

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 1 of 76

- [1- Upcoming Events, Position Opening](#)
- [2- Obit: Jody Witlock](#)
- [3- Redfield Golf Meet, Webster X-C Invite](#)
- [3- State law requires Board of Education Standards meeting postponed to Oct. 25](#)
- [4- Sunflower Classic Golf Results](#)
- [4- Reid Johnson Gets Hole-In-One](#)
- [4- Conde National League](#)
- [5- Garden Club members give downtown fall colors](#)
- [6- Ken's of Groton help wanted](#)
- [7- Rounds Report: Afghanistan](#)
- [8- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [9- Weather Pages](#)
- [12- Daily Devotional](#)
- [13- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [14- News from the Associated Press](#)

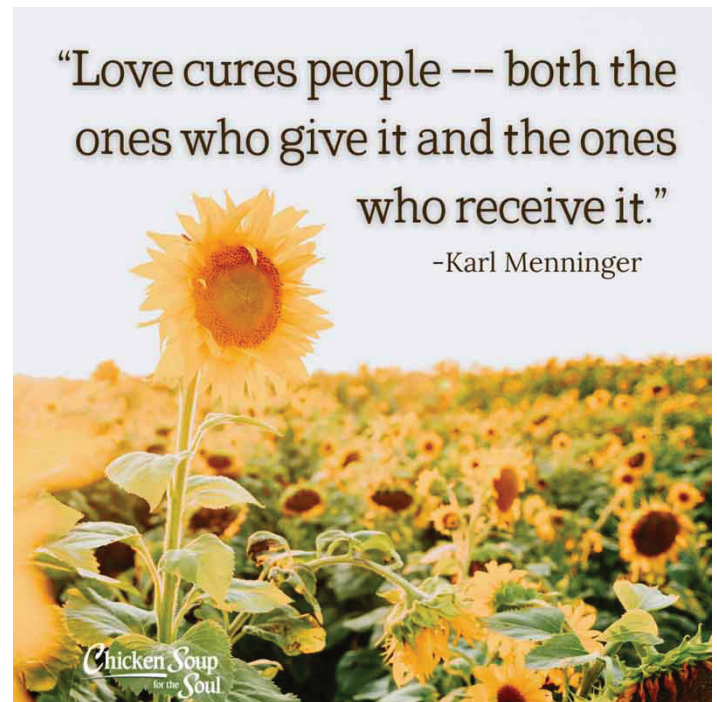
Position Opening

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)

Upcoming Events

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)



Friday, Sept. 17

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

Saturday, Sept. 18

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

Homecoming Week Dress up days

Day	MS/HS	Elementary
Wednesday	Halloween Costume Day	Twin/Matching Day
Thursday	Class color Day	Pajama Day
Friday	Spirit Day	Spirit Day



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

The Life of Jody Witlock

A Celebration of Life for Jody Lee Witlock, 65, of Breckenridge, MI and formerly of Groton will be Saturday, October 2nd at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel. Visitation will begin at 10:00 a.m. with memory sharing at 11:00 a.m.

Jody passed away peacefully Saturday, September 4, 2021 at his home.

Jody was born September 28, 1955 in Clear Lake, South Dakota, the son of Corneluis and Evelyn (Kleinemas) Witlock. He started driving truck at 14 and continued as a long-haul driver until he retired. He had spent his last 15 years driving for Wal-Mart. Jody married Jill Elsea in March of 2001.

He is survived by his wife, step-children Tina (David Lewis) Rodriguez, Chad (Kim Landreth) Robinson, BJ (Sarah) Robinson, grandchildren Michael Rodriguez, Damion (Jordan) Robinson, Aslynn Robinson, Kevin Lewis, sister LuAnn (Jeff) Steen, nephew Jordan (Lexx) Steen, niece Jennifer (Tim) Hauer and great nephew Henry Hauer.

Jody was preceded in death by his parents and granddaughter Marta Rodriguez.

Memorials may be directed to Jill Witlock, PO Box 96, Breckenridge, MI 48615-0096.



Three medalists at Redfield Golf Meet

Brevin Flihs placed third place at the Redfield golf meet held Tuesday. He shot a 41 in the front nine and a 39 in the back nine for a total score of 80. Jackson Cogley placed 18th with a 49 and a 50 for a total score of 99. Carter Simon placed 20th with a 52 and a 51 for a total score of 103. Tate Larson was 21st with a 55 and a 49 for a total of 104. Andrew Marzahn was 22nd with a 59 and a 46 for a total score of 105. Cole Simon was 24th with a 50 and a 56 for a total score of 106.

Runners at Webster Invite

Carlee Johnson placed 13th at the Webster Area Invitational Cross Country Meet held Tuesday. She ran the junior varsity 3000m course in 16:53.55. Rebecca Poor finished 33rd with a time of 21:20.94.

In the boy's junior varsity division, Ryan Goldade placed 23rd with a time of 15:35.70. Jayden Schwan was 24th with a time of 15:40.72. Benjamin Hoeft was 29th with a time of 16:09.37. Gavin Kroll placed 33rd with a time of 16:45.57. Nathan Unzen was 38th with a time of 17:58.61.

State law requires Board of Education Standards meeting postponed to Oct. 25

PIERRE, S.D. – The next meeting of the South Dakota Board of Education Standards has been postponed to Oct. 25 at the Ramkota Convention Center in Aberdeen. This meeting will include the public hearing for proposed content standards in several career and technical education career clusters, fine arts, and social studies. The meeting was previously scheduled for Sept. 20 in Aberdeen and is being postponed to comply with state law requirements for these hearings.

Per state law, public notice for the meeting was given in August announcing that it would be held at Holgate Middle School in Aberdeen. State statute requires public notice of any changes for public hearings for content standards be given at least 30 days in advance of a meeting being scheduled.

A bigger venue has been selected to ensure an open process that does not disrupt learning for students. Because of the change in venue, a new notice must be issued in accordance with state law.

"We want to ensure a productive environment for these hearings and are working to accommodate what we expect will be an enthusiastic turnout for the Aberdeen hearing. We look forward to working with the Board of Education Standards, educators, and the public through the process of adopting standards that ensure our expectations for student learning reflect South Dakota values," said Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson.

State law requires four public hearings on any proposed changes to content standards. In addition to the rescheduled Oct. 25 hearing in Aberdeen, a hearing is scheduled for Nov. 15 in Sioux Falls. At the October meeting, the board will set dates for the remaining hearings to be held in Rapid City and Pierre in 2022.

To read the content standards currently under review and to submit public comment, visit <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/review.aspx>.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 4 of 76

Sunflower Classic Golf Results

Sunday, Sept. 12, 2021 - Olive Grove Golf Course Championship Flight

1st Place – Reid and Carlee Johnson – 68
2nd Place – Derek White and Sophia McDermott – 68
3rd Place – Brad and Dar Larson – 69
4th Place – Joel and Carly Guthmiller – 71
Jordan and Chelsey Kline – 71
Randy and Sue Stanley – 74
Rick and Nikki Koehler – 75
Blake and Leah Ronning – 75
Mark and Teri Kline – 76
Jerry Ray and Becky Johnson – 79

First Flight

1st Place – Skip Kettering and Suzie Easthouse – 75
2nd Place – Ryan Yost and Andrea R – 75
3rd Place – Brad and Brenda Waage – 76
4th Place – Chad and Haley Ellingson – 76
Kyle and The Gerlach – 77
Tony and Mandy Grohs – 79
Rich and Tami Zimney – 79
Josh and Josey Heupel – 80
Mike Siegler and Sharon Zastrow – 80
Steve and Betty Dunker – 81

Second Flight

1st Place – Turner Webb and Lauren Johnson – 81
2nd Place – Lance and Cyndi Frohling – 84
3rd Place – Brandon and Taylor Stanley – 84
4th Place – TJ and Marcy Harder – 85
Larry and Shirlee Frohling – 87
Jagr Wasem and Hannah Webb – 87
Josh and Madison Claymore – 88
Bob and Mavis Rossow – 89
Kent Webb and Ranae Ball – 90
Butch Farmen and Deb Fredrickson – 92
Jeff Ringgenberg and Amy Briggs - 112

Closest to the Pin #4 (Women's) – Marcy Harder

Closest to the Pin #8 (Men's) – Larry Frohling

Longest Putt #9 – Reid Johnson



Reid Johnson Gets Hole-In-One

Congratulations to Groton's very own Reid Johnson on recording his first career Hole-in-One on Saturday, July 31st. Reid used a 5-iron on our 182-yard, Hole #8. The ace was witnessed by his children, Carlee and Liam. Congratulations Reid!

Conde National League

Sept. 13 Team Standings: Mets 3, Braves 2, Giants 2, Pirates 2, Tigers 2, Cubs 1

Men's High Games: Russ Bethke 225, Chad Furney 208, Ryan Bethke 187

Men's High Series: Russ Bethke 575, Topper Tastad 477, Brody Somke 462

Women's High Games: Anita Lowary 184, Nancy Radke 174, Vickie Kramp 172

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 453, Nancy Radke 420, Joyce Walter 411

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 5 of 76



Garden Club members give downtown fall colors

The members of the Groton Garden Club spruced up downtown on Tuesday. Those helping with the project are pictured above, in back, left to right: Marge Overacker, Beverly Sombke, Linda Anderson, Pam Rix, Eunice McColister, Jolene Townsend and Pat Larson; in front, left to right, are Linda Gengerke, Debra McKiver, Karen Babcock, Laurie Mitchell and Arlys Kluess.

(Photo by Bruce Babcock)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 6 of 76



Linda Gengerke, Debra McKiver, Marge Overacker and Beverly Sombke work on one of the light posts downtown. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Working on this light post were Linda Anderson, Eunice McColister, Arlys Kluess and Pat Larson. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

Help Wanted: Ken's in Groton
Cashiers, stockers and deli
Apply at store



Groton ~ 397-8456 ~ kenssuperfair.com

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 7 of 76

Rounds Report: Afghanistan

September 14, 2021

President Biden owns the Afghanistan departure debacle. The nation and members of Congress are left with many questions. Today, I had the opportunity to demand answers regarding the situation in Afghanistan from Secretary of State Antony Blinken at a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing. I pointedly asked the Secretary about the strategy behind the United States' disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan and our country's plan going forward. When I asked for insight into our strategy to combat our adversaries and protect American interests, the Secretary failed to provide a concrete answer. Don't take my word for it, watch the exchange yourself here or read the transcript below.

As a member of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees, I am continuing to monitor and work to get answers on this issue. We must never forget the men and women who gave their lives fighting terrorism and protecting our nation over the last two decades and the 13 young service members who were killed last month in Kabul. May God bless the USA.

I joined Fox News this morning to preview the Afghanistan hearing with Secretary Blinken. Click on the photo above to watch.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Our adversaries, Mr. Secretary, are celebrating the departure of U.S. troops, and they are most certainly celebrating the creation of a power vacuum. Most certainly they are also prepared to take this opportunity and use it to their advantage. China has announced last week that it will send \$31 million worth of aid to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. There have also been reports that they are looking at Bagram Air Base for their own use. The Russian Embassy in Afghanistan has remained opened and the ambassador met with Taliban leadership after the takeover. Pakistan is considering the Taliban government as a partner to counter India, and the Iranian president openly called this an "American military defeat" and is considering working with the Taliban. Did the Administration consider all of these foreign policy implications before such an abrupt withdrawal? And, if they did, does the Department [of State] have a strategy to counter our adversaries' malign influence in the region?

SECRETARY OF STATE BLINKEN: We certainly did. We factored everything into the decisions we made, including the impact it might have on the neighboring countries, regional countries and others with various interests in Afghanistan. A number of the countries that you cited have a whole series of different interests in Afghanistan, to include making sure that it is not a place for terrorism directed against them, to ensure that it is not a source of drugs flowing out into their countries, to make sure that it is not a source of potential refugees flowing out into their country as well. So all of those things are in play and countries are looking to take steps that they need to take to protect some of their basic interests. At the same time, we've established, across more than one hundred countries and in the UN through a security council resolution, basic expectations of the Taliban-led government. And if those expectations are not met—and other countries and aiding and abetting so that the Taliban is able to not fulfill those expectations—there will be consequences for that too.

ROUNDS: Well, Mr. Secretary if I could, what I'm really curious about is do you have a strategy you've established? Did you have enough time before this withdrawal to actually establish a strategy knowing there would be a void in Afghanistan?

BLINKEN: The work that we've done to bring together, across dozens of countries, very active contact groups, looking as we work together across these countries with NATO, the EU as well as the UN. We have a collective strategy on the way forward...

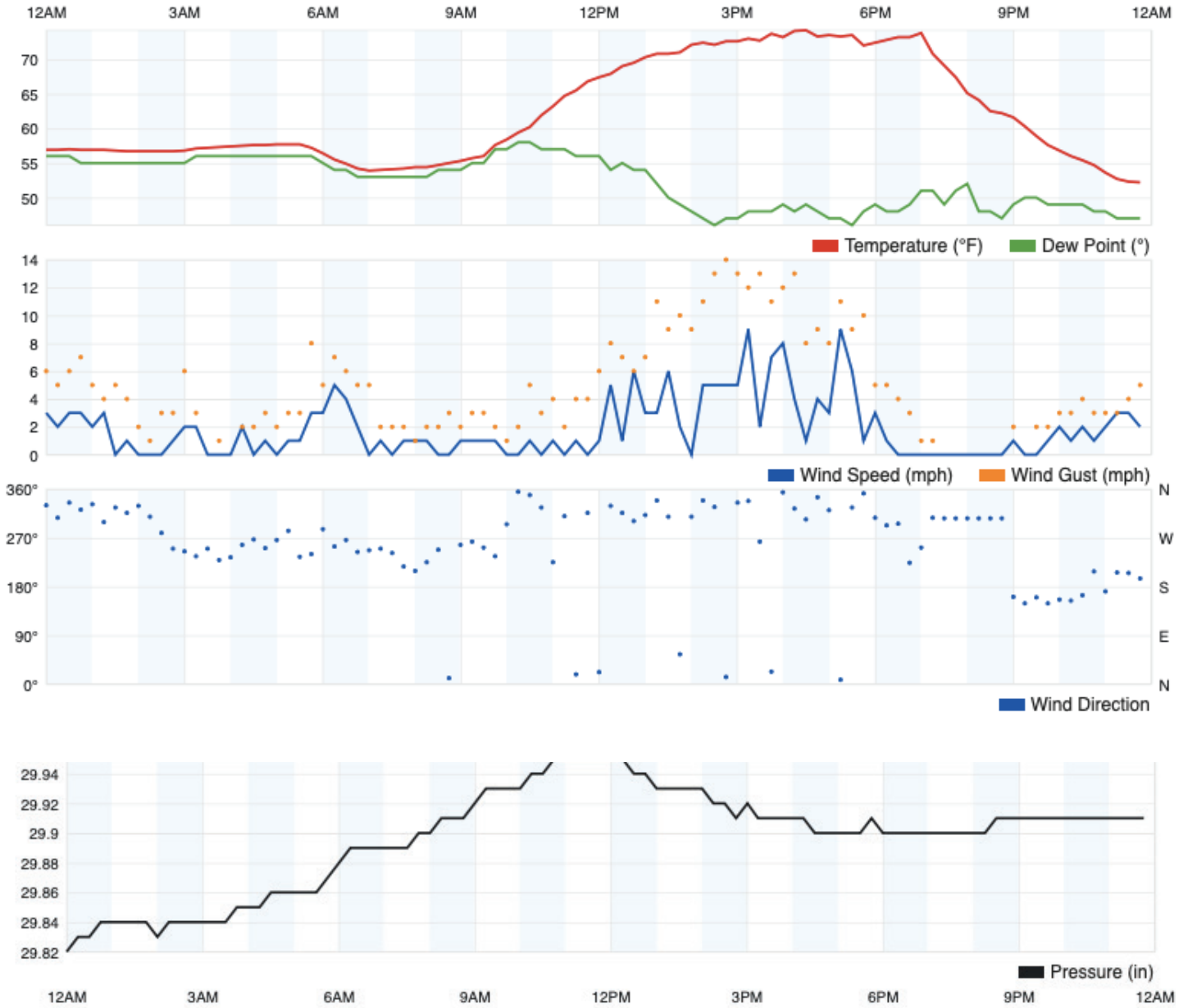
ROUNDS: Does our country—do we have a strategy? If this has been laid out, and based on the need to move out as quickly as we did, did you have time to actually establish a strategy to take care of what will be this power void? Simply to say that you're working on it with other countries looks to me that we need our own strategy here. And it doesn't sound like you're in a position to share with us that that strategy exists today.

BLINKEN: I'm happy, Senator, to follow up with you...but we have organized several dozen countries that are collectively working on and implementing a strategy...

Groton Daily Independent






Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 8 of 76

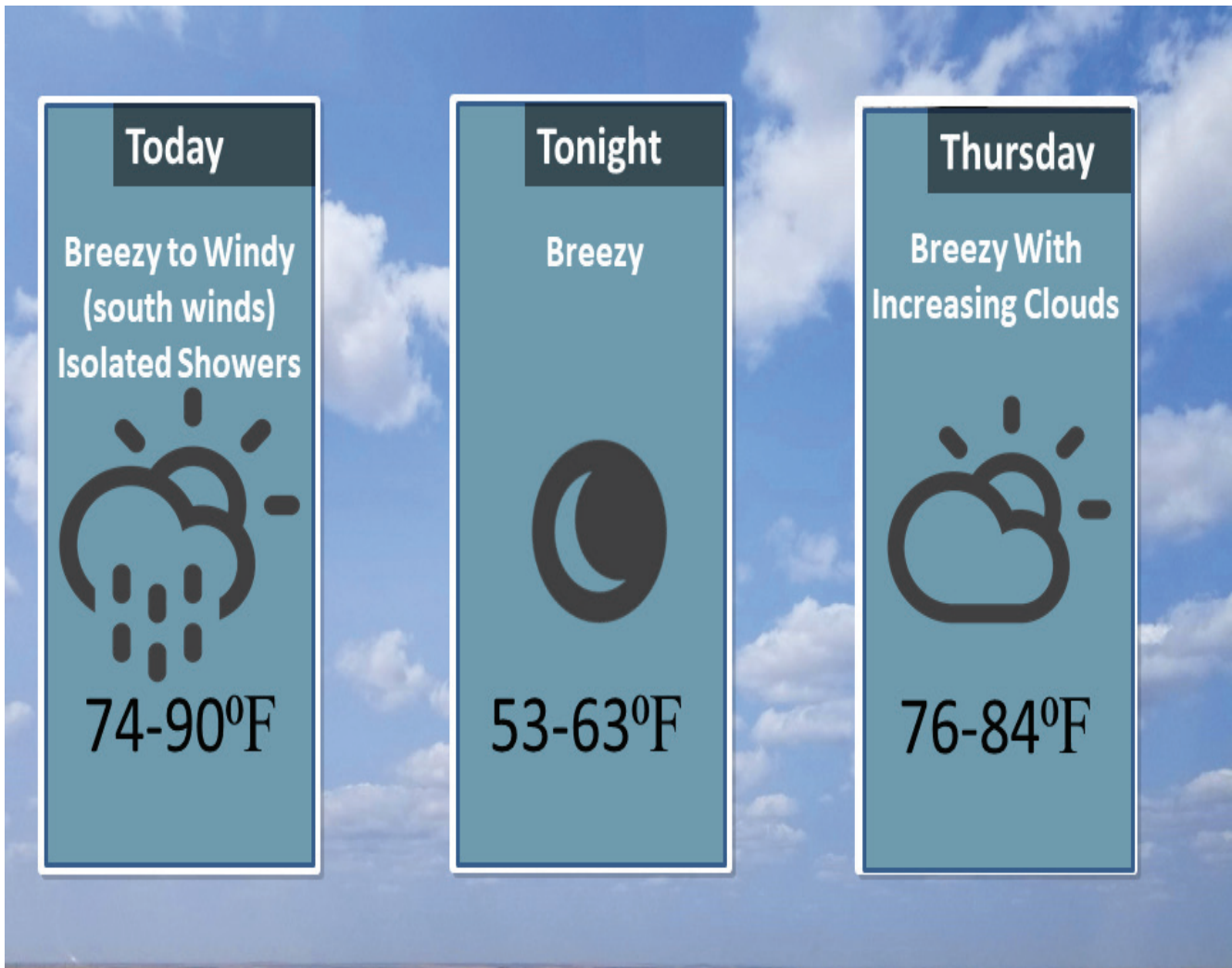
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 9 of 76

Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Sunny
High: 81 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 79 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 69 °F



Breezy to windy conditions today with just an isolated shower or two. Otherwise mostly dry till Thursday night.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 10 of 76

Today in Weather History

September 15, 1977: Sioux Falls residents received a rude awakening during the morning hours as thunderstorms rolled through the city. Over two and one-half inches of rain fell in the town in an hour and 15 minutes. A large amount of rain in a short period led to street flooding in some areas. Lightning strikes from the storms also started several small fires.

1747: Some historical accounts of a hurricane caused flooding on the Rappahannock River in Virginia. A slave ship was overturned, and several fatalities were reported.

1752 - A great hurricane produced a tide along the South Carolina coast which nearly inundated downtown Charleston. However, just before the tide reached the city, a shift in the wind caused the water level to drop five feet in ten minutes. (David Ludlum)

1910 - Rains of .27 inch on the 14th and .73 inch on the 15th were the earliest and heaviest of record for Fresno CA, which, along with much of California, experiences a ""rainy season"" in the winter. (The Weather Channel)

1939 - The temperature at Detroit MI soared to 100 degrees to establish a record for September. (The Weather Channel)

1945: A hurricane entered the south Florida coast at Homestead, curving northward right up through the center of Florida, remaining over land, and exited near Jacksonville Beach with winds gusting to 170 mph. The following is from the Homestead Air Reserve Base. "On Sept. 15, 1945, three years to the day after the founding of the Homestead Army Air Field, a massive hurricane roared ashore, sending winds of up to 145 miles per hour tearing through the Air Field's buildings. Enlisted housing facilities, the nurses' dormitory, and the Base Exchange were all destroyed. The roof was ripped from what would later become building 741, the Big Hangar. The base laundry and fire station were both declared total losses. The few remaining aircraft were tossed about like leaves." Click [HERE](#) for more information from Abandoned and Little-Known Airfields.

1982 - A snowstorm over Wyoming produced 16.9 inches at Lander to establish a 24 hour record for September for that location. (13th-15th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - The first snow of the season was observed at the Winter Park ski resort in Colorado early in the day. Eight inches of snow was reported at the Summit of Mount Evans, along with wind gusts to 61 mph. Early morning thunderstorms in Texas produced up to six inches of rain in Real County. Two occupants of a car drowned, and the other six occupants were injured as it was swept into Camp Wood Creek, near the town of Leakey. Late afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in central and northeastern Oklahoma. Wind gusts to 70 mph and golf ball size hail were reported around Oklahoma City OK. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms brought much needed rains to parts of the central U.S. Rainfall totals of 2.87 inches at Sioux City IA and 4.59 inches at Kansas City MO were records for the date. Up to eight inches of rain deluged the Kansas City area, nearly as much rain as was received the previous eight months. Hurricane Gilbert, meanwhile, slowly churned toward the U.S./Mexican border. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rain in the Central Appalachians. Virgie VA received 2.60 inches of rain during the evening hours, and Bartlett TN was deluged with 2.75 inches in just ninety minutes. Heavy rain left five cars partially submerged in high water in a parking lot at Bulls Gap TN. Thunderstorms over central North Carolina drenched the Fayetteville area with four to eight inches of rain between 8 PM and midnight. Flash flooding, and a couple of dam breaks, claimed the lives of two persons, and caused ten million dollars damage. Hugo, churning over the waters of the Caribbean, strengthened to the category of a very dangerous hurricane, packing winds of 150 mph. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2010: The largest hailstone in Kansas was found in southwest Wichita. It measured 7.75 inches in diameter.

2011: An EF0 Waterspout moved ashore in Ocean City, Maryland.

