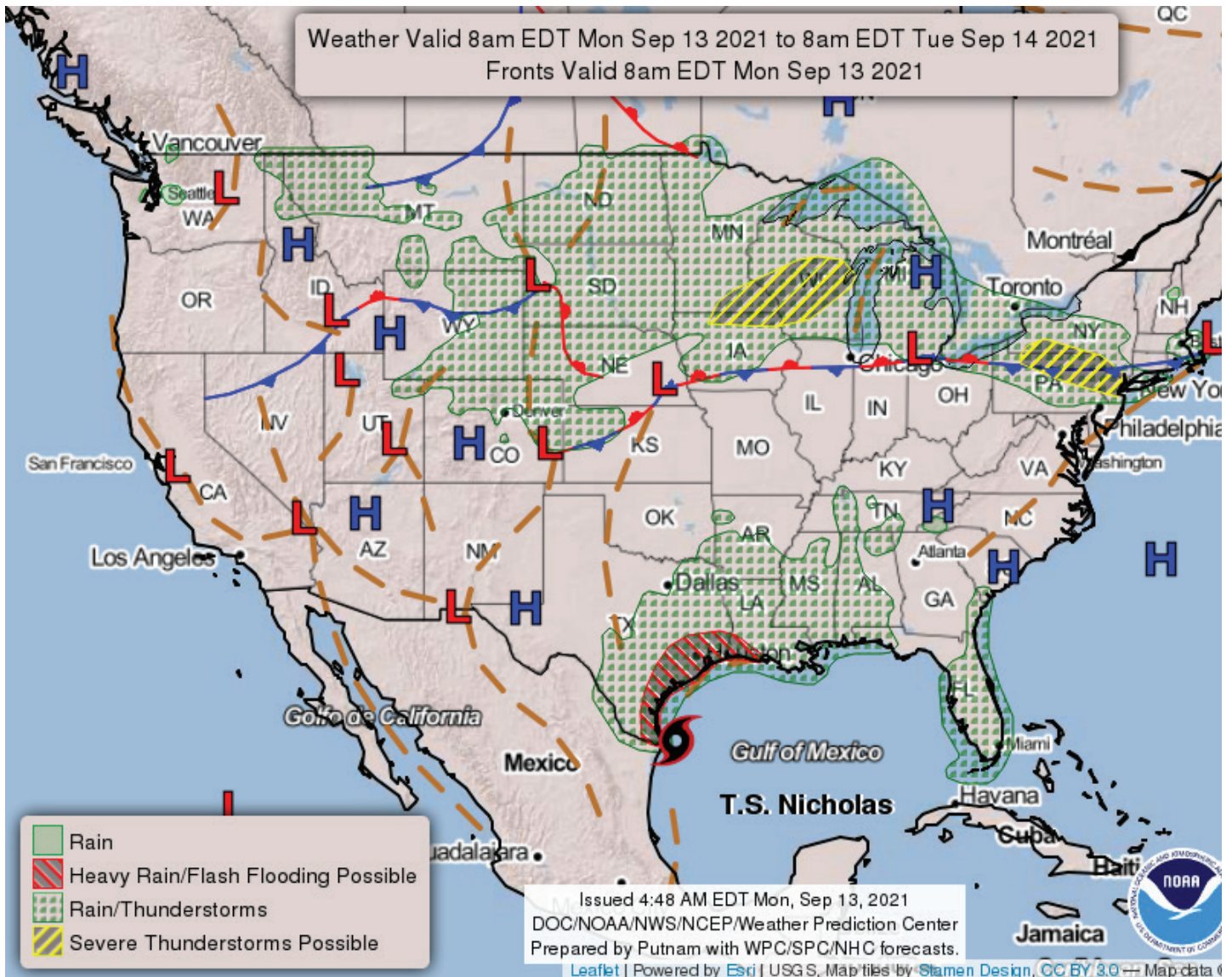
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 74.2 °F at 5:30 PM
Low Temp: 47.4 °F at 5:15 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 8:30 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 97° in 1927
Record Low: 26° in 1902
Average High: 76°F
Average Low: 48°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.88
Precip to date in Sept.: 1.77
Average Precip to date: 17.22
Precip Year to Date: 14.91
Sunset Tonight: 7:48:38 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08:51 AM



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EVERYONE HAS A PART

Martin Luther, who is recognized for his work in reforming the church, had one deep desire that drove him every day of his life: he wanted everyone to have a copy of the Bible and a song book in their own language. He had an unswerving belief that people needed God to speak to them directly through His Word and the songs they sang during times of worship at home. This was not a new idea, but one that had its beginnings in the earliest churches as they gathered together to worship the Lord.

Music and God's Word have always been a very important ingredient in worship. When there is joy in the hearts of the faithful, praising God is a natural part of life and is always evident in times of worship. With shame and sorrow, the Hebrews, when they were captives of Babylon, admitted this in Psalm 137:4. As their captors ridiculed them, they said, "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" Sin separated them from their God, and they lost the joy of their salvation. Sin does the same in our lives.

In the Old Testament we find many occasions of God's children coming together to sing and shout and praise the Lord. In Psalm 95:1 the "worship leader" looked at the crowd before him and said let's "sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation." That invitation remains open to us today.

When we pause and ponder the grace and goodness of God in saving us and becoming our "Rock" - our only source of safety and security - it is a great time to lift our voices in worship. Scripture often reminds us that "He has put a new song in our heart!"

Prayer: Help us, Father, to rejoice in the goodness of Your grace and lift our voices in shouts of joy and praise. May our songs of joy be pleasing to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Psalm 95:1

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2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

Tropical Storm Nicholas threatens Gulf Coast with heavy rain

HOUSTON (AP) — Tropical Storm Nicholas was strengthening just off the Gulf Coast and could make landfall in Texas as a hurricane Monday as it brings heavy rain and floods to coastal areas from Mexico to storm-battered Louisiana.

Forecasters at the National Hurricane Center in Miami said top sustained winds reached 60 mph (95 kph). It was traveling north-northwest at 14 mph (22 kph) on a forecast track to pass near the South Texas coast later Monday, then move onshore along the coast of south or central Texas by Monday evening.

Nicholas was centered roughly 45 miles (75 kilometers) southeast of the mouth of the Rio Grande River, and 200 miles (325 kilometers) south of Port O'Connor, Texas, as of Monday morning.

A hurricane watch was issued from Port Aransas to Freeport, Texas. Much of the state's coastline was under a tropical storm warning as the system was expected to bring heavy rain that could cause flash floods and urban flooding.

Rainfall totals of up to 10 inches (25 centimeters) in Texas and southwest Louisiana were expected, with isolated maximum amounts of 20 inches (50 centimeters) across portions of coastal Texas from Sunday night through midweek.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said the state has placed rescue teams and resources in the Houston area and along the Texas Gulf Coast.

"This is a storm that could leave heavy rain, as well as wind and probably flooding, in various different regions along the Gulf Coast. We urge you to listen to local weather alerts, heed local warnings," Abbott said in a video message.

Nicholas is headed toward the same area of Texas that was hit hard by Hurricane Harvey in 2017. That storm made landfall in the middle Texas coast then stalled for four days, dropping more than 60 inches (152 cm) of rain in parts of southeast Texas. Harvey was blamed for at least 68 deaths.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards on Sunday night declared a state of emergency ahead of the storm's arrival in a state still recovering from Hurricane Ida and last year's Hurricane Laura and historic flooding.

"The most severe threat to Louisiana is in the southwest portion of the state, where recovery from Hurricane Laura and the May flooding is ongoing. In this area heavy rain and flash flooding are possible. However, it is also likely that all of south Louisiana will see heavy rain this week, including areas recently affected by Hurricane Ida," Edwards said.

The storm was expected to bring the heaviest rainfall west of where Hurricane Ida slammed into Louisiana two weeks ago. Although forecasters did not expect Louisiana to suffer from strong winds again, meteorologist Bob Henson at Yale Climate Connections predicted rainfall could still plague places where the hurricane toppled homes, paralyzed electrical and water infrastructure and left at least 26 people dead.

"There could be several inches of rain across southeast Louisiana, where Ida struck," Henson said in an email.

Across Louisiana, just over 110,000 customers remained without power early Monday, according to the utility tracking site poweroutage.us.

The storm is projected to move slowly up the coastland and could bring torrential rain over several days, said meteorologist Donald Jones of the National Weather Service in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

"Heavy rain, flash flooding appears to be the biggest threat across our region," he said.

While Lake Charles received minimal impact from Ida, the city saw multiple wallops from Hurricane Laura and Hurricane Delta in 2020, a winter storm in February as well as historic flooding this spring.

"We are still a very battered city," Lake Charles Mayor Nic Hunter said.

He said the city is taking the threat of the storm seriously, as it does all tropical systems.

"Hope and prayer is not a good game plan," Hunter said.

In Cameron Parish in coastal Louisiana, Scott Trahan is still finishing repairs on his home damaged from

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last year's Hurricane Laura that put about 2 feet of water in his house. He hopes to be finished by Christmas. He said many in his area have moved instead of rebuilding.

"If you get your butt whipped about four times, you are not going to get back up again. You are going to go somewhere else," Trahan said.

Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said via Twitter that Nicholas is the 14th named storm of 2021 Atlantic hurricane season. Only 4 other years since 1966 have had 14 or more named storms by Sept. 12: 2005, 2011, 2012 and 2020.

North Korea says it tested new long-range cruise missiles

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Monday that it successfully tested newly developed long-range cruise missiles over the weekend, the first known testing activity in months, underscoring how the country continues to expand its military capabilities amid a stalemate in nuclear negotiations with the United States.

The state-run Korean Central News Agency reported that the missiles showed they can hit targets 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) away on Saturday and Sunday. State media published photos of a projectile being fired from a launcher truck and what looked like a missile traveling in the air.

The North hailed its new missiles as a "strategic weapon of great significance" — wording that implies they were developed with the intent to arm them with nuclear warheads.

North Korea says it needs nuclear weapons in order to deter what it claims is hostility from the U.S. and South Korea — and has long attempted to use the threat of such an arsenal to extract much-needed economic aid or otherwise apply pressure. The North and ally China faced off against South Korea and U.S.-led U.N. forces in the 1950-53 Korean War, a conflict that ended in an armistice that has yet to be replaced with a peace treaty.

The international community is bent on getting the North to abandon its nuclear arsenal and has long used a combination of the threat of sanctions and the promise of economic help to try to influence the North. But U.S.-led negotiations on the nuclear issue have been stalled since the collapse of a summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and then-U.S. President Donald Trump in 2019. At that time, the Americans rejected Kim's demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for dismantling an aging nuclear complex.

North Korea ended a yearlong pause in ballistic tests in March by firing two short-range missiles into the sea, continuing a tradition of testing new U.S. administrations to measure Washington's response. Kim's government has so far rejected the Biden administration's overtures for dialogue, demanding that Washington abandon its "hostile" policies first — a reference to the U.S. maintaining sanctions and a military alliance with South Korea.

The United States keeps about 28,000 troops in South Korea to help deter potential aggression from North Korea, a legacy of the Korean War.

There hadn't been any known test launches for months since March, as Kim focused his efforts on fending off the coronavirus and salvaging an economy damaged by sanctions, bad flooding in recent summers, and border closures amid the coronavirus pandemic. Experts have warned that the economic situation is dire, although monitoring groups have yet to detect signs of mass starvation or major instability.

The report of the tests comes before U.S. President Joe Biden's special representative for North Korea, Sung Kim, was to meet his South Korean and Japanese counterparts in Tokyo on Tuesday to discuss the stalled nuclear diplomacy with North Korea.

South Korea's military is analyzing the North Korean launches based on U.S. and South Korean intelligence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong said after a meeting with Australia's foreign and defense ministers that the resumption of testing activity illustrates an urgent need for reviving diplomacy with the North.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said it was monitoring the situation with allies and that the North Korean

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activity reflects a continuing focus on "developing its military program and the threats that poses to its neighbors and the international community." Japan said it was "extremely concerned."

While the cruise missiles were clearly aimed at sending a message to Washington, the tests may indicate that the North is struggling with more provocative weapons systems and might not garner much of a response, said Du Hyeogn Cha, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

China, the North's staunchest ally, didn't comment on the missiles when asked. A spokesperson for its Foreign Ministry, Zhao Lijian, only urged "all parties concerned to exercise restraint, move in the same direction, actively engage in dialogue and contact" to reach a political settlement.

Kim doubled down on his pledge to bolster his nuclear deterrent in the face of U.S. sanctions and pressure at a congress of the ruling Workers' Party in January. He issued a long wish list of new sophisticated equipment, including longer-range intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered submarines, spy satellites and tactical nuclear weapons.

KCNA said the missiles tested over the weekend traveled for 126 minutes above North Korean territory before hitting their targets.

"In all, the efficiency and practicality of the weapon system operation was confirmed to be excellent," it said.

It appeared that Kim wasn't in attendance to observe the tests. KCNA said Kim's top military official, Pak Jong Chon, observed the test-firings and called for the country's defense scientists to go "all out to increase" the North's military capabilities.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said North Korean missiles of such range would pose a "serious threat to the peace and safety of Japan and its surrounding areas."

He said Tokyo was working with Washington and Seoul to gather information on North Korea's latest tests but said there was no immediate indication that the weapons reached inside Japan's exclusive economic zone.

Kim's powerful sister last month hinted that North Korea was ready to resume weapons testing while issuing a statement berating the United States and South Korea for continuing their joint military exercises, which she said was the "most vivid expression of U.S. hostile policy."

The allies say their drills are defensive in nature, but they have canceled or downsized them in recent years to create space for diplomacy or in response to COVID-19.

The latest tests came after Kim threw an unusual parade last week that was a marked departure from past militaristic displays, showcasing anti-virus workers in hazmat suits and civil defense organizations involved in industrial work and rebuilding communities destroyed by floods.

Experts said the parade was focused on domestic unity as Kim faces perhaps his toughest test, with his economy in tatters.

Associated Press writers Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Energized pope cracks jokes, greets fans in Slovakia

By NICOLE WINFIELD and KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (AP) — Pope Francis cracked jokes Monday and took an ambling walk to greet well-wishers as he opened his first full day in Slovakia in good health and spirits ahead of a solemn encounter with the country's Jewish community.

Francis arrived at the presidential palace, and later at the capital's St. Martin cathedral, looking rested and energized on the second day of his four-day pilgrimage to Hungary and Slovakia, which marks his first international outing since undergoing intestinal surgery in July.

"I'm still alive!" Francis quipped when asked by an Italian journalist how he was feeling as he walked up a ramp into the cathedral for a meeting with Slovak priests and nuns, where he cracked a series of jokes in a sign he was in good spirits.

Francis, 84, has been recovering after having 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed for what

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the Vatican said was a severe narrowing of the large intestine. He has seemed in good form, though he used a golf cart buggy indoors on Sunday during a rigorous few hours in Budapest to limit a long walk, and has been delivering some speeches sitting down.

But he stood for a long time to greet priests and bishops — nearly all of them maskless — at the end of his meeting. And he then took an extended walk around the cathedral piazza to greet pilgrims, clearly enjoying the welcome and enthusiasm of the crowd after the coronavirus put a stop to his global travels for over a year.

At his first stop of the day at the Bratislava presidential palace, Francis told President Zuzana Caputova, Slovakia's first female president, that the coronavirus pandemic had been the greatest test in recent history, but that it should offer a lesson for the future.

"It has taught us how easy it is, even when we are all in the same boat, to withdraw and think only of ourselves. Let us instead set out anew from the realization that all of us are frail and in need of others."

Ahead of a rigorous two days hop-scotching around Slovakia, Francis is spending Monday in Bratislava where the highlight of his visit is an afternoon encounter at the capital's Holocaust memorial, built on the site of a synagogue destroyed by the communist regime in the 1960s.

He goes into the event having called on Sunday for Christians and Jews to work together to stop the rise of antisemitism in Europe, saying it is a "fuse which must not be allowed to burn."

Slovakia declared its independence from Czechoslovakia on March 14, 1939, and became a Nazi puppet state with politician and Roman Catholic priest Jozef Tiso becoming the country's president.

Under his rule, the country adopted strict anti-Jewish laws and deported some 75,000 Jews to Nazi death camps where some 68,000 perished. Tiso was sentenced to death and hanged in 1947.

Now, only about 5,000 Jews live in Slovakia, a largely Roman Catholic country of 5.5 million currently ruled by a four-party center-right coalition government.

Just last week, the government formally apologized for the racial laws that stripped the country's Jews of their human and civil rights, prevented their access to education and authorized the transfer of their property to non-Jewish owners.

Marking the 80th anniversary of the "Jewish Code" adopted on Sept 9, 1941, the government said in a statement Sept. 8 that it "feels a moral obligation today to publicly express sorrow over the crimes committed by the past regime."

The code was considered one of the toughest anti-Jewish laws adopted in Europe during the war.

Slovakia is now home to the far-right People's Party Our Slovakia, which has had members in Slovakia's Parliament since 2016. The party openly advocates the legacy of the Slovak Nazi puppet World War II state. Its members use Nazi salutes and want Slovakia out of the European Union and NATO.

Janicek contributed from Prague, Czech Republic. AP visual journalist Fanuel Morelli contributed.

House Democrats post record August fundraising ahead of 2022

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The campaign organization aiming to maintain Democratic control of the House in the 2022 midterm races raised \$10 million last month, its best August haul ever during a year without a national election.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee says that nearly 250,000 grassroots donors provided \$6.6 million, accounting for two-thirds of its monthly total, according to numbers shared with The Associated Press before a public filing deadline.

That total included transfers worth more than \$1 million from other Democratic campaign accounts. The largest, from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, was worth nearly \$800,000. The committee's fundraising last month topped its last off-year August, in 2019, by more than \$2.8 million, and it entered September debt-free and with \$53.3 million cash on hand.

The National Republican Congressional Committee said its August figures weren't yet available, but an-

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nounced raising \$7 million in July compared to the \$11.3 million its Democratic counterpart collected over the same month.

That followed the Republican House campaign committee outraising the Democratic committee \$45.4 million to \$36.5 million through the year's second quarter, which ended June 30.

Both sides' strong fundraising during the summer vacation season, and with the next national election more than a year away, only adds to midterm political stakes that are already high. Democrats have narrow majorities in both congressional chambers, but the party controlling the White House often loses House and Senate seats in subsequent elections.

A resurgent pandemic could add to Democratic political headwinds. The U.S. is now seeing nearly twice the number of coronavirus deaths compared to the same time last year.

Amid polling falling to the lowest levels of his time in the White House, President Joe Biden has announced new federal rules that could require millions of unvaccinated Americans to get inoculated.

New York Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney, chair of the House Democratic campaign arm, said Democratic fundraising was helped by Republicans in Congress uniformly voting against the popular COVID-19 relief bill, the insurrection by a mob loyal to then-President Donald Trump and sweeping new voting and abortion restrictions in state legislatures in Texas and elsewhere.

"Our grassroots support is proof positive the American people believe in protecting a woman's right to make choices about her own body, defending our democracy from attacks by insurrectionists, and want to protect the health and economic progress Democrats delivered," Maloney said.

Militia leader to be sentenced in Minnesota mosque bombing

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The leader of an Illinois anti-government militia group who authorities say masterminded the 2017 bombing of a Minnesota mosque is to be sentenced Monday for several civil rights and hate crimes in an attack that terrified a community.

Emily Claire Hari, who was previously known as Michael Hari and recently said she is transgender, faces a mandatory minimum of 30 years in prison for the attack on Dar al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington. Defense attorneys are asking for the minimum, but prosecutors are seeking a life sentence, saying Hari hasn't taken responsibility for the attack.

"This bomb – the Defendant's bomb – was an act of terror intended to destroy the heart of a community," prosecutors wrote in papers asking for a life sentence. While no one was physically hurt, prosecutors wrote, "the Defendant irrevocably destroyed the sense of safety and peace that a house of worship is supposed to provide."

Hari was convicted in December on five counts, including damaging property because of its religious character and obstructing the free exercise of religious beliefs. She did not testify at trial and it was unknown if she would make a statement at sentencing.

Mohamed Omar, executive director at Dar al-Farooq, said he hopes Hari gets a life sentence to show that white supremacy won't be tolerated and people shouldn't be deprived of freedom to worship. Omar said he and other community members plan to make victim impact statements at the hearing.

"We just lost a sense of security," Omar said, adding that Hari's attack made the mosque a "hot spot" for harassment or intimidation and made people uncomfortable to worship. "It became a struggle for us."

Several men were gathered at Dar al-Farooq for early morning prayers on Aug. 5, 2017, when a pipe bomb was thrown through the window of an imam's office. A seven-month investigation led authorities to Clarence, Illinois, a rural community about 120 miles (190 kilometers) south of Chicago, where Hari and co-defendants Michael McWhorter and Joe Morris lived.

Authorities say Hari, 50, led a group called the White Rabbits that included McWhorter, Morris and others and that Hari came up with the plan to attack the mosque. Prosecutors said at trial that she was motivated by hatred for Muslims, citing excerpts from Hari's manifesto known as The White Rabbit Handbook.

McWhorter and Morris, who portrayed Hari as a father figure, each pleaded guilty to five counts and

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testified against her. They are awaiting sentencing.

