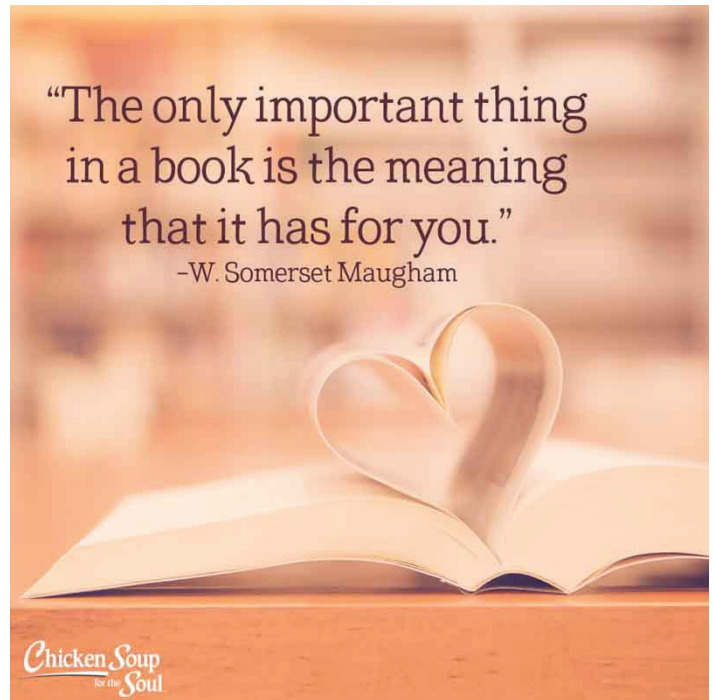


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## Upcoming Events

### Saturday, Sept. 25

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

### Monday, Sept. 27

Boys golf at Madison Golf Course

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

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

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

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

### Tuesday, Sept. 28

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

### Wednesday, Sept. 29

NE Region Land & Range Contest in Webster

### Thursday, Sept. 30

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

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

4:30 p.m.: Junior High Football at Redfield  
Volleyball hosting Hamlin (C match at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity)

### Friday, Oct. 1

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

### Saturday, Oct. 2

2 p.m.: Boys soccer hosts Freeman Academy

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



## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



**Preschool Developmental Screening**  
**Groton Area Schools #06-6**

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

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

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

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

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



### 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



**The Tiger fans lined up to congratulate the Tigers on their win over Aberdeen Roncalli.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## Groton Area claims share of NEC Title

# Battle tested Tigers stun undefeated Roncalli, 26-9

Groton Area put on an impressive second half in shutting down Aberdeen Roncalli and handing the Cavaliers their first loss of the season with a 26-9 lead. The Groton Area win also clinched a share of the Northeast Conference title.

Groton Area and Roncalli now each have one loss. Deuel suffered its second defeat to Redfield. Roncalli still has three conference games left - Deuel, Clark/Willow Lake and Mobridge-Pollock. Roncalli was ranked fifth in the state in the recent coaches poll.

Groton Area had four first downs in the first half and 11 in the second half. Roncalli had eight first downs in the first half and three in the second half.

In rushing, Groton Area had 93 yards in the first half and 168 in the second half. Roncalli had 73 yards in the first half and 21 in the second half. In passing, Groton Area had 36 in the first half and 31 in the second half. Roncalli had 45 in the first half and one in the second half. Roncalli outscored Groton Area in the first half, 9-6 while Groton outscored Roncalli in the second half, 20-0.

In the pregame interview on GDILIVE.COM, Coach Shaun Wanner said the Tigers are battle tested, emerging from deficits to wins and not giving up during the course of the game.

Kaden Kurtz had his best game of the year with 148 yards rushing, 67 yards passing, eight tackles, three sacks and one forced interception and scored two touchdowns. Favian Sanchez had 64 yards rushing, 64 yards receiving and scored two touchdowns. Andrew Marzahn had 45 yards rushing. Pierce Kettering had four yards rushing and 12 tackles. Jordan Bjerke had three yards receiving, one sack and 10 tackles. Jackson Cogley had nine tackles and kicked two extra points. Christian Ehresmann had seven tackles, Evin Nehls had one sack and Ethan Gengerke had one interception.

During the halftime interview with Groton Stat Guy Tom Woods on GDILIVE.COM, he said that Roncalli's quarterback Jackson Isakson had not been sacked all year. He had told the team that he would buy a large pizza every time Isakson was sacked. The Tiger defense did not disappoint. He was sacked five times and had two interceptions so Woods owes for seven large pizzas.

This was the 61st time that the two teams have played since 1964, according to Woods. Roncalli has won 44 times and Groton Area won it 17 times.

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**The Groton Area Tigers have claimed a share of the Northeast Conference with a 26-9 win over Roncalli Friday night at Doney Field in Groton.** (Photo: Tom and Patti Woods Facebook Page)

Roncalli took the opening kickoff, marched down the field, had six first downs and took seven and half minutes off the clock before scoring on a 35-yard pass from Jackson Isakson to Matthew Martinez. Isakson's PAT kick was no good.

A Groton turnover allowed the Cavaliers to set up the next score, but Roncalli had to kick a field goal on fourth down. Isakson kicked a 25 yard field goal with 11:17 left in the second quarter.

Then in a move that took the Cavalier defense off guard, Kaden Kurtz would escape the Cavalier defensive line and the race was on to the end zone with several Roncalli players chasing him down. Kurtz would wheel 75 yards and the Tigers were on the scoreboard with 10:59 left in the first half. Jackson Cogley missed his first PAT of the year and it was Roncalli with a 9-6 lead at half time.

"We changed some things up at halftime," Wanner said. "Our field position was terrible in the first half. Roncalli won a lot of games by getting good field position. I told the kids at half time that we have to get into better field position. We did so much better in the second half.

"We had run a different formation against Redfield, but then got away from it. I think it was Pierce (Kettering) that said 'why don't we run this against them.' We came out with it in the second half and Roncalli couldn't counter it. It was one of the kids' idea and it was a great idea. They often times see things on the field that we don't see from the sideline."

Groton Area would take the opening kickoff of the second half but would need only 92 seconds to hit pay dirt as Kaden Kurtz would score on a 28 yard run. The PAT kick was no good and Groton Area took a 12-9 lead.

In a big play from midfield, Favian Sanchez would break free and dash 46 yards down the field to score with 6:29 left in the third quarter. Cogley kicked the PAT and it was 19-9. "The kids got a lot of confidence when we got that 19-9 lead," Wanner said. "They have big hearts and I'm proud of them. This is one of the most intelligent groups I've had in a while. That's a big key to this team."

Groton Area would score again with 9:24 left in the game on a four yard run by Sanchez with Cogley kicking the PAT to make it 26-9.

"Our execution in the second half was by far the best we've had the season," Wanner said. "We have to give credit to our offensive line and our defensive line as well. It was a great win - we beat a good Roncalli program. We have a lot of respect for Roncalli when we play them."

Groton Area finished with 15 first downs, had 38 carries for 261 yards, completed seven of 11 passes for 67 yards with one interception, recovered its only fumble and had six penalties for 65 yards. Aberdeen Roncalli had 11 first downs, carried the ball 30 times for 94 yards, completed five of 14 passes for 46 yards and had one penalty for five yards. Abe Kretchman had 44 yards rushing while Maddox May had

29 and Phillip Zens had 17 yards. Matthew Martinez had 37 yards receiving. Kaden Clark led the tackles with 10 while Anthony Brunmair had seven and Martinez, Andrew Brennan and Jackson Isakson each had six tackles. Keegan Stewart had the interception.

Groton Area, now 5-1 on the season, will travel to Waubay to play Dakota Hills. Roncalli falls to 4-1.

"We have to keep playing hard and staying healthy," Wanner said. "The kids do a great job during the week preparing. It makes it easy for us to coach. No matter what the opponent's record it, we have to come ready to play."

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, TN Tax Business Solutions, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Groton Chiropractic Clinic, Dacotah Bank, Groton American Legion, Doug Abeln Seed Company and Blocker Construction. Bahr Spray Foam was the touch-down sponsor.

- Paul Kosel

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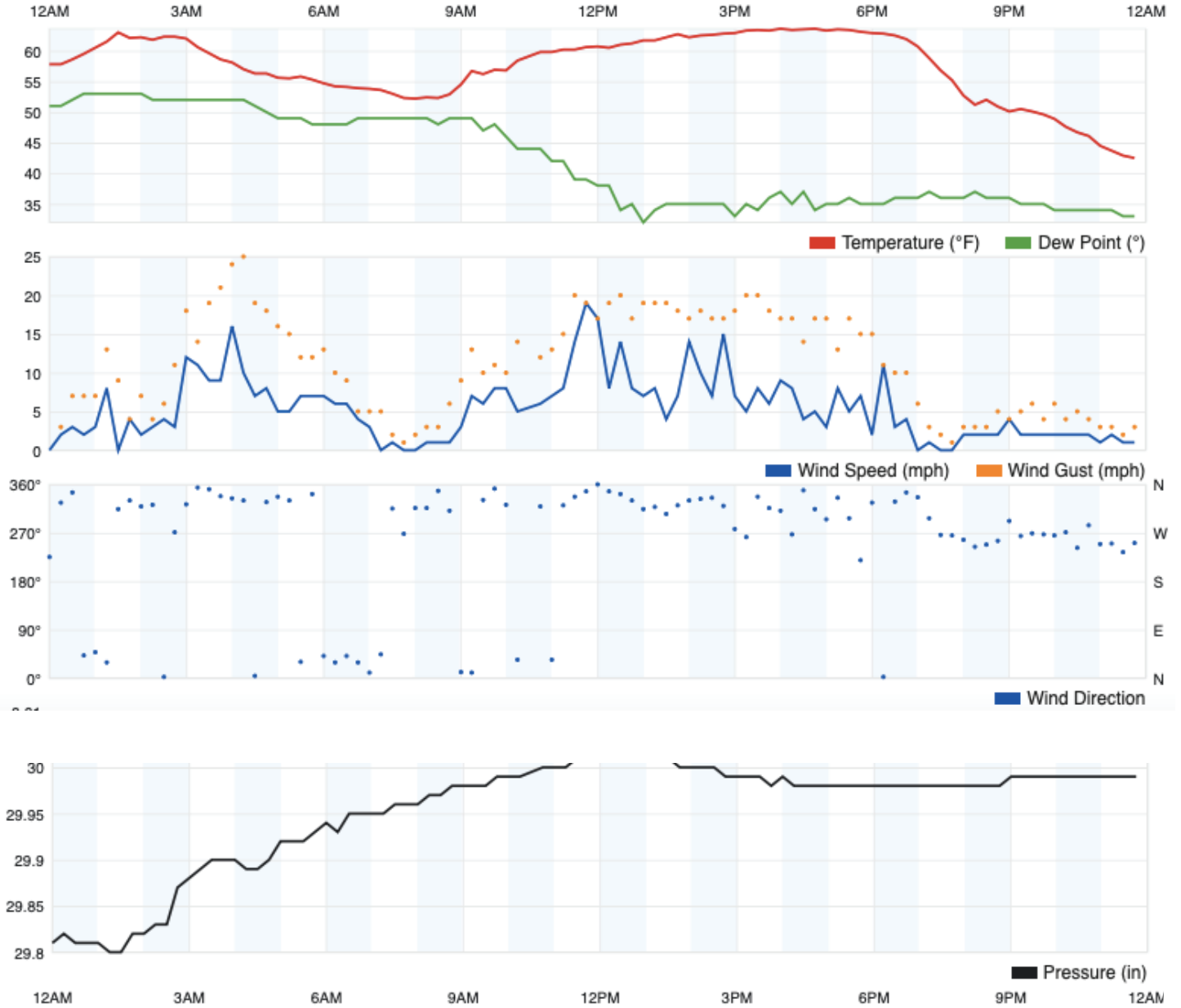
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\*Product Price - Actual retail prices are set by dealer and may vary. Taxes, freight, setup and handling charges may be additional and may vary. Models subject to limited availability. Specifications and programs are subject to change without notice. Images may not reflect dealer inventory and/or unit specifications. †† As rated by Kohler, all power levels are stated in gross horsepower at 3600 RPM per SAE J1940 as rated by engine manufacturer. \*\*See your local Cub Cadet Independent Dealer for warranty details. © 2021 Cub Cadet 3PV\_Q\_ECMMERCE

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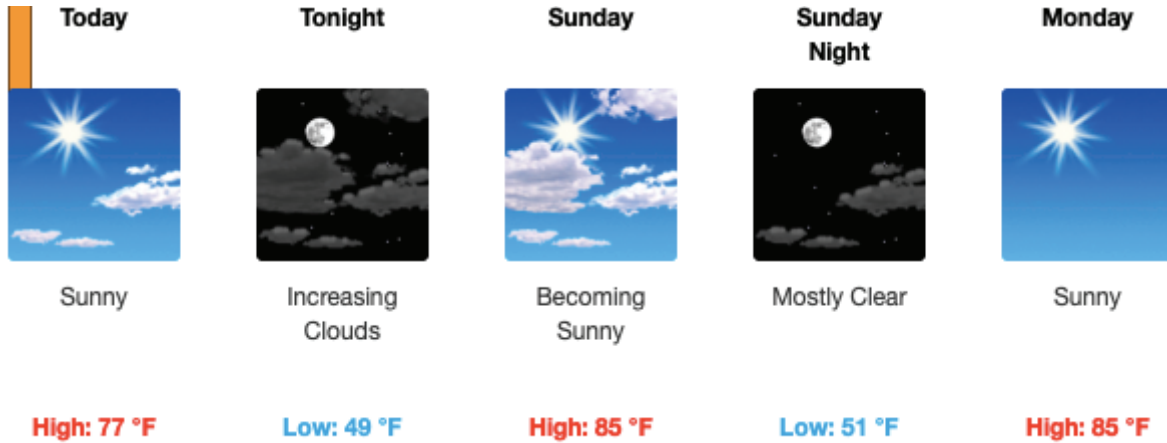
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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## Feeling Like Summer Again

High temperatures may be 20+ degrees above average by Tuesday, even approaching daily records

	9/25	9/26	9/27	9/28	9/29		9/25	9/26	9/27	9/28	9/29
	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed		Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
McIntosh	80	87	87	89	74	Miller	78	87	88	89	82
Eagle Butte	80	89	88	88	75	Redfield	77	87	86	89	82
Murdo	83	89	90	91	79	<b>Aberdeen</b>	78	85	85	88	82
<b>Pierre</b>	81	90	91	93	81	Britton	74	84	82	85	81
Mobridge	80	88	88	90	81	<b>Watertown</b>	72	85	82	83	80
Gettysburg	77	88	86	88	77	Sisseton	74	83	82	84	82
Kennebec	82	88	90	90	81	Milbank	73	83	82	84	81
Eureka	78	87	86	89	81	Wheaton	73	82	80	82	80

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD Updated: 9/25/2021 5:20 AM Central

After a chilly morning, temperatures will rebound nicely across the area today, under mostly sunny skies. Temperatures continue to climb Sunday, and remain abnormally warm (even hot!) through Wednesday. Showers and thunderstorm chances return to the picture on Wednesday/Thursday.



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## Today in Weather History

September 25, 1981: A late September tornado touched down briefly 14 miles west of Pierre during the early evening hours with no damage occurring.

September 25, 1996: An early fall storm over the Black Hills of northeast Wyoming and western South Dakota re-acquainted area residents with their winter driving techniques. Snow totals ranged from 4 to 8 inches. U.S. Highway 385, south of Deadwood South Dakota, was temporarily closed after a semi-truck jack-knifed on Strawberry Hill. Numerous minor accidents were reported in the Black Hills due to slick roads. Heavy wet snow closed the Needles Highway and Iron Mountain Road in the central/southern Black Hills until snowplows could clear the streets.

1848: The Great Gale of 1848 was the most severe hurricane to affect Tampa Bay, Florida and is one of two major hurricanes to make landfall in the area. This storm produced the highest storm tide ever experienced in Tampa Bay when the water rose 15 feet in six to eight hours.

1939 - A west coast hurricane moved onshore south of Los Angeles bringing unprecedented rains along the southern coast of California. Nearly five and a half inches of rain drenched Los Angeles during a 24 hour period. The hurricane caused two million dollars damage, mostly to structures along the coast and to crops, and claimed 45 lives at sea. "El Cordonazo" produced 5.66 inches of rain at Los Angeles and 11.6 inches of rain at Mount Wilson, both records for the month of September. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1942: From September 24th through the 26th, 1942, an early-season winter storm moved through the Northern Plains, Upper Mississippi River Valley, and Great Lakes, dropping measurable snow as it went. In many places across Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and northern Illinois, this was their earliest measurable snow on record.

1987 - Hurricane Emily crossed the island of Bermuda during the early morning. Emily, moving northeast at 45 mph, produced wind gusts to 115 mph at Kindley Field. The thirty-five million dollars damage inflicted by Emily made it the worst hurricane to strike Bermuda since 1948. Parts of Michigan and Wisconsin experienced their first freeze of the autumn. Snow and sleet were reported in the Sheffield and Sutton areas of northeastern Vermont at midday. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Northern Pacific Coast brought rain and gale force winds to the coast of Washington State. Fair weather prevailed across most of the rest of the nation. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Twenty-three cities in the south central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Topeka KS with a reading of 33 degrees, and Binghamton NY with a low of 25 degrees. Showers and thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Atlanta GA with 4.87 inches of rain, their sixth highest total of record for any given day. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) 1998: Four hurricanes were spinning simultaneously in the Atlantic basin: Georges, Ivan, Jeanne, and Karl. That was the first time this had happened since 1893.

2015: Fairbanks, Alaska received 4-9 inches of snow. Another storm on September 27-30 produced 14.2 inches, including 11.2 inches on the 29th. September 2015 would end up being Fairbanks's second snowiest September on record with 20.9 inches.

2015: An EF2 tornado tracked nearly seven miles across Johns Island in South Carolina.

2017: A large waterspout was seen over the Ionian Sea, off the coast of Gallipoli, Italy.

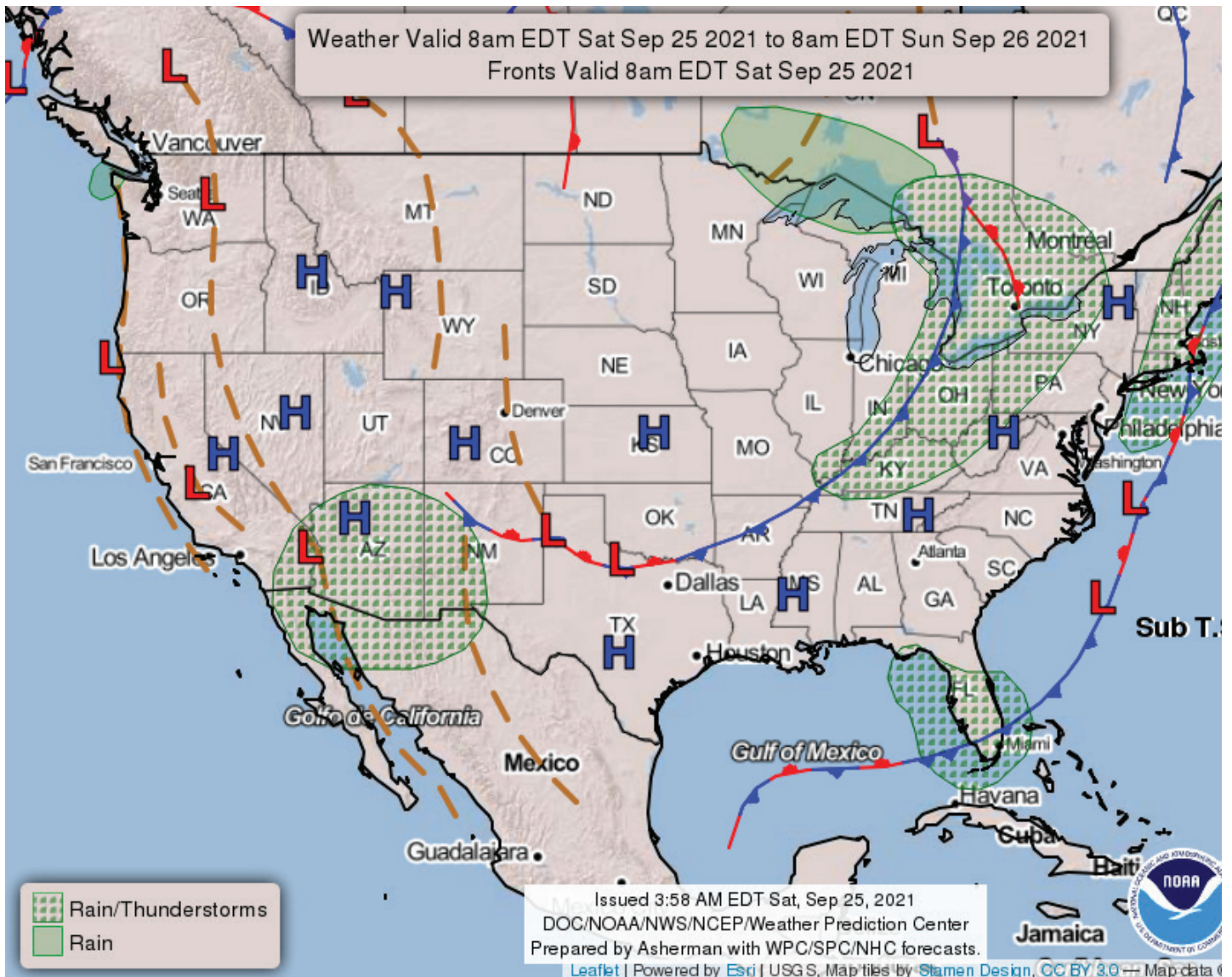
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 64 °F at 4:33 PM**  
**Low Temp: 42 °F at 11:59 PM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 3:46 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 95° in 1938**  
**Record Low: 19° in 1926**  
**Average High: 71°F**  
**Average Low: 43°F**  
**Average Precip in Sept.: 1.66**  
**Precip to date in Sept.: 2.58**  
**Average Precip to date: 18.00**  
**Precip Year to Date: 15.42**  
**Sunset Tonight: 7:25:26 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:23:34 AM**



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## LIGHT IN DARK PLACES

It was Jim's birthday, and his dad wanted it to be one he would long remember. So, he decided to take him to the Christian bookstore to buy him a picture of Jesus that he could hang in his room.

Upon entering the store, he said, "Son, which picture of Jesus do you want for your room? Look around carefully and then tell me which one you want."

After looking at most of the pictures in the store very carefully, he said, "Dad, I want a picture of Jesus that will shine in my room when it is dark."

We live in a world filled with darkness that would, if it could, put out the light of God. But this is nothing new. Jesus said, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds are evil."

Jesus brought the light of God into a world that has been darkened by sin. But His light has a condition to it: it must be received through faith in what He did for us on the cross. Those who receive Him are made righteous, and they see His light in the darkness.

Hear what the Psalmist said, "Light is shed upon those who are righteous - the godly." His light dissipates the darkness of despair and brings the hope of eternal life.

In Him we are no longer victims but victors and through Him we need no longer fear the darkness and despair that surround the lost and those facing death.

It was King David who once said, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me ... shedding Your light, giving hope"

Prayer: What a comfort it is, Lord, to know that You are the Light of the world and our lives and will always be our Guide. Thank You for being our hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Light shines on the righteous. Psalm 97:11a

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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

## Friday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP FOOTBALL=

Alcester-Hudson 42, Corsica/Stickney 20

Avon 36, Gayville-Volin 32

Belle Fourche 28, Chamberlain 14

Beresford 55, Hill City 0

Brandon Valley 17, Sioux Falls Washington 10

Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 26, McCook Central/Montrose 24

Brookings 43, Mitchell 14

Burke 55, Colome 14

Castlewood 33, Elkton-Lake Benton 14

Chester 35, Canistota 26

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 50, Pine Ridge 0

Colman-Egan 64, Centerville 18

DeSmet 44, Kimball/White Lake 0

Dell Rapids 29, Sioux Falls Christian 22

Dell Rapids St. Mary 34, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 6

Elk Point-Jefferson 41, Baltic 0

Faith 28, North Central Co-Op 12

Faulkton 50, Langford 15

Florence/Henry 63, Britton-Hecla 12

Garretson 35, Irene-Wakonda 14

Great Plains Lutheran 51, Waverly-South Shore 16

Groton Area 26, Aberdeen Roncalli 9

Hamlin 44, Arlington/Lake Preston 0

Hanson 67, Deubrook 14

Harrisburg 38, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 34

Herreid/Selby Area 46, Ipswich 28

Hitchcock-Tulare 60, Estelline/Hendricks 6

Hot Springs 49, Lakota Tech 0

Howard 47, Viborg-Hurley 0

Huron 21, Aberdeen Central 14

Kadoka Area 40, Philip 18

Lemmon/McIntosh 28, Harding County 18

Leola/Frederick 44, Northwestern 14

Lyman 52, New Underwood 0

Madison 30, Canton 14

McLaughlin 64, Oelrichs 6

Milbank 34, Clark/Willow Lake 13

Miller/Highmore-Harrold 48, Jim River 36

Mobridge-Pollock 24, Webster 22

Omaha Nation, Neb. 52, Takini 0

Parkston 46, Bon Homme 7

Pierre 24, Yankton 10

Platte-Geddes 22, Wolsey-Wessington 12

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Potter County 66, Sunshine Bible Academy 16  
Rapid City Christian 34, Bennett County 14  
Redfield 18, Deuel 0  
Sioux Falls Jefferson 35, Rapid City Central 6  
Sioux Falls Lincoln 21, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 17  
Sioux Valley 36, Parker 0  
Spearfish 30, Custer 0  
St. Thomas More 36, Douglas 0  
Tea Area 44, Watertown 13  
Tri-Valley 42, Sisseton 0  
Vermillion 21, Lennox 7  
Wall 55, Jones County 0  
West Central 27, Dakota Valley 13  
Winnebago, Neb. 42, Red Cloud 14  
Winner 57, Wagner 6  
Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 30, Tripp-Delmont/Armour/Andes Central/Dakota Christian 6  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Crazy Horse vs. Lower Brule, ppd.  
Marty Indian vs. Little Wound, ppd.

