

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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

“Believing in our hearts that who  
we are is enough is the key to a  
more satisfying and balanced life.”

-ELLEN SUE STERN

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

### 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

### Work progresses on water tower project

The new water tower may be up and operational and the old tower removed, but work continues on the final stage of the project. This morning a new transformer will be installed and power to the pump room will be removed from the temporary service to its permanent service once the transformer is in place. In the very near future, the old pumphouse will be demolished and hauled out.



## Wildlife leaders disagree on effectiveness of SD predator bounty program

Danielle Ferguson  
South Dakota News Watch

A former South Dakota Game, Fish and Park leader with vast experience in wildlife management has expressed strong disagreement with current GFP leadership on whether a state predator bounty program protects young pheasants or is the right way to get youths involved in outdoor activities.

In an online panel discussion hosted by South Dakota News Watch on Sept. 15, former GFP secretary and commissioner John Cooper said the Nest Predator Bounty Program enacted by Gov. Kristi Noem in 2019 and continued since then does not belong in South Dakota.

The South Dakota's Nest Predator Bounty Program was created for political purposes rather than with the health of the state's habitat and wildlife in mind, Cooper said during the discussion. The program, which has cost \$2.4 million so far, gives \$10 for each animal tail submitted by adults and children who trap and kill raccoons and other animals that eat the eggs and hatchlings of pheasants and ducks.

Some state wildlife officials, including GFP Sec. Kevin Robling, say the program that has resulted in 134,000 animals killed so far is working to protect pheasants and has shown a steady increase in youths involved in trapping. They acknowledge there is no scientific evidence or research in place to track whether removal of predator animals is actually leading to higher pheasant populations, though they say anecdotal evidence indicates the program is working.

Cooper said the program was "foisted" onto South Dakota by Noem without input from longtime trappers or hunters, members of the GFP Commission or the Legislature.. Cooper said he and many other sportspersons in the state are "mad" at the handling of the program. He pointed to recent studies that suggest wide-scale, long-term, lightly monitored bounty programs, such as South Dakota's, often don't protect the intended species.

"It's a bad program," Cooper said. "It costs us money and it's not doing anything at all for pheasant management or habitat."

Robling defended the program during the panel discussion, saying it is key for creating future generations of hunters and trappers and keeping predators out of pheasant and other bird nests.

"We are the pheasant capital of the world," said Robling. "Things have changed in the last 20 years. Our vision is to enhance the quality of life for future generations. It's time to think outside the box ... time to engage people in outdoor activities. The Nest Predator Bounty Program is absolutely doing that."

Robling said the program is a creative solution to new problems facing the state's \$280 million annual pheasant hunting industry and is needed to protect nests of pheasants and young and adult birds. Low fur prices and a weak market for animal pelts have reduced interest in trapping in South Dakota in recent years, and fewer people are incentivized to trap nest predators, allowing raccoons, skunks, red foxes, possums and badgers to flourish, Robling said. Climate change has also played a role, destroying some land and increasing standing water, both of which impact the habitat for pheasants, said GFP Commission member Robert Whitmyre.

Whitmyre said the number of predators removed in the first three years of the program has undoubtedly reduced predation on pheasants and pheasant nests whether there is scientific documentation of it or not.

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Fewer raccoons and skunks roaming the landscape will surely lead to fewer interactions with nests, he said.

"We've got a lot of places where predators can be for a year without anybody coming in and disturbing them at all," Whitmyre said during the panel discussion. "We've got a lot of issues that didn't used to exist."

When asked about a lack of scientific evidence that the program is working, Robling and Whitmyre pointed to personal anecdotal evidence of seeing more birds and fewer raccoons, and referenced a 2001 study that found bounty programs "have the potential" to increase pheasant survival, but also that the "parameters decrease once predator control ceases."

Robling also said youth participation in the program was up about 29% in 2021 compared to 2020. If the program prompts just 500 people to get involved in hunting or trapping, hundreds of millions of dollars could be generated in state revenue, he added.

Longtime hunter and trapper Robin Hagen, who was also part of Wednesday's panel, said habitat is the most important aspect to a healthy pheasant population, rather than the number of predators in the area. Hagen suggested money spent on the bounty program could be put to better use by preserving habitat for the pheasants.

Robling said the state spent about \$22 million in maintaining and developing habitat last year.

The ethics surrounding the program also came into question by panelists. Animals that are killed have their tails removed and are then typically left to rot or buried as there is little use for pelts taken from animals trapped in the springtime. Trapping is usually done in the fall when animal furs are thick and offspring of adults are old enough to survive.

Cooper and Hagen said the bounty program does not promote ethical trapping habits, because animals with newborns could be killed, leaving the newborns helpless.

"How do you explain outdoor activities when you have the ethics issue of leaving young ones after killing one animal for a tail?" Cooper said.

Questions were also raised about whether children who are incentivized to engage in outdoor activities through a financial incentive will remain active once payments end.

Whitmyre said ethics are always part of the conversation around wildlife conservation.

"Dealing with predators, dealing with rodents, all sorts of adversities, it's what you do if you want to keep the landscape in a productive way for anything. I don't see it as being unethical. I think the ethics of doing nothing is in its own way not responsible management," he said.

Cooper also criticized the state's decision to end the annual pheasant brood count, which has been a tool for the state and hunters to estimate how many pheasants were present across the state.

"It's not fair and it's a bad business," he said. "Honesty is what we can do better in this state."

The GFP is conducting a study through Iowa State University to survey route conditions, Robling said. The statewide brood number wasn't always accurate to certain areas of the state, he said, because one area may have more pheasants than others.

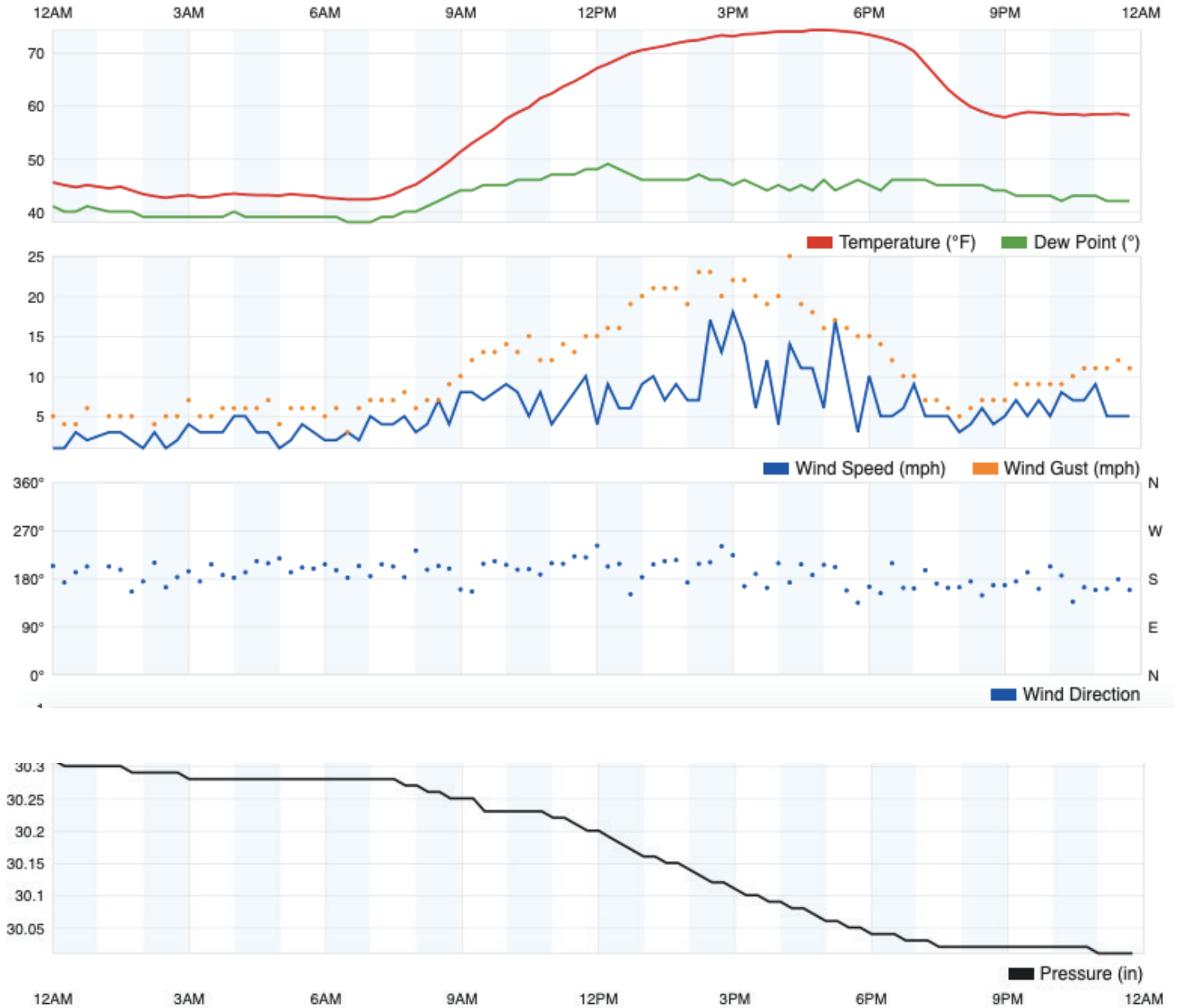
"If you put that in the statewide estimate, it's hard for a hunter to know where it is and where it's up and where it's down," Robling said.

The panel was part of South Dakota News Watch "South Dakota Matters" series, which aims to promote civil discussion about topics of importance in South Dakota. The pheasant panel is available for replay on the South Dakota News Watch Facebook and Youtube pages. In-depth articles about the predator bounty program can be found at [SDNewsWatch.org](http://SDNewsWatch.org).

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

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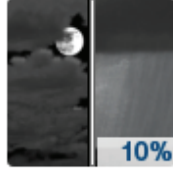
Today



Sunny

High: 78 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers

Low: 51 °F

Friday



Chance  
Showers then  
Sunny

High: 67 °F

Friday  
Night



Mostly Clear

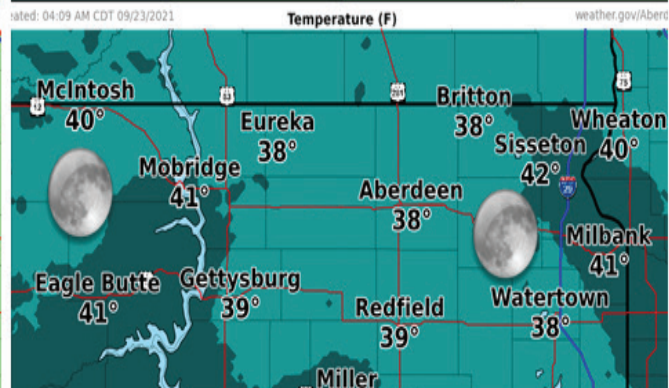
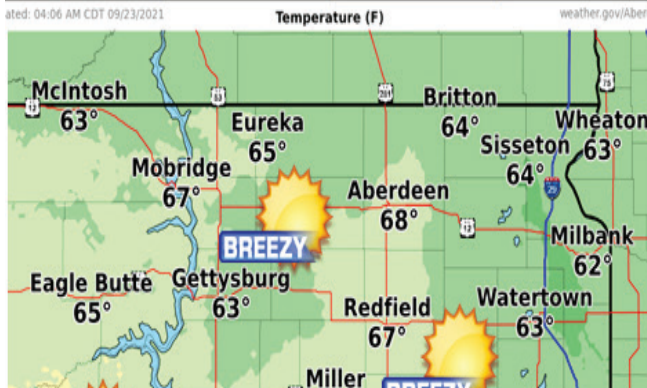
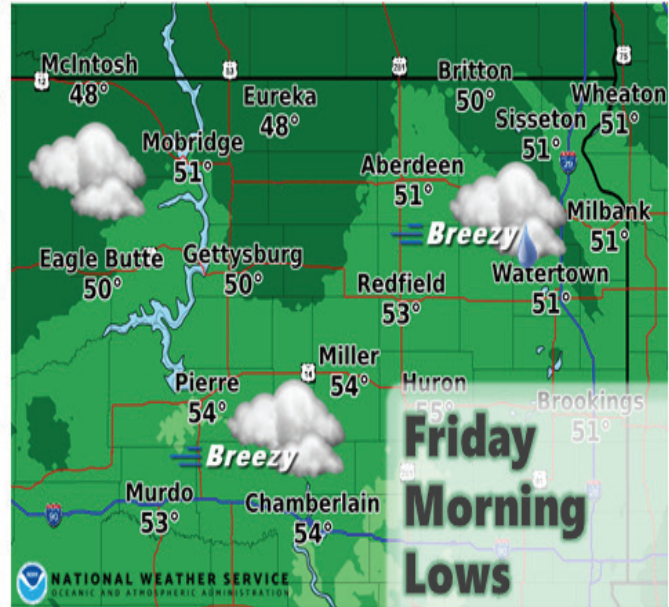
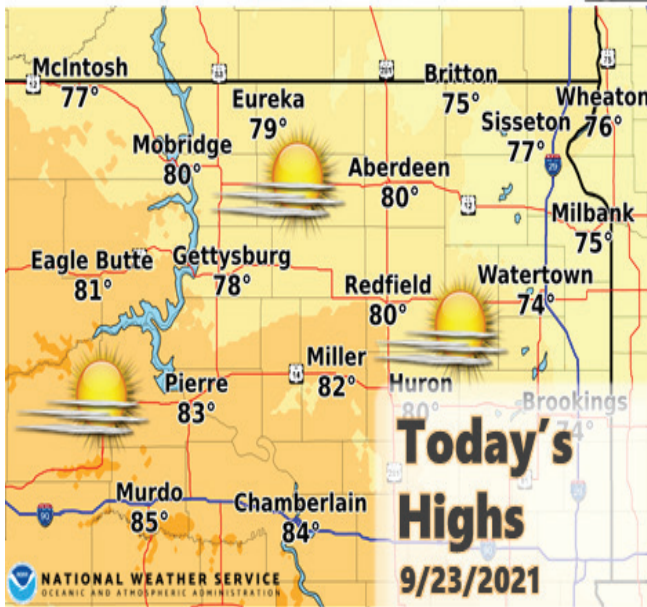
Low: 38 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 72 °F



High temperatures will be 5 to 10 degrees above normal today. However, a passing cold front tonight will cool things off a bit for Friday, with highs in the 60s. Northerly winds will be breezy Friday, and morning cloud cover and spotty light rain showers will clear out by the afternoon. Temperatures bottom out in the low 40s and upper 30s Friday night into Saturday morning, before rebounding nicely through the weekend. Above average temperatures are anticipated from Sunday through at least the first half of the new work-week.



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## Today in Weather History

September 23, 1984: Snow fell from the early morning to the late evening hours across northwest South Dakota bringing more than a foot of snow to some locations. Camp Crook in Harding County reported 14 inches. Amounts between six and twelve inches were common across Harding and Perkins Counties as well as parts of Meade and Butte Counties. Roads in these areas were slushy with icy bridges. The snow covered much of the western third of South Dakota with depths an inch or less.

September 23, 2004: A tornado touched down northeast of Browns Valley, MN during the late afternoon. This tornado traveled through a cornfield and a farmstead before dissipating. The tornado damaged several sheds and a trailer along with toppling a large grain bin. Another tornado touched down south and southwest of Rosholt in Roberts County in the late afternoon. This F2 tornado destroyed a house, a mobile home, and a travel trailer. The tornado also killed three cattle.

1551: The Grand Harbour at Valetta, Malta, was hit by a waterspout which then moved inland. This waterspout sunk four ships, killing at least 600 people. It should be noted, the year of the event could also be 1555, or 1556 as sources conflict.

1722: La Nouvelle-Orléans (New Orleans) was founded May 7, 1718, by the French Mississippi Company, under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, on land inhabited by the Chitimacha. Four years later, a hurricane destroys nearly every building in the village, including the only church and hospital.

1815 - One of the greatest hurricanes to strike New England made landfall at Long Island and crossed Massachusetts and New Hampshire. It was the worst tempest in nearly two hundred years, equal to the hurricane which struck in 1938, and one of a series of severe summer and autumn storms to affect shipping lanes that year. (David Ludlum)

1904 - The temperature at Charlotteburg, NJ, dipped to 23 degrees, the coldest reading of record for so early in the autumn for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1975: On September 22, Hurricane Eloise intensified to attain Category 2 strength, and became a major hurricane of Category 3 status shortly after that as it turned towards the northeast. Several ships penetrated the storm's center during its passage through the Gulf. Hurricane Eloise continued to strengthen until it reached its peak winds of 125 mph and a minimum barometric pressure of about 955 mbar. It moved ashore along the Florida Panhandle near Panama City on September 23.

1983 - A thunderstorm downburst caused a timber blowdown in the Kaibab National Forest north of the Grand Canyon. Two hundred acres were completely destroyed, and scattered destruction occurred across another 3300 acres. Many trees were snapped off 15 to 30 feet above ground level. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Autumn began on a rather pleasant note for much of the nation. Showers and thunderstorms were confined to Florida and the southwestern deserts. Warm weather continued in the western U.S., and began to spread into the Great Plains Region, but even in the southwestern deserts readings remained below 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front in the south central U.S. produced severe weather in Oklahoma during the afternoon and early evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail near Noble and Enterprise, and baseball size hail at Lequire and Kinta. A tornado near Noble OK destroyed a mobile home injuring one person. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Seventeen cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Devils Lake ND with a reading of 22 degrees. Jackson KY reported a record low of 41 degrees during the late afternoon. Strong northwesterly winds ushering cold air into the central and northeastern U.S. gusted to 55 mph at Indianapolis IND. Winds along the cold front gusted to 65 mph at Norfolk VA, and thunderstorms along the cold front deluged Roseland NJ with 2.25 inches of rain in one hour. The temperature at Richmond VA plunged from 84 degrees to 54 degrees in two hours. Snow and sleet was reported at Binghamton NY. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)





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## WHAT KIND OF LOVE IS THIS?

"You know how much I love you, Josie - more than anyone or anything in the world!" began his text message. "Can't wait until I see you this evening. Will be there if I don't go to the ball game with Rob. Love, Steve."

It didn't take Josie long to erase the message and text her friend Ruth asking if they could get together for dinner. She had trouble understanding that kind of love. And so does God. We say one thing to Him and then live a life that is entirely inconsistent with His understanding of what love is and what He expects us to do if we love Him.

"You who love the Lord," said the Psalmist, "hate evil!" That is a very straight forward, simple statement. It is one of Scriptures If/Then challenges that God puts in our pathway. Stated another way, we might ask, "If we don't hate evil, then do we truly love God? And, if we hate evil, how will our lives show those around us that we do?"

Loving God means that we will do whatever is necessary to align ourselves with His plan and purpose for His creation by how we live. We will work with Him to reach out to those around us with a heart full of His love and show them His grace and mercy. We will be uncomfortable if we know of someone, somewhere who needs something that we have that we can share with them that will bring hope and healing to their lives.

People who lie abandoned in convalescent homes, and children who are abused through no fault of their own, and individuals who crave a smile and a hug need to know that "we love the Lord." They will if we reach out. We will know if we will do!

Prayer: Trouble our hearts and minds, Father, and give us no peace if we know someone in need and do nothing! May we honor You by doing. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Let those who love the Lord hate evil. Psalm 97:10a

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## 2021 Community Events

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



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## News from the Associated Press

### Wednesday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined  
PREP VOLLEYBALL=  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Crazy Horse vs. Lower Brule, ppd.

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

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

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined  
PIERRE, S.D. (AP) \_ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:  
Dakota Cash  
07-11-14-28-30  
(seven, eleven, fourteen, twenty-eight, thirty)  
Estimated jackpot: \$100,000  
Lotto America  
03-16-35-37-41, Star Ball: 8, ASB: 2  
(three, sixteen, thirty-five, thirty-seven, forty-one; Star Ball: eight; ASB: two)  
Estimated jackpot: \$2.95 million  
Mega Millions  
Estimated jackpot: \$20 million  
Powerball  
20-40-47-55-63, Powerball: 5, Power Play: 3  
(twenty, forty, forty-seven, fifty-five, sixty-three; Powerball: five; Power Play: three)  
Estimated jackpot: \$490 million

### COVID-19 creates dire US shortage of teachers, school staff

By JOCELYN GECKER Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — One desperate California school district is sending flyers home in students' lunchboxes, telling parents it's "now hiring." Elsewhere, principals are filling in as crossing guards, teachers are being offered signing bonuses and schools are moving back to online learning.

Now that schools have welcomed students back to classrooms, they face a new challenge: a shortage of teachers and staff the likes of which some districts say they have never seen.

Public schools have struggled for years with teacher shortages, particularly in math, science, special education and languages. But the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the problem. The stress of teaching in the COVID-19 era has triggered a spike in retirements and resignations. Schools also need to hire staffers like tutors and special aides to make up for learning losses and more teachers to run online school for those not ready to return.

Teacher shortages and difficulties filling openings have been reported in Tennessee, New Jersey and South Dakota, where one district started the school year with 120 teacher vacancies. Across Texas, the main districts in Houston, Waco and elsewhere reported hundreds of teaching vacancies at the start of the year.

Several schools nationwide have had to shut classrooms because of a lack of teachers.

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In Michigan, Eastpointe Community Schools abruptly moved its middle school back to remote learning this week because it doesn't have enough teachers. The small district north of Detroit has 43 positions vacant — a quarter of its teaching staff. When several middle school teachers resigned without notice last week, the district shifted to online classes to avoid sending in unqualified substitutes, spokeswoman Caitlyn Kienitz said.

"You don't want just an adult who can pass a background check, you want a teacher in front of your kids," Kienitz said. "This is obviously not ideal, but we're able to make sure they're getting each subject area from a teacher certified to teach it."

According to a June survey of 2,690 members of the National Education Association, 32% said the pandemic drove them to plan to leave the profession earlier than expected. Another survey by the RAND Corp. said the pandemic exacerbated attrition, burnout and stress on teachers, who were almost twice as likely as other employed adults to feel frequent job-related stress and almost three times more likely to experience depression.

The lack of teachers is "really a nationwide issue and definitely a statewide issue," said Linda Darling-Hammond, president of California's State Board of Education.

