

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Events

Tuesday, Sept. 21

Volleyball at Warner (7th grade/C match at 5:15 p.m., 8th grade/JV at 6:30 p.m. with varsity to follow)
7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

Thursday, Sept. 23

10 a.m.: Boys golf at Sisseton Golf Course
4 p.m.: Boys soccer at James Valley Christian
Volleyball at Clark (7th grade at field house, 4 p.m.; 8th grade at field house, 5 p.m.; in the main gym: C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity).

Friday, Sept. 24

7 p.m.: Football hosting Aberdeen Roncalli

Saturday, Sept. 25

Soccer at Tea Area: Boys at 1 p.m. Girls at 3 p.m.

Monday, Sept. 27

Boys golf at Madison Golf Course
4 p.m.: Cross Country meet at Olive Grove Golf Course, Groton.
4 p.m.: Junior high football at Aberdeen Roncalli



5 p.m.: Junior Varsity football at Aberdeen Roncalli
Volleyball hosting Faulkton Area (C match at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 28

Volleyball vs. Florence/Henry at Henry High School. (7th at 3 p.m., 8th at 4 p.m., C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow).

Wednesday, Sept. 29

NE Region Land & Range Contest in Webster

Thursday, Sept. 30

Fall Planning Day and Career Expo at Northern State University for juniors

4 p.m.: Cross Country at Sisseton Golf Course

4:30 p.m.: Junior High Football at Redfield

Volleyball hosting Hamlin (C match at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity)

Friday, Oct. 1

7 p.m.: Football vs. Dakota Hills Coop at Waubay
Saturday, Oct. 2

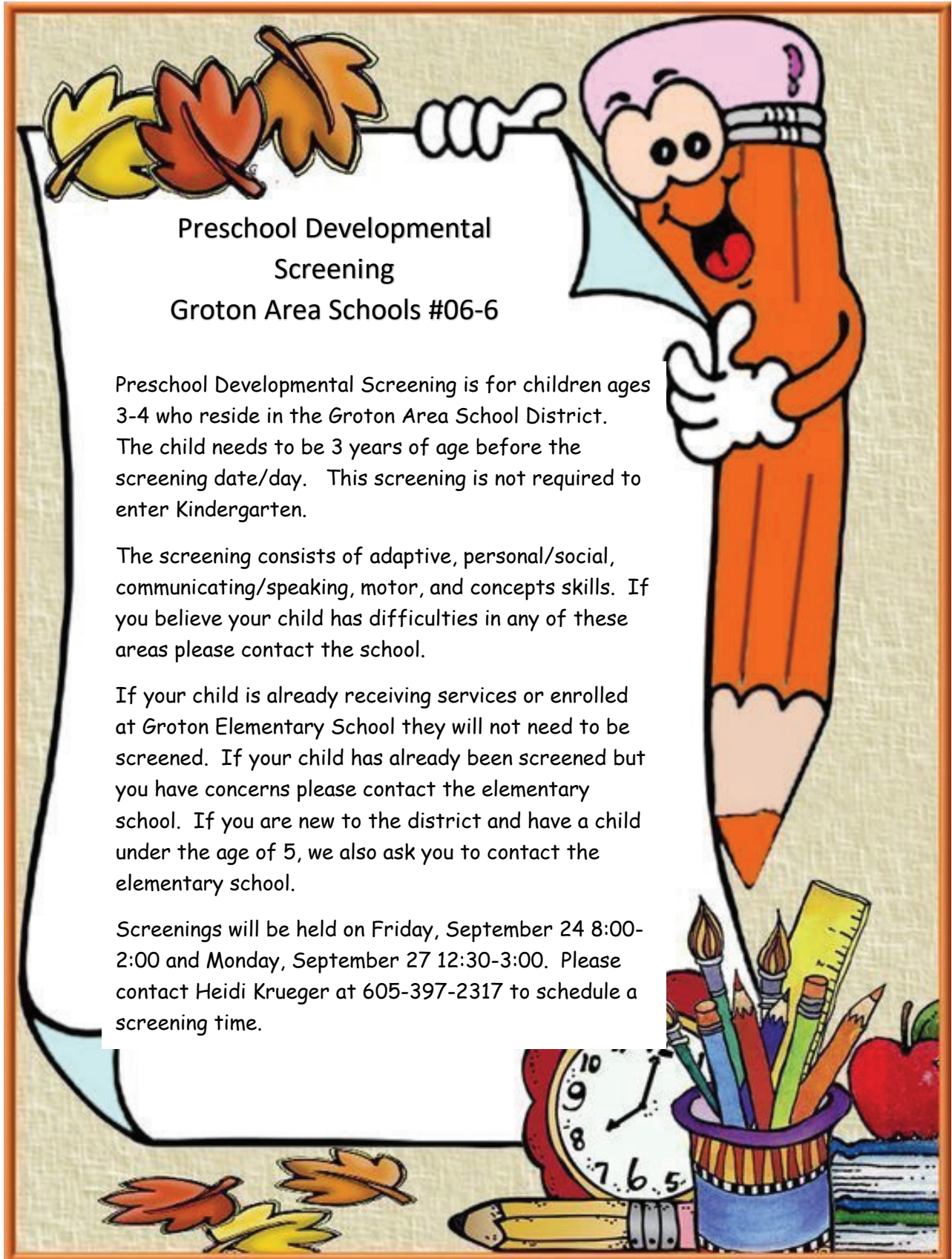
2 p.m.: Boys soccer hosts Freeman Academy

3 p.m.: Girls soccer at Dakota Valley with JV game at 1 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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





Preschool Developmental Screening
Groton Area Schools #06-6

Preschool Developmental Screening is for children ages 3-4 who reside in the Groton Area School District. The child needs to be 3 years of age before the screening date/day. This screening is not required to enter Kindergarten.

The screening consists of adaptive, personal/social, communicating/speaking, motor, and concepts skills. If you believe your child has difficulties in any of these areas please contact the school.

If your child is already receiving services or enrolled at Groton Elementary School they will not need to be screened. If your child has already been screened but you have concerns please contact the elementary school. If you are new to the district and have a child under the age of 5, we also ask you to contact the elementary school.

Screenings will be held on Friday, September 24 8:00-2:00 and Monday, September 27 12:30-3:00. Please contact Heidi Krueger at 605-397-2317 to schedule a screening time.

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



Week FIVE Soccer Coaches Poll

Boys AA

1. Sioux Falls Jefferson
2. Aberdeen Central
3. Rapid City Stevens
4. Yankton
5. Sioux Falls Washington

Receiving Votes: SF Lincoln, Spearfish, Brandon Valley, Pierre T.F. Riggs

Girls A

1. West Central
2. Sioux Falls Christian
3. Tea Area
- T4. Dakota Valley
- T4. Groton Area

Receiving Votes: Vermillion, St. Thomas More

Girls AA

1. Rapid City Stevens
2. Aberdeen Central
3. Brandon Valley
4. Pierre T.F. Riggs
5. Harrisburg

Receiving Votes: RC Central, SF Lincoln

Boys A

1. Sioux Falls Christian
2. Tea Area
3. St. Thomas More
4. Belle Fourche
5. Vermillion

Receiving Votes: Groton Area, Freeman Academy

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

September 21, 2021 – 7:00pm

120 N Main Street

(NOTICE ADDRESS)

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. August Finance Report
5. Second Reading of Ordinance #750 Water Rates
6. Second Reading of Ordinance #751 Amending Zoning Ordinances to Regulate Medicinal Cannabis
7. Revision of Resolution to Lease City Property – Airport
8. First Reading of Ordinance #752 – Amending Security Light Rates
9. Notice to Surplus Safe Deposit Boxes at City Hall – Sealed bids will be opened October 5th @ 7pm
10. Runway Improvements – Airport Grant \$8,841.20 Approved 9/16/21
11. Pay Request #10 for \$95,412.40– Maguire Iron
12. Time Extension – Maguire Iron
13. Close Main Street and portion of Railroad Avenue on October 29th from 4pm to 6pm for Downtown Trick or Treating
14. Pumpkin Fest – October 9, 2021 from 10am to 3pm – No additional cost for special event insurance
15. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
16. First Reading of Ordinance #753 – 2022 Salary Summary
17. Adjournment

Custer State Park to Host Annual Buffalo Roundup and Arts Festival

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) will host the 56th annual Buffalo Roundup and 28th annual Arts Festival in Custer State Park this week. The Buffalo Roundup begins at 9:30 a.m. MDT on Friday, Sept. 24. The Arts Festival will run from Thursday, Sept. 23, through Saturday, Sept. 25.

“Custer State Park is my favorite place in the world. It’s a special location for our state, our country, and our family,” said Governor of South Dakota, Kristi Noem. “Visitors to the Buffalo Roundup will see our heritage of wildlife management in action and leave with a permanent impression of our beautiful state.”

The parking areas for the Roundup, located near the corrals along the Wildlife Loop Road, open at 6:15 a.m. MDT and close at 9:30 a.m. MDT on Sept. 25. For safety reasons, spectators need to remain in the viewing areas until all the buffalo are corralled which typically occurs around noon.

The annual Arts Festival runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. MDT on Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday, and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26. The Arts Festival takes place near the State Game Lodge and features western and bluegrass entertainment along with numerous vendors.

“The Buffalo Roundup is a critical management tool for Custer State Park and ensures the long-term sustainability of our buffalo herd and our park,” said Scott Simpson, director of the Division of Parks and Recreation. “This is a great opportunity for the entire family to learn about buffalo management and enjoy various types of entertainment.”

A state park entrance license is required on Thursday and Saturday, but there is no cost to attend the Buffalo Roundup or Arts Festival on Friday. Share the experience by using #SDintheField, #HifromSD, and #BuffaloRoundup when posting images to Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

Next year’s Buffalo Roundup will be held Friday, Sept. 30, 2022.

To learn more about the event, visit custerstatepark.com, call 605.255.4515 or email CusterStatePark@state.sd.us

Gov. Kristi Noem to Delay Social Studies Standards

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem has directed the Department of Education to delay the process to consider revisions to the state’s social studies standards up to one year. She issued the following statement:

“The Department of Education changed the working group’s recommendations to the social studies standards significantly, but it is clear to me that there needs to be more public input to bring greater balance and emphasis on our nation’s true and honest history. Following public feedback from several constituencies, it is clear there is more work to be done to get this right.

“We will be delaying further formal action on the draft social study standards to allow more opportunity for public input, increased legislative engagement, and additional voices to be heard in this discussion.

“Our focus remains the same: ensuring that South Dakota students learn a true and honest account of American and South Dakota history.”

Governor Noem intends to ask the South Dakota legislature to pass legislation codifying Executive Order 2021-11, and banning critical race theory and action civics as the basis for instruction in South Dakota schools.

The greatest game

In the end, I was thankful for what seemed like the thankless task of coaching a first-year women's softball team in Jamestown, ND, in 1985. Early on, I realized I had just one very good ballplayer, a third-baseman named Margo, who carried herself like Geena Davis in "A League of Our Own." We had an okay shortstop, one outfielder who caught about half the balls hit her way, and another, Dolly, a devastating hitter, who was a complete liability in the outfield.

Our pitcher, Sue, showed up for practice the day after giving birth. Runaround Sue, as I dubbed her, wasn't a great pitcher. Not even good. But she had such an odd delivery, I figured it would confuse batters as much as it did me. She was so bad she was good.

In a league loaded with experienced teams with real athletes, we were lambs to the slaughter, the Worse News Bears. I spent the season teaching girls who'd never picked up a bat how to hit, throw, and occasionally catch.

I immediately put Dolly on the bench, deducing correctly that anything that wasn't hit directly to her in right field would roll to the fence for a home run. She was a big girl and could hit a ton—devastating, whistling line drives that many fielders ducked instead trying to catch, but she clogged up the base paths. A walking double play.

I remember the day Dolly turned in her jersey while I was on the air at KQDJ. If she couldn't start, she wasn't going to play, she asserted tearfully. "You know, Dolly, you're the best hitter on the team," I said with Barry Manilow fading in the studio. "I want you at the plate when it means something," assuming that at some point, in some game, we'd be competitive. A few days later, after thinking it over, she retrieved her jersey, because there's no crying in softball.

In time, we improved from being terrible to just bad. We even won a few. Still, we finished in the cellar, so no one gave us a chance in the season-ending league tournament, especially against the swaggering perennial champion Holiday Inn team. They looked great just taking the field, and were great once they started playing. Maybe Margo could have sat the bench for them.

While Runaround Sue's unorthodox delivery had helped keep us in some ballgames, the Holiday Inn team had her number right off. Two players blasted monster home runs in each of their first two at-bats, and after the second inning we were down 9-0. It's what the snoozing crowd expected.

Out of pure desperation, I intentionally walked their sluggers the rest of the game, loading the bases in doing so twice, maybe three times. The umpire looked at me incredulously each time, and the crowd groaned at the insanity, but we began to claw back. A run here, a couple there, and in the field, a series of miracles. Outfielders made snow cone catches. Line drives were snagged purely out of self-defense, and the Holiday Inn didn't score another run.

By then, the crowd was with us. With the bases loaded in the seventh and the score 9-4, I sent Dolly to the plate. What she did wasn't batting, exactly, it was attempted murder. She cleared the bases with a screamer and ended up on third where I was coaching. It was 9-7.

"Dolly," I said, "I'm going to send you, so if the play comes to home, and the catcher blocks the plate, mow her down." Because that's the way I played. And that's exactly what happened on an infield dribbler. The catcher flew one way, the ball another, and it was 9-8.

Even the girls who couldn't hit, kept hitting and we had the tying run on third when we made the final out. The crowd groaned... then cheered. Us. Us! They cheered us!

In the dugout, their faces beaming at the realization of what they'd accomplished, I told the team how proud I was. Turns out there is crying in softball. Afterward, as I was loading up the gear, a fan walked up. "I just want to tell you that's the best ballgame I've ever seen," he said.

It was. It was the greatest game ever.

I soon lost track of the girls; the next summer I was on the air in Denver, but I think of them often and what we discovered together that summer, that sometimes you win when you don't.

I've still never seen a better game.



That's Life

by Tony Bender

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SDFBCA Coaches Poll - Week 5 Results

11AAA

Brandon Valley (14) 100 4-0
Harrisburg (9) 99 4-0
Sioux Falls Jefferson 48 3-1
Sioux Falls Washington 38 2-2
Sioux Falls Lincoln 37 3-1
Others: Sioux Falls O'Gorman 15

11AA

Tea Area (20) 111 4-0
Brookings (2) 77 3-1
Pierre TF Riggs (1) 65 3-1
Aberdeen Central 47 3-1
Yankton 36 2-2
Other: Watertown 8

11A

Canton (22) 112 4-0
Madison (2) 78 4-0
West Central(1) 57 3-1
Dell Rapids 51 3-1
Lennox 32 3-1
Others: Sioux Falls Christian 30, Tri Valley 10

11B

Winner (25) 125 5-0
Sioux Valley 76 3-1
Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 63 3-1
McCook Central/ Montrose 36 3-1
Aberdeen Roncalli 24 4-0
Others: Mount Vernon-Plankinton 18, W/WS/SC
14, Elk Point-Jefferson 8

2021 SDFBCA 9 Man Poll
Week 4

9AA

1 Hanson (24) 126 4-0
2 Platte-Geddes 65 3-1
3 Florence/Henry (2) 54 5-0
4 Canistota/Freeman 44 3-2
5 Parkston 32 3-2
Other Garretson 27, Chester 25, Ipswich (1) 24,
Hamlin 13, Timber Lake 11

9A

1 DeSmet (18) 119 5-0
2 Howard (7) 102 5-0
3 Herreid/Selby Area (2) 68 5-0
4 Wall (2) 55 5-0
5 Wolsey-Wessington 51 3-1
Other Warner 8, Castlewood 5

9B

1 Avon (15) 111 4-0
2 Gayville-Volin (7) 89 3-0
3 Harding County/Bison (2) 79 3-1
4 Faulkton Area (2) 70 4-1
5 Potter County (3) 52 4-1
Other Hitchcock-Tulare 25, Alcester-Hudson 15,
Faith 9, Dell Rapids St. Mary 8

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC POLICY IN RURAL COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

My husband is a mechanic. The tools of his trade are important to his work. He has a large toolbox with many drawers lined in soft black padding. His tools lay clean and organized inside each drawer for easy access when he needs the right tool for a job. Yet, when things get busy tools don't get wiped clean and they don't get put back into that organized toolbox. This is when frustration levels rise, every job gets harder, and jobs take longer because he's looking everywhere for the right tool.

Like a mechanic needs easy access to the right tools, our local community economic development (CED) organizations need easy access to the right tools -- like public policy. In most rural communities, the CED organization is the one group responding to the local needs that neither the market economy nor government is fully satisfying. These CED organizations are working mostly alone to create solutions for housing, daycare, business retention and expansion, workforce issues, leadership development, and other quality of life issues. One organization cannot effectively tackle all these local issues. If the role of public policy is not in place to support CED, then local frustration levels rise, every project gets harder to do, and progress takes longer because CED leaders can't grab the right tool from the toolbox.

I was community coaching in a small town recently with twelve local leaders. This group represented city council members, county commissioners, and the economic development board of directors. We were mapping out their community and economic development model. This model included the components of business attraction, existing business, entrepreneurship, workforce/education, infrastructure, quality of life, leadership development, storytelling/branding, and the role of public policy. As each person was journaling their lists of activities in the nine areas, the mayor asked me for an example under the column labeled, "Role of Public Policy". To prompt his brainstorming, I asked, "To support community economic development, have you hired a code enforcement officer or implemented the Municipal Gross Receipts Tax?"

As we worked together that evening, the group named two activities under the role of public policy – 1) Implementing Zoning and 2) Code Enforcement. Those are both good supporting public policies. Yet, as I looked over their collective work, it concerned me that a room with many elected officials could only name two public policies to support CED. In that moment the story I told myself was, elected officials don't know their role in public policy when it comes to supporting CED.

So, what's missing that could help elected officials connect the dots between the role of public policy and community economic development?

A first step toward connecting those dots may be to define and understand CED in your community. In addition to the nine components of the CED model I listed above, below are a few general goals of any typical CED organization:



Paula Jensen
**Vice President of Program
Development**

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- Goal 1. Building Greater Community Capacity and Quality of Life
- Goal 2. Nurturing Pride, Self-Reliance, and Leadership
- Goal 3. Enhancing Skills and Attracting a Quality Workforce
- Goal 4. Developing Businesses that are Responsive to Social and Economic Needs
- Goal 5. Fostering Balanced, Fair, and Sustainable Economic Development

A next step is to explore public policies other communities are implementing to achieve their goals. Some examples of existing policies include:

1. Investing in workforce attraction/retention incentives
2. Prioritizing financial investments for paid staff of local housing, chamber, and economic development organizations, along with joint agreements on desired impacts
3. Implementing the second penny city sales tax and/or Municipal Gross Receipts Tax (also known as the "bed, board and booze" tax)
4. Implementing discretionary tax formulas to support housing improvements and business development
5. Implementing local Main Street beautification and façade programs
6. Creating an ecosystem of supporting local business to increase local sales tax
7. Investing in quality-of-life and recreational amenities
8. Utilizing Tax Increment Financing
9. Prioritizing Planning & Zoning
10. Owning or supplementing local daycare facilities.

Together, elected officials and economic development leaders can connect the dots between the role of public policy and CED by visioning for the future, naming the local needs, setting some goals, and innovatively developing public policy as a tool to create a thriving rural community.

The Community Coach. Having a passion for community leadership and development is what drives Paula Jensen's personal and professional life. Paula resides in her hometown of Langford, South Dakota, population 348+. She serves as a Strategic Doing practitioner, grant writer and community coach with Dakota Resources based in Renner, South Dakota. Dakota Resources is a mission-driven 501c3 Community Development Financial Institution working to connect capital and capacity to empower rural communities. Contact her at paula@dakotaresources.org.



September Students of the Month

From back left: Teagan Hanten (7th), Elizabeth Cole (6th), Colby Dunker (10th), Corbin Weismantel (9th)

From Front Left: Shaylee Peterson (11th), Alyssa Thaler (12th), Natalia Warrington(8th)

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

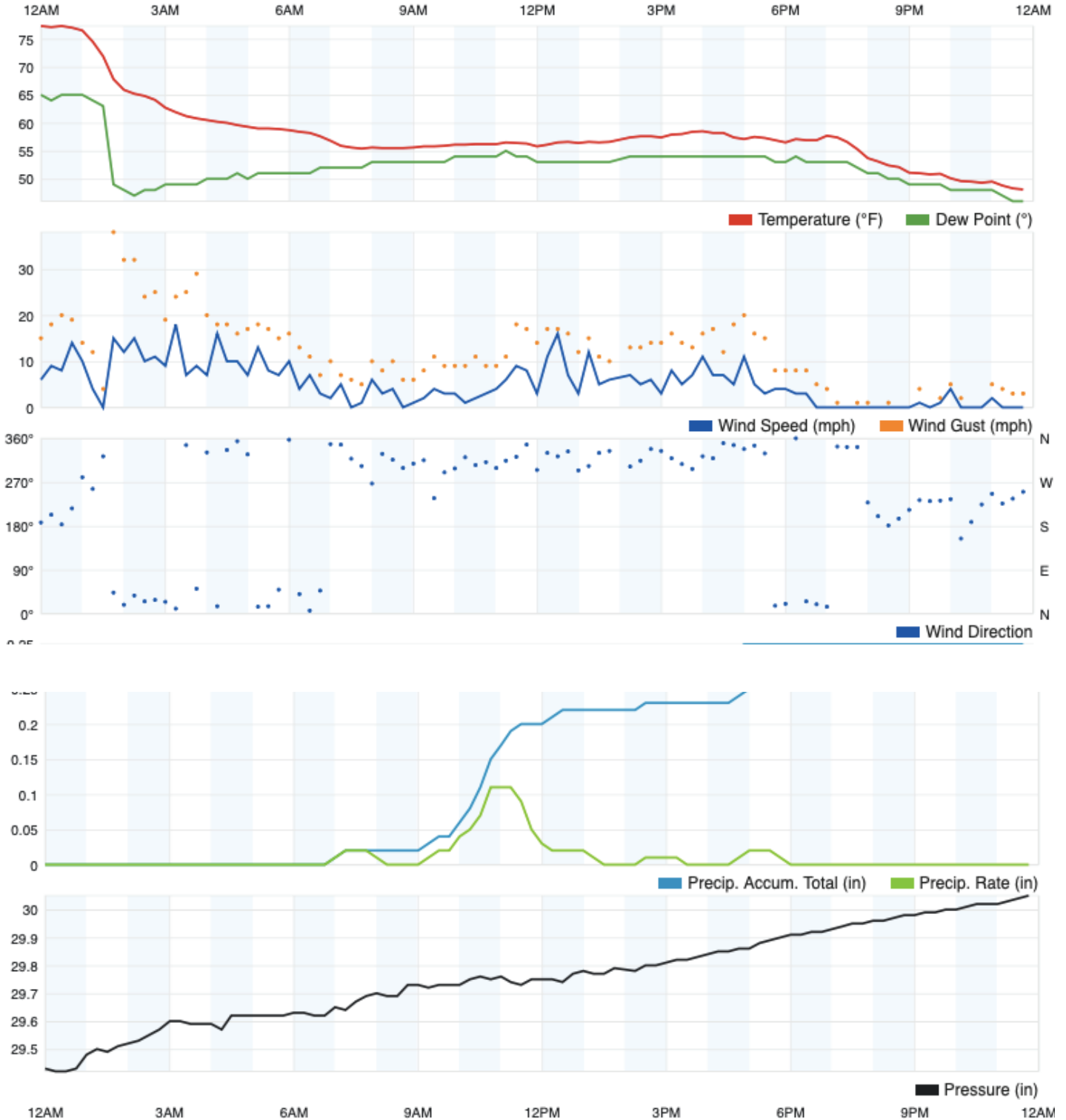
It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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| Today | Tonight | Wednesday | Wednesday Night | Thursday |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Sunny | Mostly Clear | Sunny | Mostly Clear | Sunny |
| High: 68 °F | Low: 42 °F | High: 74 °F | Low: 48 °F | High: 75 °F |

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Updated: 9/21/2021 5:10 AM Central



