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Service Notice: Arlis Doeden

Funeral services for Arlis Doeden, 74, of Groton will be 10:00 a.m. Friday, September 17th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Pastor Kari Foss will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton.

Visitation will be held at Emmanuel Lutheran Church on Thursday from 4-6 p.m. with a prayer service at 6:00 p.m.

Arlis passed away September 11, 2021 at home surrounded by her family.

Position Opening

Parish Secretary opening for Bethesda- Butler Lutheran Churches. Approximately 25-30 hours per month with the option of some work from home hours. Mail resume to Bethesda Lutheran Church, PO Box 426, Bristol, SD 57219 before October 1st.

(0914.0928)

Homecoming Week Dress up days

Day	MS/HS	Elementary
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



“They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world. Someone to love, something to do and something to hope for.”

-TOM BODETT

Chicken Soup for the Soul

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, Sept. 14

Cross Country at Webster, 4 p.m. (rescheduled from yesterday)

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 (JV and Varsity matches to be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM)



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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White wash washed out

This is what Main Street looked like Monday morning, but with the rain that fell yesterday, it has all disappeared. The senior class painted Main Street Sunday evening. The photo is a panoramic shot and that's why there is a curve in the street. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Kurtz, Flihs named GHS Royalty

Kaden Kurtz, son of Ryan and Diane Kurtz, and Megan Flihs, daughter of Jarod and Kristie Flihs, were chosen as the 2021 GHS Homecoming king and queen. Pictured in the back are candidates Jackson Cogley, son of Steve Cogley and Michelle Cogley; Pierce Kettering, son of Kevin and Kara Pharis and Scott Kettering; Jordan Bjerke, son of Jerry and Kathy Bjerke; Seth Johnson, son of Greg and Mary Johnson; Madisen Bjerke, daughter of Jerry and Kathy Bjerke; Madeline Flihs, daughter of Jeff and Bridget Flihs; Emilie Thurston, daughter of Todd Thurston and Debbie Thurston; and Trista Keith, daughter of Bary and Tricia Keith. Carrying up the scrolls were Jacob Morehouse and Hailey Erickson. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Medical Cannabis Program Rules Pass Interim Rules Review Committee

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the Legislature’s Interim Rules Review Committee approved the Department of Health’s proposed administrative rules to establish a medical cannabis program in South Dakota. The legislature approved 143 of 149 proposed rules.

Following the legislature’s endorsement of the rules, Governor Kristi Noem and Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon released the following statements:

“We are on track to implement a responsible medical cannabis program in South Dakota according to the direction given by the voters,” said Governor Noem. “I commend the Department of Health for its hard work to streamline the process. South Dakota will continue to implement the best, most patient-focused medical cannabis program in the country.”

“The passage of today’s proposed rules package by the committee is the result of months of work. It’s proof that the public engagement process works,” said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, Secretary of Health. “I am disappointed the rules review committee chose to take out the list of specific medical conditions for qualifying medical cannabis patients, a list the Department promulgated based on public input.”

On September 3, 2021, the Department of Health released the latest draft of its proposed rules for the states Medical Cannabis program. [CLICK HERE](#) to view them.

For more information on South Dakota’s medical cannabis program, please visit medcannabis.sd.gov.

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Superintendent's Report to the Groton Area School District 06-6 Board of Education

September 13, 2021

COVID-19 Case Count. As of today, we've had four students diagnosed with COVID-19. There are currently two active cases of COVID-19 of students in our schools.

COVID-19 Contact Tracing. Our current internal protocols for contact tracing are to determine who the close contacts are (defined by SDDOH as within three feet for 15 minutes or more over a 24 hour period), contacting the households (via email) and advising them to be vigilant in watching for symptoms and to seek testing or evaluation if symptoms appear.

COVID-19 Testing. The District has a supply of Abbot BiNax NOW rapid antigen tests to use on symptomatic individuals in the same manner we used during the 2020-2021 school year. This test requires parent consent.

Today we received 90 Quidel QuickVue tests that will be distributed this week. Students were provided an interest form to complete indicating their interest in testing (weekly, as needed, not at all) that we'll use in determining who receives tests and how often (of course based on available supply). We've asked families to return these documents to us by tomorrow (Tuesday, 9/14).

President Biden's COVID-19 Plan. Last week, President Biden announced his six-pronged strategy for combating COVID-19. The component I've fielded the most questions about so far relates to the vaccination/testing mandate for employers employing more than 100 people. Our district employs more than 100 individuals.

It is too soon to know the impact of this on us. The order and related rules for this have yet to be formalized and are likely to face multiple legal challenges.

The enforcement mechanism appears to be fines for non-compliance levied by OSHA which will does not apply to political subdivisions including school districts in states without a separate state OSHA plan (including South Dakota).

Fall Enrollment. Official fall enrollment will be collected by South Dakota Department of Education on the last Friday in September (Friday, September 24). As of this morning, our JK-12 grade enrollment is 594 students.

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Principal's Report

MS/HS Building

Mrs. Sombke

September 13, 2021

- 1) Homecoming Events and Schedule
 - Coronation
 - Senior Athletes Visit Elementary and Pre-School
 - Royalty will visit Elementary, Pre-School, and Nursing Home to Crown Nursing Home King and Queen
 - Dress-Up Days
 - Jungle Days
 - Spirit Day, parade, FFA Pork Loin Meal, Homecoming Football Game
 - King and Queen presented at half time of football game
- 2) Dual Credit and Senior Privileges
 - 9/13 was the first day that Seniors and Dual Credit students could use privileges
 - Dual Credit Students will follow Weekly Grade Check, no grade lower than a C-
 - Senior Students will follow ineligibility check point, no grade lower than a C- (two week check)
- 3) Internship Placements/Beginning This Week
 - Senior Internships have started
 - Mrs. Hubsch/Small Business Program and Internship, encouraging additional hours to promote scholarship readiness
- 4) MAPS Assessment
 - Will help identify student benchmark, and promote student growth through additional measurements throughout the year (3 total measurements over the year)

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Elementary Principal report

September 13, 2021

1. **Enrollment:**

- a. PS-10
- b. JK-16
- c. KG-44
- d. 1st-35
- e. 2nd-48
- f. 3rd-48
- g. 4th-44
- h. 5th-41

2. **MAP Growth Fall Benchmark Assessment.** All students have completed the reading portion of this test and most students have completed the math. We have had a few issues with administering the test but it had to do with personal errors and technology issues. The online program as worked well and has been providing staff with informative data.
3. **MAP Reading Fluency** training will be on October 8 at 1:00. Elementary staff will be trained on how to use this program. This will also be used for RtI to progress monitor those students who may require specific interventions.
4. **Homecoming:** Parents have been invited to attend our homecoming picnic/lunch on Friday.

Homecoming Dress up Days:

- Monday: Jersey/Sport Day
- Tuesday: Animal OR Superhero Day
- Wednesday: Twin/Matching Day
- Thursday: Pajama Day
- Friday: Spirit Day

Friday Lunch and Recess Schedule

Lunch Schedule:

- KG and 1st – 11:00-11:25
- 2nd and 3rd – 11:25-11:50
- 4th and 5th – 11:50-12:15.

Recess:

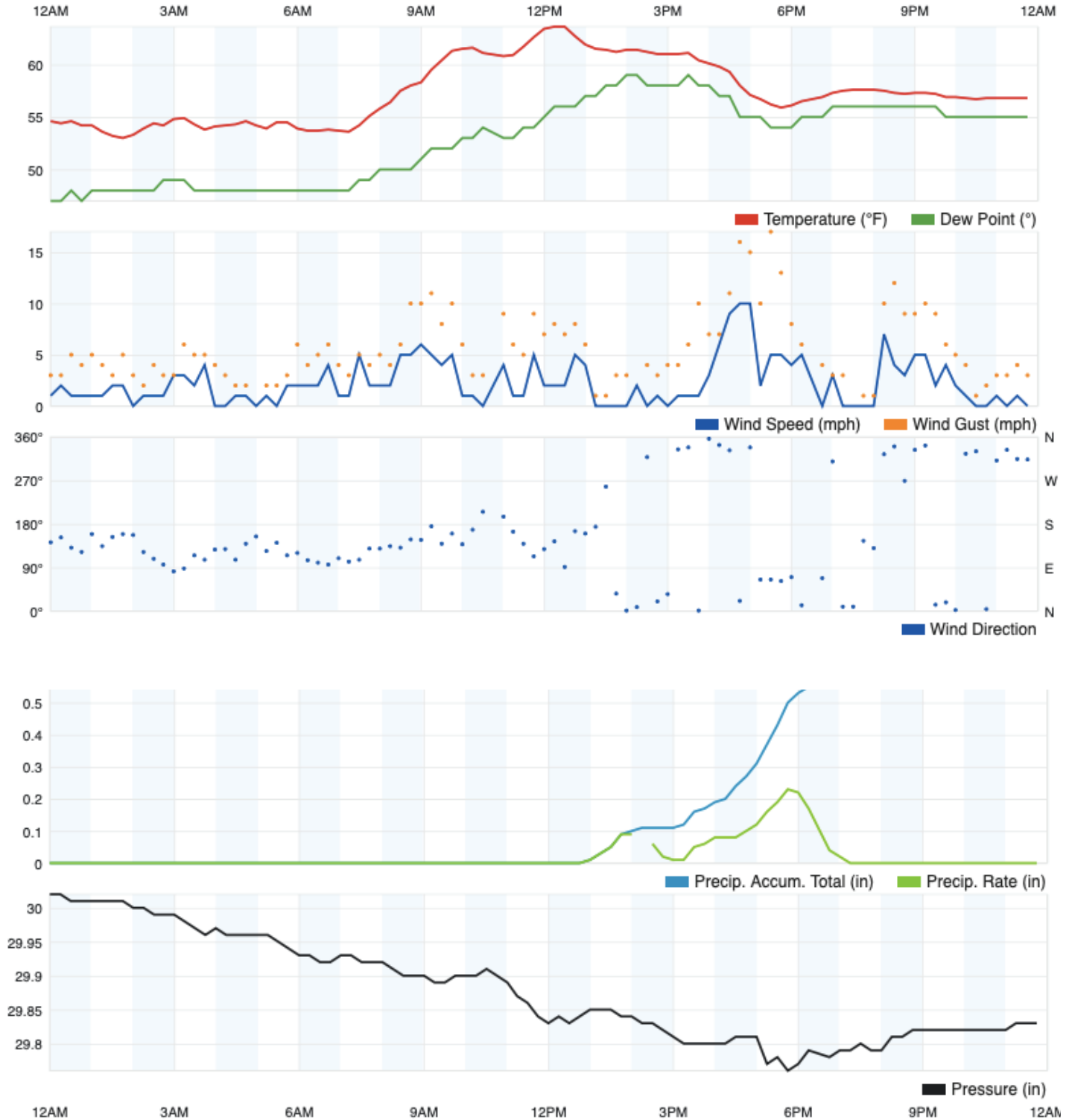
- KG and 1st – 11:20-11:40
- 2nd and 3rd – 11:45-12:05
- 4th and 5th – 12:10-12:30

5. **Music and PE Schedule.** This year we added music and PE to our Friday schedule. Classes alternate between PE and music each week.
6. Barb Paepke from **Aberdeen Community Concert Association** contacted me on Friday. On November 12th at 1:00 at the Johnson Fine Arts Center, Black Market Trust will be performing for local schools around the area. Since we were not able to take the 5th graders to the Threshing Bee, I thought this would be a great opportunity for our students.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Areas Dense Fog then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny
High: 73 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 74 °F



**Foggy & Cloudy
This Morning**

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Highs: Low 70s	Highs: Low 70s - Mid 80s	Highs: Low/Mid70s	Highs: Upper60s - Low 70s
	Lows: Low 70s - Mid 80s	Lows: 50s	Lows: 40s



www.weather.gov/abr
Updated: 9/14/2021 2:42 AM Central

Low clouds and fog will linger across the area this morning, before clearing out with temperatures recovering into the 70s. Dry conditions should run through most of Thursday with temperatures facing a cool down late in the work week.

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Today in Weather History

September 14, 1993: An early freeze and frost hit the state of South Dakota on the 14th and 15th. On the morning of the 14th, some low temperatures included 24 degrees at Rapid City, 19 degrees at Camp Crook and Porcupine, and 31 degrees at Pierre. The 24 degrees low at Rapid City broke the old record for the date by 10 degrees and was the earliest in the season it has ever been that cold. The air mass had moderated some by the time it hit eastern South Dakota early on the 15th. Some low temperatures on the 15th included 28 degrees at Brookings, 30 degrees at Watertown, and 32 at Sioux Falls.

1928: A violent, estimated F4 tornado, with winds of 200 mph, tore across Rockford, Illinois. The tornado first touched down 8 miles south-southwest of Rockford and moved across the southeast part of the city. The tornado was on the ground for 25 miles with a width varying from 200 to 500 feet. A total of 14 people were killed, with around 100 injuries reported in Rockford alone. Two hundred buildings were damaged or destroyed.

1937 - The mercury soared to 92 degrees at Seattle, WA, a record for September. (The Weather Channel)

1944 - A very destructive hurricane swept across Cape Hatteras and Chesapeake Bay, side swiped New Jersey and Long Island, and crossed southeastern Massachusetts. The hurricane killed more than four hundred persons, mainly at sea. The hurricane destroyed the Atlantic City NJ boardwalk. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1970 - The temperature at Fremont, OR, dipped to 2 above zero to equal the state record for September set on the 24th in 1926. (The Weather Channel)

1977: Severe thunderstorms produced several tornadoes in eastern Arkansas, killing one.

1987 - Barrow, AK, received 5.1 inches of snow, a record for September. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather from Minnesota to Texas. Thunderstorms in Iowa produced baseball size hail at Laporte City, and 80 mph winds at Laurens. Hail caused more than ten million dollars damage to crops in Iowa. Thunderstorms in Missouri produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Missouri City and Kansas City. A thunderstorm in Texas deluged the town of Fairlie with two inches of rain in just two hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Hurricane Gilbert made the first of its two landfalls on Mexico, producing 170 mph winds at Cozumel. (The Weather Channel)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Texas panhandle during the evening hours. One thunderstorm spawned a strong (F-2) tornado in the southwest part of Amarillo, and deluged the area with five inches of rain. The heavy rain left roads under as much as five feet of water, and left Lawrence Lake a mile out of its banks. Hurricane Gilbert lost some of its punch crossing the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Its maximum winds diminished to 120 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably cool weather prevailed across the south central U.S. Eight cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Raton NM with a reading of 30 degrees. The afternoon high of 59 degrees at Topeka KS marked their third straight record cool maximum temperature. Unseasonably warm weather continued in the Pacific Northwest. Seattle WA reported a record eight days in a row of 80 degree weather in September. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2005: Hurricane Ophelia caused some damage and beach erosion along the United States coastline from Florida to North Carolina. The closest approach occurred on September 14 and 15 with its western eyewall crossing land and the eye remaining just offshore in the Carolinas.

2008: Hurricane Ike became extratropical on this day. The St. Louis Metropolitan Area experienced hurricane conditions, with Ike's remnants inflicting severe damage to homes. Several areas in Illinois and Indiana, already flooded by the frontal boundary to the north, saw significant additional rainfall. Due to flooding in Chicago, a state of emergency was declared for Cook County due to flooding of the Des Plaines River. Hurricane-force wind gusts were reported to the east of the center across parts of Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania with significant wind damage including structural damage to buildings and trees.

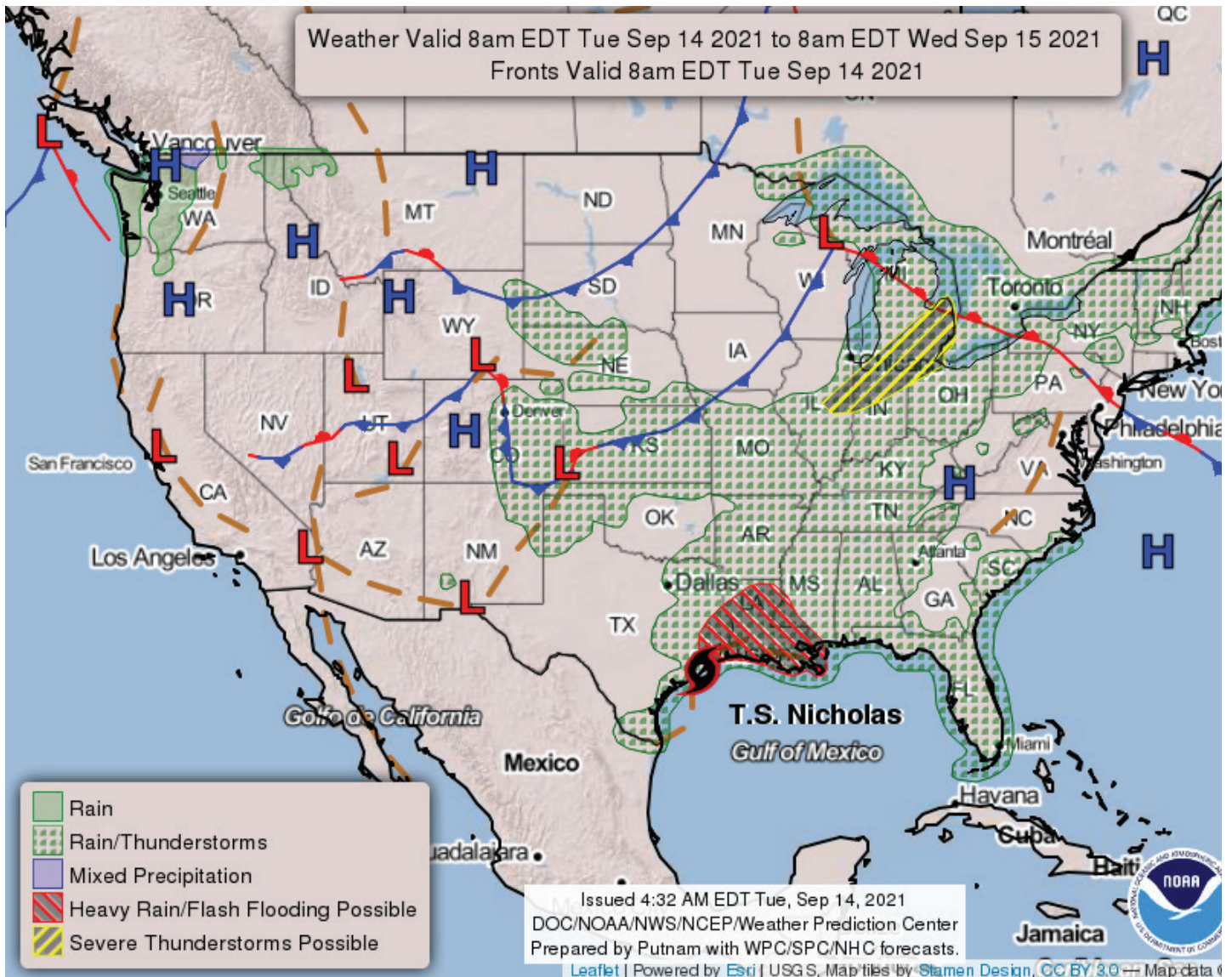
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 63.6 °F at 12:15 PM
Low Temp: 53.0 °F at 1:45 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 5:30 PM
Precip: 0.55

Record High: 102° in 1948
Record Low: 28° in 1949
Average High: 76°F
Average Low: 48°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.95
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.32
Average Precip to date: 17.29
Precip Year to Date: 15.16
Sunset Tonight: 7:46:42 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:10:04 AM



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WORTHY OF WORSHIP

Everyone seems to worship someone or something for one reason or another. Early in life we realize that we need help to survive and cannot make it on our own. Initially it is a parent or a parent-substitute that is there to help us. Then, as we get older and become more independent, we begin to realize that there are other sources to meet our needs. We begin to look to them for what they can do for us or perhaps give to us in exchange for our allegiance or respect. We think that they will bring or give us something we need. It's only natural. In return for a gift, we often worship or praise the giver.

The question is not whether we worship - but what or whom we worship. It can be fame or fortune, power or prestige, a person or a philosophy, someone or something that we believe is greater than ourselves and will bring us peace and happiness, joy and satisfaction. It is someone or something that we believe is superior to us, and we are willing to surrender and submit ourselves to it. But really, it only reveals our lostness and our need for Someone Who is above us, beyond us - yet cares for us.

The Psalmist invites us to, "Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." He wants us to recognize the superiority and sufficiency of God our Creator. Once we acknowledged God as our Creator, we immediately recognize Him as the source of all that we have or ever will have. Worship becomes God-centered and not man or thing centered. Worship results in submitting our lives to God and recognizing His grace and sovereignty as we bow before Him in awe, thanking Him for His gifts.

Prayer: Lord, we join the Psalmist in worship and praise and thank You for Your never-ending gifts. Open our eyes and hearts to see Your generosity. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. Psalm 95:6

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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

Push for Native American curriculum in schools makes gains

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

For years, many Native American tribes have felt their history has not been given its due by schools in Connecticut, a state that takes its name from an Algonquian word meaning "land on the long tidal river."

Soon, however, schools will be required to teach Native American studies, with an emphasis on local tribes, under a law passed this year at the urging of tribes including the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, best known today for its Foxwoods Resort Casino.

"When you're in Connecticut, to not learn about the Eastern woodland tribes, the tribes that Connecticut was founded on, (that) was the issue that we were pressing," said Rodney Butler, chairman of the Mashantucket Pequots.