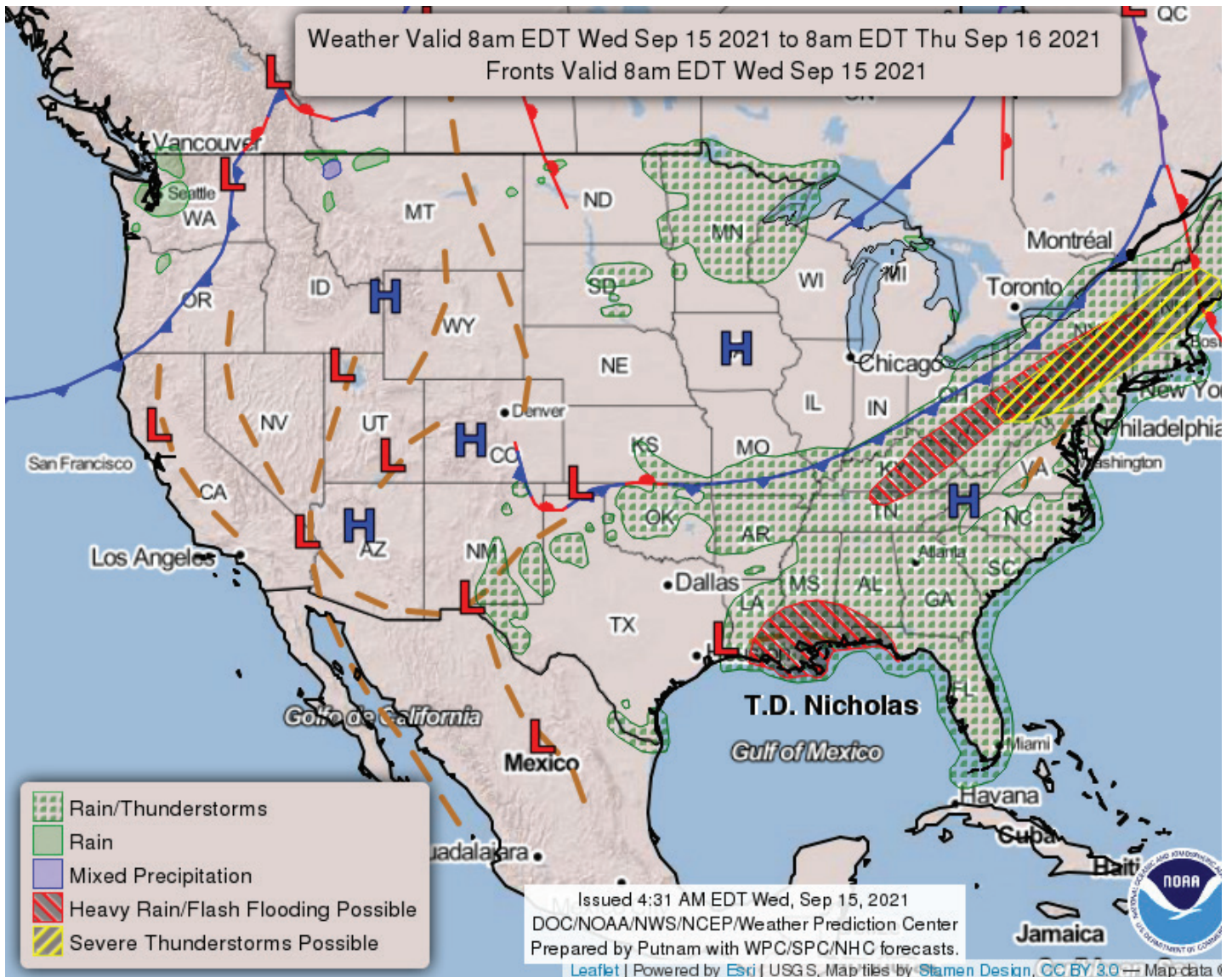
Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 11 of 76

Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 74.2 °F at 4:30 PM
Low Temp: 52.2 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 14 mph at 2:45 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 100° in 1955
Record Low: 28° in 1964
Average High: 76°F
Average Low: 47°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.02
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.32
Average Precip to date: 17.36
Precip Year to Date: 15.16
Sunset Tonight: 7:44:46 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:11:17 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 12 of 76



THE GREAT GOD WHO IS OUR GOD!

Little Mary Beth was ill and unable to attend church. When her father went into her room to see how she was doing, she asked, "What did the preacher preach about this morning?"

"God," was his response as he felt her forehead to see if she had a temperature.

"God?" she asked. "Was He our God?"

What a difference the simple word "our" makes! We worship Him because we belong to Him. And, even more than our Creator, He is our Redeemer who, through the work of His Son on the cross, reclaimed us as His children to become His very own!

Our worship leader wrote in Psalm 95:3 that "The Lord is a great God." As he continued to write, he emphasized the fact that this God "is our God!" This God whom we worship is a personal God - our very own God. He wants us to understand the implications of this important fact: God has redeemed us - reclaimed us - through the work of His Son on the cross, and we now belong to Him.

As he continues to write about our God, he draws a picture that illustrates our relationship to Him. He reminds us that "we are the people of His pasture and the flocks under His care." How very touching! Our God is the good shepherd who feeds His people in His pasture and protects them with His hand. But the picture does not end there. This picture only becomes complete when Jesus declared Himself as the "Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep."

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for being our God. May we honor You each day of our lives as we make You the "centerpiece" in all we do and bless Your name. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. Psalm 95:3, 7a

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 13 of 76

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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 14 of 76

News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-20, 25-20, 19-25, 17-25, 15-13

Andes Central/Dakota Christian def. Scotland, 25-18, 25-13, 25-27, 25-22, 15-7

Arlington def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-11, 25-7, 25-8

Baltic def. West Central, 25-21, 25-12, 22-25, 25-22

Bison def. Newell, 25-23, 25-22, 25-21

Brandon Valley def. Brookings, 25-11, 25-18, 25-17

Bridgewater-Emery def. Freeman, 25-16, 25-21, 25-23

Castlewood def. Deuel, 13-25, 25-23, 25-14, 25-23

Chamberlain def. Todd County, 25-21, 25-18, 25-14

Chester def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 25-17, 25-16, 25-22

DeSmet def. Sioux Valley, 23-25, 21-25, 25-17, 25-20, 15-11

Dell Rapids def. Canton, 25-12, 25-20, 25-13

Deubrook def. Webster, 25-13, 25-21, 25-19

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Lennox, 25-18, 31-29, 25-16

Faulkton def. Leola/Frederick, 25-11, 25-16, 25-17

Florence/Henry def. Clark/Willow Lake, 23-25, 25-12, 26-24, 25-17

Gayville-Volin def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-19, 25-14, 25-11

Great Plains Lutheran def. Estelline/Hendricks, 25-15, 25-19, 18-25, 25-18

Hamlin def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 13-25, 22-25, 25-21, 25-22, 16-14

Hanson def. Canistota, 25-22, 25-23, 17-25, 8-25, 17-15

Harrisburg def. Dakota Valley, 26-24, 25-14, 25-9

Hemingford, Neb. def. Edgemont, 22-25, 25-21, 25-20, 23-25, 15-4

Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. def. Harding County, 25-13, 25-11, 25-16

Hill City def. Hot Springs, 25-9, 25-9, 25-9

Howard def. Menno, 25-19, 26-24, 22-25, 25-18

Irene-Wakonda def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-9, 26-24, 25-12

Langford def. North Central Co-Op, 23-25, 25-16, 25-21, 25-13

Madison def. Ethan, 25-22, 25-20, 25-17

Milbank def. Waubay/Summit, 22-25, 25-17, 19-25, 25-18, 15-8

Mitchell Christian def. Marty Indian, 25-11, 25-14, 25-14

Mobridge-Pollock def. Timber Lake, 25-11, 25-16, 33-31

Mott-Regent, N.D. def. Lemmon, 25-21, 15-25, 25-23, 19-25, 15-12

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Kimball/White Lake, 23-25, 21-25, 25-13, 25-9, 15-8

Northwestern def. Miller, 25-18, 25-21, 25-13

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland def. Iroquois, 25-16, 25-22, 25-10

Parkston def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-12, 25-21, 16-25, 25-17

Potter County def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-18, 25-10, 13-25, 16-25, 15-7

Rapid City Central def. Douglas, 19-25, 25-19, 25-9, 19-25, 15-7

Rapid City Christian def. Philip, 25-19, 18-25, 25-11, 25-16

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Wessington Springs, 25-8, 25-17, 25-21

Sioux Falls Christian def. McCook Central/Montrose, 25-18, 25-11, 25-21

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Watertown, 25-14, 25-13, 25-14

Spearfish def. Lead-Deadwood, 20-25, 25-17, 25-16, 25-16

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 15 of 76

St. Thomas More def. Custer, 25-14, 25-17, 25-9
Sunshine Bible Academy def. Crow Creek, 25-21, 25-22, 26-24
Tea Area def. Parker, 25-23, 25-23, 25-17
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Bon Homme, 25-21, 25-21, 25-18
Wagner def. Avon, 25-21, 25-22, 18-25, 25-23
Warner def. Ipswich, 25-17, 25-12, 25-22
White River def. Jones County, 25-18, 21-25, 25-14, 21-25, 15-8
Wilmot def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-18, 25-17, 25-17
Winner def. Lyman, 25-15, 25-15, 25-8
Yankton def. Huron, 23-25, 25-14, 20-25, 25-15, 15-10

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

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

04-13-19-63-64, Mega Ball: 16, Megaplier: 2

(four, thirteen, nineteen, sixty-three, sixty-four; Mega Ball: sixteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$383 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$432 million

Fargo executive: COVID has put hospitals in dire situation

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — An executive at the largest health care system in North Dakota said Tuesday that its hospitals in Fargo alone could use up to 300 more nurses to handle COVID-19 cases and is bumping up incentives to try and fill the void.

"We really are in crisis," said Dr. Doug Griffin, Sanford Health vice president and medical officer in Fargo.

The state Department of Health reported Tuesday that 514 of the 2,712 active cases in the state are in Cass County, which includes the Fargo and Moorhead, Minnesota, metropolitan area of nearly 250,000 people. Hospitals across the region are filling up with both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients, Griffin said, and Fargo Sanford is about two to three weeks from reaching its peak hospitalization capacity.

Griffin said the Fargo system has hired 150 travel or contract nurses from other areas and has offered increased wages, sign-on bonuses and other unspecified perks to attract more workers. He said it's the most dire staffing situation the system has faced in an area that has long had a nursing shortage and has already seen one COVID-19 surge. Many workers have quit from burnout, fatigue and watching patients die, he said.

Sherri Miller, executive director of the North Dakota Nurses Association, agrees there is a staffing crisis in the state, one due in part because nurses have been easy targets for reduced hours and other cutbacks. She said it will take incentives, higher pay, flexible staffing models and a change in hospital culture to improve the situation.

Miller also lamented the rejection of legislation in the last session meant to create a centralized effort across the state for staffing and recruiting nurses.

"We can see the burnout that is going on," Miller said. "Even today, one of our board members expressed to us that she is exhausted and dealing with a lot of COVID in her county. I could see this on the faces of others as well."

Besides nurses, Fargo Sanford is also short-staffed in other areas like patient services, respiratory therapy and even “people who draw blood,” Griffin said. The hospital is delaying some surgeries, including knee replacements, hernia operations and even some heart procedures that are not considered urgent, Griffin said.

“It’s really all about staffing. That’s the issue,” Griffin said. “It’s day-by-day.”

It’s also about low vaccination rates, he said. In 22 hospitals across the Sanford system, 123 of the 141 COVID-19 patients are unvaccinated. Forty-four of the 48 people in intensive care units are unvaccinated and 28 of the 30 people on ventilators have not had shots.

“The vaccines are a personal responsibility to help our communities and our country get through this pandemic,” said Griffin, who added that while he respects other opinions, he is “frustrated” by the vaccination turnout.

Sioux Falls, South Dakota-based Sanford bills itself as one of the largest rural health care systems in the country. It has major medical centers in Sioux Falls, Fargo, Bismarck, North Dakota, and Bemidji, Minnesota.

While most of the coronavirus patients in the Fargo system are from the metro area, Griffin said it has received inquiries from patients in “many, many places.”

Jacksonville State’s Hail Mary delivers latest FCS-FBS upset

By JOHN ZENOR AP Sports Writer

Greg Seitz has been at Jacksonville State for nearly three decades, through a Division II national championship, conference titles and FCS playoff runs.

But the Gamecocks athletic director and longtime staffer has never seen anything quite as big as that walk-off Hail Mary to beat Florida State 20-17 last Saturday night.

“When you consider just where that program has been ... I think that probably in my mind is probably the biggest win in Jacksonville State football history,” Seitz said.

It may not have even the biggest FCS win so far this season, however. It’s only mid-September and FCS teams have eight wins over FBS programs, most notably Jacksonville State’s upset and Montana’s opening 13-7 win over then-No. 20 Washington.

It’s the most such wins in a season since FCS teams pulled off nine of them in 2017. And they’re just getting started, perhaps benefitting from spring seasons that served as defacto training camps.

FCS programs produced only two such wins last season, Jacksonville State’s win over Florida International and Tarleton State’s victory over New Mexico State — hardly earth-shaking outcomes.

The Gamecocks’ John Grass said FCS coaches may know their teams better having just recently finished another season.

“You feel like you just finished playing because you did just finish playing, but (it’s) not something we want to do every year,” Grass said. “But I think you have seen some FCS wins over FBS and some of them really good FCS teams played some bad FBS teams.

“Every game’s got a life of its own. Sometimes I think FBS teams overlook FCS teams.”

Jacksonville State provided not only a huge upset of a three-time national champion, but a fantastic finish. To Seitz, it was bigger than the 1992 Division II championship game victory, and the double-overtime upset in 2010 of Mississippi from the mighty Southeastern Conference.

This was Florida State, winner of its third national title not so long ago in 2013. The Seminoles had won their first 26 meetings over FCS, or Division I-AA, teams, though they also trailed Jacksonville State early in last year’s meeting.

Zerrick Cooper launched the desperation pass deep to Damond Philyaw-Johnson, who hauled it in just inside the 20-yard line and made a quick cut on his way to a 59-yard touchdown. That followed a 97-yard touchdown march ending with just under five minutes left.

It was the same play call Jacksonville State had tried on the previous play, and coaches had urged Cooper to look for Philyaw-Johnson.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 17 of 76

The game winner was a landmark moment not just for the Gamecocks, who normally are quietly tucked away in the northeast Alabama town of Jacksonville, which has fewer than 13,000 residents.

It also was big for Cooper, a onetime highly rated prospect who spent two seasons as a backup for Florida State's ACC rival Clemson. The three-year starter and senior suffered a season-ending injury in a win over FBS Florida International last fall and missed the spring season.

Cooper said he has watched that final play "probably over 1,000 times." Linebacker Stevonte Tullis figures he savored the moment until about dawn Sunday.

"I know I'm going to live with that for the rest of my life," Cooper said, "and I'm going to be able to tell my kids about it."

Philyaw-Johnson, who's from Pensacola, Florida, had a single catch for 1 yard in the first two games before that Hail Mary.

Jacksonville State joined the Atlantic Sun Conference in July after capturing its sixth Ohio Valley title in seven seasons. They're in a transition year that includes schools moving to the Western Athletic Conference.

Jacksonville State collected \$400,000 for the Florida State game but the win generated an abundance of priceless attention for the Gamecocks, typically overshadowed in the state by SEC teams Alabama and Auburn.

Seitz said the Web site's traffic was 500% higher than normal Saturday night and Sunday morning. The Gamecocks woke up to their highlight on ESPN's "SportsCenter" and the play topping the program's top 10 list. It's drawn more than 1 million views on social media.

It's the type of free publicity Jacksonville State could never have afforded with a total athletic budget of about \$18 million. And the memories, well, they will definitely endure.

"That play will be remembered forever as well as that game," Grass said. "We go down in history and nobody will ever take that away from us."

The same thing can be said by a few other FCS wins vs. FBS schools this season, including:

— Montana scored 10 points in the fourth quarter and stopped Washington on its final two drives in the opener for both teams. It was the first time an FCS team beat a ranked FBS team since North Dakota State beat No. 13 Iowa 23-21 in 2016.

— Holy Cross, which does not give football scholarships, never trailed in the second half and beat Connecticut 38-28, its first victory against an FBS team since it topped Army in 2002. The next day, UConn coach Randy Edsall said he would retire as season's end. The following day, he was dismissed.

— East Tennessee State beat Vanderbilt 23-3, spoiling the debut of Clark Lea as the head coach at his alma mater. The victory, secured with three fourth-quarter turnovers, was ETSU's first over a Power Five program since it beat North Carolina State on Nov. 7, 1987.

— South Dakota State, which lost in the FCS championship game 3 ½ months earlier, opened a 35-10 lead and beat Colorado State 42-23. It was the Jackrabbits' first win against an FBS team since they beat Kansas in 2015.

___ AP Sports Writer Hank Kurz Jr. contributed to this report.

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

A week after FedEx Cup decided, a new PGA Tour season begins

By The Associated Press undefined

PGA TOUR

FORTINET CHAMPIONSHIP

Site: Napa, California.

Course: Silverado Resort and Spa (North). Yardage: 7,123. Par: 72.

Prize money: \$7 million. Winner's share: \$1.26 million.

Television: Thursday-Sunday, 6-9 p.m. (Golf Channel).

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 18 of 76

Defending champion: Stewart Cink.

FedEx Cup champion: Patrick Cantlay.

Last tournament: Patrick Cantlay won the Tour Championship for the FedEx Cup.

Notes: The new season begins 11 days after the last FedEx Cup season ended. ... The tournament has a new title sponsor this year, played on the same course. ... Jon Rahm, the No. 1 player in the world, is the only Ryder Cup player in the field. Also playing is assistant captain Phil Mickelson. Both are part of the management company that runs the event. ... Rahm, defending champion Stewart Cink, Kevin Na and Hideki Matsuyama are the only players at Silverado who were at East Lake two weeks ago for the Tour Championship. ... Will Zalatoris, the PGA Tour rookie of the year, makes his first start as a full PGA Tour member. He played last year as a special temporary member and was ineligible for the FedEx Cup postseason. ... Kurt Kitayama, a Californian who has been playing in Asia and Europe since college, earned his card through the Korn Ferry Tour Finals. He is playing this week. ... The field has three of the four major champions from 2021, missing only Collin Morikawa.

Next week: Ryder Cup.

Online: <https://www.pgatour.com/>

LPGA TOUR

CAMBIA PORTLAND CLASSIC

Site: West Linn, Oregon.

Course: Oregon GC. Yardage: 6,478. Par: 72.

Prize money: \$1.4 million. Winner's share: \$210,000.

Television: Thursday-Sunday, 3-6 p.m. (Golf Channel).

Defending champion: Georgia Hall.

Race to CME Globe leader: Nelly Korda.

Last tournament: Europe won the Solheim Cup.

Notes: In the first LPGA event since Europe won the Solheim Cup, only six of the 24 players who were at Inverness are playing this week. Carlota Ciganda of Spain is the only European from the winning Solheim Cup team. ... The U.S. Solheim Cup members who are playing are Brittany Altomare, Jennifer Kupcho, Austin Ernst, Yealimi Noh and Mina Harigae. ... Georgia Hall of England, the defending champion, is not playing. ... The tournament dates to 1972 when Nancy Lopez won the inaugural event. ... This is the start of four straight domestic tournaments — in Oregon, Arkansas and two in New Jersey — before the LPGA Tour takes a two-week swing into Asia. ... Patty Tavatanakit is the only major champion from 2021 in the field. ... Brooke Henderson is playing. She won back-to-back in the Portland Classic in 2015 and 2016. ... Ernst won the first of her three LPGA titles at Portland in 2014.

Next week: Walmart NW Arkansas Championship.

Online: <https://www.lpga.com/>

EUROPEAN TOUR

DUTCH OPEN

Site: Cromvoirt, Netherlands.

Course: Bernardus Golf. Yardage: 7,200. Par: 72.

Prize money: 1 million euros (U.S. \$1.182 million). Winner's share: 166,667 euros.

Television: Thursday-Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. (Golf Channel); Saturday-Sunday, 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. (Golf Channel).

Defending champion: Sergio Garcia (2019).

Race to Dubai leader: Collin Morikawa.

Last week: Billy Horschel won the BMW PGA Championship.

Notes: The tournament was canceled last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. ... Billy Horschel joined Arnold Palmer (1975) as the only Americans to win the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 19 of 76

... Horschel moved to No. 2 in the Race to Dubai, closing in on British Open champion Collin Morikawa. ... Louis Oosthuizen was planning to play until injuring his neck late in the PGA Tour season and wanting to rest. ... Joost Luiten and Wil Besseling of the Netherlands were kept from playing in the Olympics by a Dutch national policy that players had to be among the top 100 in the world to be sent to the Games. The silver medal went to Rory Sabbatini of Slovakia, who was ranked No. 204 at the Olympics. ... Sabbatini is making his third European Tour start this year. ... The only member of the Ryder Cup team at the Dutch Open is Graeme McDowell, a vice captain. ... The Dutch Open has been part of the European Tour schedule since 1972. Seve Ballesteros was a three-time winner.

Next week: Ryder Cup.

Online: <https://www.europeantour.com/european-tour/>

PGA TOUR CHAMPIONS

SANFORD INTERNATIONAL

Site: Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Course: Minnehaha CC. Yardage: 6,729. Par: 70.

Prize money: \$1.8 million. Winner's share: \$270,000.

Television: Friday-Sunday, 9:30-11:30 p.m. (Golf Channel-Tape Delay).

Defending champion: Miguel Angel Jimenez.

Charles Schwab Cup leader: Bernhard Langer.

Last week: David Toms won the Ascension Charity Classic.

Notes: Ryder Cup captain Steve Stricker and three PGA Tour Champions-eligible assistants — Fred Couples, Jim Furyk and Davis Love III — are in the field. ... Bernhard Langer remains atop the Charles Schwab Cup standings by about \$2,500 over Jerry Kelly, with Furyk just over \$8,000 out of the lead. ... David Toms had not won since the U.S. Senior Open at the Broadmoor in Colorado in 2018. ... Last week was the sixth playoff on the PGA Tour Champions season, but only the second of 2021. ... Jay Haas closed with a 67 and shot his age or better for the fifth time, the last three at age 67. ... Steven Alker tied for ninth in St. Louis to earn a spot in the field in South Dakota. It's the fourth straight time he has finished in the top 10 to get into the following tournament. ... Langer now has shot par or better in his last 18 rounds on the PGA Tour Champions. ... Haas has played 334 times on the PGA Tour Champions to go along with his 798 starts on the PGA Tour. That gives him 1,132 combined starts on both tours, fifth on the all-time list. The leader is Miller Barber, who played 603 times on the senior circuit and 711 times on the regular tour.

Next week: Pure Insurance Championship.

Online: <https://www.pgatour.com/champions.html>

OTHER TOURS

Symetra Tour: Guardian Championship, Capitol Hill GC, Prattville, Alabama. Defending champion: Laura Restrepo (2019). Online: <https://www.symetratour.com/>

Ladies European Tour: Lacoste Ladies Open de France, Golf du Medoc (Chateaux), Le Pian-Medoc, France. Defending champion: Julia Engstrom. Online: <https://ladieseuropeantour.com/>

Japan Golf Tour: ANA Open, Sapporo GC (Wattsu), Hokkaido, Japan. Defending champion: Yosuke Asaji. Online: <https://www.jgto.org/>

Challenge Tour: Hopps Open de Provence, Golf International de Pont Royal, Mallemort, France. Defending champion: Lars Van Meijel (2019). Online: <https://www.europeantour.com/challenge-tour/>

Sunshine Tour: Vodacom Origins of Golf-Mount Edgecombe, The Woods at Mount Edgecombe, Mount Edgecombe, South Africa. Defending champion: New event. Online: <https://sunshinetour.com/>

Japan LPGA: Ladies Tokai Classic, Shin Minami Aichi CC, Aichi, Japan. Defending champion: Ayaka Furue. Online: <https://www.lpga.or.jp/en/>

Korean LPGA: Sei Ri Pak Invitational, Sejong Silk River CC, Cheongwon, South Korea. Defending champion: A Yean Cho. Online: <https://www.klpga.co.kr/>

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

California Gov. Gavin Newsom beats back GOP-led recall

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE and MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Tuesday emphatically defeated a recall aimed at kicking him out of office early, a contest the Democrat framed as part of a national battle for his party's values in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and continued threats from "Trumpism."

Newsom bolted to a quick victory boosted by healthy turnout in the overwhelmingly Democratic state. He cast it as a win for his handling of the pandemic and liberal issues, and it ensures the nation's most populous state will remain in Democratic control as a laboratory for progressive policies.

"No' is not the only thing that was expressed tonight," Newsom said. "I want to focus on what we said 'yes' to as a state: We said yes to science, we said yes to vaccines, we said yes to ending this pandemic."

With an estimated two-thirds of ballots counted, "no" on the question of whether to recall Newsom was ahead by a 30-point margin. That lead was built on votes cast by mail and in advance of Tuesday's in-person balloting, with a strong showing by Democrats. While likely to shrink somewhat in the days ahead as votes cast at polling places are counted, Newsom's lead couldn't be overcome.

Republican talk radio host Larry Elder almost certainly would have replaced Newsom had the recall succeeded, an outcome that would have brought a polar opposite political worldview to Sacramento.

The recall turned on Newsom's approach to the pandemic, including mask and vaccine mandates, and Democrats cheered the outcome as evidence voters approve of their approach. The race also was a test of whether opposition to former President Donald Trump and his right-wing politics remains a motivating force for Democrats and independents, as the party looks ahead to midterm elections next year.

Republicans had hoped for proof that frustrations over months of pandemic precautions would drive voters away from Democrats. The GOP won back four U.S. House seats last year, success that Republican leaders had hoped indicated revived signs of life in a state controlled by Democrats for more than a decade.

But a recall election is an imperfect barometer — particularly of national trends. Democrats outnumber Republicans nearly 2-to-1 in California, so the results may not translate to governors in toss-up states or reflect how voters will judge members of Congress next year.

Trump, who had largely stayed out of the contest, made unsubstantiated claims that the election was rigged in the closing days, claims echoed by Elder's campaign. Elder did not mention fraud as he addressed his supporters after the results were in.

"Let's be gracious in defeat. We may have lost the battle, but we are going to win the war," he said, later adding that the recall has forced Democrats to focus on issues such as homelessness and California's high cost of living.

Newsom for months had likened the recall to efforts by Trump and his supporters to overturn the presidential election and a push in Republican-led states to restrict voting access.

"Democracy is not a football, you don't throw it around. It's more like — I don't know — an antique vase," Newsom said after his win. "You can drop it, smash it into a million different pieces — and that's what we're capable of doing if we don't stand up to meet the moment and push back."

He became the second governor in U.S. history to defeat a recall, cementing him as a prominent figure in national Democratic politics and preserving his prospects for a future run. Republican Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker survived a recall in 2012.

California voters were asked two questions: Should Newsom be recalled, and, if so, who should replace him? Only a handful of the 46 names on the replacement ballot had public recognition, but most failed to gain traction with voters.

