

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 1 of 66

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Pre-School Screening Ad](#)
- [3- Ken's Food Fair Help Wanted](#)
- [3- Bates Township Weed Notice](#)
- [3- Tax collections bouncing back at 2021 South Dakota State Fair](#)
- [4- The Life of William H. Rock III](#)
- [5- USDA Forest Service to waive fees for National Public Lands Day and Veterans Day](#)
- [5- Conde National League](#)
- [5- Warner has clean sweep over Groton Area](#)
- [6- Nearly Half of Americans Want to Change Jobs — Do You?](#)
- [7- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [8- Weather Pages](#)
- [11- Daily Devotional](#)
- [12- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [13- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Upcoming Events

### 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

“Great opportunities to help  
others seldom come, but  
small ones surround us  
every day.”

-SALLY KOCH



### 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. fol-  
lowed by JV and Varsity)

### Friday, Oct. 1

7 p.m.: Football vs. Dakota Hills Coop at Waubay

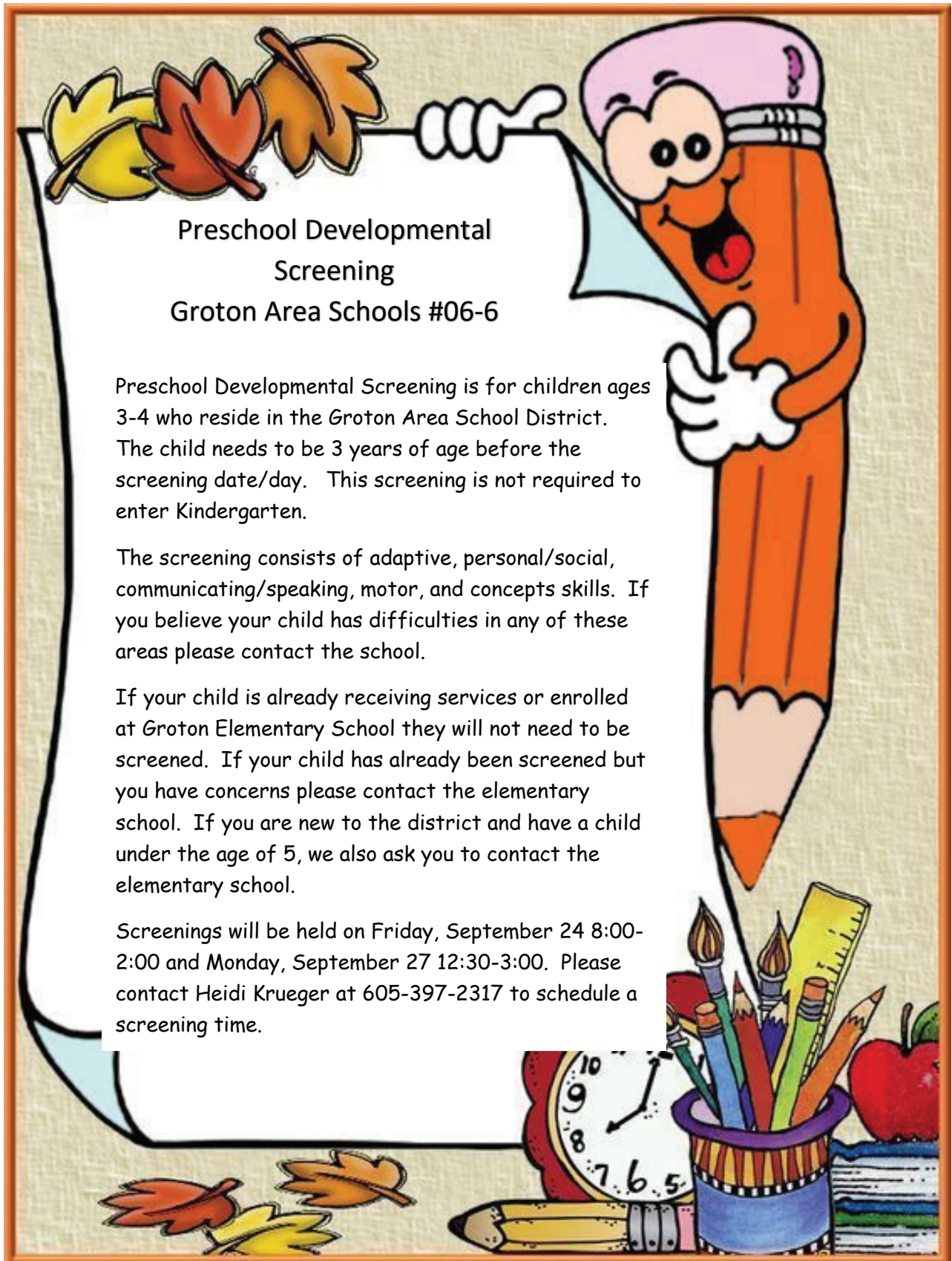
### Saturday, Oct. 2

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



### Bates Township Weed Notice

#### BATES TOWNSHIP WEED NOTICE:

OWNERS & TENANTS of Bates Township are hereby notified and required, according to law, to cut all weeds and grass in road ditches adjacent to their property or tenanted by them within Bates township on or before October 1, 2021 or same will be hired done by the township board and assessed property taxes at the rate of \$300 per half mile.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and charged to the landowner. Landowner is responsible for spraying all noxious weeds.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors

Betty Geist

Township Clerk

(0922.0929)

Published twice at the total approximate cost of \$20.57. 20410

### Tax collections bouncing back at 2021 South Dakota State Fair

PIERRE, S.D. – Tax collections from the 2021 South Dakota State Fair were \$211,651.05 according to figures released by the South Dakota Department of Revenue.

This latest data from the state fair tax rolls points to a continuing trend of more South Dakotans getting back out to enjoy our state and its numerous attractions. A booming tourism season coupled with increased business activity statewide has led to South Dakota being a recovery leader. While the nation continues to lag, South Dakota is the only state with an economy performing better than before the pandemic began in March 2020.

The latest figures from the five-day fair in Huron, S.D., show an increase from last year's total of \$107,925.73 and a slight decrease compared to 2019's numbers of \$224,871.31. The 2021 fair featured 597 booths rented to 305 different vendors, as well as dozens of events and activities that drew big crowds.

Of the tax collected, \$112,182.81 was state sales tax, \$48,541.72 was Huron's municipal sales tax, \$14,943.97 was Huron's municipal gross receipts tax, and \$35,982.55 was state tourism tax.

## The Life of William H. Rock III



William H. Rock III of Groton, South Dakota died peacefully on September 16 at his home in White Bear Lake, MN after a long illness. Bill was born to Dorothy E. and William H. Rock Jr. on December 31, 1951 in Minneapolis, MN. He attended the University of Minnesota High School for several years and graduated from Washburn High School in 1969. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Agricultural Business and decided to become a farmer. Bill worked his way through college as a silk screener in a local factory. He was clearly gifted in all things mechanical and extremely hard working.

Bill learned farming by apprenticing with Jack Walter of Groton, South Dakota starting in 1973. Several years later he took over his grandparent's land, Groton Auto and Tractor Corp., and continued farming for the rest of his life.

In 1981 Bill married Hedrin Atwood, from the Twin Cities. In 1983 Hedrin moved to Groton and taught in the Groton School District for 25 years. Bill was a great inspiration to his stepson, Sea Atwood, and later enjoyed spending time with Sea, his wife, Julie, and his grandchildren, Alex and Audrey, of Aberdeen, South Dakota.

He was a supervisor on the Groton Township Board in Brown County for many years. He was an avid gardener and won ribbons every year for his onions, wheat, and corn at the Brown County Fair. He loved to buy and sell classic cars and other vehicles. For the last 12 years Bill divided his time between South Dakota, Minnesota. and Mesa, Arizona.

A memorial will be held by the family at their White Bear Lake residence on October 2, 2021 at 2-5 pm. Bill's ashes will be buried at a later date at a gathering on his farm in Groton, SD.

Bill was preceded in death by his parents, William (Jr.) and Dorothy Rock of Minneapolis. He is survived by his wife Hedrin, son Sea (Julie) Atwood, his two grandchildren, Alex (25) and Audrey (16), and his two sisters, Amy Rock of Minneapolis and Stephanie Rock of San Diego, CA.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 5 of 66

## USDA Forest Service to waive fees for National Public Lands Day and Veterans Day

DENVER, Colo., September 21, 2021 - The USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, will waive fees, where charged, at day-use recreation sites in Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas and the Bighorn, Medicine Bow and Shoshone National Forests in Wyoming for two more days this year. Fees will be waived on National Public Lands Day, Saturday, September 25th. Fees will also be waived in honor of Veterans Day, Thursday, November 11th.

The Forest Service offers several fee-free days annually to encourage Americans to explore the outdoors and visit their public lands. The fee waiver includes many Forest Service picnic areas, boat launches, trail-heads, and visitor centers. Fees for camping, cabin rentals, or other permits still apply. Fees will continue to be charged at Forest Service standard amenity fee recreation sites operated by concessionaires, unless individual managers choose to participate.

## Conde National League

**Sept. 20 Team Standings:** Mets 6, Giants 4, Pirates 4, Tigers 4, Braves 3, Cubs 3

**Men's High Games:** Butch Farmen 176; Russ Bethke 171; Ryan Bethke 171, 161, 161; Dalton Locke 159

**Men's High Series:** Ryan Bethke 493, Russ Bethke 444, Butch Farmen 440

**Women's High Games:** Vickie Kramp 154; Michelle Johnson 153, 152; Joyce Walter 145

**Women's High Series:** Vickie Kramp 426, Michelle Johnson 412, Nancy Radke 401

## Warner has clean sweep over Groton Area

Warner swept all three matches Tuesday night in Warner, winning the C and JV matches, 2-0, and the varsity match, 3-0.

Game scores of the C match were 25-20, 25-8 and a third set was played as well, 25-16. Kara Jo Johnson had a kill and an ace serve, Emma Kutter had two kills, Cadence Feist had two ace serves and Jerrica Locke had three ace serves.

Junior varsity scores were both 25-4. Shalyn Foertsch had two kills and Faith Traphagen and Emma Schinkel shared a block.

Varsity scores were 25-8, 25-9 and 25-8. Anna Fjeldheim had two kills and a block while Madeline Fliehs had three kills.

## Nearly Half of Americans Want to Change Jobs — Do You?

**An expert weighs in on how to know if a job change is right for you**

**Pinkston News Service**

WASHINGTON, DC-(Pinkston News Service) - New research by Prudential finds that one quarter of all American workers want to change their jobs immediately after the pandemic ends, while 48% of American workers want to change their job type altogether. The report further found that 53% of people would change industries if they were confident they could be retrained.

There's no denying that American workers are eager for change. After more than a year of seismic shifts in the American economy, many of them brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, Americans have departed significantly from the status quo. Already by September of last year, about half of Americans were saying that their lives were permanently changed by the pandemic.

But the pandemic has also provided many Americans with more time to reflect on their lives and consider what they truly want to do. Americans are in a prime position to make major life decisions, like changing their job type or industry.

Pastor Tim Yee, author of "Finding Your TruCenter," a 6-week small group study program for the Tru-Motivate personality self-assessment tool by Barna Group (<https://www.barna.com/trumotivate>), thinks that the time is right for millions of Americans to dig down and reconnect with their deepest motivations.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a huge movement of change in the way people think," said Yee. "People today are thinking a lot more about the why behind what they do. In this context, it's more important than ever before that people learn to ask the right questions and access the deep-seated motivations that truly drive them."

Yee thinks that asking different questions may help Americans make better life changes after the pandemic. By last year, Americans were the unhappiest they had ever been in 50 years, with only 14% of U.S. adults saying they were "very happy." For Yee, that's a red flag. "Understanding your core motivations can help you approach your job in a new light. Perhaps you don't necessarily need to change your job, or perhaps you do. But knowing your motivations helps you to find a deeper purpose in your work, whatever it is."

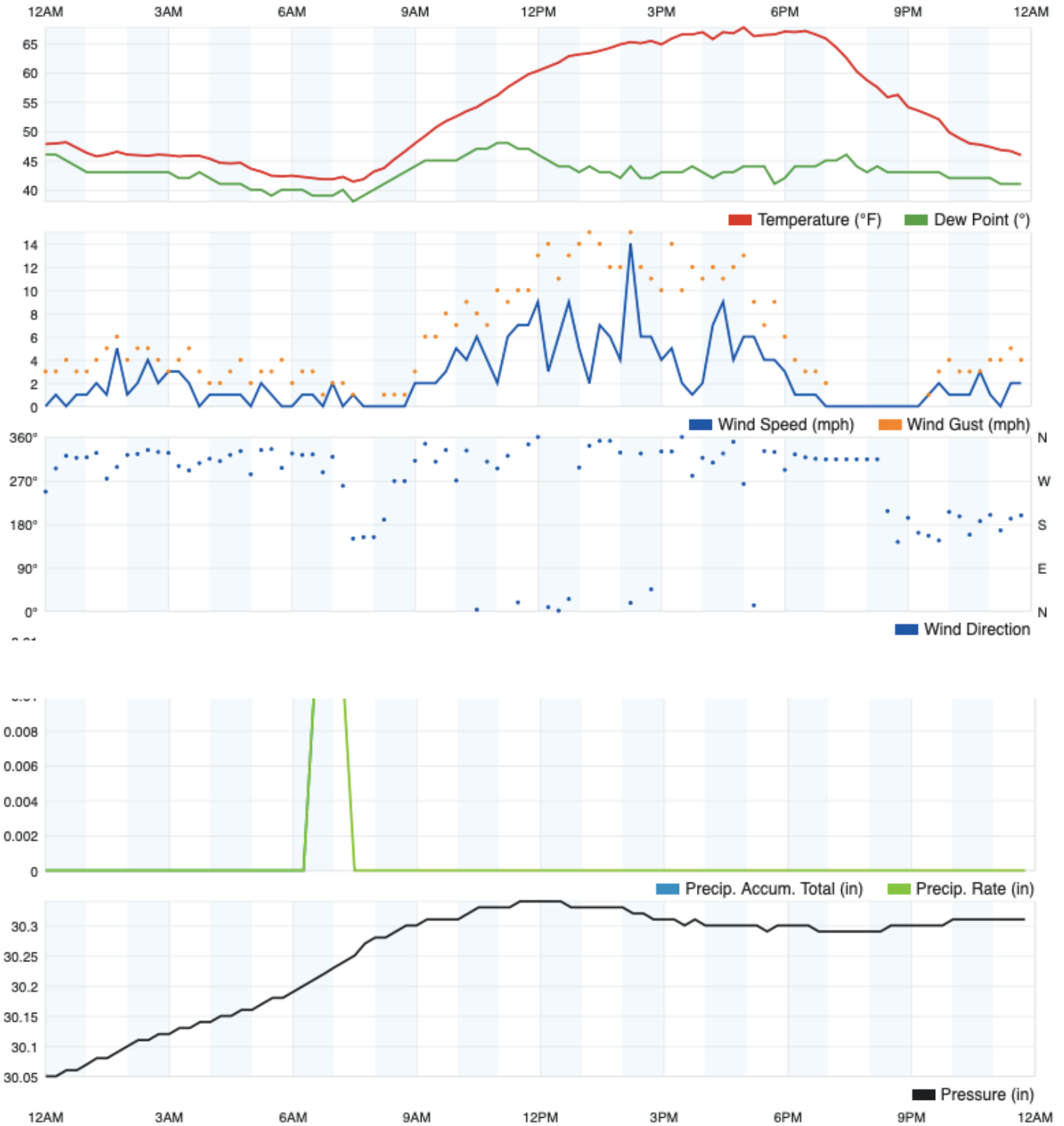
To Yee, one of the biggest problems with the way most Americans approach major life decisions is they fail to find the intersection of what they are good at and what they love to do. "Based on past Barna research, we know that Christians who find high satisfaction in their work are twice as likely to find high satisfaction in their lives. I believe this applies whether someone is a Christian or not. We've seen a direct connection between satisfaction in work and satisfaction in your overall life," says Yee.

To find that satisfaction, Americans need to take time to connect with what they really value and identify what will make their lives meaningful. For many, that can be their faith traditions, local communities and families, or even just their longest-held dreams. The important thing, according to Yee, is to find what gives you a sense of calling and purpose, and then pursue it with passion and a sustainable plan.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 7 of 66

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 8 of 66

Today



Sunny

High: 73 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 48 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny

High: 77 °F

Thursday  
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 49 °F

Friday



Sunny

High: 65 °F

**Mild Today and Thursday**

Today HI: 70 to 78°      Thursday HI: 74 to 82°

**Feeling Like Fall on Friday**

Friday HI: 62 to 70°      Saturday HI: 68 to 78°      Sunday HI: 76 to 86°

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

The graphic features a background of autumn leaves in shades of orange, red, and brown. It includes weather icons for each day: a sun for Today and Friday, a sun behind clouds for Thursday, and a sun behind a cloud with a rain arrow for Saturday. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font.

Southerly breezes today will switch to the north on Thursday as a cold front moves through. While mild prior to the frontal passage (highs 5 to 10 degrees above average), temperatures will take a dive on Friday (highs 5 degrees below average). Predominantly dry weather is forecast through the weekend.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 9 of 66

## Today in Weather History

September 22, 1936: Abnormally warm conditions brought record temperatures to much of central and northeast South Dakota along with west central Minnesota on this day in 1936. Temperatures rose into the upper 90s and lower 100s during the afternoon hours. Pierre and Watertown set record highs of 99 degrees. Mobridge and Sisseton warmed to record highs of 101 degrees. Finally, Kennebec and Aberdeen rose to record highs of 102 and 103 degrees, respectively.

1810: A tornado striking Fernhill Heath had a width between 0.5 to 1 mile; making it the widest path ever in Britain.

1890: A severe hailstorm struck Strawberry, Arizona. Five days after the storm hail still lay in drifts 12 to 18 inches deep.

1913 - Des Moines, IA, experienced their earliest freeze of record. (The Weather Channel)

1961 - Hurricane Esther made a near complete circle south of Cape Cod. The hurricane then passed over Cape Cod and hit Maine. Its energy was largely spent over the North Atlantic Ocean, however, heavy rains over Maine resulted in widespread local flooding of cellars, low roads, and underpasses. (David Ludlum)

1983 - Forty-one cities reported record cold temperatures during the morning. Houston, TX, hit 50 degrees, and Williston ND plunged to 19 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Hurricane Emily, the first hurricane to roam the Caribbean in nearly six years, made landfall over the Dominican Republic late in the day, packing 125 mph winds. Emily killed three persons and caused thirty million dollars damage. A record high of 92 degrees at Miami FL was their fifth in a row. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - An early morning thunderstorm produced baseball size hail at Plainview, in Hale County TX. Late in the evening more thunderstorms in the Southern High Plains Region produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Plainview TX and Crosby TX. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Hurricane Hugo quickly lost strength over South Carolina, but still was a tropical storm as it crossed into North Carolina, just west of Charlotte, at about 7 AM. Winds around Charlotte reached 69 mph, with gusts to 99 mph. Eighty percent of the power was knocked out to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Property damage in North Carolina was 210 million dollars, and damage to crops was 97 million dollars. The strongest storm surge occurred along the southern coast shortly after midnight, reaching nine feet above sea level at ocean Isle and Sunset Beach. Hugo killed one person and injured fifteen others in North Carolina. Strong northwesterly winds ushered unseasonably cold air into the north central U.S., in time for the official start of autumn, at 8" 20 PM (CDT). Squalls produced light snow in northern Wisconsin. Winds in Wisconsin gusted to 52 mph at Rhinelander. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2005 - For the first time in the historical record, two hurricanes reached category-5 intensity in the Gulf of Mexico in a single season as Hurricane Rita intensified before making landfall (Katrina and Rita).

2006: The tristate area of Missouri, Illinois, and Kentucky was struck by the worst tornado outbreak in the recorded history during the month of September. One supercell produced a long-track F4 tornado across southeastern Missouri into southwestern Illinois. This tornado traveled 27.5 miles.