A school district in California's West Contra Costa County is considering hiring out-of-state math educators to teach online while a substitute monitors students in person.

"This is the most acute shortage of labor we have ever had," associate superintendent Tony Wold said. "We opened this year with 50 — that's five-zero — teaching positions open. That means students are going to 50 classrooms that do not have a permanent teacher."

There are an additional 100 openings for non-credentialed but critical staff like instructional aides — who help English learners and special needs students — custodians, cafeteria workers and others, Wold said.

California's largest district, Los Angeles Unified with 600,000 students, has more than 500 teacher vacancies, a fivefold increase from previous years, spokeswoman Shannon Haber said.

Schools try to fill in with substitutes, but they're in short supply, too. Only about a quarter of the pool of 1,000 qualified substitutes is willing to work in Fresno Unified, said Nikki Henry, a spokeswoman for the central California district with 70,000 students and 12,000 staffers.

At Berkeley High School, a shortage of substitutes means teachers are asked to fill in during their prep periods, leading to exhaustion and burnout typically not felt at the start of a school year.

"We are absolutely strained. This has been an incredibly stressful start to the year," said Hasmig Minassian, a ninth-grade teacher who describes physical and mental exhaustion as she tries to juggle staffing needs and the emotional needs of students who are showing signs of more mental fragility and learning loss.

"It doesn't feel like there are enough adults on these campuses to keep kids really safe. We feel short-staffed in a way we've never felt before," she said. "You know the early videos of nurses crying in their cars? I kind of expect those to come out about teachers."

The California shortages range from dire to less severe in places that planned ahead and beat the competition, but those are the minority, said Darling-Hammond of the board of education.

In a new twist, money is not the main problem. School districts have the funds to hire additional staff, thanks to billions in federal and state pandemic relief funding. There just aren't people applying.

"We're all competing for a shrinking piece of the pie," said Mike Ghelber, assistant superintendent at the Morongo Unified School District in the Mojave Desert, which has more than 200 openings for special education aides, custodians, cafeteria workers and others. "I don't know if everybody is getting snatched up, or if they don't want to teach in the COVID era, but it's like the well has dried up."

The district of 8,000 students has ads in newspapers, radio and social media. Teachers are packing "now hiring" flyers into kids' lunchboxes, with a long list of openings so families can spread the word. In the meantime, everyone is pitching in.

"Principals and administrators are out being crossing guards. Secretaries are directing traffic because we're short on supervisors," Ghelber said.

The shortages raise concerns that schools will hire underqualified teachers, particularly in low-income communities where it's already harder to fill positions, Darling-Hammond said.

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Class sizes also are expanding.

Mount Diablo Unified School District, which serves 28,000 students east of San Francisco, has had to fill several elementary school classrooms at the maximum capacity of 32 students. It's not ideal for social distancing but frees up teachers for online school.

About 150 kids initially signed up for distance learning, but with spiking infections blamed on the highly contagious delta variant, the number ballooned to 600 when school reopened. The same happened in Fresno, where enrollment in remote learning exploded to 3,800 from 450.

Superintendent Adam Clark said the Mount Diablo district is offering \$5,000 signing bonuses for speech pathologists and \$1,500 for paraeducators who help students with learning needs.

San Francisco Unified is offering a similar starting bonus for 100 paraeducator jobs. Nearby West Contra Costa County Unified has set \$6,000 signing bonuses for teachers, with a third paid out after the first month and rest when the teacher enters year three.

Districts in Oklahoma, North Carolina, New Jersey and elsewhere are offering a range of cash incentives for new teachers, particularly in low-income and low-performing schools.

Of a dozen officials interviewed in California districts, only one said it was facing no shortages.

Long Beach Unified, the state's fourth-largest district with over 70,000 students, anticipated the need last spring for a hiring spree of about 400 jobs.

"We went full aggressive," assistant superintendent David Zaid said, including beefing up human resources for a 24-hour turnaround on contract offers.

A virtual interview team worked through the summer. Recruitment events drew hundreds of applicants, and as HR employees met hiring benchmarks, they got rewards like catered breakfasts and an ice cream truck.

"We probably would have experienced the same shortages as others," Zaid said. "But we became much more assertive, and as a result, we are not in the same position."

## South Dakota woman sentenced in starvation death of toddler

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota woman accused in the July 2019 starvation death of a 3-year-old girl was sentenced Wednesday to 75 years in prison.

Renae Fayant, 27, and Robert Price, Jr., 29, both of Brookings, are accused in the death of Fayant's niece. The two adults were the child's caregivers for two years, authorities said.

An autopsy showed the toddler died of dehydration and malnourishment. Investigators say the girl was confined to a small area of the home where they also found feces.

Fyant pleaded guilty in July to first-degree manslaughter. Price pleaded not guilty and is scheduled for a jury trial next month.

## Oglala Tribe issues stay-at-home order due to COVID increase

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — Oglala Sioux Tribe officials said Wednesday they're asking all tribal members on the Pine Ridge Reservation to shelter in place following a spike in COVID-19 cases.

The initial stay-at-home order issued earlier this week by Oglala Vice President Alicia Mousseau was approved by the tribal council on a 14-4 vote. The order will remain in place until the tribal council rescinds it.

The order only allows essential business to operate and only at 25% capacity. It includes a mask mandate and limits gatherings to no more than 10 people, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Tribal health officials say there has been 58 new cases of COVID-19 over a two-week period. There are 64 active cases on the reservation.

Mousseau said in a letter that all schools on the reservation will adopt and submit a plan for reopening school buildings and resuming all extracurricular activities, including sports.

## Tribes: Pipeline review company has conflict of interest



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BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The head of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is asking a federal agency overseeing the environmental review of the Dakota Access oil pipeline to cut ties with a contractor conducting the analysis, citing a conflict of interest.

Chairman Mike Faith and other tribal leaders fighting the pipeline sent a letter Wednesday to a top U.S. Army Corps of Engineers official, taking issue with Environmental Resources Management, the company that's doing the review, and its ties to the oil industry, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

One of the tribes' concerns is that the London-based company is a member of the American Petroleum Institute, a trade group that lobbies for the oil industry and has submitted court briefs supporting Dakota Access.

The tribes also cite testimony from an Environmental Resources Management employee to South Dakota regulators in 2015. After reviewing the proposed pipeline, the employee concluded that it "is not likely to pose a threat of serious injury to the environment."

"In essence, ERM is an agent of DAPL, rather than a neutral party," reads the tribes' letter sent to Jaime Pinkham, acting assistant secretary of the Army for civil works.

The tribes say the Corps' selection of the company "compromises" the integrity of the environmental review process and they want it to start over.

The Corps of Engineers and Environmental Resources Management did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

The pipeline underwent a less-stringent environmental review overseen by the Corps before the agency first issued a permit for it in 2017. Pipeline operator Energy Transfer maintains that review was sufficient.

Dakota Access has the capacity to carry as much as two-thirds of North Dakota's daily oil output from the Bakken oil fields to Illinois.

The pipeline has been in operation since June 2017.

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Black Hills Pioneer. September 17, 2021.

Editorial: CTE programs provide valuable learning

Thirty years ago, if a student was enrolled in shop class or auto body class, some may have seen that as an alternative to scholastic pursuits, including college.

But as we have seen, even before the pandemic, careers in the construction, automotive, healthcare, and other vocational trades are in high demand.

Northern Hills area school districts are providing opportunities for students to get hands-on, real-world skills needed for these careers through their Career & Technical Education, CTE, programs.

In South Dakota, more than 700 CTE programs are offered in 151 public, private and tribal school districts. There are 30,000 CTE students — about 45% of all students in grades 7-12 in the state.

The emphasis is on career exploration and developing skills and knowledge for work to meet the needs of South Dakota's in-demand industries.

At Sturgis Brown High School, there is a waiting list for CTE courses such as welding and machining. The school district worked with the local economic development group and businesses to develop and implement the machinist class.

Former President of the Sturgis Economic Development Corporation, Pat Kurtenbach, said at the time the partnership was forged: "Skilled machinists are extremely difficult to find and recruit, so we decided to grow our own by partnering with the high school to attract the interest of students and parents."

The CTE programs at Lead-Deadwood, Spearfish and Belle Fourche also focus on in-demand careers.

In Lead-Deadwood, students can enroll in a tourism/hospitality course with hands-on experience at any of the many tourism-related businesses throughout Deadwood and Lead.

Belle Fourche has a well-rounded CTE program that offers career exploration in the areas of metal manufacturing, welding practices, child development, culinary arts, animal science, ag mechanics, accounting,

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personal finance, wood manufacturing, carpentry, and Computer Aided Drafting (CAD). The district offers classes to students in grades 8-12.

They recently built a new two-story Belle Fourche High School Career and Technical Education building. Spearfish is developing a career and technology education center adjacent to the high school.

Spearfish High School's CTE Department also offers a variety of career and technical programs to all students with clusters in industrial technology, business, human services and information technology.

SBHS Principal Pete Wilson, the 2019 South Dakota Association of Career and Technical Education Administrator of the Year, said he believes students appreciate the relevant learning provided by CTE.

"It caters to students who like hands-on learning," he said.

Lead-Deadwood Superintendent Erik Person said the district hopes to expand its CTE program in the near future. "There's a good foundation here in Lead-Deadwood, but we're looking to take it to the next level," he said.

Person said student achievement can be tied to student engagement and that's what CTE courses can do for a student.

"There's kind of a hunger for it (CTE) right now. As we start to feed that a little more, I think it is going to grow exponentially," he said.

We believe in the continued support of CTE programs because they are flexible, forward-thinking, student-centered, and well worth the investment to expand student options.

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Yankton Press & Dakotan. September 21, 2021.

Editorial: Seeking Input On Changing Standards

Changing South Dakota's social studies standards has become an increasingly contentious quest, which is why Gov. Kristi Noem made a wise choice Monday to delay making those changes for up to a year to field more public input on the topic.

Of course, this has become a minefield of the governor's own making.

Several months ago, Noem called for changing the standards to reflect "our nation's true and honest history," as she put it in a press release issued Monday.

This echoes former President Donald Trump's call last year for the formation of a so-called 1776 Commission to devise standards for a curriculum that would provide "patriotic education" for students. This would be done, it was suggested, by emphasizing the "core principles of the American founding and how these principles may be understood to further enjoyment of 'the blessings of liberty.'"

This would, among other things, likely downplay the role of racism and sanitize other blemishes in the nation's history. It would also target Critical Race Theory (CRT), which South Dakota educators note is geared more for higher education and isn't used in the state's curriculum plans.

In South Dakota, these changes also apparently mean de-emphasizing the role of Native American culture in our history.

Over the summer, a state-approved group worked in Pierre to draft the new social studies guidelines Noem called for, but the resulting proposal was then altered by the Department of Education, removing some references to Native Americans.

This drew sharp criticism, with the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition holding a rally in Pierre last week and calling for Noem's resignation.

According to the Argus Leader, the feedback received so far to the proposed changes has been largely critical. Also, a public meeting that was scheduled for Aberdeen has been moved to a different venue to accommodate a larger crowd. Whether that meeting happens as planned is not known at this point.

Nevertheless, Noem remains determined to push ahead, based on a Twitter post Monday. She declared: "In every state, radical education activists are scheming in order to impose CRT & Action Civics. I just froze the review of SD's K-12 social studies standards (because) I have concerns. Restoring honest & true American & South Dakota history in our schools won't be easy but we must win."

There is so much in this issue that is relative and politically charged. Obviously, the term "radical edu-

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cation activists" is terribly subjective, purposely vague and divisive, which only deepens the worry that explicitly mentioning CRT as a "radical" target could be blurred in some quarters into a reference to any racial topic that appears to criticize a white- and European-dominated status quo.

There is more to America and to South Dakota than that, and such facets must also be part of the "true and honest history" that politicians say they desire. The fact that our history isn't perfect, isn't without flaws and mistakes, and is multicultural with sometimes conflicting missions must not be lost in any definition of who we are, for understanding our complexities ultimately makes us stronger.

So, getting more feedback on this issue is a sensible path forward, although how much of it will be heeded in the long run remains to be seen. Still, South Dakotans should take advantage of this opportunity to speak up when the situation presents itself.

END

## Child hunger expected to rise in South Dakota this year

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization projects more children will go hungry in South Dakota this year and won't know where their next meal is coming from.

Feeding America says the child food in security rate for 2021 in South Dakota will be 16.3%, up from 15.3% in 2019. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as reduced food intake, disruptive eating and decreased quality and variety in diets.

The USDA recently reported a national trend of increasing food insecurity, which rose to 14.8% in 2020, the Argus Leader reported.

"I think it is really concerning," said Lisa Davis, Senior Vice President of No Kid Hungry campaign, a national initiative to end child hunger. "Children who face hunger generally have worse health impacts on their physical and brain development... They don't do well in school, they graduate at lower rates, and those consequences for kids literally last a lifetime."

Before the coronavirus pandemic, food insecurity was at its lowest rate since USDA started tracking it in the late 90s. The nation was coming off a decade-long recovery period from the 2008 recession, which quickly changed after COVID-19 hit, Davis said.

South Dakotans shouldn't forget about the pandemic's disproportionate impact on food access to households with young children, households of children headed by single women, and households of color, specifically Black and Hispanic, Davis said.

"We're absolutely seeing the reality of what food insecurity means and it's on a day-to-day basis," said Michelle Erpenbach, president of Sioux Falls Thrive, a local anti-hunger community non-profit dedicated to providing services to children.

## Couple from Nebraska killed in South Dakota highway crash

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say two victims who died recently in a highway crash in southeastern South Dakota were from Nebraska.

The state Department of Public Safety says 75-year-old Albert Wingate and 74-year-old Marilyn Wingate, of Norfolk, died a week or more following the Sept. 11 crash in Hutchinson County.

Safety officials say the driver of a pickup truck pulling an empty horse trailer tried to pass a semi on Highway 81 near Freeman, but collided head-on with the Wingates' Chevy Corvette. The couple was airlifted to a Sioux Falls hospital.

Marilyn Wingate died Monday. Albert Wingate died Sept. 18. The 28-year-old pickup driver was taken to a Freeman hospital for treatment of his injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash.

## Tensions grow as US, allies deepen Indo-Pacific involvement

By DAVID RISING Associated Press



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BANGKOK (AP) — With increasingly strong talk in support of Taiwan, a new deal to supply Australia with nuclear submarines, and the launch of a European strategy for greater engagement in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. and its allies are becoming more assertive in their approach toward a rising China.

China has bristled at the moves, and the growing tensions between Beijing and Washington prompted U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the weekend to implore U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping to repair their “completely dysfunctional” relationship, warning they risk dividing the world.

As the U.N. General Assembly opened Tuesday, both leaders chose calming language, with Biden insisting “we are not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs,” and Xi telling the forum that “China has never, and will never invade or bully others or seek hegemony.”

But the underlying issues have not changed, with China building up its military outposts as it presses its maritime claims over critical sea lanes, and the U.S. and its allies growing louder in their support of Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory, and deepening military cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

On Friday, Biden hosts the leaders of Japan, India and Australia for an in-person Quadrilateral Security Dialogue for broad talks including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, but also how to keep the Indo-Pacific, a vast region spanning from India to Australia, “free and open,” according to the White House.

It comes a week after the dramatic announcement that Australia would be dropping a contract for conventional French submarines in favor of an Anglo-American offer for nuclear-powered vessels, a bombshell that overshadowed the unveiling of the European Union’s strategy to boost political and defense ties in the Indo-Pacific.

“One thing is certain, that everyone is pivoting toward the Indo-Pacific,” said Garima Mohan, an Asia program fellow with the German Marshall Fund think tank.

As partners pursue moves that play to their own strengths and needs, however, the past week has underscored the lack of coordination as a networked security strategy develops, she said.

“Not everyone has the same threat assessment of China,” she said in a telephone interview from Berlin.

The EU policy emphasizes the need for dialogue with Beijing, to encourage “China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region,” while at the same time proposing an “enhanced naval presence” and expanded security cooperation with regional partners.

It also notes China’s increased military buildup, and that “the display of force and increasing tensions in regional hotspots such as in the South and East China Sea, and in the Taiwan Strait, may have a direct impact on European security and prosperity.”

Germany, which has close economic ties to China, got a wake-up call last week when China rejected its request for a port call for the frigate Bavaria, which is currently conducting maneuvers in the Indo-Pacific.

“China is telling them this inclusive approach is not going to work, so in a way it’s a rude awakening for Berlin,” Mohan said. “You have to take a position, you can’t have your cake and eat it too, and if you have an Indo-Pacific strategy ... you can’t make it neutral.”

Other EU countries, most notably France, have also sent naval assets for exercises in the Indo-Pacific, and Britain has had a whole carrier strike group conducting exercises for several months as London pursues the new tilt toward the region recommended by a recent British government review of defense and foreign policy.

China’s Foreign Ministry said after rejecting the Bavaria’s port call that it remained “willing to carry out friendly exchanges with Germany on the basis of mutual respect and mutual trust,” but made clear it was displeased with the increased naval presence in the region.

“Individual powers... have repeatedly dispatched military aircraft and warships to the South China Sea for some time in the name of exercising freedom of navigation to flex muscle, stir up trouble and deliberately provoke conflicts on maritime issues,” spokesman Zhao Lijian said. “China’s determination to safeguard national and territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests is unwavering, and will continue to properly handle differences with the countries concerned through consultations and negotiations.”

Beijing was less reserved in its reaction to the submarine deal with Australia, under which the U.S. and Britain will help Canberra construct nuclear-powered submarines, calling it “highly irresponsible” and say-

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ing it would "seriously damage regional peace and stability."

In signing the pact with the U.S. and Britain, Australia canceled a \$66 billion deal with France for diesel-powered submarines, infuriating Paris, which recalled its ambassadors to Washington and Canberra and suggested it calls into question the entire cooperative effort to blunt China's growing influence.

While clearly irked by the surprise deal, many observers have suggested that the vociferous reaction from France may be more directed toward a domestic audience, where President Emmanuel Macron faces a reelection bid early next year.

But there was clear disappointment that the U.S. seemed to be ignoring France's own engagement in the region by not informing them in advance, said Laurence Nardon, an expert at the French Institute for International Relations.

"There was a way to do this while keeping Europeans in the loop," she said. "The Indo-Pacific is important for the EU too; it's not one or the other."

In a call with Macron late Wednesday, Biden reaffirmed "the strategic importance of French and European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region," according to a joint statement.

More than just a decision to pursue nuclear submarines, the deal was a clear signal of Australia committing long term to being in the U.S. camp on China policy, said Euan Graham, an expert with the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore.

"The submarine decision represents an emphatic doubling down on the Australia-U.S. alliance by both countries," he said in an analysis of the deal.

As the pact was introduced, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison alluded to the long-term nature, saying "at its heart, today's announcements are about the oldest of friendships, the strongest of values and the deepest of commitment."

The submarine deal seems likely to exacerbate the ongoing trade war between China and Australia, and Australia is hoping to strike a free trade deal with Quad partner India to help offset the economic impact.

While the European strategy outline will take time, the plan provides clarity in how the EU is prepared to work with the U.S. and its allies in the region — something that has been lacking in the past.

"There's a lack of understanding on the U.S. side of why Europe is interested in the Indo-Pacific and exactly what kind of role it wants to play," Mohan said in a podcast on the issue. "There's also a lack of understanding of the U.S. approach."

In the outline of the strategy, the EU broadly looks to pool its resources for greater effect, and to work more closely with the Quad countries, the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and others.

It also envisions enhancing current operations, such as the Atalanta anti-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa and in the western Indian Ocean, and the expansion of the EU maritime security and safety mission in the wider Indian Ocean area, which has already been broadened to Southeast Asia.

"The European assessment is very realistic about what they can and cannot do in the region," Mohan said. "It's about making sure the resources, the spending, that's done right and has an impact."

## Floods, books & kids: Highlights of German election campaign

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germans go to the polls on Sunday to elect a new parliament and produce a new German leader after 16 years of having Angela Merkel at the helm. Merkel decided not to run for a fifth term and the election campaign has largely focused on the three candidates hoping to succeed her.

Here is a look at the highs, the lows and the unexpected that happened during Germany's latest campaign: WHAT'S HOT...

Climate change rose to the top of Germany's political agenda over the summer, following the deadly floods that hit western Germany in July and which experts say will become more likely if global warming continues.

The issue was hotly discussed during the televised election debates, with the three main candidates staking out different plans to tackle climate change.

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While Merkel's center-right Union bloc and its main candidate, Armin Laschet, want to focus on technological solutions, the center-left Social Democrats under current Finance Minister Olaf Scholz emphasized the need to protect jobs from being lost as Europe's biggest economy tilts toward a carbon-neutral future.

The Greens, who have made the issue their core campaign topic, pledged to do everything to put Germany on course to meet the goals of the Paris climate accord. They want to achieve that by ramping up carbon prices, requiring solar panels on all new public buildings and ending the use of coal eight years earlier than planned.

## ...AND WHAT'S NOT

Foreign policy, including the future of the European Union, received comparatively little attention during the campaign. Although Berlin's allies have long called for Germany to show more leadership on the international stage, the three candidates shied away from presenting any radical foreign policy visions.

Migration has also slipped down the list of priorities for voters compared to the 2017 election, when the far-right Alternative for Germany party came third. Its co-leader said recently that the party is focusing on state elections in the east, where polls suggest it could also win several constituencies on Sunday.

## NOT LAUGHING ANYMORE

One image that will remain in many voters' minds is that of Laschet laughing in the background during a somber visit by Germany's president to the flood region. Laschet, who is governor of the hard-hit state of North Rhine-Westphalia, later expressed regret for the incident.

The 60-year-old has also come under fire for a campaign ad showing him chummily chatting with a member of the Querdenken movement that's opposed to coronavirus restrictions. Rivals said the ad was in bad taste following the killing of a gas station clerk by a man who refused to wear a mask.

## BOOK BLOOPERS

Both the Green party's candidate, Annalena Baerbock, and the Union bloc's Laschet were left red-faced by revelations that they had been economical with crediting the sources they drew on for their books.

The mistakes provided a further boost for Scholz, whose curt, no-nonsense image helped push his party to the front of the polls a month before the election.

## KID QUESTIONS

The three candidates arguably faced the toughest questions from two 10-year-olds who interviewed them in a play tent filled with toys.