Elder entered the race just two months ago and quickly rose to the top of the pack. But that allowed Newsom to turn the campaign into a choice between the two men, rather than a referendum on his performance.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 21 of 76

Newsom seized on Elder's opposition to the minimum wage and abortion rights as evidence he was outside the mainstream in California. The governor branded him "more extreme than Trump," while President Joe Biden, who campaigned for Newsom, called him "the closest thing to a Trump clone I've ever seen."

Though the contest didn't quite bring the circus-like element of California's 2003 recall — when voters replaced Democratic Gov. Gray Davis with Republican movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger — it featured quirky moments of its own.

Reality TV star and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner entered the race but gained little momentum and left the state for part of the campaign to film a reality show in Australia. Businessman John Cox, who lost badly to Newsom in 2018, tried to spice up his campaign by hiring a live bear to join him, branding himself as the "beast" to Newsom's "beauty."

Newsom will soon be campaigning again; he's up for reelection next year.

Orrin Heatlie, the Republican who launched the recall effort last year, cast it as a "David and Goliath" battle and said it was telling that Newsom had called on national Democrats like Biden to "salvage his damaged political career."

The president and other prominent Democrats offered Newsom support in the race's closing days, while national Republican leaders largely kept the contest at arm's length.

The recall needed 1.5 million signatures to make the ballot out of California's 22 million registered voters. It never would have come before voters if a judge hadn't given organizers four extra months to gather signatures due to the pandemic. That decision came the same day Newsom attended a maskless dinner at the lavish French Laundry restaurant with lobbyists and friends, stirring outcry.

Supporters of the recall expressed frustration over monthslong business closures and restrictions that kept most children out of classrooms. Rising homicides, a homelessness crisis and an unemployment fraud scandal further angered Newsom's critics.

But the broader public stayed on his side. Polling from the Public Policy Institute of California showed his approval rating remaining above 50% throughout the pandemic. With weeks to go, the institute's poll showed 60% of Californians approved of Newsom's handling of the pandemic.

The rise of the highly contagious delta variant led Newsom to frame the race as one of "life or death" consequences. He pointed to Texas and Florida, which were seeing worsening surges as their Republican governors rejected mask and vaccine mandates, as cautionary tales for what California could become.

Newsom has been viewed as a potential White House contender since at least 2004, when he defied federal law to issue marriage licenses to LGBT couples as mayor of San Francisco. His victory maintained those prospects, though he will still have to navigate around the ambitions of Harris, who came up through San Francisco politics alongside Newsom.

He came to the contest with advantages. California's electorate is less Republican, less white and younger than it was in 2003, when voters booted the Democratic Davis. Newsom was allowed to raise unlimited funds, dwarfing his competitors while flooding TV screens with advertising. Public worker unions and business and tech executives poured millions into his campaign.

Associated Press writers Julie Watson in San Diego, Jocelyn Gecker in Lafayette, Don Thompson in Lincoln, Christopher Weber in Los Angeles and Adam Beam in Sacramento contributed.

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

Serb unity day triggers worries across the Balkans

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbia kicked off a new national holiday on Wednesday with a display of military power and calls for all Serbs in the Balkans to unite under one flag, triggering unease among its neighbors decades after similar calls led to the bloody wars in the 1990s.

Serbs were told to display thousands of red, blue and white national flags wherever they live in the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 22 of 76

region or the world to mark "The Day of Serb Unity, Freedom and the National Flag."

Opening the full day of celebrations, Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic inspected military hardware displayed in a Belgrade park, praising the army's readiness to respond to outside threats.

He said that the army is "five times stronger" than only a few years ago and announced new military purchases.

The flexing of muscles by Serbian officials as well as their calls for the creation of the "Serb World," or political unification of an estimated 1.3 million Serbs who live in Bosnia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Croatia with Serbia, have triggered worries in the neighboring states.

In the 1990s, Serb forces with financial and political support from Belgrade led bloody campaigns in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo with the goal of forming a "Greater Serbia." The campaign unsuccessfully tried to redraw the internal borders of former Yugoslavia and create a single Serb state.

The renewed calls for pan-Serb unity have further raised tensions in the Balkans.

Croatian President Zoran Milanovic said he couldn't "believe that Serbs have nothing more important or smarter to do" than create holidays which infringe on the internal affairs of neighboring states.

Serbia's Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin, the most vocal supporter of the "Serb World," was quick to respond.

"There is nothing more important than the preservation of the Serb identity," he said.

The new national holiday coincides with the day when the Royal Serbian army together with French troops defeated Axis forces in a famous World War I battle in northern Greece in 1918.

Nicholas crawls into Louisiana from Texas, dumping rain

JAY REEVES and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

POINTE-AUX-CHENES, La. (AP) — Nicholas weakened to a tropical depression as it crawled from Texas into southern Louisiana on Wednesday, unleashing heavy rain across a landscape where Hurricane Ida destroyed thousands of rooftops now covered with flimsy tarps.

Forecasters said Nicholas would remain a disorganized mess over central Louisiana for days, with plenty of water still to dump east of its center, drenching the Gulf Coast as far as the western Florida Panhandle. Southeast Louisiana faced the biggest flooding threat, and Gov. John Bel Edwards warned people to take it seriously, even though Nicholas was no longer the hurricane that made landfall in Texas on Tuesday.

"This is a very serious storm, particularly in those areas that were so heavily impacted by Hurricane Ida," Edwards said.

Forecasters warned people along the central Gulf Coast that up to 20 inches (50 centimeters) are possible through Friday in places across a region still recovering from Category 4 hurricanes — Ida weeks ago and Laura last year.

Galveston, Texas, recorded nearly 14 inches (35 centimeters) of rain from Nicholas, the 14th named storm of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season, while Houston reported more than 6 inches (15 centimeters). The New Orleans office of the National Weather Service said late Tuesday that as much as 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain could fall in parts of Louisiana, with some areas seeing particularly intense periods of 2 to 3 inches (5 to 8 centimeters) of rainfall per hour.

In the small Louisiana community of Pointe-aux-Chenes, Ida peeled open the tin roof of Terry and Patti Dardar's home, leaving them without power and water for more than two weeks since. Nicholas made the damage that much worse, soaking the upstairs. But it also provided them with badly needed water, which their son Terren and grandchildren collected in jugs and poured into a huge plastic container through a strainer. From there, a pump powered by a generator brought the water inside.

His mom, Patti, said the family didn't have anywhere else to go after Ida, so members were doing their best during Nicholas.

"We ain't got no other place," she said. "This is our home."

Gov. Edwards noted that 95,000 electric customers were still without power more than two weeks after

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 23 of 76

Ida hit. And he said the new storm could mean some who had regained power might lose it again. Homes already badly damaged by Ida were not yet repaired to the extent that they could withstand heavy rain, Edwards added.

Energy companies working to restore power to remaining areas in the state said Wednesday that they were watching Nicholas closely but didn't expect it to affect their restoration times.

A spokesman for Entergy Louisiana said Nicholas so far has not caused any delays to previously announced times to restore power. Crews cannot operate when lightning is within 10 miles (16 kilometers) and can't put bucket trucks in the air at winds greater than 30 mph (50 kph), said Jerry Nappi. But once conditions improve they would quickly resume work.

Joe Ticheli, manager and CEO of South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association, said rain really doesn't stop the linemen, who are outfitted with slicker suits and grit.

"These are tough guys, and they relish all of this," he said. The coop services about 21,000 customers across five parishes including parts of the hard-hit Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. Ticheli said the coop has returned power to about 75% of its customers with the remaining 25% mostly in the hardest-hit parts of southern Terrebonne parish.

In the weather-battered city of Lake Charles, in southwestern Louisiana, Mayor Nic Hunter said ahead of Nicholas the city prepositioned assets should they be needed, and city crews scoured the drainage system to keep it free from debris that might cause clogs and flooding.

Lake Charles has been hammered. Hurricane Laura caused substantial structural damage across the city of nearly 80,000 residents. Weeks later Hurricane Delta ripped through the same area. Freezing temperatures in January burst pipes across the city, and then a May rainstorm swamped houses and businesses yet again.

The mayor says he's naturally worried about how his people are coping.

"With what people have gone through over the last 16 months here in Lake Charles, they are very, understandably, despondent, emotional. Any time we have even a hint of a weather event approaching, people get scared," he said.

Santana reported from New Orleans. Associated Press reporters Kevin McGill in New Orleans and Juan A. Lozano in Surfside Beach, Texas contributed to this report.

Rival Koreas test missiles hours apart, raising tensions

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North and South Korea tested ballistic missiles hours apart Wednesday in a display of military might that is sure to exacerbate tensions between the rivals at a time when talks aimed at stripping the North of its nuclear program are stalled.

South Korea's presidential office said the country conducted its first underwater-launched ballistic missile test. It said the domestically built missile flew from a submarine and hit its designated target.

The statement said the weapon is meant to help South Korea deter external threats — a clear reference to North Korea, which tested two short-range ballistic missile earlier in the day. Those launches came two days after the North said it fired a newly developed cruise missile, its first weapons test in six months.

Experts say the North Korean launches are an effort to apply pressure on the United States in the hopes of winning relief from sanctions aimed at persuading the North to abandon its nuclear arsenal. U.S.-led talks on the issue have been stalled for more than two years — and in the meantime, tensions have been rising on the Korean peninsula.

Meanwhile, observers say South Korean President Moon Jae-in's government, which has been actively pursuing reconciliation with North Korea, may have taken action to appear tougher in response to criticism that it's too soft on the North.

The rival nations are still technically in a state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War, which pitted the North and ally China against the South and U.S.-led U.N. forces, ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 24 of 76

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the launches “threaten the peace and safety of Japan and the region and are absolutely outrageous.” The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the move “highlights the destabilizing impact of (North Korea’s) illicit weapons program” though it said it didn’t pose an immediate threat to the U.S.

The South Korean test will likely infuriate the North, which has often accused its rival of hypocrisy for introducing modern weapons while calling for talks between the divided countries.

South Korea’s military said the North Korean ballistic missiles flew about 800 kilometers (500 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launches represent a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that bar North Korea from engaging in any ballistic missile activity. But the council typically doesn’t impose new sanctions when the North launches short-range missiles, like Wednesday’s.

Wednesday’s tests came as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in Seoul for meetings with Moon and other senior officials to discuss North Korea and other issues.

It’s unusual for North Korea to make provocative launches when China, its last major ally and biggest aid provider, is engaged in a major diplomatic event. But some experts say North Korea may have used the timing to draw extra attention.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said Wednesday’s tests appeared to be of an improved version of a short-range missile it tested in March. He said the weapon is likely modeled on Russia’s Iskander missile, whose flattened-out low altitude flight makes it hard to intercept.

The international community is bent on getting the North to abandon its nuclear program and has long used a combination of the threat of sanctions and the promise of economic help to try to influence the North. But nuclear talks between the United States and North Korea have stalled since 2019, when then-U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration rejected the North’s demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for dismantling an aging nuclear facility.

North Korea leader Kim Jong Un’s government has so far rejected U.S. President Joe Biden administration’s overtures for dialogue, demanding that Washington abandon what it calls “hostile” policies first. But the North has maintained its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests, a sign that it may not want to completely scuttle the possibility of reopening the talks.

In 2017, North Korea claimed to have acquired the ability to strike the American mainland with nuclear weapons after conducting three intercontinental ballistic missile tests and its most powerful nuclear test. In recent years, it’s also performed a series of underwater-launched missile tests in what experts say is a worrying development because such weapons are difficult to detect in advance and would provide the North with a second, retaliatory strike capability.

South Korea, which doesn’t have nuclear weapons, is under the protection of the U.S. “nuclear umbrella,” which guarantees a devastating American response in the event of an attack on its ally. But South Korea has been accelerating efforts to build up its conventional arms, including developing more powerful missiles.

Experts say the South’s military advancements are aimed at improving its capacity for preemptive strikes and destroying key North Korean facilities and bunkers.

Separate from the submarine-launched missile, South Korea also tested a missile from an aircraft that is in development.

Associated Press writer Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Sidelined by rivals, Germany’s far-right AfD bides time

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Migration is a side issue in this year’s German election campaign, but that hasn’t stopped the country’s biggest far-right party from trying to play it up.

“Cologne, Kassel or Konstanz can’t cope with more Kabul,” Alternative for Germany declared on one of

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 25 of 76

its election posters — a reference to the government's decision to take in Afghans who had worked for the German military or aid groups before the Taliban takeover.

Another, showing a retired couple embracing on a pier, read: "We'll share our pensions, but not with the whole world. Solidarity has its limits."

The party rattled Germany's political establishment four years ago, when it came third in parliamentary elections after stoking anti-migrant sentiment over Chancellor Angela Merkel's 2015 decision to allow hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war and poverty into the country.

"The 2017 election was strongly influenced by refugee and migration politics," said Hendrik Traeger, a political scientist at the University of Leipzig. "Alternative for Germany made that its core issue. This time it's not among the top three election topics though."

Current polls indicate that the party, known by its German acronym AfD, could struggle to hold the 12.6% share of the vote it got four years ago — though researchers note that respondents don't always admit in surveys that they'll vote for the party.

Still, even with a low two-digit result AfD could well pose a headache for other parties, forcing them to form larger, more cumbersome coalitions to secure a majority.

"Some constituencies might see a close race between the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and AfD," said Traeger.

Small shifts in voting patterns of just a few hundred ballots could swing marginal constituencies in unexpected ways, making some coalitions at the national level harder or impossible, he said.

AfD's co-leader, Tino Chrupalla, has no illusions that his party will win big on Sept. 26. But he's confident that it can enter government in one of Germany's 16 states in the coming years.

Armin Laschet, who leads the center-right Union bloc, has said his party will not ally with AfD, which opposes the government's coronavirus policies, has a cozy relationship with Russia and wants Germany to quit the European Union.

That pledge will be put to the test in eastern states such as Saxony, where AfD came a strong second with 27.5% of the vote in a state election two years ago.

"I'm pretty confident that sooner or later there's no way around Alternative for Germany," Chrupalla told reporters Wednesday. "That will certainly happen first in a state parliament."

Chrupalla said he already has a lot of contact with Union politicians and sees common ground with candidates such as Hans-Georg Maassen, Germany's former domestic intelligence chief now running for a seat in parliament's lower house, the Bundestag, on an anti-immigration platform. Many in Maassen's party aren't happy about his candidacy.

"Of course there are many positions where I can agree with Mr. Maassen," said Chrupalla. "And conversely, he could do so with many of our positions."

Follow AP's coverage of Germany's election at <https://apnews.com/hub/germany-election>

Latest: WHO reports big drop in new coronavirus infections

GENEVA — The World Health Organization said there were about 4 million coronavirus cases reported globally last week, marking the first major drop in new infections in more than two months. In recent weeks, there have been about 4.4 million new COVID-19 cases.

In its weekly update released on Tuesday, the U.N. health agency said every region in the world saw a drop in COVID-19 cases compared to the previous week.

Although the worldwide number of deaths decreased to about 62,000, with the sharpest decline in Southeast Asia, there was a 7% increase in deaths in Africa. The highest numbers of cases were seen in the U.S., Britain, India, Iran and Turkey and the highly contagious delta variant has now been reported in 180 countries.

WHO also said children and teenagers continue to be less affected by COVID-19 when compared to adults, adding that deaths of people under 24 due to the disease account for fewer than 0.5% of global

deaths.

WHO has previously said children should not be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccinations given the extreme vaccine shortages globally.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- Largest public universities in U.S. push vaccines with mandates and prizes
- COVID-19 deaths and cases in the U.S. climb back to last winter's levels winter
- See AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

PARIS — Health care workers in France face suspension from their jobs starting Wednesday if they haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19. With about 300,000 workers still not vaccinated, some hospitals fear staff shortages will add to their strain.

Vaccines are now compulsory for medical care, home care and emergency workers in France, and Wednesday is the deadline for such staff to have had at least one shot. Failing that, they face having pay suspended or not being able to work. But a top court has forbidden staff to be fired outright.

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Cambodia will launch a campaign Friday to begin giving COVID-19 vaccinations to children between 6 and 11 years of age.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said Wednesday the action was being taken to allow children to return safely to school after a long absence due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In an audio message to province and municipality chiefs posted on his Facebook page, he said more than 1.8 million children were expected to get their jabs under the program, which will use Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine.

He also said he was considering having children 3-5 years-old be vaccinated soon.

Pope urges compassion as he wraps Slovakia pilgrimage

By NICOLE WINFIELD and KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

SASTIN, Slovakia (AP) — Pope Francis urged Slovaks on Wednesday to look out for the neediest among them as he ended his first post-surgery trip with a huge open-air Mass that drew tens of thousands of people amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Cheering, maskless crowds lined Francis' motorcade route through Sastin, 15 kilometers (about 10 miles) from Slovakia's western border, and they were rewarded with a slow-moving popemobile jaunt and a smiling, waving Francis as he arrived at the vast field.

Organizers said 60,000 people attended the Mass, the biggest crowd at any event during the pope's four-day pilgrimage to Slovakia.

The venue was the Our Lady of Sorrows national shrine, Slovakia's most important one dedicated to the Virgin Mary, where St. John Paul II prayed in 1995. Each Sept. 15, pilgrims from Slovakia and beyond flock to Sastin on the feast day of Slovakia's patron, with some this year spending the night on the dusty field to get a better spot.

"You can imagine that I'm excited because he's from Latin America," said Erick Montalvo, a pilgrim from Mexico. "You feel it like you are kind of close to him because of that. And that's a very nice feeling."

During his homily, Francis urged the pilgrims to open their hearts to compassion and live a faith "that identifies with those who are hurting, suffering and forced to bear heavy crosses."

He called them to live a "faith that does not remain abstract, but becomes incarnate in fellowship with those in need."

The Mass was Francis' only big event Wednesday before he returns to Rome after a four-day pilgrimage to Budapest, Hungary and Slovakia, a largely Roman Catholic country of 5.5 million people.

The pilgrims had to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination to receive a barcode that gave them entry to

the site. A few thousand non-vaccinated pilgrims were allowed in with proof of a negative test or having been cured of the virus. Hardly anyone in the crowd wore face masks.

With the delta variant dominating, new coronavirus cases have been on the rise recently, reaching 760 on Tuesday, the highest figure since April. Another four people died of COVID-19 on Tuesday for a total of 12,566.

Slovakia has been badly hit by the virus and was the nation with most COVID-19 deaths per capita in the world in the middle of February.

The country now has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the EU, with slightly more than 2 million having been fully vaccinated.

The purely religious finale capped a visit that featured delicate state diplomacy. Francis met with right-wing populist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Day 1 and outreach to Slovakia's Jewish and Roma communities.

The trip was Francis' first since undergoing intestinal surgery to remove a 33-centimeter (13-inch) chunk of his colon in July. He has appeared in good form and spirit throughout the grueling itinerary, seemingly energized by the crowds after being cooped up in the Vatican for over a year of COVID-19 restrictions.

Francis has at least two other trips planned before the end of the year: a quick trip to Glasgow, Scotland, to participate in the U.N. climate conference in November, and a trip — not yet confirmed by the Vatican — to Greece, Cyprus and Malta in December.

Karel Janicek reported from Prague. Philipp Jenne contributed to this report.

Most states have cut back public health powers amid pandemic

By LAUREN WEBER and ANNA MARIA BARRY-JESTER KHN (Kaiser Health News)

Republican legislators in more than half of U.S. states, spurred on by voters angry about lockdowns and mask mandates, are taking away the powers that state and local officials use to protect the public against infectious diseases.

A Kaiser Health News review of hundreds of pieces of legislation found that, in all 50 states, legislators have proposed bills to curb such public health powers since the COVID-19 pandemic began. While some governors vetoed bills that passed, at least 26 states pushed through laws that permanently weaken government authority to protect public health. In three additional states, an executive order, ballot initiative or state Supreme Court ruling limited long-held public health powers. More bills are pending in a handful of states whose legislatures are still in session.

In Arkansas, legislators banned mask mandates except in private businesses or state-run health care settings, calling them "a burden on the public peace, health, and safety of the citizens of this state." In Idaho, county commissioners, who typically have no public health expertise, can veto countywide public health orders. In Kansas and Tennessee, school boards, rather than health officials, have the power to close schools.

President Joe Biden last week announced sweeping vaccination mandates and other COVID-19 measures, saying he was forced to act partly because of such legislation. "My plan also takes on elected officials in states that are undermining you and these lifesaving actions," he said.

The KHN review showed that:

—In at least 16 states, legislators have limited the power of public health officials to order mask mandates, or quarantines or isolation. In some cases, they gave themselves or local elected politicians the authority to prevent the spread of infectious disease.

—At least 17 states passed laws banning COVID-19 vaccine mandates or passports or made it easier to get around vaccine requirements.

—At least nine states have new laws banning or limiting mask mandates. Executive orders or a court ruling limit mask requirements in five more.

Much of this legislation takes effect as COVID-19 hospitalizations in some areas are climbing to the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 28 of 76

highest numbers at any point in the pandemic, and children are back in school.

"We really could see more people sick, hurt, hospitalized or even die, depending on the extremity of the legislation and curtailing of the authority," said Lori Tremmel Freeman, head of the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

Public health academics and officials are frustrated that they, instead of the virus, have become the enemy. They argue this will have consequences that last long beyond this pandemic, diminishing their ability to fight the latest COVID-19 surge and future disease outbreaks, such as being able to quarantine people during a measles outbreak.

"It's kind of like having your hands tied in the middle of a boxing match," said Kelley Vollmar, executive director of the Jefferson County Health Department in Missouri.

But proponents of the new limits say they are a necessary check on executive powers and give lawmakers a voice in prolonged emergencies. Arkansas state Sen. Trent Garner, a Republican who co-sponsored his state's successful bill to ban mask mandates, said he was trying to reflect the will of the people.

"What the people of Arkansas want is the decision to be left in their hands, to them and their family," Garner said. "It's time to take the power away from the so-called experts, whose ideas have been woefully inadequate."

After initially signing the bill, Gov. Asa Hutchinson, R-Ark., expressed regret, calling a special legislative session in early August to ask lawmakers to carve out an exception for schools. Lawmakers declined. The law is currently blocked by an Arkansas judge who deemed it unconstitutional. Legal battles are ongoing in other states as well.

A DELUGE OF BILLS

In Ohio, legislators gave themselves the power to overturn health orders and weakened school vaccine mandates. In Utah and Iowa, schools cannot require masks. In Alabama, state and local governments cannot issue vaccine passports and schools cannot require COVID-19 vaccinations.

The Montana Legislature passed some of the most restrictive laws of all, severely curbing public health's quarantine and isolation powers, increasing local elected officials' power over local health boards, preventing limits on religious gatherings and banning employers — including in health care settings — from requiring vaccinations for COVID-19, the flu or anything else.

Legislators there also passed limits on local officials: If jurisdictions add public health rules stronger than state public health measures, they could lose 20% of some grants.

Losing the ability to order quarantines has left Karen Sullivan, health officer for Montana's Butte-Silver Bow Health Department, terrified about what's to come, not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but for future measles and whooping cough outbreaks.

"In the midst of delta and other variants that are out there, we're quite frankly a nervous wreck about it," Sullivan said. "Relying on morality and goodwill is not a good public health practice."

While some public health officials tried to fight the national wave of legislation, the underfunded public health workforce was consumed by trying to implement the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history and had little time for political action.

Freeman said her city and county health officials group has meager influence and resources, especially in comparison with the American Legislative Exchange Council, a corporate-backed conservative group that promoted a model bill to restrict the emergency powers of governors and other officials. The draft legislation appears to have inspired dozens of state-level bills, according to the KHN review. At least 15 states passed laws limiting emergency powers. In some states, governors can no longer institute mask mandates or close businesses, and their executive orders can be overturned by legislators.

When North Dakota's legislative session began in January, a long slate of bills sought to rein in public health powers, including one with language similar to ALEC's. The state didn't have a health director to argue against the new limits because three had resigned in 2020.

Fighting the bills not only took time, but also seemed dangerous, said Renae Moch, public health director for Bismarck, who testified against a measure prohibiting mask mandates. She then received an

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 29 of 76

onslaught of hate mail and demands for her to be fired.

Lawmakers overrode the governor's veto to pass the bill into law. The North Dakota Legislature also banned businesses from asking whether patrons are vaccinated against or infected with the coronavirus and curbed the governor's emergency powers.

The new laws are meant to reduce the power of governors and restore the balance of power between states' executive branches and legislatures, said Jonathon Hauenschild, director of the ALEC task force on communications and technology. "Governors are elected, but they were delegating a lot of authority to the public health official, often that they had appointed," Hauenschild said.

'LIKE TURNING OFF A LIGHT SWITCH'

When the Indiana Legislature overrode the governor's veto to pass a bill that gave county commissioners the power to review public health orders, it was devastating for Dr. David Welsh, the public health officer in rural Ripley County.

People immediately stopped calling him to report COVID-19 violations, because they knew the county commissioners could overturn his authority. It was "like turning off a light switch," Welsh said.

Another county in Indiana has already seen its health department's mask mandate overridden by the local commissioners, Welsh said.

He's considering stepping down after more than a quarter-century in the role. If he does, he'll join at least 303 public health leaders who have retired, resigned or been fired since the pandemic began, according to an ongoing analysis by KHN and The Associated Press. That means 1 in 5 Americans have lost a local health leader during the pandemic.

"This is a deathblow," said Brian Castrucci, CEO of the de Beaumont Foundation, which advocates for public health. He called the legislative assault the last straw for many seasoned public health officials who have battled the pandemic without sufficient resources, while also being vilified.