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

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

## Rosebud program will teach 7 tribal members Lakota language

By ABBY WARGO Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Seven members of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate tribe will have a paid opportunity to learn the Lakota language this spring.

The Rosebud Economic Development Corporation is rolling out a new language preservation program, Lakolya Waoniya, which roughly translates to "breathing life into the Lakota language" in the coming months.

REDCO garnered startup funding through an anonymous philanthropic contribution and is now in the process of hiring a project manager and Lakota language teacher to build up the program. REDCO will pay seven Sicangu Lakota citizens a full-time salary and full benefits to learn Lakota.

While the salary amount is not yet set, REDCO CEO Wizipan Little Elk said the pay rate will be above minimum wage.

The purpose of the language revitalization program is to bring Lakota back from being functionally extinct, meaning it is not spoken conversationally in a public setting. Language is an important component of cultural preservation and celebration as well, Little Elk said.

The three-year program's goal is for participants to become conversationally fluent in Lakota through commitment, rigor and immersion, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"Lakota is a second language because of colonization. I want to get to the point where it's functionally alive and being used in an everyday context," Little Elk said. "Indigenous people are very practical. And in order for us to do what we do and to be who we are, especially when we're practicing our spiritual and cultural traditions, it's really important that we're able to practice those traditions while using our language."

Little Elk said of the 150,000 to 200,000 Lakota tribal members, there are a little less than 2,000 fluent Lakota speakers from all tribes. Most fluent speakers are older, with only two or three Rosebud Lakota speakers under the age of 30 and none under 18, Little Elk said.

On the Rosebud reservation last year, 550 fluent Lakota speakers were identified. A few months ago,

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that number decreased to 460. As of Sept. 15, at least four more fluent speakers have died, a trend that is expected to continue as speakers age, Little Elk said.

With those numbers in mind, Little Elk said there won't be an age limit to participate in the program, but it is intended for working-age adults. The potential to increase fluent speakers under the age of 30 from three to seven would be of "massive" importance, he said.

"We want to introduce commitment and rigor to learning the language, putting in the time and the effort," Little Elk said. "Then people (who) have the heart and desire for this, after three years, they should have a good level of conversational fluency."

Little Elk said Indigenous people need to launch an incredible effort to reintegrate cultural knowledge and resources back into society. One of the biggest structural barriers to doing this, however, is time. By paying people to learn Lakota, Little Elk said that barrier is removed by giving people time and resources to learn.

"I know very few Indigenous people that are not interested in learning their language... Who has the luxury of just not working so that they can focus on and have the resources to pay for self-improvement? I know very few people in the world who have that kind of luxury," Little Elk said. "So let's just remove all those barriers, and you can take that time and have the resources to learn the language and not have your kids starve."

The idea for the program came as REDCO thought about redefining wealth and what it means to have a meaningful existence. Little Elk said a meaningful life is about contributing to one's community and doing good works for the world, and that Indigenous people need to be able to do those things while preserving their language and culture.

"Our real wealth is really our cultural perpetuity and our ability to pass that on to future generations. So that's how we really came to this idea that if we're going to make an investment, yes we have to do standard economic development stuff, but let's also make a direct investment in our language and culture," Little Elk said.

The program comes at a moment where there has been renewed attention on the United States and Canada's histories of establishing Indian boarding schools, forcing Native American people to assimilate to a new culture. Little Elk said he is a fourth-generation boarding school attendee.

"At the same time, we also have to be focused on what's happening now, and that the eradication of native languages is still something that is kind of being perpetuated through various systems. So let's focus on these revitalization efforts," Little Elk said. "This is not just a story of something bad that happened to us. This is a story about re-emergence and rebirth and the incredible efforts being taken to move past that and move on."

The language revitalization program for adults is a complement to the Wakanyeja Tokeyachi immersion school run by REDCO's sister organization Sicangu Community Development Corporation for elementary students on the Rosebud Reservation, both of which encompass a larger effort to reclaim Indigenous languages. Little Elk said it is important to have both programs working together because adults have to step up to support children in their language-learning efforts.

"We can't put all the pressure on the kids... We as adults also have to step up and support our children. And a big part of it is creating an ecosystem of language revitalization. The kids go to school and they come home and they can talk to each other (in Lakota) but they need other people in the community to (speak Lakota) as well," Little Elk said.

There are other, similar programs that REDCO used as guides, such as a Cherokee language program in Oklahoma. Little Elk said he hopes REDCO's program can also serve as a model for other groups to emulate.

The program will begin in the spring after a manager and teacher have been hired, students accepted and curriculum developed. In informal conversations, Little Elk said people have been excited and enthusiastic about the opportunity — one person even told him it was their dream job.

Little Elk said the Rosebud program is a natural evolution of the larger movement for language and cultural revitalization. He encourages a multi-generational effort to bring Indigenous communities together.

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"We just have to have everyone working together with one mind and one heart to move this forward... and we have an obligation as people, as humanity, to address these problems that are still impacting people. For us, it isn't ancient history," Little Elk said.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

17-21-27-43-56, Mega Ball: 15, Megaplier: 3

(seventeen, twenty-one, twenty-seven, forty-three, fifty-six; Mega Ball: fifteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$523 million

## Deaths of mother, child investigated as murder-suicide

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The deaths of a child and mother in Rapid City are being investigated as a murder-suicide.

Police said the probe is ongoing, but that based on the evidence recovered so far, authorities believe this is a case of child murder and adult suicide.

The victims have been identified as 26-year-old Trisha Paxson-Dennett and her son, 4-year-old Russel Reeves. Their bodies were discovered Tuesday evening by officers who responded to the scene of a reported gunshot victim.

Police spokesman Brendyn Medina said the boy's father had called in the gunshot report, and authorities have ruled him out as a suspect, the Rapid City Journal reported.

## Additional homes may be at risk where sinkhole exposed mine

BLACK HAWK, S.D. (AP) — A second phase of geophysical tests in a Rapid City area neighborhood where a sinkhole exposed an abandoned mine shows 30 additional homes may be affected.

The sinkhole that exposed the old gypsum mine opened in April 2020 in the Black Hawk neighborhood where it has already forced 40 people to evacuate from 15 homes.

Geoscientist Mohamed Khalil, with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the second phase shows the seasonal fluctuation of the groundwater table over the past few decades has created conditions for a sinkhole in any weak spot, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The Fitzgerald Law Firm released the latest report on the geophysical testing in the neighborhood. It represents homeowners who have filed lawsuits in relation to the sinkhole.

One lawsuit says the state of South Dakota should compensate affected residents since it mined underneath the entire neighborhood up until 1993 but failed to reclaim and warn buyers about the now-collapsing mines.

Khalil said the tests also showed there are likely tunnels filled with water that extend to Interstate 90 and the southern area of Hideaway Hills subdivision. He said he would recommend structural analysis before drilling, excavation or construction is done.

## Battery manufacturer to build factory complex in Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Missouri-based battery manufacturer has selected Rapid City for a factory complex that it says could eventually employ up to 1,500 people.

AEsir Technologies plans to construct four buildings. The first building will be a 150,000-square-foot manufacturing and distribution center capable of producing 1.2 million batteries annually.

The company initially plans to hire 400 employees and expand to 1,200 to 1,500 employees. The first



phase will cost around \$90 million with a total price tag of \$300 million when all four phases of the development are finished, according to CEO Randy Moore.

The company looked for an available labor force, an economic development incentive package and community support when searching for the ideal location for the new facility, Moore said. Twenty other communities were considered for the facility.

"Rapid City was head and shoulders above the other 20 potential site selections in terms of economic development package and business community involvement," Moore told the Rapid City Journal.

Moore said easy access to rail, a state highway and Rapid City Regional Airport was also a factor in the company's decision to choose Rapid City.

AEsir Technologies manufactures nickel zinc batteries that Moore said are two to three times more powerful than lithium ion batteries and last just as long. He said they use potassium hydroxide as the electrolyte, an active ingredient in soaps and shampoos, which makes the batteries environmentally friendly.

The factory will be the anchor for the new Rushmore Industrial Center developed by Dream Design International.

## Poll numbers down, justices say they aren't politicians

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three Supreme Court justices delivered the same plea in rapid succession in recent days: Don't view justices as politicians.

The justices have reason to be concerned. Recent polls show a sharp drop in approval of a court now dominated by conservatives.

The call by justices Clarence Thomas, Stephen Breyer and Amy Coney Barrett for the public not to see court decisions as just an extension of partisan politics isn't new. But the timing of the recent comments is significant, just after a summer in which conservative majorities on the court prevailed over liberal dissents on abortion, immigration and evictions, and at the start of a blockbuster term.

The future of abortion rights and expansions of gun and religious rights already are on the docket. Other contentious cases could be added. The outcome in each could fracture the court along ideological lines, with the court's six conservative justices chosen by Republican presidents prevailing over its three liberals nominated by Democrats.

To some observers, the Supreme Court is facing the most serious threat to its legitimacy since its decision in *Bush v. Gore* two decades ago that split liberals and conservatives and effectively settled the disputed 2000 presidential election in favor of Republican George W. Bush.

"I think we may have come to a turning point. If within a span of a few terms we see sweeping right-side decisions over left-side dissents on every one of the most politically divisive issues of our time — voting, guns, abortion, religion, affirmative action — perception of the court may be permanently altered," said Irv Gornstein, executive director of Georgetown University's Supreme Court Institute.

Paul Smith, who has argued before the court in support of LGBTQ and voting rights among other issues, said people are increasingly upset that the "court is way to the right of the American people on a lot of issues."

But views of the court have dipped before, then rebounded, from a public that doesn't pay too much attention to the court's work and has trouble identifying most of the justices.

Tom Goldstein, the founder of the court-focused SCOTUSblog website who argues frequently before the justices, doubts this time will be any different. He says the court "has built up an enormous font of public respect, no matter what it does."

Still, Thomas, Breyer and Barrett took aim at the perception of the court as political in recent speeches and interviews.

Breyer, the court's eldest member at 83 and leader of its diminished liberal wing, has spoken for years about the danger of viewing the court as "junior league politicians."

But he acknowledged it can be difficult to counter the perception that judges are acting politically, par-

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ticularly after cases like the one from Texas in which the court by a 5-4 vote refused to block enforcement of the state's ban on abortions early in pregnancy. The majority was made up of three justices appointed by President Donald Trump and two other conservatives, with the three liberals and Chief Justice John Roberts in dissent.

"It's pretty hard to believe when a case like those come along that we're less divided than you might think," Breyer said in an interview earlier this month with The Washington Post.

Barrett echoed Breyer's comments soon after.

"My goal today is to convince you that this court is not comprised of a bunch of partisan hacks," the Trump nominee said in a talk in Louisville, Kentucky, at a center named for Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who was sitting on the stage near the justice.

McConnell engineered Barrett's swift confirmation just days before last year's presidential election and little more than a month after the liberal icon, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, died. Barrett's confirmation was arguably the most political of any member of the court. She was confirmed on a 52-48 vote, the first in modern times with no support from the minority party.

McConnell's push to confirm Barrett in the final days before the election stood in contrast to his decision to hold open the seat held by Justice Antonin Scalia when Scalia died months before the election in 2016 and President Barack Obama, a Democrat, sought to name a replacement.

In an appearance a few days after Barrett's, Thomas said the justices themselves were to blame for shifting perceptions of the court by taking on roles that properly belong to elected officials. "The court was thought to be the least dangerous branch and we may have become the most dangerous," he said at the University of Notre Dame, where Barrett taught law for many years.

Three new polls, all conducted after the court's Texas abortion vote, have shown sharp drops in approval of the court. Just 40% of Americans approve of the court, according to the latest Gallup poll. That's among the lowest it's been since Gallup started asking that question more than 20 years ago. Approval was 49% in July.

The change in the composition of the court and the controversies over Trump's three nominees have prompted calls from liberal interest groups to expand the court and institute term limits for the justices, who have lifetime tenure under the Constitution.

At the moment, those changes seem unlikely to succeed. But one group, Demand Justice, said this past week that it is planning to spend more than \$100,000 on advertising in the coming weeks to promote the idea of court expansion. And a court reform commission established by President Joe Biden is supposed to issue a report by November.

Some court-watchers think the efforts of the liberal groups, rather than the court's actions, are responsible for changing views of the justices.

"I do think there's a sustained campaign to delegitimize the court that has gotten some traction on the left," said Roman Martinez, a Washington lawyer who regularly argues before the court.

At one point or another, most of the justices have talked about the importance of the court maintaining its legitimacy and the need for justices to rise above partisanship.

"Every single one of us needs to realize how precious the court's legitimacy is. You know we don't have an army. We don't have any money. The only way we can get people to do what we think they should do is because people respect us," Justice Elena Kagan said at a Princeton University event around the time of Kavanaugh's confirmation.

A couple of months later, Roberts spoke up in defense of judicial independence, but he did so to combat criticism of judges from Trump. After Trump described a judge who ruled against him as a biased "Obama judge," Roberts memorably tangled with the president.

Roberts said: "We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges. What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them."

## Canadians home after Huawei CFO resolves US charges

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hugged two Canadians who landed in Canada on Saturday following what amounted to a high-stakes prisoner swap involving China, the U.S. and Canada.

Trudeau greeted Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor after their plane landed in Calgary, Alberta early Saturday. The men were arrested in China in December 2018, shortly after Canada arrested Meng on a U.S. extradition request. Many countries labeled China's action "hostage politics."

Live footage on CTV's news network showed the two men being hugged by Trudeau on the tarmac in the early morning.

The two left China just after a top executive of Chinese communications giant Huawei Technologies reached a deal with the U.S. Justice Department over fraud charges and flew from Canada to China.

The chain of events involving the global powers brought an abrupt end to legal and geopolitical wrangling that for the past three years has roiled relations between Washington, Beijing and Ottawa. The three-way deal enabled China and Canada to each bring home their own detained citizens while the U.S. wrapped up a criminal case against a prominent Chinese tech executive that for months had been mired in an extradition fight.

The first activity came Friday afternoon when Meng Wanzhou, 49, Huawei's chief finance officer and the daughter of the company's founder, reached an agreement with federal prosecutors that called for fraud charges against her to be dismissed next year and allowed for her to return to China immediately. As part of the deal, known as a deferred prosecution agreement, she accepted responsibility for misrepresenting the company's business dealings in Iran.

"These two men have been through an unbelievably difficult ordeal. For the past 1,000 days, they have shown strength, perseverance and grace and we are all inspired by that," Trudeau said at a hastily called news conference late Friday night.

News of Meng's pending return was a top item on the Chinese internet and on state broadcaster CCTV's midday news report, with no mention made of the release of Kovrig and Spavor.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian reposted on social media a report on Meng having left Canada, adding "Welcome home."

Video was also circulated online of Meng speaking at Vancouver International Airport, saying; "Thank you motherland, thank you to the people of the motherland. You have been my greatest pillar of support."

The deal was reached as President Joe Biden and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have sought to tamp down signs of public tension — even as the world's two dominant economies are at odds on issues as diverse as cybersecurity, climate change, human rights and trade and tariffs. Biden said in an address before the U.N. General Assembly earlier this week that he had no intention of starting a "new Cold War," while Xi told world leaders that disputes among countries "need to be handled through dialogue and cooperation."

"The U.S. Government stands with the international community in welcoming the decision by People's Republic of China authorities to release Canadian citizens Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig after more than two-and-a-half years of arbitrary detention. We are pleased that they are returning home to Canada," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

As part of the deal with Meng, which was disclosed in federal court in Brooklyn, the Justice Department agreed to dismiss the fraud charges against her in December 2022 — exactly four years after her arrest — provided that she complies with certain conditions, including not contesting any of the government's factual allegations. The Justice Department also agreed to drop its request that Meng be extradited to the U.S., which she had vigorously challenged, ending a process that prosecutors said could have persisted for months.

After appearing via videoconference for her New York hearing, Meng made a brief court appearance in Vancouver, where she'd been out on bail living in a multimillion-dollar mansion while the two Canadians were held in Chinese prison cells where the lights were kept on 24 hours a day.

Outside the courtroom, Meng thanked the Canadian government for upholding the rule of law, expressed

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gratitude to the Canadian people and apologized "for the inconvenience I caused."

"Over the last three years my life has been turned upside down," she said. "It was a disruptive time for me as a mother, a wife and as a company executive. But I believe every cloud has a silver lining. It really was an invaluable experience in my life. I will never forget all the good wishes I received."

Shortly afterward, Meng left on an Air China flight for Shenzhen, China, the location of Huawei's headquarters.

Huawei is the biggest global supplier of network gear for phone and internet companies. It has been a symbol of China's progress in becoming a technological world power — and a subject of U.S. security and law enforcement concerns. Some analysts say Chinese companies have flouted international rules and norms and stolen technology.

The case against Meng stems from a January 2019 indictment from the Trump administration Justice Department that accused Huawei of stealing trade secrets and using a Hong Kong shell company called Skycom to sell equipment to Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions. The indictment also charged Meng herself with committing fraud by misleading the HSBC bank about the company's business dealings in Iran.

The indictment came amid a broader Trump administration crackdown against Huawei over U.S. government concerns that the company's products could facilitate Chinese spying. The administration cut off Huawei's access to U.S. components and technology, including Google's music and other smartphone services, and later barred vendors worldwide from using U.S. technology to produce components for Huawei.

The Biden White House, meanwhile, has kept up a hard line on Huawei and other Chinese corporations whose technology is thought to pose national security risks.

Huawei has repeatedly denied the U.S. government's allegations and security concerns about its products.

Meng had long fought the Justice Department's extradition request, with her lawyers calling the case against her flawed and alleging that she was being used as a "bargaining chip" in political gamesmanship. They cited a 2018 interview in which then-President Donald Trump said he'd be willing to intervene in the case if it would help secure a trade deal with China or aid U.S. security interests.

Last month, a Canadian judge held off on ruling whether Meng should be extradited to the U.S. after a Canadian Justice Department lawyer wrapped up his case saying there was enough evidence to show she was dishonest and deserved to stand trial in the U.S.

Comfort Ero, the interim Vice President of the International Crisis Group, Kovrig's employer, said they have been waiting for more than 1,000 days for the news.

"Michael Kovrig is free. To Beijing: We welcome this most just decision. To Ottawa: Thank you for your steadfast support for our colleague. To the United States: Thank you for your willingness to support an ally and our colleague. To the inimitable, indefatigable, and inspiring Michael Kovrig, welcome home!" Ero said in a statement.

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Associated Press writer Jim Morris in Vancouver, Canada, contributed to this report.

## Neo-Nazis are still on Facebook. And they're making money

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — It's the premier martial arts group in Europe for right-wing extremists. German authorities have twice banned their signature tournament. But Kampf der Nibelungen, or Battle of the Nibelungs, still thrives on Facebook, where organizers maintain multiple pages, as well as on Instagram and YouTube, which they use to spread their ideology, draw in recruits and make money through ticket sales and branded merchandise.

The Battle of the Nibelungs — a reference to a classic heroic epic much loved by the Nazis — is one of dozens of far-right groups that continue to leverage mainstream social media for profit, despite Facebook's and other platforms' repeated pledges to purge themselves of extremism.

All told, there are at least 54 Facebook profiles belonging to 39 entities that the German government and civil society groups have flagged as extremist, according to research shared with The Associated Press

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by the Counter Extremism Project, a non-profit policy and advocacy group formed to combat extremism. The groups have nearly 268,000 subscribers and friends on Facebook alone.

CEP also found 39 related Instagram profiles, 16 Twitter profiles and 34 YouTube channels, which have gotten over 9.5 million views. Nearly 60% of the profiles were explicitly aimed at making money, displaying prominent links to online shops or photos promoting merchandise.

Click on the big blue "view shop" button on the Erik & Sons Facebook page and you can buy a T-shirt that says, "My favorite color is white," for 20 euros (\$23). Deutsches Warenhaus offers "Refugees not welcome" stickers for just 2.50 euros (\$3) and Aryan Brotherhood tube scarves with skull faces for 5.88 euros (\$7). The Facebook feed of OPOS Records promotes new music and merchandise, including "True Aggression," "Pride & Dignity," and "One Family" T-shirts. The brand, which stands for "One People One Struggle," also links to its online shop from Twitter and Instagram.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of a collaboration between The Associated Press and the PBS series FRONTLINE that examines challenges to the ideas and institutions of traditional U.S. and European democracy.

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The people and organizations in CEP's dataset are a who's who of Germany's far-right music and combat sports scenes. "They are the ones who build the infrastructure where people meet, make money, enjoy music and recruit," said Alexander Ritzmann, the lead researcher on the project. "It's most likely not the guys I've highlighted who will commit violent crimes. They're too smart. They build the narratives and foster the activities of this milieu where violence then appears."

CEP said it focused on groups that want to overthrow liberal democratic institutions and norms such as freedom of the press, protection of minorities and universal human dignity, and believe that the white race is under siege and needs to be preserved, with violence if necessary. None has been banned, but almost all have been described in German intelligence reports as extremist, CEP said.

On Facebook the groups seem harmless. They avoid blatant violations of platform rules, such as using hate speech or posting swastikas, which is generally illegal in Germany.

By carefully toeing the line of propriety, these key architects of Germany's far-right use the power of mainstream social media to promote festivals, fashion brands, music labels and mixed martial arts tournaments that can generate millions in sales and connect like-minded thinkers from around the world.

But simply cutting off such groups could have unintended, damaging consequences.

"We don't want to head down a path where we are telling sites they should remove people based on who they are but not what they do on the site," said David Greene, civil liberties director at the Electronic Frontier Foundation in San Francisco.

Giving platforms wide latitude to sanction organizations deemed undesirable could give repressive governments leverage to eliminate their critics. "That can have really serious human rights concerns," he said. "The history of content moderation has shown us that it's almost always to the disadvantage of marginalized and powerless people."

German authorities banned the Battle of the Nibelungs event in 2019, on the grounds that it was not actually about sports, but instead was grooming fighters with combat skills for political struggle.

In 2020, as the coronavirus raged, organizers planned to stream the event online — using Instagram, among other places, to promote the webcast. A few weeks before the planned event, however, over a hundred black-clad police in balaclavas broke up a gathering at a motorcycle club in Magdeburg, where fights were being filmed for the broadcast, and hauled off the boxing ring, according to local media reports.

The Battle of the Nibelungs is a "central point of contact" for right-wing extremists, according to German government intelligence reports. The organization has been explicit about its political goals — namely to fight against the "rotting" liberal democratic order — and has drawn adherents from across Europe as well as the United States.

Members of a California white supremacist street fighting club called the Rise Above Movement, and its

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founder, Robert Rundo, have attended the Nibelungs tournament. In 2018 at least four Rise Above members were arrested on rioting charges for taking their combat training to the streets at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. A number of Battle of Nibelungs alums have landed in prison, including for manslaughter, assault and attacks on migrants.

National Socialism Today, which describes itself as a "magazine by nationalists for nationalists" has praised Battle of the Nibelungs and other groups for fostering a will to fight and motivating "activists to improve their readiness for combat."

But there are no references to professionalized, anti-government violence on the group's social media feeds. Instead, it's positioned as a health-conscious lifestyle brand, which sells branded tea mugs and shoulder bags.

"Exploring nature. Enjoying home!" gushes one Facebook post above a photo of a musclebound guy on a mountaintop wearing Resistend-branded sportswear, one of the Nibelung tournament's sponsors. All the men in the photos are pumped and white, and they are portrayed enjoying wholesome activities such as long runs and alpine treks.

Elsewhere on Facebook, Thorsten Heise – who has been convicted of incitement to hatred and called "one of the most prominent German neo-Nazis" by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution in the German state of Thuringia — also maintains multiple pages.

Frank Kraemer, who the German government has described as a "right-wing extremist musician," uses his Facebook page to direct people to his blog and his Sonnenkreuz online store, which sells white nationalist and coronavirus conspiracy books as well as sports nutrition products and "vaccine rebel" T-shirts for girls.

Battle of the Nibelungs declined to comment. Resistend, Heise and Kraemer didn't respond to requests for comment.

Facebook told AP it employs 350 people whose primary job is to counter terrorism and organized hate, and that it is investigating the pages and accounts flagged in this reporting.

"We ban organizations and individuals that proclaim a violent mission, or are engaged in violence," said a company spokesperson, who added that Facebook had banned more than 250 white supremacist organizations, including groups and individuals in Germany. The spokesperson said the company had removed over 6 million pieces of content tied to organized hate globally between April and June and is working to move even faster.

Google said it has no interest in giving visibility to hateful content on YouTube and was looking into the accounts identified in this reporting. The company said it worked with dozens of experts to update its policies on supremacist content in 2019, resulting in a five-fold spike in the number of channels and videos removed.

Twitter says it's committed to ensuring that public conversation is "safe and healthy" on its platform and that it doesn't tolerate violent extremist groups. "Threatening or promoting violent extremism is against our rules," a spokesperson told AP, but did not comment on the specific accounts flagged in this reporting.

Robert Claus, who wrote a book on the extreme right martial arts scene, said that the sports brands in CEP's data set are "all rooted in the militant far-right neo-Nazi scene in Germany and Europe." One of the founders of the Battle of the Nibelungs, for example, is part of the violent Hammerskin network and another early supporter, the Russian neo-Nazi Denis Kapustin, also known as Denis Nikitin, has been barred from entering the European Union for ten years, he said.

Banning such groups from Facebook and other major platforms would potentially limit their access to new audiences, but it could also drive them deeper underground, making it more difficult to monitor their activities, he said.

"It's dangerous because they can recruit people," he said. "Prohibiting those accounts would interrupt their contact with their audience, but the key figures and their ideology won't be gone."