While Baerbock struggled to explain her green tax policies to the children, Laschet raised eyebrows by defending his cigarillo habit with the words: "I don't inhale."

Scholz was forced to explain to his young interviewers why the German government hasn't done more to stop migrants, including children, from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea on their way to Europe.

A mock election by 250,000 students under 18 in schools across Germany showed a narrow victory for the Greens, ahead of the Social Democrats and Merkel's Union bloc. In practice, however, German elections are heavily skewed toward older generations. First-time voters will make up less than 5% of the electorate of 60.4 million people on Sunday.

## GOVERNING COALITION COLORS

What have Jamaica and Kenya got to do with the German election?

Because each party in Germany is associated with a particular color, the two countries' flags are widely used as shorthand to denote two of the dizzying array of coalition options that come into play after the election.

Others include the "Germany" coalition, a "traffic light" alliance and one known as "red-red-green" because the Social Democrats and the Left party both claim slightly different shade of red.

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## TRIPLE VOTE

Aside from the national election, voters in Berlin and the northeastern state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania will also choose new regional assemblies Sunday. The Social Democrats are polling strongly there and some experts say the party could be in for a triple win.

## A SMALL PROBLEM ...

Opinion polls show smaller parties are getting more support than during many previous German elections, sapping votes from larger rivals and making forming a governing coalition harder. One tiny party that could enter the German parliament again for the first time since 1949 is the South Schleswig Voters' Association, or SSW. Election authorities say as a party representing the Danish minority in Germany it doesn't need to meet the usual 5% vote threshold.

## ... AND A BIG ONE

Whoever wins Sunday's election, experts say Germany's next parliament will likely be bigger than ever. Election rules mean the current 709-seat Bundestag could grow to 800 seats or more, making it even more unwieldy than it already is.

## Lava flow slows on Spanish island after volcanic eruption

By RENATA BRITO and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

TODOQUE, Canary Islands (AP) — The advance of lava from a volcanic eruption in Spain's Canary Islands has slowed significantly, raising doubts Thursday about whether it will fan out across the land and destroy more homes instead of flowing into the sea.

A giant river of lava slowed to four meters (13 feet) per hour after reaching a plain on Wednesday. On Monday, a day after the eruption on the island of La Palma, it was moving at 700 meters (2,300 feet) per hour.

As it slowed, the lava grew thicker. In places, it rose up to 15 meters (50 feet) high, authorities said. The lava now covers 166 hectares (410 acres) and has swallowed up around 350 homes.

The lava's slowing pace bought time for more residents of towns in its path to grab belongings, with the Guardia Civil police force escorting them to their homes in Todoque, close to the coast, on Thursday morning.

The Guardia Civil said seismic activity in the area, which surged before the eruption and has remained strong, has stabilized.

Molten lava, ash and smoke continued to pour from the volcano's mouth, shooting up to 4,200 meters (nearly 14,000 feet) high, the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute said. That raised concerns about whether airspace above the island could remain open.

ENAIRES, which manages Spain's airspace, said two areas above the affected area are being declared no-fly zones to allow emergency services to operate freely. Some flights into and out of La Palma were delayed early Thursday.

The Emergency Military Unit deployed on the island said the readings it has taken of the air found no threat to health.

Authorities haven't reported any casualties from the eruption, though damage to property, infrastructure and farmland is expected to be significant.

Scientists were monitoring the volcano activity and had warned of a possible eruption. That allowed almost 7,000 people to be evacuated in time.

Officials had initially expressed fears about what would happen when the lava reached the Atlantic Ocean. The lava, whose temperature exceeds 1,000 C (more than 1,800 F), could cause explosions, trigger landslides and produce clouds of toxic gas when it hits the ocean, experts say.

The eruption and its aftermath could last for up to almost three months, according to the Volcanology Institute.

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Spain's king and queen, and the Spanish prime minister, were due to visit the affected area Thursday. Life on the rest of La Palma, which is roughly 35 kilometers (22 miles) long and 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide at its broadest point, has been largely unaffected, with undeterred tourists landing for previously scheduled vacations.

The Canary Islands are a popular destination for European tourists due to their mild year-round climate.

## In German election, hunger strikers seek climate promises

By KARIN LAUB Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — After three-and-a-half weeks on a hunger strike, Henning Jeschke is frail and gaunt, but determined to go on, still hoping to pressure the three candidates for chancellor of Germany into meeting him for a debate about the climate crisis ahead of Sunday's general election.

For the first time in Germany, climate change is perhaps the most dominant issue in an election campaign, especially for young voters. It's at the center of televised debates among candidates, and five of the six main parties offer plans with varying degrees of detail for slowing global warming.

But young climate activists — who pitched a protest tent camp in a park in Berlin's government district last month — fear politicians' promises will quickly dissipate after the vote or give way to pressure from special interests. Jeschke and six others launched a hunger strike Aug. 30.

On Wednesday, the 24th day without food, Jeschke was resting on a mattress in the center of the camp, propped up on one elbow, giving back-to-back interviews and taking occasional sips of tea.

He said the hunger strike was an act of despair because he and his fellow activists believe that "in this time of climate collapse, there are no honest conversations, that party programs are insufficient and that we urgently need to take action against the climate catastrophe."

At this point, it's unlikely the candidates — Olaf Scholz of the center-left Social Democrats, Armin Laschet of the center-right Union bloc or even Annalena Baerbock of the pro-environment Greens — will show.

They have urged the strikers to end their protest amid health concerns, instead offering private meetings after the vote, presumably to avoid encounters that could go off the rails. Baerbock spoke to the strikers by phone and expressed empathy for their frustration. A spokeswoman for Scholz said he met with some of them and their supporters after a campaign stop near Berlin.

Six of the hunger strikers have halted the protest, including three on Wednesday. Jeschke, though, said he would continue and would refuse liquids, starting Thursday evening, if the demands weren't met.

The 21-year-old from the northeastern town of Greifswald, who quit his political science studies for full-time activism, has already lost 11 kilos (24 pounds) and said his parents are worried.

"My mother is at home in tears, my father comes to visit again and again, but they also see that it's necessary," he said.

Lena Bonasera, 24, who joined the hunger strike Monday, said the activists first met during Fridays For Future protests, as part of the international youth-led movement launched in 2018 by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg.

The Oxford-educated Bonasera, who also vowed to stop taking liquids as of Thursday evening, said she halted work on her dissertation on civil disobedience to make time for the campaign.

"I asked myself, why me, and my mom also asked this," she said of her decision to risk her health for her beliefs. "But once you allow yourself to feel how terrible the climate crisis really is, then I have no choice but to act this way."

This Friday, youth activists plan to stage large-scale international protests against climate change, weeks before leaders gather for a U.N. summit in Glasgow. Thunberg is expected at the Berlin rally, taking place just two days before an election that the Greens and climate activists say amounts to the last chance for Europe's biggest economy to correct course.

The hunger strike has made some ripples, even if there won't be a pre-election debate.

Climate scientist Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, who has advised Pope Francis, Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, spoke to the protesters by Zoom this week, urging them to start eat-

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ing again and offering to connect them to decision-makers after the election.

In an open letter, Schellnhuber lent legitimacy to the activists' warnings, writing that Earth will warm by close to 3 degrees Celsius this century if current climate policies continue worldwide, and that there is even an outside risk that large parts of the planet will become uninhabitable.

"This risk may be small, but would we push our children into a school bus that had a 5% chance of being predicted to be fatal?" he wrote in the letter, widely circulated in the German media.

But Schellnhuber told the activists it's not the time yet for drastic measures, such as hunger strikes. He said he senses a political opening, with leading politicians more willing to tackle the issue. In a phone interview with The Associated Press, he said he believes after conversations with Scholz that the front-runner "takes the issue far more seriously than a few years ago."

In the climate debate, two camps have emerged, with the Greens offering the most comprehensive program for making Germany carbon neutral with a mix of government incentives and penalties for polluters. Scholz' Social Democrats also propose government-driven change, but with more time than demanded by the Greens to phase out coal plants and combustion engines.

In the other camp, the Christian Democrats and the pro-business Free Democrats argue that market-driven innovation should take the lead.

The race between the parties remains close, with the Social Democrats just a few percentage points ahead in the polls.

Whatever the final outcome, the focus on climate change in public debate is unprecedented, driven in part by young activists, observers said.

"We can feel that this is a generation that is being politicized by the issue of climate change," said Sascha Müller-Kraenner of Deutsche Umwelthilfe, a veteran environmental protection group. "It's an enormous opportunity for our democracy ... that an entire generation has been mobilized."

Müller-Kraenner's group has taken companies with some of the highest carbon emissions to court, filing lawsuits this week against carmakers Mercedes and BMW.

He said such lawsuits and the street protests complement each other. "In the end it's the politicians who need to make the decisions, but we must keep up this positive pressure on them," he said.

## Naval officer wins praise for Portugal's vaccine rollout

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

OEIRAS, Portugal (AP) — As Portugal closes in on its goal of fully vaccinating 85% of the population against COVID-19 in nine months, other countries in Europe and beyond want to know how it was accomplished.

A lot of the credit is going to Rear Adm. Henrique Gouveia e Melo. With his team from the three branches of the armed forces, the naval officer took charge of the vaccine rollout in February — perhaps the moment of greatest tension in Portugal over the pandemic.

Now, the county could be just days away from hitting its target. As of Wednesday, 84% of the total population was fully vaccinated, the highest globally, according to Our World in Data.

Along with the rising number of shots, the COVID-19 infection rate and hospitalizations from the virus have dropped to their lowest levels in nearly 18 months. Portugal could end many of its remaining pandemic restrictions in October — a coveted development for many countries still in the grip of the highly infectious delta variant and lagging in their own vaccination rollouts.

Previously unheralded outside the military, Gouveia e Melo is now a household name in Portugal, having made a point of going on television regularly to answer public concerns about the vaccination program.

Easily recognizable even behind a face mask due to his blue eyes, close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair and 1.93-meter (6-foot-3-inch) height, he's often greeted in the street by people wanting to thank him.

"People are very nice," he says. But the 60-year-old officer also is quick to insist he is just "the tip of the iceberg" in the operation and that many others share the credit.

Military involvement in rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine is not uncommon elsewhere, but Portugal has

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given it the leading role.

It turned out to be an inspired choice: Although Gouveia e Melo's team works hand-in-hand with health authorities, police and town councils, the military's expertise has proven invaluable.

"People in the military are used to working under stress in uncertain environments," he said at his office in a NATO building near Lisbon that commands a view of the Atlantic. "They're organized, have a good logistics set-up ... and are usually very focused on the mission."

Gouveia e Melo set the tone of the rollout with his no-nonsense approach and emphasis on discipline. His straight-talking style endeared him to many who worried they might not get vaccinated in time.

In an interview with The Associated Press, he admitted that replacing a political appointee who quit after only three months was "intimidating."

At the time, Portugal was in the worst phase of the pandemic, when it was among the hardest-hit countries with public hospitals near collapse. Promised vaccine deliveries weren't arriving. And jockeying for shots was threatening to undermine public trust in the rollout.

"I felt like I had the eyes of 10 million people on me," Gouveia e Melo said, referring to Portugal's population.

His 42-year military career helps explain how he handled the pressure.

He was a submarine commander, and at one point was in charge of two of the vessels at the same time -- returning to base with one, eating a meal on shore and then taking another out to sea.

Gouveia e Melo also captained a frigate, led Euromarfor, the European Union's Maritime Force, and has logged the most hours at sea of any serving Portuguese naval officer.

He is unapologetic about couching the vaccine rollout as a battle and has worn combat fatigues ever since taking over the effort. He said he wanted to send a message that it was a call to arms.

"This uniform ... was symbolic for people to comprehend the need to roll up our sleeves and fight this virus," he says.

Gouveia e Melo did away with Portugal's initial efforts to piggyback on established vaccination strategies, such as those used annually for flu shots in usually small, public health centers. The demands of scale and speed to address COVID-19 required a very different approach.

Portugal began using large sports facilities around the country to set up what Gouveia e Melo called a "production line": a reception and processing area; a waiting room; cubicles where injections are given; and a recovery area. He used soldiers as guinea pigs at the Lisbon military hospital to figure out the fastest flow of people through a building.

A major push came with what he described as a "tsunami" of vaccine deliveries in mid-June, which allowed a shift into a higher gear.

Tiago Correia, an associate professor in international public health at Lisbon's New University Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, reckons that the public view of Gouveia e Melo as the principal factor in the successful rollout is an "exaggeration" of his role.

A key factor, Correia says, is the traditional consenting attitude in Portugal toward national vaccination programs. Its vaccination rate for measles, mumps and rubella, for example, is 95% -- one of the EU's highest - and there is no significant anti-vaccination movement.

Even so, Gouveia e Melo's military background meant he was able to "cut through all the politics" and ensure public trust in the rollout, Correia told AP.

These days, Gouveia e Melo is often greeted with spontaneous applause from the public when he visits vaccine centers and poses for selfies. He has been the subject of TikTok videos and poems.

Framed on the wall behind his desk is a drawing given to him by a child who wrote "Obrigado" — "Thank you" — in capital letters.

On a visit Tuesday to a vaccine center at the Lisbon University campus, Gouveia e Melo strode around in his combat fatigues and handed out a cloth crest he designed for the rollout to those waiting for their shots. The emblem, worn by many in the effort, depicts a three-headed hydra lunging at two virus cells, with a green border representing the more than 4,700 people who have worked at Portugal's vaccine centers.



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Claudia Boigues, a 53-year-old waiting in the recovery area with her 15-year-old son who had just been vaccinated, said she marveled at the swift rollout.

"I never thought we'd reach 85%," she said. "But now we deserve congratulations."

Other countries, which Gouveia e Melo declined to identify because their requests have not been made public, have asked Portugal about its effort.

Gouveia e Melo will soon be able to say "mission accomplished" for his immediate goal. But with significant vaccination hesitancy in some wealthier countries and many poorer countries without sufficient doses, he's under no illusion that virus variants could come back to torment Portugal.

"We've won a battle," he says. "I don't know if we've won the war against the virus. This is a world war."

## Mideast in shambles, but the world has moved on for now

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — There was a time not long ago when uprisings and wars in the Arab world topped the agenda at the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York.

With most of those conflicts in a stalemate, the world's focus has shifted to more daunting global challenges such as the still raging coronavirus pandemic and climate change, as well as new crises in Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

But the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated significantly in more countries and in more ways in the last two years. Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen are teetering on the brink of humanitarian catastrophe, with skyrocketing poverty and an economic implosion that threatens to throw the region into even deeper turmoil.

"The region's been crowded out by other global crises, but there's also a sense of Western hopelessness after so many years of crisis," said Julien Barnes-Dacey, the director of the Middle East and North Africa program at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

After more than a decade of bloodshed and turmoil sparked by Arab Spring uprisings and an Islamic State group onslaught, most of the region's Arab countries have settled into a military stalemate or frozen conflict, accompanied by worsening economies, rising poverty rates and heavier repression.

In Yemen, an ongoing six-year-war has spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis, leaving the country on the brink of famine. The head of the U.N. food agency warned Wednesday that 16 million people there "are marching towards starvation." Libya, torn apart for years by rival militias backed by foreign governments, is struggling to find unity. From its shores, more and more desperate people risk their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, once countries that made up the cultural heart of the Middle East, are all witnessing a significant economic unravelling, spurred among other things by corruption and political leaders focused on preserving their own interests rather than meeting their people's basic needs.

The most shocking fall in the past two years has been Lebanon, a tiny, multi-religious nation on the eastern Mediterranean with the highest per capita proportion of refugees in the world. The country has been in freefall since a financial crisis began in late 2019, plunging about three quarters of the population into poverty in the past months and triggering a brain drain not seen since the 1975-90 civil war days. That has been accelerated by the massive explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020 that killed more than 200 people and destroyed parts of the city.

Long proud of their entrepreneurial skills, Lebanese now struggle to get electricity, fuel or medicine, and most households can hardly scrape together enough for their next meal.

"If you're a Lebanese civilian, there is probably more likelihood to die from medicine shortages in 2021 than there was from a bullet in the 1970s and 1980s," said Joyce Karam, a Lebanese journalist and adjunct professor of political science at George Washington University.

"The economic devastation is eating at the pillars of the state in a way that is getting to a point of becoming irreversible."

A complete collapse in Lebanon could send a new wave of refugees to Europe. In Iraq, gripped by poverty,

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poor infrastructure and an unresolved displacement issue, desperation could lead to renewed violence.

Also getting little traction so far this year is this summer's 11-day Gaza War, the latest round of fighting between Israel and the Hamas militant group that rules the territory. More than 4,000 homes in Gaza were destroyed or severely damaged and 250 people killed, most of them civilians. Thirteen people died in Israel.

"How many more homes will be lost? How many more children will die before the world wakes up?" Jordan's King Abdullah said in pre-recorded remarks to the U.N. General Assembly.

While many U.N. General Assembly gatherings in the past 10 years were characterized by a flurry of diplomatic activity to find a political solution for crises in Mideast countries, none of them are expected to feature prominently, if at all, in this year's meetings in New York.

"Western actors feel out of ideas and energy in terms of focusing high-level attention on putting the region on a better track, particularly given wider global challenges," Barnes-Dacey said.

A combination of war weariness, donor fatigue and a long list of other world problems has forced Syria, Yemen and other Mideast conflicts into a back seat, with world leaders seemingly resigned to live with wrecked and divided nations for the foreseeable future.

In his first address before the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday, President Joe Biden did not mention the Arab world's festering crises, focusing instead on global issues of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, tensions with China and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Karam, the Lebanese journalist, said the Biden team has its hands full between COVID-19, exiting Afghanistan and pivoting to Asia.

"But they're running the risk of letting these crises fester and being forced to step in later when they become out of control or a threat to U.S. interests," she said.

Still, analysts say neither Europe nor the West can afford to ignore the economic implosion happening in the Middle East.

"For Europe, having much of its eastern and southern border turning into one huge arc of crisis is first of all a lost opportunity of staggering magnitude," said Heiko Wimmen, project director for Iraq, Syria and Lebanon at the International Crisis Group. He said destabilization will project itself into Europe and, to a lesser degree because of the distance, the U.S., by fueling desperation, migration and instability and at the same time giving momentum and credibility for far right ideological tendencies.

He said while the U.S. may want to extract itself from the region, the Europeans don't have this luxury. "You can't be safe if your neighbors' house is on fire," Wimmen said.

## The AP Interview: Top Pakistan diplomat details Taliban plan

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Be realistic. Show patience. Engage. And above all, don't isolate. Those are the pillars of an approach emerging in Pakistan to deal with the fledgling government that is suddenly running the country next door once again — Afghanistan's resurgent, often-volatile Taliban.

Pakistan's government is proposing that the international community develop a road map that leads to diplomatic recognition of the Taliban — with incentives if they fulfill its requirements — and then sit down face to face and talk it out with the militia's leaders.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi outlined the idea Wednesday in an interview with The Associated Press on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's meeting of world leaders.

"If they live up to those expectations, they would make it easier for themselves, they will get acceptability, which is required for recognition," Qureshi told the AP. "At the same time, the international community has to realize: What's the alternative? What are the options? This is the reality, and can they turn away from this reality?"

He said Pakistan "is in sync with the international community" in wanting to see a peaceful, stable Afghanistan with no space for terrorist elements to increase their foothold, and for the Taliban to ensure "that Afghan soil is never used again against any country."

"But we are saying, be more realistic in your approach," Qureshi said. "Try an innovative way of engag-

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ing with them. The way that they were being dealt with has not worked.”

Expectations from the Taliban leadership could include an inclusive government and assurances for human rights, especially for women and girls, Qureshi said. In turn, he said, the Afghan government might be motivated by receiving development, economic and reconstruction aid to help recover from decades of war.

He urged the United States, the International Monetary Fund and other countries that have frozen Afghan government funds to immediately release the money so it can be used “for promoting normalcy in Afghanistan.” And he pledged that Pakistan is ready to play a “constructive, positive” role in opening communications channels with the Taliban because it, too, benefits from peace and stability.

This is the second time that the Taliban, who adhere to a strict version of Islam, have ruled Afghanistan. The first time, from 1996 to 2001, ended when they were ousted by a U.S.-led coalition after the 9/11 attacks, which were directed by Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan.

During that rule, Taliban leaders and police barred girls from school and prohibited women from working outside the home or leaving it without a male escort. After they were overthrown, Afghan women still faced challenges in the male-dominated society but increasingly stepped into powerful positions in government and numerous fields.

But when the U.S. withdrew its military from Afghanistan last month, the government collapsed and a new generation of the Taliban resurged, taking over almost immediately. In the weeks since, many countries have expressed disappointment that the Taliban’s interim government is not inclusive as its spokesman had promised.

While the new government has allowed young girls to attend school, it has not yet allowed older girls to return to secondary school, and most women to return to work despite a promise in April that women “can serve their society in the education, business, health and social fields while maintaining correct Islamic hijab.”

Pakistan, which shares a long border with Afghanistan, has a long and sometimes conflicted relationship with its neighbor that includes attempts to prevent terrorism there and, some say, also encouraging it. The Islamabad government has a fundamental vested interest in ensuring that whatever the new Afghanistan offers, it is not a threat to Pakistan.

That, Qureshi says, requires a steady and calibrated approach.

“It has to be a realistic assessment, a pragmatic view on both sides, and that will set the tone for recognition eventually,” the Pakistani minister said. The good news, he said: The Taliban are listening, “and they are not insensitive to what is being said by neighbors and the international community.”

How does he know they’re listening? He says the interim government, drawn mostly from Afghanistan’s dominant Pashtun ethnic group, made some additions on Tuesday. It added representatives from the country’s ethnic minorities — Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, who are Shiite Muslims in the majority Sunni Muslim country.

“Yes, there are no women yet,” Qureshi said. “But let us let the situation evolve.”

He stressed that the Taliban must make decisions in coming days and weeks that will enhance their acceptability.

“What the international community can do, in my view, is sit together and work out a roadmap,” Qureshi said. “And if they fulfill those expectations, this is what the international community can do to help them stabilize their economy. This is the humanitarian assistance that can be provided. This is how they can help rebuild Afghanistan, reconstruction and so on and so forth.”

He added: “With this roadmap ahead, I think an international engagement can be more productive.”