It wasn't initially clear how the White Rabbits became aware of Dar al-Farooq, but the mosque was in headlines in the years before the attack: Some young people from Minnesota who traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State group had worshipped there. Mosque leaders were never accused of any wrongdoing. Hari's attorneys wrote in court filings that she was a victim of online misinformation about the mosque.

Assistant federal defender Shannon Elkins also said gender dysphoria fueled Hari's "inner conflict," saying she wanted to transition but knew she would be ostracized, so she formed a "rag-tag group of freedom fighters or militia men" and "secretly looked up 'sex change,' 'transgender surgery,' and 'post-op transgender' on the internet."

Prosecutors said gender dysphoria is not an excuse and said using it "to deflect guilt is offensive."

Hari has raised other issues with the court since she has been in custody. Hours after her conviction, Hari called the Star Tribune and said she was going on a hunger strike, calling the trial a "sham."

Last week, she sought to delay her sentencing, citing upcoming medical appointments for hormone replacement therapy and to treat what her attorney called a life-threatening allergy, but a judge refused. And before revealing her issues with gender dysphoria, she also sued authorities at the Minnesota jail where she was housed, saying she objected to having a female conduct a pat-down search for religious reasons. That lawsuit was dismissed.

In their request for a life sentence, prosecutors are seeking several sentencing enhancements, arguing the bombing was a hate crime led by Hari. They also say Hari committed obstruction when she tried to escape from custody during her transfer from Illinois to Minnesota for trial in February 2019. Hari denies trying to flee.

Hari, a former sheriff's deputy and self-described entrepreneur and watermelon farmer, has written self-published books, including essays on religion, and has floated ideas for a border wall with Mexico. She gained attention on the "Dr. Phil" talk show after she fled to the South American nation of Belize in the early 2000s during a custody dispute. She was convicted of child abduction and sentenced to probation.

Hari also sued the federal government, accusing it of cutting in on her food-safety business.

Before her 2018 arrest in the mosque bombing, she used the screen name "Illinois Patriot" to post more than a dozen videos to YouTube, most of them anti-government monologues. In one video just days before her arrest, Hari said FBI and local law enforcement were terrorizing Clarence and she asked "freedom-loving people everywhere to come and help us."

Hari, McWhorter and Morris were also charged in a failed November 2017 attack on an abortion clinic in Champaign, Illinois. Plea agreements for McWhorter and Morris say the men participated in an armed home invasion in Indiana, and the armed robberies or attempted armed robberies of two Walmart stores in Illinois.

UN seeks \$606 million for Afghanistan after Taliban takeover

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The United Nations is hosting a high-level donors conference on Monday to drum up emergency funds for Afghanistan after last month's Taliban takeover of the country that stunned the world.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was leading the world body's call for more than \$600 million for the rest of this year in a "flash appeal" for Afghans after their country's government was toppled by the Taliban and U.S. and NATO forces exited the 20-year war in a chaotic departure.

There are concerns that instability and upended humanitarian efforts, compounded by an ongoing drought, could further endanger lives and plunge Afghanistan toward famine.

The conference will put to the test some Western governments and other big traditional U.N. donors who want to help everyday Afghans without handing a public relations victory or cash to the Taliban, who ousted the internationally backed government in a lightning sweep.

The U.N. says "recent developments" have increased the vulnerability of Afghans who have already been facing decades of deprivation and violence. A severe drought is jeopardizing the upcoming harvest, and

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hunger has been rising. The U.N.'s World Food Program is to be a major beneficiary of any funds collected during Monday's conference.

Along with its partners, the U.N. is seeking \$606 million for the rest of the year to help 11 million people.

Coinciding with Monday's conference in Geneva, the head of the U.N. refugee agency, Filippo Grandi, made a previously unannounced visit to Kabul. He wrote on Twitter that he would assess humanitarian needs and the situation of 3.5 million displaced Afghans — including over 500,000 who have been displaced this year alone.

Officials at UNHCR have expressed concerns that some people could try to seek refuge in what have been traditional havens for fleeing Afghans in neighboring Pakistan and Iran, which both have large populations of Afghans who had fled their country earlier to escape war and violence.

The Taliban seized power on Aug. 15, the day they overran Kabul after capturing outlying provinces in the blitz campaign. They initially promised inclusiveness and a general amnesty for former opponents, but many Afghans remain deeply fearful of the new rulers. Taliban police officials have beaten Afghan journalists, violently dispersed women's protests and formed an all-male government despite saying initially they would invite broader representation.

The world has been watching closely to see how Afghanistan under a Taliban government might be different from the first time the Islamic militants were in power, in the late 1990s. During that era, the Taliban imposed a harsh rule of their interpretation of Islamic law. Girls and women were denied an education, and were excluded from public life.

Also on Monday, a Pakistan International Airlines plane chartered by the World Bank landed at Kabul's airport to evacuate more people, according to Abdullah Hafeez Khan, a spokesman for the airline. Pakistan has halted commercial flights to Kabul because of security reasons, and the airline has no plans so far to resume commercial flights.

Last Thursday, an estimated 200 foreigners, including Americans, left Afghanistan on a Qatar Airways flight out of Kabul with the cooperation of the Taliban — the first such large-scale departure since U.S. forces completed their frantic withdrawal on Aug. 30.

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.

Abdul Hadi Hamdani, head of Kabul's airport, said Monday that all domestic flights were back to their regular schedule but that "some technical problems need to be solved" before international flights can resume. Members of the border police who previously worked at the airport have been called back to resume their duties.

Associated Press writers Munir Ahmed in Islamabad and Rahim Faiez in Istanbul contributed to this report.

Biden to survey wildfire damage, make case for spending plan

By AAMER MADHANI and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden will promote his administration's use of the Defense Production Act to aid in wildfire preparedness during a western swing in which he'll survey wildfire damage in Idaho and California.

The administration activated the wartime provision in early August to boost the supply of fire hoses for the U.S. Forest Service, by helping to ease supply chain issues affecting the agency's primary firehose supplier. It marks the second use of the wartime law, after the president used it to boost vaccine supplies, and the administration had not previously announced it publicly.

The use of the Defense Production Act helped an Oklahoma City nonprofit called NewView Oklahoma, which provides the bulk of the U.S. Forest Service's hoses, obtain needed supplies to produce and ship 415 miles of firehoses. Biden planned to showcase the move as part of broader remarks on the work his

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administration has done to address yet another devastating wildfire season across the western U.S.

The president planned to deliver remarks during a visit Monday to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, and then travel to Sacramento, California, where he'll survey wildfire damage. He'll wrap up the day in Long Beach for an election-eve event with California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who faces a recall vote on Tuesday.

Biden's western visit is aimed primarily at drumming up support for his massive \$3.5 trillion spending plan by linking it to beating back wildfires and upgrading social programs.

In the two-day trip, which includes a stop in Colorado on Tuesday, Biden is looking to connect the dots for Americans between the increasing frequency of wildfires in the West — as well other extreme weather events around the country — and the need to invest billions in combating the climate crisis as well as in a vast expansion of the social safety net.

His eleventh-hour pitch Monday in California comes the day before voters head to the polls to decide whether to recall Newsom and then replace him with Republican and talk-show host Larry Elder, who's seen as the leading GOP alternative to Newsom, or any of the dozens of other candidates on the ballot.

The White House is trying to turn the corner after a difficult month consumed by a chaotic and violent withdrawal from Afghanistan and the surging delta variant upending what the president had hoped would mark a summer in which the nation was finally freed from the coronavirus.

Over the weekend, Biden acknowledged that his polling numbers have dipped in recent weeks, but argued his agenda is "overwhelmingly popular" with Americans. He said he expects his Republican opponents will seek to attack him instead of debating him on the merits of his spending plan.

"You're going to see — and I get it — a lot more direct attacks on me, not what I'm for," Biden told reporters on Saturday. "I'm a big boy. I've been doing this a long time."

In addition to Republican opposition, Biden still needs to overcome the skepticism of two key centrist Democrats in the closely divided Senate. Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Krysten Sinema of Arizona have expressed concerns about the size of the \$3.5 trillion spending package.

The climate provisions in Biden's budget include tax incentives for clean energy and electric vehicles, investments to transition the economy away from fossil fuels and toward renewable sources such as wind and solar power, and creation of a civilian climate corps.

The president is scheduled to head to Denver on Tuesday to continue to plug his economic agenda.

The stop in Idaho, a state he lost by more than 30 percentage points last year, will offer Biden a deep-red backdrop to argue that making investments to combat the climate crisis should be a priority across party lines. Idaho and California have seen wildfire season turn into a year-round scourge.

The Biden administration in June laid out a strategy to deal with the growing wildfire threat, which included hiring more federal firefighters and implementing new technologies to detect and address fires quickly. Last month, the president approved a disaster declaration for California, providing federal aid for the counties affected by the Dixie and River fires. Just ahead of Monday's visit he issued another disaster declaration for the state, this time aimed at areas affected by the Caldor Fire.

Biden traveled recently to New York, New Jersey and Louisiana to survey damage caused by Hurricane Ida. He declared it a "code red" moment for the nation to act on climate during a visit to a New York City neighborhood impacted by Ida.

"Folks, the evidence is clear: Climate change poses an existential threat to our lives, to our economy," he said during the New York visit. "And the threat is here; it's not going to get any better. The question: Can it get worse? We can stop it from getting worse."

Allegations fly as recall vote looms for California's Newsom

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In a blitz of TV ads and a last-minute rally, California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom urged voters Sunday to turn back a looming recall vote that could remove him from office, while leading Republican Larry Elder broadly criticized the media for what he described as double standards that

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insulated Newsom from criticism and scrutiny throughout the contest.

The sunny, late-summer weekend was a swirl of political activity, as candidates held rallies, continued bus tours and cluttered the TV airwaves with advertising offering their closing arguments in advance of the election that concludes Tuesday.

Newsom — who is expecting President Joe Biden on Monday for a capstone get-out-the-vote rally in Long Beach — was in a largely Hispanic area on the northern edge of Los Angeles, where he sought to drive up turnout with the key voting bloc.

Elder also was in Los Angeles, where he was joined by activist and former actress Rose McGowan, who repeated her claims from recent days that Newsom's wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, attempted to persuade her in 2017 not to go public with her allegations of sexual misconduct against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

Siebel Newsom's office described the allegations as a "complete fabrication." In a brief interview with The Associated Press, Newsom characterized McGowan's claims as a "last-minute classic hit piece" from one of Elder's supporters.

The governor called Elder desperate and grasping, saying McGowan's claims about his wife "just shows you how low things go in campaigns these days."

He echoed his earlier criticism of Elder, saying the conservative talk show host and lawyer "doesn't believe that women have the right to their own reproductive freedoms, he's devoutly opposed to Roe v. Wade, doesn't believe there's a glass ceiling, doesn't believe in pay equity laws."

During her appearance, McGowan spoke warmly of Elder and lambasted Hollywood Democrats who she said traumatized her life. She now lives in Mexico.

"Do I agree with him on all points? No," McGowan said. "So what. He is the better candidate. He is the better man."

The last-minute exchange highlighted growing tensions in the election, which largely grew out frustration with Newsom's pandemic orders that shuttered schools and businesses during the pandemic. Voting concludes Tuesday. Recent polling shows Newsom is likely to hold his job.

As Newsom's "first partner," Siebel Newsom, an actress turned documentary filmmaker, has championed gender equality and society's treatment of women and families.

McGowan, 48, who is known for her role in the "Scream" movie franchise, was one of the earliest of dozens of women to accuse Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct, making her a major figure in the #MeToo movement.

Elder, who could become the state's first Black governor, targeted some of his sharpest remarks at what he described as skewed media coverage.

Earlier 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.

If he was a Democrat "it would have been a major story," Elder said. He also said McGowan's accusations largely have been ignored by the media, but argued that if similar charges had been made about him "that's all you guys would be talking about."

"This is a double standard," he said. "I'm sick of it."

Emails posted on Twitter by McGowan showed she had contact with Newsom's wife, which her office confirmed but said their communication was "as fellow survivors of sexual assault and in Jennifer's former capacity leading the Representation Project, an organization that fights limiting gender stereotypes and norms."

One of McGowan's key claims is that during a 2017 phone conversation, Newsom's wife referenced a law firm that was working with Weinstein and asked her what the firm could do "to make you happy."

McGowan said Sunday she didn't recognize the firm's name at the time. "I had no idea who that was. So, I just said nothing and hung up on her. That was my last contact with her," she said.

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The election will determine whether Newsom can complete his first term or will be tossed out of office more than a year early. Voters are being asked two questions: Should Newsom be recalled and, if so, who should replace him? If he gets a majority vote on the first question, the second question with the names of 46 replacement candidate is irrelevant. Otherwise, the highest vote-getter among the replacement candidates would become governor.

Israel hits Hamas targets in Gaza in response to rocket fire

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli aircraft struck a series of targets in the Gaza Strip early Monday in response to rocket launches out of the Hamas-ruled territory. It was the third consecutive night of fighting between the two sides, even as Israel's foreign minister sought to dangle incentives for calm.

Tensions have risen after last week's escape from an Israeli prison by six Palestinian inmates, as well as struggling efforts by Egypt to broker a long-term cease-fire in the wake of an 11-day war last May.

The Israeli military reported three separate rocket launches late Sunday and early Monday, saying at least two of them were intercepted by its rocket defenses. In response, it said it attacked a number of Hamas targets. There were no reports of casualties on either side.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on Sunday called for a new approach to end the cycle of fighting with Hamas, describing a plan of international investment in Gaza's infrastructure in exchange for pressure on Hamas to halt its military buildup and preserve calm.

"The policy Israel has pursued up until now hasn't substantially changed the situation," Lapid said during a speech at Reichman University, north of Tel Aviv.

"We need to change direction," he added.

Much about his proposal — which he said was made in consultation with the United States and other countries — has been floated before but never implemented due to the fighting, deep distrust and bitter internal divisions on both sides. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, whom Lapid is to replace in 2023 under a rotation agreement, did not immediately comment on the proposal.

In the latest violence, Hamas fired rockets into Israel that were shot down by the country's Iron Dome defense system, the army said, adding that fighter jets struck a military post belonging Hamas. Within hours, the army reported an attempted stabbing of a soldier at the Gush Etzion Junction, south of Bethlehem. The army said no soldiers were reported injured and that the assailant had been transported to a hospital.

Over the weekend, Israel caught four of the six Palestinian inmates, who tunneled out of a maximum security prison on Sept. 6. Palestinian militants responded with rocket fire. Israel's search for the last two prisoners is continuing.

Meanwhile, Egyptian-mediated efforts to deliver a long-term truce have struggled with the sides unable to agree on a system to renew Qatari payments to needy Gaza families. Israel has demanded guarantees that Hamas does not divert the money for military use.

Gaza is an impoverished territory whose population is overwhelmingly comprised of families who fled or were forced from properties in what is now Israel during the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948.

Hamas is pushing for Israel to end a crippling blockade that has devastated Gaza's economy, while Israel is demanding that Hamas free two captive Israeli civilians and return the remains of two dead Israeli soldiers.

Hamas has controlled Gaza since ousting the forces of the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority in 2007, a year after the Islamic militant group won Palestinian parliamentary elections.

Since then, Israel and Hamas have fought four wars and numerous smaller rounds of fighting.

Adapt or else: Downtown businesses cope with new reality

By MAE ANDERSON and TOM KRISHER AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Downtown businesses in the U.S. and abroad once took for granted that nearby offices would provide a steady clientele looking for breakfast, lunch, everyday goods and services and last-minute gifts. As the resilient coronavirus keeps offices closed and workers at home, some are adapt-

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ing while others are trying to hang on.

Some businesses are already gone. The survivors have taken steps such as boosting online sales or changing their hours, staffing levels and what they offer customers. Others are relying more on residential traffic.

Many business owners had looked forward to a return toward normalcy this month as offices reopened. But now that many companies have postponed plans to bring workers back, due to surging COVID-19 cases, downtown businesses are reckoning with the fact that adjustments made on the fly may become permanent.

In downtown Detroit, Mike Frank's cleaning business was running out of money and, it seemed, out of time.

Frank started Clifford Street Cleaners eight years ago. Pre-pandemic, monthly revenue was about \$11,000, but by last December, when many downtown offices had to close, revenue had dropped to \$1,800, Frank said.

Frank had to borrow money from his wife to pay the bills. "It got down to , I was almost ready to go out of business."

Instead of shutting down, Frank adapted. He converted part of his store into a small market with toothpaste, laundry detergent, shampoo, bottled water, soft drinks and other essentials. He also delivered clean laundry and goods from the store.

Eventually, some foot traffic returned. With the combination of retail sales and dry cleaning, revenue is back up to about \$4,100 per month , he said. That's enough to keep him afloat, and the figure is improving each month.

In Lower Manhattan, 224 businesses closed their doors in 2020 and 2021, according to the Alliance for Downtown New York. About 100 have opened.

"There's no question, it's hard for business districts like ours, we miss our workers," said Jessica Lappin, president of the Alliance for Downtown New York. "Nobody misses them more than local businesses."

Lappin predicts office workers will come back, but it might be two or three days a week, on different days or in shifts.

"Just in the way we had to adjust so dramatically to being at home all the time, there is an adjustment to coming back," she said.

A block from Wall Street, Blue Park Kitchen used to have lines out the door each weekday as office workers waited to buy one of the grain bowls Kelly Fitzpatrick served as a healthy lunch option.

"Things are completely different," she said.

Online orders now account for 65% of the business — although they are less profitable because the online apps take a cut. Higher-margin catering orders remain non-existent and Blue Park has reduced its staff by nine workers.

"At our peak in July 2021 (before the delta variant surge), we had about 65% of peak pre-COVID business," Fitzpatrick said.

Fitzpatrick has seen more offices reopen and hopes more companies return in October, before the slower holiday months of November and December.

Nearby, Aankit Malhotra took over Indian restaurant Benares with his brother in 2019. When the pandemic hit, overnight, their core banking clientele vanished. No one came in for the \$13 three-course lunch special the restaurant was known for. Previously lunch accounted for 95% of Benares' business.

Now, Benares has about 10 lunch orders a day, down from 100. But locals, grateful that the restaurant kept its pre-pandemic hours of 10:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. every day, are keeping the brothers afloat.

Business is back to around 70% of pre-pandemic levels, helped by delivery and dinner meals. The clientele has changed from workers to younger people and families from nearby Battery Park City.

"It's nice to see not just corporate people downtown. It's becoming more of a family-oriented place."

Jorge Guzman, assistant professor of business management at Columbia University, said the shift of economic activity away from downtowns is likely to last. There has been a boom in entrepreneurship in

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non-downtown New York areas like Jamaica, Queens, and the South Bronx.

"Downtowns are not going to die, exactly. It's not like Midtown's going anywhere. But it's going to be a little bit more of a mix, more residential and mixed-use concepts."

Across the Atlantic in London, office workers have been slowly trickling back to their desks since the government lifted COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on July 19. The U.K. saw a peak of delta cases in July, but the numbers fell sharply in about two weeks. Recently, however, cases have been climbing again.

The number of commuters is nowhere near pre-pandemic levels, making it tough for small businesses in Central London's financial district to survive.

"It was amazing, it was good, it was busy before the pandemic," said Rado Asatrian, who has worked as a barber at the Man-oj hair salon in the financial district for six years. Before COVID-19, he usually had 10 to 15 customers a day, but now it's down to three or four.

"Now, it's just so empty," said Asatrian. He said he is considering moving to a busier location, switching careers, or moving abroad.

In some downtowns, while the workers are still remote, the tourists are back and providing a boost to businesses.

In Atlanta, Kwan's Deli and Korean Food is doing just about as much summertime business as it did before the pandemic, said Andrew Song, whose family owns the restaurant.

At the height of the pandemic, Kwan's had lost about 80% of its business, reduced its hours and cut staff. But the deli has bounced back thanks to tourists from the Georgia Aquarium and events at a nearby convention hall.

Still, the delta variant surge is creating uncertainty about the fall. Song said he has heard that some businesses have relocated permanently or downsized.

"It's sort of hard to imagine what it will look like with office regulars not returning or being more remote," he said.

In Nashville, Lyle Richardson, chief operating officer for restaurant operator A. Marshall Hospitality, said he has seen the city's restaurant industry ravaged by the coronavirus epidemic. He sits on the board of the Tennessee Hospitality Association trade group and estimates that hundreds of restaurants have had to close.

Those who stayed open made adjustments. Richardson stopped serving lunch at one restaurant, Deacon's New South, to focus on dinner only after office workers went remote. But he kept his other restaurant, Puckett's Grocery & Restaurant, open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., to attract the tourists flocking back to the city.

"The normalcy we called pre-COVID, that no longer exists," he said. "We have to be prepared, on our toes, to adapt."

Back in Detroit, business at Cannelle by Matt Knio, a downtown bakery and sandwich shop, has rebounded above 2019 levels after a precipitous drop-off early in the pandemic. Baseball and football crowds are back, and outdoor dining and takeout remain popular.

If businesses are subject to more restrictions when the weather gets colder, Knio believes he can rely on the lessons learned so far in the pandemic to get by.

"I think we know our way around now, and how to deal with it," he said. "We'll be able to do takeout and curbside pickup."