Thorsten Hindrichs, an expert in Germany's far-right music scene who teaches at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, said there's a danger that the apparently harmless appearance of Germany's right-wing music heavyweights on Facebook and Twitter, which they mostly use to promote their brands, could help normalize the image of extremists.

Extreme right concerts in Germany were drawing around 2 million euros (\$2.3 million) a year in revenue before the coronavirus pandemic, he estimated, not counting sales of CDs and branded merchandise. He said kicking extremist music groups off Facebook is unlikely to hit sales too hard, as there are other platforms they can turn to, like Telegram and Gab, to reach their followers. "Right-wing extremists aren't stupid. They will always find ways to promote their stuff," he said.

None of these groups' activity on mainstream platforms is obviously illegal, though it may violate Facebook guidelines that bar "dangerous individuals and organizations" that advocate or engage in violence online or offline. Facebook says it doesn't allow praise or support of Nazism, white supremacy, white nationalism or white separatism and bars people and groups that adhere to such "hate ideologies."

Last week, Facebook removed almost 150 accounts and pages linked to the German anti-lockdown Querdenken movement, under a new "social harm" policy, which targets groups that spread misinformation or incite violence but didn't fit into the platform's existing categories of bad actors.

But how these evolving rules will be applied remains murky and contested.

"If you do something wrong on the platform, it's easier for a platform to justify an account suspension than to just throw someone out because of their ideology. That would be more difficult with respect to human rights," said Daniel Holznagel, a Berlin judge who used to work for the German federal government on hate speech issues and also contributed to CEP's report. "It's a foundation of our Western society and human rights that our legal regimes do not sanction an idea, an ideology, a thought."

In the meantime, there's news from the folks at the Battle of the Nibelungs. "Starting today you can also dress your smallest ones with us," reads a June post on their Facebook feed. The new line of kids wear includes a shell-pink T-shirt for girls, priced at 13.90 euros (\$16). A child pictured wearing the boy version, in black, already has boxing gloves on.

Contact AP's global investigative team at [Investigative@ap.org](mailto:Investigative@ap.org) or <https://www.ap.org/tips/>

## 10 years after 'don't ask, don't tell,' cadets see progress

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

NEW LONDON, Conn. (AP) — Kelli Normoyle was nervous as she arrived at the Coast Guard Academy campus in Connecticut in 2008. She had come out as a lesbian to a few friends near the end of high school, but she faced a military environment where "don't ask, don't tell" was still the policy prohibiting gay people from serving openly.

She kept quiet about her sexuality for her freshman year, fearing expulsion and the ruin of her not-yet-begun career. She started testing the waters her second year.

"OK, maybe this is somebody that I can trust, maybe this is somebody that identifies the way I do," said Normoyle, now a lieutenant on the cutter Sanibel, based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. "But then you always have that moment that was that kind of leap of faith."

Marking the 10th anniversary this week of the end of "don't ask, don't tell," a new generation of military academy students say that their campuses are now tolerant, welcoming and inclusive for the most part — but that more work needs to be done.

Homophobic or ignorant comments still arise occasionally. Many transgender students still do not feel comfortable coming out. And advocates say the military needs to do more to include people with HIV, as well as nonbinary and intersex people.

Normoyle, 32, of Mount Laurel, New Jersey, and fellow cadet Chip Hall led the formation of the Coast Guard Academy's Spectrum Diversity Council, the first advocacy group for LGBTQ students at a U.S. military academy, a few months after "don't ask, don't tell" ended on Sept. 20, 2011. Similar groups later formed at the other four service academies.

Gays and lesbians were banned in the military until the 1993 approval of "don't ask, don't tell," which allowed them to serve only if they did not openly acknowledge their sexual orientation. Rather than helping, advocates say, the policy actually created more problems. In its entire history, the military dismissed

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more than 100,000 service members based on their sexual or gender identities — 14,000 of them during “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Repeal of the law was approved by Congress and President Barack Obama in late 2010 and took effect nine months later, allowing lesbian, gay and bisexual people to serve openly.

At the Air Force Academy in Colorado, second-year cadet Marissa Howard, who came out as a lesbian a few years ago, said she admires LGBTQ service members who struggled under the former policy.

“I commend them,” said Howard, of San Antonio, a member of the academy’s Spectrum group. “I feel very included in the environment, and it’s just a good place to feel like my identity is seen and I don’t have to hide who I am here.”

Some fellow cadets, however, don’t support their LGBTQ classmates, she said. Once, during an online class, someone called her “weird” for being gay, perhaps thinking they were muted, she said.

The Coast Guard Academy in New London was the only U.S. military academy to hold a public event Monday to mark the 10th anniversary. About 100 people attended a dinner that included a viewing of a documentary on “don’t ask, don’t tell,” followed by a discussion.

For many cadets, it is difficult to imagine what it was like because their generation has been more accepting, said K.C. Commins, a bisexual Coast Guard Academy senior from Altoona, Iowa, and current Spectrum Diversity Council president.

“There are so many of us now. It’s hard to ignore that we’re here and ... it is the new normal,” said Commins.

Rear Adm. William G. Kelly, the Coast Guard Academy’s superintendent, told the crowd Monday that officials have worked hard on LGBTQ inclusion and are developing a campus policy for transgender students.

Transgender people were allowed to serve openly in the military beginning in 2016, but the Trump administration largely banned them in 2019. Although President Joe Biden overturned the ban earlier this year, formal policies are still being drafted at some locations.

At the U.S. Naval Academy, sexual orientation is mostly a nonissue, said Andre Rascoe, a senior midshipman who is gay.

“In my experience, you always have the one or two people who kind of feel uncomfortable either rooming with or being on, like, a sports team with someone who’s in the queer community, but they are anomalies,” he said.

After students graduate, they will face a military environment where sexual assault and harassment continue to be pervasive and where lesbian, gay and bisexual service members are disproportionately victimized, according to an independent review commission’s report submitted to Biden in June.

In its latest annual report on sexual assaults and harassment at West Point and the Air Force and Naval academies, the Defense Department said 129 sexual assaults were reported during the 2019-20 school year, down from 149 the year before. Twelve complaints of sexual harassment were received, down from 17 the previous year.

“Obviously there’s a lot more room to grow,” said Jennifer Dane, chief executive and director of the Modern Military Association of America, an LGBTQ advocacy group.

Dane, who served in the Air Force from 2010 to 2016, said the Air Force began investigating her sexuality during her first year but dropped the probe after “don’t ask, don’t tell” was repealed.

“When it was repealed ... I was finally able to be my authentic self, and it was very empowering,” she said.

## **Witness: Taliban hang dead body in Afghan city’s main square**

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban hanged a dead body from a crane in the main square of Herat city in western Afghanistan, a witness said Saturday, in a gruesome display that signaled a return to some of the Taliban’s methods of the past.

Wazir Ahmad Seddiqi, who runs a pharmacy on the side of the square, told The Associated Press that four bodies were brought to the main square and three bodies were moved to other parts of the city for public display.



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Seddiqi said the Taliban announced in the square that the four were caught taking part in a kidnapping and were killed by police.

Ziaulhaq Jalali, a Taliban appointed district police chief in Herat, said later that Taliban members rescued a father and son who had been abducted by four kidnappers after an exchange of gunfire. He said a Taliban fighter and a civilian were wounded by the kidnappers but "the four (kidnappers) were killed in crossfire."

Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, one of the founders of the Taliban and the chief enforcer of its harsh interpretation of Islamic law when they last ruled Afghanistan, told The Associated Press this week that the hard-line movement will once again carry out executions and amputations of hands, though perhaps not in public.

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. 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.

Also on Saturday, a Taliban official said a roadside bomb hit a Taliban car in the capital of eastern Nangarhar province wounding at least one person.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing. The Islamic State group affiliate, which is headquartered in eastern Afghanistan, has said it was behind similar attacks in Jalalabad last week that killed 12 people.

Taliban spokesperson Mohammad Hanif said the person wounded in the attack is a municipal worker.

## 8 dead as al-Shabab claims blast in Somalia's capital

By HASSAN BARISE Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — A vehicle laden with explosives rammed into cars and trucks at a checkpoint leading to the entrance of the Presidential Palace in Somalia, killing at least eight people, police said Saturday.

The checkpoint is the one used by Somalia's president and prime minister on their way to and from the airport in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu.

Nine other people were wounded in the bombing, police spokesman Abdifatah Adam Hassan said.

The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab extremist group has claimed responsibility. The group often carries out such attacks in the capital.

## Refugees in fear as sentiment turns against them in Turkey

By SUZAN FRASER and AYSE WIETING Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Fatima Alzahra Shon thinks neighbors attacked her and her son in their Istanbul apartment building because she is Syrian.

The 32-year-old refugee from Aleppo was confronted on Sept. 1 by a Turkish woman who asked her what she was doing in "our" country. Shon replied, "Who are you to say that to me?" The situation quickly escalated.

A man came out of the Turkish woman's apartment half-dressed, threatening to cut Shon and her family "into pieces," she recalled. Another neighbor, a woman, joined in, shouting and hitting Shon. The group then pushed her down a flight of stairs. Shon said that when her 10-year-old son, Amr, tried to intervene, he was beaten as well.

Shon said she has no doubt about the motivation for the aggression: "Racism."

Refugees fleeing the long conflict in Syria once were welcomed in neighboring Turkey with open arms, sympathy and compassion for fellow Muslims. But attitudes gradually hardened as the number of newcomers swelled over the past decade.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is now nearing a boiling point, fueled by Turkey's economic woes. With unemployment high and the prices of food and housing skyrocketing, many Turks have turned their frustration toward the country's roughly 5 million foreign residents, particularly the 3.7 million who fled the civil war

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in Syria.

In August, violence erupted in Ankara, the Turkish capital, as an angry mob vandalized Syrian businesses and homes in response to a the deadly stabbing of a Turkish teenager.

Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population, and many experts say that has come at a cost. Selim Sazak, a visiting international security researcher at Bilkent University in Ankara and an advisor to officials from the opposition IYI Party, compared the arrival of so many refugees to absorbing "a foreign state that's ethnically, culturally, linguistically dissimilar."

"Everyone thought that it would be temporary," Sazak said. "I think it's only recently that the Turkish population understood that these people are not going back. They are only recently understanding that they have to become neighbors, economic competitors, colleagues with this foreign population."

On a recent visit to Turkey, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi acknowledged that the high number of refugees had created social tensions, especially in the country's big cities. He urged "donor countries and international organizations to do more to help Turkey."

The prospect of a new influx of refugees following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has reinforced the unreceptive public mood. Videos purporting to show young Afghan men being smuggled into Turkey from Iran caused public outrage and led to calls for the government to safeguard the country's borders.

The government says there are about 300,000 Afghans in Turkey, some of whom hope to continue their journeys to reach Europe.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who long defended an open-door policy toward refugees, recently recognized the public's "unease" and vowed not to allow the country to become a "warehouse" for refugees. Erdogan's government sent soldiers to Turkey's eastern frontier with Iran to stem the expected flow of Afghans and is speeding up the construction of a border wall.

Immigration is expected to become a top campaign topic even though Turkey's next general election is two years away. Both Turkey's main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, or CHP, and the nationalist IYI Party have promised to work on creating conditions that would allow the Syrian refugees' return. waste collection fees foreigners there to propel them to leave.

Following the anti-Syrian violence in the Altindag district of Ankara last month, Umit Ozdag, a right-wing politician who recently formed his own anti-immigrant party, visited the area wheeling an empty suitcase and saying the time has come for the refugees to "start packing."

The riots broke out on Aug. 11, a day after a Turkish teenager was stabbed to death in a fight with a group of young Syrians. Hundreds of people chanting anti-immigrant slogans took to the streets, vandalized Syrian-run shops and hurled rocks at refugees' homes.

A 30-year-old Syrian woman with four children who asked not to be named for fear of reprisals said her family locked themselves in their bathroom as an attacker climbed onto their balcony and tried to force the door open. The woman said the episode traumatized her 5-year-old daughter and the girl has trouble sleeping at night.

Some shops in the area remain closed, with traces of the disturbance still visible on their dented, metal shutters. Police have deployed multiple vehicles and a water cannon on the streets to prevent a repeat of the turmoil.

Syrians are often accused of failing to assimilate in Turkey, a country that has a complex relationship with the Arab world dating back to the Ottoman empire. While majority Muslim like neighboring Arab countries, Turks trace their origins to nomadic warriors from central Asia and Turkish belongs to a different language group than Arabic.

Kerem Pasaoglu, a pastry shop owner in Istanbul, said he wants Syrians to go back to their country and is bothered that some shops a street over have signs written in Arabic instead of Turkish.

"Just when we said we are getting used to Syrians or they will leave, now the Afghans coming is unfortunately very difficult for us," he said.

Turkey's foreign minister this month said Turkey is working with the United Nations' refugee agency to safely return Syrians to their home country.

While the security situation has stabilized in many parts of Syria after a decade of war, forced conscrip-

tion, indiscriminate detentions and forced disappearances continue to be reported. Earlier this month, Amnesty International said some Syrian refugees who returned home were subjected to detention, disappearance and torture at the hands of Syrian security forces, proving that going back to any part of the country is unsafe.

Shon said police in Istanbul showed little sympathy when she reported the attack by her neighbors. She said officers kept her at the station for hours, while the male neighbor who threatened and beat her was able to leave after giving a brief statement.

Shon fled Aleppo in 2012, when the city became a battleground between Syrian government forces and rebel fighters. She said the father of her children drowned while trying to make it to Europe. Now, she wonders whether Turkey is the right place for her and her children.

"I think of my children's future. I try to support them in any way I can, but they have a lot of psychological issues now and I don't know how to help them overcome it," she said. "I don't have the power anymore. I'm very tired.

Wieting reported from Istanbul. Mehmet Guzel in Istanbul and Zeynep Bilginsoy in Bodrum, Turkey, contributed to this report.

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

## South Africa's vaccine train takes doses to poor areas

By SEBABATSO MOSAMO Associated Press

SWARTKOPS, South Africa (AP) — When Wongalwethu Mbanjwa tried to get a COVID-19 vaccination and found his local center closed, a friend told him there was another option: Get one on the train.

So Mbanjwa did.

Not any train, but South Africa's vaccine train — which has now made its way to the small town of Swartkops on the country's south coast. Carrying doctors, nurses and, crucially, vaccine doses, it has a mission to bring vaccines closer to people in small towns and poorer parts of South Africa, which has the continent's highest number of coronavirus infections at more than 2.8 million.

The train is parked at the Swartkops rail station, the first stop on a three-month journey through the poor Eastern Cape province. It will stay for about two weeks at a time at seven stations in the province to vaccinate as many people as possible.

State-owned rail company Transnet launched the program to aid the government's rollout. The initiative aims to meet head-on two of the government's biggest challenges: getting doses out beyond big cities to areas where health care facilities are limited and trying to convince hesitant people in those areas to get vaccine shots.

The train, named Transvaco, can hold up to 108,000 vaccine doses in ultra-cold refrigerators. It has nine coaches, including accommodation coaches and a kitchen and dining area for the staff, a vaccination area and consulting rooms.

It's a new take on another train that's been taking doctors and medicine across South Africa since the mid-1990s.

Dr. Paballo Mokwana, the train program's manager, said medical personnel had vaccinated just under 1,000 people so far during the stop in Swartkops. They've given jabs on the train but have also sent a vaccination team into nearby factories and businesses to administer shots to people at work.

Untsaphokazi Singaphi was one of the people who received a vaccine shot from the off-site vaccination team at the factory where she works. She arrived to get her second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine with a smile on her face.

"I am happy, and I feel at peace," she said. "I know that I am safe, and so are my children and others around me. So I am really at peace with (the fact) that I'm done."

"I have been waiting for the moment where I too can say that I am among the vaccinated in South

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Africa," Singaphi said.

Just 14% of South Africa's population of 60 million is fully vaccinated, and the train is one part of the push to get that number up as quickly as possible.

It doesn't always work, though.

Andiswa Maseko was the first person to arrive at the train for a vaccine early Thursday morning. The head of vaccination, Bongani Nxumalo, explained the options to her. She could either have the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine or go with the two-dose Pfizer-BioNTech. After Maseko showed signs of hesitating, a nurse entered the vaccination cubicle and also tried to reassure her.

But Maseko asked to be given a moment to think about whether she wanted to get a vaccine, stepped off the train and never returned.

Nxumalo said Swartskop and the Eastern Cape province were different from other places they've worked in. People are more reluctant.

"Most of the people here...have misconceptions about the vaccine," he said. "Many people will say 'You guys are here to kill us.'"

"So, we keep on telling them that the vaccine is real, COVID is there, and many people have lost their lives. We tell them that we have also been vaccinated," Nxumalo said.

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## Is it a bluff? Some in Hungary and Poland talk of EU pullout

By JUSTIN SPIKE and VANESSA GERA Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — When Hungary and Poland joined the European Union in 2004, after decades of Communist domination, their citizens thirsted for Western democratic standards and prosperity.

Yet 17 years later, as the EU ramps up efforts to rein in democratic backsliding in both countries, some of the governing right-wing populists in Hungary and Poland are comparing the bloc to their former Soviet oppressors — and flirting with the prospect of exiting the trade bloc.

"Brussels sends us overlords who are supposed to bring Poland to order, on our knees," a leading member of Poland's governing Law and Justice party, Marek Suski, said this month, adding that Poland "will fight the Brussels occupier" as it fought past Nazi and Soviet occupiers.

It's unclear to what extent this kind of talk represents a real desire to leave the 27-member bloc or a negotiating tactic to counter arm-twisting from Brussels. The two countries are the largest net beneficiaries of EU money, and the vast majority of their citizens want to stay in the bloc.

Yet the rhetoric has increased in recent months, after the EU resorted to financially penalizing members that fail its rule of law and democratic governance standards.

In December, EU lawmakers approved a regulation tying access to some EU funds to a country's respect for the rule of law. This is seen as targeting Hungary and Poland — close political allies often accused of eroding judicial independence and media freedom, and curtailing minority and migrant rights.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban called the so-called rule of law mechanism "a political and ideological weapon" designed to blackmail countries like Hungary that reject immigration. His Polish counterpart, Mateusz Morawiecki, called it "a bad solution that threatens a breakup of Europe in the future."

The EU's executive commission has also delayed payment of tens of billions of euros in post-pandemic recovery funds over concerns the two countries' spending plans do not adequately safeguard against corruption or guarantee judicial independence.

In an interview Thursday with the AP, Hungary's Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto was defiant, insisting that the withholding of EU funds would not compel his country to change course.

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

This month, the EU Commission moved to force Poland to comply with the rulings of Europe's top court by recommending daily fines in a long-running dispute over the country's judicial system.

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This prompted Ryszard Terlecki, deputy head of Poland's governing party, to say Poland "should think about ... how much we can cooperate," with the EU and consider "drastic solutions."

Terlecki later walked back his comments.

Hungary's Orban has repeatedly insisted that "there is life outside the European Union." Last month an opinion article in daily Magyar Nemzet — a flagship newspaper allied with Orban's Fidesz party — said "it's time to talk about Huxit" — a Hungarian version of Brexit, the U.K.'s departure from the EU last year.

With the finance minister also suggesting Hungary might be better off outside the EU, Orban's opponents worry he is actually considering that.

Katalin Cseh, a liberal Hungarian EU lawmaker, told The Associated Press it was "outrageous" that senior Fidesz politicians and pundits were "openly calling to consider" Hungary's EU exit.

"They stand ready to destroy the single greatest achievement of our country's recent history," Cseh said.

But Daniel Hegedus, a fellow for Central Europe at the German Marshall Fund, says the Hungarian rhetoric could be "politically calculated leveraging" against the potential loss of EU funding.

"(They are saying), 'If you don't give us the money, then we can be even more uncomfortable for you,'" he said.

Recent surveys show that well over 80% of both Poles and Hungarians want to stay in the EU.

This seems to have had an effect on both governments.

In a radio interview last week, Orban said Hungary "will be among the last ones in the EU, should it ever cease to exist."

Jaroslaw Kaczynski, Poland's most powerful politician, said last week that the country's future is in the EU and that there will be "no Polexit."

Political analyst Jacek Kucharczyk, president of the Institute of Public Affairs, a Warsaw-based think tank, told the AP that while Poland's ruling party invigorates its nationalist base with its feuds with Brussels, popular support for EU membership constrains its options.

"The result is a kind of balancing act," Kucharczyk said. "Tough words about the EU and immediate and vehement denials that they want Poland to leave the Union."

But Polish opposition leader — and former top EU official — Donald Tusk warned that allowing anti-EU rhetoric to grow out of control could unintentionally touch off an unstoppable process.

"Catastrophes like, for example, Brexit, or the possible exit of Poland from the EU, very often happen not because someone planned it, but because someone did not know how to plan a wise alternative," Tusk said.

With Orban's party facing tight elections next year and Poland's governing coalition showing strains, battles with the EU can also serve purely domestic political purposes.

Hungary's anti-EU rhetoric is likely a "test balloon" to gauge public support on how far the government can take its conflicts with the bloc, Hegedus said, and to garner support for the ruling party ahead of elections.

"I think they are framing this whole issue very consciously so that people will associate the European Union with rather controversial issues which are dividing Hungarian society," he said.

Some European leaders have already run out of patience with both countries.

In July, the Commission started legal action against Poland and Hungary for what it sees as disrespect for LGBT rights.

In June, after Hungary adopted a law that critics said targeted LGBT people, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Hungary "has no business" in the EU, and suggested Orban activates the mechanism that precipitated Brexit.

Huxit would be "clearly against the will of Hungarian citizens, who remain staunchly pro-EU," Cseh, the European Parliament member, said. "And we will fight for our country's hard-earned place in the European community with everything we've got."

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Gera reported from Warsaw, Poland.

**'Then the killing started': Witnesses accuse Tigray fighters**

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NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — One man said he counted 55 corpses as he escaped from his town in northern Ethiopia, stepping over bodies scattered in the streets. Another asserted he was rounded up with about 20 men who were shot in front of him. Yet others claimed Tigray forces went door-to-door killing men and teenage boys.

The allegations from the town of Kobo are the latest against Tigray forces as they push through the neighboring Amhara region, in what they call an attempt to pressure Ethiopia's government to end a 10-month war and lift a deadly blockade on their own home. Both Amhara and Tigrayan civilians have joined the fight, and calls by the United States and others for peace have had little effect as war spreads in one of Africa's most powerful countries.

The accounts from Kobo are the most extensive yet of one of the deadliest known killings of Amhara in the war. The estimates of deaths there range from the dozens to the hundreds; it is not clear how many were killed in all or how many were fighters as opposed to civilians, a line that is becoming increasingly blurred.

The Associated Press spoke with more than a dozen witnesses who were in Kobo during the killings, along with others who have family there. They said the fighting started on Sept. 9 as a battle but quickly turned against civilians. At first, Tigray forces who had taken over the area in July fought farmers armed with rifles. But after the Tigray forces briefly lost and regained control of the town, they went door-to-door killing in retaliation, the witnesses said.

"We did our best, whether we die or kill, but what is heartbreaking is the massacre of innocent civilians," said one wounded resident, Kassahun, who was armed. Like others who spoke to the AP after fleeing, he gave only his first name to protect family members still in town.

His account was echoed by a health worker who gave first aid to several wounded people. The health worker said Tigray forces withdrew from Kobo on the afternoon of Sept. 9 and returned several hours later, once local militia units had run out of ammunition and retreated.

"Then the killing started," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

The area of fighting is under a communications blackout, complicating efforts to verify accounts. Calls to the local administrator went unanswered. Ethiopia's state-appointed Human Rights Commission this week said it had received "disturbing reports" of alleged "deliberate attacks against civilians in Kobo town and surrounding rural towns by TPLF fighters."

The acronym stands for the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which dominated Ethiopia's repressive national government for 27 years but was sidelined by current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. What began as a political dispute erupted into war in November in the Tigray region, with thousands killed.

While atrocities have been reported on all sides, the worst massacres recounted by witnesses have been against the civilians of Tigray, along with gang-rapes and deliberate starvation. They were blamed on the Ethiopian government, Amhara militias and Eritrean soldiers.

However, since the Tigray forces in June retook much of their region and entered Amhara, accusations have been piling up against them, too. Amhara civilians in multiple communities have alleged that the Tigray fighters are killing them in retaliation, as the war grows bigger and more complex.

Most allegations cannot be verified immediately, given a lack of access. But in September, the AP reached the scene of an alleged massacre in Chenna Teklehaymanot, where at least dozens of Amhara were reported killed, both fighters and civilians. The AP saw bodies scattered on the muddy ground, some in the uniforms of fighters and others in civilian clothing, and residents alleged at least 59 people were buried in a nearby churchyard.

The Tigray forces have denied targeting civilians. Tigray forces spokesman Getachew Reda told the AP that the accounts from Kobo "are just a figment of someone's imagination. There was no such thing as our forces going in every house and targeting civilians." He blamed local militia, "irregular units," and that "people who were hiding their guns" joined them.

"They fought and our forces had to fight back," Getachew said. Asked about the calls for peace, he said "this cessation of hostilities thing needs to be taken seriously, but it takes two to tango," referring to Ethiopia's government.

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As in Tigray, civilians are caught in the middle.

One resident, Mengesha, said he counted 55 corpses in the town. It was not clear whether they were of fighters or unarmed civilians. "I escaped by stepping over the dead bodies," he said. Like other witnesses, he fled to Dessie town 165 kilometers to the south.

Birhanu, a farmer, said he and his friend were walking home on Sept. 9 when they were rounded up with about 20 other men.

"They were shot in front of us," he said. "The fighters took us to their camp and made us line up and then picked who would be shot. I managed to run away with my friend."

He said the Tigray fighters fired at them as they fled, severing two fingers on his right hand.

Another resident, Molla, said he bandaged his wounds with grass and walked for days to safety.