On Wednesday night, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said after a meeting of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council that all five nations — the United States, China, Britain, Russia and France — want “an Afghanistan at peace, stable, where humanitarian aid can be distributed without problems or discrimination.”

He also described a hoped-for “Afghanistan where the rights of women and girls are respected, an Afghanistan that won’t be a sanctuary for terrorism, an Afghanistan where we have an inclusive government

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representing the different sectors of the population.”

Qureshi said there are different forums where the international community can work out the best way to approach the situation. In the meantime, he asserted, things seem to be stabilizing. Less than six weeks after the Taliban seized power on Aug. 15, he said, Pakistan has received information that the law-and-order situation has improved, fighting has stopped and many internally displaced Afghans are going home.

“That’s a positive sign,” Qureshi said.

He said Pakistan hasn’t seen a new influx of Afghan refugees — a sensitive issue for Pakistanis, who are highly motivated to prevent it. A humanitarian crisis, a foundering economy and workers who return to jobs and school but aren’t getting salaries and don’t have money could cause Afghans to flee across the porous border into Pakistan, which has suffered economically from such arrivals over decades of conflict.

Qureshi prescribed patience and realism. After all, he says, every previous attempt to stabilize Afghanistan has failed, so don’t expect new efforts to produce immediate success with the Taliban. If the United States and its allies “could not convince them or eliminate them in two decades, how will you do it in the next two months or the next two years?” he wondered.

Asked whether he had a prediction of what Afghanistan might be like in six months, Qureshi turned the question back on his AP interviewer, replying: “Can you guarantee me U.S. behavior over the next six months?”

## After Northeast flooding, insurance woes swamp residents

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and DAVID PORTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After being pummeled by two tropical storms that submerged basements, cracked home foundations and destroyed belongings, Northeastern U.S. residents still in the throes of recovery are being hit with another unexpected blow: Thousands of families are now swamped with financial losses because they didn’t have flood insurance.

Most of those caught off guard by the intense downpours from the remnants of Hurricane Ida and Tropical Storm Henri lived in areas outside of coastal floodplains, making flood insurance an afterthought for most of the working-class families whose neighborhoods were among the hardest hit.

“When we called the insurance company, the first thing they told us is that they don’t provide any assistance for anything that’s caused by a storm. And they left it at that,” Amit Shivprasad said, his rising voice echoing frustrations shared among his neighbors in the Jamaica section of Queens.

For weeks now, Shivprasad and his parents have been crammed into a relative’s apartment after New York City building inspectors declared their home uninhabitable.

Floodwaters from Ida, exacerbated by overflowing storm and sewer drains, ripped through an exterior wall and drowned two of the family’s tenants in a basement apartment. The storm killed about 50 people across the Northeast, many of whom drowned in basement apartments or in cars. It lashed the region less than two weeks after a drenching from Henri.

Residents in Shivprasad’s neighborhood have long complained about inadequate drainage that makes flooding a frequent worry.

“This is not a flood zone, which is something I was shocked at,” said Shivprasad, whose family home lies 4 miles inland from the nearest flood plain. If it were in a flood zone, the family’s mortgage company would have likely required flood insurance.

Among the roughly 10,000 homes in his neighborhood, just 16 were protected by flood insurance, according to a database compiled by the Association of State Floodplain Managers.

Flood damage is not covered by homeowners or renters insurance policies. People without a flood policy have few options for getting help paying for damage, according to Loretta Worters, a spokesperson for the Insurance Information Institute. They may be able to get federal assistance, she said, including low-interest loans and grants for damage.

While officials are still calculating the losses — believed to be in the billions of dollars — residents wonder how they’ll come up with the money to repair homes and replace belongings. Fans continue to whirl in dank



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basements and dump trucks still make the rounds to haul away mildewed couches, squishy mattresses and now-useless electronics.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said it has already disbursed at least \$22 million to nearly 5,200 families in New York City. More than 38,000 households have applied for aid. In New Jersey, assistance to some 39,000 families is still pending, while FEMA has paid out about \$11 million to nearly 3,000 families.

Thus far, about \$10 million in flood insurance claims has been paid out in New Jersey to 6,000 policy holders, according to FEMA. In New York City's five boroughs, about \$3 million has been disbursed for 2,600 flood insurance claims.

Flood insurance, offered through the National Flood Insurance Program, is generally required for mortgages on properties considered to have a roughly 1 in 100 chance each year of flooding — but is optional for everyone else. Some see it as an unnecessary cost, even as severe weather now strikes with more frequency and greater intensity.

"You never know, particularly with the way the world is acting right now, when that flood is going to occur in your neighborhood," said Michael Wade, a FEMA spokesperson.

"All you got to do is look at this particular storm," he said, "and you'll see that people who didn't live in flood plains — and who have never been flooded before — all of a sudden they get inundated with 6 inches of rain an hour. Now they got problems."

John and Roseann Kiernan's neighborhood in Rossmoor, a sprawling senior living development in Monroe Township in central New Jersey, is 20 miles from the coastline and not near any major rivers. The Kiernans and others said they were told over the years that they didn't need flood insurance because the area isn't in a flood zone — even though the neighborhood flooded in 2005.

John Kiernan's mother previously owned the house and had flood insurance that cost about \$650 per year, he said. She died eight years ago, and they eventually let the insurance lapse. Now, the Kiernans estimate it will cost \$100,000 to get their house back to a livable condition and replace their car.

Their existing policy "covered nothing," said John Kiernan, a retired corrections officer. "The insurance company sent out some very nice, understanding people, they listened to everybody for an hour or so, then basically said, 'You're not getting anything.' So that's the way it is."

Around the corner from the Kiernans, Joan Russo and her husband have lived in the same house for 16 years and moved in a few days before the flooding in 2005. Their house suffered extensive water damage during Henri, forcing them to move in with her son's family in another town.

"When we were getting our insurance, they said, 'You're not in a flood area, there's no need for that,'" she said. "You listen to the supplier and they say you don't need it, so you don't get it."

Back in Queens, Sahadeo Bhagwandin worries about how he will get his family back home. They've been spending nights at a hotel, courtesy of the Red Cross, ever since the flooding.

"I don't know how I'll fix this," said Bhagwandin, a structural engineer, as he pointed to a thick fissure in his basement wall. It could cost upward of \$125,000 to repair his home's foundation, which buckled after floodwaters gushed into the basement.

Until a few years back, Bhagwandin said, he had flood insurance — bought after a 2007 storm inundated streets — but the policy was later canceled.

Some of his neighbors, especially working-class immigrants who face language barriers, aren't as familiar with the complexities of property insurance and might not have realized they needed separate coverage for acts of God like flooding and earthquakes.

Even if they were aware of the risk of flooding, he said, their financial priorities might have been elsewhere.

"It's not a rich community," Bhagwandin said. "People try to save every dollar they have to do something else with it, instead of buying flood insurance."

## Wildfire victims left with nothing get hope from donated RVs

By NOAH BERGER Associated Press

QUINCY, Calif. (AP) — Clutching a bag full of duct tape and snacks, Woody Faircloth climbs aboard a

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motorhome complete with carpet and drapes. At his side, his 9-year-old daughter, Luna, quizzes a family who has just donated the recreational vehicle, appropriately called Residency. In the distance, above hills dotted with sagebrush, smoke billows from the second-largest wildfire in California history.

Father and daughter drive west an hour where they deliver the 35-foot (11-meter) RV to its new owner — a volunteer firefighter who lost his home in August when the Dixie Fire leveled most of historic downtown Greenville, a tiny Northern California mountain town dating to the gold rush era.

The vehicle is the 95th that Faircloth has delivered to wildfire victims. Run entirely on volunteer efforts and donated RVs, the nonprofit EmergencyRV.org fills a gap for victims who often wait months for emergency housing, Faircloth said.

"We're grassroots; we can move a lot faster than that. It's people helping people. ... We can get there almost immediately," he said.

And Faircloth has a long list of people who need help. Thousands of wildfires have burned in California and the U.S. West this year as a historic drought makes the flames harder to fight.

His mission began Thanksgiving week in 2018. Recently divorced and home in Denver with Luna, then 6, Faircloth watched news coverage of a man fleeing in an RV as the nation's deadliest wildfire in a century — the Camp Fire — burned his California home. Despite losing his house, the man was grateful to have the RV to call home for Thanksgiving. That struck Faircloth.

He had never been in an motorhome before, but he turned to Luna and asked, "Why don't we get an RV and drive it out there and give it to a family that lost their home? What do you think about that?"

Her reply: "Aw, Dad, God and Santa Claus are gonna be proud of us."

"That kinda sealed the deal," Faircloth said.

Within three days, with Luna riding shotgun, Faircloth steered west from Denver in a \$2,500 motorhome he found on Craigslist. They celebrated Thanksgiving on the road and delivered the vehicle the next day to a victim of the Camp Fire, which nearly destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 85 people.

As social media posts about the trip spread, donors started offering Faircloth their RVs. Some offered to deliver the vehicles themselves, but Faircloth makes many of the drops personally.

He tries to schedule the trips on weekends but often dips into vacation time from his full-time job at telecom company Comcast. Faircloth has traversed thousands of miles over the past three years, often with Luna at his side. Last year, she joined him more often as COVID-19 precautions had her going to school remotely.

While those who are given RVs own them outright, Faircloth estimates 5% to 10% return them once they're on their feet so they can be donated to other fire victims.

Faircloth and Luna spent three weekends in the last two months making the 20-hour drive from Denver to rural Northern California, where the more than 1,500-square-mile (3,898-square-kilometer) Dixie Fire has destroyed 1,329 homes, businesses and other buildings since mid-July. They have delivered three RVs to firefighters and one to a sheriff's deputy.

One of them was firefighter George Wolley. He was battling the Dixie Fire on Aug. 4 when the flames, whipped by strong winds and bone-dry vegetation, descended from the hills and leveled most of central Greenville, including Wolley's house.

"We fought the fire until we couldn't fight it no more. We couldn't stop it. We did our best," he said.

Wolley parks the RV near an air base where he's still helping load fire retardant into air tankers to battle the blaze.

"Before I got that RV, I felt like I was a burden on everybody that helped me," Wolley said. "I slept a lot in tents and in my car. It gave me a place to go."

Faircloth and Luna recently delivered their 95th motorhome to John Hunter. An assistant chief with the Indian Valley Fire Department, Hunter has been fighting blazes for 46 years. The same day Wolley's house burned, flames destroyed Hunter's home and Hunter Ace Hardware, the Greenville store his family has operated since 1929. It also gutted a building he owned next door, a former medical clinic where the 69-year-old was born.

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Hunter and his girlfriend, Kimberly Price, 57, will call the RV home as they decide whether to rebuild or start over elsewhere.

"It's been really hard because our town's gone, and this is all John's known all his life," Price said, wiping away tears as she watched a video of the family who donated the motorhome.

Price said they will park in a lot near Greenville Junior/Senior High School, one of the few buildings still standing in the town center. That will allow her to keep visiting ruined homes each day to feed cats that were left behind as owners evacuated.

Although Faircloth said it's challenging to balance work, family and his nonprofit, he hopes to expand the volunteer effort. He envisions staging RVs in hurricane and fire zones in the future to respond even faster during disasters.

For now, there are more than 100 families on EmergencyRV.org's waitlist. He plans to drive to California in the next two weeks to make his next delivery.

## **Biden presses fellow Dems: Resolve party split on \$3.5T plan**

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a personal push, President Joe Biden pressed fellow Democrats to hasten work on his big "build back better" agenda, telling them to come up with a final framework and their best topline budget figure as the party labors to bridge its divisions in Congress ahead of crucial voting deadlines.

Biden and Democratic House and Senate lawmakers met for hours of back-to-back-to-back private White House sessions stretching into Wednesday evening, convened at a pivotal juncture for Biden's \$3.5 trillion package as lawmakers struggle to draft details of the ambitious effort. With Republicans solidly opposed, Democratic leaders are counting on the president to galvanize consensus between progressives and centrists in their party.

Biden first conferred with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, then held separate sessions with moderate and progressive senators and representatives. The president listened intently, lawmakers said, but also indicated strongly he wanted progress soon, by next week.

"We're in good shape," Pelosi told reporters after returning to the Capitol.

The White House called the meetings "productive and candid" and said follow-up work would be immediately underway. Earlier in the day, press secretary Jen Psaki said the White House realized that with time growing short "there needs to be deeper engagement by the president."

The intense focus on Biden's big-money domestic proposal showcases how much is at stake politically for the president and his party in Congress. The administration has suffered setbacks elsewhere, notably with the Afghanistan withdrawal and prolonged COVID-19 crisis, and Democrats are running short of time, anxious to make good on campaign promises.

Congress is racing toward Monday's deadline for a House vote on the first part of Biden's plan — a \$1 trillion public works measure — which now also serves as a deadline for producing a compromise framework for the broader package.

At one point, Biden told the lawmakers there were plenty of conference rooms at the White House they could use to hunker down this weekend as some suggested they roll up their sleeves and stay to get final details done.

Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a key centrist who has balked at the \$3.5 trillion price tag, said the president told him to come up with a number he could live with.

"He just basically said, 'Find it,'" Manchin said. "'Just work on it, give me a number.'"

"The president is really fired up," said Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, after the evening's final session.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate remained at a standstill over a separate package to keep the government funded past the Sept. 30 fiscal yearend and to suspend the federal debt limit to avert a shutdown and a devastating U.S. default on payments. Senate Republicans are refusing the House-passed bill.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said at a news conference Tuesday that failing to extend the

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debt limit was “just not something we can contemplate or we should contemplate.”

As for Biden’s big plans, the president and the Democratic lawmakers appeared to have not fully resolved their differences ahead of Monday’s test vote on the smaller public works bill for roads, broadband and public water projects.

Centrist Democrats want swift passage of the slimmer public works bill and have raised concerns about the price tag of Biden’s broader vision, but progressive Democrats are withholding their votes for the \$1 trillion measure they view as inadequate unless it’s linked to the bigger package.

Rep. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey, a leader of the centrist coalition who attended one of the White House meetings, said all agreed on doing both — passing the bill Monday and working on the bigger package.

But Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, issued a statement after another meeting with Biden reiterating that some 50 members plan to vote against the bipartisan measure unless it’s linked to the broader bill. She has said the two bills must move “in tandem” to win the progressive votes.

Beyond the public works measure, Biden’s “build back” agenda is a sweeping overhaul of federal taxes and spending to make what the president views as overdue investments in health care, family services and efforts to fight climate change.

The \$3.5 trillion package 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, along with investments to tackle climate change.

Tensions are high as the Biden agenda is a key campaign promise not only from the president but most of the the Democratic lawmakers, including those in the House who face re-election next year.

“It wasn’t a matter of when we get it done, it was how we get it done,” said Rep. Steven Horsford of Nevada, who was with the moderate group meeting with Biden.

All told, more than 20 lawmakers were invited to confer with Biden, moderates and progressives in separate meetings stretching into the evening, making their best pitches, Manchin and another key centrist Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, among them.

Despite disputes, many Democrats say they expect the final product to align with Biden’s broader vision and eventually have robust party support, even if that version is adjusted or scaled back.

But Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., a leader of the centrist Blue Dog caucus, said the big bill will take more time. “I’m not sure that we’re at a place of closing out just yet,” she said.

While all this is going on, the 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 funding-and-debt measure Tuesday night, but Republicans are refusing to give their support in the Senate, despite the risk of triggering a fiscal crisis.

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

But 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. Other options to try to pass the debt ceiling package could be procedurally difficult.

## Is the delta variant of the coronavirus worse for kids?

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

Is the delta variant of the coronavirus worse for kids?

No, experts say there’s no strong evidence yet that it makes children and teens sicker than earlier versions of the virus, although delta has led to a surge in infections among kids because it’s more contagious.



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Delta's ability to spread more easily makes it more of a risk to children and underscores the need for masks in schools and vaccinations for those who are old enough, said Dr. Juan Dumois, a pediatric infectious disease physician at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Weekly infection rates among U.S. children earlier this month topped 250,000, surpassing the wintertime peak, according to data from the American Academy of Pediatrics and Children's Hospital Association. Since the pandemic began, more than 5 million children in the U.S. have tested positive for COVID-19.

The delta variant has been identified in at least 180 countries, according to the World Health Organization. In many of them, the spike in infections has also meant an increase in hospitalizations in young children and teens.

In the U.S., the hospitalization rate for COVID-19 was less than 2 per 100,000 children in late August and early September — similar to the peak last winter, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the portion of kids hospitalized with severe disease hasn't changed significantly.

The sheer numbers can make it seem like children are getting sicker with the delta variant, but experts say that does not appear to be the case. Most infected kids have mild infections or no symptoms and do not need to be hospitalized.

COVID-19 vaccines continue to provide protection against delta. Among children 12 and older — who are eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations — the weekly hospitalization rate in July was 10 times higher for the unvaccinated than those who have had the shots, CDC data show.

## WhatsApp, social posts helped lead Haitian migrants to Texas

By JUAN A. LOZANO, MARIA VERZA and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — For the final leg of his journey from Chile to the United States, Haitian migrant Fabricio Jean followed detailed instructions sent to him via WhatsApp from his brother in New Jersey who had recently taken the route to the Texas border.

His brother wired him money for the trip, then meticulously mapped it out, warning him of areas heavy with Mexican immigration officials.

"You will need about 20,000 pesos (about \$1,000 U.S. dollars) for the buses. You need to take this bus to this location and then take another bus," recounted Jean, who spoke to The Associated Press after reaching the border town of Del Rio.

What Jean didn't expect was to find thousands of Haitian migrants like himself crossing at the same remote spot. The 38-year-old, his wife and two young children earlier this month joined as many as 14,000 mostly Haitian migrants camped under a Del Rio bridge.

A confluence of factors caused the sudden sharp increase at the Texas town of about 35,000 residents. Interviews with dozens of Haitian migrants, immigration attorneys and advocates reveal a phenomenon produced partly by confusion over the Biden administration's policies after authorities recently extended protections for the more than 100,000 Haitians living in the United States.

It also reflects the power of Facebook, YouTube and platforms like WhatsApp, which migrants use to share information that can get distorted as it speeds through immigrant communities, directing migration flows. That's especially true for tight-knit groups like the Creole-and-French-speaking Haitians, many of whom left their homeland after its devastating 2010 earthquake and have been living in Latin America, drawn by Brazil and Chile's once-booming economies.

In extending protections for Haitians this spring, the Biden administration cited security concerns and social unrest in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the temporary protections were limited to those residing in the U.S. before July 29 — but that condition was often missing in posts, leading Haitians outside the United States to believe they, too, were eligible.

Mayorkas acknowledged that this week, saying "we are very concerned that Haitians who are taking the irregular migration path are receiving misinformation that the border is open," or that they qualify for protected status despite the expired deadline.

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"I want to make sure it is known that this is not the way to come to the United States," he said.

Thousands of Haitians have been stuck in Mexican border towns since 2016, when the Obama administration abruptly halted a policy that initially allowed them in on humanitarian grounds.

Online messages touting the Mexican town of Ciudad Acuña, across from Del Rio, started after President Joe Biden took office and began reversing some of the Trump administration's immigration policies.

Ciudad Acuña has been spared the drug and gang violence seen elsewhere along the border. Some of the social media posts recommending it appear to have come from human smugglers seeking to drum up business, according to immigrant advocates.

Haitians began crossing there this year, but their numbers ballooned after a Biden administration program that briefly opened the door to some asylum seekers ended, said Nicole Phillips, of the San Diego-based Haitian Bridge Alliance, which advocates for Haitian migrants. The program allowed in a select number of people deemed by humanitarian groups to be at high risk in Mexico.

Once it ceased in August, people panicked, and the messages recommending Ciudad Acuña "went viral," Phillips said.

"That's why they rushed at this time to get in," she said. "They realized they wouldn't be able to get in legally through a port-of-entry like they were hoping."

Del Rio is just one example of how technology that has put a smartphone in the hands of nearly every migrant is transforming migration flows, according to advocates. Migrants often monitor the news and share information on routes. The most popular platform is WhatsApp, which connects 2 billion people worldwide.

In 2020, after Turkey announced that the land border with Greece was open, thousands of migrants headed there – only to find the gates closed on the Greek side. Something similar happened this spring in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, in North Africa, when thousands of people were allowed to cross from Morocco into Spain, which promptly sent most of them back.

Last week, in a Facebook group for Haitians in Chile with 26,000 members, one member posted specific instructions on routes through Mexico. It included paths to avoid and recommended certain bus companies.

"Good luck and be careful," said the post, written in Haitian Creole.

Another member shared a different route in the comments. The group's members have since relayed stories of horrific conditions in Del Rio and risks of being deported.

The International Organization for Migration found most of the 238 Haitians who were surveyed in March after passing through a 60-mile (100-kilometer) stretch of jungle between Colombia and Panama known as the Darien Gap received route information from family or friends who had made the dangerous trek.

About 15% said they saw instructions on the internet.

Agency spokesman Jorge Gallo said the instructions led the migrants to believe crossing the gap was "difficult but not impossible."

But just as similar messages drew many Haitians to Del Rio, news of the Biden administration deporting hundreds on the Texas border caused some to change their plans.

A 32-year-old Haitian woman who made it to Del Rio with her two teenage children bought bus tickets to Mexico City after receiving a cousin's audio message via WhatsApp. She previously lived in Chile for four years.

"Wait in Mexico until this month is over. They will pick up everyone under the bridge. After that, they will give me the contact to enter Miami," said the recording in Creole, which she played for an AP reporter. The AP is withholding the woman's name to protect her safety.

Facebook Inc., which owns WhatsApp, allows people to exchange information about crossing borders, even illegally, but its policy bars posts that ask for money for services that facilitate human smuggling.

Robins Exile said he and his pregnant wife, who left Brazil after he lost his job amid the pandemic-racked economy, headed to Tijuana, Mexico, instead after seeing warnings via YouTube and WhatsApp from fellow Haitian migrants.

"A lot of Haitians are advising now not to come to Acuña. They say it's no longer a good place," he said.

On Wednesday, Antonio Pierre, 33, who was camped in Del Rio with his wife and daughter, listened to

the news on his friend's cellphone.

"The U.S. is releasing some but just a few," he said, referring to U.S. officials who told the AP on Tuesday that thousands of Haitians in custody were being let go and ordered to report to an immigration office, contradicting the Biden administration's announcement that all Haitians camped in the town would be expelled to Haiti.

