

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Events

Friday, Sept. 24

7 p.m.: Football hosting Aberdeen Roncalli

Saturday, Sept. 25

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

Monday, Sept. 27

Boys golf at Madison Golf Course

4 p.m.: Cross Country meet at Olive Grove Golf Course, Groton.

4 p.m.: Junior high football at Aberdeen Roncalli

5 p.m.: Junior Varsity football at Aberdeen Roncalli

Volleyball hosting Faulkton Area (C match at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 28

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

Wednesday, Sept. 29

NE Region Land & Range Contest in Webster

“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.

Thursday, Sept. 30

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

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

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

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

Friday, Oct. 1

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

Saturday, Oct. 2

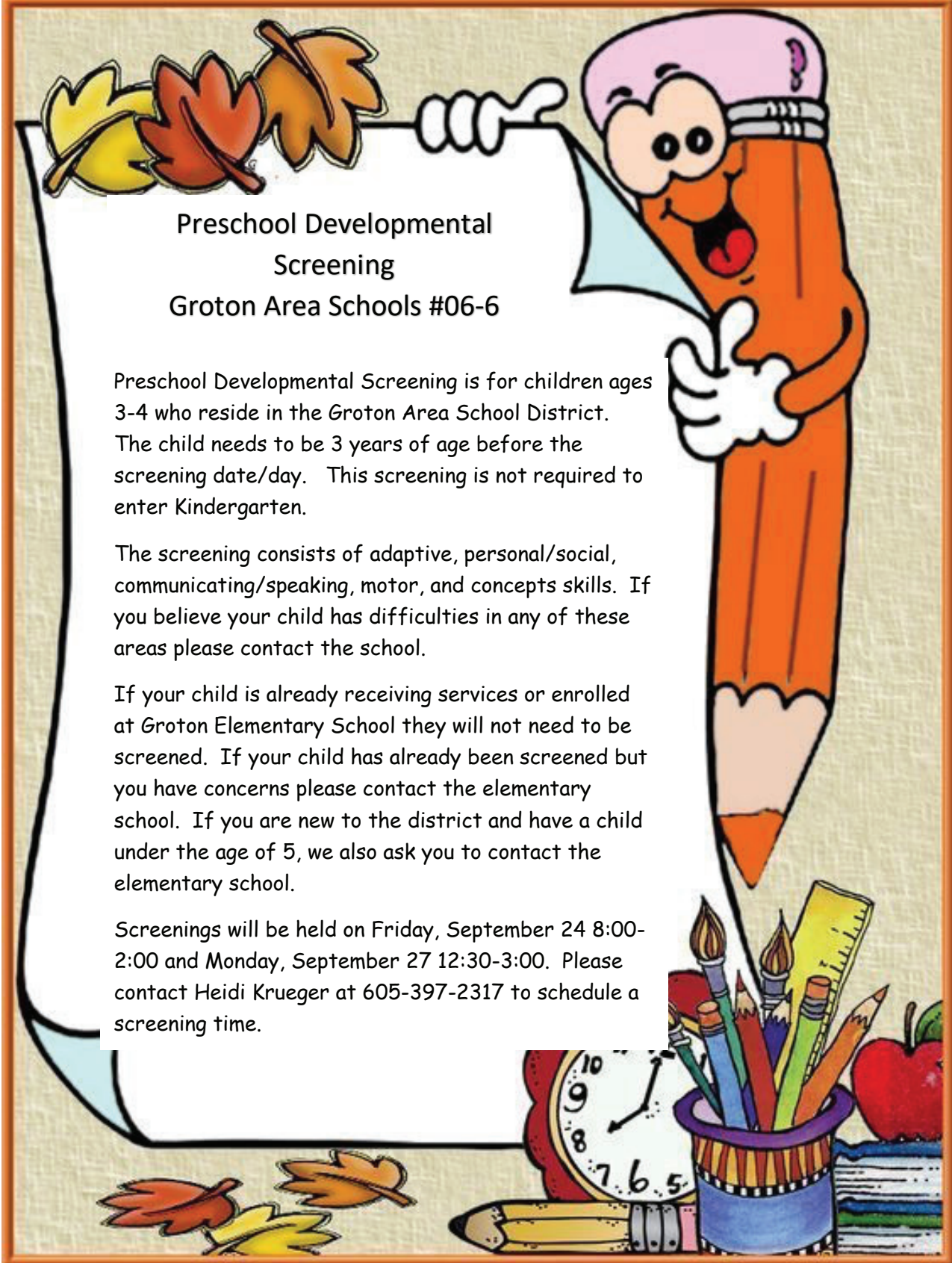
2 p.m.: Boys soccer hosts Freeman Academy

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



Preschool Developmental Screening Groton Area Schools #06-6

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

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

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

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

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



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

Netters tame Cyclones in three sets

Groton Area's varsity volleyball team swept a three-set win over Clark-Willow Lake in action played Thursday in Clark.

Game scores were 25-19, 25-16 and 25-16.

Anna Fjeldheim had eight kills, three ace serves and two digs, Elizabeth Flihs had three ace serves, 10 digs and a kill, Sydney Leicht had 13 kills, 12 digs, a block and an ace serve; Alyssa Thaler had 14 digs and two ace serves, Trista Keith had a kill, Madeline Flihs had three digs, four kills, three solo and one assisted block; Allyssa Locke had three digs, Aspen Johnson had five kills and a block and Maddie Bjerke had a kill, two digs, a solo and an assisted block.

Clark-Willow Lake won the junior varsity match, 25-20 16-25 and 15-7. Anna Fjeldheim had four kills and two ace serves, Emma Schinkel had a kill, Faith Traphagen had three kills, a block and an ace serve; Carly Guthmiller had an ace serve; Lydia Meier had three kills and three ace serves; Laila Roberts and Shallyn Foertsch each had an ace serve and Hollie Frost had two kills and a block.

The C match was split with the Cyclones winning the first set, 25-21, and the Tigers winning the second set, 25-22.

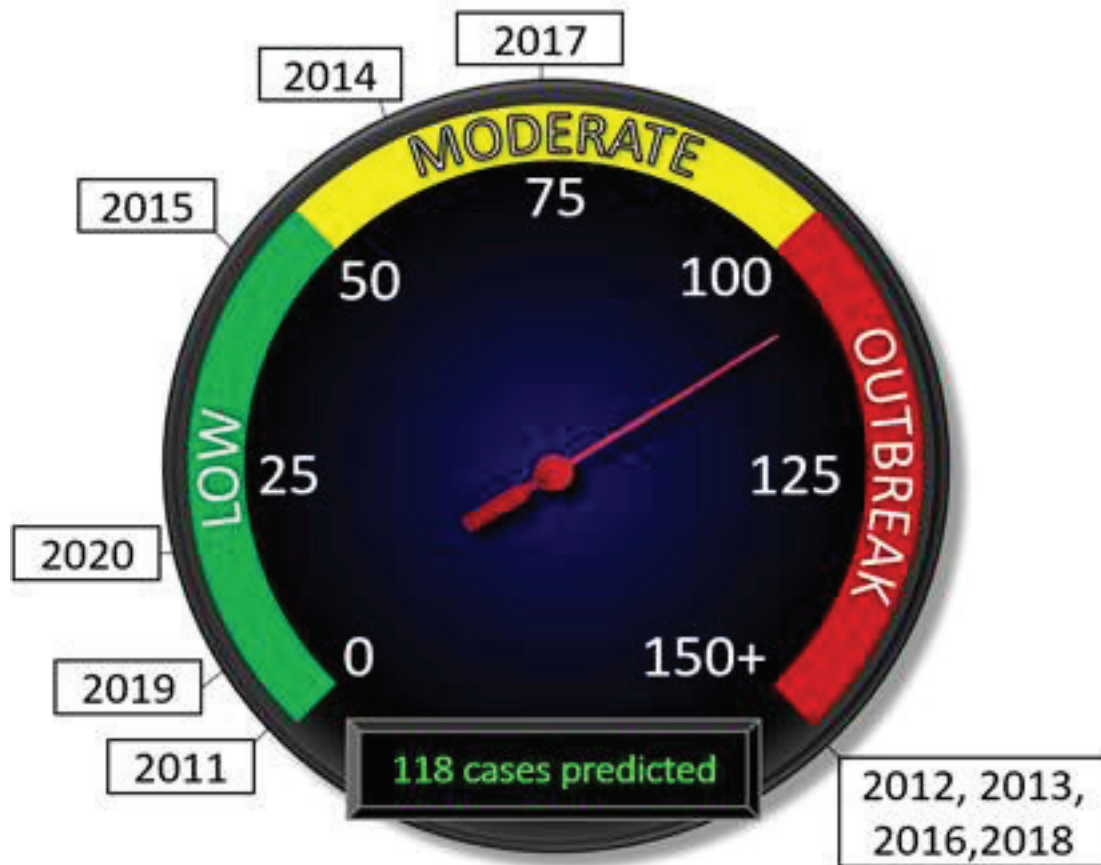
Two golfers place at Sisseton

Two Groton Area golfers placed at the Sisseton Invite held Thursday. Brevin Flihs placed 10th with a 93 and Tate Larson placed 13th with a 96. Carter Simon had a 98, Cole Simon a 117 and Jayden Schwan a 120.

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WEST NILE UPDATE



SD WNV (as of September 22): 39 human cases reported (Beadle, Bon Homme, Brown, Charles Mix, Clark, Davison, Day, Dewey, Douglas, Hamlin, Hand, Hughes, Hutchinson, Kingsbury, Lake, Lawrence, Marshall, Minnehaha, Moody, Oglala Lakota, Potter, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Stanley, Tripp, Union, Walworth, Yankton) and 1 death

Positive blood donors (as of September 22): 5 (Clark, Charles Mix, Day, Hand, Roberts)

8 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Hand, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of September 21): 479 cases (AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, ID, IL, IA, KS, LA, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, NE, NJ, NM, NY, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA) and 21 deaths

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2021, South Dakota (as of September 20)

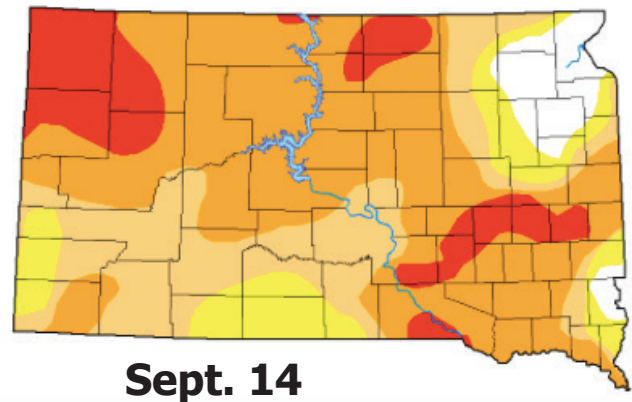
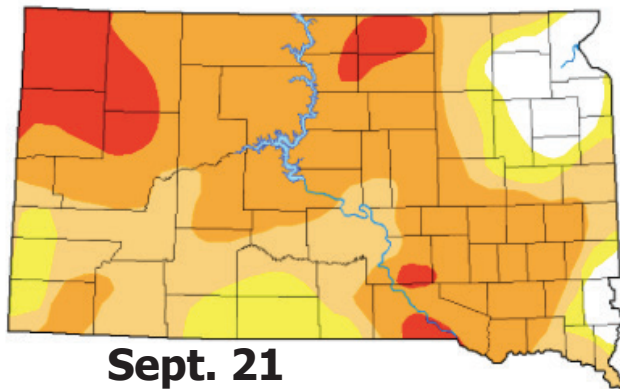
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



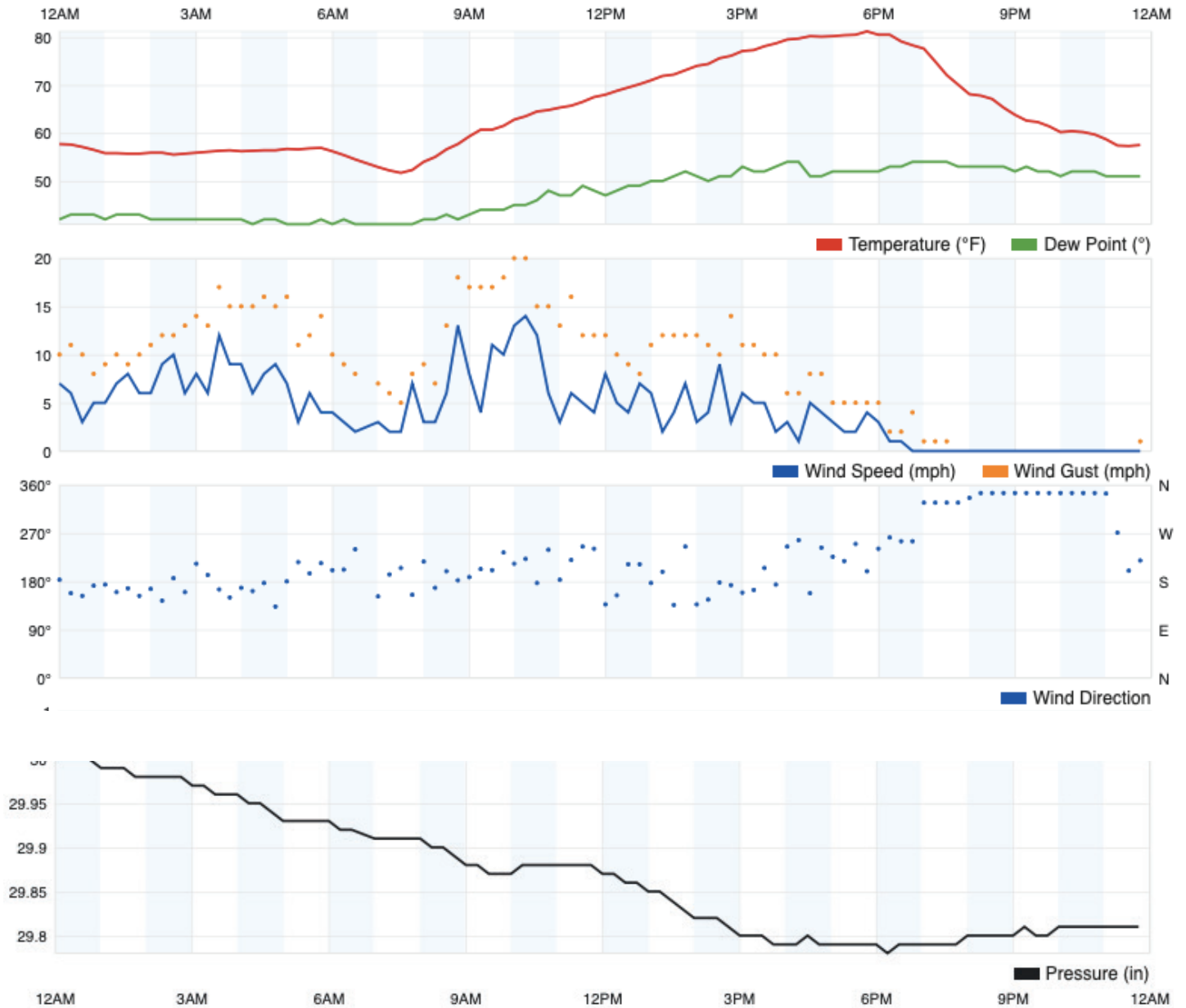
High Plains

Heavy rain clipped some eastern sections of the region, but many areas were dry, or nearly so, during the drought-monitoring period. A surge of heat in advance of a cold front, peaking on September 18, resulted in unusually high temperatures, followed by cooler conditions. On the 18th, there was a flurry of daily-record highs, including 98°F in Chadron, Nebraska; and 96°F in Dickinson, North Dakota. Still, drought conditions in many parts of the High Plains have modestly improved in recent weeks. Due to that beneficial rain, exceptional drought (D4) was removed from central North Dakota. A few other areas also noted drought improvements of up to one category, as moisture has generally increased for newly planted winter wheat—and some pastureland has begun to respond. Even with the rain, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that on September 19, topsoil moisture across the region ranged from 41% very short to short in Nebraska to 88% in Wyoming. Some rangeland and pastures continue to reel from drought that appears to have peaked earlier in the year; on September 19, the Dakotas led the region in very poor to poor ratings—83% in North Dakota and 80% in South Dakota. Wyoming's rangeland and pastures were rated 71% very poor to poor.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



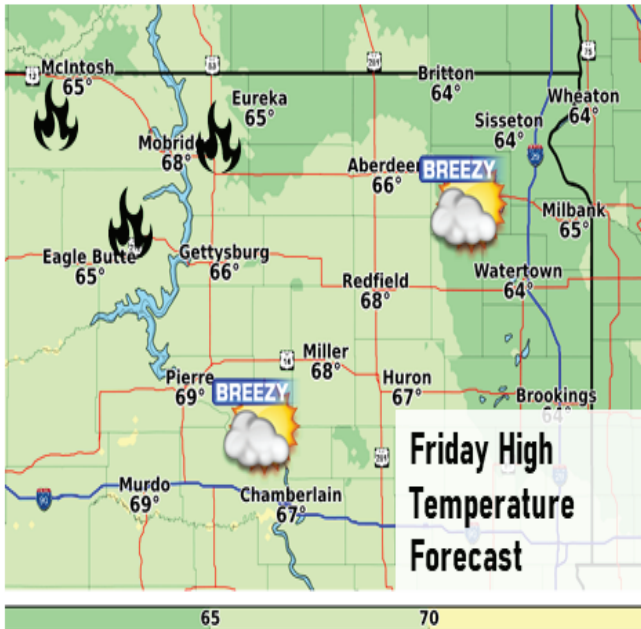
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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Slight Chance Showers then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 67 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 74 °F	Low: 47 °F	High: 81 °F

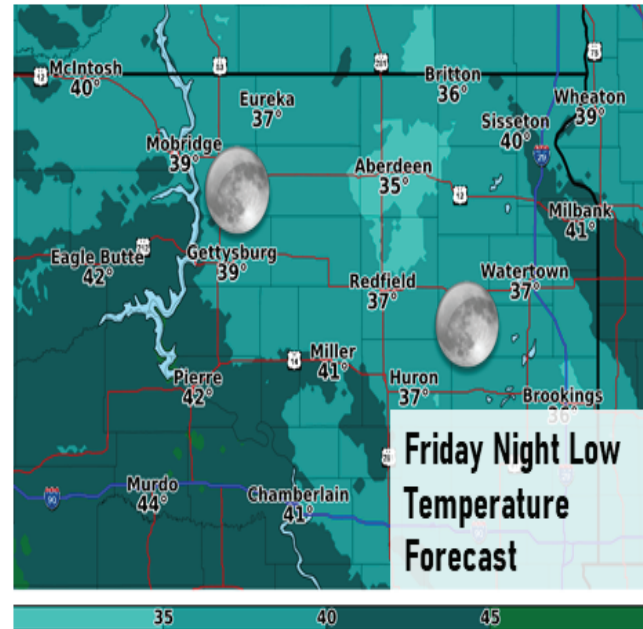
Today: Very High Fire Danger North Central SD

Sunny, cooler, and dry with low relative humidity and breezy northerly winds. **Any fires that form will spread easily across north central South Dakota**



Tonight: Cool, patchy frost possible for some

Winds lessen, skies remain clear and relatively chilly air settles in. **The greatest potential for some patchy frost is across the James River Valley by Saturday morning**







National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 9/24/2021 5:25 AM Central

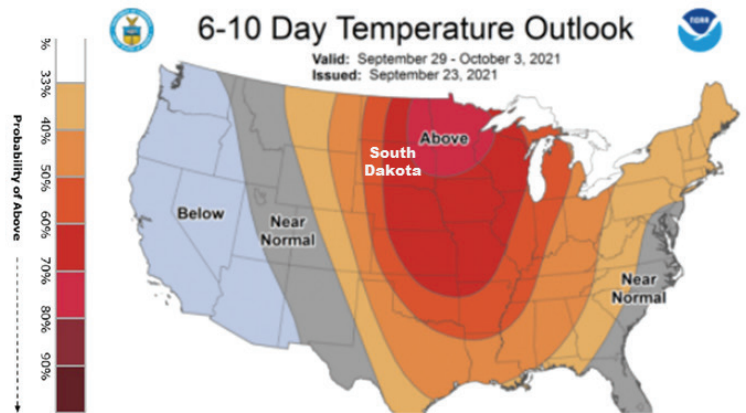
Morning showers and clouds will give way to sunshine this afternoon. Breezy and dry conditions will lead to fire weather concerns this afternoon – a Red Flag Warning is across north central South Dakota. By tonight, temperatures will cool enough where frost can't be ruled out for some. Temperatures warm back to above normal this weekend and most likely stay that way through the upcoming work-week.

Warm End to Sept & Start to Oct

SAT Sept 25, 2021	SUN Sept 26, 2021	MON Sept 27, 2021	TUE Sept 28, 2021
			
70-80°	78-86°	80-90°	82-90+°

Average high temps in late September range from the upper 60s to low 70s - we'll be well above that by the start of the new work-week. Abnormally mild air is favored to persist into the beginning of October as well.

Dry meanwhile, but precip chances increase by the second half of the new work-week.



Temperatures warm each day from Saturday through Tuesday, with much above average values anticipated by that time. A slight cool-down should follow for the second half of the new work-week, but above average temperatures remain favored through the start of the new month.

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Today in Weather History

September 24, 1986: Thunderstorms brought high winds along with several tornados to parts of western and central South Dakota from the late evening in the morning hours of the 25th. Winds were estimated up to 80 mph. Many trees and power poles were downed along with damage to many buildings. The tornadoes occurred near Newell, east of Cedar Butte, west of Murdo, 20 miles northwest of Pierre, and northwest of Ridgeview in Dewey County.

September 24, 1992: South winds gusting to 50 to 55 mph across northeast South Dakota during the day toppled several trees and light poles. In Aberdeen, a front window was blown out of a store.

1926: The temperature at Yellowstone Park drops to 9 degrees below zero, making it the coldest September reading ever recorded in the US.

1939: A thunderstorm on this day dropped 6.45 inches in six hours at Indio, CA. This rainfall preceded "El Cordonazo" or "The Lash of St. Francis", an actual tropical storm. For the entire storm, which started on this day and ended on the 26th, four inches of rain fell across the deserts and mountains as a dying tropical cyclone moved across Baja California into southwestern Arizona. This storm was the second tropical cyclone to impact California during this month. A strong El Niño may have contributed to the activity. The tropical storm produced 50 mph winds over the ocean and estimated seas of 40 feet. September rain records were set in Los Angeles with 5.66 inches and 11.6 inches at Mt. Wilson. 45 people died from sinking boats, and harbors were damaged. Total damage was estimated at \$2 million. Californians were unprepared and were alerted to their vulnerability to tropical storms. In response, the weather bureau established a forecast office for Southern California, which began operations in February of 1940.

1956: Hurricane Flossy made landfall near Destin, Florida as a Category 1 storm.

1986: An F2 tornado, unusually strong for one in California, touched down just southeast of Vina on this day and traveled two miles through an agricultural area. A mobile home was destroyed, injuring a 22-year-old occupant. Eleven other buildings were damaged or demolished, and 50 acres of walnut orchards were flattened.

2001: A weak, F0 tornado passed in the sight of the Washington Monument. Soon after, an F3 tornado struck College Park, Maryland.

2005: Early on the morning of September 24, 2005, Major Hurricane Rita came ashore near the Texas/Louisiana border.

1926 - The temperature at Yellowstone Park dipped to nine degrees below zero. It was the coldest reading of record in the U.S. during September. Severe freezes were widespread over the northwestern U.S. causing great crop destruction. In Washington State, Spokane County experienced their earliest snow of record. Harney Branch Experiment Station in Oregon reported a temperature of 2 degrees above zero to establish a state record for the month of September. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1950 - A smoke pall from western Canada forest fires covered much of the eastern U.S. Daylight was reduced to nighttime darkness in parts of the Northeast. The color of the sun varied from pink to purple, blue, or lavender. Yellow to grey-tan was common. (24th-30th) (The Weather Channel)

1972 - Lightning struck a man near Waldport, OR, a young man who it so happens was carrying thirty-five pieces of dynamite. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - The first full day of autumn proved to be a pleasant one for much of the nation, with sunny skies and mild temperatures. Thunderstorms again formed over Florida and the southwestern deserts, and also formed along a cold front in the northeastern U.S. A storm spotter at Earp CA sighted a couple of funnel clouds, one on the California side of the state line, and the other on the Arizona side. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced large hail and damaging winds in the southeastern U.S., with reports of severe weather most numerous in North Carolina. Golf ball size hail was reported at Tick Creek and a number of other locations in North Carolina. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

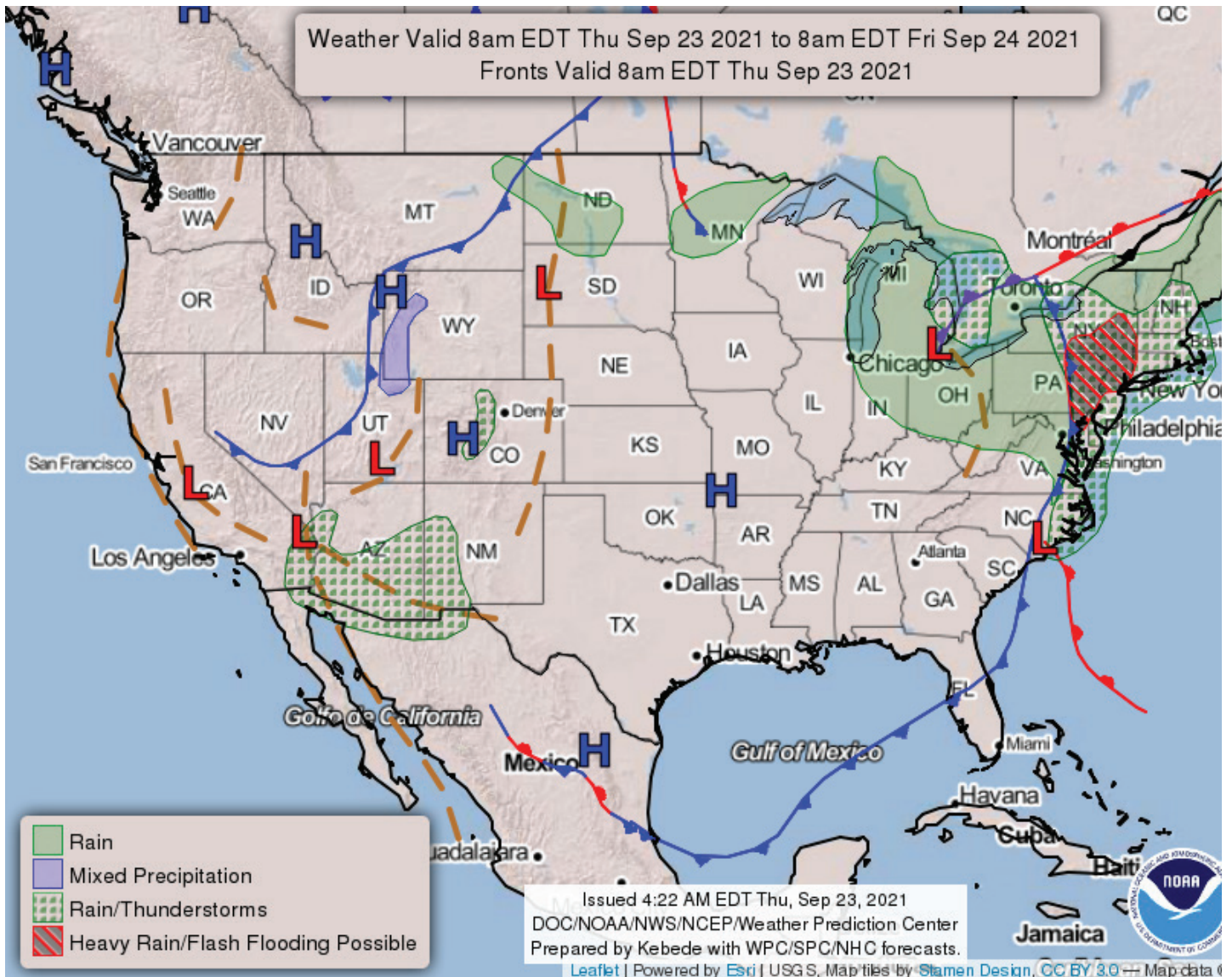
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 81.2 °F at 5:45 PM
Low Temp: 51.7 °F at 7:30 AM
Wind: 20 mph at 10:00 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 90° in 1935
Record Low: 23° in 2000
Average High: 72°F
Average Low: 43°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.59
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.58
Average Precip to date: 17.93
Precip Year to Date: 15.42
Sunset Tonight: 7:27:22 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22:19 AM



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SAFE IN GOD'S ARMS

Whenever we go to a physician for care, we are normally greeted by someone who takes our "vital signs" and then asks us to describe our "symptoms" - our reason for wanting to talk with a physician. These symptoms or vital signs are indicators - early warning signs - of a deeper or more serious condition that describes an illness or potential health issue that may require some sort of treatment.