Dry Rest of the Week

Today
HI: 62 to 70°



Wednesday
HI: 70 to 80°



Thursday
HI: 72 to 80°



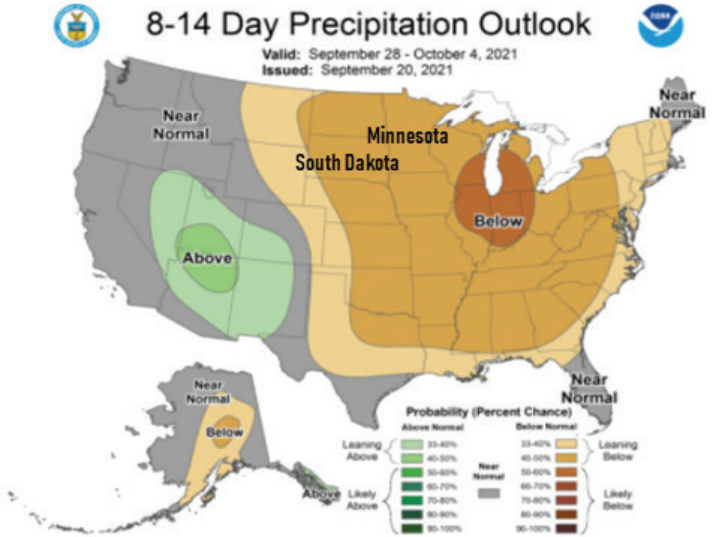
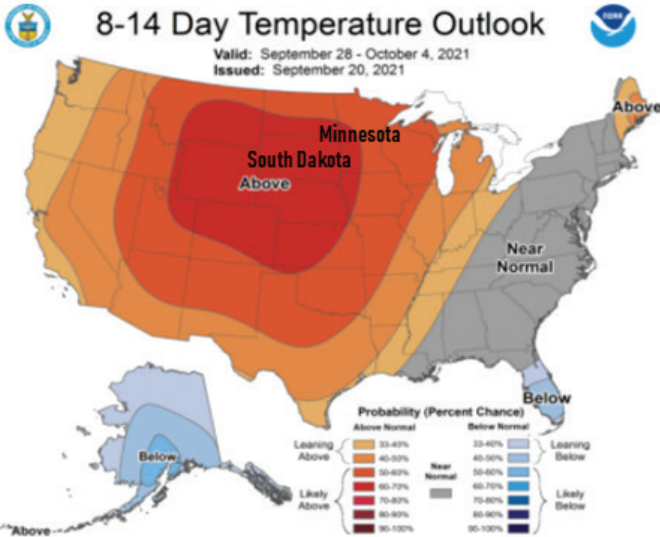
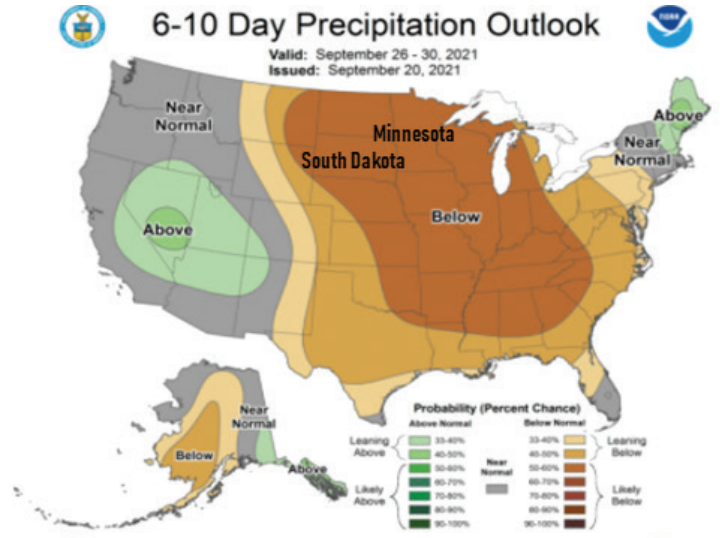
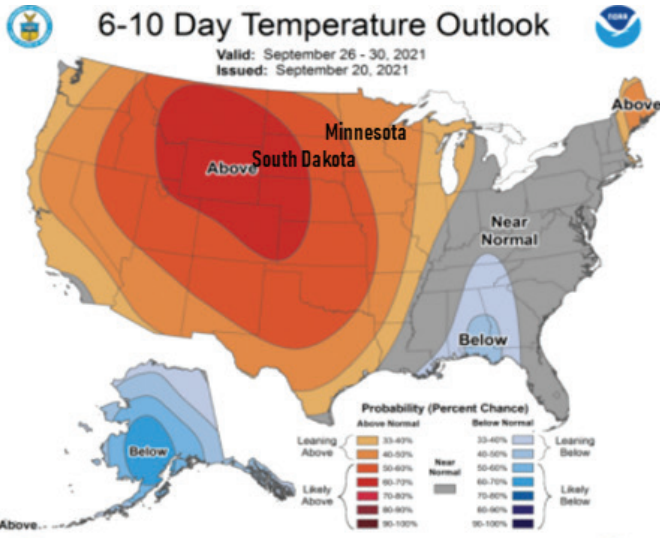
Friday
HI: 60 to 68°



Northerly breezes and below average temperatures are expected today and Friday, while southerly breezes and above average temperatures are forecast for Wednesday and Thursday. The only chance for precipitation is slim, on Friday afternoon and evening across portions of northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

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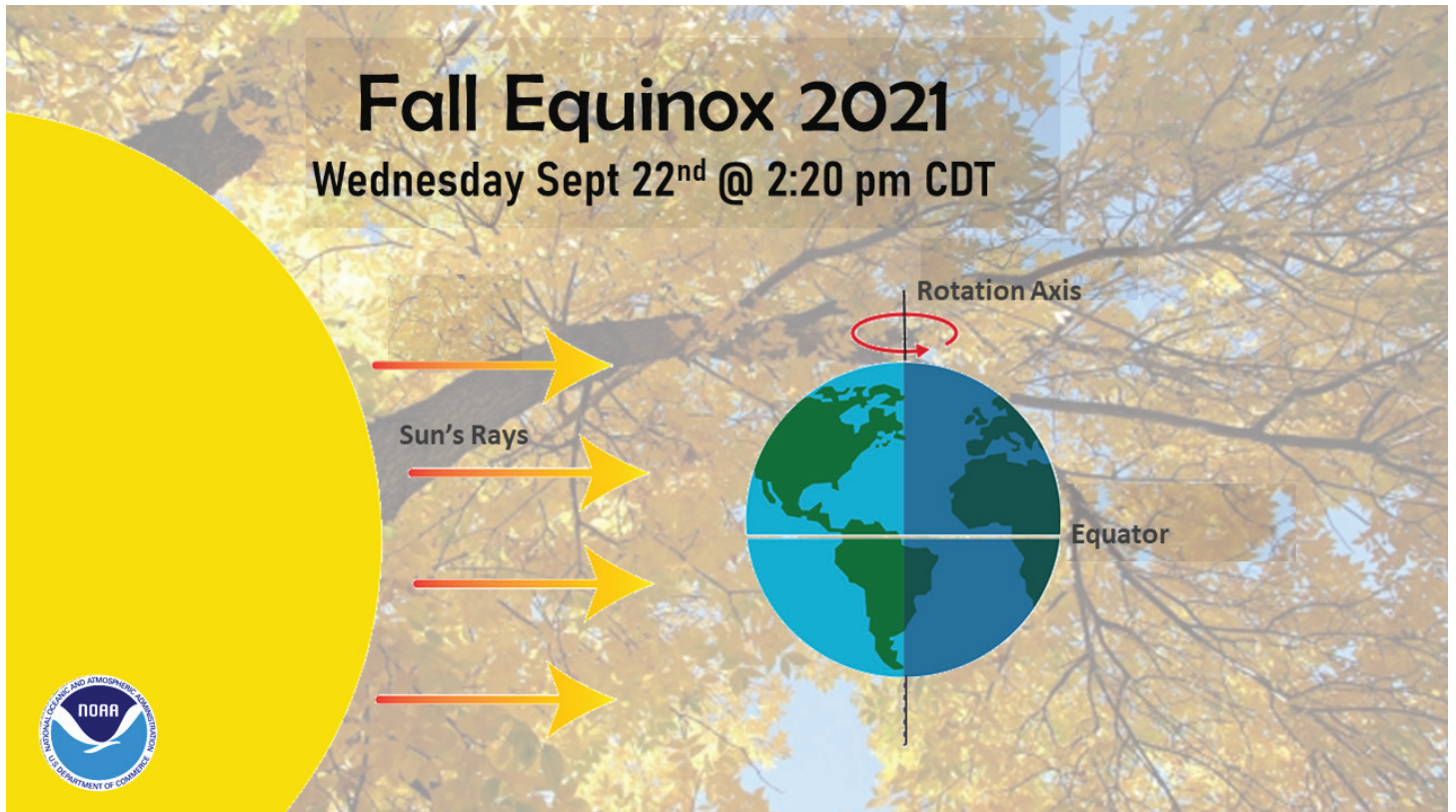
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Above average temperatures and below average precipitation is favored from late September into early October across our area. For perspective, average high temperatures for late September range from the upper 60s to low 70s.

Fall Equinox 2021

Wednesday Sept 22nd @ 2:20 pm CDT



Wednesday is the Fall Equinox, or the first day of astronomical fall. This means that nighttime will be longer than daytime for the next 6 months here in the Northern Hemisphere, thanks to Earth's tilt and position with respect to the sun.

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Today in Weather History

September 21, 1960: In the morning hours of September 21st, lightning struck and caused structural damage to a home in Clear Lake, Deuel County. Lightning also hit a home in Clark in Clark County, and two telephone poles near Milbank in Grant County. Power was also interrupted for a short time by lightning near Britton.

1894: A late season severe weather outbreak occurred across northwest Iowa, south central Minnesota and southwestern Wisconsin during the late evening hours. Several communities were impacted by this outbreak with an estimated 55 to 65 deaths, and in additional 300 injuries. The strongest tornado was an estimated F5, which tore through the counties of Kossuth, Hancock, Winnebago in Iowa, and Faribault in Minnesota.

1894 - A heavy chicken house, sixteen by sixteen feet in area, was picked up by a tornado and wedged between two trees. The hens were found the next day sitting on their eggs in the chicken house, with no windows broken, as though nothing had happened. (The Weather Channel)

1924: A couple of tornadoes, one rated F4 and the other F5, tore paths of devastation through Eau Claire, Clark, and Taylor Counties in Wisconsin. The death toll was 18 and 50 people were injured.

1938: On this day, one of the most destructive and powerful hurricanes in recorded history struck Long Island and Southern New England. This Category 3 Hurricane was traveling at 47 mph when it made landfall near Bellport, New York. This storm caused at least 600 deaths and left approximately 63,000 homeless.

1938 - A great hurricane smashed into Long Island and bisected New England causing a massive forest blowdown and widespread flooding. Winds gusted to 186 mph at Blue Hill MA, and a storm surge of nearly thirty feet caused extensive flooding along the coast of Rhode Island. The hurricane killed 600 persons and caused 500 million dollars damage. The hurricane, which lasted twelve days, destroyed 275 million trees. Hardest hit were Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Long Island NY. The "Long Island Express" produced gargantuan waves with its 150 mph winds, waves which smashed against the New England shore with such force that earthquake-recording machines on the Pacific coast clearly showed the shock of each wave. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1954 - The temperature at Deeth, NV, soared from a morning low of 12 degrees to a high of 87 degrees, a record daily warm-up for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Tropical Storm Emily, which formed in the Caribbean the previous afternoon, caused considerable damage to the banana industry of Saint Vincent in the Windward Islands. Unseasonably hot weather continued in Florida and the western U.S. Redding CA and Red Bluff CA, with record highs of 108 degrees, tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced high winds and locally heavy rain in the southwestern U.S. One thunderstorm in west Texas produced wind gusts to 86 mph at Dell City completely destroying an airport hangar. A Cessna 150 aircraft housed within the hangar was flipped over and snapped in two. Thunderstorms produced large hail in east central Utah, while snow blanketed some of the higher elevations of the state. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Hurricane Hugo slammed into the South Carolina coast about 11 PM, making landfall near Sullivan's Island. Hurricane Hugo was directly responsible for thirteen deaths, and indirectly responsible for twenty-two others. A total of 420 persons were injured in the hurricane, and damage was estimated at eight billion dollars, including two billion dollars damage to crops. Sustained winds reached 85 mph at Folly Beach SC, with wind gusts as high as 138 mph. Wind gusts reached 98 mph at Charleston, and 109 mph at Shaw AFB. The biggest storm surge occurred in the McClellanville and Bulls Bay area of Charleston County, with a storm surge of 20.2 feet reported at Seewee Bay. Shrimp boats were found one half mile inland at McClellanville. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

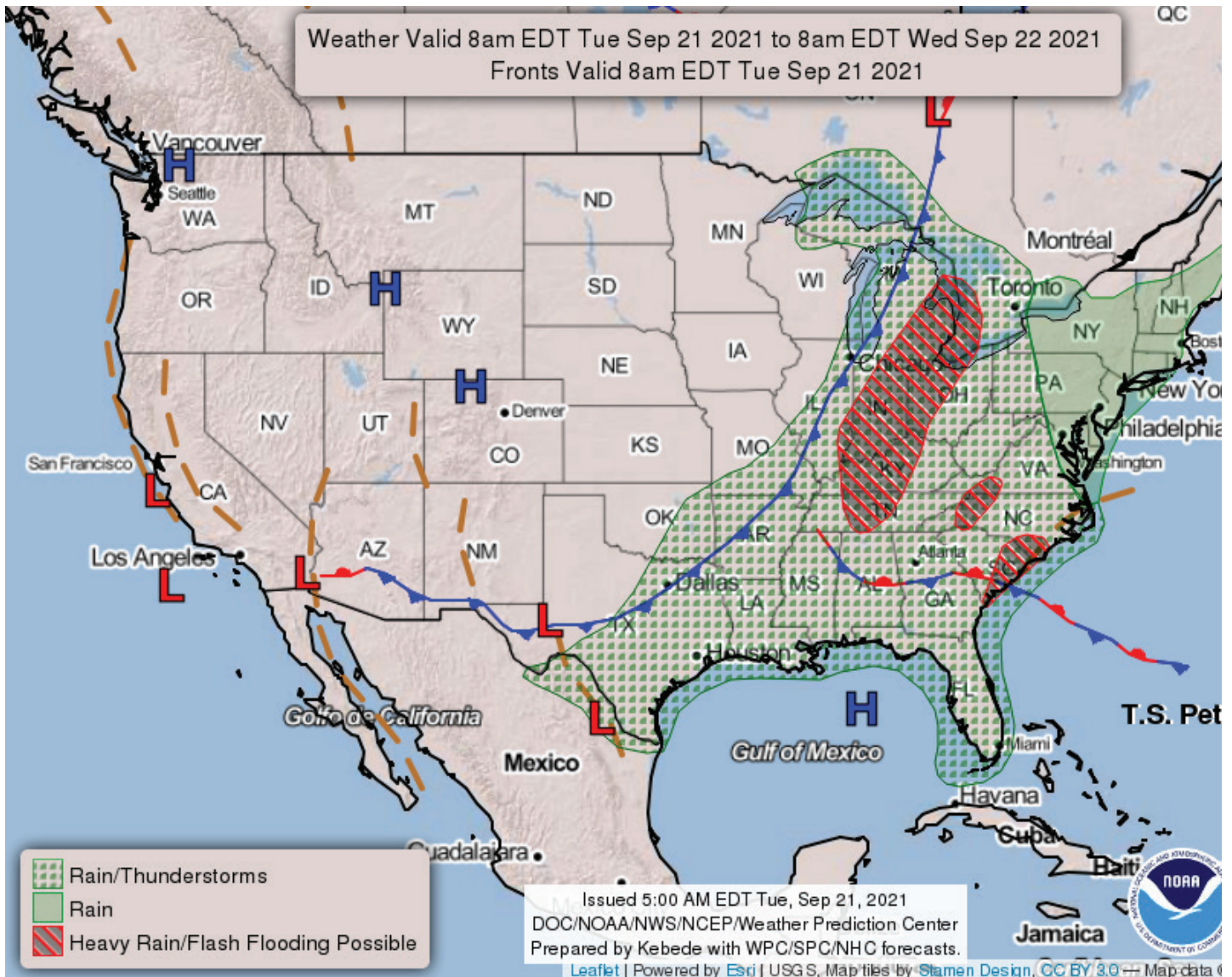
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 77.3 °F at 12:30 AM
Low Temp: 48.1 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 38 mph at 1:45 AM
Precip: 0.25

Record High: 99° in 1937
Record Low: 22° in 1893
Average High: 73°F
Average Low: 45°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.40
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.57
Average Precip to date: 17.74
Precip Year to Date: 15.41
Sunset Tonight: 7:33:09 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:18:37 AM



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THE LORD REIGNS

"Religion is an illusion of the emotions," declared Sigmund Freud, the psychiatrist, "and its funeral is at hand." And Frederick Nietzsche one day announced, "God is dead!"

No doubt that their gods died with them, but our God is alive and well and active in our lives! Shouted the Psalmist in Psalm 97:1, "The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad!"

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," wrote Moses. And He never abandoned nor cast aside His role in managing and controlling it. He continues to be the sole source and sustainer of all its life, the strength in all its movements, and the power behind its journey.

The earth spins like a top at 1,000 miles per hour without ever speeding up or slowing down so that we might have a predictable number of hours for each day and night. It is tilted at a specific angle that causes our seasons. And these two facts are only the beginning of the marvelous miracles of our planet. And why is this so? To demonstrate the fact that "The Lord reigns" – that our God will never surrender His power and control.

Our sun maintains a temperature that is warm enough to sustain us but never hot enough to burn us or freeze us to death when winter arrives. Why this consistency that we never question? "The Lord reigns" – that our God will always protect and care for us.

Wherever we look and whatever we study, we see a pattern of consistency and continuity, predictability and potential. God does reign. God does rule. Our God loves us!

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, that You reign over all Your creation. May we grant You entrance into our hear that You may also reign in our lives, too. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Psalm 97:1

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte def. Pine Ridge, 25-21, 25-22, 25-16

Dell Rapids def. Baltic, 25-17, 25-12, 23-25, 15-25, 15-10

Freeman def. Canton, 23-25, 25-22, 25-9, 25-14

Garretson def. Adrian, Minn., 25-17, 25-13, 25-22

Hamlin def. Estelline/Hendricks, 25-22, 23-25, 25-22, 25-20

McCook Central/Montrose def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 25-23, 26-24, 25-17

Mobridge-Pollock def. Winner, 25-18, 25-17, 25-19

Waverly-South Shore def. Lake Preston, 25-15, 25-16, 25-19

Wessington Springs def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-23, 25-20, 21-25, 28-26

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

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$432 million

Powerball

37-51-54-58-60, Powerball: 19, Power Play: 2

(thirty-seven, fifty-one, fifty-four, fifty-eight, sixty; Powerball: nineteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$472 million

3 members of South Dakota family sentenced for grain fraud

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Three members of a South Dakota family accused of bilking millions from farmers due to risky speculation in the grain business have been sentenced to time behind bars.

Jared Steffensen and his wife, Tami Steffensen, pleaded guilty earlier to theft by deception and were sentenced Friday to five years in prison. Jared Steffensen's mother, JoAnn Steffensen, pleaded guilty to failing to inform state regulators that the company was failing financially and was ordered serve 120 days in jail.

Authorities say Jared Steffensen lost between \$6 million to \$10 million of H&I Grain's money hedging commodities in 2016. Even though the Steffensens knew that their business was insolvent, they continued to reassure farmers they were fine, took their grain, and did not notify state regulators as required by law.

H&I declared bankruptcy and some of the farmers did win a judgment against the Steffensens in civil court, although losses are expected to total about \$5 million.

"It is good to see a favorable conclusion for the community after all the hardship the victims have faced in the aftermath of this complex financial crime," state Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg said.

Duane Steffensen, who started the company, was facing charges as well, but died in January of 2019.

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Noem: Changes to social studies standards should be delayed

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said Monday she told the state Department of Education to delay changes to social studies standards up to one year to allow more people to weigh in on the recommendations.

Noem's move follows recent calls by the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition for her to resign and the decision to postpone the first scheduled hearing a month and move it to a larger venue. The DOE reports it has received nearly 600 public comments on the standards.

"The Department of Education changed the working group's recommendations to the social studies standards significantly, but it is clear to me that there needs to be more public input to bring greater balance and emphasis on our nation's true and honest history," Noem said in a release.

The Argus Leader reported that a review of the comments show the majority are in opposition to the proposed standards, in which the DOE removed more than a dozen explicit references to Native American education on the Oceti Sakowin that were initially included in an early draft proposed by members of a working group.

Candi Brings Plenty, a member of the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition and indigenous justice organizer with the ACLU of South Dakota, said the groups will continue to push for Noem's resignation.

"She knows she's in for battle," Brings Plenty said. "She has awakened a sleeping giant. We have finally been counted to a sufficient standard this past census and now she sees the numbers. We will vote her out."

Noem intends to ask the South Dakota legislature to place into law an executive order she signed in late July that prohibits any curriculum requiring or encouraging students to take positions against one another on the basis of race, sex or the historical activity of members of a student's race or sex.

Noem also plans to ban critical race theory and action civics as the basis for instruction in South Dakota schools.

Nearly 58% of eligible South Dakota residents are vaccinated

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials said Monday about 63% of state residents age 12 and up have gotten at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine and nearly 58% are fully inoculated.

The Department of Health has reported 446 new COVID-19 cases and five deaths since Friday. The latest deaths include three men and two women in their 60s and 70s.

Active cases now stand at 7,927 with 58 of South Dakota's 66 counties experienced high community spread, which means there are 100 cases or more per 100,000 people.

Current hospitalizations have dropped since Friday and are now at 202, down from 214.

Total recovered cases are now at 130,370, up from 308 on Friday.

There have been about 430,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine administered, nearly 315,000 of the Moderna vaccine and about 28,000 doses of the Johnson and Johnson Janssen vaccine.

Thune challenger among Jan. 6 demonstrators in Washington

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Black Hills candidate who wants to unseat South Dakota Sen. John Thune in next year's Republican primary says he demonstrated in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 6 against President Joe Biden's victory.

Mark Mowry, of Spearfish, says his candidacy is fueled by Thune's unwillingness to question the validity of the presidential election.

Mowry told the Argus Leader that he participated in demonstrations near Capitol Hill the day Congress was set to confirm the results of the Nov. 3 election, but he was not part of the riots that broke out and led to protesters storming the Capitol.

"It's not something I'd normally do, because I don't consider myself much of a political activist," Mowry said of his decision to head east in January. "But I was not in the Capitol. That's a trespassing issue. And that never should have happened."

Mowry is among skeptics who don't believe former President Donald Trump lost the 2020 election.

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Mowry and other far-right Trump supporters have targeted Thune after the senator made public statements dismissing allegations of widespread voter fraud. Trump used social media to call Thune a "RINO," Republican In Name Only, and speculated that his Senate career is "over."

The U.S. Justice Department under Trump said there was no evidence that Biden did not fairly and legally win the presidency.

J&J: Booster dose of its COVID shot prompts strong response

LONDON (AP) — Johnson & Johnson released data showing that a booster dose to its one-shot coronavirus vaccine provides a strong immune response months after people receive a first dose.

J&J said in statement Tuesday that it ran two early studies in people previously given its vaccine and found that a second dose produced an increased antibody response in adults from age 18 to 55. The study's results haven't yet been peer-reviewed.

"A booster dose of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine further increases antibody responses among study participants who had previously received our vaccine," said Dr. Mathai Mammen, global head of research and development at J&J. The company previously published data showing its one-shot dose provided protection for up to eight months after immunization.

J&J said it is now in talks with regulators including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the European Medicines Agency and others regarding using booster doses of its vaccine.

J&J's vaccine is approved for use in the U.S., across Europe and there are plans for at least 200 million doses to be shared with the U.N.-backed COVAX effort aimed at distributing vaccines to poor countries. But the company has been plagued by production problems and millions of doses made at a troubled factory in Baltimore had to be thrown out.

The J&J vaccine has been considered critical by numerous health officials to ending the pandemic because it requires only one shot, but fears about the easier-to-spread delta coronavirus variant have prompted numerous governments to consider the use of booster shots for many approved vaccines.

Last week, experts at the FDA recommended people 65 and older get a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech while Britain previously authorized booster shots for people 50 and over in addition to priority groups like health workers and those with underlying health conditions. Other countries including Israel, France and Germany have also begun offering third vaccine doses to some people.

The World Health Organization has urged rich countries to stop administering booster doses until at least the end of the year, saying vaccines should immediately be redirected to Africa, where fewer than 4% of the population is fully immunized. In a paper published last week in the journal *Lancet*, top scientists from the WHO and FDA argued that the average person doesn't need a booster shot and that the authorized vaccines to date provide strong protection against severe COVID-19, hospitalization and death.

Taliban name deputy ministers, double down on all-male team

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban expanded their interim Cabinet by naming more ministers and deputies on Tuesday, but failed to appoint any women, doubling down on a hard-line course despite the international outcry that followed their initial presentation of an all-male government lineup earlier this month.

The international community has said that it will judge the Taliban by their actions, and that recognition of a Taliban-led government would be linked to the treatment of women and minorities.

In their previous rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, the Taliban, who adhere to a harsh interpretation of Islam, had barred girls and women from schools, work and public life.

At a news conference Tuesday, Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid held out the possibility of adding women to the Cabinet at a later time, but gave no specifics. He also said the Taliban are preparing rules for allowing teen-age girls and women to return to schools and jobs in line with Islamic law, but did not say when that might happen.

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Mujahid defended the latest additions to the Cabinet, saying they included members of ethnic minorities, such as the Hazaras. He said the deputies were chosen for their technical skills.

He bristled at international conditions for recognition, saying there was no reason for withholding it. "It is the responsibility of the United Nations to recognize our government (and) for other countries, including European, Asian and Islamic countries, to have diplomatic relations with us," he said.

The Taliban seek international support as they grapple with the daunting challenges of governing a nation shredded by four decades of conflict. The U.S.-backed government deposed by the Taliban in a rapid military campaign last month had depended heavily on foreign aid. Even before the Taliban takeover, the economy was in deep trouble. Now Afghanistan's new rulers face an economic meltdown and growing poverty.

Mujahid played down the financial problems, saying that much of the foreign aid to the previous government — widely seen as corrupt — was spent on funding America's 20-year war against the Taliban.

He suggested Afghanistan could manage without that aid, saying the country had sufficient resources. "According to our inspection, Afghanistan is not a failed country, financially," he said. "We have revenue, and if it is controlled and collected properly, it can solve our current problems."

It wasn't clear, however, how the Taliban government expected to raise sufficient tax revenue from a population the United Nations said would see 97% living below the poverty level by the end of the year.

The Taliban have framed their current Cabinet as an interim government, suggesting that change is still possible, but they have not said if there would ever be elections.

Mujahid was also asked about the recent restrictions imposed on girls and women, including a decision not to allow girls in grades seven to 12 to return to classrooms for the time being. Boys in those grades were allowed to return to school over the weekend.

Mujahid said this was a temporary decision, and that "soon it will be announced when they can go to school." He said plans were being made to allow for the return of girls and women to schools and work, in line with Islamic law, or Sharia.

At the moment, girls in grades one to six are allowed to go to school, and women in universities can pursue their studies, but only in gender-segregated settings and while complying with an Islamic dress code.

With the Taliban takeover, there has been widespread fear among girls and women that they would lose the gains of the past 20 years, and many of their concerns have materialized. The Taliban have repeatedly suggested their decisions are temporary, in an apparent attempt to blunt international criticism even as they issue hard-line decrees.

Haitian journey to Texas border starts in South America

By JULIE WATSON, JUAN A. LOZANO and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — Robins Exile downed a traditional meal of plantains and chicken at a restaurant run by Haitian immigrants, just a short walk from the walled border with the United States. He arrived the night before and went there seeking advice: Should he try to get to the U.S., or was it better to settle in Mexico?

Messages on WhatsApp and Facebook and YouTube videos from Haitian migrants warned him to avoid crossing in Del Rio, Texas, where thousands of Haitians have converged recently. It was no longer the easy place to cross that it was just a few weeks ago.

Discussion Monday at the Tijuana restaurant offered a snapshot of Haitians' diaspora in the Western Hemisphere that picked up steam in 2016 and has shown little sign of easing, demonstrated most recently by the more than 14,000 mostly Haitian migrants assembled around a bridge in Del Rio, a town of only 35,000 people.