It has been a long-running goal of many Native Americans to have more about their history and culture taught in grade schools. New requirements have been adopted in Connecticut, North Dakota and Oregon and advocates say their efforts have gained some momentum with the nation's reckoning over racial injustice since the killing of George Floyd.

The legislation affecting schools has advanced alongside new bans on Native American mascots for sports teams and states celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day in place of Christopher Columbus Day.

The push for curriculum requirements has not been without challenges, with some legislatures deeming new laws unnecessary because Native American history already is reflected in school curriculum. There also have been some steps in the opposite direction amid battles over how topics related to race and racism are taught in classrooms.

In South Dakota, a group of teachers and citizens charged with crafting new state social studies standards said last month that Gov. Kristi Noem's administration deleted from their draft recommendations many elements intended to bolster students' understanding of Native American history and culture. They said changes made to the draft gave it a political edge they had tried to avoid, aligning it instead with the Republican governor's rhetoric on what she calls patriotic education.

The Department of Education said in a statement that it relied heavily on the recommendations from the workgroup and made "certain adjustments before the release of the draft to provide greater clarity and focus for educators and the public."

Meanwhile, in Montana, tribes and the parents of 18 students filed a federal lawsuit in July, alleging state education leaders are violating a state constitutional requirement to teach all children about the unique culture and heritage of Native Americans.

A 2019 report from the National Congress of American Indians, which surveyed 35 states with federally recognized tribes, found nearly 90% of states said they had efforts underway to improve the quality and access to Native American curriculum. While a majority said it's included in their schools, less than half said it was required and specific to tribal nations in their state.

"We are seeing a focus on different races and issues," said Aaron Payment, first vice president of the National Congress of American Indians and chairperson of the 44,000-member Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians in Michigan.

Payment, who holds a doctorate in educational leadership, said Native American Studies should be incorporated across curriculum, and not taught "just at Thanksgiving, where it's a condensed sort of module." He doesn't support states mandating the curriculum per se but believes states should provide incentives and funding to develop curriculum, with input from tribes.

The Connecticut legislation makes it mandatory for schools to teach Native American studies starting with the 2023-2024 school year. It passed despite concerns raised by teachers unions and state Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona. Cardona, who is now the U.S. education secretary, had said it is important to teach about Native Americans but he was wary of unfunded mandates for school districts that are still

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working to implement other courses lawmakers and the governor have required them to teach.

In North Dakota, a bill became law this year that requires all elementary and secondary schools, public and private, to include Native American tribal history in their curriculum, with an emphasis on tribes within the state.

In Oregon, a similar law took effect in 2019 to provide "historically accurate, culturally embedded, place-based, contemporary, and developmentally appropriate" American Indian and Alaska Native curriculum in five subject areas.

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Sioux Falls Lutheran, 25-10, 25-18, 26-24

Marty Indian def. Colome, 25-14, 25-17, 25-23

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Redfield, 25-9, 25-22, 29-27

Platte-Geddes def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-12, 25-13, 25-12

Sioux Falls Washington def. Yankton, 25-23, 25-15, 25-15

Tea Area def. Parkston, 25-16, 25-20, 25-22

Waubay/Summit def. Tri-State, 23-25, 25-17, 25-17, 21-25, 15-12

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

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$383 million

Powerball

37-40-50-61-63, Powerball: 21, Power Play: 3

(thirty-seven, forty, fifty, sixty-one, sixty-three; Powerball: twenty-one; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$416 million

South Dakota lawmakers reject a handful of medical pot rules

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers on Monday rejected a handful of rules proposals governing medical marijuana from Gov. Kristi Noem's administration but approved the bulk of the program.

The Legislature's Rules Review Committee, which is responsible for approving administration rules, effectively told the Department of Health to try again on a number of controversial rule proposals. Most of the Department of Health's 124-page proposal got the sign-off from the Legislature, spelling out rules ranging from fees for cardholders to the heights of fences around cannabis growing facilities.

The rules they rejected included proposals that would have limited the amount of high-potency marijuana that patients could possess, required medical practitioners to write a recommendation for patients who wanted to grow more than three cannabis plants, and defined a list of conditions that would qualify for a medical marijuana recommendation.

The law allowing medical marijuana, passed by 70% of voters last year, has seen a halting acceptance from officials trying to balance a clear mandate from voters while placing restrictions on medical marijuana.

The rules set a \$75 application fee for medical marijuana cards and discount the fee to \$20 for low-income

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applicants. It also sets a state licensing fee of \$5,000 for any medical marijuana facility.

Noem celebrated the Legislature's approval of most of the rules, saying that it put her administration on track to implementing the medical cannabis program.

"I commend the Department of Health for its hard work to streamline the process," she said in a statement. "South Dakota will continue to implement the best, most patient-focused medical cannabis program in the country."

Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said she was "disappointed" the committee rejected the list of specific medical conditions, saying that it was based on public input.

A host of lobbyists, representing both medical groups and the cannabis industry, objected to some rules, though nearly all praised the Department of Health's rule-making process. For the most part, lobbyists from both the cannabis industry and medical groups convinced lawmakers to reject rules they raised issues with.

During a meeting that stretch over five hours, lawmakers questioned Malsam-Rysdon on the rule-making process. A rule proposal that would have limited the amount of high-potency marijuana that patients could possess drew considerable questioning.

"Concentrated cannabis in a smokeable form is shown to be more addictive," Malsam-Rysdon told lawmakers.

But they were not convinced by that argument and rejected the limitation on high-potency marijuana.

The Department of Health has held public town halls and meetings with industry groups throughout the summer. Malsam-Rysdon said her department had adjusted rules based on 42% of comments submitted by industry groups or individuals. She said the rest of the suggested changes were rejected either because they conflicted with existing state law, were deemed to have an impact on health and safety, or were found to be unnecessary.

"We expect to see changes as this process evolves," Malsam-Rysdon said, referring to the Legislature considering potential changes to the law next year.

The Department of Health will have just weeks if it decides to rework the rejected rules and resubmit them to the Legislature. The medical marijuana law requires the state government to enact the rules by Oct. 29 and be ready to issue ID cards by Nov. 18.

Badlands National Park to build new visitor center

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Badlands National Park in South Dakota will build a new visitor center in the southeast section of the park, the National Park Foundation said Monday.

The new visitor center will be located in the Cedar Pass section of the park, where wind and water have carved towering geological rock formations from the prairie. The center is planned to educate park visitors about the region's paleontological and geological resources, as well as the culture of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and Lakota People.

Nearly 917,000 people visited the park last year, according to the National Park Service.

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust donated \$3.3 million for the project. Badlands Natural History Association has also pledged \$1.8 million, and the Badlands National Park Conservancy has contributed \$100,000.

"Badlands National Park's layered rocks formations and stunning buttes offer visitors a breathtaking glimpse into a scenic landscape that began forming millions of years ago," Helmsley Charitable Trust Trustee Walter Panzire said in a statement. "We're excited to lead the funding effort to construct a new, modern visitor center to highlight the park's splendor and significance."

Endangered baby and sister missing from Pierre recovered

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Endangered Missing Advisory has canceled an alert Monday for two children from Pierre, allegedly taken by their father who authorities say was exhibiting signs of impairment.

Authorities said the children have been recovered, but they did not provide details.

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The alert issued earlier said the father took the 3-week-old girl and her 1-year-old sister from their caregiver's home in Pierre early Monday morning.

According to authorities, the children were believed to be endangered because the father appeared to be impaired and unable to care for them.

Biden makes push for California's Newsom as recall nears end

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

LONG BEACH, Calif. (AP) — California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom ended his campaign to retain his job in a recall election with a final push from President Joe Biden, who warned that the outcome of the contest could shape the country's direction on the pandemic, reproductive rights and the battle to slow climate change.

The Democrat who defeated Republican President Donald Trump less than a year ago said that the issues that defined the 2020 race had been resurrected in California, with potentially disastrous results if Newsom is removed in the election that ends Tuesday.

Speaking to hundreds of cheering supporters during a twilight rally in the coastal city of Long Beach, south of Los Angeles, Biden referred to the leading Republican candidate Larry Elder as "the clone of Donald Trump."

"Can you imagine him being governor of this state?" Biden asked, as the crowd responded with shouts of "No, no!"

"You can't let that happen. There is too much at stake," the Democratic president said.

"The eyes of the nation are on California," he warned. The recall vote is "going to reverberate around the nation and ... around the world."

The results of the race in which Newsom needs a majority vote to hold his job are likely to influence the 2022 midterms, when control of Congress again will be in play and the party that controls the White House historically loses seats. They could determine how prominently Democrats campaign on COVID-19 restrictions that many Republicans have decried as unnecessary and overly burdensome.

With much riding on the outcome, Biden was last among a prominent list of Democrats to make cameo appearances in the contest either in person or in ads, including Vice President Kamala Harris, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, former President Barack Obama and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

Newsom's ouster would be a stunning rebuke in heavily Democratic California, where the party controls every statewide office, dominates the Legislature and congressional delegation and holds a nearly 2-to-1 advantage in registered voters. Less than three years ago he was elected in a landslide.

Biden's visit in the waning hours of the race was intended as a final effort to motivate the state's more than 10 million Democratic voters. Newsom's advisers, meanwhile, expressed increasing confidence that the governor would survive the effort to drive him out of office more than a year before the end of his first term. The campaign had 25,000 volunteers on the streets over the weekend, and has sent 31 million text messages to voters.

Recent polling has shown Newsom holding an edge in his bid to save his job.

"There's no scenario where we lose tomorrow," Newsom strategist Sean Clegg said.

Elder staged his capstone rally in nearby Orange County, where he urged his supporters to reach out to friends and neighbors and urge them to vote. The GOP will need a heroic election day turnout to catch Democrats who have been turning in mail ballots in larger numbers. Nearly 8 million Californians already have cast mail-in ballots.

"Make sure you have your friends vote, vote, vote, and try and get 10 more friends to vote and hit every call, make every call, knock on every door, we're gonna win this thing if we turn out the vote," Elder said from a hotel ballroom in Costa Mesa.

California Republican Party Chairwoman Jessica Millan Patterson called it "baffling and insulting" that Biden engaged in a political event when some Californians remain stuck in Afghanistan.

"It's clear protecting those they were elected to serve comes second to politics," she said in a statement.

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While Newsom has sought to nationalize the race, Republicans have criticized him relentlessly for rising taxes, an unchecked homeless crisis, climbing crime rates and housing prices that are out of reach for many in the working class. The recall gained momentum largely out of frustration with Newsom's COVID-19 restrictions that shuttered schools and businesses and cost millions of jobs.

"There's no front that I can think of where this man has done a good job — not on schools, not on homelessness, not in the way he shut down this state," Elder said earlier Monday.

Voters are being asked two questions: Should Newsom be recalled, yes or no, and, if he is ousted, who should replace him? The results of the second question are irrelevant if a majority of voters support retaining Newsom.

In recent days, Elder suggested the results of the recall election could be skewed by unspecified "shenanigans," echoing Trump's baseless claims of voting fraud in his 2020 race with Biden.

There has been no confirmed evidence of widespread fraud. Elder's campaign website has linked to a "Stop CA Fraud" site where people could sign a petition demanding a special legislative session to investigate the "twisted results," well before any results were announced. It states that "instances of undocumented ballots have been discovered prior to the election date of September 14."

Asked to provide evidence of any suspicious voting activity, Elder campaign spokeswoman Ying Ma said that "we all want every proper vote to be counted" and "whatever shenanigans there are will not stand in the way of him becoming the next governor."

Before the rally, Biden toured wildfire damage in Northern California. He praised Newsom's leadership on responding to climate change, which is contributing to California's wildfires becoming bigger and more destructive. Elder and Republicans say Democratic leaders have failed to appropriately manage California's forests, leaving more fuel for fires to burn through.

Other prominent candidates in the race are Republicans Kevin Faulconer, Kevin Kiley, Caitlyn Jenner and John Cox, and Democrat Kevin Paffrath.

Newsom is the fourth governor in U.S. history and the second in California to face a recall. Californians removed Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in 2003 and replaced him with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Ronayne reported from Sacramento. Associated Press journalist Alexandra Jaffe contributed from Long Beach.

This story has been corrected; the "Stop CA Fraud" petition calls for a special legislative session, not a special election.

Catch up with AP's recall coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/california-recall>

Pope visit a sign of inclusion for Slovakia's excluded Roma

By NICOLE WINFIELD and KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

KOSICE, Slovakia (AP) — Pope Francis traveled to the far east of Slovakia on Tuesday to meet with the country's Roma in a gesture of inclusion for the most socially excluded minority group in Slovakia, who have long suffered discrimination, marginalization and poverty.

Francis' visit to the Lunik IX settlement in Kosice is one of the highlights of his four-day pilgrimage to Hungary and Slovakia. It's his first trip since undergoing intestinal surgery in July and marks the restart of his globetrotting papacy after a nearly two-year coronavirus hiatus.

Lunik IX is the biggest of about 600 shabby, segregated settlements where the poorest 20% of Slovakia's 400,000 Roma live. Most lack basics such as running water or sewage systems, gas or electricity.

The "pope of the peripheries" has long sought to meet with society's most marginal during his foreign trips, making sure to always include visits to slums, ghettos or prisons where he can offer words of encouragement, solidarity and welcome.

Francis started the day by celebrating a Byzantine rite Mass in Presov, near Kosice, in recognition of the

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country's Greek-Catholic believers. During the chant-filled, open-air Mass, Francis took a swipe at European politicians who often brandish crosses to emphasize their Christian credentials.

"Crucifixes are found all around us: on necks, in homes, in cars, in pockets," he said. "Let us not reduce the cross to an object of devotion, much less to a political symbol, to a sign of religious and social status."

Organizers said more than 30,000 people attended, and well before Francis' arrival they had filled the site as a choir sang hymns. They cheered and wildly waved the yellow and white flags of the Holy See as Francis looped through the crowd in his popemobile before the service.

"We came here at 3 a.m. to get the best spot," said Slavka Marcinakova, a local resident from Presov. "Pope coming to Slovakia — you have an opportunity like this only once in a lifetime, we are so happy for that."

Among those on hand for the Mass was Polish Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, the longtime aide to St. John Paul II, the Polish pope who made three visits to Slovakia during his quarter-century papacy.

The Rev. Michal Ospodar, a Greek-Catholic priest from Kosice, said Francis' visit would encourage the local faithful who were persecuted during the atheist communist rule.

"Our church suffered a lot in the past because we were loyal to the pope," he said. "Because of that we feel thankful that the pope came to our region and that we can meet him in person."

Francis, 84, has appeared in good form during his trip, clearly enjoying being back on the road again after the coronavirus, and then his intestinal surgery in July, kept him cooped up in the Vatican.

After the Mass and Roma encounter, Francis was meeting with Slovakia's young people. He returns to Rome on Wednesday after celebrating his main big Mass in Sastin near the capital, the site of an annual pilgrimage each Sept. 15 to venerate Slovakia's patron, Our Lady of Sorrows.

Karel Janicek reported from Prague, Czech Republic. Andrea Rosa and Luigi Navarra contributed to this report.

Nicholas, now tropical storm, dumps rain along Gulf Coast

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Tropical Storm Nicholas hit the Texas coast early Tuesday as a hurricane and dumped more than a foot (30.5 centimeters) of rain along the the same area swamped by Hurricane Harvey in 2017, drenching storm-battered Louisiana and bringing the potential for life-threatening flash floods across the Deep South.

Nicholas made landfall on the eastern part of the Matagorda Peninsula and was soon downgraded to a tropical storm. It was about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south-southwest of Houston, Texas, with maximum winds of 70 mph (110 kph) as of 4 a.m. CDT Tuesday, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami. Nicholas was the 14th named storm of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season.

The storm was moving north-northeast at 9 mph (15 kph) and the center of Nicholas was expected to move slowly over southeastern Texas on Tuesday and over southwestern Louisiana on Wednesday.

Galveston has received nearly 14 inches (35 centimeters) of rain with the storm while the flood-prone Houston area saw more than 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain, according to preliminary reports from the National Weather Service. Nicholas could dump up to 20 inches (51 centimeters) of rain in parts of central and southern Louisiana.

Nearly all of the coastline in Texas was under a tropical storm warning that included potential flash floods and urban flooding. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said authorities placed rescue teams and resources in the Houston area and along the coast.

In Houston, officials worried that heavy rain could inundate streets and flood homes. Authorities deployed high-water rescue vehicles throughout the city and erected barricades at more than 40 locations that tend to flood, Mayor Sylvester Turner said Monday.

"This city is very resilient. We know what we need to do. We know about preparing," said Turner, referencing four major flood events that have hit the Houston area in recent years, including devastating

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damage from Harvey.

Meteorologist Kent Prochazka of the National Weather Service told The Associated Press early Tuesday that Nicholas' winds downed trees in coastal counties and caused some gas stations to lose awnings.

"Right before it made landfall, it abruptly intensified into a hurricane and as it moved inland, the pressures began to rise with it. The winds have relaxed slightly and now we're getting down into tropical storm force (winds)," he said.

CenterPoint Energy reported that over 300,000 customers lost power as the storm rolled through Houston and that it expected those numbers to rise.

Numerous school districts along the Texas Gulf Coast canceled classes Monday because of the incoming storm. The Houston school district, the state's largest, as well as others, announced that classes would be canceled on Tuesday. The weather threat also closed multiple COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites in the Houston and Corpus Christi areas and forced the cancellation of a Harry Styles concert scheduled for Monday evening in Houston.

Six to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of rain were expected along the middle and upper Texas coast, with isolated maximum amounts of 18 inches (46 centimeters) possible. Other parts of southeast Texas and south-central Louisiana and southern Mississippi could see 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) over the coming days.

A tornado or two may be possible Tuesday along the upper Texas and southwest Louisiana coast, according to the weather service.

"Listen to local weather alerts and heed local advisories about the right and safe thing to do, and you'll make it through this storm just like you've had many other storms," Abbott said during a news conference in Houston.

Nicholas brought rain to the same area of Texas that was hit hard by Harvey. 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, including 36 in the Houston area.

After Harvey, voters approved the issuance of \$2.5 billion in bonds to fund flood-control projects, including the widening of bayous. The 181 projects designed to mitigate damage from future storms are at different stages of completion.

But University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy said he expects that Nicholas "will be magnitudes less than Harvey in every regard."

The worry with Nicholas will be how slowly it moves. Storms are moving slower in recent decades, and Nicholas could get stuck between two other weather systems, said hurricane researcher Jim Kossin of The Climate Service.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency Sunday night, 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," Edwards said.

The storm was expected to bring the heaviest rainfall west of where Ida slammed into Louisiana two weeks ago. Ida has been blamed for 86 deaths throughout the United States. Across Louisiana, about 95,000 customers remained without power Tuesday morning, according to the utility tracking site poweroutage.us.

Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said via Twitter that only four other years since 1966 have had 14 or more named storms by Sept. 12: 2005, 2011, 2012 and 2020.

Associated Press writers Jill Bleed in Little Rock, Arkansas, Julie Walker in New York, and AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein in Washington contributed to this report.

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

Russia's Putin slams presence of foreign troops in Syria

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By ALBERT AJI and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin criticized the presence of foreign troops in Syria, saying they are there against the will of the Syrian government and are blocking the consolidation of the war-torn country, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Putin was referring to hundreds of U.S. troops stationed in eastern Syria and working with Kurdish-led fighters in battling the militant Islamic State group, as well as Turkish forces in northern Syria. Speaking during a rare meeting in Moscow on Monday night with his Syrian counterpart Bashar Assad, he said the presence of the foreigners is illegal because they don't have permission to be there from the United Nations or Syria's government.

Russia joined Syria's 10-year conflict in September 2015, when the Syrian military appeared close to collapse, and has since helped in tipping the balance of power in favor of Assad, whose forces now control much of the country. Hundreds of Russian troops are deployed across Syria and they also have a military air base along Syria's Mediterranean coast.

Assad has rarely made trips abroad in the past decade since Syria's conflict began, except to visit key allies Russia and Iran. Assad and Putin discussed cooperation between their armies and ways to continue operations to gain control of the last rebel-held areas in Syria, state media in Damascus reported.

Putin later announced he was going into self-isolation because of coronavirus cases in his inner circle. Assad and his wife tested positive to coronavirus in March, and recovered three weeks later.

It was the first meeting between the two allies since they held a summit in the Syrian capital in January last year. The two also met in the Black Sea resort of Sochi in 2017 and in Moscow in 2015. Syrian state TV described Monday's meeting as "long" and said the two were later joined by Syria's foreign minister and Russia's defense minister to discuss mutual relations and fighting terrorism.

"This clearly violates international law and doesn't allow you to make maximum efforts to consolidate the country," Putin was quoted as telling Assad about the foreign forces, according to a statement released by the Kremlin.

"Only a consolidation of all forces in Syria will allow the country to get on its feet and start steady development, moving forward," Putin said.

Putin and Assad also discussed the political process in the war-torn country, the TV said.

"I am happy to meet you in Moscow, six years after our joint operations to fight terrorism," the Syrian TV quoted Assad as saying.

In recent weeks, Syrian opposition activists said that Russian warplanes have been carrying out strikes on the northwestern province of Idlib, the last major rebel stronghold in the country. The region is home to some 4 million people, many of them internally displaced by the conflict.