One of the gifts that we have through the grace and mercy of God is His love that surrounds us and His arms that protect us. "He guards the lives of His faithful," wrote the Psalmist, "and delivers them from the hand of the wicked." Our God is there to prevent the "illnesses" caused by sin that could destroy us who want to be faithful to Him.

One of the most influential saints of God was C.I. Scofield. He is the author of the Scofield Study Bible - no doubt one of the most widely used and perhaps most influential study Bible that was ever published. "Shortly after my conversion," he once wrote, "I saw a picture of Daniel in the den of lions. His hands were behind him, and the lions were circling him. It reminded me of myself. The one thing I was in fear of was that I might go back to my sins. But as I stood before that picture, a great hope and faith came into my heart. I said, 'Why these lions are all about me - my old habits and sins - the God that shut the mouths of the lions for Daniel can shut them for me.' And He did!"

God promises that He will guard us and guide us, defend us and deliver us from the "hand of the wicked." But only if we are faithful to call on Him!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, that we may look to You for deliverance from the sins that would so easily destroy us. May we find protection in Your care. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He guards the lives of His faithful and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Psalm 97:10b

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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

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Christian def. North Central Co-Op, 25-16, 25-8, 25-13

Andes Central/Dakota Christian def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-23, 25-17, 25-17

Arlington def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-14, 27-25, 25-8

Avon def. Colome, 25-16, 25-17, 25-20

Baltic def. Parker, 25-21, 25-20, 24-26, 25-16

Bison def. Takini, 25-1, 25-9, 25-9

Brandon Valley def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 26-24, 25-22, 25-17

Bridgewater-Emery def. Canistota, 25-20, 25-4, 25-13

Burke def. Bon Homme, 25-21, 25-9, 25-17

Canton def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 23-25, 17-25, 25-14, 25-22, 15-12

Colman-Egan def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 18-25, 25-13, 18-25, 25-18, 15-4

Dell Rapids def. Flandreau, 25-16, 25-15, 25-19

Douglas def. Sturgis Brown, 19-25, 23-25, 25-17, 25-21, 15-10

Estelline/Hendricks def. Deubrook, 25-17, 25-21, 14-25, 25-17

Florence/Henry def. Milbank, 25-15, 25-16, 25-11

Freeman def. Menno, 25-16, 25-18, 25-15

Garretson def. Chester, 25-16, 25-15, 25-15

Gayville-Volin def. Vermillion, 25-19, 25-12, 25-18

Great Plains Lutheran def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-8, 25-18, 25-9

Gregory def. Corsica/Stickney, 29-27, 22-25, 25-23, 25-17

Groton Area def. Clark/Willow Lake, 25-19, 25-16, 25-16

Hankinson, N.D. def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-7, 25-17, 25-22

Harrisburg def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 14-25, 28-26, 22-25, 25-22, 15-7

Hill City def. Newell, 25-9, 25-8, 25-8

Hot Springs def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-19, 20-25, 25-18, 25-23

Huron def. Brookings, 25-13, 25-17, 25-20

Irene-Wakonda def. Hanson, 20-25, 22-25, 25-19, 25-12, 15-11

Jones County def. Todd County, 28-26, 25-20, 25-15

Langford def. Ipswich, 25-22, 20-25, 25-27, 29-27, 16-14

Lennox def. West Central, 22-25, 25-17, 23-25, 25-18, 15-13

Linton/HMB, N.D. def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-12, 25-14, 25-10

Madison def. Tri-Valley, 21-25, 25-12, 25-17, 25-17

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

Mobridge-Pollock def. Lemmon, 25-8, 25-21, 27-25

Northwestern def. Waubay/Summit, 25-6, 25-8, 25-13

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland def. Sioux Falls Lutheran, 25-17, 25-10, 25-11

Parkston def. McCook Central/Montrose, 25-23, 18-25, 25-21, 22-25, 15-7

Rapid City Christian def. St. Thomas More, 25-20, 25-14, 25-19

Rapid City Stevens def. Rapid City Central, 25-23, 25-18, 25-14

Redfield def. Britton-Hecla, 25-10, 25-20, 25-23

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Iroquois, 25-5, 25-17, 25-16

Sioux Falls Christian def. Dakota Valley, 22-25, 25-19, 25-15, 25-20

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, 27-25, 25-16, 25-21

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Sisseton def. Deuel, 26-24, 25-20, 25-18
Spearfish def. Custer, 25-18, 25-15, 25-16
Stanley County def. Potter County, 25-23, 25-12, 25-21
Sully Buttes def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-17, 25-14, 28-26
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Mitchell Christian, 25-22, 25-12, 25-9
Viborg-Hurley def. Centerville, 25-18, 25-20, 25-18
Wagner def. Kimball/White Lake, 15-25, 25-15, 25-6, 25-13
Webster def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 17-25, 26-24, 16-25, 25-23, 15-9
Wessington Springs def. Lower Brule, 25-10, 25-11, 25-21
Wolsey-Wessington def. James Valley Christian, 25-13, 25-21, 23-25, 25-11
West Sioux Triangular=
Elk Point-Jefferson def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-21, 25-10, 25-11
Elk Point-Jefferson def. West Sioux, Iowa, 25-18, 25-19, 21-25, 25-17

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

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

Court: Pierre not liable for injuries caused by fire trainee

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court, in an opinion released Thursday, agreed with a lower court ruling that two people on a motorcycle who were severely injured in a crash with a volunteer firefighting trainee cannot collect damages from the city of Pierre and its fire department.

Lisa Tammen and Randall Jurgens were badly hurt and had their left legs amputated above the knees as the result of the August 1, 2016, crash in rural Hughes County.

Firefighting trainee Gerrit Tronvold was on his way to a department meeting in Pierre when he ran through a stop sign and collided with the victims' motorcycle. Tronvold was cited for failure to yield.

The circuit court found that the city and the fire department weren't liable for Tronvold's actions because he wasn't acting within the scope of his employment.

Circuit Judge Thomas Trimble rejected arguments for exceptions to what's known as the 'going and coming' rule that protects employers from liability in most instances when their employees are driving to and from work, KELO-TV reported.

Supreme Court Justice Janine Kern wrote the opinion supporting the judge's decision. Kern said the exceptions didn't apply because neither the city nor the department "exercised sufficient control nor received a sufficient benefit from Tronvold's commute."

"Employers commonly rely on their employees to drive their personal vehicles to arrive at work. This is especially true in rural America where 'neither public transportation nor car pooling (are) common,'" Kern wrote, citing a 1990 federal-court decision.

Few COVID-19 vaccinated patients need intensive care

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Fully vaccinated people make up a minority of COVID-19 hospitalizations and an even lower number of people needing intensive care and ventilators, current data from two large hospital systems in the Upper Midwest shows.

Minneapolis-based Allina Health reported 176 patients were hospitalized with COVID-19 this week and that 22% are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Sanford Health, based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, reported 159 patients with COVID-19 hospitalized this week at its facilities in the Dakotas and Minnesota, and that 10% are fully vaccinated.

The hospital systems are among the first in the nation to report their COVID-19 hospitalizations by severity and vaccination status.

Data from the two hospital systems show patients with breakthrough COVID-19 cases were less likely

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to need intensive care or ventilators. Only one of Sanford's 34 COVID-19 patients on ventilators had been fully vaccinated compared with two of Allina's 21 patients.

Minnesota ranks 21st among states with a first-dose vaccination rate of about 74% in its age 12 and older population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Dakotas had some of the highest vaccination rates in the nation earlier this year as health care workers were immunized, but progress has since declined. First-dose vaccination rates among people 12 and older are 70% in South Dakota and 60% in North Dakota with the latter being the fifth worst among U.S. states, according to the CDC.

Albanian court reopens case of ex-minister over fatal blast

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — An Albanian court ruled on Friday to reopen the case of a former defense minister who faced charges over a massive blast at a munitions disposal factory 13 years ago that killed 26 people.

Judge Saida Dollani of the Tirana Appeals Special Court Against Corruption and Organized Crime that handles top officials' corruption cases asked a lower court to re-open the case against Fatmir Mediu whose 2009 abuse of power charge was dismissed because of his immunity from prosecution as a re-elected member of parliament.

Mediu remains a member of parliament with an opposition party, but parliamentary immunity from criminal cases was abolished in 2012.

Mediu has denied wrongdoing, calling the move politically motivated.

The case resumed following a request from Zamira Durda and her husband Feruzan Durda, whose six-year-old son was killed while playing in the backyard of their home in Gerdec, outside the capital, Tirana, in the March 15, 2008 explosion. Apart from resulting in the death of 26 people the blast injured 264 and damaged about 5,500 houses.

In 2012 a court convicted and jailed 19 people over the explosion, but angry relatives of the victims complained that top government officials had evaded justice.

Biden hosts Indo-Pacific leaders as China concerns grow

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday is set to host the first in-person gathering of leaders of an Indo-Pacific alliance known as "the Quad" as he wraps up a difficult week of diplomacy after facing no shortage of criticism from allies and adversaries.

The White House meeting with leaders from India, Japan and Australia gives Biden a chance to put the spotlight on a chief foreign policy goal: greater attention to the Pacific in light of what the United States sees as China's coercive economic practices and unsettling military maneuvering in the region.

The leaders plan are expected to announce a coronavirus vaccine initiative, plans to bolster semiconductor supply chains and a program to bring graduate and doctoral students in STEM fields to U.S. universities.

Before the summit, the Japanese and Indian governments welcomed a recent announcement that the U.S., as part of a new alliance with Britain and Australia, would equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines.

That will allow Australia to conduct longer patrols and give it an edge on the Chinese navy. But the announcement infuriated France, which accused the Biden administration of stabbing it in the back by squelching its own \$66 billion deal to provide diesel-powered submarines.

Tensions between Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron eased after the two leaders spoke Wednesday and agreed to take steps to coordinate more closely in the Indo-Pacific.

Michael Green, who served as senior director for Asia at the National Security Council during the George W. Bush administration, said Japan and India welcome the United States-United Kingdom-Australian alliance "because it will really for the next 50 years reset the trajectories in naval power in the Pacific and from the perspective of those countries stabilize things as China massively builds up its naval forces."

But Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian called it a reflection of "outdated Cold War zero-

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sum mentality and narrow-minded geopolitical perception" that would intensify a regional arms race.

Beijing has also sought to push the notion that creation of the alliance indicates the U.S. will favor Australia in the Quad at the expense of Japan and India, said Bonny Lin, senior fellow for Asian security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

China also has tried to undercut the Quad as out of step with other nations in Southeast Asia and portrayed members of the Quad as "U.S. pawns," Lin said.

The White House meeting is playing out as China continues efforts to make a show of force in the region.

On Thursday, China sent 24 fighter jets toward Taiwan after Taiwan announced its intention to join a Pacific trade group, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. China has also applied for membership.

During his busy week of diplomacy, Biden addressed the U.N. General Assembly and hosted a virtual global summit on COVID-19.

Biden and leaders of other wealthy nations faced criticism about the slow pace of global vaccinations and the inequity of access to shots between residents of wealthier and poorer nations. The pushback from leaders of low- and moderate-income countries came even as Biden announced plans for the U.S. to double to 1 billion doses its purchase of Pfizer vaccine to share with the world.

In addition to the Quad meeting, Biden is scheduled to meet separately with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who is soon to step down from his post.

First lady Jill Biden, who spent time with Suga when she visited Japan for the Summer Olympic, is expected to join for part of the meeting.

Modi plans to bring up Afghanistan, according to a person familiar with Modi's agenda who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Modi is expected to raise objections to the Taliban's effort to get recognition at the United Nations. The Indian government also has concerns about the influence it believes Pakistan's intelligence service exerted in how factions of the Taliban divvied up government offices in Kabul.

When the Taliban previously controlled Afghanistan, the group supported militants in Kashmir, a long disputed territory at the center of wars and skirmishes between India and Pakistan. The Haqqani network was behind two suicide bombings of India's embassy in 2008 and 2009. Members of the network, which the U.S. has designated a terrorist organization, have been given top positions in the Taliban government.

Suga is expected to discuss China, North Korea, Afghanistan, the COVID-19 response and climate change, according to a foreign ministry official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

North Korea last week said it successfully launched ballistic missiles from a train for the first time, striking a target in the sea some 800 kilometers (500 miles) away.

That test came after the North this month said it tested new cruise missiles, which it intends to make nuclear-capable, that can strike targets 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) away, a distance putting all of Japan and U.S. military installations there within reach.

Associated Press writer Yuri Kageyama in Tokyo contributed reporting.

Activists stage global rallies over climate change

BERLIN (AP) — Environmental activists, many of them students taking time out from school, staged rallies around the world on Friday to demand that leaders take stronger action to curb climate change amid dire warnings of an increasingly hotter globe if nothing is done soon.

The issue has climbed the political agenda in many countries as scientists are warning that the world faces dangerous temperature rises unless greenhouse gas emissions are cut sharply in the coming years.

Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg planned to take part in a protest in Berlin, two days before the German election in which climate change has been a major topic.

The issue has also topped the agenda in Iceland, which heads to the polls for general elections on

Saturday. All parties running for seats in the North Atlantic island nation's parliament acknowledge global warming as a force of change in a sub-Arctic landscape, but disagree on how to respond to it.

Global climate protests were muted during the coronavirus pandemic due to restrictions on public gatherings, but with many countries relaxing rules again thousands are expected on the streets of Berlin, Milan and other large cities.

EXPLAINER: Why North Korea wants sanctions lifted first

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Days after outgoing South Korean President Moon Jae-in made possibly his last ambitious push to diplomatically resolve the standoff over North Korea's nuclear program, the North on Friday rejected his call for a declaration ending the Korean War, making it clear it has no interest in political statements unless they bring badly needed relief from crippling economic sanctions. Nuclear diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea has stalled over disagreements over a relaxation of the U.S.-led sanctions in exchange for steps toward denuclearization by the North.

Analysts say North Korea is trying to use Moon's desire for inter-Korean engagement to pressure South Korea into extracting concessions from Washington on its behalf.

WHY IS MOON OFFERING A PEACE DECLARATION?

The 1950-53 Korean War, in which North Korea and ally China faced off against South Korea and U.S.-led U.N. forces, ended with an armistice, but there was never a peace treaty.

In a speech at the U.N. General Assembly this week, Moon called for an end-of-war declaration while expressing hopes for a quick resumption of talks between the U.S. and North Korea. He said such a declaration among the leaders of the Koreas, the United States and China would help achieve denuclearization and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Moon's proposal was an attempt to break the stalemate as he nears the end of his term in May 2022. North Korea had initially supported South Korea's call for an end-of-war declaration when Seoul helped set up a summit between its leader, Kim Jong Un, and former U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018 in which Kim aimed to leverage his nuclear weapons in exchange for economic benefits.

Such an end-of-war declaration would make it easier for North Korea to demand that the United States withdraw its 28,500 troops in South Korea and ease sanctions.

But North Korea lost interest in the idea after talks between Kim and Trump collapsed during their second summit in February 2019. The Americans rejected North Korea's demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for the dismantling of an aging nuclear facility, a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

WHY IS NORTH KOREA REJECTING MOON'S OFFER?

On Friday, Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Ri Thae Song issued separate statements rebuffing Moon's proposal.

Kim Yo Jong's comments were directed toward Moon while Ri's were aimed at the Biden administration, but they communicated essentially the same message — that North Korea isn't interested in an end-of-war declaration unless Washington first discards its "hostile" policies, a reference to the U.S.-led economic sanctions and its military activities with ally South Korea.

Ri said such a declaration would be "premature" considering U.S. efforts to strengthen its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, which North Korea has increasingly used to justify the expansion of its own nuclear and missile programs.

Kim Yo Jong, who handles inter-Korean affairs, used softer language toward South Korea, saying the North is willing to resume "constructive" discussions over improving bilateral ties if the South abandons its hostility and "double-dealing standards."

She was clearly demanding that Seoul try harder to persuade Washington to offer "concrete actions to resume negotiations, whether they be the relaxing of sanctions or suspension of U.S.-South Korea joint

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military exercises," which North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal, said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

North Korea's statements on Friday show it has no expectation that Biden will accept Moon's call, said Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University.

"The North still has nothing to lose with the South proposing an end-of-war declaration again and it basically gave Seoul 'homework' to press Washington to meet its demands," Park said. "The North could be trying to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul, or create a rift in public opinion within South Korea by pressuring Seoul over the state of inter-Korean relations."

WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR NUCLEAR TALKS?

The North Korean nuclear issue receded from the center of attention at this year's U.N. General Assembly with newer global challenges such as the coronavirus, rising U.S.-China tensions and Afghanistan's uncertain future.

But North Korea hates to be ignored, and its recent missile tests after months of relative quiet have raised speculation that Kim is once again flaunting its military might to wrest concessions from Washington if the long-stalled talks over his nuclear program resume.

Some experts say Kim is facing harsh domestic challenges, with pandemic-linked border closures further hurting an economy already battered by decades of mismanagement and international sanctions. They say the sense of alarm could push North Korea to escalate its weapons tests in the coming months to pressure the world before offering negotiations to extract aid, at least until China begins pushing for calm ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics early next year.

This month, North Korea tested a new cruise missile it intends to arm with nuclear warheads and demonstrated the launching of ballistic missiles from rail cars as it expands its arsenal of shorter-range weapons threatening U.S. allies South Korea and Japan.

"Even while under a pandemic lockdown, North Korea continues to modernize its military, including nuclear weapons and various means of delivering them," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha, who sees no room for Moon to advance his peace agenda. "The Biden administration has repeatedly offered dialogue and humanitarian engagement, but the Kim regime appears to want sanctions relief and de facto nuclear recognition in exchange for averting a crisis."

Drive for Britain! UK scrambles for truckers amid supply woe

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British energy firms are rationing supplies of gasoline and closing some petrol pumps — the latest in a string of shortages that have seen McDonald's take milkshakes off the menu, KFC run short of chicken and gaps appear on supermarket shelves.

A big factor behind the problems is a lack of truck drivers. The U.K. is short tens of thousands of hauliers, as factors including Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic converge to create a supply-chain crunch.

Officials urged motorists not to panic-buy petrol after BP and Esso shut a handful of stations because there were not enough trucks to get gas to the pumps.

"The advice would be to carry on as normal," Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said Friday.

The haulage industry warns that things are anything but normal, and is pressing the government to loosen immigration rules and recruit more drivers from Europe to avert Christmas shortages of turkeys and toys.

The government is resisting that move, and scrambling to lure more British people into truck driving, long viewed as an underpaid and underappreciated job.

"Driving isn't seen as a 21st-century sexy vocation," said Laurence Bolton, managing director of the National Driving Centre, a family-owned school for truck drivers in the London suburb of Croydon.

But that is starting to change. Bolton's school has seen a 20% increase in applicants since the U.K.'s pandemic restrictions eased earlier this year, with bus drivers, laid-off hospitality workers and even former airline pilots seeking to retrain as truckers, a suddenly in-demand and increasingly well-paid occupation.

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"It opens up the opportunities," said 31-year-old Stephen Thrower, who works as a van driver but is training on trucks. "It's more of a job for life."

As a trainee trucker practiced reversing a huge rig between orange cones at the school's asphalt lot, Bolton reeled off the ingredients that have made for a trucking crisis. Britain's departure from the European Union prompted some European workers to head home. The British government closed a loophole that many drivers used to keep tax payments down. COVID-19 lockdowns halted driver testing for months, stopping the flow of new truckers.

Countries including the United States and Germany are also facing a driver shortage. But the U.K.'s problem has been worsened by Brexit. Britain's full departure from the EU last year ended the right of the bloc's citizens to live and work in the U.K., making it harder for firms to employ the eastern European drivers that many had come to rely on.

The pandemic also disrupted labor markets around the world, throwing millions of people at least temporarily out of work. An estimated 1.4 million Europeans left Britain for their home countries during the pandemic, often to be closer to family. It's uncertain how many will return.

Britain's trucking industry is lobbying for truck drivers to be added to the "shortage occupation list," which would make it easier to recruit drivers from Europe. There are similar calls from Britain's farming and food processing industries, which are short of fruit-pickers and meat-packers.

The Conservative government has refused, saying British workers should be trained to fill the jobs.

"We've continually allowed our domestic market to underperform by essentially having wages undercut by people coming in prepared to do the job for less, and in pretty bad conditions sometimes," Shapps told lawmakers Wednesday. "And that's the wider picture that we're determined to resolve."

In an attempt to ease the shortage, the government has extended the number of hours drivers can work each week, increased trucker testing and "streamlined" the training process. One change means drivers no longer have to qualify on a rigid truck before moving up to huge tractor trailers.

Bolton generally welcomes the government moves, but has concerns about the safety of letting drivers move straight from cars to 18-wheelers.

"I don't care if you're the best car driver in the world — it's 16½ meters (54 feet) long," he said.

Shapps said the situation is improving "week by week" as more new drivers pass their tests. But businesses warn the solution won't be quick or easy.

Ian Wright, chief executive of industry group the Food and Drink Federation, said the driver drought is part of a huge shakeup of labor markets and supply chains around the world.

"It's going to get worse," Wright said at a recent seminar organized by the Institute for Government think-tank. "We should get used to the fact that occasionally empty shelves ... is going to be the new normal."

For trainee truck drivers, that's good news. Wages are up, and some firms are offering free training, signing bonuses and other incentives. A driver for a big supermarket can make up to 50,000 pounds (\$68,000) a year, more than many teachers, police officers or even lawyers.

"It's absolutely a drivers' market right now," Bolton said. "They know they're in demand. And it's sort of turned into a bit of a bidding auction for lorry drivers at the moment — which is great because it's been a long time coming."

Cadhene Lubin-Hewitt, a London bus driver preparing to take his truck-driving test, started thinking about making the move when he got laid off last year because of the pandemic. News of the truck driver shortage convinced him he is doing the right thing.

The 32-year-old hopes to work for a big supermarket or delivery company, and says he doesn't worry about the loneliness, or the stress. He finds long-distance driving relaxing, "like going to a spa."

"I wouldn't find it boring at all," he said. "I'd just blast (the music) higher, and go down the road smiling and singing."

German parties rally supporters ahead of Sunday election

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

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BERLIN (AP) — Germany's political parties prepared to rally their supporters and win over undecided voters Friday, two days before a national election that will determine who succeeds Chancellor Angela Merkel after 16 years in power.

Merkel's center-right Union bloc, with Armin Laschet as its candidate for chancellorship, has made small gains in the polls in recent weeks. But it remains narrowly behind the center-left Social Democrats, headed by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz.

The Greens, who are putting forward their own candidate for chancellor for the first time, are trailing in third place, but could play kingmakers when it comes to forming a government.

Experts say one reason why this year's German election is tighter and less predictable than usual is that the candidates are relative unknowns to most voters.

"It's certainly not the most boring election," said Hendrik Traeger, a political scientist at the University of Leipzig. "There were those in which Angela Merkel stood as the incumbent and it was simply a question of who she would govern with."

This time, Merkel's party has struggled to energize its traditional base, which has so far failed to warm to Laschet, the governor of North Rhine-Westphalia state.

"The key question is whether these voters will overcome the Laschet hurdle and vote for the Union despite Laschet" said Peter Matuschek of the polling company Forsa. "Or will they abstain from the vote or even choose another party."

The Union bloc will have its last big rally in Munich, while the Social Democrats are holding an event in the western city of Cologne. The Greens will stage their rally in nearby Duesseldorf.

Climate change has been cited as the most important issue by many in this election. Youth groups plan to stage a large protest outside the chancellery Friday to demand tougher action on climate change.

The economy and the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic have also played an important role during the campaign, while migration has is less of a concern to many voters than in 2017.

Foreign policy — largely absent from the campaign — became an issue during the final television debate Thursday, with the Greens calling for a tougher stance on China.

About 60.4 million Germans are eligible to vote for a new parliament on Sept. 26. The strongest party will seek to form a governing coalition.

The business-friendly Free Democrats are angling for a place in government this time, after pulling the plug on coalition talks at the last minute after the 2017 election. The far-right Alternative for Germany is expected to do well in the east, but other parties refuse to work with them. The Left party remains a possible governing partner for the Greens and Social Democrats, a prospect that has drawn alarm from conservatives.

Election officials say many more people will vote by mail this year, due to the pandemic, but this is not expected to significantly affect the turnout.

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

Tiny San Marino votes in referendum on legalizing abortion

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Tiny San Marino is one of the last countries in Europe which forbids abortion in any circumstance — a ban that dates from 1865. On Sunday, its citizens can vote in a referendum calling for abortion to be made legal in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

The ballot proposal also calls for abortion to be permitted beyond that point if the woman's life is in danger or if her physical or psychological health are at risk due to fetal anomalies or malformations.

Women in San Marino seeking an abortion currently go to neighboring Italy, which legalized the procedure in 1978.

San Marino is one of the world's oldest republics and has a population of some 33,000. The referendum was set for Sunday after some 3,000 Sammarinesi, as its citizens are called, signed a petition drive. About

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65% of signatories are women, said Karen Pruccoli, a San Marino entrepreneur who spearheaded the drive.

"We had asked the political sphere to make a law" legalizing abortion, Pruccoli said in a telephone interview Thursday. "When we realized that the political sphere didn't want to enact a law, we decided to have the referendum."

No opinion polls have been conducted. If "Yes" votes prevail, San Marino's Parliament will need to legalize abortion.

Antonella Mularoni, who leads the "No" camp, noted that in San Marino, women, including minors, can receive free contraception at pharmacies as well as the so-called "morning-after" pill. But all abortion, for whatever reason, is a crime in San Marino, she stressed, and her campaign aims to keep it that way.

When Sammarinesi go to Italy to access health care that might not be available in their homeland — say, a transplant — their public health service reimburses them, but not for abortion since it's a crime in San Marino.

The "Yes" camp says that puts a financial burden on San Marino citizens who must go to Italy for an abortion.

Critics of San Marino's abortion ban say it also penalizes women who have been raped.

"If you are prevented or if your access to the support services is hampered because of the stigma — you may fear that because you don't want to make it known that you do not intend to carry on with the pregnancy — then it's even less likely that you will turn to the police and report the rape," said Joanna Nelles, executive secretary of the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanism for the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women. Nelles spoke with the AP in a phone interview Thursday.

Younger women in San Marino tend to be more favorable toward abortion rights, Mularoni acknowledged. "Many of the girls go to school in Italy. They consider (abortion) an acquired right."