Public health groups expect further combative legislation. ALEC's Hauenschild said the group is looking into a Michigan law that allowed the legislature to limit the governor's emergency powers without Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's signature.

Curbing the authority of public health officials has also become campaign fodder, particularly among Republican candidates running further on the right. While Republican Idaho Gov. Brad Little was traveling out of state, Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin signed a surprise executive order banning mask mandates that she later promoted for her upcoming campaign against him. He later reversed the ban, tweeting: "I do not like petty politics. I do not like political stunts over the rule of law."

At least one former lawmaker — former Oregon Democratic state Sen. Wayne Fawbush — said some of today's politicians may come to regret these laws.

Fawbush was a sponsor of 1989 legislation during the AIDS crisis. It banned employers from requiring health care workers, as a condition of employment, to get an HIV vaccine, if one became available.

But 32 years later, that means Oregon cannot require health care workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Calling lawmaking a "messy business," Fawbush said he certainly would not have pushed the bill through if he had known then what he does now.

"Legislators need to obviously deal with immediate situations," Fawbush said. "But we have to look over the horizon. It's part of the job responsibility to look at consequences."

KHN data reporter Hannah Recht, Montana correspondent Katheryn Houghton and Associated Press writer Michelle R. Smith in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

This story is part of a collaboration between The Associated Press and KHN. To reach the AP's investigative team, email investigative@ap.org.

KHN (Kaiser Health News) is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.

Zimbabwe's older people often sent to homes amid pandemic

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Banana bread was served at a recent birthday party at Melfort Old People's home, where a group of residents mustered a raspy happy birthday tune.

Just a week after arriving at the facility, Rodrick Bhatare, in his 90s, said he felt a bittersweet moment at the celebration for a 103-year-old fellow resident.

"I haven't been this happy in a very long time," he said. "I just wished I was doing it with my family." Hard-hit by the pandemic, his family could no longer provide for him, he said.

The economic ravages of COVID-19 are forcing some families in Zimbabwe to abandon the age-old tradition of taking care of older people.

Some roam the streets. The lucky ones end up at facilities for older people— once widely viewed by many Zimbabweans as "un-African" and against the social bonds that have held extended families together for generations.

Rarely talked about, older people are "silent victims" of the pandemic, said Priscilla Gavi, executive director of HelpAge Zimbabwe.

"Parents or elderly relatives have become an extra strain in this pandemic so although it goes against our culture, many people are finding old people's homes as the only option," Gavi said.

Zimbabwe's care homes have experienced a 60% increase in admissions since the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in March 2020, and most of the country's more than 170 facilities for older people are full, she said.

COVID-19 has increased the risk of abuse and neglect of older people across Africa and around the world, according to a report by HelpAge International.

In addition to being one of the groups most at risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, older people are chronically neglected in response and recovery efforts, especially in lower-income countries, according to the report, "Bearing the Brunt."

For the older people in care institutions, the experience is both a saving grace and a source of anguish.

Bhatare said that after he retired from work as a quarry miner about two decades ago "all was well" as he alternately stayed with his two daughters and other relatives.

He was living with a married niece and four of her children when COVID-19 hit and their income from selling goods on the street dropped. Food in the home became scarce, tensions rose, and to survive Bhatare began foraging for meals on the streets until concerned neighbors alerted HelpAge, which found him a place in the Melfort home, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Harare, the capital.

"My daughters are married but they are also struggling. I had become a strain to everybody," he said.

Zimbabwe's economy was already battered before the pandemic and now more than 80% of urban households are struggling to buy basic food supplies, while large numbers of rural families are also sinking into hunger, according to the World Food Program.

People age 70 and above make up less than 3% of Zimbabwe's population of about 15 million and often became casualties of belt-tightening.

"They are not bringing in any income in an environment where even young children are working to contribute towards household incomes. The elderly are becoming the sacrificial lambs. COVID-19 has really knocked them down," said Phillip Pasirayi, a sociologist and director of the Center for Community Development in Zimbabwe.

Feeling "abandoned" by their families can be a shock for many older people at care facilities, he said.

"It doesn't really resonate with what we are accustomed to as Africans. You want to spend your last days surrounded by family. That is the tradition," Pasirayi said.

"When they are forced into old people's homes, many go into depression, into dementia ... they are confused that their children or relatives have abandoned them," said Daniel Francis, the administrator at Melfort Old People's home.

Some families resort to tricks to remove their older relatives, he said.

"With the pandemic, some people take an elderly relative to a faraway place. They buy them a drink at

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 31 of 76

the shops, tell them 'We are coming back,' and they go for good. Elderly persons are being dumped and they are forgotten," Francis said. Police take such people to the social welfare department.

"The social welfare department doesn't have a home so they come to us," said Francis, whose facility has a capacity for 40 resident. But in the pandemic it limits numbers to 22 to allow more physical distance between residents.

The care homes that don't charge their residents, and are funded by charities and churches, are under strain.

The Melfort home would find it difficult to return to full capacity, he said, as its donations have dropped by more than 60% in the pandemic, he said.

Times are even tougher at the Society for the Destitute Aged's care home in Harare's Highfield township. Princess Diana opened an accommodation wing amid much fanfare in 1993. But today paint is peeling off the walls, ceilings are falling in and bees have taken over the out-of-service 200-liter (53-gallon) water heater.

The home has no vehicle so when a resident needs medical care, manager Emilia Mukaratirwa must risk crowded public taxis or, when money permits, hire a small car to rush a retiree to a hospital.

"The whole place needs a makeover, but for now just getting bread is like Christmas. That's how desperately we need help," Mukaratirwa said.

Despite the disappointment of not being with family, Bhatara at the Melfort Old People's home is adjusting to his new reality.

"These strangers have become my family, they treat me well," he said. "I still love my real family but I don't want to be a burden to them."

Unvaccinated French health care workers face suspension

By OLEG CETINIC and THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Health care workers in France face suspension from their jobs starting Wednesday if they haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19. With about 300,000 workers still not vaccinated, some hospitals fear staff shortages will add to their strain.

Vaccines are now compulsory for medical care, home care and emergency workers in France, and Wednesday is the deadline for such staff to have had at least one shot. Failing that, they face having pay suspended or not being able to work. But a top court has forbidden staff to be fired outright.

The mandate was approved by France's parliament over the summer, after the government insisted that the measure was needed to protect patients and the public from new surges of COVID-19. More than 113,000 people with the virus have died in France, and health authorities say most of those hospitalized in the most recent surge weren't vaccinated.

Nearly 90% of French health care workers are estimated to be vaccinated, and polls suggest most people support the vaccine mandate for medical staff.

But since some hospitals are already facing strains after a year and half of fighting the pandemic and catching up on other treatments, some fear staff shortages could spell disaster.

"We are raising the alarm ... if you insist on implementing this measure your beds will be closed, thus reducing chances (of survival) for a number of patients," said Christophe Prudhomme, emergency room doctor and CGT union member, at a protest outside the Health Ministry on Tuesday.

The government health authority said Tuesday that 300,000 health workers remained unvaccinated.

If health care workers have had only one dose, they have to take a virus test every three days until they have completed the second one. Oct. 15 is the legal deadline for both vaccines to have been completed.

Firms and employers failing to verify the vaccination statuses of their staff are liable for a 135 euro (\$160) fine that can rise to 3,750 euros (\$4,430) for repeated failure.

Amid the population at large, about 87% of adults have received at least one jab and 83% are fully vaccinated in France.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 32 of 76

But a small, vocal minority of people are opposed to the coronavirus vaccines, including some health care workers. Many cite incorrect information about the vaccines circulating online, worry about their long-term effects or want more time to decide. Others are angry at the government and the mandate, not the vaccines themselves.

"I am not a revolutionary, I am just afraid and we are thousands in this situation. I want them to listen to us and sit and talk around a table," said Rachid Ouchem, a medical-psychological assistant at a hospital in Plaisir west of Paris who doesn't want to be vaccinated and is facing suspension.

"We can't decide ourselves, we have doubts," he told The Associated Press. "We had politicians saying one thing and its opposite."

Scientists note that the vaccines used in France were tested widely and the data shared publicly. Worldwide, 5.7 billion coronavirus vaccine doses have been administered so far, providing an exceptionally broad overview of vaccines' impact on people's health.

The vaccine mandate and France's "health pass" system required for restaurants and other venues have prompted two months of weekly protests by far-right activists and some other groups. Another Paris protest is planned Wednesday.

Wu advances in Boston mayor race; opponent too early to call

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Democrat Michelle Wu has emerged the top vote-getter in a runoff election for the next mayor of Boston, but the race to decide her opponent in November remained too early to call early Wednesday.

Wu, a city councilor, easily won Tuesday's preliminary balloting, with fellow councilor Annissa Essaibi George trailing in second. Two other candidates — acting mayor Kim Janey and fellow city councilor Andrea Campbell — both conceded defeat late Tuesday night despite partial results showing a tight race for the No. 2 slot.

All four are candidates of color, as is John Barros, Boston's former economic development chief and the only man in contention. Barros trailed well behind the four women.

No matter who joins Wu on the Nov. 2 ballot, history has already been made in a city that has never elected a woman, Black resident or Asian American as mayor. For the past 200 years, the office has been held by white men.

Wu and Tuesday's other winner will face off against each other on Nov. 2, ushering in a new era for the city which has wrestled with racial and ethnic strife.

"I'm overjoyed that we are confident we've made the top two and are moving on to the final election," Wu told her supporters earlier in the evening. "I just want to take a moment to honor and thank this historic field of candidates, an amazing moment for the City of Boston."

Essaibi George said she'd won enough support to challenge Wu in November.

"I am so grateful to you showing up not just tonight but showing up for the last eight months," she told supporters, adding that while every vote needed to be counted, "it doesn't mean we can't celebrate."

Earlier this year, Janey became the first Black Bostonian and first woman to occupy the city's top office in an acting capacity after former Mayor Marty Walsh stepped down to become President Joe Biden's labor secretary.

"I want to congratulate Michelle Wu and Annissa Essaibi George on their victories this evening," Janey said in a statement. "This was a spirited and historic race, and I wish them both luck in the final election."

There had been an effort among some leaders in the Black community to rally around a single candidate to ensure that at least one Black mayoral hopeful could claim one of the two top slots.

All of the candidates are Democrats. Mayoral races in Boston do not include party primaries.

The candidates hail from a range of backgrounds. Wu's parents immigrated to the United States from

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 33 of 76

Taiwan. Janey and Campbell are Black. Essaibi George describes herself as a first-generation Arab-Polish American. Barros is of Cape Verdean descent.

Wu was elected to the Boston City Council in 2013 at age 28, becoming the first Asian-American woman to serve on the council. In 2016, she was elected city council president by her colleagues in a unanimous vote, becoming the first woman of color to serve as president.

Essaibi George won a series of key endorsements during the race including from unions representing firefighters, nurses and emergency medical technicians. She also won the backing of former Boston Police Commissioner William Gross.

Essaibi George grew up in the city's Dorchester neighborhood and taught in the Boston Public Schools. She was elected to the city council in 2015. Her father immigrated to the United States from Tunisia in 1972. Her mother was born in a displaced persons' camp in Germany of Polish parents.

The November contest could also be a test of whether voters in a city long dominated by parochial neighborhood and ethnic politics are ready to tap someone like Wu, who grew up in Chicago.

Wu moved to Boston to attend Harvard University and Harvard Law School and studied under U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, then a law professor. She's the only candidate not born in Boston.

Boston has changed radically since the 1970s, when the city found itself in the national spotlight over the turmoil brought on by school desegregation, and in the late 1980s, when the case of Charles Stuart again inflamed simmering racial tensions.

Stuart is believed to have shot and killed his pregnant wife in 1989 while trying to blame the killing on an unknown Black man, prompting police to search Black neighborhoods in vain for a suspect. Stuart later jumped to his death from a bridge.

The latest U.S. Census statistics show residents who identify as white make up 44.6% of the population compared to Black residents (19.1%), Latino residents (18.7%) and residents of Asian descent (11.2%).

Among the challenges facing the city are those brought on by gentrification, which has forced out many long-term residents, including those in historically Black neighborhoods.

Added to that are a host of other challenges that will face the new mayor, from transportation woes, racial injustice and policing to schools and the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Russian feminist runs for Duma to take on domestic violence

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Alyona Popova's campaign rhetoric is blunt: Unless she is elected to parliament, there won't be much hope for a law against domestic violence in Russia.

One of the country's most ardent feminists, Popova has fought for years to lobby members of the State Duma to adopt legislation to protect women — without success. So she decided to run herself in the election in which voting begins Friday and runs through Sunday.

Popova believes she has a good chance of winning and will be able to push through a domestic violence law. Analysts and recent actions by Russian authorities, however, suggest that both face an uphill battle.

Few reliable official statistics are kept on violence against women in Russia, but it is clearly a national problem. Police routinely turn a blind eye to domestic abuse, and restraining orders don't exist, leaving victims without a key protection.

The Interior Ministry's official magazine, Russia's Police, reported in 2019 that one in three murders occur within "family and domestic relations"; violent acts of different kinds happen in one out of four families; and 70% of crimes within families and households are against women and children.

There are virtually no legal mechanisms to protect people from domestic abuse. Laws address a wide range of violent crimes, but attempts to create measures that would prevent these crimes from happening have faced resistance from authorities.

Yulia Gorbunova, senior researcher for Human Rights Watch in Russia and Ukraine, said the available statistics suggest Russia isn't much different from the rest of the world. She cited World Health Organization data that showed one in three women around the globe suffers from physical or sexualized violence

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 34 of 76

by her partner or others, "and in Russia, the numbers are quite similar."

"Unfortunately, Russia differs from other countries in a bad way, with its inadequate response — lack of legislation, lack of a normal system of supporting the victims," she added.

Popova's decision to run came after her only ally in the Duma — Oksana Pushkina of the ruling United Russia bloc — announced she wasn't seeking reelection.

Popova said she spoke with other advocates about what to do: "To run after Duma lawmakers for five more years, given that this next parliament will be ultra-bigoted, ultra-fundamentalist?" Popova said. "Or to fight for it ourselves?"

Simple assault against a family member was a criminal offense only briefly in 2016 under a measure passed by lawmakers, but it prompted a backlash from conservative groups.

At his annual news conference in December 2016, President Vladimir Putin was asked about parents who could face imprisonment for spanking a child, which the questioner said was "quite traditional" Russian discipline.

Putin responded that "it's better not to spank children and not to cite traditions," but agreed that "unceremonious interference with the family is unacceptable," and promised to review the law. It was decriminalized the next year and was downgraded to a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of about \$68.

Women's rights activists protested vehemently, saying abusers were given a green light.

"Our state is sending us a signal that violence is a staple (of the regime), and nothing should be done against this staple, because otherwise the entire system will fall apart," Popova said.

Valentina Matviyenko, the speaker of the upper house of parliament, acknowledged the problem in 2019 and vowed to have a domestic violence bill by the end of the year. One was drafted by Popova, Pushkina and other activists.

It faced weeks of stiff resistance from conservative groups and the Russian Orthodox Church, arguing that the state shouldn't interfere in family matters. As a result, it was watered down and never came up for a vote.

Nasiliu.Net, a prominent nonprofit that supports domestic violence victims and advocated for the law, has been labeled a "foreign agent," and given repeated hefty fines.

Diana Barsegyan, its deputy director, said the crippling moves speak volumes about the government's attitude toward domestic violence.

"In a healthy situation, the state should work together with experts and NGOs on such a huge and complex problem," Barsegyan said. "And now we're in a situation when (the government) comes to experts who are dealing with this problem, saying, 'You're (foreign) agents now, and from now on, it will be difficult for you to work.'"

Pushkina, who in recent years was a firebrand for domestic violence legislation, decided not to run again after United Russia endorsed someone else in her constituency.

"Of course, (the authorities) don't need this pro-feminist agenda today," she said. "Our state policy has taken an ultraconservative path."

Pushkina said that what Popova stands for resonates with voters, pointing out that even state-funded pollsters found that 70% of Russians support a domestic violence law. She believes Popova will fight for the law if elected, but that authorities will have the final say.

"No matter how hard Alyona fights, if there's a decision higher up to slow something down, block it or adopt, then that will come to pass," Pushkina said.

Popova is running in a Moscow district, and her competitors include a famous TV personality widely seen as pro-government and a seasoned lawmaker from the Communist Party.

She said she has fewer resources than her biggest opponents. Her candidacy was put forward by the democratic Yabloko party, which meant that she didn't need to collect signatures, but the party isn't financing her campaign.

Apathy by voters and their conviction that the election won't change anything makes campaigning even harder, Popova said, adding: "The scariest thing the authorities achieved over the past 20 years is convincing people that elections are a farce."

She said she was criticized initially for making domestic violence the cornerstone of her campaign, but it strikes a chord with many people she meets.

"At every meeting we hold (with voters), at least one person either witnessed domestic violence or suffered from it," she said.

The bill that was shelved had included a system of restraining orders — something that abuse survivors told The Associated Press they wished had been in place when they went to authorities.

Irina Petrakova, 41, suffered years of abuse at the hands of her husband. She said that even when they were finally divorced, he was able to assault her outside the courthouse where she brought a case against him.

"Had the law been in force, had I had a (restraining) order, he wouldn't have been able to even approach me," said Petrakova, whose case is before the European Court of Human Rights.

Popova said she receives messages of support from all over Russia. However, political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter Abbas Gallyamov said it is unclear whether she will have enough support within her district.

Domestic violence hasn't been a priority for voters, Gallyamov said, although he notes it has never been on the agenda of a nationwide election before and may have potential because women usually turn out more than men at the polls.

He added that the Kremlin's constant peddling of traditional values has "annoyed a significant chunk of protest voters so much" that Popova could benefit.

5 takeaways after Newsom survives California recall attempt

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

California Gov. Gavin Newsom ably fended off a recall attempt from Republicans on Tuesday, changing the stakes of the contest from a referendum on his own performance and into a partisan fight over Trumpism and the coronavirus.

Five takeaways from Newsom's victory:

COVID PRECAUTIONS CAN HELP DEMOCRATS

Republicans intended the recall to be a referendum on Democrats' rule of California, and the homelessness, crime, high housing costs and energy problems that accompanied it. But in a bit of political ju-jitsu — and with the help of the spreading delta variant — Newsom turned it into a referendum on Republicans' opposition to precautions against the coronavirus.

The Republicans running to replace Newsom opposed mask and vaccine mandates, and the California governor was happy to highlight that. Newsom aired an ad calling the recall "a matter of life and death" and accusing the top Republican candidate, talk radio host Larry Elder, of "peddling deadly conspiracy theories."

Ironically, the recall gained steam after Newsom was caught in November at a lobbyist's birthday party at a swanky Napa Valley restaurant — unmasked and in a large party that violated his own social distancing orders. But his strategists have been arguing for weeks that his leadership during the pandemic is a plus for him — and that other Democrats shouldn't be afraid to lead on the issue.

In his remarks after winning, Newsom kept the emphasis on the virus. "I want to focus on what we said yes to as a state: We said 'yes' to science, we said 'yes' to vaccines, we said 'yes' to ending this pandemic," the governor told reporters.

GOP REVIVES BASELESS FRAUD CLAIMS

Republicans' groundless claims of election fraud aren't going away anytime soon.

Even while ballots were still being cast, Republicans were claiming the election was "rigged." It was a baseless allegation — and a strange one considering Republicans performed relatively well under the same California election system in November, gaining four congressional seats.

But former President Donald Trump's false election fraud rhetoric quickly has burrowed into Republi-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 36 of 76

can politics. The former president enthusiastically added his own voice to the claims. And, several days before the polls closed, the Elder campaign bizarrely began circulating a link to a petition demanding an investigation into his loss, alleging widespread fraud — which some Republicans feared was a message that his voters shouldn't even bother to show up Tuesday.

The recall was always a long shot in a state where registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans by nearly 2-to-1 and where the GOP hasn't won a statewide election since 2006. But Republicans' turn to conspiracy theories and baseless fraud claims to explain a loss that polls had indicated was coming for months shows the party won't walk away from those suspicions. That led to the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol after Trump's defeat.

Notably, Elder seemed to try to climb down from the inflammatory election allegations Tuesday night. In his concession speech he told supporters: "Let's be gracious in defeat."

Still, some Californians worry about what could happen in their state.

"This is going to be the second election in a row where there are going to be aggressive, emotional charges of voter fraud," said Mindy Romero, director of the Center for Inclusive Democracy at the University of Southern California. "I cannot see a positive out of it."

NO LIGHT AT END OF THE TUNNEL FOR CALIFORNIA GOP

The recall offered California Republicans their only plausible shot at statewide office in one of the bluest states in the nation. The recall is a way to dodge a head-to-head match that would send voters to their regular partisan corners.

That's what happened in 2003 when Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger won a recall against Democratic Gov. Gray Davis. Schwarzenegger's moderate politics never would have won a GOP primary but were appealing enough to voters fed up with the incumbent. Some Republicans hoped that would happen again this year, with former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, a moderate, on the ballot.

But there were two problems for the GOP. First, California is very different now compared to 2003 — it's more liberal and more diverse. There are more than 3 million more registered Democrats in the state now than during the last recall, but nearly 400,000 fewer Republicans.

Second, Faulconer never caught on. Instead, Elder's bombastic style, honed during his decades on talk radio and echoing Trump, vaulted him to the top of the Republican pack. Newsom, sensing a favorable contrast, started pounding Elder on the airwaves.

Some Republicans had hoped the populist approach of Elder, who is African American, could appeal to California's diverse electorate. But that doesn't seem to have worked.

"Larry Elder was exactly what Gavin Newsom needed," said Rob Stutzman, a veteran California GOP strategist.

NEWSOM STEPS BACK FROM THE BRINK

There's no question that Newsom won the recall election. But he might not have emerged unscathed.

When he was elected in 2018, Newsom was riding an anti-Trump wave in a state that saw itself as the heart of the "resistance" to Republican power in Washington. The former San Francisco mayor was mulled as a possible future presidential candidate.

Three years later, his state is reeling from a brutal drought and accompanying wildfires. Heat waves trigger rolling blackouts. Homelessness continues to plague the state's megacities as the cost of housing shows no signs of letting up.

The recall demonstrated that Republicans are unlikely to beat Newsom in a partisan race. And the governor can boast of a lopsided win on Tuesday, though the precise margin likely won't be known for weeks until all the ballots are counted.

But California has a large bench of Democrats who may be itching to move up and the state's problems aren't going away anytime soon. "I think there are Democrats who are watching this thing with their bibs on and their forks and knives out," Stutzman said.

Newsom's political operation was able to keep any major Democrats from running as an alternative in the recall, freeing him up to paint the effort as a partisan Republican scam. Will he be able to keep chal-

lengers out in 2022?

MUDDLED SIGNS FOR THE MIDTERMS

The recall is the first significant election of Joe Biden's presidency and served as something of a political stress test for both parties ahead of next year's midterms.

Democrats showed they could turn out their voters even as their party held the White House — a traditionally tough feat that is why the party in power usually loses seats in Congress in midterm elections. Republicans are trying to win back the House and Senate. Turnout in the recall was expected to be high — some experts predicted it'll be in the neighborhood of the more than 12 million who voted in 2018 in California.

The rejection of the recall — and Elder — shows that a candidate who is too aligned with Trump remains toxic in some areas, both Democratic ones and also current political battlegrounds like formerly Republican Orange County.

Finally, the recall was a referendum on Newsom and how Californians wanted their state governed, particularly in regards to the coronavirus — an issue the governor has a lot of influence over. The midterms will be a referendum on Biden. The power the GOP could win — control of Congress — is not the executive branch, where coronavirus regulations have come from to date.

It's not clear Democrats can mount the same defense of Congress as they did of their governor in the nation's most populous state.

Largest colleges push student vaccines with mandates, prizes

By AMY DiPIERRO and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. (AP) — At most of the largest U.S. public universities, students are under no obligation to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Some schools do require vaccines, but with leniency for those who opt out. Still others have expelled students who do not comply.

As a new semester begins amid a resurgence of the coronavirus, administrators and faculty nationwide see high vaccination rates as key to bringing some normalcy back to campus. Where mandates face political opposition, schools are relying on incentives and outreach to get more students vaccinated.

An analysis by The Associated Press shows 26 of the nation's 50 largest public university campuses are not requiring vaccination, representing roughly 55% of students enrolled at those schools. The AP looked at the largest campuses by 2019-2020 enrollment that offer on-campus housing and award bachelor's degrees.

Universities with vaccine mandates are concentrated in the Northeast and California. Almost all of those without mandates are in states that have restricted the ability to implement COVID-19 vaccine requirements, including Florida, Texas and Arizona.

Here is a look at approaches that three public universities are taking to get students vaccinated:

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

Students are required to be vaccinated, but the school has been lenient with those opposed to getting the shots. It has granted over 800 exemptions without denying a single request, no matter the reason.

Officials are working with students who have not complied with the mandate to understand their concerns about the vaccines, said the university's interim president, Dr. Andrew Agwunobi, a pediatrician.

"We would be very sensitive to the fact that there is misinformation out there, that we might need to educate the student," he said. "So it's about trying to work with that student to understand what their concerns are, trying to get them to the right place in terms of vaccinations."

The campus set up clinics for unvaccinated students to get shots as they arrive. Among those who signed up was graduate student Cindy Barreto, who said it was hard to get an appointment back home in Brazil, where her brother was hospitalized in intensive care with the virus.

"I know people who are waiting to get the vaccine, and I would say don't do that," she said.