Of the roughly 1.8 million Haitians living outside their homeland, the United States is home to the largest Haitian immigrant population in the world, numbering 705,000 people from the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Significant numbers also live in Latin American countries like Chile, which is home to an estimated 69,000 Haitians, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

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Nearly all Haitians reach the U.S. border on a well-worn route: Fly to Brazil, Chile or elsewhere in South America. If jobs dry up, slowly move through Central America and Mexico by bus and on foot to wait — perhaps years — in northern border cities like Tijuana for the right time to enter the United States and claim asylum.

It is a population that relies little on smugglers and instead moves based on shared experience and information exchanged between the tight-knit community, often via WhatsApp or Facebook, about where it is safest, where jobs are most plentiful and where it is easiest to enter a country. Earlier this year, large numbers showed up in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, to cross into El Paso, Texas.

Haitians shifted over the summer to Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, across from Del Rio. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said Monday that it was unusually sudden.

Many Haitians began attempting to enter the U.S. in the 1980s by sea. Most of them were cut off by the Coast Guard and perhaps given a cursory screening for asylum eligibility, said David FitzGerald, a sociology professor at the University of California, San Diego and an asylum expert. In 1994, Haitians were intercepted and screened by U.S. authorities on a rented Ukrainian ship and a U.S. Navy hospital ship parked in Kingston, Jamaica. Attempts by sea waned after a Supreme Court decision allowing forced repatriations without refugee protections.

Tens of thousands of Haitians fled after a devastating earthquake in 2010 to settle in South America. After jobs dried up from the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, many came to Tijuana. President Barack Obama initially allowed them in the U.S. on humanitarian grounds but abruptly began flying them back to Haiti, leaving many stranded on the Mexican border.

Since then, Haitian restaurants and other businesses have sprouted in Tijuana. Haitians have found work at border factories built for U.S. exports and at car washes. One hardscrabble neighborhood is now known as "Little Haiti" because so many settled there.

Many Haitians have established at least temporary legal status in Mexico, Brazil and elsewhere. Some have spouses or children from their adopted countries.

Exile, who joked that he seemed born to be a refugee given his name, said he was interested in getting documents to be able to work in Mexico if his plan to reach the United States fails. He and his pregnant wife had been on the road for 2 1/2 months after he lost his job in Brazil. They had flown there from Haiti a year and half ago amid spiraling crime.

They stayed along Mexico's southern border with Guatemala for three weeks, and had planned to go to the Texas border. But by the time his family sent money, he heard Tijuana was the safer option with its well-established Haitian community.

"It's getting complicated, so that's why I came here where I can hopefully find work and live peacefully, taking care of my family," Exile said in the restaurant, painted in the colors of the Haitian flag.

He understands the U.S. crackdown in Del Rio, where the Biden administration on Sunday launched an expulsion campaign to Haiti.

"I think people should wait and work in Mexico," he said. "There are opportunities here, just not as many as in the U.S."

Pierre Wilthene and his wife agree. They operate the restaurant "Chris Kapab," or "God Willing" in Creole. They arrived in Tijuana five years ago. The two went to Brazil when the economy was booming ahead of the 2014 World Cup.

"Things are good here," said Wilthene, who also is vice president of the Association of the Defense of Haitian Immigrants in Tijuana, which helps arrivals find housing, passes along donated furniture, clothing and toys and guides Haitians through Mexico's health care and public school systems.

Yuliy Ramírez came to Tijuana five years after losing her job in Brazil, where she arrived in 2012. She enrolled in a Tijuana university for a nursing degree.

"Mexico was a good option for me, but I won't deny that for many they could have a much better life in the U.S.," Ramirez said.

About 150,000 Haitians went to Chile from 2014 to 2018, many on charter flights to qualify for a visa,

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and found work as street vendors, janitors and construction workers. They lived largely in marginalized neighborhoods of the capital and suffered discrimination.

In April, a stricter immigration law took effect, and the Chilean government started massive aerial deportations.

Now more Haitians are moving through the Colombian town of Necocli, where migrants catch boat rides to the Panama border to begin the perilous trek through the jungle of the Darien Gap. In July, the town hosted more than 10,000 migrants, nearly all Haitian.

Migrants waiting there stay in hotels or locals' homes, where they rent rooms for \$6 to \$10 a night. Large groups sleep under tarps on the beach.

Panama's Security Minister Juan Pino said Monday that last week his country was still receiving 2,500 to 3,000 migrants — mostly Haitians — arriving through the Darien Gap.

From there, many have made their way to Mexico, where some apply for asylum in the southern city of Tapachula and live in encampments.

Unlike Central Americans, Haitians have generally not been deported from Mexico. So far this year, 19,000 have requested asylum in Mexico, a figure second only to Hondurans. In the previous two years, only about 6,000 Haitians had applied each year.

But most in the past have decided to push on to the United States, though now some are weighing the risks.

The Biden administration plans to ramp up this week to seven flights a day in what may be the swiftest, large-scale American efforts to remove migrants or refugees in decades.

Junior Jean lived in Chile for four years before coming through Mexico to the makeshift camp under the Del Rio bridge.

"Chile was bad for me," said Jean, 32. "I was sleeping on the street, eating from the trash. That is what we were doing. There is nothing."

Biden aims to enlist allies in tackling climate, COVID, more

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden planned to use his first address before the U.N. General Assembly to reassure other nations of American leadership on the global stage and call on allies to move quickly and cooperatively to address the festering issues of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and human rights abuses.

Biden, who arrived in New York on Monday evening to meet with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres ahead of Tuesday's address, offered a full-throated endorsement of the body's relevance and ambition at a difficult moment in history.

The president, in brief remarks at the start of his meeting with Guterres, returned to his mantra that "America is back" — a phrase that's become presidential shorthand meant to encapsulate his promise to take a dramatically different tack with allies than predecessor Donald Trump.

"The vision of the United Nations has never been short on ambition, any more than our Constitution," Biden said.

But the president was facing a healthy measure of skepticism from allies during his week of high-level diplomacy. The opening months of his presidency have included a series of difficult moments with friendly nations that were expecting greater cooperation from Biden following four years of Trump's "America first" approach to foreign policy.

Eight months into his presidency, Biden has been out of sync with allies on the chaotic ending to the U.S. war in Afghanistan. He has faced differences over how to go about sharing coronavirus vaccines with the developing world and over pandemic travel restrictions. And there are questions about the best way to respond to military and economic moves by China.

Biden also finds himself in the midst of a fresh diplomatic spat with France, the United States' oldest ally, after announcing plans — along with Britain — to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. The

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move is expected to give Australia improved capabilities to patrol the Pacific amid growing concern about the Chinese military's increasingly aggressive tactics, but it upended a French defense contract worth at least \$66 billion to sell diesel-powered submarines to Australia.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Monday there was a "crisis of trust" with the U.S. as a result of the episode.

Before Biden's arrival, EU Council President Charles Michel strongly criticized the Biden administration for leaving Europe "out of the game in the Indo-Pacific region" and ignoring the underlying elements of the trans-Atlantic alliance — transparency and loyalty — in the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the announcement of the U.S.-U.K.-Australia alliance.

Despite such differences, Biden hoped to use his address to the General Assembly as well as a series of one-on-one and larger meetings with world leaders this week to make the case for American leadership on the world stage.

"There are points of disagreement, including when we have disagreed with the decisions other countries are making, the decision points of when countries have disagreed with the decisions we're making," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. "But the larger point here ... is that we are committed to those alliances, and that always requires work from every president, from every global leader."

In an interview before his meeting with Biden, Guterres told The Associated Press that he was concerned about the "completely dysfunctional" U.S.-China relationship and that it could lead to a new cold war. Psaki said the administration disagreed with the assessment, adding that the U.S.-China relationship was "one not of conflict but of competition."

In his address Tuesday, Biden planned to put a heavy emphasis on the need for world leaders to work together on the COVID-19 pandemic, meet past obligations to address climate change, head off emerging technology issues and firm up trade rules, White House officials said.

Biden was expected to release new plans to assist the global vaccination effort and to talk about the U.S. plan to meet its part of financial commitments that the U.S. and other developed nations made in 2009 to help poorer nations adopt clean energy technology, assistance that was due to kick in annually last year, according to a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the president's remarks.

Ahead of his departure, the Biden administration announced plans to ease foreign travel restrictions to the U.S. beginning in November. The U.S. has largely restricted travel by non-U.S. citizens coming from Europe since the start of the pandemic, an issue that had become a point of contention in trans-Atlantic relations.

The new rules will allow foreigners in if they have proof of vaccination and a negative COVID-19 test, the White House said Monday.

Biden planned to limit his time at the United Nations due to coronavirus concerns. He was to meet with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison while in New York before shifting the rest of the week's diplomacy to virtual and Washington settings.

At a virtual COVID-19 summit Biden is hosting Wednesday, leaders will be urged to step up vaccine-sharing commitments, address oxygen shortages around the globe and deal with other critical pandemic-related issues.

The president is also scheduled to meet with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday at the White House, and invited the prime ministers of Australia, India and Japan — part of a Pacific alliance known as "the Quad" — to Washington on Friday. In addition to the gathering of Quad leaders, Biden will sit down for one-on-one meetings with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

Trudeau's party wins Canada vote but fails to get majority

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party secured victory in parliamentary elections but failed to get the majority he wanted in a vote that focused on the coronavirus pandemic but that many Canadians saw as unnecessary.

Trudeau entered Monday's election leading a stable minority government that wasn't under threat of being toppled — but he was hoping Canadians would reward him with a majority for navigating the pandemic better than many other leaders. Still, Trudeau struggled to justify why he called the election early given the virus, and the opposition was relentless in accusing him of holding the vote two years before the deadline for his own personal ambition.

In the end, the gamble did not pay off, and the results nearly mirrored those of two years ago. The Liberal Party was leading or elected in 156 seats — one less than they won 2019, and 14 short of the 170 needed for a majority in the House of Commons.

The Conservatives were leading or elected in 121 seats, the same number they won in 2019. The leftist New Democrats were leading or elected in 27, a gain of three seats, while the Bloc Québécois remained unchanged with 32 seats and the Greens were down to two.

"You are sending us back to work with a clear mandate to get Canada through this pandemic," Trudeau said. "I hear you when you say you just want to get back to the things you love and not worry about this pandemic or an election."

But experts noted that it was not the victory Trudeau had hoped for.

"Trudeau lost his gamble to get a majority so I would say this is a bittersweet victory for him," said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

"Basically we are back to square one, as the new minority parliament will look like the previous one. Trudeau and the Liberals saved their skin and will stay in power, but many Canadians who didn't want this late summer, pandemic election are probably not amused about the whole situation," he said.

Trudeau bet Canadians didn't want a Conservative government during a pandemic, playing up his own party's successes. Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, and Trudeau's government spent hundreds of billions of dollars to prop up the economy amid lockdowns. Trudeau argued that the Conservatives' approach, which has been skeptical of lockdowns and vaccine mandates, would be dangerous.

Trudeau supports making vaccines mandatory for Canadians to travel by air or rail, something the Conservatives oppose.

And he has pointed out that Alberta, run by a Conservative provincial government, is in crisis. Alberta Premier Jason Kenney said the province might run out of beds and staff for intensive care units within days. Kenney apologized for the dire situation and is now reluctantly introducing a vaccine passport and imposing a mandatory work-from-home order two months after lifting nearly all restrictions.

Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, meanwhile, didn't require his party's candidates to be vaccinated and would not say how many were not. O'Toole described vaccination as a personal health decision, but a growing number of vaccinated Canadians are increasingly upset with those who refuse to get the shot.

"The debate on vaccination and Trudeau taking on the anti-vaccination crowd helped the Liberals to salvage a campaign that didn't start well for the party," Béland said.

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, said the Conservatives were hurt by the situation in Alberta.

"The explosion of the pandemic in Alberta in the past 10 days undermined O'Toole's compliments of the Alberta Conservatives on how they had handled the pandemic and reinforced Trudeau's argument for mandatory vaccinations," he said.

The 49-year-old Trudeau channeled the star power of his father, the Liberal icon and late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, when he first won election in 2015 and has led his party to the top finish in two elections since.

A Conservative win would have represented a rebuke of Trudeau by a politician with a fraction of his name

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recognition. O'Toole, 47, is a military veteran, former lawyer and a member of Parliament for nine years.

"Canadians did not give Mr. Trudeau the majority mandate he wanted," O'Toole said. Conservative campaign co-chair Waleed Soliman earlier said holding Trudeau to a minority government would be a win.

O'Toole said he was more determined than ever to continue but his party might dump him as it did the previous leader who failed to beat Trudeau in 2019.

O'Toole advertised himself a year ago as a "true-blue Conservative." He became Conservative Party leader with a pledge to "take back Canada," but immediately started working to push the party toward the political center.

O'Toole's strategy, which included disavowing positions held dear by his party's base on issues such as climate change, guns and balanced budgets, was designed to appeal to a broader cross section of voters in a country that tends to be far more liberal than its southern neighbor.

Whether moderate Canadians believed O'Toole is the progressive conservative he claims to be and whether he alienated traditional Conservatives became central questions of the campaign.

Regina Adshade, a 28-year-old Vancouver software developer, said she was bothered that an election was called early, during a pandemic and with wildfires burning in British Columbia. But it didn't stop her from voting Liberal because the party represents her values.

"I don't love there was an election right now, but it wasn't going to change my vote," she said.

Trudeau's legacy includes embracing immigration at a time when the U.S. and other countries closed their doors. He also legalized cannabis nationwide and brought in a carbon tax to fight climate change. And he preserved free trade deal with the U.S. and Mexico amid threats by former U.S. President Donald Trump to scrap the agreement.

Nerves on edge on Spanish island as quakes, lava threaten

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

EL PASO, Canary Islands (AP) — Several small earthquakes shook the Spanish island of La Palma off northwest Africa in the early hours of Tuesday, keeping nerves on edge as rivers of lava continued to flow toward the sea and a new vent blew open on the mountainside.

The new vent is 900 meters (3,000 feet) north of the Cumbre Vieja ridge, where the volcano first erupted on Sunday after a week of thousands of small earthquakes.

That so-called earthquake swarm gave authorities warning that an eruption was likely and allowed more than 5,000 people to be evacuated, avoiding casualties.

The new fissure opened after what the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute said was a 3.8-magnitude quake late Monday.

La Palma, with a population of some 85,000 people, is part of the volcanic Canary Islands.

Lava by Tuesday had covered 106 hectares (about 260 acres) of terrain and destroyed 166 houses and other buildings, according to the European Union's Earth Observation Program, called Copernicus.

Unstoppable rivers of lava, as much as six meters (nearly 20 feet) high, rolled down hillsides, burning and crushing everything in their path.

Authorities said the pace of the lava's advance appeared to have slowed and didn't expect it to reach the sea before Wednesday at the earliest, Spanish private news agency Europa Press reported.

When it reaches the Atlantic Ocean, it could cause explosions and produce clouds of toxic gas. Scientists monitoring the lava measured it at more than 1,000 C (more than 1,800 F).

Scientists say the lava flows could last for weeks or months. The volcano has been spewing out between 8,000 and 10,500 tons of sulfur dioxide a day, the Volcanology Institute said.

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World leaders return to UN and face many escalating crises

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — World leaders will be back at the United Nations for the first time in two years on Tuesday with a formidable agenda of escalating crises to tackle, including the still raging COVID-19 pandemic and a relentlessly warming planet.

Other pressing issues are rising U.S.-China tensions, Afghanistan's unsettled future under its new Taliban rulers and ongoing conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region.

Last year, no leaders came to the U.N. because the coronavirus was sweeping the globe, so all their addresses were pre-recorded. This year, the General Assembly offered leaders a choice of coming to New York or remaining online, and more than 100 heads of state and government decided to appear in person in the General Assembly hall.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who opens the week-long event, "will pull no punches in expressing his concern about the state of the world, and he will lay out a vision to bridge the numerous divides that stand in the way of progress," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

By tradition, the first country to speak is Brazil, whose president, Jair Bolsonaro, isn't vaccinated. He reiterated last Thursday that he doesn't plan to get the shot any time soon, justifying his refusal by saying he had COVID-19 and therefore has a high level of antibodies.

A key issue ahead of the meetings has been COVID-19 entry requirements for leaders to the United States — and to the U.N. headquarters itself. The U.S. requires a vaccination or a recent COVID-19 test, and the U.N. will operate on an honor system whereby anyone entering the complex attests that they do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and have not tested positive in the last 10 days.

The three most closely watched speakers on Tuesday morning are expected to be U.S. President Joe Biden, appearing at the U.N. for the first time since his defeat of Donald Trump in the November election, China's President Xi Jinping, who in a surprise move will deliver a video address, and Iran's recently elected hardline President Ebrahim Raisi.

Ahead of the opening of the General Assembly's annual General Debate, Guterres issued a dire warning that the world could be plunged into a new and probably more dangerous Cold War unless the United States and China repair their "totally dysfunctional" relationship.

The U.N. chief said in an interview this weekend with The Associated Press that Washington and Beijing should be cooperating on the climate crisis and negotiating on trade and technology, but "unfortunately, today we only have confrontation" including over human rights and geostrategic problems mainly in the South China Sea.

Speaking last week about Biden's speech, Richard Gowan, U.N. director of the International Crisis Group, said "the really significant question is exactly how he frames relations with China." He predicted that Biden "won't be as forthright in criticism of China as Trump was, especially in 2019 and 2020," but rather will "try and cast China as a country that is challenging the rules-based world order and a country that should not be trusted with leadership of the international system."

On the latest speakers list released earlier this month, China's speech was supposed to be delivered on Friday by a deputy prime minister. But the U.N. confirmed Monday that Xi will give the country's video address instead.

His speech and any comments about the U.S. rivalry are certain to be closely watched and analyzed.

Other leaders scheduled to speak in person during the meeting, which ends Sept. 27, include King Abdullah II of Jordan, the president of Venezuela, and the prime ministers of Japan, India and the United Kingdom along with Israel's new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Leaders delivering prerecorded statements this year include the presidents of Egypt, Indonesia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. French President Emmanuel Macron was supposed to deliver a pre-recorded statement on Tuesday, but the government said Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian will now deliver the country's address virtually on the final day.

France and China have reacted angrily to the surprise announcement by Biden, alongside the leaders of Australia and Britain, of a deal to provide Australia with at least eight nuclear-powered submarines.

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Australia had signed a contract worth at least \$66 billion for a dozen French conventional diesel-electric submarines and their construction was already under way.

Le Drian told a news conference Monday that there is a "crisis of trust" between the United States and its oldest ally, France, as well as Europe, which has been excluded from the new US-UK-Australia alliance focused on the Indo-Pacific and aimed at confrontation with China. He said Europeans "should not be left behind," and need to define their own strategic interests.

As Merkel bids farewell, German women wish for more equality

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Angela Merkel, Germany's first female chancellor, has been praised by many for her pragmatic leadership in a turbulent world and celebrated by some as a feminist icon. But a look at her track record over her 16 years at Germany's helm reveals missed opportunities for fighting gender inequality at home.

Named "The World's Most Powerful Woman" by Forbes magazine for the last 10 years in a row, Merkel has been cast as a powerful defender of liberal values in the West. She has easily stood her ground at male-dominated summits with leaders such as former U.S. President Donald Trump or Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Millions of women admire the 67-year-old for breaking through the glass ceiling of male dominance in politics, and she's been lauded as an impressive role model for girls.

On trips to Africa, the Middle East and Asia, Merkel has often made a point of visiting women's rights projects. She has always stressed that giving women in poor countries better access to education and work is key to those nations' development.

But when it comes to the situation of women in Germany, Merkel — who said in 2018 that she wouldn't seek reelection in this Sunday's general election — has been criticized for not using her position enough to push for more gender equality.

"One thing is clear: a woman has demonstrated that women can do it," said Alice Schwarzer, Germany's most famous feminist. "However, one female chancellor alone doesn't make for emancipation."

Schwarzer, the 78-year-old women's rights activist, is the most prominent founding member of the German women's liberation movement, both loved and loathed in the country.

"She's the first one who made it all the way to the top," added Schwarzer, who has met Merkel for several one-on-one dinners over the years. "But has she done anything for women's policy aside from her sheer presence? Honestly, not a lot."

German women have even seen some setbacks during Merkel's reign. Before Merkel took office in 2005, 23% of federal lawmakers for her center-right Union bloc were women. Today, the figure is 19.9%. Only the far-right Alternative for Germany party, with 10.9%, has fewer female lawmakers.

Germany also lags behind other European countries when it comes to equal political representation.

In 2020, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and governments was 31.4% in Germany, well below Sweden's 49.6%, Belgium's 43.3% or Spain's 42.2%, according to the European Union statistics agency Eurostat.

Women also remain second-class citizens in Germany's working world. Last year, only 14.6% of top-level managers in big listed German companies were women. Germany also has one of the biggest gender pay gaps in the EU, with women earning 18% less than men in 2020, according to the Federal Statistical Office.

Some experts say Merkel has pressed for more power for women in indirect ways.

"Angela Merkel did not take up her job with the claim to use her role as chancellor for the support of women or making gender equality her vested interest," said Julia Reuschenbach, a political analyst at the University of Bonn. "However, she did very much engage in promoting other women in politics."

Ursula von der Leyen, a Merkel Cabinet stalwart, became the European Commission's first female president in 2019. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer succeeded Merkel as leader of her CDU in 2018, though she failed to impose her authority on the party and stepped down earlier this year.

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In 2007, von der Leyen, who was then family minister in Merkel's Cabinet, pushed through a progressive reform of the country's child-raising allowance which encouraged fathers to take some parental leave after the birth of a child. However, it was one of few legal changes during the chancellor's tenure that actively sought to improve the situation of women.

One reason for Merkel's reluctance to fight more openly for feminist issues in Germany may be her own struggle to get to the top of German politics, Schwarzer said.

"Merkel got a lot of pushback as a woman," especially early in her political career, she said. "She didn't expect that, so that may be a reason she didn't pick out the fact that she is a woman as her central topic."

Influential men in her conservative, traditionally West German and Catholic-dominated party didn't exactly welcome the Protestant former East German physicist with open arms, and male politicians from other parties initially did not treat her respectfully, Schwarzer said.

German journalists' comments on Merkel's appearance were often openly sexist, particularly in the beginning. German media first dubbed her "Kohl's girl," because Merkel was initially promoted by then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and later called her "Mutti," or "mommy," even though Merkel has no children.

Leonie Pouw, a 24-year-old election campaign manager in Berlin, was eight years old when Merkel came to power, so she says it was the most normal thing for her to have a female chancellor.

"It was only in school, when I started to have political awareness, that I realized how much it meant, especially for the older generation, that a woman is leading Germany," said Pouw, who grew up in south-western Germany. "When I understood that, it made me proud, too."

Nonetheless, Pouw thinks that Merkel could have done more for women's rights and noted that none of Merkel's Cabinets throughout her four terms achieved gender parity.

"I wish that in the future there will be as many women as men representing us," Pouw said.

When Merkel herself was asked in 2017 whether she was a feminist, she answered evasively, saying: "I don't want to embellish myself with a title I don't have."

Only in the last few years did Merkel take up the topic proactively and speak out for more gender equality in Germany. In 2018, as Germany marked the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, she said in a speech in Berlin to the loud applause of mostly female listeners that there was a lot still to do to achieve gender equality.

"The goal needs to be equality, equality everywhere," she said. "I hope it becomes natural for women and men to split up work, raising the children and doing the household equally ... and I hope it's not going to take another 100 years to get there."

Merkel has talked little about her experiences of discrimination or her personal life and her husband, quantum chemist Joachim Sauer, has kept a low public profile.

In the last few weeks, Merkel took a noteworthy step in further embracing women's rights, declaring at a discussion with women in Duesseldorf: "I'm a feminist."

"Yes, we should all be feminists," she added.

After Afghans fell from plane, families live with horror

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — It's a scene that has come to symbolize the chaotic end to America's 20 years of war in Afghanistan: A lumbering U.S. Air Force cargo plane takes off from Kabul airport, chased by hundreds of desperate Afghan men scrambling to get on the aircraft.

As the C-17 transporter gains altitude, shaky mobile phone video captures two tiny dots dropping from the plane. Footage from another angle shows many in the crowd on the tarmac stopping in their tracks and pointing.

The full extent of the horror becomes apparent only later. The dots, it turns out, were desperate Afghans hidden in the wheel well. As the wheels folded into the body of the plane, the stowaways faced the choice of being crushed to death or letting go and plunging to the ground.

More than a month later, much remains unclear about what happened in that tragic takeoff on Aug.

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16, a day after the Taliban swept into Kabul, prompting a flood of Afghans trying to escape the country.

Even how many were killed remains unknown. Videos show two dots falling from the airborne plane, several seconds apart. But two bodies landed on the same rooftop at the same time, suggesting they fell together, so the other figure seen falling in the videos could be at least one other person. Also, the U.S. military has said it found human remains still in the wheel well of the C-17 when it landed in Qatar but did not specify how many people. At least one person, a young soccer player, died on the tarmac, crushed under the C-17's wheels.

The U.S. military says it has not completed its investigation into the day. It said the C-17 was bringing in supplies for the evacuation effort at the airport but was mobbed by Afghans on the tarmac as it landed. Fearing the plane would be overwhelmed, the crew decided to take off again without unloading the cargo. Videos taken by Afghans on the tarmac show hundreds running alongside it, and perhaps a dozen people sitting on top of the wheel well, though it is not known how many jumped off before the plane lifted off.

One of those tucked into the wheel well was Fida Mohammad, a 24-year-old dentist.

He had once been full of hope, his family said. He had married last year in an extravagant ceremony that cost his family \$13,000. His dream of opening a dental clinic in Kabul had become a reality.

Then the Taliban seized Kabul, and all the possibilities for his future seemed to disappear, his father Painda Mohammed told The Associated Press.

The older man still struggles to understand what his son was thinking when he climbed into the wheel well. He's wracked with guilt, fearing that Fida took such an enormous risk because he wanted to help repay the large loan his father took out for the wedding.

Burying his head in his hands, Painda says he spends hours imagining his son's final minutes, the fear he must have felt as the earth below him began to disappear and the wheels swung in, knowing he had no choice but to let go.