Pruccoli said young men in San Marino are supportive as well. "They study in Italy, they study abroad. They are more forward-thinking. They understand that San Marino can't have a law that's more than 150 years old," she said, referring to the 1865 ban on abortion.

Other tiny countries in Europe are considering easing abortion bans. This spring, a lawmaker in European Union member nation Malta presented a bill to scrap part of the criminal code that makes abortion a crime punishable with up to three years in prison. The provision is rarely enforced, with the last known jailing for abortion occurring in 1980, according to Maltese officials.

In Gibraltar, a tiny British territory on Spain's southern tip, voters in June endorsed legislative changes to ease an abortion ban and allow the procedure up to the 12th week of pregnancy if a doctor deems the woman's physical or mental health is at risk or if there is risk of a fatal fetal abnormality.

Andorra, a microstate bordering Spain and France, has a total ban on abortion.

Italy's abortion law, fiercely lobbied against by the Catholic church, allows health personnel to refuse to perform abortions for reasons of conscience. In some southern regions, as many as 80% of gynecologists have claimed conscientious objector status, leaving a shortage of available personnel, particularly in rural areas.

"These percentages (for objectors) are higher than those for practicing Catholics in Italy" said Mularoni, who leads the "No" camp ahead of the referendum. She attributes Italian doctors' refusal to perform abortions to them seeing sonograms that show fetal organs. "It's not just an argument of being Catholic," she said. Catholic teaching forbids abortion.

Rights were slow to come for women in San Marino. They received the right to vote in 1960. A 1982 referendum seeking to end a law which stripped San Marino women of their citizenship if they married a foreigner failed. The law was later changed to allow them to keep their citizenship.

Nicole Winfield in Rome contributed to this report

CDC endorses COVID booster for millions of older Americans

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By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writers

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday endorsed booster shots for millions of older or otherwise vulnerable Americans, opening a major new phase in the U.S. vaccination drive against COVID-19.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky signed off on a series of recommendations from a panel of advisers late Thursday.

The advisers said boosters should be offered to people 65 and older, nursing home residents and those ages 50 to 64 who have risky underlying health problems. The extra dose would be given once they are at least six months past their last Pfizer shot.

However, Walensky decided to make one recommendation that the panel had rejected.

The panel on Thursday voted against saying that people can get a booster if they are ages 18 to 64 years and are health-care workers or have another job that puts them at increased risk of being exposed to the virus.

But Walensky disagreed and put that recommendation back in, noting that such a move aligns with an FDA booster authorization decision earlier this week. The category she included covers people who live in institutional settings that increase their risk of exposure, such as prisons or homeless shelters, as well as health care workers.

The panel had offered the option of a booster for those ages 18 to 49 who have chronic health problems and want one. But the advisers refused to go further and open boosters to otherwise healthy front-line health care workers who aren't at risk of severe illness but want to avoid even a mild infection.

The panel voted 9 to 6 to reject that proposal. But Walensky decided to disregard the advisory committee's counsel on that issue. In a decision several hours after the panel adjourned, Walensky issued a statement saying she had restored the recommendation.

"As CDC Director, it is my job to recognize where our actions can have the greatest impact," Walensky said in a statement late Thursday night. "At CDC, we are tasked with analyzing complex, often imperfect data to make concrete recommendations that optimize health. In a pandemic, even with uncertainty, we must take actions that we anticipate will do the greatest good."

Experts say getting the unvaccinated their first shots remains the top priority, and the panel wrestled with whether the booster debate was distracting from that goal.

All three of the COVID-19 vaccines used in the U.S. are still highly protective against severe illness, hospitalization and death, even with the spread of the extra-contagious delta variant. But only about 182 million Americans are fully vaccinated, or just 55% of the population.

"We can give boosters to people, but that's not really the answer to this pandemic," said Dr. Helen Keipp Talbot of Vanderbilt University. "Hospitals are full because people are not vaccinated. We are declining care to people who deserve care because we are full of unvaccinated COVID-positive patients."

Thursday's decision represented a dramatic scaling back of the Biden administration plan announced last month to dispense boosters to nearly everyone to shore up their protection. Late Wednesday, the Food and Drug Administration, like the CDC panel, signed off on Pfizer boosters for a much narrower slice of the population than the White House envisioned.

The booster plan marks an important shift in the nation's vaccination drive. Britain and Israel are already giving a third round of shots over strong objections from the World Health Organization that poor countries don't have enough for their initial doses.

Walensky opened Thursday's meeting by stressing that vaccinating the unvaccinated remains the top goal "here in America and around the world."

Walensky acknowledged that the data on who really needs a booster right away "are not perfect." "Yet collectively they form a picture for us," she said, "and they are what we have in this moment to make a decision about the next stage in this pandemic."

The CDC panel stressed that its recommendations will be changed if new evidence shows more people need a booster.

The CDC advisers expressed concern over the millions of Americans who received Moderna or Johnson &

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Johnson shots early in the vaccine rollout. The government still hasn't considered boosters for those brands and has no data on whether it is safe or effective to mix-and-match and give those people a Pfizer shot.

"I just don't understand how later this afternoon we can say to people 65 and older, 'You're at risk for severe illness and death, but only half of you can protect yourselves right now,'" said Dr. Sarah Long of Drexel University.

About 26 million Americans got their last Pfizer dose at least six months ago, about half of whom are 65 or older. It's not clear how many more would meet the CDC panel's booster qualifications.

CDC data show the vaccines still offer strong protection against serious illness for all ages, but there is a slight drop among the oldest adults. And immunity against milder infection appears to be waning months after people's initial immunization.

For most people, if you're not in a group recommended for a booster, "it's really because we think you're well-protected," said Dr. Matthew Daley of Kaiser Permanente Colorado.

Public health experts not involved in Thursday's decision said it is unlikely people seeking third doses at a drugstore or other site will be required to prove they qualify.

Even with the introduction of boosters, someone who has gotten just the first two doses would still be considered fully vaccinated, according to the CDC's Dr. Kathleen Dooling. That is an important question to people in parts of the country where you need to show proof of vaccination to eat in a restaurant or enter other places of business.

Among people who stand to benefit from a booster, there are few risks, the CDC concluded. Serious side effects from the first two Pfizer doses are exceedingly rare, including heart inflammation that sometimes occurs in younger men. Data from Israel, which has given nearly 3 million people — mostly 60 and older — a third Pfizer dose, has uncovered no red flags.

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.

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Jailbreak shines light on mass incarceration of Palestinians

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — The cinematic escape of six prisoners who tunneled out of an Israeli penitentiary earlier this month shone a light on Israel's mass incarceration of Palestinians, one of the many bitter fruits of the conflict.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have passed through a military justice system designed for what Israel still portrays as a temporary occupation, but that is now well into its sixth decade and critics say is firmly cemented.

Nearly every Palestinian has a loved one who has been locked up in that system at some point, and imprisonment is widely seen as one of the most painful aspects of life under Israeli rule.

The saga of the six, who were eventually recaptured, also underscored the irreconcilable views Israelis and Palestinians hold about the prisoners and, more broadly, what constitutes legitimate resistance to occupation.

Israel classifies nearly every act of opposition to its military rule as a criminal offense, while many Palestinians see those acts as resistance and those engaged in them as heroes, even if they kill or wound Israelis.

Israel has granted limited autonomy to the Palestinian Authority, which administers cities and towns in the occupied West Bank and is responsible for regular law enforcement. But Israel has overarching authority and the military regularly carries out arrest raids even in PA-run areas. Israel seized the West Bank along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 war. The Palestinians seek an independent state in all three.

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SYMBOLS OF STRUGGLE

The Palestinian prisoners held by Israel include everyone from hardened militants convicted of suicide bombings and shootings that killed Israeli civilians to activists detained for demonstrating against settlements and teenagers arrested for throwing stones at Israeli soldiers.

Israel says it provides due process and largely imprisons those who threaten its security, though a small number are held for petty crimes. Palestinians and human rights groups say the system is designed to quash opposition and maintain permanent control over millions of Palestinians while denying them basic rights.

"Mass incarceration of Palestinians is a means to control the population, to stifle political activity, to keep a lid on turmoil and activism," said Dani Shenhar, the legal director of HaMoked, an Israeli group that advocates for the rights of detainees.

Four of the escapees were known militants convicted of deadly attacks against Israelis. Of the more than 4,600 Palestinians currently held by Israel in connection with the conflict — known as "security prisoners" — more than 500 are serving life sentences. A similar number are being held without charge in so-called administrative detention, perhaps the most controversial aspect of Israel's military justice system.

Qadoura Fares, head of the Prisoners Club, which represents current and former Palestinian prisoners, said they are all "freedom fighters."

"We see them as symbols of the Palestinian people's struggle," he said.

Alaa al-Rimawi, a Palestinian journalist with the Al-Jazeera television network, said he has spent a total of 11 years in prison in several stints over the last three decades over allegations related to political activism, but was never convicted of anything. The Israeli military declined to comment.

In 2018 he was arrested while working as the West Bank director of Al-Quds TV, which is affiliated with the Hamas militant group that runs the Palestinian territory of Gaza. Al-Rimawi says he is not a member of Hamas or any other group.

He said he was accused of "inciting violence against the occupation" by publishing stories about home demolitions and Palestinians killed by Israeli forces. He was released after 30 days but barred from working as a journalist for two months. On separate occasions earlier this year, he was briefly detained by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which also suppresses dissent.

"Existence in a prison is like being in the grave," al-Rimawi said. "And then you come out of it, and you feel like you came back to life after death."

'THE SYSTEM IS RIGGED'

Many are jailed for violations of the sweeping Israeli military orders that govern the 2.5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. Those include belonging to a banned organization and taking part in demonstrations, which are generally considered illegal. Hundreds of minors are arrested every year, mostly charged with stone-throwing.

Palestinians from the West Bank detained on security-related charges are prosecuted in military courts, while Jewish settlers living in the territory and held for similar offenses would be subject to civilian courts.

Palestinians are rarely released on bail, and most believe it's futile to contest charges in military trials that can drag on for months or years. Instead, most cases are settled by plea bargains, contributing to an estimated conviction rate of more than 95%.

Maurice Hirsch, who served as the top military prosecutor from 2013 to 2016, attributes the high conviction rate to resource-strapped prosecutors only bringing indictments when cases are solid. He says acquittals are not unheard-of, pointing to a recent case in which a Palestinian policeman was acquitted in the shooting death of an Israeli.

Defendants "choose to take the plea bargains because they understand that they will be convicted because of the evidence," he said.

He insists the trials are fair, saying they have the same procedural rules as Israeli civilian courts. All

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evidence must be shared with defense lawyers, and the military judges issuing verdicts are legal experts outside of the normal chain of command, he said.

But Shenhar said lawyers for Palestinians “know it’s futile to try to defend your client in court.”

“He won’t be acquitted in the end, and he’ll stay longer in prison,” he explained. “So the system is rigged.”

LIFE IN PRISON

Escape is extremely rare — the last major prison break was decades ago — but Israel has released hundreds of prisoners over the years as part of political negotiations or in exchange for captured Israelis.

Within the prisons, Palestinians have organized themselves and won concessions over the years through hunger strikes and other collective action, a source of frustration for many Israelis.

“We become hysterical, like overprotective mothers, reacting to every terrorist who threatens to fast,” Israeli journalist Kalman Liebskind wrote in a recent column in the Maariv newspaper.

Palestinians say life in prison is hard enough.

So-called security prisoners are usually barred from making phone calls, but some manage to smuggle in cellphones. Otherwise, their only link with the outside world is visits by lawyers and family members. Relatives coming from the West Bank require military permits, meaning that some prisoners, including minors, can go months without seeing loved ones, said Shenhar.

Al-Rimawi recalls a stint in prison in the mid-2000s in which his wife, who had given birth after his arrest, was unable to visit him for more than a year.

“My wife eventually visited me and brought a boy with her. I said, ‘Who is this?’ and she said, ‘It’s your son.’”

Associated Press reporter Jelal Hassan contributed to this report.

Haitians see history of racist policies in migrant treatment

By AARON MORRISON and ASTRID GALVAN Associated Press

The images — men on horseback, appearing to use reins as whips to corral Haitian asylum seekers trying to cross into the U.S. from Mexico — provoked an outcry. But to many Haitians and Black Americans, they’re merely confirmation of a deeply held belief:

U.S. immigration policies, they say, are and have long been anti-Black.

The Border Patrol’s treatment of Haitian migrants, they say, is just the latest in a long history of discriminatory U.S. policies and of indignities faced by Black people, sparking new anger among Haitian Americans, Black immigrant advocates and civil rights leaders.

They point to immigration data that indicate Haitians and other Black migrants routinely face structural barriers to legally entering or living in the U.S. — and often endure disproportionate contact with the American criminal legal system that can jeopardize their residency or hasten their deportation.

Haitians, in particular, are granted asylum at the lowest rate of any nationality with consistently high numbers of asylum seekers, according to an analysis of data by The Associated Press.

“Black immigrants live at the intersection of race and immigration and, for too long, have fallen through the cracks of red tape and legal loopholes,” said Yoliswa Cele of the UndocuBlack Network, a national advocacy organization for currently and formerly undocumented Black people.

“Now through the videos capturing the abuses on Haitians at the border, the world has now seen for itself that all migrants seeking a better tomorrow aren’t treated equal when skin color is involved.”

Between 2018 and 2021, only 4.62% of Haitian asylum seekers were granted asylum by the U.S. — the lowest rate among 84 groups for whom data is available. Asylum seekers from the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, have a similarly low rate of 5.11%.

By comparison, four of the five top U.S. asylum applicants are from Latin American countries — El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Honduras. Their acceptance rates range from 6.21% to 14.12%.

Nicole Phillips, legal director for the Haitian Bridge Alliance, said racism has long driven the American

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government's treatment of Haitian immigrants.

Phillips, whose organization is on the ground helping Haitians in Texas, says this dates back to the early 1800s, when Haitian slaves revolted and gained independence from France, and has continued through decades of U.S. intervention and occupation in the small island nation.

She said the U.S., threatened by the possibility of its own slaves revolting, both assisted the French and didn't recognize Haitian independence for nearly six decades. The U.S. also loaned money to Haiti so that it could, in essence, buy its independence, collecting interest payments while plunging the country into poverty for decades.

"This mentality and stigma against Haitians stems all the way back to that period," Phillips said.

The U.S. violently occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and backed former Haiti dictator Francois Duvalier, whose oppressive regime resulted in 30,000 deaths and drove thousands to flee.

While the U.S. long treated Cubans with compassion — largely because of opposition to the Communist regime — the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton took a hard line on Haitians. And the Trump administration ended Temporary Protected Status for several nationalities, including Haitians and Central Americans.

Over and over, the U.S. has passed immigration legislation that excluded Black immigrants and Haitians, and promoted policies that unfairly jeopardized their legal status in the country, advocates said.

When they manage to enter the U.S., Black immigrants say they contend with systemic racism in the American criminal legal system and brutality of U.S. policing that has been endemic for people from across the African diaspora.

The Black Alliance for Just Immigration, a national racial justice and immigrant rights group, largely defines Black immigrants as people from nations in Africa and the Caribbean. By that definition, AP's analysis of 2019 Department of Homeland Security data found 66% Black immigrants deported from the U.S. were removed based on criminal grounds, as opposed to 43% of all immigrants.

Nana Gyamfi, BAJI's executive director, said crimes of moral turpitude, including petty theft or turnstile jumping, have been used as partial justification for denying Black immigrants legal status. "We have people getting deported because of train fare," she said.

Leaders within the Movement for Black Lives, a national coalition of Black-led racial justice and civil rights organizations, have pointed to the treatment of Haitians at the border as justification for their broader demands for defunding law enforcement agencies in the U.S.

Last year, following the murder of George Floyd, the coalition proposed sweeping federal legislation known as the BREATHE Act, which includes calls to end immigration detention, stop deportations due to contact with the criminal legal system, and ensure due process within the immigration court system.

"A lot of times in the immigration debate, Black people are erased and Black immigrants are erased from the conversation," said Amara Enyia, a policy researcher for the Movement for Black Lives.

Ahead of a Thursday tour of the migrant encampment in Texas, civil rights leaders called for an investigation into the treatment of Black migrants at the border and for an immediate end to the deportation of Black asylum seekers.

The camp is "a catastrophic and human disgrace," the Rev. Al Sharpton said after an hourlong tour with several Black American leaders in Del Rio. "We will keep coming back, as long as is necessary."

At the border and in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where hundreds had already been sent on flights from the U.S., Haitians said there was no doubt that race played a major part in their mistreatment.

"They are grabbing people, they bother us, especially Haitians because they identify us by skin," said Jean Claudio Charles who, with his wife and year-old son, had been staying in an encampment on the Mexico side near Texas out of fear of arrest and deportation to Haiti.

Claude Magnolie, a Haitian citizen removed from the U.S. this week, said he didn't see Border Patrol agents treating migrants of other nationalities the way he and others were treated: "This is discrimination, that is how I call it, they are treating us very badly."

And in Miami, immigrant rights advocate Francesca Menes couldn't believe her eyes as she watched images of the asylum seekers being corralled by men on horseback.

"My family is under that bridge," Menes said, referring to a cousin, his wife and their newborn who recently met up in a small border town in Texas. It took Menes's cousin two months to make the trek from Chile, where he had been living with his brothers for three years to escape Haiti's political tumult, violence and devastation.

"It made me sick," Menes said. "This didn't happen with unaccompanied minors. You didn't see people riding on horseback, basically herding people like they were cattle, like they were animals."

Menes' outrage has only grown, as have her fears for her family. When she overheard her mother on the phone with family members this week, Menes said she wanted nothing more than to tell them to return to Chile.

"We've actually tried to discourage our families," she said. "People are looking for a better life. And we try to kind of ground our families: Do you know what it means to be Black in America?"

AP staffers Maria Verza in Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, Fernando Gonzalez in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jasen Lo in Chicago and Elliot Spagat from San Diego contributed. Morrison reported from New York City. Galvan reported from Phoenix. Both are members of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow Galvan on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/astridgalvan>. Follow Morrison on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

The AP Interview: Hungary committed to contentious LGBT law

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The right-wing populist government in Hungary is attracting conservative thinkers from the United States who admire its approaches to migration, LGBT issues and national sovereignty — all matters that have put the country at odds with its European partners, who see not a conservative haven but a worrying erosion of democratic institutions on multiple fronts.

Hungary's top diplomat has a few things to say about that.

In an interview Thursday with The Associated Press on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's meeting of world leaders, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said his country would not cede ground on policies that have caused the European Union to impose financial penalties and start legal proceedings against it over violations of the bloc's values.

"We do not compromise on these issues because we are a sovereign country, a sovereign nation. And no one, not even the European Commission, should blackmail us regarding these policies," Szijjarto said.

Topping the list of contentious government policies: a controversial Hungarian law that the EU says violates the fundamental rights of LGBT people. That led the EU's executive commission to delay billions in economic recovery funds earmarked for Hungary — a move Szijjarto called "a purely political decision" and "blackmail." The law, he says, is meant to protect children from pedophiles and "homosexual propaganda."

"We will not make make compromises about the future of our children," Szijjarto told the AP.

The law, passed in June, makes it illegal to promote or portray sex reassignment or homosexuality to minors under 18 in media content. It also contains provisions that provide harsher penalties for pedophilia. Critics say it conflates pedophilia with homosexuality and stigmatizes sexual minorities.

The measures were rejected emphatically by most European leaders. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte suggested Hungary's right-wing prime minister, Viktor Orban, should pull his country out of the EU if he is unwilling to abide by its collective principles.

The conflict is only the latest in a protracted fight with the bloc over what it sees as a sustained assault on democratic standards in Hungary — alleged corruption, a consolidation of the media and increasing political control over state institutions and the judiciary.

Last year, the EU adopted a regulation that links the payment of funds to its member states' compliance with rule-of-law standards — a measure fiercely opposed by Hungary's government, which argued it was a means to punish countries that break with the liberal consensus of Western Europe's countries.

The EU's concerns over Hungary straying from democratic values have gone unheard by several prominent American conservatives who have recently visited the country and extolled Orban's hardline policies

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on immigration and flouting of the EU's rules. On Thursday, Hungary hosted former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence at a conference in Budapest dedicated to family values and demography, both issues that form a central pillar of Hungary's conservative policy.

"One approach (to population decline) says that we should foster migratory flows toward Europe. This is an approach which we don't like," Szijjarto said.

In addition to firm opposition to immigration, Hungary's government emphasizes traditional family values and resistance to the widening acceptance of sexual minorities in Western countries. It also portrays itself as a beacon of "Christian democracy," and a bulwark against migration from Muslim-majority countries — positions on which it finds common cause with the former vice president.

"We know that Vice President Pence is very committed to this issue ... with a strong Christian background, so that is the reason we invited him," Szijjarto said.

Despite Hungary's position on immigration, it did evacuate more than 400 Afghan citizens who had assisted Hungarian forces in Afghanistan after that country's government fell to the militant Taliban last month. But Szijjarto said his country was "not going to take any more Afghans," and that no refugees would be allowed to cross Hungary's southern border into the EU.

"We will not allow anybody to come illegally to Europe," he told the AP.

Pence's visit to Hungary was only the latest in a series of anti-immigration right-wing Americans visiting Hungary, which its government increasingly portrays as a bastion of conservative values.

Tucker Carlson, the most popular host on the right-wing Fox News Channel, spent a week broadcasting from Budapest in August. While there, he heaped praise on Orban's approach to immigration, family values and national sovereignty. Carlson also made a visit by helicopter to tour a fortified fence along the country's southern border.

On Wednesday, the Hungarian state news agency reported that Budapest would host next year's Conservative Political Action Conference or CPAC, an annual gathering of primarily U.S. conservative activists and politicians.

Hungary's government, Szijjarto said, is "happy when American commentators come to Hungary. We are happy because when they come, they will see the reality."

"United States press or media outlets usually characterize us as a dictatorship, as a place where it's bad to stay, and they write all kinds of fake news about Hungary," he said. "But when these commentators come over, they can be confronted with the reality."

But while some of Hungary's admirers see it as a beacon, the EU's financial pressure — designed to change Budapest's behavior — represents increasing pushback from the other side of the political spectrum.

Last week, Hungary sold several billion dollars in foreign currency bonds in an effort to cover the costs of planned development projects even if EU recovery funds are not released. This, along with economic growth, means Hungary's budget is "in pretty good shape," Szijjarto said, allowing for flexibility with the country's central budget without the need for EU funds.

"Hungarian people should not be afraid of any kind of loss suffered because of this political decision by the European Commission," Szijjarto said.

With national elections next spring expected to be the biggest challenge to Orban's power since he was elected in 2010, Hungary's government is ramping up on divisive issues like migration, LGBT rights and the COVID-19 pandemic that can mobilize its conservative voting base.

On Thursday night, in his speech before world leaders at the United Nations, Szijjarto drew parallels between migration and the pandemic, saying the two together formed a "vicious circle" in which the health and economic impacts of the virus's spread would lead more people to "hit the road."

"The more people that are involved in the migratory flows, the more accelerated the virus will spread," he told the U.N. assembly. "So nowadays, migration does not only constitute the already well-known cultural, civilizational or security-related risks, but very serious health care risks as well."

Hungary's law affecting LGBT people will be accompanied by a national referendum ahead of elections on the availability of gender-change procedures to children and on sexual education in schools. Szijjarto

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said the referendum will provide "strong argumentation in the debates" with the EU over the law, and a mandate from voters for the government to hold strong on its policies.

"The best munition a government can have during such a debate," the minister said, "is the clear expression of the will of the people."

Justin Spike, based in Budapest, covers Hungary for The Associated Press. He is on assignment this week at the United Nations. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/jspikebudapest>

Buckle up: Arizona Republicans to show 2020 recount results

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Ten months after Donald Trump lost his 2020 reelection bid in Arizona, supporters hired by Arizona Senate Republicans were preparing to deliver the results of an unprecedented partisan election review that is the climax of a bizarre quest to find evidence supporting the former president's false claim that he lost because of fraud.

Nearly every allegation made by the review team so far has crumbled under scrutiny. Election officials in Arizona and around the country expect more of the same Friday from the review team they say is biased, incompetent and chasing absurd or disproven conspiracy theories.

"Every time Trump and his supporters have been given a forum to prove this case, they have swung and missed," said Ben Ginsberg, a longtime Republican election attorney and vocal critic of Trump's push to overturn the election.

The unprecedented partisan review — focused on the vote count in Arizona's largest county, Maricopa — is led and funded largely by people who already believe that Trump was the true winner, despite dozens of lawsuits and extraordinary scrutiny that found no problems that could change the outcome. They've ignored the detailed vote-counting procedures in Arizona law.

Despite being widely mocked, the Arizona review has become a model that Trump supporters are eagerly pushing to replicate in other swing states where Biden won. Pennsylvania's Democratic attorney general sued Thursday to block a GOP-issued subpoena for a wide array of election materials. In Wisconsin, a retired conservative state Supreme Court justice is leading a Republican-ordered investigation into the 2020 election, and this week threatened to subpoena election officials who don't comply.

No matter what the reviews in Arizona and elsewhere purport to find, they cannot reverse Biden's victory.

In Arizona, five people are scheduled to publicly outline the findings for two top Republicans in the state Senate chamber, including Doug Logan, the CEO of Cyber Ninjas, a cybersecurity consulting firm with no election experience. He served as the head of the review team despite his prior work to promote "stop the steal" election conspiracies.

Shiva Ayyadurai, who has developed a loyal following for promoting COVID-19 misinformation on social media, will discuss his review of signatures on mail ballots. It's not clear why he is qualified to do so. Ayyadurai, who is known as Dr. Shiva to his fans, has a Ph.D. but is not a medical doctor.

Ben Cotton, a computer forensics expert, will outline his analysis of vote-counting machines. Cotton has walked back his allegation that a key elections database was deleted.

Also scheduled to speak are Ken Bennett, a former Republican secretary of state, and Randy Pullen, a former chairman of the Arizona Republican Party. Both served as liaisons between the Senate and the review team.

They've been tight-lipped about their findings, but Bennett told a conservative radio host this week that he will "have a brief report about where Maricopa County failed to meet and comply with state statutes and election procedures."

A document purported to be a leaked draft of the Cyber Ninjas report circulated late Thursday. It said a hand count of ballots confirmed Biden's victory and showed a net gain of 360 votes for him. It also outlined a series of alleged shortcomings and recommended changes to state election laws.

Republican Senate President Karen Fann said in a text message the document was "a leaked draft from

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three days ago," but did not dispute its authenticity. She would not say if the findings from the draft had changed over the course of the week, citing a nondisclosure agreement.

"I have signed an NDA," she said. "I will not break my word."

The hand count's confirmation of a Biden victory goes against Trump's narrative that widespread election fraud cost him the election. It also undercuts claims by some of his closest allies that vote-counting machines from Dominion Voting Systems, which were used in Maricopa County, changed votes.

"Unfortunately, the report is also littered with errors & faulty conclusions about how Maricopa County conducted the 2020 General Election," Maricopa County officials said on Twitter.

The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors, controlled 4-1 by Republicans, has vehemently defended the vote count. Republican Chairman Jack Sellers has called the review "a grift disguised as an audit." GOP Supervisor Bill Gates said Thursday that the review's reliance on funding from out-of-state Trump allies means the findings won't be believable.

"The people who are funding this audit, the people who have called for this audit, we all know what they want it to find," Gates said. "They want it to find that Donald Trump won Maricopa County."

The Senate has agreed to spend \$150,000 on the audit, plus security and facility costs. That pales in comparison to the nearly \$5.7 million contributed as of late July by Trump allies.

Another Republican county supervisor, Clint Hickman, has been the subject of an outlandish conspiracy theory claiming a fire that killed 120,000 chickens at his family's egg farm west of Phoenix was a ruse to destroy evidence of Trump's victory.