At the school in Storrs where 25% of classes were online last year, students are hoping for a better experience this fall. About 90% of classes were expected to be in person this semester at the university

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 38 of 76

where about 11,000 of the 19,000 undergraduates live on campus. All students must wear masks indoors, and those who are unvaccinated face weekly testing.

"I was at my friend's residence hall, and I was just talking to a bunch of people, and I was like, 'I haven't done this in a while, especially with people my age,'" said Sahiti Bhyravavahala, a sophomore from Avon, Connecticut, who spent her freshman year at home taking classes online. "So, yes, it does feel surreal for sure, overwhelming as well. But I'm also very excited to get to know people."

Ten COVID-19 infections have been recorded among students since the semester began, according to UConn, where officials say 97% of students are vaccinated.

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

The Orlando campus is holding a raffle with prizes for vaccinated students, offering the shots at its student health center and rolling out a campaign urging students to get "Vacci-Knighted" — a play on the name of its sports teams, the Knights.

But an executive order from Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis prevents the school and other organizations in Florida from mandating vaccines.

Many professors are scared because they don't know who is vaccinated, said Joseph Harrington, a physics professor and chair of the UCF Faculty Senate. He's part of a group of state faculty petitioning the governor to allow schools to set their own policies.

"There are some large classes where students are sitting in the aisles because they're afraid to sit next to other students," Harrington said. "They want to be socially distanced, but they can't, because we're not allowed to reduce capacity because of COVID. We are required to teach in fully densified classrooms."

In the first week of classes, random sampling found 72.6% of those surveyed had at least one vaccine dose, university spokesman Chad Binette said. He said the school is using incentives to try to push that number higher, including the raffle where vaccinated students have a chance to win textbooks, computers and \$5,000 worth of tuition and fee waivers.

The university says some 12,000 of its 72,000 students live on campus. It's recommending students wear masks inside.

Over the two weeks ending Sept. 11, the university reported 377 COVID-19 infections among students.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Students who don't comply with a school vaccine mandate or apply for a religious or medical exemption have been kicked out.

Near the start of the semester, 193 students had been unenrolled for not getting the shots, according to Dr. Christopher Holstege, director of student health and wellness. He said the policy aligns with requirements that students be vaccinated for other diseases such as measles and mumps.

The university called and sent emails and text messages to students who had not complied to work with them on getting their shots or an exemption, said Susan Davis, vice president for student affairs. She said all of those who were unenrolled will be welcomed back in January or later if they follow the mandate.

About 97% of the school's 25,000 students and 92% of staff are vaccinated, officials said. Anyone on campus who is not vaccinated must wear a mask around others — indoors and outdoors — and undergo weekly COVID-19 testing.

So far this semester, the school has reported 255 COVID-19 cases among students.

It's offering more than 90% of classes in person, compared with last semester, when about half were online.

Mallory Griffin, a senior, said most students have no issue with the vaccine mandate.

"I think the consensus among at least everyone I've talked to and all of my friends is that we're glad that everybody is vaccinated or getting vaccinated, because that just brings us one step closer to hopefully being able to return completely to normal," Griffin said.

DiPierro reported from San Diego. Associated Press writer Skip Foreman contributed from Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Justice Department seeks order against Texas abortion law

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has asked a federal court in Texas to stop the enforcement of a new state law that bans most abortions in the state while it decides the case.

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

The law went into effect earlier this month after the Supreme Court declined an emergency appeal from abortion providers asking that the law be stayed.

In Tuesday night's emergency motion in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas, Austin Division, the Justice Department said "a court may enter a temporary restraining order or a preliminary injunction as a means of preventing harm to the movant before the court can fully adjudicate the claims in dispute."

The case was assigned to U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman.

Last week, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit in Texas asking a federal judge to declare that the law is invalid because it unlawfully infringes on the constitutional rights of women and violates the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution, which says federal law supersedes state law.

The department made a similar argument in seeking the restraining order or temporary injunction and said that its challenge would likely be successful.

"When other States have enacted laws abridging reproductive rights to the extent that S.B. 8 does, courts have enjoined enforcement of the laws before they could take effect. In an effort to avoid that result, Texas devised an unprecedented scheme that seeks to deny women and providers the ability to challenge S.B. 8 in federal court. This attempt to shield a plainly unconstitutional law from review cannot stand."

Under the Texas law, someone could bring a lawsuit — even if they have no connection to the woman getting an abortion — and could be entitled to at least \$10,000 in damages if they prevail in court.

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

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

Democrats try delicate tax maneuvers for \$3.5 trillion bill

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats began the serious work of trying to implement President Joe Biden's expansive spending plan, but getting there will require remarkable legislative nimbleness, since Biden has said the revenue to pay for it must come only from Americans who earn more than \$400,000 a year.

Republicans, who have vowed lockstep opposition to the plan, turned their anger against proposed tax breaks they portrayed as subsidies for wealthy elites rather than help for the poor and middle class. Electric vehicles became a rallying symbol as class-warfare overtones echoed through a committee session.

The Democrats are proposing that the top tax rate rise back to 39.6% on individuals earning more than \$400,000 — or \$450,000 for couples — in addition to a 3% surtax on wealthier Americans with adjusted income beyond \$5 million a year. For big business, the proposal would lift the corporate tax rate from 21% to 26.5% on companies' annual income over \$5 million.

"Look, I don't want to punish anyone's success, but the wealthy have been getting a free ride at the expense of the middle class for too long," Biden tweeted Tuesday. "I intend to pass one of the biggest middle class tax cuts ever — paid for by making those at the top pay their fair share."

The reach for revenue from the wealthy was even billboarded at the ultra-chic Met Gala in Manhattan

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 40 of 76

Monday night. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., a leading House progressive, wore a white gown with "Tax the Rich" in giant red letters emblazoned on the back (designer Aurora James).

For middle- and low-income people, tax help, not increase, is on offer as the House Ways and Means Committee digs into debate and drafting of tax proposals to both fund and buttress Biden's ambitious \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan that includes spending for child care, health care, education and tackling climate change.

It's an opening bid at a daunting moment for Biden and his allies in Congress as they assemble the "Build Back Better" package considered by some on par with the Great Society of the 1960s or even the New Deal of the 1930s Depression.

The proposals call for \$273 billion in tax breaks for renewable energy and "clean" electricity, including \$42 billion for electric vehicles and \$15 billion for a "green workforce" and environmental items. Increases in the child tax credit to \$300 a month per child under 6 and \$250 monthly per child 6-17, which came in coronavirus relief legislation earlier this year, would be extended through 2025.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee, meanwhile, advanced proposals promoting clean electricity, investments in electric vehicles and other climate provisions. The 30-27 vote along party lines sends the energy measure forward as part of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's goal to approve the huge overall package.

The energy panel's \$456 billion slice is the most consequential for dealing with climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, along with the tax breaks debated by the Ways and Means Committee.

The Democratic proposals would invest \$150 billion in grants to encourage power companies to provide "clean electricity" from renewable sources such as wind and solar. Electricity suppliers would receive grants based on how much clean electricity they provide, as part of Biden's plan to stop climate-damaging fossil fuel emissions from U.S. power plants by 2035.

All GOP lawmakers are expected to vote against the overall legislation. 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 with the Senate split 50-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker, if there is no Republican support.

But one Democratic senator vital to the bill's fate, Joe Manchin of West Virginia, says the cost will need to be slashed to \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion to win his support. Manchin also has said he will not support a number of clean energy and climate provisions pushed by Democrats.

A day earlier, Biden appeared to respond to concerns about the plan's size, saying the cost "may be" as much as \$3.5 trillion and would be spread out over 10 years as the economy grew.

Republican lawmakers, who have denounced the Democratic spending plan as socialist and job-killing, also went after proposed tax breaks on Tuesday.

The Democrats propose to extend to five years the current \$7,500 electric vehicle tax credit, with another \$4,500 if a car is made by union workers, and \$500 more for a U.S.-made battery. But Republicans painted electric vehicles as a bourgeois-bohemian accessory to be subsidized by taxpayers, the latest symbol of excess.

"Speaking of outrageous green welfare, this bill allows a near-millionaire family to buy a \$75,000 Beamer, Jaguar or Benz luxury electric vehicle — and their maid is forced to send them a \$12,500 subsidy from her taxes," said Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the panel's senior Republican. "Why are blue-collar workers, nurses, teachers and firefighters subsidizing the wealthy and big business with a quarter of a trillion dollars in green welfare checks?"

Hold on, said Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich. "We're not going to subsidize the wealthiest buying luxury vehicles." The legislation does impose caps on the sale price of the vehicle (\$55,000 for a sedan) and the income of the buyer (\$600,000 adjusted gross income for a head of household.)

The proposal hits another nerve for Republicans — Democrats' support of labor unions — by adding incentives for vehicles and batteries manufactured by union workers.

As they slogged through the legislation, members of the majority Democratic committee voted down a series of Republican amendments seeking to tighten the limitations on electric vehicle credits and to eliminate other tax breaks denounced as smacking of progressive Democrats' proposed "Green New Deal."

The House tax proposal is pitched as potentially raising some \$2.9 trillion — a preliminary estimate — which 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 spending plan to generate an additional \$600 billion to make up the difference.

To reach the Democrats' goal, 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%.

Targeting wealthy individuals, the Democrats propose 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 a 2017 Republican tax law to \$11.7 million for individuals, would revert to \$5 million.

Associated Press writer Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

Book: Top US officer feared Trump could order China strike

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fearful of Donald Trump's actions in his final weeks as president, the United States' top military officer twice called his Chinese counterpart to assure him that the two nations would not suddenly go to war, a senior defense official said after the conversations were described in excerpts from a forthcoming book.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley told Gen. Li Zuocheng of the People's Liberation Army that the United States would not strike. One call took place on Oct. 30, 2020, four days before the election that defeated Trump. The second call was on Jan. 8, 2021, just two days after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of the outgoing chief executive.

Trump said Milley should be tried for treason if the report was true.

Milley went so far as to promise Li that he would warn his counterpart in the event of a U.S. attack, according to the book "Peril," written by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the book. Details from the book, which is set to be released next week, were first reported by The Washington Post on Tuesday.

"General Li, I want to assure you that the American government is stable and everything is going to be okay," Milley told him in the first call, according to the book. "We are not going to attack or conduct any kinetic operations against you."

"If we're going to attack, I'm going to call you ahead of time. It's not going to be a surprise," Milley reportedly said.

According to the defense official, Milley's message to Li on both occasions was one of reassurance. The official questioned suggestions that Milley told Li he would call him first, and instead said the chairman made the point that the United States was not going to suddenly attack China without any warning — whether it be through diplomatic, administrative or military channels.

Milley also spoke with a number of other chiefs of defense around the world in the days after the Jan. 6 riot, including military leaders from the United Kingdom, Russia and Pakistan. A readout of those calls in January referred to "several" other counterparts that he spoke to with similar messages of reassurance that the U.S. government was strong and in control.

The second call was meant to placate Chinese fears about the events of Jan. 6. But the book reports that Li wasn't as easily assuaged, even after Milley promised him: "We are 100 percent steady. Everything's fine. But democracy can be sloppy sometimes."

Trump responded Tuesday with a sharply worded statement dismissing Milley as a "Dumbass," and insisting he never considered attacking China.

Still, he said that if the report was true, "I assume he would be tried for TREASON in that he would have

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 42 of 76

been dealing with his Chinese counterpart behind the President's back and telling China that he would be giving them notification 'of an attack.' Can't do that!"

"Actions should be taken immediately against Milley," Trump said.

Milley believed the president suffered a mental decline after the election, agreeing with a view shared by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a phone call they had Jan. 8, according to officials.

Pelosi had previously said she spoke to Milley that day about "available precautions" to prevent Trump from initiating military action or ordering a nuclear launch, and she told colleagues she was given unspecified assurances that there were longstanding safeguards in place.

Milley, according to the book, called the admiral overseeing the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the military unit responsible for Asia and the Pacific region, and recommended postponing upcoming military exercises. He also asked senior officers to swear an "oath" that Milley had to be involved if Trump gave an order to launch nuclear weapons, according to the book.

Officials in January and on Tuesday confirmed that Milley spoke with Pelosi, which was made public by the House speaker at the time. The officials said the two talked about the existing, long-held safeguards in the process for a nuclear strike. One official said Tuesday that Milley's intent in speaking with his staff and commanders about the process was not a move to subvert the president or his power, but to reaffirm the procedures and ensure they were understood by everyone.

It's not clear what, if any, military exercises were actually postponed. But defense officials said it is more likely that the military postponed a planned operation, such as a freedom of navigation transit by a U.S. Navy ship in the Pacific region. The defense officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Milley was appointed by Trump in 2018 and later drew the president's wrath when he expressed regret for participating in a June 2020 photo op with Trump after federal law enforcement cleared a park near the White House of peaceful protesters so Trump could stand at a nearby damaged church.

In response to the book, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., sent President Joe Biden a letter Tuesday urging him to fire Milley, saying the general worked to "actively undermine the sitting Commander in Chief."

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, called the report "deeply concerning," telling reporters at the Capitol, "I think the first step is for General Milley to answer the question as to what exactly he said."

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said he had no concerns that Milley might have exceeded his authority, telling reporters that Democratic lawmakers "were circumspect in our language but many of us made it clear that we were counting on him to avoid the disaster which we knew could happen at any moment."

A spokesperson for the Joint Staff declined to comment.

Milley's second warning to Beijing came after Trump had fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper and filled several top positions with interim officeholders loyal to him.

The book also offers new insights into Trump's efforts to hold on to power despite losing the election to Biden.

Trump refused to concede and offered false claims that the election had been stolen. He repeatedly pressed his vice president, Mike Pence, to refuse to certify the election results at the Capitol on Jan. 6, the event that was later interrupted by the mob.

Pence, the book writes, called Dan Quayle, a former vice president and fellow Indiana Republican, to see if there was any way he could acquiesce to Trump's request. Quayle said absolutely not.

"Mike, you have no flexibility on this. None. Zero. Forget it. Put it away," Quayle said, according to the book.

Pence ultimately agreed. He defied Trump to affirm Joe Biden's victory.

Trump was not pleased.

"I don't want to be your friend anymore if you don't do this," Trump replied, according to the book, later telling his vice president: "You've betrayed us. I made you. You were nothing."

"Peril" describes Trump's relentless efforts to convince Attorney General William Barr that the election had been stolen. Barr is quoted as telling Trump, "The Justice Department can't take sides, as you know,

between you and the other candidate." According to the book, Barr had determined that allegations about rigged voting machines "were not panning out." Barr also expressed disgust with Rudolph Giuliani and others insisting Trump had won, calling them a "clown car."

Trump aides aim to build GOP opposition to Afghan refugees

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As tens of thousands of Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban arrive in the U.S., a handful of former Trump administration officials are working to turn Republicans against them.

The former officials are writing position papers, appearing on conservative television outlets and meeting privately with GOP lawmakers — all in an effort to turn the collapse of Afghanistan into another opportunity to push a hard-line immigration agenda.

"It is a collaboration based on mutual conviction," said Stephen Miller, the architect of President Donald Trump's most conservative immigration policies and among those engaged on the issue. "My emphasis has been in talking to members of Congress to build support for opposing the Biden administration's overall refugee plans."

The approach isn't embraced by all Republican leaders, with some calling it mean-spirited and at odds with Christian teachings that are important to the white evangelicals who play a critical role in the party's base. The strategy relies on tactics that were commonplace during Trump's tenure and that turned off many voters, including racist tropes, fear-mongering and false allegations.

And the hard-liners pay little heed to the human reality unfolding in Afghanistan, where those who worked with Americans during the war are desperate to flee for fear they could be killed by the new Taliban regime.

But the Republicans pushing the issue are betting they can open a new front in the culture wars they have been fighting since President Joe Biden's election by combining the anti-immigrant sentiment that helped fuel Trump's political rise with widespread dissatisfaction with the Afghan withdrawal. That, they hope, could keep GOP voters motivated heading into next year's midterms, when control of Congress is at stake.

"From a political standpoint, cultural issues are the most important issues that are on the mind of the American people," said Russ Vought, Trump's former budget chief and president of the Center for Renewing America, a nonprofit group that has been working on building opposition to Afghan refugee settlement in the U.S. along with other hot-button issues, like critical race theory, which considers American history through the lens of racism.

His group is working, he said, to "kind of punch through this unanimity that has existed" that the withdrawal was chaotic, but that Afghan refugees deserve to come to the U.S.

Officials insist that every Afghan headed for the country is subject to extensive vetting that includes thorough biometric and biographic screenings conducted by intelligence, law enforcement and counterterrorism personnel. At a pair of hearings this week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said those "rigorous security checks" begin in transit countries before refugees arrive in the U.S. and continue at U.S. military bases before anyone is resettled. Checks then continue as refugees await further processing.

But Trump and his allies, who worked to sharply curtail refugee admissions while they were in office, insist the refugees pose a threat.

"Who are all of the people coming into our Country?" Trump asked in a recent statement. "How many terrorists are among them?"

With the U.S. confronting a host of challenges, it's unclear whether voters will consider immigration a leading priority next year. It was a key motivator for voters in the 2018 midterm elections, with 4 in 10 Republicans identifying it as the top issue facing the country, according to AP VoteCast data. But it became far less salient two years later, when only 3% of 2020 voters — including 5% of Republicans — named it as the No. 1 issue facing the country amid the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic woes.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 44 of 76

When it comes to refugees, 68% of Americans say they support the U.S. taking in those fleeing Afghanistan after security screening, according to a Washington Post/ABC News poll in late August and early September. That includes a majority — 56% — of Republicans.

The party's leaders are far from united. Dozens of Republican lawmakers and their offices have been working tirelessly to try to help Afghans flee the country. And some, like Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., have admonished those in his party who have suggested the Afghans pose a security risk.

Some of the skepticism voiced by the right has been exacerbated by the Biden administration's refusal to date to provide an accounting of who was able to leave Afghanistan during the U.S.'s chaotic evacuation campaign from Kabul's airport.

The State Department has said that more than 23,800 Afghans arrived in the U.S. between Aug. 17-31. Thousands more remain at U.S. military sites overseas for screening and other processing. But officials have said they are still working to compile the breakdown of how many are applicants to the Special Immigrant Visa program designed to help Afghan interpreters and others who served side-by-side with Americans, how many are considered other "Afghans at risk," like journalists and human rights workers, and how many fall into other categories.

The organization War Time Allies estimates as many as 20,000 special visa applicants remain in the country, not counting their families and others eligible to come to the U.S.

Ken Cuccinelli, who served as Trump's acting deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and is now a senior fellow at the Center for Renewing America, says he doesn't believe the refugees have faced sufficient review.

"It's unachievable as a simple administrative matter," he said of the process. While Cuccinelli, like Miller, believes that SIVs should be allowed to come to the U.S., he argues that the other refugees should be resettled in the region, closer to home.

The "mass importation of potentially hundreds of thousands of people who do not share American cultural, political, or ideological commonalities poses serious risks to both national security and broader social cohesion," he wrote in a recent position paper on the group's website that cites Pew Research Center polling on beliefs about Sharia law and suicide bombings.

Other former administration officials strongly disagree with such inflammatory language.

"Some of the people who've always been immigration hard-liners are seeing this wrongly as an opportunity ahead of the midterms to, lack a better term, stoke fear of, 'I don't want these people in my country,'" said Alyssa Farah, a former Pentagon press secretary who also served as White House communications director under Trump.

Farah said she has been working to "politely shift Republican sentiment" away from arguments that she sees as both factually false and politically questionable. The Republican Party, she noted, includes a majority of veterans — many of whom worked closely alongside Afghans on the ground and have led the push to help their former colleagues escape — as well as evangelical Christians, who have historically welcomed refugees with open arms.

"It's totally misreading public sentiment to think that Republicans should not be for relocating Afghan refugees who served along side the U.S.," she said. "The Christian community is there. The veterans community is for it."

Nicholas, now a tropical depression, still douses Gulf Coast

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

SURFSIDE BEACH, Texas (AP) — Tropical Storm Nicholas continued weakening Tuesday night after being downgraded to a tropical depression and slowing to a crawl over southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana, drenching both states with flooding rains.

The downgrade earlier Tuesday evening came the same day Nicholas blew ashore as a Category 1 hurricane, knocking out power to a half-million homes and businesses and dumping more than a foot (30.5 centimeters) of rain along the same area swamped by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 45 of 76

Nicholas could potentially stall over storm-battered Louisiana and bring life-threatening floods across the Deep South over the coming days, forecasters said.

Nicholas made landfall early Tuesday on the eastern part of the Matagorda Peninsula and was soon downgraded to a tropical storm. By Tuesday night, its center was 15 miles (24.14 kilometers) west-northwest of Port Arthur, Texas, with maximum winds of 35 mph (55 kph) as of 10 p.m. CDT, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami. However, weather radar showed the heaviest rain was over southwestern Louisiana, well east of the storm center.

The storm is moving east-northeast at 6 mph (9 kph). The National Hurricane Center said the storm may continue to slow and even stall, and although its winds will gradually subside, heavy rainfall and a significant flash flood risk will continue along the Gulf Coast for the next couple days.

Galveston, Texas, saw nearly 14 inches (35 centimeters) of rain from Nicholas, the 14th named storm of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season, while Houston reported more than 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain. That's a fraction of what fell during Harvey, which dumped more than 60 inches (152 centimeters) of rain in southeast Texas over a four-day period.

In the small coastal town of Surfside Beach about 65 miles (105 kilometers) south of Houston, Kirk Klaus, 59, and his wife Monica Klaus, 62, rode out the storm in their two-bedroom home, which sits about 6 to 8 feet (1.8 to 2.4 meters) above the ground on stilts.

"It was bad. I won't ever do it again," Kirk Klaus said.

He said it rained all day on Monday and, as the night progressed, the rainfall and winds got worse.

Sometime around 2:30 a.m. Tuesday, the strong winds blew out two of his home's windows, letting in rain and forcing the couple to continually mop their floors. Klaus said the rainfall and winds created a storm surge of about 2 feet in front of his home.

"It looked like a river out here," he said.

Nearby, Andrew Connor, 33, of Conroe, had not been following the news at his family's rented Surfside Beach vacation house and was unaware of the storm's approach until it struck. The storm surge surrounded the beach house with water, prompting Connor to consider using surfboards to take his wife and six children to higher ground if the house flooded.

The sea never made its way through the door, but it did flood the family sport utility vehicle, Connor said.

"When I popped the hood, I had seaweed and beach toys and all that stuff in my engine," he said.

Nicholas is moving so slowly it will dump several inches of rain as it crawls over Texas and southern Louisiana, meteorologists said. This includes areas already struck by Hurricane Ida and devastated last year by Hurricane Laura. Parts of Louisiana are saturated with nowhere for the extra water to go, so it will flood, said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy.

"It's stuck in a weak steering environment," McNoldy said Tuesday. So while the storm itself may weaken "that won't stop the rain from happening. Whether it's a tropical storm, tropical depression or post-tropical blob, it'll still rain a lot and that's not really good for that area."

More than a half-million homes and businesses had lost power in Texas, but that number dropped below 200,000 by late Tuesday afternoon, according to the website poweroutage.us that tracks utility reports. Most of those outages were caused by powerful winds as the storm moved through overnight, utility officials said. Across Louisiana, about 89,000 customers remained without power Tuesday afternoon, mostly in areas ravaged by Hurricane Ida.

Nicholas brought rain to the same area of Texas that was hit hard by Harvey, which 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.

McNoldy, the hurricane researcher, said Nicholas is bringing far less rain than Harvey did.

"It's not crazy amounts of rain. It isn't anything like Hurricane Harvey kind of thing with feet of rain," McNoldy said. Harvey not only stalled for three days over the same area, it moved a bit back into the Gulf of Mexico, allowing it to recharge with more water. Nicholas won't do that, McNoldy said.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 46 of 76

Nicholas, expected to weaken into a tropical depression by Tuesday night, could dump up to 20 inches (51 centimeters) of rain in parts of southern Louisiana. Forecasters said southern Mississippi, southern Alabama and the western Florida Panhandle could see heavy rainfall as well.

On Tuesday, heavy rains from Nicholas pelted blue tarps that covered roofs damaged by Ida all over southern Louisiana.

Ida destroyed one building and left holes in the roof of the main plant at Motivait Seafoods, a family-run oyster wholesaler in Houma, Louisiana. With rain from Nicholas pouring in on high-pressure processing equipment, owner Steven Voisin said he didn't know whether the machines could be saved after the latest round of tropical weather.

"And many people from here to New Orleans have this or more damage," he said. "They're not going to recover quickly or easily."

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency Sunday night, ahead of the storm's arrival in a state.

In southwestern Louisiana, Lake Charles Mayor Nic Hunter said Monday that crews were scouring the drainage system to keep it free from debris that might clog up and cause flooding. But after multiple natural disasters in such a short period of time, he said he's worried about residents' state of mind.

Last year, Category 4 Hurricane Laura caused substantial structural damage across the city of nearly 80,000 residents. Weeks later, Hurricane Delta ripped through the same area. Freezing temperatures in January burst pipes across the city, and a May rainstorm swamped houses and businesses yet again. Some residents have had to gut houses multiple times over one year.

"With what people have gone through over the last 16 months here in Lake Charles, they are very, understandably, despondent, emotional. Any time we have even a hint of a weather event approaching, people get scared," he said.

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. Just over 8.5 million mail-in ballots — the form of voting most Californians use — were returned prior to Election Day 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 the heavily Democratic state, where the GOP hasn't won a state-wide 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.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 47 of 76

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 were asked if Newsom should be removed, yes or no, and then who should replace him. There were 46 replacement candidates on the ballot.

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.