On the ground, Abdullah Waiz was asleep in his home at the time and was awakened by a powerful noise. His first thought was an explosion. He rushed outside. His neighbors gestured toward his roof and told him of the bodies tumbling from the sky.

Two bodies hit in the same corner of his roof, Waiz said, pointing at the spot, where the concrete was still stained with blood. Waiz believes they were holding hands since they fell in the same location. He collected the remains on a cloth and carried it to a nearby mosque, he said.

"For 48 hours after that, I couldn't sleep or eat," he said.

They identified one body as Fida, as he had stuffed his father's name and number in his pocket. Local media said the second body was identified as a young man named Safiullah Hotak.

For two weeks at the end of August as the United States and its allies wrapped up their presence in Afghanistan, tens of thousands of Afghans surged toward the Kabul airport, frantic to escape a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. A 2-year-old child died in the stampede. An Islamic State group suicide bomber blew himself up in the middle of the crowd, killing 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. military personnel. Yet even after the explosion, thousands returned to the airport, hoping to make it inside.

The scenes were so traumatic that the U.S. Air Force offered psychological counseling to the air force personnel who worked at Kabul airport, as well as the crew of the ill-fated C-17 flight after it landed at Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar.

Another victim on Aug. 16 was 17-year-old Zaki Anwari, a rising star on Afghanistan's national soccer team. He would spend hours watching his hero Lionel Messi play. "He couldn't get enough. It was all he talked about, all he did," said his 20-year-old brother Zakir Anwari.

Zaki was too young to have known the Taliban's harsh rule of the late 1990s. But as the militant force swept through the provinces, Zaki's social media were flooded by rumors and horror stories purporting to tell of life under the Taliban.

Last time they ruled, the Taliban banned most sports, including soccer, and routinely rounded up young men at prayer times to force them to the mosque. Zaki was certain his dream of competing internationally on the Afghan team was over.

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Zaki went to the airport with an elder brother and a cousin on Aug. 16. He was meant to just watch the car while the cousin, who had worked for an American company, tried to get into the airport. Instead, while they were gone, he climbed over the airport boundary wall.

A breathless Zaki then called his other brother Zakir. He said he was inside the airport and was soon getting onto a plane. Zakir said he pleaded with his brother to not go, reminding him he didn't have his passport or even his ID card with him and asking him, "What will you do in America?"

But his younger brother hung up, then called his mother. "Pray for me. I am going to America," Zaki said. She begged him, "Come home."

Zaki was no longer listening. He raced alongside the aircraft as it picked up speed until suddenly he was knocked from the side and fell under the wheel and died, witnesses told the family later.

Painda Mohammad, the young dentist's father, watches over and over videos on his phone showing his son dancing at his wedding.

Through his tears, he said, "He was a gift from God and now God has taken him back."

Trudeau's Liberals win Canada election, but miss majority

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canadians gave Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party a victory in Monday's parliamentary elections, but his gamble to win a majority of seats failed and nearly mirrored the result of two years ago.

The Liberals won the most seats of any party. The 49-year-old Trudeau channeled the star power of his father, the Liberal icon and late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, when he first won election in 2015 and has led his party to the top finish in two elections since.

Trudeau's Liberals were leading or elected in 156 seats — one less than they won 2019, and 14 short of the 170 needed for a majority in the House of Commons.

The Conservatives were leading or elected in 121 seats, the same number they won in 2019. The leftist New Democrats were leading or elected in 27, a gain of three seats, while the Quebec-based Bloc Québécois remained unchanged with 32 seats and the Greens were down to two.

"You are sending us back to work with a clear mandate to get Canada through this pandemic," Trudeau said.

"I hear you when you say you just want to get back to the things you love and not worry about this pandemic or an election."

Trudeau entered the election leading a stable minority government that wasn't under threat of being toppled.

The opposition was relentless in accusing Trudeau of calling an unnecessary early vote — two years before the deadline — for his own personal ambition.

"Trudeau lost his gamble to get a majority so I would say this is a bittersweet victory for him," said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

"Basically we are back to square one, as the new minority parliament will look like the previous one. Trudeau and the Liberals saved their skin and will stay in power, but many Canadians who didn't want this late summer, pandemic election are probably not amused about the whole situation," he said.

Trudeau bet Canadians didn't want a Conservative government during a pandemic. Canada is now among the most fully vaccinated countries in the world and Trudeau's government spent hundreds of billions of dollars to prop up the economy amid lockdowns. Trudeau argued that the Conservatives' approach, which has been skeptical of lockdowns and vaccine mandates, would be dangerous and says Canadians need a government that follows science.

Conservative leader Erin O'Toole didn't require his party's candidates to be vaccinated and would not say how many were unvaccinated. O'Toole described vaccination as a personal health decision, but a growing number of vaccinated Canadians are increasingly upset with those who refuse to get vaccinated.

"The debate on vaccination and Trudeau taking on the anti-vaccination crowd helped the Liberals to

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salvage a campaign that didn't start well for the party," Beland said.

Trudeau supports making vaccines mandatory for Canadians to travel by air or rail, something the Conservatives oppose. And Trudeau has pointed out that Alberta, run by a Conservative provincial government, is in crisis.

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, an ally of O'Toole, said the province might run out of beds and staff for intensive care units within days. Kenney apologized for the dire situation and is now reluctantly introducing a vaccine passport and imposing a mandatory work-from-home order two months after lifting nearly all restrictions.

"Hubris led Trudeau to call the election. He and the Liberals won the election but lost the prize they were seeking. This is only a great night for the Liberals because two weeks ago it appeared they would lose government outright something they could not fathom before they gambled on an election," said Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto.

Wiseman said the Conservatives were hurt by the situation in Alberta. "The explosion of the pandemic in Alberta in the past 10 days undermined O'Toole's compliments of the Alberta Conservatives on how they had handled the pandemic and reinforced Trudeau's argument for mandatory vaccinations," he said.

A Conservative win would have represented a rebuke of Trudeau against a politician with a fraction of his name recognition. O'Toole, 47, is a military veteran, former lawyer and a member of Parliament for nine years.

"Canadians did not give Mr. Trudeau the majority mandate he wanted," O'Toole said.

O'Toole said he was more determined than ever to continue but his party might dump him after it dumped the previous leader who failed to beat Trudeau in 2019.

O'Toole advertised himself a year ago as a "true-blue Conservative." He became Conservative Party leader with a pledge to "take back Canada," but immediately started working to push the party toward the political center.

O'Toole's strategy, which included disavowing positions held dear by his party's base on issues such as climate change, guns and balanced budgets, was designed to appeal to a broader cross section of voters in a country that tends to be far more liberal than its southern neighbor.

The son of a long-time politician has faced criticism he will say and do anything to get elected.

Whether moderate Canadians believed O'Toole is the progressive conservative he claims to be and whether he alienated traditional Conservatives became central questions of the campaign.

Regina Adshade, a 28-year-old Vancouver software developer, said she was bothered that an election was called early, during a pandemic and with wildfires burning in British Columbia. But it didn't stop her from voting Liberal because the party represents her values.

"I don't love there was an election right now but it wasn't going to change my vote," she said.

Trudeau's legacy includes embracing immigration at a time when the U.S. and other countries closed their doors. He also legalized cannabis nationwide and brought in a carbon tax to fight climate change. And he preserved free trade deal with the U.S. and Mexico amid threats by former U.S. President Donald Trump to scrap the agreement.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama and ex-Democratic Party nominee Hillary Clinton tweeted support for Trudeau. There wasn't a Trump endorsement of O'Toole. Conservative campaign co-chair Walied Soliman said there is no alignment whatsoever between O'Toole and Trumpism. Soliman said earlier in the day holding Trudeau to a minority government would be a win for O'Toole.

Liberals governed Canada for 69 years during the 20th century. Pierre Trudeau called for a "just society" and ran the country with a panache not seen before from a Canadian leader. He is responsible for Canada's version of the bill of rights and is credited with opening the door wide to immigration.

Trudeau's Liberals dominated in Toronto, Canada's largest city and one of the most multicultural cities in the world.

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Democrats tie government funding to debt bill, GOP digs in

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic congressional leaders backed by the White House say they will push ahead with a vote to fund the government and suspend the debt limit, all but daring Republicans who say they will vote against it despite the risk of a fiscal crisis.

Congress is rushing headlong into an all-too-familiar stalemate: The federal government faces a shutdown if funding stops at the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30. At the same time, the U.S. risks defaulting on its accumulated debt load if the borrowing limits are not waived or adjusted.

All this while Democratic lawmakers are laboring to shoulder President Joe Biden's massive \$3.5 trillion "build back better" agenda through the House and Senate with stark opposition from Republicans.

"The American people expect our Republican colleagues to live up to their responsibilities and make good on the debts they proudly helped incur," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer in a joint statement Monday.

From the White House, the president backed the congressional leaders' plan to hold the votes.

"This is a bipartisan responsibility, just as it was under my predecessor," Biden said in a tweet. "Blocking it would be inexcusable."

The magnitude of the challenges ahead and the speed required to accomplish the job are like nothing Congress has faced in recent memory, situating Biden's entire domestic agenda and the political fate of his Democratic party at a crucial moment.

As Democrats charge ahead, the Republicans as the minority party in Congress hoping to regain control in the next election in 2022 plan to sit back, watching and waiting to see if Biden and his allies can succeed against the odds — or spectacularly fail.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said he's not about to help pay off past debts when Biden is about to pile on more with a "reckless" tax and spending package.

"Since Democrats decided to go it alone, they will not get Senate Republicans' help with raising the debt limit. I've explained this clearly and consistently for over two months," McConnell said Monday on the Senate floor.

The vote this week on funding to keep the government running past Sept. 30 and allow more borrowing will force the political stalemate into the open.

The Treasury Department warned that it will soon run out of cash-on-hand, and have to rely on incoming receipts to pay its obligations, now at \$28.4 trillion. That could force the Treasury to delay or miss payments, a devastating situation.

"Doing so would likely precipitate a historic financial crisis," wrote Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in the Wall Street Journal.

Stocks on Wall Street closed sharply lower Monday, handing the S&P 500 index its biggest drop in four months as worries about heavily indebted Chinese real estate developers rippled across markets and investors have concerns that the U.S. Federal Reserve could signal that it's planning to pull back some of the support measures it's been giving markets and the economy.

Once a routine matter, lifting the debt ceiling has become a political weapon of choice for Republicans in Washington ever since the 2011 arrival of tea party lawmakers who refused to allow it. At the time, they argued against more spending and the standoff triggered a fiscal crisis.

Echoing that strategy, McConnell is refusing to provide Republican votes, even though some GOP senators might have a tough time voting no.

The package is expected to keep most spending at its current levels on a stopgap basis through the end of the year and include supplemental funds for the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and other natural disasters, as well as money to help defray the evacuations from Afghanistan. Tacking on legislative language to allow more borrowing would cover the nation's debt payments through 2022.

Republican Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana, whose state was battered by the hurricane and who is up for election next year, said he will likely vote for it if "the disaster relief portion is acceptable." He added,

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“Because my people desperately need the help.”

When McConnell was in control of the Senate he relied on Democratic votes to help raise the debt ceiling during the past administration and the Democrats said they expect the same from him now. It typically takes 60 votes to advance bills in what’s now a divided 50-50 Senate, meaning at least 10 GOP senators would be needed.

By withholding votes, Schumer said, “what Republicans are doing is nothing short of a dine-and-dash of historic proportions.”

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Democrats are negotiating among themselves over Biden’s big \$3.5 trillion package as the price tag likely slips to win over skeptical centrist lawmakers who view it as too much.

The size and scope of Biden’s “Build Back Better” initiative cannot be overstated. It touches almost all aspects of Americans’ lives.

Biden’s plan aims to not just rebuild the country after the COVID-19 crisis and economic fallout, but begin to change longstanding federal spending patterns in ways that provide more services to more Americans, and attempt to level the growing income inequality that permeates the economy.

The proposal would impose tax hikes on corporations and wealthy Americans earning beyond \$400,000 a year and plow that money back into federal programs for young and old. It would increase and expand government health, education and family support programs for households, children and seniors, and boost environmental infrastructure programs to fight climate change.

With Republicans opposed in lockstep to Biden’s sweeping vision, Democrats have no votes to spare in the Senate, and just a few votes’ margin in the House.

Pelosi has promised a Sept. 27 vote on a companion bill, a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill of public works projects that enjoys widespread support from both parties in the Senate, though House Republicans mostly oppose it.

Even though that bipartisan bill should be an easy legislative lift, it too faces a political obstacle course. Dozens of lawmakers in the Congressional Progressive Caucus are expected to vote against it if it comes ahead of the broader Biden package. But centrists won’t vote for the broader package unless they are assured the bipartisan bill will also be included.

Q&A: America’s new COVID-19 rules for international travel

By ZEKE MILLER and DAVID KOENIG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is rolling out new international travel policies affecting Americans and noncitizens alike who want to fly into the U.S. The goal is to restore more normal air travel after 18 months of disruption caused by COVID-19.

The across-the-board rules, which will take effect in November, will replace a hodgepodge of confusing restrictions. Some details of the plan announced Monday are being worked out, but here are some questions and answers about what to expect:

WHAT IS THE NEW POLICY IN A NUTSHELL?

All adult foreign nationals traveling to the U.S. will be required to be fully vaccinated before boarding their flight. This is in addition to the current requirement that travelers show proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of departure to the U.S.

Once the vaccination requirement is put in place, the White House will ease all the country-specific restrictions on international travel that have prevented noncitizens who have been in the United Kingdom, European Union, China, India, Iran, Republic of Ireland, Brazil or South Africa in the prior 14 days from entering the U.S.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT AMERICANS?

Fully vaccinated Americans will only need to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of departure to the U.S.

WHAT ABOUT UNVACCINATED AMERICANS?

U.S. citizens and permanent residents who are not fully vaccinated will still be able to fly to the U.S., but

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they will see tougher testing and contact tracing protocols. They will need to be tested within 24 hours of boarding a flight to the U.S., as well as undergo testing upon return to the country. It remains to be seen, though, how the federal government will enforce the testing requirement upon return.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT CHILDREN?

The new U.S. policy only requires adult foreign nationals to be fully vaccinated in order to enter the U.S. The White House did not immediately say whether unvaccinated children will face different testing protocols when flying into the country.

WHICH VACCINES ARE ACCEPTABLE?

The CDC says the U.S. will accept full vaccination of travelers with any COVID-19 vaccine approved for emergency use by the World Health Organization, including those from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson used in the U.S. Other vaccines are also approved by the WHO and used widely around the world, including from AstraZeneca and China's Sinovac, with varying degrees of effectiveness against COVID-19 and its more transmissible delta variant. The WHO is reviewing Russia's Sputnik V vaccine but hasn't approved it.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT AIR FARES?

Adit Damodaran, economist for the travel-research firm Hopper, predicted that growing demand is likely to cause higher airfares on flights from Europe, although the rush to book flights could be slowed by the delta variant and high COVID-19 rates in the U.S. If fares rise, it would mark a turnaround in prices since the start of the pandemic.

WILL AIRLINES COLLECT DATA ON PASSENGERS?

The CDC will require airlines to collect information about passengers and provide it to the health agency if it needs to conduct contact tracing. The airlines had resisted a similar change last year, when it was proposed by the CDC and eventually blocked by the Trump administration.

WHAT ABOUT TRAVEL OVER LAND BORDERS?

The administration's restrictions on crossing land borders from Mexico and Canada into the U.S. are to remain unchanged for now. That means that in some cases fully vaccinated people from the two American neighbors will soon be able fly to the U.S., but may not be able to make the same journey by car.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY?

Analysts and industry officials think it will help. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce said lifting the current restrictions on international travelers will contribute to a durable recovery for the U.S. economy. Before Monday, the U.S. was on pace to lose \$175 billion in export income from international visitors this year, according to the U.S. Travel Association.

HOW HAVE THE CURRENT RESTRICTIONS AFFECTED INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL?

They have made it easier for Americans to visit Europe than the other way around. U.S. international travel in August was down 54% compared with two years ago, and arrivals by non-U.S. citizens were off 74%, according to Airlines for America.

HOW WILL THE CHANGES AFFECT BUSINESS TRAVEL?

There is pent-up demand among business travelers from Europe. Foreign executives who have been vaccinated will no longer have to prove that their travel to the United States serves the U.S. "national interest" — a time-consuming process.

Packers dominate 2nd half, bounce back to beat Lions 35-17

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — While celebrating one of his four touchdowns, Aaron Jones lost a necklace he wears with a little black football containing some of the ashes of his late father.

That was just about the only thing that went wrong for Jones and the Green Bay Packers against the Detroit Lions.

Jones caught three of Aaron Rodgers' four TD passes and rushed for a fourth score, and the Packers had a welcome return to normal, dominating the second half in a 35-17 win over the division rival Lions

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on Monday night.

The Packers, who got thumped 38-3 by the New Orleans Saints in Week 1, looked more like the team that went 13-3 in each of coach Matt LaFleur's first two seasons. Green Bay (1-1) won its ninth straight home opener.

"I think that there's, even more now than when I started playing, there's so many overreactions that happen on a week-to-week basis," Rodgers said. "So it's nice to come out and have a good performance and get the trolls off our back for at least a week."

Jones became the first Packers running back to catch three touchdown passes in a game since Andy Uram against the Chicago Cardinals in 1942. He had 17 carries for 67 yards and six catches for 48 yards.

As for the missing necklace, he was hopeful he'd see it again.

"I think the grounds crew is about to go out there and look right now," Jones said. "But if there was any place to lose it, that's where my dad would've wanted me to lose it, so I know he's smiling."

Jones' father, Alvin Jones Sr., died on April 8.

"My dad's always taught me as a man, it's how you respond to adversity, how you respond is what makes a man really," Jones said. "I think we came out and did a great job of responding. We played well. We played at a high level."

Rodgers went 22 of 27 for 255 yards and surpassed John Elway for 10th all-time in passing yards with 51,633. Rodgers has followed up each of the Packers' last five regular-season losses by throwing four touchdown passes and no interceptions in his next game.

Detroit's Jared Goff completed 13 of his first 14 passes but struggled the rest of the way as the Lions (0-2) blew a 17-14 halftime lead. Goff finished 26 of 36 for 246 yards. He connected on touchdown passes to Quintez Cephus and T.J. Hockenson but also threw an interception and lost a fumble.

Green Bay scored touchdowns on its first three second-half possessions to seize control.

"We just kind of kept shooting ourselves in the foot there," Goff said.

The Packers faced third-and-12 on their opening series of the second half when Rodgers threw a 50-yard completion to Davante Adams, who ended the night with eight catches for 121 yards.

Lions rookie cornerback Ifeatu Melifonwu injured his thigh on the play, weakening a secondary that already lost cornerback Jeff Okudah to a ruptured Achilles tendon in Detroit's season-opening loss to the San Francisco 49ers.

Green Bay dominated the rest of the way.

"Sometimes, it just takes one play," Rodgers said. "I think the throw over the top to Davante kind of got us going."

Rodgers capped that drive with a 22-yard touchdown pass to Robert Tonyan. Detroit's next series ended when Goff threw an incompleteness on fourth-and-1 from the Green Bay 25.

Rodgers threw an 11-yard touchdown pass to Jones to extend the Packers' lead to 28-17.

Green Bay's Krys Barnes recovered Goff's fumble at the Detroit 23 on the Lions' next snap. Jones scored on a 1-yard run and that was that.

INJURIES

Lions: WR Tyrell Williams missed the game with a concussion.

Packers: TE Josiah Deguara was out with a concussion.

ST. BROWN VS. ST. BROWN

The Packers activated wide receiver Equanimeous St. Brown from the practice squad, giving him the chance to play against his younger brother. The Lions selected receiver Amon-Ra St. Brown out of Southern California in the fourth round of this year's draft. Amon-Ra had the better stat line with three receptions for 18 yards, while Equanimeous had one catch for no gain.

IN MEMORIAM

The Packers wore a helmet decal to honor Ted Thompson, who worked as the team's general manager from 2005-17 and died Jan. 20 at the age of 68. The Packers also honored Thompson during a halftime ceremony.

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UP NEXT

Lions: Host Baltimore (1-1) on Sunday. The Ravens are coming off a Sunday night victory over the Kansas City Chiefs.

Packers: At San Francisco (2-0) on Sunday night. This will be the fourth time in the last three seasons the Packers have played at San Francisco. They won 34-17 last season. Two years ago, the Packers lost 37-8 to the 49ers in the regular season and 37-20 in the NFC championship game.

China keeps virus at bay at high cost ahead of Olympics

By JOE McDONALD and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The Beizhong International Travel Agency in the eastern city of Tianjin has had only one customer since coronavirus outbreaks that began in July prompted Chinese leaders to renew city lockdowns and travel controls.

Most of China is virus-free, but the abrupt, severe response to outbreaks has left would-be tourists jittery about traveling to places they might be barred from leaving. That has hit consumer spending, hindering efforts to keep the economic recovery on track.

China's "zero tolerance" strategy of trying to isolate every case and stop transmission has helped keep the country where the virus first was detected in late 2019 largely free of disease. But the public and businesses are paying a steep price.

Foreign athletes are due to compete in the Winter Olympics that start Feb. 4 in Beijing and the nearby city of Zhangjiakou, but the government has yet to say whether restrictions that prevent most foreigners from entering China will be relaxed to allow spectators in.

"Two years ago, this was our busiest season," said the Beizhong agency manager, Wang Hui.

"Now, customers tend to postpone their plans because of the outbreaks," Wang said. "This year is worse than last year."

China is closed to most foreign visitors and discourages its own public from traveling.

The government has yet to give final details on anti-coronavirus measures for the Winter Games. Some 2,900 athletes are due to compete, plus 800 more in the Paralympic Winter Games on March 4-13.

China has reported 4,636 deaths — and none since February — out of 95,577 cases since early 2020. Its total is smaller than one-day new infection figures in the United States, India and some other countries.

Since July, outbreaks blamed on travelers bringing the more contagious delta variant into the country have occurred in Nanjing west of Shanghai, Putian and Xiamen in the southeast and Yunnan province in the southwest. But cases number in the dozens, not the tens of thousands of new daily infections seen in other countries.

"The zero-tolerance policy has been highly effective in putting COVID under control, but the short-term cost is also extremely high," economists Larry Hu and Xinyu Ji of Macquarie said in a report.

China was the only major economy to grow last year after the ruling party declared the virus under control in March and allowed factories, shops and offices to reopen. Output in the United States, Europe and Japan contracted.

Economic output rose 1.3% over the previous quarter in the three months ending in June, better than 0.6% in January-March but among the past decade's weakest quarters.

The International Monetary Fund and private sector forecasters have lowered economic growth forecasts but still expect output to rise by as much as 8.5% this year, up sharply from last year's multi-decade low of 2.3% and well above the ruling party target of "more than 6%."

Exports in August rose 25.6% over a year earlier, but retail spending growth slowed to 2.5% from July's 8.5%.

"People are clearly worried that they could get trapped in tourist destinations if Covid cases emerge," economist Iris Pang of ING said in a report.

Authorities on Sept. 12 suspended most access to Putian, a city of 2.9 million people in Fujian province,

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after an outbreak that an official newspaper, Global Times, said might have begun with a resident who returned from Singapore. Cinemas, bars and other public facilities were closed. Supermarkets and restaurants were ordered to limit customer numbers.

Xiamen, a coastal business center in Fujian with 3.5 million people, closed off access to some neighborhoods after cases were detected there. Schools shut down.

An entrepreneur who sells shoes made in Putian online said the outbreak and anti-disease controls have shut down that local industry.

"Customers are urging us to deliver goods, but factories have stopped working," said the merchant, Su Ye. She said September and October usually are busy, but disruptions in production and delivery "will cause orders to drop a lot."

"Many orders were canceled because of our slow delivery," Su said.

The Global Times said a man who returned from Singapore on Aug. 4 was suspected of spreading the virus to Putian.

The traveler, identified by the surname Lin, underwent a 14-day quarantine and nine nucleic acid and serologic tests, all of which were negative, the Global Times said. But he tested positive on Sept. 10.

Despite that, the screening and quarantine process is working properly, according to Yu Changping, a physician at the Department of Respiratory Medicine of People's Hospital of Wuhan University.

"There is no special change in the situation," said Yu. "There is no need to adopt measures different from the past."

Some experts suggest China might need to adopt more flexible tactics because "zero tolerance" is too disruptive and new variants might be impossible to eradicate.

"The bottom line is, I don't think they can keep the virus out, and they need to live with the reality," said Nicholas Thomas, a professor of health security at the City University of Hong Kong.

Chinese leaders have tried to squelch public discussion of such a possible change.

A prominent disease expert, Zhang Wenzhong, faced official criticism after he said on his widely read social media account the world needs to "learn to coexist with the virus."

A former health minister rejected Zhang's suggestion in a commentary published by the Communist Party newspaper People's Daily. The university that awarded Zhang's PhD in 2000 announced an investigation of accusations of plagiarism but concluded his work "met all the criteria" for the degree.

For now, tourist arrivals from abroad are shut down. That has devastated high-end hotels and resorts.

Some engineers and other employees who were abroad when the government shut down travel in early 2020 have been allowed to return, but lawyers and others say they were turned away.

Authorities also are trying to keep Chinese from leaving the country. The government refuses to issue or renew passports without an important need to travel. Businesspeople have been told that doesn't include visiting customers or business partners.

The government announced last week it had vaccinated just over 1 billion people, or 71% of its population.

But while regulators have given emergency approval to nine coronavirus vaccines, most are made by local companies Sinopharm or Sinovac. China has yet to approve BioNTech, Moderna or other vaccines used abroad.

"As far as the vaccine strategy is, it's been very successful, the trouble is the Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines are not very efficacious against delta," Thomas said.

As is true elsewhere, online grocers and other e-commerce have reaped a windfall from shutdowns and lockdowns.

But a wave of bankruptcies has hit small shops, restaurants and other businesses.

China's populous domestic market means travel restrictions "do not impact it as much as countries such as Thailand that depend heavily on tourism," said Trinh Nguyen of Natixis, a French financial firm, in an email.

In another blow to tourism, the government told students and teachers to avoid travel during September's Mid-Autumn Festival and the Oct. 1-7 National Day break.

"There used to be a silver September and a golden October for travel, but now we have nothing," said Wang, the travel agency manager in Tianjin.

People suffering from cancer, heart disease and other chronic, potentially life-threatening conditions, meanwhile have struggled to get treatment as hospitals shut down other departments to focus on treating coronavirus patients or refused to accept cases deemed non-emergency.