Nelson Saintil and his wife and four children had been camped in Texas but moved back to Mexico as they awaited word on where to go next to avoid deportation.

"I do not want to be like mice who do not find out that they are falling into a trap," he said. "Because returning to Haiti is to bury a person alive."

## Vaccine inequity comes into stark focus during UN gathering

By PIA SARKAR Associated Press

The inequity of COVID-19 vaccine distribution will come into sharper focus Thursday as many of the African countries whose populations have little to no access to the life-saving shots step to the podium to speak at the U.N.'s annual meeting of world leaders.

Already, the struggle to contain the coronavirus pandemic has featured prominently in leaders' speeches — many of them delivered remotely exactly because of the virus. Country after country acknowledged the wide disparity in accessing the vaccine, painting a picture so bleak that a solution has at times seemed impossibly out of reach.

"Some countries have vaccinated their populations, and are on the path to recovery. For others, the lack of vaccines and weak health systems pose a serious problem," Norway's Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, said in a prerecorded speech Wednesday. "In Africa, fewer than 1 in 20 people are fully vaccinated. In Europe, one in two are fully vaccinated. This inequity is clearly unfair."

Countries slated to give their signature annual speeches on Thursday include South Africa, Botswana, Angola, Burkina Faso and Libya.

Also among them will be Zimbabwe, where the economic ravages of the pandemic have forced some families to abandon the long-held tradition of taking care of their older people. And Uganda, where a surge in virus cases have made scarce hospital beds even more expensive, leading to concerns over alleged exploitation of patients by private hospitals.

On Wednesday, during a global vaccination summit convened virtually on the sidelines of the General Assembly, President Joe Biden announced that the United States would double its purchase of Pfizer's COVID-19 shots to share with the world to 1 billion doses, with the goal of vaccinating 70% of the global population within the next year.

The move comes as world leaders, aid groups and global health organizations have 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 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.

During an anti-racism event on Wednesday commemorating a landmark but contentious conference 20 years ago, President Felix Tshisekedi of Congo pointed to the fact that only about 1 in 1,000 people in his country have gotten at least one shot.

The disparity in vaccine availability around the world "clearly does not demonstrate equality between the countries and peoples of this world," Tshisekedi said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy likewise called out failures in sharing coronavirus vaccines during his speech Wednesday night, his hopes in 2020 of "effective multilateralism and effective international solidarity" dashed a year later, "where one thing is to share objectives and quite another is to share vaccines."

Also on Thursday, foreign ministers are due to ponder climate change as a security issue when the Security Council, the U.N.'s most powerful body, meets in the morning.

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Climate change has been a major focus during this week's General Assembly gathering. World leaders made "faint signs of progress" on the financial end of fighting climate change in a special United Nations feet-to-the-fire meeting Monday, but they didn't commit to more crucial cuts in emissions of the heat-trapping gases that cause global warming.

## Suits against Ohio State over sex abuse by doc are dismissed

By KANTELE FRANKO Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A federal judge dismissed some of the biggest unsettled lawsuits over Ohio State's failure to stop decades-old sexual abuse by now-deceased team doctor Richard Strauss, saying Wednesday it's indisputable Strauss abused hundreds of young men but agreeing with OSU's argument that the legal window for such claims had passed.

"For decades, many at Ohio State tasked with protecting and training students and young athletes instead turned a blind eye to Strauss's exploitation," U.S. District Court Judge Michael Watson wrote in one ruling. "From 1979 to 2018, Ohio State utterly failed these victims. Plaintiffs beseech this Court to hold Ohio State accountable, but today, the legal system also fails Plaintiffs."

The matter isn't done. Strauss-related lawsuits against OSU filed this year by dozens of other plaintiffs appeared to still be pending, with no dismissal or other new rulings appearing on those dockets as of late Wednesday. And lawyers for the 200-plus plaintiffs whose cases were dismissed immediately vowed to appeal.

Attorney Stephen Estey said the group of men he represents was devastated by the judge's decision.

"The students were betrayed on the campus, and they're betrayed again by the university in the legal proceedings" through the settlement amounts it offered and its argument for dismissing the cases, Estey said. "I mean, it's betrayal across the board."

Roughly 400 men and one woman had sued Ohio State since 2018 over its failure to stop Strauss despite concerns they say were raised with school officials during his two-decade tenure, as far back as the late 1970s. Many of the accusers say they were fondled in medical exams at campus athletic facilities, a student health center, his home and or his off-campus clinic.

Watson said the court wasn't questioning their suffering and acknowledged "their claims cry out for a remedy," but he concluded the two-year legal window in Ohio for bringing the claims related to the federal Title IX law had passed long before the cases were first filed in 2018 and 2019. If the men have a legal path forward, it starts at the Statehouse, not courts, he said.

"At all times since the filing of these cases, the Ohio legislature had the power, but not the will, to change the statute of limitations for these Plaintiffs," Watson wrote.

Some of the plaintiffs had recently sought the judge's recusal from the case after he disclosed to them this month that his wife's business has ties with the university, but Watson also denied those requests Wednesday. Attorneys for the men said they intend to appeal that issue, too.

The university has publicly and repeatedly apologized and has said it was committed to a "monetary resolution" for those Strauss harmed. It previously reached nearly \$47 million in settlements with 185 survivors – an average of about \$252,000 – and separately offered plaintiffs in certain remaining cases an individual settlement program that recently closed.

Including individual settlements, the university has reached agreements with more than 230 survivors, OSU spokesperson Benjamin Johnson said by email Wednesday. He said he couldn't provide details on the total sum of settlements or the average settlement amount for those in the individual program.

After the allegations came to light three years ago, the university "sought to uncover and acknowledge the truth about Richard Strauss' abuse and the university's failure at the time to prevent it," Johnson said.

But many of the men who'd been continuing the legal fight argued that the university hadn't treated them fairly and had thus added to their trauma. They maintained that the earlier settlements were too small and that they deserve compensation more comparable to other recent sexual abuse scandals in higher education. They point to Michigan State's \$500 million settlement for 500-plus female victims of imprisoned sports doctor Larry Nassar, and the University of Southern California's \$852 million settlement



with more than 700 women who accused a gynecologist of sexual abuse.

Rocky Ratliff, an attorney who represented some of the plaintiffs and was one himself, said some of the guys in his group who had recently and reluctantly agreed to settle reached out to him Wednesday, upset for him and others who had decided against settling only to see their cases dismissed weeks afterward.

Ratliff said he hadn't yet brought himself to read the judge's full rulings but was left feeling "sad and disgusted" to have been an Ohio State Buckeye wrestler and alumnus.

The Ohio State accusers can't confront Strauss, who died in 2005. Since his family's initial statement of shock, no one has publicly defended him.

He had retired in 1998 with an unblemished employment file. Other records show there was a state medical board investigation about Strauss in 1996, but he was never disciplined. Current officials at the board say evidence of misconduct was ignored in that case but that they can't determine now why his case was closed back then.

## **FDA backs Pfizer COVID-19 boosters for seniors, high-risk**

By MATTHEW PERRONE, LAURAN NEERGAARD and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

The U.S. moved a step closer Wednesday to offering booster doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to senior citizens and others at high risk from the virus as the Food and Drug Administration signed off on the targeted use of extra shots.

The FDA authorized booster doses for Americans who are 65 and older, younger adults with underlying health conditions and those in jobs that put them at high risk for COVID-19. The ruling represents a drastically scaled back version of the Biden administration's sweeping plan to give third doses to nearly all American adults to shore up their protection amid the spread of the highly contagious delta variant.

However, more regulatory hurdles lie ahead before the dispensing of boosters can begin.

Advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention opened a two-day meeting Wednesday to make their own, more specific recommendations about who should get the extra shots and when. And in their first day of discussions, some experts were so perplexed by the questions surrounding the rationale for boosters that they suggested putting off a decision for a month in hopes of more evidence.

The uncertainties were yet another reminder that the science surrounding boosters is more complicated than the Biden administration suggested when the president and his top aides rolled out their plan at the White House last month.

The FDA decision Wednesday was expected after the agency's own panel of advisers last week overwhelmingly rejected the Biden plan. The panel instead recommended boosters only for those most vulnerable to severe cases of COVID-19.

FDA acting commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock said in a statement that the FDA authorization would allow for boosters in health care workers, teachers, grocery workers and those in homeless shelters or prisons.

"As we learn more about the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines, including the use of a booster dose, we will continue to evaluate the rapidly changing science and keep the public informed," Woodcock said.

Under the FDA authorization, vaccinated Americans are eligible for a third dose six months after receiving their second Pfizer shot. That's different than the Biden proposal announced in August, which called for boosters after eight months.

"Today's FDA decision is a major step forward in our effort to provide Americans with additional protection from COVID-19," White House press secretary Jen Psaki tweeted Wednesday night. "We have been preparing for weeks to administer booster shots to eligible Americans and are ready to do so following CDC's final recommendation later this week."

The timing of the FDA decision was highly unusual given that the agency typically takes action before the CDC convenes its own experts.

The CDC panelists heard a series of presentations Wednesday outlining the knotty state of science on boosters. On one hand, the COVID-19 vaccines continue to offer strong protection against severe illness,

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hospitalization and death. On the other hand, there are signs of more low-grade infections among the vaccinated as immunity wanes.

Ultimately the committee must decide who is considered at high enough risk for an extra dose. Data provided by Pfizer and the Israeli government suggests a strong case for boosters in people 65 and older, but there is less evidence that extra shots provide much benefit for younger people with underlying health conditions.

Several CDC advisers agreed boosters are also important for keeping health care workers on the job. "We don't have enough health care workers to take care of the unvaccinated," said Dr. Helen Keipp Talbot of Vanderbilt University. "They just keep coming."

The CDC has already said it is considering boosters for older people, nursing home residents and front-line health care workers, rather than all adults.

The World Health Organization and other global health advocates are opposed to wealthy nations dispensing a third round of shots when poor countries don't have enough vaccine for their first doses. And many independent scientists say that the vaccines continue to perform well against the worst effects of COVID-19 and that their ability to curb the overall trajectory of the epidemic is uncertain.

U.S. regulators will decide at a later date on boosters for people who have received the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccines. They indicated the Pfizer shots would not be recommended for people who got a different brand of vaccine initially.

The across-the-board rollout of boosters proposed by the White House was supposed to have begun this week. Some questioned whether President Joe Biden had gotten ahead of the science by announcing his plans before government regulators had reached any conclusions.

Despite the resistance in recent days, some top U.S. health officials said they expect boosters to eventually win broader approval in the coming weeks or months. Dr. Anthony Fauci said over the weekend that "this is not the end of the story."

Other administration officials noted that the FDA decision covers tens of millions of Americans and that seniors and other high-risk groups would have been the first to get boosters even if extra shots had been authorized for the entire population. Seniors were in the first group of Americans eligible for vaccination last December.

The U.S. has already authorized third doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for certain people with weakened immune systems, such as cancer patients and transplant recipients. Other Americans, healthy or not, have managed to get boosters, in some cases simply by asking.

The U.S. is dispensing around 760,000 vaccinations per day on average, down from a high of 3.4 million a day in mid-April. About 180 million Americans are fully vaccinated, or 64% of those who are eligible.

## Former US defense secretary testifies in Holmes fraud trial

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis testified Wednesday in the trial of fallen tech star Elizabeth Holmes, saying the entrepreneur misled him into believing she was on the verge of rolling out a blood-testing breakthrough that he hoped would help save lives of troops in battle.

Mattis' appearance came during the sixth day of a high-profile trial in San Jose, California. The U.S. government alleges that Holmes duped sophisticated investors, patients and customers into believing that her startup, Theranos, had developed a technology that could scan for an array of potential health problems with just a few drops of blood. Existing tests generally each require a vial of blood.

During more than three hours of maskless testimony delivered behind plexiglass, Mattis recalled how impressed he was with Holmes when he first met her in 2011 while still serving a four-star general in the Marine Corps, where he oversaw U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A few months after retiring from the military in 2013, Mattis joined the Theranos board and also invested some of his own savings in the startup. In 2017, Mattis joined the cabinet of President Donald Trump.

Mattis, nicknamed "Mad Dog," while he was in the military, testified that Holmes initially struck him as a

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"sharp, articulate, committed" CEO who drew his interest when she described the compact blood-testing machine called Edison that Theranos was developing.

Holmes assured him that the Edison would be able to scan for health problems with just a finger prick — a concept that Mattis testified he found "pretty breathtaking" for its potential applications in the field of battle.

"I'm strong believer in what you have designed/built and hope we can get it in the theater soon to test it," Mattis wrote in a March 2013 email shortly before he retired from the military. In other emails, Mattis affectionately addressed Holmes as "young Elizabeth."

While cross-examining Mattis, a lawyer for Holmes showed a July 2013 email from the retired general that suggested he had muted expectations for Theranos' impact on the military. "U.S. military may be a customer but likely not immediately, or in a big way," Mattis wrote while seeking clearance to be on the Theranos board.

In another email presented by government prosecutors during Mattis' testimony, Holmes encouraged his belief in what Theranos could do for the military. "This initiative is a small way of being able to serve and we will do whatever it takes to make it successful," Holmes assured him in her email.

As Mattis testified, Holmes watched him intently without displaying much emotion. Holmes maintains her innocence, arguing she poured her life into an invention that she sincerely believed would revolutionize medicine yet failed in her quest.

Holmes, 37, ended up convincing Mattis, 71, to join the Theranos board of directors later in 2013, even though he had no medical background. Mattis testified that Holmes wanted him on the board to help teach her about leadership and team building.

Besides joining the board, Mattis said he also decided to invest \$85,000 of his own savings so he would have some "skin in the game." Theranos paid him \$150,000 annually as a board member, according to evidence submitted Wednesday by Holmes' lawyers, though Mattis testified he told Holmes he would do it for free because "I believe in what you are doing."

By the time he left Theranos in late 2016, Mattis testified he had lost faith in Holmes. His disillusionment began a year earlier after a series of explosive articles published in The Wall Street Journal exposed troubling flaws and inaccuracies in Theranos' blood-testing technology. Those revelations triggered Theranos' downfall and culminated in the criminal case against Holmes, which could send her to prison for up to 20 years if she is convicted.

"There became a point where I didn't know what to believe about Theranos any more," Mattis said, although he couldn't pinpoint a precise date when he lost faith in Holmes.

Mattis isn't the only well-known board member or investor who became enthralled with Holmes and Theranos.

Theranos' other board members included other former Cabinet members such as the late George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry and former Wells Fargo Bank CEO Richard Kovacevich. The list of billionaire investors that once valued the privately held company at \$9 billion — with half of the stock owned by Holmes — included media mogul Rupert Murdoch, Walmart's Walton family and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison.

Some of them are expected to testify during a trial scheduled to run through Dec. 17.

## Biden presses fellow Dems: Resolve party split on \$3.5T plan

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a personal push, President Joe Biden pressed fellow Democrats to hasten work on his big "build back better" agenda Wednesday, telling them to come up with a final framework and their best topline budget figure as the party labors to bridge its divisions in Congress ahead of crucial voting deadlines.

Biden and Democratic House and Senate lawmakers met for hours of back-to-back-to-back private White House sessions stretching into the evening, convened at a pivotal juncture for Biden's \$3.5 trillion package

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as lawmakers struggle to draft details of the ambitious effort. With Republicans solidly opposed, Democratic leaders are counting on the president to galvanize consensus between progressives and centrists in their party.

Biden first conferred with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, then held separate sessions with moderate and progressive senators and representatives. The president listened intently, lawmakers said, but also indicated strongly he wanted progress soon, by next week.

"We're in good shape," Pelosi told reporters back at the Capitol after returning.

The White House called the meetings "productive and candid" and said follow-up work would be immediately underway. Earlier in the day, press secretary Jen Psaki said the White House realized that with time growing short "there needs to be deeper engagement by the president."

The intense focus on Biden's big-money domestic proposal showcases how much is at stake politically for the president and his party in Congress. The administration has suffered setbacks elsewhere, notably with the Afghanistan withdrawal and prolonged COVID-19 crisis, and Democrats are running short of time, anxious to make good on campaign promises.

Congress is racing toward Monday's deadline for a House vote on the first part of Biden's plan — a \$1 trillion public works measure — which now also serves as a deadline for producing a compromise framework for the broader package.

At one point, Biden told the lawmakers there were plenty of conference rooms at the White House they could use to hunker down this weekend as some suggested they roll up their sleeves and stay to get final details done.

Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a key centrist who has balked at the \$3.5 trillion price tag, said the president told him to come up with a number he could live with.

"He just basically said, 'Find it,'" Manchin said. "Just work on it, give me a number."

"The president is really fired up," said Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, after the evening's final session.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate remained at a standstill over a separate package to keep the government funded past the Sept. 30 fiscal yearend and to suspend the federal debt limit to avert a shutdown and a devastating U.S. default on payments. Senate Republicans are refusing the House-passed bill.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said at a press conference Tuesday that failing to extend the debt limit was "just not something we can contemplate or we should contemplate."

As for Biden's big plans, the president and the Democratic lawmakers appeared to have not fully resolved their differences ahead of Monday's test vote on the smaller public works bill for roads, broadband and public water projects.

Centrist Democrats want swift passage of the slimmer public works bill and have raised concerns about the price tag of Biden's broader vision, but progressive Democrats are withholding their votes for the \$1 trillion measure they view as inadequate unless it's linked to the bigger package.

Rep. Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey, a leader of the centrist coalition who attended one of the White House meetings, said all agreed on doing both — passing the bill Monday and working on the bigger package.

But Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, issued a statement after another meeting with Biden reiterating that some 50 members plan to vote against the bipartisan measure unless it's linked to the broader bill. She has said the two bills must move "in tandem" to win the progressive votes.

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All told, more than 20 lawmakers were invited to confer with Biden, moderates and progressives in separate meetings stretching into the evening, making their best pitches, Manchin and another key centrist Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, among them.

Despite disputes, many Democrats say they expect the final product to align with Biden's broader vision and eventually have robust party support, even if that version is adjusted or scaled back.

But Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., a leader of the centrist Blue Dog caucus, said the big bill will take more time. "I'm not sure that we're at a place of closing out just yet," she said.

While all this is going on, the 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 funding-and-debt measure Tuesday night, but Republicans are refusing to give their support in the Senate, despite the risk of triggering a fiscal crisis.

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

But 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. Other options to try to pass the debt ceiling package could be procedurally difficult.

## **Analysis: A 'United' Nations, navigating a fractured world**

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When the United Nations rose from World War II's rubble, its birth reflected a widespread aspiration that humanity could be lifted up and dispatched down a positive path — if only there was a coherent, informed, unified effort of good faith among countries and their leaders. That would require persistence, compromise and, above all, hope.

Four generations later, the theme of this year's mid-pandemic U.N. General Assembly leaders' meeting reflects that ideal: "Building resilience through hope." But at U.N. headquarters this week, while persistence seems abundant, hope is a scarce commodity.

The General Assembly is unfolding this week under a thundercloud of deep pessimism. Coherence is spotty. Two growing kinds of unwanted information — mis and dis — are scurrying around unchecked. And that unified effort of good faith? It feels absent, if not outright outdated, in an era when those responsible for the rest of us can't even agree to check at the door to see if everyone is free of the deadly virus that has upended humanity's best-laid plans.

"Our world has never been more threatened, or more divided," the U.N. secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, said Tuesday, setting the tone with his first words as he opened the meeting. "The world," he said, "must wake up."

But the leaders he summoned are fragmented and cranky and, to hear them tell it, unsettled and intimidated by pandemic, polarization and climate-fueled natural disaster. And the question that leaders keep implying at the United Nations this week, in speech after speech, is both one of the most basic and intricate that there is: What on Earth do we do now?

Part of the answer — or at least, a clue to why it hasn't been answered yet — is contained in the nature of the United Nations itself.

For nations to commit to being united — and to actually follow through — isn't easy in a fractured world brimming with problems that often come down hardest on the least powerful. The notion of nations playing

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on a level field may sound fair and just, but smaller countries insist that principle crumbles when power dynamics come into play.

What's more, the whole concept of "multilateralism," an ever-present U.N. priority based on distributed solutions and layers of agreements that gives smaller countries a voice, clashes with the mythology of charismatic leadership embraced by the West for centuries.

Overlaid atop all that is the problem that the United Nations' structure doesn't match the era in which it is operating — something its leaders and members have long acknowledged. This is, remember, an organization founded in an age — the mid-20th century — when many of the best and brightest believed the world could act in concert and coherence.

Yet even in the context of nations united, a significant power imbalance was baked in from the outset. The United Nations built its greatest authority into a council with five permanent members that represented the world's most powerful and dominant nations. Inevitably, they often operated with their own interests in mind.

That structure remains to this day, and some call it out of step with a fragmented world where many voices not amplified in the past are increasingly expecting to be heard and heeded. African nations, for example, have been demanding for years to have permanent representation on the Security Council for their 1.2 billion people. "We must eradicate hierarchies of power," Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio said.

So far, though, that hasn't happened. And many leaders, particularly of smaller nations, consider such inequities antithetical to the whole point of the United Nations — a place that represents all of them and forms a whole that benefits all of them as well.

Not that progress is entirely absent at the U.N. meetings. On Tuesday, both the United States and China took notable, separate steps forward in efforts to reduce the carbon emissions that power global warming. And this time last year, no vaccine for the coronavirus had been deployed; today, billions have been injected with one of several iterations.

"Indeed, we are in a much better place than a year ago," Slovakian President Zuzana Caputova said Tuesday. And from Romanian President Klaus Iohannis: "While the pandemic affected almost all aspects of our lives, it also provided us with opportunities to learn, adapt and do things better."

Have those opportunities been seized? Guterres, for one, is skeptical, and he isn't alone. The emotional, psychological and political baggage of a world reeling from unremitting crises is evident this year. Even compared with two or three years ago, leaders' words and thoughts are peppered more with desperation, with exhortations like this one from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi: "Let us stand together to save ourselves before it is too late."

And take the remarks of Ecuadorean President Guillermo Lasso Mendoza. When he said that "health has no ideology," he was making a larger point. Yet he hit on part of the problem: Everything is political. Health, it turns out, has revealed fissures in ideology that were festering elsewhere but that the pandemic laid bare. Same story with climate change, as leaders reeling from a summer of natural disaster sounded ever-louder alarms.