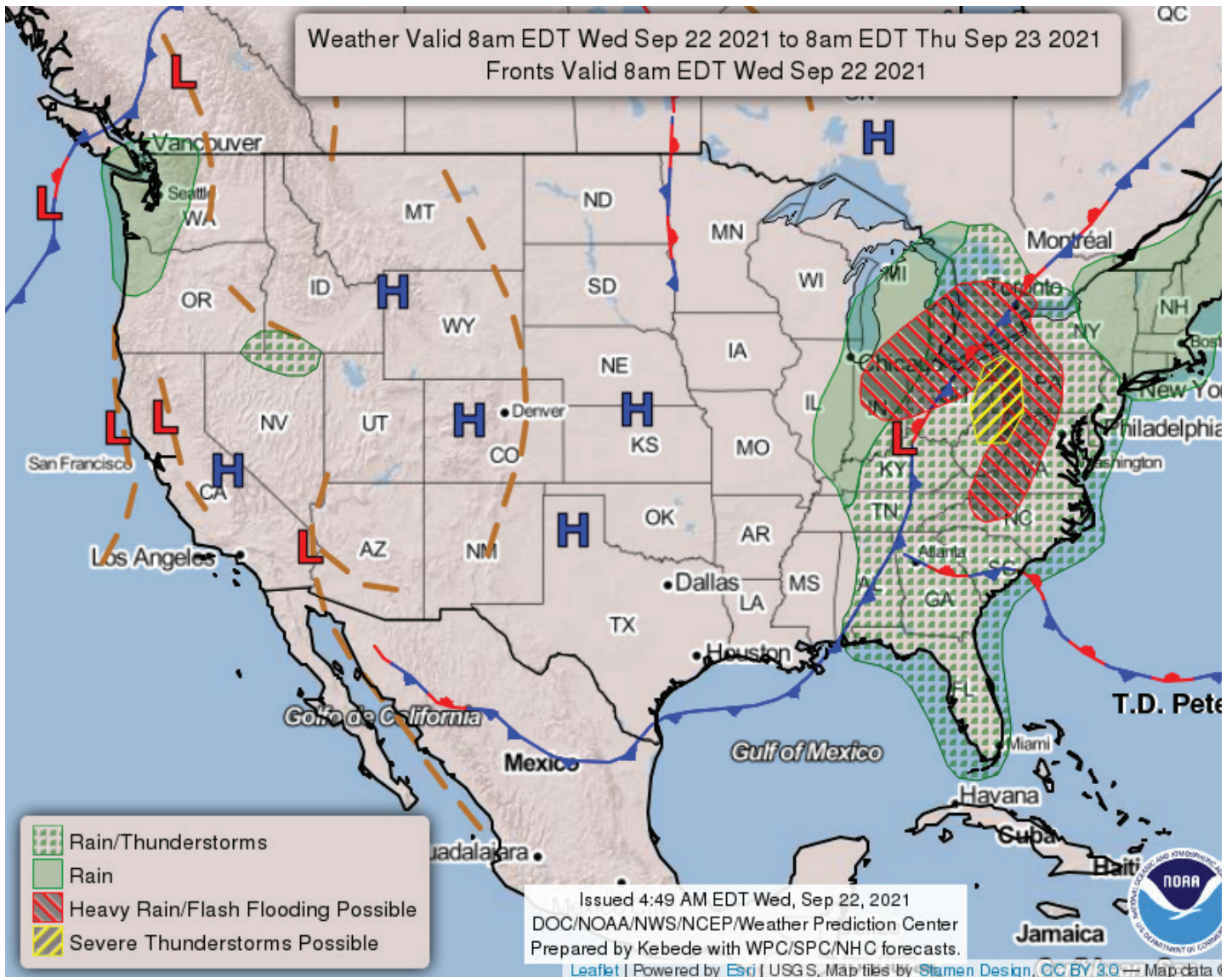
# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 10 of 66

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 67.7 °F at 5:00 PM**  
**Low Temp: 41.4 °F at 7:30 AM**  
**Wind: 15 mph at 2:15 PM**  
**Precip: 0.01**

**Record High: 103° in 1936**  
**Record Low: 20° in 1995**  
**Average High: 73°F**  
**Average Low: 44°F**  
**Average Precip in Sept.: 1.47**  
**Precip to date in Sept.: 2.58**  
**Average Precip to date: 17.81**  
**Precip Year to Date: 15.42**  
**Sunset Tonight: 7:31:13 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:19:51 AM**





## **"I'M REALLY AFRAID OF HIM"**

Little Johnny clutched his blanket tightly and pulled it up under his chin. His Dad was reading a bedtime story about God, Noah, and the flood. When he finished, his Dad asked what he liked best about the story.

"Nothing! I'm afraid God will flood our house, and all my toys will be gone!" he replied.

Many people only see that side of God. Whenever there is a disaster or a tragedy, they point a finger and say, "What kind of a god would do that? See, that's why I can't believe in him. I can't trust him. He's cruel and inhumane, uncaring and unconcerned."

Psalm 97 seems to add to the confusion. It begins with a statement about the Lord reigning and that we ought to be glad and rejoice. Then the Psalmist writes, "Clouds and thick darkness surround Him, righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne." If that is the only picture of God that people have, no wonder they are frightened. Most people would be. Surely, that view of God is distasteful and disgusting.

But what did the Psalmist mean when he wrote those words? He is reminding us that God exposes and expresses Himself on His terms and in His time and where He chooses. Our God is a Holy God - and He, in love and compassion, made Himself available ultimately and completely through His Son. When we read that He is surrounded by "clouds and darkness," it does not mean that He is hiding from us and is unapproachable. Not at all. Only that we come to Him on His terms. What are His terms?

Jesus defined them: "No one comes to the Father except through Me!" When we accept Christ as our Savior, He enters our life and nothing can separate us from Him, and we can know Him as He is: a God who cares, who is close, and who saves!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your Son our Savior. We cannot understand all Your ways. Give us a faith to trust as well as to believe and accept Your love. In Jesus' Name, Amen!

Scripture For Today: Clouds and thick darkness surround Him, righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne. Psalm 97:2

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 12 of 66

## 2021 Community Events

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 13 of 66

## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

36-41-45-51-56, Mega Ball: 13, Megaplier: 3

(thirty-six, forty-one, forty-five, fifty-one, fifty-six; Mega Ball: thirteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$432 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$490 million

### Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. Waubay/Summit, 25-10, 25-9, 25-12

Baltic def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 25-17, 25-16, 25-19

Bridgewater-Emery def. Hanson, 25-11, 25-10, 25-14

Britton-Hecla def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-12, 25-10, 23-25, 25-19

Canton def. Tri-Valley, 25-12, 25-22, 25-16

Centerville def. Sioux Falls Lutheran, 21-25, 25-22, 25-21, 25-18

Chester def. Parker, 25-17, 25-17, 25-13

Clark/Willow Lake def. Lake Preston, 21-25, 25-13, 25-21, 25-15

Cody-Kilgore, Neb. def. Bennett County, 19-25, 25-15, 25-21, 25-16

Dakota Valley def. West Central, 25-3, 25-9, 25-12

DeSmet def. James Valley Christian, 25-9, 26-24, 25-13

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Howard, 25-22, 20-25, 25-18, 22-25, 15-5

Deubrook def. Deuel, 25-9, 25-11, 25-11

Edgemont def. Crawford, Neb., 25-17, 13-25, 25-11, 25-16

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Beresford, 25-18, 25-13, 25-21

Faulkton def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-10, 25-10, 24-26, 25-20

Florence/Henry def. Sisseton, 25-21, 25-12, 26-24

Freeman def. Scotland, 23-25, 25-18, 25-16, 25-8

Garretson def. Dell Rapids, 17-25, 25-21, 25-15, 21-25, 15-12

Gregory def. Todd County, 25-20, 25-9, 25-8

Herreid/Selby Area def. McIntosh, 25-21, 25-7, 25-13

Hill City def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-8, 25-9, 25-18

Huron def. Aberdeen Central, 25-17, 26-24, 18-25, 25-22

Kimball/White Lake def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-17, 12-25, 25-19, 18-25, 15-12

Langford def. Wilmot, 18-25, 25-20, 20-25, 25-19, 15-10

Madison def. Chamberlain, 25-10, 25-13, 25-14

McCook Central/Montrose def. Flandreau, 25-13, 25-12, 22-25, 25-22

Miller def. Redfield, 25-23, 25-22, 25-20

Mitchell def. Brookings, 25-18, 25-15, 25-22

Parkston def. Winner, 25-23, 20-25, 20-25, 25-20, 15-13

Platte-Geddes def. Burke, 23-25, 25-19, 25-21, 21-25, 15-9

Potter County def. Ipswich, 18-25, 25-16, 25-21, 25-19

Rapid City Christian def. Belle Fourche, 25-21, 24-26, 25-19, 25-19

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 14 of 66

Sioux Falls O’Gorman def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-19, 25-22, 15-25, 25-23  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Brandon Valley, 18-25, 25-21, 20-25, 25-18, 15-11  
Sioux Falls Washington def. Harrisburg, 25-23, 25-20, 25-20  
Sioux Valley def. Milbank, 22-25, 25-18, 16-25, 25-15, 16-14  
Spearfish def. Sturgis Brown, 25-15, 25-23, 17-25, 22-25, 15-11  
St. Thomas More def. Hot Springs, 25-18, 25-18, 25-15  
Sully Buttes def. North Central Co-Op, 25-17, 25-20, 25-13  
Tea Area def. Vermillion, 24-26, 25-22, 25-14, 25-18  
Timber Lake def. McLaughlin, 25-8, 25-6, 25-13  
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 23-25, 25-14, 25-19, 25-20  
Viborg-Hurley def. Menno, 25-12, 25-23, 25-21  
Wagner def. Bon Homme, 25-6, 25-6, 25-16  
Warner def. Groton Area, 25-8, 25-9, 25-8  
Wolsey-Wessington def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 15-25, 27-25, 25-18, 25-20  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Lakota Tech vs. Crazy Horse, ppd.

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

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

## Dakota Access asks high court to reverse pipeline decision

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The company that operates the Dakota Access oil pipeline is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse an appellate ruling ordering additional environmental review, saying it puts the line at risk of being shut down.

A Washington, D.C., Circuit Court of Appeals panel earlier this year supported the Standing Rock Sioux and other tribes’ argument that the project deserves a thorough environmental review and is currently operating without a key federal permit. The study will determine whether the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reissues a permit for the line to cross the Missouri River in south-central North Dakota.

Texas-based Energy Transfer, which operates the \$3.8 billion, 1,172-mile (1,886 kilometer) pipeline, said in a filing Monday to the Supreme Court that the appeals court decision creates uncertainty for the pipeline and puts it “at a significant risk of being shut down, which would precipitate serious economic and environmental consequences.”

Standing Rock Chairman Mike Faith said in a statement the request by the pipeline operator “is part of an ongoing attempt to “evade accountability.”

The pipeline began operating in 2017, after being the subject of months of protests during its construction. A federal judge ruled earlier this year that the Dakota Access oil pipeline may continue operating while the U.S. Army Corps conducts an extensive environmental review.

But U.S. District Judge James Boasberg also outlined a path for a future legal challenge to an ongoing environmental review, should the tribe seek to make one.

The Standing Rock Reservation is downstream of where the pipeline passes under the Missouri River, and tribal members are concerned about a potential spill. The company says the pipeline is safe.

## Rapid City establishes rules for medical marijuana sellers

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Rapid City Council has approved an ordinance which establishes rules for medical marijuana dispensaries in the community.

The rules go into effect Oct. 2 after legal publication following the council’s 8-1 voted Monday night. The ordinance limits the number of dispensaries to 15 within city limits. That’s one dispensary per 5,000 city residents.

Council member Bill Evans cast the only opposing vote. Evans says he voted no on the ordinance because he believes the market should decide the number of dispensaries, or the city should have its own facility, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"We continuously from up here talk about the inadequate funding for the city budget," he said.

Council member Pat Jones cautioned the council and community members that the dispensaries approved could turn into recreational marijuana dispensaries.

"These 15 medical ones, whatever date that becomes, in a puff of smoke, will become recreational and make a difference and impact on our community," Jones said.

Businesses who apply for a medical cannabis and receive a license will have one year to get the business up and running. Licenses cost \$5,000 and require an annual renewal fee of the same amount.

There are four types of medical marijuana establishments, including dispensaries, testing, cultivation and manufacturing facilities. There is no limit to the number of non-dispensary facilities within city limits.

## Three Minnesota teens beaten with gun at Sioux Falls bar

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Three teenagers from Minnesota were beaten with a gun at a bar in Sioux Falls, which caused severe head injuries to one of the victims, police said.

Sioux Falls police spokesman Sam Clemens said the assaults took place Sunday about 1 a.m. at an unnamed bar where two boys and a girl were threatened with a gun after an altercation with two men.

The three were then beaten with the gun, Clemens said. The teens were transported to the hospital with injuries. The youngest teen, a 15-year-old boy, suffered severe head injuries that required staples.

The other victims include a 16-year-old boy and 17-year-old girl. Their hometowns were not released.

Clemens said police are not sure how the three underage teens got into the bar.

The two suspects were not found.

## House OKs debt and funding plan, inviting clash with GOP

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted to keep the government funded, suspend the federal debt limit and provide disaster and refugee aid, setting up a high-stakes showdown with Republicans who oppose the package despite the risk of triggering a fiscal crisis.

The federal government faces a shutdown if funding stops on Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year. Additionally, at some point in October the U.S. risks defaulting on its accumulated debt load if its borrowing limits are not waived or adjusted.

Rushing to prevent that dire outcome, the Democratic-led House passed the measure Tuesday night by a party-line vote of 220-211. The bill now goes to the Senate, where it is likely to falter because of overwhelming GOP opposition.

"Our country will suffer greatly if we do not act now to stave off this unnecessary and preventable crisis," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said shortly before the vote.

Backed by the White House, the Democratic leaders pushed the package to approval at a time of great uncertainty in Congress. With lawmakers already chiseling away at the \$3.5 trillion price tag of President Joe Biden's broad "build back better" agenda, immediate attention focused on the upcoming deadlines to avert deeper problems if votes to shore up government funding fail.

The measure approved Tuesday would provide stopgap money to keep the government funded to Dec. 3 and extend borrowing authority through the end of 2022. It includes \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and other extreme weather events, and \$6.3 billion to support Afghanistan evacuees in the fallout from the end of the 20-year war.

While suspending the debt ceiling allows the government to meet financial obligations already incurred, Republicans argued it would also facilitate a spending binge in the months ahead.

"I will not support signing a blank check as this majority is advancing the most reckless expansion of government in generations," said Rep. Dan Meuser, R-Pa., during the debate.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 16 of 66

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said since Democrats control the White House and Congress, it's their problem to find the votes — even though he had relied on bipartisan cooperation to approve the debt limits when Republicans were in charge.

"The debt ceiling will be raised as it always should be, but it will be raised by the Democrats," McConnell said.

In the 50-50 Senate, Democrats will be hard-pressed to find 10 Republicans to reach the 60-vote threshold needed to overcome a filibuster.

"This is playing with fire," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

The Treasury Department has been using "extraordinary measures" to fund the government since the last debt limit suspension expired July 31, and projects that at some point next month will run out cash reserves. Then, it will 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.

Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody's Analytics, warned if lawmakers allow a federal debt default "this economic scenario is cataclysmic." In a report circulated by Democrats, Zandi warned that a potential downturn from government funding cutbacks would cost 6 million jobs and stock market losses would wipe out \$15 trillion of household wealth.

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

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that "in our view, this should not be a controversial vote." Psaki noted that Congress has raised the debt ceiling numerous times on a bipartisan basis, including three times under President Donald Trump.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the Democratic chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, was forced to introduce another version of the bill Tuesday after some within the Democratic caucus objected to the inclusion of \$1 billion for Israel's Iron Dome defense system, which uses missiles to intercept short-range rockets fired into the country.

The Israel defense issue splits Democrats, but DeLauro assured colleagues that money for the weapons system would be included in the annual defense spending bill. Hoyer went a step further and said he would bring a bill to the floor this week to replenish the Iron Dome system.

Republicans were highly critical of the change and vowed to stand as allies with Israel.

Meanwhile, Democrats are negotiating over Biden's \$3.5 trillion package of social, environmental and climate proposals as the price tag likely slips to win over skeptical centrist lawmakers who view it as too much.

Publicly, the White House has remained confident the legislation will pass soon, despite sharp differences among progressives and moderates in the party over the eventual size of the package and a companion \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill.

There has been a flurry of outreach from the White House to Democrats on Capitol Hill, and Biden was scheduled to hold White House meetings later Wednesday with a number of lawmakers.

Biden's big initiative 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, including government health, education and family support and environmental efforts to fight climate change.

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Associated Press writers Darlene Superville and Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.

## **The Latest: WHO reports global decline in new COVID-19 cases**

By The Associated Press undefined

The number of new COVID-19 cases continued to fall last week, with 3.6 million new cases reported globally, down from 4 million new infections the previous week, the World Health Organization said.

Last week's drop marked the first substantial decline for more than two months, with falling COVID-19



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 17 of 66

cases in every world region. In its latest update on the pandemic released on Tuesday, WHO said there were major decreases in cases in two regions: a 22% fall in the Middle East and a 16% drop in Southeast Asia.

The U.N. health agency said there were just under 60,000 deaths in the past week, a 7% decline. It said that while Southeast Asia reported a 30% decrease in COVID-19 deaths, the Western Pacific region reported a 7% increase. The most coronavirus cases were seen in the U.S., India, Britain, Turkey and the Philippines. WHO said the faster-spreading delta variant has now been seen in 185 countries and is present in every part of the world.

The organization also revised its list of "variants of interest," or those that it believes have the potential to cause big outbreaks; WHO said it's tracking the lambda and mu variants, which both arose in Latin America but have yet to cause widespread epidemics. WHO has previously said that in all countries where the delta variant is circulating, it has become the predominant virus.

## MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- Biden doubling vaccine purchase, calls for more global shots
- U.S. COVID-19 deaths are topping 1,900 a day
- Ravaged by war, Syrian rebel area struggles with virus surge

— See AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

## HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

**DUBAI, United Arab Emirates** — As coronavirus infections plummet and vaccinations accelerate in the United Arab Emirates, authorities have loosened a long-standing face mask mandate.

The Gulf Arab sheikhdom said Wednesday that residents no longer need to wear masks while exercising outdoors or visiting beaches and pools in the country. Those who receive medical or beauty treatments may also forgo the mask. However, face masks will still be required in indoor spaces like shopping malls and public transportation.

It's the first time the Emirati government has relaxed the strict nationwide mask mandate, violations of which result in a hefty \$800 fine.

Virus cases have steadily declined in recent weeks, with health authorities now recording some 300-400 cases a day. Over 80% of the population has been fully vaccinated.

The move comes just a week before Dubai hosts the long-awaited World Expo, which was pushed back a year because of the pandemic.

**BRATISLAVA, Slovakia** — Coronavirus infections in Slovakia are rising steeply, surpassing 1,000 people testing positive in one day for the first time since April.

The Health Ministry says the day-to-day increase in new cases reached 1,180 on Tuesday, the highest number since April 7. It was 474 a week ago.

Nine more people died of COVID-19 on Tuesday for a total of 12,589 in the nation of 5.5 million.

Some 2.3 million people in Slovakia have been fully vaccinated. The country has one of the slowest vaccination rates among the European Union countries.

**BEIJING** — Officials in the northeast China city of Harbin say national level health officials have been sent to the city to deal with what may be a coronavirus outbreak.

The city of 9.5 million people reported three infection cases Wednesday, a day after discovering a first case of community transmission.

After the initial finding, authorities started mass testing and closed schools. The city also ordered businesses like mahjong parlors, cinemas and gyms to shut. City authorities say residents must display a negative virus test to be able to leave for only essential travel. Otherwise, people are being told to stay home.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 18 of 66

China has been able to keep the virus from transmitting widely within its borders through a costly and strict strategy that relies on lockdowns and mass testing.

**HONOLULU** — A man who helped organize a Hawaii group that opposes coronavirus vaccines and pandemic restrictions says he now has regrets after contracting COVID-19.

Chris Wikoff told Hawaii News Now this week that he helped start the Aloha Freedom Coalition last October. He says he believed government shutdowns and other restrictions were threatening liberties and harming businesses.

But then he and his wife contracted COVID-19, the disease that is sometimes caused by the virus. Wikoff says he thought he was going to die and he still has trouble breathing.

He is now considering getting vaccinated because his family and doctors recommend it.

Wikoff says he no longer wants to be associated with the Aloha Freedom Coalition. He is warning others in the group not to gather.

**LOS ANGELES** — California is seeing lower coronavirus transmission than other U.S. states as virus cases and hospitalizations for COVID-19 decline following a summer surge.

The state is currently the only one experiencing "substantial" coronavirus transmission, the second-highest level on the CDC's color-coded map. So is Puerto Rico. In all other U.S. states, virus transmission is rated as "high."

State health experts say relatively high vaccination rates in California ahead of the arrival of the delta variant of the coronavirus made a difference. They say additional measures, such as masking, also helped stem the surge.

State data say nearly 70% of eligible Californians are fully vaccinated.

**HONOLULU** — Hawaii health care providers are receiving half the number of monoclonal antibody treatments for COVID-19 that they requested amid a shortage of the drugs.

The Honolulu Star-Advertiser reports the federal government has capped Hawaii's weekly allocation at 680 treatments. The state will have to see whether it can get more supply in the coming weeks.

There has been a spike in demand for the drugs in states where surging hospitalizations among the unvaccinated have overwhelmed hospitals.

The treatments have been shown to reduce death and hospitalization if given early. The drugs are laboratory-made versions of virus-blocking antibodies that help fight infections.

**CHEYENNE, Wyo.** — Wyoming's governor has activated the Wyoming National Guard to provide temporary assistance to hospitals that are dealing with a surge of patients with COVID-19.

Gov. Mark Gordon activated 95 soldiers and airmen Tuesday to serve at 24 sites in 17 Wyoming cities.

The Guard members will help with cleanup, food service, coronavirus screening, management of personal protective equipment and other support tasks.

Guard members will serve 14- to 30-day rotations, with the potential to extend through the end of the year.

On Tuesday, 190 people were hospitalized in Wyoming with COVID-19, the sometimes deadly disease that can be caused by the coronavirus. That is down from a recent high of 223 on Sept. 8.

**WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.** — A North Carolina-based health care provider says nearly 400 of its workers face firings for failing to comply with a mandatory coronavirus vaccination program.

The Winston-Salem Journal reports that Novant Health said Tuesday that 1.4% of its overall workforce, or 375 employees, are not being allowed to work.

Novant announced its mandatory vaccination policy July 22, saying then that it would require full compliance by Sept. 15.

In a news release, Novant Health says the affected workers will have five days to comply with the vac-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 19 of 66

cine mandate. If they don't get the shot before the deadline, they will be fired.