Options shrink for Haitian migrants straddling Texas border

By JUAN A. LOZANO, ERIC GAY, ELLIOT SPAGAT and MARIA VERZA Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — The options remaining for thousands of Haitian migrants straddling the Mexico-Texas border are narrowing as the United States government ramps up to an expected six expulsion flights to Haiti Tuesday and Mexico began busing some away from the border.

More than 6,000 Haitians and other migrants had been removed from an encampment at Del Rio, Texas, U.S. officials said Monday as they defended a strong response that included immediately expelling migrants to their impoverished Caribbean country and faced criticism for using horse patrols to stop them from entering the town.

That was enough for some Haitian migrants to return to Mexico, while others struggled to decide on which side of the border to take their chances.

Marie Pierre, 43, stood on the Mexican side of the river as night fell with hundreds of other migrants unsure what to do. She said Border Patrol agents had separated her from her 19-year-old son in Texas and she didn't know if he had been deported or not. She waited for a chance to charge her phone, hoping to get news from her sister and cousin in Florida.

"They told me he was an adult and couldn't be with us," she said of the moment they were separated.

Earlier Monday, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas conceded it was a "challenging and heartbreaking situation," but he issued a stark warning: "If you come to the United States illegally, you will be returned. Your journey will not succeed, and you will be endangering your life and your family's life."

Officials from Mexico's National Human Rights Commission walked among the migrants signing up those interested in applying for asylum in Mexico. So far this year, more than 19,000 Haitians have opted to do so, including some now at the border.

At the same time, Mexican authorities were detaining some migrants. The first busloads pulled out Sunday and more empty buses arrived Monday.

Some humanitarian workers said Monday they had seen Mexican National Guard troops help immigration agents detain a group of 15 to 20 migrants in Acuña.

Mexico's immigration agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But a federal official told The Associated Press on Sunday that the plan was to take the migrants to Monterrey, in northern Mexico, and Tapachula, in the south, with flights to Haiti from those cities to begin in coming days.

Authorities stopped some bus lines from operating in the state of Coahuila in an effort to force them not to carry migrants, said Luis Ángel Urraza, president of the local chamber of commerce.

He said the U.S. government's decision to close the bridge connecting Ciudad Acuña and Del Rio was wearing on the city's merchants who were counting the days until the migrant population dropped enough to reopen it.

Mayorkas and U.S. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz said they would look into agents on horseback using what appeared to be whips and their horses to push back migrants at the river between Ciudad Acuña and Del Rio, a city of about 35,000 people roughly 145 miles (230 kilometers) west of San Antonio where thousands of migrants remain camped around a bridge.

Later Monday, the Department of Homeland Security issued a statement calling the footage "extremely troubling" and promising a full investigation that would "define the appropriate disciplinary actions to be taken."

Mayorkas said 600 Homeland Security employees, including from the Coast Guard, have been brought to Del Rio. He said he has asked the Defense Department for help in what may be one of the swiftest, large-scale expulsions of migrants and refugees from the United States in decades.

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He also said the U.S. would increase the pace and capacity of flights to Haiti and other countries in the hemisphere. The number of migrants at the bridge peaked at 14,872 on Saturday, said Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, a labor union that represents agents.

The rapid expulsions were made possible by a pandemic-related authority adopted by former President Donald Trump in March 2020 that allows for migrants to be immediately removed from the country without an opportunity to seek asylum. President Joe Biden exempted unaccompanied children from the order but let the rest stand.

Any Haitians not expelled are subject to immigration laws, which include rights to seek asylum and other forms of humanitarian protection. Families are quickly released in the U.S. because the government cannot generally hold children.

Haitians have been migrating to the U.S. in large numbers from South America for several years, many having left their Caribbean nation after a devastating 2010 earthquake. After jobs dried up from the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, many made the dangerous trek by foot, bus and car to the U.S. border, including through the infamous Darien Gap, a Panamanian jungle.

Some of the migrants at the Del Rio camp said the recent devastating earthquake in Haiti and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse make them afraid to return to a country that seems more unstable than when they left.

"It's not right," said Haitian migrant Jean Philippe Samus. "The Americans are grabbing Haitians and deporting everyone to Haiti. Haiti has no president, no jobs, there is nothing. In the earthquake a lot of people died. It's not right over there, I'm going back to Mexico."

But Mayorkas defended his recent decision to grant Haitians temporary legal status due to political and civil strife in their homeland if they were in the United States on July 29, but not to those being sent back now.

"We made an assessment based on the country conditions... that Haiti could in fact receive individuals safely," he said.

US easing virus restrictions for foreign flights to America

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a major easing of pandemic travel restrictions, the U.S. said Monday it will allow foreigners to fly into the country this fall if they have vaccination proof and a negative COVID-19 test — changes replacing a hodgepodge of rules that had kept out many non-citizens and irritated allies in Europe and beyond where virus cases are lower.

The changes, to take effect in November, will allow families and others who have been separated by the travel restrictions for 18 months to plan for long-awaited reunifications and allow foreigners with work permits to get back to their jobs in the U.S.

Airlines, business groups and travelers cheered — though they also called the step long overdue.

"It's a happy day. Big Apple, here I come!" said French entrepreneur Stephane Le Breton, 45, finally able to book a trip to New York City that had been put on hold over the virus restrictions.

The new policy will replace a patchwork of travel bans first instituted by President Donald Trump last year and tightened by President Joe Biden that restrict travel by non-citizens who have in the prior 14 days been in the United Kingdom, European Union, China, India, Iran, Republic of Ireland, Brazil or South Africa.

White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients announced the new policies, which still will require all foreign travelers flying to the U.S. to demonstrate proof of vaccination before boarding, as well as proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within three days of flight. Biden will also tighten testing rules for unvaccinated American citizens, who will need to be tested within a day before returning to the U.S., as well as after they arrive home.

The tougher rules for unvaccinated Americans come as the White House has moved to impose sweeping vaccination-or-testing requirements affecting as many as 100 million people in an effort to encourage holdouts to get shots.

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Fully vaccinated passengers will not be required to quarantine, Zients said.

There will be no immediate change to U.S. land border policies, which restrict much cross-border travel with Mexico and Canada.

The travel bans had become the source of growing geopolitical frustration, particularly among allies in the UK and EU. The easing comes ahead of Biden meeting with some European leaders on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly this week.

"This is based on individuals rather than a country-based approach, so it's a stronger system," Zients said.

The EU and UK had previously moved to allow vaccinated U.S. travelers in without quarantines, in an effort to boost business and tourism. But the EU recommended last month that some travel restrictions be reimposed on U.S. travelers to the bloc because of the rampant spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus in America.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will require airlines to collect contact information from international travelers to facilitate tracing, Zients said.

The U.S. will accept full vaccination of travelers with any of the vaccines approved for emergency use by the World Health Organization, the CDC said. The WHO is reviewing Russia's Sputnik V vaccine but hasn't yet approved it.

Monday's announcement was met with applause by the air travel industry, which has lost significant revenue from declines in international travel.

Delta Air Lines spokesman Morgan Durrant said, "Science tells us that vaccinations coupled with testing is the safest way to re-open travel, and we are optimistic this important decision will allow for the continued economic recovery both in the U.S. and abroad and the reunification of families who have been separated for more than 18 months."

Worldwide, air travel is still down more than half from pre-pandemic levels, and the decline is much sharper for cross-border flying. By July, domestic travel had recovered to 84% of 2019 numbers, but international travel was just 26% of the same month two years ago, according to figures this month from the airline industry's main global trade group, the International Air Transport Association.

The numbers are similar but not quite as stark for the U.S., where international travel in August was 46% of that in August 2019, according to Airlines for America. Arrivals by non-U.S. citizens were only 36% of the 2019 level.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted that he was "delighted" by the news. He said: "It's a fantastic boost for business and trade, and great that family and friends on both sides of the pond can be reunited once again."

Airlines hailed the U.S. decision as a lifeline for the struggling industry. Tim Alderslade, chief executive of industry body Airlines U.K. said it was "a major breakthrough."

Shai Weiss, chief executive of Virgin Atlantic, said it was "a major milestone. ... The U.K. will now be able to strengthen ties with our most important economic partner, the U.S., boosting trade and tourism as well as reuniting friends, families and business colleagues."

"The travel bans were really behind the times," said Maka Hutson, counsel specializing in immigration issues at the law firm Akin Gump. She said they were very frustrating to European executives who'd been vaccinated but still couldn't fly to the United States to conduct business.

The changes also drew praise from business groups, who have been contending with labor shortages as the economy bounces back with unexpected strength from last year's coronavirus recession. U.S. employers have been posting job openings — a record 10.9 million in July — faster than applicants can fill them.

Myron Brilliant, head of international affairs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement, "Allowing vaccinated foreign nationals to travel freely to the United States will help foster a robust and durable recovery for the American economy."

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US officials defend expulsion of Haitians from Texas town

By JUAN A. LOZANO, ERIC GAY, ELLIOT SPAGAT and MARIA VERZA Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — More than 6,000 Haitians and other migrants have been removed from an encampment at a Texas border town, U.S. officials said Monday as they defended a strong response that included immediately expelling migrants to their impoverished Caribbean country and faced criticism for using horse patrols to stop them from entering the town.

Calling it a “challenging and heartbreaking situation,” Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas issued a stark warning: “If you come to the United States illegally, you will be returned. Your journey will not succeed, and you will be endangering your life and your family’s life.”

Isaac Isner, 30, and his wife Mirdege, took wet clothing off their 3-year-old daughter Isadora after crossing the Rio Grande to Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, Monday afternoon. They had been in Del Rio, Texas, for seven days but decided to return to Mexico after a friend showed cellphone video of the U.S. expelling migrants.

“They were putting people on a bus and sent them to Haiti just like that without signing anything,” Isner said.

His family has an appointment this month with Mexico’s asylum agency in the southern city of Tapachula, and they think they could be safe in Mexico.

Most migrants, however, still haven’t made up their minds.

“We don’t know what we’re going to do,” said a second Haitian man, who declined to give his name but said he crossed into Mexico Monday for food, leaving his wife and child in Del Rio. “The U.S. is deporting and now Mexico won’t just sit back and do nothing. We don’t know where to go.”

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico’s foreign minister, said about 15% of the Haitian migrants in Mexico have accepted refuge there. So far this year, about 19,000 Haitian migrants have requested asylum in Mexico.

“Mexico does not have any problem with them being in our country as long as they respect Mexico’s laws,” he said.

Mexico was busing Haitian migrants from Ciudad Acuña Sunday evening, according to Luis Angel Urraza, president of the local chamber of commerce. Mexico’s immigration agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But a federal official told The Associated Press on Sunday that the plan was to take the migrants to Monterrey, in northern Mexico, and Tapachula, in the south, with flights to Haiti from those cities to begin in coming days.

Mayorkas and U.S. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz said they would look into agents on horseback using what appeared to be whips and their horses to push back migrants at the river between Ciudad Acuña and Del Rio, a city of about 35,000 people roughly 145 miles (230 kilometers) west of San Antonio where thousands of migrants remain camped around a bridge.

Both officials said during an afternoon news conference they saw nothing apparently wrong based on the widely seen photos and video. Mayorkas said agents use long reins, not whips, to control their horses. Ortiz, the former chief of the Del Rio sector, said it can be confusing to distinguish between migrants and smugglers as people move back and forth near the river. The chief said he would investigate to make sure there was no “unacceptable” actions by the agents.

“I don’t think anyone seeing that footage would think it acceptable or appropriate,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said when asked about the images at a nearly simultaneous briefing. She deemed the footage “horrific” and said the matter would be investigated.

Later Monday, the Department of Homeland Security issued a statement calling the footage “extremely troubling” and promising a full investigation that would “define the appropriate disciplinary actions to be taken.”

Mayorkas said 600 Homeland Security employees, including from the Coast Guard, have been brought to Del Rio. He said he has asked the Defense Department for help in what may be one of the swiftest, large-scale expulsions of migrants and refugees from the United States in decades.

He also said the U.S. would increase the pace and capacity of flights to Haiti and other countries in the hemisphere. The number of migrants at the bridge peaked at 14,872 on Saturday, said Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, a labor union that represents agents.

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"When it was reported that were flights going back to Haiti, it got around almost immediately," he said. "There has been talk that some of them are going to go back (to Mexico) but we have not seen very much movement."

The rapid expulsions were made possible by a pandemic-related authority adopted by former President Donald Trump in March 2020 that allows for migrants to be immediately removed from the country without an opportunity to seek asylum. President Joe Biden exempted unaccompanied children from the order but let the rest stand.

Any Haitians not expelled are subject to immigration laws, which include rights to seek asylum and other forms of humanitarian protection. Families are quickly released in the U.S. because the government cannot generally hold children.

More than 320 migrants arrived in Port-au-Prince on three flights Sunday, and Haiti said six flights were expected Tuesday. The U.S. plans to begin seven expulsion flights daily on Wednesday, four to Port-au-Prince and three to Cap-Haitien, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. Flights will continue to depart from San Antonio but authorities may add El Paso, the official said.

The only obvious parallel for such an expulsion without an opportunity to seek asylum was in 1992 when the Coast Guard intercepted Haitian refugees at sea, said Yael Schacher, senior U.S. advocate at Refugees International whose doctoral studies focused on the history of U.S. asylum law.

Similarly large numbers of Mexicans have been sent home during peak years of immigration but over land and not so suddenly.

Central Americans have also crossed the border in comparable numbers without being subject to mass expulsion, although Mexico has agreed to accept them from the U.S. under pandemic-related authority in effect since March 2020. Mexico does not accept expelled Haitians or people of other nationalities outside of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

In Mexico, local authorities of border municipalities have asked for help from state and federal authorities. Claudio Bres, the mayor in Piedras Negras, about 62 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of Ciudad Acuña, told local media that the official agreement is to turn back all the buses with migrants to prevent them from reaching the border. He said that last weekend around 70 buses passed through his town.

Haitians have been migrating to the U.S. in large numbers from South America for several years, many having left their Caribbean nation after a devastating 2010 earthquake. After jobs dried up from the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, many made the dangerous trek by foot, bus and car to the U.S. border, including through the infamous Darien Gap, a Panamanian jungle.

Some of the migrants at the Del Rio camp said the recent devastating earthquake in Haiti and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse make them afraid to return to a country that seems more unstable than when they left.

"In Haiti, there is no security," said Fabricio Jean, a 38-year-old Haitian who arrived in Texas with his wife and two daughters. "The country is in a political crisis."

But Mayorkas defended his recent decision to grant Haitians temporary legal status due to political and civil strife in their homeland if they were in the United States on July 29, but not to those being sent back now.

"We made an assessment based on the country conditions ... that Haiti could in fact receive individuals safely," he said.

Six flights were scheduled to Haiti on Tuesday — three to Port-au-Prince and three to the northern city of Cap-Haitien, said Jean Négot Bonheur Delva, Haiti's migration director.

Some migrants said they were planning to leave Haiti again as soon as possible. Valeria Ternission, 29, said she and her husband want to travel with their 4-year-old son back to Chile, where she worked as a bakery's cashier.

"I am truly worried, especially for the child," she said. "I can't do anything here."

Asian shares extend losses as China worries darken sentiment

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares declined Tuesday, with Tokyo down 2% as worries about heavily indebted Chinese real estate developers weighed on sentiment.

On Monday, U.S. stocks logged their biggest drop since May, with the tech-heavy Nasdaq composite sinking 2.2%.

Markets were closed Tuesday in Taiwan, Shanghai and South Korea.

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng dropped 0.5% to 23,971.73 as selling of property developers slowed.

The Nikkei 225 dropped 601.48 points to 29,898.57. Australia's S&P ASX 200 slipped 0.1% to 7,244.80.

Analysts said fears the damage from a property bust in China could ripple worldwide were drawing on memories of past financial crises such as the bursting of the Japanese "bubble" economy or the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis.

In Japan, that catastrophe is called the Lehman crisis for the 2008 collapse of the Lehman Brothers which aggravated the situation.

"The whisper is that this could be China's 'Lehman moment.' Even with Chinese markets closed until Wednesday, we are seeing knock-on sell-offs around the world," said RaboResearch.

The S&P 500 tumbled 1.7% on Monday to 4,357.73, its biggest drop since May. The S&P 500 was coming off two weeks of losses and is on track for its first monthly decline since January.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.8% to 33,970.47. The Nasdaq shed 2.2%, to 14,713.90. The Russell 2000 dropped 2.4% to 2,182.20.

Technology companies led the broader market lower. Apple fell 2.1% and chipmaker Nvidia dropped 3.6%.

Airlines were among the few bright spots. American Airlines rose 3% to lead all the gainers in the S&P 500. Delta Air Lines rose 1.7% and United Airlines added 1.6%.

"What's happened here is that the list of risks has finally become too big to ignore," said Michael Arone, chief investment strategist at State Street Global Advisors. "There's just a lot of uncertainty at a seasonally challenging time for markets."

The worries over Chinese property developers and debt have recently centered on Evergrande, one of China's biggest real estate developers, which looks like it may be unable to repay its debts.

Those property companies have been big drivers of the Chinese economy, which is the world's second-largest.

If they fail to make good on their debts, the heavy losses taken by investors who hold their bonds would raise worries about their financial strength. Those bondholders could also be forced to sell other, unrelated investments to raise cash, which could hurt prices in seemingly unrelated markets.

It's a product of how tightly connected global markets have become, and it's a concept the financial world calls "contagion."

Many analysts say they expect China's government to prevent such a scenario, and that this does not look like a Lehman-type moment. Nevertheless, any hint of uncertainty may be enough to upset Wall Street after the S&P 500 has glided higher in almost uninterrupted fashion since October, leaving stocks looking expensive and with less room for error.

On top of those worries, investors are watching to see if the Federal Reserve might ease off the accelerator on its support for the economy. And heavy government spending to counter the impact of the pandemic has raised the likelihood that Congress may opt for a destructive game of chicken before allowing the U.S. Treasury to borrow more money.

The Fed is due to deliver its latest economic and interest rate policy update on Wednesday.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude rose 61 cents to \$70.90 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, added 57 cents to \$74.49 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar added 10 cents to 109.49 Japanese yen. The euro cost \$1.1740, up from \$1.1726.

Pfizer says COVID-19 vaccine works in kids ages 5 to 11

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Pfizer said Monday its COVID-19 vaccine works for children ages 5 to 11 and that it will seek U.S. authorization for this age group soon — a key step toward beginning vaccinations for youngsters.

The vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech already is available for anyone 12 and older. But with kids now back in school and the extra-contagious delta variant causing a huge jump in pediatric infections, many parents are anxiously awaiting vaccinations for their younger children.

For elementary school-aged kids, Pfizer tested a much lower dose — a third of the amount that's in each shot given now. Yet after their second dose, children ages 5 to 11 developed coronavirus-fighting antibody levels just as strong as teenagers and young adults getting the regular-strength shots, Dr. Bill Gruber, a Pfizer senior vice president, told The Associated Press.

The kid dosage also proved safe, with similar or fewer temporary side effects — such as sore arms, fever or achiness — that teens experience, he said.

"I think we really hit the sweet spot," said Gruber, who's also a pediatrician.

Gruber said the companies aim to apply to the Food and Drug Administration by the end of the month for emergency use in this age group, followed shortly afterward with applications to European and British regulators.

Earlier this month, FDA chief Dr. Peter Marks told the AP that once Pfizer turns over its study results, his agency would evaluate the data "hopefully in a matter of weeks" to decide if the shots are safe and effective enough for younger kids.

An outside expert said scientists want to see more details but called the report encouraging.

"These topline results are very good news," said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former FDA vaccine chief. The level of immune response Pfizer reported "appears likely to be protective."

Many Western countries so far have vaccinated no younger than age 12, awaiting evidence of what's the right dose and that it works safely. Cuba last week began immunizing children as young as 2 with its homegrown vaccines and Chinese regulators have cleared two of its brands down to age 3.

While kids are at lower risk of severe illness or death than older people, more than 5 million children in the U.S. have tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began and at least 460 have died, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Cases in children have risen as the delta variant swept through the country.

"I feel a great sense of urgency" in making the vaccine available to children under 12, Gruber said. "There's pent-up demand for parents to be able to have their children returned to a normal life."

In New Jersey, 10-year-old Maya Huber asked why she couldn't get vaccinated like her parents and both teen brothers have. Her mother, Dr. Nisha Gandhi, a critical care physician at Englewood Hospital, enrolled Maya in the Pfizer study at Rutgers University. But the family hasn't eased up on their masking and other virus precautions until they learn if Maya received the real vaccine or a dummy shot.

Once she knows she's protected, Maya's first goal: "a huge sleepover with all my friends."

Maya said it was exciting to be part of the study even though she was "super scared" about getting jabbed. But "after you get it, at least you feel like happy that you did it and relieved that it didn't hurt," she told the AP.

Pfizer said it studied the lower dose in 2,268 kindergartners and elementary school-aged kids. The FDA required what is called an immune "bridging" study: evidence that the younger children developed antibody levels already proven to be protective in teens and adults. That's what Pfizer reported Monday in a press release, not a scientific publication. The study still is ongoing, and there haven't yet been enough COVID-19 cases to compare rates between the vaccinated and those given a placebo — something that might offer additional evidence.

The study isn't large enough to detect any extremely rare side effects, such as the heart inflammation that sometimes occurs after the second dose, mostly in young men. The FDA's Marks said the pediatric studies should be large enough to rule out any higher risk to young children. Pfizer's Gruber said once the

vaccine is authorized for younger children, they'll be carefully monitored for rare risks just like everyone else.

A second U.S. vaccine maker, Moderna, also is studying its shots in elementary school-aged children. Pfizer and Moderna are studying even younger tots as well, down to 6-month-olds. Results are expected later in the year.

George Holliday, who filmed Rodney King video, dies of COVID

LOS ANGELES (AP) — George Holliday, the Los Angeles plumber who shot grainy video of four white police officers beating Black motorist Rodney King in 1991, has died of complications of COVID-19, a friend said Monday.

Holliday, 61, died Sunday at a Los Angeles hospital, where he had been for more than a month, according to Robert Wollenweber, a longtime friend and former coworker. Holliday was not vaccinated and was on a ventilator in recent days after contracting pneumonia, Wollenweber said.

Holliday was awakened by a traffic stop outside his San Fernando Valley home on the night of March 3, 1991. He went outside to film it with his new video camera, catching the Los Angeles officers punching, kicking and using a stun gun on King, even after he was on the ground.

A year later, Holliday's out-of-focus footage — about 9 minutes worth — was a key piece of evidence at the four officers' criminal trial for assault and excessive use of force.

When a jury acquitted all the officers on April 29, 1992, the city erupted in widespread violence. Hundreds of businesses were looted and destroyed over several days. Entire blocks of homes and stores went up in flames. More than 60 people died by shootings or other violence, mostly in South Los Angeles.

The uprising seemed to catch the rest of the nation by surprise, but longtime residents said tensions were building in South LA for years and the King verdict was just the tipping point.

On the third day of the riots, King went on TV to plead for calm, asking in a trembling voice, "Can we all get along?"

King sued Los Angeles over the beating and was awarded \$3.8 million in 1994, but he told The Associated Press in 2012 that he lost most of that money to bad investments. King drowned in his backyard swimming pool on June 17, 2012, at age 47.

Holliday's death was first reported by TMZ.com.

Holliday put the Sony camcorder he used to record the beating up for auction last July, with bidding starting at \$225,000. It was unclear if it ever sold.

Holliday told the New York Times last year that he was still working as a plumber and never profited from the video.

He said he had purchased the camera about a month earlier and he grabbed it instinctively when he was awakened by noise outside his window.

"You know how it is when you have a new piece of technology," he told the Times. "You film anything and everything."

Holliday said in 2017 that he was working on a documentary about his role in the King case, but it was unclear if anything became of that project.

Texas doctor who defied state's new abortion ban is sued

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A San Antonio doctor who said he performed an abortion in defiance of a new Texas law all but dared supporters of the state's near-total ban on the procedure to try making an early example of him by filing a lawsuit — and by Monday, two people obliged.

Former attorneys in Arkansas and Illinois filed separate state lawsuits Monday against Dr. Alan Braid, who in a weekend Washington Post opinion column became the first Texas abortion provider to publicly reveal he violated the law that took effect on Sept. 1.

They both came in ahead of the state's largest anti-abortion group, which had said it had attorneys ready to bring lawsuits. Neither ex-lawyer who filed suit said they were anti-abortion. But both said courts

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should weigh in.

The Texas law prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect cardiac activity, which is usually around six weeks and before some women even know they are pregnant. Prosecutors cannot take criminal action against Braid, because the law explicitly forbids that. The only way the ban can be enforced is through lawsuits brought by private citizens, who don't have to be from Texas and who are entitled to claim at least \$10,000 in damages if successful.

Oscar Stilley, who described himself in court paperwork as a disgraced former lawyer who lost his law license after being convicted of tax fraud in 2010, said he is not opposed to abortion but sued to force a court review of Texas' anti-abortion law, which he called an "end-run."

"I don't want doctors out there nervous and sitting there and quaking in their boots and saying, 'I can't do this because if this thing works out, then I'm going to be bankrupt,'" Stilley, of Cedarville, Arkansas, near the Oklahoma border, told The Associated Press.

Felipe N. Gomez, of Chicago, asked a court in San Antonio in his lawsuit to declare the new law unconstitutional. In his view, the law is a form of government overreach. He said his lawsuit is a way to hold the Republicans who run Texas accountable, adding that their lax response to public health during the COVID-19 pandemic conflicts with their crack down on abortion rights.

"If Republicans are going to say nobody can tell you to get a shot they shouldn't tell women what to do with their bodies either," Gomez said. "I think they should be consistent."

Gomez said he wasn't aware he could claim up to \$10,000 in damages if he won his lawsuit. If he received money, Gomez said, he would likely donate it to an abortion rights group or to the patients of the doctor he sued.

Legal experts say Braid's admission is likely to set up another test of whether the law can stand after the Supreme Court allowed it to take effect.

"Being sued puts him in a position ... that he will be able to defend the action against him by saying the law is unconstitutional," said Carol Sanger, a law professor at Columbia University in New York City.

Braid wrote that on Sept. 6, he provided an abortion to a woman who was still in her first trimester but beyond the state's new limit.