Newsom was successful in discouraging any fellow Democrats with political standing from entering the race and offering themselves as an alternative should the recall be successful. He urged his supporters to vote no on the recall but leave the second question blank.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 48 of 76

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>

Democrats try delicate tax maneuvers for \$3.5 trillion bill

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats on Tuesday began the serious work of trying to implement President Joe Biden's expansive spending plan, but getting there will require remarkable legislative nimbleness, since Biden has said the revenue to pay for it must come only from Americans who earn more than \$400,000 a year.

Republicans, who have vowed lockstep opposition to the plan, turned their anger against proposed tax breaks they portrayed as subsidies for wealthy elites rather than help for the poor and middle class. Electric vehicles became a rallying symbol as class-warfare overtones echoed through a committee session.

The Democrats are proposing that the top tax rate rise back to 39.6% on individuals earning more than \$400,000 — or \$450,000 for couples — in addition to a 3% surtax on wealthier Americans with adjusted income beyond \$5 million a year. For big business, the proposal would lift the corporate tax rate from 21% to 26.5% on companies' annual income over \$5 million.

"Look, I don't want to punish anyone's success, but the wealthy have been getting a free ride at the expense of the middle class for too long," Biden tweeted Tuesday. "I intend to pass one of the biggest middle class tax cuts ever — paid for by making those at the top pay their fair share."

The reach for revenue from the wealthy was even billboarded at the ultra-chic Met Gala in Manhattan Monday night. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., a leading House progressive, wore a white gown with "Tax the Rich" in giant red letters emblazoned on the back (designer Aurora James).

For middle- and low-income people, tax help, not increase, is on offer as the House Ways and Means

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 49 of 76

Committee digs into debate and drafting of tax proposals to both fund and buttress Biden's ambitious \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan that includes spending for child care, health care, education and tackling climate change.

It's an opening bid at a daunting moment for Biden and his allies in Congress as they assemble the "Build Back Better" package considered by some on par with the Great Society of the 1960s or even the New Deal of the 1930s Depression.

The proposals call for \$273 billion in tax breaks for renewable energy and "clean" electricity, including \$42 billion for electric vehicles and \$15 billion for a "green workforce" and environmental items. Increases in the child tax credit to \$300 a month per child under 6 and \$250 monthly per child 6-17, which came in coronavirus relief legislation earlier this year, would be extended through 2025.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee, meanwhile, advanced proposals promoting clean electricity, investments in electric vehicles and other climate provisions. The 30-27 vote along party lines sends the energy measure forward as part of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's goal to approve the huge overall package.

The energy panel's \$456 billion slice is the most consequential for dealing with climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, along with the tax breaks debated by the Ways and Means Committee.

The Democratic proposals would invest \$150 billion in grants to encourage power companies to provide "clean electricity" from renewable sources such as wind and solar. Electricity suppliers would receive grants based on how much clean electricity they provide, as part of Biden's plan to stop climate-damaging fossil fuel emissions from U.S. power plants by 2035.

All GOP lawmakers are expected to vote against the overall legislation. 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 with the Senate split 50-50, with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker, if there is no Republican support.

But one Democratic senator vital to the bill's fate, Joe Manchin of West Virginia, says the cost will need to be slashed to \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion to win his support. Manchin also has said he will not support a number of clean energy and climate provisions pushed by Democrats.

A day earlier, Biden appeared to respond to concerns about the plan's size, saying the cost "may be" as much as \$3.5 trillion and would be spread out over 10 years as the economy grew.

Republican lawmakers, who have denounced the Democratic spending plan as socialist and job-killing, also went after proposed tax breaks on Tuesday.

The Democrats propose to extend to five years the current \$7,500 electric vehicle tax credit, with another \$4,500 if a car is made by union workers, and \$500 more for a U.S.-made battery. But Republicans painted electric vehicles as a bourgeois-bohemian accessory to be subsidized by taxpayers, the latest symbol of excess.

"Speaking of outrageous green welfare, this bill allows a near-millionaire family to buy a \$75,000 Beamer, Jaguar or Benz luxury electric vehicle — and their maid is forced to send them a \$12,500 subsidy from her taxes," said Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the panel's senior Republican. "Why are blue-collar workers, nurses, teachers and firefighters subsidizing the wealthy and big business with a quarter of a trillion dollars in green welfare checks?"

Hold on, said Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich. "We're not going to subsidize the wealthiest buying luxury vehicles." The legislation does impose caps on the sale price of the vehicle (\$55,000 for a sedan) and the income of the buyer (\$600,000 adjusted gross income for a head of household.)

The proposal hits another nerve for Republicans — Democrats' support of labor unions — by adding incentives for vehicles and batteries manufactured by union workers.

As they slogged through the legislation, members of the majority Democratic committee voted down a series of Republican amendments seeking to tighten the limitations on electric vehicle credits and to eliminate other tax breaks denounced as smacking of progressive Democrats' proposed "Green New Deal."

The House tax proposal is pitched as potentially raising some \$2.9 trillion — a preliminary estimate —

which 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 spending plan to generate an additional \$600 billion to make up the difference.

To reach the Democrats' goal, 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%.

Targeting wealthy individuals, the Democrats propose 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 a 2017 Republican tax law to \$11.7 million for individuals, would revert to \$5 million.

Associated Press writer Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

Book: Top US officer feared Trump could order China strike

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fearful of Donald Trump's actions in his final weeks as president, the United States' top military officer twice called his Chinese counterpart to assure him that the two nations would not suddenly go to war, a senior defense official said Tuesday after the conversations were described in excerpts from a forthcoming book.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley told Gen. Li Zuocheng of the People's Liberation Army that the United States would not strike. One call took place on Oct. 30, 2020, four days before the election that defeated Trump. The second call was on Jan. 8, 2021, just two days after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of the outgoing chief executive.

Trump said Milley should be tried for treason if the report was true.

Milley went so far as to promise Li that he would warn his counterpart in the event of a U.S. attack, according to the book "Peril," written by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the book. Details from the book, which is set to be released next week, were first reported by The Washington Post on Tuesday.

"General Li, I want to assure you that the American government is stable and everything is going to be okay," Milley told him in the first call, according to the book. "We are not going to attack or conduct any kinetic operations against you."

"If we're going to attack, I'm going to call you ahead of time. It's not going to be a surprise," Milley reportedly said.

According to the defense official, Milley's message to Li on both occasions was one of reassurance. The official questioned suggestions that Milley told Li he would call him first, and instead said the chairman made the point that the United States was not going to suddenly attack China without any warning — whether it be through diplomatic, administrative or military channels.

Milley also spoke with a number of other chiefs of defense around the world in the days after the Jan. 6 riot, including military leaders from the United Kingdom, Russia and Pakistan. A readout of those calls in January referred to "several" other counterparts that he spoke to with similar messages of reassurance that the U.S. government was strong and in control.

The second call was meant to placate Chinese fears about the events of Jan. 6. But the book reports that Li wasn't as easily assuaged, even after Milley promised him: "We are 100 percent steady. Everything's fine. But democracy can be sloppy sometimes."

Trump responded Tuesday with a sharply worded statement dismissing Milley as a "Dumbass," and insisting he never considered attacking China.

Still, he said that if the report was true, "I assume he would be tried for TREASON in that he would have been dealing with his Chinese counterpart behind the President's back and telling China that he would be giving them notification 'of an attack.' Can't do that!"

"Actions should be taken immediately against Milley," Trump said.

Milley believed the president suffered a mental decline after the election, agreeing with a view shared by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a phone call they had Jan. 8, according to officials.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 51 of 76

Pelosi had previously said she spoke to Milley that day about "available precautions" to prevent Trump from initiating military action or ordering a nuclear launch, and she told colleagues she was given unspecified assurances that there were longstanding safeguards in place.

Milley, according to the book, called the admiral overseeing the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the military unit responsible for Asia and the Pacific region, and recommended postponing upcoming military exercises. He also asked senior officers to swear an "oath" that Milley had to be involved if Trump gave an order to launch nuclear weapons, according to the book.

Officials in January and on Tuesday confirmed that Milley spoke with Pelosi, which was made public by the House speaker at the time. The officials said the two talked about the existing, long-held safeguards in the process for a nuclear strike. One official said Tuesday that Milley's intent in speaking with his staff and commanders about the process was not a move to subvert the president or his power, but to reaffirm the procedures and ensure they were understood by everyone.

It's not clear what, if any, military exercises were actually postponed. But defense officials said it is more likely that the military postponed a planned operation, such as a freedom of navigation transit by a U.S. Navy ship in the Pacific region. The defense officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Milley was appointed by Trump in 2018 and later drew the president's wrath when he expressed regret for participating in a June 2020 photo op with Trump after federal law enforcement cleared a park near the White House of peaceful protesters so Trump could stand at a nearby damaged church.

In response to the book, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., sent President Joe Biden a letter Tuesday urging him to fire Milley, saying the general worked to "actively undermine the sitting Commander in Chief."

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, called the report "deeply concerning," telling reporters at the Capitol, "I think the first step is for General Milley to answer the question as to what exactly he said."

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said he had no concerns that Milley might have exceeded his authority, telling reporters that Democratic lawmakers "were circumspect in our language but many of us made it clear that we were counting on him to avoid the disaster which we knew could happen at any moment."

A spokesperson for the Joint Staff declined to comment.

Milley's second warning to Beijing came after Trump had fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper and filled several top positions with interim officeholders loyal to him.

The book also offers new insights into Trump's efforts to hold on to power despite losing the election to Biden.

Trump refused to concede and offered false claims that the election had been stolen. He repeatedly pressed his vice president, Mike Pence, to refuse to certify the election results at the Capitol on Jan. 6, the event that was later interrupted by the mob.

Pence, the book writes, called Dan Quayle, a former vice president and fellow Indiana Republican, to see if there was any way he could acquiesce to Trump's request. Quayle said absolutely not.

"Mike, you have no flexibility on this. None. Zero. Forget it. Put it away," Quayle said, according to the book.

Pence ultimately agreed. He defied Trump to affirm Joe Biden's victory.

Trump was not pleased.

"I don't want to be your friend anymore if you don't do this," Trump replied, according to the book, later telling his vice president: "You've betrayed us. I made you. You were nothing."

"Peril" describes Trump's relentless efforts to convince Attorney General William Barr that the election had been stolen. Barr is quoted as telling Trump, "The Justice Department can't take sides, as you know, between you and the other candidate." According to the book, Barr had determined that allegations about rigged voting machines "were not panning out." Barr also expressed disgust with Rudolph Giuliani and others insisting Trump had won, calling them a "clown car."

Alanis Morissette blasts documentary 'Jagged' as 'salacious'

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Just hours before the HBO documentary "Jagged" was to premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on Tuesday, Alanis Morissette criticized the film about her life as "reductive" and "salacious."

Morissette participated in the film, directed by Alison Klayman, sitting for lengthy interviews. But in a statement issued by her publicist, the Canadian musician said she would not be supporting the film, named after her breakthrough 1995 album, "Jagged Little Pill."

"I agreed to participate in a piece about the celebration of 'Jagged Little Pill's 25th anniversary, and was interviewed during a very vulnerable time (while in the midst of my third postpartum depression during lockdown)," wrote Morissette. "I was lulled into a false sense of security and their salacious agenda became apparent immediately upon my seeing the first cut of the film. This is when I knew our visions were in fact painfully diverged. This was not the story I agreed to tell."

Morissette didn't specify her issues with "Jagged," which is to premiere Nov. 19 on HBO. But its most sensitive material includes Morissette discussing sexual encounters when she was 15 that she calls statutory rape. The Washington Post earlier reported on that section of the film.

"It took me years in therapy to even admit there had been any kind of victimization on my part," Morissette says in the film. "I would always say I was consenting, and then I'd be reminded like 'Hey, you were 15, you're not consenting at 15.' Now I'm like, 'Oh yeah, they're all pedophiles. It's all statutory rape.'"

Canada's age of consent has been 16 years old since 2008. A person under the age of 18 cannot consent if the sexual activity is with a person with authority over them. Youths 14 or 15 years old can consent to nonexploitive sexual activity when the age difference is no more than five years. Before 2008, the age of consent was 14. Morissette doesn't go into any detail on who the encounters were with.

Representatives for Klayman didn't immediately return requests for comment Tuesday. In an interview with Deadline Hollywood published Tuesday, Klayman, whose films include "Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry" and the Steve Bannon documentary "Brink," lamented that Morissette wouldn't be there for the premiere.

"It's a really hard thing, I think, to see a movie made about yourself," Klayman said. "I think she's incredibly brave and the reaction when she saw it was that it was a really — she could feel all the work, all the nuance that went into it. And again, she gave so much of her time and so much of her effort into making this and I think that the movie really speaks for itself."

Morissette is currently on tour and is to perform in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Wednesday.

"I have chosen not to attend any event around this movie for two reasons: one is that I am on tour right now. The other is that, not unlike many 'stories' and unauthorized biographies out there over the years, this one includes implications and facts that are simply not true," said Morissette. "While there is beauty and some elements of accuracy in this/my story to be sure — I ultimately won't be supporting someone else's reductive take on a story much too nuanced for them to ever grasp or tell."

Jury weighing fate of Robert Durst after long murder trial

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Los Angeles jury began deliberating Tuesday in the lengthy murder trial of New York real estate heir Robert Durst after a prosecutor described him as a "narcissistic psychopath" who needs to be held accountable.

Deputy District Attorney John Lewin told jurors in Los Angeles County Superior Court that Durst, a multimillionaire, had lived a privileged life in which he played by his own rules and only cared about himself. Lewin said he didn't kill for pleasure but to resolve problems when backed into a corner.

"Bob Durst is not crazy. He's not some nut job serial killer who goes around killing for the thrill of it," Lewin said. "Don't let this narcissistic psychopath get away with what he's done."

Durst, 78, who was hunched in a wheelchair in a light blue sportscoat, has pleaded not guilty to a first-degree murder charge in the point-blank shooting of Susan Berman, his confidante.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 53 of 76

Jurors deliberated about three hours before recessing for the day. They began hearing evidence in March 2020 before taking a 14-month break during the pandemic. The case resumed in May.

Prosecutors say Durst killed Berman in December 2000 at her home as she planned to speak with police about a phony alibi she provided for him when his wife vanished in New York in 1982.

Lewin said Berman was killed because she was a witness. Prosecutors presented evidence of Kathie Durst's presumed killing to provide his motive and also introduced evidence from a Galveston, Texas, trial where he was acquitted of murder in the shooting death of a neighbor.

Durst had gone into hiding in Texas in late 2000 to avoid what he believed were imminent charges in New York when authorities reopened the investigation into his wife's disappearance. He testified that Morris Black pulled a gun on him in Durst's apartment and was shot in the head during a struggle for the weapon.

The defense challenged the strength of the evidence presented by prosecutors, arguing there was no evidence of Kathie Durst's death and generally a lack of forensic and direct evidence in the case.

They said prosecutors failed to prove that Berman impersonated Kathie Durst to call in sick at the medical school she attended the day after her husband last saw her. The call made it appear she was still alive after Robert Durst had seen her.

"Everything's been this theory but with no meat to the bone, no evidence," defense attorney David Chesnoff said. "You know that what I'm telling you is real."

Kathie Durst has never been found and no one has been charged in her disappearance.

Durst faces a life sentence if he's convicted.

The defense claimed that prosecutors beat up a "sick, old," defenseless man during nine days of brutal cross-examination in which Durst admitted lying under oath and made numerous damning admissions.

Among other things, Durst testified he didn't kill Kathie Durst or Berman, but said he would lie if he had.

"I just hope when this is over, you let Mr. Durst be in a hospital of his choosing to live out whatever time he has left," Chesnoff said.

Lewin countered that Durst was only old and feeble because he had been able to live a full life — unlike his victims.

"He's up here, he's old and he's sick. He got to live to be old," Lewin said. "Kathie never made it to 30. Susan Berman, his close friend, horribly executed. Morris Black murdered and then dismembered. ... He's lucky to have gotten to live to be 78 to have the health issues he does. Because his victims and their families don't have that same peace of mind."

Haiti prosecutor seeks to charge PM in killing, is replaced

By EVENS SANON and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A new chief prosecutor was sworn in Tuesday just hours after his predecessor asked a judge to charge Prime Minister Ariel Henry in the slaying of the president and to bar him from leaving Haiti, a move that could further destabilize a country roiled by turmoil following the assassination and a recent major earthquake.

The request filed by Port-au-Prince prosecutor Bed-Ford Claude, who was fired by Henry, came on the same day that the prosecutor had asked that the prime minister come to a meeting and explain why he spoke twice with a key suspect in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse just hours after the killing.

"There are enough compromising elements ... to prosecute Henry and ask for his outright indictment," Claude wrote before he was replaced by Frantz Louis Juste, a prosecutor who oversaw the case involving the deaths of more than a dozen children in a fire at an orphanage near Port-au-Prince last year.

A spokesman for Henry could not be reached for comment.

It wasn't clear if Claude's removal would have any impact on the case, but an analyst noted that the investigation is in the hands of a judge.

It wasn't clear if Claude was officially removed before he made the request to the judge. The Associated Press obtained a letter dated Monday in which Henry told Claude that he was being fired for an undefined

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 54 of 76

"serious administrative fault" and that the decision was effective as soon as he received the document.

Claude did not respond to a request for comment on his firing or when he got the letter.

Claude said the phone calls in question were made at 4:03 a.m. and 4:20 a.m. on July 7, adding that evidence shows the suspect, Joseph Badio, was in the vicinity of Moïse's home at that time. Badio once worked for Haiti's Ministry of Justice and at the government's anti-corruption unit until he was fired in May amid accusations of violating unspecified ethical rules.

In the two-page document, Claude said that the calls lasted a total of seven minutes and that Henry was at the Hotel Montana in Port-au-Prince at the time. The prosecutor also noted a government official tweeted last month that Henry told him he never spoke with Badio.

On Monday, Justice Minister Rockfeller Vincent ordered the chief of Haiti's National Police to boost security for Claude because Claude had received "important and disturbing" threats in the past five days.

Brian Concannon, an adviser for the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, said he did not expect much to change despite the appointment of a new prosecutor.

"A lot of this is theater," he said.

Concannon noted that the assassination case is in the hands of Judge Garry Orélien and that he can decide whether to pursue an investigation of Henry even if the new prosecutor advises otherwise. He said the judge has three months to determine whether to take action.

Robert Fatton, a Haitian politics expert at the University of Virginia, said there was clearly a power struggle within the government between Henry and those who supported Moïse.

"We have a very confusing situation, a power struggle at the moment, and we will see who will win it," he said. "It's not clear where we are going, and it's not clear what the international community thinks about everything."

In recent days, Haiti's ombudsman-like Office of Citizen Protection announced it was demanding that Henry step down and asked that the international community stop supporting him.

Henry has not specifically addressed the issue in public, although during a meeting with politicians and civil society leaders on Saturday, he said he is committed to helping stabilize Haiti.

"Rest assured that no distraction, no summons or invitation, no maneuver, no threat, no rear-guard combat, no aggression will distract me from my mission," Henry said. "The real culprits, the intellectual authors and coauthor and sponsor of the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse will be found and brought to justice and punished for their crimes."

Moïse had appointed Henry as prime minister shortly before he was killed at his home in an attack that also seriously wounded his wife, Martine Moïse.

More than 40 suspects have been arrested in the case, including 18 former Colombian soldiers. Authorities are still looking for additional suspects, including Badio and a former Haitian senator.

The investigation is ongoing despite court clerks going into hiding after receiving death threats if they didn't change certain names and statements in their reports.

In addition, a Haitian judge assigned to oversee the investigation stepped down last month citing personal reasons. He left after one of his assistants died in unclear circumstances. A new judge has been assigned.

On final day, Californians cast votes to keep, oust governor

California voters headed to the polls Tuesday to cast final ballots in an election focused on whether Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom should keep his job.

Voters were asked to answer whether Newsom should stay in his post and if he doesn't, who should replace him. Dozens of candidates, most of them Republicans, are running for the seat.

Many Californians voted in recent weeks by dropping off their ballots at designated boxes or by mail. Others chose to cast their ballots at vote centers on Tuesday, the last day to do so.

Here are some of their stories:

—
Erica Taylor, 47, works at San Francisco's Department of Public Health and said she voted against the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 55 of 76

recall, which she found to be a waste of money.

She said she supports Newsom and likes how he has handled the pandemic.

"At the end of the day politicians are humans. They are held up on this high pedestal, but underneath all of that we're all humans and make mistakes," she said.

A native San Franciscan, Taylor said she has supported Newsom since he began his political career in the city.

"I've worked with this man here at the Bill Graham (Civic Auditorium) doing Project Homeless Connect, so he is definitely a person who gets out in his community," she said.

Maricela Ruiz, 43, is a Democrat who voted against the recall. In case the recall effort were to succeed, Ruiz said she voted for cannabis consultant Jacqueline McGowan as Newsom's replacement.

"I want Democrats to continue in California," the Los Angeles caregiver said outside a polling place at the Montecito Heights Senior Citizen Center.

Ruiz said her top concern is homelessness, but she believes Newsom is "trying his best to clean up the streets."

She is open to the idea of another Democrat challenging Newsom in 2022 to get fresh ideas.

She said she has heard conspiracy theories about the election's integrity but does not believe them. "It's very silly," she said.

Bradley Pierce, 21, voted against recalling Newsom at a high school in San Diego in a diverse neighborhood with a large refugee population.

"I was unnerved by the chance of somebody who supports a more conservative agenda becoming governor," said Pierce, who is studying education at San Diego State University.

He said he did not check any box for a candidate to replace Newsom in case he is in fact recalled. He said the Democrats seeking to replace him all have little experience.

Pierce said he believes Newsom has handled the pandemic well. He also likes what Newsom has promised to do about homelessness and improving public education in the state.

Joe Cusumano, 77, who is a registered Democrat but has voted Republican in recent years, wants a new governor.

The San Diego barber said his feelings toward Newsom are the same as those toward President Joe Biden. "They don't know how to delegate power," he said. "Newsom still has a lot to learn."

Cusumano used to cut the hair of former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, who he described as "a San Diego man, someone who is decent."

But he doesn't believe he would be the best Republican to replace Newsom. He said he favors conservative talk show host Larry Elder, who he finds more charismatic.

"Larry Elder has a little more knowledge than the others," he said.

Briana Mendoza, 30, said the last thing California needs is more turmoil. The San Diego social worker said she voted against recalling Newsom.

"We're in the middle of a pandemic. Why would we recall the governor who has been really trying to curb the spread of the virus?" she said. "I am a big fan of the mask, testing and vaccine mandates."

Mendoza said she sees the recall effort as the "backlash" of a small minority of Republicans toward a firmly Democratic state.

Mendoza said she is not worried about the recall effort succeeding, but she also made sure to cast her ballot. "We don't want Elder in office," she said. "This is ridiculous. We just got Trump out. We don't want a Trump puppet."

Than Nguyen, 66, said he voted to recall Newsom over his comment last year that the coronavirus spread through a nail salon, which offended many in the Vietnamese American community.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 56 of 76

The retiree from the Orange County city of Garden Grove, who came to the country from Vietnam four decades ago, said he doesn't work in the salon industry but the remark upset him.

"He never corrected it," Nguyen said after voting in the nearby city of Westminster.

Nguyen said he's concerned about education and how officials are dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

He said he chose Assemblyman Kevin Kiley to replace Newsom since he was an early supporter of the recall and has the backing of some of its original proponents.

"We don't know much about him, but the main thing is he's the one to stand up and do the recall," he said. "I give him the credit for that."

—
Kimmi Vuong, 54, said her biggest concerns are the economy and homelessness, and she doesn't feel Newsom is doing enough on either.

That's why the hair salon owner from the Orange County city of Westminster said she voted to recall him.

"I think he doesn't do a good job for this state," she said. "The economy here is so bad. Every company is moving out of this state."

Vuong said she has seen many of her salon's clients leave California over the past year, moving to places such as Arizona and Texas. She said that has hurt her business and yet prices keep rising.

She said she chose Kiley to replace Newsom, adding that she's a committed Republican and believes in his Republican credentials.

"I think he's a fair leader and looks out for our community," she said. "He has more experience. And besides, he's a true Republican."

—
Denise Cain, 51, a Republican homemaker in Lafayette, California, voted to recall Newsom because of "the trash, the homeless, the fires, the bias toward what businesses could be open and which could be closed during COVID and the lockdown," she said, continuing a long list.

"Let's see, the schools are a disgrace. Oh, gas prices would be another one," she said.

She did not vote for Newsom in 2018.

"I'm hoping a replacement candidate will do a better job. I just think this state is in terrible disrepair and something needs to be done," she said.

She said she voted for Kiley because she feels he is more centrist and she likes his policies. "We need someone to unite this state," not polarize it, she said.

—
Eric Fonseca, 63, said he voted against the recall because he supports Newsom and doesn't want to see a divided California.

"That man has done a lot for the state. He has helped poor people throughout the pandemic, and it's not fair that the Republicans want to come in and destroy the peace we have in California," Fonseca said after voting in San Francisco.

Fonseca moved to the city 40 years ago from Nicaragua, when his home country was going through a civil war. He said he voted for Trump in 2016 because he talked about ending authoritarian governments in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela.

"It was all lies. He fooled us and didn't do anything," Fonseca said.

"Larry Elder is the same thing. He just lies. We don't want any more lies," he added.

—
Janet Webb, 69, of Lafayette, said she voted for the recall and for Elder because of Newsom's stance on vaccine mandates.

"I am angry. It should be a freedom of choice. What is this, a dictatorship? I've had it. I've never felt so angry. I'm losing all my friends and family. They don't want to have anything to do with me right now," she said.