Krisher reported from Detroit. AP Writer Kelvin Chan in London and Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta contributed to this report.

As Dubai's food delivery booms, dangers and casualties mount

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Running late, the delivery driver threaded his motorcycle around lurching cars, speeding against time and traffic to satisfy a customer's burger craving — the day's last delivery in Dubai.

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Moments later, a car sideswiped him.

The collision catapulted Mohammed Ifran off his bike and smashed him into the street, instantly killing the 21-year-old as he was delivering a meal worth some \$8. After giving up farming in Pakistan, he had been working in Dubai as a contractor for Talabat, an online food delivery app popular in the United Arab Emirates.

"His family's only source of happiness, gone," said a fellow courier in the working-class district of Deira, who declined to give his name for fear of reprisals.

Ifran's June death represents just one in a growing number of casualties among food delivery riders in Dubai, workers and advocates say, as the pandemic pushed millions of people indoors and accelerated a surge in app-based orders.

The boom has transformed Dubai's streets and stores and drawn thousands of desperate riders, predominantly Pakistanis, into the high-risk, lightly regulated and sometimes-fatal work. With most paid between \$2 to \$3 per delivery rather than a fixed salary, riders race in the scorching heat to keep pace with a relentless rush of orders.

The conditions of couriers worldwide, long perilous, worsened during the pandemic as riders became essential to feeding cities and faced new risks of coronavirus exposure. But in Dubai, the United Arab Emirate's glimmering sheikhdom that runs on low-paid migrant labor from Africa and Asia, the job can be particularly precarious.

At the mercy of visa sponsors, workers in Dubai have few protections. To reduce cost, companies like London-based Deliveroo outsource bikes, logistics and responsibility to contracting agencies — a labor pipeline that prevails across Gulf Arab states and can lead to mistreatment.

"For food delivery riders in the UAE, the issue of exploitation is usually on the part of the sponsor. That's where people feel they're unable to change jobs or even to complain about working conditions," said Karen Young, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

On Dubai's streets, more than a dozen delivery riders interviewed said they knew of two or three co-workers killed every month. Memories of colleagues sprawled on the street in shredded uniforms and bloodied helmets remain vivid as they mount their bikes each morning, many said.

Dubai police have not yet released a road crash count for 2020. Past tallies did not offer breakdowns for motorcycle deaths. Authorities declined to offer recent figures or comment on crash cases like Ifran's.

Without an official number, advocates have scoured local media to gauge the work's hidden toll. One road safety activist, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, collected press reports of at least 70 delivery riders hospitalized last year in Dubai, including 24 who died.

The figure, although likely an undercount, "is intense" for Dubai during a year that kept most residents off the roads, he said. The entire country recorded 448 crash deaths in 2019.

State-linked Emirati newspaper The National reported that 12 delivery drivers were killed during the city's lockdown in April alone, quoting a police official as saying, "When money comes into the equation, safety is put aside."

Couriers in Dubai often lack protective gear and adequate safety training, industry experts said, with riders uneducated about critical motorcycle maneuvers like the blind-spot check. Helmets are often worn incorrectly. Contractors allocate just \$27 a month for bike servicing — a small sum for a bike's necessary oil changes and brake, tire and plug maintenance.

In response to questions from The Associated Press, Dubai's Roads and Transportation Authority said safety remains the government's "top priority" as it supports the delivery market's explosive growth. Authorities referred to recently announced regulations, including penalizing riders' use of the fast lane, requiring cooling towels and reducing riding radius.

Riders for two main companies, Deliveroo and Talabat described receiving limited insurance coverage from third-party contractors, with payouts often capped at a few hundred dollars with no death benefits or crash compensation. Several riders struck by cars on delivery trips said their contractors refused to foot hefty Dubai hospital bills, instead forcing them to fly back to Pakistan to pay for cheaper surgery.

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UAE-based Talabat, which saw its deliveries increase by 100% in the first half of the year, said the platform has “a very high standard” for rider training and ensures contractors provide insurance for medical care as required by law. The company, owned by Germany-based Delivery Hero, has introduced a task-force of the best riders, it said, “who help to ensure that our fleet across the UAE continue to adhere to the safety rules.”

Deliveroo said it has adjusted working hours “to meet particularly high customer demand,” and stressed that all riders provide their contractors with documentation, including insurance.

“Our agency operators in each market work with Deliveroo to ensure quality standards,” it said.

Neither Deliveroo nor Talabat offered crash or fatality data for their contractors. London-based Deliveroo is valued at over \$8 billion, while Talabat-owner Delivery Hero is valued at over \$35 billion.

Authorities transfer all riders injured in crashes to government-run hospitals, where doctors declined to comment. But workers at private hospitals said even they have seen a growing stream of food couriers with fractured limbs who fell from their bikes.

“Of course they’re getting injured. They’re overworked, dehydrated, exhausted,” said Dr. Taimoor Tung at Dubai’s Orthopedics and Spine Hospital.

One rider, Mohammed Asin, said he never would have left his family in Sialkot, Pakistan, to race through rounds as a Dubai deliveryman if it weren’t for his childhood classmate, 22-year-old Hamed Shafiq, who rode for Talabat.

“He kept saying, ‘Join me, this is the dream. We can make real money. Our families can have a better life,’” Asin said.

On Feb. 16, Asin touched down in Dubai, moved in with Shafiq and signed up for Deliveroo, ready to live out the dream.

The next day, his best friend was dead — knocked off his bike by a car that swerved into his lane. Asin, however, keeps delivering to this day.

Follow Isabel DeBre on Twitter at www.twitter.com/isabeldebre

School starts for 1 million NYC kids amid new vaccine rules

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Classroom doors swing open for about a million New York City public school students on Monday in the nation’s largest experiment of in-person learning during the coronavirus pandemic.

The start of the school year coincides with several milestones in the city’s pandemic recovery that hinge on vaccine mandates.

Nearly all of the city’s 300,000 employees will be required to be back in their workplaces, in person, Monday as the city ends remote work. Most will either need to be vaccinated, or undergo weekly COVID-19 testing to remain in their jobs.

The city was also set to start enforcing rules requiring workers and patrons to be vaccinated to go indoors at restaurants, museums, gyms and entertainment venues. The vaccination requirement has been in place for weeks, but had not previously been enforced.

There will also be a vaccine mandate — with no test-out option — for teachers, though they have been given until Sept. 27 to get their first shot.

Unlike some school districts across the country that are still offering online instruction to families that prefer it, New York City officials say there will be no remote option despite the persistence of the highly transmissible delta variant of COVID-19.

New York City kept schools open for most of the last school year, with some students doing a mix of remote and in-person instruction, but the majority of families chose all-remote learning. That choice won’t be available this year, Mayor Bill de Blasio has insisted.

“Our kids need to be in school and it’s unbelievable that some kids haven’t seen the inside of a classroom for a year and a half,” the mayor said Thursday. “There are massive consequences to that, including health

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care consequences. The healthiest, best place for kids to be is in school.”

Masks will be required for all students and staff members, as is the case in schools across New York state. There is no vaccine mandate for students 12 and over who are eligible for inoculations, but vaccinations will be required to participate in contact sports like football and basketball as well as some extracurricular activities like band practice and theater. About two-thirds of the city’s 12-to-17-year-olds are currently vaccinated.

In the U.S., anyone 12 and older is eligible for COVID-19 vaccines. The Food and Drug Administration’s vaccine chief said last week he is hopeful children as young as 5 will be eligible to get vaccinated by the end of 2021.

De Blasio, a Democrat in his final months in office, has insisted that masks, cleaning protocols and random COVID-19 testing makes school buildings safe. But he has gotten pushback both from parents who want their children home and from unions representing teachers and other school staff members.

One caller to WNYC during the mayor’s weekly radio appearance Friday said she was “absolutely beside myself with fear of sending my 6-year-old into school.”

“We believe this is an extraordinarily safe environment,” de Blasio responded. “We’ve proven it and the most important thing is our kids have to come back.”

Asked if some students might just disappear from the system because their virus-wary parents won’t send them to school, de Blasio said “the vast, vast majority” of parents would bring their children to school.

The city has been in arbitration with the United Federation of Teachers, which represents almost 80,000 teachers in city public schools, over issues including accommodations for teachers who say they have health issues that prevent them from being vaccinated.

The arbitrator ruled late Friday that the city must offer non-classroom assignments to teachers who aren’t vaccinated because of medical and religious exemptions.

“As a group, teachers have overwhelmingly supported the vaccine, but we have members with medical conditions or other reasons for declining vaccination,” UFT president Michael Mulgrew said in a news release.

Meanwhile, other unions for city workers have objected to the mayor’s decision to order employees back into workplaces, saying that if they were performing their jobs well remotely, they should be allowed to continue.

The Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella group for unions representing municipal workers, has also threatened legal action if the mayor moves to eliminate the option of weekly virus testing for workers who opt not to get vaccinated.

And a group of restaurant and bar owners has sued over the vaccination requirement for indoor dining and employees, saying the city has overstepped its legal authority.

Firefighters advance on blaze that shut California highway

CASTAIC, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters were making progress on a wildfire that jumped across a Southern California freeway and spread across dry hillsides while a new blaze forced residents of a Northern California community to evacuate.

The fire broke out Saturday afternoon near Castaic in northern Los Angeles County. Pushed by 10-15mph (16-24 kph) winds, the blaze chewed through tinder-dry brush and jumped across the busy freeway, spread across more than a half of a square mile.

The California Highway Patrol closed a stretch of the interstate for several hours as air tankers dropped bright-orange retardant on the flames. A large flareup sent heavy smoke drifting toward freeway lanes Sunday afternoon, the CHP reported.

Two firefighters were taken to the hospital to treat burn injuries, said Andrew Mitchell, a spokesman for the Angeles National Forest.

Officials said the fire was about 63% contained Sunday, adding that firefighters made progress overnight with the help of water-dropping aircraft and an aggressive ground attack, Mitchell said.

He said crews would take advantage of the beginning of a cooling trend Sunday to build containment lines.

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The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Meanwhile, a fire that erupted Sunday afternoon prompted Mendocino County authorities to evacuate parts of Calpella, a community on the Russian River about 6 miles (10 kilometers) north of Ukiah. Video footage posted on Twitter shows the fire pushing in the direction of Lake Mendocino.

Further north, residents of a mountain town devastated by the huge Caldor Fire south of Lake Tahoe will be allowed back Sunday to inspect the damage. Most of Grizzly Flat's homes, as well as the school, post office, church and fire station were destroyed in the first days of the month-old fire. Evacuation orders were also lifted for homes along State Route 50 as containment of the 342-square-mile (886 square kilometer) wildfire increased to 65%.

President Joe Biden issued a disaster declaration late Sunday for El Dorado County in an effort to provide federal funding to state, tribal and eligible local governments, plus certain private nonprofit organizations, who have been affected by damage from the Caldor Fire.

Firefighters were diverted from battling the blaze to fight multiple overnight lightning fires when thunderstorms swept across the state Thursday night into Friday.

The thunderstorms dropped light rain to slightly dampen the drought-stricken north, fire officials said.

Up to a half-inch of rain fell on portions of the Dixie Fire, which began in mid-July and has burned through huge swaths of the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades. However, fire officials said the rain is drying fast and vegetation is becoming more flammable.

The second-largest fire in California history has burned 1,500 square miles (3,885 square kilometers) of land and more than 1,300 homes and other buildings. It was 65% contained.

Capitol rally seeks to rewrite Jan. 6 by exalting rioters

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — First, some blamed the deadly Jan. 6 attack at the U.S. Capitol on left-wing antifa antagonists, a theory quickly debunked. Then came comparisons of the rioters to peaceful protesters or even tourists.

Now, allies of former President Donald Trump are calling those charged in the Capitol riot "political prisoners," a stunning effort to revise the narrative of that deadly day.

The brazen rhetoric ahead of a rally planned for Saturday at the Capitol is the latest attempt to explain away the horrific assault and obscure what played out for all the world to see: rioters loyal to the then-president storming the building, battling police and trying to stop Congress from certifying the election of Democrat Joe Biden.

"Some people are calling it Jan. 6 trutherism — they're rewriting the narrative to make it seem like Jan. 6 was no big deal, and it was a damn big deal, and an attack on our democracy," said Heidi Beirich, co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, who studies extremist movements.

All told, the attempted whitewashing of the Jan. 6 attack threatens to further divide an already polarized nation that finds itself drifting from what had been common facts and a shared commitment to civic order toward an unsettling new normal.

Rather than a nation healing eight months after the deadly assault, it is at risk of tearing itself further apart, as the next election approaches.

The anticipated crowd size and the intensity of the Saturday rally are unclear, but law enforcement appears to be taking no chances. Security fencing has been requested around the Capitol and reinforcements are being summoned to back up the Capitol Police, whose leadership was criticized and summarily dismissed for its handling of Jan. 6.

While authorities have been bracing for a repeat appearance by right-wing extremist groups and other Trump loyalists who mobbed the Capitol, it's unclear if those actors will participate in the new event. The extremist groups are concerning because, while members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers made up a small portion of the Jan. 6 rioters, they are accused of some of the more serious crimes in the attack.

Rally organizer Matt Braynard, a former Trump campaign strategist, has been promoting the event and

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others like it in cities nationwide, focusing attention on what he calls the “prisoners” being unfairly prosecuted for their involvement in the Jan. 6 riot.

“I am so proud of all of the brave patriots who participated in these rallies under the same threat to their rights of so many who are being held in prison now for a non-violent expression of their First Amendment rights,” he said in a July news release.

Braynard declined to respond to additional questions by email, and The Associated Press declined to accept the conditions he made for an interview.

As Trump openly considers another run for the White House, many of the Republican lawmakers who joined his effort to challenge Biden’s victory are staying away from the Saturday rally, even though many still echo his false claims that the election was rigged — despite numerous court cases by Trump’s allies that have failed to confirm those allegations.

Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., who joined rally-goers near the White House on Jan. 6 where Trump encouraged the crowd to go to the Capitol, declined to comment, his spokesman said by email. Brooks is now running for the Senate.

Another Republican, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who voted to challenge some Electoral College tallies, was unavailable for an interview, his office said.

Also declining an interview was Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., who was captured in a photo raising a fist in salute to the mob as he entered the Capitol that day.

Yet, even in their absence, some of the Republicans are telegraphing their views. When asked whether he would be attending, Hawley’s office issued a comment on the senator’s behalf.

“Joe Biden should resign,” Hawley said in a statement.

More than 600 people are facing federal charges in the riot that injured dozens of officers and sent lawmakers into hiding. Five people eventually died, including Trump supporter Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into a lobby off the House chamber. Several police officers later took their own lives.

Hundreds of people were charged with misdemeanors for entering the Capitol illegally, but hundreds of others are facing more serious felony charges including assault, obstruction of an official proceeding or conspiracy.

The most serious cases have been brought against members of two far-right extremist groups — the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers — as authorities probe to what extent the attack was planned. No Jan. 6 defendant has been charged with sedition, though it was initially considered by authorities.

More than 60 people have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanor charges of demonstrating in the Capitol.

Only a fraction of the defendants remain locked up while they await trial. Lawyers have complained of overly harsh conditions for the Jan. 6 defendants in the D.C. jail, saying they are being held in what has been dubbed the “Patriot Unit.”

Defenders of the alleged Capitol attackers claim they are facing harsher prosecutions because of their political views than others, including Black Lives Matter protesters, but a review of court cases by the AP refutes that claim.

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and a member of the select panel investigating the Jan. 6 attack, said those who broke the law need to be prosecuted, “otherwise, we just rationalize, excuse and encourage more of the same.”

Schiff laments that the nation had a chance to move on from the attack of Jan. 6, but instead chose a different path.

“There was really an opportunity to repudiate everything that led up to Jan. 6, and instead, Republican leadership has continued to embrace it,” he said. “So that is discouraging. It means that the recovery is going to take much longer than it should.”

The Capitol’s leafy grounds, a park-like favorite spot for people to snap photos in front of the iconic dome, would typically see few lawmakers or staff on a Saturday. While the Senate returns to session Monday, the House doesn’t resume until after the Monday following the rally.

When the fence first went up around the Capitol after the January attack, it drew heavy criticism from

those worried about the message being sent as a symbol of democracy was closed off. Now, it's increasingly seen as necessary precaution.

Associated Press writers Alanna Durkin in Boston and Michael Balsamo, Eric Tucker and Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington contributed to this report.

Nicaragua gov't squeezes doctors, talk of 'health terrorism'

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Other countries have lured doctors out of retirement, pushed medical students to the front lines and buoyed medical personnel exhausted by COVID-19 cases, but in Nicaragua doctors have been harassed, threatened and sometimes forced into exile for questioning official handling of the pandemic.

Vice President Rosario Murillo, who is also the first lady, has accused doctors of "health terrorism" and of spreading "false outlooks and news" by reporting that COVID-19 has been far more widespread than officials acknowledge.

As international health organizations warn of increasing infections in Nicaragua and independent Nicaraguan doctors call for a voluntary quarantine to slow the spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus, the government has made clear that comments out of step with its line are unacceptable as President Daniel Ortega seeks a fourth consecutive term.

Groups of doctors report much higher numbers than the government of virus infections and deaths from COVID-19, the disease that can be caused by the coronavirus. And they have criticized the Sandinista government for promoting mass gatherings.

Dr. Leonel Argüello, a physician who also is one of the country's most prominent epidemiologists, recently fled Nicaragua after months of harassment and threats.

Argüello maintains his own tally of medical workers who died of COVID-19 and accuses the government of creating a false sense of security that has cost lives.

"We are not working to remove a government," the doctor said from an undisclosed country. "We are not working to be an opposition party. We are working like we would work with any patient to look for a way to save his life."

Argüello, who worked for the Health Ministry during the first Sandinista government, said he had ignored death threats, but said he sensed a change when Murillo spoke publicly about doctors inventing things and made clear the government would not continue tolerating it.

"My role as a health educator was going to be lost if they imprisoned me or silenced me," he said.

In comments that appeared directed toward Argüello and other doctors in exile, Murillo said this month that "to carry out terrorism with health topics is a sacrilege, it is a crime."

Questions sent to the vice president about the alleged intimidation of doctors elicited a thank you note from Murillo, but no additional comment.

It is not clear how many doctors have left the country during the pandemic, but The Associated Press identified at least five who left because they felt government intimidation. "I think it's a decision you take when you feel your physical safety is compromised," Argüello said.

In early July, Murillo spoke of "fake doctors" giving "false predictions and false surveys" about the pandemic. "In life everything has a cost and if we cause harm, harm will come to us, we shouldn't expose ourselves to receive the consequences," she said on national television.

Around that time, urologist José Luis Borgen was called into the Health Ministry and told to stop providing pandemic statistics different from the official numbers. He said he knows of about a dozen doctors who were summoned and told the same.

"They accuse us of giving false news and generating fear in the people," Borgen said. One doctor was told his medical license could be revoked and he could be charged with spreading false information. Borgen said he believes that doctor is no longer in Nicaragua.

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Borgen was also summoned to the Attorney General's Office about treatment he had given an opposition politician sought by authorities. He said he viewed that as an attempt at intimidation.

"It's all linked," Borgen said. "When the vice president says something, the rest of the institutions execute it."

Borgen, who himself has been ill with COVID-19, said that he did not know of any doctors who had had their licenses revoked or been charged with a crime, but that "many" had left the country fearing that could happen.

The government had already shown willingness to put political pressure on health workers. When big street protests broke out in April 2018 in response to a government change to the social security system, the government told public health workers to not treat injured protesters.

Those who disobeyed — some 400, according to Argüello — were fired. Others went into exile at that time.

The pressure has continued during the pandemic.

From the time Nicaragua started seeing its first coronavirus infections in March 2020, speaking of the pandemic was taboo. Wearing a surgical mask in hospitals became a political statement because administrators forbade hospital personnel from donning them. Masks could make patients nervous, they said.

Relatives and health workers reported secretive "express burials" of COVID-19 victims by personnel in white protective suits under cover of darkness. La Prensa, Nicaragua's main newspaper, reported in July that a Managua funeral home had performed 14 such burials in 10 days with patients from three hospitals in the capital.

Nicaragua's health workers have been hit hard by the pandemic, too. At least 160 medical personnel have died from COVID-19, statistics the government has not shared, according to Argüello. Borgen said Friday that 88 of those who died were doctors.

A doctor in the northwestern city of Chinandega said physicians were unable to obtain coronavirus tests outside government hospitals — and even those are strictly limited.

"They have it controlled and if someone in a given case tests positive they handle it discreetly," the doctor said. "They want to sell an image that the virus is controlled."

But she said her region was seeing a heavy load of cases, the local hospital ward devoted to COVID-19 cases was full and a colleague who had been treating patients night and day died of the disease a month ago. She, too, spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals.

Dr. Eddy Valverde fled into exile in late June, weeks after the government began arresting prominent opposition leaders. He had faced months of threats and attacks on social media for speaking publicly about the government's handling of the pandemic. Journalists from government outlets had called for revocation of his medical license.

He said independent doctors have been the only source of reliable data about the pandemic. He is a member of the Nicaraguan Medical Unit, which was formed by doctors fired from public hospitals in 2018.

That organization, which provided free consultations to COVID-19 patients, was forced to close its offices in July after months of harassment from police.