"I fully understood that there could be legal consequences — but I wanted to make sure that Texas didn't get away with its bid to prevent this blatantly unconstitutional law from being tested," Braid wrote.

Two federal lawsuits were already making their way through the courts over the law, known as Senate Bill 8. In one, filed by abortion providers and others, the Supreme Court declined to block the law from taking effect while the case makes its way through the legal system. It's still proceeding in the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. In the second case, the Justice Department is asking a federal judge to declare the law invalid, arguing it was enacted "in open defiance of the Constitution."

The Center for Reproductive Rights, one of the plaintiffs in the first federal lawsuit, is representing Braid.

The center's senior counsel, Marc Hearron, noted in a statement that the Texas law "says that 'any person' can sue over a violation, and we are starting to see that happen, including by out-of-state claimants."

Braid could not immediately be reached for comment Monday. His clinic referred interview inquiries to the center.

Texas Right to Life, the state's largest anti-abortion group, criticized both lawsuits and Braid's opinion column.

"Neither of these lawsuits are valid attempts to save innocent human lives," the group said. "We believe Braid published his op-ed intending to attract imprudent lawsuits, but none came from the Pro-Life movement."

Texas Right to Life launched a website to receive tips about suspected violations, though it is currently redirecting to the group's homepage. A spokeswoman for the group has noted that the website is mostly symbolic because anyone can report a violation and because abortion providers appeared to be complying with the law.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's office did not immediately return a message seeking comment Monday.

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Joanna Grossman, a law professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, said that if a lawsuit against Braid reaches the Texas Supreme Court, that court could decide whether the Legislature exceeded its power by allowing anyone to sue.

"The Texas Supreme Court will have the opportunity/obligation to say whether this approach — which would not be limited to abortion — is an acceptable way for the Legislature to pursue its goals," Grossman said.

Seth Chandler, a law professor at the University of Houston, said anyone suing would "have to persuade a Texas court that they have standing" despite not having personally suffered monetary or property damages.

Braid said in the Post column that he started his obstetrics and gynecology residency at a San Antonio hospital on July 1, 1972, when abortion was "effectively illegal in Texas." That year, he saw three teens die from illegal abortions, he wrote.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its Roe v. Wade ruling, which established a nationwide right to abortion at any point before a fetus can survive outside the womb, generally around 24 weeks.

"I have daughters, granddaughters and nieces," Braid wrote. "I believe abortion is an essential part of health care. I have spent the past 50 years treating and helping patients. I can't just sit back and watch us return to 1972."

'Crisis of trust': France bristles at US submarine deal

By EDITH M. LEDERER and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — France's top diplomat declared Monday that there is a "crisis of trust" in the United States after a Pacific defense deal stung France and left Europe wondering about its longtime ally across the Atlantic.

France canceled meetings with British and Australian officials and worked to rally EU allies behind its push for more European sovereignty after being humiliated by a major Pacific defense pact orchestrated by the U.S. Speaking to reporters in New York, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said European countries won't let Washington leave them behind when shaping its foreign policy,

Le Drian reiterated complaints that his country was sandbagged by the submarine deal between the U.S., Britain and Australia, which led to France losing a contract to sell subs to Australia. Washington, London and Canberra say the deal bolsters their commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, and it has widely been seen as an effort to counter an increasingly assertive China.

But Le Drian, who is in New York to represent France at the U.N. General Assembly, said it was a "brutal, unexpected and unexplained breach" of a contract — and a relationship.

The U.S., Australia and Britain insisted that the diplomatic crisis wouldn't affect their longer-term relations with France, even after Paris recalled its ambassadors to the U.S. and Australia for the first time in history because of the deal.

"There is a crisis of trust beyond the fact that the contract is being broken, as if Europe itself didn't have any interest to defend in that region," Le Drian said.

Arguing that the U.S. is "refocusing its fundamental interests, step by step, with de facto confrontation with China," Le Drian noted pointedly that "Europeans too have their own fundamental interests."

"The Europeans' fundamental interests need to be taken into account by the United States, which is our ally. And the Europeans shall not be left behind in the strategy chosen by the United States," he said.

He said European countries need to "put together their own priorities and strategy" and discuss it with the U.S.

Le Drian was meeting with foreign ministers from the other 26 European Union nations to discuss the consequences of the submarine deal and France's vision for a more strategically independent Europe.

European foreign ministers expressed solidarity with France after discussing the matter at a meeting Monday night, EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said.

"This announcement runs counter to calls for greater cooperation with the European Union," Borrell said after the meeting in New York. He said he met earlier in the day with Australian Foreign Minister Marise

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Payne and stressed "that the current challenges to stability in the region called for more cooperation and coordination among like-minded partners" and "less confrontation."

Earlier Monday, France won support from the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, who told CNN that "one of our member states has been treated in a way that is not acceptable. ... We want to know what happened and why."

While U.S. President Joe Biden is hosting the Australian and British leaders this week, he won't see French President Emmanuel Macron, who's not traveling to the U.N.

Instead, Biden plans a call with Macron in the coming days, where he will underscore the U.S. commitment to its alliance with France and lay out specific measures the two nations can take together in the Indo-Pacific, according to a senior U.S. administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss planning for the leaders' call. The official said while the administration understands the French position on the issue, it did not "share their view in terms of how this all developed."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said a disagreement about "a single decision" would not disrupt a relationship or harm the United States' standing across Europe.

The submarine deal, known as AUKUS, will see Australia cancel a contract to buy diesel-electric French submarines and instead acquire nuclear-powered vessels from the U.S.

The French government appears to have been blindsided by the agreement, and feels its own strategic interests in the Pacific — thanks to its territories and military presence there — were ignored by major allies.

Le Drian said he canceled a meeting with his Australian counterpart in New York and has no meeting scheduled with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, while he's at the U.N., but might "pass him in the hallways."

Meanwhile France's defense minister canceled a meeting with her British counterpart this week.

Still, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson insisted that Britain's relationship with France is "ineradicable." Speaking on his way to New York, he said, "AUKUS is not in any way meant to be zero-sum, it's not meant to be exclusionary. It's not something that anybody needs to worry about and particularly not our French friends."

British officials have stressed the close military ties between the U.K. and France, including joint operations in Mali and Estonia.

In Australia, officials said France's anger wouldn't derail negotiations on an Australia-European Union free trade deal.

French Ambassador to Australia Jean-Pierre Thebault denied media reports that France was lobbying the EU not to sign the trade deal with Australia that has been under negotiation since 2018.

Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan said he would travel to Paris within weeks for trade negotiations and was "very keen to touch base with my French counterpart."

"I see no reason why those discussions won't continue," Tehan said.

The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, said Monday they're analyzing the impact of the Australian submarine agreement.

Australia argues that the submarine deal was about protecting its strategic interests amid broad concern about China's growing assertiveness.

Democrats tie government funding to debt bill, GOP digs in

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic congressional leaders backed by the White House announced Monday they would push ahead with a vote to fund the government and suspend the debt limit, all but daring Republicans who say they will vote against it despite the risk of a fiscal crisis.

Congress is rushing headlong into an all-too-familiar stalemate: The federal government faces a shutdown if funding stops at the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30. At the same time, the U.S. risks defaulting on its accumulated debt load if the borrowing limits are not waived or adjusted.

All this while Democratic lawmakers are laboring to shoulder President Joe Biden's massive \$3.5 trillion

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"build back better" agenda through the House and Senate with stark opposition from Republicans.

"The American people expect our Republican colleagues to live up to their responsibilities and make good on the debts they proudly helped incur," wrote House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer in a joint statement.

From the White House, the president backed the congressional leaders' plan to hold the votes.

"This is a bipartisan responsibility, just as it was under my predecessor," Biden said in a tweet. "Blocking it would be inexcusable."

The magnitude of the challenges ahead and the speed required to accomplish the job are like nothing Congress has faced in recent memory, situating Biden's entire domestic agenda and the political fate of his Democratic party at a crucial moment.

As Democrats charge ahead, the Republicans as the minority party in Congress hoping to regain control in the next election in 2022 plan to sit back, watching and waiting to see if Biden and his allies can succeed against the odds — or spectacularly fail.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said he's not about to help pay off past debts when Biden is about to pile on more with a "reckless" tax and spending package.

"Since Democrats decided to go it alone, they will not get Senate Republicans' help with raising the debt limit. I've explained this clearly and consistently for over two months," McConnell said Monday on the Senate floor.

The vote this week on funding to keep the government running past Sept. 30 and allow more borrowing will force the political stalemate into the open.

The Treasury Department warned that it will soon run out of cash-on-hand, and have to rely on incoming receipts to pay its obligations, now at \$28.4 trillion. That could force the Treasury to delay or miss payments, a devastating situation.

"Doing so would likely precipitate a historic financial crisis," wrote Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in the Wall Street Journal.

Stocks on Wall Street closed sharply lower Monday, handing the S&P 500 index its biggest drop in four months as worries about heavily indebted Chinese real estate developers rippled across markets and investors have concerns that the U.S. Federal Reserve could signal that it's planning to pull back some of the support measures it's been giving markets and the economy.

Once a routine matter, lifting the debt ceiling has become a political weapon of choice for Republicans in Washington ever since the 2011 arrival of tea party lawmakers who refused to allow it. At the time, they argued against more spending and the standoff triggered a fiscal crisis.

Echoing that strategy, McConnell is refusing to provide Republican votes, even though some GOP senators might have a tough time voting no.

The package is expected to keep most spending at its current levels on a stopgap basis through the end of the year and include supplemental funds for the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and other natural disasters, as well as money to help defray the evacuations from Afghanistan. Tacking on legislative language to allow more borrowing would cover the nation's debt payments through 2022.

Republican Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana, whose state was battered by the hurricane and who is up for election next year, said he will likely vote for it if "the disaster relief portion is acceptable." He added, "Because my people desperately need the help."

When McConnell was in control of the Senate he relied on Democratic votes to help raise the debt ceiling during the past administration and the Democrats said they expect the same from him now. It typically takes 60 votes to advance bills in what's now a divided 50-50 Senate, meaning at least 10 GOP senators would be needed.

By withholding votes, Schumer said, "what Republicans are doing is nothing short of a dine-and-dash of historic proportions."

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Democrats are negotiating among themselves over Biden's big \$3.5 trillion package as the price tag likely slips to win over skeptical centrist lawmakers who view it as too much.

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The size and scope of Biden's "Build Back Better" initiative cannot be overstated. It touches almost all aspects of Americans' lives.

Biden's plan aims to not just rebuild the country after the COVID-19 crisis and economic fallout, but begin to change longstanding federal spending patterns in ways that provide more services to more Americans, and attempt to level the growing income inequality that permeates the economy.

The proposal would impose tax hikes on corporations and wealthy Americans earning beyond \$400,000 a year and plow that money back into federal programs for young and old. It would increase and expand government health, education and family support programs for households, children and seniors, and boost environmental infrastructure programs to fight climate change.

With Republicans opposed in lockstep to Biden's sweeping vision, Democrats have no votes to spare in the Senate, and just a few votes' margin in the House.

Pelosi has promised a Sept. 27 vote on a companion bill, a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill of public works projects that enjoys widespread support from both parties in the Senate, though House Republicans mostly oppose it.

Even though that bipartisan bill should be an easy legislative lift, it too faces a political obstacle course. Dozens of lawmakers in the Congressional Progressive Caucus are expected to vote against it if it comes ahead of the broader Biden package. But centrists won't vote for the broader package unless they are assured the bipartisan bill will also be included.

UN climate talks: Faint progress on money, none on pollution

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Opening pocketbooks wider to fight climate change? That's looking slightly more doable. Closing more smokestacks for the same goal? Not yet sold.

World leaders made "faint signs of progress" on the financial end of fighting climate change in a special United Nations feet-to-the-fire meeting Monday, but they didn't commit to more crucial cuts in emissions of the heat-trapping gases that cause global warming. So after two high-level meetings in four days, frustrated leaders are still pointing to tomorrow — or next month — for key climate-change fighting promises.

"If countries were private entities, all leaders would be fired, as we are not on track. Things remain the same," Costa Rican President Carlos Quesada said after a closed-door session of more than two dozen world leaders at the United Nations. "It is absurd."

Leaders said they had hope for promised "good news" coming Tuesday from U.S. President Joe Biden when he speaks at the U.N. Biden is expected to talk about America helping poorer countries develop cleaner energy and cope with climate change's worsening harms. Other leaders are hoping rich nations will finally reach a long-promised \$100 billion a year package to help poorer nations switch to cleaner energy and cope with climate change's worst impacts.

The focus on climate change this week comes at the end of another summer of disasters related to extreme weather, including devastating wildfires in the western United States, deadly flooding in the U.S., China and Europe, a drumbeat of killer tropical cyclones worldwide and unprecedented heat waves everywhere.

After what was supposed to be the big push to get more commitments before huge climate negotiations in six weeks to ratchet up the 2015 Paris agreement, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said an end-of-October meeting of top economies "will be absolutely essential to guarantee the success" of climate talks. The G-20 meeting is one day before the start of U.N.-sponsored climate negotiations in Glasgow, Scotland.

"We need decisive action now to avert climate catastrophe. And for that we need solidarity," Guterres said Monday after the private leaders' meeting.

In the meeting, vulnerable countries such as the Marshall Islands and the Maldives that are "staring down the barrel" of climate change were "pleading with the developed world to step up to the plate" to provide needed money for them to cope with warming's impacts, said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who

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hosted the meeting with Guterres.

The meeting was "very frank and outspoken — not polite," said Jochen Flasbarth, Germany's deputy environment minister.

Instead of 35 to 40 leaders attending as expected, only 21 heads of state participated. The top leaders of the four largest carbon polluting countries — China, the United States, India and Russia — all sent emissaries.

Guterres said he has three goals out of the Glasgow negotiations: emission reductions of about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030; \$100 billion in annual financial help from rich to poor countries; and half of that money going to help poor nations adapt to warming's worst impacts.

The rich nations made "faint signs of progress" on the money end, Johnson said. "Let us see what the president of the United States has to say tomorrow."

American representatives at the meeting told other leaders that "good news was imminent" on the U.S. share of the \$100 billion a year, said a senior U.N. official who briefed reporters, on condition of anonymity, about what went on in the closed-door session. Special U.S. climate envoy John Kerry represented the United States at the meeting instead of Biden, according to the United Nations.

But there was "not as much progress," in getting countries to commit to deeper cuts in emissions of heat-trapping gases, the U.N. official said.

The official said several countries that have not updated emissions-cutting goals said they were in the process of doing that, offering some hope. He wouldn't say which countries those are, but both the No. 1 and No. 3 carbon polluters, China and India, fall in that category.

"Unless we collectively change course, there is a high risk of failure" at huge climate negotiations in six weeks, Guterres said in a news conference after the session. The upcoming climate negotiations in Scotland this fall are designed to be the next step after the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Guterres told CNN that Kerry's negotiation efforts "have largely failed" because of China's reluctance to cooperate with the United States. Earlier, in a weekend interview with The Associated Press, he characterized himself as "not desperate, but I'm tremendously worried."

"We all agree that 'something must be done,'" Johnson told the leaders, according to a statement released by his office. "Yet I confess, I'm increasingly frustrated that 'something' to which many of you have committed is nowhere near enough. It is the biggest economies in the world that are causing the problem, while the smallest suffer the worst consequences."

Johnson said the leaders should "rid the world of coal-fired power and internal combustion engines" and stop deforestation, while rich nations need to live up to their commitment to spend \$100 billion a year to help poorer nations deal with climate change.

"It is the developing world that is bearing the brunt of catastrophic climate change," Johnson said Monday. "We're the guys that created the problem. ... I understand the feelings of injustice in the developing world and the passionate appeals we just heard from Costa Rica, the Maldives and other countries."

If all the planned coal power plants are built, Guterres said, "the Paris targets would go up in smoke."

As the world's leaders gather, activists, other government leaders and business officials are convening in New York City for climate week, a giant cheerleading session for action that coincides with the high-level U.N. meeting. Throughout the week, the push is on the rich nations, the G-20, to do more.

Touting Europe's green recovery plans, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the opening climate week crowd that rich countries have to give financial help "to support developing countries not to fall into the trap of the fossil fuel economy but to leapfrog" into an economy based on renewable energy.

Guterres is pushing for rich nations to fulfill their longtime pledges of \$100 billion a year in climate aid to poor nations, with at least half of that going to help them cope with the impacts of global warming. Guterres and Germany's Flasbarth pointed to a study that shows the world about \$20 billion a year short. Funding to cope with climate change's impacts fell 25% last year for small island nations, "the most vulnerable of the vulnerable," he said.

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The most stringent U.N. goal seeks to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. That translates to about 0.4 degree Celsius (0.7 degrees Fahrenheit) from now because of warming that's already happened.

A UN report on Friday showed that current pledges to cut carbon emissions set the world on a path toward 2.7 degrees Celsius (4.9 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since the pre-industrial era. That shoots way past even the weaker Paris goal of limiting warming to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

"That is catastrophic," Guterres said. "The world could not live with a 2.7-degree increase in temperature."

Oklahoma sets 7 executions in 6 months; 1st since 2015

By TERRY WALLACE Associated Press

Oklahoma scheduled seven executions Monday in what would be the first lethal injections for the state since putting them on hold six years ago following a series of mishaps.

Among the men scheduled to die is Julius Darius Jones, even though the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board just last week recommended that his death sentence be commuted to life in prison. The case that drew national attention after it was featured in 2018 on the ABC television documentary series "The Last Defense."

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals scheduled six other executions — one a month from October through March, with two in January.

Oklahoma once had one of the busiest death chambers in the nation. Executions were put on hold following a botched lethal injection in 2014 that left an inmate writhing on the gurney, followed by drug mix-ups in 2015.

Its first execution since that is set for Oct. 28. The man scheduled to die — John David Marion, 60 — was initially set to be executed in October 2018, but his lethal injection was among those delayed by the concerns over the execution drugs.

Grant was convicted of killing prison employee Gay Carter in 1998 while serving sentences for four armed robberies. According to evidence submitted at trial, Grant dragged Carter into a small closet and stabbed her 16 times with a homemade knife after she removed him from a job in the kitchen of Dick Conner Correction Center in Hominy.

Jones' execution is set for Nov. 18. He was convicted in the 1999 slaying of Edmond businessman Paul Howell. Any commutation is ultimately up to Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt.

Archbishop Paul Coakley of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, who opposes the death penalty, said the state seemed to be in a rush to execute people after seven years.

"We have an opportunity to support the God-given dignity of every human person, protect society, and seek justice for victims and their families by using other available means to hold criminals accountable," Coakley said.

The other men scheduled to die are:

-Bigler Stouffer on Dec. 9 for a 1985 attack on his girlfriend's ex-husband in Oklahoma City that left the man's schoolteacher girlfriend, Linda Reaves, dead.

-Wade Greely Lay on Jan. 6 for shooting Tulsa bank teller Amber Rogers dead during a 2004 holdup.

-Donald Anthony Grant on Jan. 27 for the 2001 fatal shooting of the manager and desk clerk of a Del City motel where he had applied for a job the day before.

-Gilbert Ray Postelle on Feb. 17 for the 2005 revenge killings of four people at an Oklahoma City mobile home park, including one man he held responsible for hitting the motorcycle Postelle's father was riding, leaving him incapacitated.

-James Allen Coddington on March 10 for the 1997 hammer killing in Choctaw of co-worker Albert Hale, who had refused to lend Coddington \$50 to buy drugs.

Jones has perhaps the the highest-profile case. It has drawn the attention of reality television star Kim Kardashian West and numerous professional athletes with ties to Oklahoma, who have appealed for clemency.

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Jones, 41, has consistently maintained that he is innocent of the killing and alleged that he was framed by the actual killer, a high school friend and former co-defendant who was a key witness against him.

District Attorney David Prater of Oklahoma County, where the killing occurred, and Oklahoma's former attorney general, Mike Hunter, have said the evidence against Jones is overwhelming.

Information from trial transcripts shows that witnesses identified Jones as the shooter and placed him with Howell's stolen vehicle. Investigators found the murder weapon and a bandanna with Jones' DNA in an attic space above his bedroom, but Jones claims in his commutation filing that the gun and bandanna were planted there by the actual killer.

"Given the setting of a November 18 execution date, it is our hope the Governor adopts the Board's recommendation and commutes Julius's death sentence," Jones' attorney, Amanda Bass, said in a written statement. "Oklahoma must not allow an innocent man to be executed."

COVID has killed about as many Americans as the 1918-19 flu

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

COVID-19 has now killed about as many Americans as the 1918-19 Spanish flu pandemic did — approximately 675,000.

The U.S. population a century ago was just one-third of what it is today, meaning the flu cut a much bigger, more lethal swath through the country. But the COVID-19 crisis is by any measure a colossal tragedy in its own right, especially given the incredible advances in scientific knowledge since then and the failure to take maximum advantage of the vaccines available this time.

"Big pockets of American society — and, worse, their leaders — have thrown this away," medical historian Dr. Howard Markel of the University of Michigan said of the opportunity to vaccinate everyone eligible by now.

Like the Spanish flu, the coronavirus may never entirely disappear from our midst. Instead, scientists hope it becomes a mild seasonal bug as human immunity strengthens through vaccination and repeated infection. That could take time.

"We hope it will be like getting a cold, but there's no guarantee," said Emory University biologist Ruston Antia, who suggests an optimistic scenario in which this could happen over a few years.

For now, the pandemic still has the United States and other parts of the world firmly in its jaws.

While the delta-fueled surge in infections may have peaked, U.S. deaths are running at over 1,900 a day on average, the highest level since early March, and the country's overall toll topped 675,000 Monday, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University, though the real number is believed to be higher.

Winter may bring a new surge, with the University of Washington's influential model projecting an additional 100,000 or so Americans will die of COVID-19 by Jan. 1, which would bring the overall U.S. toll to 776,000.

The 1918-19 influenza pandemic killed 50 million victims globally at a time when the world had one-quarter the population it does now. Global deaths from COVID-19 now stand at more than 4.6 million.

The Spanish flu's U.S. death toll is a rough guess, given the incomplete records of the era and the poor scientific understanding of what caused the illness. The 675,000 figure comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The ebbing of COVID-19 could happen if the virus progressively weakens as it mutates and more and more humans' immune systems learn to attack it. Vaccination and surviving infection are the main ways the immune system improves. Breast-fed infants also gain some immunity from their mothers.

Under that optimistic scenario, schoolchildren would get mild illness that trains their immune systems. As they grow up, the children would carry the immune response memory, so that when they are old and vulnerable, the coronavirus would be no more dangerous than cold viruses.

The same goes for today's vaccinated teens: Their immune systems would get stronger through the shots and mild infections.

"We will all get infected," Antia predicted. "What's important is whether the infections are severe."

Something similar happened with the H1N1 flu virus, the culprit in the 1918-19 pandemic. It encountered

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too many people who were immune, and it also eventually weakened through mutation. H1N1 still circulates today, but immunity acquired through infection and vaccination has triumphed.

Getting an annual flu shot now protects against H1N1 and several other strains of flu. To be sure, flu kills between 12,000 and 61,000 Americans each year, but on average, it is a seasonal problem and a manageable one.

Before COVID-19, the 1918-19 flu was universally considered the worst pandemic disease in human history. Whether the current scourge ultimately proves deadlier is unclear.

In many ways, the 1918-19 flu — which was wrongly named Spanish flu because it first received widespread news coverage in Spain — was worse.

Spread by the mobility of World War I, it killed young, healthy adults in vast numbers. No vaccine existed to slow it, and there were no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections. And, of course, the world was much smaller.

Yet jet travel and mass migrations threaten to increase the toll of the current pandemic. Much of the world is unvaccinated. And the coronavirus has been full of surprises.

Markel said he is continually astounded by the magnitude of the disruption the pandemic has brought to the planet.

"I was gobsmacked by the size of the quarantines" the Chinese government undertook initially, Markel said, "and I've since been gob-gob-gob-smacked to the nth degree." The lagging pace of U.S. vaccinations is the latest source of his astonishment.

Just under 64% of the U.S. population has received at least one dose of the vaccine, with state rates ranging from a high of approximately 77% in Vermont and Massachusetts to lows around 46% to 49% in Idaho, Wyoming, West Virginia and Mississippi.

Globally, about 43% of the population has received at least one dose, according to Our World in Data, with some African countries just beginning to give their first shots.

"We know that all pandemics come to an end," said Dr. Jeremy Brown, director of emergency care research at the National Institutes of Health, who wrote a book on influenza. "They can do terrible things while they're raging."

COVID-19 could have been far less lethal in the U.S. if more people had gotten vaccinated faster, "and we still have an opportunity to turn it around," Brown said. "We often lose sight of how lucky we are to take these things for granted."

The current vaccines work extremely well in preventing severe disease and death from the variants of the virus that have emerged so far.

It will be crucial for scientists to make sure the ever-mutating virus hasn't changed enough to evade vaccines or to cause severe illness in unvaccinated children, Antia said.

If the virus changes significantly, a new vaccine using the technology behind the Pfizer and Moderna shots could be produced in 110 days, a Pfizer executive said Wednesday. The company is studying whether annual shots with the current vaccine will be required to keep immunity high.

One plus: The coronavirus mutates at a slower pace than flu viruses, making it a more stable target for vaccination, said Ann Marie Kimball, a retired University of Washington professor of epidemiology.

So, will the current pandemic unseat the 1918-19 flu pandemic as the worst in human history?

"You'd like to say no. We have a lot more infection control, a lot more ability to support people who are sick. We have modern medicine," Kimball said. "But we have a lot more people and a lot more mobility. ... The fear is eventually a new strain gets around a particular vaccine target."

To those unvaccinated individuals who are counting on infection rather than vaccination for immune protection, Kimball said, "The trouble is, you have to survive infection to acquire the immunity." It's easier, she said, to go to the drugstore and get a shot.

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Police: 2 shot at Virginia high school, suspect in custody

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (AP) — Two students were wounded in a shooting at a Virginia high school and a suspect is in custody, police said Monday.

A 17-year-old boy was shot in the side of his face at Heritage High School and a 17-year-old girl was shot in the leg, Newport News police Chief Steve Drew said at a news conference. Both were taken to the hospital and neither injury was thought to be life-threatening, he said.

A boy was taken into custody in the case, police said in a statement. The chief said authorities believe the suspect and victims knew one another but did not provide details. The firearm was found at the scene of the shooting, he said.