NEW YORK — A new study of Texas prison inmates provides more evidence that coronavirus can spread even in groups where most people are vaccinated.

A COVID-19 outbreak at a federal prison in July and August infected 172 male inmates in two prison housing units, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report released Tuesday.

About 80% of the inmates in the units had been vaccinated. More than 90% of the unvaccinated inmates wound up being infected, as did 70% of the fully vaccinated prisoners.

Severe illness, however, was more common among the unvaccinated. The hospitalization rate was almost 10 times higher for them compared with those who got the shots.

It echoes research into a July outbreak in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where several hundred people were infected -- about three-quarters of whom were fully vaccinated.

Such reports have prompted a renewed push by health officials for even vaccinated people to wear masks and take other precautions. They believe the delta variant, a version of coronavirus that spreads more easily, and possibly waning immunity may be playing a role.

The authors did not identify the prison, but media reports in July detailed a similar-sized outbreak at the federal prison in Texarkana.

OKLAHOMA CITY — Fans of the NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder will be required to provide proof of a COVID-19 vaccination or a negative coronavirus test to attend games in person, the team announced Tuesday.

"As we continue to face serious health challenges from COVID-19, we must remain committed to protecting the health and safety of our community," Thunder Chairman Clay Bennett said.

The policy will be in effect for the first 12 games of the preseason and continuing into the start of the regular season.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health on Tuesday reported 484 new virus cases and a seven-day average of 1,834 new cases daily, down from a seven-day average of 2,114 new daily cases one week ago.

The number of hospitalizations has declined from a three-day average of nearly 1,600 on Sept. 1 to 1,327 on Tuesday, according to the health department, which announced a virtual career day on Sept. 29 in an effort to hire 70 nurses statewide.

## Top US military officer holds talks with Russian counterpart

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

HELSINKI, Finland (AP) — The top American military officer held talks Wednesday with his Russian counterpart as the United States struggles to secure basing rights and other counterterrorism support in countries bordering Afghanistan — an effort Moscow has opposed.

The daylong session in the Finland's capital between Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff, comes at a crucial time after the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Without troops on the ground, the U.S. needs to reach more basing, intelligence sharing and other agreements to help monitor al-Qaida and Islamic State militants in Afghanistan.

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, had said in July that Moscow warned the U.S. that any deployment of American troops in countries neighboring Afghanistan "is unacceptable." He said Russia told the U.S. "in a direct and straightforward way that it would change a lot of things not only in our perceptions of what's going on in that important region, but also in our relations with the United States."

Ryabkov also said that Russia had a "frank talk" with the Central Asian countries to warn them not to allow U.S. troops within their borders.

Milley declined to provide details of the meeting to reporters traveling with him to Helsinki. His spokesman, Col. Dave Butler, said the meeting would last all day and is "military focused."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 20 of 66

"Both sides seek increased transparency to reduce misunderstanding and increase stability," Butler said. "The meeting is serious, both generals display mutual respect for each other though both have taken opportunity to quip or joke on occasion."

Both sides agreed not to disclose details of the talks, as has been the practice in previous meetings and calls.

But just a few days ago, Milley made it clear the basing issue was a key topic on his European trip, saying he discussed it with NATO counterparts when they met in Greece over the weekend.

Milley, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and American intelligence officials have warned that al-Qaida or IS could regenerate and pose a threat to the United States in one year to two years.

U.S. military leaders have said they can conduct counterterrorism surveillance and, if necessary, strikes in Afghanistan from military assets based in other countries. But they acknowledge that surveillance flights from bases in the Persian Gulf are long and provide limited time in the air over Afghanistan. So the U.S. and allies want basing agreements, overflight rights and increased intelligence-sharing with nations closer to Afghanistan, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan.

So far there are no indications of any progress. Moscow maintains a tight grip on the Central Asian nations and opposes a Western presence there.

The U.S. used the Transit Center at Manas, in Krygyzstan, for a large part of the Afghanistan war, moving troops in and out of the war zone through that base. Under pressure from Russia and its allies, however, Krygyzstan insisted the U.S. vacate the base in 2014.

The U.S. also leased Karshi-Khanabad, known as K2, as a base in Uzbekistan for several years after the Afghanistan war began. Uzbekistan ordered the base closed in 2005 amid tensions with Washington, and the Defense Ministry reaffirmed in May that the country's constitution and military doctrine rule out the presence of foreign troops there.

It's unclear whether there is any potential for negotiations with the Russians to encourage them to lessen their objections to U.S. or allied presence in the region. But Russian officials also have expressed concern that the Taliban takeover could destabilize Central Asia, and they worry about a growing threat from IS.

Milley's meeting with Gerasimov, and broader discussions about counterterrorism this week, come on the heels of a deadly U.S. airstrike in Afghanistan in the final days of the chaotic evacuation of Americans, Afghans and others. The U.S. initially claimed the drone strike killed an Islamic extremist looking to attack the Kabul airport, but now says it was a mistake that killed 10 civilians, including seven children.

The incident triggered questions about the future use of drone strikes to target terrorists in Afghanistan from beyond the country. But Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, said that while that airstrike was a "tragic mistake" it was not comparable to future counterterror strikes.

Future strikes on insurgents deemed to pose a threat to America, McKenzie said, would be "done under different rules of engagement" and there would be more time to study the target.

## Apple, Google raise new concerns by yanking Russian app

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writers

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) — Big Tech companies that operate around the globe have long promised to obey local laws and to protect civil rights while doing business. But when Apple and Google capitulated to Russian demands and removed a political-opposition app from their local app stores, it raised worries that two of the world's most successful companies are more comfortable bowing to undemocratic edicts — and maintaining a steady flow of profits — than upholding the rights of their users.

The app in question, called Smart Voting, was a tool for organizing opposition to Russia President Vladimir Putin ahead of elections held over the weekend. The ban levied last week by a pair of the world's richest and most powerful companies galled supporters of free elections and free expression.

"This is bad news for democracy and dissent all over the world," said Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel for Access Now, an internet freedom group. "We expect to see other dictators copying Russia's tactics."

Technology companies offering consumer services from search to social media to apps have long walked

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 21 of 66

a tightrope in many of the less democratic nations of the world. As Apple, Google and other major companies such as Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook have grown more powerful over the past decade, so have government ambitions to harness that power for their own ends.

"Now this is the poster child for political oppression," said Sascha Meinrath, a Penn State University professor who studies online censorship issues. Google and Apple "have bolstered the probability of this happening again."

Neither Apple nor Google responded to requests for comment from The Associated Press when the news of the app's removal broke last week; both remained silent this week as well.

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.

According to a person with direct knowledge of the matter, Google faced legal demands by Russian regulators and threats of criminal prosecution of individual employees if it failed to comply. The same person said Russian police visited Google's Moscow offices last week to enforce a court order to block the app. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Google's own employees have reportedly blasted the company's cave-in to Putin's power play by posting internal messages and images deriding the app's removal.

That sort of backlash within Google has become more commonplace in recent years as the company's ambitions appeared to conflict with its one-time corporate motto, "Don't Be Evil," adopted by cofounders Larry Page and Sergey Brin 23 years ago. Neither Page nor Brin — whose family fled the former Soviet Union for the U.S. when he was a boy — are currently involved in Google's day-to-day management, and that motto has long since been set aside.

Apple, meanwhile, lays out a lofty "Commitment To Human Rights" on its website, although a close read of that statement suggests that when legal government orders and human rights are at odds, the company will obey the government. "Where national law and international human rights standards differ, we follow the higher standard," it reads. "Where they are in conflict, we respect national law while seeking to respect the principles of internationally recognized human rights."

A recent report from the Washington nonprofit Freedom House found that global internet freedom declined for the fifth consecutive year and is under "unprecedented strain" as more nations arrested internet users for "nonviolent political, social, or religious speech" than ever before. Officials suspended internet access in at least 20 countries, and 21 states blocked access to social media platforms, according to the report.

For the seventh year in a row, China held the top spot as the worst environment for internet freedom. But such threats take several forms. Turkey's new social media regulations, for instance, require platforms with over a million daily users to remove content deemed "offensive" within 48 hours of being notified, or risk escalating penalties including fines, advertising bans and limits on bandwidth.

Russia, meanwhile, added to the existing "labyrinth of regulations that international tech companies must navigate in the country," according to Freedom House. Overall online freedom in the U.S. also declined for the fifth consecutive year; the group said, citing conspiracy theories and misinformation about the 2020 elections as well as surveillance, harassment and arrests in response to racial-injustice protests.

Big Tech companies have generally agreed to abide by country-specific rules for content takedowns and other issues in order to operate in these countries. That can range from blocking posts about Holocaust denial in Germany and elsewhere in Europe where they're illegal to outright censorship of opposition parties, as in Russia.

The app's expulsion was widely denounced by opposition politicians. Leonid Volkov, a top strategist to jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, wrote on Facebook that the companies "bent to the Kremlin's blackmail."

Navalny's ally Ivan Zhdanov said on Twitter that the politician's team is considering suing the two companies. He also mocked the move: "Expectations: the government turns off the internet. Reality: the internet, in fear, turns itself off."

It's possible that the blowback could prompt either or both companies to reconsider their commitment to operating in Russia. Google made a similar decision in 2010 when it pulled its search engine out of mainland China after the Communist government there began censoring search results and videos on YouTube.

Russia isn't a major market for either Apple, whose annual revenue this year is expected to approach \$370 billion, nor Google's corporate parent, Alphabet, whose revenue is projected to hit \$250 billion this year. But profits are profits.

"If you want to take a principled stand on human rights and freedom of expression, then there are some hard choices you have to make on when you should leave the market," said Kurt Opsahl, general counsel for the digital rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Ortutay reported from Oakland, California. Associated Press writers Daria Litvinova in Moscow and Kelvin Chan in London contributed to this story.

## Officials: Many Haitian migrants are being released in US

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

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — Many Haitian migrants camped in a small Texas border town are being released in the United States, two U.S. officials said, undercutting the Biden administration's public statements that the thousands in the camp faced immediate expulsion.

Haitians have been freed on a "very, very large scale" in recent days, according to one U.S. official who put the figure in the thousands. The official, with direct knowledge of operations who was not authorized to discuss the matter Tuesday and thus spoke on condition of anonymity.

Many have been released with notices to appear at an immigration office within 60 days, an outcome that requires less processing time from Border Patrol agents than ordering an appearance in immigration court and points to the speed at which authorities are moving, the official said.

The Homeland Security Department has been busing Haitians from Del Rio to El Paso, Laredo and Rio Grande Valley along the Texas border, and this week added flights to Tucson, Arizona, the official said. They are processed by the Border Patrol at those locations.

A second U.S. official, also with direct knowledge and speaking on the condition of anonymity, said large numbers of Haitians were being processed under immigration laws and not being placed on expulsion flights to Haiti that started Sunday. The official couldn't be more specific about how many.

U.S. authorities scrambled in recent days for buses to Tucson but resorted to flights when they couldn't find enough transportation contractors, both officials said. Coast Guard planes took Haitians from Del Rio to El Paso.

The releases in the U.S. were occurring despite the signaling of a massive effort to expel Haitians on flights to Haiti under pandemic-related authority that denies migrants an opportunity to seek asylum. A third U.S. official not authorized to discuss operations said there were seven daily flights to Haiti planned starting Wednesday.

Accounts of wide-scale releases — some observed at the Del Rio bus station by Associated Press journalists — are at odds with statements a day earlier by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who traveled to Del Rio to promise swift action.

"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," he said at a Monday news conference.

The releases come amid a quick effort to empty the camp under a bridge that, according to some estimates, held more than 14,000 people over the weekend in a town of 35,000 people. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, during a visit Tuesday to Del Rio, said the county's top official told him the most recent tally at the camp was about 8,600 migrants.

The criteria for deciding who is flown to Haiti and who is released in the U.S. was unclear, but two U.S. officials said single adults were the priority for expulsion flights.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 23 of 66

The Homeland Security Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment late Tuesday night.

Meanwhile, Mexico has begun busing and flying Haitian migrants away from the U.S. border, authorities said Tuesday, signaling a new level of support for the United States as the camp presented President Joe Biden with a humanitarian and increasingly political challenge.

The White House is facing sharp bipartisan condemnation. Republicans say Biden administration policies led Haitians to believe they would get asylum. Democrats are expressing outrage after images went viral this week of Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics against the migrants.

Mexico has helped at key moments before. It intensified patrols to stop unaccompanied Central American children from reaching the Texas border in 2014, allowed tens of thousands of asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration courts in 2019 and, just last month, began deporting Central American migrants to Guatemala after the Biden administration flew them to southern Mexico.

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's foreign relations secretary, said Tuesday he had spoken with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, about the Haitians' situation. Ebrard said most of the Haitians already had refugee status in Chile or Brazil and weren't seeking it in Mexico.

"What they are asking for is to be allowed to pass freely through Mexico to the United States," Ebrard said.

Two Mexican federal officials, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, confirmed Mexico's actions.

One of the officials said three busloads of migrants left Acuña on Tuesday morning for Piedras Negras, about 55 miles (90 kilometers) down the border, where they boarded a flight to the southern city of Villahermosa in the state of Tabasco.

The other official said there was a flight Monday from the northern city of Monterrey to the southern city of Tapachula near the Guatemala border. Tapachula is home to the largest immigrant detention center in Latin America. The flight carried about 100 migrants who had been picked up around the bus station in Monterrey, a hub for various routes north to the U.S. border.

The second official said the plan was to move to Tapachula all Haitians who already solicited asylum in Mexico.

The Haitian migrants who are already in Mexico's detention centers and have not requested asylum will be the first to be flown directly to Haiti once Mexico begins those flights, according to the official.

Around Ciudad Acuña, Mexican authorities were stepping up efforts to move migrants away from the border. There were detentions overnight by immigration agents and raids on hotels known to house migrants.

"All of a sudden they knocked on the door and (yelled) 'immigration,' 'police,' as if they were looking for drug traffickers," said Freddy Registre, a 37-year-old Venezuelan staying at one hotel with his Haitian wife, Vedette Dollard. The couple was surprised at midnight.

Authorities took four people plus others who were outside the hotel, he said. "They took our telephones to investigate and took us to the immigration offices, took our photos," Registre said. They were held overnight but finally were given their phones back and released. Authorities gave them two options: leave Mexico or return to Tapachula.

On Tuesday afternoon, they decided to leave town. They bought tickets for a bus ride to the Gulf Coast state of Veracruz, planning to continue to Tapachula where they had already applied for asylum.

Others left without being told. Small groups arrived at Ciudad Acuña's bus station to buy tickets to Veracruz, Monterrey and Mexico City. The same bus lines prohibited from selling them tickets for rides north through Mexico, sold them tickets to head south without issue.

In Haiti, dozens of migrants upset about being deported from the U.S. tried to rush back into a plane that landed Tuesday afternoon in Port-au-Prince as they yelled at authorities. A security guard closed the plane door in time as some deportees began throwing rocks and shoes at the plane. Several of them lost their belongings in the scuffle as police arrived. The group was disembarking from one of three flights

scheduled for the day.

Verza reported from Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, and Spagat from San Diego. Associated Press writers Mark Stevenson in Mexico City, Felix Marquez in Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, Danica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Evens Sanon from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Michael Balsamo in Washington, Michael R. Sisak in New York and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, also contributed to this report.

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## **Biden doubling vaccine purchase, calls for more global shots**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

President Joe Biden is set to announce that the United States is doubling its purchase of Pfizer's COVID-19 shots to share with the world to 1 billion doses as he embraces the goal of vaccinating 70% of the global population within the next year.

The stepped-up U.S. commitment is to be the cornerstone of the global vaccination summit Biden is convening virtually Wednesday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, where he plans to push well-off nations to do more to get the coronavirus under control.

World leaders, aid groups and global health organizations are growing increasingly vocal about the slow pace of global vaccinations and the inequity of access to shots between residents of wealthier and poorer nations.

The U.S. purchase, according to two senior Biden administration officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview Biden's remarks, will bring the total U.S. vaccination commitment to more than 1.1 billion doses through 2022. At least 160 million shots supplied by the U.S. have been distributed to more than 100 countries, representing more donations than the rest of the world combined.

The latest purchase reflects only a fraction of what will be necessary to meet a goal of vaccinating 70% of the global population — and 70% of the citizens of each nation — by next September's U.N. meeting. It's a target pushed by global aid groups that Biden will throw his weight behind.

The White House said Biden will use the summit to press other countries to "commit to a higher level of ambition" in their vaccine sharing plans, including specific challenges for them to meet. The officials said the White House will publicly release the targets for well-off nations and nonprofits after the summit concludes.

The American response has come under criticism for being too modest, particularly as the administration advocates for providing booster shots to tens of millions of Americans before vulnerable people in poorer nations have received even a first dose.

"We have observed failures of multilateralism to respond in an equitable, coordinated way to the most acute moments. The existing gaps between nations with regard to the vaccination process are unheard of," Colombian President Iván Duque said Tuesday at the United Nations.

More than 5.9 billion COVID-19 doses have been administered globally over the past year, representing about 43% of the global population. But there are vast disparities in distribution, with many lower-income nations struggling to vaccinate even the most vulnerable share of their populations, and some yet to exceed 2% to 3% vaccination rates.

In remarks at the U.N., Biden took credit on Tuesday for sharing more than 160 million COVID-19 vaccine doses with other countries, including 130 million surplus doses and the first installments of more than 500 million shots the U.S. is purchasing for the rest of the world.

Other leaders made clear in advance it was not enough.

Chilean President Sebastian Piñera said the "triumph" of speedy vaccine development was offset by political "failure" that produced inequitable distribution. "In science, cooperation prevailed; in politics, individualism. In science, shared information reigned; in politics, reserve. In science, teamwork predominated; in politics, isolated effort," Piñera said.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 25 of 66

The World Health Organization says only 15% of promised donations of vaccines — from rich countries that have access to large quantities of them — have been delivered. The U.N. health agency has said it wants countries to fulfill their dose-sharing pledges “immediately” and make shots available for programs that benefit poor countries and Africa in particular.

COVAX, the U.N.-backed program to ship vaccines to all countries has struggled with production issues, supply shortages and a near-cornering of the market for vaccines by wealthy nations.

The WHO has urged companies that produce vaccines to prioritize COVAX and make public their supply schedules. It also has appealed to wealthy countries to avoid broad rollouts of booster shots so doses can be made available to health care workers and vulnerable people in the developing world. Such calls have largely gone ignored.

COVAX has missed nearly all of its vaccine-sharing targets. Its managers also have lowered their ambitions to ship vaccines by the end of this year, from an original target of some 2 billion doses worldwide to hopes for 1.4 billion now. Even that mark could be missed.

As of Tuesday, COVAX had shipped more than 296 million doses to 141 countries.

The 70% global target is ambitious, not least because of the U.S. experience.

Biden had set a goal of vaccinating 70% of the U.S. adult population by July 4, but persistent vaccine hesitance contributed to the nation not meeting that target until a month later. Nearly 64% of the entire U.S. population has received at least one dose and less than 55% is fully vaccinated, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

U.S. officials hope to increase those figures in the coming months, both through encouraging the use of vaccination mandates and by vaccinating children once regulators clear the shots for the under-12 population.

Aid groups have warned that the persistent inequities risk extending the global pandemic, and that could lead to new and more dangerous variants. The delta variant raging across the U.S. has proved to be more transmissible than the original strain, though the existing vaccines have been effective at preventing nearly all serious illness and death.

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Associated Press writers Jamey Keaten in Geneva, Josh Boak at the United Nations and David Biller in Rio de Janeiro contributed to this report.

## **‘My whole life in a van’: islanders flee Spanish volcano**

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

TODOQUE, Canary Islands (AP) — A wall of lava up to 12 meters (40 feet) high bore down on a Spanish island village Wednesday, as residents scrambled to save what they could before the molten rock swallowed up their homes following a volcanic eruption.

The lava still spewing from last Sunday’s eruption in the Canary Islands off northwest Africa advanced slowly down hillsides to the coast, where Todoque was the last village between the molten rock and the Atlantic Ocean.

Residents hoping to save some of their belongings queued up at two areas designated by authorities so they could be escorted into the village. The lava was advancing slowly in the distance, at around 120 meters (400 feet) an hour, with smoke coming from its leading edge as it destroyed everything in its path.

Javier López said his house for the past three decades appeared to be in the lava’s path. He and his relatives had been staying at a friend’s house with the few documents, family memories and basic belongings they had been able to take when they were evacuated on Monday.

“I’ve put my whole life in a van,” López told The Associated Press while waiting for his turn to try to recover a vehicle he had left behind and other valuables.

“This is probably going to be the last time I see my home,” he said. “Or, in the best-case scenario, the house will remain isolated by the lava and inaccessible for who knows how long.”

Firefighting crews trying to save as many houses as possible from being entombed by lava worked

nonstop overnight to open a trench to divert the lava flow.

Melisa Rodríguez, another Todoque resident, said that she was trying to stay positive and calm.

"It's hard to think straight about what you want to save, but we are only allowed in for one hour and you don't want to take longer because that would be taking time away from others," she said.

As the lava headed downhill toward the island's more densely populated coast, some 1,000 people were evacuated late Tuesday from Todoque, bringing the total number of evacuated people on the island of La Palma to around 6,000.

The meeting of the lava, whose temperature exceeds 1,000 degrees Celsius (more than 1,800 F), with a body of water could cause explosions, trigger landslides and produce clouds of toxic gas.

The volcanic eruption and its aftermath could last for up to 84 days, experts said.