Maricopa County's vote count was conducted in front of bipartisan observers, as were legally required audits meant to ensure voting machines work properly. A partial hand count spot check found a perfect match.

Two extra post-election reviews by federally certified election experts also found no evidence that voting machines switched votes or were connected to the internet. The Board of Supervisors commissioned the extraordinary reviews in an effort to prove to Trump backers that there were no problems, but Fann and others backing her partisan review were unpersuaded.

Election experts predict the report could misinterpret normal election procedures to claim something nefarious or elevate minor mistakes into major allegations of wrongdoing.

"They're minor procedural issues, and to try and amplify them to the point where they cast doubt on the election is nothing more than sore loserism," said David Becker, a former lawyer in the U.S. Department of Justice voting section who founded the Center for Election Innovation and Research.

Biden won Maricopa County by 45,109 votes and Arizona by 10,457 votes. Minor procedural issues wouldn't affect a margin that large, Becker said.

In July, Logan laid out a series of claims stemming from his misunderstanding of the election data he was analyzing, including that 74,000 mail ballots that were recorded as received but not sent. Trump repeatedly amplified the claims. But they had innocuous explanations.

Friday's report stems from a process that began nearly a year ago. Trump and his allies, after their claims of election fraud were repeatedly dismissed in court, searched frantically for a way to block the certification of Biden's victory on Jan. 6. Two top Republicans in the Arizona Senate came through, issuing a sweeping subpoena for all ballots in Maricopa County, the machines that counted them and a trove of election data. They said they would use the materials to conduct a "forensic audit."

A court battle over the validity of the subpoena delayed the delivery of materials until April, three months after Biden took office. The review was supposed to take about 60 days but has been repeatedly set back, most recently because Logan and four others on his team contracted COVID-19.

The review has energized Trump supporters who hope it will prove he was the legitimate winner of the election and lead to his return to the White House, despite extraordinary scrutiny finding no fraud that would affect the election's outcome.

Fann, the Republican Senate president, says the review is not intended to overturn the 2020 election but will find ways the Legislature can improve election laws.

Not all Republicans, even in the Senate, trust whatever results will come out of the review.

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"They're going to have to justify their existence, so they're going to have to come up with something," GOP Sen. Paul Boyer said Thursday. "And God knows what that is."

Associated Press writer Bob Christie contributed.

Great Wall of Lights: China's sea power on Darwin's doorstep

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

ABOARD THE OCEAN WARRIOR in the eastern Pacific Ocean (AP) — It's 3 a.m., and after five days plying through the high seas, the Ocean Warrior is surrounded by an atoll of blazing lights that overtakes the nighttime sky.

"Welcome to the party!" said third officer Filippo Marini as the spectacle floods the ship's bridge and interrupts his overnight watch.

It's the conservationists' first glimpse of the world's largest fishing fleet: an armada of nearly 300 Chinese vessels that have sailed halfway across the globe to lure the elusive Humboldt squid from the Pacific Ocean's inky depths.

As Italian hip hop blares across the bridge, Marini furiously scribbles the electronic IDs of 37 fishing vessels that pop up as green triangles on the Ocean Warrior's radar onto a sheet of paper, before they disappear.

Immediately he detects a number of red flags: two of the boats have gone 'dark,' their mandatory tracking device that gives a ship's position switched off. Still others are broadcasting two different radio numbers — a sign of possible tampering.

The Associated Press with Spanish-language broadcaster Univision accompanied the Ocean Warrior this summer on an 18-day voyage to observe up close for the first time the Chinese distant water fishing fleet on the high seas off South America.

The vigilante patrol was prompted by an international outcry last summer when hundreds of Chinese vessels were discovered fishing for squid near the long-isolated Galapagos Islands, a UNESCO world heritage site that inspired 19th-century naturalist Charles Darwin and is home to some of the world's most endangered species, from giant tortoises to hammerhead sharks.

China's deployment to this remote expanse is no accident. Decades of overfishing have pushed its overseas fleet, the world's largest, ever farther from home. Officially capped at 3,000 vessels, the fleet might actually consist of thousands more. Keeping such a sizable flotilla at sea, sometimes for years at a time, is at once a technical feat made possible through billions in state subsidies and a source of national pride akin to what the U.S. space program was for generations of Americans.

Beijing says it has zero tolerance for illegal fishing and points to recent actions such as a temporary moratorium on high seas squid fishing as evidence of its environmental stewardship. Those now criticizing China, including the U.S. and Europe, for decades raided the oceans themselves.

But the sheer size of the Chinese fleet and its recent arrival to the Americas has stirred fears that it could exhaust marine stocks. There's also concern that in the absence of effective controls, illegal fishing will soar. The U.S. Coast Guard recently declared that illegal fishing had replaced piracy as its top maritime security threat.

Meanwhile, activists are seeking restrictions on fishing as part of negotiations underway on a first-ever High Seas Treaty, which could dramatically boost international cooperation on the traditionally lawless waters that comprise nearly half of the planet.

Of the 30 vessels the AP observed up close, 24 had a history of labor abuse accusations, past convictions for illegal fishing or showed signs of possibly violating maritime law. Collectively, these issues underscore how the open ocean around the Americas — where the U.S. has long dominated and China is jockeying for influence — have become a magnet for the seafood industry's worst offenders.

Specifically, 16 ships either sailed with their mandatory safety transponders turned off, broadcast multiple electronic IDs or transmitted information that didn't match its listed name or location — discrepancies that are often associated with illegal fishing, although the AP saw no evidence that they were engaged

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in illicit activity.

Six ships were owned by companies accused of forced labor including one vessel, the Chang Tai 802, whose Indonesian crew said they had been stuck at sea for years.

Another nine ships face accusations of illegal fishing elsewhere in the world while one giant fuel tanker servicing the fleet, the Ocean Ruby, is operated by the affiliate of a company suspected of selling fuel to North Korea in violation of United Nations sanctions. Yet another, the Fu Yuan Yu 7880, is operated by an affiliate of a Nasdaq-traded company, Pingtan Marine Enterprise, whose Chinese executives had their U.S. visas cancelled for alleged links to human trafficking.

"Beijing is exporting its overfishing problem to South America," said Captain Peter Hammarstedt, director of campaigns for Sea Shepherd, a Netherlands-based ocean conservation group that operates nine well-equipped vessels, including the Ocean Warrior.

"China is chiefly responsible for the plunder of shark and tuna in Asia," says Hammarstedt, who organized the high seas campaign, called Operation Distant Water, after watching how illegal Chinese vessels ravaged poor fishing villages in West Africa. "With that track record, are we really supposed to believe they will manage this new fishery responsibly?"

'WILD WEST'

The roar of the mechanical jiggers pulling the catch from the ocean's depths can be heard hundreds of feet away before you come upon the floating slaughterhouse. The stench too, as the highly aggressive squid blow their ink sacs in one final, futile effort to avoid their inexorable fate.

By all accounts, the Humboldt squid — named for the nutrient-rich current found off the southwest coast of South America — is one of the most abundant marine species. Some scientists believe their numbers may even be thriving as the oceans warm and their natural predators, sharks, and tuna, are fished out of existence.

But biologists say they've never faced a threat like the explosion of industrial Chinese fishing off South America.

The number of Chinese-flagged vessels in the south Pacific has surged 10-fold from 54 active vessels in 2009 to 557 in 2020, according to the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization, or SPRFMO, an inter-governmental group of 15 members charged with ensuring the conservation and sustainable fishing of the species. Meanwhile, the size of its catch has grown from 70,000 tons in 2009 to 358,000.

Fishing takes place almost exclusively at night when each ship turns on hundreds of lights as powerful as anything at a stadium to attract swarms of the fast-flying squid. The concentration of lights is so intense it can be seen from space on satellite images that show the massive fleet shining as brightly as major cities hundreds of miles away on land.

"It really is like the Wild West," said Hammarstedt. "Nobody is responsible for enforcement out there."

Experts warn that even a naturally bountiful species like squid is vulnerable to overfishing. Although it's unknown how many Humboldt squid remain, they point to past disappearance of squid stocks in Argentina, Mexico, and Japan as cause for concern.

"If you have a vast resource and it's easy to take, then it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that this is limitless, that it's just stars in the sky," said William Gilly, a Stanford University marine biologist. "If humanity puts its mind to it, there's no limit to the damage we can do."

Gilly said squid are also a key barometer of marine environments — a biological conveyor belt transporting energy from tiny carbon-absorbing plankton to longer-living predators, like sharks and tuna, and ultimately, human beings.

"The people who fish squid are happy," said Daniel Pauly, a prominent marine biologist who in the 1990s coined the phrase "fishing down the food web" to describe how previously spurned chum were replacing bigger fish on dinner plates. "But this is part of the gradual degradation of the ocean."

'DARK' FLEET

For dozens of Chinese ships, the journey to the warm equatorial waters near the Galapagos began months earlier, on the opposite side of South America, where every Austral summer, between November

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and March, hundreds of foreign-flagged jiggers scoop up untold amounts of shortfin squid in one of the world's largest unregulated fishing grounds.

The plunderer's paradise lies between Argentina's maritime border and the British-held Falkland Islands in a Jamaica-sized no man's land where fishing licenses, catch limits and oversight are non-existent.

Between November 2020 and May 2021, a total of 523 mostly Chinese fishing vessels — 35% more than the previous season — were detected just beyond the boundary of Argentina's 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone, according to satellite data analyzed by Windward, a maritime intelligence firm.

Of that amount, 42% had turned off at least once their safety transponders. Meanwhile, 188 of those same vessels showed up near the Galapagos, including 14 Chinese vessels that went offline in both oceans for an average 34 hours each time.

It's impossible to know what the ships did while they were 'dark.' However, sometimes ships turn off their tracking systems to avoid detection while carrying out illicit activities. Argentine authorities over the years have spotted numerous Chinese vessels off the grid fishing illegally in its waters, once even firing shots into and sinking a trawler that tried to ram its pursuer near a whale breeding ground.

Under a United Nations maritime treaty, to which China is a signatory, large ships are required to continuously use what's known as an automated identification system, or AIS, to avoid collisions. Switching it off, except in cases of an imminent threat, for example hiding from pirates, is a major breach that should lead to sanctions for a vessel and its owner under the law of the nation to which it is flagged.

But China until now appears to have done little to reign in its distant water fleet.

The Chinese fleet is able to fish for sometimes years at a time because they can offload their catch at sea into a network of giant refrigerated vessels, or reefers, capable of hauling more than 15,000 cubic meters of fish — enough to fill six Olympic-sized pools — to port. Giant tankers provide cheap fuel heavily subsidized by the Chinese government, adding to the environmental burden.

The 12 reefers active in the Pacific this past July as the Ocean Warrior was patrolling nearby had at least 196 encounters with fishing vessels during that period, according to satellite data analyzed by Global Fishing Watch, a group that supports sustainable fishing.

Nearly 11% of total U.S. seafood imports in 2019 worth \$2.4 billion came from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, according to the U.S. International Trade Commission, a federal agency. Outside the U.S., the problem is believed to be even worse.

"We don't know if things are getting better or worse," said Boris Worm, a marine biologist at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. "It basically comes down to who you believe."

FISHY BUSINESS?

In the seascape of the world's oceans, Pingtan Marine and its affiliates have left in their wake accusations of illegal fishing by authorities in places as diverse as South Africa, Timor Leste, Ecuador, and Indonesia.

But the company is not some rogue outfit. It boasts China's second-largest overseas fleet, trades shares on the U.S. Nasdaq, and in its home port of Fuzhou, across from Taiwan, is helping build one of the world's largest fish factories. The company's Chairman and CEO, Zhou Xinrong, appears to have built the fishing empire through massive state loans, generous subsidies, and Communist Party connections.

"It's not just a fishing company — it's practically a Chinese government asset," said Susi Pudjiastuti, who as Indonesia's former fishing minister between 2014 and 2019 was lionized by conservationists for destroying hundreds of illegal foreign fishing vessels.

Fifty-seven of Pingtan's ships, including three refrigerated carrier vessels, all of them owned directly or through an affiliate, were registered by China in the past few years to fish in the south Pacific, according to C4ADS, a Washington-based think tank that last year authored a report on illegal fishing.

Pingtan in its last earnings report almost a year ago said that it had \$280 million in outstanding loans from the China Development Bank and other state lenders. One of the country's biggest state investment funds owns an 8% stake in one of its subsidiaries. Meanwhile, Chinese state subsidies to Pingtan for the building of vessels totaled \$29 million in the first nine months of last year — about a third of all its purchases of property and equipment.

As part of Pudjiastuti's crackdown, vessels operated by two Pingtan affiliates in Indonesia had their li-

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censes revoked for a slew of alleged offenses ranging from falsifying catch reports, illegal transshipments, and the smuggling of endangered species.

Those affiliates, PT Avona Mina Lestari and PT Dwikarya Reksa Abad, are managed or partly owned by members of Zhou's immediate family, Pingtan disclosed in filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Crew members of one vessel told authorities they had been "gang-beaten," hit on their heads with a piece of steel and subjected to "torture" by their Chinese supervisors, according to an Indonesian court ruling upholding the ban on the Pingtan affiliate. A Panama-flagged carrier vessel, the Hai Fa, whose listed owner is a different Pingtan affiliate based in Hong Kong, was seized in 2014 with 900 tons of illegally caught fish, including endangered shark species. A lenient court later released the vessel from custody after it paid a \$15,000 fine.

An entity majority-owned by Zhou's wife also operates the Fu Yuan Yu Leng 999, which was caught in 2017 transiting through the Galapagos Marine Reserve with more than 6,000 dead sharks on board.

Another Pingtan-affiliated vessel spotted by AP, the Fu Yuan Yu 7880, was arrested by South Africa in 2016 after it tried to flee a naval patrol that suspected it of illegal squid fishing. The ship's officers were found guilty of possessing illegal gear and disobeying a maritime authority but were released after paying a fine.

"The more you learn about these vessels and equipment, the harder it is to sleep at night," said Pudjiastuti. "These South Americans should wake up as early as possible."

Pingtan didn't answer a detailed list of questions. "Pingtan doesn't answer questions raised by the media," the company said in an e-mail.

As scandal has followed Pingtan and its affiliates around the world, investors have dumped the company's stock.

In June, Nasdaq sent notice that it would delist the company unless its share price, which has tumbled nearly 80% the last two years, crawls back above a minimum \$1 threshold soon. The threat of delisting followed the abrupt resignation of the company's independent auditor, which warned about Pingtan's ability to continue doing business. Pingtan told the SEC that its failure to file any quarterly reports for nearly a year was due to a "material weakness" in its ability to conform with U.S. accounting practices.

One decision that Pingtan has also not commented on is the surprise U.S. sanction of its top executives. Two U.S. officials said that CEO Zhou Xinrong and his wife were among the 15 individuals who had their visas cancelled last year for being "complicit" in illegal fishing and human trafficking. The decision, taken in the waning days of the Trump administration, was the first of its kind specifically targeting abuse in the fishing industry, the two officials said on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

BULLYING CHINA?

Criticism of China's distant water fishing fleet has spurred some reform.

Last year, China imposed stricter penalties on companies caught breaking the rules, including manipulating their transceivers. They've also boosted reporting requirements for transshipments on the high seas, banned blacklisted vessels from entering Chinese ports and ordered off-season moratoriums on squid fishing in the high seas near Argentina and Ecuador.

The measures, while far from a panacea, nonetheless mark a giant leap for the world's largest consumer and producer of fish products.

"I used to go to conference and officials would be in just complete denial," said Tabitha Mallory, a China scholar at the University of Washington who specializes in the country's fishing policies. "At least now, they're acknowledging that their fishing is unsustainable, even if it's just to counter all the negative push-back they're getting around the world."

China's Foreign Ministry, the Bureau of Fisheries and the China Overseas Fisheries Association, an industry group, didn't respond to multiple requests for an interview nor a detailed list of questions.

China's distant water fishing fleet launched in the 1980s as a response to depleting fish stocks at home and the need to feed its fast-growing population. But it's evolved into a thriving industry and an important part of China's geopolitical push to secure access to the world's dwindling natural resources, says Mallory.

In the eastern city of Zhoushan, home to China's largest distant water fleet, an ultramodern "Squid Mu-

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seum” opened this year that allows visitors to follow the squid on a sanitized, adventure-filled 3D journey from the ocean depths to the giant jiggers and their eventual processing back at home into squid rings.

Researcher Pauly believes that much of the criticism of the Chinese fleet’s fishing around the Galapagos is attributed to growing anti-China sentiment in the U.S. and sensitivities about Beijing’s growing presence in what has traditionally been considered Washington’s backyard.

He said imposing restrictions on high seas fishing, something that could be discussed as part of the negotiations over a high seas treaty, would be a more effective way to curtail China’s activities than bullying.

“China doesn’t do anything that Europe has not done exactly the same way,” said Pauly. “The difference is that everything China does is big, so you see it.”

CHINA’S STONEWALLING

Seafood companies in the U.S. have started to take note of the risks posed by China’s expansion and are seeking to leverage their market power to bring more transparency to the sourcing of squid.

This year, a group of 16 importers and producers banded together to devise a common strategy to root out abuse. Much of their focus is on China, which is responsible for around half of the \$314 million in squid that the U.S. imported in 2019, the bulk served up as fried calamari in restaurants

The initiative is opening something of a Pandora’s Box for an industry that until now has thrived in the shadows without a lot of attention focused on its supply chains. The bulk of China’s squid harvest comes from the high seas, where there’s little in the way of controls like there is in many coastal waters.

“Right now, it’s the perfect situation” for would-be violators, said Alfonso Miranda, executive director of CALAMASUR, a group made up of squid industry representatives from Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador. “You can do whatever you want, even forced labor, nobody says anything, and you still have a market for your product.”

One alternative is to deploy technology, like publicly available AIS tracking data, to allow consumers to eventually identify the very vessel — its owner, fishing history and precise location — that caught the fish. In that way, the seafood industry can catch up with other manufacturers, from meat producers to the garment trade, where such practices are more common.

“The keyword is traceability,” said Ambassador Jean Manes, the top civilian at U.S. Southern Command in Miami. “When consumers insist on traceability, the market responds.”

However, boosting transparency is a challenge the industry has grappled with for decades.

Nobody knows for sure how much China is fishing on the high seas. Meanwhile, critics say regional fishing management organizations that operate on the basis of consensus are powerless to block China from registering vessels with links to illegal fishing and abuse.

Case and point: the Hua Li 8, which was greenlighted by China to fish in the south Pacific in 2018 — two years after it was the target of an international manhunt when it fled warning shots fired by an Argentine naval vessel that had caught it fishing illegally. Four of the Hua Li 8’s crew members were treated like “slaves,” Indonesian officials said at the time of the ship’s arrest pursuant to an Interpol “Purple Notice.”

The ship again was involved in suspicious fishing activity in 2019, this time in the western hemisphere, when it went dark for 80 hours as it was fishing along the edge of Peru’s exclusive economic zone. At the same time as the ship was offline, vessel movements were detected inside Peru’s waters, nighttime satellite data analyzed by Global Fishing Watch shows.

Craig Loveridge, executive secretary of the SPRFMO, declined requests for interviews. But in an e-mail, he pointed out that it’s up to each member to take into account the history of fishing operators when deciding whether or not to authorize a vessel to fly its flag.

To address concerns, several South American governments proposed at this year’s SPRFMO meeting a number of conservation measures already in place elsewhere.

Ideas included banning transshipments at sea, allowing countries to board other member states’ vessels on the high seas, and creating a buffer zone so coastal states are automatically alerted whenever a foreign vessel comes within 12 nautical miles of its territorial waters.

But each proposal was shot down by China, Miranda said.

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"China doesn't really seem interested in expanding protection," said Mallory. "They follow the letter of the law but not the spirit."

Moreover, once the catch is landed in China — or a warehouse anywhere — it's impossible to discern between legal and illegally caught fish.

"This is the black hole and having clarity there is really complex," said Miranda. "There are many things that can be done but you need to rely on credible data, which right now is lacking."

ALONE AT SEA

In the absence of more robust monitoring, the Ocean Warrior is something of a high seas' sheriff holding bad actors responsible. But it's surrounded by dozens of Chinese vessels accustomed to operating with little fear of reprisal.

As the sun prepares to set, and the Chinese squid fleet awakens in time for another night of fishing, the Ocean Warrior's crew sets out on a dinghy to inspect up close the Chang Tai 802. The ship is one of 39 vessels suspected of forced labor in a May 2021 report by Greenpeace based on complaints by workers to Indonesian authorities.

Six shirtless men, all of them Indonesian, gather on the Chang Tai's stern, gesturing friendly and looking comforted to see another human being so far from land.

But the mood quickly turns when one man, who the AP isn't identifying by name out of concern for his safety, shouts above the engine that his boss is "not nice" and asks, with only the foggiest of comprehension, whether the coronavirus pandemic that has ravaged the world has arrived in the U.S.

"I'm stuck here," he says with a sullen look before a visibly irritated Chinese supervisor appears and orders the men back to work. "I want to go home."

A day later, when the Ocean Warrior returns with a megaphone to facilitate the open water exchange, the Chinese supervisor moves quickly to block any talk with the English-speaking strangers. But as the Chang Tai pulls away, the man throws overboard a plastic bottle stuffed with his brother's phone number scribbled on a piece of paper.

Reached back home in Indonesia, the relative confesses to knowing precious little about how his brother was recruited or the conditions of his employment. Since leaving home three years ago, after graduating from a vocational school with few other job prospects, he's communicated with his family only sporadically.

He nonetheless worries for his brother's wellbeing, to the point that he recently pressed the agency that hired him to bring him back. The Greenpeace report cites a complaint by another anonymous Indonesian sailor on the same ship who, while ill with kidney pain due to drinking poorly treated seawater, was forced to sign a document or risk being marooned in Peru with no travel documents.

"I hope he can come back soon," says the man's brother, hesitant to reveal too much out of fear it could compromise someone's safety. "And I hope he's always healthy."

AP Writer Joe McDonald and AP researcher Yu Bing in Beijing, AP Global Investigations intern Roselyn Romero in San Luis Obispo, Calif., and AP Writers Edna Tarigan and Nini Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed to this report.

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Darnold, defense lead Panthers past Texans; McCaffrey hurt

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Thanks to another efficient performance from Sam Darnold and continued dominant play by their defense, the Carolina Panthers are 3-0 for the first time since 2015, when they reached the Super Bowl.

That combination was certainly too much for the Houston Texans in Carolina's 24-9 victory on Thursday night. But a hamstring injury to star running back Christian McCaffrey could cause serious adversity for Darnold and the Panthers' offense going forward.

"Losing Christian is tough, but I thought we did a great job of bouncing back," Darnold said. "We were

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able to put the first half behind us and do a good job in the second half.”

Darnold threw for 304 yards and ran for two touchdowns as the Panthers eased past the Texans despite losing McCaffrey early in the second quarter.

“In the second half we trusted Sam,” coach Matt Rhule said. “We were throwing more verticals and pushing the ball down the field.”

Carolina’s top-ranked defense put the squeeze on Houston rookie Davis Mills in his first career start, sacking him four times and holding him to 168 yards passing. Mills was pressed into action after Tyrod Taylor suffered a hamstring injury last Sunday and was placed on injured reserve.

The Panthers have allowed 573 yards and totaled 14 sacks in three games.

Darnold topped 300 yards passing for the second straight game as he continues to revitalize his career with the Panthers after being cast aside by the New York Jets.

McCaffrey came in leading the league in scrimmage yards, the same thing he did in the 2019 season. But he missed all but three games in 2020 with various injuries as the Panthers sputtered to 5-11 in Rhule’s first year.

Rhule said McCaffrey had a strained hamstring.

“I don’t know the severity level of it yet, to be quite honest with you,” Rhule said. “But I knew the minute it happened I said: ‘Hey, he’s out for the game.’ That’s all I knew. I saw him in there, and he’s moving around, but it’s a wait and see.”

Darnold rushed for Carolina’s first score in the first quarter and put the game away when he bulled in from 1 yard out to make it 24-9 with about four minutes left, losing his helmet in the process.

Mills threw for a touchdown and avoided big mistakes after he threw an interception in the second half of Sunday’s loss at Cleveland. But the Texans (1-2) couldn’t run the ball, finishing with 42 yards on the ground, and that forced Mills into tough down-and-distance situations as Houston punted six times.

“We just weren’t very good on offense tonight ... because we weren’t able to run the ball,” Texans coach David Culley said.

Mills’ favorite target was Brandin Cooks, who had nine receptions for 112 yards.

“I thought he was great,” Cooks said of the rookie. “He handled himself well.”

Darnold’s 5-yard run put the Panthers ahead early and McCaffrey was injured on Carolina’s next drive. Rookie Chuba Hubbard was stopped for no gain on fourth-and-1 from the Houston 5 to end that possession.

Hubbard, a fourth-round pick from Oklahoma State, finished with 11 carries for 52 yards and three receptions for 27 yards.

Anthony Miller grabbed a 1-yard touchdown pass about 30 seconds before halftime, but Joey Slye missed the extra point. Miller made his debut with the Texans after he missed the first two games with a shoulder injury.

Tommy Tremble dashed untouched into the end zone from 7 yards out to put Carolina ahead 14-6 in the third quarter. The teams traded field goals before Darnold’s short rush on third-and-goal capped a 12-play drive that put it away.

INJURIES

Carolina rookie CB Jaycee Horn, the eighth overall pick in the draft, suffered broken bones in his right foot, Rhule said. ... Panthers S Juston Burris pulled a groin muscle and Rhule said he would miss some time.

HE SAID IT

“We just didn’t execute. We missed tackles. They were just making plays they were supposed to make and we weren’t making plays we were supposed to make.” — Texans linebacker Christian Kirksey.

UP NEXT

Carolina visits Dallas on Oct. 3.

Houston visits Buffalo on Oct. 3.

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

Migrant camp shrinks on US border as more Haitians removed

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By MARÍA VERZA and JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — Haitian migrants waited to learn their fate at a Texas border encampment whose size was dramatically diminished from the almost 15,000 who gathered there just days ago in an effort to seek humanitarian protection in the U.S. but now face expulsion.

Families milled around makeshift shelters held up with giant reeds under a bridge between Del Rio, Texas, and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, as wind blew dust through the camp littered with plastic bottles and overflowing trash bags. Some migrants sat on plastic paint cans or the ground while others hung clothes to dry on the bamboo-like carrizo cane.

About 3,000 remained late Thursday, the Department of Homeland Security said. The number peaked Saturday as migrants driven by confusion over the Biden administration's policies and misinformation on social media converged at the border crossing trying to seek asylum.

The administration recently extended protections for more than 100,000 Haitians already in the U.S. — many of whom left their homeland after its devastating 2010 earthquake — citing security concerns and social unrest in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. But it doesn't apply to new arrivals.

The United States and Mexico appeared eager to end the increasingly politicized humanitarian situation at the border that prompted the resignation of the U.S. special envoy to Haiti and condemnation from civil rights leader Rev. Al Sharpton and UNICEF after images spread widely this week of border agents maneuvering their horses to forcibly block and move migrants.

Homeland Security said nearly 2,000 Haitians have been rapidly expelled on flights since Sunday under pandemic powers that deny people the chance to seek asylum. About 3,900 were being processed for possible return to Haiti or placement in U.S. immigration court proceedings. Others have been released in the U.S. with notices to appear in court or report to immigration authorities. Thousands have returned to Mexico.

Authorities expect the camp will be empty in about two days, according to a U.S. official with direct knowledge who was not authorized to speak publicly. Homeland Security had planned to ramp up to seven daily flights but flew only three Wednesday and five Thursday because of issues with contractors and mechanical delays, the official said. Seven flights were scheduled to Haiti on Friday, six on Saturday and seven on Sunday.