Last week, a Russian-negotiated cease-fire deal went into effect to end a government siege and intense fighting in the southern city of Daraa. The deal brought areas held by the rebels in the city under government control for the first time since 2013.

"We have the intention in Syria as a government and institutions to move in parallel between the liberation of land and the political process," the TV also quoted Assad as saying.

The TV said the during the meeting, the two leaders discussed cooperation between their armies "in fighting terrorism and the continuation of liberating lands held by terrorists." Assad's government refers to all armed opposition groups as terrorists.

The Russian president noted that "our joint efforts have liberated the main, overwhelming territory of the Syrian Republic." Speaking to Assad, Putin added that "the terrorists have suffered very serious, significant damage, and the Syrian government, headed by you, controls 90% of the territory."

Syria's conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests and later turned into a civil war that has killed half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million, including 5 million who are refugees outside the country.

Litvinova reported from Moscow.

Putin to self-isolate due to COVID cases among inner circle

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin is going into self-isolation because of coronavirus cases in his inner circle, the Kremlin said Tuesday, adding that he tested negative for COVID-19.

The announcement came in the Kremlin's readout of Putin's phone call with Tajikistan's president. Putin has been fully vaccinated with the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V, receiving his second shot in April.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Putin is "absolutely healthy," but will self-isolate after coming in contact with someone who contracted the virus. He didn't clarify for how long Putin would remain in self-isolation, but assured that the president will continue working as usual.

Asked if Putin tested negative for the virus, Peskov said "definitely, yes."

Peskov didn't say who among Putin's contacts were infected, saying only that there were several cases.

On Monday, the Russian president attended several public events. He greeted Russian Paralympians, attended military exercises conducted in coordination with Belarus, and met with Syrian President Bashar Assad.

During the meeting with the Paralympians, Putin mentioned that he "may have to quarantine soon."

"Even in my circle problems occur with this COVID," the Russian leader was quoted by the state RIA Novosti news agency as saying. "We need to look into what's really happening there. I think I may have to quarantine soon myself. A lot of people around (me) are sick."

Asked why Putin proceeded with public events on Monday, even though he already knew that there were coronavirus cases around him, Peskov said that the decision to self-isolate was made after "doctors completed their testing, their procedures." Peskov assured that "no one's health was endangered" at Monday's events.

Russia's daily new coronavirus infections in recent weeks have plateaued around 17,000-18,000, with the daily death toll remaining just under 800, the highest level in the pandemic. Nevertheless, hardly any virus restrictions are currently in place in Russia.

Russia's state coronavirus task force has reported a total of 7.1 million confirmed coronavirus cases and 194,249 deaths. However, reports by the government's statistical service Rosstat that tally coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively reveal much higher numbers.

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Biden turns to Colorado to pitch investments in clean energy

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

LONG BEACH, Calif. (AP) — While legislators craft the details back in Washington, President Joe Biden is pitching his massive domestic spending package with a visit to a renewable energy lab in Colorado to highlight how the investments in clean energy in his plan would help combat climate change.

The trip to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Denver will cap off the president's two-day swing to the West, and offer Biden the chance to continue linking the need to pass the spending package to the urgent threat posed by climate change. Biden spent Monday in Boise, Idaho, and Sacramento, California, receiving briefings on the devastating wildfire season and viewing the damage by the Caldor Fire to communities around Lake Tahoe.

"We can't ignore the reality that these wildfires are being supercharged by climate change," Biden said, noting that catastrophic weather doesn't strike based on partisan ideology. "It isn't about red or blue states. It's about fires. Just fires."

During both of his Monday stops, Biden held out the wildfires across the region as an argument for his

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\$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill and additional \$3.5 trillion package of spending. The president said that every dollar spent on "resilience" would save \$6 in future costs. And he made the case that the rebuilding must go beyond simply restoring damaged systems and instead ensure communities can withstand such crises.

"These fires are blinking 'code red' for our nation. They're gaining frequency and ferocity," Biden said after concluding his tour of the Caldor Fire damage. "We know what we have to do."

The climate provisions in Biden's plans 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.

Biden has set a goal of eliminating pollution from fossil fuel in the power sector by 2035 and from the U.S. economy overall by 2050.

While in California, Biden also campaigned for Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is facing a recall election Tuesday. Speaking at a rally in Long Beach, Biden framed the recall as a battle against "Trump Republicans trying to block us from beating this pandemic" and characterized Newsom's leading Republican opponent as "another Trump climate denier."

The president's two-day Western swing comes at a critical juncture for a central plank of his legislative agenda. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill are working to assemble details of the infrastructure-plus plan — and how to pay for it, a concern not just for Republicans.

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

Manchin said Sunday, "I cannot support \$3.5 trillion," citing his opposition to a proposed increase in the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% and vast new social spending envisioned by the president. Manchin also complained about a process he said feels rushed.

In California, Biden appeared to respond to those concerned about the plan's size, saying the cost "may be" as much as \$3.5 trillion and would be spread out over 10 years, a period during which the economy is expected to grow. He also insisted that, when it comes to addressing climate change, "we have to think big."

"Thinking small is a prescription for disaster," he said.

The 100-member Senate is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. Given solid GOP opposition, Biden's plan cannot pass the Senate without Manchin's or Sinema's support.

The White House is trying to turn the corner after a difficult month dominated by a chaotic and violent U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the surging delta COVID-19 variant that have upended what the president had hoped would mark a summer in which the nation was finally freed from the coronavirus.

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

Superville reported from Washington.

Chinese students hit by US visa rejections amid tension

By FU TING Associated Press

After a semester online, Wang Ziwei looked forward to meeting classmates who are returning to campus at Washington University in St. Louis. But the 23-year-old finance student said the U.S. revoked his student visa on security grounds.

Wang is among at least 500 students the Chinese government says have been rejected under a policy issued by then-President Donald Trump to block Beijing from obtaining U.S. technology with possible military uses. Students argue it is applied too broadly and fume at what they say is an accusation they are spies.

"The whole thing is nonsense," Wang said. "What do we finance students have to do with the military?"

The students join companies and individuals whose plans have been disrupted by U.S.-Chinese tension

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over technology and security, Beijing's military buildup, the origins of the coronavirus, human rights and conflicting claims to the South China Sea and other territory.

The policy blocks visas for people who are affiliated with the ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army, or universities deemed by Washington to be part of military modernization efforts.

U.S. officials say they believe thousands of Chinese students and researchers participate in programs that encourage them to transfer medical, computer and other sensitive information to China.

Washington cites Beijing's strategy of "civil-military fusion," which it says treats private companies and universities as assets to develop Chinese military technology.

"Joint research institutions, academia and private firms are all being exploited to build the PLA's future military systems — often without their knowledge or consent," the State Department said in a 2020 report.

Trump's successor, Joe Biden, has given no indication of what he might do.

Chinese officials appealed to U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman to drop the visa restrictions when she visited in July, according to The Paper, a Shanghai online news outlet.

The policy is necessary to "protect U.S. national security interests," the U.S. Embassy in Beijing said in a statement. It said the policy is a response to "some abuses of the visa process" and is "narrowly targeted."

More than 85,000 visas for Chinese students have been approved over the past four months, according to the embassy.

"The numbers show clearly that the United States stands ready to issue visas to all those who are qualified — including Chinese students and scholars," it said.

Separately, a group of 177 Stanford University professors sent an open letter this month asking the U.S. Justice Department to end the China Initiative, another Trump-era program that investigates researchers in the United States. The letter signers say it has raised concerns about racial profiling and discouraged scholars from staying in or coming to the country.

China is the biggest source of foreign students in the United States, according to U.S. government data. The number fell 20% in 2020 from the previous year but at 380,000 was nearly double that of second-ranked India.

An engineer at a state-owned aircraft manufacturer said he was turned down for a visa to accompany his wife, a visiting scholar in California studying pediatric cancer.

The engineer, who would give only his surname, Huang, has undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Harbin Institute of Technology in China's northeast. It is one of seven schools Chinese news reports say are associated with visa rejections because they are affiliated with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

"I was insulted," Huang said. "That I graduated from this school means I am a spy? What's the difference between this and racism?"

Huang said his wife's fellowship was two to three years, but she will cut that to one, "sacrificing her career" to avoid being away from their two children for too long.

"It's a pretty big impact on individuals when one country fights with another," Huang said.

Rejection letters received by several students cited Trump's order but gave no details of the decision. However, some students said they received rejections immediately after being asked which university they attended.

Wang, the finance student, said he obtained a visa, but the U.S. Embassy called later and said it was revoked.

Wang graduated from the Beijing Institute of Technology, another university associated with visa rejections due to its connection with the industry ministry. Others include Beijing Aerospace University, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Harbin Engineering University and Northwestern Polytechnical University.

Graduates of the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications also say they have been rejected.

Five Chinese scientists at universities in California and Indiana were charged last year with lying about possible military connections on visa applications. Those charges were dropped in July after the Justice

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Department said an FBI report indicated such offenses often had no connection to technology theft.

The Chinese government complained in August that three students who had visas were refused entry into the United States at the Houston airport after military training photos were found in their phones.

Beijing "strongly deplores and rejects" the policy and appealed to the U.S. government to make changes, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said.

A group that says it represents more than 2,000 students and scholars has announced plans for a lawsuit asking a court to throw out or narrow the restrictions.

At Washington University in St. Louis, a "handful of student visas" were affected, according to Kurt Dirks, vice chancellor for international affairs.

Students can start the semester online or wait until next year, Dirks said in an email.

"Should they continue to face challenges, the university will work with them so they can complete their program online," Dirks said.

Monica Ma, 23, said she was turned down for a U.S. visa to complete a master's degree in information management at Carnegie Mellon University.

The graduate of the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications said after spending a year in Australia working on her degree, she needs to attend classes in person at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh because they no longer are taught online.

Ma said she has a job offer from an internet company that requires her to complete her degree. She has postponed her attendance for classes until next year in hopes she can obtain a visa by then.

"I cannot change it through my efforts. That's the saddest part," Ma said.

Li Quanyi, an electrical engineering student from the southern city of Guiyang, said he was accepted by Columbia University but failed to obtain a visa. Li graduated from the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications.

Carnegie Mellon and Columbia didn't respond to questions sent by email.

Li has moved to Hong Kong and said he is happy there.

"I am not going, even if the rule changes," Li said. "The United States rejected me, and I am not going."

With Taliban's rise, India sees renewed threat in Kashmir

By AIJAZ HUSSAIN Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — India's leaders are anxiously watching the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, fearing that it will benefit their bitter rival Pakistan and feed a long-simmering insurgency in the disputed region of Kashmir, where militants already have a foothold.

Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda, former military commander for northern India between 2014-2016, said militant groups based across the border in Pakistan would "certainly try and push men" into Kashmir, following the Taliban victory in Afghanistan.

Hooda added it was too early to predict if any influx of fighters into Kashmir would be "in numbers that destabilize the security situation" and push the region into a military confrontation.

Neighbors India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir and both countries rule parts of the Himalayan region, but claim it in full.

Indian officials worry that Afghanistan under the Taliban could be a base for organizing Islamist militants in Kashmir, many of whom are allied with Pakistan in their struggle against New Delhi.

New Delhi has called the Taliban Pakistan's "proxy terrorist" group and supported Afghanistan's U.S.-backed government before it was overthrown in August.

Syed Salahuddin, the leader of an alliance of Kashmiri rebel groups, called the Taliban's victory "extraordinary and historical" in a voice message shared across social media days after the fall of Kabul. Salahuddin, who is based in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, said he expected the Afghan group to aid Kashmir's rebels.

"Same way, in the near future, India too will be defeated by Kashmir's holy warriors," he added.

In the last few years, anger in Kashmir has deepened after the Indian government — led by a right-wing Hindu nationalist party — stripped the Muslim-majority region of its semiautonomous status.

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Indian officials with direct knowledge of strategic planning for the region say that the Taliban's rise could draw more recruits and weapons for Kashmiri fighters coming from the Pakistani side. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity keeping with government regulations.

"Pakistan's geopolitical stature has risen with the coming of Taliban and this will result in hardening of its position on Kashmir," explained Pravin Sawhney, a military expert and editor of FORCE, a monthly magazine focused on India's national security.

Pakistan's powerful spy chief Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed traveled in early September to Kabul amid speculation that he was there to help in the formation of the new Taliban government.

Around the same time, India's foreign secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, dashed to Washington where he said the United States and his country were "closely watching Pakistan's actions in Afghanistan."

Ahead of the final U.S. withdrawal, India was one of the first countries to evacuate its diplomats after Taliban fighters entered Kabul on Aug. 15, fearing for the safety for its staff.

Indian officials maintain that Pakistan-based militant groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba, both believed to have helped the Taliban campaign against the U.S., could use Afghanistan as an operating base and training ground.

In 2019, Jaish-e-Mohammad took credit for the deadliest bombing in Kashmir's insurgency — a blast that killed 40 Indian soldiers and brought the two nuclear-armed neighbors to the brink of war.

"We do have concerns about the free ingress that these two terrorist groups have had in Afghanistan," India's top diplomat Shringla said when in Washington.

"The role of Pakistan has to be seen in that context," he added.

Pakistan also accuses India of fomenting violence within its own borders. Islamabad has said Indian intelligence agents were operating out of Afghanistan and using anti-Pakistan groups like the Baluchistan Liberation Army to carry out attacks.

India was the region's largest provider of development aid to Afghanistan's U.S.-backed government, investing around \$3 billion. Even though it had no military boots on the ground, India trained Afghan army and police and supplied military equipment — while Pakistan maintained links with the Taliban.

With no diplomatic presence left in Kabul, India held its first official meeting with a Taliban representative in Qatar on Aug. 31.

New Delhi said it raised its "concern that Afghanistan's soil should not be used for anti-Indian activities and terrorism in any manner."

Indian policymakers and experts say they see no guarantees that Afghanistan won't become a haven for militants.

"Afghanistan may be poised to become a bottomless hole for all shades of radical, extremist and jihadi outfits somewhat similar to Iraq and Syria, only closer to India," said Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, who was India's ambassador in Kabul between 2010 to 2013.

He added that the Taliban victory could have an "inspirational effect" not only for Kashmir's rebels but wherever religiously-driven groups operate in the broader region.

In 1989, partly inspired by the defeat of Soviet troops at the hands of Afghan guerrillas, Kashmir erupted into a full-blown armed rebellion against Indian control. Many Kashmiri rebels were trained in Afghanistan in the years before.

Most Muslim Kashmiris continue to support rebel goals for a united Kashmir that would either be independent or ruled by Pakistan. In recent years, tens of thousands of Kashmiris have defied police restrictions and participated in street protests, as well as the funerals of rebel leaders, including Pakistan-based militants.

After Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed Kashmir's special status in 2019, the crackdown on dissent and civil liberties in the territory intensified. Hundreds of resistance activists remain in Indian jails.

Experts say such a stifling environment partly feeds insurgency, opening up the space for foreign militant groups.

The Taliban has indicated it wants India to continue with its developmental projects in Afghanistan, but the group has also made statements challenging New Delhi.

Suhail Shaheen, a Taliban spokesman recently told the BBC that the group had a right to “raise our voice for Muslims in Kashmir, India or any other country.”

Those who have fought against India in Kashmir see renewed hope.

Ahmed, a former Kashmiri rebel who guided a few Afghan militants across the mountains into Kashmir in the 1990s, recalled them as “good fighters” who “motivated and trained” young men to join the armed struggle.

Two decades on, Ahmed, who gave only his middle name for fear of retribution from Indian authorities, said he anticipated local militants, facing a shortage of weapons, would receive the “latest arms” from Afghanistan.

“Their victory has instilled a tremendous hope. It’s a shot in the arm, at a time when we are not even allowed to speak openly,” he said.

Associated Press writer Kathy Ganon in Kabul, Afghanistan, contributed to this story.

Follow Aijaz Hussain on Twitter at twitter.com/hussain_aijaz

Lebanese cancer patients face frantic search for medication

By BASSEM MROUE and FAY ABUELGASIM Associated Press

QLEIAT, Lebanon (AP) — Saydi Mubarak and her mother share a bond that goes beyond a close mother-daughter relationship: They were both diagnosed with breast cancer a year ago and underwent months of chemotherapy at a Beirut hospital, together facing the anxiety, the hair loss and the uncertainty for the future.

Now they share the fear of not being able to get the medication they need to complete their treatment because in Lebanon, where a devastating economic crisis has upended daily life, there are almost no drugs to be found.

The small Mediterranean country — once a medical hub in the Middle East — is grappling with severe shortages in medical supplies, fuel and other necessities. The economic crisis, described as one of the world’s worst of the past 150 years, is rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement by a political class that has accumulated debt and done little to encourage local industries, forcing the country to rely on imports for almost everything.

But those imports are hard to come by since the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its value since 2019, and the Central Bank’s foreign reserves are drying up. The crisis was worsened by a massive explosion that destroyed the country’s main port last year.

For months, pharmacy shelves have been bare, exacerbated by panic buying and suppliers holding back drugs, hoping to sell them later for higher prices amid the uncertainty. Hospitals are at a breaking point, barely able to secure diesel to keep generators and life-saving machines operating day to day.

The drug shortages threaten tens of thousands of people, including cancer patients. In desperation, many have taken to social media or turned to travelers coming from abroad. Visitors and Lebanese expats these days often arrive with suitcases full of pills, vials and other medical supplies for relatives and friends.

Mubarak, a 36-year-old high-school teacher and mother of two boys, says the feeling of not being safe never leaves her. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in July last year, a few weeks before her mother, Helen Akiki, discovered a lump in her breast.

After months of chemo, Mubarak had a mastectomy in December. She is now undergoing a therapy that’s supposed to take 10 years, consisting of a daily pill and a monthly hormone injection to make sure the cancer doesn’t return.

As the shortages grew more dire and Mubarak was unable to find the hormone, the family posted her story on Instagram along with Mubarak’s cell phone number.

For the next day and a half, the phone didn’t stop ringing — Lebanese from all over the world offered to send her the medication. Six days after she was due for an injection, a traveler from neighboring Jordan

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hand-delivered her the drug.

"It was very emotional," Mubarak recounted, sitting in the garden of her single-story house in Qleiat, a mountain town north of Beirut, as her sons ran about, feeding chicken and rabbits. She said the traveler refused to accept payment.

Getting the medicine is not the last hurdle for Mubarak and her mother. Because of Lebanon's fuel crisis, they worry about whether they will find enough gasoline each time they need to drive into Beirut for treatment. On a recent day, Akiki was told that the hospital couldn't find the medicine used in the serum for her therapy. They replaced it with an injection she said was more painful.

Akiki says the two have found strength in facing the battle together, though she struggles with feelings of guilt that she became ill herself when her daughter needed her most.

"This is not the time for me to be sick," Akiki said. "I tell myself what is important is her. A mother stops thinking of herself in this moment."

Issam Shehadeh, head of the cancer department at Beirut's Rafik Hariri University Hospital, said the situation has deteriorated significantly in the past three months. The Health Ministry's stockpiles of critical medicine are now empty, and many hospitals are unable to secure supplies from importers who are holding back.

"We reached a point when we told the patients that 'we have run out of ways to treat you,'" said Shehadeh. Doctors are often left with no recourse but to advise patients to try to get the medicine from abroad, a difficult task for anyone but especially the poor, whose ranks are swelling in the economic crisis. More than half of Lebanon's 6 million people now live in poverty.

One of Shehadeh's patients, Wahiba Doughan, who has lung cancer, reached out to relatives in France who sent enough medicine for two sessions of chemotherapy. The relatives refused to be reimbursed, but Doughan worries about having to pay for future medicine: A government-subsidized dose for one session in Lebanon costs \$40 — a 10th of the price in France.

"I live in anxiety," said Doughan, a 60-year-old civil servant. "I found the dose now but maybe later I will not."

In late August, dozens of cancer patients gathered outside the main U.N. offices in Beirut demanding international help. "We refuse to have a life countdown," read one banner. Another one said: "Our government is killing us."

Najat Rochdi, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon, broke into tears as she listened to the patients speak about their situation. She said her office is in contact with potential donors, including the World Bank, to find solutions.

A new government has promised to get control of the economic meltdown.

But with the Lebanese state absent, calls on social media have mobilized the country's large diaspora, as in Mubarak's case.

Mubarak says she doesn't know how to compensate those who sent her a three-month supply of medication.

"I mention them in my prayers every day," said Mubarak, a devout Christian. "God willing, people will continue to help each other."

Inside Met Gala, where there's always someone more famous

U.S. women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe had just gotten her beverage at the bar at the edge of the room. She looked back at the throbbing crowd of celebrities packed into the center of the airy Petrie Court, where the Met Gala was holding its cocktail reception.

Even for a world-renowned athlete, one's first Met Gala can be a little intimidating -- whoever you are, it seems, there's always someone more famous (unless you're Rihanna, maybe.) Rapinoe looked for a bit, and suddenly said "Another athlete! I'm going over." She headed off in the direction of NBA star Russell Westbrook.

Rapinoe, who looked smashing in her bright red silk Sergio Hudson pantsuit with a royal blue blouse

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emblazoned with white stars -- she nailed Monday evening's sartorial theme, American independence -- had just been noting the preponderance of big athletes at this particular gala. "We've infiltrated," she said with a grin.