"The motive is certainly interesting to me," Drew said at a briefing without elaborating. The suspect wasn't apprehended at the school, he said.

George Parker, superintendent of Newport News Public Schools, said the high school does random searches for guns. Classes resumed on Sept. 8, so students were in their second full week of the school year.

"No superintendent, no teacher or principal would want to ever go through this situation," Parker said. "Just seeing the faces of our students and how afraid they were under these circumstances, and our staff, who are traumatized. ... No one would want to go through these circumstances."

Video from the scene showed tactical units arriving at the scene, parents on sidewalks talking on cell-phones as crime scene tape stretched across portions of the school parking lot.

Drew said two other people were taken to the hospital after the shooting: one whose arm was injured as people ran from school and another because of asthma. Reports of active shooters at other schools were false, police said.

Freshman Devin Gray said he was walking back to class from the cafeteria with a friend when he heard what sounded like a gunshot, The Virginian-Pilot reported.

"We all just looked in confusion and then we heard three continuous shots," Gray said. "We all ran."

An emergency exit door he tried was locked, so he ran to a classroom and hid under a desk with about 20 others and they blocked the door with bookshelves.

Senior Dominic Banks was also leaving the cafeteria and thought the first shot was a classroom door being slammed. Banks was able to run outside.

"It's very disappointing," Banks said. "Everybody in here's life just got put in danger over one student wanting to bring a gun to the school."

R Kelly prosecutors rest; defense calls on singer's allies

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prosecutors at the R. Kelly sex trafficking trial ended their case Monday after calling dozens of witnesses over the past month who detailed the government's sweeping allegations against the singer in lurid detail.

The defense began its case later in the day by starting to call Kelly loyalists to the witness stand in an effort to cast doubt on some of the accusers' accounts.

A New York City jury has heard several women and two men who were in Kelly's celebrity orbit tell the panel that he groomed them for unwanted sex and psychologically tormented them — mostly when they were teenagers — in episodes dating to the 1990s. Their accounts were backed at least in part by former Kelly employees whose own testimony suggested they were essentially paid off to look the other way or actively enable the recording artist.

Kelly's lawyers must find ways to counter testimony from accusers alleging perverse misconduct spanning three decades. Among the troubling tableaux: his entourage locking a radio station intern in a room where he sexually assaulted her while she was passed out; witnesses claiming that he gave them herpes without disclosing he had an STD; and Kelly shooting a shaming video of one alleged victim showing her smearing feces on her face as punishment for breaking arbitrary rules meant to protect his fragile ego.

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On Monday, Larry Hood, a childhood friend who worked security for Kelly as an off-duty Chicago police officer in the early 2000s, claimed he never witnessed Kelly misbehaving with underage girls. A defense attorney also asked if he saw his friend lock anyone in a room.

"No, sir," Hood responded. If he saw that, he added, "As a police officer, I would have had to take action against that."

On cross-examination, Hood admitted the police department fired him in 2007 after a guilty plea in a counterfeit money case, though he got to keep his pension.

A large chunk of the testimony focused on an infamous scandal involving his youngest and most famous alleged victim: R&B phenom Aaliyah. One of the final witnesses described seeing Kelly sexually abusing Aaliyah around 1993, when Aaliyah was only 13 or 14. The former backup performer also told the jury Kelly sexually abused her as well when she was 15 — another in a series of accusers who say he exploited them when they were underage.

Jurors had previously heard evidence about a fraud marriage scheme hatched to protect Kelly after he feared he had impregnated Aaliyah. A marriage license that was put into evidence falsely listed her age as 18; he was 27 at the time.

Aaliyah, whose full name was Aaliyah Dana Haughton, worked with Kelly, who wrote and produced her 1994 debut album, "Age Ain't Nothing But A Number." She died in a plane crash in 2001 at age 22.

The last government witness was an expert witness on abusive relationships. Dawn Hughes testified about studies showing that many abusers systematically isolate, demean, subjugate and spy on their victims as means of control — all tactics allegedly used by Kelly. Generally speaking, it isn't unusual for powerful people like Kelly to be surrounded by underlings who "knew about it and didn't do anything," Hughes said.

The 54-year-old defendant, born Robert Sylvester Kelly, has pleaded not guilty to racketeering charges accusing him of running a Chicago-based enterprise of managers, bodyguards and other employees who helped him recruit and transport his victims. That alleged travel violated the Mann Act, which makes it illegal to transport anyone across state lines "for any immoral purpose" — the same law that sent rock legend Chuck Berry to prison in 1959.

Kelly, whose song "I Believe I Can Fly" topped charts, has vehemently denied the charges, claiming that the women were groupies who wanted to take advantage of his fame and fortune until the #MeToo movement turned them against him.

Oddly, members of the press and public haven't actually seen the jailed Kelly in person since the trial began on Aug. 18. U.S. District Judge Ann Donnelly has barred people not directly involved in the case from the courtroom in what she called a coronavirus precaution.

Observers are restricted to an overflow courtroom, leaving them to try to follow the case through a video feed.

K-pop stars BTS dip into global diplomacy at UN gathering

By SALLY HO Associated Press

It was a United Nations speech that got attention like few others — a plug for vaccines, young people and the earth's well being from superstar K-pop band BTS.

Addressing the stage for a sustainability event, the seven-member musical juggernaut appeared before the renowned green-marbled backdrop in the General Assembly hall on Monday to help promote U.N. goals for 2030 including ending extreme poverty, preserving the planet and achieving gender equality.

"Every choice we make is the beginning of change, not the end," said RM, the band's leader.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in introduced the pop stars as special presidential envoys and an "exceptionally outstanding group of young men who are connecting with the youth across the world."

The gravity of the moment wasn't lost on the musicians standing before world leaders and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Nerves were evident when band member Jimin stumbled over his words while talking about young people trying to navigate the pandemic. Jimin apologized before taking a breath to recollect himself. It was a moment that prompted the "BTS ARMY" of fans to rally behind him in a show

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of support on social media. The artists took turns on stage during their seven-minute speech.

But it wasn't all about U.N. goals. The group also unveiled a new music video for its current hit single "Permission to Dance," which was filmed at U.N. Headquarters in New York. The singers crooned, "Don't need to talk the talk, just walk the walk," while dancing their way from the General Assembly hall to the garden overlooking the East River.

Since its debut in 2013, BTS has garnered global recognition for its self-produced music and activism, which also includes publicly calling out anti-Asian racism. The band topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart three times in 2020, and was nominated for prominent music awards like Billboard Music Awards and MTV Video Music Awards.

Monday's speech marked the group's second appearance at the U.N. The band took part in an event in 2018, when RM spoke about its work with UNICEF.

The AP Interview: UN chief warns China, US to avoid Cold War

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Warning of a potential new Cold War, the head of the United Nations implored China and the United States to repair their "completely dysfunctional" relationship before problems between the two large and deeply influential countries spill over even further into the rest of the planet.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke to The Associated Press this weekend ahead of this week's annual United Nations gathering of world leaders — a convening blemished by COVID, climate concerns and contentiousness across the planet.

Guterres said the world's two major economic powers should be cooperating on climate and negotiating more robustly on trade and technology even given persisting political fissures about human rights, economics, online security and sovereignty in the South China Sea.

"Unfortunately, today we only have confrontation," Guterres said Saturday in the AP interview.

"We need to re-establish a functional relationship between the two powers," he said, calling that "essential to address the problems of vaccination, the problems of climate change and many other global challenges that cannot be solved without constructive relations within the international community and mainly among the superpowers."

Two years ago, Guterres warned global leaders of the risk of the world splitting in two, with the United States and China creating rival internets, currency, trade, financial rules "and their own zero-sum geopolitical and military strategies."

He reiterated that warning in the AP interview, adding that two rival geopolitical and military strategies would pose "dangers" and divide the world. Thus, he said, the foundering relationship must be repaired — and soon.

"We need to avoid at all cost a Cold War that would be different from the past one, and probably more dangerous and more difficult to manage," Guterres said.

The so-called Cold War between the Soviet Union and its East bloc allies and the United States and its Western allies began immediately after World War II and ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was a clash of two nuclear-armed superpowers with rival ideologies — communism and authoritarianism on one side, capitalism and democracy on the other.

The U.N. chief said a new Cold War could be more perilous because the Soviet-U.S. antipathy created clear rules, and both sides were conscious of the risk of nuclear destruction. That produced back channels and forums "to guarantee that things would not get out of control," he said.

"Now, today, everything is more fluid, and even the experience that existed in the past to manage crisis is no longer there," Guterres said.

He said the U.S.-Britain deal to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines so it could operate undetected in Asia "is just one small piece of a more complex puzzle ... this completely dysfunctional relationship between China and the United States." The secretly negotiated deal angered China and France, which had signed a contract with Australia worth at least \$66 billion for a dozen French conventional

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diesel-electric submarines.

The White House gently pushed back against Guterres' critique on Monday. Press secretary Jen Psaki said the administration disagrees with Guterres' characterization of the U.S.-China relationship. "Our relationship with China is one not of conflict but of competition," Psaki said. She added: "He is not looking to pursue a new Cold War with any country in the world."

Biden, in his address before the General Assembly on Tuesday, will underscore that he doesn't believe in "the notion of a new Cold War" in which the world divided into blocs, according to a senior administration official. That official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview Biden's speech, said Biden will make the case that vigorous competition between the two nations is possible without tipping into conflict.

In the wide-ranging AP interview, Guterres also addressed three major issues that world leaders will be confronting this week: the worsening climate crisis, the still-raging pandemic and Afghanistan's uncertain future under its new Taliban rulers. They took power Aug. 15 without a fight from the government's U.S.-trained army as American forces were in the final stage of withdrawing from the country after 20 years.

What role will the United Nations have in the new Afghanistan? Guterres called it "a fantasy" to believe that U.N. involvement "will be able all of a sudden to produce an inclusive government, to guarantee that all human rights are respected, to guarantee that no terrorists will ever exist in Afghanistan, that drug trafficking will stop."

After all, he said, the United States and many other countries had thousands of soldiers in Afghanistan and spent trillions of dollars and weren't able to solve the country's problems — and, some say, made them worse.

Though the United Nations has "limited capacity and limited leverage," he said, it is playing a key role in leading efforts to provide humanitarian aid to Afghans. The U.N. is also drawing the Taliban's attention to the importance of an inclusive government that respects human rights, especially for women and girls, he said.

"There is clearly a fight for power within different groups in the Taliban leadership. The situation is not yet clarified," he said, calling it one more reason why the international community should engage with the Taliban.

While former U.S. president Donald Trump was wedded to an "America First" policy, President Joe Biden — who will make his first appearance as chief executive at the General Assembly's high-level meeting Tuesday — has reaffirmed U.S. commitment to multilateral institutions.

Guterres said Biden's commitment to global action on climate, including rejoining the 2015 Paris climate agreement that Trump withdrew from, is "probably the most important of them all."

He said there is "a completely different environment in the relationship" between the United Nations and the United States under Biden. But, Guterres said, "I did everything — and I'm proud of it — in order to make sure that we would keep a functional relationship with the United States in the past administration."

Guterres also lamented the failure of countries to work together to tackle global warming and ensure that people in every country are vaccinated.

Of the past year of COVID-19 struggles, he said: "We were not able to make any real progress in relation to effective coordination of global efforts."

And of climate: "One year ago, we were seeing a more clear movement in the right direction, and that movement has slowed down in the recent past. So we need to re-accelerate again if we are not going into disaster."

Guterres called it "totally unacceptable" that 80% of the population in his native Portugal has been vaccinated while in many African countries, less than 2% of the population is vaccinated.

"It's completely stupid from the point of view of defeating the virus, but if the virus goes on spreading like wildfire in the global south, there will be more mutations," he said. "And we know that mutations are making it more transmissible, more dangerous."

He again urged the world's 20 major economic powers in the G20, who failed to take united action against COVID-19 in early 2020, to create the conditions for a global vaccination plan. Such a plan, he said, must bring together vaccine-producing countries with international financial institutions and pharmaceutical

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companies to double production and ensure equitable distribution.

"I think this is possible," Guterres said. "It depends on political will."

The secretary-general said rich, developed countries are spending about 20% of their GDP on recovery problems, middle income countries about 6% and the least developed countries 2% of a small GDP. That, he says, has produced frustration and mistrust in parts of the developing world that have received neither vaccines nor recovery assistance.

The divide between developed countries in the north and developing countries in the south "is very dangerous for global security," Guterres said, "and it's very dangerous for the capacity to bring the world together to fight climate change."

Trump CFO's lawyer says he suspects more indictments on way

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A lawyer for Donald Trump's indicted corporate finance chief told a judge Monday he has "strong reason to believe" more indictments are coming in an ongoing New York investigation into the former president's real estate empire.

Lawyer Bryan Scarlatos made the remark during Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg's first court appearance since his July 1 arraignment on tax fraud charges. Scarlatos did not say what led him to believe more people would be charged.

In recent weeks, a pair of Trump Organization executives have testified before a grand jury in the case. Under New York law, grand jury witnesses are granted immunity and can not be charged for conduct they testify about.

The Manhattan District Attorney's office declined comment.

"Mr. Weisselberg is separate from the Trump Organization. He is the only individual here whose liberty is at stake," Scarlatos said. "What I am concerned about is that he will become collateral damage in a larger fight between the Trump Organization and the DA's office."

Scarlatos raised the issue of more possible indictments while arguing for more time to review up to 6 million pages of documents that he said prosecutors are turning over as evidence, calling it "a herculean task" and saying new indictments would create a "moving target."

Prosecutors said Weisselberg is "no stranger" to many of the documents because they include Trump Organization business records that the executive likely produced or reviewed as part of his job.

Judge Juan Manuel Merchan gave both sides until next spring to file motions and responses. He said he'd decide on motions at a July 12, 2022, hearing, the next time Weisselberg is due in court.

Merchan said he expected to set a trial date at that time and would likely schedule it for the end of August or beginning of September next year.

"The reason I mention it now is that it's on everybody's radar," Merchan said. "I don't have an exact date yet."

Weisselberg has pleaded not guilty to charges he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation, including apartment rent, car payments and school tuition.

Trump's company is also charged in the case, which prosecutors have described as a "sweeping and audacious" tax fraud scheme.

One of the Trump executives granted immunity to testify before the grand jury is the company's director of security, Matthew Calamari Jr. Prosecutors have been looking at him and his father, Trump chief operating officer Matthew Calamari Sr., in their probe of untaxed benefits.

A lawyer for the Calamaris said in a statement responding to Scarlatos' remarks that he was not aware of any plans to indict the elder Calamari.

"We remain in discussions with the district attorney's office relating to Matthew Calamari (Sr.), but continue to believe there is no basis for indicting him," lawyer Nicholas Gravante said. "If they presently intended to indict him, I would have been informed. I haven't been and, in fact, have been informed to the contrary."

Weisselberg sat quietly next to his lawyers at Monday's brief hearing and didn't speak to reporters on his

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way to and from court. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, everyone wore masks and the courtroom had clear plastic partitions between various parties.

Trump himself has not been charged with any wrongdoing. He has condemned the case, the first to arise from New York authorities' two-year investigation into the former president's business dealings, as a "political Witch Hunt."

Trump has said his company's actions were standard practice in the business and in no way a crime.

According to the indictment, from 2005 through this year, the Trump Organization and Weisselberg cheated tax authorities by conspiring to pay senior executives off the books by way of lucrative fringe benefits and other means.

Weisselberg alone was accused of defrauding the federal government, state and city out of more than \$900,000 in unpaid taxes and undeserved tax refunds.

The most serious charge against Weisselberg, grand larceny, carries five to 15 years in prison. The tax fraud charges against the company are punishable by a fine of double the amount of unpaid taxes, or \$250,000, whichever is larger.

Weisselberg's lawyers, Skarlatos and Mary Mulligan, said in a statement after Monday's hearing that the indictment is "full of unsupported and flawed factual and legal assertions."

"We look forward to challenging those assertions in court," the lawyers said.

The 74-year-old Weisselberg has intimate knowledge of the Trump Organization's financial dealings from nearly five decades at the company. The charges against him could enable prosecutors to pressure him to cooperate with the investigation and tell them what he knows, but so far there have been no signs of that.

The case is being led by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. and New York Attorney General Letitia James, both Democrats.

The Trump Organization is the entity through which the former president manages his many ventures, including his investments in office towers, hotels and golf courses, his many marketing deals and his TV pursuits.

According to the indictment, Weisselberg paid rent on his Manhattan apartment with company checks and directed the company to pay for his utility bills and parking, too.

The company also paid for private school tuition for Weisselberg's grandchildren with checks bearing Trump's signature, as well as for Mercedes cars driven by Weisselberg and his wife, and gave him cash to hand out tips around Christmas.

Such perks were listed on internal Trump company documents as being part of Weisselberg's compensation but were not included on his W-2 forms or otherwise reported, and the company did not withhold taxes on their value, prosecutors said.

Trump's company also issued checks, at Weisselberg's request, to pay for personal expenses and upgrades to his homes and an apartment used by one of his sons, such as new beds, flat-screen TVs, carpeting and furniture, prosecutors said.

4 famous giant trees unharmed by Sequoia National Park fire

THREE RIVERS, Calif. (AP) — Four famous giant sequoias were not harmed by a wildfire that reached the edge of Giant Forest in California's Sequoia National Park, authorities said.

The Four Guardsmen, a group of trees that form a natural entryway on the road to the forest, were successfully protected from the KNP Complex fire by the removal of nearby vegetation and by wrapping fire-resistant material around the bases of the trees, the firefighting management team said in a statement Sunday.

The KNP Complex began as two lightning-sparked fires that eventually merged and has scorched more than 37 square miles (96 square kilometers) in the heart of sequoia country on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada.

There was no immediate word, however, on the full extent of damage in several other sequoia groves reached by a separate blaze, the Windy Fire, in the Giant Sequoia National Monument area of Sequoia

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National Forest and the Tule River Indian Reservation.

The Windy Fire has burned through the Peyrone and Red Hill groves, as well as a portion of the Long Meadow Grove along the Trail of 100 Giants.

A portion of one giant sequoia along the trail was confirmed to have burned, said Thanh Nguyen, a spokesman for the fire command.

Fire crews with hoses and water-dropping helicopters were working to limit damage to the giant sequoias in the groves, where there are also other types of trees.

Sequoias have adapted to fire and can benefit if the flames are low intensity.

The Windy Fire has scorched more than 39 square miles (101 square kilometers) and was just 4% contained.

The KNP Complex forced the evacuation of Sequoia National Park last week, and on Sunday much of adjacent Kings Canyon National Park was closed. Visitors to areas that were still open were warned of hazardous air quality due to smoke.

A large area of Northern California was under a red flag warning for extreme fire danger Monday due to dry offshore winds that can raise fire danger.

The warning did not extend into Southern California, but forecasters said there would be weak Santa Ana winds and significant warming — elevating the risk of wildfires.

Historic drought tied to climate change is making wildfires harder to fight. It has killed millions of trees in California alone. Scientists say climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

More than 7,000 wildfires in California this year have damaged or destroyed more than 3,000 homes and other buildings and torched well over 3,000 square miles (7,770 square kilometers) of land, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Mop up: Ballot-stuffing videos taint Russian election

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — In one surveillance video, a hand appears from behind a Russian flag to stuff ballots into a box. In another, a woman is seen removing ballot papers from under her clothes and, with the help of another woman, puts them into the box amid sounds of giggling.

And then there's the mop being raised by someone to cover a camera in a room where workers were reviewing documents after the polling place in southern Russia had closed.

A clean election?

Russian authorities maintained that there were fewer violations in the three days of voting for a new parliament than the last election in 2016, but multiple videos and photos of incidents of ballot fraud have emerged since Friday.

Critics argued that without the ballot manipulation, the Kremlin-backed United Russia party couldn't have won enough votes to hold its supermajority in the parliament, which is particularly important for the next balloting in 2024. That's when President Vladimir Putin's current term expires, and he is either expected to seek reelection or choose some other strategy to stay in power. In any case, a State Duma that the Kremlin can control would be key.

Over the weekend, election monitors and opposition activists shared photos of thick, folded piles of ballots in transparent ballot boxes that obviously were put in in one piece. Videos from polling surveillance cameras at polling stations showed people trying to shove multiple ballots into boxes, to various degrees of success. There was also footage from several regions of scuffles and confrontations between poll workers and election monitors trying to expose violations.

In one video published by activists from the liberal Yabloko party, reportedly shot Friday in the Siberian region of Kemerovo, a woman subtly steps in front of a ballot box, blocking it from the view of a camera. But a hand can still be seen reaching to the box from behind a Russian flag next to it. The hand puts ballots in several times and the woman then walks away.

Russia's prominent independent election monitoring group Golos pointed to another video depicting bal-

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lot box stuffing in the Bryansk region, which borders Belarus and Ukraine. In the video, a woman takes ballots from under her clothes. Together with another woman, they put them into the box. Giggling can be heard on the video as poll workers at their desks go about their business as if nothing is happening.

In a St. Petersburg precinct, a piece of cardboard appeared in front of a surveillance camera shortly after a man opened a safe with ballots that was supposed to remain sealed, local news outlet Fontanka reported, showing the video. Police were investigating the incident.

The video from the southern region of Stavropol, showed two poll workers handling documents in polling station No. 1085 in the city of Pyatigorsk. Suddenly, a mop is raised to the lens of the surveillance camera, blocking the view of ballot manipulation.

The incident drew the attention of Russia's Central Election Commission, where its head, Ella Pamfilova, fired the polling station chief.

Still, she insisted at a teleconference with Putin on Monday that the number of complaints the commission has received this year was "minimal as ever." Election officials said more than 25,000 ballots were invalidated — including those from the polling station in Bryansk.

On Saturday, Pamfilova alleged that videos were being fabricated. She showed a video, in which police confronted a group of people in an apartment containing video equipment, ballots and a ballot box. The video showed the group had photos of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny among other papers.

Golos, which has been exposing Russian election problems since 2000, disagreed with Pamfilova's assessment of the scale of violations this year.

"Violations during the vote and the vote count, the three-day voting procedure and the way the vote count went in some regions, during which, in our opinion, results have been significantly distorted, don't allow us to talk about the veracity of the results the system of election commission is demonstrating right now," the group said in a statement Monday.

IS bomb attacks on Taliban raise specter of wider conflict

By ISABEL DEBRE and RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The extremist Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for a series of deadly roadside bombs targeting Taliban fighters in eastern Afghanistan, raising the specter of wider conflict between the country's new Taliban rulers and their long-time rivals.

A string of explosions struck Taliban vehicles in Afghanistan's provincial city of Jalalabad over the weekend, killing eight people, among them Taliban fighters. On Monday, three more explosions were heard in the city, an IS stronghold, with unconfirmed reports of additional Taliban casualties.

The Taliban are under pressure to contain IS militants, in part to make good on a promise to the international community that they will prevent the staging of terror attacks from Afghan soil. There is also a widely held expectation among conflict-weary Afghans that — despite fears and misgivings about the Taliban — the new rulers will at least restore a measure of public safety.

"We thought that since the Taliban have come, peace will come," said Feda Mohammad, a brother of an 18-year-old rickshaw driver who was killed in one of Sunday's blasts, along with a 10-year-old cousin.

"But there's no peace, no security. You can't hear anything except the news of bomb blasts killing this one or that," Mohammad said, speaking at the family home where relatives and neighbors gathered for a memorial ceremony, drinking black tea and reciting verses from the Quran.

The latest IS bombings come as the Taliban face the daunting task of governing a country shredded by four decades of war. The economy is in free fall, the health system on the verge of collapse and thousands of members of the country's educated elite have fled. International aid groups predict worsening drought, hunger and poverty.

"Our misery has reached its peak," Abdullah, a shopkeeper in Jalalabad, said Monday, a day after IS claimed responsibility for the bombings that rocked the city the two days before.

"People have no jobs, people sell their carpets to buy flour ... still there are explosions and (IS) claims the attacks," said Abdullah, who like many Afghans goes by one name.

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The weekend bomb blasts served as a reminder of the threat the militants pose. Just weeks ago, as American and foreign troops completed their withdrawal and frantic airlift from the country, IS suicide bombers targeted U.S. evacuation efforts outside Kabul international airport in one of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan in years. The blast killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members.

The events have bolstered fears of more violence, as IS militants exploit the vulnerability of an overstretched Taliban government facing massive security challenges and an economic meltdown.

"They're making a very dramatic comeback," Ibraheem Bahiss, an International Crisis Group consultant and an independent research analyst said of Islamic State. "There could be a long-term struggle between the groups."

For now, the Afghan affiliate of IS has shied away from attacks against the West and maintained a local focus, but that could potentially change, Bahiss said.

The aims of the IS affiliate in Afghanistan are different from those of the Taliban, who seized control of the country days before the U.S. troop pullout last month. While the Taliban have fought to gain ground in Afghanistan, the IS chapter seeks to incorporate swaths of the country into a broader self-styled caliphate, or Islamic empire, across the Middle East.

The franchise, largely made up of Pakistani militants pushed across the border by military operations, first embraced the IS call for a worldwide jihad against non-Muslims in the months after the group's core fighters swept through Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2014.

While they share enmity toward American forces and a harsh interpretation of Sunni Islam, the Taliban and IS are sworn enemies. Just as the Taliban battled U.S. coalition troops in the long Afghan war, the group also waged a successful offensive to drive IS militants from their enclaves in the country's north and east — at times assisted by the U.S. and U.S.-backed Afghan government.

Despite years of U.S. airstrikes and other military setbacks that shrank IS ranks, the United Nations reported this year the group "remains active and dangerous," a threat to Afghanistan and the wider region. The affiliate has mounted some of the country's most brutal attacks in recent years on schools, mosques and even a maternity hospital, mainly targeting the Shiite Muslim minority.

The affiliate has increasingly drawn hard-line Taliban defectors and foreign militants disillusioned with what they see as the Taliban's overly moderate ways. The New York-based Soufan Center said in an analysis on Monday that the franchise poses "one of the most serious risks to future splintering of the Taliban ... at a time when the group is seeking to gather strength and play a major spoiler role in Afghanistan." As a power struggle between pragmatists and ideologues in the Taliban leadership intensifies, the IS branch has ramped up recruiting efforts.

For now, Taliban forces far outnumber IS militants and experts doubt the extremist group poses an existential threat to Afghanistan's new rulers. But if the bombings continue, said Franz Marty, a Kabul-based fellow at the Swiss Institute for Global Affairs, "it could become a large problem."