Across a river, Haitians who camped in Mexico awoke Thursday surrounded by security forces, with a helicopter thundering overhead and state police trucks spaced every 30 feet (9 meters) or so between their tents and the edge of the Rio Grande.

After anxious minutes of indecision, dozens of families hurried into the river to cross where there was only one municipal police vehicle, calculating it was better to take their chances with U.S. authorities.

Guileme Paterson, a 36-year-old from Haiti, appeared dazed. "It is a difficult moment," she said before beginning to cross with her husband and their four children.

"Things are going badly," said Michou Petion, carrying her 2-year-old son toward the river. Her husband carried bags of belongings and several pairs of sneakers dangled around his neck.

"The U.S. is deporting a lot to Haiti, now I don't know if I can enter or leave," Petion said.

Texas Department of Public Safety officials allowed journalists to visit the camp but prevented them from talking to migrants. For those who remained, food, shelter and medical care was being provided, U.S. officials said.

Sharpton said Thursday that he toured the camp and witnessed "a real catastrophic and human disgrace." A handful of protesters, some wearing camouflage hats from former President Donald Trump's 2020 campaign, shouted through Sharpton's remarks.

Sharpton vowed to "continue to come back ... and stand with our people and make sure asylum is treated in one way and one manner."

Some Haitians are being allowed to remain in the U.S. at least temporarily to seek asylum or to stay under some other claim to residency, with notices to appear later before immigration authorities. DHS officials declined to specify the number but said they are people with particular "vulnerabilities," mean-

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ing they are pregnant, have young children or the U.S. doesn't have capacity to hold them in detention, especially during the pandemic.

The government has no plans to stop expelling others on public health grounds despite pressure from Democratic lawmakers, who say migrants are being sent back to a troubled country that some left more than a decade ago.

The Trump administration enacted the policy in March 2020 to justify restrictive immigration policies in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The Biden administration has used it to justify the deportation of Haitian migrants.

A federal judge late last week ruled the rule was improper and gave the government two weeks to halt it, but the Biden administration appealed.

Officials said the U.S. State Department is in talks with Brazil and Chile to allow some Haitians who previously resided there to return, but it's complicated because some no longer have legal status there.

Meanwhile, the U.S. special envoy to Haiti, Daniel Foote, submitted a letter of resignation protesting the "inhumane" large-scale expulsions of Haitian migrants.

Foote, who was appointed in July, wrote to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, saying he was stepping down immediately "with deep disappointment and apologies to those seeking crucial changes."

"I will not be associated with the United States inhumane, counterproductive decision to deport thousands of Haitian refugees and illegal immigrants to Haiti, a country where American officials are confined to secure compounds because of the danger posed by armed gangs to daily life," he wrote. "Our policy approach to Haiti remains deeply flawed, and my policy recommendations have been ignored and dismissed, when not edited to project a narrative different from my own."

The career diplomat was known to be deeply frustrated with what he considered a lack of urgency in Washington and a glacial pace on efforts to improve conditions in Haiti.

State Department spokesman Ned Price disputed Foote's assertions, saying his proposals had been "fully considered in a rigorous and transparent policy process."

"Some of those proposals were determined to be harmful to our commitment to the promotion of democracy in Haiti and were rejected during the policy process. For him to say his proposals were ignored is simply false," Price said.

UNICEF said initial estimates show more than two out of three migrants expelled to Haiti are women and children, including newborns.

"Haiti is reeling from the triple tragedy of natural disasters, gang violence and the COVID-19 pandemic," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF's executive director, who said those sent back without adequate protection "find themselves even more vulnerable to violence, poverty and displacement — factors that drove them to migrate in the first place."

U.S. officials said about two-thirds of those at the camp are families and the rest are single adults.

But even as the number of Haitian migrants in Del Rio dwindled, a few groups of Cubans walked along a dirt road toward the camp Thursday.

As a group of three men approached, a Texas officer yelled out, "We got migrants!" One of the men said in Spanish: "We're here. We made it to the country of liberty."

Lozano reported from Del Rio, Texas. AP journalists Julio Cortez in Del Rio; Joshua Goodman in Miami; Matthew Lee in New York; Danica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

House Jan. 6 panel subpoenas Trump advisers, associates

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol has issued its first subpoenas, demanding records and testimony from four of former President Donald Trump's close advisers and associates who were in contact with him before and during the attack.

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In a significant escalation for the panel, Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., announced the subpoenas of former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, former White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications Dan Scavino, former Defense Department official Kashyap Patel and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon. The four men are among Trump's most loyal aides.

Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., wrote to the four that the committee is investigating "the facts, circumstances, and causes" of the attack and asked them to produce documents and appear at depositions in mid-October.

The panel, formed over the summer, is now launching the interview phase of its investigation after sorting through thousands of pages of documents it had requested in August from federal agencies and social media companies. The committee has also requested a trove of records from the White House. The goal is to provide a complete accounting of what went wrong when the Trump loyalists brutally beat police, broke through windows and doors and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory — and to prevent anything like it from ever happening again.

Thompson says in letters to each of the witnesses that investigators believe they have relevant information about the lead-up to the insurrection. In the case of Bannon, for instance, Democrats cite his Jan. 5 prediction that "(a)ll hell is going to break loose tomorrow" and his communications with Trump one week before the riot in which he urged the president to focus his attention on Jan. 6.

In the letter to Meadows, Thompson cites his efforts to overturn Trump's defeat in the weeks prior to the insurrection and his pressure on state officials to push the former president's false claims of widespread voter fraud.

"You were the president's chief of staff and have critical information regarding many elements of our inquiry," Thompson wrote. "It appears you were with or in the vicinity of President Trump on January 6, had communication with the president and others on January 6 regarding events at the Capitol and are a witness regarding the activities of the day."

Thompson wrote that the panel has "credible evidence" of Meadows' involvement in events within the scope of the committee's investigation. That also includes involvement in the "planning and preparation of efforts to contest the presidential election and delay the counting of electoral votes."

The letter also signals that the committee is interested in Meadows' requests to Justice Department officials for investigations into potential election fraud. Former Attorney General William Barr has said the Justice Department did not find fraud that could have affected the election's outcome.

The panel cites reports that Patel, a Trump loyalist who had recently been placed at the Pentagon, was talking to Meadows "nonstop" the day the attack unfolded. In the letter to Patel, Thompson wrote that based on documents obtained by the committee, there is "substantial reason to believe that you have additional documents and information relevant to understanding the role played by the Defense Department and the White House in preparing for and responding to the attack on the U.S. Capitol."

Scavino was with Trump on Jan. 5 during a discussion about how to persuade members of Congress not to certify the election for Joe Biden, according to reports cited by the committee. On Twitter, he promoted Trump's rally ahead of the attack and encouraged supporters to "be a part of history." In the letter to Scavino, Thompson said the panel's records indicate that Scavino was "tweeting messages from the White House" on Jan. 6.

Thompson wrote that it appears Scavino was with Trump on Jan. 6 and may have "materials relevant to his videotaping and tweeting" messages that day. He noted Scavino's "long service" to the former president, spanning more than a decade.

The subpoenas are certain to anger Republicans, most of whom have been content to move on from the insurrection and have remained loyal to Trump even after denouncing the attack. Only two Republicans sit on the panel, Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney and Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger.

In July, the committee held an emotional first hearing with four police officers who battled the insurrectionists and were injured and verbally abused as the rioters broke into the building and repeated Trump's lies about widespread election fraud.

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At least nine people who were there died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that immediately followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner later determined he died of natural causes.

The Metropolitan Police announced this summer that two more of their officers who had responded to the insurrection, Officers Kyle DeFreytag and Gunther Hashida, had also died by suicide.

Sub snub just one symptom of longtime French unease with US

By MATTHEW LEE and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Liberty and Fraternity, yes. Equality, not so much.

Born of a revolution fought for liberty, ties between the United States and its oldest ally, France, have long been fraternal, but they've also been marked by deep French unease over their equality.

French concerns about being the junior partner in the relationship boiled over last week when the U.S., Britain and Australia announced a new security initiative for the Indo-Pacific, aimed at countering a rising China. The AUKUS agreement scuttled a multibillion-dollar submarine deal that France had with Australia, but, more alarmingly for the French, pointedly ignored them, reinforcing a sense of insecurity that has haunted Paris since the end of World War II.

France has long bristled at what it sees as Anglo-Saxon arrogance on the global stage and has not been shy about rallying resistance to perceptions of British- and German-speaking dominance in matters ranging from commerce to conflict.

Successive American presidents through the decades have ignored French warnings about military involvements from Indochina to Iraq. France's lessons learned in Vietnam and Algeria didn't translate. And, when France has on occasion supported military interventions, notably in Syria in 2013, the Americans have pulled back.

Thus the latest affront, AUKUS, resulted in an explosion of ire, with the French loudly protesting and recalling their ambassadors to the U.S. and Australia while shunning the British in an overt manifestation of centuries of rivalry.

The French argue they are a natural partner for an initiative to blunt China's growing assertiveness in the Pacific, with far more territory, troops and influence in the region than Britain, whose empire has shrunk to just one inhabited island there. As such, they would have expected to have been consulted, particularly by a U.S. administration that ostensibly champions multilateral diplomacy and values allies.

"It leaves an unpleasant taste of being disdained and sidelined," said Pierre Vimont, a former French ambassador to the United States who is now at Carnegie Europe, a branch of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "France was totally left out by this new alliance even if we didn't want to be a party to it."

And, while Biden administration officials raised eyebrows over the intensity of the French reaction, many acknowledge that the announcement of the initiative was handled poorly with little to no thought to how Paris would respond.

Indeed, the joint U.S.-French statement following the Wednesday make-up call between Presidents Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron said "the two leaders agreed that the situation would have benefitted from open consultations among allies on matters of strategic interest to France and our European partners."

Privately, some American officials see the rollout of the submarine deal as clumsy. "Here's a new ANGLO SAXON bromance partnership with our besties, the Brits and Ozzies. No Gauls allowed," a veteran diplomat who was not authorized to speak publicly to the matter said in an email.

That sense of resentment is palpable among French academics and leaders, especially those who barely concealed their disgust at President Donald Trump and his brash and brusque "America First" ideology and heartily welcomed the arrival of Biden and his "America Is Back" mantra.

"France is disappointed because it didn't expect this from the Biden administration, which it thought

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would be much more multilateral and trans-Atlantic, and even Francophile," said Laurence Nardon of the French Institute for International Relations.

In fact, Biden's top diplomat, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, is a fluent French speaker who grew up and went to high school in Paris. And despite the fallout from AUKUS, Blinken still plans an official visit to Paris in early October.

Yet, French anger over the snub was such that a normally routine meeting between Blinken and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian on the sidelines of the annual U.N. General Assembly in New York this week became an issue, leading to uncertainty about whether it would actually take place.

When it finally did, on Thursday, a day after Biden spoke to Macron, the French foreign ministry said the meeting was aimed at "restoring confidence," but Le Drian said "it would take time to end the crisis between our two countries and would require actions."

The American account of the meeting made no mention of a "crisis" or "restoring confidence" but did give a nod to Indo-Pacific issues and "the need for close cooperation with France and other European allies and partners active in the region."

Charlton reported from Paris.

The closer: Biden in familiar role, to unite party on \$3.5T

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The time has come for President Joe Biden to close the deal — bring progressive and centrist Democratic coalitions together in Congress — if he has any hope of delivering on his domestic policy ambitions.

As the House and Senate chase endless deliberations over the president's big \$3.5 trillion vision for a rewrite of the nation's tax and spending priorities, Biden is being called upon by fellow Democrats to do what he is known for doing best: stitch together the party's diverse and often unwieldy factions into a working majority to pass what would be a landmark piece of legislation.

It just might be working.

"I think everybody in the room thought this was important to get done — I don't think there was any debate on that," said Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., after meetings at the White House this week.

It's a familiar role for Biden, who was not the most beloved or exciting candidate running for president in 2020, but the one whom Democrats from all wings of the party eventually rallied around. They saw in the seasoned leader their best option for achieving the common goal of defeating then-President Donald Trump.

Now Biden is gathering those same diverse voices that make up the party's oh-so-slim hold on Congress to do it again. This week, Biden hosted multiple constellations of lawmakers in the Oval Office, cajoling and wooing, handing out chocolate chip cookies wrapped in the presidential seal as he listened and made his case.

Biden was left to bridge the divide in his party, as he has often been before.

Unneeded to be said during the more than five hours of talks at the White House with three different groups of some 20-plus lawmakers is the political reality at stake. It's not only Biden's first-year presidential legacy but his party's political future on the line — the midterm election little more than a year away. With Republicans in lockstep opposition to Biden's plan, it's up to Democrats alone to get it approved.

As difficult as it will be to pass the "Build Back Better" plan, the package also has become too big to fail. "Failure," as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has repeatedly warned, "is not an option."

If ever there was a time for Biden to draw on his decades of experience, as a senator, vice president and now president to tap into the soft skills and hard-knuckled negotiation strategies he has honed during his long tenure, this would be it. And he is known to use both.

Congress faces a Monday deadline for a test vote on the first piece of his domestic plan, a \$1 trillion public works measure that has become snared in the deliberations over the broader package.

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Centrist Democrats want swift passage of the public works bill that's popular for its money for roads, broadband and public water projects. But progressives are withholding their votes for the \$1 trillion measure, viewing it as inadequate unless it's linked to the bigger, more expansive package.

Biden was in deal-making mode at the White House, telling progressives he would consider their appeal for a delay, while pressing centrists to wrap up their talks and settle on an overall price tag.

In his meeting with moderates, Biden went around the room to determine what they could live with as a top number, declaring, "Find it," Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., recalled the president saying. "Just work on it, give me a number."

"Everybody's just working in good faith right now — the president has everyone working in good faith," Manchin said afterward.

Biden's week has been outwardly dominated by foreign policy, including his speech at the U.N. General Assembly, his virtual international vaccine summit and his efforts to repair relations with France after a contentious submarine deal with Australia. But his lawmaker call sheet was never far from hand, as he worked down a list of Democrats to find out their sticking points.

As deadlines come into focus, so, too, has the White House's bottom line: No Democrat should want to be the holdout whose "no" vote tanks a top priority of the president.

"We're in agreement with 90% of the package," said Rep. Steven Horsford, D-Nev., who joined the White House meeting of moderates. "This is about delivering on a once in a generation investment."

It was never going to be easy.

The president had less trouble getting all the Democrats onboard with his first signature piece of legislation, a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill, back in March, due to the urgency of the pandemic and the measure's centrality to his agenda for the first 100 days. But even then, the president had to step in to smooth over Manchin's concerns at the 11th hour.

The White House approach this time had to be different.

Because this time, the benefits are less well-defined, in part because there are so many: dental care for older people, lower health insurance costs for Americans who purchase their own policies, tax breaks for child care, tuition-free community college, spending to fight climate change — the list goes on.

The total size of the package, at \$3.5 trillion, covers spending over 10 years and is to be paid for largely by higher taxes on corporations and people earning above \$400,000, pouring the money back into what Biden views as overdue investments in the nation's infrastructure and its people.

The hefty price tag has scared some moderate Democrats. Aides concede the total will almost certainly shrink — perhaps considerably — but it's not clear which elements will fall out.

"What's important to understand about President Biden is that he is more inclined to have one-on-one, private conversations with people than to have a public debate because that's how he's always gotten things done and that's how he's going to get this done," said Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wisc.

"As much as I know that mudwrestling would be great for primetime news, that's not how he operates. And I think that's why he's going to be effective and get this done."

On Thursday, Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced they had reached a framework with the White House over how to pay for the package — essentially, a menu of options from the tax-writing committees that can be dialed up or down, depending on the size of the final package.

Lawmakers are planning to work nonstop in the days ahead, perhaps over the weekend, to meet Biden's request to have the framework wrapped up in time for Monday's test vote.

Biden has tasked them to prioritize and deliver the good over the perfect, reminiscent of the choice he gave voters in casting their ballots for him last fall.

Now, the Democrats are asked again to rally around what they may feel is imperfect, all because the alternatives are too bleak to face.

Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writer Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Women's voices at UN General Assembly few, but growing

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — With cascading crises casting a pall over the proceedings at this year's United Nations General Assembly, Slovakian President Zuzana Čaputová had this reminder on the first day of debate: "We cannot save our planet if we leave out the vulnerable — the women, the girls, the minorities."

But gender parity at the world's preeminent forum of leaders still seems far out of sight. Eight women are set to speak at the U.N. General Assembly on Friday. That's more than double the number — five — of women that spoke across the first three days of the summit.

On Friday, three vice presidents and five prime ministers — including Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina and New Zealand's Jacinda Arden — will take the rostrum or give their address in a prerecorded video.

"As the first female president in the history of my country, the burden of expectation to deliver gender equality is heavier on my shoulder," said Samia Suluhu Hassan, the president of Tanzania. When it comes to such equality, she said, "COVID-19 is threatening to roll back the gains that we have made,"

Hassan was the lone woman to address the General Assembly on Thursday.

Despite those 13 women making up less than 10% of speakers over the first four days, the 13 represent an increase from last year, when just nine women spoke over the course of the session. There are also three more female heads of state or heads of government — 24 — than there were at this point in 2020.

"There can be no democracy, no security and no development without one-half of the humankind," Estonia President Kersti Kaljulaid said Wednesday, also underscoring women's vulnerability in society.

The theme of vulnerability has been at the forefront during a week haunted by the ever-looming specters of climate change, coronavirus and conflict. Most of the speeches have taken on the tenor of pleas issued at the precipice, battling away the summit's theme of "building resiliency through hope."

Dire predictions were not limited to the General Assembly. At a U.N. Security Council meeting Thursday, the high-level officials urged stepped-up action to address the security implications of climate change and make global warming a key part of all U.N. peacekeeping operations. They said warming is making the world less safe, pointing to Africa's conflict-plagued Sahel region and Syria and Iraq.

Scores of leaders have already spoken, and many have left New York altogether. But some of the most anticipated countries have yet to deliver their addresses: North Korea, Myanmar and Afghanistan — all perennially but also lately much in the news — are expected to close out the session Monday afternoon.

Friday alone promises fireworks, with a slate of speakers from countries roiled by internal and external conflict.

The president of the ethnically divided Cyprus is scheduled to open the proceedings, soon followed by a Lebanon also riven by internal strife. The morning plenary will also see addresses from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the prime minister of Armenia, lambasted Thursday in Azerbaijan's speech in the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

The afternoon will see both Albania and Serbia, perpetually at odds over Kosovo, as well as a Pakistan feeling pressure on its eastern border with India and western border with Afghanistan.

"Their victory has instilled a tremendous hope. It's a shot in the arm, at a time when we are not even allowed to speak openly," a former Kashmiri rebel who has fought against India told The Associated Press last week of the Taliban's ascension in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and India, which goes Saturday, are historically eager users of the "right of reply" function, which allows diplomats to lob polemics defending their countries in response to speeches from unfriendly nations. That window of opportunity opens Friday night, after the leaders' speeches conclude.

Migrant camp along Texas border shrinks as removals ramp up

By MARÍA VERZA and JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — Haitian migrants milled around makeshift shelters held up with giant reeds, as wind blew dust through the camp littered with plastic bottles and overflowing trash bags. Some migrants sat on plastic paint cans or the ground while others hung clothes to dry on the bamboo-like carrizo cane.

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All waited to learn their fate at a dramatically diminished Texas border encampment where almost 15,000 migrants had gathered just days ago under a bridge between Del Rio, Texas, and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico.

About 4,000 remained on Thursday, Department of Homeland Security officials said. The number had peaked on Saturday, as migrants driven by confusion over the Biden administration's policies and misinformation on social media converged at the crossing.

But the United States and Mexico appeared eager to end the increasingly politicized humanitarian situation that prompted the resignation of the U.S. special envoy to Haiti and fresh condemnation from civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton and UNICEF.

DHS officials said about 1,400 migrants had been sent to Haiti on 13 flights, rapidly expelled under the pandemic public health authority known as Title 42. Another 3,200 were in U.S. custody and being processed, while several thousand have returned to Mexico, DHS officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity to brief journalists about an ongoing operation.

Mexico's immigration agency had estimated late Wednesday there were as many as 600 migrants in Ciudad Acuña. The riverside camp appeared to hold that many at its peak, while other migrants were scattered through the city in hotels and private homes. A city official said Wednesday that Mexican authorities had removed about 250 Haitian migrants from the city since Sunday evening. Still, "several thousand" migrants returning to Mexico from the Del Rio camp seemed an exaggeration.

Haitians camped in Mexico awoke Thursday surrounded by security forces, with a helicopter thundering overhead and state police trucks spaced every 30 feet or so between their tents and the water's edge.

After anxious minutes of indecision, dozens of families hurried into the river to cross at a point where there was only one municipal police vehicle, calculating it was better to take their chances with U.S. authorities.

Guileme Paterson, a 36-year-old from Haiti, appeared dazed. "It is a difficult moment," she said before beginning to cross the Rio Grande with her husband and their four children.

"Things are going badly," said Michou Petion, carrying her 2-year-old son in her arms toward the river. Her husband carried bags of belongings and several pairs of sneakers dangled around his neck.

"The U.S. is deporting a lot to Haiti, now I don't know if I can enter or leave," Petion said.

Texas Department of Public Safety officials allowed journalists to visit the camp later Thursday but prevented them from talking to migrants. For those who remained, food, shelter and medical care was being provided to those who need it, U.S. officials said.

At one point, two men riding in an ATV emblazoned with "Homeland Security" approached a group of women holding infants and said in Spanish: "We have food for the baby." The women approached the men, who handed them a small container.

A low dam that had been used to cross from Mexico into the U.S. was closed, and a worker picked up mounds of discarded belongings that included cellphone chargers, clothing and Styrofoam containers.

Sharpton said Thursday that he toured the camp and witnessed "a real catastrophic and human disgrace." A handful of protesters, some wearing camouflage hats from former President Donald Trump's 2020 campaign, shouted through the entirety of Sharpton's remarks.

"Del Rio is not a racist city. Del Rio is a loving, caring community," one protester yelled while Sharpton spoke to reporters.

Sharpton vowed to "continue to come back... and stand with our people and make sure asylum is treated in one way and one manner."

Some Haitians are being allowed to remain in the U.S. at least temporarily to seek asylum or to stay under some other claim to residency, with notices to appear later before immigration authorities. DHS officials declined to specify the number but said they are people with particular "vulnerabilities," which can mean they have young children or are pregnant, or because the U.S. doesn't have capacity to hold them in detention, especially during the pandemic.

There are no plans to stop expelling other migrants under Title 42, despite pressure from Democratic lawmakers, who say migrants are being sent back to a troubled country that some left more than a decade ago.

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The provision was put in place by the Trump administration in March 2020 to justify restrictive immigration policies in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. But the Biden administration has used Title 42 to justify the deportation of Haitian migrants.

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

Officials said Thursday that the U.S. State Department also is in talks with Brazil and Chile to allow some Haitians who previously resided in those countries to return, but the issue is complicated because some no longer have legal status there.

Meanwhile, the U.S. special envoy to Haiti, Daniel Foote, submitted a letter of resignation protesting the "inhumane" large-scale expulsions of Haitian migrants.

Foote, who was appointed only in July, wrote Secretary of State Antony Blinken that he was stepping down immediately "with deep disappointment and apologies to those seeking crucial changes."

"I will not be associated with the United States inhumane, counterproductive decision to deport thousands of Haitian refugees and illegal immigrants to Haiti, a country where American officials are confined to secure compounds because of the danger posed by armed gangs to daily life," he wrote. "Our policy approach to Haiti remains deeply flawed, and my policy recommendations have been ignored and dismissed, when not edited to project a narrative different from my own."

The career diplomat was known to be deeply frustrated with what he considered a lack of urgency in Washington and a glacial pace on efforts to improve conditions in Haiti.

State Department spokesman Ned Price disputed Foote's assertions, saying his proposals had been "fully considered in a rigorous and transparent policy process."

"Some of those proposals were determined to be harmful to our commitment to the promotion of democracy in Haiti and were rejected during the policy process. For him to say his proposals were ignored is simply false," Price said.

UNICEF also condemned the expulsions, saying initial estimates show more than two out of three migrants expelled to Haiti are women and children, including newborns, and about 40% in Del Rio are children.

"Haiti is reeling from the triple tragedy of natural disasters, gang violence and the COVID-19 pandemic," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF's executive director, who said those sent back without adequate protection "find themselves even more vulnerable to violence, poverty and displacement — factors that drove them to migrate in the first place."

DHS officials said about two-thirds of those under the bridge are families and the rest are single adults.

But even as the number of Haitian migrants gathered in Del Rio dwindled, a few groups of Cubans were seen walking along a dirt road toward the camp at the bridge on Thursday.

As a group of three men approached, a DPS officer yelled out, "We got migrants!" One of the men said in Spanish: "We're here. We made it to the country of liberty."

Verza reported from Ciudad Acuña. AP journalists Julio Cortez in Del Rio, Texas, Joshua Goodman in Miami, Matthew Lee in New York, Danica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

Bad Bunny tops Billboard Latin Music Awards with 10 trophies

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) — Bad Bunny is the champion of the Billboard Latin Music Awards, taking home artist of the year honors and a whopping 10 trophies.

Among the awards received Thursday by the urban music superstar were Hot Latin Song of the Year for "Dákiti" and album of the year for "YHLQMDLG."

"Thanks always to all the audience for all the support, for supporting the music we make, thanks to all those who worked on this anthem," said Bad Bunny after receiving the Hot Latin Song award. "Thank you for always being there for us. You are the ones who give us this award."

The awards were handed out at a ceremony at the Watsco Center in Coral Gables, Florida, that was

attended by Latin superstars Marc Anthony, Camila Cabello and more.

The Black Eyed Peas won Latin Pop Song of the Year for "Mamacita," while Karol G, Maluma and The Weeknd each won two awards apiece.

Performers included Rosalía, Juanes, Daddy Yankee, Karol G and Maná.

Tennessee grocery store attack: 'He kept on shooting'

By JONATHAN MATTISE and MARK HUMPHREY Associated Press

COLLIERVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A gunman attacked a grocery store in an upscale Tennessee suburb on Thursday afternoon, killing one person and wounding 12 others before he was found dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound at the store, authorities said.

Collierville Police Chief Dale Lane said the shooting broke out at a Kroger grocery in Collierville, a suburban community 30 miles (50 kilometers) east of Memphis. He said the gunman shot 13 others and himself, and that 12 of the victims were taken to hospitals, some with very serious injuries.

Kroger worker Brignetta Dickerson told WREG-TV she was working a cash register when she heard what at first she thought were balloons popping.

"And, here he comes right behind us and started shooting," Dickerson said. "And, he kept on shooting, shooting, shooting. He shot one of my co-workers in the head and shot one of my customers in the stomach."

Lane said police received a call about 1:30 p.m. about the shooting and arrived almost immediately, finding multiple people with gunshot wounds upon entering the building.

He said a police SWAT team and other officers went aisle to aisle plucking panicked people from hiding and taking them out safely. He said the shooter, whom he described as male, was found dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot.

"We found people hiding in freezers, in locked offices. They were doing what they had been trained to do: run, hide, fight," the chief said.

The identities of the shooter and the victims were not immediately released. Lane declined to reveal more about the suspect at a news briefing Thursday evening, citing the ongoing investigation and search warrants that will be carried out.

"We're going to carry this thing as far as we can to see and make sure that there's no else involved," Lane said, adding that there was "no credible evidence" that there was a second shooter.

The chief also said that, "As far as we know there wasn't any other incident that led up to this."

Dickerson, the employee, said her co-worker, who is in his 20s, was shot in the head and asked for his mother to be notified.