The Canary Island Volcanology Institute said it based its calculation on the length of previous eruptions on the archipelago, which like the latest eruption were followed by heavy lava flows and lasting seismic activity.

The institute reported that Tuesday night saw a strong increase in the number of smaller eruptions that hurl rocks and cinders high into the air on the island of La Palma, one of the Canary Islands off northwest Africa.

Authorities say that dangers still lie ahead for residents, including earthquakes, lava flows, toxic gases, volcanic ash and acid rain.

Since last Sunday's eruption, powerful rivers of unstoppable lava — up to six meters (nearly 20 feet) high — have swallowed up 320 buildings, mostly homes in the countryside.

The lava now covers 154 hectares, according to the Volcanology Institute.

Prompt evacuations have helped avoid any casualties from the eruption, though damage to homes, infrastructure and farmland is significant, officials say.

The volcano has also been spewing out between 8,000 and 10,500 tons of sulfur dioxide — which also affects the lungs — every day, the Volcanology Institute said.

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Barry Hatton contributed from Lisbon, Portugal.

## **Racism, climate and divisions top UN agenda as leaders meet**

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Racism, the climate crisis and the world's worsening divisions will take center stage at the United Nations on Wednesday, a day after the U.N. chief issued a grim warning that "we are on the edge of an abyss."

For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began, more than two dozen world leaders appeared in person at the U.N. General Assembly on the opening day of their annual high-level meeting. The atmosphere was somber, angry and dire.

China's President Xi Jinping warned that "the world has entered a period of new turbulence and transformation." Finland's President Sauli Niinistö said: "We are indeed at a critical juncture." And Costa Rica's President Carlos Alvarado Quesada declared: "The future is raising its voice at us: Less military weaponry, more investment in peace!"

Speaker after speaker at Tuesday's opening of the nearly week-long meeting decried the inequalities and deep divisions that have prevented united global action to end the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed nearly 4.6 million lives and is still raging, and the failure to sufficiently tackle the climate crisis threatening the planet.

COVID-19 and climate are certain to remain top issues for heads of state and government. But Wednesday's U.N. agenda will first turn the spotlight on the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the controversial U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, which was dominated by clashes over the Middle East and the legacy of slavery.

The U.S. and Israel walked out during the meeting over a draft resolution that singled out Israel for

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 27 of 66

criticism and likened Zionism to racism — a provision that was eventually dropped. Twenty countries are boycotting Wednesday's commemoration, according to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which urged more countries to join them "in continuing to fight racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism."

Following the commemoration, heads of state will start delivering their annual addresses again in the vast General Assembly hall. Speakers include King Abdullah II of Jordan, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Perhaps the harshest assessment of the current global crisis came from U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who opened his state of the world address sounding an "alarm" that "the world must wake up."

"Our world has never been more threatened or more divided," he said. "We face the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes."

"We are on the edge of an abyss — and moving in the wrong direction," the secretary-general warned.

Guterres pointed to "supersized glaring inequalities" in addressing COVID-19, "climate alarm bells ... ringing at fever pitch," upheavals from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen and beyond thwarting peace, and "a surge of mistrust and misinformation (that) is polarizing people and paralyzing societies."

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the pandemic was a reminder "that the entire world are part of a big family."

"But the solidarity test that we were put to failed us miserably," he said. "It is a disgrace for humanity that vaccine nationalism is still being carried on through different methods," and underdeveloped countries and poor segments of societies have been "literally left to their fate in the face of the pandemic."

As for the climate crisis, Erdogan said whoever did the most damage to nature, the atmosphere and water, "and whoever has wildly exploited natural resources" should make the greatest contribution to fighting global warming.

"Unlike the past, this time no one can afford the luxury to say, 'I'm powerful so I will not pay the bill' because climate change will treat mankind quite equally," the Turkish leader said. "The duty for all of us is to take measures against this enormous threat, with a fair burden-sharing."

Romania's President Klaus Iohannis did find something positive from the COVID-19 crisis.

"While the pandemic affected almost all aspects of our lives," he said, "it also provided us with opportunities to learn, adapt and do things better."

Two of the most closely watched speeches on Tuesday were delivered by U.S. President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping.

In an Associated Press interview on Saturday, Guterres warned that the world could plunge into a new and probably more dangerous Cold War if China and the United States don't repair their "completely dysfunctional" relationship. "Unfortunately, today we only have confrontation," he said.

The secretary-general kept that theme in his speech Tuesday saying: "I fear our world is creeping towards two different sets of economic, trade, financial and technology rules, two divergent approaches in the development of artificial intelligence — and ultimately two different military and geopolitical strategies. This is a recipe for trouble."

Biden said in his U.N. address that the United States was not attempting to be divisive or confrontational.

"We are not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs," he said. "The United States is ready to work with any nation that steps up and pursues peaceful resolution to shared challenges even if we have intense disagreements in other areas."

Speaking later, Xi said disputes among countries "need to be handled through dialogue and cooperation."

"One country's success does not have to mean another country's failure," Xi said. "The world is big enough to accommodate common development and progress of all countries."

By tradition, the first country to speak was Brazil, whose president, Jair Bolsonaro rebuffed criticism of his handling of the pandemic and touted recent data indicating less Amazon deforestation. He said he was seeking to counter the image of Brazil portrayed in the media, touting it as a great place for investment and praising his pandemic welfare program, which helped avoid a worse recession last year.

Bolsonaro said that his government has successfully distributed first doses to the majority of adults, but doesn't support vaccine passports or forcing anyone to have a shot. He has said several times in the past week that he remains unvaccinated.

"By November, everyone who chooses to be vaccinated in Brazil will be attended to," Bolsonaro told the General Assembly.

Brazil's health minister, Marcelo Quiroga, who was with Bolsonaro, later tested positive for the coronavirus and will remain in isolation in the United States, the government said. Quiroga got his first shot of coronavirus vaccine in January.

Bolsonaro had COVID-19 last year and has said several times over the last week that he remains unvaccinated. He said getting a shot is a personal, medical decision.

## **EXPLAINER: Wide dangers ahead for Spanish volcanic island**

MADRID (AP) — A small Spanish island in the Atlantic Ocean is struggling days after a volcano erupted, forcing the evacuation of thousands of people, and authorities are warning that more dangers from the explosion lie ahead.

Here is a look at the volcanic eruption on La Palma and its consequences:

### **WHERE DID THE VOLCANO ERUPT?**

The eruption occurred Sunday afternoon on La Palma, one of eight volcanic islands in Spain's Canary Islands archipelago, which is strung along Africa's northwestern coast. It was the second volcanic eruption in 50 years for the island, which has a population of 85,000.

A 4.2-magnitude quake was recorded before the eruption. Huge plumes of black-and-white smoke shot out from the Cumbre Vieja volcanic ridge after a week of thousands of small earthquakes. Unstoppable rivers of molten lava, some up to 6 meters (20 feet) high, are now flowing downhill toward the ocean, engulfing everything in their path.

The Canary Islands are a volcanic hot spot popular with European tourists due to their mild year-round climate. Mount Teide, on the nearby island of Tenerife, is one of the world's tallest volcanoes and Spain's highest mountain. On La Palma, people live mostly from farming.

### **WHAT CAUSED THE ERUPTION?**

Scientists had been closely monitoring a build-up of underground magma in La Palma for a week before the eruption, detecting more than 20,000 earthquakes — most too small to be felt. That is known as an "earthquake swarm" and can indicate an approaching eruption.

Three days before the eruption, the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute reported that 11 million cubic meters (388 million cubic feet) of molten rock had been pushed into Cumbre Vieja.

After the 4.2-magnitude earthquake, two fissures belched bright red magma into the air. The lava flowed in streams down the mountain slope.

### **HOW BAD HAS THE DAMAGE BEEN?**

The close scientific monitoring meant that authorities were able to quickly evacuate people when the volcano erupted and no casualties have been reported.

But the damage to property, infrastructure and farmland has been considerable. So far, the eruption has destroyed around 190 houses and forced the evacuation of 6,000 people. The molten rock has also entombed banana groves, vineyards and crops of avocado and papaya. Some irrigation networks have been lost, groundwater contaminated and roads blocked.

The rivers of lava are now moving toward the island's more populated coast and the Atlantic Ocean, where they could cause new problems.

### **WHAT ARE THE DANGERS NOW?**

Authorities say residents face a host of dangers in the coming days and weeks.

When the lava 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 degrees Celsius (more than 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit). In the island's last eruption in 1971, one person died after inhaling the gas emitted as lava

hit the water.

Earthquakes on the island have continued, rattling nervous residents. A new fissure opened late Monday after what the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute said was a 3.8-magnitude quake, and began spewing more lava. Scientists say more new lava vents and cracks in the earth could emerge, endangering new areas.

The volcano has been producing between 8,000 and 10,500 tons of sulfur dioxide a day, the Volcanology Institute said. Sulfur dioxide is smelly and irritates the skin, eyes, nose and throat. It can also cause acid rain and air pollution.

The eruption has also produced volcanic ash, which can cause respiratory problems. Authorities on La Palma told people in the wide areas where the ash was falling to stay indoors with their doors and windows closed.

**HOW LONG WILL THE ERUPTION GO ON?**

Scientists say the lava flows on La Palma could last for weeks or even months. The last eruption on the island, in 1971, went on for just over three weeks.

The last eruption on all of the Canary Islands occurred underwater off the coast of El Hierro island in 2011. It lasted five months.

## **Trump sues niece, NY Times over records behind '18 tax story**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday sued his estranged niece and The New York Times over a 2018 story about his family's wealth and tax practices that was partly based on confidential documents she provided to the newspaper's reporters.

Trump's lawsuit, filed in state court in New York, accuses Mary Trump of breaching a settlement agreement by disclosing tax records she received in a dispute over family patriarch Fred Trump's estate.

The lawsuit accuses the Times and three of its investigative reporters, Susanne Craig, David Barstow and Russell Buettner, of relentlessly seeking out Mary Trump as a source of information and convincing her to turn over documents. The suit claims the reporters were aware the settlement agreement barred her from disclosing the documents.

The Times' story challenged Trump's claims of self-made wealth by documenting how his father, Fred, had given him at least \$413 million over the decades, including through tax avoidance schemes.

Mary Trump identified herself in a book published last year as the source of the documents provided to the Times.

Trump's lawsuit alleges Mary Trump, the Times and its reporters "were motivated by a personal vendetta" against him and a desire to push a political agenda.

The defendants "engaged in an insidious plot to obtain confidential and highly-sensitive records which they exploited for their own benefit and utilized as a means of falsely legitimizing their publicized works," the lawsuit said.

In a statement to NBC News, Mary Trump said of her uncle, "I think he is a loser, and he is going to throw anything against the wall he can. It's desperation. The walls are closing in and he is throwing anything against the wall that he thinks will stick. As is always the case with Donald, he'll try and change the subject."

A Times spokesperson, Danielle Rhoads Ha, said the lawsuit "is an attempt to silence independent news organizations and we plan to vigorously defend against it."

The Times' coverage of Trump's taxes, she said, "helped inform citizens through meticulous reporting on a subject of overriding public interest."

One of the Times reporters, Craig, responded in a tweet: "I knocked on Mary Trump's door. She opened it. I think they call that journalism."

Trump is seeking \$100 million in damages.

Trump filed his lawsuit almost a year to the day after Mary Trump sued him over allegations that he and

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 30 of 66

two of his siblings cheated her out of millions of dollars over several decades while squeezing her out of the family business.

That case is pending.

Mary Trump, 56, is the daughter of Donald Trump's brother, Fred Trump Jr., who died in 1981 at age 42. Mary Trump was 16 at the time.

Trump's lawsuit focuses only on the Times' 2018 story, a Pulitzer Prize winner for explanatory reporting. It makes no mention of another Times scoop on Trump's taxes last year, which found he paid no federal income taxes in 10 of the previous 15 years.

According to the lawsuit, Mary Trump came into possession of more than 40,000 pages of "highly sensitive, proprietary, private and confidential documents" through a legal case involving Fred Trump's will.

The documents including financial records, accountings, tax returns, bank statements, and legal papers pertaining to Donald Trump, Fred Trump and their businesses, Trump's lawsuit said.

In 2001, about two years after Fred Trump died, Mary Trump and other family members entered into a settlement agreement with confidentiality and non-disclosure clauses that barred them from sharing information about Fred Trump's estate in, among other venues, newspaper stories, Trump's lawsuit said. The agreement also covered the estate of Fred's wife, Mary Anne Trump, who died in 2000.

Trump, who bashed the Times repeatedly during his presidency as the "failing New York Times," noted in the lawsuit that the 2018 article was viewed more online than any previous Times article and that the New York Times Company's stock price jumped 7.4% the week it ran.

The Times' story said that Donald Trump and his father avoided gift and inheritance taxes by methods including setting up a sham corporation and undervaluing assets to tax authorities. The Times says its report was based on more than 100,000 pages of financial documents, including confidential tax returns from the father and his companies.

Mary Trump's book, "Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man," debuted in the midst of Donald Trump's re-election campaign last year. Donald Trump's brother, Robert, tried unsuccessfully to have a court block the book's publication, citing the 2001 settlement agreement.

Ruling in Mary Trump's favor, a judge said the confidentiality clauses, "viewed in the context of the current Trump family circumstances in 2020, would '...offend public policy as a prior restraint on protected speech."

In the book, Mary Trump recounted providing the family financial records that underlaid the Times' reporting. The book sold more than 1.3 million copies in its first week and soaring to No. 1 on the Times' bestseller list.

In an interview connected with the release of the book, Mary Trump told ABC's George Stephanopoulos she didn't feel the non-disclosure agreement "mattered one way or the other because what I have to say is too important."

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at [twitter.com/mikesisak](https://twitter.com/mikesisak)

## Germany's diversity shows as immigrants run for parliament

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Ana-Maria Trasnea was 13 when she emigrated from Romania because her single, working mother believed she would have a better future in Germany. Now 27, she is running for a seat in parliament.

"It was hard in Germany in the beginning," Trasnea said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But I was ambitious and realized that this was an opportunity for me, so I decided to do whatever I can to get respect and integrate."

Trasnea, who is running for the center-left Social Democrats in Sunday's election, is one of hundreds of candidates with immigrant roots who are seeking a seat in Germany's lower house of parliament, or

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 31 of 66

Bundestag. While the number in office still doesn't reflect their overall percentage of the population, the country's growing ethnic diversity is increasingly visible in politics.

"A lot has changed in Germany in the last few decades. The population has become much more diverse," says Julius Lagodny, a Cornell University political scientist who has researched migration and political representation in Germany. "Young immigrants are not only striving for political offices across almost all parties in Germany, they are demanding them. There's a whole new sense of assertiveness now."

There are about 21.3 million people with migrant backgrounds in Germany, or about 26% of the population of 83 million.

The current parliament has 8.2%, or 58 of 709 lawmakers with immigrant roots. The 2013-17 parliament had only 5.9%, or 37 out of 631 lawmakers, according to Mediendienst Integration, an organization tracking migrant issues in Germany.

Of the 6,227 candidates running for parliament, 537 have immigrant roots, said Julia Schulte-Cloos, a political scientist from Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University specializing in political behavior and discrimination of minorities in Germany and Europe.

Schulte-Cloos said the share of Bundestag candidates with immigrant roots has risen continuously since 2005.

Even though the number elected to parliament is expected to rise again this time, it will still fall short of 26% of Germany's population with what is officially termed a "migrant background" — defined as a person either born abroad or with at least one parent who was.

In Berlin, where about 35% of residents have foreign roots, immigrant candidates for Bundestag can be found in many parties.

Joe Chialo, 51, whose parents are from Tanzania, is competing for a seat for outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democrats in Berlin's Spandau neighborhood. Hakan Demir, 31, whose grandfather emigrated from Turkey 50 years ago, is trying to become the Social Democrats' new lawmaker in the Neukoelln neighborhood, one of the most diverse in Germany.

Outside the capital, Ezgi Guyildar, the 35-year-old daughter of Kurdish refugees from Turkey, is running with the progressive Left Party in the western city of Essen.

Their motivations include concern over global warming, seeking more rights for women and families, raising the minimum wage and improving the status of immigrants.

All four candidates, who are seeking a seat in parliament for the first time, told AP they sometimes experienced discrimination and racism, especially as children. But they also stressed their gratitude for coming to Germany and said they appreciated the education they received, leading to opportunities they might not have had otherwise.

Chialo, a music industry manager tapped by Merkel's would-be successor, Armin Laschet, as one of his advisers, is the son of Tanzanian diplomats. He was born in Bonn and raised in boarding schools after his parents went on to other diplomatic duties abroad.

"In the beginning, my brother and I were the only two Black kids at a school with 1,000 students," Chialo said. "The sentence, 'Oh look, there's a Negro,' tells you how unusual we and also many other Black people of my age were at the time in Germany."

Trasnea, who works for Berlin's education department and is running in the city's Koepenick-Treptow district, can't forget how other teenagers in high school threw stones at her and accused her of coming to Germany only to collect welfare.

Guyildar remembers how kids had snitched on her and other children for speaking Turkish in the schoolyard, which was not allowed. Demir is still embarrassed when he remembers lying to classmates from academic families that his father was a chemical technician, ashamed of his real job as an unskilled worker at a chemical company.

As an adult living in the ethnically diverse Berlin neighborhood of Neukoelln, Demir sees political advantages in his background.

"People from more than 150 nations live in this district — it's a great mix and very diverse," said Demir,

who previously worked for another immigrant lawmaker, Karamba Diaby. "Of course, when I notice somebody wants to speak Turkish, I do that and that right away creates a kind of intimacy which is important during the election campaign. It makes people feel involved."

More than 60 years ago, West Germany recruited "guest workers" from Turkey, Italy, Greece and later Morocco to help the country advance economically. They were employed in coal mining, steel production and the auto industry. Many who initially came as temporary workers decided to stay and bring their families, giving Berlin and other cities in western and southwestern Germany large immigrant communities.

Others followed in subsequent decades: people from Russia or Kazakhstan who could claim German ancestry; refugees from Lebanon's civil war; Jews from the former Soviet Union; and Eastern Europeans who took advantage of the free movement within the European Union. From 2005-2016, another wave of more than 1 million arrived, fleeing war in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

About 7.4 million migrant adults have German passports and are eligible to vote Sunday, according to 2019 figures from the Federal Statistical Office. Many often don't vote, however, and therefore are under-represented in parliament. Another 8.7 million adults living permanently in Germany can't vote because they don't have German citizenship.

Germany doesn't allow dual citizenship, except for nationals of other EU countries and Switzerland. That's a dilemma for many first generation immigrants who still have close ties to their home countries and don't want to give up their old passport — either for emotional reasons or out of fear they could lose inheritance rights or property in the countries of their birth.

Allowing dual citizenship is one issue Guyildar wants to fight for, if elected.

"I can feel close to Turkey, have my grandmother living there, and still consider Germany my homeland," she said. "There's nothing wrong about dual citizenship — on the contrary."

Sometimes, however, not having a German passport isn't the only barrier to running for office or even voting. First-generation immigrants, in particular, often are more focused on politics in their former countries.

"There's sometimes this barrier caused by discrimination or also by closed migrant societies here, in which the parents or grandparents are more interested in what's happening in the home countries than in the current politics here," says Canan Bayram, 55, a German-Kurdish lawyer who was elected to the Bundestag in 2017 for the Green party.

Bayram believes, however, that will change as more immigrants run for office.

"I think it is only another small step, and in 10 years we won't even talk about these topics that intensively any more because the new generation now is clearly forward looking and has found their center of life in Germany," she said.

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

## Ravaged by war, Syrian rebel area struggles with virus surge

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Coronavirus cases are surging to the worst levels of the pandemic in a rebel stronghold in Syria — a particularly devastating development in a region where scores of hospitals have been bombed and that doctors and nurses have fled in droves during a decade of war.

The total number of cases seen in Idlib province — an overcrowded enclave with a population of 4 million, many of them internally displaced — has more than doubled since the beginning of August to more than 61,000. In recent weeks, daily new infections have repeatedly shot past 1,500, and authorities reported 34 deaths on Sunday alone — figures that are still believed to be undercounts because many infected people don't report to authorities.

The situation has become so dire in the northwestern province that rescue workers known as the White Helmets who became famous for digging through the rubble of bombings to find victims now mostly ferry coronavirus patients to the hospital or the dead to burials.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 33 of 66

"What is happening is a medical catastrophe," the Idlib Doctors Syndicate said this week as it issued a plea for support from international aid groups.

Idlib faces all the challenges that places the world over have during the pandemic: Its intensive care units are largely full, there are severe shortages of oxygen and tests, and the vaccination rollout has been slow.

But extreme poverty and the ravages of Syria's civil war have made the situation in Idlib uniquely terrible. Half of its hospitals and health centers have been damaged by bombing, and the health system was close to collapse even before the pandemic. A large number of medical personnel have fled the country seeking safety and opportunities abroad. Tens of thousands of its residents live in crowded tent settlements, where social distancing and even regular hand-washing are all but impossible. And increasing violence in the region is now threatening to make matters worse.

Large parts of Idlib and neighboring Aleppo province remain in the hands of Syria's armed opposition, dominated by radical groups including al-Qaida-affiliated militants who have struggled to respond to the outbreak, which intensified in August, apparently driven by the more contagious delta variant and gatherings for the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha.

Cases and deaths have also been increasing in recent weeks in government-held areas and those under the control of U.S.-backed Kurdish-led fighters in the east, but the situation appears to be worse in Idlib, though it's hard to measure the true toll anywhere.