"If he enforces this, I'm going to have to move out of this state. I can't live here like this if they're going to force everyone to get a vaccine," she said. "I do everything right: I take my vitamins, I walk around the reservoir, I eat healthy. I've already had the coronavirus, and my immune system is built up already."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 57 of 76

She said she was at her daughter-in-law's baby shower this weekend, and it devolved into such heated arguments with relatives that she had to leave. She said she voted to recall Newsom and replace him with Elder.

Steve Marsh, 75, a retired realtor from the Orange County city of Westminster and a Republican, said he supports the recall and feels Newsom favors too many taxes and too many social programs.

He said he also didn't like how the governor handled the coronavirus pandemic by closing businesses.

"I just really objected to the whole thing," he said.

Marsh said he chose Elder to replace Newsom, adding he used to listen to Elder's radio program and identifies with his conservative views on abortion and social programs.

Marsh said he didn't expect the recall to succeed in California with so many Democratic voters. But he said he hopes it might stop Newsom from seeking higher office even if it fails.

"I didn't vote for him in the first place, and I'm voting him out, but I don't have any hope that California, because there's so many Democrats, that it would actually change anything," Marsh said.

Erik Peterson, 52, a Lafayette resident who works in construction, is a Democrat who says he tends to vote Republican.

He said he voted for the recall and to replace Newsom with Elder.

"Newsom's handling of the pandemic was terrible. He told us to shelter in place and stay home, and he's out doing fundraisers, unmasked," he said referring to Newsom's now infamous meal at the high-end French Laundry restaurant.

"He has to be held accountable for his actions. Look at what happened to Cuomo," he said of the former governor in New York.

Other issues for him were homelessness and Newsom's policies on gun control, Peterson said.

Alex Ralph, 40, and her partner, Bobby Lang, 33, said they both voted against the recall in Los Angeles. The self-described progressive couple said they voted for candidate Kevin Paffrath in case the recall succeeds, calling him their "backup Democrat."

Lang, who works in the food industry, said the governor's flip-flopping stance on restaurant shutdowns was not helpful.

"We don't want Larry Elder, but we're critical of Newsom's performance," Lang said, adding the number of signatures to trigger a recall election should be higher. "We could do a lot better."

Ralph said she didn't have any names in mind yet to challenge Newsom in 2022. "So much could happen between now and then," she said.

Chris Williams, 50, a Democrat from Roseville northeast of Sacramento, said he voted to retain Newsom because of his leadership on the pandemic.

"I support vaccinations, I believe in science, I support masks," he said. "You look at some other states where there are Republican governors, like Florida and Texas, and I think their rates of hospitalizations are skyrocketing."

As a school administrator himself, he does not support banning masks in schools.

"I like the fact that here in California we support vaccinations and masks. And I also think some of the things that the governor is doing I like. And I also believe the choices for the Republicans are pretty bad," he said.

Williams also said recalling a governor is an extreme measure and that voters have the opportunity to change their governor through the normal election process.

"We are in a democracy. People have the opportunity to vote every four years," he said. "So I don't think Newsom has done anything extreme enough that would warrant a recall."

Lysa Flores, 48, dropped off her ballot at a polling place at the Montecito Heights Senior Citizen Center

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 58 of 76

in Los Angeles.

She said she voted against the recall but has heard unsubstantiated rumors of ballot boxes being stolen so she wanted to drop it off at a polling place.

"I'm more worried that the Republicans could compromise it somehow," she said.

Flores said she has agreed with Newsom's pandemic rules and believes California is being proactive and careful.

"I think he has been making the right moves" to combat the virus, she said.

While she also agrees with other policies of Newsom's, she said wouldn't mind seeing him face a challenger in 2022. "I think the more options the better," she said.

Norm Macdonald, former 'Saturday Night Live' comic, dies

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Comedian Norm Macdonald, a former "Saturday Night Live" writer and performer who was "Weekend Update" host when Bill Clinton and O.J. Simpson provided comic fodder during the 1990s, has died.

Macdonald, who was 61, died Tuesday after having cancer for nine years, but keeping it private, according to Brillstein Entertainment Partners, his management firm in Los Angeles.

He never reached the same television heights after being fired from "SNL" in 1998, but was an indefatigable stand-up comic and popular talk show guest whose death provoked an outpouring from fellow comedians.

"Norm was in a comedy genre of his own," tweeted Sarah Silverman. "No one like him on this planet. Please do yourself a favor and watch his stuff."

Macdonald, the son of two schoolteachers, was raised in Quebec City, Canada. Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau offered his condolences, calling him "a comedic genius and a great Canadian."

He was a stand-up comic and briefly a writer for the sitcom "Roseanne" when he was picked to join the cast of "Saturday Night Live" in 1993.

He became known for his esoteric impressions, including Burt Reynolds, who gave Will Ferrell's Alex Trebek character grief on "Celebrity Jeopardy." He also impersonated Bob Dole, Larry King and David Letterman.

His deadpan style and skills as a writer made him the choice to host "Weekend Update." Simpson was a favorite target. Macdonald opened the fake newscast the week of the former football star's acquittal on murder charges by saying, "Well, it's finally official. Murder is legal in the state of California."

"Saturday Night Live" executive producer Lorne Michaels, speaking for the show, called MacDonal "one of the most impactful comedic voices of his or any other generation."

"There are so many things that we'll miss about Norm — from his unflinching integrity to his generosity to his consistent ability to surprise," he said. "But most of all he was just plain funny. No one was funny like Norm."

Macdonald was fired in the middle of the season in 1998 by NBC Entertainment executive Don Ohlmeyer, a friend of Simpson's who reportedly didn't appreciate the "SNL" star making Simpson the near-constant butt of jokes.

"I was never bitter," Macdonald said in the oral history "Live From New York," released in 2002. "I always understood that Ohlmeyer could fire me, because he was the guy who owned the cameras, so that didn't bother me. I was always happy that 'SNL' gave me a chance."

He said in the same book that "I just like doing jokes I like, and if the audience doesn't like them, they're wrong, not me."

Ohlmeyer said that was his problem.

"When 'Saturday Night Live' is really good, they do care what the audience thinks," he said. "And when 'Saturday Night Live' is not really good, they're kind of doing it for themselves and their pals."

MacDonald went on Letterman's show to announce that he was fired. During a commercial break, Let-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 59 of 76

terman asked him, "This is like some Andy Kaufman thing with fake wrestling, right?" Macdonald recalled. But it wasn't.

Letterman was a fan who made Macdonald one of the guests in the CBS "Late Show" host's final run of shows.

In 2016, Letterman told The Washington Post, that the show would have had Macdonald on every week "if we could."

"He is funny in a way that some people inhale and exhale," Letterman told The Post. "With others, you can tell the comedy, the humor is considered. With Norm, he exudes it ... There may be people as funny as Norm, but I don't know anybody who is funnier."

The Post's story was headlined, "Will Somebody Please Give Norm Macdonald Another Show?"

As if to answer, Netflix two years later aired 10 episodes of an interview series, "Norm Macdonald Has a Show." Guests included Letterman, Lorne Michaels, Jane Fonda and Judge Judy Sheindlin.

He had limited success in other TV ventures. He created and starred in the ABC sitcom "The Norm Show," later shortened to "Norm," playing a former NHL player kicked out of the league for gambling and tax evasion and forced into community service as a social worker.

A Comedy Central show, "Sports Show with Norm Macdonald," lasted only a handful of episodes, but he kept busy in comedy clubs.

"In my mind, I'm just a stand-up," he told The New York Times in 2018. "But other people don't think that. They think, 'oh, the guy from 'SNL' is doing stand-up now,'"

In a 2011 comedy special, MacDonald said it was wrong to say you "lost your battle" with cancer when you died. "I'm not a doctor, but I'm pretty sure that if you die, the cancer also dies at exactly the same time," he said. "That, to me, is not a loss. That's a draw."

Jim Carrey tweeted that Macdonald was "an honest and courageous comedy genius." Seth Rogen said he essentially ripped off his delivery when he started acting.

"No one could make you break like Norm Macdonald," Jon Stewart said on Twitter. "Hilarious and unique."

Census: Relief programs staved off hardship in COVID crash

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Massive government relief passed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic moved millions of Americans out of poverty last year, even as the official poverty rate increased slightly, the Census Bureau reported Tuesday.

The official poverty measure rose 1 percentage point in 2020, with 11.4% of Americans living in poverty, or more than 37 million people. It was the first increase in poverty after five consecutive annual declines.

But the Census Bureau's supplemental measure of poverty, which takes into account government benefit programs and stimulus payments, showed that the share of people in poverty dropped significantly after the aid was factored in.

The supplemental poverty measure was 2.6 percentage points lower than its pre-pandemic level in 2019. Stimulus payments moved 11.7 million people out of poverty, while expanded unemployment benefits kept 5.5 million from falling into poverty. Social Security continued to be the nation's most effective anti-poverty program.

"This really highlights the importance of our social safety net," said Liana Fox, chief of the Census' poverty statistics bureau.

That finding is likely to resonate in a divided Congress, where President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion "Build Back Better" domestic agenda faces uncertain prospects. Two anchors of last year's COVID response — enhanced unemployment benefits and a federal eviction moratorium — have expired, adding to concerns.

The White House quickly took note.

"The key takeaway from this report is the extremely powerful anti-poverty and pro-middle class income impacts of the government response in 2020," said spokeswoman Emilie Simons. "It isn't enough

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 60 of 76

to temporarily lift people out of poverty, we need to provide opportunities for working Americans and their families to stay there.”

The Census reports released Tuesday cover income, poverty and health insurance, and amount to an annual check-up on the economic status of average Americans. They are based on extensive surveys and analysis.

During last year’s epic economic collapse, employers shed 22.4 million jobs in March and April, the sharpest decline since records began in the 1940s. Weekly applications for unemployment benefits topped 6 million in a single week in April, by far the highest on record. Since then, the economy has recovered three-quarters of those lost jobs, but the U.S. still has 5.3 million fewer positions than before the pandemic.

A basic indicator of the economic health of the middle class registered the shock.

The median — or midpoint — household income decreased by 2.9% to \$67,521 in 2020. The median is a dividing line, with half of American households having lower incomes and the other half, higher. It was the first statistically significant drop in that measure in nearly a decade.

Driving the erosion, the number of people with earnings from work fell by about 3 million and the number of full-time year-round workers contracted by some 13.7 million.

Below those topline it was a story of haves and have-nots.

People who held on to steady year-round jobs saw an increase in economic well-being, with their median earnings rising 6.9% after adjusting for inflation. People on the lower rungs of the job market, those with part-time jobs or trying to stay afloat in the gig economy, lost ground as median earnings decreased 1.2% for workers overall.

Despite widespread concerns that the pandemic would make millions more Americans uninsured, health coverage held its own in 2020, Census found. More than 91% of Americans had insurance, but 28 million were uninsured.

But Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation said the numbers revealed some glaring exceptions. For example, 38% of poor working age adults in the dozen states that have not expanded Medicaid were uninsured. Biden’s budget bill would provide a workaround.

“It would be hard to find a group that struggles more to get access to affordable health care,” Levitt said.

Congress passed five bipartisan COVID-19 response bills last year, totaling close to \$3.5 trillion and signed into law by then-President Donald Trump. This year Democrats pushed through Biden’s nearly \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan on party-line votes. Its effects are not reflected in the Census reports.

Though some of the federal aid last year was delayed for reasons from wrangling over costs to problems with distribution, on the whole it insulated families from economic disaster that would have compounded the public health crisis. Some were left out, such as people not legally authorized to be in the country.

As Americans fought over measures like mask wearing and closing down businesses and community life, lawmakers of both parties were motivated to take dramatic action, said economist Bruce Meyer, a University of Chicago expert on poverty.

“You had Democrats who were very focused on helping those who were unemployed and hurting, and you had Republicans who were willing to do many things to help the reelection of their president, so there was a confluence of incentives, or of desires, by politicians on both sides,” he said.

On a historical note, the Census reports documented that government aid was much more effective in preventing poverty last year than in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 Great Recession, a decade earlier. Even after accounting for government programs, the supplemental measure of poverty rose in 2010, while it fell sharply in 2020. That reflects how much more financial juice was provided by Congress and the Trump administration in 2020, compared with President Barack Obama’s roughly \$900 billion package in 2009.

That’s relevant to the current debate over Biden’s social infrastructure plan, said public policy analyst Robert Greenstein of the Brookings Institution think tank.

“For people who have a cynical view that nothing much government does works effectively, particularly on the poverty front, it will be harder to maintain that view,” said Greenstein, who founded the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonprofit advocating on behalf of low-income people.

Among other provisions, the Biden plan extends tax credits for families with children, which is seen

as a strategy for reducing childhood poverty and its long-term consequences. The Census reports for 2020 showed that childhood poverty would have increased without the impact of government benefits. Instead it declined.

Apple's next iPhone mirrors last year's, adds more storage

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Apple unveiled its next iPhone line-up, including a model that offers twice the storage available in earlier versions and other modest upgrades to last year's editions that proved to be a big hit among consumers devouring the latest technology during the pandemic.

The pre-recorded video event streamed Tuesday gave Apple a chance to present a polished story following a turbulent few weeks. The recent bumps included a hastily patched security vulnerability that could let hackers secretly take control of iPhones and other Apple devices; a backlash to the company's plans to scan iPhones for images of child sex abuse and a federal judge's ruling that chipped away further at the competitive barrier Apple built around its app store, which generates billions of dollars in profits each year.

As has been the case since Apple's late co-founder unveiled the first iPhone in 2007, Apple executives talked reverently about the latest model, even though it isn't dramatically different from the version Apple released nearly a year ago.

Like last year's model, the new iPhone 13 will come in four different designs, with prices starting from \$700 to \$1,100. They're scheduled to be in stores September 24.

"It's an incremental upgrade," said Gartner analyst Tuong Nguyen. "Some of the new features are impressive, but most of them are not noticeable or practical for most users."

Possibly the most notable change in the latest high-end iPhone 13 will be an option for a full terabyte of storage — that's 1,000 gigabytes — on the device, up from its previous maximum of 512 gigabytes. That's enough storage to accommodate roughly 250,000 photos, or about 500 hours of high definition video.

Having a massive amount of storage could become more important to many consumers with the advent of ultra-high definition video and ultrafast wireless 5G networks that will make downloading content faster and easier, Nguyen said.

Apple is also promising better cameras on the iPhone 13, including an improved ultrawide lens, a cinematic-like video feature and technology for better nighttime pictures. (The latter mirrors a feature Google has long offered in its line of Pixel phones, which haven't been big sellers yet.) As usual, the latest iPhones are supposed to have longer-lasting batteries, too.

"We keep making the iPhone more capable," Apple CEO Tim Cook boasted.

These kinds of incremental upgrades have become routine for Apple and other device makers in recent years as the pace of smartphone innovation slowed, even while prices for some phones have climbed above \$1,000. That trend has prompted more consumers to hold on to their older smartphones for longer periods.

But the release of last year's iPhone 12 unleashed one of Apple's biggest sales spurts since 2014, possibly because the pandemic helped make homebound people realize it was time to get a newer and better model than what they had been using. Through the first six months of this year, Apple's iPhone sales have surged by nearly 60% from the same time last year.

That boom has helped push Apple's stock price near its all-time highs recently, giving the company a market value of about \$2.5 trillion -- more than twice what it was before the pandemic began 18 months ago.

Apple's shares dipped 1% Tuesday in a sign that investors weren't excited by what they saw in the new iPhones.

Although the iPhone is still by far Apple's biggest moneymaker, the company has been trying to supplement its success with peripheral products such as its smartwatch. The Cupertino, California, company used Tuesday's showcase to provide a preview of its next Apple Watch, which will feature a thinner, more rounded and brighter display.

Minister pledges Taliban govt won't allow militant attacks

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's new foreign minister said Tuesday that the Taliban governing the country remain committed to not allowing militants to use their territory to launch attacks. But he refused to say when or if the country's new rulers would create a more inclusive government.

Without other political factions and women serving in the government, the Taliban seem unlikely to win international recognition as the legitimate leaders of Afghanistan. And without such recognition, the Afghan state is unable to tap billions of its funds frozen abroad, leaving it virtually bankrupt at a time of immense humanitarian need.

The Taliban received sharp criticism last week after they announced a Cabinet made up entirely of men from their movement, including several on international terror lists. Taliban leaders previously had promised broader representation.

Amir Khan Mutaqi, a longtime Taliban negotiator named as foreign minister, appeared Tuesday at his first news conference since becoming a member of the interim government. But he gave little indication of whether the Taliban would bend to international pressure.

Asked if the Taliban would include women or ethnic and religious minorities in the government, Mutaqi answered, "We will decide in time" but did not offer a commitment.

He underscored that the current government is ruling on an interim basis and said that when a permanent one is formed, "we will take into account what the people want." He would not give a timetable for a permanent government.

"We are taking everything step by step. We have not said how long this Cabinet will last," Mutaqi said.

After the withdrawal of Western troops and the Taliban's sudden return to power last month, the U.S. and its allies have used money, potential recognition and warnings of isolation to pressure them away from repeating their repressive rule of the 1990s. At that time, the Taliban imposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, including severe restrictions on women and minorities.

Mutaqi, responding Tuesday to a question about the eventual holding of elections, replied that other countries must not interfere in Afghanistan's internal issues, a comment he repeated several times during the news conference.

However, the foreign minister did give the first confirmation from the interim government of the new Cabinet's intention to honor a deal the Taliban reached with the United States last year.

Under the deal, which opened the way for the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban promised to break ties with al-Qaida and other militant groups and ensure they don't threaten other countries from the movement's territory.

"We will not allow anyone or any groups to use our soil against any other countries," Mutaqi said.

While ruling Afghanistan during the late 1990s, the Taliban sheltered al-Qaida and its chief, Osama bin Laden. Their refusal to hand over bin Laden and other al-Qaida members after the Sept. 11 terror attacks prompted the U.S. to launch a military assault which ousted the Taliban and led to a 20-year war in Afghanistan.

Many experts remain skeptical the Taliban have broken ties with al-Qaida since they reached the 2020 withdrawal deal with the Trump administration. But al Qaida has been significantly weakened, and Washington has made clear its top priority is preventing Islamic State attacks from Afghanistan.

The Taliban have battled with the Islamic State since its emergence in Afghanistan in 2014. A burgeoning IS affiliate has claimed responsibility for most recent attacks, including the horrific bombing outside the Kabul airport that killed 13 U.S. service personnel and 169 Afghans during last month's chaotic evacuations.

Still, U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, who leads the Defense Intelligence Agency, said at a national security summit Tuesday that al-Qaida could begin to threaten the United States from Afghanistan within one to two years, echoing warnings that were issued before the U.S. withdrawal.

Meanwhile, the broader terms of the world's relationship with the Taliban remain unsettled a month after they swept into Kabul on Aug. 15 and Afghanistan's U.S.-backed president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the presidential palace.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 63 of 76

There also appear to be divisions within the Taliban over the next steps. Some leaders are said to be more open to compromise, while others insist on resolute Taliban domination.

The makeup of the Taliban government poses a dilemma for the United Nations as it prepares to open a new session of the U.N. General Assembly. Several of the interim ministers, including Mutaqi, Prime Minister Mohammad Hasan Akhund and Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, are on the U.N.'s so-called black list of international terrorists and terrorist financiers.

Haqqani is also wanted by the FBI for questioning in connection with attacks in the Afghan capital during the last two decades. As the interim interior minister, he oversees Afghanistan's police and has already called former officers back to work. While some have returned, including most traffic police, many are reluctant.

Mutaqi urged the U.N. to remove the Taliban ministers from the watch list. "The list has no logic," he said.

When the Taliban last ruled, the U.N. refused to recognize their government and instead gave Afghanistan's seat to the previous, warlord-dominated government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who eventually was killed by a suicide bomber in 2011. It was Rabbani's government that brought bin Laden to Afghanistan from Sudan in 1996.

This time around, it is not clear whether the seat will be reserved for a representative of Ghani's government. The president's sudden departure shocked the political leadership in Kabul, including former President Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, the government's chief negotiator, who were still negotiating with the Taliban to form an interim government.

The governments of the U.S. and other countries promised millions in new humanitarian aid for the U.N. to spend in Afghanistan as the country faces increasing hunger and economic collapse, but they suggested a future willingness to help could depend on the actions of the Taliban.

During a second day of tough congressional questioning about the Afghanistan withdrawal, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the Biden administration would hold the Taliban, to their promises not to allow Afghanistan to be used again as a base for terrorist attacks.

Mutaqi said the Taliban-led government seeks good relations with foreign nations but insisted they must not interfere in its affairs. He also called for international donors to send more aid and international banking institutions to continue their projects in Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan is poor. It needs all the help" the world can give, Mutaqi said, promising that foreign aid would be distributed without corruption.

He also said that all of Afghanistan's embassies operating abroad have been told to continue their operations. He promised Afghans would be allowed to leave the country and said it was the job of the Taliban government to provide passports to its citizens.

Blinken defense of Afghan policy clouded by al-Qaida warning

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday sought to parry bipartisan congressional criticism of the Biden administration's Afghanistan withdrawal, as new intelligence estimates warned that al-Qaida could soon again use Afghan soil to plot attacks on the United States.

Blinken had mixed results in attempting to face down a second day of tough congressional questioning, this time from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As a day earlier before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, he was assailed by Democratic and Republican lawmakers alike over the administration's preparation for and handling of the pullout.

Even lawmakers sympathetic to President Joe Biden's decision to end America's longest-running war by withdrawing from Afghanistan after 20 years expressed disappointment and concern about the large number of Americans, green card holders and at-risk Afghans left behind in the chaotic and hasty evacuation from Kabul.

And, as Blinken testified just three days after the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist at-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 64 of 76

tacks that led to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, intelligence officials presented a bleak assessment that al-Qaida could begin to use Afghan territory to threaten America within one to two years.

"The execution of the U.S. withdrawal was clearly and fatally flawed," said committee chairman Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., who has been generally supportive of Biden's foreign policy but has taken issue with several of its aspects, including Afghanistan.

"This committee expects to receive a full explanation of this administration's decisions on Afghanistan since coming into office last January," he said. "There has to be accountability."

"The withdrawal was a dismal failure," said Sen. Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the committee. He and virtually all of his Republican colleagues accused the administration of "ineptitude" that has cost the United States international credibility, led to a deadly attack on U.S. troops and Afghan civilians at the Kabul airport and left many in the lurch.

"There's not enough lipstick in the world to put on this pig to make it look any different than what it actually is," Risch said.

Much as he did on Monday at the often contentious hearing in the House, Blinken tried to deflect the criticism and maintained the administration had done the best it could under extremely trying and chaotic circumstances.

Blinken again blamed the Trump administration for its February 2020 peace deal with the Taliban that he said had tied Biden's hands, as well as the quick and unexpected collapse of the Afghan government and security forces that led to the Taliban takeover on Aug. 15.

"Even the most pessimistic assessments did not predict that government forces in Kabul would collapse while U.S. forces remained," he said. "They were focused on what would happen after the United States withdrew, from September onward."

Blinken said the administration would hold the Taliban, which hosted and protected Osama bin Laden and top members of his al-Qaida network as they plotted the 9/11 strikes, to their promises not to allow Afghanistan to be used again as a base for terrorist attacks.

But as he spoke, U.S. intelligence officials said al-Qaida may be only 12 to 24 months from reconstituting itself in Afghanistan to pose a significant threat to the United States.

Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, who leads the Defense Intelligence Agency, gave that estimate while speaking at the Intelligence & National Security Summit. Meanwhile, David Cohen, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said the U.S. already had detected "some of the indications of some potential movement of al-Qaida to Afghanistan."

Experts have long said the Taliban still maintains ties to al-Qaida, which took sanctuary in Afghanistan prior to 9/11. Although Blinken was not asked directly about the intelligence assessments, he said the Taliban had not fully severed its links with the group.

Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, a vehement opponent of numerous Biden policies, called the withdrawal "the worst foreign policy catastrophe in a generation" and accused the administration of being naive in hoping the Taliban live up to their promises of moderation. "They don't want to be welcomed into the community of civilized nations," he said.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., demanded to know how intelligence about the collapse of the Afghan government had been so wrong. He suggested not only that the wrong people were in charge of assessing the situation but that the policy had been incoherent and left the U.S. vulnerable to rivals.

"This was a failure of policy and planning," said Rubio, another frequent critic of Biden's. "I think China and Russia and Iran, they look at this botched withdrawal and what they see as incompetence that they think they might be able to exploit."

The State Department has come under heavy criticism from both sides for not doing enough and not acting quickly enough to get people out of the country after the Taliban took control of Kabul, cementing its hold on the country before the completion of the U.S. withdrawal on Aug. 30.

Blinken defended the withdrawal and the end of America's longest-running war as "the right thing to do" after 20 years. And, he noted that despite severe difficulties the U.S. and its allies had managed to

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 65 of 76

evacuate some 124,000 people.

"The evacuation was an extraordinary effort — under the most difficult conditions imaginable — by our diplomats, military, and intelligence professionals," he said.

Even some Democrats, though, were unswayed.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the only woman on the committee, who has long fought for the U.S. to protect the advances made by Afghan women and girls, lamented the current situation and said presidents and lawmakers of both parties shared the blame for the situation.

"Let's stop with the hypocrisy of who's to blame, there are a lot of people to blame and we all share in it," she said, her voice rising as she took a pointed dig at former President Donald Trump and his second Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who negotiated the 2020 peace deal with the Taliban separate from the Afghan government with no assurance that minority rights would be respected.