"The world — this precious blue sphere with its eggshell crust and wisp of an atmosphere — is not some indestructible toy, some bouncy plastic romper room against which we can hurl ourselves to our heart's content," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, channeling the global mood in his uniquely colorful way, said Wednesday night.

For now, the overall principles of a united United Nations remain intact and heartily advocated. Stick together. Keep trying. Don't give up. Success is still possible. That's all on brand: For all of the postwar pragmatism of the era that birthed it, the United Nations was founded on optimism — on what the world might be, on what it could be if peoples and nations worked together.

"The U.N.," said Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "is like a retired superhero who has long forgotten how great they once were."

So this week, they're here. They're talking. They're still committed, still determined. Yes, the topics may

veer toward existentialism and extinction, but they're still promising — in oceans of speechified words and ideas and plans — to figure it all out and not simply go down with the ship. Perhaps — again, staying on brand — that's building resilience through hope after all.

## **Britney Spears court filing says conservatorship should end**

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears said in a court filing Wednesday that she agrees with her father that the conservatorship that has controlled her life and money since 2008 should be terminated.

The filing in Los Angeles Superior Court from Spears' attorney Mathew Rosengart says she "fully consents" to "expeditiously" ending the conservatorship, which her father James Spears, who has controlled it for most of its 13 years, asked for in a Sept. 7 petition.

It's the first time Britney Spears has called for an end to the arrangement in court documents, though she has called for its termination in hearings.

Her filing emphasizes, however, that it is more important to her that her father be removed, calling it "a necessary first — and substantial — step towards Ms. Spears's freedom and ending the Kafkaesque nightmare imposed upon her by her father, so that her dignity and basic liberties can be restored."

It is urgent that James Spears be suspended from his role of conservator of Britney Spears' finances by Sept. 29, the next hearing date in the case, the filing says.

"Mr. Spears cannot be permitted to hold a position of control over his daughter for another day," the document says.

The documents also reveal that Britney Spears is in the process of putting together a pre-nuptial agreement after getting engaged to her longtime boyfriend Sam Asghari earlier this month. That process will mean the intensive involvement of the conservator of her money, a role her father can't be permitted to play, the filing says.

The flurry of major filings means that next week's hearing could be pivotal.

Judge Brenda Penny, who has remained largely neutral in her oversight of the case, will be pressed to decide whether to remove James Spears or to put the conservatorship on a path to termination.

James Spears stepped aside as conservator of his daughter's person in 2019, maintaining only his role as conservator of her money. He and his attorneys have said that renders many of his daughter's complaints about his control meaningless.

Jodi Montgomery, a court-appointed professional, now acts as conservator of Britney Spears' person. Wednesday's filing from Britney Spears says Montgomery also consents to ending the conservatorship,

Spears had said in a dramatic June 23 speech in court that gave a jolt to the case and galvanized support for her that she was being compelled under the conservatorship to take certain medications and to use an intrauterine device for birth control against her will.

James Spears has denied acting in anything but his daughter's best interest, and has declined demands that he resign immediately, though he said in court documents that he does have a plan to eventually step down.

But in a major reversal and possibly strategic move, he said in his Sept. 7 filing that if she "wants to terminate the conservatorship and believes that she can handle her own life, Mr. Spears believes that she should get that chance."

Rosengart has sought to keep the focus on James Spears removal since his hiring in July, and says he will pursue an investigation of his handling of the conservatorship even after any removal.

The conservatorship was established in 2008 when Britney Spears' began to have very public mental struggles as media outlets obsessed over each moment, hordes of paparazzi aggressively followed her everywhere, and she lost custody of her children.

## **Ukraine's leader takes UN to task as 'retired superhero'**

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

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UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Leaders who are “playing” at unity and stuffing pressing problems into an overflowing bag of woe. A world that’s in the same boat, but first-class passengers get the lifeboats. A United Nations that resembles “a retired superhero” that has lost sight of what it used to be.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy certainly wasn’t the only world leader at this week’s U.N. General Assembly meeting to paint a dire picture of international relations. But the former actor and comedian may well have painted the most colorful one.

In a speech Wednesday, he called out failures in areas from sharing coronavirus vaccines to halting climate change to turning back Russia’s annexation of part of his country. He floated a proposal for the U.N. to head to global hotspots to hold its meetings — and offered to host one.

“I’m not being ironic. I’m not trolling anyone,” he said. “It’s time to wake up.”

A political novice when elected in 2019, the 43-year-old president was addressing global diplomacy’s biggest annual gathering for the third time. His first appearance, in 2019, was fraught with a U.S. political firestorm over a phone call between him and then-U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump was eventually impeached over the call, in which he prodded Zelenskyy to investigate now-President Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

When the 2020 assembly meeting went virtual because of the pandemic, Zelenskyy expressed hope that the gathering would usher in a return “to effective multilateralism and effective international solidarity.”

A year later, a frustrated Zelenskyy concluded that the pandemic had shown the world had been “playing unity — where one thing is to share objectives and quite another is to share vaccines.”

Professions of unity seem to have a footnote, said the president of a country where about 12% of people are vaccinated: “We are all in one boat, but access to lifeboats is given first to first-class passengers.”

As he has in the past, Zelenskyy exhorted the world to mount a more effective challenge to Russia’s 2014 annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea peninsula, a move that Moscow portrayed as protecting Russian-speaking people there. Subsequent fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russia-supported separatists has killed more than 14,000 people, and efforts to negotiate a political settlement have stalled.

“Maybe somewhere in Central Park or Madison Square Garden, those gunshots are not heard as loudly,” Zelenskyy said, referring to landmarks near the U.N. headquarters in New York. The powerful U.N. Security Council, where Russia has veto power, has never been able to take action on Ukraine.

“No one feels secure anymore in this world,” Zelenskyy said, warning against allowing national interests to blow up international relations and leave only “the rule of brute force.”

Nor, he said, is the world meaningfully tackling problems that cross many national lines: climate change, hunger, poverty, illiteracy, air pollution, lack of access to drinking water, and more. Each time leaders gather for the assembly, “it’s as if we were voting to award some sort of a ‘Global Misfortune of the Year’ prize,” only to be supplanted by another, he said.

“The world simply is throwing all those misfortunes into a big bag, and it’s now already ripping at the seams,” Zelenskyy lamented. “The U.N. is like a retired superhero who’s long forgotten how great they once were.”

But he went on to enumerate reasons to remember. He pointed to such U.N. endeavors as the milestone 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, food programs, peacekeeping missions and UNICEF, the agency that helps children in more than 190 countries and territories.

“That is our most valuable asset,” Zelenskyy said. “And that’s why it will never be banal or outdated to call for unity for their sake.”

## US soldier wins long fight to get Afghan translator asylum

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

Army combat veteran Spencer Sullivan has never felt more victorious.

Sullivan spent years fighting to get his Afghan translator asylum after his former platoon’s other interpreter was denied a U.S. visa before being killed by the Taliban in 2017.

On Wednesday, Abdulhaq Sodais was finally granted asylum by a court in Germany, where he was forced



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to flee after being denied a U.S. visa repeatedly despite facing death threats for aiding U.S. troops during its 20-year war in Afghanistan.

Sullivan, who now lives in Virginia, said he dropped his phone when he saw the text message from Sodais. "I just started crying," Sullivan said.

The decision marked the end of an eight-year journey between the two men who risked their lives together trying to eliminate the Taliban, bonding in a way that can only be forged in war.

Sullivan dedicated himself to helping Sodais after losing another translator, Sayed Masoud, who was killed by the Taliban in 2017 while waiting for a U.S. visa. The former soldier is among scores of U.S. combat veterans who have been working on their own to rescue the Afghans who served alongside them.

"It's ultimately just cathartic relief," said Sullivan, adding that he was overwhelmed with emotion Wednesday in part because it also opened the war wound that he couldn't help Masoud. "This long journey is over but Sayed didn't make it."

Thousands of Afghans who aided U.S. troops have spent years stuck in a backlogged and beleaguered U.S. Special Immigrant Visa program, and countless others were denied because of minor inconsistencies in their work records, such as showing up late to their jobs, according to veterans who worked with them.

Sodais first applied for a U.S. visa in 2013 but was denied. He appealed four times before ultimately fleeing to Germany after his uncle was beheaded and his neighbor who worked for the U.S. military was gunned down by the Taliban.

Sodais traveled for seven months going through nearly a half dozen countries. He was beaten and abandoned by smugglers and jailed and beaten by police before reaching Germany, where his first asylum request was denied.

Sullivan wrote letters of recommendation, provided photos of his time with his platoon and obtained records from the U.S. government that showed his denial was based on a vague review by a civilian contractor who Sodais said falsely accused him of checking social media on the job.

On Aug. 11, Germany temporarily halted the deportation of all Afghans due to the upheaval but did not specify how long the order would last. Sodais said he believes Sullivan's letters of recommendation made the difference in finally being granted asylum. His case will be reviewed in three years when he can then apply to become a German citizen.

Sodais said he looks forward to getting his German passport so he can someday visit Sullivan and they can travel together so Sodais can finally see the United States.

"I'm feeling right now that I will have an amazing future," he said.

## Melvin Van Peebles, godfather of Black cinema, dies at 89

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Melvin Van Peebles, the groundbreaking filmmaker, playwright and musician whose work ushered in the "blaxploitation" wave of the 1970s and influenced filmmakers long after, has died. He was 89.

In statement, his family said that Van Peebles, father of the actor-director Mario Van Peebles, died Tuesday evening at his home in Manhattan.

"Dad knew that Black images matter. If a picture is worth a thousand words, what was a movie worth?" Mario Van Peebles said in a statement Wednesday. "We want to be the success we see, thus we need to see ourselves being free. True liberation did not mean imitating the colonizer's mentality. It meant appreciating the power, beauty and interconnectivity of all people."

Sometimes called the "godfather of modern Black cinema," the multitalented Van Peebles wrote numerous books and plays, and recorded several albums — playing multiple instruments and delivering rap-style lyrics. He later became a successful options trader on the stock market.

But he was best known for "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song," one of the most influential movies of its time. The low-budget, art-house film, which he wrote, produced, directed, starred in and scored, was the frenzied, hyper-sexual and violent tale of a Black street hustler on the run from police after killing

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white officers who were beating a Black revolutionary.

With its hard-living, tough-talking depiction of life in the ghetto, underscored by a message of empowerment as told from a Black perspective, it set the tone for a genre that turned out dozens of films over the next few years and prompted a debate over whether Black people were being recognized or exploited.

"All the films about Black people up to now have been told through the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon majority in their rhythms and speech and pace," Van Peebles told Newsweek in 1971, the year of the film's release.

"I could have called it 'The Ballad of the Indomitable Sweetback.' But I wanted the core audience, the target audience, to know it's for them," he told The Associated Press in 2003. "So I said 'Ba-ad Asssss,' like you really say it."

Made for around \$500,000 (including \$50,000 provided by Bill Cosby), it grossed \$14 million at the box office despite an X-rating, limited distribution and mixed critical reviews. The New York Times, for example, accused Van Peebles of merchandizing injustice and called the film "an outrage."

Van Peebles, who complained fiercely to the Motion Picture Association over the X-rating, gave the film the tagline: "Rated X by an all-white jury."

But in the wake of the its success, Hollywood realized an untapped audience and began churning out such box office hits as "Shaft" and "Superfly" that were also known for bringing in such top musicians as Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye and Isaac Hayes to work on the soundtracks.

Many of Hollywood's versions were exaggerated crime dramas, replete with pimps and drug dealers, which drew heavy criticism in both the white and Black press.

"What Hollywood did — they suppressed the political message, added caricature — and blaxploitation was born," Van Peebles said in 2002. "The colored intelligentsia were not too happy about it."

In fact, civil rights groups like the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality coined the phrase "blaxploitation" and formed the Coalition Against Blaxploitation. Among the genre's 21st century fans was Quentin Tarantino, whose Oscar-winning "Django Unchained" was openly influenced by blaxploitation films and spaghetti Westerns.

On Wednesday, a younger generation of Black filmmakers mourned Van Peebles' death. Barry Jenkins, the "Moonlight" director, said on Twitter: "He made the most of every second, of EVERY single damn frame."

After his initial success, Van Peebles was bombarded with directing offers, but he chose to maintain his independence.

"I'll only work with them on my terms," he said. "I've whipped the man's ass on his own turf. I'm number one at the box office — which is the way America measures things — and I did it on my own. Now they want me, but I'm in no hurry."

Van Peebles then got involved on Broadway, writing and producing several plays and musicals like the Tony-nominated "Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death" and "Don't Play Us Cheap." He later wrote the movie "Greased Lighting" starring Richard Pryor as Wendell Scott, the first Black race car driver.

In the 1980s, Van Peebles turned to Wall Street and options trading. He wrote a financial self-help guide entitled "Bold Money: A New Way to Play the Options Market."

Born Melvin Peebles in Chicago on Aug. 21, 1932, he would later add "Van" to his name. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1953 and joined the Air Force, serving as a navigator for three years.

After military service, he moved to Mexico and worked as a portrait painter, followed by a move to San Francisco, where he started writing short stories and making short films.

Van Peebles soon went to Hollywood, but he was only offered a job as a studio elevator operator. Disappointed, he moved to Holland to take graduate courses in astronomy while also studying at the Dutch National Theatre.

Eventually he gave up his studies and moved to Paris, where he learned he could join the French directors' guild if he adapted his own work written in French. He quickly taught himself the language and wrote several novels.

One he made into a feature film. "La Permission/The Story of the Three Day Pass," was the story of an affair between a Black U.S. soldier and a French woman. It won the critic's choice award at the San

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Francisco film festival in 1967, and Van Peebles gained Hollywood's attention.

The following year, he was hired to direct and write the score for "Watermelon Man," the tale of a white bigot (played by comic Godfrey Cambridge in white face) who wakes up one day as a Black man.

With money earned from the project, Van Peebles went to work on "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song."

Van Peebles' death came just days before the New York Film Festival is to celebrate him with a 50th anniversary of "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song." Next week, the Criterion Collection is to release the box set "Melvin Van Peebles: Essential Films." A revival of his play "Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death" is also planned to hit Broadway next year, with Mario Van Peebles serving as creative producer.

## US-French spat seems to simmer down after Biden-Macron call

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The most significant rift in decades between the United States and France seemed on the mend Wednesday after French President Emmanuel Macron and President Joe Biden got on the phone Wednesday to smooth things over.

In a half-hour call that the White House described as "friendly," the two leaders agreed to meet next month to discuss the way forward after the French fiercely objected when the U.S., Australia and Britain announced a new Indo-Pacific defense deal last week that cost the French a submarine contract worth billions. France also agreed to send its ambassador back to Washington.

The White House made a point of releasing a photograph of Biden smiling during his call with Macron.

In a carefully crafted joint statement, the two governments said Biden and Macron "have decided to open a process of in-depth consultations, aimed at creating the conditions for ensuring confidence."

So did Biden apologize?

White House press secretary Jen Psaki sidestepped the question repeatedly, allowing that Biden did acknowledge "there could have been greater consultation."

"The president is hopeful this is a step in returning to normal in a long, important, abiding relationship that the United States has with France," she said.

The call suggested a cooling of tempers after days of outrage from Paris directed at the Biden administration.

In an unprecedented move, France last week recalled its ambassadors to the United States and Australia to protest what the French said amounted to a stab in the back by allies. As part of the defense pact, Australia will cancel a multibillion-dollar contract to buy diesel-electric French submarines and acquire U.S. nuclear-powered vessels instead.

It was clear there is still repair work to be done.

The joint statement said the French ambassador will "have intensive work with senior U.S. officials" upon his return to the United States.

Biden and Macron agreed "that the situation would have benefitted from open consultations among allies on matters of strategic interest to France and our European partners," the statement said.

Biden reaffirmed in the statement "the strategic importance of French and European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, during a visit to Washington, didn't mince words in suggesting it was time for France to move past its anger over the submarine deal, saying French officials should "get a grip." Using both French and English words, he added they should give him a "break."

Johnson said the deal was "fundamentally a great step forward for global security. It's three very like-minded allies standing shoulder-to-shoulder, creating a new partnership for the sharing of technology."

"It's not exclusive. It's not trying to shoulder anybody out. It's not adversarial towards China, for instance."

Psaki declined to weigh in on whether Johnson's comments were constructive at a moment when the U.S. was trying to mend relations with France.

The European Union last week unveiled its own new strategy for boosting economic, political and defense ties in the vast area stretching from India and China through Japan to Southeast Asia and eastward past

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New Zealand to the Pacific.

The United States also "recognizes the importance of a stronger and more capable European defense, that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to NATO," the statement said.

No decision has been made about the French ambassador to Australia, the Elysee said, adding that no phone call with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was scheduled.

Earlier Wednesday, Macron's office had said the French president was expecting "clarifications and clear commitments" from Biden, who had requested the call.

French officials described last week's U.S.-U.K.-Australia announcement as creating a "crisis of trust," with Macron being formally notified only a few hours beforehand. The move had prompted fury in Paris, with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian calling it a "stab in the back."

France's European Union partners agreed Tuesday to put the dispute at the top of the bloc's political agenda, including at an EU summit next month.

Following the Macron-Biden call, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met in New York with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell as the administration worked to repair the damage done to broader EU-U.S. relations by the deal.

Blinken spoke of the need for trans-Atlantic cooperation on any number of issues "quite literally around the world, to include of course Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific and Europe and beyond."

Borrell, taking note of the phone call, said he hoped to be able to "build a stronger confidence among us following the conversation that had been taking place this morning between President Biden and President Macron. I'm sure we'll be working together."

The French presidency categorically denied a report by Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper published on Wednesday saying Macron could offer the country's permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council to the European Union if the bloc backs his plans on EU defense.

Psaki echoed Johnson's point that the creation of the new security alliance — which has been dubbed AUKUS — wasn't meant to freeze out other allies on Indo-Pacific strategy.

"During the conversation, the president reaffirmed the strategic importance of France — French and European nations I should say — in the Indo-Pacific region," Psaki said.

The deal has widely been seen as part of American efforts to counter a more assertive China in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Florida makes quarantine optional for exposed students

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A day after assuming his job, Florida's newly appointed surgeon general on Wednesday signed new protocols allowing parents to decide whether their children should quarantine or stay in school if they are asymptomatic after being exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

The new guidelines signed by Dr. Joseph Ladapo also tweaked the state's prohibition against school mask mandates, prompting an administrative law judge to dismiss a lawsuit against the old rule that had been filed by various school boards.

In terms of quarantine rules, Ladapo eliminated previous mandates requiring students to quarantine for at least four days off campus if they've been exposed. Under the new guidelines, students who have been exposed can continue going to campus, "without restrictions or disparate treatment," provided they are asymptomatic. They can also quarantine, but no longer than seven days, provided they do not get sick.

"Quarantining healthy students is incredibly damaging for their educational advancement," Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis said Wednesday at a news conference in Kissimmee. "It's also disruptive for families. We are going to be following a symptoms-based approach."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says people who get infected can spread the virus starting from two days before they have any symptoms. The CDC recommends that a student should quarantine for 14 days if they are unvaccinated. They can shorten the quarantine to seven days by testing



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negative, according to the CDC.

The president of a statewide teachers' union said school districts need all the tools necessary to keep children safe.

"Limiting districts' options and blocking them from following CDC guidelines is not in the best interest of the health of our students, employees or families," said Andrew Spar, president of the Florida Education Association.

DeSantis named Ladapo to the job on Tuesday. Ladapo, who previously was a UCLA doctor and health policy researcher, shares the governor's approach to managing the coronavirus pandemic. Like DeSantis, Ladapo has said he doesn't believe in school closures, lockdowns or vaccine mandates.

DeSantis' administration has opposed mask and vaccine mandates, fought local school boards over their efforts to require students to wear masks in schools and championed the use of monoclonal antibodies as a treatment for those who get sick with COVID-19.

Unchanged from the earlier rules are requirements that students with the virus either quarantine for 10 days, receive a negative test and be asymptomatic before returning to campus or offer a doctor's note granting permission.

As in the previous guidelines, schools can require masks as long as students can opt out, though the new rules add language that it's "at the parent or legal guardian's sole discretion."

School officials in Alachua, Broward, Leon and Miami-Dade and Orange counties recently challenged the state's prohibition against mask mandates. But the Florida Department of Health argued that its new rule should lead to the dismissal of the lawsuit that targeted the old rule. An administrative law judge agreed Wednesday, saying no decision on the validity of the rule could be made since it had been repealed.

Alachua County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Carlee Simon called the Department of Health rule changes "disingenuous."

"Essentially, the State is responding to the legal challenges of its rules by repealing them and creating new ones, with limited public notice," Simon said in a statement.

## Fed: On track to slow support for economy later this year

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell signaled Wednesday that the Fed plans to announce as early as November that it will start withdrawing the extraordinary support it unleashed after the coronavirus paralyzed the economy 18 months ago.

Powell said that if the job market maintained its steady improvement, the Fed would likely begin slowing the pace of its monthly bond purchases. Those purchases have been intended to lower longer-term loan rates to encourage borrowing and spending.

"I think if the economy continues to progress broadly in line with expectations," the Fed chair said at a news conference, "I think we can easily move ahead at the next meeting" in November.

At the same time, the Fed's policymaking committee indicated that it expects to start raising its benchmark rate sometime next year — earlier than the members had envisioned three months ago and a sign that they're concerned that high inflation pressures may persist. Powell stressed, though, that a rate hike would occur only after the Fed had ended its bond purchases, a process he said would likely last through the middle of next year.

Taken together, the Fed's plans reflect its belief that the economy has recovered sufficiently from the pandemic recession for it to soon begin dialing back the emergency aid it provided after the virus erupted. As the economy has strengthened, inflation has also accelerated to a three-decade high, heightening the pressure on the Fed to pull back.

The central bank's pullback in bond purchases and its eventual rate hikes, whenever they happen, will mean that some borrowers will have to pay more for mortgages, credit cards and business loans.

Stock and bond traders took the Fed's message Wednesday in stride. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which had been up more than 400 points before the Fed issued a policy statement, closed up 338 points,

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or a full 1%. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note was all but unchanged at roughly 1.31%.