Indeed, in the room and nearby were a tournament's worth of tennis stars — Serena Williams, recent U.S. Open finalist Leylah Fernandez, gala host Naomi Osaka, Maria Sharapova, Venus Williams, Sloane Stephens, and U.S. Open champ Emma Raducanu, resplendent in Chanel. Westbrook wasn't the only NBA luminary -- there was Steph Curry and his wife, Ayesha. Gymnasts were in the house, too: Simone Biles made a memorable entrance in an 88-pound embroidered gown with a huge train carried up the museum steps by six men. And gymnast Nia Dennis did an actual gymnastic routine on the steps, to the Brooklyn Marching Band.

But then, the museum was filled with screen and TV stars, too, and musicians, and luminaries of business and politics. In fact, an evening that had been casually billed as a "mini" gala — with the full-size gala to return in May — hardly felt "mini" at all, with 400 guests instead of the usual 550 or so. The cocktail reception seemed as packed as always, the mingling just as energetic.

Also as energetic: the attention from the crowds outside, who packed themselves behind barricades across Fifth Avenue and a block away on Madison, too, several rows deep as arrivals began. At one point, fans had also swarmed outside the Petrie Court's full-length windows, hoping for a glimpse of the stars, and forcing museum staff to quickly move screens in front of the windows to block their view.

Still, there were some reminders that this was no ordinary gala. The most obvious were masks, though few wore them during cocktails. Guests were also required not only to provide proof of vaccination, but also to take a rapid PCR test, administered by the museum either the day before or the day of the gala.

And many guests spoke of the greater importance of the occasion this time, as not merely fashion's biggest party, which it is, but as a crucial shot in the arm for New York City, and a step toward a normal, vigorous life. Prominent New York chef and restaurateur Marcus Samuelsson had chosen a group of 10 chefs to provide a plant-based menu — a first for the gala — and spoke passionately of the need to bring back the restaurant industry, the fashion industry, Broadway theater and much more.

"This evening says to the rest of the world that we are back," Samuelsson said.

The 10 chefs that contributed to the dinner were also at the gala. "Chefs don't usually come to this," said Nasim Alikhani, owner of a Persian restaurant, Sofreh, in Brooklyn. "We are in the kitchen." To mark the special occasion, she wore a dress with a silk panel at the back with a satellite map of her home country, Iran.

Fernandez, the Canadian teenager who made a fairytale run to the finals of the U.S. Open just as she turned 19, also felt the evening was an important sign of the city bouncing back. It was Fernandez who had moved an entire arena, and countless fans at home, when she paid eloquent tribute to the city on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, in her runner-up speech.

It was after the final, Fernandez said at the cocktail reception, that her parents told her she'd been invited to the Met Gala. The invitation had come earlier in the week, but they hadn't wanted to distract her.

"When they told me, I just had this huge smile on my face and I was so excited," said Fernandez, who was wearing an elegant black-and-white Carolina Herrera cocktail dress. "I started laughing." She again praised the city's spirit. "Whenever I come here I feel electric, with this sense of energy," she said.

Talk about spirit: Sitting on a bench in the reception was New York congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney, taking a break after killing it on the red carpet (actually, beige) with her head-to-toe outfit calling for certification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The 75-year-old congresswoman said the gala was a sign "to New York, and the rest of the country, of the vibrancy of the fashion industry."

Not to be outdone by fellow congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who wore a white gown with the message "Tax the Rich" on the back, Maloney wore a full-length number in suffragette colors, with sashes reading "Equal rights for women."

She also carried a tambourine that read "ERA YES." It would have made a great purse, if it were closed,

and Maloney said she was going to try to transform it into one.

"I'm into fashion with a purpose," she said.

Russia opposition stifled but unbowed as Duma election nears

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — In the months before Sunday's parliamentary election in Russia, authorities unleashed an unprecedented crackdown on the opposition, making sure that the best-known and loudest Kremlin critics didn't run.

Some were barred from seeking public office under new, repressive laws. Some were forced to leave the country after threats of prosecution. Some were jailed.

Pressure also mounted on independent media and human rights activists: A dozen news outlets and rights groups were given crippling labels of "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" or accused of ties with them.

The embattled opposition groups admit the Kremlin has left them few options or resources ahead of the Sept. 19 election that is widely seen as a key to President Vladimir Putin's effort to cement his hold on power. But they still hope to erode the dominance of the ruling United Russia party in the State Duma, or parliament.

"We still want to take a lot of seats away from the United Russia so that a lot of candidates not approved (by the authorities) become State Duma deputies and members of regional legislatures," Leonid Volkov, top ally of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny, told The Associated Press.

The election is crucial because the Kremlin wants complete control over the next parliament, opposition politicians and political analysts say. The Duma chosen this year will still be in place in 2024, when Putin's current term expires and he must decide on running for re-election or choosing some other strategy to stay in power.

"Putin loves to maintain uncertainty and make decisions at the last minute," says political analyst Abbas Gallyamov, a former Kremlin speechwriter.

"No one will know until the last minute what he will do in 2024," Gallyamov said. "Will he run himself once again or put forward a successor? ... Will it be another constitutional reform, or will a new cabinet need to be approved, or election laws need to be changed? ... All roads must be open to Putin, he must feel that his options are not limited by anything. For that, the parliament must be absolutely obedient."

It's equally important to eliminate any risk of lawmakers supporting possible protests in 2024, Gallyamov said, because a directly elected institution opposing the Kremlin alongside demonstrators could take the conflict to another level.

It won't be easy, however, to preserve United Russia's dominance in parliament, where it holds 334 of 450 seats.

A poll by the independent Levada Center showed only 27% of Russians are prepared to vote for the party. Thus, steamrolling the opposition and using administrative leverage is the only way, Gallyamov said.

Navalny, Putin's biggest critic who dented United Russia's dominance in regional legislatures in recent years, is serving a 2½-year prison sentence for violating parole for a conviction he says was politically motivated. That followed his return to Russia from Germany, where he was treated for a poisoning by a nerve agent that he blamed on the Kremlin, which denies it.

Navalny's top allies were slapped with criminal charges, and his Foundation for Fighting Corruption and a network of regional offices have been outlawed as extremist organizations.

That has exposed hundreds of people associated with the groups to prosecution. The parliament also quickly rubber-stamped a law barring those with ties to extremist organizations from seeking office.

As a result, no one from Navalny's team is running, and many have left the country. About 50 websites run by Navalny and his associates have been blocked, and dozens of regional offices are closed. Several other opposition activists were not allowed to run because they supported Navalny.

Another prominent Kremlin critic, former lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov, was briefly arrested in June along

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with his aunt on fraud charges. Gudkov said he had planned to run in a Moscow district against a less-popular United Russia candidate, but authorities pushed him out of the race.

"They took my aunt, found some alleged 6-year-old debt she owed for a rented basement, added me to the case, arrested the two of us for two days, and made it clear that if I don't drop out of the election and don't leave the country, they will imprison me and my aunt," Gudkov told the AP. He then left the country.

Authorities also jailed Andrei Pivovarov of the Open Russia opposition group financed by Russian tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a Putin critic who moved to London after spending 10 years in prison on charges widely seen as political revenge.

Pivovarov, who had planned run for the Duma, was removed from a Warsaw-bound plane just before takeoff from St. Petersburg and taken to the southern city of Krasnodar. He was accused of supporting a local candidate last year on behalf of an "undesirable" organization and jailed pending an investigation.

Open Russia shut down several days before Pivovarov's arrest. In a twist, Pivovarov was allowed on the ballot of the liberal Yabloko party even though he will remain behind bars through election day. Allies say it will be next to impossible for him to win.

"They destroyed everyone, who was at least somehow visible, as potential political players," said Marina Litvinovich, a human rights activist and one of the few Kremlin critics running.

Litvinovich was a longtime member of the state Public Monitoring Commission that observes the treatment of prisoners and detainees but was removed after exposing abuses of jailed Navalny supporters. She decided to run in a Moscow district in place of Yulia Galyamina, a prominent politician who was convicted in a criminal case last year and barred from running.

Litvinovich told AP it's difficult knowing that at any moment, "you could be barred from the race, or targeted with a raid tomorrow, or become implicated in a criminal probe."

"But we're trying to overcome that feeling and move forward," she said.

Navalny ally Volkov echoed her sentiment.

"It's not a very pleasant feeling, when a giant, very heavy, very dumb elephant is galloping towards you," he said.

Despite the crackdown, Navalny's team still plans to deploy its Smart Voting strategy — a project to support candidates who are most likely to defeat those from United Russia. In 2019, Smart Voting helped opposition candidates win 20 of 45 seats on Moscow's city council, and regional elections last year saw United Russia lose its majority in legislatures in three cities.

Volkov said it's been harder to promote Smart Voting, with dozens of websites blocked and people intimidated by the crackdown: Online registrations for the project soared a year ago after Navalny's poisoning, but there are fewer this year.

There have been record downloads, however, for the team's smartphone app, which is much harder for the authorities to block.

Others plan to continue advocating against voting for United Russia. Pivovarov's allies decided to proceed with his campaign even though he jailed. Last month, they opened campaign offices in Moscow and Krasnodar, using cardboard cutouts of Pivovarov to greet supporters.

"For us, this campaign is a megaphone," Pivovarov's top ally Tatyana Usmanova told AP at the Moscow office opening last month.

"What Andrei was striving for is that as many people as possible understood that they shouldn't vote for United Russia, that the elections are unfair. ... Now we have a legitimate opportunity to talk to people about it all."

Daniel Kozin in Moscow and Tanya Titova in Kyiv, Ukraine, contributed.

Carr's TD pass caps Raiders rally past Ravens 33-27 in OT

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — After a premature bench-clearing celebration and a couple of blunders that almost

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cost the Raiders the game, the party could finally begin for real after the first game with fans in Las Vegas.

The Raiders won an exhilarating and exhausting season opener thanks to a furious rally, a stellar defensive play from Carl Nassib and a perfect play call that produced a 31-yard touchdown pass from Derek Carr to Zay Jones that gave the Raiders a 33-27 win over the Baltimore Ravens on Monday night.

"Felt like I died and woke up. And died. And woke up again," coach Jon Gruden said. "I was like a cat — I had multiple lives."

Carr engineered three game-tying drives in the fourth quarter and before winning it in the wild overtime.

He appeared to win it with a 33-yard TD pass to Bryan Edwards on the first possession of overtime only to have the celebration halted when replay put the ball at the 1.

An unsuccessful QB sneak, a false start from rookie Alex Leatherwood and then an interception that deflected off Willie Snead's hands appeared to cost the Raiders the game.

Then Nassib delivered the strip sack of Lamar Jackson in his first game since becoming the first active NFL player to come out as gay in the offseason.

"I'm really happy that we got we got the win on the day that kind of made a little bit of history," Nassib said.

The Raiders then made another blunder by committing a delay of game before a field goal try, leading to Gruden sending the offense back on the field.

The Ravens sent a blitz and Carr lofted a pass that Jones ran under for the score, sending the Raiders pouring out on the field for a second celebration.

"I'm glad coach trusted us, put it in our hands at the end," Carr said. "Because it always feels good to win that way, especially when you almost gave away."

The Raiders trailed 14-0 early, ending a 98-game, regular-season win streak for the Ravens when leading by at least 14 points dating to 2004.

The loss capped a rough stretch for the Ravens, who have had a run of injuries that sidelined top three running backs J.K. Dobbins, Gus Edwards and Justice Hill, as well as cornerback Marcus Peters, for the season.

"We just didn't close the game out when we had the opportunity to do it three or four times," coach John Harbaugh said. "That's what you need to do when you have an opportunity to win, you got to win. We just didn't do that tonight."

They had won the past five openers by a margin of 177-26, but came up short in this nail-biter thanks to a strong game from Carr, who threw for 435 yards.

The overtime came after a wild back-and-forth fourth quarter that featured the Raiders rallying to tie the game on three separate occasions, with Carr driving Las Vegas to a tying 55-yard field goal in the final 37 seconds.

The Ravens had taken the lead when Jackson scrambled 28 yards to help set up Justin Tucker's 47-yard field goal.

But Jackson is still haunted by the two late fumbles.

"That ticked me off," he said. "I hate any type of turnover."

The Raiders earlier got a forced fumble by Quinton Jefferson against Jackson to set up Josh Jacobs' 15-yard TD run, tying the game at 17. The Ravens answered when former Raider Latavius Murray ran it in from 8 yards one play after Jackson found Sammy Watkins on a mismatch for a 49-yard pass.

Carr then connected on a 37-yard pass to Henry Ruggs III that set up a tying 10-yard TD to Darren Waller with 3:44 to play.

SPECTACULAR PLAY

Jackson's TD pass to Marquise Brown in the first half was a spectacular individual effort. He escaped pressure from Maxx Crosby and Yannick Ngakoue and scrambled before finding Brown in the back of the end zone for a 10-yard score.

According to NFL NextGen stats, Jackson took 7.84 seconds to throw for the fifth longest on a TD pass in the past five seasons and scrambled 27 yards for his most ever on a TD.

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GO FOR IT

The Ravens went for it twice on fourth down in the first half, getting a 35-yard TD run from Ty'Son Williams on the first. Murray got stuffed by K.J. Wright on the second.

The Raiders got stopped on a fourth-and-1 run by Jacobs at the Ravens 13 in the third quarter.

SLOW START

The Raiders got off to a sluggish start offensively after sitting most of their starters in the preseason. A holding penalty and botched snap spoiled a promising first drive that reached the Ravens 21 before going backwards and ending in a punt.

The Raiders then punted on the next three drives, marking the first time in 15 years they punted on the first four drives of the season.

They then scored twice late in the half to make it 14-10 at the break.

INJURY REPORT

Ravens: G Tyre Phillips was taken off the field on a cart late in the first half after injuring his leg and didn't return.

Raiders: G Denzelle Good left in the first half with a knee injury. ... Ngakoue left in the second half with a hamstring injury. ... DT Gerald McCoy was taken off on a cart in the fourth quarter with a knee injury.

UP NEXT

Ravens: Host Kansas City on Sunday night. Baltimore has lost four straight against the Chiefs, including all three matchups between Jackson and Patrick Mahomes.

Raiders: Visit Pittsburgh on Sunday.

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

Met Gala returns in style with Eilish, Lil Nas X, Rihanna

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Billie Eilish went full glam in a huge peach ball gown at the pandemic-delayed Met Gala on Monday night, while fellow host of the evening Amanda Gorman was breathtaking in cobalt blue custom Vera Wang with a diamond laurel wreath in her hair.

Rihanna, ever the Met Gala queen, showed up late in a huge black Balenciaga look and hat accompanied by A\$ap Rocky in a multicolored quilted coat from ERL. She wore over 267 carats of Bulgari diamonds, including two choker necklaces.

Co-host Timothée Chalamet raced onto Fifth Avenue to take selfies with fans before walking up the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for his entrance after a marching band and gymnast Nia Dennis kicked off the long-awaited evening. Last year's gala was canceled due to the pandemic.

This year's official theme of the fundraiser for the museum's Costume Institute was "American Independence," leaving plenty of room for interpretation. Just ask Lil Nas X, who did a Lady Gaga-esque strip tease on the carpet in gold Versace, from cape to armor to embellished jumpsuit.

Eilish, the belle of the ball, wore Oscar de la Renta. She told Vogue: "It was time for this. I feel like I've grown so much over the last few years."

Chalamet had Converse sneakers on his feet but Cartier diamonds on his look. Chalamet called his outfit, including Rick Owens sweatpants, "a bit of everything," just like America. Alfonso Navas, the fashion editor for Esquire, lauded his fashion choices as a "a smart play on the theme by interpreting American icons in sportswear."

Gorman's dress, which included more than 3,000 hand-sewn crystals, was made to evoke a starry night sky. She told Vogue she felt like Lady Liberty, reimagined. Her crown, the star poet said, was a nod to publishing. Another of the hosts, Naomi Osaka, wanted to celebrate all her cultures — Japan, Haitian and the U.S. — and picked a Louis Vuitton gown designed in collaboration with her sister, Mari Osaka. It was a swirly blue, aqua and purple print with long black ruffle sleeves and a wide red sash.

If this gala produced a trend, it's huge statement sleeves, with some stars and stripes thrown in. There

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was a smattering of red, as in the red, white and blue of the American flag. Karlie Kloss wore red Carolina Herrera with huge ruffles at the neck and sleeves. Jennifer Hudson also chose red sans sleeves.

Also in red: Ella Emhoff, the daughter of the country's second gentleman, Doug Emhoff, and Vice President Kamala Harris. She wore a bodysuit and high-shine trousers by Stella McCartney with a sheer top and a crystal design in all the right places. She wore Adidas by McCartney embellished in red and made partially of a recycled material derived from ocean plastic.

The gala, drawing standouts in fashion, TV, film, sports, tech and beyond, included tiny but mighty Olympian Simone Biles in an 88-pound Area embroidered gown of silver with a top adorned in a firework burst pattern and a huge train carried up the museum steps by six men. The gown was a collaboration with Athleta.

Ralph Lauren dressed Jennifer Lopez in a faux fur wrap with a dark brown crystal and beaded look in her signature plunge at the neck and high slit, a wide-brimmed Western-style hat on her head. She and Ben Affleck smooched with masks on days after their red carpet coming out in Venice.

Dan Levy took the party's theme to the extreme in a blue confection from Loewe. It had, according to the brand, "printed leg of mutton sleeves" on a polo shirt with an applique of two men kissing.

Yara Shahidi wore silver custom Dior complete with a light hood. She said she was inspired by Josephine Baker. Harris Reed, in collaboration with Dolce & Gabbana, put Iman in a huge golden feathered head piece and equally adorned skirt of crinoline with a jacquard bustier.

Blake Newby, the style and beauty editor for Essence, called Iman's look "both massive and angelic."

Gala overseer Anna Wintour arrived early with a wave to the crowd accompanied by her pregnant daughter, Bee, in a floral design with ruffles at the neck.

Along with oh-so-many jumpsuits, there were plenty of classic red carpet looks and a wave of gold, the latter including a Peter Dundas look worn by Mary J. Blige. It plunged to the belly button and beyond at the front and back.

MJ Rodriguez, the "Pose" star and first transgender performer to pick up an Emmy nomination in a major acting category, wore an old glam, black-and-white corseted look from Thom Browne. The designer called it a modern-day twist on classic American sportswear. She attended the gala with purpose.

"Not a lot of trans girls like myself get this opportunity," she said. "The human condition is what I'm here for."

U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez showed up in an Brother Vellies by Aurora James gown of white with a message splashed in red across the back: "Tax the Rich."

"It's really about having a real conversation about fairness and equity in our system, and I think this conversation is particularly relevant as we debate the budget and reconciliation bill," she said.

The evening had its share of what-the-heck moments, like a couple of horse heads on dresses and a green-haired Frank Ocean carrying a fake baby with a green face to match. Thom Browne gave the walking fashion statement Erykah Badu an extra-tall top hat with a bulky black look, a bunch of crystals and chunky bling around her neck.

Her purse was a black leather dachshund.

The fashion girls represented, Gigi Hadid in classic white Prada fresh from a slew of runway walks at New York Fashion Week, and Kendall Jenner in glittery, revealing silver by Givenchy. Jenner's look was inspired by "My Fair Lady."

The entrance of Jenner's older sister, Kim Kardashian West, caused a stir as fans wondered whether her estranged husband Kanye was the masked man at her side. It was none other than Demna Gvasalia, the creative director for Balenciaga who created her get-up: A black face covering worn with a T-shirt dress, catsuit and boots.

Newby told the AP the easiest and most obvious ways to stay true to the evening's theme is by wearing American designers. Many of the greats, including Michael Kors, showed up, along with smaller brands.

"Black American designers had their moment," she said, noting looks by Christopher John Rogers, Aliette and Sergio Hudson.

Lorde wore a custom upcycled gown with detailed beadwork and embroidery by Emily Bode, a New York

designer who repurposes fabrics and garments for her menswear line.

"Her exquisite gown may have done more to make the case that upcycled fashion can be fabulous than a hundred sustainability summits," said Erik Maza, style features director for Town & Country.

There were hair statements as well.

"Geometric bobs also made an appearance with Sophia Roe and Tracee Ellis Ross showing off very avant garde 'dos, while Yara Shahidi and Kaia Gerber channeled old Hollywood glam with deep waves," Newby said.

After 18 months in sweats, it was "clear that celebrities were beyond thrilled to give it their all," said Sara Tan, beauty director for a millennial-focused lifestyle site Refinery29.com.

They did in clothes, but also accessories and beauty, she said, noting Gorman's sparkly jewels across her face and Eilish's short, curled bob and classic winged liner in a definite ode to Marilyn Monroe.

Eilish, Gorman, Iman and AOC were the night's best dressed for Refinery29's fashion director Irina Grechko.

"Not only did Gorman wear an American designer, Vera Wang, but she also nailed the 'American Independence' dress code with a book-shaped clutch that read 'Give Us Your Tired' in reference to the Emma Lazarus poem featured on the base of the Statue of Liberty.

The gala, which raises money for the museum's Costume Institute, was pushed last year from its traditional May berth and morphed this year into a two-part affair marking the institute's 75th anniversary. It coincides with the opening of "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion," the first of a two-part exhibition at the Met's Anna Wintour Costume Center.

Organizers invited 400 guests, less than the number that usually attend.

Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>

Once inmates, Taliban now in charge in a Kabul prison

By FELIPE DANA Associated Press

KABUL (AP) — Once, Kabul's main prison was crowded with thousands of Taliban captured and arrested by the government. On Monday, a Taliban commander strolled through its empty halls and cell blocks, showing his friends where he had once been imprisoned.

It was a sign of the sudden and startling new order in Afghanistan after the militant group swept into the capital nearly a month ago and threw out the crumbling, U.S.-backed government it had fought for 20 years.

The Taliban now run Pul-e-Charkhi Prison, a sprawling complex on Kabul's eastern outskirts. After capturing the city, the fighters freed all the inmates there, the government guards fled, and now dozens of Taliban fighters are running the facility.

The commander, who refused to give his name, was on a personal visit to the complex with a group of his friends. He told The Associated Press he had been arrested around a decade ago in eastern Kunar province and was brought to Pul-e-Charkhi, bound and blindfolded.

"I feel so terrible when I remember those days," he said. He said prisoners suffered abuses and torture. He was imprisoned for around 14 months before he was released. "Those days are the darkest days of my life, and now this the happiest moment for me that I am free and come here without fear."

Many Afghans as well as governments around the world have been alarmed by the swift Taliban seizure of power, fearing the movement will impose a similar, harsh rule as they did during their first time ruling in the 1990s. But for the Taliban fighters, it's a moment to savor a victory after years of grueling fighting — and to see a city few of them have entered since the war began.

For some of the Taliban guards accompanying the AP, it was the first time they'd entered the abandoned cell blocks. They looked with curiosity through the cells, still littered with things the last inmates left behind — fabrics hanging from the walls and windows, small rugs, water bottles.

One fighter exchanged his sandals for a better pair he found in a cell. Then he found yet a better pair and exchanged again. Others played with the former prisoners' makeshift weight bars.

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Pul-e-Charkhi had a long, disturbing history of violence, mass executions and torture. Mass graves and torture cells were uncovered dating from the Soviet-backed governments of the late 1970s and 1980s. Under the U.S.-backed government, it was more known for poor conditions and overcrowding — its 11 cell blocks were built to house 5,000 inmates, but were often packed with more than 10,000, including Taliban prisoners and criminals.

Taliban prisoners often complained of abuses and beatings, and there were regular riots. Still, they kept up their organization behind bars, winning concessions like access to cell phones and longer time outside their cells.

Some of the Taliban now guarding the site were former inmates. The government guards have fled and don't dare return, fearing reprisals. Though the facility remains largely empty, one section holds around 60 people imprisoned in the past few weeks, who the guards said were mostly accused criminals and drug addicts.

Nicholas strengthens to hurricane ahead of Texas landfall

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Nicholas strengthened into a Category 1 hurricane Monday as it headed toward landfall along the Texas Gulf Coast and it was expected to bring 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 75 mph (120 kph) a few hours before expected landfall.

Although the system was expected to generate only a fraction as much rain as Harvey, a hurricane warning was issued for Port O'Connor to Freeport, as well as a hurricane watch from Freeport to the western tip of Galveston Island. A tropical storm warning was issued for Port Aransas to Sabine Pass, as well as a storm surge warning for Port Aransas to Sabine Pass, including Galveston, Aransas, San Antonio and Matagorda bays. A storm surge watch is in effect from Sabine Pass to Rutherford Beach, Louisiana.

An automated station in Matagorda Bay registered a sustained wind of 76 mph (122 kph) with gusts to 95 mph (153 kph), the hurricane center reported. About 50,000 customers were without power in Texas on Monday night, according to the utility tracking site poweroutage.us.

In flood-prone Houston, officials worried that heavy rain expected to arrive late Monday and early Tuesday could inundate streets and flood homes. Authorities deployed high-water rescue vehicles throughout the city and erected barricades at more than 40 locations that tend to flood, Mayor Sylvester Turner said.

"This city is very resilient. We know what we need to do. We know about preparing," said Turner, referencing four major flood events that have hit the Houston area in recent years, including devastating damage from Harvey, which flooded more than 150,000 homes in the Houston area.

Turner and Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo asked residents to stay off the roads Monday evening to avoid risking their lives or the lives of first responders who might be called to rescue them from flooded roadways.

"What I need each resident to do is get where you need to be by 6 p.m. and stay there," said Hidalgo, the top elected official in Harris County, which includes Houston.

The Houston school district, the state's largest, announced that classes would be canceled Tuesday because of the incoming storm. The weather threat also closed multiple COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites in the Houston and Corpus Christi areas, and forced the cancellation of a Harry Styles concert scheduled for Monday evening in Houston.

Late Monday night, shortly before landfall, Nicholas was centered roughly 45 miles (75 kilometers) southwest of Freeport. The National Hurricane Center said the storm was moving to the north-northeast at near 10 mph (17 kph) and was expected to continue on that path through the night, moving over extreme southeastern Texas on Tuesday. Forecasters said they expected the storm to turn more toward the northeast at a slower motion by late Tuesday and an even slower eastward track on Wednesday, when it was expected to drift over southwestern Louisiana.

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Six to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of rain were expected along the middle and upper Texas coast, with isolated maximum amounts of 18 inches (46 centimeters) possible. Other parts of southeast Texas and south-central Louisiana and southern Mississippi could see 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) over the coming days.

"Listen to local weather alerts and heed local advisories about the right and safe thing to do, and you'll make it through this storm just like you've had many other storms," Abbott said during a news conference in Houston.

Nicholas was headed toward the same area of Texas that was hit hard by Harvey. That storm made landfall, 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, including 36 in the Houston area.

After Harvey, voters approved the issuance of \$2.5 billion in bonds to fund flood-control projects, including the widening of bayous. The 181 projects designed to mitigate damage from future storms are at different stages of completion.

University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy said he expects Nicholas to be "magnitudes less than Harvey in every regard."

The main worry with Nicholas will be its speed. Storms are moving slower in recent decades, and Nicholas could get stuck between two other weather systems, said hurricane researcher Jim Kossin of The Climate Service.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency Sunday night, ahead of the storm's arrival in a state still recovering from Hurricane Ida and last year's Hurricane Laura and historic flooding. The system was expected to bring the heaviest rainfall west of where Ida slammed into Louisiana two weeks ago.

Across Louisiana, almost 120,000 customers remained without power Monday morning, according to poweroutage.us.

In Cameron Parish in coastal Louisiana, Scott Trahan was still finishing repairs on his home from Hurricane Laura, which 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 the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season. Only four other years since 1966 have had 14 or more named storms by Sept. 12: 2005, 2011, 2012 and 2020.

Associated Press writers Jill Bleed in Little Rock, Arkansas, Seth Borenstein in Washington and Terry Wallace in Dallas contributed to this report.

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

EXPLAINER: How California could recall Gov. Gavin Newsom

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The California recall election that could remove first-term Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom from office wraps up Tuesday. Nearly 8 million mail-in ballots — the form of voting most Californians use — already have been returned out of 22 million sent to registered voters.

The contest unfolded this summer as the nation's most populous state saw a surge in coronavirus infections from the highly contagious delta variant and the return of masks and other restrictions in many places. There have been raging wildfires, crime rates have risen and a homeless crisis persists unabated.

Republicans are hoping for an upset in a heavily Democratic state, where the GOP hasn't won a statewide election since 2006. Newsom has been defending his record on the virus and warning that Republican front-runner Larry Elder, a conservative talk radio host, would undermine California's progressive values.

The election is being watched nationally and the outcome could influence the 2022 elections, when a

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closely divided Congress will be in play.

How did California arrive at this point? Here are some answers:

WHAT IS A RECALL ELECTION?

California is one of 20 states that have provisions to recall a sitting governor, 19 through elections. The state law establishing the rules goes back to 1911 and was intended to give more power to voters by allowing them to remove elected officials and repeal or pass laws by placing them on the ballot.

Recall attempts are common in the state, but they rarely get on the ballot and even fewer succeed. The only time a governor was recalled was 2003, when Democrat Gray Davis was removed and voters replaced him with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

A federal judge in late August rejected a lawsuit that sought to block the recall on grounds it violated the Constitution by creating a situation where a sitting governor could lose the recall but still get more votes to stay in office than the winning replacement candidate receives.

WHY IS THERE A RECALL DRIVE AGAINST NEWSOM?

The answer is simple and complicated.

The simple part: Californians grew angry during the pandemic. Whipsaw stay-at-home orders by Newsom, crushing job losses from business closures, shuttered schools and the disruption of daily life soured just about everybody. Many of life's routines were cut off at some point if not altogether, whether it was trips to the beach or lunches at a favorite taco joint.

The complicated part: In a state with nearly 40 million people, there are many grievances, including California's wallet-sapping taxes, rising food and gas prices, the threat of water rationing to contend with a long-running drought, a homeless crisis and the continuing menace of wildfires. As governor, Newsom is a ready target for that resentment.

He also is being hit by fallout from a multibillion-dollar fraud scandal at the state unemployment agency while weathering public shaming for dining out maskless with friends and lobbyists at an exclusive restaurant last fall as he told residents to stay home.

HOW DOES THE ELECTION WORK?

There are two questions: Voters are being asked if Newsom should be removed, yes or no, and then who should replace him. They will choose from 46 replacement candidates.

If a majority of voters approve Newsom's removal, the candidate who gets the most votes on the second question becomes governor. With dozens of candidates dividing those ballots, it's possible a winner could get 25% or less of the vote.

Statistics compiled by Political Data Inc., a firm that gathers voting information for Democrats, independents and academics, found that nearly 8 million voters have returned mail-in ballots, which would equal about a 35% turnout rate with voting continuing through Tuesday.

Senior citizens are voting in their usual high numbers, while younger voters have been less enthusiastic so far.

WHO ARE THE REPLACEMENT CANDIDATES?

There are 46 names on the ballot, but former Congressman Doug Ose withdrew because of health reasons after it had been printed. The 24 Republican candidates include Elder; former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer; businessman John Cox, who was defeated by Newsom in 2018; reality TV personality and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner; and Assemblyman Kevin Kiley.

There are nine Democrats, 10 independents, two Green Party members and one Libertarian. No Democrat with political stature ran — the best-known is real estate agent and YouTube personality Kevin Paffrath. Most of the candidates are largely unknown and have not mounted credible campaigns.

WHAT ARE THE CANDIDATES PROMISING?

Elder, whom polls have leading the field, has promised to bring a fresh eye and common sense to the Democratic-dominated state and has said he would swiftly lift state mask and vaccine mandates.

Kiley has said he would immediately end the pandemic state of emergency, which would automatically wipe out all state and local orders issued under it.

Faulconer has proposed ending the state income tax for individuals making up to \$50,000 and households

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up to \$100,000 as part of a plan to make the state more affordable for the middle class.

Cox sought attention by campaigning with a 1,000-pound (450-kilogram) Kodiak bear, which he said represented the need for “beastly” changes in the state, and is calling for a historic tax cut.

Jenner received significant attention when she entered the race but has run a very low-key campaign and is barely registering in polls.

WHAT IS NEWSOM SAYING ABOUT THE RECALL?

He steered around questions of a possible recall for months, saying he wanted to focus on the coronavirus, vaccinations and reopening schools. In March, he launched an aggressive campaign and began running ads attacking the recall and doing national TV and cable interviews.

The main committee opposing the recall had raised nearly \$70 million through the end of August.

Newsom, who was elected in a 2018 landslide, has acknowledged that people were anxious and weary after a difficult year of restrictions. Recently, he has defended his record during the pandemic — arguing his decisions saved thousands of lives — while warning that a Republican victory would undermine the state’s progressive values and possibly have a ripple effect nationwide.

Democrats say the effort to remove him is being driven by far-right extremists and supporters of former President Donald Trump. The recall is backed by state and national Republicans, but organizers argue they have a broad-based coalition, including many independents and Democrats.

Lately, Newsom has focused his attacks on Elder, calling him more extreme in many ways than Trump. Elder dismisses such criticism as a political ploy to divert attention from Newsom’s record on crime, homelessness and the pandemic.

The governor spent much of 2020 on the defensive. But he has benefitted from a record budget surplus that allowed him to tour the state to announce vast new spending programs, including \$12 billion to fight homelessness; checks of up to \$1,100 each for millions of low and middle-income earners who struggled during lockdowns; and \$2.7 billion for free kindergarten for all of the state’s 4-year-olds.

HOW PRECARIOUS IS NEWSOM’S HOLD ON HIS JOB?

In the depths of the pandemic, Newsom’s popularity was tumbling and he appeared imperiled, with widespread unrest over long-running school and business closures. Many business owners were infuriated by what they saw as Newsom’s heavy-handed restrictions that had some open and close several times. Others rebelled against mask mandates.

Earlier this year, a reopened economy and the astounding windfall of tax dollars helped Newsom recover. However, when Newsom fully reopened the state on June 15, virus cases were near record lows. Since then, cases have been climbing, particularly among the unvaccinated.

Los Angeles County, which accounts for a quarter of the state’s population, reimposed an indoor mask mandate in public places, even if people are vaccinated. California also is requiring K-12 students to wear masks when they go back to classrooms. Such an order could hurt Newsom, especially among those who felt he didn’t do enough to reopen schools last year.

However, recent polling indicates Newsom is in a strong position to hold his job. He has advantages over his GOP rivals: Democratic voters outnumber Republicans nearly 2-to-1, and the party controls every statewide office and dominates the Legislature and congressional delegation. President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Barack Obama have called on voters to reject the recall.

Republicans last won a statewide election in 2006, when Schwarzenegger was reelected.

See AP’s complete coverage of the California recall election: <https://apnews.com/hub/california-recall>

Ex-cops accused of violating Floyd’s rights to be arraigned

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Four former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd’s civil rights are scheduled to be arraigned in federal court Tuesday at a hearing that could also address some pretrial motions.

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A federal grand jury indicted Derek Chauvin, Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao in May for allegedly depriving Floyd of his rights while acting under government authority on May 25, 2020, as Floyd, 46, was held face-down, handcuffed and not resisting in a restraint that was captured on bystander video. His death led to worldwide protests and calls for change in policing.

At federal arraignment hearings, defendants can have the charges read to them, and not guilty pleas are typically entered. The parties were to appear at Tuesday's hearing via videoconference.

Prosecutors and attorneys for the former officers could also argue several motions on Tuesday.

Among them, Kueng and Thao have asked that their federal trials be separated from Chauvin's, saying they would be unfairly prejudiced if they went to trial alongside him. Lane asked to join that request, which is being opposed by prosecutors. It wasn't immediately clear if that issue will come up at Tuesday's hearing, because both sides have agreed the request was premature and have asked to set it aside until more information develops, according to court documents.

The federal indictment alleges Chauvin violated Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure and unreasonable force by a police officer. Thao and Kueng are charged with violating Floyd's right to be free from unreasonable seizure by not intervening to stop Chauvin as he knelt on Floyd's neck. All four officers are also charged with depriving Floyd of his rights when they failed to provide him with medical care.

During Floyd's arrest, he repeatedly said he couldn't breathe as Chauvin pinned him to the ground. Kueng and Lane helped restrain Floyd; Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, and Lane held Floyd's legs, according to evidence in state court. Thao held back bystanders and kept them from intervening during the 9 1/2-minute restraint.

The four officers were also charged in state court, where Chauvin's trial was eventually separated from the others due to space restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chauvin was convicted in April of murder and manslaughter and was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison. The other three former officers face state trial next March on aiding and abetting counts.

Chauvin is also charged in a separate federal indictment alleging he violated the civil rights of a 14-year-old boy in 2017.

Meanwhile, the federal government is investigating policing practices in Minneapolis. The investigation known as a "pattern or practice" — examining whether there is a pattern or practice of unconstitutional or unlawful policing — includes a sweeping review of the entire police department. It may result in major changes to policing in the Minnesota city.

Find AP's full coverage of the death of George Floyd at: <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-george-floyd>

Biden: Results of California recall will be felt nationally

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE AND MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LONG BEACH, Calif. (AP) — President Joe Biden put Democrats' approach to the coronavirus pandemic on the line Monday, casting the California recall that could remove Gov. Gavin Newsom from office as an opportunity for voters to show the nation that "leadership matters, science matters."

"The eyes of the nation are on California because the decision you're going to make isn't just going to have a huge impact on California, it's going to reverberate around the nation, and quite frankly, not a joke, around the world," the Democratic president said at a rally in the Southern California city of Long Beach.

The closing pitch from Newsom and his most prominent Democratic ally came a night before voting concludes in the race that could remove the first-term governor from office. He is just the fourth governor in U.S. history and the second in California to face a recall. Californians removed Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in 2003 and replaced him with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Biden's appearance underscored the importance to Democrats of keeping the governor's office in the nation's most populous state, where many progressive policies originate. Newsom and other prominent Democrats have cast the race as a battle. The results of the race ending Tuesday will send signals about how voters are poised to react to Democrats who adopted aggressive pandemic policies in next year's

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midterm elections, when control of Congress and half the nation's governorships are at stake.

"Gavin will be a governor who will help us finish the job," Biden said, regarding the pandemic.

Just a half hour south from where Biden spoke, Republican front-runner and talk radio host Larry Elder was urging his supporters not to let up on getting out the vote among fellow Republicans, friends and neighbors in the race's final 24 hours. The party needs a strong Election Day showing to catch up to Democrats who performed better in early voting, mostly by mail. Nearly 8 million Californians already have cast mail-in ballots.

"Make sure you have your friends vote, vote, vote, and try and get 10 more friends to vote and hit every call, make every call, knock on every door, we're gonna win this thing if we turn out the vote," Elder said from a hotel ballroom in the Orange County city of Costa Mesa. He then went through his standard stump speech of what he deems Newsom's failures on public education, water and wildfires, and crime.

Newsom has likened Elder as a California-version of former Republican President Donald Trump, branding him as in some ways even "more extreme." Biden echoed that note, referring to Elder not by name but as "the closest thing to a Trump clone I've ever seen."

Biden handily won California, though Trump earned more than 6 million votes in the state. California has more than 22 million registered voters.

California Republican Party Chairwoman Jessica Millan Patterson called it "baffling and insulting" that Biden engaged in a political event when some Californians remain stuck in Afghanistan.

"It's clear protecting those they were elected to serve comes second to politics," she said in a statement.

Amateur Republican political organizers upset with Newsom's approach to crime, homelessness and immigration launched the recall drive in early 2020, but the coronavirus pandemic got it to the ballot. Newsom was the first governor in the country to issue a statewide stay-at-home order that shuttered many businesses for months and kept kids out of classrooms.

"There's no front that I can think of where this man has done a good job — not on schools, not on homelessness, not in the way he shut down this state," Elder said earlier Monday.

Voters are being asked two questions: Should Newsom be recalled, yes or no, and who should replace him? The results of the second question only matter if a majority wants to remove Newsom. Recent polls from the Public Policy Institute of California and others showed Newsom defeating the recall.

Lead recall organizer Orrin Heatlie said neither Biden nor Trump should be weighing in on the contest because it's about California issues. Meanwhile, he said Trump's statement Monday calling the election rigged risks diminishing Republican turnout.

"When people aren't confident, if they don't have faith that their vote is going to count, then they're not going to waste their time to cast their ballot," Heatlie said.

There has been no confirmed evidence of widespread fraud. Elder's campaign website links to a website called "Stop CA Fraud" where people can sign a petition demanding a special election to investigate the election, even though the election hasn't concluded.

Before the rally, Biden toured wildfire damage in Northern California. He praised Newsom's leadership on responding to climate change, which is contributing to California's wildfires becoming bigger and more destructive. Elder and Republicans say Democratic leaders have failed to appropriately manage California's forests, leaving more fuel for fires to burn through.

Other prominent candidates in the race are Republicans Kevin Faulconer, Kevin Kiley and John Cox, and Democrat Kevin Paffrath.

Ronayne reported from Sacramento. Associated Press journalist Alexandra Jaffe contributed from Long Beach.

Catch up with AP's recall coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/california-recall>

Out West, Biden points to wildfires to push for big rebuild

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By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

MATHER, Calif. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday used his first Western swing in office to hold out the wildfires burning across the region as an argument for his \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plans, calling year-round fires and other extreme weather a climate change reality the nation can no longer ignore.

"We can't ignore the reality that these wildfires are being supercharged by climate change," Biden said, noting that catastrophic weather doesn't strike based on partisan ideology. "It isn't about red or blue states. It's about fires. Just fires."

With stops in Idaho and California, Biden sought to boost support for his big rebuilding plans, saying every dollar spent on "resilience" would save \$6 in future costs. And he said the rebuilding must go beyond simply restoring damaged systems and instead ensure communities can withstand such crises.

"These fires are blinking 'code red' for our nation. They're gaining frequency and ferocity," Biden said after concluding an aerial tour of the Caldor Fire that threatened communities around Lake Tahoe. "We know what we have to do."

The president's two-day Western swing comes at a critical juncture for a central plank of his legislative agenda. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill are working to assemble details of the infrastructure-plus plan — and how to pay for it, a concern not just for Republicans. A key Democratic senator said Sunday that he will not vote for a package so large.

In California, Biden took an aerial tour of land charred by the Caldor Fire after getting a briefing from officials at the state emergency services office. Gov. Gavin Newsom, who faces a recall vote Tuesday, joined Biden for the briefing.

Hours later, Biden campaigned with the embattled governor in Long Beach, tying Newsom's leading Republican challenger to former President Donald Trump and telling voters their decision would "reverberate around the nation and, quite frankly, not a joke, around the world." By voting against the recall, Biden told the crowd, "you'll be protecting California from another Trump climate denier."