"(The Tigray forces) were indiscriminately killing people, especially men," he said. "They dragged them out and killed them while their mothers were crying. They killed my uncle and his son-in-law on his doorstep."

A third resident, Ayene, said he watched out a window as fighters took his three brothers out of their nearby home and shot them on the street at point-blank range, along with four others.

"Then the fighters called me outside to shoot me, but luckily a woman intervened and I was saved," he said. "There were so many bodies, I lost my mind."

Before fleeing, Kobo residents said they spent days recovering bodies. One shop assistant, Tesfaye, said he locked himself inside his house, and then counted 50 bodies once the firing stopped.

"I saw many of my friends who were dead on the street," he said. "I was just crying, then I went to bury them."

Cara Anna in Nairobi, Kenya contributed.

## Israel says US booster plan supports its own aggressive push

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel is pressing ahead with its aggressive campaign of offering coronavirus boosters to almost anyone over 12 and says its approach was further vindicated by a U.S. decision to give the shots to older patients or those at higher risk.

Israeli officials credit the booster shot, which has already been delivered to about a third of the population, with helping suppress the country's latest wave of COVID-19 infections. They say the differing approaches are based on the same realization that the booster is the right way to go, and expect the U.S. and other countries to expand their campaigns in the coming months.

"The decision reinforced our results that the third dose is safe," said Dr. Nadav Davidovitch, head of the school of public health at Israel's Ben-Gurion University and chairman of the country's association of public health physicians. "The main question now is of prioritization."

The World Health Organization has called for a moratorium on boosters until at least the end of the year so that more people in poor countries can get their first two doses, but Israeli officials say the booster shot is just as important in preventing infections.

"We know for sure that the current system of vaccine nationalism is hurting all of us, and it's creating variants," said Davidovitch, who is also a member of an Israeli government panel of experts. But he added that the problem is "much broader than Israel."

Israel raced out of the gate early this year to vaccinate most of its adult population after striking a deal with Pfizer to trade medical data in exchange for a steady supply of doses. It has also purchased large quantities of the Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.

Most adults had received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine by March, causing infection levels to plummet and allowing the government to lift nearly all coronavirus restrictions.

But in June, the highly infectious delta variant began to spread. After studying the matter, experts concluded that the vaccine remained effective against the virus, but that its efficacy waned roughly five months after the second shot.

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In late July, Israel began distributing booster shots to at-risk citizens, including those over 60. Within weeks, it expanded the campaign to the general population.

More than 3 million of Israel's 9 million citizens have gotten a third dose of the Pfizer vaccine, according to the Health Ministry.

In a study published last week in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Israeli experts said that in people who had been vaccinated five months earlier, the booster increased vaccine efficacy tenfold compared with vaccinated patients who didn't receive it.

That study tracked about 1 million people 60 and older and found that the booster was "very effective at reducing the rate of both confirmed infection and severe illness," the Health Ministry said.

A senior Israeli health official, Dr. Sharon Alroy Preiss, was among the experts testifying before the U.S. Food and Drug Administration panel last week in favor of the booster shot. But the regulator decided against boosters for the general population, opting only to authorize it for people aged 65 or older and those in high-risk groups.

Experts cited a lack of safety data on extra doses and also raised doubts about the value of mass boosters, rather than ones targeted to specific groups. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention made a similar endorsement Thursday.

The Israeli Health Ministry said the FDA decision "gave validity to the third vaccine operation" underway in Israel, which "decided to act responsibly and quickly in order to treat growing infections." It said statistics show the booster dose has "restored protection."

Recent weeks have seen "a declining rate of new infections among the elderly," the vast majority of whom have received booster shots, and "a continuous increase in the proportion of unvaccinated individuals within the new severe cases," Dr. Ran Balicer, head of the government's expert advisory panel on COVID-19, told *The Associated Press*.

In recent weeks, as the booster campaign has been rolled out, the percentage of unvaccinated among serious COVID-19 cases has climbed, and the overall new cases among people with at least two shots has dropped.

As of Friday, around 70% of Israel's 703 serious cases of COVID-19 were among the unvaccinated, and about 20% had not received a booster. A month earlier, after Israel vaccinated 1.5 million people with a third dose, those two groups were equally represented among the serious cases.

Over 60% of Israelis — the overwhelming majority of the adult population — have received at least two doses of the coronavirus vaccine.

Some experts noted that the U.S. and Europe were several months behind Israel's vaccination campaign and predicted those countries would follow suit in the months ahead.

"We are experiencing first a phenomenon that will become apparent likely in many other countries in the coming months and create a similar challenge there," Balicer said. "Few, if any at all, other countries are walking in our shoes right now."

The U.K. already is rolling out a booster campaign, with third doses to be offered to anyone over 50 and other vulnerable groups.

The WHO has called on rich countries to refrain from exhausting vaccine stockpiles on boosters while much of the world has yet to receive any. A third shot may be necessary for people with certain health conditions, but "boosters for the general public are not appropriate at this stage of the pandemic," it said.

"The longer vaccine inequity persists, the more the virus will circulate and change, the longer social and economic disruptions will continue, and the higher the chances that more variants will emerge that render vaccines less effective," it said in a statement Friday.

Balicer said that Israel, as a small country, has little effect on global supplies and that its role as the world's laboratory provides "a very important source of knowledge" for other countries.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has exhorted the public to get vaccine boosters as part of his aggressive public relations campaign since taking office in June.

"Israel is the only country in the world that is giving its citizens this gift of the possibility — both legally



and in terms of supply — of a booster,” he said last week.

Balicer said other states should ready national plans for the rollout of booster shots.

“Countries that vaccinated more recently should be prepared for the impact of waning vaccine immunity manifesting in midwinter, further intensifying the challenge,” he said.

Follow Ilan Ben Zion on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IlanBenZion>

## **Biden: Budget talks hit ‘stalemate,’ \$3.5T may take a while**

By LISA MASCARO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden says that talks over his \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan have hit a “stalemate” in Congress as he made the case for his expansive effort to recast the nation’s tax and spending programs and make what he sees as sweeping, overdue investments.

Biden spoke at the White House as Democrats in the House and Senate are laboring to finish drafts and overcome differences between the party’s centrist and moderate factions. Despite efforts by the president and congressional leaders to show progress, Biden on Friday cast the road ahead as long and potentially cumbersome, even with upcoming deadlines.

“We’re getting down to the hard spot here,” Biden told reporters at the White House. “We’re at this stalemate at the moment.”

Biden said the process is “going to be up and down” but “hopefully at the end of the day I’ll be able to deliver on what I said I would do.”

The president’s acknowledgment of Democrats’ disagreements — and they have serious differences over taxes, health, climate change and the ultimate price tag — contrasted with congressional leaders’ more upbeat tone in recent days. Using carefully chosen words, top Democrats have seemed to be trying to create a sense of momentum as House votes approach.

On Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., predicted passage of both pillars of Biden’s domestic agenda. One is a still-evolving \$3.5 trillion package of social safety net and climate programs, the other a separate \$1 trillion measure financing highway, internet and other infrastructure projects that’s already passed the Senate with bipartisan support.

“We’re going to pass both bills,” she told reporters.

But she did not spell out how she and her Senate counterpart, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., would resolve disagreements and distrust between their party’s moderate and progressive wings that’s stalled both measures. And there remained confusion about the voting schedule, which will be crucial.

Pelosi promised House moderates last month that by this Monday, the chamber will consider the infrastructure bill, centrists’ top priority.

But progressives are threatening to vote to derail the infrastructure legislation until a final version of their favorite — the \$3.5 trillion social and environment bill — passes the Senate and returns to the House. Progressives think delaying the public works bill would pressure moderates to back the larger measure.

“We’re bringing the bill up, we will have a vote when we have the votes,” Pelosi told a reporter Friday about the infrastructure bill’s timing. While she said debate would begin Monday, her remarks suggested that final passage of the public works legislation could slip.

Pelosi also told reporters that “the plan” was for her chamber to consider the \$3.5 trillion package next week as well. It remained unclear how House-Senate bargainers would solve their differences over that bill that quickly.

The president said his private meetings with some two dozen Democratic lawmakers this week in efforts to hasten progress and close the deal went well — describing the tone as collegial and with “no hollering.”

But as lawmakers raised objections over the sweep and scope of the plan, which is to be funded by higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy, Biden said he tried to get them focused on priorities — what they can and can’t live with.

“It’s about paying your fair share, for lord’s sake,” Biden said. “There clearly is enough, from a panoply

of options, to pay for whatever it is.”

In a stark reality check, Biden suggested talks could drag to the end of the year. “It’s just going to take some time,” he said.

Lawmakers are working nonstop and Biden is facing pressure to close the deal. Pelosi met Friday at the Capitol with her leadership team, and the House Budget Committee planned a rare Saturday session to take the strictly procedural step of sending the \$3.5 trillion bill, as drafted by 13 other House panels, to the full chamber without any changes.

Before the House votes on that measure, it is certain to change, perhaps more than once, to reflect compromises reached with Senate Democrats.

Biden’s big vision over his “Build Back Better” campaign promise proposes expanding health, education and federal programs, with more services for Americans of all ages, while investing heavily in efforts to tackle climate change. All this would be paid for largely by hiking tax rates on corporations and wealthy individuals, those earning beyond \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for married couples.

But centrist Democrats see the overall price tag as too much, while progressive lawmakers are hesitant to compromise any further after already having dropped even more ambitious ideas.

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Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

## **US police departments clamoring for de-escalation training**

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

SACO, Maine (AP) — Angry over being fired, a former employee slashed the tires of his boss’ vehicle and still held the knife when police officers arrived.

Three officers positioned themselves at a safe distance as the man yelled and ranted. One officer had a stun gun, another a handgun.

The third used the most important tool — a willingness to talk.

Here in a school parking lot in Maine, the emergency was fake, but the strategies were very real. The officers were going through a training course offered by the Police Executive Research Forum that thousands of police officers around the country are receiving this year. Officers are taught: keep a safe distance, slow things down.

The organization based in Washington, D.C., is the foremost policing think tank in the country. Its two-day training now has a long waiting list.

“The most common mistake is rushing a situation that you don’t need to rush,” said Steven Stefanakos of New York City Police Department, who was brought in to help train the officers. “When you compress time and space, it usually does not go the way we want it to go.”

Police department requests for training on how to better deal with the public have skyrocketed since the death of George Floyd and the protests that followed, particularly as calls to defund police rise and cities pass reforms aimed at cracking down on police brutality.

The Police Executive Research Forum’s training effort began five years ago after the shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, in Ferguson, Missouri, and has been updated since with fresh techniques. The idea had its genesis in the United Kingdom, where most officers don’t carry handguns, forum director Chuck Wexler said. It’s a mix of classroom training and scenarios played out with actors to give officers time to work through what they’ve learned.

The goal is to take the training to as many of the nation’s 18,000 law enforcement agencies as possible.

New York City announced all 36,500 officers will get the training, and all 35,000 police officers in New Jersey are being trained, as well. Smaller departments are reaching out, and the agency is doing regional sessions. The first regional session was held in late July for officers from 90 police departments in New England, who are then expected to take what they’ve learned back to their departments and train other officers. There was also a session in Colorado. The latest training wrapped up Friday in Tampa.

Police officers are asked to do a lot. They’re asked to be roadside psychologists, family counselors, men-

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tal health workers — and even soldiers in an active-shooter event, said Saco Police Chief Jack Clements, whose agency hosted the event in New England.

That's why it's important to rehearse.

"Rather than rushing in and winding up in an encounter that's deadly force, let's back up, slow down, talk, formulate a plan. Then engage. If it takes an hour to de-escalate this guy, that's fine. Take the time," the chief said.

Some officers say the training is already saving lives.

In Texas, a police officer responded to a call for a suicidal woman with a knife a couple of weeks after receiving the training in Harris County. The woman had rammed a vehicle in which her boyfriend was sitting and nearly hit a deputy before fleeing and locking herself in an apartment.

The first deputies on the scene kicked in the door, but Sgt. Pete Smith slowed things down and initiated a conversation when he arrived. Assured that he was there to help, the woman dropped her knife.

Instead of a violent arrest, or worse, she was taken for a mental health evaluation, said Sgt. Jose Gomez, part of the department's behavioral health training unit, who was responsible for securing the training.

In Saco, the officers spent the first day in the classroom before working through role-playing exercises on the second day. The scenarios focused on the vast majority of encounters with the public where no gun is present, but may involve knives or weapons.

In the tire-slashing scenario, the three officers kept a distance from the man who was displaying a knife. The man was a threat, they said, but not an imminent one as long as he remained at a safe distance. The three of them quickly designated the officer who would do the speaking.

Long minutes dragged by as the officer and assailant talked and commiserated, allowing the focus of the conversation to shift away from the boss. They ended up talking about customizing cars. The man put down his knife.

After the exercise, a police officer from New Haven, Connecticut, said during the debriefing that he kept the "21-foot rule" in mind.

The 21-foot distance is sometimes referred to as the "kill zone." It's drilled into officers that at that distance someone armed with a knife, baseball bat or other weapon can quickly close the distance and inflict deadly injuries.

Officers who want to protect themselves and survive to go home at the end of the shift are more likely to use deadly force simply because that's what they were trained to do once that distance limit is broken.

After listening in on the post-training conversation, Wexler said he was troubled by the results he's seen from what believes to be an arbitrary rule taught in police training.

"These are what you would call the lawful but awful kinds of shootings," Wexler said.

Sometimes, he said, winning means backing away to keep a distance, instead of charging into a situation or standing one's ground. It means taking time to assess and communicate, he said.

Raphael Thornton, who played the role of the knife-wielding assailant, said officers aren't always sold on textbook training. But, he said, that changes with the role-playing.

"That's when we really get the buy-in," said Thornton, who works for the Camden County Police Department in New Jersey. "If we have any naysayers when they leave the classroom, they really buy in when they get out there. They get to put what they learned into action."

## Canadians released after Huawei CFO resolves US charges

By ERIC TUCKER, JIM MUSTIAN and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two Canadians detained in China on spying charges were released from prison and flown out of the country on Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, just after a top executive of Chinese communications giant Huawei Technologies reached a deal with the U.S. Justice Department over fraud charges and flew to China.

The frenetic chain of events involving the global powers brought an abrupt end to legal and geopolitical wrangling that for the past three years has roiled relations between Washington, Beijing and Ottawa.

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The three-way deal enabled China and Canada to each bring home their own detained citizens while the U.S. wrapped up a criminal case against a prominent tech executive that for months had been mired in an extradition fight.

The first activity came Friday afternoon when Meng Wanzhou, 49, Huawei's chief finance officer and the daughter of the company's founder, reached an agreement with federal prosecutors that called for fraud charges against her to be dismissed next year and allowed for her to return to China immediately. As part of the deal, known as a deferred prosecution agreement, she accepted responsibility for misrepresenting the company's business dealings in Iran.

About an hour after Meng's plane left Canada for China, Trudeau revealed that Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were also on their way home. The men were arrested in China in December 2018, shortly after Canada arrested Meng on a U.S. extradition request. Many countries labeled China's action "hostage politics."

"These two men have been through an unbelievably difficult ordeal. For the past 1,000 days, they have shown strength, perseverance and grace and we are all inspired by that," Trudeau said.

News of Meng's pending return was a top item on the Chinese internet and on state broadcaster CCTV's midday news report, with no mention made of the release of Kovrig and Spavor.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian reposted on social media a report on Meng having left Canada, adding "Welcome home."

Video was also circulated online of Meng speaking at Vancouver International Airport, saying; "Thank you motherland, thank you to the people of the motherland. You have been my greatest pillar of support."

The deal was reached as President Joe Biden and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have sought to tamp down signs of public tension — even as the world's two dominant economies are at odds on issues as diverse as cybersecurity, climate change, human rights and trade and tariffs. Biden said in an address before the U.N. General Assembly earlier this week that he had no intention of starting a "new Cold War," while Xi told world leaders that disputes among countries "need to be handled through dialogue and cooperation."

"The U.S. Government stands with the international community in welcoming the decision by People's Republic of China authorities to release Canadian citizens Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig after more than two-and-a-half years of arbitrary detention. We are pleased that they are returning home to Canada," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

As part of the deal with Meng, which was disclosed in federal court in Brooklyn, the Justice Department agreed to dismiss the fraud charges against her in December 2022 — exactly four years after her arrest — provided that she complies with certain conditions, including not contesting any of the government's factual allegations. The Justice Department also agreed to drop its request that Meng be extradited to the U.S., which she had vigorously challenged, ending a process that prosecutors said could have persisted for months.

After appearing via videoconference for her New York hearing, Meng made a brief court appearance in Vancouver, where she'd been out on bail living in a multimillion-dollar mansion while the two Canadians were held in Chinese prison cells where the lights were kept on 24 hours a day.

Outside the courtroom, Meng thanked the Canadian government for upholding the rule of law, expressed gratitude to the Canadian people and apologized "for the inconvenience I caused."

"Over the last three years my life has been turned upside down," she said. "It was a disruptive time for me as a mother, a wife and as a company executive. But I believe every cloud has a silver lining. It really was an invaluable experience in my life. I will never forget all the good wishes I received."

Shortly afterward, Meng left on an Air China flight for Shenzhen, China, the location of Huawei's headquarters.

Huawei is the biggest global supplier of network gear for phone and internet companies. It has been a symbol of China's progress in becoming a technological world power — and a subject of U.S. security and law enforcement concerns. Some analysts say Chinese companies have flouted international rules and norms and stolen technology.

The case against Meng stems from a January 2019 indictment from the Trump administration Justice

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Department that accused Huawei of stealing trade secrets and using a Hong Kong shell company called Skycom to sell equipment to Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions. The indictment also charged Meng herself with committing fraud by misleading the HSBC bank about the company's business dealings in Iran.

The indictment came amid a broader Trump administration crackdown against Huawei over U.S. government concerns that the company's products could facilitate Chinese spying. The administration cut off Huawei's access to U.S. components and technology, including Google's music and other smartphone services, and later barred vendors worldwide from using U.S. technology to produce components for Huawei.

The Biden White House, meanwhile, has kept up a hard line on Huawei and other Chinese corporations whose technology is thought to pose national security risks.

Huawei has repeatedly denied the U.S. government's allegations and security concerns about its products.

Meng had long fought the Justice Department's extradition request, with her lawyers calling the case against her flawed and alleging that she was being used as a "bargaining chip" in political gamesmanship. They cited a 2018 interview in which then-President Donald Trump said he'd be willing to intervene in the case if it would help secure a trade deal with China or aid U.S. security interests.

Last month, a Canadian judge held off on ruling whether Meng should be extradited to the U.S. after a Canadian Justice Department lawyer wrapped up his case saying there was enough evidence to show she was dishonest and deserved to stand trial in the U.S.

Comfort Ero, the interim Vice President of the International Crisis Group, Kovrig's employer, said they have been waiting for more than 1,000 days for the news.

"Michael Kovrig is free. To Beijing: We welcome this most just decision. To Ottawa: Thank you for your steadfast support for our colleague. To the United States: Thank you for your willingness to support an ally and our colleague. To the inimitable, indefatigable, and inspiring Michael Kovrig, welcome home!" Ero said in a statement.

Tucker reported from Washington and Gillies from Toronto. Associated Press writer Jim Morris in Vancouver, Canada, contributed to this report.

## US, Pakistan face each other again on Afghanistan threats

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Taliban's takeover of Kabul has deepened the mutual distrust between the U.S. and Pakistan, two putative allies who have tangled over Afghanistan. But both sides still need each other.

With the Biden administration looking for new ways to stop terrorist threats in Afghanistan, it will likely look again to Pakistan, which remains critical to U.S. intelligence and national security because of its proximity to Afghanistan and connections to the Taliban leaders now in charge.

Over two decades of war, American officials accused Pakistan of playing a double game by promising to fight terrorism and cooperate with Washington while cultivating the Taliban and other extremist groups that attacked U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Islamabad, meanwhile, pointed to what it saw as failed promises of a supportive government in Kabul after the U.S. drove the Taliban from power following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks as extremist groups took refuge in eastern Afghanistan and launched deadly attacks throughout Pakistan.

But the U.S. wants Pakistani cooperation in counterterrorism efforts and could seek permission to fly surveillance flights into Afghanistan or other intelligence cooperation. And Pakistan wants U.S. military aid and good relations with Washington, even as its leaders openly celebrate the Taliban's rise to power.

"Over the last 20 years, Pakistan has been vital for various logistics purposes for the U.S. military. What's really been troubling is that, unfortunately, there hasn't been a lot of trust," said U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, an Illinois Democrat who sits on the House Intelligence Committee. "I think the question is whether we can get over that history to arrive at a new understanding."

Former diplomats and intelligence officers from both countries say the possibilities for cooperation are severely limited by the events of the last two decades and Pakistan's enduring competition with India. The previous Afghan government, which was strongly backed by New Delhi, routinely accused Pakistan

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of harboring the Taliban. The new Taliban government includes officials that American officials have long believed are linked to Pakistan's spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence.

Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., said he understood "the temptation of officials in both countries to try and take advantage of the situation" and find common ground. But Haqqani said he expected Pakistan to give "all possible cooperation to the Taliban."

"This has been a moment Pakistan has been waiting for 20 years," said Haqqani, now at the Hudson Institute think tank. "They now feel that they have a satellite state."

U.S. officials are trying to quickly build what President Joe Biden calls an "over the horizon" capacity to monitor and stop terrorist threats.

Without a partner country bordering Afghanistan, the U.S. has to fly surveillance drones long distances, limiting the time they can be used to watch over targets. The U.S. also lost most of its network of informants and intelligence partners in the now-deposed Afghan government, making it critical to find common ground with other governments that have more resources in the country.

Pakistan could be helpful in that effort by allowing "overflight" rights for American spy planes from the Persian Gulf or permitting the U.S. to base surveillance or counterterrorism teams along its border with Afghanistan. There are few other options among Afghanistan's neighbors. Iran is a U.S. adversary. And Central Asian countries north of Afghanistan all face varying degrees of Russian influence.

There are no known agreements so far. CIA Director William Burns visited Islamabad earlier this month to meet with Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, Pakistan's army chief, and Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed, who leads the ISI, according to a Pakistani government statement. Burns and Hameed have also separately visited Kabul in recent weeks to meet with Taliban leaders. The CIA declined to comment on the visits.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi noted this week that Islamabad had cooperated with U.S. requests to facilitate peace talks before the Taliban takeover and that it had agreed to U.S. military requests throughout the war.

"We have often been criticized for not doing enough," Qureshi told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "But we've not been appreciated enough for having done what was done."

Qureshi would not directly answer whether Pakistan would allow the basing of surveillance equipment or overflight of drones.

"They don't have to be physically there to share intelligence," he said of the U.S. "There are smarter ways of doing it."

The CIA and ISI have a long history in Afghanistan, dating back to their shared goal of arming bands of mujahedeen — "freedom fighters" — against the Soviet Union's occupation in the 1980s. The CIA sent weapons and money into Afghanistan through Pakistan.

Those fighters included Osama bin Laden. Others would become leaders of the Taliban, which emerged victorious from a civil war in 1996 and gained control of most of the country. The Taliban gave refuge to bin Laden and other leaders of al-Qaida, which launched deadly attacks on Americans abroad in 1998 and then struck the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.

After 9/11, the U.S. immediately sought Pakistan's cooperation in its fight against al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. Declassified cables published by George Washington University's National Security Archive show officials in President George W. Bush's administration made several demands of Pakistan, from intercepting arms shipments heading to al-Qaida to providing the U.S. with intelligence and permission to fly military and intelligence planes over its territory.

The CIA would carry out hundreds of drone strikes launched from Pakistan targeting al-Qaida leaders and others alleged to have ties to terrorist groups. Hundreds of civilians died in the strikes, according to figures kept by outside observers, leading to widespread protests and public anger in Pakistan.

Pakistan, meanwhile, continued to be accused of harboring the Taliban after the U.S.-backed coalition drove the group from power in Kabul. And bin Laden was killed in 2011 by U.S. special forces in a secret raid on a compound in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad, home to the country's military academy. The bin Laden operation led many in the U.S. to question whether Pakistan had harbored bin Laden and angered

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Pakistanis who felt the raid violated their sovereignty.

For years, CIA officials tried to confront their Pakistani counterparts after collecting more proof of Pakistani intelligence officers helping the Taliban move money and fighters into a then-growing insurgency in neighboring Afghanistan, said Douglas London, who oversaw the CIA's counterterrorism operations in South Asia until 2018.

"They would say, 'You just come to my office, tell me where the location is,'" he said. "They would just usually pay lip service to us and say they couldn't confirm the intel."

London, author of the forthcoming book "The Recruiter," said he expected American intelligence would consider limited partnerships with Pakistan on mutual enemies such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State-Khorasan, which took responsibility for the deadly suicide attack outside the Kabul airport last month during the final days of the U.S. evacuation.

The risk, London said, is at times "your partner is as much of a threat to you as the enemy who you're pursuing."

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Associated Press writer Edith M. Lederer contributed to this report from the United Nations.

## Leaders at UN to face global concern over regional conflicts

By SALLY HO Associated Press

In today's world, few conflicts stay local.

There's India's fight over the Kashmir region with bitter rival Pakistan, Haiti's inner turmoil spilling into a migrant crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border and questions about the Ethiopian government's role in reported starvation deaths in the Tigray region.

All will come into full view Saturday when leaders from those regions address the U.N. General Assembly.

India Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who spent part of the week meeting with U.S. officials to strengthen ties in the Indo-Pacific, is expected to push back against Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's scathing — albeit predictable — rhetoric that landed hours earlier.

Khan on Friday once again labeled Modi's Hindu nationalist government "fascist" and railed against India's crackdown on Kashmir, the disputed region divided between each country but claimed by both.

Modi, like Khan, is also expected to weigh in on the Afghanistan crisis. The Indian government has raised concerns that the chaos left in the wake of the U.S.'s military withdrawal from Afghanistan will benefit Pakistan and feed the long-simmering insurgency in Kashmir, where militants already have a foothold.