The economy has recovered faster than many economists had expected, though growth has slowed recently as COVID-19 cases have spiked and labor and supply shortages have hampered manufacturing, construction and some other sectors. The U.S. economy has returned to its pre-pandemic size, and the unemployment rate has tumbled from 14.8%, soon after the pandemic struck, to 5.2%.

At the same time, inflation has surged as resurgent consumer spending and disrupted supply chains have combined to create shortages of semiconductors, cars, furniture and electronics. Consumer prices, by the Fed's preferred measure, rose 3.6% in July from a year ago — the sharpest such increase since 1991.

In their new quarterly projections, Fed officials expect to raise their key short term rate once in 2022, three times in 2023 — one more than they had projected in June — and three times in 2024. That benchmark rate, which influences many consumer and business loans, has been pinned near zero since March 2020, when the pandemic erupted.

One factor in the Fed's move toward eventually raising rates is that inflationary forces, as Powell noted in his news conference, appear to be enduring longer than expected. In their new forecasts, Fed officials raised their projection for "core" inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, to 2.3% next year, from a 2.1% estimate in June.

"The bottlenecks and shortages that we're seeing in the economy have really not begun to abate in a meaningful way yet," Powell said, acknowledging that inflation pressures could endure "at least for a few more months and perhaps into next year."

The central bank had signaled last year that it would likely start tapering its \$120 billion-a-month in purchases of Treasuries and mortgage bonds once the economy had made "substantial further progress" toward the Fed's goals of maximum employment and 2% average annual inflation.

"If progress continues broadly as expected, the Committee judges that a moderation in the pace of asset purchases may soon be warranted," the Fed said in the statement it issued Wednesday after its two-day meeting ended.

Inflation has risen enough to meet the Fed's test for substantial progress. And Powell said at his news conference that in his view, employment has "all but met" that test, too.

The Fed hasn't hinted at how fast it will taper the purchases. But it is widely expected to pare its purchases of Treasuries by \$10 billion a month and mortgage-backed securities by \$5 billion.

Powell has repeatedly expressed his belief that the current high level of inflation will fade as the economy normalizes — and in part for that reason, has said the central bank isn't yet close to raising rates. But the changes in the Fed's rate projections suggest that it's moving gradually closer to doing so. In March, the 18 officials who make up its policymaking committee predicted that they wouldn't raise rates at all until after 2023. In June, the committee revised its forecast to two rate hikes in 2023. Now, it foresees a rate hike as soon as next year.

In their latest forecasts, the policymakers also indicate that they expect the economy to grow more slowly this year, at 5.9%, down from its June projection of 7%. It sees inflation at 4.2% by the end of this year, but raised its projection for inflation next year to just 2.2%, from 2.1%.

Powell is also grappling with a major ethics issue surrounding the investments and trading of some Fed regional bank presidents. Robert Kaplan, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, revealed in financial disclosures that he traded millions of dollars' worth of such individual stocks as Amazon, Chevron, Facebook and Google in 2020, while the Fed was taking extraordinary measures to boost the economy.

Eric Rosengren, president of the Boston Fed, invested last year in real estate investment trusts that held mortgage-backed bonds of the type the Fed is buying as part of its efforts to lower borrowing rates. And Powell himself owns municipal bonds, which the Fed bought last year for the first time to shore up that market.

A spokesman said last week that the Fed is taking "a fresh and comprehensive look" at its rules surrounding its officials' financial holdings. The investments were permitted under the Fed's current rules, and Rosengren and Kaplan have pledged to sell their holdings and reinvest the proceeds into index funds

and cash.

Asked about the topic at his news conference, Powell said: "We need to make changes, and we are going to do that as a consequence of this. This will be a thorough going and comprehensive review. We are going to gather all the facts and look at ways to further tighten our rules and standards."

## Researchers detect malaria resistant to key drug in Africa

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Scientists have found evidence of a resistant form of malaria in Uganda, a worrying sign that the top drug used against the parasitic disease could ultimately be rendered useless without more action to stop its spread.

Researchers in Uganda analyzed blood samples from patients treated with artemisinin, the primary medicine used for malaria in Africa in combination with other drugs. They found that by 2019, nearly 20% of the samples had genetic mutations suggesting the treatment was ineffective. Lab tests showed it took much longer for those patients to get rid of the parasites that cause malaria.

Drug-resistant forms of malaria were previously detected in Asia, and health officials have been nervously watching for any signs in Africa, which accounts for more than 90% of the world's malaria cases. Some isolated drug-resistant strains of malaria have previously been seen in Rwanda.

"Our findings suggest a potential risk of cross-border spread across Africa," the researchers wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which published the study on Wednesday.

The drug-resistant strains emerged in Uganda rather than being imported from elsewhere, they reported. They examined 240 blood samples over three years.

Malaria is spread by mosquito bites and kills more than 400,000 people every year, mostly children under 5 and pregnant women.

Dr. Philip Rosenthal, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, said that the new findings in Uganda, after past results in Rwanda, "prove that resistance really now has a foothold in Africa."

Rosenthal, who was not involved in the new study, said it was likely there was undetected drug resistance elsewhere on the continent. He said drug-resistant versions of malaria emerged in Cambodia years ago and have now spread across Asia. He predicted a similar path for the disease in Africa, with deadlier consequences given the burden of malaria on the continent.

Dr. Nicholas White, a professor of tropical medicine at Mahidol University in Bangkok, described the new paper's conclusions about emerging malaria resistance as "unequivocal."

"We basically rely on one drug for malaria and now it's been hobbled," said White, who also wrote an accompanying editorial in the journal.

He suggested that instead of the standard approach, where one or two other drugs are used in combination with artemisinin, doctors should now use three, as is often done in treating tuberculosis and HIV.

White said public health officials need to act to stem drug-resistant malaria, by beefing up surveillance and supporting research into new drugs, among other measures.

"We shouldn't wait until the fire is burning to do something, but that is not what generally happens in global health," he said, citing the failures to stop the coronavirus pandemic as an example.

## As Texas draws its maps, Latinos push for political power

By ACACIA CORONADO and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — As a Dallas County commissioner, Elba Garcia represents some 670,000 people — nearly the population of a congressional district. The majority of her constituents are Latino and live in the fast-growing suburbs west of Dallas, where they share worries about managing growth, schools and access to health care.

Garcia is the area's voice on the commission, but her constituents don't have such neat representation in Congress. The area is divided up among three House members, according to boundaries drawn by

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Republican legislators 10 years ago. None is Latino.

Garcia says the impact of the divisions is clear: "Everyone gets cut up and scattered around," she said. "They dilute the Latino vote."

Texas this week will begin redrawing those congressional lines, and Latino advocates and officeholders say it's time to correct past wrongs. The state's explosive population growth over the past decade — half of which comes from Latinos — has earned it two new congressional seats. At least one should be a Latino-majority congressional seat in the Dallas area, they argue.

The push is part of a national campaign ramping up as states dive into a once-a-decade redistricting fight that could determine control of the House of Representatives. Although the battle is expected to be sharpest in Texas, Latino advocacy groups are already fanning out across the country, working in Arizona, Colorado and Texas with one clear message: Latinos accounted for slightly more than half of all U.S. population growth in the last decade, and it's time for the political system to pay attention.

While Latinos don't vote as a monolith, they lean heavily toward Democrats in Texas and across the country. Advocates argue that district lines shouldn't blunt their power.

"Ultimately, it's about providing Latinos a fair opportunity to choose their representatives," said Dorian Caal of the National Association of Latino Elected Officials. "We're all better off when a community can choose someone they prefer."

But the tactic of "packing and cracking" racial and ethnic groups has a long history. In every decade since the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, courts or the Department of Justice have ruled that Texas' redistricting plans violated federal laws — partly by scattering Democratic-leaning Latino voters among multiple districts dominated by non-Latino white residents who lean Republican.

This year there will be less federal oversight. For the first time in decades, the state does not need approval from the Department of Justice before enacting its plans, because of a 2013 decision by the conservative-majority U.S. Supreme Court.

Using census data released last month, advocates say they see a handful of places ripe for new Latino-majority congressional districts. In Florida, which is adding a new seat, some are pushing for a new district south of Orlando, where an influx of Puerto Ricans has led to a population boom.

In Colorado, another fast-growing state gaining a seat, some advocates see a way to draw a majority-Latino district in the state's urban heart, but only by splitting Denver in half and merging it with various close-in suburbs. The initial drafts of maps drawn by a nonpartisan commission kept Denver in the same district.

Then there's Texas, home to more Latinos than any other state besides California. Republicans repeatedly have used partisan gerrymandering — drawing districts to favor the party in power — to cement control of the state legislature and seats in Congress.

The lines have helped the GOP-controlled legislature enact an ambitious conservative agenda, even as the electorate becomes more Democratic. And those lawmakers have shown a willingness to test how far they can go without the "pre-clearance" requirement of the Voting Rights Act. Earlier this month, they passed broad legislation erecting new barriers to voting, over objections from civil rights groups and Democrats in the minority.

That's left many deeply skeptical that the Republican-controlled Texas legislature will draw fair maps without court intervention.

"They're afraid of losing their power," said Lydia Camarillo, whose Texas Redistricting Task Force was one of the groups that sued Texas to block their 2011 redistricting plan on the basis of racial discrimination.

Texas Republicans insist they are trying to be fair. "This process is under a microscope for both potential litigation as well as making sure that we have effective representation," said state Rep. Jim Murphy, chair of the Texas House Republican Caucus, adding that he wants to make sure "every community is represented."

There are many political crosscurrents at play. The state's growth is concentrated in diverse, urban and suburban areas that are turning against Republicans, pressuring the GOP to use redistricting to shore up its own districts.



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At the same time, the party performed relatively well with Latino voters during last year's presidential election. Former President Donald Trump won 37% of Latinos in Texas, while President Joe Biden was backed by 62%, similar to the national split, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate. Trump was helped by strong support in the heavily Latino counties in the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas.

National Republicans have mused about creating a new majority-Latino congressional district in that part of the state, one that would likely lean Republican. The area currently is split into three majority-Latino seats, all represented by Latino Democrats.

Some Latino advocates are expecting more success on the local level. It may be easier to draw a bevy of new local and statehouse districts that are dominated by Latino voters, said Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

"We'll see lots of 'first one ever on the city council,' 'first one ever on the school board,'" Saenz said of coming elections. "The hope is you're creating a pipeline for leadership who can rise up and represent even an area without a Latino majority."

It isn't always Republicans standing in the way, Saenz notes. In Illinois, for example, Democrats have proposed a map that would redraw the boundaries of a majority-Latino state Senate seat in the Chicago area to protect the white incumbent.

Redistricting isn't the only factor diluting Latinos' political power. Nearly 70% of Latinos live in just five states — California, Florida, New Jersey, New York and Texas. About half of Latinos are ineligible to vote because they are not citizens or are under age 18. With 1 in 4 children in the country Latino, that's a large share of the population that can't mark a ballot — yet.

Rep. Ruben Gallego, an Arizona Democrat who chairs a group trying to elect more Latino Democrats, says there's a benefit to Hispanic communities being able to select representatives who have similar life experiences, such as living in multigenerational households during the pandemic. "Sometimes the only people who think about those issues are Latino politicians who represent those districts," Gallego said.

In Dallas, Cristina Garrido, an organizer for the Latino group Jolt Action, says that when she talks to young Hispanic people in her community, she often runs into cynicism and apathy, a sense that "whatever happens is going to happen and they don't actually have a voice."

She worries that lawmakers' redistricting work will make it worse.

"The danger is if we see some negative consequences with the redistricting, that people are just going to feel more and more disenfranchised and just not encouraged to vote," Garrido said.

## Afghan Taliban's new UN envoy urges quick recognition

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban's newly appointed envoy to the United Nations on Wednesday urged quick world recognition of Afghanistan's new rulers even as the World Health Organization raised the alarm of an impending health care disaster in the war-wracked country.

The humanitarian crisis is one of the many challenges the Taliban face since their takeover of Afghanistan last month, including renewed threats from the militant Islamic State group, which recently stepped up its attacks, targeting members of the Taliban in its stronghold in the country's east.

In an emergency measure, the U.N. aid coordinator Martin Griffiths released \$45 million in life-saving support Wednesday for Afghanistan from the world body's emergency fund.

The World Health Organization said Afghanistan's health system is on the brink of collapse and that urgent action is needed. The statement followed a recent visit to Kabul by a WHO team led by the agency's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who also met with Taliban leaders and others.

"The country faces an imminent humanitarian catastrophe," WHO said, adding that thousands of health facilities are without funding for medical supplies and salaries for health staff.

"Many of these facilities have now reduced operations or shut down, forcing health providers to make hard decisions on who to save and who to let die," WHO said and also emphasized "the need for women to maintain access to education, health care, and to the health workforce."

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Griffiths warned that "allowing Afghanistan's health-care delivery system to fall apart would be disastrous." People across Afghanistan, he added, "would be denied access to primary health care such as emergency caesarian sections and trauma care."

Earlier, the Taliban had written to the United Nations announcing that Suhail Shaheen, a former peace negotiator and spokesman for the Taliban political office, is their new U.N. representative. They requested that Shaheen be allowed to address the U.N. General Assembly underway in New York.

"We have all the requirements needed for recognition of a government. So we hope the U.N. as a neutral world body recognize the current government of Afghanistan," Shaheen told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Afghanistan is listed as the final speaker of the ministerial meeting on Monday, and if no world recognition of the Taliban comes by then, Afghan Ambassador Ghulam Isaczai will give the address.

Isaczai is currently recognized as his country's U.N. ambassador but the Taliban, who overran most of Afghanistan last month as the U.S. and NATO forces were in the final stages of their chaotic withdrawal from the country, argue that they are now in charge and have the right to appoint ambassadors.

Since they swept to power and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, the Taliban have appointed an all-male Cabinet made up mostly of hard-liners from when they previously ruled Afghanistan in the late 1990s, including several people on the U.N. sanctions list.

Among those on the so called U.N. "black list" is Amir Khan Mutaqqi, the Taliban foreign minister and the author of the letter to the U.N. requesting Shaheen address the General Assembly.

The decision rests with a U.N. committee that generally meets in November and will issue a ruling "in due course," the General Assembly's spokeswoman Monica Grayley said Wednesday.

Meanwhile, attackers hit vehicles with Taliban fighters in eastern Afghanistan on Wednesday, witnesses said, killing at least two fighters and three civilians. In one attack, gunmen opened fire on a Taliban vehicle at a local gas station in the provincial capital of Jalalabad, killing two fighters, a gas station attendant and a child.

A second child was killed and two Taliban fighters were wounded in a bombing of another Taliban vehicle. A third attack, also a bombing of Taliban vehicle in Jalalabad, wounded a person nearby but it was unclear if that person was a Taliban member or a civilian, the witnesses added, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of Taliban retribution.

No one claimed immediate responsibility for Wednesday's attacks, although the Islamic State group, which is headquartered in eastern Afghanistan, has said it was behind similar attacks in Jalalabad last week that killed eight people.

The Taliban and IS are enemies, and the attacks have raised the specter of a wider conflict between the long-time rivals.

## **Biden doubles US global donation of COVID-19 vaccine shots**

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

President Joe Biden announced Wednesday 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 marks the cornerstone of the global vaccination summit Biden convened virtually on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, where he encouraged well-off nations to do more to get the coronavirus under control. It comes as world leaders, aid groups and global health organizations have growing increasingly vocal about the slow pace of global vaccinations and the inequity of access to shots between residents of wealthier and poorer nations.

"Global health security until now has failed, to the tune of 4.5 million lives, and counting," UN Secretary General António Guterres told the summit, referring to the confirmed global death toll from the coronavirus. "We have effective vaccines against COVID-19. We can end the pandemic. And that is why I have been appealing for a global vaccination plan and I hope this summit is a step in that direction."

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The U.S. purchase of another 500 million shots brings the total U.S. vaccination commitment to more than 1.1 billion doses through 2022. About 160 million shots supplied by the U.S. have already been distributed to more than 100 countries, representing more donations than the rest of the world combined. The remaining American doses will be distributed over the coming year.

"To beat the pandemic here, we need to beat it everywhere," Biden said. He added that with the new commitments, "For every one shot we've administered to date in America, we have now committed to do three shots to the rest of the world."

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 threw his weight behind.

Biden is pressing other countries to do more in their vaccine sharing plans.

"We need other high income countries to deliver on their own ambitious vaccine donations and pledges," Biden said. He called on wealthy countries to commit to donating, rather than selling the shots to poorer nations, and to provide them "with no political strings attached."

The European Union committed to donating 500 million doses — a slight increase from its earlier announced plans — according to a joint statement between the bloc and the U.S. "We call for nations that are able to vaccinate their populations to double their dose-sharing commitments or to make meaningful contributions to vaccine readiness," the statement said.

They also committed to working with the U.S. to bolster global vaccine supply.

Biden, in his remarks, said the U.S. would also increase its funding to global aid groups that are administering shots.

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.

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.

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.

"Today's summit was full of speeches but tragically lacking in action," said Oxfam America's President

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and CEO Abby Maxman. "While we commend President Biden for rallying world leaders to commit to vaccinate 70% of the world by this time next year, we have yet to see an effective plan to meet this goal. President Biden and leaders of rich countries should listen to what leaders from developing countries are asking for: the rights and the recipe to make their own vaccine doses."

Biden, earlier this year, broke with European allies to embrace waivers to intellectual property rights for the vaccines, but there was no movement Wednesday toward the necessary global consensus on the issue required under World Trade Organization rules. While some nongovernmental organizations have called those waivers vital to boosting global production of the shots, U.S. officials concede it is not the most constricting factor in the inequitable vaccine distribution — and some privately doubt the waivers for the highly complex shots would lead to enhanced production.

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.

## '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 village Wednesday as islanders scrambled to save what they could before the molten rock swallowed up their homes following a volcanic eruption.

The lava, which was still spewing from Sunday's eruption in the Canary Islands archipelago off northwest Africa, advanced slowly down hillsides of La Palma to the coast, where Todoque was the last village between it and the Atlantic Ocean. Residents hoping to save some belongings queued up so they could be escorted briefly into the village.

In the distance, the lava grew thicker and slowed down to 4 meters (13 feet) per hour after reaching a plain. Smoke poured out of its leading edge as it destroyed everything it touched.

Experts said the lava could either take several days to cover the remaining 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) to the sea or it could instead spread more widely on land, burying more residential areas and farmland.

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, photos and basic belongings they had grabbed Monday as they were evacuated.

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

"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 worked nonstop to try to open a trench to divert the lava flow.

Melisa Rodríguez, another Todoque resident, 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.

The eruption was following an "expected pattern" but there were still many uncertainties, said Vicente Soler, a volcanologist with Spain's top scientific body, CSIC.



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"It is difficult to say if the lava will reach the sea," he told the BTC broadcaster. "If the source remains active and with a steady flow, it will be easy for it to arrive at the ocean. But if there are new lava diversions, that will slow down the flow's head."

But authorities and locals were taking no chances. As the lava headed toward the island's more densely populated coast, 1,000 people were evacuated late Tuesday from Todoque, bringing the total number of evacuated on the island of La Palma to over 6,800.

The few evacuees not staying with relatives or friends were being relocated Wednesday from a military barrack to a hotel, with the most vulnerable being moved to a nursing home. Island officials announced a plan to purchase unused housing to accommodate those who lost homes due to the eruption.

Speaking in New York after attending the U.N. General Assembly, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said he was confident that local, national and European authorities would contribute to the response to the eruption and the area's reconstruction.

Authorities say more dangers lie ahead for residents, including more earthquakes, possible new lava flows, toxic gases, volcanic ash and acid rain. The lava, whose temperature exceeds 1,000 degrees Celsius (more than 1,800 F), could cause explosions, trigger landslides and produce clouds of toxic gas when it hits the ocean.

As volcanic ash fell over a wide area, authorities advised people to keep children inside as much as possible due to possible breathing difficulties.

The volcanic eruption and its aftermath could last for up to 84 days, the Canary Island Volcanology Institute said, basing its calculation on previous eruptions in the archipelago that were also followed by heavy lava flows and lasting seismic activity.

Tuesday night saw a sharp increase in the number of smaller volcanic eruptions that hurl rocks and cinders high into the air, it said.

The lava has swallowed up around 320 buildings so far and now covers 154 hectares (380 acres), the institute said. It has also ruined banana groves, vineyards and other crops. Prompt evacuations have helped avoid any casualties.

The volcano has also been spewing out up to 10,500 tons of sulfur dioxide a day, which also affects the lungs, it said.

Life on the rest of La Palma, which is roughly 35 kilometers (22 miles) long and 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide at its broadest point, has been largely unaffected, with undeterred tourists landing for previously scheduled holidays. Air traffic remained normal.

The Canary Islands are a popular destination for European tourists due to their mild year-round climate.

## Italy: Uncle of teen who refused arranged marriage detained

ROME (AP) — The uncle of an 18-year-old woman who disappeared months ago in Italy after refusing an arranged marriage in Pakistan was detained Wednesday on the outskirts of Paris, according to Italian authorities who fear the teenager may be dead.

Saman Abbas was last seen in late April by neighbors in the vicinity of her family's home in the farm town of Novellara, near the city of Reggio Emilia. A few days later, a Milan airport video captured her parents, who had reportedly been pressuring Abbas to marry a man she had never met, hurrying to catch a flight to Pakistan.

Italian Prosecutor Isabella Chiesi told reporters that Paris police, acting on a European warrant issued in connection with the woman's disappearance, detained the uncle in an apartment where he had been living with other people. Italian police said his social media use played a part in investigators tracking him down.

"I contend it's fundamental to have gotten the uncle, who, from all the investigations and checks, appears to be the mastermind of this crazy criminal plan," the Italian news agency LaPresse quoted the prosecutor as saying at a news conference in Reggio Emilia.

Chiesi didn't elaborate on what the alleged plan entailed. She expressed hope that the uncle's detention in France would lead to his transfer to Italy so he could be interrogated by Italian authorities.

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Abbas told her boyfriend in Italy, who is also of Pakistani origin, that her parents wanted to marry her off to an older man in their homeland but that she was refusing. After going to authorities, Abbas was allowed to stay at a shelter but later returned home, reportedly after her family sent her text messages begging her to come back, Italian news reports said.