Another organization made up of activists and independent doctors called the Citizen Observatory has reported 20 times the number of COVID-19 deaths — more than 4,000 — than the government's official number.

The government has been reporting one COVID-19 death per week for the past nine months.

The Observatory called for Nicaraguans to join a "voluntary quarantine" during the month of September in the face of "the pandemic peak and collapse of the health system."

Nicaragua started limited vaccinations in April, and the nation of some 6.5 million people has vaccinated more than 520,000 adults older than 45, though it wasn't clear if they had received two doses or only one. The president said Thursday the government would begin vaccinating people over age 30 later this month.

Rather than impose restrictions to slow the virus' spread, the government encouraged mass gatherings and a continuation of life as normal despite warnings from local physicians and the Pan American Health

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Organization.

Argüello believes the government's attempts to muzzle him and other health workers aims to give the public a false sense of security.

"Those who started speaking out were fired and that was the signal for everyone to stay quiet in the public sector," Argüello said.

Leaving Nicaragua was a difficult decision, Argüello said. In most cases, a doctor cannot quickly resume practice in another country. Argüello is still treating remotely 15 patients who are on oxygen at home.

"The apparent normalcy being sold is a false sense of security that keeps people from taking steps to protect themselves," Argüello said.

"We're worse every day, the numbers are rising," Argüello said. "The hospitals are full and everyone knows a relative or a neighbor with COVID."

Lil Nas X, Justin Bieber top star-packed MTV VMAs

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

Lil Nas X won video of the year at Sundays MTV VMAs on a night that Justin Bieber triumphantly returned to the stage as a performer and as winner of the artist of the year.

"I do not take this for granted," Lil Nas X said while accepting the night's final award for the music video for his song, "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)."

Much of the early show belonged to Bieber, who for his first VMAs performance in six years rappelled from the ceiling of the Barclays Center at the start of the show for an energetic performance of "Stay" with Kid LAROI and then his single "Ghost."

The VMAs celebrated MTV's 40th anniversary, mixing moments between early network stars like Cyndi Lauper and show opener Madonna with high-octane performances by newer stars like Olivia Rodrigo, Lil Nas X, Camila Cabello and Chloe.

Bieber was the leading nominee going into the ceremony. He took home the best pop honor for "Peaches," a song that featured Daniel Caesar and Giveon - who accompanied him onstage.

Sporting baggy clothes and a hoodie, Bieber showed his appreciation for the awards being in-person and thanked his wife, Hailey, for supporting him.

"As we know, there's so much going on in the world as we speak," Bieber said during his acceptance speech after winning artist of the year. "I know you guys have probably heard it a lot. We are in unprecedented times with this COVID thing that's happening right now. It's a big deal. Music is such an amazing outlet to be able to reach people and bring us all together. That's why we are here right now. We're all here together."

Opening the show, Madonna told the screaming crowd: "They said we wouldn't last. But we're still here."

Moments after Olivia Rodrigo performed her hit "good 4 u," she collected the night's first award for her massive hit song "Drivers License." She later won best new artist.

"I feel so grateful that I get to write music, make stuff that I love and call it my job," said Rodrigo, the first-time nominee. Earlier in the awards, the singer called this the "most magical year of my life."

Jennifer Lopez, who three days earlier made her re-kindled romance with Ben Affleck official on the red carpet of his new film "The Last Duel" at the Venice International Film Festival, presented Rodrigo her trophy.

Billie Eilish won the fan-voted video for good for her song "Your Power." In her acceptance speech, she said Alicia Keys kissed her on the cheek, spoke about the satisfaction of writing the song and women empowerment.

Eilish and Rosalía won best Latin video for their song "Lo Vas A Olvidar." BTS won three awards including group of the year, best K-pop and song of summer for "Butter."

"We need to protect our own women at all costs," said Eilish, while her brother-producer Finneas applauded his sister from his seat. "We need to remember that we all have power. We have to remember not to abuse it."

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Lauper, who presented Bieber with his first award, advocated for equal rights for women.

"Girls still want to have fun," said Lauper, known for classic melody "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." "But we also want to have funds, equal pay, control over our bodies, you know, fundamental rights."

Lil Nas X hit the stage with Jack Harlow, then he performed his controversial song "Montero (Call Me by Your Name)." Kacey Musgraves and Shawn Mendes also hit the stage.

Olympic gymnastic champion Simone Biles introduced Doja Cat — the show's host — who went aerial during her performance. With wires holding her up, Doja Cat glided over the crowd and landed on stage as she performed "Been Like This" and "You Right."

Before the show, Machine Gun Kelly got into a heated argument on the red carpet with UFC fighter Conner McGregor. Video showed McGregor being held back by security from Kelly who later won best alternative for his song "My Ex's Best Friend," featuring Blackbear.

Kelly said he initially didn't want to release the song, but thanked his label for going against his wishes. He also gave thanks to the director of the song's music video, despite their squabble on set.

"I haven't talked to you since we did because we got into a fight on set, but it's a great video and I'm so glad we won," he said. "We won!"

Megan Thee Stallion entered the show as the second-leading nominee with six nominations. BTS, Doja Cat, Drake, Giveon, Lil Nas X and Rodrigo each had five nods.

The Foo Fighters performed and then accepted the Global Icon Award, an honor handed out for the first time at the VMAs. The award recognizes an artist or band "whose unparalleled career and continued impact and influence has maintained a unique level of global success in music and beyond."

The prestigious award was previously presented at the annual MTV Europe Music Awards. Past recipients include Queen, Eminem and Whitney Houston.

The rock band — comprised of Dave Grohl, Taylor Hawkins, Nate Mendel, Chris Shiflett, Pat Smear and Rami Jaffee — performed several of their hits including "Learn to Fly" and "Shame Shame." It was their first performance at the VMAs since 2007.

Eilish presented the Global Icon Award to the group, who thanked MTV veterans from Kurt Loder to Tabitha Soren.

"Thank you very much for this award," Grohl said. "We'll see you in another 26 years."

Barrett concerned about public perception of Supreme Court

By PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett expressed concerns Sunday that the public may increasingly see the court as a partisan institution.

Justices must be "hyper vigilant to make sure they're not letting personal biases creep into their decisions, since judges are people, too," Barrett said at a lecture hosted by the University of Louisville's McConnell Center.

Introduced by Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who founded the center and played a key role in pushing through her confirmation in the last days of the Trump administration, Barrett spoke at length about her desire for others to see the Supreme Court as nonpartisan.

Barrett said the media's reporting of opinions doesn't capture the deliberative process in reaching those decisions. And she insisted that "judicial philosophies are not the same as political parties."

"To say the court's reasoning is flawed is different from saying the court is acting in a partisan manner," said Barrett, whose confirmation to the seat left open by the death of the liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg cemented conservative control of the court. "I think we need to evaluate what the court is doing on its own terms."

Barrett's comments followed a high-profile decision earlier this month in which the court by 5-4 vote declined to step in to stop a Texas law banning most abortions from going into effect, prompting outrage from abortion rights groups and President Joe Biden.

Barrett was asked about that decision by students who submitted questions in advance and also asked

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about another recent decision by the court in which it refused to block a lower court ruling ordering the Biden administration to reinstate a Trump-era program informally known as Remain in Mexico. Barrett said it would be "inappropriate" to comment on specific cases.

Several supporters of abortion rights demonstrated outside the Seelbach Hotel, where the private event was held.

Barrett, 49, also spoke about her introduction to the court in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, saying it "certainly is a different experience." The court has for more than a year been hearing arguments by telephone though it recently announced a return to the courtroom in October.

Barrett described the court as a "warm, collegial place." She said that after she was confirmed a colleague brought Halloween candy for her children. The first mother of school-age children on the nine-member court also spoke about balancing her job and family life.

"I have an important job, but I certainly am no more important than anyone else in the grocery store checkout line," Barrett said, describing how her relationship with her children — who are not "particularly impressed" with her high-profile post — helps her stay grounded in her "regular life" where she is busy "running carpools, throwing birthday parties, being ordered around."

When asked what advice she would give to young women who would like to pursue a career in public service, the justice said she would like young women to know it is possible to raise a family and be successful.

Barrett was confirmed by the Senate in a 52-48 vote last year, a little over a month after Ginsburg's death. Democrats opposed her nomination, arguing that the process was rushed and that the winner of the 2020 presidential election should have been able to choose Ginsburg's replacement. McConnell's decision to move forward with Barrett's nomination was a contrast to the position he took in 2016, when he refused to consider President Barack Obama's choice to fill the seat left vacant by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February of that year. McConnell blocked hearings for then-judge Merrick Garland, now Biden's attorney general, saying the choice should be left to voters in an election year.

The lecture was held in celebration of the McConnell Center's 30th anniversary. Founded in 1991, the nonpartisan center provides educational and scholarship opportunities to students at the University of Louisville. Three other Supreme Court Justices, most recently Justice Neil Gorsuch, have spoken at the center.

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

Allegations fly as recall vote looms for California's Newsom

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and EUGENE GARCIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In a blitz of TV ads and a last-minute rally, California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom urged voters Sunday to turn back a looming recall vote that could remove him from office, while leading Republican Larry Elder broadly criticized the media for what he described as double standards that insulated Newsom from criticism and scrutiny throughout the contest.

The sunny, late-summer weekend was a swirl of political activity, as candidates held rallies, continued bus tours and cluttered the TV airwaves with advertising offering their closing arguments in advance of the election that concludes Tuesday.

Newsom — who is expecting President Joe Biden on Monday for a capstone get-out-the-vote rally in Long Beach — was in a largely Hispanic area on the northern edge of Los Angeles, where he sought to drive up turnout with the key voting bloc.

Elder also was in Los Angeles, where he was joined by activist and former actress Rose McGowan, who repeated her claims from recent days that Newsom's wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, attempted to persuade her in 2017 not to go public with her allegations of sexual misconduct against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

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Siebel Newsom's office described the allegations as a "complete fabrication." In a brief interview with The Associated Press, Newsom characterized McGowan's claims as a "last-minute classic hit piece" from one of Elder's supporters.

The governor called Elder desperate and grasping, saying McGowan's claims about his wife "just shows you how low things go in campaigns these days."

He echoed his earlier criticism of Elder, saying the conservative talk show host and lawyer "doesn't believe that women have the right to their own reproductive freedoms, he's devoutly opposed to Roe v. Wade, doesn't believe there's a glass ceiling, doesn't believe in pay equity laws."

During her appearance, McGowan spoke warmly of Elder and lambasted Hollywood Democrats who she said traumatized her life. She now lives in Mexico.

"Do I agree with him on all points? No," McGowan said. "So what. He is the better candidate. He is the better man."

The last-minute exchange highlighted growing tensions in the election, which largely grew out of frustration with Newsom's pandemic orders that shuttered schools and businesses during the pandemic. Voting concludes Tuesday. Recent polling shows Newsom is likely to hold his job.

As Newsom's "first partner," Siebel Newsom, an actress turned documentary filmmaker, has championed gender equality and society's treatment of women and families.

McGowan, 48, who is known for her role in the "Scream" movie franchise, was one of the earliest of dozens of women to accuse Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct, making her a major figure in the #MeToo movement.

Elder, who could become the state's first Black governor, targeted some of his sharpest remarks at what he described as skewed media coverage.

Earlier 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.

If he was a Democrat "it would have been a major story," Elder said. He also said McGowan's accusations largely have been ignored by the media, but argued that if similar charges had been made about him "that's all you guys would be talking about."

"This is a double standard," he said. "I'm sick of it."

Emails posted on Twitter by McGowan showed she had contact with Newsom's wife, which her office confirmed but said their communication was "as fellow survivors of sexual assault and in Jennifer's former capacity leading the Representation Project, an organization that fights limiting gender stereotypes and norms."

One of McGowan's key claims is that during a 2017 phone conversation, Newsom's wife referenced a law firm that was working with Weinstein and asked her what the firm could do "to make you happy."

McGowan said Sunday she didn't recognize the firm's name at the time. "I had no idea who that was. So, I just said nothing and hung up on her. That was my last contact with her," she said.

The election will determine whether Newsom can complete his first term or will be tossed out of office more than a year early. Voters are being asked two questions: Should Newsom be recalled and, if so, who should replace him? If he gets a majority vote on the first question, the second question with the names of 46 replacement candidate is irrelevant. Otherwise, the highest vote-getter among the replacement candidates would become governor.

Tailgating, face-painted fans back in force at NFL stadiums

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Tailgating, face-painted fans returned in full force at stadiums around the country as the NFL opened its doors to capacity for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic.

Some wore masks, some didn't. Some are vaccinated, some aren't.

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Restrictions varied in different cities with the Seattle Seahawks, Las Vegas Raiders and New Orleans Saints the only teams requiring fans to provide proof of vaccination to enter.

The defending Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers welcomed 65,566 fans Thursday night to kick off the season and 15 teams were set to host more than one million fans in Week 1.

Fans are back as COVID-19 surges because of the delta variant. President Joe Biden has a proposal to require that companies with more than 100 employees vaccinate their workforce and he will also mandate shots for executive branch workers and federal contractors with no testing opt-out.

In Nashville, fans were tailgating in the usual spaces outside Nissan Stadium before the Titans hosted the Arizona Cardinals. No proof of vaccination or recent negative COVID-19 test were required of fans. Masks were only encouraged inside suites and other enclosed spaces but not required. The only exception to that is postgame for reporters around players and coaches.

The field on opposite sides between the 15 and 5 featured the words "WELCOME BACK."

Judy Maag of Hohenwald, Tennessee, had tickets for the 2020 season only to sell them when the pandemic hit. She has been coming to Titans' games for the past five seasons and was racing to her seats in the upper deck Sunday.

"It feels great and I hope we win," Maag said.

In Buffalo, fans who are not fully vaccinated must wear a face covering at all times. Masks are required regardless of vaccination status when visiting the indoor settings at Highmark Stadium. Unvaccinated guests may remove their mask only when eating or drinking. Seating will not be designated by vaccination status.

The team sent a letter to ticket holders recommending they get through the gates earlier than normal, and that they were opening the gates at 11 a.m., a half hour early.

Outside the stadium, it was back to normal after fans weren't allowed to attend Bills home games during the regular season last year, and only about 6,600 were allowed in for the playoffs. The private lots around the stadium were already filling up by 8 a.m.

Jeff Boyst made his annual trip from North Carolina to watch the Bills play the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"I think it's time to get back out in the public and take my chances. I've been vaccinated," said Boyst, who was attending a tailgate party across the street from the stadium more than four hours before kickoff. "But I'm here willing to take the chances to resume life and try to get back to normal. And this is a tradition that I've missed. I drove 600 miles just to be here and to be back to normal, and support the Bills, support the community that I grew up in. And like so many of us, we've left New York to end up somewhere else. Our hearts are still here."

Bill Langdoa traveled from Long Island, New York, to North Carolina to watch Zach Wilson make his NFL debut with the Jets against Sam Darnold and the Carolina Panthers.

"We've been waiting a long time for this," Langdoa said. "We were at Game 6 of the Islanders against Tampa Bay and that was completely packed. We're vaccinated. We feel pretty comfortable."

Panthers coach Matt Rhule said he was so excited for the game and to see fans that he woke up at 4 a.m. He decided to walk from the team hotel to Bank of America Stadium so he can soak in the atmosphere of a game day.

Masks weren't required but recommended in the stands at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium and they were required in any indoor area.

Dustin Faircloth came with his wife and two children without masks, unaware of protocols.

"I was hoping they weren't requiring it or I was in trouble," Faircloth said.

The two-time AFC champion Kansas City Chiefs expected more than 75,000 fans for their late afternoon game against the Cleveland Browns. Masks were only required inside club suites.

"Our objective is the same objective that we had last year: How do we create a safe environment for our fans?" Chiefs President Mark Donovan said. "We are not experts in the COVID space, we are not experts in the vaccination space and testing space, so we'll have to work with experts on that. I will say this, as an organization we fully support full vaccination. We think it's the safest way for all of us, and we have promoted that."

The New England Patriots asked unvaccinated fans to wear a mask to Gillette Stadium events. Like other

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teams, they ask all ticketholders to agree that neither they nor their guests will attend an event if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days, been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days, or experienced symptoms of COVID-19 within 48 hours prior to the event.

"Last year, it felt like a Massachusetts high school football game, where there was little bands in there. Now we're getting back to how we used to be, just embracing every opportunity to be out there on the field competing," Patriots linebackers coach Steve Belichick said. "Last year, it was humbling not being out there with the fans. I'm sure they wanted to be there. We wanted them there. But that didn't take away from our intensity in our preparation and our effort and all that type of stuff."

AP Pro Football Writer Teresa M. Walker and AP Sports Writers John Wawrow, Steve Reed, Charles Odum, David Skretta and Kyle Hightower contributed.

More AP NFL coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

'Relief': Djokovic's bid for year Slam ends against Medvedev

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A game from the end of his bid for what would have been the first calendar-year Grand Slam in men's tennis since 1969, Novak Djokovic covered his face with a towel, hiding his tears during a changeover.

For 27 Grand Slam matches in 2021, on hard courts, clay courts and grass, Djokovic could not be deterred, could not be beaten. Needing one more victory, in the U.S. Open final Sunday against Daniil Medvedev, to complete a season sweep of major titles and to claim the record 21st of his career, Djokovic could not come through.

Outplayed by someone using a similar style to his own, Djokovic came up just short of those two historic milestones, losing 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 to first-time major champion Medvedev at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

What was in Djokovic's thoughts as he sat there on the sideline, knowing full well that his quest was moments from its conclusion?

"Relief. I was glad it was over, because the buildup for this tournament, and everything that mentally, emotionally, I had to deal with throughout the tournament in the last couple of weeks, was just a lot. It was a lot to handle," Djokovic said at his news conference. "I was just glad that, finally, the run is over. At the same time, I felt sadness, disappointment — and also gratitude for the crowd and for that special moment that they've created for me on the court."

Until Sunday, the No. 1-ranked Djokovic had been sublime at the sport's four most important tournaments, enduring the burdens of expectations and pressure over the past seven months and, in New York, the past fortnight.

He won the Australian Open in February, beating Medvedev in the final in straight sets, the French Open in June and Wimbledon in July, pulling even with Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer at 20 Grand Slam titles, the most for a man in the history of a sport that dates to the 1800s.

The last man to complete a true Grand Slam by going 4 for 4 at the majors in a single season remains Rod Laver, who did it twice — in 1962 and 1969 — and was in the stands Sunday. The last woman to accomplish the feat was Steffi Graf in 1988.

Instead, Djokovic joins Jack Crawford in 1933 and Lew Hoad in 1956 as men who won a year's first trio of Grand Slam tournaments and made it all the way to the U.S. Open final before losing.

"I do feel sorry for Novak, because I cannot imagine what he feels," said Medvedev, a 25-year-old from Russia who had been 0-2 in major finals. "Knowing that I managed to stop him, it definitely makes it sweeter, and brings me confidence for what is to come."

Djokovic, a 34-year-old from Serbia, simply was far from his best on this particular day.

"Just energy-wise, I felt slow," said Djokovic, who could not create the kind of comeback he had in each of his previous four matches — and six others in Grand Slam action this year — when he dropped the opening set.

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"I know I could have, and should have, done better," he said.

Djokovic made plenty of mistakes, 38 unforced errors in all. He wasn't able to convert a break chance until it was too little, too late, going just 1 for 6. He showed frustration, too, destroying his racket by pounding it three times against the court after one point, drawing boos from the crowd of 25,703 and a code violation from chair umpire Damien Dumusois.

A lot of Djokovic's issues also had to do with the No. 2-ranked Medvedev, who used his 6-foot-6 (1.98-meter) frame to chase down everything and respond with seemingly effortless groundstrokes — much the way Djokovic wears down foes — and delivered pinpoint serving.

"He was amazing. Just congratulate him, full credit from his mentality, his approach, his game, everything," Djokovic said. "He absolutely was the better player and deserved to win, no doubt about it."

Medvedev won 20 of his first 23 service points, establishing a pattern. He finished with 16 aces and 38 winners in all, 11 more than Djokovic. And Medvedev employed a strategy his coach, Gilles Cervara, described as hitting more balls down the middle of the court, rather than trying to find angles that would Djokovic to pick up balls on the run.

"He's so good that every match is different. He changes his tactics, he changes his approach," Medvedev said about Djokovic.

"I had a clear plan, which did seem to work. Was he at his best? Maybe not today. He had a lot of pressure," Medvedev said. "I had a lot of pressure, too."

Nerves, distracting noise from spectators and cramps that started in his legs got to Medvedev at the very end. He served for the match at 5-2 and was a point from winning before double-faulting twice in a row. At 5-4, he had a second match point and double-faulted again. On the next chance, though, a 129 mph service winner finally finished the job, and Medvedev toppled over to the court on his side with his tongue hanging out, which he explained afterward was inspired by a goal celebration from a soccer video game.

During the trophy presentation, Medvedev addressed Djokovic, offering praise for "what you accomplished this year and throughout your career" and adding, "I never said this to anybody, but I'll say it right now: For me, you are the greatest tennis player in history."

In recent years, there has been constant discussion and debate about which member of the so-called Big Three — Federer, who turned 40 last month, Nadal, 35, or Djokovic — deserves to be considered the best of the bunch and the "GOAT" ("Greatest of All Time").