In response, the political arm of the insurgent group that runs Idlib has closed some markets, forced restaurants to serve outdoor meals only, and delayed the opening of schools by a week.

But most residents are daily laborers who could not survive if they stopped working, making full lockdowns impossible.

"If they don't work, they cannot eat," said Idlib resident Ahmad Said, who added that most people cannot even afford to buy masks.

What's more, a population that has suffered through so much already is often too weary to follow restrictions that have tested people even in easier circumstances.

"It is as if people have gotten used to death," said Salwa Abdul-Rahman, an opposition activist who reports on events in Idlib. "Those who were not killed by regime and Russian airstrikes are being killed now by coronavirus."

The vaccination campaign meanwhile, has been slow, though the arrival of some 350,000 doses of a Chinese vaccine earlier this month could help. According to the World Health Organization, only about 2.5% of Idlib's population has received at least one shot.

The new virus outbreak also comes amid the most serious increase in violence in Idlib, 18 months after a truce reached between Turkey and Russia who support rival sides in Syria's conflict brought relative calm. In recent weeks, airstrikes and artillery shelling by government forces have left scores of people dead or wounded.

At al-Ziraa hospital, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah says there is no sign that the outbreak has reached its peak yet.

But for some Idlib residents, getting infected is the least of their worries.

"We have gone through more difficult situations than coronavirus," said resident Ali Dalati, walking through a market without wearing a mask. "We are not afraid of coronavirus."

## Beloved 'Sex and the City' actor Willie Garson dies at 57

By ROBERT JABLON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Willie Garson, who played Stanford Blatch, Carrie Bradshaw's friend on TV's "Sex and the City" and its movie sequels, has died, his son announced Tuesday. He was 57.

"I love you so much papa. Rest In Peace and I'm so glad you got to share all your adventures with me and were able to accomplish so much," Nathen Garson wrote on Instagram. "I'm so proud of you."

"You always were the toughest and funniest and smartest person I've known," his son added.

No details of his death were released. Messages seeking comment from his representatives weren't

immediately returned.

Garson portrayed Blatch, a talent agent and the devoted and stylish best male friend to Sarah Jessica Parker's Carrie for six seasons. He reprised the role in the films "Sex and the City" and "Sex and the City 2," and had been filming an upcoming series revival for HBO Max called "And Just Like That."

Cynthia Nixon, who played Miranda Hobbes in the series, expressed her sorrow in a tweet.

"We all loved him and adored working with him. He was endlessly funny on-screen and in real life," she wrote. "He was a source of light, friendship and show business lore. He was a consummate professional — always."

"I couldn't have had a more brilliant TV partner," tweeted Mario Cantone, who played Garson's husband in "Sex and the City." "I'm devastated and just overwhelmed with sadness."

He added: "You were a gift from the gods."

"Willie Garson was in life, as on screen, a devoted friend and a bright light for everyone in his universe. He created one of the most beloved characters from the HBO pantheon and was a member of our family for nearly 25 years," an HBO Facebook statement said. "We are deeply saddened to learn of his passing and extend our sincere condolences to his family and loved ones."

Born William Garson Paszamant in Highland Park, New Jersey, Garson began studying acting at age 13 at the Actors Institute in New York. He made hundreds of appearances on TV and in motion pictures.

Besides "Sex and the City," he was perhaps best known as Mozzie, a con man on the TV show "White Collar," and also had recurring roles on "NYPD Blue," "Hawaii Five-0" and "Supergirl."

Garson, who was an advocate for adoption agencies, adopted his son, Nathen, in 2009 and marked the adoption in a January Instagram posting that read: "Best day of my life. Always."

## White House faces bipartisan backlash on Haitian migrants

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, COLLEEN LONG and BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is facing sharp condemnation from Democrats for its handling of the influx of Haitian migrants at the U.S. southern border, after images of U.S. Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics went viral this week.

Striking video of agents maneuvering their horses to forcibly block and move migrants attempting to cross the border has sparked resounding criticism from Democrats on Capitol Hill, who are calling on the Biden administration to end its use of a pandemic-era authority to deport migrants without giving them an opportunity to seek asylum in the United States.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., an administration ally, said images of the treatment of the migrants "turn your stomach" and called on the administration to discontinue the "hateful and xenophobic" policies of Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump.

"The policies that are being enacted now — and the horrible treatment of these innocent people who have come to the border — must stop immediately," Schumer told the Senate on Tuesday.

At the same time, the administration continues to face attacks from Republicans, who say Biden isn't doing enough to deal with what they call a "crisis" at the border.

Reflecting the urgency of the political problem for the administration, Homeland Security chief Alejandro Mayorkas said Tuesday the images "horrified" him, a seeming shift in tone from a day earlier, when he and others were more sanguine about the situation at the border.

Mayorkas announced later that the agents involved have been placed on administrative duties pending the outcome of an investigation. "The actions we're taking are swift and strong, and we will take further action as the facts adduced in the investigation compel," he said on Twitter.

It's a highly uncomfortable position for the administration, led by a president who has set himself up as a tonic for the harshness of his predecessor. But immigration is a complex issue, one no administration has been able to fix in decades. And Biden is trapped between conflicting interests of broadcasting compassion while dealing with throngs of migrants coming to the country — illegally — seeking a better life.

The provision in question, known as Title 42, was put in place by the Trump administration in March

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 35 of 66

2020 to justify restrictive immigration policies in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. But the Biden administration has used Title 42 to justify the deportation of Haitian migrants who in recent days have set up an encampment in and around the small city of Del Rio, Texas. The provision gives federal health officials powers during a pandemic to take extraordinary measures to limit transmission of an infectious disease.

A federal judge late last week ruled the regulation was improper and gave the government two weeks before its use was to be halted, but the Biden administration on Monday appealed the decision.

"The Biden administration pushing back on this stay of expulsions is another example of broken promises to treat migrants with respect and humanity when they reach our borders to exercise their fundamental right to asylum," said Karla Marisol Vargas, senior attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project and co-counsel on the litigation.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson demanded a meeting with Biden to discuss the situation and called the treatment of the Haitian migrants "utterly sickening."

"The humanitarian crisis happening under this administration on the southern border disgustingly mirrors some of the darkest moments in America's history," he said in a statement.

Shortly after the judge's decision on Friday, Homeland Security officials formed a plan to begin immediately turning the groups of Haitian migrants around, working against the clock. But people kept coming.

Trump essentially put a chokehold on immigration. He decreased the number of refugees admitted to a record low, made major changes to policy and essentially shut down asylum.

Biden has undone many of the Trump-era policies, but since his inauguration, the U.S. has seen a dramatic spike in the number of people encountered by border officials. The Haitian migrants are the latest example.

More than 6,000 Haitians and other migrants have been removed from the encampment in Del Rio, and Mayorkas predicted a "dramatic change" in the number of migrants there within the next two to four days as the administration continues the removal process.

As the controversy swirled around him, Biden spent his Tuesday address at the U.N. General Assembly in New York calling for the global community to come together to defend human rights and combat injustice worldwide, declaring, "the future will belong to those who embrace human dignity, not trample it."

The remarks stood in notable contrast to images of the Border Patrol agents on horseback. Biden himself seemed to acknowledge the challenge his administration faces with immigration, offering a clipped response when asked by a reporter after his U.N. remarks to offer his reaction to the images.

"We'll get it under control," he insisted.

Vice President Kamala Harris also weighed in, telling reporters in Washington that she was "deeply troubled" by the images and planned to talk to Mayorkas about the situation. Harris has been tasked with addressing the root causes of migration to the U.S., and emphasized that the U.S. should "support some very basic needs that the people of Haiti have" that are causing them to flee their homes for the U.S.

Videos and photos taken in recent days in and around Del Rio show Border Patrol agents confronting Haitians along the Rio Grande near a border bridge where thousands of migrants have gathered in hopes of entering the country.

One Border Patrol agent on horseback was seen twirling his long leather reins in a menacing way at the Haitian migrants, but not actually striking anyone. There was no sign in photos and videos viewed by The Associated Press that the mounted agents were carrying whips or using their reins as such when confronting the migrants.

The agents, wearing chaps and cowboy hats, maneuvered their horses to forcibly block and move the migrants, almost seeming to herd them. In at least one instance, they were heard taunting the migrants.

Asked about the images on Tuesday, Mayorkas told lawmakers that the issue had been "uppermost in my mind" ever since he had seen them. He said the department had alerted its inspector general's office and directed that staff from the Office of Professional Responsibility be present round-the-clock in Del Rio.

"I was horrified to see the images, and we look forward to learning the facts that are adduced from the

investigation, and we will take actions that those facts compel," Mayorkas said. "We do not tolerate any mistreatment or abuse of a migrant. Period."

Previously, during a Monday news conference, both Mayorkas and Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz played down the incident, with Ortiz telling reporters that the agents were working in a difficult and chaotic environment and trying to control their horses.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Mayorkas spoke Monday before he had seen the images. "He believes this does not represent who we are as a country and does not represent the positions of the Biden-Harris administration," Psaki told reporters on Tuesday.

Criticism was withering from members of Congress, including Rep. Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat who chairs the House Homeland Security Committee. He called on Mayorkas to "take immediate action to hold those responsible accountable." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also called for an investigation.

Republicans, meanwhile, stepped up their continued criticism of Biden's approach to the border, with 26 Republican governors calling on the president to change his border policies.

"A crisis that began at the southern border now extends beyond to every state and requires immediate action before the situation worsens," they said in a statement.

## Officials: Many Haitian migrants are being released in US

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

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — Many Haitian migrants camped in a small Texas border town are being released in the United States, two U.S. officials said Tuesday, undercutting the Biden administration's public statements that the thousands in the camp faced immediate expulsion.

Haitians have been freed on a "very, very large scale" in recent days, according to one U.S. official who put the figure in the thousands. The official, with direct knowledge of operations who was not authorized to discuss the matter and thus spoke on condition of anonymity

Many have been released with notices to appear at an immigration office within 60 days, an outcome that requires less processing time from Border Patrol agents than ordering an appearance in immigration court and points to the speed at which authorities are moving, the official said.

The Homeland Security Department has been busing Haitians from Del Rio to El Paso, Laredo and Rio Grande Valley along the Texas border, and this week added flights to Tucson, Arizona, the official said. They are processed by the Border Patrol at those locations.

A second U.S. official, also with direct knowledge and speaking on the condition of anonymity, said large numbers of Haitians were being processed under immigration laws and not being placed on expulsion flights to Haiti that started Sunday. The official couldn't be more specific about how many.

U.S. authorities scrambled in recent days for buses to Tucson but resorted to flights when they couldn't find enough transportation contractors, both officials said. Coast Guard planes took Haitians from Del Rio to El Paso.

The releases in the U.S. were occurring despite the signaling of a massive effort to expel Haitians on flights to Haiti under pandemic-related authority that denies migrants an opportunity to seek asylum. A third U.S. official not authorized to discuss operations said there were seven daily flights to Haiti planned starting Wednesday.

Accounts of wide-scale releases - some observed at the Del Rio bus station by Associated Press journalists - are at odds with statements a day earlier by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who traveled to Del Rio to promise swift action.

"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," he said at a Monday news conference.

The releases come amid a quick effort to empty the camp under a bridge that, according to some estimates, held more than 14,000 people over the weekend in a town of 35,000 people. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, during a visit Tuesday to Del Rio, said the county's top official told him the most recent tally at the camp was about 8,600 migrants.

The criteria for deciding who is flown to Haiti and who is released in the U.S. was unclear, but two U.S.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 37 of 66

officials said single adults were the priority for expulsion flights.

The Homeland Security Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment late Tuesday night.

Meanwhile, Mexico has begun busing and flying Haitian migrants away from the U.S. border, authorities said Tuesday, signaling a new level of support for the United States as the camp presented President Joe Biden with a humanitarian and increasingly political challenge.

The White House is facing sharp bipartisan condemnation. Republicans say Biden administration policies led Haitians to believe they would get asylum. Democrats are expressing outrage after images went viral this week of Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics against the migrants.

Mexico has helped at key moments before. It intensified patrols to stop unaccompanied Central American children from reaching the Texas border in 2014, allowed tens of thousands of asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration courts in 2019 and, just last month, began deporting Central American migrants to Guatemala after the Biden administration flew them to southern Mexico.

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's foreign relations secretary, said Tuesday he had spoken with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, about the Haitians' situation. Ebrard said most of the Haitians already had refugee status in Chile or Brazil and weren't seeking it in Mexico.

"What they are asking for is to be allowed to pass freely through Mexico to the United States," Ebrard said.

Two Mexican federal officials, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, confirmed Mexico's actions.

One of the officials said three busloads of migrants left Acuña on Tuesday morning for Piedras Negras, about 55 miles (90 kilometers) down the border, where they boarded a flight to the southern city of Villahermosa in the state of Tabasco.

The other official said there was a flight Monday from the northern city of Monterrey to the southern city of Tapachula near the Guatemala border. Tapachula is home to the largest immigrant detention center in Latin America. The flight carried about 100 migrants who had been picked up around the bus station in Monterrey, a hub for various routes north to the U.S. border.

The second official said the plan was to move to Tapachula all Haitians who already solicited asylum in Mexico.

The Haitian migrants who are already in Mexico's detention centers and have not requested asylum will be the first to be flown directly to Haiti once Mexico begins those flights, according to the official.

Around Ciudad Acuña, Mexican authorities were stepping up efforts to move migrants away from the border. There were detentions overnight by immigration agents and raids on hotels known to house migrants.

"All of a sudden they knocked on the door and (yelled) 'immigration,' 'police,' as if they were looking for drug traffickers," said Freddy Registre, a 37-year-old Venezuelan staying at one hotel with his Haitian wife, Vedette Dollard. The couple was surprised at midnight.

Authorities took four people plus others who were outside the hotel, he said. "They took our telephones to investigate and took us to the immigration offices, took our photos," Registre said. They were held overnight but finally were given their phones back and released. Authorities gave them two options: leave Mexico or return to Tapachula.

On Tuesday afternoon, they decided to leave town. They bought tickets for a bus ride to the Gulf coast state of Veracruz, planning to continue to Tapachula where they had already applied for asylum.

Others left without being told. Small groups arrived at Ciudad Acuña's bus station to buy tickets to Veracruz, Monterrey and Mexico City. The same bus lines prohibited from selling them tickets for rides north through Mexico, sold them tickets to head south without issue.

In Haiti, dozens of migrants upset about being deported from the U.S. tried to rush back into a plane that landed Tuesday afternoon in Port-au-Prince as they yelled at authorities. A security guard closed the plane door in time as some deportees began throwing rocks and shoes at the plane. Several of them lost their belongings in the scuffle as police arrived. The group was disembarking from one of three flights

scheduled for the day.

Verza reported from Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, and Spagat from San Diego. Associated Press writers Mark Stevenson in Mexico City, Felix Marquez in Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, Danica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Evens Sanon from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Michael Balsamo in Washington, Michael R. Sisak in New York and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, also contributed to this report.

Follow AP's coverage of migration at <https://apnews.com/hub/migration>

## 'The world must wake up': Tasks daunting as UN meeting opens

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In person and on screen, world leaders returned to the United Nations' foremost gathering for the first time in the pandemic era on Tuesday with a formidable, diplomacy-packed agenda and a sharply worded warning from the international organization's leader: "We face the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetime."

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres rang the alarm in his annual state-of-the-world speech at the opening of the U.N. General Assembly's high-level meeting for leaders of its 193 member nations. More than 100 heads of state and government kept away by COVID-19 are returning to the U.N. in person for the first time in two years. But with the pandemic still raging, about 60 will deliver pre-recorded statements over coming days.

"We are on the edge of an abyss — and moving in the wrong direction," Guterres said. "I'm here to sound the alarm. The world must wake up."

Guterres said the world has never been more threatened and divided. People may lose faith not only in their governments and institutions, he said, but in basic values when they see their human rights curtailed, corruption, the reality of their harsh lives, no future for their children — and "when they see billionaires joyriding to space while millions go hungry on Earth."

Nevertheless, the U.N. chief said he has hope.

Guterres urged world leaders to bridge six "great divides": promote peace and end conflicts, restore trust between the richer north and developing south on tackling global warming, reduce the gap between rich and poor, promote gender equality, ensure that the half of humanity that has no access to the Internet is connected by 2030, and tackle the generational divide by giving young people "a seat at the table."

Other pressing issues on the agenda of world leaders include 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.

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

The General Assembly's president, Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives, opened debate by challenging delegates to rise to the occasion. "There are moments in time that are turning points," he said. "This is one such moment."

In his speech, Biden, too, called this moment "an inflection point in history" and said that for the United States to prosper, it "must also engage deeply with the rest of the world."

He urged "relentless diplomacy" and global cooperation on COVID-19, climate change and human rights abuses, pledged to work with allies, and said the United States is "not seeking a new Cold War."

Biden was almost certainly responding to Secretary-General Guterres' warning in an AP interview over the weekend 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.S. president's pledge to work with allies follows sharp criticism from France, America's oldest ally,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 39 of 66

for the Biden administration's secret deal announced last week to provide nuclear-powered submarine to Australia with UK support, upending a French-Australia contract worth at least \$66 billion to build a dozen French conventional diesel-electric submarines.

Ahead of the opening, Guterres warned 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.

Biden, in his speech, insisted he was "not seeing a new Cold War or a world divided" and said Washington is ready to work with any nation, "even if we have intense disagreement in other areas."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told a news conference Monday that there is a "crisis of trust" between the United States and 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.

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: China's presence in the world, and its relationship with the United States, affect most every corner of the planet.

By tradition, the first country to speak was Brazil, whose president, Jair Bolsonaro rebuffed criticism of his administration's handling of the pandemic and touted recent data indicating less Amazon deforestation. He said he was seeking to counter the image of Brazil portrayed in the media, touting it as a great place for investment and praising his pandemic welfare program, which helped avoid a worse recession last year.

He said that his government has successfully distributed first doses to the majority of adults, but doesn't support vaccine passports or forcing anyone to have a shot. Bolsonaro has said several times in the past week that he remains unvaccinated.

"By November, everyone who chooses to be vaccinated in Brazil will be attended to," Bolsonaro told the General Assembly.

He also doubled-down on "early treatment" methods such as hydroxychloroquine, without naming the drug. Brazil's government continued promoting the antimalarial long after scientists roundly dismissed it as ineffective against COVID-19.

Alarm over global warming was a common theme in speeches. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, president of the tiny Indian Ocean island nation of the Maldives, said further rising temperatures are a "death sentence" for his country.

"One overarching fact remains. The state of environmental ruin small island states endure now, will without a doubt catch up with bigger nations sooner than later. There is no guarantee of survival for any one nation in a world where the Maldives cease to exist," Solih warned.

Nonetheless, he said, : "This organization still represents the pinnacle of what concerted diplomacy can achieve."

Guterres, in his opening speech, pointed to "supersized glaring inequalities" sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate alarm bells "ringing at fever pitch," upheavals from Afghanistan to Ethiopia and Yemen thwarting global peace, a surge of mistrust and misinformation "polarizing people and paralyzing societies" and human rights "under fire."

The solidarity of nations to tackle these and other crises "is missing in action just when we need it most," he said. "Instead of humility in the face of these epic challenges, we see hubris."

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David Biller in Rio de Janeiro and Malika Sen in New York contributed to this report.

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Edith M. Lederer, chief U.N. correspondent for The Associated Press, has been reporting internationally for nearly 50 years. Follow her on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/EdithLedererAP>.

## White House faces bipartisan backlash on Haitian migrants

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE, COLLEEN LONG and BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is facing sharp condemnation from Democrats for its handling of the influx of Haitian migrants at the U.S. southern border, after images of U.S. Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics went viral this week.

Striking video of agents maneuvering their horses to forcibly block and move migrants attempting to cross the border has sparked resounding criticism from Democrats on Capitol Hill, who are calling on the Biden administration to end its use of a pandemic-era authority to deport migrants without giving them an opportunity to seek asylum in the United States.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., an administration ally, said images of the treatment of the migrants “turn your stomach” and called on the administration to discontinue the “hateful and xenophobic” policies of Biden’s predecessor, Donald Trump.

“The policies that are being enacted now — and the horrible treatment of these innocent people who have come to the border — must stop immediately,” Schumer told the Senate on Tuesday.

At the same time, the administration continues to face attacks from Republicans, who say Biden isn’t doing enough to deal with what they call a “crisis” at the border.

Reflecting the urgency of the political problem for the administration, Homeland Security chief Alejandro Mayorkas said Tuesday the images “horrified” him, a seeming shift in tone from a day earlier, when he and others were more sanguine about the situation at the border.

Mayorkas announced later that the agents involved have been placed on administrative duties pending the outcome of an investigation. “The actions we’re taking are swift and strong, and we will take further action as the facts adduced in the investigation compel,” he said on Twitter.

It’s a highly uncomfortable position for the administration, led by a president who has set himself up as a tonic for the harshness of his predecessor. But immigration is a complex issue, one no administration has been able to fix in decades. And Biden is trapped between conflicting interests of broadcasting compassion while dealing with throngs of migrants coming to the country — illegally — seeking a better life.

The provision in question, known as Title 42, was put in place by the Trump administration in March 2020 to justify restrictive immigration policies in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. But the Biden administration has used Title 42 to justify the deportation of Haitian migrants who in recent days have set up an encampment in and around the small city of Del Rio, Texas. The provision gives federal health officials powers during a pandemic to take extraordinary measures to limit transmission of an infectious disease.