"I left her a voicemail that he was alert and talking," Dickerson said, unable to immediately reach her.

Another employee, Glenda McDonald, described the chaotic scene to WHBQ-TV.

"I was walking back towards the floral department and I heard a gunshot," she said. "It sounded like it was coming from the deli. And I ran out the front door and they had already shot the front door."

Jason Lusk, 39, had just left a tool store beside Kroger when he heard some women screaming in the parking lot about a shooter. He didn't see the gunman, but heard 10 to 15 rounds in rapid succession at the grocery store.

"It sounded like they were directly over my head," he said, adding he could feel the concussion of every shot and knew the weapon was powerful. Even at a distance of some 40 yards, he said, he worried that he and others around him were in grave danger.

"As the firing started, I dove in front of my vehicle onto the ground to provide the most cover for myself and instructed the people around me panicking, trying to get into the cars, not to get in their cars, but to actually hide," he said.

Then police arrived within minutes and "they swarmed that place," Lusk said. He added that he used his phone to record at least two of the gunman's final shots, and then a final gunshot on his last recording of the SWAT team on the scene.

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At a new briefing afterward, the police chief Lane called it a sad day for his department.

"I've been involved in this for 34 years and I've never seen anything like it," he said.

The suspect's vehicle was in the store's parking lot and remained part of the investigation, the chief said, adding investigators were trying to determine how events unfolded.

"Let's get through the investigation," Lane said. "Remember, we're two hours away from the most horrific event that's occurred in Collierville history."

Collierville is a growing suburb of more than 51,000 people with a median household income of about \$114,000, according to U.S. census figures. Set in a rural and historic area, the town square has largely become known for its boutiques and bed and breakfasts.

Earlier this year, Tennessee became the latest state to allow most adults 21 and older to carry handguns without first clearing a state-level background check and training. The measure was signed into law by Republican Gov. Bill Lee over objections from some law enforcement groups and gun control advocates concerned the measure would possibly lead to more gun violence.

The Kroger Co., based in Cincinnati, Ohio, issued a statement that it was "deeply saddened" by the shooting and was cooperating with law enforcement. The company in 2019 asked its customers not to openly carry guns while visiting its stores.

A Kroger spokesperson said the Collierville store will be closed until further notice.

Lights were still on in the store after nightfall, chrysanthemums set out front. The parking lot, entirely roped off with police tape, was still full of cars, with a heavy police presence. Neighboring businesses, including a fast food restaurant and an auto parts store, were closed.

Mattise reported from Nashville. Associated Press writer Carrie Antfinger in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and News Researcher Jennifer Farrar in New York contributed to this report.

House Jan. 6 panel subpoenas Trump advisers, associates

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol has issued its first subpoenas, demanding records and testimony from four of former President Donald Trump's close advisers and associates who were in contact with him before and during the attack.

In a significant escalation for the panel, Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., announced the subpoenas of former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, former White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications Dan Scavino, former Defense Department official Kashyap Patel and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon. The four men are among Trump's most loyal aides.

Thompson wrote to the four that the committee is investigating "the facts, circumstances, and causes" of the attack and asked them to produce documents and appear at depositions in mid-October.

The panel, formed over the summer, is now launching the interview phase of its investigation after sorting through thousands of pages of documents it had requested in August from federal agencies and social media companies. The committee has also requested a trove of records from the White House. The goal is to provide a complete accounting of what went wrong when the Trump loyalists brutally beat police, broke through windows and doors and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory — and to prevent anything like it from ever happening again.

Thompson says in letters to each of the witnesses that investigators believe they have relevant information about the lead-up to the insurrection. In the case of Bannon, for instance, Democrats cite his Jan. 5 prediction that "(a)ll hell is going to break loose tomorrow" and his communications with Trump one week before the riot in which he urged the president to focus his attention on Jan. 6.

In the letter to Meadows, a former GOP member of the House, Thompson cites his efforts to overturn Trump's defeat in the weeks prior to the insurrection and his pressure on state officials to push the former president's false claims of widespread voter fraud.

"You were the president's chief of staff and have critical information regarding many elements of our

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inquiry," Thompson wrote. "It appears you were with or in the vicinity of President Trump on January 6, had communication with the president and others on January 6 regarding events at the Capitol and are a witness regarding the activities of the day."

It is unclear how the witnesses will respond, or whether they will try and resist the demands as many of them did under the Trump administration. Complicating matters is that Trump is no longer in office and cannot directly assert privilege to keep witnesses quiet or documents out of Congress's hands. As the current president, Biden will have some say in turning over materials.

The committee set a deadline of Oct. 7 for documents and scheduled interviews for Oct. 14 and 15.

Thompson wrote Meadows that the panel has "credible evidence" of his involvement in events within the scope of the committee's investigation. That also includes involvement in the "planning and preparation of efforts to contest the presidential election and delay the counting of electoral votes."

The letter also signals that the committee is interested in Meadows' requests to Justice Department officials for investigations into Trump's false claims of widespread election fraud. Former Attorney General William Barr has said the Justice Department did not find fraud that could have affected the election's outcome.

In the letter to Patel, the panel cites reports that he was talking to Meadows "nonstop" the day the attack unfolded. Thompson wrote that based on documents obtained by the committee, there is "substantial reason to believe that you have additional documents and information relevant to understanding the role played by the Defense Department and the White House in preparing for and responding to the attack on the U.S. Capitol."

Patel, a former Republican aide on the House intelligence committee and at Trump's National Security Council, was one of several loyalists hired at the Pentagon in the days immediately after the November election and after Trump had fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

Scavino was with Trump on Jan. 5 during a discussion about how to persuade members of Congress not to certify the election for Joe Biden, according to reports cited by the committee. On Twitter, he promoted Trump's rally ahead of the attack and encouraged supporters to "be a part of history." In the letter to Scavino, Thompson said the panel's records indicate that Scavino was "tweeting messages from the White House" on Jan. 6.

Thompson wrote that it appears Scavino was with Trump on Jan. 6 and may have "materials relevant to his videotaping and tweeting" messages that day. He noted Scavino's "long service" to the former president, spanning more than a decade.

The subpoenas are certain to anger Republicans, most of whom have been content to move on from the insurrection and have remained loyal to Trump even after denouncing the attack. Only two Republicans sit on the panel, Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney and Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger.

In July, the committee held an emotional first hearing with four police officers who battled the insurrectionists and were injured and verbally abused as the rioters broke into the building and repeated Trump's lies about widespread election fraud.

At least nine people who were there died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that immediately followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner later determined he died of natural causes.

The Metropolitan Police announced this summer that two more of their officers who had responded to the insurrection, Officers Kyle DeFreytag and Gunther Hashida, had also died by suicide.

Biden has say in whether Trump's 1/6 records go to Congress

By COLLEEN LONG and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration will have a big say in whether the government releases information to Congress on the actions of former President Donald Trump and his aides on Jan. 6. But there could be a lengthy court battle before any details come out.

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The House committee investigating the January insurrection at the U.S. Capitol asked last month for a trove of records, including communication within the White House under Trump and information about planning and funding for rallies held in Washington. Among those events was a rally near the White House featuring remarks by Trump, who egged on a crowd of thousands before loyalists stormed the Capitol.

A person familiar with the matter confirmed that the first tranche of documents from the Trump White House was turned over by the National Archives at the end of last month to the White House and Trump. Either party can object to the release of specific items. And Biden's White House has the right to overrule a Trump effort to block the release of information.

Beyond that, the former president may sue to block it all. Or Congress could choose to sue if legislators felt the Biden White House wanted to hold back too much. The person was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Trump has said he would cite executive privilege and refuse to hand over any details. The legal maneuver has been used for decades by presidents and staff — including Trump himself — to avoid scrutiny by Congress.

But Trump doesn't necessarily have the final word now that he's out of office. According to a executive order on presidential records, the archivist who is in possession of the records "shall abide by any instructions given him by the incumbent President or his designee unless otherwise directed by a final court order."

The White House has indicated it is inclined to release as many of the documents as possible; but officials aren't ruling out that there could be individual records Biden may deem privileged.

Presidents tend to be protective of their executive privilege to keep White House documents private, both for themselves and their predecessors. But any White House move to deny the congressional request for records on Trump's activities could inflame Democratic legislators just when Biden needs their support to advance his agenda.

The requested documents are part of a lengthy, partisan and rancorous investigation into how a mob was able to infiltrate the Capitol and disrupt the certification of Biden's presidential victory, inflicting the most serious assault on Congress in two centuries. More than 650 people have been charged criminally in the attack, the largest prosecution in U.S. history.

In addition to White House records from the archives, demands are being made for material from the departments of Defense, Justice, Homeland Security and Interior, as well as the FBI and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

And late Thursday, the House committee subpoenaed former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, former White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications Dan Scavino, former Defense Department official Kashyap Patel and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon.

The request for the National Archives and Records Administration is 10 pages long. The committee is seeking "All documents and communications within the White House on January 6, 2021," related to Trump's close advisers and family members, the rally at the nearby Ellipse and Trump's Twitter feed. It asks for his specific movements on that day and communications, if any, from the White House Situation Room. Also sought are all documents related to claims of election fraud, as well as Supreme Court decisions on the topic.

White House spokesman Michael Gwin said Biden has been engaging with Congress on Jan. 6 issues for several months, and will continue to do so.

"As President Biden has said, the events of January 6th were a dark stain on our country's history, and they represented an attack on the foundations of our constitution and democracy in a way that few other events have," Gwin said. "The president is deeply committed to ensuring that something like that can never happen again and he supports a thorough investigation into what occurred."

The committee is also seeking information about efforts within the Trump administration to push the president's baseless claims of election fraud and any efforts to try to overturn the results of November's election or to "impede the peaceful transfer of power."

Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., is heading the committee, appointed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi

after all but two Republicans opposed creating the 13-person panel.

It has also requested that telecommunications and social media companies preserve the personal communications of hundreds of people who may have somehow been connected to the attack.

Taylor Budowich, communications director for Trump and his political action committee, criticized the congressional panel's request for records and said the former president would fight it.

"The highly partisan, Communist-style 'select committee' has put forth an outrageously broad records request that lacks both legal precedent and legislative merit," he said. "Executive privilege will be defended, not just on behalf of President Trump and his administration, but also on behalf of the Office of the President of the United States and the future of our nation."

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Boyfriend of slain Gabby Petito charged with bank card fraud

By MATTHEW BROWN and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The boyfriend of Gabby Petito, whose body was found at a national park in Wyoming after a cross-country trip with him, was charged with unauthorized use of a debit card as searchers continued looking for him Thursday in Florida swampland.

A federal grand jury indictment filed in U.S. District Court in Wyoming alleges Brian Laundrie used a Capital One Bank card and someone's personal identification number to make unauthorized withdrawals or charges worth more than \$1,000 during the period in which Petito went missing. It does not say who the card belonged to.

FBI spokeswoman Courtney Bernal declined to reveal the nature of the charges made to the debit card.

FBI Special Agent in Charge Michael Schneider said an arrest warrant issued Wednesday over the alleged fraudulent use of the bank card will allow law enforcement across the country to continue pursuing Laundrie while the investigation continues into Petito's homicide.

Laundrie has been named a person of interest in the 22-year-old woman's death. The case has garnered enormous public interest — but also raised uncomfortable questions over the unequal attention given to the hundreds of cases of Native American and other minority women missing or murdered across the United States.

In Florida, searchers on Thursday spent a fifth unsuccessful day searching for Laundrie in the forbidding wilderness preserve near his parents' home.

The search at the Carlton Reserve park was set to resume Friday, said Joshua Tayler with the city of North Port, where the park is located. It began after Laundrie told his parents he was going there, several days after returning alone Sept. 1 from his trip out west with Petito.

The indictment says the unauthorized use of the debit card occurred from about Aug. 30 to Sept. 1.

Laundrie family attorney Steven Bertolino said it is his understanding that the arrest warrant was related to activities that occurred after the death of Petito, and not to her actual demise.

"The FBI is focused on locating Brian and when that occurs the specifics of the charges covered under the indictment will be addressed in the proper forum," Bertolino said in a text message to The Associated Press.

An attorney who has represented the Petito family also did not immediately respond for comment.

Petito was reported missing Sept. 11 by her parents after she did not respond to calls and texts for several days while the couple visited parks in the West. Her body was discovered Sunday in the vicinity of a remote, undeveloped campground along the border of Grand Teton National Park in northwestern Wyoming.

Teton County Coroner Brent Blue classified Petito's death as a homicide — meaning her death was caused by another person — but did not disclose how she was killed pending further autopsy results.

Officials urged anyone with knowledge of Laundrie's role in Petito's death or his whereabouts to contact the FBI. With online sleuths and theories multiplying by the day, the FBI and police have been deluged

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with tips about possible Laundry sightings.

"No piece of information is too small or inconsequential to support our efforts in this investigation," Schneider said in a statement.

Petito and Laundry grew up together on Long Island, New York, but they moved in recent years to North Port where his parents live. Their home, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) south of Sarasota, was searched by investigators earlier this week, and a Ford Mustang driven by Laundry's mother was towed from the driveway. Authorities believe Laundry drove that car to the Carlton Reserve before disappearing.

The couple documented online their trip in a white Ford Transit van converted into a camper, but they got into a physical altercation Aug. 12 in Moab, Utah, that led to a police stop for a possible domestic violence case. Ultimately, police there decided to separate the quarreling couple for the night. But no charges were filed, and no serious injuries were reported.

The city of Moab said it will conduct a formal investigation into the handling of the dispute. City officials said they were not aware of any breach of department policies, but intend to make a "thorough, informed evaluation" based on the results of the investigation.

On Thursday, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland told reporters in Washington, D.C., that the extensive news media coverage of the case should be a reminder of missing or murdered Native American girls and women.

Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet secretary, said that her heart goes out to Petito's family, but that she also grieves for "so many Indigenous women" whose families have endured similar heartache "for the last 500 years."

Anderson reported from St. Petersburg, Florida. Associated Press writers Sophia Eppolito contributed from Salt Lake and Matthew Daly from Washington.

Oldest human footprints in North America found in New Mexico

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fossilized footprints discovered in New Mexico indicate that early humans were walking across North America around 23,000 years ago, researchers reported Thursday.

The first footprints were found in a dry lake bed in White Sands National Park in 2009. Scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey recently analyzed seeds stuck in the footprints to determine their approximate age, ranging from around 22,800 and 21,130 years ago.

The findings may shed light on a mystery that has long intrigued scientists: When did people first arrive in the Americas, after dispersing from Africa and Asia?

Most scientists believe ancient migration came by way of a now-submerged land bridge that connected Asia to Alaska. Based on various evidence — including stone tools, fossil bones and genetic analysis — other researchers have offered a range of possible dates for human arrival in the Americas, from 13,000 to 26,000 years ago or more.

The current study provides a more solid baseline for when humans definitely were in North America, although they could have arrived even earlier, the authors say. Fossil footprints are more indisputable and direct evidence than "cultural artifacts, modified bones, or other more conventional fossils," they wrote in the journal *Science*, which published the study Thursday.

"What we present here is evidence of a firm time and location," they said.

Based on the size of the footprints, researchers believe that at least some were made by children and teenagers who lived during the last ice age.

David Bustos, the park's resource program manager, spotted the first footprints in ancient wetlands in 2009. He and others found more in the park over the years.

"We knew they were old, but we had no way to date the prints before we discovered some with (seeds) on top," he said Thursday.

Made of fine silt and clay, the footprints are fragile, so the researchers had to work quickly to gather samples, Bustos said.

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"The only way we can save them is to record them — to take a lot of photos and make 3D models," he said.

Earlier excavations in White Sands National Park have uncovered fossilized tracks left by a saber-toothed cat, dire wolf, Columbian mammoth and other ice age animals.

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Ex-Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont detained in Sardinia

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont, who fled Spain after a failed secession bid for the northeastern region in 2017, was detained Thursday in Sardinia, Italy, his lawyer said.

Puigdemont, who lives in Belgium and now holds a seat in the European Parliament, has been fighting extradition to Spain, which accused him and other Catalan independence leaders of sedition.

Lawyer Gonzalo Boye said Puigdemont was detained when he arrived in Sardinia, where he was due to attend an event this weekend.

The circumstances under which Puigdemont was taken into custody were not immediately clear. Boye wrote on Twitter the ex-regional president was detained under a 2019 European arrest warrant, even though it had been suspended.

Police at the airport in northern Sardinia didn't answer phone calls Thursday night, while police in the city of Alghero said they weren't aware of his detention.

The European Parliament voted in March to lift the immunity of Puigdemont and two of his associates. In July the three EU lawmakers failed to have their immunity restored after the European Union's general court said that they did not demonstrate they were at risk of being arrested.

Sardinian media reported earlier in the week he was due to attend an event in Alghero on Sunday, so his presence on the Mediterranean island had been expected. Sardinian media had also reported that Puigdemont was invited by a Sardinian pro-separatist group.

Puigdemont's office said in a statement that he had traveled to Alghero from Brussels to attend a folklore festival where he was detained upon arrival by Italian police. On Friday Puigdemont will appear in front of a judge in the city of Sassari who would rule on whether he should be freed, the statement said.

Puigdemont and a number of his separatist colleagues fled to Belgium in October 2017, fearing arrest after holding an independence referendum for Catalonia that the Spanish courts and government said was illegal.

Nine Catalan separatists received prison sentences for their role in the 2017 referendum ranging from nine to 13 years. They were pardoned in July.

They said it: Leaders at the hybrid UN, in their own words

By The Associated Press undefined

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Many leaders saying many things about many topics that matter to them, to their regions, to the world: That's what the U.N. General Assembly invariably produces each year.

And each year, certain voices dominate. Here, The Associated Press takes the opposite approach and spotlights some thoughts — delivered in pre-recorded speeches or from the rostrum at the United Nations after a yearlong pandemic break — from leaders who might have not captured the headlines and airtime on Thursday, the third day of the 2021 debate.

"The frequency and ferocity of hurricanes, floods, forest fires, landslides, volcano eruptions, and earthquakes that devastate entire cities and population centers in rural areas, sometimes with a significant number of deaths, should draw everyone's attention, from governments, nongovernmental organizations,

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the academy, scientists, civil society, to the need for concerted efforts to protect planet Earth, our common home, which has been giving us increasingly clear signals that she is not happy with how we treat her, and is defending herself in the most violent manner possible.”

— JOÃO LOURENÇO, president of Angola

“Our decisions today matter. I repeat: Our decisions today matter.”

— LAURENTINO CORTIZO COHEN, president of Panama

“The policies and plans to avert further catastrophes have been negotiated and adopted in the U.N.’s hallowed halls, only to meet lackluster implementation attempts and sit idly on bookshelves and in hard drives while the world moves on and battles new crises and shocks.”

— LIONEL ROUWEN AINGIMEA, president of Nauru

“We are in an ever-accelerating world, more disunited, more anxious, more pessimistic and more individualistic. A world in which almost no one knows where we are going, or even where we would like to go. Resolving problems in the moment, bouncing from crisis to crisis, until we reach one we can’t resolve.”

— NAYIB BUKELE, president of El Salvador

“During more than 40 years of war and instability, which the Afghan people are not to blame for, Afghanistan has become a geopolitical platform; and the world is well aware of the consequences of the horrible events of September 2001. The suffering Afghanistan ... should not be dragged into the abyss of imposed bloody wars again.”

— EMOMALI RAHMON, president of Tajikistan

Leaders to UN: A warmer world is a more violent one, too

By EDITH M. LEDERER and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Using apocalyptic images, three presidents and seven foreign ministers warned Thursday that a warmer world is also a more violent one.

At a ministerial meeting of the Security Council, the officials urged the U.N.’s most powerful body to do more to address the security implications of climate change and make global warming a key part of all U.N. peacekeeping operations.

The leaders and ministers pushing for more U.N. action said warming is making the world less safe, pointing to Africa’s conflict-plagued Sahel region and Syria and Iraq as examples..

Micheal Martin, Ireland’s president, who chaired the meeting, said climate change “is already contributing to conflict in many parts of the world.” And Vietnam President Nguyen Xuan Phuc said climate change “is a war without gunfire so to speak that causes economic damage and losses in lives no less dire than actual wars.”

“The effects of climate change are particularly profound when they overlap with fragility and past or current conflicts,” said U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. “And when natural resources like water become scarce because of climate change, “grievances and tensions can explode, complicating efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace.”

“Our lives and daily realities are at the nexus of climate change insecurity,” said Ilwad Elman, a Somali-Canadian peace activist. “The impact of climate change and environmental degradation are also changing what it takes to build peace ... because we are experiencing climate-related shocks and stresses.”

The Security Council first discussed the impact of climate on peace and security in 2007 and has held a number of meetings about it since, most recently in February. But it remains off the council’s agenda because of divisions among members. That means there can be no legally binding resolutions or official requests for action.

Ireland’s Martin said he recognized the different views bit if the council is to meet its responsibility to

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maintain international peace and security, "it must have the information and tools to analyze and address climate-related security risks."

For years, academics who study conflict and climate change have been highlighting how events like a once-in-a-millennium Syrian drought have exacerbated conflicts without being the sole causes. It's a more nuanced approach to understanding conflict — and to developing tools that reduce its impact on societies.

"Look at almost every place where you see threats to international peace and security today, and you'll find that climate change is making things less peaceful, less secure, and rendering our response even more challenging," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. He cited a list of nations including Syria, Mali, Yemen, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

"We have to stop debating whether the climate crisis belongs in the Security Council," Blinken said, "and instead ask how the council can leverage its unique powers to tackle the negative impacts of climate on peace and security."

Russian and Chinese diplomats reiterated their countries' objections to putting climate change on the agenda of the council, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, when other U.N. and international forums are addressing the entire climate issue.

"There is a Russian saying that ... too many cooks spoil the broth," said Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador, Dmitry Polyansky. He accused council members of introducing "a completely unnecessary political component to an already complicated and sensitive discussion."

Chinese U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun said the council must "refrain from using a wholesale approach," saying that not all war-torn countries "were plunged into chaos because of climate change."

Both Russia and China, which is the world's top emitter of climate-damaging pollution, stressed their countries' commitment to cut emissions. So did Blinken for the United States, the second largest carbon polluter, and India, the third-largest, which also said climate change doesn't belong on the council agenda. Reenat Sandhu, a deputy Indian foreign secretary, said singling out one cause of conflict is "counterproductive."

"Climate change may enhance conflict, but cannot be determined as a reason for it," she said. "Oversimplification of causes of conflict will not help in resolving them nor can it justify extreme policy measures. We need to bring back our focus to where it should be — combating climate change."

Still, most of the leaders who spoke Thursday morning painted a gloomy picture for the planet as a whole. They said climate change needs to be fought in the same way the world is battling the coronavirus because, for the planet, it is a matter of life and death.

Decisions at the November U.N. climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland "will decide whether this decade will be remembered as the decade when we started to save the planet or the beginning of the end," said Estonia President Kersti Kaljulaid.

At the General Assembly's annual gathering of world leaders on Thursday, Angola President Joao Lourenco said Earth "has been giving us increasingly clear signals that she is not happy with how we treat her, and is defending herself in the most violent manner possible."

And the previous evening, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who will host the climate negotiations in Scotland, gave a speech that started with a lesson on extinction among mammals — and then reminded the world that humans, too, are mammals.

"Our grandchildren will know that we are the culprits. And they'll know that we knew — that we were warned," Johnson said. "And they will ask themselves what kind of people we were to be so selfish and so shortsighted."

Borenstein, an Associated Press science writer, reported from Washington.

R. Kelly jury asked to make him 'pay' or not fall for 'lies'

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A prosecutor in closing arguments at the sex-trafficking trial of R. Kelly urged jurors

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on Thursday to make the R&B superstar “pay” for his alleged crimes, while a defense lawyer told them they’ve been misled by opportunistic accusers about consensual relationships.

“It is now time to hold the defendant responsible for the pain he inflicted on each of his victims,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Geddes said in concluding her closing in federal court in Brooklyn that spanned two days. “It is now time for the defendant, Robert Kelly, to pay for his crimes. Convict him.”

Defense attorney Deveraux Cannick countered by telling the jury that testimony by several accusers was full of lies, and that “the government let them lie.”

He added: “Where the fairness to Robert? Where’s the integrity of the system?”

The exchange came with trial nearing jury deliberations after testimony from dozens of witnesses since the beginning of the proceedings on Aug. 18. Jurors could get the case as soon as Friday afternoon.

The 54-year-old Kelly, perhaps best known for the 1996 smash hit “I Believe I Can Fly, ” has pleaded not guilty to racketeering charges accusing him of abusing women, girls and boys for more than two decades. He’s also charged with multiple violations of the Mann Act, which makes it illegal to transport anyone across state lines “for any immoral purpose.”

Geddes gave an exhaustive recitation of evidence the government says proves how Kelly, with the help of some loyal members of his entourage, used tactics from “the predator playbook” to sexually exploit his victims.

The tactics included isolating them in hotel rooms or his recording studio, subjecting them to degrading rules like making them call him “Daddy” and shooting video recordings of them having sex with him and others as a means to control them, prosecutors said.

Geddes described one of several graphic homemade videos in evidence — seen by the jury during testimony, but not by the public. She said it showed Kelly grabbing one of his victims by the hair and forcing her to give another man oral sex. The woman submitted “because her will had been broken,” the prosecutor said.

The defense argued that it would make no sense for a celebrity like Kelly to set up a criminal enterprise to entrap victims.

Someone like Kelly “didn’t have to recruit women,” Cannick said.

He also argued the accusers were never forced to do anything against their will. Instead, his girlfriends stuck around because Kelly spoiled them with free air travel, shopping sprees and fancy dinners — treatment that belied the predator label, he said.

“He gave them a lavish lifestyle,” he said. “That’s not what a predator is supposed to do.”

Cannick even went as far as comparing Kelly’s case to the struggle led by civil rights legend Martin Luther King Jr. for equal protections under the U.S. Constitution.

“And that’s all that Robert wants — to make (the government) true to what it says on paper,” he said.

Democrats see tax ‘framework’ to pay for huge \$3.5T package

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House and congressional Democrats have agreed to a framework of options to pay for their huge, emerging social and environment bill, top Democrats said Thursday. Now they face the daunting task of narrowing the menu to tax possibilities they can pass to fund President Joe Biden’s \$3.5 trillion plan.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California announced the progress as Biden administration officials and Democratic congressional leaders negotiated behind the scenes. The package aims to rewrite tax and spending priorities to expand programs for Americans of all ages, while upping efforts to tackle income inequality and fight climate change.

Staring down a self-imposed Monday deadline, lawmakers said they would work nonstop to find agreement on specifics. Democrats’ views on those vary widely, though they largely agree with Biden’s idea of raising taxes on corporations and the wealthy to fund the package.

“We certainly think it’s progress,” Biden press secretary Jen Psaki said at the White House.

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Biden has been putting his shoulder into the negotiations, inviting more than 20 of his party's moderate and progressive lawmakers to the White House for lengthy meetings this week. He's working to close the deal with Congress on his "Build Back Better" agenda at a time when his presidential campaign promises are running into the difficulty of actually governing.

But the party has been divided over many of the details.

Moderate Democrats, most prominently Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, are demanding that the massive dollar total be reduced. The revenue options to pay for it — that mostly means taxes — being considered can be dialed up or down, the leaders say. The ultimate price tag may certainly slip from the much-publicized \$3.5 trillion.

Republicans are solidly opposed to the package, calling it a "reckless tax and spending spree." So Democrats will have to push it through Congress on their own, which is only possible if they limit their defections to a slim few in the House and none in the Senate.

"We're proceeding," Pelosi said. "We intend to stay the course and pass the bill as soon as possible."