Even with Sunday's setback, Djokovic has accumulated statistics that help people make the case for him. He is the only one of that dominant trio to have won four majors in a row across two seasons, in 2015-16. He is the only one with at least two titles at each major tournament. He is the only player who has won each of the next-tier Masters 1000 events at least twice, too. He has spent more weeks than anyone at No. 1 since the ATP computerized rankings began in 1973, surpassing Federer for that accolade in March. And he holds the edge in head-to-head matchups against both of his long-time rivals.

After a five-set win over Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Alexander Zverev on Friday night, Djokovic looked ahead to what awaited in the final and declared, "I'm going to put my heart and my soul and my body and my head into that one. I'm going to treat the next match like it is the last match of my career."

But Medvedev, who lost only one set in the entire tournament, never allowed Djokovic to get into this match.

From the start, Djokovic was not quite himself. After flubbing three break points early in the second set, the last with a sliced backhand in the net, he pounded his racket against his thigh — one, two, three, four times, perhaps as disappointed in his footwork as his form.

Thousands in the audience tried to boost him by chanting his nickname, "No-le! No-le! No-le!" After some of Medvedev's faults, some in the stands would applaud, considered poor form in tennis and repeatedly admonished with a "please" from Dumusois.

By the end, the deficit grew too large for Djokovic, the climb too steep.

"I was below par with everything, to be honest," he said. "So just one of these days where, unfortunately, wasn't meant to be."

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More AP tennis: <https://apnews.com/hub/tennis> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Britney Spears gets engaged with 'lioness' engraved ring

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears announced her engagement Sunday to her boyfriend Sam Asghari with an exuberant post displaying a diamond ring engraved with the word "lioness."

The news comes days after her father filed to end the court conservatorship that has controlled the singer's life and money for 13 years.

She wrote "I can't (expletive) believe it!" with an Instagram video post where she winks, kisses a smiling Asghari on the cheek and answers "yes!" when he asks if she likes the ring.

Asghari posted his own photo of Spears showing her ring finger to the camera.

The four-carat diamond ring is engraved inside the band with "lioness" because it's his nickname for her, the company Forever Diamonds NY said in a statement.

The couple met on the set of the "Slumber Party" music video in 2016.

The singer told a judge in June she wanted to marry Asghari and have a baby with him during an impassioned plea to end the conservatorship, but said she hadn't been allowed to remove an intrauterine device for birth control or even drive with him.

Legally, Spears can get married, but the conservatorship must approve it as with other major life decisions.

Spears was previously married to Kevin Federline, with whom she shares two sons, ages 14 and 15. She was briefly married to childhood friend Jason Alexander in 2004.

Polish nun, cardinal who defied communism are beatified

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poland's top political leaders on Sunday attended the beatification of two revered figures of the Catholic church — a cardinal who led the Polish church's resistance to communism and a blind nun who devoted her life to helping others who couldn't see.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Mother Elzbieta Roza Czacka took a step toward sainthood at a time of declining church attendance and as some Poles have left the church over sex abuse scandals and the church's coziness with the current right-wing government.

In a time of growing secularization and societal divisions, the celebration was a reminder of the moral authority and the unifying power the church once held over Poland.

The Mass was led by Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, the head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

It took place in the Temple of Divine Providence in Warsaw, attended by President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, ruling party leader Jarosław Kaczyński and many faithful.

Wyszyński was Poland's primate, or top church leader, from 1948 until his death in 1981. He was under house arrest in the 1950s for his refusal to bend to the communist regime, and was considered by some to be the true leader of the nation. His long resistance to communism is credited as a factor that led to the election of a Polish pope, John Paul II, and ultimately the toppling of Poland's communist system in 1989.

Czacka, born in 1876 to an aristocratic family, went blind as a young woman and devoted the rest of her life to helping others. The Franciscan nun helped develop a Polish version of Braille and opened a center for the blind near Warsaw.

Pope Francis paid tribute to them both during a visit to Budapest on Sunday, recalling how Wyszyński was arrested and imprisoned and how Czacka devoted her whole life to helping the blind.

"May the example of these new Blesseds encourage us to transform darkness into light with the power of love," he said.

Wyszyński led the church through nearly three turbulent decades of often bitter conflict with the communist authorities, followed later by a form of partnership with the secular regime. Late in his life, Wyszyński had become accepted by the authorities as an important force in national life, and members of the regime

attended his funeral.

During the difficult years of the 1950s, when Poland's avowedly atheistic government sought to silence the church, the tall, slender Wyszynski thundered from his pulpit that "Christ has the right to be announced, and we have the right to announce him."

Warsaw Archbishop Kazimierz Nycz recalled Wyszynski as a man who saved the Polish church under communism.

Wyszynski is often called the Primate of the Millennium in recognition of his achievement of holding a celebration of Poland's millennium of Christianity in 1966.

Sunday's ceremony comes after the Holy See has punished around 10 Polish bishops and archbishops over reported cover-ups of sexual abuse of minors by priests under their authority.

The revelations of clerical abuse and coverups have been pushing some Poles away from the church and leading some to take their children out of religion classes in schools.

Some Poles are also angry about the church's closeness with the right-wing authorities and a new restriction on abortion. The ruling, which went into effect earlier this year, denies women the right to abort fetuses with congenital defects.

Spain deploys military against wildfire, evacuates 2,500

By SERGIO RODRÍGO Associated Press

JUBRIQUE, Spain (AP) — Soldiers were deployed Sunday in southeastern Spain to join the battle against a major wildfire that is burning for a fourth day, invigorated by stray embers that sparked a new hot spot.

The blaze in Malaga province has destroyed nearly 7,000 hectares (17,300 acres) of forest and prompted fresh evacuations, bringing the total number of residents displaced to around 2,500.

Plan Infoca, the Andalusia region's agency in charge of firefighting efforts, described Sunday as a "key day" for bringing the blaze under control.

Authorities on Sunday preventively removed nearly 1,500 residents from the towns of Jubrique, Genalguacil and four other villages. Over 1,000 other people had been evacuated before the weekend from areas around the resort town of Estepona, which is popular among tourists and foreign expats.

An emergency brigade traveled from the military base of Morón, in southern Spain, to join more than 300 firefighters and 41 water-dropping aircraft battling the flames.

The reinforcement was welcomed. But firefighters like Rafael Fanega, who said the blaze was still "out of control," called for more boots on the ground to battle the flames.

"I don't see enough deployed personnel," Fanega told The Associated Press, speaking in Jubrique after it was evacuated. "Some may see it differently, but that's how I see it."

Some progress was seen on Saturday, when authorities said better weather conditions had helped them stabilize the perimeter of the blaze, allowing them to focus on four hot spots.

A combination of hot and dry temperatures with strong winds created a perfect storm, turning the blaze that started late Wednesday into a "hungry monster," Alejandro García, deputy operational chief of Plan Infoca, said earlier this week.

"The potency and strength of this wildfire is unusual for the kind of blazes that we are used to seeing in this country," García told reporters Sunday.

The firefighting agency released aerial pictures showing towering plumes of smoke emerging from rugged terrain, which it said made crews' access on the ground difficult. A 44-year-old firefighter died Thursday while trying to extinguish the blaze.

Authorities said they have evidence of arson and are investigating.

Wildfires are common in southern Europe during the hot, dry summer months. But have been particularly numerous around the Mediterranean Sea this year, worsened by the intense August heat waves.

In Spain, over 75,000 hectares (186,000 acres) of forest and bush areas have burned in the first eight months of the year, according to Spain's Ministry of Ecological Transition.

Climate scientists say there is little doubt that climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural

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gas is driving more extreme events, such as heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods and storms.

Follow all AP stories on climate change issues at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-change>.

Poignant return for Met Opera after 18-month pandemic pause

By RONALD BLUM Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Even before the first note, there were a pair of standing ovations — one when the chorus filed in and another when concertmaster Benjamin Bowman walked on to tune up the orchestra.

About 90 minutes later, when conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin relaxed his arms, the 3,600 people filling the seats of the Metropolitan Opera House responded with 8 1/2 minutes of thunderous applause, bringing wide smiles and hints of tears to the 200-plus performers on stage.

For the first time in 550 days, an audience was inside the auditorium at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday night, attending a poignant performance of the Verdi Requiem. The night was in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks but in fact marked much more.

The company was performing in its home for the first time since hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by the coronavirus pandemic, including Met violist Vincent Lonti, assistant conductor Joel Revzen and chorister Antoine Hodge.

It also marked the first performance in the house since the death of conductor James Levine, the Met's towering figure of the last half-century. He died in March at 77, a little over three years after he was fired for sexual improprieties. Verdi was a specialty, and the last of his 2,552 Met performances was the company's previous Verdi Requiem in December 2017.

Levine's successor as music director was on the podium. The 46-year-old Nézet-Séguin led a performance of far more impact and subtlety than Levine's final efforts, when his conducting was hampered by Parkinson's Disease.

Following a year of labor strife that culminated in new contracts, the Met orchestra of 90 and chorus of 120 led by chorus master Donald Palumbo showed the world-class status they reached under Levine, basking in the rapturous applause of an audience starved for live music.

The pandemic caused the Met to cancel more than 275 performances, including its entire 2020-21 season, plus an international tour. The gap was the longest since the company began in 1883.

In the first performance at the house since Mozart's "Così fan tutte" on March 11, 2020, the four soloists were all superb: soprano Ailyn Pérez, mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung, tenor Matthew Polenzani and bass-baritone Eric Owens.

Some in the audience congratulated long unseen friends and acquaintances for making it through the 18 months. There were no speeches from the stage. This was the second step in the Met's return following a pair of Mahler Seconds performed outdoors last weekend in Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park.

Accounting for the pandemic, the audience appeared to be 100% masked. Proof of vaccination was required for entry, leading to lengthy lines.

The first two rows of the orchestra were covered, increasing separation between the performances and audience.

Programs were digital only -- the Met said printed versions will be restored when the season starts.

Gregory Zuber's bass drum thundered during the a "Dies Irae (Day of Wrath). Perez and Polenzani sang ethereally. Nézet-Séguin conducted spaciouly.

Still ahead is the formal opening night of the season on Sept. 27, when Nézet-Séguin conducts Terence Blanchard's "Fire Shut Up in My Bones," the first work by a Black composer in the Met's 138-year history and another milestone in New York City's return to normalcy.

The Met's opening night is a marker of the start of New York's social season, a series of white-tie and black-tie gatherings that was largely skipped in 2020-21.

A series of Broadway shows will start opening next week. The New York Philharmonic begins Sept. 17 at Alice Tully Hall, while David Geffen Hall undergoes reconstruction expected to last another year. Carnegie

Hall starts a limited fall season Oct. 6 followed by a fuller spring.

On a night to remember those who perished, the Met made city life seem a lot closer to normal.

Iran to allow new memory cards in UN's nuclear site cameras

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran agreed Sunday to allow international inspectors to install new memory cards into surveillance cameras at its sensitive nuclear sites and to continue filming there, potentially averting a diplomatic showdown this week.

The announcement by Mohammad Eslami of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran after a meeting he held with the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, in Tehran still leaves the watchdog in the same position it has faced since February, however.

Tehran holds all recordings at its sites as negotiations over the U.S. and Iran returning to the 2015 nuclear deal remain stalled in Vienna. Meanwhile, Iran is now enriching small amounts of uranium to its closest-ever levels to weapons-grade purity as its stockpile continues to grow.

"We had a major, major communication breakdown with Iran, which, of course, is something we cannot afford, having so many important issues that we need to solve," Grossi told reporters on his return from Tehran. "And I think that was solved."

Eslami described the negotiations between Iran and the Vienna-based IAEA as "sheerly technical" without any room for politics. He said Grossi would return to Iran soon to talk with officials, without elaborating. Also left unsaid was whether Iran would hand over copies of the older recordings, which Tehran had threatened previously to destroy.

"The memory cards are sealed and kept in Iran, according to the routine," Eslami said. "New memory cards will be installed in cameras. That is a routine and natural trend in the agency's monitoring system."

A joint statement released by the IAEA and Iran confirmed the understanding, saying only that "the way and the timing are agreed by the two sides."

Grossi said the agreement would ensure "continuity of knowledge" that would ensure the watchdog can piece together the data it needs in future.

"The reconstruction and the coming together of the jigsaw puzzle will come when there is an agreement at the JCPOA level," he said, a reference to the talks on reviving the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers. "But at that time, we will have all this information and there will not have been a gap."

The announcement could buy time for Iran ahead of an IAEA board meeting this week in which Western powers had been arguing for Tehran to be censured over its lack of cooperation with international inspectors. Eslami said Iran would take part in that meeting and its negotiations with the IAEA would continue there.

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

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

Grossi said the broken and damaged cameras would be replaced, but indicated that the technical agreement reached in Tehran was only a stopgap.

"This cannot be a permanent solution," he said. "If you ask me how many months, how many days, it's difficult for me to say. But I don't see this as a long term prospect."

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador to the IAEA, praised the agreement on Twitter, calling it "technical but very important."

"It is no less important for Iran to rebuff groundless speculations against it," Ulyanov wrote.

Iran and world powers agreed in 2015 to the nuclear deal, which saw Tehran drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. In 2018, then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord, raising tensions across the wider Middle East and sparking

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a series of attacks and incidents.

President Joe Biden has said he's willing to re-enter the accord, but so far, indirect talks have yet to see success. In the meantime, Iran elected Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line protégé of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as president. Raisi also has said he wants Iran to regain the benefits of the accord, though Tehran in general has struck a tougher pose since his victory.

In Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Nafatli Bennett urged world powers to not "fall into the trap of Iranian deception that will lead to additional concessions" over the impasse. Israel, widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, has long accused Iran of seeking an atomic bomb.

Tehran maintains its program is peaceful, though U.S. intelligence agencies and international inspectors believe the Islamic Republic pursued the bomb in an organized program up until 2003.

"You must not give up on inspecting sites and the most important thing, the most important message is that there must be a time limit," Bennett said. "The Iranian nuclear program is at the most advanced point ever. ... We must deal with this project."

Israel is suspected of launching multiple attacks targeting Iran's Natanz nuclear facility, as well as killing a scientist associated with Iran's one-time military nuclear program last year.

From Riyadh, the top diplomats of Saudi Arabia and Austria jointly expressed concern over Iran's nuclear advances, with Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg citing "Iran's failure to allow access for nuclear inspections."

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writers Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem, Isabel DeBre in Dubai and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

Oregon, Iowa enter top 5; Arkansas has 1st ranking since '16

By ERIC OLSON AP College Football Writer

Oregon and Iowa were the big movers in The Associated Press college football poll after road wins over top-10 opponents.

The Ducks' victory over Ohio State earned them a promotion from No. 12 to No. 4.

Another impressive defensive performance by Iowa in the Cy-Hawk Trophy game pushed the Hawkeyes from No. 10 to No. 5.

Arkansas, coming off a home win over old Southwest Conference rival Texas, was rewarded with its first appearance in the AP Top 25 in five years, coming in at No. 20.

Alabama remained No. 1 in the AP Top 25, which is presented by Regions Bank. The Crimson Tide received 60 of the 63 first-place votes. Georgia, which picked up the other three first-place votes, stayed at No. 2.

Oklahoma was No. 3 and followed by Oregon, Iowa, Clemson, Texas A&M, Cincinnati, Ohio State and Penn State.

Oregon's eight-rung leap came after its 35-28 win in the Horseshoe. It marks the biggest jump for a team entering the top five since LSU went from No. 13 to No. 5 after it knocked off second-ranked Georgia in October 2018.

The Ducks have their highest ranking since they finished the 2014 season No. 2 as the national runner-up to Ohio State.

Iowa, a 27-17 winner at Iowa State, allowed a total of 23 points while beating two ranked teams in succession for the first time since 1960. The Hawkeyes' defense is always stout. The question about this team is whether it can elevate its offensive play with quarterback Spencer Petras.

As it is, the Hawks have their highest ranking since they were No. 3 on Nov. 22, 2015, after a 12-0 start. Ohio State dropped from No. 3 to No. 9 and Iowa State from No. 9 to No. 14.

POLL POINTS

The Big Ten has five ranked teams and matches the Southeastern Conference with three in the top 10, thanks to Penn State's move up from No. 11.

More could come in over the next couple of weeks.

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Mel Tucker's much-improved Michigan State team is 2-0 entering its road game against No. 24 Miami this week. Indiana, which fell flat in its opener against Iowa, gets a chance to show it wasn't a one-year wonder in 2020 when it hosts No. 8 Cincinnati. Maryland likely will be 4-0 going into its Oct. 1 home game against Iowa.

IN
— No. 20 Arkansas gets a third straight home game, this one against Georgia Southern, before things get real in SEC play.

— No. 23 BYU, which appeared in every regular-season poll last season, returns after beating Utah for the first time in 10 meetings. Voters are buying in after taking a wait-and-see stance with a team that lost the No. 2 overall draft pick (QB Zach Wilson) and eight defensive starters.

— Two solid wins to start the season, the latest against a surprisingly weak Washington, bring No. 25 Michigan back into the rankings. The Wolverines don't hit the road until Oct. 2.

OUT
— Southern California dropped out after a 42-28 loss to Stanford, which scored its most points against the Trojans in 10 years.

— Texas won't have buyer's remorse about its looming entry to the SEC, but new coach Steve Sarkisian's 40-21 loss to an Arkansas team picked second-to-last in the West surely had Longhorns fans gnashing their teeth.

— Utah's two-week stay in the rankings is over. Its offense has converted just 4 of 17 third downs in two games.

CONFERENCE CALL

The SEC has seven teams in the AP Top 25 for the first time since October 2020.

SEC — 7 (Nos. 1, 2, 7, 11, 17, 20, 22).

Big Ten — 5 (Nos. 5, 9, 10, 18, 25).

ACC — 4 (Nos. 6, 15, 21, 24).

Pac-12 — 3 (Nos. 4, 13, 19).

Big 12 — 2 (Nos. 3, 14).

American — 1 (No. 8).

Sun Belt — 1 (No. 16).

Independents — 2 (No. 12, 23).

RANKED vs. RANKED

No. 1 Alabama at No. 11 Florida. Crimson Tide have won seven straight against the Gators.

No. 19 Arizona State at No. 23 BYU. First meeting since 1998 is a prove-it game for the Sun Devils.

No. 22 Auburn at No. 10 Penn State. The teams split two bowl matchups, but this is the first regular-season meeting.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-football> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25. Sign up for the AP's college football newsletter: <https://apnews.com/cfbtop25>

Manchin favors trimming Biden budget plan by more than half

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Democratic senator vital to the fate of President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion plan for social and environmental spending said Sunday he won't support even half that amount or the ambitious timetable envisioned for passing it.

The stand by Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., was described as unacceptable by the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, who is helping craft the measure. But Democrats have no votes to spare if they want to enact Biden's massive "Build Back Better" agenda, with the Senate split 50-50 and Vice President Kamala Harris the tiebreaker if there is no Republican support.

With congressional committees working toward the target of Wednesday set by party leaders to have

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the bill drafted, Manchin made clear his view, in a series of television interviews, that there was “no way” Congress would meet the late September goal from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., for passage.

“I cannot support \$3.5 trillion,” Manchin said, citing in particular his opposition to a proposed increase in the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% and vast new social spending.

“We should be looking at everything, and we’re not. We don’t have the need to rush into this and get it done within one week because there’s some deadline we’re meeting, or someone’s going to fall through the cracks,” he said.

Pressed repeatedly about a total he could support, Manchin said, “It’s going to be \$1, \$1.5 (trillion).” He later suggested the range was based on a modest rise in the corporate tax rate to 25%, a figure he believes will keep the U.S. globally competitive.

“The numbers that they’re wanting to pay for and the tax changes they want to make, is that competitive?” Manchin asked. “I believe there’s some changes made that does not keep us competitive.”

But Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who is developing the budget bill, noted that he and other members of the liberal flank in Congress had initially urged an even more robust package of \$6 trillion.

“I don’t think it’s acceptable to the president, to the American people, or to the overwhelming majority of the people in the Democratic caucus,” Sanders said. He added: “I believe we’re going to all sit down and work together and come up with a \$3.5 trillion reconciliation bill which deals with the enormously unmet needs of working families.”

The current blueprint proposes billions for rebuilding infrastructure, tackling climate change and expanding or introducing a range of services, from free prekindergarten to dental, vision and hearing aid care for seniors.

Manchin voted last month to approve a budget resolution that set the figure, though he and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., have expressed reservations about the topline amount. All of it would be paid for with taxes on corporations and the wealthy.

Congressional committees have been working hard this month on slices of the 10-year proposal in a bid to meet this week’s timeline from Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., to have the bill drafted. Pelosi is seeking a House vote by Oct. 1, near the Sept. 27 target for voting on a slimmer infrastructure plan favored by moderates.

Manchin, who in an op-ed earlier this month urged a “strategic pause” on the legislation to reconsider the cost, described the timing as unrealistic. He has urged Congress to act first on a nearly \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill already passed by the Senate. But liberal Democrats have threatened to withhold their support until the \$3.5 trillion spending bill is passed alongside it.

Neither side on Sunday revealed how they hoped to quickly bridge the divide among Democrats.