Haiti Prime Minister Ariel Henry is scheduled to give a pre-recorded speech Saturday on behalf of the country that's been roiled by turmoil following the assassination of its president and a recent major earthquake.

The address comes days after Henry fired his chief prosecutor, who had asked a judge to charge Henry in the slaying of Haiti President Jovenel Moise and to bar the prime minister from leaving the country.

The troubles have moved beyond Haiti's borders, with thousands of migrants fleeing to the U.S. This week, the Biden administration's special envoy to Haiti, Daniel Foote, resigned in protest of "inhumane" large-scale U.S. expulsions of Haitian migrants. Foote was appointed to the position only in July, following the assassination.

Ethiopia will also address the largest gathering of world leaders on Saturday and face the pressure of global concern for its Tigray region.

The U.N. has warned of famine in the embattled corner of northern Ethiopia, calling it the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade. Starvation deaths have been reported since the government in June imposed what the U.N. calls "a de facto humanitarian aid blockade."

Russia and the Holy See are also slated to speak Saturday.

The Catholic Church's government is one of only two permanent non-member observer states to be included in the United Nations.

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## Texas migrant camp empty, Haitians await word on their fate

By MARÍA VERZA and JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — No migrants are left at a Texas border encampment, about a week after nearly 15,000 people — most of them Haitians — huddled in makeshift shelters hoping for the chance to seek asylum.

Some will get that chance, while the others will be expelled to their homeland. The Department of Homeland Security planned to continue flights to Haiti throughout the weekend, ignoring criticism from Democratic lawmakers and human rights groups who say Haitian migrants are being sent back to a troubled country that some left more than a decade ago.

Meanwhile, Bruno Lozano, the mayor of Del Rio, Texas, where the camp was located, said officials would search the brush along the Rio Grande to ensure nobody was hiding and finish cleaning the site before reopening the international bridge. He said that would happen Sunday night at the earliest.

Officials also want to be sure no other large groups of migrants are making their way to the Del Rio area who might decide to set up a similar camp, he said.

Lozano said there were no deaths during the time the camp was occupied and that 10 babies were born to migrant mothers, either at the camp or in Del Rio's hospital.

"It took an urban village at this scale to help prevent any loss of life and actually welcome the births of children here," said Lozano, who called the relocation of all the migrants "phenomenal."

The number of migrants peaked last Saturday as migrants driven by confusion over the Biden administration's policies and misinformation on social media converged at the border crossing connecting Del Rio, Texas, and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico.

The U.S. and Mexico worked swiftly, appearing eager to end the humanitarian situation that prompted the resignation of the U.S. special envoy to Haiti and widespread outrage after images emerged of border agents maneuvering their horses to forcibly block and move migrants.

On Friday, President Joe Biden said the way the agents used their horses was "horrible" and that "people will pay" as a result. The agents have been assigned to administrative duties while the administration investigates.

"There will be consequences," Biden told reporters. "It's an embarrassment, but it's beyond an embarrassment — it's dangerous, it's wrong, it sends the wrong message around the world and sends the wrong message at home. It's simply not who we are."

Later, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas spoke cautiously about the pending investigation. Asked about the discrepancy, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden "was not prejudging an outcome" or interfering with the investigation, but "was speaking from the heart."

Many migrants face expulsion because they are not covered by protections recently extended by the Biden administration to the more than 100,000 Haitian migrants already in the U.S., citing security concerns and social unrest in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. A devastating 2010 earthquake forced many from their homeland.

Mayorkas said about 2,000 Haitians had been rapidly expelled on 17 flights since Sunday and more could be expelled in coming days under pandemic powers that deny people the chance to seek asylum.

The Trump administration enacted the policy, called Title 42, 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 that 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 of them no longer have legal status there.

The Mexico office of the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration released a statement late Friday



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saying it is looking for countries where some Haitians have residency or where their children have citizenship as an alternative to allowing them to be deported to Haiti.

"Should migrants be willing to return and should concerned states be in agreement, IOM is ready to offer its expertise through its Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Program to help these migrants return in a safe and informed manner," the statement said.

Mayorkas said the U.S. has allowed about 12,400 migrants to enter the country, at least temporarily, while they make claims before an immigration judge to stay in the country under the asylum laws or for some other legal reason. They could ultimately be denied and would be subject to removal.

Mayorkas said about 5,000 are in DHS custody and being processed to determine whether they will be expelled or allowed to press their claim for legal residency. Some returned to Mexico.

A U.S. official with direct knowledge of the situation said six flights were scheduled to Haiti on Friday, with seven planned Saturday and six Sunday, though that was subject to change. The official was not authorized to speak publicly.

In Mexico, around 50 migrants, most of them single men, remained Friday evening in the riverside camp in Ciudad Acuña. Dozens of families had crossed back to Del Rio overnight after Mexican authorities left the area. Others moved to small hotels or private homes in Ciudad Acuña.

Luxon, a 31-year-old Haitian migrant who withheld his last name out of fear, said he was leaving with his wife and son for Mexicali, about 900 miles (1,450 kilometers) west along Mexico's border with California.

"The option was to go to a place where there aren't a lot of people and there request documents to be legal in Mexico," he said.

At the Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition in Del Rio, migrants stepped off a white Border Patrol van on Friday, many smiling and looking relieved to have been released into the U.S. Some carried sleeping babies. A toddler walked behind her mother wrapped in a silver heat blanket.

A man who'd driven almost 1500 miles (2,414 kilometers) from Toledo, Ohio, hoping to pick up a friend and her family wore a neon yellow vest and quietly scanned the line of Haitian migrants. Dave, who didn't want to share his last name, didn't see them.

"I feel like my friend is worth my time to come down and help," he said, explaining that he wore the vest so his friend — a nurse whom he'd met on a humanitarian trip to Haiti over a decade ago — would be able to spot him in the crowd when she arrived with her husband and 3-year-old daughter.

"I just see it as an opportunity to serve somebody," said Dave, who considers himself a Trump supporter but hates how politicized the immigration issue has become. "We have so much."

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Maria Verza reported from Ciudad Acuña, Mexico. AP journalists Sarah Morgan in Del Rio, Texas; Ben Fox and Nancy Benac in Washington; Elliot Spagat in Los Angeles; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

## **AP FACT CHECK: Pro-Trump auditors spin election falsehoods**

By CHRISTINA CASSIDY and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

A group hired by Trump-friendly Republicans to examine the results of the 2020 election in Arizona's largest county spun falsehoods about deleted data, double voting and other malfeasance in a report that ignored basic facts about how elections are run.

The report released Friday by the Cyber Ninjas, the firm hired by Republican lawmakers in Arizona to look for 2020 election fraud, came up with nothing that throws the election won by President Joe Biden into legitimate question. Instead it tried to paint routine election practices in Maricopa County as errors, irregularities or sinister efforts to deny Donald Trump another term.

Even with its skewed analysis, the report actually came up with more votes for Biden than he was certified to have won in the county last year.

Here's a look at some of the claims by Doug Logan, CEO of Cyber Ninjas, in a hearing to present its report on Friday:

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LOGAN, claiming election results were deleted from Maricopa County's election management system: "So some individual went into an application, and they chose specifically to run something that would clear all records in the system that was used to generate the official results, the day before an audit started."

THE FACTS: No, the data never disappeared; it was just moved. Maricopa County officials made copies of the data and archived it before removing it from the election management system.

"We have backups for all Nov. data & those archives were never subpoenaed," the county said in a statement on Twitter. County officials said data cannot be stored indefinitely on the election management system. "Cyber Ninjas don't understand the business of elections," the county said. "We can't keep everything on the EMS server because it has storage limits."

LOGAN: "23,344 people voted when they should no longer have access, or would not normally have access" to voting in Maricopa County because they have moved.

THE FACTS: No, that's not what happened. Logan reviewed the names of voters against a commercial database of addresses, not a database of voters. He found that 23,344 reported moving before ballots went out in October. While the review suggests something improper, election officials note that voters such as college students, those who own vacation homes and military members, can move to temporary locations while still legally voting at the address where they are registered.

"A competent reviewer of an election would not make a claim like that," said Trey Grayson, a former Republican secretary of state in Kentucky.

LOGAN: There were 9,041 mail-in voters who "were mailed one ballot but somehow two ballots were received, which I do not know how you would have one ballot sent and two received."

THE FACTS: This isn't unusual, and it's not a sign of wrongdoing. The file Logan consulted, known as EV33, shows two returned ballot entries whenever a voter's mail-in ballot has a signature discrepancy that gets fixed.

When a voter mails in a ballot with a blank or mismatched signature, election officials contact the voter. If the discrepancy is resolved, they enter a second record in the EV33 file, election officials said.

"The appropriate conclusion to draw from this finding is that the early voting team was performing their statutory-required responsibility by reviewing signatures on all returned mail-in ballots," Maricopa County tweeted in response to Logan's claim.

Associated Press writers Jude Joffe-Block in Phoenix and Cal Woodward in Washington contributed to this report.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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## Imran Khan paints Pakistan as victim of US ungratefulness

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prime Minister Imran Khan sought to cast Pakistan as the victim of American ungratefulness and an international double standard in his address to the United Nations General Assembly on Friday.

In a prerecorded speech aired during the evening, the Pakistani prime minister touched on a range of topics that included climate change, global Islamophobia and "the plunder of the developing world by their corrupt elites" — the latter of which he likened to what the East India Company did to India.

It was for India's government that Khan reserved his harshest words, once again labeling Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government "fascist." But the cricketer turned posh interna-

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tional celebrity turned politician was in turn indignant and plaintive as he painted the United States as an abandoner of both Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan.

"For the current situation in Afghanistan, for some reason, Pakistan has been blamed for the turn of events, by politicians in the United States and some politicians in Europe," Khan said. "From this platform, I want them all to know, the country that suffered the most, apart from Afghanistan, was Pakistan when we joined the U.S. war on terror after 9/11."

He launched into a narrative that began with the United States and Pakistan training mujahedeen — regarded as heroes by the likes of then-President Ronald Reagan, he said — during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. But Pakistan was left to pick up the pieces — millions of refugees and new sectarian militant groups — when the Soviets and the Americans left in 1989.

Khan said the U.S. sanctioned its former partner a year later, but then came calling again after the 9/11 attacks. Khan said Pakistan's aid to the U.S. cost 80,000 Pakistani lives and caused internal strife and dissent directed at the state, all while the U.S. conducted drone attacks.

"So, when we hear this at the end. There is a lot of worry in the U.S. about taking care of the interpreters and everyone who helped the U.S.," he said, referring to Afghanistan. "What about us?"

Instead of a mere "word of appreciation," Pakistan has received blame, Khan said.

Despite Khan's rhetoric espousing a desire for peace, many Afghans have blamed Pakistan for the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan because of close links. The United Nations in August also rejected Pakistan's request to give its side at a special meeting on Afghanistan, indicating the international community's shared skepticism.

In his speech, Khan echoed what his foreign minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, told The Associated Press earlier this week on the sidelines at the U.N.: the international community should not isolate the Taliban, but instead strengthen the current Afghan government for the sake of the people.

He struck an optimistic tone about Taliban rule, saying their leaders had committed to human rights, an inclusive government and not allowing terrorists on Afghan soil. But messages from the Taliban have been mixed.

A Taliban founder told the AP earlier this week that the hard-liners would once again carry out executions and amputated hands — though this time after adjudication by judges, including women, and potentially not in public.

"If the world community incentivizes them, and encourages them to walk this talk, it will be a win-win situation for everyone," he said.

Khan also turned his ire on that same community for what he perceives as a free pass given to India.

"It is unfortunate, very unfortunate, that the world's approach to violations of human rights lacks evenhandedness, and even is selective. Geopolitical considerations, or corporate interests, commercial interests often compel major powers to overlook the transgressions of their affiliated countries," Khan said.

He went through a litany of actions that have "unleashed a reign of fear and violence against India's 200 million strong Muslim community," he said, including lynchings, pogroms and discriminatory citizenship laws.

As in years past, Khan — who favors delivering his speeches in his British-inflected English, in contrast to Modi's Hindi addresses — devoted substantial time to Kashmir.

"New Delhi has also embarked on what it ominously calls the 'final solution' for the Jammu and Kashmir dispute," Khan said, rattling off a list of what he termed "gross and systematic violations of human rights" committed by Indian forces. He specifically decried the "forcible snatching of the mortal remains of the great Kashmiri leader, " Syed Ali Geelani , who died earlier this month at 91.

Geelani's family has said authorities took his body and buried him discreetly and without their consent, denying the separatist leader revered in Kashmir a proper Islamic burial. Khan called upon the General Assembly to demand Geelani's proper burial and rites.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and has been claimed by both since they won independence from the British empire and began fighting over their rival claims.

He said Pakistan desires peace, but it is India's responsibility to meaningfully engage.

India exercised its right of reply after the last leader spoke Friday, saying it was upon Pakistan, not India, to demonstrate good faith in engagement. An Indian diplomat said Pakistan needed to look inward before making accusations, and stressed that Kashmir was inalienably India's. Pakistan then exercised its own right of reply, excoriating India once more.

Modi is set to address the U.N. General Assembly in person on Saturday, a day after a bilateral meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden.

Follow Sen on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mallikavsen>

## **EXPLAINER: Medication abortion becomes latest GOP target**

By IRIS SAMUELS Associated Press/Report for America

Medication abortion accounts for about 40% of all abortions in the U.S. The increasingly common method relies on pills rather than surgery, opening the possibility for abortions to be done in a woman's home rather than a clinic. It's an option that has become important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Republican states move to restrict access to abortion generally, many of them also are limiting access to medication-induced abortions.

Providers say medication abortion is safe and essential, especially as access to clinics in Republican-controlled states becomes more difficult.

### **HOW DOES MEDICATION ABORTION WORK?**

Medication abortion has been available in the U.S. since 2000, when the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of mifepristone.

A medication abortion consists of taking mifepristone, waiting 24 to 48 hours, and then taking misoprostol. Mifepristone blocks the hormone progesterone, which is essential to sustain a pregnancy. Misoprostol empties the uterus by causing cramping and bleeding.

The drugs are approved for use by the FDA up to 10 weeks of gestation.

The method is considered by health professionals to be highly effective and safe, with pregnancies terminated in more than 95% of cases and serious complications in 0.4% of cases.

According to the FDA, 3.7 million women used medication abortion between 2000 and 2018. In that period, 24 women died after taking mifepristone.

The method's popularity has grown steadily. The Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights, estimates that it accounts for about 40% of all abortions in the U.S. and 60% of those taking place up to 10 weeks' gestation.

### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

Abortion rights advocates say the pandemic has demonstrated the value of medical care provided virtually, including the privacy and convenience of abortion taking place in a woman's home, instead of a clinic.

Adding to its appeal: Clinics are few and far between in several states where Republicans have passed strict laws limiting access. Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and West Virginia are states that have just a single abortion clinic.

Abortion providers say as access to clinics becomes more difficult, medication abortion can allow women to get abortions without facing the burden of traveling, which can be especially difficult and expensive for lower-income women.

### **WHAT ARE STATES DOING TO RESTRICT IT?**

Abortion opponents, worried medication abortion is becoming increasingly prevalent, are pushing legislation in Republican-led states to limit access to the drugs.

States have passed several measures to limit its availability. These include outlawing the delivery of abortion pills by mail, shortening the 10-week window in which the method is allowed and requiring women take the pills in a clinic rather than at home.

Some states also require doctors to tell women undergoing drug-induced abortions that the process can be reversed midway through, a claim critics say is not supported by science.

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In 33 states, only physicians are allowed to provide abortion pills. In 17 states and the District of Columbia, they can be provided by advanced-practice clinicians.

Clinicians providing the medication must be physically present when it is administered in 19 states, meaning abortion patients cannot take the drugs at home.

Republican governors in Arkansas, Arizona, Montana, Oklahoma and Texas signed laws this year prohibiting abortion drugs from being delivered by mail. Such laws were largely seen as a response to the rise in popularity of telemedicine during the pandemic.

The laws face legal challenges in Montana and Oklahoma. In Ohio, a judge temporarily blocked a law that would have banned the use of telemedicine for abortion pills while a legal challenge is underway.

Some Republican legislatures also put limits on the point during a pregnancy when medication abortion can be provided. In Indiana and Montana, laws passed this year ban the medication after 10 weeks' gestation, and in Texas a newly signed law bans the medication after seven weeks.

The Texas law is set to take effect in December. It passed just as Texas began banning nearly all abortions under a more far-reaching law, known as Senate Bill 8, which has become the nation's biggest curb to abortion in a half-century.

## CAN MEDICATION ABORTION BE REVERSED?

Eight states require counseling to promote the idea that medication abortion can be reversed through a high dose of progesterone after taking mifepristone. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not support prescribing progesterone for that use and says the reversal claim is not based on scientific evidence.

Such laws are in effect in Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Utah and West Virginia. Court cases in Indiana, North Dakota, Oklahoma and Tennessee have blocked enforcement of these counseling requirements. In Montana, the law is set to take effect Oct. 1 but is being challenged in court.

## WHAT ARE THE FEDERAL RULES?

In July 2020, the Food and Drug Administration -- under federal court order -- eased restrictions on abortion pills so they could be sent by mail. That came after the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other groups sued to overturn a rule that required patients to pick up the single tablet of mifepristone at a hospital, clinic or medical office and sign a form that includes information about the medication's potential risks.

The FDA and its parent health agency, under the Trump administration, argued the rules were necessary to ensure the pills were used safely.

But last April, the FDA affirmed that women seeking an abortion pill would not be required to visit a doctor's office during the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy change applies only in states where there are no laws banning the use of telemedicine or requiring a physician to be present when the drugs are taken.

The FDA policy also applies only as long as the COVID-19 health emergency lasts. Several medical organizations are pushing to make medication abortion permanently available through online prescribing and mail-order pharmacies.

## WHAT ARE WOMEN'S OPTIONS?

Aid Access is one of several online initiatives that is offering to send women abortion pills by mail. It is led by Dr. Rebecca Gomperts, a Dutch physician.

The FDA, then under the Trump administration, sent a letter to Aid Access more than two years ago asking it to cease its activity, but the online drug provider has continued to send abortion pills to patients the U.S.

The legality of the practice is ambiguous, but groups such as Plan C, which aims to raise awareness about self-managed abortions, provide information about where and how the drugs can be obtained online.

Those groups say such access is especially important for women in places where abortion clinics face an ongoing assault by anti-abortion advocates and where lawmakers and governors are making it progressively harder for the clinics to remain open.

If/When/How, a reproductive rights legal aid group, has tracked 24 cases since 2000 when women were prosecuted for self managed abortions.

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"It is possible that someone could be targeted for investigation or arrest or prosecution, even in the absence of a law that actually makes it illegal," said Sara Ainsworth, policy director for the group.

Samuels is a corps member for The Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

This version of the story clarifies that the FDA eased restrictions on abortion pills in July 2020, rather than at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

## Officials: All migrants are gone from Texas border camp

By MARIA VERZA and JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

DEL RIO, Texas (AP) — No migrants remained Friday at the Texas border encampment where almost 15,000 people — most of them Haitians — had converged just days earlier seeking asylum, local and federal officials said.

It's a dramatic change from last Saturday, when the number peaked as migrants driven by confusion over the Biden administration's policies and misinformation on social media converged at the border crossing connecting Del Rio, Texas, and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico.

At a news conference, Del Rio Mayor Buno Lozano called it "phenomenal news."

Many face expulsion because they are not covered by protections recently extended by the Biden administration to the more than 100,000 Haitian migrants already in the U.S., citing security concerns and social unrest in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. The devastating 2010 earthquake forced many of them from their homeland.

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 widespread outrage after images emerged of border agents maneuvering their horses to forcibly block and move migrants.

On Friday, President Joe Biden said the way the agents used their horses was "horrible" and that "people will pay" as a result. The agents have been assigned to administrative duties while the administration investigates.

"There will be consequences," Biden told reporters. "It's an embarrassment, but it's beyond an embarrassment — it's dangerous, it's wrong, it sends the wrong message around the world and sends the wrong message at home. It's simply not who we are."

Later, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas spoke cautiously about the pending investigation into the use of horses. Asked about the discrepancy, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden "was not prejudging an outcome. He was speaking from the heart." She said he is not interfering with any investigation.

Mayorkas said about 2,000 Haitians have been rapidly expelled on 17 flights since Sunday and more could be expelled in coming days under pandemic powers that deny people the chance to seek asylum.

He said the U.S. has allowed about 12,400 to enter the country, at least temporarily, while they make claims before an immigration judge to stay in the country under the asylum laws or for some other legal reason. They could ultimately be denied and would be subject to removal.

Mayorkas said about 5,000 are in DHS custody and being processed to determine whether they will be expelled or allowed to press their claim for legal residency. Some returned to Mexico.

A U.S. official with direct knowledge of the situation said six flights were scheduled to Haiti on Friday, with seven planned Saturday and six Sunday, though that was subject to change. The official was not authorized to speak publicly.

In Mexico, just over 100 migrants, most of them single men, remained Friday morning in the riverside camp in Ciudad Acuña.

Dozens of families who had been there crossed back to Del Rio overnight after Mexican authorities left

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the area. With the river running higher, some Border Patrol agents helped families who were struggling to cross with children.

Some migrants also moved to small hotels or private homes in Ciudad Acuña. Authorities detained six migrants at one on Thursday afternoon.

Luxon, a 31-year-old Haitian migrant who withheld his last name out of fear, said he was leaving with his wife and son for Mexicali, about 900 miles west along Mexico's border with California.

"The option was to go to a place where there aren't a lot of people and there request documents to be legal in Mexico," he said.

Asked about the situation in Ciudad Acuña on Friday, Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said, "we don't want Mexico to be a migrant camp, we want the problem to be addressed fully."

At the Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition in Del Rio, migrants stepped off a white Border Patrol van on Friday, many smiling and looking relieved to have been released into the U.S. Some carried sleeping babies. A toddler walked behind her mother wrapped in a silver heat blanket.

A man who'd driven almost 1,500 miles from Toledo, Ohio, hoping to pick up a friend and her family wore a neon yellow vest and quietly scanned the line of Haitian migrants. Dave, who didn't want to share his last name, didn't see them in this group.

"I feel like my friend is worth my time to come down and help," he said, explaining that he wore the vest so his friend — a nurse whom he'd met on a humanitarian trip to Haiti over a decade ago — would be able to spot him in the crowd when she arrived with her husband and 3-year-old daughter.

"I just see it as an opportunity to serve somebody," said Dave, who considers himself a Trump supporter but hates how politicized the immigration issue has become. "We have so much."

Lozano, the Del Rio mayor, said the international bridge won't reopen until Sunday night at the earliest, while officials ensure nobody is hiding in the brush along the Rio Grande and to finish cleanup. Officials also want to be sure no other large groups of migrants are making their way to the Del Rio area who might decide to set up a similar camp, he said.

Lozano said there were no deaths during the time the camp was occupied and that 10 babies were born to migrant mothers, either at the camp or in Del Rio's hospital.

"It took an urban village at this scale to help prevent any loss of life and actually welcome the births of children here," Lozano said.

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

The Trump administration enacted the policy, called Title 42, 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 that 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 of them no longer have legal status there.

The Biden administration's special envoy to Haiti, Daniel Foote, submitted a letter of resignation on Thursday 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," and said some of his policy recommendations had been ignored.

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

The humanitarian group UNICEF also condemned the expulsions, saying Thursday that 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,"

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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."

And Civil Rights leader Rev. Al Sharpton, who toured the camp on Thursday, vowed to "stand with our people and make sure asylum is treated in one way and one manner."

Maria Verza reported from Ciudad Acuña, Mexico. AP journalists Sarah Morgan in Del Rio, Texas; Ben Fox and Nancy Benac in Washington; Elliot Spagat in Los Angeles; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

## Back in Haiti, expelled migrant family plans to flee again

By EVENS SANON and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — You're lucky, the U.S. officials said. "You're going to see your family."

The authorities had called out numbers corresponding to raffle-like tickets the Haitians had been issued when they were detained after crossing the border into Texas. As each number was called, another bedraggled immigrant stood up.

"Everyone was happy," recalled Jhon Celestin. "But I was not happy. I saw it was a lie."

The prize was a one-way trip back to the place they had so desperately wanted to escape. And so it was that Celestin arrived in Haiti aboard the last flight Wednesday to the capital of Port-au-Prince, a city the 38-year-old left three years ago in search of a better-paying job to help support his family.

He is among some 2,000 migrants that the U.S. expelled to Haiti this week via more than 17 flights, with more scheduled in upcoming days. Staying in Haiti is not an option for many of them. Like Celestin, they plan to flee their country again as soon as they can.

It had stopped drizzling as Celestin left the airport and stepped out into streets choked with dust and smoke, carrying a bag in one hand and his 2-year-old daughter in the other.

Chloe, born in Chile, looked around quietly at her new surroundings as Celestin and his wife asked to borrow someone's phone to call a taxi. It would be more expensive, but they didn't want their toddler riding on a motorcycle — a common means of transport in city where vehicles must veer around smoldering garbage dumps, heavy traffic and the occasional burning barricade.

After a 35-minute ride, they arrived at a house whose basement they would share with a cousin who had been expelled from the U.S. the day before. The home is located a couple blocks away from where 15 people were killed in a shooting rampage in June, including a journalist and political activist. Among those charged was a police officer.

"This is not what I imagined, being here," said Celestin's wife, 26-year-old Delta de León, who was born in the Dominican Republic to a Dominican father and a Haitian mother. "But here I am, although I hope to leave soon because the one thing I've never wanted for my daughter is for her to grow up here."

Haiti has more than 11 million people; about 60% make less than \$2 a day. A cornerstone of its economy is money from Haitians living abroad -- \$3.8 billion a year, or 35% of the country's GDP.