The congressional leaders huddled early Thursday with the chairmen of the tax writing committees to agree to the framework, pulling from work already being done on those panels. They are intent on sticking to Biden's pledge not to raise taxes on people making less than \$400,000 a year.

Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., the chairman of the House Ways & Means Committee, has already drafted his version, which would raise about \$2.3 trillion by hiking corporate tax rates to 26.5% for businesses earning more than \$5 million a year and increasing the top individual tax from 37% to 39.6% for those earning more than \$400,000, or \$450,000 for married households.

The House panel's bill also includes a 3% surtax on the adjusted incomes of very wealthy people making more than \$5 million a year.

The Senate Finance Committee under Sen. Ron Wyden has not yet passed its bill, but has been eyeing proposals that further target the superrich including efforts to curtail practices used to avoid paying taxes.

"I'm not going to get into any specific stuff today, but I've made it very clear as chairman of the Finance Committee a billionaire's tax will be on the menu," Wyden said.

Those tax goals align with the Biden administration, which is marshaling arguments that the increases are fundamentally about fairness at a time of gaping income inequality.

According to a new analysis released Thursday by the White House, the wealthiest 400 families worth more than a billion dollars paid an average tax rate of just 8.2% between 2010 and 2018. Treasury Department tables show that is lower than the average tax rate of families with an income of roughly \$142,000.

The analysis suggests two clear reasons why billionaires pay a lower rate than the upper middle class: They derive income from stocks, dividends and other assets that are taxed at lower rates and they can permanently avoid paying tax on certain investment gains that by law are excluded from taxable income.

Without divulging a framework, Wyden indicated he is in agreement with the House's plans for certain retirement savings accounts used by the wealthy to shield liabilities.

Targeting "Mega IRAs," Democrats hope to correct what they see as a flaw in the retirement savings system enabling billionaires to amass millions in independent retirement accounts without ever paying taxes. Under some proposals, individuals earning beyond \$400,000 would be barred from contributing to their IRAs once their account balances top \$10 million.

The Biden administration has also shown interest in one climate change tax — a so-called pollution importer fee, which would essentially impose a tariff on goods coming from countries without certain emissions controls — and seen as a way to pressure China.

Gaining less traction seems to be a carbon tax that could fall on households and stray from Biden's pledge not to tax those earning less than \$400,000.

Another big unknown: Whether Democrats can coalesce around a plan to rein in prescription drug costs, which could save the government hundreds of billions that could be used for Biden's goals

Thursday's sudden announcement of framework options caught key lawmakers off guard, including Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., the chairman of the Budget Committee, and others playing leading roles in assembling one of the biggest bills Congress has ever attempted.

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Schumer later acknowledged about the emerging framework — “it’s hardly conclusory, but it was a good step of progress.”

Yet the framework could help the congressional leaders show momentum as they head toward crucial deadlines and start to address concerns raised by Manchin and other moderates who want a more clear-cut view of what taxes are being considered before they move forward, aides said.

On Monday, the House plans to begin considering a separate \$1 trillion package of road and other infrastructure projects as a first test of Biden’s agenda. That public works bill has already passed the Senate, and Pelosi has agreed to schedule it for a House vote to assuage party moderates who badly want that legislation passed but are leery of supporting the larger \$3.5 trillion measure.

But progressives are threatening to defeat the public works bill as inadequate unless it is partnered with the broader package. To make sure both bills can pass, Democratic leaders are trying to reach agreement on the bigger bill.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate remain at a standstill over a separate package to keep the government funded past the Sept. 30 fiscal year-end and to suspend the federal debt limit to avert a shutdown and a devastating U.S. default on payments. Senate Republicans are refusing to back that House-passed bill, despite the risk of triggering a fiscal crisis.

Associated Press writers Marcy Gordon and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

Haaland: Petito case a reminder of missing Native Americans

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaking in personal terms, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said extensive news media coverage of the disappearance and death of 22-year-old Gabby Petito while on a cross-country trip should be a reminder of hundreds of Native American girls and women who are missing or murdered in the United States.

Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet secretary, said that her heart goes out to Petito’s family, but that she also grieves for “so many Indigenous women” whose families have endured similar heartache “for the last 500 years.”

The search for Petito generated a whirlwind of news coverage, especially on cable television, as well as a frenzy of online sleuthing, with tips, possible sightings and theories shared by the hundreds of thousands on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. The Florida woman, who disappeared while on a cross-country trip with her boyfriend, was found dead at the edge of Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. Authorities have determined she was a homicide victim.

A report prepared for the state of Wyoming found that at least 710 Native Americans were reported missing between 2011 and late 2020. Between 2010 and 2019, the homicide rate per 100,000 for Indigenous people was 26.8, eight times higher than the homicide rate for white people, the report said.

Haaland, a member of the Pueblo Laguna tribe, said she has frequently seen Native American family members posting pictures on fences and the sides of buildings to help locate missing girls or women. When that happens, “you know I see my sisters,” she told reporters Thursday at a news conference. “I see my mother. I see my aunties or my nieces or even my own child. So I feel that every woman and every person who is in this victimized place deserves attention and deserves to be cared about.”

A former New Mexico congresswoman, Haaland pushed for a law signed last year to address the crisis of missing, murdered and trafficked Indigenous women. The law, known as Savanna’s Act, is intended to help law enforcement track, solve and prevent crimes against Native Americans, especially women and girls.

The law is named for Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, a member of the Spirit Lake tribe who was abducted and killed in 2017 near Fargo, North Dakota. Greywind, 22, was pregnant, and her unborn baby was cut from her body. Her remains were found in the Red River.

Haaland said she sees her mission as interior secretary in part as a way to elevate attention on Native American issues.

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"I feel like it's my job to lift up this issue as best I can. And hopefully, the folks who are writing the news, and broadcasting the news will understand that these women are also friends, neighbors, classmates and work colleagues," she said.

Haaland stressed that her comments were not intended to downplay the pain suffered by Petito's family. "Anytime a woman faces assault, rape, murder, kidnapping — any of those things — it's very difficult and my heart goes out to any family who has to endure that type of pain," she said. "And so, of course, my heart goes out to the young woman who was found in Wyoming."

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their communities, Haaland said, but "where I can make a difference in particular is in addressing the missing and murdered Indigenous peoples crisis, which has occurred since the beginning of colonization of Indigenous people on this continent for about the last 500 years and it continues."

Haaland created a Missing & Murdered Unit within the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services earlier this year and has established a joint commission of national tribal leaders and experts, led by the Interior and Justice departments, to reduce violent crime against American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Haaland also ordered Interior to investigate its past oversight of Native American boarding schools that forced hundreds of thousands of children from their families and communities.

"The primary goal of this work is to share the truth of this dark chapter in our nation's history, so that we can begin to heal," Haaland said.

A written report is expected next year.

Ancient tablet acquired by Hobby Lobby going back to Iraq

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A 3,500-year-old clay tablet discovered in the ruins of the library of an ancient Mesopotamian king, then looted from an Iraqi museum 30 years ago, is finally headed back to Iraq.

The \$1.7 million cuneiform clay tablet was found in 1853 as part of a 12-tablet collection in the rubble of the library of Assyrian King Assur Banipal. Officials believe it was illegally imported into the United States in 2003, then sold to Hobby Lobby and eventually put on display in its Museum of the Bible in the nation's capital.

Federal agents with Homeland Security Investigations seized the tablet — known as the Gilgamesh Dream tablet — from the museum in September 2019. The Gilgamesh tablet is part of a section of a Sumerian poem from the Epic of Gilgamesh. It is one of the world's oldest works of literature, and one of the oldest religious texts.

Federal prosecutors in Brooklyn, New York, began a civil forfeiture court proceeding that resulted in a repatriation ceremony on Thursday at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian with officials from Iraq.

Farreed Yasseen, the Iraqi ambassador to the United States, said the looting of the museum in the 1990s hit Iraqis hard.

"The real core of what happened, though, is that people, individual people, did the right thing," he said. But there is much more to be done to preserve cultural heritage across the world. "Artifacts are still being stolen, they are being smuggled out."

Hassan Nadhem, the Iraqi minister of culture, tourism and antiquities, spoke of the pride he felt in seeing the artifacts returned.

"Restituting the Iraqi artifacts for me means restituting our self-esteem and confidence in Iraqi society," he said, speaking through a translator.

It's part of an increasing effort by authorities in the U.S. and around the world to return antiquities pilfered from their home countries. In years past, such items probably would never have made it back. The black market for these relics is vast, as are criminal networks and smugglers dealing in stolen items and falsifying ownership data.

"By returning these illegally acquired objects, the authorities here in the United States and in Iraq are allowing the Iraqi people to reconnect with a page in their history," said Audrey Azoulay, director general

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of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "This exceptional restitution is a major victory over those who mutilate heritage and then traffic it to finance violence and terrorism."

For the acting head of Homeland Security Investigations, which found and investigated the origins of the tablet, the repatriation is personal. Steve Francis' parents were born in Iraq, part of a small sect known as Chaldean Iraqis who are Christian, and he was assigned to a U.S. Customs unit in 2003 that was sent to Iraq to help protect looted artifacts.

"It's really special to me. I'm a Chaldean Iraqi and leading the agency that did this work," Francis said. "It is really something."

Authorities are also repatriating a Sumerian Ram sculpture that was seized during a separate case.

The sculpture, from 3000 B.C., was used for religious vows in Sumerian temples. Investigators believe it had been stolen from an archaeological site in southern Iraq, then passed off as part of a collection that had been discovered years earlier. Homeland Security Investigations teams, curious about the size of the collection, looked it up and discovered the ram was not among the listed items. The dealer eventually fessed up.

Homeland Security Investigations has returned more than 15,000 items in 40 countries, including at least 5,000 artifacts to Iraq since 2008. Many of the cases have come from the agency's office in New York, where a team of agents is investigating the trafficking of cultural property and stolen artifacts, which have included other tablets and clay seals.

The owners of Oklahoma City-based Hobby Lobby, devout Christians, collected artifacts for the Bible museum on a large scale. Prosecutors said Steve Green, the president of the \$4 billion company, agreed to buy more than 5,500 artifacts in 2010 for \$1.6 million in a scheme that involved a number of middlemen and the use of phony or misleading invoices, shipping labels and other paperwork to slip the artifacts past U.S. customs agents.

Prosecutors say Hobby Lobby was warned by its own expert that acquiring antiquities from Iraq carried "considerable risk" because so many of the artifacts in circulation are stolen. But Green, who had been collecting ancient artifacts since 2009, pleaded naiveté in doing business with dealers in the Middle East.

In 2018, the executives agreed to settle the case for \$3 million and return thousands of objects. The lead agent on the case, John Labbatt, based in New York, said Homeland Security was repatriating items from that case in 2018 when they were made aware of the smuggled tablet, too.

But getting it back wasn't simple. Agents had to prove it was wrongly acquired.

Labbatt pored over records and tracked the tablet from London to the United States in 2003. It had been bought by a couple who admitted they were aware at the time they were purchasing it from someone who may not have been above board, he said. They mailed it to themselves in the U.S., so it didn't go through customs.

A false provenance letter was used to sell the tablet several times before Hobby Lobby bought it from a London-based auction house in 2014.

By then, the statute of limitations had passed to charge the couple with any crimes.

"But really in the end, the most important part is getting it back where it belongs," Labbatt said. "And that's what we're doing."

Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo contributed to this report.

Its relevance at stake, UN reaches toward a new generation

By SALLY HO Associated Press

At the United Nations this week, the pandemic-era rules of engagement for General Assembly week are strict. Entourage sizes are tightly regulated, and there are no exceptions for kings, presidents or other "excellencies." Yet somehow, in the middle of it all, the U.N. made room to fully embrace the diplomatic soft power of seven young Korean pop stars.

While the mega-popular BTS may croon that they don't need "Permission to Dance," the decision to

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allow the K-pop band to both give a serious speech to world leaders and film a sunny new music video at the U.N.'s distinctive headquarters was another of the many signs that the elders are ready — eager, even — to turn to young people for diplomacy and relevance.

In this era of kid icons and social media activism, the contrast was evident: globally cherished musical juggernaut fronted by the youthful South Korean men in perfect makeup on one hand, and the famously bureaucratic — stodgy, even — 76-year-old diplomatic institution built in the aftermath of WWII on the other.

The paradox was captured by Trevor Noah, the millennial late-night talk show host: "Old people were probably watching this, like, 'What the hell is a BTS?'" he said. "And young people were watching it, like, 'What the hell is the U.N.?"

In his General Assembly opening address on Tuesday, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres practically scolded world leaders for disappointing young people with a perceived inaction on climate change, inequalities and the lack of educational opportunities, among other issues.

"Some 60% of your future voters feel betrayed by their governments," Guterres told the gathering of world leaders. "We must prove to children and young people that despite the seriousness of the situation, the world does have a plan and the governments are committed to implementing it."

Rather than initiating a sentiment, Guterres clearly was channeling one that already exists. Other world leaders from Slovakia to Maldives, Latvia to Costa Rica took a similar conciliatory tone toward the estimated 1.8 billion human beings aged 10 to 24 — a cohort that the United Nations claims is the largest generation of young people in the history of the world.

"A new generation has grown up in the last 30 years," said Latvia President Egils Levits. "In Latvia, like elsewhere, youth are deeply concerned about the climate crisis and about disinformation. They want to build inclusive societies where people of all generations, backgrounds and communities can feel included — not only formally, but in practice."

To this end, Guterres also announced the creation of a new U.N. Youth Office to "bridge the generational divide" in global affairs. While details are sparse on the actual functions and budget of this new office, it is designed to tackle issues distinctly tied to the activism of people between the ages of 15 and 29, including climate change and worldwide inequities.

"If we want to ask what kind of world do we want to have, 15 to 29 is kind of the age that's doing it," said Connie Flanagan, a University of Wisconsin professor who studies youth activism. "Those are the years when you're taking stock of your life. And as a result, you're taking stock of your world."

Flanagan said the United Nations must find a way to include young people in initiatives but not tokenize them, and in the process harness the strengths of late adolescents and early adults, who are generally less jaded about the pace of change and more collaborative and eager to make it happen.

"Whatever the motivation may be, it's good they want to remain relevant with young people," Flanagan said. "It's always hard for people who have power to give up power."

The new office will be an expansion of the current U.N. youth envoy's work, which has been slowly building up over the past decade just as a generation of young people have established their agency on-line — earning corporate deals as entrepreneurs, developing loyal fans as entertainers and spearheading social movements, often using just their words, charisma and smartphone.

The current appointed envoy, Jayathma Wickramanayake said young luminaries like Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg have brought mainstream visibility to young people's agenda, and social media has democratized the work of activism and what it means to influence public policy.

Yousafzai was a Pakistani schoolgirl when she was shot in the head for advocating for girls' access to education, and the Swedish Thunberg has been an outspoken — and sometimes confrontational — force on climate change. Both were teenage girls when they, to much fanfare, addressed the United Nations in recent years.

By paving the way for other young people to take on weighty issues, Wickramanayake said, the two have also helped shatter preconceptions that young people lack experience to deal with world leaders and expertise on issues like education or the extremes of climate change.

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"Having those icons with really global outreach and also the power to reach out to the world's most powerful people have destroyed those stereotypes ... about young people having leadership positions and being able to lead movements," said Wickramanayake, who at 30 years old is the youngest person in Guterres' cabinet. She was first hired at 26, making her the youngest person ever to serve in the top ranks of the secretary-general's administration in the history of the United Nations.

The sensibility is spreading. In Denmark, a children's nonprofit on Tuesday also convened 20 "delegates" between the ages of 11 and 16 years old from across the globe to deliver a manifesto to the United Nations. They called themselves the "Children's General Assembly" — an initiative sponsored in part by the Lego toy company — and discussed a range of issues from children's rights and bullying to refugees and development goals.

"If you really want to do something about (injustice), it has to start with you," said Mankgara Maime, a 16-year-old girl from Johannesburg, South Africa, who participated in the Denmark presentation. "You can't feel sorry about them and not think about how to help."

There is already evidence that this week may prove to be a milestone for the U.N.'s engagement with young people.

Nearly a million people tuned into the U.N. YouTube channel livestream on Monday to watch BTS discuss young peoples' resilience, COVID-19 vaccines and the earth's well-being. To date, that BTS music video — which could easily be mistaken for a U.N. promotional reel — has 16 million views on the same channel. The U.N. institution itself has just 1.7 million regular subscribers.

"I've heard that people in their teens and 20s today are being referred to as COVID's lost generation, that they've lost their way at a time when they need the most diverse opportunities," RM, the leader of BTS, said in their speech. "But I think it's a stretch to say they're lost just because the paths they tread can't be seen by grown-up eyes."

Follow Sally Ho on Twitter at http://twitter.com/_sallyho

Inflation forces homebuilders to take it slow, raise prices

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Even in the hottest U.S. housing market in more than a decade, new home construction has turned into a frustratingly uncertain and costly proposition for many homebuilders.

Rising costs and shortages of building materials and labor are rippling across the homebuilding industry, which accounted for nearly 12% of all U.S. home sales in July. Construction delays are common, prompting many builders to pump the brakes on the number of new homes they put up for sale. As building a new home gets more expensive, some of those costs are passed along to buyers.

Across the economy, prices having spiked this year amid shortages of manufactured goods and components, from cars and computer chips to paint and building materials. The Federal Reserve meets this week and officials' outlook on when they might start raising interest rates could indicate how worried the Fed is about inflation.

The constraints on homebuilders are unwelcome news for homebuyers, already facing historically low levels of resale homes on the market and record prices. Economists worry many first-time homebuyers are getting priced out of the market. The erosion in affordability is one reason the pace of home sales has been easing in recent months.

At Sivage Homes in Albuquerque, N.M., the builder's efforts to keep its construction on schedule are undercut almost daily by delays for everything from plumbing fixtures and windows, to bathtubs and appliances.

"Nowadays, we literally could be sitting waiting 30 days, maybe even 60, for one thing or another," said CEO Mike Sivage. "I've been doing this since 1986 and I have to say I've never seen anything like this before."

The pandemic set the stage for higher prices and shortages of construction products. Factories went idle

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temporarily and are now trying to catch up on production at the same time that demand has intensified due to an unexpectedly hot housing market and a surge in home remodeling.

Lumber futures jumped to an all-time high \$1,670 per thousand board feet in May. They've since dropped to \$634, about 10% higher than a year ago. Still, wholesale prices for a category of homebuilding components that includes windows, roofing tiles, doors and steel, increased 22% over the last 12 months, according to an analysis of Labor Department data conducted by the National Association of Home Builders. Before 2020, it was typical for such aggregate prices to rise a little over 1% annually.

Those conditions are likely to persist. Robert Dietz, chief economist at the NAHB, said he's heard from builders that "there are ongoing challenges, and in some cases growing challenges, with flooring, other kinds of building materials."

Meanwhile, any savings on lumber have yet to filter down to many builders, including Thomas James Homes, which operates in California, Washington state and Colorado.

"The price we're paying for lumber today is the same price we were paying 90 or 120 ago," said Jon Tattersall, the builder's president, who noted his company's overall building costs have increased about 30% since November.

Homebuyers shouldn't expect to see any discounts from falling lumber prices, either, because builders set their prices based largely on overall demand in the housing market.

A signed contract for a home yet to be built typically includes an allowance for unexpected construction costs, but generally builders will have to eat big increases and then pass them on to the next buyer.

"On our future ones, those are the ones we're having to raise the costs on," Tattersall said.

Higher building materials prices aren't the only factor driving up builders' costs. A chronic shortage of skilled construction workers has worsened during the pandemic, forcing builders to factor in higher labor costs.

Inflation is being felt across the economy. Consumer prices rose 5.3% in August from the same month a year ago. At the producer level, inflation jumped an even steeper 8.3%, the biggest annual gain on record.

The Federal Reserve has said it believes the surge in inflation will be temporary. For now, though, the rise in building materials costs and the lingering supply crunch are making everything from houses and apartments to commercial buildings more expensive.

To manage, many builders are slowing the rollout of new homes. Zonda Economics, a real estate data tracker, estimates some 85% of builders are intentionally limiting their sales.

"They're trying to make sure they have the land ready, the workers ready and the materials ready to be able to actually deliver the homes that they've sold," said Ali Wolf, Zonda's chief economist.

Even with inflation, builders are benefiting from the hottest housing market in years. Demand for new homes has strengthened, while the number of previously occupied U.S. homes up for sale has fallen to historic lows, pushing prices higher.

The median price of a new home sold in July climbed 18.4% from a year earlier to \$390,500, an all-time high, according to the Commerce Department. For existing homes, the median price jumped 17.8% in July to \$359,900, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Builders typically hire contractors who handle framing, electrical, plumbing and other facets of construction. As these firms have faced higher costs to secure skilled labor or source the materials they need to do their job, they've had to pass those increases onto builders.

Tri Pointe Homes, which builds homes in 10 states, including California, Texas and Maryland, has faced higher labor costs. It's been working through those increases, at times moving beyond its core group of contractors, said CEO Doug Bauer.

One way Tri Pointe and other builders are dealing with product delays is to ask contractors to install temporary fixtures and appliances, for example, so that buyers can move in as quickly as possible.

"Then, as soon as the original item becomes available, we are returning to install it," Bauer said.

To stay ahead of rising costs, Tri Pointe has raised its home prices and reduced buyer incentives when necessary. Even so, the builder has raised its guidance on the number of homes it expects to deliver this

year from 6,000 to 6,300.

While the big, publicly traded builders have the means to buy building materials and warehouse them until needed, smaller builders that make up the majority of the industry are at the mercy of suppliers.

Sivage, whose company builds homes priced from \$250,000 to \$1 million, used to be able to lock in the price of lumber with suppliers a year in advance. That changed in recent years as demand for lumber increased. Now, Sivage doesn't know what it will cost him until it's ready for delivery.

"We've had to grin and bear it," he said.

Taliban official: Strict punishment, executions will return

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — One of the founders of the Taliban and the chief enforcer of its harsh interpretation of Islamic law when they last ruled Afghanistan said the hard-line movement will once again carry out executions and amputations of hands, though perhaps not in public.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Mullah Nooruddin Turabi dismissed outrage over the Taliban's executions in the past, which sometimes took place in front of crowds at a stadium, and he warned the world against interfering with Afghanistan's new rulers.

"Everyone criticized us for the punishments in the stadium, but we have never said anything about their laws and their punishments," Turabi told The Associated Press, speaking in Kabul. "No one will tell us what our laws should be. We will follow Islam and we will make our laws on the Quran."

Since the Taliban overran Kabul on Aug. 15 and seized control of the country, Afghans and the world have been watching to see whether they will re-create their harsh rule of the late 1990s. Turabi's comments pointed to how the group's leaders remain entrenched in a deeply conservative, hard-line worldview, even if they are embracing technological changes, like video and mobile phones.

Turabi, now in his early 60s, was justice minister and head of the so-called Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice — effectively, the religious police — during the Taliban's previous rule.

At that time, the world denounced the Taliban's punishments, which took place in Kabul's sports stadium or on the grounds of the sprawling Eid Gah mosque, often attended by hundreds of Afghan men.

Executions of convicted murderers were usually by a single shot to the head, carried out by the victim's family, who had the option of accepting "blood money" and allowing the culprit to live. For convicted thieves, the punishment was amputation of a hand. For those convicted of highway robbery, a hand and a foot were amputated.

Trials and convictions were rarely public and the judiciary was weighted in favor of Islamic clerics, whose knowledge of the law was limited to religious injunctions.

Turabi said that this time, judges — including women — would adjudicate cases, but the foundation of Afghanistan's laws will be the Quran. He said the same punishments would be revived.

"Cutting off of hands is very necessary for security," he said, saying it had a deterrent effect. He said the Cabinet was studying whether to do punishments in public and will "develop a policy."

In recent days in Kabul, Taliban fighters have revived a punishment they commonly used in the past — public shaming of men accused of small-time theft.

On at least two occasions in the last week, Kabul men have been packed into the back of a pickup truck, their hands tied, and were paraded around to humiliate them. In one case, their faces were painted to identify them as thieves. In the other, stale bread was hung from their necks or stuffed in their mouth. It wasn't immediately clear what their crimes were.

Wearing a white turban and a bushy, unkempt white beard, the stocky Turabi limped slightly on his artificial leg. He lost a leg and one eye during fighting with Soviet troops in the 1980s.

Under the new Taliban government, he is in charge of prisons. He is among a number of Taliban leaders, including members of the all-male interim Cabinet, who are on a United Nations sanctions list.

During the previous Taliban rule, he was one of the group's most ferocious and uncompromising enforcers. When the Taliban took power in 1996, one of his first acts was to scream at a woman journalist,

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demanding she leave a room of men, and to then deal a powerful slap in the face of a man who objected. Turabi was notorious for ripping music tapes from cars, stringing up hundreds of meters of destroyed cassettes in trees and signposts. He demanded men wear turbans in all government offices and his minions routinely beat men whose beards had been trimmed. Sports were banned, and Turabi's legion of enforcers forced men to the mosque for prayers five times daily.

In this week's interview with the AP, Turabi spoke to a woman journalist.

"We are changed from the past," he said.

He said now the Taliban would allow television, mobile phones, photos and video "because this is the necessity of the people, and we are serious about it." He suggested that the Taliban saw the media as a way to spread their message. "Now we know instead of reaching just hundreds, we can reach millions," he said. He added that if punishments are made public, then people may be allowed to video or take photos to spread the deterrent effect.

The U.S. and its allies have been trying to use the threat of isolation — and the economic damage that would result from it — to pressure the Taliban to moderate their rule and give other factions, minorities and women a place in power.

But Turabi dismissed criticism over the previous Taliban rule, arguing that it had succeeded in bringing stability. "We had complete safety in every part of the country," he said of the late 1990s.

Even as Kabul residents express fear over their new Taliban rulers, some acknowledge grudgingly that the capital has already become safer in just the past month. Before the Taliban takeover, bands of thieves roamed the streets, and relentless crime had driven most people off the streets after dark.

"It's not a good thing to see these people being shamed in public, but it stops the criminals because when people see it, they think 'I don't want that to be me,'" said Amaan, a storeowner in the center of Kabul. He asked to be identified by just one name.

Another shopkeeper said it was a violation of human rights but that he was also happy he can open his store after dark.

EPA rule sharply limits HFCs, gases used as refrigerants

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In what officials call a key step to combat climate change, the Environmental Protection Agency is sharply limiting domestic production and use of hydrofluorocarbons, highly potent greenhouse gases commonly used in refrigerators and air conditioners.

The new rule announced Thursday follows through on a law Congress passed last year and is intended to decrease U.S. production and use of HFCs by 85% over the next 15 years, part of a global phaseout designed to slow global warming.

The administration also is taking steps to crack down on imports of HFCs, greenhouse gases that are thousands of times more powerful than carbon dioxide. They often leak through pipes or appliances that use compressed refrigerants and are considered a major driver of global warming. President Joe Biden has pledged to embrace a 2016 global agreement to greatly reduce HFCs by 2036.

White House climate adviser Gina McCarthy, a former EPA administrator, said the new rule was "a win on climate and a win on jobs and American competitiveness. It's really, frankly, folks, a very big deal."

The rule, set to take effect in late October, is expected to reduce harmful emissions by the equivalent of 4.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide by 2050, McCarthy said, a total similar to three years of emissions from the U.S. power sector.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said the phasedown is backed by a coalition of industry groups that see it as an opportunity to "supercharge" American leadership on domestic manufacturing and production of alternative refrigerants. The industry has long been shifting to the use of alternative refrigerants and pushed for a federal standard to avoid a patchwork of state laws and regulations.

"This action reaffirms what President Biden always says — that when he thinks about climate, he thinks about jobs," Regan said, echoing a Biden refrain about climate change. Transitioning to safer alternatives

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and more energy-efficient cooling technologies is expected to generate more than \$270 billion in cost savings and public health benefits over the next 30 years, Regan said.