“There’s no way we can get this done by the 27th, if we do our job,” Manchin said. “There’s so much differences that we have here and so much — there’s so much apart from us where we are. ... I’m working with people. I’m willing to talk to people. It makes no sense at all.”

Manchin spoke on CNN’s “State of the Union,” NBC’s “Meet the Press” and ABC’s “This Week.” Sanders was on CNN and ABC.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Taliban: Women can study in gender-segregated universities

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Women in Afghanistan can continue to study in universities, including at post-graduate levels, but classrooms will be gender-segregated and Islamic dress is compulsory, the Taliban government’s new higher education minister said Sunday.

The announcement came as a Taliban official said Qatar’s foreign minister arrived in the Afghan capital of Kabul — the highest level visitor since the Taliban announced their interim Cabinet. There was no immediate confirmation of the visit by Qatari officials.

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Earlier Sunday, the higher education minister, Abdul Baqi Haqqani, laid out the new policies at a news conference, several days after Afghanistan's new rulers formed an all-male government. On Saturday, the Taliban had raised their flag over the presidential palace, signaling the start of the work of the new government.

The world has been watching closely to see to what extent the Taliban might act differently from their first time in power, in the late 1990s. During that era, girls and women were denied an education, and were excluded from public life.

The Taliban have suggested they have changed, including in their attitudes toward women. However, women have been banned from sports and the Taliban have used violence in recent days against women protesters demanding equal rights.

Haqqani said the Taliban did not want to turn the clock back 20 years. "We will start building on what exists today," he said.

However, female university students will face restrictions, including a compulsory dress code. Haqqani said hijabs will be mandatory but did not specify if this meant compulsory headscarves or also compulsory face coverings.

Gender segregation will also be enforced, he said. "We will not allow boys and girls to study together," he said. "We will not allow co-education."

Haqqani said the subjects being taught would also be reviewed. While he did not elaborate, he said he wanted graduates of Afghanistan's universities to be competitive with university graduates in the region and the rest of the world.

The Taliban, who subscribe to a strict interpretation of Islam, banned music and art during their previous time in power. This time around television has remained and news channels still show women presenters, but the Taliban messaging has been erratic.

In an interview on Afghanistan's popular TOLO News, Taliban spokesman Syed Zekrullah Hashmi said last week that women should give birth and raise children. While the Taliban have not ruled out the eventual participation of women in government, the spokesman said "it's not necessary that women be in the Cabinet."

The Taliban seized power on Aug. 15, the day they overran Kabul after capturing outlying provinces in a rapid military campaign. They initially promised inclusiveness and a general amnesty for their former opponents, but many Afghans remain deeply fearful of the new rulers. Taliban police officials have beaten Afghan journalists, violently dispersed women's protests and formed an all-male government despite saying initially they would invite broader representation.

The new higher education policy signals a change from the accepted practice before the Taliban takeover. Universities were co-ed, with men and women studying side by side, and female students did not have to abide by a dress code. However, the vast majority of female university students opted to wear headscarves in line with tradition.

In elementary and high schools, boys and girls were taught separately, even before the Taliban came to power. In high schools, girls had to wear tunics reaching to their knees and white headscarves, and jeans, makeup and jewelry were not permitted.

Taliban political spokesman Suhail Shaheen tweeted Sunday about the Qatari delegation, saying it included Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdur Rahman Al-Thani, the deputy prime minister who is also Qatar's foreign minister.

The Qatari foreign minister met with Taliban Prime Minister Mohammad Hasan Akhund, Shaheen said. The Qatari delegation also met with former president Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, the previous government's chief negotiator in peace talks with the Taliban.

The Taliban have maintained a political office in the Qatar capital of Doha since 2013. Last week, Qatar Airways became the first international airline to begin operating international flights out of Kabul airport, transporting more than 250 foreign nationals, including U.S. citizens, out of the capital.

Qatar has also provided technical assistance, along with Turkey, to restart the airport, which had been damaged by departing U.S. troops who left Afghanistan on Aug. 30 after evacuating tens of thousands

of Afghans fleeing the Taliban.

Meanwhile, the Taliban government faces enormous economic challenges with near daily warnings of an impending economic meltdown and a humanitarian crisis. The United Nations warns it could drive 97% of Afghans below the poverty level by the end of the year.

Thousands of desperate Afghans wait daily outside Afghanistan's banks for hours to withdraw the \$200 weekly allotment. In recent days, the Taliban appear to have been trying to establish a system for allowing customers to withdraw funds but it rapidly deteriorates into stick-waving as crowds surge toward the bank gates.

Outside the New Kabul Bank, Afghanistan's first private bank established in 2004, nearly 2,000 people demanded their money Sunday.

For Zaidullah Mashwani, Sunday was the third day he had come to the bank hoping to get his \$200. Each night the Taliban make a list of eligible customers for the following day and by morning Mashwani said a whole new list is presented.

"This is our money. The people have the right to have it," he said. "No one has money. The Taliban government needs to do something so we can get our money."

Custody fight over child, 6, who survived Italy cable crash

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — A six-year-old boy who was the sole survivor of a cable car crash this year in northern Italy is at the center of a bitter custody battle between his maternal grandparents in Israel and his paternal relatives in Italy, who claim the child was flown without their permission to Israel over the weekend.

Fourteen people, including Eitan Biran's parents and younger sibling, died when the cable car slammed into a mountainside on May 23 after the cable broke. After the boy was released from a Turin hospital following weeks of treatment for critical injuries, Italian juvenile court officials ruled that the child could live with a paternal aunt near Pavia, in northern Italy. But the aunt, Aya Biran, told reporters on Sunday that the previous day, Eitan's maternal grandfather took the boy on an agreed-upon day visit, then flew him without permission to Israel.

She said the boy has been undergoing both physical therapy and psychotherapy since his hospital release and was due to have follow-up medical visits this week, including one in Turin.

"His bed is empty, his toys and clothes were left behind. His new desk, school backpack, notebooks, pencil case and books were ready" for his first day of class on Monday, she said.

The aunt contended that when the maternal grandfather had come to pick him up for an arranged visit on Saturday morning, it was agreed that the boy would be back by dinner. But after Eitan didn't return, the aunt filed a police report on Saturday night, Italian news reports said.

The maternal grandfather couldn't immediately be reached for comment. But a sister of Eitan's late mother denied that the boy was snatched away from Italy.

"We did not abduct Eitan," Gali Peleg told radio station 103 FM in Israel. "We will not use that word. What happened is that we brought Eitan home."

Gali Peleg wouldn't say exactly where the boy was, only that he had arrived on Saturday. "We are caring for his emotional state and health."

In Italy, Aya Biran told reporters the boy has Italian citizenship and had been living with his parents since when he was a toddler in Italy before the accident. It wasn't immediately possible to confirm if the child also had Israeli citizenship but he reportedly had an Israeli passport.

The Italian foreign ministry wasn't immediately commenting on the case.

The aunt in Israel told the radio station that the boy "screamed from excitement when he saw us. He said, 'I'm finally in Israel.'" The aunt added that "everything we did was only for the good of the boy."

Pavia prosecutors' offices were closed on Sunday and investigators couldn't immediately be reached for comment on Italian news reports that they were considering opening an investigation into the case.

"I am certain and full of hope" that Israeli and Italian authorities will work together "to ensure his return

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home" to Italy, Aya Biran told reporters.

The Corriere della Sera newspaper quoted a paternal uncle, Or Nirko, as saying Saturday that the Pelegs had the boy's Israeli passport and had failed to give it to the paternal relatives despite an Italian court order that they do so by Aug. 30. Nirko was quoted as saying that the boy's maternal grandparents had contended that if he stayed in Italy, "Eitan would have grown up without ties to his (Israeli) identity."

According to the paternal relatives, the maternal family had challenged in Italian courts the custody arrangement that let Eitan live with Biran, who is a doctor with her own children.

Josef Federman contributed from Jerusalem.

Judge cancels Rod Stewart's trial, sets plea deal hearing

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — A Florida judge has canceled the trial for rock icon Rod Stewart and his adult son and scheduled a hearing next month to discuss a plea deal to resolve charges stemming from a New Year's Eve altercation with a hotel security guard nearly two years ago.

Court records show the hearing with Judge August Bonavita is set for Oct. 22 regarding a plea agreement to close the case without them needing to appear in court. The trial had been scheduled to begin Tuesday but was canceled on Thursday.

If convicted, the Stewarts were facing a year in jail, or probation and a \$1,000 fine. The terms of the agreement are not clear yet, and attorney Guy Fronstin did not respond to an email and phone call seeking comment.

The Stewarts' battery charges have taken long to resolve because of the pandemic and settlement negotiations.

The London-born singer of 70s hits such as "Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?" and "Maggie May" is a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2016.

Stewart and his son are accused of pushing and shoving security guard Jessie Dixon at the upscale The Breakers Hotel on Dec. 31, 2019, because he wouldn't let them into a New Year's Eve party.

Dixon told Palm Beach police officers the Stewart's group was at the check-in table for a private party they weren't authorized to attend, a police report said.

Dixon said the group became loud and began causing a scene. Dixon, then 33, told investigators he put his hand on the younger Stewart's chest and told him to back up and make space.

That's when Sean Stewart, the rock star's son, got "nose to nose" with Dixon.

Sean Stewart, now 41, then shoved Dixon backwards. Rod Stewart, now 76, punched Dixon in his "left rib cage area" with a closed fist, prosecutors allege.

Sean Stewart told investigators he became agitated when they were not able to attend the event "due to Dixon's interaction with him and his family."

Two Breakers employees who were working the private event told police they saw Sean Stewart push Dixon and Rod Stewart punch the guard.

The arresting officer said he viewed security footage at the hotel and determined that the Stewarts were the "primary aggressors."

Kabul flag shop that started in Soviet era retools yet again

By BERNAT ARMANGUE Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A small flag shop, tucked away in the courtyard of a Kabul market, has documented Afghanistan's turbulent history over the decades with its ever-changing merchandise.

Now the shop is filled with white Taliban flags, emblazoned with the Quran's Muslim statement of faith, in black Arabic lettering.

On Sunday, four teen-age boys leaned over white fabric draped on a table illuminated by fluorescent lights and filled the template for the Quranic verse with black ink. Finished flags were hung over a balcony railing to dry.

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The owner, Wahidullah Honarwer, 58, said that before President Ashraf Ghani fled the country on Aug. 15, as the Taliban were poised to take the capital of Kabul, he produced flags from all nations that had diplomatic relations with Afghanistan.

Honarwer still has those flags in stock.

"The Taliban came over and saw all those flags and said nothing to us," he said, sitting behind a computer in his shop. He said the Taliban told him to hang on to those flags until the situation stabilizes.

Honarwer said he's been in the flag business for almost four decades, at a time when a Soviet-backed government was in power in the 1980s. The Soviets withdrew in 1989 and their communist allies in 1992, followed by the rule of warlords and civil war.

The Taliban ruled from 1996-2001, when a U.S.-led invasion expelled the Islamic militants. The Taliban retook control as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew from Afghanistan by the end of August.

Honarwer says he spent 27 years in exile in Pakistan, but that he'll now stay in Afghanistan, no matter who is in charge. It was not immediately clear if the flag shop was open throughout.

"I love Afghanistan and I want to live here," he said. "Whatever regime comes, my business is on and will continue."

Pope to Orban's Hungary: Open your arms to everyone

By NICOLE WINFIELD and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Pope Francis urged Hungary on Sunday to "extend its arms towards everyone," in a veiled critique of Prime Minister Viktor Orban's anti-migrant policies, as the pontiff opened a four-day visit to Central Europe in his first big international outing since undergoing intestinal surgery in July.

Francis, 84, appeared in good form during his short visit to Budapest, presiding over a lengthy Mass and standing as he waved to crowds from his open-sided popemobile. He used a golf cart to avoid walking long distances indoors and confessed at one point that he had to sit because "I'm not 15 anymore." But otherwise he kept up the typical grueling pace of a papal trip despite his ongoing recovery.

Francis spent just seven hours in Budapest before arriving Sunday afternoon in neighboring Slovakia to start a four-day tour. The lopsided itinerary suggested that Francis wanted to avoid giving Orban — the type of populist nationalist he frequently criticizes — the political boost that comes with hosting a pope for a proper state visit ahead of elections in Hungary next spring.

Francis did meet upon arrival with Orban, whose refugee policies clash with the pope's call to welcome and integrate those seeking better lives in Europe. After the meeting, Orban wrote on Facebook: "I asked Pope Francis not to let Christian Hungary perish."

Orban has frequently depicted his government as a defender of Christian civilization in Europe and a bulwark against migration from Muslim-majority countries. In 2015, he rejected proposals to settle refugees from the Mideast and Africa in Hungary and erected a fence along Hungary's southern border to keep out asylum-seekers trying to enter the European Union.

The Vatican said the meeting was held in a "cordial atmosphere" and lasted longer than expected — 40 minutes.

"Among the various topics discussed were the role of the church in the country, the commitment to the protection of the environment, the protection and promotion of the family," said a Vatican statement.

Vatican and Hungarian officials have insisted Francis wasn't snubbing Hungary by staying for such a short time, noting that the Hungarian church and state only invited him to close out an international conference on the Eucharist on Sunday.

It was at the end of that Mass that Francis urged Hungarians to remain steadfast in their religious roots, but not in a defensive way that closes them off from the rest of the world.

"Religious sentiment has been the lifeblood of this nation, so attached to its roots," he said. "Yet the cross, planted in the ground, not only invites us to be well-rooted, it also raises and extends its arms toward everyone."

He said Hungarians should stay firm in their roots while "opening ourselves to the thirst of the men and women of our time."

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"My wish is that you be like that: rounded and open, rooted and considerate," he said.

Orban had a front-row seat during the Mass. During their private meeting, he gave Francis a copy of a 1243 letter from King Bela IV of Hungary to Pope Innocent IV which informed the pope that Bela would strengthen fortifications along the Danube River in Hungary in preparation for a Mongol invasion — evidence of Hungary's long role in preserving Europe's Christian roots.

Francis referred to that history in his meeting with the country's bishops, but also urged them to preach a message of openness and dialogue with newcomers.

"Diversity always is scary because it puts at risk acquired securities and provokes stability," he said. "But it's still a great opportunity because opens the heart" to the Gospel message of loving one another.

Francis' visit and his final Mass in Heroes' Square went ahead with few coronavirus restrictions even as Hungary, like the rest of Europe, is battling new infections fueled by the highly contagious delta variant.

Few in the crowd wore masks and no tests or vaccination certificates were required to gain entrance. Some 65.4% of Hungarians over 18 are vaccinated.

Matyas Mezosi, a Hungarian Catholic who got to the Mass site early, was jubilant that the pope had come at all so soon after his surgery. The 84-year-old pope had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed in early July.

"It's great to see him recovered from that surgery," Mezosi said. "Him being here in Hungary today means that he sacrifices himself to be with us, and that he feels good now."

During the flight from Rome, Francis indeed seemed in good form. He stayed so long greeting journalists at the back of the plane that an aide had to tell him to get back to his seat because it was time to land.

Francis said he was happy to be resuming foreign trips again after the coronavirus lull and then his own post-operative recovery. "If I'm alive it's because bad weeds never die," he quipped about his health, quoting an Argentine dictum.

But later in the morning he apologized to a gathering of Christian and Jewish leaders that he had to deliver his speech sitting down. In his remarks, Francis warned against a resurgence of antisemitism in Europe, saying it is a "fuse which must not be allowed to burn."

The Argentine pope called for Christians, Jews and people of other faiths to commit themselves to promoting greater fraternity "so that outbursts of hatred that would destroy that fraternity will never prevail."

Hungary's large Jewish population was devastated during the closing months of World War II, with more than 550,000 Jewish deaths. More Hungarians died in Auschwitz than any other nationality, and more Hungarian Jews perished in the Holocaust than from any country other than Poland and the Soviet Union.

Hungary's government under Orban has been accused of trafficking in veiled antisemitic stereotypes, largely aimed at Hungarian-born American financier and philanthropist George Soros, whom the government frequently accuses of meddling in the country's internal affairs.

Registered churches have been major beneficiaries of state support under Orban since he returned to power in 2010. Additionally, around 3,000 places of worship have been built or restored using public funds since 2010.

AP visual journalists Bela Szandelszky and Helena Alves contributed.

Ida deals new blow to Louisiana schools struggling to reopen

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

LULING, La. (AP) — Tara Williams' three little boys run shirtless, because most of their clothes were swept away, and they stack milk crates beneath a blazing sun because their toys are all gone too. Their apartment is barely more than a door dangling from a frame, the roof obliterated, most everything in it lost.

A Ford Fusion is the family's home now, and as if Hurricane Ida didn't take enough, it has also put the boys' education on hold.

"They're ready to get inside, go to school, get some air conditioning," said 32-year-old Williams, who has twin 5-year-olds and a 7-year-old and is more pessimistic than officials about when they might be back in

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class. "The way it's looking like now, it's going to be next August."

After a year and a half of pandemic disruptions that drove children from schools and pulled down test scores, at least 169,000 Louisiana children are out of class again, their studies derailed by the storm. The hurricane followed a rocky reopening in August that led to more COVID-19 infections and classroom closures, and now it will be weeks before some students go back again.

"How concerned am I? If you pick up a thesaurus, whatever's the word for 'most concerned,'" said Jarod Martin, superintendent of schools in the hard-hit Lafourche Parish, southwest of New Orleans. "We were brimming with optimism and confident that we were going to defeat COVID, confident we were on a better path. And now we've got another setback."

Williams was working at McDonald's until COVID-19 cutbacks claimed her job. The family rode out the storm in their apartment as it disintegrated around them, then drove to Florida, where they found a hotel room, which they could afford for only a few days.

The streets around them are dotted with gutted trailers, peeled roofs and mounds of debris, and every mention of the Federal Emergency Management Agency seems to be preceded by a colorfully profane adjective. School would be nice for the boys, Williams says, but right now, they don't even have a home.

A couple of miles away, at the boys' school, Luling Elementary, crews are cleaning up fallen trees, and piping from giant dehumidifiers snakes through windows. Shantele Slade, a 42-year-old youth pastor, is among those at work, but her own children an hour away in Amite are on her mind. The pandemic had already taken its toll on her 14-year-old son, who had to go to summer school because he'd fallen behind while learning virtually. Now she's worried that he will have trouble keeping up with algebra after so many days of absence.

"The last two years have already been so hard on them," she said.

Though many children spent most or all of last school year back in class, some children remained in virtual programs and arrived back in class last month for the first time since the shutdowns began. The return did not go smoothly, with nearly 7,000 infections of students and teachers reported in the opening weeks, a fact that led to quarantines, more shutdowns and more disruptions.

The latest state standardized test scores, released in August, showed a 5% drop in proficiency among students across Louisiana, blamed largely on disruptions from COVID-19. Younger and poorer children fared worst, as did members of minority groups and those with English as a second language.

The state's education superintendent, Cade Brumley, acknowledged that students "did lose a little bit" and that Ida dealt another blow. A quarter-million students' schools remained shuttered Friday, but classes for 81,000 children were to reopen Monday, according to the education department. Brumley said the rest would likely be back in a matter of weeks.

"We need to get those kids back with us as soon as we possibly can," he said.

But in the most devastated areas, returning to class requires not only schools to be repaired or temporary classrooms to be set up, but for students and staff scattered around the country to come back to Louisiana. That means they must have homes with electricity and running water. Buses also have to run, and cafeterias must be stocked with food and people to serve it, and so on.

After the storm destroyed their house in Dulac, a stretch of Cajun country swampland, Penny Verdin's two children and a nephew she cares for began cramming each night into a car, along with a gecko, a hamster and a squirrel named Honey. They hope to use some lumber and tin from the carcass of their home to fashion a new shack they can stay in.

The children are smiling, one doing handstands on the soggy lawn, another fishing a 3-foot gator out of a creek, but Verdin, 43, says they've been shaken up by the storm. After a year in which nearly the whole family fell sick with COVID-19 and her disability checks were suddenly halted, she's worried about them falling behind in their studies.

"It's going to be a big catch-up," she says.

When the pandemic first raged and students were forced to learn on screens at home, some observers warned of a "lost generation" of children falling through the cracks. The opening of the school year gave

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some teachers their first chance to fully assess the effects on pupils, only to have students forced out again.

Lauren Jewett, a 34-year-old special education teacher in New Orleans, said she was just starting to evaluate any regression due to the pandemic's disruptions, not to mention the "summer slide" that happens each year. She already had students who were dealing with family deaths from COVID; now she's hearing about their collapsed roofs, swamped homes and dwindling resources.

"We couldn't cover all of the things that are supposed to be covered because of all the disruptions," said Jewett, whose own home was damaged in the storm.

Many people remain without power or running water, and some districts are still assessing damage. In several parishes, no reopening dates have been announced for schools. They are simply closed until further notice.

"Last school year was rough. This school year started rough. And then there's this thing here," said Randy Bush, a school board member in Tangipahoa Parish, who worried that the widespread lack of electricity might mean students are not welcomed back until October.

Ida's 150 mph winds tore the roof from 44-year-old Christy Aymami's rental home in Kenner, leaving it uninhabitable. Virtual school was rough on her 15-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter, both socially and in what they were learning, and she wonders what this new extended absence might mean. For now, she's waiting at a hotel in Chattanooga, Tennessee, focused on finding a suitable hotel closer to home or leasing a new property sight unseen.