A federal judge late last week ruled the regulation was improper and gave the government two weeks before its use was to be halted, but the Biden administration on Monday appealed the decision.

“The Biden administration pushing back on this stay of expulsions is another example of broken promises to treat migrants with respect and humanity when they reach our borders to exercise their fundamental right to asylum,” said Karla Marisol Vargas, senior attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project and co-counsel on the litigation.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson demanded a meeting with Biden to discuss the situation and called the treatment of the Haitian migrants “utterly sickening.”

“The humanitarian crisis happening under this administration on the southern border disgustingly mirrors some of the darkest moments in America’s history,” he said in a statement.

Shortly after the judge’s decision on Friday, Homeland Security officials formed a plan to begin immediately turning the groups of Haitian migrants around, working against the clock. But people kept coming.

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# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 41 of 66

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"We'll get it under control," he insisted.

Vice President Kamala Harris also weighed in, telling reporters in Washington that she was "deeply troubled" by the images and planned to talk to Mayorkas about the situation. Harris has been tasked with addressing the root causes of migration to the U.S., and emphasized that the U.S. should "support some very basic needs that the people of Haiti have" that are causing them to flee their homes for the U.S.

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Republicans, meanwhile, stepped up their continued criticism of Biden's approach to the border, with 26 Republican governors calling on the president to change his border policies.

"A crisis that began at the southern border now extends beyond to every state and requires immediate action before the situation worsens," they said in a statement.

## House OKs debt and funding plan, inviting clash with GOP

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted late Tuesday to keep the government funded, suspend the

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 42 of 66

federal debt limit and provide disaster and refugee aid, setting up a high-stakes showdown with Republicans who oppose the package despite the risk of triggering a fiscal crisis.

The federal government faces a shutdown if funding stops on Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year — midnight next Thursday. Additionally, at some point in October the U.S. risks defaulting on its accumulated debt load if its borrowing limits are not waived or adjusted.

Rushing to prevent that dire outcome, the Democratic-led House passed the measure by a party-line vote of 220-211. The bill now goes to the Senate, where it is likely to falter because of overwhelming GOP opposition.

"Our country will suffer greatly if we do not act now to stave off this unnecessary and preventable crisis," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said shortly before the vote.

Backed by the White House, the Democratic leaders pushed the package to approval at a time of great uncertainty in Congress. With lawmakers already chiseling away at the \$3.5 trillion price tag of President Joe Biden's broad "build back better" agenda, immediate attention focused on the upcoming deadlines to avert deeper problems if votes to shore up government funding fail.

The package approved Tuesday would provide stopgap money to keep the government funded to Dec. 3 and extend borrowing authority through the end of 2022. It includes \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and other extreme weather events, and \$6.3 billion to support Afghanistan evacuees in the fallout from the end of the 20-year war.

While suspending the debt ceiling allows the government to meet financial obligations already incurred, Republicans argued it would also facilitate a spending binge in the months ahead.

"I will not support signing a blank check as this majority is advancing the most reckless expansion of government in generations," said Rep. Dan Meuser, R-Pa., during the debate.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said since Democrats control the White House and Congress, it's their problem to find the votes — even though he had relied on bipartisan cooperation to approve the debt limits when Republicans were in charge.

"The debt ceiling will be raised as it always should be, but it will be raised by the Democrats," McConnell said.

In the 50-50 Senate, Democrats will be hard-pressed to find 10 Republicans to reach the 60-vote threshold needed to overcome a filibuster.

"This is playing with fire," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

The Treasury Department has been using "extraordinary measures" to fund the government since the last debt limit suspension expired July 31, and projects that at some point next month will run out cash reserves. Then, it will 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.

Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody's Analytics, warned if lawmakers allow a federal debt default "this economic scenario is cataclysmic."

In a report being circulated by Democrats, Zandi warned that a potential downturn from government funding cutbacks would cost 6 million jobs and stock market losses would wipe out \$15 trillion of household wealth.

Once a routine matter, raising 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 the increase. At the time, they argued against more spending and the standoff triggered a fiscal crisis.

Echoing that strategy, McConnell is setting the tone for his party, but some GOP senators might have a tough time voting no.

Republican 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 the increase. "My people desperately need the help," he said.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that "in our view, this should not be a controversial vote." Psaki said Congress has raised the debt ceiling numerous times on a bipartisan basis, including three times under President Donald Trump.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 43 of 66

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the Democratic chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, was forced to introduce another version of the bill Tuesday after some within the Democratic caucus objected to the inclusion of \$1 billion for Israel's Iron Dome defense system, which uses missiles to intercept short-range rockets fired into the country.

The Israel defense issue splits Democrats, but DeLauro assured colleagues that money for the weapons system would be included in the annual defense spending bill. Hoyer went a step further and said he would bring a bill to the floor this week to replenish the Iron Dome system.

Republicans were highly critical of the change and vowed to stand as allies with Israel.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Democrats were negotiating over Biden's big "build back better" package as the price tag likely slips to win over skeptical centrist lawmakers who view it as too much.

Publicly, the White House has remained confident the legislation will pass soon, despite sharp differences among progressives and moderates in the party over the eventual size of the package and a companion \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill.

There has been a flurry of outreach from the White House to Democrats on Capitol Hill, and Biden himself was given a call sheet of lawmakers to cajole. The president has been talking to a wide number of lawmakers beyond his recent meetings with key centrist Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., according to a White House official familiar with the calls and granted anonymity to discuss them.

Biden's big initiative touches almost all aspects of Americans' lives. It 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, including government health, education and family support and environmental efforts to fight climate change.

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

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has promised a Sept. 27 vote on the companion \$1 trillion bill of public works projects that has already passed the Senate.

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. And centrists won't vote for the broader package unless they are assured the bipartisan bill will also be included.

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Associated Press writers Darlene Superville and Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.

## China, US unveil separate big steps to fight climate change

By SETH BORENSTEIN and CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writers

The two biggest economies and largest carbon polluters in the world announced separate financial attacks on climate change Tuesday.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said his country will no longer fund coal-fired power plants abroad, surprising the world on climate for the second straight year at the U.N. General Assembly. That came hours after U.S. President Joe Biden announced a plan to double financial aid to poorer nations to \$11.4 billion by 2024 so those countries could switch to cleaner energy and cope with global warming's worsening impacts. That puts rich nations close to within reach of its long-promised but not realized goal of \$100 billion a year in climate help for developing nations.

"This is an absolutely seminal moment," said Xinyue Ma, an expert on energy development finance at Boston University's Global Development Policy Center.

This could provide some momentum going into major climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, in less than six weeks, experts said. Running up to the historic 2015 Paris climate deal, a joint U.S.-China agreement kickstarted successful negotiations. This time, with China-U.S. relations dicey, the two nations made their announcements separately, hours and thousands of miles apart.

"Today was a really good day for the world," United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is host-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 44 of 66

ing the upcoming climate negotiations, told Vice President Kamala Harris.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who has made a frenetic push this week for bigger efforts to curb climate change called the two announcements welcome news, but said "we still have a long way to go" to make the Glasgow meeting successful.

Depending on when China's new coal policy goes into effect, it could shutter 47 planned power plants in 20 developing countries that use the fuel that emits the most heat-trapping gases, about the same amount of coal power as from Germany, according to the European climate think-tank E3G.

"It's a big deal. China was the only significant funder of overseas coal left. This announcement essentially ends all public support for coal globally," said Joanna Lewis, an expert on China, energy and climate at Georgetown University. "This is the announcement many have been waiting for."

From 2013 to 2019, data showed that China was financing 13% of coal-fired power capacity built outside China – "far and away the largest public financier," said Kevin Gallagher, who directs the Boston University center. Japan and South Korea announced earlier this year that they were getting out of the coal-financing business.

With all three countries pulling out of financing coal abroad "that sends a signal to the global economy. This is a sector that's fast becoming a stranded asset," Gallagher said.

While this is a big step it is not quite a death knell for coal, said Byford Tsang, a policy analyst for E3G. That's because China last year added as much new coal power domestically as was just potentially cancelled abroad, he said.

Tsang cautioned that the one-sentence line in Xi's speech that mentioned this new policy lacked details like effective dates and whether it applied to private funding as well as public funding.

What also matters is when China stops building new coal plants at home and shuts old ones, Tsang said. That will be part of a push in the G-20 meetings in Italy next month, he said. "The Chinese are going to respond to international pressure, rather than just American bilateral pressure right now," said Deborah Seligsohn, an expert on China's politics and energy at Villanova University.

"A coal-free energy mix is still decades in the future" because coal power plants typically operate for 50 years or more, said Stanford University environment director Chris Field.

Many nations that are trying to build their economies — including top polluters China and India — have long argued they needed to industrialize with fossil fuels, like developed nations had already done. Starting in 2009 and then with "a grand bargain" in 2015 in Paris, richer nations promised \$100 billion a year in financial help to poorer nations to make the switch from dirty to clean fuel, World Resources Institute climate finance expert Joe Thwaites said.

But as of 2019, the richer nations were only providing \$80 billion a year, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

So when rich nations like the United States asked poorer ones to do more "it gives any other country a very easy retort," Thwaites said: "You took out commitments and you haven't delivered on those either.""

In April, Biden announced he would double the Obama era financial aid pledge of \$2.85 billion a year to \$5.7 billion. On Tuesday he announced that he hopes to double that to \$11.4 billion a year starting in 2024, but he does need passage from Congress.

The European Union has been doling out \$24.5 billion a year with the European Commission recently upping that to more than \$4.7 billion over seven years. "The Europeans are doing a lot more and the Americans are lagging behind," Thwaites said.

He said several studies calculate that based on the U.S. economy, population and carbon pollution, it should be contributing 40% to 47% of the \$100 billion fund to be doing its fair share.

But Congressional Republicans aren't convinced. "We shouldn't be contributing to a fund that picks winners and losers and further subsidizes China in the process," said Rep. Garret Graves, R-Louisiana, the ranking Republican on the House Climate Committee.

The time for global grandstanding is over, said Princeton University climate science and international affairs professor Michael Oppenheimer said. "It's what's happening on the ground that matters."

"Accelerating the global phase out of coal is the single most important step" to keeping the Paris agreement's key warming limit within reach, said U.N. chief Guterres.

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Associated Press journalist Matthew Daly contributed from Washington.

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## UN: Afghanistan's Taliban want to address General Assembly

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Who should represent Afghanistan at the United Nations this month? It's a complex question with plenty of political implications.

The Taliban, the country's new rulers for a matter of weeks, are challenging the credentials of their country's former U.N. ambassador and want to speak at the General Assembly's high-level meeting of world leaders this week, the international body says.

The question now facing U.N. officials comes just over a month after the Taliban, ejected from Afghanistan by the United States and its allies after 9/11, swept back into power as U.S. forces prepared to withdraw from the country at the end of August. The Taliban stunned the world by taking territory with surprising speed and little resistance from the U.S.-trained Afghan military. The Western-backed government collapsed on Aug. 15.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres received a communication on Sept. 15 from the currently accredited Afghan Ambassador, Ghulam Isaczai, with the list of Afghanistan's delegation for the assembly's 76th annual session.

Five days later, Guterres received another communication with the letterhead "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs," signed by "Ameer Khan Muttaqi" as "Minister of Foreign Affairs," requesting to participate in the U.N. gathering of world leaders.

Muttaqi said in the letter that former Afghan president Ashraf Ghani was "ousted" as of Aug. 15 and that countries across the world "no longer recognize him as president," and therefore Isaczai no longer represents Afghanistan, Dujarric said.

The Taliban said it was nominating a new U.N. permanent representative, Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, the U.N. spokesman said. He has been a spokesman for the Taliban during peace negotiations in Qatar.

Senior U.S. State Department officials said they were aware of the Taliban's request — the United States is a member of the U.N. credentials committee — but they would not predict how that panel might rule. However, one of the officials said the committee "would take some time to deliberate," suggesting the Taliban's envoy would not be able to speak at the General Assembly at this session at least during the high-level leaders' week.

In cases of disputes over seats at the United Nations, the General Assembly's nine-member credentials committee must meet to make a decision. Both letters have been sent to the committee after consultations with General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid's office. The committee's members are the United States, Russia, China, Bahama, Bhutan, Chile, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Sweden.

Afghanistan is scheduled to give the last speech on the final day of the high-level meeting on Sept. 27. It wasn't clear who would speak if the committee met and the Taliban were given Afghanistan's seat.

When the Taliban last ruled from 1996 to 2001, the U.N. refused to recognize their government and instead gave Afghanistan's seat to the previous, warlord-dominated government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who eventually was killed by a suicide bomber in 2011. It was Rabbani's government that brought Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of 9/11, to Afghanistan from Sudan in 1996.

The Taliban have said they want international recognition and financial help to rebuild the war-battered country. But the makeup of the new Taliban government poses a dilemma for the United Nations. Several

of the interim ministers are on the U.N.'s so-called blacklist of international terrorists and funders of terrorism.

Credentials committee members could also use Taliban recognition as leverage to press for a more inclusive government that guarantees human rights, especially for girls who were barred from going to school during their previous rule, and women who weren't able to work.

Kathy Gannon in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Matthew Lee in New York contributed to this report.

## Coroner IDs remains, says Gabby Petito was homicide victim

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

NORTH PORT, Fla. (AP) — Gabby Petito was killed by another person, a coroner concluded while also confirming that the human remains found recently at a Wyoming national park were those of the 22-year-old woman who disappeared months after she set out on a cross-country road trip with her boyfriend, the FBI said Tuesday.

Teton County Coroner Brent Blue determined Petito was a homicide victim, but did not disclose a cause of death pending final autopsy results, officials said. Her body was found Sunday near an undeveloped camping area in remote northern Wyoming along the border of Grand Teton National Park.

Meanwhile, authorities continued to search a swampy Florida preserve area near the home of Petito's boyfriend. Police in North Port, Florida, said investigators returned Tuesday to the Carlton Reserve to look for Brian Laundrie, 23. Nothing of note was found, and the search was expected to continue Wednesday. Investigators began searching the 24,000-acre (9,700-hectare) Florida nature preserve over the weekend, focusing on the area after Laundrie's parents told police he may have gone there.

Authorities are using helicopters, drones, dogs and officers in all-terrain vehicles in their search for Laundrie. About 75% of the search area is underwater.

On Monday, the FBI went to Laundrie's parents' home in North Port and removed several boxes and towed away a car neighbors said Laundrie's mother typically used.

Laundrie and Petito had been living with his parents at the North Port home before the road trip on which she died.

The young couple had set out in July in a converted van to visit national parks in the West. They got into a fight along the way, and Laundrie was alone when he returned in the van to his parents' home Sept. 1, police said.

Laundrie has been named a person of interest in the case, but his whereabouts in recent days were unknown.

Petito's father, Joseph, posted on social media an image of a broken heart above a picture of his daughter, with the message: "She touched the world."

In an interview broadcast Monday on TV's "Dr. Phil" show, Joseph Petito said Laundrie and his daughter had dated for 2 1/2 years, and Laundrie was "always respectful." During the interview, which was recorded before his daughter's body was found, Petito said the couple had taken a previous road trip to California in her car and there were no problems.

Joseph Petito said the family began worrying after several days without hearing from their daughter. "We called Brian, we called the mom, we called the dad, we called the sister, we called every number that we could find," Joseph Petito said. "No phone calls were picked up, no text messages were returned."

Joseph Petito said he wants Laundrie to be held accountable for whatever part he played in his daughter's disappearance, along with his family for protecting him.

"I hope they get what's coming, and that includes his folks," Joseph Petito said. "Because I'll tell you, right now, they are just as complicit, in my book."

The FBI said investigators are seeking information from anyone who may have seen the couple around Grand Teton.

Gabby Petito and Laundrie were childhood sweethearts who met while growing up on New York's Long

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 47 of 66

Island. His parents later moved to North Port, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) south of Sarasota.

A man who saw Petito and Laundrie fighting in Moab, Utah, on Aug. 12 called 911 to report a domestic violence incident, according to a recording of the call obtained from the Grand County Sheriff's Office. The man said he saw Laundrie slap Petito while walking through the town and proceeded to hit her before the two got in their van and drove off.

Video released by the Moab police showed that an officer pulled the couple's van over on the same day after it was seen speeding and hitting a curb near Arches National Park. The body-camera footage showed an upset Petito.

Laundrie said on the video that the couple had gotten into a scuffle after he climbed into the van with dirty feet. He said he did not want to pursue a domestic violence charge against Petito, who officers decided was the aggressor.

Moab police separated the couple for the night, with Laundrie checking into a motel and Petito remaining with the van.

In the footage, Gabby Petito cried as she told the officer she and Laundrie had been arguing over her excessive cleaning of the van. She told the officer she has OCD — obsessive compulsive disorder.

On "Dr. Phil," her father said that was not literally true. She just likes to keep her living area orderly and was using slang, he said.

AP writer Matthew Brown in Billings, Montana, contributed to this report.

## US sues to stop deal between American Airlines and JetBlue

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

The Justice Department and officials in six states have filed a lawsuit to block a partnership formed by American Airlines and JetBlue, claiming that it will reduce competition and lead to higher fares.

The Justice Department said Tuesday that the agreement will eliminate important competition in New York and Boston and reduce JetBlue's incentive to compete against American in other parts of the country.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said the lawsuit was about ensuring fair competition that lets Americans fly at affordable prices.

"In an industry where just four airlines control more than 80% of domestic air travel, American Airlines' 'alliance' with JetBlue is, in fact, an unprecedented maneuver to further consolidate the industry," Garland said in a statement. "It would result in higher fares, fewer choices, and lower quality service if allowed to continue."

American and JetBlue vowed to fight the lawsuit and to continue their alliance unless a court orders them to stop.

American and JetBlue announced their deal last year and have already started to coordinate flights in the Northeast. They argue that it is a pro-consumer arrangement that has already helped them start 58 new routes from four airports in New York and Boston, add flights on other routes, and plan new international destinations.

American CEO Doug Parker said that blocking the deal will "take away consumer choice and inhibit competition, not encourage it. This is not a merger: American and JetBlue are — and will remain — independent airlines."

The lawsuit comes two months after President Joe Biden issued an executive order calling on government agencies to help consumers by increasing competition in the airline industry and other parts of the economy.

The Transportation Department approved the agreement, with certain conditions, in January during the final days of the Trump administration. The airlines gave up some takeoff and landing slots at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York and Washington Reagan National Airport outside Washington, and they agreed not to cooperate on setting prices.

"Instead of suing now, the (Justice Department) should have waited and monitored and held us ac-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 48 of 66

countable to the benefits that we said this would deliver," JetBlue CEO Robin Hayes said in an interview. Hayes disputed the Justice Department's belief that the deal will stop his airline from competing against American outside the Northeast. He noted that JetBlue this year started flying from New York to London and between Miami and Los Angeles, important routes for American.

Despite the green light from the Transportation Department, antitrust lawyers at the Justice Department began examining the deal more closely this spring and requested interviews and documents from the airlines, according to an airline lawyer involved in the case.

In the last three weeks it became apparent that the Justice Department was likely to file a lawsuit, said the attorney, who spoke on condition of anonymity because discussions with the regulators were private.

The airlines call their partnership the Northeast Alliance or NEA. It lets American and JetBlue sell seats on each other's flights and give customers reciprocal benefits in the separate frequent-flyer programs.

American and JetBlue argue that the deal is pro-consumer by making their combination a stronger competitor in the Northeast. Together, the airlines say, they controlled 16% of the region's air-travel market before the partnership, and that has grown to 24%.

The airlines argue that the Justice Department has no evidence that their agreement is leading to higher fares. Air-travel prices have been hurt by the pandemic, which continues to cut into travel demand and push fares lower.

American and JetBlue argue that nothing in their deal controls pricing, and that each airline will continue to set its own fares.

Southwest Airlines and Spirit Airlines filed formal complaints against the American-JetBlue alliance, however, arguing that — along with a similar deal on the West Coast between American and Alaska Airlines — it will make American too big.

The Justice Department lawsuit was filed in federal district court in Massachusetts. The department was joined by the attorneys general of California, Massachusetts, Florida, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Arizona and the District of Columbia.

## 'Soul-crushing': US COVID-19 deaths are topping 1,900 a day

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have climbed to an average of more than 1,900 a day for the first time since early March, with experts saying the virus is preying largely on a distinct group: 71 million unvaccinated Americans.

The increasingly lethal turn has filled hospitals, complicated the start of the school year, delayed the return to offices and demoralized health care workers.

"It is devastating," said Dr. Dena Hubbard, a pediatrician in the Kansas City, Missouri, area who has cared for babies delivered prematurely by cesarean section in a last-ditch effort to save their mothers, some of whom died. For health workers, the deaths, combined with misinformation and disbelief about the virus, have been "heart-wrenching, soul-crushing."

Twenty-two people died in one week alone at CoxHealth hospitals in the Springfield-Branson area, a level almost as high as that of all of Chicago. West Virginia has had more deaths in the first three weeks of September — 340 — than in the previous three months combined. Georgia is averaging 125 dead per day, more than California or other more populous states.

"I've got to tell you, a guy has got to wonder if we are ever going to see the end of it or not," said Collin Follis, who is the coroner in Missouri's Madison County and works at a funeral home.

The nation was stunned back in December when it was witnessing 3,000 deaths a day. But that was when almost no one was vaccinated.

Now, nearly 64% of the U.S. population has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. And yet, average deaths per day have climbed 40% over the past two weeks, from 1,387 to 1,947, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Health experts say the vast majority of the hospitalized and dead have been unvaccinated. While some



vaccinated people have suffered breakthrough infections, those tend to be mild.