The Haiti to which the migrants are returning is more violent, more impoverished and more politically unstable than the one they left. It is struggling to recover from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and from a 7.2-magnitude earthquake that struck southern Haiti in August, killing more than 2,200 people and destroying or damaging tens of thousands of homes. Thousands of people live in squalid shelters after their homes were razed in recent months as a result of rampant gang violence.

Celestin and his wife don't plan on staying long.

On his first day back in Haiti, Celestin spent several hours sprawled on the queen-sized bed he shared with his wife and daughter. He chatted on the phone with his sister, who lives in Chile, and with friends elsewhere as he planned his family's departure. He paused only to get a haircut and to figure out how to pick up a money transfer, since he had previously sent all his identification documents to his family in Miami in hopes he would be reunited with them with this month.



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The new plan is to return to Chile, where he built homes as a construction worker after obtaining a visa. With the pandemic drying up jobs and freezing the economy, the family decided to try their luck at the U.S.-Mexico border, traveling by foot, bus and boat at night for about a month.

"What hurt me the most, what frustrated me the most, was the dead people I saw," migrants who died along the way, said de León.

The toll of that trip, the conditions at the border and the recent deportation flight with a sick child -- Chloe had developed an incessant cough while the family camped under a Texas bridge -- meant de León didn't sleep much her first night in Haiti.

"I cried because I don't want to be here," she said.

De León intends to cross the border into the Dominican Republic with her daughter as soon as possible to reunite with her father, sister and brother while her husband flies ahead to Chile.

But first, the family planned to go to the coastal city of Jacmel in southern Haiti to see more relatives, a risky trip because it entailed crossing gang-controlled territory. Buses often form convoys for safety, and sometimes pay gangs for safe passage. The violence in that neighborhood has reached such high levels that Doctors Without Borders recently closed its clinic there after 15 years.

Breakfast on that first morning in Haiti consisted of spaghetti and bits of avocado. Normally, Chloe has milk and fruit, but de León said she was waiting on a money transfer to buy some basic food items. She worried about her daughter's health, and about her future.

"The future I want for her is a better life, a more comfortable one, the kind a poor person can give their children," she said. "If that life has to be in the United States, so be it. If it has to be in Chile, let it be in Chile. But let it be a better life."

On their second day in Haiti, the couple decided to take the risk and go to Jacmel. A minibus waited as Celestin and de León grabbed their bags and put on new shoes they had bought earlier that morning: black-and-white sneakers for him, white sandals for her.

"Na pale!" Celestin's cousin called out to them in Creole -- "We'll talk!" And the couple boarded the minibus, placing their little girl between them as they embarked on the treacherous road to Jacmel.

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Coto reported from San Juan, Puerto Rico.

## COVID at the UN: One topic, used to make many points

By SALLY HO Associated Press

For the United States, COVID-19 was about leadership and "a dose of hope." For Iran, it was about the inhumanity of sanctions. Tiny Palau, largely virus-free, used its precious speech minutes to praise Taiwan for its support during the pandemic — and, not incidentally, to urge the United Nations to re-admit the island as a member state.

Unsurprisingly, the coronavirus pandemic was THE talking point at the United Nations General Assembly this week — serving as projection, promotional tool and proxy for other pressing issues put forward by world leaders in their signature annual addresses.

Through the lenses of vaccine inequality, economic disaster, scientific misinformation and social isolation, just about every president, king, foreign minister and head of state talked about the pandemic as a sweeping global catastrophe. Yet each made it into a distinctive political message that said as much about a nation and its leader as it did about the virus itself.

As the world at large has done for many months now, leaders struggled to connect the pandemic with the ways they wish to govern — and with the threats that face their attempts to do so.

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PALAU

Palau President Surangel S. Whipps Jr. said his country was "COVID-safe" because Taiwan — and other allies, including the U.S., Japan, and Australia — delivered vaccines, PPE, testing capacity and training. Palau now has an 80% vaccination rate with zero deaths or hospitalizations.

Whipps praised Taiwan for its management of the pandemic within the territory's borders and also the

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development of a safe travel route to Palau that saved the remote island from total isolation.

"This sterile corridor has allowed Taiwan and Palau to resume medical and educational cooperation, and recoup economic engagement and other benefits of international travel," Whipps said. "We encourage the U.N. system to accept Taiwan as a valuable contributor to our collective efforts and strongly advocate for Taiwan's participation in the U.N. system."

## UNITED STATES

Joe Biden used his first speech as U.S. president to reassure the world that America was back to reclaim its elder statesman role in supporting world peace and prosperity, projecting itself as well-resourced and generous.

"Planes carrying vaccines from the United States have already landed in 100 countries, bringing people all over the world a little 'dose of hope,' as one American nurse termed it to me. A 'dose of hope,' direct from the American people — and, importantly, no strings attached," Biden said before later announcing that the U.S. is doubling its global donation of COVID-19 vaccine shots.

## IRAN

Iran President Ebrahim Raisi slammed U.S. sanctions repeatedly in his address, declaring "sanctions on medicine at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic are crimes against humanity."

"Despite the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran was keen from the outset to purchase and import COVID-19 vaccines from reliable international sources, it faced inhumane medical sanctions. Therefore, from the very beginning, we started to sustainably produce vaccines domestically," Raisi said.

## NAMIBIA

Several countries denounced efforts to offer booster shots in wealthy nations while, as of mid-September, fewer than 4% of Africans have been fully immunized.

African nations like Namibia were not shy about drawing parallels between vaccine inequality and centuries of racism that had ravaged the continent.

"Vaccine apartheid has resulted in significant disparities in terms of vaccine rollout and availability, with many people in developing countries left out," said Namibian President Hage Geingob. "It is a pity that we have a situation where in some countries, citizens are at the stage of receiving booster shots while in other countries, many are still waiting to receive their first doses of vaccines."

Namibia faced apartheid when neighboring South Africa's white minority government controlled what they called South West Africa. Namibia gained official independence in 1990.

The apartheid reference was also especially poignant because the U.N. addressed racism and reparations for slavery and colonialism at a high-level meeting on Wednesday. There, member states recommitted to efforts to combat racism around the world and commemorated a landmark but contentious 2001 anti-racism conference.

## POLAND

Some world leaders talked about their own bouts of illness, making their infection personal to their agenda. Poland President Andrzej Duda said he was humbled by the virus and philosophized about global recovery.

"I am standing before you as one of more than 200 million people who have recovered from COVID-19. Like surely many of you present here, I went through the illness which befalls people irrespective of their function, status, religion, convictions, orientation and world views," Duda said at the start of his speech.

He later asked: "In the last 20 months when the pandemic weighed so heavily on us, we have often asked ourselves: what will the post-pandemic world be like? Will it be the world of solidarity? Or shall we resume business as usual and consider that these months have been nothing more than an interruption in our routine, after which we can go on repeating our old mistakes?"

## BRAZIL

For vaccine skeptic Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro, who was infected with COVID-19 last year, his showing at the U.N. was decidedly more defiant.

He flouted the requirement for all attendees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, declaring repeatedly that he remained unvaccinated because getting a shot is a personal, medical decision, and then circulated a photo of himself eating pizza on a New York street, an apparent jab at city's restrictions on indoor dining.

In Bolsonaro's U.N. speech, he also rebuffed criticism of his country's handling of the pandemic, insisted vaccines would be available but not required, and chastised the overwhelming medical consensus that "early treatment" drugs like the one that he took are not effective.

"Since the start of the pandemic, we have supported doctor's autonomy in search of an early treatment, as recommended by our Federal Council of Medicine. I was among those who tried the early treatment. We also respect the doctor-patient relationship with regard to the medication to be used and its off-label utilization," Bolsonaro said. "We don't understand why many countries, along with a large portion of the media, oppose early treatment. History and science will hold them accountable."

Hours after his speech, it was announced that Brazil's health minister, who had traveled with Bolsonaro, tested positive. Marcelo Quiroga got a shot of the vaccine in January; he now must stay behind in the United States for isolation.

Follow Sally Ho on Twitter at [http://twitter.com/\\_sallyho](http://twitter.com/_sallyho)

## Oregon school board ban on anti-racist, LGBT signs draws ire

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

NEWBERG, Ore. (AP) — An Oregon school board has banned educators from displaying Black Lives Matter and gay pride symbols, prompting a torrent of recriminations and threats to boycott the town and its businesses.

Newberg, a town of 25,000 residents situated 25 miles (40 kilometers) southwest of Portland in gorgeous wine country, has become an unlikely focal point of a battle between the left and right across the nation over schooling.

The City Council has condemned the action by the Newberg School Board. So did members of color of the Oregon Legislature and House and Senate Democrats. The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon is threatening to sue. The Oregon State Board of Education called on the school board to reverse course, saying student identities should be welcomed and affirmed.

But the four conservative members of the seven-member board are digging in their heels. Member Brian Shannon, who proposed the ban, said lawmakers from Portland should keep out of the school district's business and instead focus on Portland, where homelessness is an issue.

Opponents say the board has emboldened racists. On Sept. 17, a special education staffer at a Newberg elementary school showed up for work in blackface, saying she was portraying anti-segregation icon Rosa Parks in order to protest a statewide vaccine mandate for educators. She was immediately placed on administrative leave.

The same week, word emerged that some Newberg students had participated in a Snapchat group in which participants pretended to buy and sell Black fellow students. Newberg Public Schools Superintendent Joe Morelock said there will be an investigation and disciplinary action meted out.

Underscoring how deeply the board's action has cut, raw emotion was on display during a virtual public hearing of the board Wednesday night. Some speakers said the board's action is harmful. Others said the signs have no place in schools, saying they're political.

Local resident Peggy Kilburg said they should be banned from schools, as well as signs supporting any political position, like National Rifle Association posters.

Robert Till, who is gay and a sophomore at Newberg High School, said he is embarrassed to live in Newberg. He cited an estimate from the Trevor Project, a group that aims to end suicide among LGBTQ young people, that at least one LGBTQ person between the ages of 13–24 attempts suicide every 45

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seconds in the U.S.

"A simple pride or BLM flag in a classroom shows the love and acceptance that we need," Till said, his voice shaking with anger. "Pride flags can literally save someone's life, and you're just going to take that away?"

School board chairman Dave Brown, who voted for the sign ban, declared in an earlier Zoom meeting that "I'm not a racist."

"I work with and will always accept those around me no matter what," Brown said, an American flag pinned behind him. "I don't care if they're gay. I don't care if they're white or brown or Black. I work with everybody."

Shannon defended the ban, which hasn't been imposed yet.

"I don't think any of us can deny the fact that these symbols are divisive," Shannon said. "They've divided our community and gotten our attention away from where it needs to be, just teaching the basic fundamentals of education."

Opponents of the ban say it is the board that is being divisive and distracting from the challenges as educators begin in-person instruction with safety protocols after a year of remote teaching because of COVID-19.

"It has been difficult to see a community divided. You can see the anguish on both sides. It makes being an educator harder than it already was," said a faculty member at Newberg High School.

Speaking on condition she not be named for fear of being harassed online, she said more students than ever are displaying gay pride and Black Lives Matter symbols on lockers, water bottles and laptops since the board took its vote in August. The ban does not apply to students.

Alexis Small, a 15-year-old high school junior who is Black, believes the members who endorsed the ban simply don't approve of people who aren't like them.

"The message that I feel is hate," Small said in a telephone interview. "I mean, I can't say that this decision was made out of love or made out of what's best for people. I genuinely think that they did this out of hate."

In June 2020 — as Black Lives Matter protests roiled the nation after the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis — the board took a completely different stance, condemning racism and committing to being an anti-racist school district. But conservatives gained a majority in school board elections last May amid a light turnout, and everything changed.

Tai Harden-Moore, a Black candidate who lost, recalls a nasty election. Comments on social media supporting her opponent called Harden-Moore un-American and claimed she hated whites, she said. Her campaign signs were ripped from the ground or left in place — with tree branches placed on top.

"My sign, I've got my face on it, and so for them to put the branches on it, it was like this weird link to lynching for me," Harden-Moore said.

Harden-Moore has joined a group called Newberg Equity in Education, which is advocating for inclusion and equity in Newberg schools.

The Chehalem Valley Chamber of Commerce told the school board that it has received numerous phone calls and emails from people saying they will boycott Newberg, the valley's main town.

"As business leaders and owners, we are very concerned about the impact this has on our businesses and on the reputation of our community," the chamber said, the Newberg Graphic newspaper reported.

Newberg Mayor Rick Rogers told the four conservative board members their actions can hurt the town, which features a dozen wine tasting rooms and a university founded by Quakers.

"While you may believe your actions only affect the school district, please know in truth your actions impact us all. To thrive, Newberg must be welcoming to all," he wrote.

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Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>

**Autopsy: Actor Michael K. Williams died of drug intoxication**

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By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Actor Michael K. Williams died of acute drug intoxication in what New York City's medical examiner said Friday was an accidental death.

Williams, known for playing Omar Little on "The Wire" and an Emmy Award nominee this year, had fentanyl, paraflorofentanyl, heroin and cocaine in his system when he died Sept. 6 in Brooklyn.

Williams, 54, was found dead by family members in his penthouse apartment. Police said at the time that they suspected a drug overdose.

The city's Office of Chief Medical Examiner said it would not comment further. A message seeking comment was left with Williams' representative.

Williams had spoken frankly in interviews in recent years about his struggle with drug addiction, which he said persisted after he gained fame on "The Wire" in the early 2000s.

"I was playing with fire," he told the Newark Star-Ledger in 2012. "It was just a matter of time before I got caught and my business ended up on the cover of a tabloid or I went to jail or, worse, I ended up dead. When I look back on it now, I don't know how I didn't end up in a body bag."

New York Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said in an interview shortly after Williams' death that he had spoken with the actor earlier this year about collaborating with the department on community outreach.

Williams had been working with a New Jersey charity to smooth the journey for former prison inmates seeking to reenter society, and was working on a documentary on the subject. Another project involved reaching out directly to at-risk youth.

"This Hollywood thing that you see me in, I'm passing through," Williams told the Associated Press last year. "Because I believe this is where my passion, my purpose is supposed to be."

Omar, a rogue robber of drug dealers based on real figures from Baltimore, was hugely popular among fans of "The Wire," which ran on HBO from 2002 to 2008.

Williams also starred as Chalky White in HBO's "Boardwalk Empire" from 2010 to 2014 and had roles in the films "12 Years a Slave" and "Assassin's Creed."

Williams was nominated this year for an Emmy for supporting actor in a drama series for HBO's "Lovecraft Country," but lost Sunday to a star of "The Crown."

Williams was remembered in the ceremony's "In Memoriam" segment.

## US booster shots start, even as millions remain unprotected

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writers

The U.S. launched a campaign to offer boosters of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to millions of Americans on Friday even as federal health officials stressed the real problem remains getting first shots to the unvaccinated.

"We will not boost our way out of this pandemic," warned Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — even though she took the rare step of overruling the advice of her own expert panel to make more people eligible for the booster.

The vast majority of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are among the unvaccinated, Walensky noted. And all three COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S. offer strong protection against severe illness, hospitalization and death despite the extra-contagious delta variant that caused cases to soar. But immunity against milder infection appears to wane months after initial vaccination.

People anxious for another Pfizer dose lost no time rolling up their sleeves after Walensky ruled late Thursday on who's eligible: Americans 65 and older and others vulnerable because of underlying health problems or where they work and live — once they're six months past their last dose.

Jen Peck, 52, of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, qualified because of her job as an education math and science consultant. She was vaccinated back in March but worries about unknowingly picking up and spreading an infection. She travels between rural schools where many students and teachers don't wear masks and the younger children can't yet be vaccinated.

"I don't want to be COVID Mary carrying it around to buildings full of unvaccinated kiddos. I could not

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live with myself if I carried it from one building to another. That haunts me, the thought of that," said Peck, who got the extra shot first thing Friday morning.

Health officials must clear up confusion over who should get a booster, and why. For now, the booster campaign is what Walensky called "a first step." It only applies to people originally vaccinated with shots made by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech. Decisions on boosters for Americans who received Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccines are still to come.

President Joe Biden said if you're vaccinated, "You're in good shape and we're doing everything we can to keep it that way, which is where the booster comes in." He urged those now eligible for an extra shot to "go get the booster," saying he'd get his own soon — and that everyone should be patient and wait their turn.

Exactly who should get a booster was a contentious decision as CDC advisers spent two days poring over the evidence. Walensky endorsed most of their choices: People 65 and older, nursing home residents and those ages 50 to 64 who have chronic health problems such as diabetes should be offered one once they're six months past their last Pfizer dose. Those 18 and older with health problems can decide for themselves if they want a booster.

But in an extremely unusual move, Walensky overruled her advisers' objections and decided an additional broad swath of the population also qualifies: People at increased risk of infection — not serious illness — because of their jobs or their living conditions. That includes health care workers, teachers and people in jails or homeless shelters.

"This was scientific close call," Walensky said Friday. "In that situation it was my call to make."

Experts say it was only the second time since 2000 that a CDC director overruled its advisory panel.

Health care workers can't come to work if they have even a mild infection and hospitals worried about staffing shortages welcomed that decision.

But some of the CDC's advisers worry that offering boosters so broadly could backfire without better evidence that it really will make a difference beyond the most medically vulnerable.

"My hope is that all of this confusion — or what may feel like confusion — doesn't send a message to the public that there is any problem with the vaccine," said Dr. Beth Bell, a University of Washington expert. "I want to make sure people understand these are fantastic vaccines and they work extremely well."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious disease specialist, cautioned against seeking a Pfizer booster before the recommended six-month mark.

"You get much more of a bang out of the shot" by letting the immune system mature that long so it's prepared to rev up production of virus-fighting antibodies, he explained.

The U.S. had 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.

About 182 million Americans are fully vaccinated, or just 55% of the total population. Three-quarters of those 12 and older — the ages eligible for vaccination — have had a first dose.

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Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire in New York, Zeke Miller in Washington and Todd Richmond in Madison, Wisconsin contributed reporting.

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Harry and Meghan visit with students at a Harlem school

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, offered lots of hugs to kids at a Harlem public school Friday where she read her children's book to about two dozen students who sat cross-legged with her husband in the play yard.

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The hourlong visit to PS 123, which serves shelters for families without permanent homes, was one of several stops so far in a whirlwind New York week for the two. A couple of the children shed tears when they met the pair under a white tent set up near the school's play structure.

Nearly a dozen second-graders had prime spots on round, green cushions after older students showed off a three-dimensional flower mural they had created. Then Meghan read "The Bench," which she initially wrote as a Father's Day poem to Harry after the birth of their son Archie.

After reading her multicultural tribute to fatherhood, Meghan took questions from her young listeners after asking them what special spot they share with the important people in their lives.

"It doesn't have to be a bench," she told the children. "It can be anywhere where you feel comfortable."

The couple, students and staff, joined by New York City Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter, wore masks during their time together. Harry and Meghan donated two garden boxes filled with vegetables and herbs to the school. Through their Archewell Foundation, in partnership with Procter & Gamble, they also stocked the school's pantry with personal health and hygiene supplies. They plan to donate a washer and dryer to the school as well so more children can have clean uniforms.

Meghan wore a merlot trouser outfit to the appearance, while Harry wore khakis and a casual gray collar shirt.

The couple, who live in California after stepping aside from royal duties last year, are scheduled to appear on Saturday at a Global Citizen concert aimed at raising awareness and money to tackle a variety of issues, including climate change, global poverty and vaccine inequity. The two, in partnership with the World Health Organization, gathered a key group of NGOs, executives, experts, public health officials and world leaders Thursday for a joint dialogue on achieving shared global COVID-19 vaccine equity goals.

At the school, also called the Mahalia Jackson school, a heckler with a bullhorn stood just outside the fence blaring anti-vaccine mandate and anti-mask mandate vitriol as Harry and Meghan visited with the students.

The school, supported in part by the youth and family nonprofit Graham Windham, serves children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Meghan donated copies of her book, published by Random House, to the school, and the students presented Meghan with paper hearts of pink and white with drawings and messages to conclude the visit.

James Reynolds, an art teacher who helped with the mural as part of a collaboration with the Studio in a School program, called the visit "really extraordinary" considering New York students recently returned to classrooms after the pandemic upended in-person learning.

"Being able to meet her was like a chance of a lifetime. Everybody was really excited. It was a secret from all of us. It was really a marvelous experience," he said.

And those tears from some of the students?

"I think (it was) gratitude, because we have been through a lot in the last 18 months. We're sensitive in ways that we probably weren't on the other side of this," he said, referring to the pandemic. "I think they were just eternally grateful that she took time to stop by."

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Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>

## **Powell meets a changed economy: Fewer workers, higher prices**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Restaurant and hotel owners struggling to fill jobs. Supply-chain delays forcing up prices for small businesses. Unemployed Americans unable to find work even with job openings at a record high.

Those and other disruptions to the U.S. economy — consequences of the viral pandemic that erupted 18 months ago — appear likely to endure, a group of business owners and nonprofit executives told Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Friday.

The business challenges, described during a "Fed Listens" virtual roundtable, underscore the ways that

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the COVID-19 outbreak and its delta variant are continuing to transform the U.S. economy. Some participants in the event said their business plans were still evolving. Others complained of sluggish sales and fluctuating fortunes after the pandemic eased this summer and then intensified in the past two months.

"We are really living in unique times," Powell said at the end of the discussion. "I've never seen these kinds of supply-chain issues, never seen an economy that combines drastic labor shortages with lots of unemployed people. ... So, it's a very fast changing economy. It's going to be quite different from the one (before)."

The Fed chair asked Cheetie Kumar, a restaurant owner in Raleigh, North Carolina, why she has had such trouble finding workers. Powell's question goes to the heart of the Fed's mandate of maximizing employment, because many people who were working before the pandemic lost jobs and are no longer looking for one. When — or whether — these people resume their job hunts will help determine when the Fed can conclude that the economy has achieved maximum employment.

Kumar told Powell that many of her former employees have decided to permanently leave the restaurant industry.

"I think a lot of people wanted to make life changes, and we lost a lot of people to different industries," she said. "I think half of our folks decided to go back to school."

Kumar said her restaurant now pays a minimum of \$18 an hour, and she added that higher wages are likely a long-term change for the restaurant industry.

"We cannot get by and pay people \$13 an hour and expect them to stay with us for years and years," Kumar said. "It's just not going to happen."

Loren Nalewanski, a vice president at Marriott Select Brands, said his company is losing facing similar challenges, as many former employees, particularly housekeepers, have left for other jobs that have recently raised pay. Even the recent cutoff of a \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement, he said, hasn't led to an increase in job applicants.

"People have left the industry and unfortunately they're finding other things to do," Nalewanski said. "Other industries that didn't pay as much perhaps ... are (now) paying a lot more."

Jill Rizika, president of Towards Employment, a workforce development nonprofit in Cleveland, said she sees the striking disconnect every day between companies that are posting millions of job openings and people who are struggling to find work and escape poverty. About 60% of the people her organization helps find jobs have criminal records, she said, and 65% have only high school diplomas. Many parents, particularly mothers, are still unable to return to full-time work.

"They have tried to work but because of outbreaks, children are being sent home from day care or school, making their schedules impossible to manage," Rizika said. "Or the digital divide intervenes: A young mother tried remote work but didn't have sufficient broadband to make it work."

Small businesses are also grappling with rising costs, with little relief in sight, some participants said. The Fed has accelerated its plans to begin pulling back on its low-interest-rate policies, in part because of concerns about rising inflation.

Larry Andrews, president of Massachusetts Growth Capital, a state agency that supports small businesses, said that on a recent tour of the state, one café owner told him that a case of eggs had skyrocketed in price since the pandemic hit. Another restaurant owner said that a jug of cooking oil had risen from \$17 to \$50 — "if you can get it."

"The speed and intensity of this downturn — and the rapidity of the recovery in many areas — are without modern precedent," Powell said in prepared remarks at the start of the event. "Business plans have been reworked, outlooks have been revised and the future continues to be tinged with uncertainty."

## Mystery solved: Biden gets proof of family ties to India

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mystery solved.

President Joe Biden sat down with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday for important talks



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about the Indo-Pacific region. But first, the leaders caught up on the president's own family ties to the subcontinent.

Biden recalled that soon after he was first elected to the U.S. Senate, he got a letter from a man in Mumbai who said his last name was also Biden. The president said he never had the chance to follow up.

Later, as vice president, Biden was in India and recalled being asked by local press if he had any Indian relatives. He retold the story of the letter. The next day, Biden said, he was informed by Indian press that there were at least a few Bidens in India.

"And although we never admitted it ... I've found out that there was a Capt. George Biden who was a captain in the East India Tea Company in India," Biden said. He appeared to be referring to the British East India Company, a commercial power for centuries that controlled trade in colonized India and parts of southeast Asia.

Biden, who frequently talks of his Irish ancestry, quipped that the British connection was "hard for an Irishman to admit."

Biden, who has told versions of the anecdote to Indian audiences before, said Capt. Biden "apparently stayed and married an Indian woman" but he'd never been able to nail down further details.

He joked that Modi was in Washington "to help me figure it out."

In fact, Modi told the president that he had "hunted" for documents that would shed light on the president's Mumbai connection, and brought his findings with him.

"Are we related?" Biden asked.

The prime minister confirmed that the 46th U.S. president did indeed have family connections to the subcontinent.

"Maybe we'll be able to take this matter forward, and maybe those documents could be of use to you," Modi told Biden.

## **Biden: Budget talks hit 'stalemate,' \$3.5T may take a while**

By LISA MASCARO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Friday that talks over his \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan have hit a "stalemate" in Congress as he made the case for his expansive effort to recast the nation's tax and spending programs and make what he sees as sweeping, overdue investments.

Biden spoke at the White House as Democrats in the House and Senate are laboring to finish drafts and overcome differences between the party's centrist and moderate factions. Despite efforts by the president and congressional leaders to show progress, Biden cast the road ahead as long and potentially cumbersome, even with upcoming deadlines.