"I have all the resources, I have fairly good leads, I have cell service and internet and lots of contacts," said Aymami, a former teacher who is a school technology director, "and I still can't find anything."

Inevitably, as parents and others ponder what's next for their children, 2005's monster Hurricane Katrina is invoked. When researchers at Columbia University and the Children's Health Fund tried to determine that storm's impact on children five years after landfall, they found unstable living conditions persisted, serious emotional and behavioral issues were rampant and one-third of students in affected areas were behind in schooling for their age.

"We don't have to go back that far to see the outright and ultimate failure of our children," said Kevin Griffin-Clark, a 36-year-old entrepreneur and father of three who is now running for City Council in New Orleans. "Now the children are going to suffer even more."

Katrina led to the dismantling of the New Orleans school system, which was replaced with a first-of-its-kind all-charter school network that has seen test scores and graduation rates rise, alongside other positive metrics. But resentment simmers over the changes, seen by many as imposed by mostly white decision-makers on mostly Black communities, with widespread firings of teachers and disintegration of union contracts and protections.

Douglas Harris, a Tulane University economist whose work focuses on education, said he expects test scores will eventually recover, as they did after Katrina, but they won't be a true reflection of the harm from the pandemic and now a hurricane.

"In both cases, it's a significant amount of learning loss, a significant amount of trauma, a significant amount of anxiousness and disruption to life and school," Harris said, comparing the post-Katrina landscape with today. "But the disruption has been so much longer now. We're talking about 18 months of COVID. So the effects are going to be bigger here and the amount of time it takes to rebound will be greater."

New Orleans' schools superintendent, Henderson Lewis Jr., flatly rejects the comparisons to Katrina, saying physical damage to schools is minimal. He said some will be able to return to class on Wednesday and all should be back by Sept. 22. But he acknowledges the hardships for students since COVID-19 first shuttered schools on March 13, 2020, and everything that's happened since.

"It's one more thing compounded," he said.

When students do finally arrive, they will bear memories of howling winds and cratered houses, of weeks spent in faraway places or without a home, of favorite toys and familiar comforts taken away. It amounts to trauma for many, even if their homes did survive, and it's compounded by pandemic anxiety.

Ashana Bigard, a 46-year-old New Orleans activist and mother of two, worries schools will be so wrapped up in academic catch-up that they won't do enough to address those lingering scars. She remains wor-

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ried about her children being infected with COVID-19 in school and expects her kids will get "the same subpar education" they were getting before the pandemic. But she's prepared to accept that as long as their emotional needs are met.

"Dead children can't learn, and children who are broken emotionally and mentally cannot do good on your test. I want my children alive and happy. I'd rather that and have them five grades behind," she said. "Their education deficits I can deal with."

Sedensky can be reached at mstedensky@ap.org and <https://twitter.com/sedensky>.

Northern Idaho's anti-government streak hampers COVID fight

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS Associated Press

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho (AP) — Northern Idaho has a long and deep streak of anti-government activism that has confounded attempts to battle a COVID-19 outbreak overwhelming hospitals in the deeply conservative region.

A deadly 1992 standoff with federal agents near the Canadian border helped spark an expansion of radical right-wing groups across the country and the area was for a long time the home of the Aryan Nations, whose leader envisioned a "White Homeland" in the county that is now among the worst hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

Hospitals in northern Idaho are so packed with COVID-19 patients that authorities announced last week that facilities would be allowed to ration health care.

"This is extremism beyond anything I ever witnessed," Tony Stewart said of people who refused to get vaccinated and wear masks.

Stewart is a founding member of the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations, which battled the Aryan Nations for decades and helped bankrupt the neo-Nazi group. "I'm almost speechless in seeing so many people have lost concern for their fellow humans."

Only 41% of Kootenai County's 163,000 residents were fully vaccinated, well below the state average of about 56%, officials said.

Anti-government sentiments are strong in northern Idaho.

State Rep. Heather Scott, a Republican from Blanchard in the northern part of the state, refused an interview request, saying reporters were liars. Scott promoted mask-burning protests around northern Idaho and the rest of the state earlier this year. She is also among the lawmakers that have frequently pushed misinformation about COVID-19 on Facebook.

Stewart called fierce opponents of vaccines an "irrational segment of the population."

But not everyone agrees there is a problem.

David Hall, 53, who co-owns a restaurant in bustling downtown Coeur d'Alene, said Friday he "serves hundreds of customers a week and I've heard of nobody that's been hospitalized."

"Not a single person who worked for me got it," Hall said of COVID-19. "I don't know where (patients) are coming from."

One thing Hall does know is news of packed hospitals is bad for business, saying his revenues have dropped.

Don Kress, 65, of Coeur d'Alene, said he believes that Kootenai Health, the town's major hospital, is overflowing with patients.

"It's become such a politicized issue," he said of COVID-19. "If you take the politics out of it and let common sense prevail, people will get the shot."

Northern Idaho has had an anti-government segment of the population for decades. It was the site of the standoff at Ruby Ridge, north of the town of Sandpoint.

Randy Weaver moved his family to the area in the 1980s to escape what he saw as a corrupt world. Over time, federal agents began investigating the Army veteran for possible ties to white supremacist and anti-government groups. Weaver was eventually suspected of selling a government informant two illegal

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sawed-off shotguns.

To avoid arrest, Weaver holed up on his land.

On Aug. 21, 1992, a team of U.S. marshals scouting the forest to find suitable places to ambush and arrest Weaver came across his friend, Kevin Harris, and Weaver's 14-year-old son Samuel in the woods. A gunfight broke out. Samuel Weaver and Deputy U.S. Marshal William Degan were killed.

The next day, an FBI sniper shot and wounded Randy Weaver. As members of the group ran back toward the house, the sniper fired a second bullet, which passed through wife Vicki Weaver's head — killing her — and wounding Harris in the chest. The family surrendered on Aug. 31, 1992.

The Aryan Nations was not specifically anti-government, but it drew many disaffected people to the area after white supremacist Richard Butler moved there in 1973 from California.

Four years after moving to rural Kootenai County, Butler — a former aeronautical engineer — started a compound. The 20-acre site north of Hayden Lake would become a racist encampment that drew people from across the country. The group held parades in downtown Coeur d'Alene and annual summits at the compound. By the 1990s, the Aryan Nations had one of the first hate websites.

The Aryan Nations compound and its contents were burned and bulldozed after a lawsuit brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center bankrupted the group in 2000.

Now COVID-19 has exacerbated conflicts in Coeur d'Alene, a fast-growing resort and retirement community that hugs the shore of a namesake lake and draws celebrities and the rich to gorgeous lakefront homes. High-rise condos have replaced lumber mills near the lakefront, and swanky stores abound.

Last year, armed groups patrolled the city's downtown core to protect against non-existent Black Lives Matter protesters.

COVID-19 has thrived in this environment.

Kootenai Health has 200 beds for medical or surgical patients. On Wednesday, 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 Friday, the hospital tallied 101 COVID-19 patients, including 35 requiring critical care. The hospital normally has just 26 intensive care unit beds.

Jeanette Laster is executive director of the Human Rights Education Institute, which was established in the wake of the Aryan Nation's rise in the region.

She cautioned that it is incorrect to assume that the neo-Nazi philosophy of the Aryans is related to the anti-government sentiments that now dominate the political agenda.

The Aryan Nations was a white supremacist, antisemitic group, she said, while anti-government sentiments are rooted in freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

"I don't feel the majority of our community is hateful," Laster said. "This is more about constitutional rights."

Distrust of the media and authorities is also an issue, she said.

"People are begging for accurate information," Laster said. "There's a lot of fear."

Evangelical Lutheran church installs 1st transgender bishop

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America installed its first openly transgender bishop in a service held in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral on Saturday.

The Rev. Megan Rohrer will lead one of the church's 65 synods, overseeing nearly 200 congregations in Northern California and northern Nevada.

"My call is ... to be up to the same messy, loving things I was up to before," Rohrer told worshippers. "But mostly, if you'll let me, and I think you will, my hope is to love you and beyond that, to love what you love."

Rohrer was elected in May to serve a six-year term as bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod after its current bishop announced his retirement.

"I step into this role because a diverse community of Lutherans in Northern California and Nevada prayerfully and thoughtfully voted to do a historic thing," Rohrer said in a statement. "My installation will

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celebrate all that is possible when we trust God to shepherd us forward.”

Rohrer, who uses the pronoun “they,” previously served as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in San Francisco and a chaplain coordinator for the city’s police department, and also helped minister to the city’s homeless and LGBTQ community. They studied religion at Augustana University in their hometown of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, before moving to California to pursue master and doctoral degrees at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

Rohrer became one of seven LGBTQ pastors accepted by the progressive Evangelical Lutheran church in 2010 after it allowed ordination of pastors in same-sex relationships. Rohrer is married and has two children.

The church is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States with about 3.3 million members.

This story has been updated to correct the name of the church. It is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, not of America.

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California voters: Less Republican and white than in 2003

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — It’s a familiar refrain among California’s recall watchers: 2021 is not 2003.

Yes, the state again is in the middle of a recall election that could remove the Democratic governor from office. But today’s California electorate looks far different than it did 18 years ago: It’s less Republican, more Latino and Asian, and younger — all trends that favor Gov. Gavin Newsom, so long as he can get his voters to turn out.

“Newsom has always had it by the numbers, and he knows that,” said Mindy Romero, director of the Center for Inclusive Democracy at the University of Southern California and an expert in voters and the electorate.

Early voting has been going on for weeks and more than 7 million ballots have been cast so far. The final day to vote is Tuesday.

There are two questions on the ballot: Should Newsom be recalled and, if so, who should replace him? If a majority wants him gone, whoever gets the most support among the 46 names on the replacement ballot will become governor. It would almost certainly be a Republican since no Democrat with political standing is running. Conservative talk radio host Larry Elder has been leading in polls.

The recall began as an effort driven by amateur Republican political organizers upset by Newsom’s positions on immigration, crime and other issues. But the coronavirus pandemic, and frustrations over business and school closures, got it on the ballot.

In 2003, Democrat Gray Davis became the first California governor to get recalled. He had just begun his second term and voters were agitated over an energy crisis that had led to rolling power outages, looming tax and fee increases and a poor economy. Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger jumped into the race and won handily.

Back then, about 9 million of nearly 15 million registered voters participated in the race. Roughly 4 million backed Davis, or 44%. On the question of who should replace him, Schwarzenegger got about 4.2 million votes.

At the time, about 35% of voters were registered Republicans, 43% were Democrats and 16% weren’t in a party.

Today, California has 22 million registered voters but the Republican Party claims just a quarter of the electorate because registration numbers have remained essentially flat, hovering above 5 million. Democrats, meanwhile, have added 3 million voters, and 2.6 million more people are independents.

Latino voters now make up more than a quarter of registered voters compared to 17.5% in 2003, ac-

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According to data provided by Romero. Asian voters also increased their share, now at 10.4%. As those demographic groups have grown, the overall electorate is younger.

"It's not like it's Baby Boomers that are Latinos and Asian Americans moving from another state to California. These are people born and bred in this state and they are aging into the electorate," said Sonja Diaz, founding director of the Latino Policy & Politics Initiative at the University of California, Los Angeles.

All of those trends should benefit Democrats, who have only strengthened their hold on the state over the past two decades. Californians haven't elected a Republican to elected office since 2006, when Schwarzenegger won a second term, and Democrats today hold supermajorities in both houses of the state Legislature.

Though former Republican President Donald Trump increased his support among Latinos between 2016 and 2020, the Latino population still heavily favors Democrats in California, Diaz said.

But Diaz said the party can't be taking Latino voters for granted, particularly as their power as a voting bloc expands. Latinos now make up 40% of California's population of nearly 40 million people, more than any other racial or ethnic group. Yet they are less likely to vote than other groups.

Campaigns often focus on likely voters, which usually means people with a track record of participating. Though a focus on those voters certainly helps candidates win in the short term, the Democratic Party should be thinking out a long-term strategy for turning non-white voters into regular participants, Diaz said.

Recent polling shows Newsom poised to defeat the recall and early voter turnout is strong for Democrats, though neither guarantee that Newsom will win. Turnout so far among Latinos and voters 18 to 34 is disproportionately low. None of the 6 million voters in that age group were old enough to vote in the 2003 election.

Newsom has turned the race into a highly partisan one, branding the recall's supporters as extreme Republicans in an effort to ensure the state's Democratic voters not only stick with him, but show up to vote. He's focused his attention on Elder, who has a libertarian bent and does not support abortion rights or the minimum wage, among other policies supported by most Californians.

Newsom, after voting Friday in Sacramento at an early vote center, said he's taking nothing for granted in the race's final days.

"I'm just focused on doing the job, encouraging folks to turn out and to get our base out at this critical juncture," he said.

See AP's complete coverage of the California recall election: <https://apnews.com/hub/california-recall>

Two women campaign to become France's 1st female president

PARIS (AP) — Two French politicians kicked off their presidential campaigns Sunday, seeking to become France's first female leader in next year's spring election.

The far-right National Rally party's Marine Le Pen and Paris' Socialist mayor, Anne Hidalgo, both launched their presidential platforms in widely expected moves.

They join a burgeoning list of challengers to centrist President Emmanuel Macron. This includes battles among multiple potential candidates on the right — including another female politician Valerie Pécresse — and among the Greens.

Hidalgo, 62, mayor of the French capital since 2014, is the favorite to win the Socialist Party nomination. She launched her candidacy in the northwestern city of Rouen.

"I want all children in France to have the same opportunities I had," she said, invoking her roots. Hidalgo is the daughter of Spanish immigrants who fled their country in search of freedom amid dictator Francisco Franco's rule.

Le Pen, the 53-year-old leader of France's far-right party, started her campaign in the southern city of Frejus with a pledge to defend French "liberty." In keeping with a hard-right message that critics say has vilified Muslim communities, Le Pen promised to be tough on "parts of France that have been Talibanized." Although she launched her candidacy earlier this year, on Sunday she made 26-year-old Jordan Bardella

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the acting head of the party as her campaign goes into full gear.

Le Pen is also remaking her image for this election. Gone is the dark blue wardrobe that has been her trademark. She now will be donning light blue for the campaign, "to show our vision, less partisan, (reaching) higher," Le Pen's special councillor Philippe Olivier was quoted as saying by Le Figaro, the conservative daily.

Macron, 43, has not yet announced his reelection bid but is expected to do so. Launching a candidacy in France is a necessary formality for each presidential election.

The vote is expected to boil down to a duel between Le Pen and Macron, as it was during France's last presidential election in 2017.

Vulnerable Democrats push for local priorities in budget

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — U.S. Rep. Cindy Axne of Iowa was slow to get behind a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill after the Senate passed it last month. It wasn't the price tag that tripped up the Democrat from a swing House district. It was that none of the money was targeted for a home state industry — ethanol and biodiesel.

Axne set out to fix that. In the weeks since, she won assurances from congressional leaders that a separate multitrillion-dollar budget blueprint would include money for the renewable fuels. She's now on board.

Her biofuels bargain underscores the political strategy embedded in the negotiations over massive new federal spending.

While Democrats have set out to pass ambitious bills with historic expansions of the social safety net and long-sought new programs, that's not how many politically vulnerable Democrats such as Axne are selling them at home. For them, Washington's spending boom has become a chance to deliver the goods — and win headlines and perhaps bipartisan support in their districts.

"If she wants to get elected next time, this is her political bread and butter," Ray Gaesser, a Republican farmer in Axne's district and past candidate for Iowa secretary of agriculture, said about her work to secure money for biofuels. "For my part, I appreciate her approach."

Rep. Angie Craig of Minnesota has taken a similar tack.

Craig, whose district includes vast tracts of farmland southeast of the Twin Cities, is promoting her role securing \$2.5 billion for farmers and rural small businesses to convert to renewable energy sources and high efficiency equipment as a financial incentive to meet higher environmental standards.

She tweeted on Friday that she was "thrilled that this long-time priority of mine" would be "supporting family farmers and driving investment across rural America."

In Virginia, Rep. Abigail Spanberger said she is chiefly focused on a measure to exempt her district's small-scale farmers and foresters from an increase in the estate tax which President Joe Biden has proposed to help pay for the \$3.5 trillion bill.

Though Spanberger's constituents are concentrated in suburban Richmond, the district stretches north and south across the rolling, agricultural Piedmont and its many dairy, vegetable and cattle farms and private forestland.

"I've been very focused on making sure we're protecting small family farmers and foresters, certainly across central Virginia," Spanberger told The Associated Press.

The lawmakers' efforts are aimed at assisting rural America, where Democrats have steadily lost votes over the past decade. The party is clear-eyed about needing to at least trim its losses in those areas, if they are to hold the congressional seats — and control of the House in 2022.

Democrats currently have a mere eight-seat majority. Republicans are targeting roughly 30 House seats where Democrats won by fewer than 10 percentage points in 2020. Axne, Spanberger and Craig each won by no more than 2 percentage points.

"There's been a very deliberate effort to think about those provisions in ways that would be beneficial to rural communities," said Democratic pollster Geoff Garin who is advising the party on the budget package.

Republicans argue that the size of the spending bill will turn off rural voters in key districts, not attract support.

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"Rural voters are incredibly concerned about the reckless spending and massive tax hikes that will be included in Democrats' reconciliation bill," said Mike Berg, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee. "If Democrats think these voters' concerns will be mollified by a few kickbacks from the federal government, they are sorely mistaken."

The trillion-dollar infrastructure bill — a plan for roads, bridges, public transit and broadband internet — passed the Democratic-controlled Senate with bipartisan support last month. The House is expected to pass the bill, but its success is tied to progress on the \$3.5 trillion budget bill that includes extended child tax credits, expanded Medicare coverage, tuition-free community college, and other social and environmental programs.

Pelosi has set the ambitious goal of passing it by Oct. 1.

Axne announced on Wednesday that the draft of the House budget bill would include \$1 billion to expand retail availability of ethanol and biodiesel around the country. Iowa leads the nation producing ethanol, a corn-based fuel additive, and biodiesel, commonly made from soybeans. The amount is double what Axne sought in a bill she had introduced in the House Agriculture Committee this year.

The grants are expected to increase demand for the fuels nationally, spur output in Iowa's 42 ethanol plants and biodiesel refineries, as well as boost the price of corn and soybeans for the farmers who supply them, according to Iowa renewable fuels advocates.

"It impacts the price of soybeans by more than a dollar a bushel. That's a lot of money," said Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association and a past Republican candidate for Congress. "For ethanol you're looking at an extra \$400 to \$500 million for farmers in Iowa, because the price of corn is higher."

On top of that, for the fraction of the cost of the overall bill, the measure would immediately accelerate cutting carbon emissions, a priority of Biden's plan, Axne said.

"There's no way that we're going to have everybody driving electric vehicles overnight," Axne said in a recent AP interview. "So why the heck are we not, if our goal is to impact climate in a positive way, blending more biofuels now so we can automatically lower greenhouse gases?"

It's also a relatively small price for a House seat critical to Democrats' chances at holding the majority. Axne holds the distinction of winning by the smallest margin — 1.4 percentage points — of any Democrat in a district carried by Republican Donald Trump last year.

Last year, the former state government administrator and small business owner from suburban Des Moines won Polk County, home to Des Moines and most of its suburbs, but lost the district's other 15 counties.

Like Spanberger's advocacy for rural Virginians, Axne's emphasis on an economic priority in the GOP-leaning geographic majority of her district could trim her losses in rural Iowa next year.

There will be other factors, of course. Biden's overall approval rating, now down after criticism for the chaotic recent U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and surging COVID-19 cases, is likely to play a major role. And any number of factors will emerge before an election still almost 17 months away.

Still, Axne's first-step success is a good sign for her, said Shaw, the Republican renewable fuels advocate.

"I hate to ever say one thing makes or breaks somebody. But there are times when you have a chance to make a difference and that's where the rubber meets the road," he said. "Ultimately, we need folks who can deliver."

Internet funding rule could favor rural areas over cities

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Cities and urban counties across the U.S. are raising concerns that a recent rule from President Joe Biden's administration could preclude them from tapping into \$350 billion of coronavirus relief aid to expand high-speed internet connections.

Biden has set a goal of delivering fast, affordable internet to every American household. The massive American Rescue Plan took a step toward that by including broadband infrastructure among the primary uses for pandemic aid flowing to each city, county and state.

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But an interim rule published by the U.S. Treasury Department has narrowed the broadband eligibility. It focuses on areas that lack reliable broadband, which connects devices to the internet through a cable or data line, at download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps.

That threshold ensures funding for remote, rural areas that have slow or no internet service, and it matches the definition of broadband set by the Federal Communications Commission in 2015. But cities contend the eligibility mark overlooks the realities of today's internet needs.

Though most cities already have broadband available, the speed still might not be fast enough to handle multiple people in a home trying to work, study and stream entertainment simultaneously — a common scenario during the coronavirus pandemic. The price also can be more than lower-income residents can afford.

"They're basically prioritizing those rural areas over the underserved urban areas where there is more population," said Detta Kissel, a retired Treasury Department attorney who helped write agency rules and now advocates for better internet service in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Arlington, Virginia.