Newsom joked at the briefing that the California emergency center had become his office because fire season has "just kept going," as he amplified Biden's message.

"This has been a hard year and a half," Newsom said.

During an earlier briefing in Boise at the National Interagency Fire Center, which coordinates the government's wildfire response, Biden noted that wildfires start earlier every year and that this year they have scorched 5.4 million acres. "That's larger than the entire state of New Jersey," Biden said.

"The reality is we have a global warming problem, a serious global warming problem, and it's consequential, and what's going to happen is, things are not going to go back," he said.

Biden, who visits Denver on Tuesday before returning to Washington, aimed to link the increasing frequency of wildfires, drought, floods and other extreme weather events to what he and scientists say is a need to invest billions in combating climate change, along with vastly expanding the nation's social safety net.

The president argued for spending now to make the future effects of climate change less costly, as he did during recent stops in Louisiana, New York and New Jersey — all states that suffered millions of dollars in flood and other damage and scores of deaths after Hurricane Ida.

Biden also praised firefighters for the life-threatening risks they take, and discussed the administration's recent use of a wartime law to boost supplies of firehoses from the U.S. Forest Service's primary supplier, an Oklahoma City nonprofit called NewView Oklahoma.

In deep-red Idaho, several opposing groups leveraged Biden's visit as a way to show resistance to his administration. GOP gubernatorial candidates, an anti-vaccine organization and a far-right group were among those urging people to turn out against the president.

More than 1,000 protesters did so, gathering in Boise before Biden arrived to express displeasure with his coronavirus plan, the election and other issues.

Chris Burns, a 62-year-old from Boise, said, "I'm against everything Biden is for." Burns was especially displeased with a sweeping new vaccine mandate for 100 million people that Biden announced last week.

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"He's acting like a dictator," Burns said.

The White House is trying to turn the corner after a difficult month dominated by a chaotic and violent U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the surging delta COVID-19 variant that have upended what the president had hoped would mark a summer in which the nation was finally freed from the coronavirus.

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

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

Manchin said Sunday, "I cannot support \$3.5 trillion," citing his opposition to a proposed increase in the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% and vast new social spending envisioned by the president. Manchin also complained about a process he said feels rushed.

In California, Biden appeared to respond to those concerned about the plan's size, saying the cost "may be" as much as \$3.5 trillion and would be spread out over 10 years, a period during which the economy is expected to grow.

The 100-member Senate is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. Given solid GOP opposition, Biden's plan cannot pass the Senate without Manchin or Sinema's support.

The climate provisions in Biden's plans 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 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. He issued another disaster declaration for the state just before Monday's visit aimed at areas affected by the Caldor Fire.

Superville reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Rebecca Boone and Keith Ridler in Boise and Amer Madhani in Wilmington, Delaware, contributed to this report.

George Wein, Newport Jazz Festival co-founder, dies at 95

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — George Wein, an impresario of 20th century music who helped found the Newport Jazz and Folk festivals and set the template for gatherings everywhere from Woodstock to the south of France, died Monday.

Wein, 95, died "peacefully in his sleep" in his New York City apartment, said Carolyn McClair, a family spokesperson.

A former jazz club owner and aspiring pianist, Wein launched the Newport Jazz Festival in 1954 under pouring rain and with a lineup for the heavens — Billie Holiday and Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald and Lester Young. Louis Armstrong was there the following year and Duke Ellington made history in 1956, his band's set featuring an extraordinary, 27-chorus solo from saxophonist Paul Gonsalves that almost single-handedly revived the middle-aged Ellington's career.

Wein led the festival for more than 50 years and performers would include virtually every major jazz star, from Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk to Charles Mingus and Wynton Marsalis. Just in 1965, the bill featured Frank Sinatra, Count Basie, John Coltrane, Ellington, Gillespie, Davis and Monk.

"As a young pianist and club owner, he understood quality, worshipped the giants of the music, and created a revolutionary Festival format that offered the widest possible range of jazz to much larger outdoor audiences," Marsalis said in a statement. "He loved telling stories about Bird, Duke and all of the greats, engaging in spirited debates on a variety of subjects, and was an optimistic supporter of young talent."

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The success of Newport inspired a wave of jazz festivals in the U.S. and Wein replicated his success worldwide, his other projects including the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival and the Grande Parade du Jazz in Nice, France. His multiday, all-star gatherings were also a model for rock festivals, whether Woodstock in 1969 or the Lollapalooza tours of recent years.

Critic Gene Santoro observed in 2003 that without Wein, "everything from Woodstock to Jazz at Lincoln Center might have happened differently — if it happened at all." Wein "can justifiably claim to have invented, developed and codified the contemporary popular music festival," Santoro wrote.

The idea for Newport came in part from locals Louis and Elaine Lorillard, who urged Wein to organize a jazz festival in their gilded resort community in Rhode Island. Elaine Lorillard, a socialite, complained that the summer scene was "terribly boring." Her tobacco-heir husband backed her up with a \$20,000 donation.

Wein had never known of a large-scale jazz festival, so, in the spirit of the music, he improvised — seeking to combine the energy and musicality of a Harlem jazz club with the ambience of a summer classical concert in Tanglewood.

"What was a festival to me?" Wein later said. "I had no rulebook to go by. I knew it had to be something unique, that no jazz fan had ever been exposed to."

Wein didn't only work with jazz musicians. In 1959, he and Pete Seeger began a companion folk festival that would feature early performances by Joan Baez and Jose Feliciano among others and track the evolution of Bob Dylan from earnest troubadour to rule-breaking rock star.

Dylan's show in 1963 helped establish him as the so-called "voice of his generation," but by 1965 he felt confined by the folk community and turned up at Newport with an electric band. The response was mostly positive, but there were enough boos from the crowd and conflicts backstage — Wein rejected the legend that Seeger tried to cut the power cables to Dylan's amps — to make Dylan's appearance a landmark in rock and folk history.

In his memoir "Myself Among Others," Wein remembered confronting Dylan as he left the stage and demanding he return to play something acoustic. When Dylan resisted, saying he didn't have an acoustic guitar, Wein asked for volunteers to lend him one and helped persuade Dylan to go back out. Years later, Wein remained moved by memories of hearing Dylan sing "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," a farewell ballad in more ways than one.

"It was a farewell to the idealism and purity of the folk revival," Wein wrote. "There was no turning back — not for Dylan, not for anyone."

The Newport festivals have led to numerous films and concert albums, notably Murray Lerner's Oscar-nominated 1967 documentary "Festival!", with Dylan, Johnny Cash and Howlin' Wolf among the performers. Wein would later bring in Led Zeppelin, Sly and the Family Stone and James Brown and other rock and rhythm and blues acts. In 2020, when Newport went virtual because of the pandemic, Wein introduced Mavis Staples from his home in Manhattan.

Wein himself had been a pianist since childhood and he maintained an active music career, releasing "Wein, Women and Song," "Swing That Music" and several other albums and making yearly appearances at the Newport festival with his Newport All-Stars band. He was named a "Jazz Master" in 2005 by the National Endowment for the Arts and received an honorary Grammy in 2014. Years earlier, President Clinton brought his saxophone to the White House stage for a celebration of the Newport Jazz Festival.

Wein grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, his father a dentist with a gambling habit and an eye for his secretary, his mother a pianist of "passable skills" and heiress to a paper products fortune. As a teenager, he defied his family by inviting Black musicians to their home and in his 20s he dated a Black woman, Joyce Alexander, whom he married in 1959. Joyce Wein, who became his business partner and closest adviser, died in 2005.

Wein saw himself as just an "average middle-class, Jewish-American kid," although one easily bewitched by music. He would remember attending a Benny Goodman concert and listening just a few feet away from trumpeter Cootie Williams.

"For the duration of the evening I stood alone, wide-eyed, at the foot of the stage," he wrote in "Myself

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Among Others," released in 2003, "oblivious to the sea of couples swirling around the dance floor behind me."

Wein enlisted in the Army during World War II and twice escaped possible death: Hitler died in April 1945 as Wein and others were nearing the German front. Months later, he was spared being transferred to the Pacific when the Japanese surrendered.

He graduated from Boston University and started the Storyville jazz club and record label in Boston, where Ellington, Charlie Parker and others came. Wein even got to join some of the performances, including playing piano for a set by Holiday, whose regular keyboardist had not showed up.

The Newport festival lasted despite ongoing conflicts, whether objections from the locals in Newport, the declining appeal of jazz, or the demands and resentments of the musicians. In 1960, Mingus organized a rival festival to protest Wein's alleged favoritism among performers and a riot at the Newport gathering led to Wein's being sidelined until 1962. In 1971, the booking of the Allman Brothers Band proved disastrous when rock fans overran the festival grounds, even setting sheet music on fire, and brought about a decade-long exile from Newport.

Wein, once described by The New Yorker's Lillian Ross as a stocky man "who seemed to be filled with controlled frenzy," was a fighter who faced down racist officials in New Orleans and chastised Monk for waiting too long to take the stage in Newport. He was also good at math. He recruited Sinatra, Dionne Warwick and other popular singers to help support the jazz artists. In the mid-1970s, he was struggling financially and became among the first popular music promoters to work with corporate sponsors, notably the makers of Kool cigarettes.

In 2005, he sold his company Festival Productions Inc. to Festival Network LLC and took on a more limited role at Newport. Six years later, he established the nonprofit Newport Festivals Foundation to oversee the summertime events.

"I want the festivals to go on forever," Wein told The Associated Press at the time. "With me it's not a matter of business. This is my life."

Associated Press writer Michelle R. Smith contributed from Providence, Rhode Island. Former AP writer Charles J. Gans also contributed to this report.

Blinken pushes back on GOP criticism of Afghan withdrawal

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken pushed back Monday against harsh Republican criticism of the handling of the military withdrawal from Afghanistan, saying the Biden administration inherited a deal with the Taliban to end the war, but no plan for carrying it out.

In a sometimes contentious hearing Monday before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Blinken sought to blunt complaints from angry GOP lawmakers about the administration's response to the quick collapse of the Afghan government and, more specifically, the State Department's actions to evacuate Americans and others.

Blinken echoed White House talking points blaming the Trump administration for the situation that President Joe Biden inherited in Afghanistan. "We inherited a deadline. We did not inherit a plan," he said, maintaining that the administration had done the right thing in ending 20 years of war.

"We made the right decision in ending America's longest-running war," said Blinken, who will testify on Tuesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Republicans savaged the withdrawal process as "a disaster" and "a disgrace." And while some Democrats allowed that the operation could have been handled better, many used their questions to heap criticism on former President Donald Trump.

The State Department has come under heavy criticism from both sides for not doing enough and not acting quickly enough to get American citizens, legal residents and at-risk Afghans out of the country after the Taliban took control of Kabul on Aug. 15. Some seeking to leave remain stranded there, although

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Blinken could not provide an exact number. He said roughly 100 U.S. citizens remain along with about "several thousand" green card holders.

"This was an unmitigated disaster of epic proportions," said Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, the top Republican on the committee. He said the abrupt withdrawal along with leaving some Americans and Afghans behind had "emboldened the Taliban" and other U.S. adversaries. "I can summarize this in one word: betrayal."

His GOP colleagues Steve Chabot of Ohio and Lee Zeldin of New York were even more blunt. "This is a disgrace," Chabot said. "This was fatally flawed and poorly executed," said Zeldin. "I believe that you, sir, should resign. That would be leadership."

The chairman of the committee, New York Rep. Gregory Meeks, urged his colleagues to keep politics out of their criticism. But he acknowledged that there had been problems. "Could things have been done differently? Absolutely," he said.

Republican congressman Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, who has been ostracized by many in the GOP for his criticism of Trump, placed blame for the situation on both Trump and Biden. "The Trump administration failed in the setup and the Biden administration failed in the execution," Kinzinger said.

Blinken tried to calmly deflect allegations of unpreparedness by noting that the Biden administration had inherited a U.S.-Taliban peace deal from its predecessor, along with a languishing program to grant visas to Afghans who had worked for the U.S. government.

Blinken, who had publicly predicted in June that a complete Taliban takeover would not happen "from a Friday to a Monday," also tried to preempt criticism of the prediction by noting that no one in the U.S. government expected the Afghan government to fall as quickly as it did.

"Even the most pessimistic assessments did not predict that government forces in Kabul would collapse while U.S. forces remained," Blinken said in prepared remarks released ahead of his appearance. He also defended the evacuation effort, saying it succeeded despite near insurmountable odds.

"The evacuation was an extraordinary effort — under the most difficult conditions imaginable — by our diplomats, military, and intelligence professionals," he said. "In the end, we completed one of the biggest airlifts in history, with 124,000 people evacuated to safety."

But Republicans, in particular, have been demanding answers as to why American citizens were left behind in the chaotic days and weeks before the military completed its withdrawal on Aug. 30.

In a preview of GOP questions, the Republican National Committee released a statement earlier Monday with the banner headline "Fire Blinken," demanding that he be held to account for what it described as a litany of failings.

After the more than five-hour hearing concluded, the GOP committee doubled down on its demand.

"Today's hearing makes Blinken's failures and lies abundantly clear," RNC chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said. "Biden has no choice but to fire Blinken, hold him accountable, and take responsibility for the disaster he created."

Some Republicans appeared to have been spoiling for a fight with the generally unflappable Blinken. Rep. Bryan Mast of Florida accused Blinken of lying when he denied that intelligence had been manipulated to support Biden's desire to withdraw U.S. troops. "I do not believe a word you have said," he told Blinken.

In a rare show of temper, Blinken replied: "Simply put, what you said congressman, is dead wrong."

Blinken is very close to Biden and his job as America's top diplomat is almost certainly safe, but criticism of the administration's handling of the Afghanistan withdrawal has not been limited to Republicans.

Numerous Democrats have also questioned the policy and expressed concern about stranded Americans, green card holders and Afghans who could face retaliation from the Taliban because of their work or ties to the U.S. government over the past 20 years.

State Department officials have acknowledged that the congressional hearings could be contentious and possibly ugly, but many remain convinced the U.S. military and other officials did the best they could under extremely trying circumstances — including the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and the crush of thousands of desperate people at Kabul's airport seeking to leave the country.

Norway's center-left heads to victory in general elections

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — The center-left bloc headed to a victory in Norway's elections Monday as official projections pointed to the governing Conservatives losing power after a campaign dominated by climate change and the future of the country's oil and gas exploration industry.

With a projection based on a preliminary count of nearly 93% of the votes, the Labor Party and its two allies — the Socialist Left and the euroskeptic Center Party — would hold 100 seats in the 169-seat Stortinget assembly while the current government would get 68. One seat was still unsure.

As Norway's largest party, Labor will try to form a coalition government and its chief, 61-year-old Jonas Gahr Stoere, is poised to become Norway's next leader. The Scandinavian country is not a member of the European Union.

"We will now give Norway a new government and a new course," Gahr Stoere said on an election night before cheering party members who chanted "Stoere" and clapped. He added that he will in the coming days invite the parties "that want a new change" for talks.

Labor has promised an industrial policy that will funnel support to new green industries, like wind power, "blue hydrogen" that uses natural gas to produce an alternative fuel, and carbon capture and storage, which seeks to bury carbon dioxide under the ocean.

In the 2013 election, Labor was ousted from power, enabling the Conservatives' Erna Solberg to become prime minister and Norway's longest-serving leader. Gahr Stoere said Monday that he also wanted to thank Solberg for having been "a good prime minister."

"We knew we needed a miracle — the Conservatives' work session is over," said Solberg. "I congratulate Jonas Gahr Stoere with what looks like a clear majority."

Her Conservatives suffered a setback, losing 4.7 percentage points which was dubbed by Norwegian broadcaster NRK as "the election's biggest loser." Its former coalition partner, the Progress Party lost 3.4 percentage points, according to a preliminary counting of more than 93% of the votes by Norway's election commission.

The 60-year-old Solberg has been ahead of a minority government since 2020 -- before then it was coalitions with, among others, the populist Progress Party. Due to her long tenure, as well as her commitment to economic liberalism, she became known at home as "Iron Erna" -- inspired by the late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who was nicknamed "The Iron Lady" for her firm style.

Solberg was hoping to become the first prime minister to win a third consecutive four-year term. During her eight-year tenure, she has expanded oil exploration, cut taxes and sought to make public administration more efficient.

Any post-election horse trading is likely to be fraught for the Labor Party and Gahr Stoere. The Socialist Left won't offer its support lightly and the Center Party is also demanding a more aggressive approach toward shifting to renewable energy.

The Center Party made the largest gains in the election by grabbing nearly 14% of the votes — a 3.6 percentage point hike — with its leader Trygve Slagsvold Vedum, a farmer-turned-politician, noting with a large smile that it had become the third largest group in Stortinget after Labor and the Conservatives.

The campaign focused on the North Sea oil and gas that has helped make Norway one of the world's wealthiest countries. But fears about climate change have put the future of the industry in doubt. The country's biggest industry is responsible for over 40% of exports and directly employs more than 5% of the workforce.

On the other hand, Norwegians are among the most climate-conscious consumers in the world, with most new car purchases now being electric.

Most of Norway's oil and gas still comes from mature areas in the North Sea, but most of the country's untapped reserves are in the Barents Sea, above the Arctic Circle. That is a red line for environmentalists, who could play a crucial role in securing a majority government.

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Gahr Stoere is a former civil servant who was elected to the Stortinget in 2009. He also owns a large part of his family's company, and most the fortune there comes from the sale in 1977 of a Norwegian company that made cast iron stoves and fireplaces.

Stoere also served as foreign minister from 2005-2013 under then-Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and took over the reins of the party when Stoltenberg became NATO's secretary general.

Nearly 3.9 million Norwegians were eligible to vote and more than 1.6 million of them voted in advance, according to Norway's election commission. Turnout was 76.3%, down from more than 78% in this nation of 5.3 million voted.

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

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, the country 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 was approved Monday for areas 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.

Whether those groups participate or not, the rally could bring lone actors to Washington. Just after midnight on Monday, Capitol Police arrested a California man who had a bayonet and machete in his pickup truck outside of Democratic National Committee headquarters. The man, Donald Craighead of Oceanside, California, had a swastika and other white supremacist symbols painted on his truck and told officers he was "on patrol." The police said it was unclear if he was planning on attending any upcoming demonstrations.

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

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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.

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."

The Capitol's leafy grounds, a 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 returned to session Monday, the House doesn't resume until next week.

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 a necessary precaution.

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

Democrats seek corporate, wealthy tax hikes for \$3.5T plan

By LISA MASCARO and MARCY GORDON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats unveiled a sweeping proposal Monday for tax hikes on big corporations and the wealthy to fund President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan, as Congress speeds ahead to shape the far-reaching package that touches almost all aspects of domestic life.

The proposed top tax rate would revert to 39.6% on individuals earning more than \$400,000, or \$450,000

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for couples, and there would be a 3% tax on wealthier Americans with adjusted income beyond \$5 million a year. For big businesses, the proposal would lift the corporate tax rate from 21% to 26.5% on incomes beyond \$5 million, slightly less than the 28% rate the president had sought.

In all, the tax hikes are in line with Biden's own proposals and would bring about the most substantive changes in the tax code since Republicans with then-President Donald Trump slashed taxes in 2017. Business and anti-tax groups are sure to object. But Democrats are pressing forward.

Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., the chairman of the tax-writing Ways & Means Committee, said the proposals, taken together, would "expand opportunity for the American people and support our efforts to build a healthier, more prosperous future."

It's an opening bid at a daunting moment for Biden and his allies in Congress as they assemble the massive package that is expected to become one of the largest single domestic policy measures considered in decades. The president's "Build Back Better" agenda includes spending on child care, health care, education and strategies to confront climate change. It is an ambitious undertaking on par with the Great Society or New Deal.

Republican critics decry the sweep of Biden's plan, suggesting it slopes toward a Western European-style socialism, and they particularly reject the taxes required to pay for it, bristling because it would reverse the GOP tax cuts that were approved just a few years ago.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said the proposal is "the last thing American families need." All GOP lawmakers are expected to vote against it.

But Republicans are largely sidelined as Democrats rely on a budget process that will allow them to approve the proposals on their own, if they can muster their slight majority in Congress.

Democrats have no votes to spare to enact Biden's agenda, with their slim hold on the House and the Senate split 50-50 and Vice President Kamala Harris the tiebreaker if there is no Republican support. Democratic congressional leaders have set a target of Wednesday for committees to have the bill drafted.

One Democratic senator vital to the bill's fate says the cost will need to be slashed to \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion to win his support.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., has suggested it's time for a "strategic pause," and cautioned there was "no way" Congress will meet the late September goal from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., for passage, given his wide differences with liberal Democrats on how much to spend and how to pay for it.

"I cannot support \$3.5 trillion," Manchin said Sunday, citing in particular his opposition to raising the corporate tax rate above 25%, a figure he says will keep the U.S. globally competitive.

Manchin is not alone, as other centrist lawmakers have raised concerns. Restive Democrats from high-tax, heavily Democratic states like New York, New Jersey and California are pushing for a repeal of the \$10,000 cap on state and local tax deductions that was imposed by the 2017 Trump law. Neal indicated Monday that the issue is under serious consideration.

Finding compromise will be a daunting project as progressives, including Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., are angling for the most robust package possible. As chairman of the Budget Committee helping to write the bill, Sanders has noted that he and other members of the liberal flank had initially urged an even more robust package of \$6 trillion.