The young woman's disappearance has gripped Italians for weeks. Police, aided by dogs, searched the farm fields of Novellara near the family's home looking for Abbas' body. Her younger brother told authorities that he had learned that the uncle had allegedly killed her sister, according to Italian media.

Three men were seen on a surveillance camera video carrying shovels, a pail and a sack near the family home in Italy about the time of her disappearance.

Italian authorities are also seeking the parents and a male cousin, while another cousin was detained in France earlier this year and then transferred to Italy. He is being held in jail for investigation of a suspected role in the case.

## 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 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

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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 11th 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, or 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.

## Anger, confusion spread over UK's new COVID travel rules

By CARA ANNA, DANICA KIRKA and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Travelers and authorities from India and some African countries are furious — and confused — about Britain's new COVID-19 travel rules, calling them discriminatory.

The British government announced what it billed as a simplification of the rules last week, including allowing fully vaccinated travelers arriving in England from much of the world to skip quarantine and take fewer tests.

But the fine print on who was considered "fully vaccinated" is proving far more complicated. In order to skip self-isolation, travelers must have received a vaccine under the American, British or European programs or have received a U.K.-authorized shot from an approved health body. Bodies in more than a dozen countries in Asia, the Caribbean and the Middle East made it to the list — but India's did not, nor did any in Africa.

Countries like Kenya, which has received hundreds of thousands of doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the U.K. itself, were left wondering why their vaccination programs don't appear to be good enough in the eyes of the British government. That's leading to concerns that the rules could exacerbate already

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worrying vaccine hesitancy in Africa as some people question whether the doses available there don't measure up.

Kenya's government noticed "significant public concern" in the wake of the new rules. South African Medical Association chairwoman Dr. Angelique Coetzee said citizens were being "discriminated against" and it's "totally unacceptable." South African authorities objected not only to the new quarantine rules but also to the fact that the country remains on the U.K.'s so-called red list, from which all travel is severely restricted.

The Hindustan Times, one of India's leading English-language dailies, called the decision "illogical and harmful" in an editorial.

Shashi Tharoor, a leader of India's main opposition Congress party, said he had canceled his upcoming book tour of Britain in protest. "Why should Indians be deemed to be lesser breeds than others?" he wrote Tuesday on The Quint news website.

The U.K. Department for Transport, which issued the rules, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. But since the initial furor, Britain has walked back one aspect that caused particular consternation: Doses of AstraZeneca made in India, known as Covishield, were initially not on the list of approved vaccines. The Indian-made product hasn't been formally authorized by U.K. regulators, although some doses have been used in Britain — and millions were shipped to low- and middle-income country.

Covishield was added to the U.K.'s list of approved vaccines for travelers on Wednesday, but the group of approved public health bodies remained unchanged — meaning the practical effect of the move is limited. Outrage over Covishield was particularly pointed in India, where the vast majority of people have been vaccinated with the shot.

Before Covishield was added to Britain's travel list, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told reporters this week: "We understand that this has been used in (Britain's) National Health System and therefore non-recognition of Covishield is a discriminatory policy."

Shringla said the rules, which take effect next month, could force India to "impose reciprocal measures" if the issue isn't resolved.

The government has yet to officially comment on the change, but even after it, outrage continued to pour out from Indians on social media.

"India's digital certification is far more reliable than other countries' manual system. Is UK trying to make money on PCR tests?" tweeted Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, founder of Indian pharmaceutical company Biocon.

For African nations, the new U.K. rules are a setback after a glimmer of hope following India's announcement this week that it will resume exports and donations of surplus coronavirus vaccines in October — after a monthlong freeze because of a surge in domestic infections.

Less than 4% of Africa's population of 1.3 billion is fully vaccinated, and many have looked on with dismay as richer countries stockpile doses and discuss giving third shots to their populations.

Beyond supply issues, many African countries are struggling with vaccine hesitancy as misinformation swirls about the shots.

Kenya's health minister and the British ambassador to Kenya issued a joint statement on Tuesday that appeared aimed at allaying the latest concerns.

"We want to make it clear that both the U.K. and Kenya recognize vaccines administered in both countries," specifically AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, they said.

However, "establishing a system to mutually recognize each other's vaccine certificates for a vaccine passport program takes time," they said, adding that neither country had completed the process.

## Louisiana's struggling seafood industry teetering after Ida

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Louisiana's oyster farmers, crabbers, shrimpers and anglers are nothing if not adaptable, producing millions of pounds of seafood annually, often in water that was dry land a generation ago. They've fought off a devastating oil spill, floods, changing markets and endless hurricanes just



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to stay in business.

After Hurricane Ida, though, some wonder about their ability to continue in a seemingly endless cycle of recovery and readjustment.

The Category 4 hurricane that struck Louisiana late last month fractured some parts of the industry even worse than 2005's Katrina, which cost seafood businesses more than \$1 billion. No one yet knows how many boats, docks and processors were lost because of Ida's relentless, 150-mph winds. Vessels that made it to the safest harbors fared the best, yet even some of them were destroyed by the storm's fury.

Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser, whose office oversees seafood promotion, said some areas, like Lafitte, were all but wiped out. The damage is a devastating blow to people whose entire lives are intertwined with fishing and the Gulf Coast.

"This thing just seemed to beat and beat and beat, kind of mixing it up like a washing machine," Nungesser said. "I think that slow-moving storm beating these boats against the docks, against each other, caused a lot more vessels to sink and have major damage."

The story of Ida's impact on Louisiana's \$2.4 billion seafood industry, which employs more than 23,000 at last count, is unfolding across places that outsiders struggle to even pronounce: Parishes like Plaquemines, Lafourche, and Terrebonne, cities and hamlets including Pointe-aux-Chenes, Des Allemandes and Houma. There, seafood families go back generations.

The people who make their living off the Gulf bounty are pledging to come back again this time provided another hurricane doesn't wipe them out first. But there are other challenges ahead as Louisiana tries to save a vanishing coastline, an industry and a way of life, all at the same time.

## RAINING INSIDE

The ferocious wind from Hurricane Ida tore off so much of the roof of Motivait Seafoods that it rained inside the oyster plant in Houma when squalls from Hurricane Nicholas blew through two weeks later, ruining expensive processing equipment. Across a parking lot, Ida reduced the company's maintenance shop to a crumpled heap of metal.

"This is at least 20 times worse than we've ever had," said Steven Voisin, who runs the 50-year-old family business founded by his late brother and father. "It could have been worse, but it doesn't matter. The buildings are to the extent of not really being able to be reused."

Oyster production already was down in Louisiana because of hurricanes and the BP oil spill of 2010, and several years of bad flooding virtually wiped out some areas where the shellfish grew, partly because a major spillway had to be opened in 2019, Voisin said.

"Where this state was out-producing all other states combined in the past, now we're just another state with a few oysters," he said.

Then, the coronavirus pandemic forced restaurants around the U.S. to close last year, killing demand for a product that's best served fresh. While Motivait Seafoods employed as many as 100 people in the past, Voisin said, the current payroll is around 20 people, at least some of whom will help determine how to move forward after Ida.

"We're going to have to consolidate things, become smaller, use what we can and hope to get up and running," he said.

Voisin said he has yet to compute a dollar estimate for damage to the company, which also operates boats that harvest oysters, but it's substantial.

"We hope that we're able to have the vision and the wisdom to continue. It's going to be a battle," he said.

## FRACTURED SHRIMPERS

Unable to speak for a decade since cancer surgery, Dale Williams gets by on disability payments of \$1,300 a month. Living in a mobile home at Port Sulphur on the west bank of the Mississippi River, he supplements his income by catching shrimp with a little boat he parked in his front yard for Hurricane Ida.

Ida's Category 4 winds flipped Williams' trawler on its side, bending the frame and tearing nets, but it should be ready to go after about \$1,500 in repairs, he said in an interview conducted by written notes. The goal is to get back on the water by October, he said, either with the damaged boat or another one that fared better.

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"I miss it," he wrote.

Still, Williams felt fortunate after seeing what happened a few miles down Highway 23, toward the tip of Louisiana's boot. There, dozens of shrimp boats were sunk or damaged at a commercial marina off Bay Lanoux; workers tried to salvage one at dockside the day before Hurricane Nicholas followed Ida.

About half the shrimping fleet was destroyed by Ida in some coastal parishes, Acy Cooper, president of the Louisiana Shrimp Association, said. That amounts to hundreds of boats.

"It's going to be devastating for the industry," Cooper said. "Every (boat) is a small business you're losing."

Even shrimp boats that weren't damaged couldn't fish for days after Ida because of the lack of power and clean water needed to make ice, which is vital to storing the catch, he said. A day at the dock means a day without income, which hurts in an industry already buffeted by years of foreign imports, high fuel prices, shifting demand and more.

"The industry is going to take a big hit here," said Cooper.

## COMMUNITY ON THE EDGE

The fate of a handful of rental houses could help determine whether an isolated fishing community on Louisiana's southern coast lives or dies after Hurricane Ida.

Anglers from all over visit Pointe-aux-Chenes, which bills itself as having some of the very best fishing and crabbing in a state proclaimed on car license plates as a "Sportsman's Paradise." Many of the community's 3,600 or so residents are Native American or speak Cajun French, and the marina at the end of the main road helps bring cash into the modest local economy.

"They come from Illinois. They come from Michigan, Ohio. All kind of people come down," said Patti Dardar, who works at the marina and lives just a few miles up the road in a badly damaged home that hasn't had water or power since Ida.

The problem for Pointe-aux-Chenes is that Ida heavily damaged a group of rental houses that stand on stilts near the marina's docks, about 80 miles southwest of New Orleans. Without housing, the visitors who normally buy tackle, fuel, food and beer won't be around for awhile to contribute to the community's economy, which needs every penny it can get.

Even before Ida, the shrinking community was fighting to prevent its elementary school from being merged with one in nearby Montegut. Members of the Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe were among those who protested the proposal at a demonstration in April, before hurricane season began.

For now, though, cleaning up the wreckage from Ida is the main job for an isolated community that, like others in the far reaches of the state, plays a sometimes-forgotten role in the state's seafood industry. Sunken or damaged commercial fishing boats, broken docks and splintered homes line the bayou that runs through town.

Dardar doesn't know when the marina might reopen, but she knows it will. It must, she said, for the town.

"We gotta rebuild and start over," said Dardar.

## OYSTERS ON THE HOMESTEAD

Mitch Jurisich's grandparents immigrated to the United States from Croatia in the early 1900s, settling at Bayou LaChute and living in a house surrounded by peach trees, chickens and, just off the shore, oyster beds. Today, the entire homestead is covered by more than 4 feet of water, and all that remains visible of the old camp are wooden pilings around where Jurisich farms oysters near Empire, Louisiana.

"This was a high hill," he said, pointing out over submerged beds where big, succulent oysters grow to maturity quickly in the warm waters of Plaquemines Parish about 60 miles southeast of New Orleans.

Ida's heavy rains caused freshwater and sediment to flood coastal estuaries, killing the shellfish, said Jurisich, chair of the Louisiana Oyster Task Force, an industry group. While farmers are still assessing their losses, he said, the final numbers will be bad.

"Overall, it's pretty dismal," he said.

Many in the seafood industry fear more trouble could come from a method officials are debating to save Louisiana's coastline, which is disappearing similarly to the way the old Jurisich property vanished. Coastal land has been sinking in the region for years in a process that's linked in part to oil and gas extraction.

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Rising waters associated with climate change are only making matters worse.

To help regain land, some are advocating a multi-billion dollar plan to divert Mississippi River water in a way that would cause sediment to build new acreage where land was lost in decades past. Opponents fear the project would upset the freshwater-saltwater balance and kill an industry that's already teetering; an initial federal review found the benefit would outweigh harm to the seafood industry.

Combine that uncertainty with demand that's still off sharply because of the pandemic, and Jurisich said the future of he and his brother's company, Jurisich Oysters LLC, is far from guaranteed.

"As long as Mother Nature leaves us something out there to work with, we're going to bounce back," he said. "Natural disasters have been around since the dawn of time. Man-made disasters are so much harder to recover from."

## Travel in Canada is a prize for the vaccinated and vigilant

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

KAMOURASKA, Quebec (AP) — When the pandemic descended, the boundless vistas and insane sunsets of Kamouraska became a distant, unattainable dream for this bicyclist from Virginia. This is one of Quebec's most beautiful places and, for me, a yearly touchstone I could no longer touch.

It finally came within reach. On Aug. 9, the day Canada conditionally reopened the border to U.S. tourists, my car with the bicycle was packed and ready to go. But I wasn't. I had put off the required coronavirus test too late to be sure I would have the results in time.

On Labor Day, my documents now complete, I drove north, breezed across the border and was soon cycling in a tapestry of storybook villages, canola fields and hedgerows of wild roses along the broad expanse of the St. Lawrence River.

Americans wanting to experience Canada's vibrant autumn or its winter landscapes can do so again. But getting here means jumping through hoops before you go. And being here means adapting to hyper-vigilance against the virus. Canada doesn't mess around with COVID-19 — and isn't suffering from it like people in many parts of the U.S. are now.

Those hoops? To get into Canada as a tourist you must be fully vaccinated. You must have a PCR-variety COVID test taken no more than 72 hours in advance, with results ready to present at the border if driving or at the airport of departure before you can board.

You have to pre-register with the Canadian government and get a code. You must present the basics of a backup quarantine plan in advance, in case you are randomly tested again upon arrival and found to be positive.

You can't be like the man from Atlanta whom border guards were talking about when I crossed. He'd pulled up a few nights earlier, unvaccinated, no test, no pre-registration and no hope of getting into Canada, more than 16 hours from home.

I crossed at the Thousand Islands Bridge in Ontario, where there was no wait. Two officials checked my vaccine and test documentation before I could proceed to the border station, where I had the information checked again along with my U.S. passport. The guard asked a few questions and cheerfully sent me on my way.

In nearby Brockville, people were wearing masks outside as well as inside. They were masked on downtown streets, in the waterfront park and in parking lots. When I indulged my unnatural craving for Tim Hortons coffee, a rarity in most of the U.S. but everywhere-just-everywhere in Canada, a group of about 10 people walked in together.

They were masked, but not socially distanced. The staff immediately ordered them out and told them to re-enter properly separated, a few at a time.

This was in contrast to the laxity along much of the Interstate 81 corridor and upstate New York, where few customers in stores off the highway were masked and no enforcement of distancing was evident. After my trip, New York's St. Lawrence County was seeing new COVID cases at a rate 12 times higher than across the river in Ontario.

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The vigilance in Ontario only intensified when I reached Quebec the next day. These were the early days of Quebec's vaccine "passport," the first of its kind in Canada.

Residents older than 12 must have the passport to be seated inside or on the patios of restaurants, bars, concert halls, outdoor events with more than 50 people, and most other public places that are not deemed essential. Outsiders do not need and cannot get the passport but must present vaccine proof as well as an ID showing a home address outside Quebec. Vaccine proof is not required to stay at a hotel in Quebec but must be shown to go into the lobbies and other common spaces.

Entering the once-again-bustling l'Estaminet restaurant in Rivière-du-Loup, my friend Suzie Loiselle, a tourism official for the vast Quebec Maritime region, held up her phone's passport app to be scanned by the host.

"Adéquatement protégé" — "adequately protected" — flashed on the screen in green. With that and my vaccine card, we got our seats.

The pandemic hit hard in Quebec, as in Ontario, before Canada overcame its vaccine shortages and outpaced the U.S. and much of the world in immunizations. Now, 70% of Canadians are fully vaccinated compared with 55% of Americans.

"We went through hell in those first three waves," Quebec Health Minister Christian Dubé said when announcing the passport. "People want to be vaccinated and they want to have a normal life."

For many Americans, a system registering people's movements in public places is a non-starter. In Quebec, Loiselle said, it has won broad public acceptance in its early going. "Most of the population really wants access to things that were closed during the pandemic," she said. Now they have their freedom of movement and assembly again, from a government app.

I stayed at Auberge sur Mer, as I usually do, in Notre-Dame-du-Portage, a village on the outskirts of Rivière-du-Loup, in a plain room next to the elegant main house and its fine restaurant. Here the wide river is transitioning to the sea, the mountains of Charlevoix far away on the other shore. The view from my room's balcony and all along the shore is breathtaking.

The bicycle ride to Kamouraska and back, some 40 miles or 64 kilometers, passes misty islands and banks of fog wedged into coves under a sky that always seems turbulent, except in the early morning calm. It's a recipe for the magnificent sunsets that, together with the kayaking, whale-watching, hiking, cycling and food, draw crowds from across Europe in normal times.

The road here is part of Route Verte 1, a prime leg of Quebec's enormous network of more than 3,300 miles or 5,300 km of cycling routes. The Route Verte (Green Way) system was developed to offer cyclists safe long-distance roads with amenities such as guaranteed space for cyclists at campgrounds and accredited inns with secure bike storage and healthy foods.

On this seaside route and other roads up in Kamouraska's hills, you can ride your bike in peaceful solitude. You may discover that a solitude of your own choosing is very different from the one a virus forces on you.

## Top US general holds 'productive' talks with Russian officer

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 six-hour meeting in 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, came 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



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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.

Both sides agreed not to disclose details of the talks, as has been the practice in previous meetings and calls. Afterward, Milley said: "It was a productive meeting. When military leaders of great powers communicate, the world is a safer place."

He recently made clear that 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.

## 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."

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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."

## 'The future is raising its voice': A dire mood at UN meeting

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Racism, climate change and worsening divisions among nations and cultures topped the agenda Wednesday as leaders from China to Costa Rica, from Finland to Turkey to the United Nations itself outlined reasons why the world isn't working as it should — and what must be done quickly to fix it. Said one country's president: "The future is raising its voice at us."

For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began early last year, 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 Tuesday. In speech after speech, the atmosphere was somber, angry and dire.

Chinese President Xi Jinping warned that "the world has entered a period of new turbulence and transformation." Finland President Sauli Niinistö said: "We are indeed at a critical juncture." And Costa Rican 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 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."

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"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 Chinese 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.

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. He had COVID-19 last year.

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.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 23, the 266th day of 2021. There are 99 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 23, 1955, a jury in Sumner, Mississippi, acquitted two white men, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam,

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of murdering Black teenager Emmett Till. (The two men later admitted to the crime in an interview with Look magazine.)

On this date:

In 1779, during the Revolutionary War, the American warship Bon Homme Richard, commanded by John Paul Jones, defeated the HMS Serapis in battle off Yorkshire, England; however, the seriously damaged Bon Homme Richard sank two days later.

In 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition returned to St. Louis more than two years after setting out for the Pacific Northwest.

In 1846, Neptune was identified as a planet by German astronomer Johann Gottfried Galle (GAH'-luh).

In 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded.

In 1949, President Harry S. Truman announced there was evidence the Soviet Union had recently conducted a nuclear test explosion. (The test had been carried out on Aug. 29, 1949.)

In 1952, Sen. Richard M. Nixon, R-Calif., salvaged his vice-presidential nomination by appearing on television from Los Angeles to refute allegations of improper campaign fundraising in what became known as the "Checkers" speech.

In 1957, nine Black students who'd entered Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas were forced to withdraw because of a white mob outside.

In 1987, Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., withdrew from the Democratic presidential race following questions about his use of borrowed quotations and the portrayal of his academic record.

In 1999, the Mars Climate Orbiter apparently burned up as it attempted to go into orbit around the Red Planet.

In 2001, President George W. Bush returned the American flag to full staff at Camp David, symbolically ending a period of national mourning following the 9/11 attacks.

In 2002, Gov. Gray Davis signed a law making California the first state to offer workers paid family leave.

In 2018, capping a comeback from four back surgeries, Tiger Woods won the Tour Championship in Atlanta, the 80th victory of his PGA Tour career and his first in more than five years.

Ten years ago: Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas took his people's quest for independence to the United Nations, seeking the world body's recognition of Palestine and sidestepping negotiations that had foundered for nearly two decades. Pope Benedict XVI, visiting his native Germany, met with victims of sexual abuse by priests and expressed "deep compassion and regret," according to the Vatican. After 41 years, the soap opera "All My Children" broadcast its final episode on ABC-TV.

Five years ago: Sen. Ted Cruz announced on Facebook he would vote for Donald Trump, a dramatic about-face months after the fiery Texas conservative called the Republican nominee a "pathological liar" and "utterly amoral." President Barack Obama vetoed a bill to allow the families of 9/11 victims to sue the government of Saudi Arabia, arguing it undermined national security. (Both the House and Senate voted to override the veto.)

One year ago: A Kentucky grand jury brought no charges against Louisville police for the shooting death of a Black woman, Breonna Taylor, during a failed drug raid; prosecutors said officers were justified in using force to protect themselves after facing gunfire. (Charges of wanton endangerment were filed against fired Officer Bret Hankison for shooting into a neighboring home.) In Louisville and cities nationwide, protesters took to the streets in anger over the killings of Black people by police; two officers in Louisville were shot and wounded during the demonstrations. Police in Portland, Oregon, said protesters hurled firebombs at officers in what police said were the most violent protests Portland had seen in months of unrest. President Donald Trump refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he were to lose the election, telling reporters, "We're going to have to see what happens." The parent company of the Uncle Ben's rice brand changed the name to Ben's Original and dropped a logo criticized as a racial stereotype. Pro football Hall of Fame running back Gale Sayers died at 77.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Julio Iglesias is 78. Actor Paul Petersen (TV: "The Donna Reed Show") is 76. Actor/singer Mary Kay Place is 74. Rock star Bruce Springsteen is 72. Director/playwright George C. Wolfe



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is 67. Rock musician Leon Taylor (The Ventures) is 66. Actor Rosalind Chao is 64. Golfer Larry Mize is 63. Actor Jason Alexander is 62. Actor Chi McBride is 60. Actor Erik Todd Dellums is 57. Actor LisaRaye is 55. Singer Ani (AH'-nee) DiFranco is 51. Rock singer Sam Bettens (K's Choice) is 49. Recording executive Jermaine Dupri is 49. Actor Kip Pardue is 45. Actor Anthony Mackie is 43. Pop singer Erik-Michael Estrada (TV: "Making the Band") is 42. Actor Aubrey Dollar is 41. Actor Brandon Victor Dixon is 40. Actor David Lim is 38. Actor Cush Jumbo is 36. Actor Skylar Astin is 34. Former tennis player Melanie Oudin (oo-DAN') is 30.