A pandemic relief and spending bill passed by Congress last December directs the EPA to sharply reduce production and use of HFCs. The measure, known as the American Innovation and Manufacturing, won wide bipartisan support. The law also includes separate measures to promote technologies to capture and store carbon dioxide produced by power and manufacturing plants and calls for reductions in diesel emissions by buses and other vehicles.

Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, was an influential backer of the law, with Sen. John Kennedy, R-La. Both represent states that are home to chemical companies that produce alternative refrigerants and sought regulatory certainty through federal action.

At a signing ceremony Thursday, Carper said the new rule was "a profound leap forward in tackling the climate crisis," even if many Americans probably have never heard of HFCs or realized how they contribute to global warming.

The HFC provision in the new law was supported by an unusual coalition that included major environmental and business groups, including the National Association of Manufacturers, American Chemistry Council and the Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute. The chemistry council represents major companies including Dow, DuPont, Honeywell, Chemours and Arkema.

The administration said it also is taking other steps to ensure reductions in HFCs, including creation of an interagency task force to prevent illegal trade, production, use or sale of the climate-damaging gases. The task force will be led by the Department of Homeland Security, and EPA's offices of Air and Radiation and Enforcement and Compliance Assurance.

Working with the departments of Justice, State and Defense, the task force will "detect, deter and disrupt any attempt to illegally import or produce HFCs in the United States," the White House said in a fact sheet.

Joseph Goffman, a top official with EPA's air and radiation office, said the experience of the European Union shows that enforcement is an important part of an HFC crackdown.

"Unfortunately, (the EU) has experienced a lot of illegal activity" on HFC imports and other issues, Goffman said. "We're going to be vigorous and proactive" in trying to stop illegal imports, he said.

David Doniger, a climate and clean energy expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the EPA's action was significant, even as the Biden administration presses for ambitious climate legislation making its way through Congress.

"Moving from HFCs to climate-friendlier alternatives is an important part of President Biden's plan to meet the climate crisis by cutting America's heat-trapping emissions at least in half by 2030 — with big benefits for jobs, our health and a safer future," Doniger said.

Biden issued an executive order in January that embraces a 2016 amendment to the 1987 Montreal Protocol on ozone pollution. That amendment calls for the United States and other large industrialized countries to reduce HFCs by 85% by 2036. The State Department has prepared documents for formal ratification of the amendment, but the White House has not submitted them to the Senate.

Harry, Meghan visit NYC sites, including Sept. 11 memorial

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, got a hawk's-eye view of New York City on Thursday with a visit to the rebuilt World Trade Center's signature tower.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, de Blasio's wife, Chirlane McCray, and their son, Dante de Blasio, posed for photos with Harry and Meghan at the 1,268-foot (386-meter) observatory at One World Trade Center, where clouds partially obscured the panoramic view.

In answer to a question about how she was enjoying her trip to New York, Meghan responded, "It's wonderful to be back, thank you." Harry, asked the same question, said, "It's wonderful, thank you."

The royals did not make further remarks.

After enjoying the view from the 102nd floor, they made their way back down and outside.

Hochul chatted with Meghan while de Blasio and Harry spoke before posing for photos in front of the building, which stands near where the center's former twin towers were destroyed by terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001.

Harry and Meghan then visited the neighboring Sept. 11 memorial plaza. The couple looked out over a reflecting pool where one of the towers stood and then visited the Sept. 11 museum.

The duke and duchess are in New York for a Global Citizen Live event to call for vaccine equity.

Boy Scouts' bankruptcy creates rift with religious partners

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Amid the Boy Scouts of America's complex bankruptcy case, there is worsening friction between the BSA and the major religious groups that help it run thousands of scout units. At issue: the churches' fears that an eventual settlement — while protecting the BSA from future sex-abuse lawsuits — could leave many churches unprotected.

The Boy Scouts sought bankruptcy protection in February 2020 in an effort to halt individual lawsuits and create a huge compensation fund for thousands of men who say they were molested as youngsters by scoutmasters or other leaders. At the time, the national organization estimated it might face 5,000 cases; it now faces 82,500.

In July, the BSA proposed an \$850 million deal that would bar further lawsuits against it and its local councils. The deal did not cover the more than 40,000 organizations that have charters with the BSA to sponsor scout units, including many churches from major religious denominations that are now questioning their future involvement in scouting.

The United Methodist Church — which says up to 5,000 of its U.S. congregations could be affected by future lawsuits — recently advised those churches not to extend their charters with the BSA beyond the end of this year. The UMC said these congregations were "disappointed and very concerned" that they weren't included in the July deal.

Everett Cygal, a lawyer for Catholic churches monitoring the case, said it is unfair that parishes now face liability "solely as a result of misconduct by Boy Scout troop leaders who frequently had no connection to the parish."

"Scouting can only be delivered with help of their chartered organizations," Cygal told The Associated Press. "It's shortsighted not to be protecting the people they absolutely need to ensure that scouting is viable in the future."

Officials of several other denominations — including the Southern Baptist Convention, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) — have advised their churches to hire their own legal counsel if they fear possible sex-abuse litigation.

The Presbyterian Church said its national leadership can't act on behalf of member churches because they are separate corporations. The leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran church also said its congregations were on their own, legally speaking, and must decide for themselves whether to continue any relationship with the BSA.

"As a result of the bankruptcy, the congregation cannot confidently rely on the BSA, the local council, or their insurers to defend it," the Lutheran church warned. "The congregation needs to make sure that it has sufficient insurance and that its own insurance will cover them."

The Boy Scouts, in a statement provided to the AP, said its partnership with chartered organizations, including churches, "has been critical to delivering the Scouting program to millions of youth in our country for generations." It said negotiations with those organizations are continuing, and it hopes to conclude the bankruptcy proceedings around the end of this year.

Negotiators face a challenging situation.

According to lawyers representing different parties in the bankruptcy case, the Boy Scouts have suggested chartered organizations have some protection from liability for abuse cases that occurred after 1975, due to an insurance arrangement that took effect in 1976. The BSA has said there's little or no protection,

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however, for the many pre-1976 cases, and the best way for organizations to gain protection for that era would be to make a substantial financial contribution to a settlement fund.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints took such a step last week, agreeing to contribute \$250 million to a compensation fund in exchange for a release from further liability. The denomination, widely known as the Mormon church, pulled its units out of the BSA on Jan. 1, 2020, after decades as the biggest sponsor.

One key distinction: The Latter-day Saints have a centralized governing structure, making possible a contribution covering its vast former network of scout units. The remaining faith-based charter organizations are more decentralized, complicating the question of how contributions to the compensation fund would be mandated and organized.

Jeremy Ryan, a lawyer representing United Methodist churches, said his clients believe there is some pre-1976 insurance available to them under policies the BSA and its local councils held at the time.

Cygal, the lawyer representing Catholic churches, made a similar argument but said some chartered organizations eventually may have to make an appropriate financial contribution "to put an end to this dispute once and for all."

Another complication in the negotiations: differing views on how much blame lies with the churches.

Some of the churches argue that they merely provided a venue for a local scout unit to meet, while scout leaders were responsible for hiring decisions that might have led to sexual abuse. Some lawyers for the plaintiffs disagree, saying church leaders were often actively involved in those decisions.

"The Scouts had plenty of fault due to their negligence, but the local institutions had plenty of fault also," said Christopher Hurley, whose Chicago law firm says it represents about 4,000 men who filed claims in the bankruptcy.

"It's just not OK to pass the buck on this," Hurley added. "Everybody's got to suck it up and make a fair contribution to get justice for these guys."

Stephen Crew, whose Oregon-based law firm represents about 400 plaintiffs, said he sympathizes with faith-based chartered organizations who "worry about being hung out to dry."

"But survivors also have a lot of anxiety," said Crew. "And the problem now is that the insurance companies are balking at everybody."

A third lawyer for plaintiffs, California-based Paul Mones, blamed the churches' predicament on the BSA, saying its initial bankruptcy strategy failed to properly anticipate the impact on chartered organizations.

"For decades, the religious organizations have been the backbone of the BSA," Mones said. "They did not sign up thinking they'd have any kind of liability ... and all of a sudden they're being told, 'You're going to get sued.' It's a hot mess."

Some church leaders, such as United Methodist Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., have been blunt in their dismay over the bankruptcy fallout.

"This is a very sad and tragic matter that has occurred within our nation and the Church," Saenz said in a recent letter to the clergy he oversees in Kansas and Nebraska. He said there might be 110 abuse claims in the bankruptcy case potentially connected to UMC churches in his region.

Saenz said the BSA might struggle to move forward post-bankruptcy without participation of the UMC, the biggest active sponsor of Scout units.

But due to BSA positions in the case that are detrimental to the UMC, Saenz wrote, "We simply cannot currently commit to the relationship with the BSA as we have in the past."

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The jail where Jeffrey Epstein killed himself is crumbling

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Inside the notorious federal jail in Lower Manhattan, small chunks of concrete fall

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from the ceiling. Freezing temperatures force inmates to stuff old coronavirus face masks into vents to try to stop the cold air.

One cell is off-limits because the door is now unstable - likely because of constant pounding over the years from the prisoners inside on the cinder-block walls.

Once hailed as a prototype for a new kind of federal jail and the most secure in the country, the Metropolitan Correctional Center has become a blighted wreck, so deteriorated it's impossible to safely house inmates. The Justice Department said last month it would close the jail in the coming months to undertake much-needed repairs - but it may never reopen.

The Associated Press was granted rare access inside — the first time a reporter has toured the facility since wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein killed himself there in August 2019. His death exposed a slew of problems inside the jail, and that list has only grown: rampant spread of the coronavirus, recording of squalid conditions, a loaded gun smuggled in, another inmate's death.

The Metropolitan Correctional Center has housed a slew of well-known criminals — El Chapo, John Gotti, Bernie Madoff, and some of the world's most dangerous terrorists. Prisoners are held at the jail as they await their trials or transfers to federal prisons after conviction. It has housed close to 900 inmates in the past.

Now, about 200 inmates are left. Around 125 will be moved to the federal detention center just over the Brooklyn Bridge in downtown Brooklyn, and about 75 will head to FCI Otisville, a medium-security prison in upstate New York.

But until they get transferred, they are serving time in squalor.

The pathway that trucks and buses would take inside isn't useable because of structural concerns from decades of wear and tear, so inmates instead are brought in and out through pedestrian walkways outside, significantly raising security and safety concerns.

The ceiling in one part of the kitchen is falling in and it's too unsafe to wash dishes, so inmates now eat off paper plates. In one housing unit, one of two sinks has a slow and steady drip; paint is peeling from the walls near the window and black spots stain the tiles in the single shower.

When the jail was built, the architect said he was told to make it "as little like a prison as possible," a new style of lock-up for an urban area, not spread out over mass grounds but a vertical building more like a college dormitory or a hotel than a detention center.

But what was hailed by the Justice Department in the 1970s as a "quantum leap forward from traditional jails" eventually backslid into one. Lofty amenities fell by the wayside and even basic jail accommodations, like working cell doors, got harder to come by.

Within two years of its opening, it was already showing signs of failure. Its population had ballooned to 539 inmates -- 90 more than it had been designed for -- prompting a judge to declare the jail "unacceptably cramped and oppressive for most healthy inmates."

Since then, it has slowly fallen into dank decay. The pipes are so old they sometimes stop working, and some are in such narrow quarters no one can get close to fix them. Repairing them is costly and requires cutting water, heat, or air conditioning to the entire jail. That means long-term repairs or upgrades aren't feasible while prisoners are inside.

Certain housing units are no longer used because cell door openings known as food ports won't close. Inmates might grab officers through the broken slots and assault them.

Even before news that the jail would close, judges were taking the deteriorating conditions into account when sentencing inmates, crediting them with extra for time served because they had to endure life there.

In April, Manhattan Federal Judge Paul Oetken gave Daniel Gonzalez a reduced sentence of time served on drug charges after the inmate described a "chaotic" stay at the jail that he said included being locked in a cell for 23 hours a day, not showering for days and a persistent foot infection.

"I do believe that because it's been harsher than a usual period that it's more punitive, that it's essentially the equivalent of either time and a half or two times what would ordinarily be served," Oetken said. "So, I think having served 24 months is equivalent to having served three years."

The facility — which another judge said was "run by morons" — has cycled through four wardens in the

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past two years.

The warden brought in right after Epstein's death abruptly retired in January after allegations of inmate abuse and of sexual misconduct involving staff members.

Her replacement, fresh from serving as an executioner in the Trump administration's historic run of capital punishment that became a virus superspreader, lasted three months. The one after that was there just two weeks.

The current warden, in charge since May, was sent from a regional office to run the jail through its closure.

The Justice Department's decision to close the MCC could be a sign of progress toward much-needed accountability for the federal Bureau of Prisons, advocates say. The jail was closed just a few weeks after Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco toured the conditions for herself, a signal the Biden administration recognized immediate action was needed.

The Bureau of Prisons has long been plagued by allegations of serious misconduct and abuse and has faced blistering criticism from the Justice Department's inspector general, advocates and lawmakers. Just in the past two years, the agency has struggled with a failed response to the pandemic, a series of escapes, deaths and critically low staffing levels that have hampered responses to emergencies.

Nearly one-third of federal correctional officer jobs in the United States are vacant, forcing prisons to use cooks, teachers, nurses and other workers to guard inmates. The expanded use of that practice, known as augmentation, has been raising questions about whether the agency can carry out its required duties to ensure the safety of prisoners and staff members while also putting in place programs and classes required under the law.

One of the two officers assigned to guard Epstein the night he died was augmented and both were working overtime shifts. Prosecutors say they were sleeping and browsing the internet — shopping for furniture and motorcycles — instead of watching Epstein, who was supposed to be checked on every 30 minutes.

David Patton, the executive director and attorney-in-chief of the Federal Defenders of New York, said he was "genuinely surprised" that the government was closing the Metropolitan Correctional Center, which he called a failed institution. Though, he said, he and other public defenders figured something was going on because the inmate count kept dwindling.

"My experience with the BOP, at least with the facilities here, is that there just seems to be a complete lack of accountability," Patton said. "It is a revolving door of wardens. Nobody seems to own the management of those facilities."

Justice officials hope relocating prisoners to the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn will vastly improve things. But that jail, which opened in the early 1990s to alleviate crowding at the MCC in Manhattan, has had its own problems, including a botched response to a weeklong power failure in the winter of 2019, and an associate warden charged last month with killing her husband.

Still, conditions at the facility are still a vast improvement from just across the East River. Housing units are much newer, cleaner and larger; there are outdoor recreation facilities, enhanced medical services and a separate wing for educational programs and the jail's library.

Staff members in Brooklyn are also preparing for the influx of new inmates by increasing telephone and video conferencing capabilities for visits with lawyers. The jail has built special rooms at the top of each unit with televisions for inmates to meet one-on-one with their lawyers virtually, in addition to the 20 attorney conference rooms in the regular visiting area.

The Brooklyn jail also offers a program for prisoners to earn GED diplomas, along with other educational programs and group therapy. The medical unit — staffed with about 30 people currently and more being brought from Manhattan — features a full dental suite, urgent care rooms and a handful of examination rooms for inmates to see Bureau of Prisons doctors.

As for the Manhattan jail, when the last inmate leaves, it's not clear what will happen. The department hasn't said yet what it would spend to fix the facility.

Met season to open with first-ever opera by Black composer

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By MIKE SILVERMAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Charles Blow recalls being in the audience at the premiere of the opera based on his memoir, "Fire Shut Up in My Bones," and watching the scene that depicts his sexual abuse as a child by an older cousin.

"To be honest," he said, "it was more uncomfortable watching everybody watching me. Because they were so unnerved by it they worried about my reaction."

They needn't have been concerned, Blow said in an interview. "When I wrote the book I'd already dealt with all that," he said. "I don't have the residual trauma that a lot of people expect me to have."

Blow, a columnist for The New York Times, will again be in the audience when the opera opens the Metropolitan Opera season on Sept. 27. It will be the first operatic performance in the house since the pandemic shutdown 18 months ago.

More history-making is the fact that "Fire," with a score by jazz trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard, will be the first opera by a Black musician presented at the Met in its 138 years.

"Of course you're filled with pride to be labeled with that," Blanchard said after a rehearsal last week. "But there's a certain sense of, not guilt, but sorrow, because I know I'm not the first who was qualified."

For example, Blanchard said he was at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis this summer — where "Fire" premiered in 2019 — and heard a performance of "Highway 1," a one-act opera by Black composer William Grant Still first performed in 1963.

"I'm sitting there listening to that," he said, "and I go, like, why couldn't that be at the Met?"

Blanchard said OTSL artistic director James Robinson had been after him to compose another opera after his first, "Champion," based on the life of boxer Emile Griffith, premiered there in 2013. When his wife, Robin Burgess, recommended he read Blow's memoir, Blanchard said it struck a chord.

In his book, Blow, now 51, describes growing up in poverty as a shy, sensitive child in rural Louisiana with four macho older brothers, a philandering drunk for a father and a warm-hearted, hard-working mother who carried a gun in her purse.

"What drew me to this story was the notion of being isolated and different in your own community," said Blanchard, who was born in New Orleans. "I knew a lot about that growing up, wanting to be a musician and walking to the bus stop on the weekends, carrying my horn and wearing glasses while the other boys were playing football in the street. That was not a popular look."

To write the libretto, Blanchard enlisted filmmaker Kasi Lemmons, his friend and frequent collaborator. She had never written an opera libretto, though she said it was on a "bucket list" of things she hoped someday to accomplish.

"I didn't know what the process normally was," Lemmons said. "I didn't even know the libretto went first. I thought maybe the music came first."

For advice, she turned to Robinson who gave her the crucial suggestion that "in an opera, anything can sing." Inspired by that, she created two characters known as Destiny and Loneliness who accompany Blow at different points in his life. She also has a child in the role of the young Charles on stage at various points alongside the adult character.

Lemmons said she was nervous about how Blow might react to some of her inventions because, "OK, I've written this guy's loneliness as a character. That's pretty intrusive.

"On the other hand," she said, "the way he spoke about loneliness in the book was very palpable."

Once she handed the libretto to Blanchard, he set it to music with few changes. The score is infused with jazz rhythms and filled with lyrical passages, including full-fledged arias for some of the characters.

The Met production is co-directed by Robinson and Camille A. Brown, who is the first Black director on the Met's main stage. Met music director Yannick Nezet-Seguin will lead a cast that stars baritone Will Liverman as the adult Charles, soprano Latonia Moore as his mother and soprano Angel Blue as Destiny, Loneliness and his girlfriend Greta. There will be eight performances, with the final one on Saturday afternoon Oct. 23 shown live in HD in movie theaters worldwide.

The production is co-commissioned by the Lyric Opera of Chicago, where it will be presented next spring, and by LA Opera.

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In his memoir, Blow describes himself as bisexual and writes frankly about having homoerotic fantasies, which are dramatized in the opera through a dance sequence choreographed by Brown.

Lemmons hopes audiences can see past the trauma Blow endured as a youngster and draw inspiration from his story.

"It's deeply sad. But the thing that's not sad is Charles Blow," she said. "The remarkable aspect of the story is how you can draw strength from pain."

Blanchard echoes that view: "The mere fact that Charles is such a success in his life indicates how much he overcame," he said.

"Hopefully some young kid coming to this opera will see that. Hopefully it can really change some people's lives."

Tensions grow as US, allies deepen Indo-Pacific involvement

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

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 Thursday, China sent 24 fighter jets toward Taiwan in a large display of force after the island announced its intention to join a Pacific trade group, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, that China has also applied to join.

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

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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 saying 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."

Associated Press writer Lorne Cook in Brussels contributed to this report.

US jobless claims tick up from near a pandemic low

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid rose last week for a second straight week to 351,000, a sign that the delta variant of the coronavirus may be disrupting the job market's recovery, at least temporarily.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that jobless claims rose by 16,000 from the previous week. As the job market has strengthened, unemployment aid applications, which generally track layoffs, have tumbled since topping 900,000 early this year, reflecting the economy's reopening after the pandemic recession. The four-week moving average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week swings, registered its sixth straight drop — to a pandemic low of 336,000.

Jobless claims still remain somewhat elevated: Before the virus tore through the economy in March 2020, they generally numbered about 220,000 a week.

In a research report, Contingent Macro Advisors concluded that the recent jump in applications for unemployment benefits — especially so last week in California and Virginia — likely reflected a technical problem in processing the claims: "For now, the jump in claims in the last two weeks is not yet alarming but it certainly bears close watching in the coming weeks."

America's employers have rapidly increased their hiring since they slashed 22 million jobs in March and April 2020 as the pandemic — and the shutdowns that were meant to contain it — brought economic activity to a near-standstill. Since then, the economy has recovered about 17 million jobs as the rollout of vaccines encouraged businesses to open and expand hours and Americans to go back out to shop, travel and dine out.

But hiring, which has averaged more than 585,000 jobs a month this year, slowed to just 235,000 in August as the delta variant disrupted the recovery. Restaurants and bars cut nearly 42,000 jobs last month as COVID-19 cases picked up.

Overall, 2.8 million Americans were receiving unemployment benefits during the week of Sept. 11, up by 131,000 from the week before.

Earlier this month, more than 8 million people lost all their unemployment benefits with the expiration of two federal programs that covered gig workers and people who have been jobless for more than six months. Those emergency programs had been created in March of last year to help ease the economic hardship caused by the pandemic.

An additional 2.7 million people who were receiving regular state unemployment aid lost a \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement last week.

Woman with Down syndrome loses UK abortion law challenge

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A woman with Down syndrome lost a court challenge against the British government Thursday over a law allowing the abortion up until birth of a fetus with the condition.

Heidi Crowter, 26, and two others took the Department of Health and Social Care to court, arguing that part of the Abortion Act is discriminatory and violates the European Convention on Human Rights.

Abortions in England, Wales and Scotland are allowed up till 24 weeks of pregnancy. But the law states that terminations can be allowed up until birth if there's "a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped."

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Crowter, who lives independently and recently got married, has said that she found the legislation “offensive” and disrespectful. She said she wanted to change the law to challenge people’s perception of Down syndrome.

Two senior judges dismissed the case Thursday after a two-day hearing, concluding that the legislation isn’t unlawful and that it aims to strike a balance between the rights of the unborn child and that of women.

Judges Rabinder Singh and Nathalie Lieven said the case gave rise to strong feelings and differences over ethical and religious views, but the court must not enter into such controversies and rule only in accordance with the law.

“The evidence before the court powerfully shows that there will be some families who positively wish to have a child, even knowing that it will be born with severe disabilities,” they said. “But the evidence is also clear that not every family will react in that way,” they said, and many families may not be able to provide a disabled child with a supportive environment.

“The evidence is also clear that, although scientific developments have improved and earlier identification may be feasible, there are still conditions which will only be identified late in a pregnancy, after 24 weeks,” the judges added.

Crowter brought the case with Maire Lea-Wilson, 33, who has a son with Down syndrome, and an unidentified child with the condition.

She said she plans to appeal the ruling.

“The fight is not over,” Crowter said outside the Royal Courts of Justice in central London, surrounded by supporters.

“We face discrimination every day in schools, in the workplace and in society. Thanks to the verdict, the judges have upheld discrimination in the womb too,” she said.

Paul Conrathe, a lawyer from the firm representing the three claimants, called the judgment disappointing and “out of step with modern attitudes to disability.”

“By allowing babies with (Down) syndrome to be aborted up to birth, unlike neurotypical babies, the law sends a powerful message that the lives of people with (Down) syndrome are of lesser value,” he said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Sept. 24, the 267th day of 2021. There are 98 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Sept. 24, 2001, President George W. Bush ordered a freeze on the assets of 27 people and organizations with suspected links to terrorism, including Islamic militant Osama bin Laden, and urged other nations to do likewise.

On this date:

In 1789, President George Washington signed a Judiciary Act establishing America’s federal court system and creating the post of attorney general.

In 1869, thousands of businessmen were ruined in a Wall Street panic known as “Black Friday” after financiers Jay Gould and James Fisk attempted to corner the gold market.

In 1929, Lt. James H. Doolittle guided a Consolidated NY-2 Biplane over Mitchel Field in New York in the first all-instrument flight.

In 1934, Babe Ruth made his farewell appearance as a player with the New York Yankees in a game against the Boston Red Sox. (The Sox won, 5-0.)

In 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a heart attack while on vacation in Denver.

In 1960, the USS Enterprise, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, was launched at Newport News, Virginia. “The Howdy Doody Show” ended a nearly 13-year run with its final telecast on NBC.

In 1969, the trial of the Chicago Eight (later seven) began. (Five were later convicted of crossing state lines to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic convention, but the convictions were ultimately overturned.)

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In 1976, former hostage Patricia Hearst was sentenced to seven years in prison for her part in a 1974 bank robbery in San Francisco carried out by the Symbionese Liberation Army. (Hearst was released after 22 months after receiving clemency from President Jimmy Carter.)

In 1991, children's author Theodor Seuss Geisel (GY'-zul), better known as Dr. Seuss, died in La Jolla, Calif., at age 87.

In 1996, the United States and 70 other countries became the first to sign a treaty at the United Nations to end all testing and development of nuclear weapons. (The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has yet to enter into force because of the refusal so far of eight nations — including the United States — to ratify it.)

In 2015, a stampede and crush of Muslim pilgrims occurred at an intersection near a holy site in Saudi Arabia; The Associated Press estimated that more than 2,400 people were killed, while the official Saudi toll stood at 769.

In 2019, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi launched a formal impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump; the probe focused partly on whether Trump abused his presidential powers and sought help from the government of Ukraine to undermine Democratic foe Joe Biden. (Trump would be acquitted by the Republican-controlled Senate on two impeachment charges.)

Ten years ago: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev proposed Vladimir Putin as a presidential candidate for 2012, paving the way for Putin's return to office four years after he was legally forced to step aside. NASA's dead six-ton Upper Atmosphere Research Satellite fell to Earth, 20 years after being deployed from the space shuttle Discovery.

Five years ago: The new Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture opened its doors in Washington, D.C. Police arrested a suspect in a shooting at the Cascade Mall in Burlington, Washington. The shooting a day earlier left five people dead.

One year ago: Protesters again gathered in Louisville, Kentucky, and in New York, Philadelphia and other cities to protest the decision by a Kentucky grand jury not to indict the officers involved in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor. President Donald Trump's refusal to commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he were to lose the November election drew swift blowback from both parties in Congress, with Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell saying that the winner "will be inaugurated on January 20th." Trump was booed by spectators in the streets near the Supreme Court as he arrived to pay respects to the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Florida prosecutors dropped a misdemeanor charge against New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft after courts blocked their use of video that allegedly showed him paying for massage parlor sex.

Today's Birthdays: R&B singer Sonny Turner (The Platters) is 82. Singer Phyllis "Jiggs" Allbut Sirico (The Angels) is 79. Political commentator Lou Dobbs is 76. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Joe Greene is 75. Actor Gordon Clapp is 73. Actor Harriet Walter is 71. Songwriter Holly Knight is 65. Actor Kevin Sorbo is 63. Actor-writer Nia Vardalos is 59. Rock musician Shawn Crahan (AKA Clown) (Slipknot) is 52. Country musician Marty Mitchell is 52. Actor Megan Ward is 52. Singer-musician Marty Cintron (No Mercy) is 50. Contemporary Christian musician Juan DeVevo (Casting Crowns) is 46. Actor Ian Bohen is 45. Actor Justin Bruening is 42. Olympic gold medal gymnast Paul Hamm (hahm) is 39. Actor Erik Stocklin is 39. Actor Spencer Treat Clark is 34. Actor Grey Damon is 34. Actor Kyle Sullivan is 33. Actor Ben Platt is 28.