"It's impacting people's perceptions. If the Taliban can't make good on their promise on securing the country, that could turn the tide of public sentiment against them in the east," he said.

Despite the residents' concerns in Jalalabad, there had been a marked improvement in public safety elsewhere, including the capital of Kabul. Before the Taliban takeover, Kabul had been plagued by a sharp increase in crime, and many residents feared to leave their homes after dark.

But in Jalalabad, the grief-stricken father of the 10-year-old boy killed in Sunday's blast described the recent attacks as an ominous portent.

"We live in poverty and we don't have security, either," said Zarif Khan. "Today, my son lost his life, tomorrow others' sons will lose their lives."

Pro-Kremlin party keeps large majority in Russian parliament

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's ruling party retained its supermajority in parliament, further cementing President Vladimir Putin's grip on power following elections that excluded most opposition politicians and were marred by multiple reports of violations.

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The vote was watched closely for signs that Putin's control might slip, however slightly, ahead of the 2024 presidential election. It's not yet clear whether he will run again, choose a successor or outline a different path — but he is expected to keep his hand on the tiller whatever he decides, and an obedient State Duma, or parliament, will be crucial to those plans.

Results released Monday from nearly 99% of the country's polling stations gave the ruling United Russia party 49.8% of the vote for the 225 seats apportioned by parties, according to the Central Election Commission. Another 225 lawmakers are chosen directly by voters, and the results showed United Russia candidates leading in 198 of those races.

Ella Pamfilova, the head of the commission, confirmed that United Russia has retained the so-called constitutional majority in the parliament, or at least two-thirds of the 450 seats required for a party to make changes to the country's constitution.

In fact, the results indicated there would be almost no opposition voices in the Duma at all, with three other parties that usually toe the Kremlin line set to take many of the remaining seats, along with the New People party, which was formed last year and is regarded by many as a Kremlin-sponsored project.

According to Pamfilova, candidates from three other parties each won a seat, so in all eight political parties will be represented in the Duma. Voter turnout stood at 51%, she said.

The Communist Party received 19% of the party-list vote, a sizable improvement from the 13% it got in the 2016 election. United Russia got about 54% five years ago, so the results indicate some falloff in support.

But concerns that the results had been manipulated mounted Monday, with many decrying that a breakdown of the online voting in Moscow was not available until late in the day. The results in the other six regions that were allowed to vote online have been detailed. In Moscow, approval of the ruling party has always been particularly low and protest voting has been widespread.

The Communists held a protest of the election results Monday evening, attracting several hundred people.

Fraud allegations aside, the Kremlin sweep was widely expected since few opposition candidates were even allowed to run this year after Russian authorities unleashed a sweeping crackdown on Kremlin critics.

Organizations linked to imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny have been declared extremist, and anyone associated with them was barred from seeking public office by a new law. Navalny is serving 2½-year prison sentence for violating parole over a previous conviction he says is politically motivated.

Other prominent opposition politicians faced prosecution or were forced to leave the country under pressure from the authorities.

U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said the moves against the opposition "severely restricted political pluralism and prevented the Russian people from exercising their civil and political rights." The chairman of the Duma's foreign relations committee, Leonid Slutsky, denounced that statement as "an element of hybrid war."

Navalny's team hoped to make dents in United Russia's dominance with their Smart Voting strategy, which promoted candidates who had the best chance at defeating those backed by the Kremlin. However, authorities undertook a massive effort to suppress the strategy in recent weeks.

The government blocked the Smart Voting website and pressured Apple and Google to remove an app featuring it from their Russian online stores — a move the tech giants took as voting began Friday. Google also denied access to two documents on its online service Google Docs that listed candidates endorsed by Smart Voting, and YouTube blocked similar videos. In addition, the founder of the Russian messaging app Telegram, Pavel Durov, on Saturday disabled a Smart Voting chatbot set up by allies of Navalny.

Durov said he wanted to respect the laws prohibiting campaigning on voting days, but critics quickly pointed out that he didn't disable similar chatbots imitating Smart Voting and didn't remove the Moscow mayor's call to vote for United Russia candidates.

Apple and Google did not respond to a request for comment. However, a person with direct knowledge of the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said that Google was forced to remove the app because it faced legal demands by regulators and threats of criminal prosecution in Russia.

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Voting was marred by numerous reports of violations, including ballot-stuffing. Some videos on social media showed people trying to stuff thick piles of ballots into boxes, with only flimsy attempts at blocking the view of surveillance cameras by raising mops or pieces of cardboard. Brawls with election monitors were also caught on camera.

Some Kremlin critics said there were as many violations as in the 2011 parliamentary election, when reports of mass fraud triggered months of anti-government and anti-Putin protests. Pamfilova maintained, however, that there were fewer violations this year than before. She said 25,830 ballots in 35 regions were invalidated.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin views the election "quite positively" in terms of its "competitiveness, transparency and fairness."

Putin himself thanked Russians "for the trust" and for "a proactive approach to life," referring to the turnout, which was higher than in 2011.

Voting was extended to three days because of the coronavirus, and in seven of Russia's 80-plus regions, voters were offered the option of casting ballots online. Officials said the measures were taken to reduce crowding at the polls during the pandemic, but election monitors said this created more room for manipulating the results.

There were particular concerns in Moscow, where nearly 2 million votes were cast online, and the results of some races changed dramatically at the last minute Monday.

"Results of unverifiable fraudulent online voting in Moscow must be invalidated completely," Navalny's top strategist Leonid Volkov wrote on Facebook.

Others questioned why the results of Moscow's online voting hadn't been broken out as they had been for other areas.

"As far as I understand, data from offline polling stations shows that candidates (endorsed by) Smart Voting won in 12 (single-constituency) districts out of 15, and in St. Petersburg — in seven out of eight," Navalny said in a social media post relayed through his lawyers from prison.

"So the robot thought about it, lit a cigarette and decided to slow down the publication until the clever little hands of United Russia faked the results into completely opposite ones," he said.

Valery Rashkin, a senior member of the Communist Party who ran for reelection, urged supporters to gather at Pushkin Square in the center of Moscow on Monday evening to "discuss" election results and protest the reported violations. "Come out with us to fight for our rights!" wrote Rashkin, who was backed by Smart Voting and initially led his race but lost to a United Russia opponent.

Russian news site Ura.ru released a video showing the square already fenced off and surrounded by police vans.

Independent political analyst Masha Lipman said anecdotal evidence of violations suggests the vote may have been even more problematic than in 2011, but she believes a wave of protests as large as 10 years ago is unlikely.

"There is a huge difference in the public mood between back in 2011 when people took to the streets (and now)," Lipman said.

"Between back 2011-2012 and now, the government has hardened its policy quite dramatically," she said. "The last time we had mass street protests earlier this year, they were very brutally suppressed, and it seems that this policy of brutal suppression and intimidation has worked."

'Hotel Rwanda' hero sentenced to 25 years on terror charges

By IGNATIUS SSUUNA Associated Press

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) — The man who inspired the film "Hotel Rwanda" for saving hundreds of his countrymen from genocide was convicted of terrorism offenses Monday and sentenced to 25 years at a trial that human rights watchdogs and other critics of Rwanda's repressive government have described as an act of retaliation.

Paul Rusesabagina, credited with sheltering ethnic Tutsis during Rwanda's 1994 genocide and a recipi-

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ent of the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, boycotted the announcement of the verdict after calling the trial a "sham."

The U.S. resident and Belgian citizen was convicted on eight charges including membership in a terrorist group, murder and abduction. He was charged along with 20 other people.

The circumstances surrounding Rusesabagina's arrest last year, his limited access to an independent legal team and his reported worsening health have drawn international concern for the 67-year-old who left Rwanda in 1996.

Rusesabagina, who remains in custody, has asserted that his arrest was in response to his criticism of longtime Rwandan President Paul Kagame over alleged human rights abuses. Kagame's government has repeatedly denied targeting dissenting voices with arrests and extrajudicial killings.

Monday's ruling comes more than a year after Rusesabagina disappeared during a visit to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and appeared days later in Rwanda in handcuffs, accused of supporting the armed wing of his opposition political platform, the Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change.

The armed group claimed some responsibility for attacks in 2018 and 2019 in southern Rwanda in which nine Rwandans died. Rusesabagina testified at trial that he helped to form the armed group to help refugees but said he never supported violence — and sought to distance himself from its deadly attacks.

Throughout, Rusesabagina has maintained that he is not guilty of the charges against him but said he didn't expect to get justice.

"We knew from the day he was kidnapped that the verdict would be 'guilty' on some or all of the false charges. We are happy that the charade of the trial is ending," Rusesabagina's family said in a statement.

A member of his legal team, Kate Gibson, added that "the only thing that has been surprising in watching this horror show unfold over the last year has been the brazenness and openness with which the Rwandan authorities have been willing to systematically violate all of the fair trial rights to which Paul was entitled."

Government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo tweeted shortly after the sentencing that the evidence against Rusesabagina was "indisputable."

"Rwandans will feel safer now justice has been delivered," Makolo wrote.

Rusesabagina's family alleges he was kidnapped and taken to Rwanda against his will to stand trial. But the court ruled that he wasn't kidnapped when he was tricked into boarding a chartered flight. Rwanda's government asserted that at the time he was going to Burundi to coordinate with armed groups based there and in Congo.

Rusesabagina said he was gagged and tortured before he was jailed, but Rwandan authorities denied that. His attorney, Felix Rudakemwa, has asserted that Rusesabagina's legal papers were confiscated by prison authorities. His family has feared he might die from poor health behind bars.

Amnesty International criticized the proceedings, noting that Rusesabagina was initially denied the right to choose his own lawyer. It added that Kagame's comments that "Rusesabagina had 'done something terribly wrong, committed a crime,' may have prejudiced the defendant's right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty."

U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said "the reported lack of fair trial guarantees calls into question the fairness of the verdict," and he urged Rwanda's government to examine "shortcomings" in the case, including Rusesabagina's reported lack of confidential, unimpeded access to his lawyers and case documents.

Belgium's foreign minister, Sophie Wilmes, said that "despite repeated appeals from Belgium, it must be concluded that Mr. Rusesabagina has not been given a fair and equitable trial." She said Belgium remained in close contact with him.

Rusesabagina is credited with saving more than 1,000 people by sheltering them at the hotel he managed during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda in which more than 800,000 Tutsi and Hutus who tried to protect them were killed.

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'I just cry': Dying of hunger in Ethiopia's blockaded Tigray

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — In parts of Ethiopia's Tigray region, people now eat only green leaves for days. At a health center last week, a mother and her newborn weighing just 1.7 pounds died from hunger. In every district of the more than 20 where one aid group works, residents have starved to death.

For months, the United Nations has warned of famine in this embattled corner of northern Ethiopia, calling it the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade. Now internal documents and witness accounts reveal the first starvation deaths since Ethiopia's government in June imposed what the U.N. calls "a de facto humanitarian aid blockade."

Forced starvation is the latest chapter in a conflict where ethnic Tigrayans have been massacred, gang-raped and expelled. Months after crops were burned and communities stripped bare, a new kind of death has set in.

"You are killing people," Hayelom Kebede, the former director of Tigray's flagship Ayder Referral Hospital, recalled telling Ethiopia's health ministry in a phone call this month. "They said, 'Yeah, OK, we'll forward it to the prime minister.' What can I do? I just cry."

He shared with The Associated Press photos of some of the 50 children receiving "very intensive care" because of malnutrition, the first such images to emerge from Tigray in months. In one, a small child with startled-looking eyes stares straight into the camera, a feeding tube in his nose, a protective amulet lying in the pronounced hollow of his throat.

Medicines have almost run out, and hospital staffers haven't been paid since June, Hayelom said. Conditions elsewhere for Tigray's 6 million people are often worse.

The blockade and the starvation that comes with it mark a new phase in the 10-month war between Tigray forces and the Ethiopian government, along with its allies. Now the United States has issued an ultimatum: Take steps to stop the fighting and let aid flow freely, or a new wave of sanctions could come within weeks.

"The United States is appalled by reports of starvation deaths in Ethiopia," a State Department spokesperson told the AP, calling the government's denial of basic needs "indications of a siege." The spokesperson called for the immediate restoration of "vital services" to Tigray.

The war began as a political dispute between the prime minister, 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmed, and the Tigrayans who had long dominated Ethiopia's repressive national government. Since November, witnesses have said, Ethiopian forces and those from neighboring Eritrea looted food sources and destroyed health centers.

In June, the Tigray fighters retook the region, and Ethiopia's government declared a ceasefire, citing humanitarian grounds. Instead, the government has sealed off the region tighter than ever, fearing that aid will reach the Tigray forces.

More than 350,000 metric tons of food aid are positioned in Ethiopia, but very little of it can get into Tigray. The government is so wary that humanitarian workers boarding rare flights to the region have been given an unusual list of items they cannot bring: Dental flossers. Can openers. Multivitamins. Medicines, even personal ones.

The list, obtained by the AP, also banned means of documenting the crisis, including hard drives and flash drives. Photos and video from Tigray have disappeared from social media since June as aid workers and others, facing intense searches by authorities, fear being caught with them on their devices. Tigray has returned to darkness, with no telecommunications, no internet, no banking services and very little aid.

Ethiopia's prime minister and other senior officials have denied there is hunger in Tigray. The government has blamed the Tigray forces and insecurity for troubles with aid delivery. It also has accused humanitarian groups of supporting, even arming, the Tigray fighters.

The prime minister's spokeswoman, Billene Seyoum, did not say when the government would allow basic services to the region. The government "has opened access to aid routes by cutting the number of checkpoints from seven to two and creating air bridges for humanitarian flights," she said in a statement. But

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medical supplies on the first European Union air bridge flight were removed during government inspection, and such flights cannot carry the large-scale food aid needed.

In the most extensive account yet of the blockade's toll, a humanitarian worker told the AP that deaths from starvation are being reported in "every single" district of the more than 20 in Tigray where one aid group operates. The group had run out of food aid and fuel. The worker, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

"Currently, there are devastating reports coming from every corner," the aid group wrote to a donor in August, according to documents shared with the AP. "If no urgent solution is found, we will lose many people due to hunger."

In April, even before the current blockade was imposed, the same group wrote to the donor that "reports of malnourishment are rampant," and that 22 people in one sub-district had starved to death.

"People's skin color was beginning to change due to hunger; they looked emaciated with protruding skeletal bones," the aid group wrote.

In August, another staffer visited a community in central Tigray and wrote that the number of people at risk of starvation was "exponentially increasing" in both rural and urban areas. In some cases, "people are eating only green leaves for days."

The staffer described speaking with one mother who said her family had been living on borrowed food since June. For the past month, they had eaten only bread with salt. She worried that without food aid in the coming days they would die.

"Finally, we stopped asking her because we could not tolerate to hear additional grim news," the staffer wrote. "The administrator of the (sub-district) has also told us that there are many families who are living in similar conditions."

At least 150 people starved to death in August, including in camps for displaced people, the Tigray External Affairs Office has alleged. The International Organization for Migration, the U.N. agency which supports the camps, said: "We unfortunately are not able to speak on this topic."

Some toilets in the crowded camps are overflowing because there's no cash to pay for their cleaning, leaving thousands of people vulnerable to outbreaks of disease, a visiting aid worker said. People who ate three meals a day now eat only one. Camp residents rely on the charity of host communities who often struggle to feed themselves.

"People have been able to get by, but barely," the aid worker said. "It's worse than subsistence, let's put it that way."

Food security experts months ago estimated that 400,000 people in Tigray face famine conditions, more than the rest of the world combined. But the blockade means experts cannot collect the needed data to make a formal declaration of famine.

Such a declaration would be deeply embarrassing for Ethiopia, which in the 1980s seized the world's attention with a famine so severe, also driven by conflict and government neglect, that some 1 million people were killed. Since then, Africa's second most populous country had become a success story by pulling millions from extreme poverty and developing one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

Now the war is hollowing out the economy, and stomachs. Malnutrition rates are near 30% for children under the age of 5, the U.N. World Food Program said Wednesday, and near 80% for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

As the war spreads, so might hunger. Tigray forces have entered the neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar in recent weeks, and some residents accuse them of carrying out acts of retaliation, including closing off supply routes. The Tigray forces deny it, saying they aim to pressure Ethiopia's government to lift the blockade.

The U.N. human rights office says abuses have been committed by all sides, although to date witness accounts indicate the most widespread atrocities have been against Tigrayan civilians.

There is little help coming. The U.N. says at least 100 trucks with food and other supplies must reach Tigray every day to meet people's needs. But as of Sept. 8, fewer than 500 had arrived since July on the

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only accessible road into the region. No medical supplies or fuel have been delivered to Tigray in more than a month, the U.S. says, blaming "government harassment" and decisions, not the fighting.

In mid-September the U.N. issued the first report of its kind showing in red the number of days remaining before cash or fuel ran out for key humanitarian work like treating Tigray's most severely malnourished. Often, that number was zero.

Some trucks carrying aid have been attacked, and drivers intimidated. In August, a U.N. team trying to pick up staff from Tigray was turned around by armed police who "ordered the drivers to drive significantly over speed limits while verbally abusing, harassing and threatening them," a U.N. report said.

Major international aid groups like Doctors Without Borders and the Norwegian Refugee Council have had their operations suspended, accused of spreading "misinformation" about the war. Almost two dozen aid workers have been killed, some while distributing food. Some aid workers are forced to ration their own food.

"It is a day-to-day reality to see human sufferings, starvation," the Catholic bishop of Adigrat, Abune Tesfaselassie Medhin, wrote in a Sept. 3 letter, shared with the AP, appealing to partners overseas for help and warning of catastrophe ahead.

The need for food will continue well into next year, the U.N. says, because the limited crops planted amid the fighting are likely to produce only between a quarter and at most half of the usual harvest.

Grim as they are, the reports of starvation deaths reflect only areas in Tigray that can be reached. One Tigrayan humanitarian worker pointed out that most people live or shelter in remote places such as rugged mountains. Others are in inaccessible areas bordering hostile Eritrea or in western Tigray, now controlled by authorities from the Amhara region who bar the way to neighboring Sudan, a potential route for delivering aid.

As food and the means to find it run out, the humanitarian worker said, "I am sure the people that are dying out of this man-made hunger are way more than this."

Cleanup of abandoned mines could get boost, relieving rivers

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Thousands of abandoned coal mines in the U.S. have been polluting rivers and streams for decades, in some cases harming fish and contaminating drinking water. Now efforts to finally clean up the sites could soon get a big boost.

Tucked into the Senate-passed infrastructure bill is \$11.3 billion for the cleanup of defunct coal mines to be distributed over 15 years — money experts say would go a long way toward rehabilitating the sites that date back to before 1977. Cleanup efforts are currently funded by fees from coal mining companies, but that money has fallen far short of what's needed to fix the problems.

"The next 15 years — if this passes — is literally a historic advancement in mine reclamation," said Eric Dixon, a research fellow at the Ohio River Valley Institute.

In the past 40 years, only about a quarter of the damage has been cleaned up, he said.

Abandoned coal mines are concentrated along the Appalachian Mountains, with clusters also dotting the Midwest and Rocky Mountains. The sites can clog rivers with debris or pollute streams with harmful discharges caused by minerals exposed from mining, reducing fish populations and turning water brick red. Safety is another issue since people can topple into mineshafts and debris can fall from the mine's high walls.

Fees from companies to clean up the sites are collected under the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1977, which sought to remedy the history of unregulated coal production that left abandoned mines around the country. Companies are now regulated so that sites are cleaned up once mining stops.

Among the states that need significant funding for mine cleanups are Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia, according to the Interior Department.

Pennsylvania — which needs the most funding in the country — has 5,500 miles of streams with impaired water quality due to runoff from abandoned mines, according to state officials.

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The problem has persisted for so long that some Pennsylvania residents are surprised when red streams in their backyard are finally cleaned up and change color, said John Stefanko of the Office of Active and Abandoned Mine Operations in Pennsylvania.

"These are streams that you wouldn't want to walk through," he said, noting that the sediment from the mine runoff can come off on people.

Another worry is property damage. In 2019, for example, a collapsed tunnel entrance blocked water from escaping an abandoned mine in Pennsylvania's Schuylkill County. State officials worried a rupture and deluge could threaten the houses downstream. Workers were able to fix the blocked tunnel.

The federal program that funds cleanups categorizes sites by priority, and those that pose a safety hazard to humans are bumped to the top of the list. Priority rankings can also rise if drinking water is affected. A site may be a lower priority if it only poses an environmental threat.

The infrastructure bill directs cleanup funds toward several priority groups.

Elizabeth Klein, senior counselor to the Interior Secretary, said clean water is essential for the economic growth that many Appalachian communities are pursuing.

"It's really hard to convince people to stay in a community where they don't think they'll have access to clean drinking water," she said.

Some environmentalists want the bill's language changed to ensure money will also be available for the maintenance costs that are sometimes required for cleanup projects that address water quality.

A single abandoned mine site can pose multiple problems; U.S. officials estimate \$10.6 billion in construction costs would be needed to fix the more than 20,000 problems nationwide. Dixon of the Ohio River Valley Institute puts the price tag at nearly \$21 billion when factoring in inflation, project planning costs and other expenses.

Dixon also noted that the federal inventory is incomplete, since states do not have to document all abandoned sites that do not pose a health or safety risk to people, even if they're environmentally damaging.

The infrastructure bill's fate is tied to Congressional negotiations over a \$3.5 trillion spending plan. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., has praised the impact the funds could have on mine cleanups, but cast doubt on the size of the spending plan, complicating negotiations over the package.

The bill would also extend the fees coal companies pay into the fund until 2034, though at a reduced rate.

Rebecca Shelton, the director of policy and organizing for the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, said coal company executives "have never paid enough" to clean up the problems and that their fees alone are not enough to fix the sites.

Ashley Burke of the National Mining Association said bigger fees would harm coal companies and make them less competitive, but that the industry supports the extension of a reduced fee.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 21, the 264th day of 2021. There are 101 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Sept. 21, 1989, Hurricane Hugo crashed into Charleston, South Carolina (the storm was blamed for 56 deaths in the Caribbean and 29 in the United States). Twenty-one students in Alton, Texas, died when their school bus, hit by a soft-drink delivery truck, careened into a water-filled pit.

On this date:

In 1792, the French National Convention voted to abolish the monarchy.

In 1912, magician Harry Houdini first publicly performed his "Water Torture Cell" trick at the Circus Busch in Berlin.

In 1938, a hurricane struck parts of New York and New England, causing widespread damage and claiming some 700 lives.

In 1948, Milton Berle made his debut as permanent host of "The Texaco Star Theater" on NBC-TV.

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In 1961, the first Boeing CH-47 Chinook military helicopter made its first hovering flight.

In 1981, the Senate unanimously confirmed the nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor to become the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

In 1982, Amin Gemayel, brother of Lebanon's assassinated president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, was himself elected president. National Football League players began a 57-day strike, their first regular-season walkout ever.

In 1985, in North Korea and South Korea, family members who had been separated for decades were allowed to visit each other as both countries opened their borders in an unprecedented family-reunion program.

In 1987, NFL players called a strike, mainly over the issue of free agency. (The 24-day walkout prompted football owners to hire replacement players.)

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act denying federal recognition of same-sex marriages, a day after saying the law should not be used as an excuse for discrimination, violence or intimidation against gays and lesbians. (Although never formally repealed, DoMA was effectively overturned by U.S. Supreme Court decisions in 2013 and 2015.)

In 2001, Congress again opened the federal coffers to those harmed by terrorism, providing \$15 billion to the airline industry, which was suffering mounting economic losses since the Sept. 11 attacks.

In 2008, baseball said farewell to the original Yankee Stadium as the Bronx Bombers defeated the Baltimore Orioles 7-3.

Ten years ago: Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer, two Americans jailed in Iran as spies, left Tehran for the Gulf state of Oman, closing a high-profile drama that brought more than two years of hope and heartbreak for their families. The state of Texas executed Lawrence Russell Brewer for his role in the gruesome dragging death of James Byrd Jr. The state of Georgia executed Troy Davis, who used his last words to declare his innocence in the killing of police officer Mark MacPhail. Alternative rock group R.E.M. announced on its website that it had "decided to call it a day as a band."

Five years ago: Outraged Republican and Democratic lawmakers grilled Heather Bresch, the CEO of pharmaceutical company Mylan, about the significant cost increase of its life-saving EpiPens; defending her company's business practices, Bresch told the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee she wished the company had "better anticipated the magnitude and acceleration" of the rising prices for some families.

One year ago: President Donald Trump met at the White House with Amy Coney Barrett, as the conservative judge emerged as an early favorite for the Supreme Court seat left vacant by the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. An enormous wildfire in the mountains northeast of Los Angeles was one of more than two dozen major fires burning across California, including five of the largest wildfires in state history. The Las Vegas Raiders, playing their first game at a new \$2 billion stadium following their move from Oakland, defeated the New Orleans Saints 34-24; there were no fans in attendance because of the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Author-comedian Fannie Flagg is 80. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer is 78. Former Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear is 77. Musician Don Felder is 74. Author Stephen King is 74. Basketball Hall of Famer Artis Gilmore is 72. Actor-comedian Bill Murray is 71. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is 64. Movie producer-writer Ethan Coen is 64. Actor-comedian Dave Coulier is 62. Actor David James Elliott is 61. Actor Serena Scott Thomas is 60. Actor Nancy Travis is 60. Actor Rob Morrow is 59. Actor Angus Macfadyen is 58. Retired MLB All-Star Cecil Fielder is 58. Actor Cheryl Hines is 56. Country singer Faith Hill is 54. Rock musician Tyler Stewart (Barenaked Ladies) is 54. Country singer Ronna Reeves is 53. Actor-talk show host Ricki Lake is 53. Rapper Dave (De La Soul) is 53. Actor Billy Porter is 52. Actor Rob Benedict is 51. Actor James Lesure is 50. Actor Alfonso Ribeiro (rih-BEHR'-oh) is 50. Actor Luke Wilson is 50. Actor Paulo Costanzo is 43. Actor Bradford Anderson is 42. Actor Autumn Reeser is 41. TV personality Nicole Richie is 40. Actor Maggie Grace is 38. Actor Joseph Mazzello is 38. Actor Ahna O'Reilly is 37. Rapper Wale (WAH'-lay) is 37. R&B singer Jason Derulo is 35. Actor Ryan Guzman is 34. Actor Nikolas Brino is 23.