The number of vaccine-eligible Americans who have yet to get a shot has been put at more than 70 million.

"There is a very real risk you'll end up in the hospital or even in the obituary pages," Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, chief medical officer for the Ohio Department of Health, said to the unvaccinated. "Don't become a statistic when there is a simple, safe and effective alternative to go out today and get vaccinated."

Many low-vaccination communities also have high rates of conditions like obesity and diabetes, said Dr. William Moss of Johns Hopkins. And that combination — along with the more contagious delta variant — has proved lethal.

"I think this is a real failure of society and our most egregious sin to be at this stage where we have hospitals overwhelmed, ICUs overwhelmed and hitting this mark in terms of deaths per day," Moss lamented.

New cases of the coronavirus per day in the U.S. have dropped since the start of September and are now running at about 139,000. But deaths typically take longer to fall because victims often linger for weeks before succumbing.

In Kansas, 65-year-old cattleman Mike Limon thought he had beaten COVID-19 and went back to work for a few days. But the virus had "fried" his lungs and he died last week, said his grandson, Cadin Limon, 22, of Wichita.

He said his grandfather didn't get vaccinated for fear of a bad reaction, and he hasn't gotten the shot either for the same reason, though serious side effects have proved extremely rare.

He described his grandfather as a "man of faith."

"Sixty-five is still pretty young," the young man said. "I know that. It seems sudden and unexpected, but COVID didn't surprise God. His death wasn't a surprise to God. The God I serve is bigger than that."

Cases are falling in West Virginia from pandemic highs, but deaths and hospitalizations are expected to continue increasing for as many as six more weeks, said retired National Guard Maj. Gen. James Hoyer, who leads the state's coronavirus task force.

Dr. Greg Martin, who is president of the Society of Critical Care Medicine and practices mostly at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, said the staff is buckling under the strain.

"I think everyone in 2020 thought we would get through this. No one really thought that we would still be seeing this the same way in 2021," he said.

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon activated the state's National Guard on Tuesday to provide assistance to hospitals dealing with a surge of COVID-19 patients.

In Oklahoma, Hillcrest South Hospital in Tulsa is among several medical centers around the country to add temporary morgues. Deaths are at an all-time high there, at three to four times the number it would see in a non-COVID-19 world, said Bennett Geister, hospital CEO.

He said the staff there, too, is worn out.

"They didn't sign up to be ICU nurses only to have people pass away on them," he said. "They signed up to be ICU nurses to take people to recovery and heal people from the brink of death."

## **Biden promises 'relentless diplomacy' to skeptical allies**

By JOSH BOAK and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — President Joe Biden summoned the world's nations to forcefully address the festering global issues of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and human rights abuses in his first address before the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday. He decried military conflict and insisted the U.S. is not seeking "a new Cold War" with China.

But while stressing to fellow world leaders the urgency of working together, Biden avoided addressing criticism from allies about the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and a diplomatic tempest with France.

Instead, Biden used his address before the annual gathering of world leaders to make his case that the United States remains a reliable international partner following four years of President Donald Trump's "America first" foreign policy.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 50 of 66

"We're opening a new era of relentless diplomacy, of using the power of our development aid to invest in new ways of lifting people up around the world," Biden said.

The president offered an impassioned plea for cooperation, to friends and adversaries, arguing that overcoming a daunting list of crises "will hinge on our ability to recognize our common humanity."

Biden said the U.S., under his watch, had reached a turning point with the end of military operations in Afghanistan last month, closing out America's longest war. That set the table, he said, for his administration to shift its attention to intensive diplomacy at a moment with no shortage of crises facing the globe.

"Today, many of our greatest concerns cannot be solved or even addressed by the force of arms," he said. "Bombs and bullets cannot defend against COVID-19 or its future variants."

Biden offered a robust endorsement of the U.N.'s relevance and ambition at a difficult time in history, and sought to reassure wary allies of U.S. cooperation.

He pledged to double U.S. financial aid to poorer countries to help them switch to cleaner energy and cope with the "merciless" effects of climate change. That would mean increasing assistance to about \$11.4 billion a year — after five months ago doubling the amount to \$5.7 billion a year. The Biden administration set a 2024 goal to reach the \$11.4 billion mark.

As part of the fight against climate change, rich nations for many years have promised to spend \$100 billion a year in climate help, but a new study shows that they're \$20 billion a year short. Biden said his new commitment would help rich nations reach their goal.

In climate negotiations there's a dramatic rich-poor nation gap. Developing nations and others are reluctant to curb emissions further of heat-trapping gases without help from developed nations, which — in the words of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson — are "the guys that created the problem."

Biden seemed to look past the mounting skepticism he's faced from world leaders in the early going of his presidency, including criticism that Biden has given too little weight to allies' concerns on issues that have ramifications for America's friends on the world stage.

Eight months into his presidency, Biden has been out of sync with allies on the 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.

His recent blow-up with France was born out of a three-way agreement between the U.S., Britain and Australia that undercut a more than \$60 billion French submarine deal in favor of a plan to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines.

The move is expected to give Australia improved capabilities to patrol the Pacific amid growing concern about the Chinese military's increasingly aggressive tactics.

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.

Biden wasn't so concerned. Asked by a reporter as he arrived at the U.N. on Tuesday how he planned to repair relations with the French, Biden responded with two words: "They're great."

In an interview before meeting with Biden on Monday, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres told The Associated Press that he was concerned about the "completely dysfunctional" U.S.-China relationship and the possibility it could lead to a new Cold War.

The secretary-general did not back off his concerns about the U.S.-China tensions as he addressed leaders at the opening of Tuesday's gathering. "It will be impossible to address dramatic economic and development challenges while the world's two largest economies are at odds with each other," he said.

Biden sought to play down concerns about China tensions escalating into something more, saying: "We are not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs." Notably, Biden didn't utter the word "China" in his 34-minute address.

More broadly, he put a heavy emphasis on the need for world leaders to work together on the COVID-19 pandemic, to meet past obligations to address climate change, to head off emerging technology issues and to firm up trade rules.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 51 of 66

"We will choose to build a better future. We, you and I, we have the will and capacity to make it better. Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot afford to waste any more time," he said. "We can do this."

Biden limited his time at the United Nations due to coronavirus concerns. He met with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison in New York following his speech, before heading back to the White House for a busy week of diplomacy in virtual and Washington settings.

Morrison and Biden did not comment on the flap with the French when they appeared briefly before the media at the start of their meeting.

Johnson, the British prime minister, made passing reference to the new security alliance that paved the way for the submarine deal when he met with Biden later Tuesday at the White House. Johnson said that creation of the alliance, dubbed AUKUS, has "great potential to benefit the whole world." The British leader made no mention of the French uproar.

The president's advisers were still arranging Tuesday for Biden to hold a call with French President Emmanuel Macron, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said Sunday that Macron, who was among many world leaders who did not attend the UNGA in person, is expected to speak to Biden in the coming days.

Madhani reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Seth Borenstein, Matthew Daly, and Darlene Superville in Washington, Jonathan Lemire in New York and Edith Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

## **Biden bets on rapid COVID tests but they can be hard to find**

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is betting on millions more rapid, at-home tests to help curb the latest deadly wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is overloading hospitals and threatening to shutter classrooms around the country.

But the tests have already disappeared from pharmacy shelves in many parts of the U.S., and manufacturers warn it will take them weeks to ramp up production, after scaling it back amid plummeting demand over the summer.

The latest shortage is another painful reminder that the U.S. has yet to successfully manage its COVID-19 testing arsenal, let alone deploy it in the type of systematic way needed to quickly crush outbreaks in schools, workplaces and communities.

Experts say encouraging signs last spring led to false confidence about the shrinking role for tests: falling case numbers, rising vaccination rates and guidance from health officials that vaccinated people could largely skip testing. Officials recently reversed that advice as cases and deaths driven by the delta variant surged anew.

"For all of us, there was a combination of optimism and hubris in the June timeframe that led us believe this was over," said Mara Aspinall, a health industry researcher at Arizona State University who has become a leading authority on COVID-19 testing supplies.

Colorado's Mesa County is among the local governments that have stopped offering rapid tests as part of their free testing programs for the general public.

"We were seeing shortages in the tests across the county, so we are really prioritizing supplies for our school districts to have quick turnaround for testing, to help them if needed," said Stefany Busch, a county spokeswoman. She noted that tests that are processed in laboratories — which take longer to give results — remain plentiful.

Indeed, parts of the U.S. testing system are faring better than during prior surges. The large commercial labs that process the majority of tests performed at hospitals and testing sites still report plenty of capacity. Labcorp, one of the biggest laboratory chains, said last week it was delivering results for 150,000 tests daily, with the ability to double that number.

Still, rapid tests have a clear advantage in that they can be done anywhere and have a 20-minute turn-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 52 of 66

around time, but most school testing programs still rely on tests processed in labs, which return results in a day or two.

In general, the U.S. has been far more cautious about embracing rapid, at-home testing technology compared to countries like Britain that have rolled it out widely. The Food and Drug Administration has authorized only about a half-dozen such tests, compared with more than 400 laboratory tests. Many experts, including FDA regulators, still consider laboratory technology the "gold standard" for accuracy because it can detect even minute levels of virus in the nose.

But in his speech this month announcing sweeping new vaccine mandates, Biden highlighted rapid tests, saying the government would purchase 280 million of them, as he also called on all schools to set up regular testing programs. Biden said the federal government will use the Defense Production Act to ensure manufacturers have the raw materials they need to make tests.

If those plans sound familiar, it's because they were part of Biden's original strategy for dealing with COVID-19 released in January.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Health and Human Services said the latest actions "build on earlier initiatives" as the delta variant-driven surge boosts testing demand.

HHS has announced few details of the \$2 billion-plan to purchase rapid tests. For now, retail chains like CVS and Walgreens have placed limits on how many at-home tests customers can buy.

Abbott Laboratories — the country's largest rapid test maker — said it is currently producing "tens of millions" of its BinaxNOW tests per month and working to increase capacity in coming weeks.

The New York Times recently reported that over the summer Abbott shut down one of its factories, laid off employees and destroyed some testing components.

Abbott said those decisions came after vaccinations climbed and demand for testing plunged. The destroyed supplies had limited shelf life and were not viable for sale in the U.S. or for donation overseas, according to Abbott.

"It is now very clear that testing is a necessary companion to vaccines and Abbott is ramping up again," said a company spokesperson.

The Biden administration's purchase plans should help stabilize supplies. But testing experts said the government could have stepped in months ago.

"We can't let the market determine our testing supplies, which is what happened here," said Scott Becker of the Association of Public Health Laboratories. "These tests are essential for public health purposes, so we have to have supply at all times."

Becker's group and others have seen testing demand increasing for weeks. And while labs are still operating well below levels seen last winter, there are unknowns, including how Biden's push for increased testing at schools and workplaces will impact them.

Testing policies vary widely by schools and states. Some districts regularly screen all students — including in Los Angeles, Baltimore and San Antonio. But many more districts do no testing at all.

A recent survey of 100 large districts found fewer than 15% required any testing for students. That's despite \$10 billion in federal funds made available last spring to set up testing programs.

Many districts said the benefits of frequent testing didn't outweigh the logistical headaches of setting up programs and quarantining students. Some states even attempted to return testing funds to the federal government.

The Biden plan has no penalties for schools that don't test, a factor that may limit uptake.

To make rapid tests more affordable big retailers like Wal-Mart and Kroger have agreed to sell them at a 35% discount for the next three months. But the cheapest test — Abbott's BinaxNOW — would still sell for about \$15 for a two-pack, out of reach for some families looking to frequently test themselves.

Other tests will cost \$35 or more even after the discount.

That's far different from countries like Britain and Germany that either distribute rapid tests for free or for prices in the low single digits.

But with the federal government investing billions in rapid tests, testing advocates are hopeful that more options — and cheaper ones — could eventually hit the market.

"When you're not winning a war you need to change your strategy, and I think this is a terrific first step to do that," said Aspinall.

This story has been updated to correct the name of Becker's group to the Association of Public Health Laboratories.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP\_FDAswriter

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

## Afghanistan girls soccer team given asylum in Portugal

By ALEX SANZ Associated Press

The girls on Afghanistan's national soccer team were anxious. For weeks, they had been moving around the country, waiting for word that they could leave.

One wants to be a doctor, another a movie producer, others engineers. All dream of growing up to be professional soccer players.

The message finally came early Sunday: A charter flight would carry the girls and their families from Afghanistan — to where they didn't know. The buses that would take them to the airport were already on their way.

"They left their homes and left everything behind," Farkhunda Muhtaj, the captain of the Afghanistan women's national team who from her home in Canada had spent the last few weeks communicating with the girls and working to help arrange their rescue, told The Associated Press. "They can't fathom that they're out of Afghanistan."

Since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the girls, ages 14-16, and their families, had been trying to leave, fearing what their lives might become like under the Taliban — not just because women and girls are forbidden to play sports, but because they were advocates for girls and active members of their communities.

Late Sunday, they landed in Lisbon, Portugal.

In interviews with the AP this week, Muhtaj, members of the soccer team, some of their family members, and soccer federation staff, spoke about their final days in Afghanistan, the international effort to rescue them and the promise of their newfound freedom.

The rescue mission, called Operation Soccer Balls, was coordinated with the Taliban through an international coalition of former U.S. military and intelligence officials, U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, U.S. allies, and humanitarian groups, said Nic McKinley, a CIA and Air Force veteran who founded Dallas-based DeliverFund, a nonprofit that's secured housing for 50 Afghan families.

"This all had to happen very, very quickly. Our contact on the ground told us that we had a window of about three hours," said McKinley. "Time was very much of the essence."

Operation Soccer Balls had suffered a number of setbacks, including several failed rescue attempts, and a suicide bombing carried out by Islamic State militants, the Taliban's rivals, at the Kabul airport that killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members. That bombing came during a harrowing airlift in which the U.S. military has acknowledged it was coordinating to some extent with the Taliban.

Complicating the rescue effort was the size of the group — 80 people, including the 26 youth team members as well as adults and other children, including infants.

Robert McCreary, a former congressional chief of staff and White House official under President George W. Bush who has worked with special forces in Afghanistan and helped lead the effort to rescue the national girls soccer team, said Portugal granted the girls and their families asylum.

"The world came together to help these girls and their families," said McCreary. "These girls are truly a symbol of light for the world and humanity."

The Taliban have tried to present a new image, promising amnesty to former opponents and saying they would form an inclusive government. Many Afghans don't trust those promises, fearing the Taliban will quickly resort to the brutal tactics of their 1996-2001 rule, including barring girls and women from schools and jobs.

This week, the Taliban set up a ministry for the "propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice" in the building that once housed the Women's Affairs Ministry, the latest sign that it is restricting women's rights.

As the girls moved from safehouse to safehouse, Muhtaj, who is also a teacher, said she helped them stay calm through virtual exercise and yoga sessions and by giving them homework assignments, including writing autobiographies.

She said she couldn't share details about the rescue mission with the girls or their families and asked them to believe in her and others "blindly."

"Their mental state was deteriorating. Many of them were homesick. Many of them missed their friends in Kabul," said Muhtaj. "They had unconditional faith. We've revived their spirit."

Some of the girls spoke to the AP through an interpreter. They said they want to continue playing soccer — something they were urged to not do while they were in hiding — and hope to meet soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, Manchester United's forward and a Portugal native.

Wida Zemarai, a goalkeeper and coach for the Afghanistan women's national soccer team who moved to Sweden after the Taliban ascended to power in 1996, said the girls were emotional after their rescue.

"They can dream now," Zemarai said. "They can continue to play."

Follow Alex Sanz on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/alexsanz>

## Sequoia National Park's Giant Forest unscathed by wildfire

THREE RIVERS, Calif. (AP) — The ancient massive trees of Sequoia National Park's famed Giant Forest were unscathed Tuesday even though a wildfire has been burning near them on the western side of California's Sierra Nevada for nearly two weeks.

"As of right now we don't have any damage to any of our trees," said fire information officer Mark Garrett.

The KNP Complex, two lightning-sparked fires that merged, has spread over more than 39 square miles (101 square kilometers), feeding on other types of trees that also live on the high-elevation slopes of the mountain range.

Giant Forest is home to about 2,000 sequoias, including the General Sherman Tree, which is considered the world's largest by volume and is a must-see for visitors to the national park.

The fire recently entered the perimeter of Giant Forest near a cluster of huge trees called the Four Guardsmen but their bases had been wrapped in fire-resistant material and crews had raked and cleared vegetation that could help spread the fire, Garrett said.

Firefighting crews monitored as what was described as a "low-intensity fire" passed through and made sure it did not affect the sequoias, he said.

For decades, Giant Forest has been subjected to prescribed fires that are carefully set and controlled to burn away vegetation that could otherwise become fuel for a fire like the KNP Complex and allow it to become established.

The next-closest sequoia grove is Redwood Canyon, but it is at least 6 miles (9.6 kilometers) away and the fire would have to travel up and down terrain to get there, Garrett said.

"But like Giant Forest, that one has also seen prescribed burn treatments for several decades since the late '60s so that grove is also well-equipped to transform a high-intensity fire into low-intensity fire," he said.

To the south, another forest fire in sequoia country was showing minimal movement.

The Windy Fire in the Giant Sequoia National Monument area of Sequoia National Forest and on the Tule River Indian Reservation covered more than 42 square miles (108 square kilometers) and was 5% contained.

"The fire behavior is not as extreme as it was a couple of days ago," said Thanh Nguyen, a fire informa-

tion officer.

On the Trail of 100 Giants, one tree known as the "natural bench" sequoia because of the shape of its base was confirmed to have sustained some burning.

Several sequoia groves have been impacted by the Windy Fire but it's not clear whether any other sequoia trees have been burned.

Nguyen said fire can move through a grove by burning other types of trees and vegetation rather than sequoias and assessments will come later.

The largest trees on the Trail of 100 Giants are on average 220 feet (67 meters) tall, 20 feet (6.1 meters) in diameter and 1,500 years old, Nguyen said.

"Those trees are beloved," he said.

Firefighters have been hand-digging control lines and spraying water to protect the trees and have worked to protect several evacuated communities. The only structure lost so far was the Mule Peak fire lookout structure, which burned in the early stages of the fire even though it was wrapped in fire-resistant material.

More than 7,500 wildfires have scorched about 3,600 square miles (9,324 square kilometers) in California so far this year.

Nearly half of that land — 1,505 square miles (3,898 square kilometers) — was burned by the Dixie Fire across five counties in the northern Sierra and southern Cascades region. It is the second-largest fire on record in California and was 90% contained after destroying 1,329 homes, businesses and other structures since July 13.

South of Lake Tahoe, the 342-square-mile (886-square-kilometer) Caldor Fire is three-quarters contained after destroying 800 homes and commercial properties. Highway 50, the main route between the San Francisco Bay Area and the south end of the alpine resort lake, reopened to the public on Tuesday for the first time in weeks.

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.

## Toxic gas, new rivers of molten lava endanger Spanish island

By ARITZ PARRA and RENATA BRITO Associated Press

EL PASO, Canary Islands (AP) — As a new volcanic vent blew open and unstoppable rivers of molten rock flowed toward the sea, authorities on a Spanish island warned Tuesday that more dangers lie ahead for residents, including earthquakes, lava flows, toxic gases, volcanic ash and acid rain.

Several small earthquakes shook the island of La Palma in the Atlantic Ocean off northwest Africa on Tuesday, keeping nerves on edge after a volcanic eruption on Sunday. The island, with a population of 85,000, is part of the Canary Islands archipelago, a key tourist destination for Europeans.

Authorities said the new fissure demonstrated that the area was unstable and unsafe, and kept people at least 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) away.

The rivers of lava, up to six meters (nearly 20 feet) high, rolled down hillsides, burning and crushing everything in their path, as they gradually closed in on the island's more densely populated coast. One was bearing down on Todoque, where more than 1,000 people live, and where emergency services were preparing evacuations.

So far, the eruption has destroyed around 190 houses and forced the evacuation of 6,000 people.

"The truth is that it's a tragedy to see people losing their properties," said municipal worker Fernando Díaz in the town of El Paso.

The lava's advance has slowed to about 120 meters (400 feet) an hour, according to the head of the Canary Island Volcanic Emergency Plan, Miguel Ángel Morcuende, and wasn't expected to reach the Atlantic Ocean before Wednesday.

Canary Islands government chief Ángel Víctor Torres said "when (the lava) reaches the sea, it will be

a critical moment.”

The meeting of the lava, whose temperature exceeds 1,000 degrees Celsius (more than 1,800 F), with a body of water could cause explosions and produce clouds of toxic gas. Torres asked locals to remember the island’s last eruption in 1971, when one person died after inhaling the gas emitted as lava met the water.

A change in the wind direction blew the ashes from the volcano across a vast area on the western side of the island, with the black particles blanketing everything. Volcanic ash is an irritant for the eyes and lungs.

The volcano has also been spewing out between 8,000 and 10,500 tons of sulfur dioxide — which also affects the lungs — every day, the Volcanology Institute said.

Adding to the dangers, the emergence of new cracks in the earth spewing lava cannot be ruled out, said Nemesio Pérez, head of the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute, who noted there is “important superficial seismic activity in the area.”

The new fissure that appeared Monday night is 900 meters (3,000 feet) north of the Cumbre Vieja ridge, where the volcano first erupted Sunday after a week of thousands of small earthquakes. That earthquake swarm warned authorities that an eruption was likely and allowed many people to be evacuated, avoiding casualties.