"We're getting down to the hard spot here," Biden told reporters at the White House. "We're at this stalemate at the moment."

Biden said the process is "going to be up and down" but "hopefully at the end of the day I'll be able to deliver on what I said I would do."

The president's acknowledgment of Democrats' disagreements — and they have serious differences over taxes, health, climate change and the ultimate price tag — contrasted with congressional leaders' more upbeat tone in recent days. Using carefully chosen words, top Democrats have seemed to be trying to create a sense of momentum as House votes approach.

On Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., predicted passage of both pillars of Biden's domestic agenda. One is a still-evolving \$3.5 trillion package of social safety net and climate programs, the other a separate \$1 trillion measure financing highway, internet and other infrastructure projects that's already passed the Senate with bipartisan support.

"We're going to pass both bills," she told reporters.

But she did not spell out how she and her Senate counterpart, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., would resolve disagreements and distrust between their party's moderate and progressive wings that's stalled both measures. And there remained confusion about the voting schedule, which will be crucial.

Pelosi promised House moderates last month that by this Monday, the chamber will consider the infra-

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structure bill, centrists' top priority.

But progressives are threatening to vote to derail the infrastructure legislation until a final version of their favorite — the \$3.5 trillion social and environment bill — passes the Senate and returns to the House. Progressives think delaying the public works bill would pressure moderates to back the larger measure.

"We're bringing the bill up, we will have a vote when we have the votes," Pelosi told a reporter Friday about the infrastructure bill's timing. While she said debate would begin Monday, her remarks suggested that final passage of the public works legislation could slip.

Pelosi also told reporters that "the plan" was for her chamber to consider the \$3.5 trillion package next week as well. It remained unclear how House-Senate bargainers would solve their differences over that bill that quickly.

The president said his private meetings with some two dozen Democratic lawmakers this week in efforts to hasten progress and close the deal went well — describing the tone as collegial and with "no hollering."

But as lawmakers raised objections over the sweep and scope of the plan, which is to be funded by higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy, Biden said he tried to get them focused on priorities — what they can and can't live with.

"It's about paying your fair share, for lord's sake," Biden said. "There clearly is enough, from a panoply of options, to pay for whatever it is."

In a stark reality check, Biden suggested talks could drag to the end of the year. "It's just going to take some time," he said.

Lawmakers are working nonstop and Biden is facing pressure to close the deal. Pelosi met Friday at the Capitol with her leadership team, and the House Budget Committee planned a rare Saturday session to take the strictly procedural step of sending the \$3.5 trillion bill, as drafted by 13 other House panels, to the full chamber without any changes.

Before the House votes on that measure, it is certain to change, perhaps more than once, to reflect compromises reached with Senate Democrats.

Biden's big vision over his "Build Back Better" campaign promise proposes expanding health, education and federal programs, with more services for Americans of all ages, while investing heavily in efforts to tackle climate change. All this would be paid for largely by hiking tax rates on corporations and wealthy individuals, those earning beyond \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for married couples.

But centrist Democrats see the overall price tag as too much, while progressive lawmakers are hesitant to compromise any further after already having dropped even more ambitious ideas.

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Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

## House votes to protect abortion rights amid state challenges

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed legislation Friday that would guarantee a woman's right to an abortion, an effort by Democrats to circumvent a new Texas law that has placed that access under threat.

The bill's 218-211 approval is mostly symbolic, as Republican opposition will doom it in the Senate.

Still, Democrats say they are doing all they can to codify the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision after the Supreme Court recently allowed the Texas law banning most abortions in the state to take effect. The court will hear arguments in December in a separate Mississippi bid to overturn the landmark decision.

Despite the long odds in his chamber, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said in a statement after the vote that "Congress must assert its role to protect the constitutional right to abortion" and that the Senate would hold a vote "in the very near future."

Codifying the Roe ruling would mean creating a right to abortion in federal law, a monumental change that would make it harder for courts and states to impose restrictions.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has said that congressional action would make a "tremendous difference" in Democrats' efforts to maintain access to abortion rights. She called the Supreme Court's decision "shame-

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ful" and counter to its own precedent.

Pelosi said just ahead of Friday's vote that it should "send a very positive message to the women of our country — but not just the women, to the women and their families, to everyone who values freedom, honors our Constitution and respects women."

No Republicans voted for the legislation, which would supersede state laws on the subject, give health care providers the right to perform abortions and patients the right to receive them. Republicans argue it would prevent states from setting requirements like parental involvement and could weaken laws that allow doctors to refuse to perform an abortion.

The legislation "isn't about freedom for women, it's about death for babies," said Republican Rep. Vicky Hartzler of Missouri. She said it would eliminate protections for women and girls who may be coerced into having abortions.

"It ends the life of a living human being with a plan and a purpose from God and who deserves to live," Hartzler said.

Only one member crossed party lines — Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar of Texas, who voted against the bill.

The vote came as Democrats have spoken boldly about fighting the Supreme Court — which has a more conservative tilt after Justice Amy Coney Barrett was confirmed last year — but struggled privately to find an effective strategy. They control Congress by the slimmest of margins, including the evenly split 50-50 Senate, making the prospects of a successful legislative response difficult.

The party has split, in some cases, over how far Washington must go to preserve access to abortions. Liberal lawmakers backed by advocates of reproductive rights who helped power President Joe Biden to office want to expand the number of justices on the Supreme Court to rebalance power, changing the rules if needed to lower the 60-vote threshold typically required in the Senate to advance legislation.

"Democrats can either abolish the filibuster and expand the court, or do nothing as millions of peoples' bodies, rights, and lives are sacrificed for far-right minority rule," tweeted Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y. "This shouldn't be a difficult decision."

But other Democrats — Biden among them — have been wary of such a move.

Biden supports the House bill and called the court's ruling on Texas an "unprecedented assault on a woman's constitutional rights." He has directed multiple agencies to conduct a government-wide effort to ensure women have abortion access and to protect health care providers. But he has not endorsed the idea of adding justices to the Supreme Court, instead forming a commission to study the idea.

The court's decisions on abortion could prompt political tensions among Republicans, as well.

Former President Donald Trump was able to secure three new conservative Supreme Court justices because Republican leadership in Congress led by GOP leader Mitch McConnell paved the way. Now, as the court upheld the strict new Texas law outlawing most abortions in the state, the political fallout will test the limits of that strategy.

Women and advocates of abortion rights are quickly mobilizing to take on not just those Republicans, but also the big businesses that backed them, aiming squarely at those that contributed to many of the Texas Republicans behind the abortion law.

"They will be met with a fierce response from women and people across the country," said Sonja Spoo, director of Reproductive Rights Campaigns at UltraViolet, an advocacy organization, in an interview.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican who supports abortion rights, says the Texas law is "harmful and extreme" and she supports codifying Roe.

But she says the House bill goes "way beyond" that and could threaten the rights of doctors who refuse to perform abortions on religious or moral grounds, for example.

"I support codifying Roe, and I am working with some of my colleagues in the Senate on legislation that would do so," Collins said in a statement.

## New head of Time's Up pledges openness after Cuomo scandal

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

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Almost four years ago, a group of high-profile Hollywood women — producers, agents, movie stars — formed Time's Up, an ambitious initiative to fight sexual harassment in their own industry and beyond, as the #MeToo reckoning was taking hold.

"It's very hard for us to speak righteously about the rest of anything if we haven't cleaned our own house," said producer Shonda Rhimes, one of those powerful women, at the time.

She was speaking about Hollywood. But now, Time's Up itself is on a mission to clean its own house — and salvage its very existence -- after a damaging scandal that forced the departure of its chief executive, Tina Tchen, over revelations the group's leaders advised former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration after he was first accused of misconduct last year.

Tchen's replacement, Monifa Bandele, says that the embattled organization, currently re-evaluating its structure, will operate with a new openness and rededicate itself to "people power," giving a strong voice to women from all walks of life.

"What we need to do moving forward is to make sure ... that in the driver's seat of Time's Up, we also have women who are farm workers, who are restaurant workers, who are domestic workers like my own grandmother was," Bandele told The Associated Press in an interview this week, her first since taking interim leadership of the organization. (She said she's eager to take on the role permanently).

Bandele, 50, who joined Time's Up last fall as chief operating officer, says she played no role in the highly criticized dealings with the Cuomo administration and was unaware of them until the release of the extensive report by New York's attorney general, which concluded Cuomo had sexually harassed at least 11 women.

She said the revamped organization, currently working with a consultant, will pay close attention to the inherent dangers of being connected to people in power, asking itself: "What are our conflicts of interests, what are our guardrails?"

Asked the best way to do that, she said it was about "opening it up."

"You have to involve the community that you represent in an ongoing feedback loop," she said.

That might have prevented the damaging Cuomo episode, she added. "These are the mistakes that our organization has made and we want to learn from that," she said. "We want to use this crisis as an opportunity to be in the right relationship with the other organizations in our movement."

Tchen's Aug. 26 resignation followed the earlier departure of the organization's chair, Roberta Kaplan. Both women had angered Time's Up supporters with the idea they'd offered any help to Cuomo, and that Tchen initially discouraged other Time's Up leaders from commenting publicly on allegations by one of his accusers, Lindsey Boylan.

A member of the now-dissolved Time's Up global leadership board, Tarana Burke, the founder of #MeToo, described it as a young organization with good intentions grappling with how to handle the power that came with its highly connected and visible founding members.

"I think they have to do a lot of soul searching," she told The AP in a recent interview. "It may come out the other end ... that they have to figure out how to work differently, that they have to relinquish some of the power ... in order to do the work well, in the way that people trust."

Power, Burke said, "can be really difficult to navigate if you're not really careful."

Bandele said she agreed.

"That's one of my mantras, right? If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, you go together," she said. "That's involving a lot of voices. That's making sure people who need to be seen and heard, that there's an intentional mechanism for them to be seen and heard, because the default is for other folks who have a big platform to be seen and heard."

Time's Up was launched in January 2018 in the wake of stunning revelations over sexual misconduct by mogul Harvey Weinstein. More than 300 women in entertainment — from Rhimes to actors Reese Witherspoon and Eva Longoria — signed an open letter that established them as founders.

Days later at the Golden Globes, attendees donned black in solidarity, and sported Time's Up pins. Oprah Winfrey made an impassioned speech saying that for powerful men who abuse, "Their time is up!"

Celebrities will still play a role in the organization, Bandele said. Earlier this month, governing board mem-

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bers offered their resignations, and the star-studded leadership board was disbanded; Bandele described it as an opportunity to reconstitute her leadership team. But she said some members would be returning.

"Our celebrities, our creatives and the industry of entertainment are going to be key in us moving forward," she said. "But there will be equity in who is driving this movement."

Anita Hill, now a potent symbol of the #MeToo movement some 30 years since she testified against Clarence Thomas in Congress, said she was confident Time's Up would rebound from its crisis "by placing survivors and victims first in all the work they do." Hill chairs the Hollywood Commission, which combats harassment in the entertainment industry, and was part of the dissolved Time's Up advisory board.

Hill said in an interview she hoped people would remember the role of Time's Up in achieving legislation in New York that extended the statute of limitations for rape and sexual assault. "That's permanent," she said.

Boosters of Time's Up point to its Legal Defense Fund. Housed and administered by the National Women's Law Center in Washington, it was established to help people with workplace misconduct claims — particularly those who can't afford legal help — by either funding their cases or connecting them with lawyers. It has raised just over \$27 million, most during its inception, and funded nearly 300 legal cases.

Bandele, a longtime activist and advocate, came to Time's Up from MomsRising, an advocacy group for mothers and families. She has also worked extensively on police reform. She took the helm as interim leader three weeks ago; she says she's been on a listening tour and also working on a new action plan.

"I can't wait to share it," she said. "Because people are waiting, right? People want Time's Up. I haven't talked to anyone directly who does not want Time's Up to exist."

## NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press Associated Press

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

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Supreme Court hasn't ruled on COVID-19 vaccines or 'universal vaccination'

CLAIM: After a legal challenge from Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and a group of scientists, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled COVID-19 vaccines are unsafe and "canceled universal vaccination."

THE FACTS: The Supreme Court has not issued any rulings regarding the safety of coronavirus vaccines and Kennedy, a lawyer who has advocated against vaccines, called articles sharing the claim "misinformation." Dozens of posts making the false claim link to blogs that regularly publish hoaxes and misinformation. The claim has been circulating for months and recently reemerged as new vaccine requirements issued by the federal government take effect. The articles and posts include a supposed quote from Kennedy. But Kennedy told The Associated Press that the articles are false, as is the quote. "The quote is fabricated," Kennedy said. "Clearly somebody made it up and is promoting it because the same quote keeps coming back no matter how many times I deny it." Furthermore, there is no legal case that matches the one described in the articles. "The U.S. Supreme Court has not ruled in a case involving a challenge to a Covid-19 vaccination requirement," Joanne Rosen, a senior lecturer at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, wrote in an email to AP. Rosen has studied the legislative precedent for vaccine mandates. While Kennedy said he has been a part of more than 30 lawsuits on the subject of vaccine safety, those are at different stages of the judicial process and none have appeared before the Supreme Court.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

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Medical journal did not suggest vaccines are unsafe in pregnancy

CLAIM: The New England Journal of Medicine posted a correction earlier this month that backtracked on its earlier statements. The journal now admits the COVID-19 vaccine may not be safe for pregnant women.

THE FACTS: The medical journal did not "backtrack" or suggest that COVID-19 vaccines could be unsafe

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for pregnant women, as vaccine critics have falsely claimed on social media. Posts online misrepresent the journal's Sept. 8 correction, which addressed an update in Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, while still arriving at the same conclusion: that the vaccines were not found to be harmful to pregnant people. The CDC updated an original report on vaccines in pregnant people "to address an issue about how the risk calculation was performed," according to Jennifer Zeis, director of communications and media relations for NEJM Group. The initial CDC report, published online in April and in print in June, included only a small portion of people who had been vaccinated early in pregnancy. An accompanying editorial based on that incomplete information included an estimated risk for miscarriage before 20 weeks of pregnancy and said the risk was within the expected range for the pregnant population as a whole. NEJM's correction deleted that wording, along with the risk estimate. The same day, the journal published a CDC research letter that included additional data and estimated that the risk for miscarriage among individuals vaccinated early in their pregnancies ranged from 14% to 19%, which the authors said was "within the expected risk range" for pregnant people generally. March of Dimes statistics indicate that 10% to 15% of people who know they are pregnant miscarry, but the nonprofit says as many as half of pregnancies may end in miscarriage. The exact number isn't known, because some people lose their pregnancies before they realize they are pregnant. The CDC data on which the NEJM's conclusions were based included people who didn't realize they were pregnant until after they were vaccinated. The CDC on Aug. 11 urged all pregnant people to get vaccinated for COVID-19 to protect themselves and their children. Leading obstetrician groups also have recommended the vaccines for pregnant individuals, who face an elevated risk of severe illness if infected with the coronavirus.

- Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in Los Angeles contributed this report, with additional reporting by Associated Press writer Lindsey Tanner in Three Oaks, Michigan.

Public commenter, not FDA, falsely claimed COVID vaccines kill many  
CLAIM: Experts with the Food and Drug Administration revealed that the COVID-19 vaccines are killing at least two people for every person they save.

THE FACTS: FDA experts did not say this, and strongly refuted this false claim in an email to The Associated Press. A speaker who is not affiliated with the FDA made these statements during the open public hearing portion of a Sept. 17 FDA vaccine advisory panel meeting. The 15-member panel of outside experts held an eight-hour streamed meeting to make recommendations on the use of booster doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. In the days after the meeting, social media users and bloggers began misattributing several statements from the livestream to FDA panelists, when they were actually made by independent speakers during a public comment period. "FDA Panel Member Says COVID Vaccines are Killing More Than They're Saving During Youtube Livestream," read a headline on a blog post shared widely in conservative Facebook groups. However, this unsubstantiated claim actually came from Steve Kirsch, an independent speaker unaffiliated with the FDA, a YouTube video of the meeting shows. Abby Capobianco, an FDA press officer, confirmed that none of the comments in the open public hearing session came from FDA employees or advisory committee members. She said the FDA does not screen remarks by speakers for the open public hearing portion of the meeting. To support his argument, Kirsch referenced data from the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, a CDC- and FDA-run database of unverified reports of adverse events that occur after receiving a vaccine. But the VAERS system does not determine whether a vaccine caused the events that are reported. The FDA requires health care providers to report any death after COVID-19 vaccination to VAERS, "even if it's unclear whether the vaccine was the cause," Capobianco said. More than 380 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the U.S., and reports of death after vaccination are rare, according to the FDA. Meanwhile, research shows COVID-19 vaccines are safe and extremely effective at preventing severe COVID-19 disease and death. The vaccines also have continued to provide strong protection against the highly contagious delta variant. Kirsch did not respond to a message requesting comment. Another post that was widely shared online falsely claimed the FDA advisory panel had said the "unvaccinated are more educated on the vaccine than most people who have gotten it," and that experts cannot disprove concerns made by anti-vaccine advocates. But the vaccine

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advisory committee did not make those statements, either. Similar comments were made by Dr. Joseph B. Fraiman, an emergency medicine physician in New Orleans, during the open public hearing portion of the meeting. Fraiman confirmed to the AP that he is not affiliated with the FDA or the vaccine advisory committee and said some of his wording was changed and taken out of context in the online posts. In his comments to the committee, he was urging the FDA to pursue larger booster vaccine trials that he argued could help counter vaccine hesitancy. Several days after the Sept. 17 meeting, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky decided Thursday that people 65 and older, nursing home residents and those ages 50 and up who have chronic health problems should be offered a COVID-19 vaccine booster once they're six months past their last Pfizer dose,

— Ali Swenson, with reporting contributed by Associated Press writers Sophia Tulp in Atlanta and Terrence Fraser in New York.

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There was no interruption in England's vaccine rollout for kids ages 12 to 15

CLAIM: The COVID-19 vaccine rollout for children between the ages of 12 and 15 in England is being suspended due to an error with the paperwork.

THE FACTS: The U.K.'s public health agency, Public Health England, confirmed that a vaccine rollout for children ages 12 to 15 was not suspended nor delayed, contrary to false claims on social media. Earlier this month, the chief medical officers of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland recommended that children in that age group be given a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine, the AP reported. On Monday, England's National Health Service announced that the rollout began, and will be carried out in hundreds of schools this week. A false tweet linked to a video claims the "Child jab rollout" is "in disarray" and multiple schools canceled because of paperwork issues. "Basically, jab rollouts across schools in England are being suspended because Public Health England haven't sent out the correct paperwork, something called the Patient Group Direction," says a man in the video, falsely portraying the situation. A representative for Public Health England confirmed to The Associated Press in an email Tuesday that vaccinations were not halted for those 12 to 15 years old and there will be no delay or suspension. The agency said that the Patient Group Direction, which is the legal framework, was in place for the jabs.

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

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Voters did not register to vote in North Dakota using identical details

CLAIM: When registering to vote in North Dakota, 23,000 people used the same phone number.

THE FACTS: An erroneous tweet circulating on Twitter claims that 23,000 people used the same phone number to register to vote in North Dakota. The tweet originally claimed that the voter registration occurred in North Carolina but was updated in the replies to say North Dakota. "Since North Dakota does not have voter registration, that would be false," Secretary of State Al Jaeger told The Associated Press. In a separate tweet, the same user claimed that 23,000 people used the same phone number and the address of a prison when voting in North Dakota. Jaeger said that would be impossible, too. "And, If they tried using the same address when voting, our systems would have quickly identified the duplicate addresses and that it was a prison," Jaeger said. "By our law, a citizen that is incarcerated cannot vote." Voters in North Dakota are asked to show an acceptable form of identification such as a driver's license as proof of address and then the election officials search for their name on a precinct voting list. If a voter's name is not on the list, the election board will attempt to verify the voter's name and address. The state has numerous small precincts which allow electoral board officials to quickly verify who is voting in their precinct, according to the Secretary of State's Office. Donnell Preskey, executive director of The North Dakota County Auditors Association, said voters can bring in supplemental information to prove their address like a utility bill or bank statement when voting. "The county employees go into their system to verify that the person lives in their county," she said. "If it doesn't match up, they contact the voter."

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

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Video clip was manipulated to add anti-Biden chant

CLAIM: A video clip shows a speech in Virginia by President Joe Biden being interrupted by chants of "F--- Joe Biden."

THE FACTS: The original video, from July, does not include those chants; the clip was altered to add that audio. The video captures remarks by Biden at a campaign event for Virginia gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe. When Biden spoke, he was interrupted by hecklers speaking out against a pipeline project. A White House transcript shows that some audience members were yelling, "Stop line three!" — a reference to a pipeline replacement project in Minnesota opposed by environmental groups and some Ojibwe tribes. Others in the crowd responded with yelling and chants supportive of Biden, as the president said: "That's alright — no, no, no, no, let him talk." That clip is now circulating on social media with different audio, falsely suggesting Biden's speech was interrupted by chants of "F--- Joe Biden." Some posts sharing the clip note that the chants were added and not part of the original video. But others do not. In an Instagram post liked more than 6,000 times, the manipulated clip was used at the start of a video montage showing people shouting the same phrase elsewhere, primarily at sporting events. "F Joe Biden in Virginia Speech," reads text that appears on top of the clip in the video.

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

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## Companies, activists push to speed zero-emission truck sales

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Officials from companies with fleets of trucks are urging governors across the country to embrace a rule meant to speed the adoption of zero-emission trucks and reduce a potent source of greenhouse gases spewed from the large commercial vehicles.

In a letter released Friday, representatives of companies including IKEA, Nestle, Siemens, Etsy, eBay, Ben & Jerry's and Unilever joined with environmental activists and investors to call for the wide adoption of the Advanced Clean Trucks rule. Transportation is a leading cause of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., with trucks being one of the top culprits, activists said.

The rule requires manufacturers of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles to increase sales of zero-emission models over time in states where the policy is put in place. As production ramps up, the cost to manufacturers and buyers should come down, advocates said.

Supporters of the rule say companies increasingly are demanding clean trucks and vans to help meet climate and pollution goals and to save on the costs of fuel and maintenance. Approval of the rule by state governments could help give an added nudge to truck makers, backers said.

"The ACT rule will help bring down costs for zero-emission medium- and heavy-duty vehicles by requiring manufacturers to increase model availability to meet the needs of fleet operators and driving investment in clean transportation research and development," the companies and advocacy groups said in the letter.

"This will enable cost-effective electrification of commercial vehicles at the pace and scale needed to meet climate and air quality goals," they added.

The switch to zero-emission trucks also will help reduce pollution in lower-income neighborhoods, many of which border highways, major roads and shipping centers, and where residents often have health problems like asthma, advocates said.

The rule has already been adopted in California and is being considered in several other states, including Oregon, Washington, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York and Colorado.

"Medium- and heavy-duty vehicles are an essential part of the logistics networks that millions of Etsy sellers rely upon to deliver items to their buyers around the world, but these vehicles contribute disproportionately to air pollution and global warming emissions," Chelsey Evans, senior manager of sustain-



ability for Etsy, said in a statement. "Widespread adoption of zero-emission vehicles, including through the Advanced Clean Trucks Rule, is key to combating climate change."

The letter was organized by the nonprofit group Ceres.

States have begun to acknowledge the pollution linked to cars and trucks and its effect on the climate.

The governors of three New England states and the mayor of Washington last year signed a regional pact aimed at dramatically reducing transportation pollution, an agreement they hope other states will eventually join.

The Transportation and Climate Initiative Program is designed to reduce motor vehicle emissions by at least 26% by 2032 by requiring large gasoline and diesel fuel suppliers to purchase "allowances" for the pollution caused by the use of the fuels they sell in the region. Opponents say that could drive up gas prices.

In New England, transportation is responsible for over 40% of greenhouse gas emissions.

## **EXPLAINER: Who's eligible for Pfizer booster shots in US?**

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Millions of Americans are now eligible to receive a Pfizer booster shot to help increase their protection against the worst effects of the coronavirus.

A look at the nuts and bolts of this new phase of the vaccination campaign:

### **WHO SHOULD GET THE PFIZER BOOSTER?**

People who got two Pfizer shots at least six months ago and who fall into one of these groups should get the booster:

— People 65 and older, nursing home residents and assisted living residents.

— Others ages 50 to 64 with a long list of risky health problems including cancer, diabetes, asthma, HIV infection and heart disease. Being overweight or obese is a category that qualifies roughly 70% of people in this age group.

### **WHO ELSE CAN CONSIDER GETTING IT?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says these people may get a booster, but stopped short of a full recommendation:

— People 18 to 49 who got their Pfizer shots at least six months ago with risky health problems can consider the booster based on their individual benefits and risks.

— Anyone 18 to 64 with a risky job, such as health care, can consider boosters. Prisoners and people living in homeless shelters are also in this group.

### **WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?**

Serious side effects from the first two Pfizer doses are exceedingly rare, including heart inflammation that sometimes occurs in younger men.

### **WEREN'T SOME PEOPLE ALREADY ELIGIBLE FOR A THIRD DOSE?**

Yes, people with severely weakened immune systems were already eligible to get a third dose of Pfizer or Moderna. This group includes people taking immune-suppressing medications and those with diseases that tamp down their immune systems. They didn't have to wait six months to get a third dose.

### **WHAT IF I GOT MODERNA? CAN I GET A PFIZER BOOSTER?**

Not yet. Health officials say they don't have enough data on mix-and-match vaccinations. Moderna has applied to U.S. health regulators for its own booster, one that would be half the dose of the original shots. The Food and Drug Administration is considering that application.

### **WHAT IF I GOT J&J?**

People who originally got the single-dose Johnson & Johnson also must wait. The government doesn't recommend mixing-and-matching. J&J hasn't yet filed a booster application. But earlier this week, the company released data showing two doses of its vaccine provided stronger immunity than one — whether the extra dose was given either two months or six months after the first.