"I want to know where the outrage was when they were giving away the rights of women and girls," Shaheen said.

In response, Blinken said he would soon be appointing a senior official to oversee U.S. policy toward Afghan women and girls.

COVID-19 cases climbing, wiping out months of progress

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, CATHY BUSSEWITZ and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

COVID-19 deaths and cases in the U.S. have climbed back to levels not seen since last winter, erasing months of progress and potentially bolstering President Joe Biden's argument for his sweeping new vaccination requirements.

The cases — driven by the delta variant combined with resistance among some Americans to getting the vaccine — are concentrated mostly in the South.

While one-time hot spots like Florida and Louisiana are improving, infection rates are soaring in Kentucky, Georgia and Tennessee, fueled by children now back in school, loose mask restrictions and low vaccination levels.

The dire situation in some hospitals is starting to sound like January's infection peak: Surgeries canceled in hospitals in Washington state and Utah. Severe staff shortages in Kentucky and Alabama. A lack of beds in Tennessee. Intensive care units at or over capacity in Texas.

The deteriorating picture nine months into the nation's vaccination drive has angered and frustrated medical professionals who see the heartbreak as preventable. The vast majority of the dead and the hospitalized have been unvaccinated, in what has proved to be a hard lesson for some families.

"The problem now is we have been trying to educate based on science, but I think most of the education that is happening now is based on tragedy, personal tragedy," said Dr. Ryan Stanton, an emergency room physician in Lexington, Kentucky.

In Kentucky, 70% of the state's hospitals -- 66 of 96 -- are reporting critical staff shortages, the highest level yet during the pandemic, the governor said.

"Our hospitals are at the brink of collapse in many communities," said Dr. Steven Stack, Kentucky's public health commissioner.

The U.S. is averaging over 1,800 COVID-19 deaths and 170,000 new cases per day, the highest levels respectively since early March and late January. And both figures have been on the rise over the past two weeks.

The country is still well below the terrifying peaks reached in January, when it was averaging about 3,400 deaths and a quarter-million cases per day.

The U.S. is dispensing about 900,000 vaccinations per day, down from a high of 3.4 million a day in mid-April. On Friday, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel will meet to discuss whether the U.S. should begin giving booster shots of the Pfizer vaccine.

On a positive note, the number of people now in the hospital with COVID-19 appears to be leveling off

or even declining at around 90,000, or about where things stood in February.

Last week, the president ordered all employers with more than 100 workers to require vaccinations or weekly tests, a measure affecting about 80 million Americans. And the roughly 17 million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid also will have to be fully vaccinated.

"We read about and hear about and we see the stories of hospitalized people, people on their deathbeds among the unvaccinated over the past few weeks," Biden said in announcing the rules. "This is a pandemic of the unvaccinated."

The requirements have met with resistance and threats of lawsuits from Republicans.

Arizona on Tuesday reported 117 deaths, the most in a single day since last February. Tennessee now ranks first in the U.S. in new cases per capita. Hundreds of students there have been forced to quarantine. Some schools have closed because of staffing shortages. Others have asked to switch to remote learning.

But measures aimed at containing the virus have run into opposition. Last week, a Tennessee high school student who spoke at a school board meeting in favor of a mask mandate was heckled by adults while he talked about his grandmother dying from the virus.

Stanton, the ER doctor in Kentucky, said he has admitted families where the delta variant has swept through generations, especially if the older members are unvaccinated.

"Now in Kentucky, one-third of new cases are under age 18," he said. Some children brought it home from summer camp and spread it to the rest of the family, and now, "between day care and schools and school activities, and friends getting together, there are just so many exposures."

In Alabama, hundreds of COVID-19 patients fill intensive care units, and one hospital contacted 43 others in three states to find a specialty cardiac ICU bed for Ray Martin DeMonia. It wasn't soon enough. The 73-year-old died Sept. 1.

"In honor of Ray, please get vaccinated if you have not, in an effort to free up resources for non-COVID related emergencies," his family pleaded in his obituary.

In Hidalgo County, Texas, along the Mexican border, about 50 patients were in the hospital with COVID-19 on a given day in July. By early August, the number had soared to over 600.

"Back in July we were almost celebrating. Little did we know," said Ivan Melendez, public health authority for Hidalgo County. The situation has improved, with just under 300 people in the hospital as of Monday, but ICUs are still above 90% capacity, Melendez said.

The biggest surge over the summer occurred in states that had low vaccination rates, particularly in the South, where many people rely on air conditioning and breathe recirculated air, said Linsey Marr, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech. She said states farther north could see upticks as the onset of cold weather sends people indoors.

Vaccination rates are not as low in some Northern states, but "there's still a lot of unvaccinated people out there. Delta is going to find them," Marr said.

Ex-cops accused of violating Floyd's rights plead not guilty

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Four former Minneapolis police officers charged with violating George Floyd's civil rights pleaded not guilty Tuesday in a federal hearing that included arguments on several pretrial motions, including requests to hold separate trials.

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.

All four of the men appeared at the hearing remotely via videoconference. Chauvin, wearing a plain T-shirt, appeared from a small room in the state's maximum security prison, where he is serving a 22 1/2-year sentence for murder in Floyd's death. The other three men appeared remotely alongside their

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 67 of 76

attorneys.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Tony Leung asked each man separately how he would plea, and each clearly responded: "Not guilty."

The hearing also addressed roughly 40 pretrial motions, though many were similar. Most of the motions were routine, such as agreeing when names of witnesses would be disclosed. But Leung heard oral arguments on two issues, and ordered attorneys to file additional written arguments on those motions.

Attorneys for Lane and Kueng asked the judge to remove language from the indictment that says their clients had been police officers since December 2019. Earl Gray, Lane's attorney, said his client was still in training and remained under supervision for months. Gray said Lane was working his fourth shift without supervision when he encountered Floyd. Tom Plunkett, Kueng's attorney, said his client was on his third shift without supervision. Both attorneys said language in the indictment that indicates otherwise would be unfair.

"Common sense dictates that a law officer with four days on the job would be less apt to intervene," Gray argued.

Prosecutor Manda Sertich said the men were officers as of December 2019 — they graduated from the police academy and were sworn in.

Kueng, Thao and Lane are also asking that their federal trials be separated from Chauvin's, saying they would be unfairly prejudiced if they went to trial alongside him.

Plunkett wrote in court documents that evidence against Chauvin would confuse the jury and deprive Kueng of his right to a fair trial. Gray argued in court that "everybody knows Derek Chauvin was convicted of murder" so a jury would have a hard time presuming the other former officers' innocence.

Attorney Robert Paule argued that much of the evidence against Chauvin would not come into play against his client, Thao. Paule also argued that since it appears Lane and Kueng intend to use their lack of experience as a defense, Thao, who had been an officer for more than eight years, should be tried alone.

Leung gave no indication of how he would rule. He said this case has video evidence, which shows what each defendant did or did not do. He also said separating trials in federal court is not common, but it does happen. He asked prosecutors why the men should be tried together.

Sertich said the state's case against the men was separated due to space restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but federal court has more space. She also said jurors will know about Chauvin's murder conviction whether he is sitting in the courtroom with the other three former officers or not.

As Floyd was being arrested, 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.

While all four officers are charged broadly with depriving Floyd of his rights while acting under government authority, the indictment breaks down the counts. A count against Chauvin alleges he 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 charged with depriving Floyd of his rights when they failed to provide medical care.

The four former officers were also charged in state court, where Chauvin was convicted in April of murder and manslaughter. 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.

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

By NICOLE WINFIELD and KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

KOSICE, Slovakia (AP) — Pope Francis on Tuesday urged Slovakia's Roma to integrate better into the mainstream as he met with the country's most socially excluded minority group, who have long suffered discrimination, marginalization and poverty.

But in some ways Francis' visit to the Lunik IX settlement in the eastern city of Kosice brought home just how excluded the Roma are: Slovak police and soldiers lined tall fencing along the main route into the neighborhood, preventing residents who hadn't registered in advance from accessing the small seating area for the event.

Despite the problematic optics, the visit was nevertheless a highlight of Francis' four-day pilgrimage to Hungary and Slovakia. The trip marks his first outing since undergoing intestinal surgery in July and the restart of his globetrotting papacy after a nearly two-year coronavirus hiatus.

Lunik XI 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.

Francis acknowledged Slovakia's Roma had long been subject to "prejudice and harsh judgments, discriminatory stereotypes, defamatory words and gestures," and even misunderstandings on the part of the Catholic Church. His visit alone could help change attitudes among Slovakia's majority, many of whom would never visit a neighborhood that until recently police refused to enter at night.

But Francis, 84, urged the residents to think of future generations in trying to overcome their own prejudices, obstacles and longstanding mistrust of the Slovak majority, and try to integrate better so their children can have a brighter future.

"Their great dreams must not collide with barriers that we have erected. They deserve a well-integrated and free life," Francis told the crowd. "Courageous decisions must be made on behalf of our children: to promote their dignity, to educate them in such a way that they can grow up solidly grounded in their own identity and be given every opportunity they desire."

Roma have long suffered racism and discrimination in Slovakia and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, and continue to face huge hurdles in employment and education. The mistrust is reciprocal, with some Slovaks blaming the Roma for crime and Roma distrusting state institutions that have long failed them.

That distrust was on display during Francis' visit, with a far more robust Slovak security presence than at any of Francis' other stops, literally keeping the Lunik residents behind wire fencing.

Vladimir Fabian, spokesman for the city of Kosice, said residents had been given the chance to register to attend the event, but many didn't. In addition, anyone who wanted to attend had to show proof of vaccination, a negative test or proof of recovery from COVID-19.

The fence was erected for security reasons, Fabian said, adding that security also dictated that residents were told to stay in their buildings and watch the pope from their windows.

The Rev. Marian Deahos, a Salesian priest who works with the Roma in a nearby community, said Francis' call for greater integration may fall on deaf ears given the deeply felt barriers the Roma have about integration and the "racism" some Slovaks have toward them.

"The biggest problem is that we, Slovaks, consider the Roma to be under us, less than us, that they steal, they don't work and have problems with us," Deahos said on the sidelines of the Lunik event. While some Roma are able to work and live in mixed neighborhoods, those in Lunik haven't managed to because either they don't believe they can or don't have the education or means to, he said.

The residents of Lunik IX have faced a compounded hurdle: The settlement was originally a neighborhood where Roma families lived alongside the families of service members and police officers, a communist-era measure to keep law and order. Kosice authorities later moved Roma from other parts of the city to the neighborhood, essentially confirming its ghettoization and the forced separation of Roma from the mainstream.

"Marginalizing others accomplishes nothing," Francis told the crowd. "Segregating ourselves and other

people eventually leads to anger. The path to peaceful coexistence is integration: an organic, gradual and vital process that starts with coming to know one another, then patiently grows, keeping its gaze fixed on the future."

Francis sought to highlight the example of Roma who had left or otherwise integrated more fully into Slovak society. His encounter featured one resident — Ján Hero, 61, who married a Slovak woman — and a family of four who got out of Lunik IX with the help of the Salesian priests who minister to the community.

"Thanks to this, we can today offer our children a life that's happier and more dignified and peaceful," said one of those who left, René Harakaly. Noting that she still has family members in Lunik IX, she added: "We hope that your visit brings a new hope and passion for an internal transformation to those here today."

Lunik IX mayor Marcel Sana, a resident since he was 2, has overseen a host of public works since taking over in 2014, including improving sanitation and security. The local school is well-regarded, and playgrounds have opened for local children.

"When I took over the office, my vision was to make Lunik IX a quarter like all others in Kosice," Sana said. "But after everything was neglected for 20 or 30 years, we need time to make it happen."

Residents said Tuesday that some things had already changed in the runup to Francis' visit, with fresh paint on building exteriors.

"We have new roads, new stairs, they repaired everything," said resident Alexander Horvath.

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

Francis started his penultimate day by celebrating a Byzantine rite Mass in Presov, near Kosice, in recognition of the 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 they received the Eucharist via small spoons, as is done in the Eastern rite.

Well before Francis' arrival they had filled the outdoor 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.

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

Slaughter of dolphins on Faeroes sparks debate on traditions

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — The slaughter of 1,428 white-sided dolphins over the weekend, part of a four-century-old traditional drive of sea mammals into shallow water where they are killed for their meat and blubber, has reignited a debate on the small Faeroe Islands.

The hunt in the North Atlantic islands is not commercial and is authorized, but environmental activists claim it is cruel. Even people in the Faeroes who defend the traditional practice worry that this year's hunt will draw unwanted attention because it was far larger than previous ones and seemingly took place without the usual organization.

Heri Petersen, the foreman of a group that drives pilot whales toward shore on the central Faeroese island of Eysturoy, where the killings took place Sunday, said he was not told about the dolphin drive and "strongly dissociated" himself from it.

He told the news outlet in.fo. that there were too many dolphins and too few people on the beach to slaughter them.

Islanders usually kill up to 1,000 sea mammals annually, according to data kept by the Faeroe Islands. Last year, that included only 35 white-sided dolphins.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 70 of 76

Olavur Sjurdarberg, chairman of the Faeroese Pilot Whale Hunt Association, feared Sunday's slaughter would revive the discussion about the sea mammal drives and put a negative spin on the ancient tradition of the 18 rocky islands located halfway between Scotland and Iceland. They are semi-independent and part of the Danish realm.

"We need to keep in mind that we are not alone on earth. On the contrary, the world has become much smaller today, with everyone walking around with a camera in their pocket," Sjurdarberg told local broadcaster KVF. "This is a fabulous treat for those who want us (to look bad) when it comes to pilot whale catching."

Faeroese Fishery Minister Jacob Vestergaard told local radio station Kringvarp Foeroya that everything was done by the book in the dolphin hunt.

For years, the Seattle-based Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has been opposing the sea mammal drives that date from the late 16th century. On Facebook, the organization described the weekend's events as "an illegal hunt."

The white-side dolphins and pilot whales are not endangered species.

Each year, islanders drive herds of the mammals — chiefly pilot whales — into shallow waters, where they are stabbed to death. A blow-hole hook is used to secure the beached whales and their spine and main artery leading to the brain are severed with knives. The drives are regulated by laws and the meat and blubber are shared on a community basis.

WHO, partners aim to get Africa 30% of needed doses by Feb

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization and its partners said they hope to provide Africa with about 30% of the COVID-19 vaccines the continent needs by February, badly missing the 60% vaccination coverage goal that African leaders had once hoped for this year.

At a press briefing Tuesday, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called the massive disparity in vaccination rates between rich and poor countries a "solvable problem" and called again for pharmaceutical companies to prioritize the U.N.-backed initiative known as COVAX, which is designed to share vaccines globally.

But drugmakers — including Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna — have shown no indications they are eager to switch their current tactics, which involve appealing to rich countries and their regulators to authorize booster shots.

Tedros called last week for a "moratorium" on the use of boosters in healthy populations until the end of the year. Countries including Israel, France and Germany have already started dispensing third doses to certain people; the U.K. announced plans on Tuesday to offer boosters to anyone over 50 as well as younger people who might be more vulnerable to COVID-19.

In the U.S., the FDA is going to publicly debate the topic of boosters this week. In an opinion piece this week, two top FDA officials and senior WHO scientists wrote in the *Lancet* that the average person doesn't need a booster shot.

To date, fewer than 4% of Africans have been fully immunized and most of the 5.7 billion vaccine doses administered around the world have been given in just 10 rich countries.

COVAX has missed nearly all its targets and has now resorted to begging rich countries to share their vaccine doses.

Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of vaccines alliance Gavi, said COVAX expects to have 1.4 billion doses ready for delivery by the end of this year, about one quarter fewer than its original goal.

Afreximbank President Benedict Oramah warned that booster shots in Africa would require \$500 million to \$600 million more "on the conservative side," and if the cost of logistics is included, that would mean \$1 billion a year.

Strive Masiyiwa, the African Union's envoy for COVID-19 vaccines, also called for export restrictions and intellectual property rights to be lifted to allow vaccine production within Africa.

In June, WHO and its partners launched a hub in South Africa intended to transfer technology needed

to make the vaccines produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, but none of those companies have yet agreed to share their vaccine recipes.

"It's not an unreasonable call, because our neighbors in the U.S. supported these companies to produce some of these vaccines," Masiyiwa said. "Now let this miracle to be available to all mankind."

Putin in self-isolation due to COVID cases in inner circle

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin entered self-isolation after people in his inner circle became infected with the coronavirus, the Kremlin said Tuesday, adding that the leader himself tested negative for COVID-19.

Putin, who is fully vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik V, held several public engagements indoors Monday and even said that he may have to quarantine soon. An aide at the time sought to suggest he was speaking generally and insisted Tuesday that no one's health was endangered.

During a daily conference call with reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin, 68, is "absolutely healthy" but had come in contact with someone who contracted the virus. Asked if Putin tested negative for the virus, Peskov said "definitely, yes."

Peskov didn't say when Putin began self-isolating, when he tested negative, how long he would remain in self-isolation or who among the president's contacts was infected.

During a videoconference with government officials and members of the ruling United Russia party, Putin said that several people in his "immediate circle" were infected with the virus, including a staff member who he was in close contact with throughout Monday.

That staffer was vaccinated and recently got "revaccinated," Putin said, apparently referring to a third shot that Russia is offering people who were immunized more than six months ago.

"Three days after revaccination he fell ill," Putin said. "We will see how Sputnik V really works."

Even the most highly effective coronavirus vaccines in use don't prevent all infections, but they reduce the risk of getting seriously sick or dying from COVID-19.

Russian authorities have been regularly criticized for underplaying the pandemic and for rarely imposing measures to control it even in the face of infection surges. Russia's death toll is currently running at its highest level of the pandemic, with just under 800 fatalities a day. Nevertheless, hardly any virus restrictions are currently in place.

Putin has hardly ever worn a mask publicly, though he appeared to work largely remotely and was rarely seen in public for a period before he was vaccinated.

On Monday, Putin attended several public events, most of which were indoors and where it appeared from images on TV that no one wore masks. He shook hands with Russian Paralympians and pinned medals on them, attended military exercises alongside other officials, and met with Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose hand he also shook. Assad tested positive for the coronavirus in March and later recovered; it's not clear if he is vaccinated.

During the meeting with the Paralympians, Putin signaled that he was aware of cases close to him.

"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."

Peskov later said Putin was speaking "figuratively."

Asked Tuesday about why Putin proceeded with public events, Peskov said that the decision to self-isolate was made after "doctors completed their testing, their procedures." Peskov said without explaining that "no one's health was endangered" at Monday's events.

Russia's daily coronavirus infections have fallen in the past month from over 20,000 to about 17,000 — but experts have called into question how Russia is tallying cases and deaths.

Despite high caseloads, Russia has struggled to vaccinate its citizens, and its rates lag behind many

other countries. As of Friday, only 32% of the population had received at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine, and only 27% had been fully vaccinated.

Putin has occasionally gone to extreme lengths to protect himself from infection, despite the lack of restrictions in general. Peskov has confirmed media reports that people who meet in-person with Putin or attend events with him have to undergo "rigorous testing" or quarantine ahead of time.

Officials even set up special "disinfection tunnels" last year at his residence and the Kremlin that anyone meeting Putin had to walk through. The visitors were sprayed with a disinfectant mist, although it is not clear how effective that is. Putin also once visited a hospital in a full hazmat suit.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 73 of 76

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 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."

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

By JOCELYN NOVECK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — 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 in the direction of NBA star Russell Westbrook.

Rapinoe, who made a fashionably patriotic statement in her bright red silk Sergio Hudson pantsuit with a royal blue blouse emblazoned with white stars -- she'd gotten the memo that the sartorial theme was 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 Nia Dennis did an actual gymnastic routine, to music from the Brooklyn United 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, packed behind barricades across Fifth Avenue and a block away on Madison, too, several rows deep. At one point, fans had also swarmed outside the Petrie Court's full-length windows, hoping for a glimpse and a photo, and forcing museum staff to quickly move screens to the windows to block their view.

Still, there were reminders that this was no ordinary gala. The most obvious were masks, though few wore them during cocktails. (Guests had been reminded beforehand that masks were required, unless eating or drinking.) Participants were also required to provide proof of vaccination, and to take a rapid PCR test, administered by the museum either the day before or the day of the gala.

The smaller size had been a nod to pandemic restrictions, but there was clearly a need to bring in funds to make up for losses incurred in May, when the gala was canceled. (Tickets are estimated at about \$35,000 per person.) The Costume Institute raises its own funds, and this gala had been presented as a way of signaling that not only the fashion industry and the Met, but New York itself was back, even as the pandemic still poses huge challenges.

And so, museum officials, like director Max Hollein, and many guests spoke of the greater importance of the occasion this time, as not merely fashion's biggest party, but a crucial shot in the arm for New York. Prominent chef and restaurateur Marcus Samuelsson had chosen a group of 10 chefs to provide a plant-based menu, and he spoke passionately of the need to restore the health of the restaurant industry, fashion, Broadway theater and more.

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

The contributing chefs were also guests at the gala. "Chefs don't usually come to this," said Nasim Alikhani, owner of a Persian restaurant, Sofreh, in Brooklyn. "We're in the kitchen."

To mark the occasion, she wore a dress with a silk panel bearing a satellite map of her home country, Iran. She and fellow chef Simone Tong, owner of Silver Apricot in the West Village, said they were happy to be included and felt safe, given the strict COVID protocols in place.

Fernandez, the Canadian teenager who made a fairytale run to the U.S. Open final just as she turned

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 75 of 76

19, also called the evening an important sign of the city bouncing back. Fernandez had paid eloquent tribute to the city on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, in her runner-up speech Saturday in the arena.

It was only 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 a 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.

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 carpet) with an outfit calling for certification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Not to be outdone by fellow congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, her junior by four decades 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 was eager to talk about how it was past time for the amendment, which would ban discrimination on the basis of sex, to become law, and she urged the administration to prioritize it.

The 75-year-old congresswoman also carried a tambourine that read "ERA YES." It would have made a great purse, and Maloney said she was going to try to transform it into one.

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

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 15, the 258th day of 2021. There are 107 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 15, 2001, President George W. Bush ordered U.S. troops to get ready for war and braced Americans for a long, difficult assault against terrorists to avenge the Sept. 11 attack. Beleaguered Afghans streamed out of Kabul, fearing a U.S. military strike against Taliban rulers harboring Osama bin Laden.

On this date:

In 1776, British forces occupied New York City during the American Revolution.

In 1789, the U.S. Department of Foreign Affairs was renamed the Department of State.

In 1857, William Howard Taft — who served as President of the United States and as U.S. chief justice — was born in Cincinnati, Ohio.

In 1890, English mystery writer Agatha Christie was born in Torquay.

In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws deprived German Jews of their citizenship.

In 1959, Nikita Khrushchev became the first Soviet head of state to visit the United States as he arrived at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington.

In 1963, four Black girls were killed when a bomb went off during Sunday services at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. (Three Ku Klux Klansmen were eventually convicted for their roles in the blast.)

In 1972, a federal grand jury in Washington indicted seven men in connection with the Watergate break-in.

In 1981, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted unanimously to approve the Supreme Court nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor.

In 1985, Nike began selling its "Air Jordan 1" sneaker.

In 2008, on Wall Street, the Dow Jones industrial average fell 504.48, or 4.42 percent, to 10,917.51 while oil closed below \$100 a barrel for the first time in six months amid upheaval in the financial industry as Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. filed for bankruptcy protection and Merrill Lynch & Co. was sold to Bank of America.

In 2015, Hungary sealed off its border with Serbia with massive coils of barbed wire and began detaining migrants trying to use the country as a gateway to Western Europe. Harsh new measures left thousands

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 070 ~ 76 of 76

of frustrated asylum-seekers piled up on the Serbian side of the border.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama bestowed the Medal of Honor on Sgt. Dakota Meyer, a young and humble Marine who had defied orders and repeatedly barreled straight into a ferocious "killing zone" in Afghanistan to save 36 lives at extraordinary risk to himself.

Five years ago: A report issued by the Republican-led House intelligence committee condemned Edward Snowden, saying the National Security Agency leaker was not a whistleblower and that the vast majority of the documents he stole were defense secrets that had nothing to do with privacy; Snowden's attorney blasted the report, saying it was an attempt to discredit a "genuine American hero."

One year ago: Months after the police killing of Breonna Taylor thrust her name to the forefront of a national reckoning on race, the city of Louisville agreed to pay the Black woman's family \$12 million and reform police practices as part of a settlement. Israel signed diplomatic pacts with two Gulf Arab states – the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain – at a White House ceremony that President Donald Trump said would mark the "dawn of a new Middle East." In the Gaza Strip, Palestinian militants fired two rockets into Israel, apparently meant to coincide with the White House ceremony.

Today's Birthdays: Baseball Hall of Famer Gaylord Perry is 83. Actor Carmen Maura is 76. Writer-director Ron Shelton is 76. Actor Tommy Lee Jones is 75. Movie director Oliver Stone is 75. Rock musician Kelly Keagy (KAY'-gee) (Night Ranger) is 69. Actor Barry Shabaka Henley is 67. Director Pawel Pawlikowski is 64. Rock musician Mitch Dorge (Crash Test Dummies) is 61. Football Hall of Famer Dan Marino is 60. Actor Danny Nucci is 53. Rap DJ Kay Gee is 52. Actor Josh Charles is 50. Actor Tom Hardy is 44. Actor Marisa Ramirez is 44. Pop-rock musician Zach Filkins (OneRepublic) is 43. Actor Dave Annable is 42. Actor Amy Davidson is 42. Britain's Prince Harry is 37. TV personality Heidi Montag is 35. Actor Kate Mansi is 34.