"For me, this is not a particular number, but it is making sure that we meet this moment," said Rep. Katherine Clark, D-Mass., a member of House leadership. "The pandemic has shown us that we cannot continue to have an economy of haves and have nots."

The White House welcomed the preliminary tax plan, which keeps to Biden's promise not to tax anyone making less than \$400,000. The proposal "makes significant progress towards ensuring our economy rewards work and not just wealth," said deputy press secretary Andrew Bates.

The House, Senate and White House are working together to align their plans ahead of this month's deadlines, though some differences are emerging that will need to be resolved.

The House tax proposal was pitched as potentially raising some \$2.9 trillion, a preliminary estimate — but it would go a long way toward paying for the \$3.5 trillion legislation. The White House is counting on long-term economic growth from the plan to generate an additional \$600 billion to make up the difference.

Much of the revenue raised would come from the higher taxes on corporations and the highest earners,

increasing the individual tax rate to 39.6% from the current 37%.

Looking at wealthy individuals, Neal is proposing an increase in the top tax rate on capital gains for those earning \$400,000 a year or more, to 25% from the current 20%. Exemptions for estate taxes, which were doubled under the 2017 Trump tax law to now \$11.7 million for individuals, would revert to \$5 million.

Also proposed are increases in the tax rate on tobacco products and a new tax on non-tobacco nicotine delivered by e-cigarettes.

The broader blueprint from Democrats proposes spending 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 older people.

Congressional committees are hustling to wrap up their work 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, and it would then go to the Senate. That's near the Sept. 27 timeline for voting on a slimmer infrastructure plan favored by moderate lawmakers.

Associated Press writers Hope Yen and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: How California could recall Gov. Gavin Newsom

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The California recall election that could remove first-term Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom from office wraps up Tuesday. Nearly 8 million mail-in ballots — the form of voting most Californians use — already have been returned out of 22 million sent to registered voters.

The contest unfolded this summer as the nation's most populous state saw a surge in coronavirus infections from the highly contagious delta variant and the return of masks and other restrictions in many places. There have been raging wildfires, crime rates have risen and a homeless crisis persists unabated.

Republicans are hoping for an upset in a heavily Democratic state, where the GOP hasn't won a statewide election since 2006. Newsom has been defending his record on the virus and warning that Republican front-runner Larry Elder, a conservative talk radio host, would undermine California's progressive values.

The election is being watched nationally and the outcome could influence the 2022 elections, when a closely divided Congress will be in play.

How did California arrive at this point? Here are some answers:

WHAT IS A RECALL ELECTION?

California is one of 20 states that have provisions to recall a sitting governor, 19 through elections. The state law establishing the rules goes back to 1911 and was intended to give more power to voters by allowing them to remove elected officials and repeal or pass laws by placing them on the ballot.

Recall attempts are common in the state, but they rarely get on the ballot and even fewer succeed. The only time a governor was recalled was 2003, when Democrat Gray Davis was removed and voters replaced him with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

A federal judge in late August rejected a lawsuit that sought to block the recall on grounds it violated the Constitution by creating a situation where a sitting governor could lose the recall but still get more votes to stay in office than the winning replacement candidate receives.

WHY IS THERE A RECALL DRIVE AGAINST NEWSOM?

The answer is simple and complicated.

The simple part: Californians grew angry during the pandemic. Whipsaw stay-at-home orders by Newsom, crushing job losses from business closures, shuttered schools and the disruption of daily life soured just about everybody. Many of life's routines were cut off at some point if not altogether, whether it was trips to the beach or lunches at a favorite taco joint.

The complicated part: In a state with nearly 40 million people, there are many grievances, including California's wallet-sapping taxes, rising food and gas prices, the threat of water rationing to contend with a long-running drought, a homeless crisis and the continuing menace of wildfires. As governor, Newsom

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is a ready target for that resentment.

He also is being hit by fallout from a multibillion-dollar fraud scandal at the state unemployment agency while weathering public shaming for dining out maskless with friends and lobbyists at an exclusive restaurant last fall as he told residents to stay home.

HOW DOES THE ELECTION WORK?

There are two questions: Voters are being asked if Newsom should be removed, yes or no, and then who should replace him. They will choose from 46 replacement candidates.

If a majority of voters approve Newsom's removal, the candidate who gets the most votes on the second question becomes governor. With dozens of candidates dividing those ballots, it's possible a winner could get 25% or less of the vote.

Statistics compiled by Political Data Inc., a firm that gathers voting information for Democrats, independents and academics, found that nearly 8 million voters have returned mail-in ballots, which would equal about a 35% turnout rate with voting continuing through Tuesday.

Senior citizens are voting in their usual high numbers, while younger voters have been less enthusiastic so far.

WHO ARE THE REPLACEMENT CANDIDATES?

There are 46 names on the ballot, but former Congressman Doug Ose withdrew because of health reasons after it had been printed. The 24 Republican candidates include Elder; former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer; businessman John Cox, who was defeated by Newsom in 2018; reality TV personality and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner; and Assemblyman Kevin Kiley.

There are nine Democrats, 10 independents, two Green Party members and one Libertarian. No Democrat with political stature ran — the best-known is real estate agent and YouTube personality Kevin Paffrath. Most of the candidates are largely unknown and have not mounted credible campaigns.

WHAT ARE THE CANDIDATES PROMISING?

Elder, whom polls have leading the field, has promised to bring a fresh eye and common sense to the Democratic-dominated state and has said he would swiftly lift state mask and vaccine mandates.

Kiley has said he would immediately end the pandemic state of emergency, which would automatically wipe out all state and local orders issued under it.

Faulconer has proposed ending the state income tax for individuals making up to \$50,000 and households up to \$100,000 as part of a plan to make the state more affordable for the middle class.

Cox sought attention by campaigning with a 1,000-pound (450-kilogram) Kodiak bear, which he said represented the need for "beastly" changes in the state, and is calling for a historic tax cut.

Jenner received significant attention when she entered the race but has run a very low-key campaign and is barely registering in polls.

WHAT IS NEWSOM SAYING ABOUT THE RECALL?

He steered around questions of a possible recall for months, saying he wanted to focus on the coronavirus, vaccinations and reopening schools. In March, he launched an aggressive campaign and began running ads attacking the recall and doing national TV and cable interviews.

The main committee opposing the recall had raised nearly \$70 million through the end of August.

Newsom, who was elected in a 2018 landslide, has acknowledged that people were anxious and weary after a difficult year of restrictions. Recently, he has defended his record during the pandemic — arguing his decisions saved thousands of lives — while warning that a Republican victory would undermine the state's progressive values and possibly have a ripple effect nationwide.

Democrats say the effort to remove him is being driven by far-right extremists and supporters of former President Donald Trump. The recall is backed by state and national Republicans, but organizers argue they have a broad-based coalition, including many independents and Democrats.

Lately, Newsom has focused his attacks on Elder, calling him more extreme in many ways than Trump. Elder dismisses such criticism as a political ploy to divert attention from Newsom's record on crime, homelessness and the pandemic.

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The governor spent much of 2020 on the defensive. But he has benefitted from a record budget surplus that allowed him to tour the state to announce vast new spending programs, including \$12 billion to fight homelessness; checks of up to \$1,100 each for millions of low and middle-income earners who struggled during lockdowns; and \$2.7 billion for free kindergarten for all of the state's 4-year-olds.

HOW PRECARIOUS IS NEWSOM'S HOLD ON HIS JOB?

In the depths of the pandemic, Newsom's popularity was tumbling and he appeared imperiled, with widespread unrest over long-running school and business closures. Many business owners were infuriated by what they saw as Newsom's heavy-handed restrictions that had some open and close several times. Others rebelled against mask mandates.

Earlier this year, a reopened economy and the astounding windfall of tax dollars helped Newsom recover. However, when Newsom fully reopened the state on June 15, virus cases were near record lows. Since then, cases have been climbing, particularly among the unvaccinated.

Los Angeles County, which accounts for a quarter of the state's population, reimposed an indoor mask mandate in public places, even if people are vaccinated. California also is requiring K-12 students to wear masks when they go back to classrooms. Such an order could hurt Newsom, especially among those who felt he didn't do enough to reopen schools last year.

However, recent polling indicates Newsom is in a strong position to hold his job. He has advantages over his GOP rivals: Democratic voters outnumber Republicans nearly 2-to-1, and the party controls every statewide office and dominates the Legislature and congressional delegation. President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Barack Obama have called on voters to reject the recall.

Republicans last won a statewide election in 2006, when Schwarzenegger was reelected.

See AP's complete coverage of the California recall election: <https://apnews.com/hub/california-recall>

School starts for 1 million NYC kids amid new vaccine rules

By KAREN MATTHEWS and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — School started Monday for about a million New York City public school students in the nation's largest experiment of in-person learning during the coronavirus pandemic.

The first day of school coincided with several milestones in the city's pandemic recovery that hinge on vaccine mandates.

Nearly all of the city's 300,000 employees were required to be back in their workplaces, in person, Monday as the city ended 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 provided 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.

"There are kids who have not been in a classroom in a year and a half, and they deserve better," de Blasio said Monday. "Kids need to be back in school for their mental health, their physical health, their ability to develop socially, and for so many reasons."

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona visited a Bronx elementary school and appeared remotely at the mayor's briefing to praise the city's school opening plan. "They did it right, and I know this is going

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to be an awesome year for New York, for everyone," Cardona said.

Masks will be required for all students and staff members, as is the case in schools across New York state. Samiya Ramdial's mask was firmly in place for the start of first grade at Public School 33 in Manhattan — and so were her spiffy black sneakers.

"These are great shoes," Samiya said. "I can dance in these."

Under the city's blended learning model, Samiya was in kindergarten in person part-time last year and learned remotely the rest of the time.

"She preferred in person of course, because she got to see her friends, and she enjoys being with the teachers as well," her mother, Christina Brea, said.

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.

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.

Under the school system's coronavirus protocols, if there is a positive case in an elementary school classroom, students in the class will receive remote instruction while quarantining for 10 days. In middle schools and high schools, only unvaccinated students will quarantine.

De Blasio said he does not expect many classrooms to close.

"We do not expect to see anywhere near the kind of closures or classroom disruptions that we saw last year," he said Monday.

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 way that this full-time return to office was rolled out with less than two weeks notice has been the part that has been so disorienting," said Ashley Firestone, who works for the city's Department of Cultural Affairs.

"There are so many aspects of this that have not been considered and thoughtful in a humane or empathic way to the humanity of the workers that have been putting themselves on the line for the last 18 months on behalf of the city," she added.

Some city employees like Yvette Santiago had been back to work on a limited basis. But the mandatory full-time return will require some adjustment.

"The return to work has been a little anxious," said Santiago, the director of the Department for the Aging. "I'm just trying to adjust."

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.

The outbreak had disrupted much of public life, including the shuttering of restaurants and other gathering places. City officials have pushed for vaccinations to prevent the further spread of the virus, particularly more highly transmittable variants that could prompt another round of mass closures.

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On Monday, the city began enforcing its vaccine mandate at indoor eateries, museums, gyms and entertainment venues.

At the Museum of Modern Art in midtown Manhattan, lines formed at the door as patrons swiped through phone apps or dug into their wallets for their proof of vaccination.

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.

Allison Torres, a server at Court Square Diner in Queens, had turned away nearly a dozen customers by midmorning, including a regular.

"I'm sorry, today is when they go strict," she explained to a couple of young men before turning them away because they did not have proof they've been vaccinated.

"We're definitely going to lose business," Torres said. "I'm going to lose money and my boss is going to lose money."

Torres said the diner would follow the rules "because they're the rules — but we don't have to like it."

Study: Pentagon reliance on contractors hurt US in 9/11 wars

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

Up to half of the \$14 trillion spent by the Pentagon since 9/11 went to for-profit defense contractors, a study released Monday found. It's the latest work to argue the U.S. reliance on private corporations for war-zone duties that used to be done by troops contributed to mission failure in Afghanistan.

In the post-9/11 wars, U.S. corporations contracted by the Defense Department not only handled war-zone logistics like running fuel convoys and staffing chow lines but performed mission-crucial work like training and equipping Afghan security forces — security forces that collapsed last month as the Taliban swept the country.

Within weeks, and before the U.S. military had even completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban easily routed an Afghan government and military that Americans had spent 20 years and billions of dollars to stand up. President Joe Biden placed blame squarely on the Afghans themselves. "We gave them every chance," he said last month. "What we could not provide them was the will to fight."

But William Hartung, the author of Monday's study by Brown University's Costs of War project and the Center for International Policy, and others say it's essential that Americans examine what role the reliance on private contractors played in the post-9/11 wars. In Afghanistan, that included contractors allegedly paying protection money to warlords and the Taliban themselves, and the Defense Department insisting on equipping the Afghan air force with complex Blackhawk helicopters and other aircraft that few but U.S. contractors knew how to maintain.

"If it were only the money, that would be outrageous enough," Hartung, the director of the arms and security program at the Center for International Policy, said of instances where the Pentagon's reliance on contractors backfired. "But the fact it undermined the mission and put troops at risk is even more outrageous."

At the start of this year, before Biden began the final American withdrawal from Afghanistan, there were far more contractors in Afghanistan and also in Iraq than U.S. troops.

The U.S. saw about 7,000 military members die in all post-9/11 conflicts, and nearly 8,000 contractors, another Costs of War study estimates.

The Professional Services Council, an organization representing businesses contracting with the government, cited a lower figure from the U.S. Department of Labor saying nearly 4,000 federal contractors have been killed since 2001.

A spokeswoman pointed to a statement last month from the organization's president, David J. Berteau: "For almost two decades, government contractors have provided broad and essential support for U.S. and allied forces, for the Afghan military and other elements of the Afghan government, and for humanitarian and economic development assistance."

U.S. officials after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks embraced private contractors as an essential part of the

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U.S. military response.

It started with then-Vice President Dick Cheney, the former CEO of Halliburton. Halliburton received more than \$30 billion to help set up and run bases, feed troops and carry out other work in Iraq and Afghanistan by 2008, the study says. Cheney and defense contractors argued that relying on private contractors for work that service members did in previous wars would allow for a trimmer U.S. military, and be more efficient and cost effective.

By 2010, Pentagon spending had surged by more than one-third, as the U.S. fought dual wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a post-9/11 American, politicians vied to show support for the military in a country grown far more security conscious.

"Any member of Congress who doesn't vote for the funds we need to defend this country will be looking for a new job after next November," the study notes Harry Stonecipher, then the vice president of Boeing, telling *The Wall Street Journal* the month after the attacks.

And up to a third of the Pentagon contracts went to just five weapons suppliers. Last fiscal year, for example, the money Lockheed Martin alone got from Pentagon contracts was one and a half times the entire budgets of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, according to the study.

The Pentagon pumped out more contracts than it could oversee, lawmakers and government special investigators said.

For example, a Florida Republican Party official made millions on what lawmakers charged were excess profits when the U.S. granted a one-of-a-kind contract for fuel convoys from Jordan to Iraq, the study notes. The electrocution of at least 18 service members by bad wiring in bases in Iraq, some of it blamed on major contractor Kellogg, Brown and Root, was another of many instances where government investigations pointed to shoddy logistics and reconstruction work.

The stunning Taliban victory last month in Afghanistan is drawing attention now to even graver consequences: the extent to which the U.S. reliance on contractors may have heightened the difficulties of the Afghan security forces.

Jodi Vittori, a former Air Force lieutenant colonel and scholar of corruption and fragile states at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who was not involved in the study, points to the U.S. insistence that the Afghan air force use U.S.-made helicopters. Afghans preferred Russian helicopters, which were easier to fly, could be maintained by Afghans, and were suited to rugged Afghanistan.

When U.S. contractors pulled out with U.S. troops this spring and summer, taking their knowledge of how to maintain U.S.-provided aircraft with them, top Afghan leaders bitterly complained to the U.S. that it had deprived them of one essential advantage over the Taliban.

Hartung, like others, also points to the corruption engendered by the billions of loosely monitored dollars that the U.S. poured into Afghanistan as one central reason that Afghanistan's U.S.-backed government lost popular support, and Afghan fighters lost morale.

Hillary Clinton, while secretary of state under President Barack Obama, accused defense contractors at risk in war zones of resorting to payoffs to armed groups, making protection money one of the biggest sources of funding for the Taliban.

The United States also relied, in part, on defense contractors to carry out one of the tasks most central to its hopes of success in Afghanistan — helping to set up and train an Afghan military and other security forces that could stand up to extremist groups and to insurgents, including the Taliban.

Tellingly, Vittori said, it was Afghan commandos who had consistent training by U.S. special operations forces and others who did most of the fighting against the Taliban last month.

Relying less on private contractors, and more on the U.S. military as in past wars, might have given the U.S. better chances of victory in Afghanistan, Vittori noted. She said that would have meant U.S. presidents accepting the political risks of sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan, and getting more body bags of U.S. troops back.

"Using contractors allowed America to fight a war that a lot of Americans forgot we were fighting," Vittori said.

EXPLAINER: 4 will circle Earth on 1st SpaceX private flight

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists.

SpaceX's first private flight will be led by a 38-year-old entrepreneur who's bankrolling the entire trip. He's taking two sweepstakes winners with him on the three-day, round-the-world trip, along with a health care worker who survived childhood cancer.

They'll ride alone in a fully automated Dragon capsule, the same kind that SpaceX uses to send astronauts to and from the International Space Station for NASA. But the chartered flight won't be going there.

Set to launch Wednesday night from Kennedy Space Center, the two men and two women will soar 100 miles (160 kilometers) higher than the space station, aiming for an altitude of 357 miles (575 kilometers), just above the current position of the Hubble Space Telescope.

By contrast, Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson and Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos briefly skimmed space during their short rides in July — Branson reached 53 miles (86 kilometers) while Bezos hit 66 miles up (106 kilometers).

As the private flight's benefactor, Jared Isaacman, sees it: "This is the first step toward a world where everyday people can go and venture among the stars."

A look at the spaceflight, dubbed Inspiration4:

BILLIONAIRE'S QUEST

Isaacman's idea of fun is flying fighter jets and keeping up with the Air Force Thunderbirds. He quit high school and started his own payment-processing company, Shift4 Payments in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He segued into aviation, founding Draken International for tactical aircraft training. While he won't divulge what he's paying for the flight, Isaacman acknowledges the "worthwhile debates" over whether the wealthy should spend their fortunes fixing problems on Earth, versus sightseeing in space. But he contends investing in space now will lower costs in the future. "Because it's so expensive, space has been the exclusive domain of world superpowers and the elite that they select," he told The Associated Press last week. "It just shouldn't stay that way." When he announced the flight in February, he pledged \$100 million to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and aims to raise another \$100 million in donations.

LUCK OF THE DRAW

Isaacman offered one of the four capsule seats to St. Jude, which offered it to physician assistant Hayley Arceneaux, a former patient who now works at the Memphis, Tennessee, hospital. Now 29, Arceneaux was 10 when diagnosed with bone cancer, and had much of her left thigh bone replaced with a titanium rod. She'll be the first person in space with a prosthesis, proud to pave the way for "those who aren't physically perfect." She'll also be the youngest American in space, beating the late Sally Ride, who became the first American woman in space in 1983 at age 32. Contest winners claimed the final two seats. Sian Proctor, 51, a community college educator in Tempe, Arizona, and former geology instructor, beat out 200 other Shift4 Payments clients with her space-themed artwork business. Also a pilot, she was a NASA astronaut finalist more than a decade ago. Chris Sembroski, 42, a data engineer and former Air Force missileman from Everett, Washington, entered an open lottery by donating to St. Jude. He didn't win, but a friend from his college days did and gave him the slot.

TRAINING LIKE ASTRONAUTS

It's been a whirlwind since all four came together in March. They hiked up Washington's Mount Rainier in the snow, sampled brief bursts of weightlessness aboard modified aircraft and took intense, rapid spins in fighter jets and centrifuges. "I know that my prosthesis can now handle 8 G's of force," Arceneaux told the AP. Her only compromise: SpaceX had to adjust her capsule seat to relieve pain in that knee. Although the capsule is fully automated, the four spent time in the SpaceX capsule simulator rehearsing launch, reentry and other critical operations. "We definitely had some Apollo 13-like simulation rides home where virtually everything was broken, and everybody made it back. So I think we passed all the tests," Isaacson said.

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While acknowledging the risks, the four are impressed with SpaceX's focus on safety and reusability. But Sembroski said his wife, a schoolteacher, will hold off celebrating until splashdown.

PRIVATE VS NASA MISSION

This is SpaceX's first private flight and the company is running the show -- NASA isn't involved. So SpaceX is providing its own facilities for private passengers to sleep, eat and hang out before launch, and to get into their white-with-black-trim flight suits. The leased launch pad used by SpaceX is the same one used by Apollo moonwalkers, shuttle astronauts and all three previous NASA crews. And at mission's end, they'll splash down off the Florida coast just like their predecessors. The pandemic is again limiting spectators: St. Jude is scaling back its launch delegation, with actor Marlo Thomas, whose father Danny Thomas, founded St. Jude, canceling her trip to Florida with husband, talk show host Phil Donahue.