Several cities, including Washington, Los Angeles, Milwaukee and San Antonio, have submitted public comments to the Treasury Department urging it to loosen the eligibility standard for spending pandemic relief money on broadband. Some want the Treasury to define underserved areas as anything less than download and upload speeds of 100 Mbps.

That would increase the number of locations eligible for funding from about 11 million to 82 million households and businesses nationwide, according to a study conducted for America's Communications Association, which represents small and medium-sized internet providers.

Cities argue that the Treasury should use a 100/100 Mbps eligibility threshold because that's the same speed projects are supposed to achieve if they receive funding. A separate infrastructure bill working its way through Congress is more flexible, allowing some of its \$65 billion in broadband funding to go to "underserved" areas lacking download speeds of 100 Mbps and upload speeds of 20 Mbps.

If the Treasury goes forward with its rule as originally written, sparsely populated areas currently lacking broadband could leapfrog certain urban areas in their internet speeds. That doesn't sit well with some mayors.

"The inner city of Memphis is as in a dire need of broadband connection as rural Tennessee," said Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland, who wants Treasury Department assurance before spending \$20 million from the American Rescue Plan on a broadband project.

Residents almost anywhere in Milwaukee already have access to at least one internet provider offering download speeds of 25 Mbps and upload speeds of 3 Mbps. But in parts of the city, fewer than half the households subscribe to internet service because of its cost, said David Henke, the city's chief information officer.

"If you don't have a job and you can't afford broadband, that's kind of a cycle," Henke said. "You're locked out of remote learning, remote work, telemedicine and participating basically in a modern society."

Milwaukee has applied for a \$12.5 million grant from Wisconsin's share of the American Rescue Plan and would chip in \$2.5 million of its own pandemic relief money to expand affordable broadband into more parts of the city, Henke said. But the city wants the Treasury Department to broaden "the narrow wording" of its rule.

Although the public comment period ended in July, the Treasury has set no date for when it will publish the rule's final version. A Treasury official said the department is undertaking a thorough review of the comments that is likely "to continue into the fall."

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, is among those urging the Treasury Department to adopt a broader eligibility threshold. He wrote that it would be "severely misguided" to assume that communities are adequately served by the "woefully outdated" broadband benchmark the department has set.

Broadband industry groups generally have urged the Treasury to stick with its original plan of targeting money at areas with the slowest internet speeds.

"Rather than reinvesting in locations that already have broadband to make it better," the pandemic relief

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money should go to “places that don’t have any broadband at all,” said Patrick Halley, general counsel at USTelecom, whose membership includes AT&T, Verizon and others.

The cable industry group NCTA urged treasury officials to tighten eligibility even further. It wants to limit the number of households that already have faster service that can be included in areas targeted for improvements. It also wants to remove the potential for locally subjective decisions about areas that lack reliable service.

Allowing improvements in areas that already meet minimum speed thresholds could siphon money away from the neediest, hard-to-reach areas — potentially leaving them without service once the federal money is spent, industry groups said.

To bring super-fast internet service to every place currently lacking 25/3 Mbps speeds could cost between \$20 billion and \$37 billion, according to the study for America’s Communications Association. That cost jumps to between \$106 billion to \$179 billion when covering all areas currently lacking speeds of 100/100 Mbps.

“As a matter of prioritization, we think it’s best to start with the areas that have the least,” said Ross Lieberman, the association’s senior vice president of government affairs.

Though most of the complaints about the Treasury Department rule have come from larger cities, some residents in rural areas also have raised concerns.

Charlie Hopkins, a retired computer hardware and software designer, owns a home on a Maine island that is accessible only by boat. The internet speeds at his house registered barely 5 Mbps for downloading and just 0.4 Mbps for uploading when tested recently for The Associated Press.

Because some homes have faster speeds, Hopkins is concerned the Treasury Department rule could make it difficult for the island to get funding to improve its internet. He said broadband is essential to attract and retain residents.

“Other cities and towns in Maine, especially the cities, are getting higher-speed fiberoptic-based internet,” Hopkins said. “I don’t like being in a position where we’re essentially being told, ‘Well, you’re at the end of the Earth, so you don’t qualify.’”

UK ditches plans for vaccine passports at crowded venues

LONDON (AP) — Authorities in Britain have decided not to require vaccine passports for entry into nightclubs and other crowded events in England, Britain’s health secretary said Sunday, reversing course amid opposition from some of the Conservative government’s supporters in Parliament.

Health Minister Sajid Javid said the government has shelved the idea of vaccine passports for now but could reconsider the decision if COVID-19 cases rise exponentially once again.

“We’ve looked at it properly and whilst we should keep it in reserve as a potential option, I’m pleased to say that we will not be going ahead with plans for vaccine passports,” Javid told the BBC.

The U-turn came just days after both the government’s vaccines minister and the culture secretary suggested that vaccine passports would still be necessary, despite growing opposition from lawmakers.

In particular, members of the governing Conservative Party have objected to such passports as an unacceptable burden on businesses and an infringement on residents’ human rights.

The idea of requiring people to show proof of vaccination or a recent negative test for COVID-19 has been uncomfortable for many in Britain, where people generally aren’t required to carry identification documents.

Other European nations are using similar documents showing peoples’ vaccination status as a way to re-open society — although the rules vary widely. Each of Germany’s 16 states has slightly different rules on what is required, but in general, people are required to show a negative test, vaccine or recovery certificate before being allowed to participate in indoor dining, drinking or dancing.

Passes are required in France when frequenting bars, cafes, restaurants, museums and other places where the public gathers and for long-distance travel on buses, trains and planes. In Italy, where discos have not re-opened since the start of the pandemic, so-called Green Passes are required to dine indoors, attend a concert or for domestic travel by trains, buses, planes or ferries, although local transport is exempt.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:
<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

FBI releases newly declassified record on Sept. 11 attacks

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A declassified FBI document related to logistical support given to two of the Saudi hijackers in the run-up to the Sept. 11 attacks details contacts the men had with Saudi associates in the United States but does not provide proof that senior kingdom officials were complicit in the plot.

The document released Saturday, on the 20th anniversary of the attacks, is the first investigative record to be disclosed since President Joe Biden ordered a declassification review of materials that for years have remained out of public view. The 16-page document is a summary of an FBI interview done in 2015 with a man who had frequent contact with Saudi nationals in the U.S. who supported the first hijackers to arrive in the country before the attacks.

Biden ordered the Justice Department and other agencies to conduct a declassification review and release what documents they can over the next six months. He was under pressure from victims' families, who have long sought the records as they pursue a lawsuit in New York alleging that Saudi government officials supported the hijackers.

The heavily blacked-out document was released hours after Biden attended Sept. 11 memorial events in New York, Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon. Victims' relatives had said they would object to Biden's presence at those remembrances as long as the documents remained classified.

The Saudi government has long denied any involvement in the attacks. The Saudi Embassy in Washington has it supported the full declassification of all records as a way to "end the baseless allegations against the Kingdom once and for all." The embassy said that any allegation that Saudi Arabia was complicit was "categorically false."

The documents have come out at a politically delicate time for the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, which have forged a strategic, if difficult, alliance, particularly on counterterrorism matters. The Biden administration in February released an intelligence assessment implicating Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the 2018 killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but drew criticism from Democrats for avoiding a direct punishment of the royal himself.

Victims' relatives said the document's release was a significant step in their effort to connect the attacks to Saudi Arabia. Brett Eagleson, whose father, Bruce, was killed in the World Trade Center attack, said the release of the FBI material "accelerates our pursuit of truth and justice."

Jim Kreindler, a lawyer for the victims' relatives, said in a statement that "the findings and conclusions in this FBI investigation validate the arguments we have made in the litigation regarding the Saudi government's responsibility for the 9/11 attacks.

"This document, together with the public evidence gathered to date, provides a blueprint for how (al-Qaida) operated inside the US with the active, knowing support of the Saudi government," he said.

That includes, he said, Saudi officials exchanging phone calls among themselves and al-Qaida operatives and then having "accidental meetings" with the hijackers while providing them with assistance to get settled and find flight schools.

Regarding Sept. 11, there has been speculation of official involvement since shortly after the attacks, when it was revealed that 15 of the 19 attackers were Saudis. Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaida at the time, was from a prominent family in the kingdom.

The U.S. investigated some Saudi diplomats and others with Saudi government ties who knew hijackers after they arrived in the U.S., according to previously declassified documents.

Still, the 9/11 Commission report in 2004 found "no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded" the attacks that al-Qaida masterminded, though it noted Saudi-linked charities could have diverted money to the group.

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Particular scrutiny has centered on the first two hijackers to arrive in the U.S., Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, and support they received.

In February 2000, shortly after their arrival in Southern California, they encountered at a halal restaurant a Saudi national named Omar al-Bayoumi who helped them find and lease an apartment in San Diego. He had ties to the Saudi government and had earlier attracted FBI scrutiny.

Bayoumi has described his restaurant meeting with Hazmi and Mihdhar as a "chance encounter," and the FBI during its interview made multiple attempts to ascertain if that characterization was accurate or if the meeting had actually been arranged in advance, according to the document.

The 2015 interview that forms the basis of the FBI document was of a man who was applying for U.S. citizenship and who years earlier had repeated contacts with Saudi nationals, who investigators said, provided "significant logistical support" to several of the hijackers. Among the man's contacts was Bayoumi, according to the document.

The man's identity is blacked out throughout the document, but he is described as having worked at the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles.

Also referenced in the document is Fahad al-Thumairy, at the time an accredited diplomat at the Saudi Consulate in Los Angeles who investigators say led an extremist faction at his mosque. The document says communications analysis identified a seven-minute phone call in 1999 from Thumairy's phone to the Saudi Arabian family home phone of two brothers who later were detained at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, prison.

Follow Eric Tucker at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Al-Qaida chief appears in video marking 9/11 anniversary

BEIRUT (AP) — Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri appeared in a video marking the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, attacks, months after rumors spread that he was dead.

The SITE Intelligence Group that monitors jihadist websites said the video was released Saturday. In it, al-Zawahri said that "Jerusalem Will Never be Judaized," and praised al-Qaida attacks including one that targeted Russian troops in Syria in January.

SITE said al-Zawahri also noted the U.S. military's withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. It added that his comments do not necessarily indicate a recent recording, as the withdrawal agreement with the Taliban was signed in February 2020.

Al-Zawahri made no mention of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and the capital Kabul last month, SITE added. But he did mention a Jan. 1, attack that targeted Russian troops on the edge of the northern Syrian city of Raqqa.

Rumors have spread since late 2020 that al-Zawahri had died from illness. Since then, no video or proof of life surfaced, until Saturday.

"He could still be dead, though if so, it would have been at some point in or after Jan 2021," tweeted Rita Katz, SITE's director.

Al-Zawahri's speech was recorded in a 61-minute, 37-second video produced by the group's as-Sahab Media Foundation.

In recent years, al-Qaida has faced competition in jihadi circles from its rival, the Islamic State group. IS rose to prominence by seizing large swaths of Iraq and Syria in 2014, declaring a "caliphate" and extending affiliates to multiple countries across the region.

IS's physical "caliphate" was crushed in Iraq and Syria, though its militants are still active and carrying out attacks. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the shadowy leader of IS was killed by U.S. special forces in a raid in northwestern Syria in October 2019.

Al-Zawahri, an Egyptian, became leader of al-Qaida following the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan by U.S. Navy SEALs.

Death and suffering in Iraq a painful legacy of 9/11 attacks

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By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press
BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11. But the terrorist attacks in the United States changed forever the lives of Iraqis.

In their aftermath, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, swiftly deposing the Taliban regime that had been sheltering Osama bin Laden, the leader of the al-Qaida terror network blamed for the attacks.

But it was not long before President George W. Bush shifted his attention to Iraq, identifying it, along with Iran and North Korea, as part of an “axis of evil” and asserting that its brutal dictator, Saddam Hussein, was armed with weapons of mass destruction and had ties to al-Qaida. No evidence of either was found.

What followed was a U.S.-led invasion of a country in the heart of the Middle East that spurred a decade of war, with consequences that reverberate across the region to this day.

“At first, I was happy with the U.S. invasion, everyone was happy. We were filled with hope for a better future,” said Mohammed Agha, an Iraqi Kurd who was 27 when the invasion began.

“But then what happened was that the country’s institutions were destroyed and never rebuilt again,” he said. “There was no planning for the day after and no nation-building.”

Agha’s words reflect the lingering anger and bitterness felt by many Iraqis over what they regard as a lost opportunity to remake their country following the ouster of Saddam, who ruled with an iron grip for almost 30 years.

The invasion reshaped Iraqi politics, including a shift in the country’s power base from minority Arab Sunnis to majority Shiites, with Kurds gaining their own autonomous region. But while many Iraqis welcomed Saddam’s ouster and the degree of democracy that followed, they expected the U.S. to bring good governance, security and reliable basic services like electricity.

Failure to achieve any of those things fueled resentment and led to an insurgency that ultimately devolved into civil war, with both Shiite and Sunni militias fighting the Americans for control of the country.

After decades of conflict, Iraq today has a relatively stable government, and the car bombings, suicide attacks and death squads have subsided. But the economy is in tatters, its infrastructure is crumbling and corruption is rampant. The government, with its fractious politics, is unable to control the dozens of powerful Iran-backed militias that wield enormous control.

For some, the loss is also personal.

On the evening of April 7, 2003, two missiles crashed with such a deafening sound and force that they knocked Itimad Hassoun to the floor of her home in Baghdad’s Jadriyah district and blasted her doors off their hinges.

The Americans had been bombing for more than two weeks as part of their “shock and awe” campaign to topple Saddam, and the Iraqi capital was in darkness. Hassoun had been sitting by candlelight with her husband. The next few moments were a blur, as she fumbled blindly, screaming for him and their children.

Her son, two daughters and a granddaughter lay dead in the rubble of their home next door. Only a newborn granddaughter survived.

Twenty years after 9/11, Hassoun is 74 and still dresses in black after losing her son 18 years ago. She says she will never forgive America for killing her loved ones.

“There’s nothing that makes me happy. I have a pain that cannot be removed and an injury that cannot be healed. It’s inside me,” she said, looking frail and tired as she sat in a chair in a large guest room.

Baghdad fell on April 9, two days after the airstrike that killed Hassoun’s family. Many Iraqis cheered as U.S. Marines pulled down a statue of Saddam in the capital’s Firdous Square.

But the euphoria was short-lived, as hope gave way to occupation, as well as more daily death and destruction after the Americans dissolved the Iraqi army. The move led to the rise of al-Qaida and later the Islamic State group in the country.

The following years were stamped with images of horror. Among them: the bodies of four U.S. security contractors hanging from a bridge over the Euphrates River in Fallujah in March 2004; photos cataloging the abuse of Iraqis in the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison; the bloody battles between U.S. troops and al-Qaida militants in Fallujah in 2004; the February 2006 attack by Sunni extremists that shattered the golden dome

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of a revered Shiite shrine in Samarra, unleashing sectarian bloodletting.

By the time Washington withdrew its last combat troops in December 2011, tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians were dead, along with 4,487 Americans. U.S. troops were invited back in 2014 after Iraqi security forces collapsed in the face of an onslaught by the Islamic State group there and in neighboring Syria. Tens of thousands more Iraqis were killed before the last pockets of those militants were defeated in 2017.

"A dictatorship was removed for a supposed democracy, and we found ourselves with a civil war, al-Qaeda and ISIS, with no services and just thieves all around us," said Assim Salman, Hassoun's 53-year-old neighbor who helped dig out the bodies of her relatives that fateful night.

"To hell with such democracy."

In his 2010 memoir, "Decision Points," Bush admitted to mistakes in Iraq, including the decision to disband the Iraqi army, and said he got a "sickening feeling" every time he thought about the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, his main justification for the war. But he stood by his decision to invade.

Political analyst Bassam al-Qazwini said the people of Iraq and Afghanistan paid the price of the U.S. invasions after 9/11, not the quickly collapsing regimes in those countries.

Instead of building democracy in Iraq, he said, the Americans supported a political class that created networks of corruption and militias that continue to rob the country. Even though it is rich in oil, Iraq suffers chronic blackouts and crumbling infrastructure because of graft, profiteering and mismanagement. Tens of thousands of students graduate each year with no hope of finding jobs.

"This corrupt network is capable of killing Iraqis to survive, the same way Saddam killed Iraqis to stay in power. So, what has changed?" al-Qazwini said, citing the crackdown on peaceful anti-government protests in 2019.

Today, Hassoun lives in the same house in Jadriyah, 200 meters (yards) from the Tigris River. Black and white photos of her husband adorn the walls.

Dina, her granddaughter who survived the bombing, is now an 18-year-old student of dentistry.

Hassoun wants the few thousand Americans still in Iraq to leave — "a departure without a return, this time" — because of what they did to her family.

But her neighbor Salman, like many other Iraqis, views the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan with concern, worried about a return of militant groups like the Islamic State.

"America needs to fix things," he said. "It cannot do to us what it did to Afghanistan, where it fought the Taliban for 20 years and then gave the country back to them."

Karam reported from Beirut.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Sept. 13, the 256th day of 2021. There are 109 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 13, 1971, a four-day inmates' rebellion at the Attica Correctional Facility in western New York ended as police and guards stormed the prison; the ordeal and final assault claimed the lives of 32 inmates and 11 hostages.

On this date:

In 1788, the Congress of the Confederation authorized the first national election, and declared New York City the temporary national capital.

In 1814, during the War of 1812, British naval forces began bombarding Fort McHenry in Baltimore but were driven back by American defenders in a battle that lasted until the following morning.

In 1959, Elvis Presley first met his future wife, 14-year-old Priscilla Beaulieu, while stationed in West Germany with the U.S. Army. (They married in 1967, but divorced in 1973.)

In 1962, Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett rejected the U.S. Supreme Court's order for the University of

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Mississippi to admit James Meredith, a Black student, declaring in a televised address, "We will not drink from the cup of genocide."

In 1970, the first New York City Marathon was held; winner Gary Muhrcke finished the 26.2-mile run, which took place entirely inside Central Park, in 2:31:38.

In 1990, the combination police-courtroom drama "Law & Order" premiered on NBC.

In 1993, at the White House, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat shook hands after signing an accord granting limited Palestinian autonomy.

In 1996, rapper Tupac Shakur died at a Las Vegas hospital six days after he was wounded in a drive-by shooting; he was 25.

In 1997, funeral services were held in Calcutta, India, for Nobel peace laureate Mother Teresa.

In 1998, former Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace died in Montgomery at age 79.

In 2001, two days after the 9/11 terror attacks, the first few jetliners returned to the nation's skies, but several major airports remained closed and others opened only briefly. President George W. Bush visited injured Pentagon workers and said he would carry the nation's prayers to New York.

In 2010, Rafael Nadal won his first U.S. Open title to complete a career Grand Slam, beating Novak Djokovic 6-4, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2.

Ten years ago: Teams of insurgents firing rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons struck at the U.S. Embassy, NATO headquarters and other buildings in the heart of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul.

Five years ago: Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump rolled out a plan aimed at making child care more affordable, guaranteeing new mothers six weeks of paid maternity leave and suggesting new incentives for employees to provide their workers child care during a speech in Aston, Pennsylvania. Former Israeli President Shimon Peres, 93, suffered a major stroke (he died 15 days later).

One year ago: In open defiance of state regulations and his own administration's pandemic health guidelines, President Donald Trump hosted his first indoor rally since June, telling a packed, nearly mask-less crowd in Henderson, Nevada, that the nation was "making the last turn" in defeating the virus. Dominic Thiem became the first man in 71 years to win the U.S. Open after dropping the first two sets of the final; Thiem earned his first Grand Slam title with a 2-6, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (6) comeback victory against Alexander Zverev.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Barbara Bain is 90. Actor Eileen Fulton (TV: "As the World Turns") is 88. Actor Joe E. Tata is 85. Rock singer David Clayton-Thomas (Blood, Sweat & Tears) is 80. Actor Jacqueline Bisset is 77. Singer Peter Cetera is 77. Actor Christine Estabrook is 71. Actor Jean Smart is 70. Singer Randy Jones (The Village People) is 69. Record producer Don Was is 69. Actor Isiah Whitlock Jr. is 67. Actor-comedian Geri Jewell is 65. Country singer Bobbie Cryner is 60. Rock singer-musician Dave Mustaine (Megadeth) is 60. Radio-TV personality Tavis Smiley is 57. Rock musician Zak Starkey is 56. Actor/comedian Jeff Ross is 56. Actor Louis Mandylor is 55. Olympic gold medal runner Michael Johnson is 54. Rock musician Steve Perkins is 54. Actor Roger Howarth is 53. Actor Dominic Fumusa is 52. Actor Louise Lombard is 51. Former tennis player Goran Ivanisevic (ee-van-EE'-seh-vihch) is 50. Country singer Aaron Benward (Blue County) is 48. Country musician Joe Don Rooney (Rascal Flatts) is 46. Actor Scott Vickaryous is 46. Singer Fiona Apple is 44. Contemporary Christian musician Hector Cervantes (Casting Crowns) is 41. Actor Ben Savage is 41. Rock singer Niall Horan (One Direction) is 28. Actor Mitch Holleman is 26. Actor Lili Reinhart (TV: "Riverdale") is 25.