### **WHERE CAN I GET MY BOOSTER?**

Health departments, clinics and drugstores are offering boosters, and many people have already gotten

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them ahead of the official green light. You may have to show your vaccine card. Proving how you qualify is on the honor system. Your word about your risky job or health condition is likely to be enough.

**ARE BOOSTERS FREE?**

Yes, shots given under FDA's emergency use authorization are free. And there should be enough supplies.

**AM I 'FULLY VACCINATED' WITHOUT A BOOSTER?**

Yes, two doses of Pfizer or Moderna, or one of J&J, is still considered fully vaccinated.

**WHY WERE BOOSTERS SO HOTLY DEBATED?**

The need is not crystal clear. Studies show the vaccines are still offering strong protection against serious illness for all ages. And many experts want to focus attention on getting shots to the unvaccinated, the group most in danger of infection, hospitalization and death.

On the other hand, there is a slight drop in the vaccine's effectiveness among the oldest adults. And immunity against milder infection appears to wane months after people's initial shots. Protecting health care workers from even mild illness may help some hospitals now struggling to care for unvaccinated COVID-19 patients.

**ARE OTHER COUNTRIES OFFERING BOOSTERS?**

Britain and Israel are already giving boosters over strong objections from the World Health Organization that poor countries don't have enough for their initial doses.

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Catalan separatist leader out of Sardinia jail, can travel

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Catalan separatist leader Carles Puigdemont left a jail in Sardinia on Friday after a judge ruled that he could go free pending an Oct. 4 hearing on his extradition to Spain, where the political firebrand is wanted for sedition.

Puigdemont, the former president of Spain's Catalonia region and a member of the European Union parliament, left the jail in Sassari a day after he had been detained by police. He had been invited to attend a Catalan cultural event and a meeting of Sardinian independence sympathizers on the Mediterranean island.

"Spain never misses the opportunity to be ridiculous. #NoSurrender," Puigdemont tweeted after he left the jail. Mobbed by reporters outside the gates, he said of his less than 24 hours behind bars: "Very good, no problem. The police and prison guards were very professional, very serious people."

The judge who authorized his release ruled hours earlier that Puigdemont was free to travel without restrictions.

Judge Plinia Clara Azzena told The Associated Press by phone from the courthouse in Sassari that while she found his arrest to be valid, based on the documentation she examined, "we didn't restrict him in any way. He can travel" if he wants.

Azzena and two other judges will hold an Oct. 4 hearing to rule on extradition.

Earlier, Puigdemont's Italian lawyer, Agostinangelo Marras, told reporters that when the judge during the brief hearing asked his client whether he wanted to go to Spain, Puigdemont replied "no."

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.

He was taken into custody Thursday night when he arrived at the airport in Alghero, Sardinia. Sardinia has strong Catalan cultural roots and its own independence movement. Alghero, a city on the island's northwest coast, is hosting the traditional Catalan folklore festival that Puigdemont planned to attend.

"Freedom, freedom," shouted demonstrators outside the courthouse in Sassari. They held signs in a Sardinian dialect proclaiming, "Democracy, the Sardinian nation supports the Catalan nation," and held the flags of Sardinia and Catalonia.

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Although Puigdemont currently holds a seat in the European Parliament, that legislature stripped him of parliamentary immunity.

Puigdemont's detention caused political commotion in Spain, where the topic of Catalan independence has for decades been a deeply divisive issue. Separatists demanded his release and scheduled street protests, while right-of-center parties said he should face justice.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said during an official visit to the Canary Islands on Friday that he has "respect for all legal procedures opened in Spain, in Europe and, in this case, in Italy."

Sánchez, who recently opened direct talks with Catalan regional leaders, said that "dialogue is the only way to bring together Catalans who have distinct opinions and to bring together Catalans with the rest of Spain."

Just under half of Catalans want to break away from Spain, opinion polls indicate. Most Spaniards don't want Catalonia to be granted independence.

At the heart of the immediate legal matter was whether the warrant issued by Spain seeking Puigdemont's arrest is valid. Gonzalo Boye, his lawyer, has insisted the warrant issued in 2019 that provided the basis for Italian authorities to detain him has been suspended.

Boye told Spanish radio station SER: "We have to see whether the arrest warrant is enforceable. That'll be up to the legal authorities" in Italy.

The Spanish Supreme Court judge handling the case, Pablo Llarena, sent a letter to the European Union's Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation stating that the arrest warrant is "in force and pending the capture of those accused of rebellion."

Ultimately, it would be up to the Italian Justice Ministry to approve or deny extradition. Spain's Supreme Court, which issued the European arrest warrant, made no official comment.

It's not the first time Spanish courts have tried to detain Puigdemont abroad. After a Belgian court declined to send him back in 2017, the following year he was arrested in Germany but a court there also refused to extradite him.

Nine Catalan separatists later received prison sentences for their role in the 2017 referendum ranging from nine to 13 years. They were pardoned in July, but Puigdemont, who fled, was not.

Puigdemont's being taken into custody in Italy at Spain's request triggered anger by some Italian politicians, including Democratic Party lawmaker Romina Mura, who is Sardinian.

"To arrest a representative of the Catalan people who sits in the European Parliament, who is traveling to carry out his functions and on top of that arrest him in Sardinia in a city of Catalan tradition and culture like Alghero, is a relevant political deed, even if carried out as a judicial act," Mura said.

Alghero's historic and cultural ties date with Catalonia date back to the 14th century, when a Catalan-Aragonese force won a naval battle off the Sardinian coast and the force's commander triumphantly entered the city on Sardinia's northwest coast.

Some 20% of Alghero's residents speak a Sardinian dialect derived from the Catalan language and recognized by both the national government of Italy and the island's regional government.

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Renata Brito in Barcelona and Barry Hatton in Lisbon, Portugal, 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!" says 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

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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 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

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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 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.

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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 rein 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 licenses 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

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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."

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

As scandal has followed Pingtang 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 Pingtang's ability to continue doing business. Pingtang 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 Pingtang 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 Museum" 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

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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.

A case in 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, the inter-governmental fishing group, 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.

"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.



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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."

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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 Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed to this report.

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## In battle to restore power after Ida, a tent city rises

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

AMELIA, La. (AP) — When Hurricane Ida was brewing in the Gulf of Mexico, the grass was chest high and the warehouse empty at this lot in southeastern Louisiana. Within days, electric officials transformed it into a bustling "tent city" with enormous, air-conditioned tents for workers, a gravel parking lot for bucket trucks and a station to resupply crews restoring power to the region.

In the wake of hurricanes, one of the most common and comforting sites is the thousands of electric workers who flow into a battered region when the winds die down to restore power and a sense of normalcy. They need to sleep somewhere. They need to eat. Their trucks need fuel. They need wires, ties and poles. And occasionally they need cigarettes. Power providers build tent cities like this to meet those needs.

"There's three things a lineman wants: good food, cold bed, hot shower. If you can get those three, you can work," says Matthew Peters, operations manager for South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association, which built the tent city to house a peak of about 1,100 workers helping restore power to the cooperative's customers.

When Ida came ashore on Aug. 29, it knocked out power to about 1.1 million customers in the state. The vast majority have seen their power restored, but in a sign of the storm's extent, thousands are still in the dark while downed lines are righted and substations repaired.

SLECA provides electricity to about 21,000 customers, including many in the hard-hit bayou regions. Power has been restored to about 81% of their coverage area with the remaining 19% in areas with the most catastrophic damage, said Joe Ticheli, general manager of the cooperative. After initially fearing full restoration of power could take months, estimates are now that it could happen by next week, Ticheli said.

Over a few short days, SLECA and a consulting firm transformed the location that used to be a hub for

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oil field manufacturer McDermott International into a temporary home for workers from across the country. Ticheli even appointed a mayor to make sure things run smoothly.

In one massive white tent, hundreds of cots are spread out; experienced workers bring their own inflatable mattresses. Another tent houses a cafeteria that serves hot breakfast starting about 5 a.m., dinner and boxed lunches that can be eaten out in the field. Tons of gravel was packed down on top of a grassy field so bucket trucks and other equipment — many flying American flags — can park.

At sunset, after workers park their trucks and head in to eat, shower and sleep, gasoline trucks drive up and down the rows, fueling the vehicles so no time is lost in the morning. Special treats — like cigarettes or steak night — help ease 16-hour workdays. Out-of-state crews are teamed with a local employee dubbed a “bird dog” who helps them.

Across the street is a warehouse where supplies such as transformers and wires are available. Outside, long wooden replacement poles wait to be loaded onto trucks.

Jordy Bourg, who runs the warehouse, said that right after the storm they had some supplies but immediately had to start ordering more. But like many things in the pandemic era, it’s been a challenge after Ida to get certain supplies.

Many people coming in to help have covered other disasters: Hurricane Michael, Hurricane Laura, ice storms in Arkansas and Texas. It’s good money, but more than that, they say it’s the feeling of restoring normalcy to someone who’s had everything stripped away from them. And many point out that the next disaster could easily be in their own backyard. Last year crews from SLECA went to southwest Louisiana when another Category 4 hurricane, Laura, slammed ashore there. This year, crews from southwest Louisiana came east to help.

“We’ve had a few storms hit back home and you kind of know how it is when you’ve been out of power,” said Robbie Davis, a lineman from Georgia. So many people in southeast Louisiana have no where to go, he said: “Out here, these folks’ homes got destroyed, businesses got destroyed.”

It can be dangerous work — two men believed to be electrocuted died helping restore power in Alabama.

The Louisiana terrain presents special challenges. In some areas, lines thread through thick swamps that can be accessed only by air boat or marsh buggy, which looks like a cross between a tank and a pontoon boat. Workers don waders to climb into muddy, chest-high waters home to alligators and water moccasins.

“You only work in this kind of area when you’re in south Louisiana. I can assure you, you don’t get this anywhere else,” says Jon Hise, a Sparks Energy foreman working with a crew in Houma to reset power lines. “It’s nasty. It’s chest deep. You can’t walk because the growth.”

As SLECA staff work to restore power to their slice of southeastern Louisiana, they have also been struggling with hurricane damage themselves. The general manager wears clothes from the Salvation Army after his home was severely damaged and looted. Coworkers have helped each other tarp damaged roofs. The company is operating out of trailers in their Houma headquarters after Ida peeled off the roof. Bourg is living in a trailer with his wife and two Boston terriers — his kids are staying with his in-laws — after Ida wrecked his house.

There’s also the toll of seeing large swaths of their coverage area so utterly destroyed. For many, getting power is just the first step in a long rebuilding process. Peters gets emotional when he talks of the dedication of his staff as well as the damage he’s seen among longtime customers.

“We’ve had storms before,” he said. “But the devastation was nothing of this magnitude.”

Follow Santana on Twitter @ruskygal.

## China says all crypto transactions illegal; Bitcoin tumbles

BEIJING (AP) — China’s central bank on Friday declared all transactions involving Bitcoin and other virtual currencies illegal, stepping up a campaign to block use of unofficial digital money.

Friday’s notice complained Bitcoin, Ethereum and other digital currencies disrupt the financial system and are used in money-laundering and other crimes.

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"Virtual currency derivative transactions are all illegal financial activities and are strictly prohibited," the People's Bank of China said on its website.

The price of Bitcoin fell more than 9%, to \$41,085, in the hours after the announcement, as did most other crypto tokens. Ethereum skidded almost 10%, falling from \$3,100 to around \$2,800.

Chinese banks were banned from handling cryptocurrencies in 2013, but the government issued a reminder this year. That reflected official concern cryptocurrency mining and trading might still be going on or the state-run financial system might be indirectly exposed to risks.

Promoters of cryptocurrencies say they allow anonymity and flexibility, but Chinese regulators worry they might weaken the ruling Communist Party's control over the financial system and say they might help to conceal criminal activity.

The People's Bank of China is developing an electronic version of the country's yuan for cashless transactions that can be tracked and controlled by Beijing.

Regulators in other countries have increasingly warned that cryptocurrencies need greater oversight. In the U.S., Gary Gensler, the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, has said that investors need more protection in the cryptocurrency market, which he called "rife with fraud, scams and abuse" and compared to the "Wild West."

The SEC has won dozens of cases against crypto fraudsters, but Gensler says the agency needs Congress to give it more authority and funding to adequately regulate the market.

Regulators in China have also been trying to rein in cryptocurrency mining, an energy-intensive process whereby specialized computers generate digital currencies. As a result, miners have been moving operations out of China.

Two years ago, China alone accounted for around three-quarters of all the electricity used for crypto mining, by far the most in the world, according to the Cambridge Bitcoin Electricity Consumption index. By April of this year, before the latest crackdown, China's share had fallen back to 46%. That still towers over the No. 2 country, the United States, at less than 17%.

## Male tennis players surveyed on LGBTQ attitudes, environment

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP National Writer

About 60 players on the men's professional tennis tour have taken part so far in an anonymous, online survey about LGBTQ issues that ATP CEO Massimo Calvelli calls part of a "broader initiative" to create "an environment for players and staff that is inclusive, that is diverse and that is very safe and welcoming."

"Statistically, it's a bit unusual that you don't have players on the ATP Tour that are openly gay. We thought, in today's world, this is an area that it's worth taking a proactive approach — and what better way to do that than trying to get a sense of where we are today," Calvelli said in a video interview with The Associated Press this week. "Are there hurdles? Is there anything in terms of culture, behaviors, attitudes out there that sort of puts people in a position where they are not comfortable being open?"

A link to more than 30 questions was emailed to about 500 singles players and 250 doubles players in August, and the tour plans to close the survey at the end of September, ATP spokesman Mark Epps said.

The tour also sought volunteers for 1-on-1 interviews.

The survey was created after the ATP reached out to Pride Sports, a U.K.-based group whose website says it works "to challenge homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in sport and improve access to sport for LGBT+ people."

Pride Sports enlisted researchers at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, to help develop the survey.

"We've never had a circumstance where a sport has approached us," said Erik Denison, a behavioral science researcher at Monash. "It's always the other way, where either the LGBT community has approached the sport and said, 'You need to do something about this problem' and (the sport was) ... dragged along on the journey. Or the sport has a crisis."

His description of the ATP's approach: "Hey, we want to do more than just put up rainbows. We actually want to figure out what to do that's going to be meaningful and drive change."

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"I don't think anyone's denying that homophobia is a problem in tennis, just like it is in any sport," Denison said.

It is rare for male athletes on U.S. pro teams to publicly come out while they are active. In June, Las Vegas Raiders defensive end Carl Nassib became the first NFL player to do so. No active NHL player has, although a Nashville Predators prospect did in July.

NBA player Jason Collins came out shortly after that league's season ended in 2013, then played the following year before retiring. Billy Bean came out after retiring as a baseball player; he now works for Major League Baseball as a VP and ambassador for inclusion.

Denison said the ATP's survey itself can help alter the culture, because it leads players to consider subjects they otherwise might not.

"I don't know how many straight guys wake up," he said, "and, while they're brushing their teeth, think: 'I wonder if gay people are all right in tennis?'"

The ATP questionnaire includes links to research from the International Olympic Committee and the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine that, the survey says, "found everyone's mental health and sport performance can be negatively impacted if a sport culture is not welcoming to gay and bisexual people."

Survey excerpts:

—Are you gay, bisexual, unsure/other? ... If you identify as one of the above, it will be extremely valuable to learn about your experiences in more detail.

—How many ACTIVE professional male tennis players do you know personally who are gay?

—How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: Jokes about other people's race or ethnicity are normal in MEN'S tennis. ... Jokes about gay people are normal in MEN'S tennis. ... Jokes about women are normal in MEN'S tennis. ... Sexuality is not important in MEN'S tennis. Gay people should keep it private. ... Homophobia is a problem in professional men's tennis.

—Why do you think a player who came out as gay would earn more, less or the same money from sponsors?

—What percentage of professional tennis players would be uncomfortable or would reject a gay tennis player? Please be honest.

Other topics included what factors contribute the most to there being no openly gay active professional male tennis players, whether the respondent agrees with the ATP's desire "to combat homophobia in sport" and whether he "would publicly support a gay or bisexual tennis player."

Once results are collected, Denison said, Monash will pass along statistical analysis to Pride Sports, which will offer suggestions to the ATP for programs it could adopt.

"We need to be open-minded," the tour's Calvelli said. "Whatever the recommendations will be, we have to take it seriously."

More AP tennis: <https://apnews.com/hub/tennis> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## 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.

Despite the plea, lines of cars formed at some gas stations across the U.K. as drivers filled up just in case.

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As concern over the disruption mounts, the haulage industry 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.

"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."

## **CDC leader adds people with risky jobs to COVID booster list**

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.

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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 & 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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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Many hurdles for families with food challenges, poll shows

By ASHRAF KHALIL and CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Many Americans struggling to feed their families over the past pandemic year say they have had difficulty figuring out how to get help and had trouble finding healthy foods they can afford.

A poll from Impact Genome and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 23% of Americans say they have not been able to get enough to eat or the kinds of foods they want. Most of those facing food challenges enrolled in a government or nonprofit food assistance program in the past year, but 58% still had difficulty accessing at least one service.

And 21% of adults facing challenges meeting their food needs were unable to access any assistance at all. The most common challenge to those in need was a basic lack of awareness of eligibility for both government and nonprofit services.

The poll results paint an overall picture of a country where hundreds of thousands of households found

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themselves suddenly plunged into food insecurity due to the economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. They often found themselves navigating the intimidating bureaucracy of government assistance programs and with limited knowledge of local food banks or other charitable options available.

Black and Hispanic Americans, Americans living below the federal poverty line and younger adults are especially likely to face food challenges, according to the poll.

Americans who have a hard time affording food also feel less confident than others about their ability to get healthy food. Just 27% say they are "very" or "extremely" confident, compared with 87% of those who do not face food challenges.

For homemaker Acacia Barraza in Los Lunas, a rural town outside Albuquerque, New Mexico, the challenge has been to find a steady supply of fresh fruits and vegetables for her 2-year-old son while staying inside the family budget.

Barraza, 34, quit her job as a waitress before the pandemic when her son was born. She considered going back to work, but on-and-off child care shortages as the pandemic took hold made that impossible, she said. The family lives off her husband's salary as a mechanic while receiving assistance from SNAP — the government program commonly known as food stamps.

Despite the government help, Barraza said she still scrambles to find affordable sources of fresh vegetables, actively scouring local markets for bargains such as a bag of fresh spinach for \$2.99.

"If we don't always have vegetables, he's going to not want to eat them in the future. And then I worry that he's not going to get enough vitamins from vegetables in the future or now for his growing body. So it's really hard. It's just really hard," she said.

Even those who didn't lose income during the pandemic find themselves stretching their food dollars at the end of the month. Trelecia Mornes of Fort Worth, Texas, works, as a telephone customer service representative, so she was able to work from home without interruption.

She makes too much money to qualify for SNAP, but not enough to easily feed the family.

She decided to do distance learning with her three children home because of fears about COVID-19 outbreaks in the schools, so that removed school lunches from the equation. Her work responsibilities prevent her from picking up free lunches offered by the school district. She takes care of her disabled brother, who lives with them and does receive SNAP benefits. But Mornes said that \$284 a month "lasts about a week and a half."

They try to eat healthy, but budget considerations sometimes lead her to prioritize cost and longevity with "canned soups, maybe noodles — things that last and aren't so expensive," she said.

Radha Muthiah, president of the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington said the struggles reflected in the poll are evidence of a new phenomenon brought by the pandemic: Families with no experience with food insecurity are suddenly in need, without knowledge of charitable options or experience navigating government assistance programs.

"It's all new to them," she said. "Many individuals and families — especially those experiencing food insecurity for the first time — are unaware of their full range of options."

Many are leery of engaging directly with government programs such as SNAP and WIC — the parallel government food-assistance program that helps mothers and children. Muthiah said that reluctance often stems from either frustration with the paperwork or, among immigrant communities, fear of endangering their immigration status or green card applications.

The poll shows that overall, about 1 in 8 Americans regularly get their food from convenience stores, which typically offer less nutritious food at higher prices. That experience is more common among Americans facing food challenges, with about 1 in 5 frequenting convenience stores.

The dependence on convenience stores is a particularly troubling dynamic, Muthiah said, because the options there are both more expensive and generally less nutritious. Part of the issue is simply habit, but a much larger problem is the lack of proper grocery stores in "food deserts" that exist in poorer parts of many cities.

"Sometimes they are the only quick efficient option for many people to get food," she said. "But they



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don't get the full range of what they need from a convenience store and that leads to a lot of negative health outcomes."

The poll shows half of Americans facing food challenges say extra money to help pay for food or bills is necessary for meeting their food needs.

Fewer consider reliable transportation or enough free food to last a few days, such as in emergency food packages, or free prepared meals at a soup kitchen or school to be necessary resources for meeting their food needs, though majorities say these would be helpful.

Gerald Ortiz of Española, New Mexico, bought a 2019 Chevy pickup truck before the pandemic, then lost the office job he had held for 20 years. Now he scrambles to make the \$600 monthly payment and gets by through charity and by simply eating less. His unemployment payments ended this month.

"I make sure my truck payment is done," said Ortiz, as he sat in a line of about 30 cars waiting to pick up food from a charitable organization, Barrios Unidos, in nearby Chimayó. "After that I, I, just eat like once a day," he said, pointing to his stomach. "That's why you see me I'm so thin now."

He's applying for multiple jobs and surviving on charity and whatever produce he can grow in his backyard — chili peppers, onions, cucumbers and watermelons.

"It's been depressing. It's been, like, stressful and I get anxiety," he said. "Like, I can't wait to get a job. I don't care what it is right now."

Attanasio reported from Chimayó, New Mexico. Associated Press polling reporter Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

The AP-NORC poll of 2,233 adults was conducted August 5-23 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Sept. 25, the 268th day of 2021. There are 97 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 25, 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor was sworn in as the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

On this date:

In 1513, Spanish explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and sighted the Pacific Ocean.

In 1789, the first United States Congress adopted 12 amendments to the Constitution and sent them to the states for ratification. (Ten of the amendments became the Bill of Rights.)

In 1890, President Benjamin Harrison signed a measure establishing Sequoia National Park.

In 1911, ground was broken for Boston's Fenway Park.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson collapsed after a speech in Pueblo, Colo., during a national speaking tour in support of the Treaty of Versailles (vehr-SY').

In 1956, the first trans-Atlantic telephone cable officially went into service with a three-way ceremonial call between New York, Ottawa and London.

In 1957, nine Black students who'd been forced to withdraw from Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, because of unruly white crowds were escorted to class by members of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division.

In 1978, 144 people were killed when a Pacific Southwest Airlines Boeing 727 and a private plane collided over San Diego.

In 1992, NASA's Mars Observer blasted off on a \$980 million mission to the red planet (the probe disappeared just before entering Martian orbit in August 1993).

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In 1991, Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie died in Lyon, France, at age 77.

In 2015, House Speaker John Boehner abruptly announced his resignation.

In 2018, Bill Cosby was sentenced to three to 10 years in state prison for drugging and molesting a woman at his suburban Philadelphia home. (After nearly three years in prison, Cosby went free in June 2021 after the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his conviction.)

Ten years ago: Declaring they'd been detained because of their nationality, not their actions, Joshua Fattal and Shane Bauer, two American hikers held for more than two years in an Iranian prison, returned to the United States. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah decreed that women would, for the first time, have the right to vote and run in local elections due in 2015. Wangari Maathai (wan-GAH'-ree mah-DY'), 71, the first African woman recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, died in Nairobi.

Five years ago: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump met separately in New York with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, giving each candidate fresh foreign policy talking points on the eve of their first presidential debate. Golf legend Arnold Palmer, 87, died in Pittsburgh. Jose Fernandez, 24, ace right-hander for the Miami Marlins, was killed in a boating accident with two friends off Miami Beach. Country singer Jean Shepard, a Grand Old Opry staple, died in Nashville at 82.

One year ago: The late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg lay in state at the U.S. Capitol, making history as the first woman so honored in America. With coronavirus numbers soaring across France, officials said only 1,000 spectators would be allowed each day at the French Open tennis tournament. Gov. Ron DeSantis lifted all restrictions on restaurants and other businesses in Florida and banned local fines against people who refused to wear masks as he sought to reopen the state's economy despite the spread of the coronavirus. The Mid-American Conference, the first major college football league to postpone its season because of the pandemic, became the final one to jump back in, making it 10 out of 10 conferences that would play in the fall.

Today's Birthdays: Former broadcast journalist Barbara Walters is 92. Folk singer Ian Tyson is 88. Polka bandleader Jimmy Sturr is 80. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates is 78. Actor Josh Taylor is 78. Actor Robert Walden is 78. Actor-producer Michael Douglas is 77. Model Cheryl Tiegs is 74. Actor Mimi Kennedy is 73. Movie director Pedro Almodovar is 72. Actor-director Anson Williams is 72. Actor Mark Hamill is 70. Basketball Hall of Famer Bob McAdoo is 70. Actor Colin Friels is 69. Actor Michael Madsen is 63. Actor Heather Locklear is 60. Actor Aida Turturro is 59. Actor Tate Donovan is 58. TV personality Keely Shaye Smith is 58. Actor Maria Doyle Kennedy is 57. Basketball Hall of Famer Scottie Pippen is 56. Actor Jason Flemyng is 55. Actor Will Smith is 53. Actor Hal Sparks is 52. Actor Catherine Zeta-Jones is 52. Rock musician Mike Luce (Drowning Pool) is 50. Actor Bridgette Wilson-Sampras is 48. Actor Clea DuVall is 44. Actor Robbie Jones is 44. Actor Joel David Moore is 44. Actor Chris Owen is 41. Rapper T. I. is 41. Actor Van Hansis is 40. Actor Lee Norris is 40. Actor/rapper Donald Glover (AKA Childish Gambino) is 38. Actor Zach Woods is 37. Actor Jordan Gavaris is 32. Olympic silver medal figure skater Mao Asada is 31. Actor Emmy Clarke is 30.