THREE DAYS ALOFT

Isaacman and SpaceX settled on three days as the sweet spot for orbiting the Earth. It gives him and his fellow passengers plenty of time to take in the views through a custom bubble-shaped window, take blood samples and conduct other medical research, and drum up interest for auction items to benefit the hospital. While roomy for a capsule, the Dragon offers virtually no privacy; only a curtain shields the toilet. Unlike the space station and NASA's old shuttles, there is no galley or sleeping compartments, or even separate work areas. As for food, they'll chow down on cold pizza following liftoff. They're also packing ready-to-eat, astronaut-style fare.

SPACE TOURISM ON THE RISE

Space tourism has never been hotter. Branson and Bezos rode their companies' rockets into space to fulfill lifelong dreams but also advance ticket sales. Too busy to launch himself, SpaceX founder Elon Musk has two tourist flights to the space station coming up in the next year — the first as early as January — and also a private moonshot in the works. The businessmen shelling out \$55 million apiece to fly SpaceX to the space station won't be the first to pay their own way there. Seven wealthy clients of Virginia-based Space Adventures rode Russian rockets to the space station from 2000 to 2009. Isaacman traveled to Kazakhstan in 2008 to watch one of them soar: Richard Garriott, the video game-developing son of the late NASA astronaut Owen Garriott. While once opposed to space tourism, NASA is rooting for these newcomers. "I can't wait for them to fly and fly safely and fly often," said NASA's commercial spaceflight director, Phil McAlister.

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

Oldest US veteran of WWII celebrates his 112th birthday

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A Louisiana man who is the oldest living World War II veteran in the United States has marked his 112th birthday.

Lawrence Brooks celebrated Sunday with a drive-by party at his New Orleans home hosted by the National World War II Museum, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported. He also received greetings from Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, who tweeted, "Mr. Brooks, the entire state of Louisiana thanks you for your service and we all wish you a joyous birthday."

The museum has previously hosted parties for Brooks, although the coronavirus pandemic has caused those events to shift to drive-by celebrations for the past two years.

This year's festivities included a Jeep parade, a live performance from the museum vocal trio and entertainment from New Orleans musicians. The city also recognized Brooks' birthday with an official proclamation.

Born in Norwood, Louisiana, in 1909, Brooks has lived in New Orleans since 1929. Drafted in 1940, he was a private in the Army's mostly Black 91st Engineer Battalion, a unit that was stationed in New Guinea and the Philippines and built infrastructure such as bridges, roads and airstrips.

In an oral history about his service posted on YouTube, Brooks also described how he was delivering a load of barbed wire to the front when one of the engines of the C-47 he was traveling in went out.

After they dumped the barbed wire to conserve weight, he made his way to the cockpit. He told the

pilot and co-pilot that since they were the only two with parachutes, if they had to jump for it, he was going to grab on to one of them.

"We made it though," he said laughing. "We had a big laugh about that."

FDA experts among group opposing US booster shot plan

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

The average person doesn't need a COVID-19 booster yet, an international group of scientists — including two top U.S. regulators — wrote Monday in a scientific journal.

The experts reviewed studies of the vaccines' performance and concluded the shots are working well despite the extra-contagious delta variant, especially against severe disease.

"Even in populations with fairly high vaccination rates, the unvaccinated are still the major drivers of transmission" at this stage of the pandemic, they concluded.

The opinion piece, published in *The Lancet*, illustrates the intense scientific debate about who needs booster doses and when, a decision the U.S. and other countries are grappling with.

After revelations of political meddling in the Trump administration's coronavirus response, President Joe Biden has promised to "follow the science." But the review raises the question of whether his administration is moving faster than the experts.

The authors include two leading vaccine reviewers at the Food and Drug Administration, Drs. Phil Krause and Marion Gruber, who recently announced they will be stepping down this fall. Among the other 16 authors are leading vaccine researchers in the U.S., Britain, France, South Africa and India, plus scientists with the World Health Organization, which already has urged a moratorium on boosters until poor countries are better vaccinated.

In the U.S., the White House has begun planning for boosters later this month, if both the FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agree. Advisers to the FDA will weigh evidence about an extra Pfizer shot Friday at a key public meeting.

Georgetown University's Larry Gostin said the paper "throws gasoline on the fire" in the debate about whether most Americans truly need boosters and whether the White House got ahead of scientists.

"It's always a fundamental error of process to make a scientific announcement before the public health agencies have acted and that's exactly what happened here," said Gostin, a lawyer and public health specialist.

The FDA did not respond to requests for comment Monday morning.

The U.S. already offers an extra dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines to people with severely weakened immune systems.

For the general population, the debate is boiling down to whether boosters should be given even though the vaccines are still offering high protection against severe disease — possibly in hopes of blocking milder "breakthrough" infections among the fully vaccinated.

Last week, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said new data showed that as delta surged, the unvaccinated were 4.5 times more likely than the fully vaccinated to get infected, over 10 times more likely to be hospitalized and 11 times more likely to die. Still, government scientists are also weighing hints that protection is waning among older adults who were vaccinated early last winter.

The writers of Monday's commentary reported reviewing worldwide studies since delta began surging, mostly of U.S. and European vaccines. The team concluded "none of these studies has provided credible evidence of substantially declining protection against severe disease."

Because the body builds layers of immunity, gradual drops in antibody levels don't necessarily mean overall effectiveness is dropping "and reductions in vaccine efficacy against mild disease do not necessarily predict reductions in the (typically higher) efficacy against severe disease," they wrote.

The more the virus spreads, the more opportunity it has to evolve into strains that could escape current vaccines. The *Lancet* reviewers suggest there could be bigger gains from creating booster doses that better match circulating variants, much like flu vaccine is regularly updated, than from just giving extra

doses of the original vaccine.

"There is an opportunity now to study variant-based boosters before there is widespread need for them," the scientists wrote.

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No bull: Scientists potty train cows to use 'MooLoo'

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Turns out cows can be potty trained as easily as toddlers. Maybe easier.

It's no bull. Scientists put the task to the test and 11 out of 16 cows learned to use the "MooLoo" when they had to go.

Just like some parents, the researchers used a sweet treat to coax the cows to push through a gate and urinate in a special pen. And it took only 15 days to train the young calves. Some kids take quite a bit longer.

"The cows are at least as good as children, age 2 to 4 years, at least as quick," said study senior author Lindsay Matthews, an animal behavioral scientist at New Zealand's University of Auckland who worked with colleagues on the tests at an indoor animal research lab in Germany.

What started with a half-in-jest question on a New Zealand radio talk show about the very real problem of livestock waste resulted in a serious study published Monday in the journal *Current Biology*. And it wasn't just a "wow, this could be fun" academic question. Massive amounts of urine waste is a serious environmental issue, Matthews said.

Urine contains nitrogen, and when mixed with feces becomes ammonia, which is an environmental issue with acid rain and other problems, Matthews said. It can also taint the water with nitrates and create the airborne pollutant nitrous oxide, he said.

And cows do pee a lot. A single cow can produce about 8 gallons (30 liters) of urine a day, Matthews said. In 2019, nitrous oxide comprised 7% of all the U.S. greenhouse gases, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"I am not surprised they can train calves to urinate in set locations, but I am surprised no one has demonstrated this before," said Duke University animal cognition scientist Brian Hare, who wasn't part of the research. "The critical question is can it and will it scale?"

If it could be done, toilet training animals makes it easier to manage waste products and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, said Donald Broom, a professor of animal welfare at the University of Cambridge in England.

At the lab in Dummerstorf, Germany, the researchers mimicked a toddler's training, putting the cows in the special pen, waiting until they urinated and then giving them a reward: a sweet liquid of mostly molasses. Cows do have a sweet tooth, Matthews said. If the cows urinated outside the MooLoo after the initial training, they got a squirt of cold water.

Then in two sets of experiments, the researchers let the Holstein cows roam about the indoor facility. When they had to urinate, 11 of them pushed into the pen, did their business, and got their sweet reward.

There are a couple caveats to this experiment.

No. 1, they gave diuretics to the cattle to get them to urinate more because they had limited time to run the experiments under ethics guidelines.

And No. 2, they didn't do No. 2. They only trained cows to use the MooLoo to urinate, not defecate.

Urine is a bigger problem, at least in Europe, Matthews said. But he predicted they could train cows to poop in a certain place too.

While dogs, cats and horses can be toilet trained, they already show the desire to go in special places, but cows don't, Matthews said.

The biggest environmental problem for livestock, though, is the heat-trapping gas methane they emit in belches and flatulence, a significant source of global warming. The cows can't be trained not to belch or fart, Matthews said: "They would blow up."

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears.

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Report: Climate change could see 200 million move by 2050

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Climate change could push more than 200 million people to leave their homes in the next three decades and create migration hot spots unless urgent action is taken to reduce global emissions and bridge the development gap, a World Bank report has found.

The second part of the Groundswell report published Monday examined how the impacts of slow-onset climate change such as water scarcity, decreasing crop productivity and rising sea levels could lead to millions of what it describes as "climate migrants" by 2050 under three different scenarios with varying degrees of climate action and development.

Under the most pessimistic scenario, with a high level of emissions and unequal development, the report forecasts up to 216 million people moving within their own countries across the six regions analyzed. Those regions are Latin America; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; South Asia; and East Asia and the Pacific.

In the most climate-friendly scenario, with a low level of emissions and inclusive, sustainable development, the world could still see 44 million people being forced to leave their homes.

The findings "reaffirm the potency of climate to induce migration within countries," said Viviane Wei Chen Clement, a senior climate change specialist at the World Bank and one of the report's authors.

The report didn't look at the short-term impacts of climate change, such as the effects of extreme weather events, and did not look at climate migration across borders.

In the worst-case scenario, Sub-Saharan Africa — the most vulnerable region due to desertification, fragile coastlines and the population's dependence on agriculture — would see the most migrants, with up to 86 million people moving within national borders.

North Africa, however, is predicted to have the largest proportion of climate migrants, with 19 million people moving, equivalent to roughly 9% of its population, due mainly to increased water scarcity in northeastern Tunisia, northwestern Algeria, western and southern Morocco, and the central Atlas foothills, the report said.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is particularly affected by flooding and crop failures, accounting for almost half of the predicted climate migrants, with 19.9 million people, including an increasing number of women, moving by 2050 under the pessimistic scenario.

"This is our humanitarian reality right now and we are concerned this is going to be even worse, where vulnerability is more acute," said Prof. Maarten van Aalst, director of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, who wasn't involved with the report.

Many scientists say the world is no longer on track to the worst-case scenario for emissions. But even under a more moderate scenario, van Aalst said many impacts are now occurring faster than previously expected, "including the extremes we are already experiencing, as well as potential implications for migration and displacement."

While climate change's influence on migration is not new, it is often part of a combination of factors pushing people to move, and acts as a threat multiplier. People affected by conflicts and inequality are also more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as they have limited means to adapt.

"Globally we know that three out of four people that move stay within countries," said Dr. Kanta Kumari Rigaud, a lead environmental specialist at the World Bank and co-author of the report.

The report also warns that migration hot spots could appear within the next decade and intensify by 2050. Planning is needed both in the areas where people will move to, and in the areas they leave to help

those who remain.

Among the actions recommended were achieving “net zero emissions by mid-century to have a chance at limiting global warming to 1.5° degrees Celsius” and investing in development that is “green, resilient, and inclusive, in line with the Paris Agreement.”

Clement and Rigaud warned that the worst-case scenario is still plausible if collective action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and invest in development isn’t taken soon, especially in the next decade.

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

Read more of AP’s global migration coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/migration>

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 adapting 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

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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 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 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 Writers Kelvin Chan in London, Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta and Video Journalist Mike Householder in Detroit contributed to this report.

Tony Awards land hosts Leslie Odom Jr. and Audra McDonald

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The long-delayed Tony Awards have landed two impressive master of ceremonies: Tony- and Grammy-winning singer and actor Leslie Odom Jr. will host a splashy TV special, and the awards will be hosted by Tony-, Grammy- and Emmy Award-winning actor and singer Audra McDonald.

Producers of the telecast announced Monday that Odom will host the two-hour celebration of Broadway's return on Sept. 26 from 9 p.m.-11p.m. ET/PT, and McDonald will host the award ceremony from 7 p.m.-9 p.m. ET/PT

The four-hour event will be broadcast live from Broadway's Winter Garden Theatre. Capping the evening will be the awarding of the three top awards: best play, best play revival and best musical.

Broadway theaters abruptly closed on March 12, 2020, knocking out all shows — including 16 that were still scheduled to open in the spring. The four-hour awards and special are an attempt to celebrate live theater and serve as a splashy advertisement that Broadway is inching back to normalcy.

"While we look back, my greatest hope is that this event marks the beginning of a new era for Broadway — one with renewed commitment to inclusivity and belonging as well as appreciation for the sacred experience of live theater," McDonald said in a statement.

This season's nominations were pulled from just 18 eligible plays and musicals, a fraction of the 34 shows the season before. During most years, there are 26 competitive categories. This year there are 25 with several depleted ones.

Not everyone is happy with the way CBS is handling the awards this year. The bulk of the Tonys — the acting, directing and technical ones — will only be accessible to Paramount+ customers — with Odom's special then airing on CBS.

Odom broke through as the Tony-winning Aaron Burr in "Hamilton," but McDonald is a nominee this time. She's hoping to break her own record for the most Tony Awards won by a performer for her work in a revival of the Terrence McNally play "Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune."

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

EXPLAINER: If Newsom recall fails, no winning candidate

By STEPHEN OHLEMACHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — California voters are being asked to weigh in on two questions in Tuesday's recall election for Gov. Gavin Newsom. But it's possible The Associated Press will only declare the winner in one of the races.

Here's a look at how AP plans to handle the calls in an election with some unusual mechanics.

TWO QUESTIONS, BUT ONLY ONE MAY MATTER

Forty-six candidates are on the ballot to replace Newsom but it won't matter who comes in first unless the effort to remove the first-term Democrat succeeds.

California voters are being asked these two questions: Should Newsom be removed from office, yes or no, and who should replace him? If a majority votes yes on Newsom's removal, the candidate who gets

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the most votes on the second question would become governor for the final year of Newsom's term.

But if the recall fails, the question of who would replace him would be irrelevant.

That's why The Associated Press will only declare a winner among the replacement candidates if the vote to recall Newsom is successful.

The top vote-getter on the replacement ballot could become obvious before the outcome of the recall vote is decided. Talk radio host Larry Elder, a Republican, is polling well ahead of the other 45 candidates. AP will report on the status of the replacement election in its news coverage, but will not declare a winner unless Newsom is recalled.

Winners are declared only when AP is fully confident a race has been won — defined most simply as the point when the number of remaining votes do not provide a path to victory for a trailing candidate.

Before Election Day, AP analysts study county-by-county election results for past races, vote-counting procedures, recount requirements and changes to state election laws, relying on information from AP's election research group.

On election night, they study the incoming vote and are in constant contact with AP's vote count team, in search of the latest information about what's been counted so far and how many ballots may still be left to count.

BE READY TO WAIT FOR IT

If the races are close, it could take a while to determine the winners.

California historically takes weeks to count all the votes in statewide elections. In 2020, when nearly 18 million people cast ballots, a third of the votes in the presidential election were counted after Election Day. Two years earlier, more than 40% were counted after Election Day.

After the polls close, the first results released by most counties in California include the mail-in ballots and early-in person votes that officials were able to count before the polls closed. Then they start counting the votes cast on Election Day at local polling places, a process that can last through the night.

Mail ballots can arrive up to a week after Election Day and still be counted, as long as they are post-marked by Election Day. This can take days or weeks. Mail ballots are generally counted in the order they are received, so the last ballots to be counted tend to be the last ones to arrive.

MARGINS MAY SHIFT

In 2020, Republicans were much less likely than Democrats to vote by mail in part because then-President Donald Trump repeatedly claimed — without evidence — that voting by mail was unsafe and susceptible to fraud.

If that trend continues, the results in the recall election could swing back and forth on election night, depending on which types of votes are being reported — mail ballots or in-person votes.

Most California voters cast their ballots by mail, a trend that accelerated during the pandemic as many voters were reluctant to enter crowded polling places on Election Day. About 87% of California voters cast their ballots by mail in last year's presidential election.

For Tuesday's election, all 22 million registered voters were sent a mail ballot.

Mail ballots take longer to process than in-person votes because election officials must remove the ballots from their envelopes, check the voter's registration and make sure that the voter's signature on the envelope matches the one on file. Then the votes can be counted.

When voters cast ballots in person, officials perform security measures at the polling place so the votes can be counted soon after the polls close.

Voters who don't want to vote by mail can vote in person, on Election Day or during the early voting period. Voters can also drop off mail ballots at local polling places, county election offices or in county drop boxes.

Ohlemacher is the AP's Election Decision Editor.

Today in History

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 14, the 257th day of 2021. There are 108 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key was inspired to write the poem "Defence of Fort McHenry" (later "The Star-Spangled Banner") after witnessing the American flag flying over the Maryland fort following a night of British naval bombardment during the War of 1812.

On this date:

In 1812, Napoleon Bonaparte's troops entered Moscow following the Battle of Borodino to find the Russian city largely abandoned and parts set ablaze.

In 1836, former Vice President Aaron Burr died in Staten Island, N.Y., at age 80.

In 1847, during the Mexican-American War, U.S. forces under Gen. Winfield Scott took control of Mexico City.

In 1861, the first naval engagement of the Civil War took place as the USS Colorado attacked and sank the Confederate private schooner Judah off Pensacola, Florida.

In 1901, President William McKinley died in Buffalo, New York, of gunshot wounds inflicted by an assassin; Vice President Theodore Roosevelt succeeded him.

In 1927, modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan died in Nice (nees), France, when her scarf became entangled in a wheel of the sports car she was riding in.

In 1982, Princess Grace of Monaco, formerly film star Grace Kelly, died at age 52 of injuries from a car crash the day before; Lebanon's president-elect, Bashir Gemayel (bah-SHEER' jeh-MAY'-el), was killed by a bomb.

In 1994, on the 34th day of a strike by players, Acting Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig announced the 1994 season was over.

In 2001, Americans packed churches and clogged public squares on a day of remembrance for the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. President George W. Bush prayed with his Cabinet and attended services at Washington National Cathedral, then flew to New York, where he waded into the ruins of the World Trade Center and addressed rescue workers in a flag-waving, bullhorn-wielding show of resolve.

In 2010, Reggie Bush announced he was forfeiting his 2005 Heisman title, citing a scandal over improper benefits while he was a star running back at Southern California; it was the first time college football's top award had been relinquished by a recipient.

In 2012, fury over an anti-Muslim film ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad spread across the Muslim world, with deadly clashes near Western embassies in Tunisia and Sudan, an American fast-food restaurant set ablaze in Lebanon, and international peacekeepers attacked in the Sinai.

In 2015, Rowan County, Kentucky, clerk Kim Davis returned to work for the first time since she was jailed for defying a federal court and announced that she would no longer block her deputies from issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Ten years ago: A government panel released a report saying that BP bore ultimate responsibility for the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history.

Five years ago: Hillary Clinton's campaign released a letter from her doctor saying the Democratic presidential nominee was "recovering well" from pneumonia and remained "fit to serve as President of the United States." President Barack Obama said the U.S. was lifting economic sanctions and restoring trade benefits to former pariah state Myanmar as he met with former political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi (ahng sahn soo chee), the nation's de facto leader. Tyre King, a Black 13-year-old, was fatally shot by Columbus, Ohio, police after authorities said he pulled a BB gun from his pants.

One year ago: In Northern California for a briefing on the West Coast wildfires that had killed dozens of people and burned millions of acres, President Donald Trump dismissed the scientific consensus that climate change was playing a central role in the historic fires; he renewed his unfounded claim that failure to rake forest floors and clear dead timber was mostly to blame. Democrat Joe Biden labeled Trump a

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"climate arsonist" in a speech in which Biden said the response to the wildfires would require stronger presidential leadership. The mayor of Rochester, New York, fired the city's police chief amid the upheaval over the suffocation death in March of Daniel Prude, a Black man who died several days after officers put a hood over his head to stop him from spitting and pressed his face into the pavement.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Walter Koenig (KAY'-nihg) is 85. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Larry Brown is 81. Singer-actor Joey Heatherton is 77. Actor Sam Neill is 74. Singer Jon "Bowzer" Bauman (Sha Na Na) is 74. Actor Robert Wisdom is 68. Rock musician Steve Berlin (Los Lobos) is 66. Country singer-songwriter Beth Nielsen Chapman is 65. Actor Mary Crosby is 62. Singer Morten Harket (a-ha) is 62. Country singer John Berry is 62. Actor Melissa Leo is 61. Actor Faith Ford is 57. Actor Jamie Kaler is 57. Actor Michelle Stafford is 56. Rock musician Mike Cooley (Drive-By Truckers) is 55. Actor Dan Cortese is 54. Contemporary Christian singer Mark Hall is 52. Actor-writer-director-producer Tyler Perry is 52. Actor Ben Garant is 51. Rock musician Craig Montoya (Tri Polar) is 51. Actor Kimberly Williams-Paisley is 50. Actor Andrew Lincoln is 48. Rapper Nas is 48. Actor Austin Basis is 45. Country singer Danielle Peck is 43. Pop singer Ayo is 41. Chef/TV personality Katie Lee is 40. Actor Sebastian Sozzi is 39. Actor Adam Lamberg is 37. Singer Alex Clare is 36. Actor Chad Duell (TV: "General Hospital") is 34. Actor Jessica Brown Findlay is 34. Actor-singer Logan Henderson is 32. Actor Emma Kenney is 22.

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