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

Scientists say the lava flows could last for weeks or months.

Torres described the lava-hit region as a “catastrophe zone” and said he would request money to rebuild roads, water pipes and create temporary accommodations for families who have lost their homes as well as their farmland.

Spain’s King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia are to visit the area on Thursday.

Barry Hatton contributed from Lisbon, Portugal.

## Haitian trip to Texas border often 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, which 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 Del Rio bridge. The town has only about 35,000 people.

Of the roughly 1.8 million Haitians living outside their homeland, the United States is home to the most, about 705,000. Significant numbers of people from the Western Hemisphere’s poorest country also have settled in Latin American countries like Chile, where an estimated 69,000 Haitian immigrants reside, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

Nearly all Haitians reach the U.S. 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.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 57 of 66

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, U.S. authorities reached an agreement with Jamaica to anchor ships off its coast to hold shipboard hearings for Haitians intercepted on boats. 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 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.

Many have already lived outside their country for years. About 150,000 Haitians went to Chile from 2014 to 2018, many on charter flights to qualify for a visa, 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.

Since then more Haitians have been 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 58 of 66

Large groups sleep under tarps on the beach.

Panama's Security Minister Juan Pino said Monday that his country was receiving 2,500 to 3,000 migrants daily — mostly Haitians.

From Panama, the migrants usually make their way through Central America aboard a series of buses, offloading to cross Nicaragua stealthily because it does not allow their transit before they reach Guatemala's border with Mexico, where some apply for asylum in the Mexican 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. 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."

Lozano reported from Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, and Spagat reported from San Diego. AP reporters Eva Vergara in Santiago, Chile, Astrid Suarez and Manuel Rueda in Bogota, Colombia, Juan Zamorano in Panama City, and Maria Verza in Mexico City contributed to this report.

This story has been updated to correct the spelling of FitzGerald. It also corrects that Panama receives 2,500 to 3,000 migrants daily, not weekly.

## Report: Births decline in pandemic may have turned corner

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

While there has been a decline in births in the U.S. during the pandemic, a new report released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau suggests the drop may have turned a corner last March as births started rebounding.

The decline in births was most noticeable at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. In December 2020, births in the U.S. were down 7.7% from the previous year, and they were down 9.4% last January compared to the previous January.

Births continued to be down 2.8% in February from the previous year, but in March births barely declined, only 0.15%, compared to March 2020, when the new coronavirus was declared a national emergency.

"This trend suggests that some people who postponed having babies last year had them this year," said Anne Morse, a Census Bureau demographer in the report. "The winter decrease in births may have been prompted by couples who consciously chose to delay having children amid the uncertainty of the pandemic. It may also have been influenced by stress or limited physical interaction with a sexual partner."

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in May that U.S. birth rate fell 4% last year, the largest single-year decrease in nearly 50 years.

The U.S. isn't alone in experiencing declines in births, followed by a slight rebound in the early part of 2021, according to the report. Twenty-one out of 30 countries with available monthly data had fewer births in December 2020 than in 2019 but more births in March 2021 than in March 2020.

Spain had more births in March 2021 than in March 2020, and Germany had more births in March 2021 than in any other March in the past 20 years. The report noted, though, that different countries have different seasonal cycles for births. In the U.S., births typically increase in the spring and peak in the summer, but then they decline in the fall and are lowest in the winter.

It's still probably too soon to determine if births will still go in an upward year-over-year projection given

the herky-jerky nature of pandemic recovery. After all, the babies born in the U.S. last March were likely conceived in June 2020 when spring lockdowns seemed to be easing up. But that optimism was soon met with the summer surge of 2020.

"It is still too soon to make broad conclusions about the pandemic's effect on U.S. birth trends," the report said. "But the data so far indicate there was a temporary drop in births amid the pandemic after accounting for other factors that existed before the pandemic — declining births and seasonality."

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>.

Follow AP's coverage of the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

## Kremlin's party gets 324 of 450 seats in Russian parliament

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's ruling party will get 324 of the 450 seats in the next national parliament, election authorities announced Tuesday. The number is less than the pro-Kremlin party, United Russia, won in the previous election but still an overwhelming majority.

Retaining the party's dominance in the State Duma was widely seen as crucial for the Kremlin ahead of Russia's presidential election in 2024. President Vladimir Putin's current term expires that year, and he is expected either to seek reelection or to choose another strategy to stay in power.

A parliament the Kremlin can control could be key to both scenarios, analysts and Kremlin critics say.

Most opposition politicians were excluded from the parliamentary election that concluded Sunday, which was tainted by numerous reports of violations and voter fraud.

The results gave United Russia 49.8% of the vote for the 225 seats apportioned by parties. Another 225 lawmakers are chosen directly by voters, and United Russia candidates won 198 of those races.

Russia's Central Election Commission said on Tuesday that these wins will translate into 324 seats for the party, which is 19 seats fewer than in 2016 but still enough to make changes to the Russian Constitution.

Three other parties that usually toe the Kremlin line will take most 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.

Individual candidates from three more parties each won a seat, along with five independents.

The Communist Party, the second-biggest political force in the parliament, will get 57 seats — an improvement from the 42 seats five years ago.

Few opposition candidates were allowed to run this time around after Russian authorities unleashed a sweeping crackdown on Kremlin critics.

The government declared organizations linked to imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny as extremist, and a new law barred anyone associated with them from seeking public office. Navalny is serving a 2½-year prison sentence for violating parole from a previous conviction he says is politically motivated.

Other prominent opposition politicians faced prosecution or were forced to leave Russia under pressure from authorities.

Navalny's team hoped to undermine United Russia's dominance with its Smart Voting strategy, which endorsed candidates who had the best chance of defeating those backed by the Kremlin. However, authorities undertook a massive effort to suppress the project in recent weeks.

Navalny, other opposition politicians and independent election monitors have denounced the results of the weekend election. Kremlin critics cited polls from earlier this year that showed less than 30% of Russians were willing to cast ballots for the ruling party.

Opposition activists and news outlets also pointed to races in 15 single-constituency districts in Moscow, where United Russia's approval ratings have been traditionally lower than elsewhere in the country and protest voting was more widespread.

Candidates endorsed by Smart Voting were winning at least half of those races until the results of on-line voting — something that was an option in Moscow and several other regions — came in on Monday, when the Kremlin-backed candidates suddenly shot ahead.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 60 of 66

"Technically, we're seeing a huge success of Smart Voting," Navalny said in a social media post relayed from prison through his lawyers. "Look at the charts with Moscow results before the fraudulent online voting and after. But to be honest, the overall result can't be called a victory. Our result has been simply stolen."

## Billionaires rocketing into space draw UN chief's red glare

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Space, we have an equity problem.

When three billionaires rocketed into space this summer, they did more than escape Earth's surly bonds, they helped spread "a malady of mistrust" plaguing an all-too hungry world, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told other world leaders Tuesday.

In his opening speech to the General Assembly, a grim Guterres highlighted the gap between the rich and poor with "billionaires joyriding to space while millions go hungry on Earth."

In July, billionaires Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos flew into space on private rockets that their companies built, gathering worldwide attention in their short trips that didn't make it into orbit. Both bank on space tourism business from their fellow space fans with big wallets.

After returning to Earth, Branson, 71, sprayed G.H. Mumm champagne over his crew and then chugged it from the bottle.

Billionaire Jared Isaacman led the first all-private orbital mission that splashed down Saturday after three days in orbit. His flight was on a Dragon capsule and Space X rocket built by a fourth space-obsessed billionaire, Elon Musk. Unlike the other two missions, Isaacman's ride raised more than \$200 million for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital including \$100 million from Isaacman and \$50 million from Musk.

Guterres lumped billionaire space hops with the maladies of hopelessness, corruption, curtailing of personal freedoms and "when parents see a future for their children that looks even bleaker than the struggles of today."

After Branson and Bezos spaceflights and revelations that Bezos, the richest man in the world, didn't pay any federal income tax in 2007 and 2011, critics called for taxing billionaires with some wanting to tax them out of the 10-digit income level. So far those proposals, unlike the billionaires, haven't gotten off the ground.

## 'Dear Evan Hansen' filmmakers refine a hit Broadway musical

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Millions of people will get a chance to get to know the shy, teenager Evan Hansen this month, but Ben Platt is waving farewell.

The actor and singer is intimately intertwined with Evan, originating the role in 2015 and eventually leading the stage musical "Dear Evan Hansen" to its world debut in Washington, D.C. He soon took Evan off-Broadway, then to Broadway and Grammy triumphs. He is now unveiling the character on film, a final pairing.

"I really was very grateful and very privileged to have the opportunity to get back in and say one final goodbye," says Platt. "I've grown to love him and care for him so much because he's obviously changed kind of everything about my life."

Under Stephen Chbosky's direction, the movie is not a filmed version of the stage musical but a full cinematic rethinking, with new musical numbers and the development of a minor character in the musical into a full and complex young woman.

"I think the best movie musicals that I love use the film as an opportunity to improve upon and elaborate on certain elements of the musical that are left unfinished or that still have room for improvement," says Platt.

Alongside Platt is a whole new cast — Julianne Moore, Kaitlyn Dever, Amy Adams, Amandla Stenberg, Nik Dodani, Colton Ryan and Danny Pino. Steven Levenson adapted the script from his original stage version.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 61 of 66

Platt is the only actor to make the leap from stage to screen, angering some in the theater community. "Dear Evan Hansen" centers on the awkward Evan who inadvertently becomes a social media sensation, with disastrous consequences. A lie about being the best friend of a dead classmate earns him popularity and a girlfriend, but the falsehood is ultimately corrupting.

It captures the strains between children and their parents, as well as exploring suicide, alienation and peer pressure. It's central paradox — why do people feel so alone in a world that's so connected? — is a timely message as the nation grapples with COVID-19 isolation.

"We've all been through this horrible ordeal. It has left scars on our societies and on our psyches. And I think that 'Dear Evan Hansen' is part of the solution to help us heal and help us find some hope that we desperately not only need, but quite frankly, deserve," says Chbosky.

The songs by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul include the iconic anthem "You Will Be Found," "Waving Through a Window," "For Forever" and "Words Fail," but some didn't make the transfer to film.

The stage version, for example, opens with the show's two moms singing "Anybody Have a Map?" but the new film roars out the gate with "Waving Through a Window" with Evan in his bedroom.

Chbosky explains that "Waving Through a Window" was necessary to start the film because it's told from Evan's point of view and instantly ground the film in his head. "As much as it was hard to slay that darling, it opened up the whole movie," he says. Fans will still hear "Anybody Have a Map?" if they pay attention: Evan's high school marching band plays the song in the opening sequence, a sweet little Easter egg.

The film "Dear Evan Hansen" is in keeping with the intimate nature of the stage version, which Chbosky calls "a small-m musical" and "more like a drama with songs." In this version, the songs become thoughts in the characters' heads and no one lets on that they're actually singing or that anyone in the scene is singing.

The filmmakers have taken the opportunity to expand the role and give a song to Alana, a hyper-organized friend of Evan's (played by Stenberg) who confesses she shares a lot of his anxieties and that many more people than he realizes do, too. There's also a revised ending showing more of Evan's repentance.

But one thing that was never up for debate was tapping Platt to play Evan again. Despite some online snark over his age — he turns 28 this month — Platt stunned the director with a performance he calls the "stuff of legend."

"See the movie," says Chbosky. "If by the end of the movie you still feel that way, well, OK. I might shell a couple of bucks for some therapy out of kindness. But the vast, vast, vast, vast, vast majority of people, once they see the movie and they see what he can do, it's like, 'Who else can play it?' Nobody. Literally nobody. He is Evan Hansen."

Filming was made more challenging by COVID-19 protocols, but Platt thinks the isolation and dread that the pandemic triggered was seized on by the cast.

"The one silver lining of the absolute horror of the pandemic was that we already were really very much in that emotional headspace," he says. "As difficult and sort of lonely as that made the experience, I think that it really added to the integrity and the authenticity of the feeling of the film."

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

## European court: Russia responsible for Litvinenko killing

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The European Court of Human Rights on Tuesday backed the conclusion of a British inquiry that Russia was responsible for the killing of Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian spy who died in London in 2006 after drinking tea laced with a radioactive material.

A former agent for the KGB spy agency and its post-Soviet successor agency FSB, Litvinenko defected from Russia in 2000 and fled to London. While in Britain, Litvinenko became involved in exposing corruption and links to organized crime in the Russian intelligence service.

He fell violently ill on Nov. 1, 2006, after drinking tea with two Russian men at a London hotel, and

spent three weeks in the hospital before he died. His tea was found to have been laced with radioactive polonium-210.

The British inquiry concluded in early 2016 that Russian agents Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitry Kovtun had killed Litvinenko, and that Russian President Vladimir Putin had "probably approved" the operation. Both Lugovoi and Kovtun have denied any involvement in the killing.

Litvinenko's widow, Marina, took the case to the Strasbourg-based court, vowing to get justice for her husband. Both Britain and Russia are members of the Council of Europe, which was founded in 1949 to uphold human rights on the continent in the aftermath of World War II. One of its main responsibilities is to oversee the work of the European Court of Human Rights, which seeks to uphold the European Convention on Human Rights.

"The Court found in particular that there was a strong prima facie case that, in poisoning Mr. Litvinenko, Mr. Lugovoi and Mr. Kovtun had been acting as agents of the Russian State," it said in its judgment.

It also noted that the Russian government had "failed to provide any other satisfactory and convincing explanation of the events or counter the findings of the U.K. inquiry."

The European court rejected Marina Litvinenko's claim for "punitive" damages, though it did order Russia to pay her 100,000 euros (\$117,000) in damages and 22,500 euros (\$26,400) in costs.

Marina Litvinenko welcomed the court's ruling that the Russian state was responsible for her husband's death and said it highlighted the "undemocratic regime" in Moscow.

"This case helps other people not give up and try to change what might happen in Russia. One day Russia (could) become a better country to everybody," she told Sky News.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov brushed aside Tuesday's court judgment.

"We're not ready to take such rulings on board," he told reporters.

Lugovoi, who is now a lawmaker in the Russian parliament, called the ruling "idiotic" and said it undermined the reputation of the court.

"After such a ruling, such an institution as the European Court simply does not exist for me," he told the Govorit Moskva radio station. "I believe this is absolutely politically biased ruling that has nothing to do with lawfulness."

Daria Litvinova in Moscow contributed to this report.

## 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. 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 63 of 66

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.

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."

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Associated Press writer Robert Burns in Washington contributed to this report.

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Follow Gannon on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Kathygannon](http://www.twitter.com/Kathygannon)

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

LONDON (AP) — Johnson & Johnson said Tuesday that a booster of its one-shot coronavirus vaccine provides a stronger immune response months after people receive a first dose.

J&J said in statement that an extra dose — given either two months or six months after the initial shot — revved up protection. The results haven't yet been published or vetted by other scientists.

The J&J vaccine was considered an important tool in fighting the pandemic because it requires only one shot. But even as rollout began in the U.S. and elsewhere, the company already was running a global test of whether a two-dose course might be more effective — the second dose given 56 days after the first.

That two-dose approach was 75% effective globally at preventing moderate to severe COVID-19, and 95% effective in the U.S. alone, the company reported — a difference likely due to which variants were circulating in different countries during the monthslong study.

Examined a different way, the company said when people got a second J&J shot two months after the first, levels of virus-fighting antibodies rose four to six times higher. But giving a booster dose six months after the first J&J shot yielded a 12-fold increase.

While the single-dose vaccine remains strongly effective, "a booster shot further increases protection against COVID-19 and is expected to extend the duration of protection significantly," Dr. Paul Stoffels, J&J's chief scientific officer, said in a statement.

The company previously published data showing its one-shot dose provided protection for up to eight months after immunization. It also pointed to recent real-world data showing 79% protection against coronavirus infection and 81% protection against COVID-19 hospitalization in the U.S. even as the extra-contagious delta variant began spreading.

J&J said it has provided the data to regulators including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the European Medicines Agency and others to inform decisions about boosters.

J&J's one-dose vaccine is approved for use in the U.S. and 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.

As the delta variant spread worldwide, numerous governments have considered the use of booster shots for many of the COVID-19 vaccine options.

Last week, advisers to the FDA recommended people 65 and older get a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine made by Pfizer and German partner BioNTech. A final decision is pending.

Britain previously authorized booster shots for people 50 and over and to priority groups like health workers and those with other health conditions. 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 giving 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 vaccinated.

Last week in the journal *Lancet*, top scientists from the WHO and FDA argued that the average person



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 65 of 66

doesn't need a booster shot and that the authorized vaccines to date provide strong protection against severe COVID-19, hospitalization and death.

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## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 22, the 265th day of 2021. There are 100 days left in the year. Autumn arrives at 3:20 p.m. EDT.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 22, 2014, the United States and five Arab nations launched airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria, sending waves of planes and Tomahawk cruise missiles against an array of targets.

On this date:

In 1761, Britain's King George III and his wife, Charlotte, were crowned in Westminster Abbey.

In 1776, during the Revolutionary War, Capt. Nathan Hale, 21, was hanged as a spy by the British in New York.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves in rebel states should be free as of January 1, 1863.

In 1927, Gene Tunney successfully defended his heavyweight boxing title against Jack Dempsey in the famous "long-count" fight in Chicago.

In 1949, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb.

In 1950, Omar N. Bradley was promoted to the rank of five-star general, joining an elite group that included Dwight D. Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, George C. Marshall and Henry H. "Hap" Arnold.

In 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued rules prohibiting racial discrimination on interstate buses.

In 1975, Sara Jane Moore attempted to shoot President Gerald R. Ford outside a San Francisco hotel, but missed.

In 1980, the Persian Gulf conflict between Iran and Iraq erupted into full-scale war.

In 1993, 47 people were killed when an Amtrak passenger train fell off a bridge and crashed into Big Bayou Canot near Mobile, Alabama. (A tugboat pilot lost in fog pushed a barge into the railroad bridge, knocking the tracks 38 inches out of line just minutes before the train arrived.)

In 1995, an AWACS plane carrying U.S. and Canadian military personnel crashed on takeoff from Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage, Alaska, killing all 24 people aboard.

In 2017, Sen. John McCain declared his opposition to the GOP's last-ditch effort to repeal and replace "Obamacare," the second time in three months McCain had emerged as the destroyer of his party's signature promise to voters.

Ten years ago: American diplomats led a walkout at the U.N. General Assembly as Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (ah-muh-DEE'-neh-zahd) fiercely attacked the United States and major West European nations as "arrogant powers" ruled by greed and eager for military adventurism. Pope Benedict XVI arrived in Germany on his first state visit to his homeland.

Five years ago: Prosecutors charged a white Oklahoma police officer with first-degree manslaughter less than a week after she killed an unarmed Black man on a city street, saying in court documents the officer "reacted unreasonably." (Betty Shelby was acquitted in May 2017 of manslaughter in the death of Terence Crutcher.) It was disclosed that computer hackers had swiped personal information from at least 500 million Yahoo accounts in what was believed to have been the biggest digital break-in at an email provider.

One year ago: U.S. deaths from the coronavirus topped 200,000, by far the highest confirmed death

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2021 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 077 ~ 66 of 66

toll from the virus in the world at that point, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University. The U.N. General Assembly convened for its first-ever virtual meeting, as Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged nations to tackle the coronavirus and the "economic calamity" it had unleashed, as well as the risk of a new Cold War between the United States and China. A Louisiana state trooper, Chris Hollingsworth, died after a single-vehicle crash that took place hours after he learned he would be fired for his role in the 2019 in-custody death of a Black man, Ronald Greene, following a high-speed chase. Overriding the mayor's veto, Seattle's City Council voted to reduce the police budget and reallocate some money to community programs. Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was released from a Berlin hospital after more than a month's treatment for poisoning. (Navalny would be arrested and jailed upon his return to Russia.)

Today's Birthdays: Dancer/choreographer/singer Toni Basil is 78. Actor Paul Le Mat is 76. Musician King Sunny Adé (ah-DAY') is 75. Capt. Mark Phillips is 73. Rock singer David Coverdale (Deep Purple, Whitesnake) is 70. Actor Shari Belafonte is 67. Singer Debby Boone is 65. Country singer June Forester (The Forester Sisters) is 65. Singer Nick Cave is 64. Rock singer Johnette Napolitano is 64. Actor Lynn Herring is 64. Classical crossover singer Andrea Bocelli (an-DRAY'-ah boh-CHEL'-ee) is 63. Singer-musician Joan Jett is 63. Actor Scott Baio is 61. Actor Catherine Oxenberg is 60. Actor Bonnie Hunt is 60. Actor Rob Stone is 59. Actor Dan Bucatinsky (TV: "24: Legacy") is 56. Musician Matt Sharp is 52. Rock musician Dave Hernandez is 51. Rapper Mystikal is 51. R&B singer Big Rube (Society of Soul) is 50. Actor James Hillier (TV: "The Crown") is 48. Actor Mireille Enos is 46. Actor Daniella Alonso is 43. Actor Michael Graziadei (GRAHT'-zee-uh-day-ee) is 42. Actor Ashley Eckstein is 40. Actor Katie Lowes is 39. Rock musician Will Farquarson (Bastille) is 38. Actor Tatiana Maslany is 36. Actor Ukweli Roach (TV: "Blindspot") is 35. Actor Tom Felton is 34. Actor Teyonah Parris is 34. Actor Juliette Goglia is 26. Actor Dalya Knapp is 11.