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Upcoming Events

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.

Monday, Oct. 4

State Boys Golf Meet at Madison

Oral Interp at Milbank Invitational

5 p.m.: Junior Varsity Football hosts Sisseton (re-scheduled from 9-20-21)

"There are few things that are more beautifully infectious than true kindness. It spreads like a magnificent wildfire."

-Keith Wynn



Tuesday, Oct. 5

State Boys Golf Meet at Madison

Soccer Playoffs for boys and girls

Junior High Volleyball at Redfield (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)

Thursday, Oct. 7

10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Flu Shot Clinic at Groton Area

1 p.m.: NEC Cross Country Meet at Webster

4 p.m. to 8 p.m.: Parent/Teacher Conferences

5 p.m.: Junior High Football hosting Webster Area

Friday, Oct. 8 - NO SCHOOL

8 a.m. to Noon: Parent/Teacher Conferences

10 a.m.: Lake Region Marching Festival in Groton

Noon to 3:30 p.m.: Faculty Inservice



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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SDFBCA Coaches Football Poll Results

11AAA	9AA	Team	Points	Re-
	cord			
Harrisburg (13) 105 5-0	1	Hanson	(19) 121	5-0
Brandon Valley (8) 84 5-0	2	Florence/Henry	(7) 76	6-0
Sioux Falls Jefferson 46 4-1	3	Platte-Geddes	(1) 68	4-1
Sioux Falls Lincoln 34 4-1	4	Chester Area	46	4-1
Sioux Falls Washington 32 2-3	5	Parkston	(1) 34	4-2
Others: Sioux Falls Roosevelt 1-4, Sioux Falls O'Gorman	Other	Canistota/Freeman 24, Hamlin 24, Timber Lake 21, Garretson 15, Lemmon/McIntosh 10, Lyman 5, Stanley Co 5, Ipswich 4		
11AA	9A	Team	Points	Re-
	cord			
Tea Area (21) 109 5-0	1	DeSmet	(15) 116	6-0
Pierre T.F. Riggs (2) 82 4-1	2	Howard	(10) 116	6-0
Brookings 70 4-1	3	Herreid/Selby Area	(1) 80	6-0
Aberdeen Central 30 3-2	4	Wall	(3) 68	6-0
Yankton 25 2-3	5	Wolsey-Wessington	37	3-2
Others : Watertown 10 2-3	Other	Castlewood 9, Newell 3, Gregory 1, Warner 1		
11A	9B	Team	Points	Re-
	cord			
Madison (14) 85 5-0	1	Avon	(26) 144	5-0
Canton (3) 70 4-1	2	Gayville-Volin	(1) 88	3-1
Dell Rapids (1) 46 4-1	3	Faulkton Area	(2) 87	5-1
West Central 43 4-1	4	Potter County	48	5-1
Sioux Falls Christian 15 3-2	5	Harding County/Bison	(1) 29	3-2
Others: Lennox 7, 3-2	Other	Hitchcock-Tulare 16, Dell Rapids St. Mary 13, Jones Co 6, Alcester-Hudson 4, Faith 4, Sully Buttes 2, Corsica-Stickney 1, New Underwood 1		
11B				
Winner (19) 95 6-0				
Bridgewater/Emery-Ethan 65 4-1				
Sioux Valley 60 4-1				
McCook Central/Montrose 25 3-2				
Groton 13 5-1				
Others: Aberdeen Roncalli 4-1, Elk-Point/Jefferson 4-1				

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



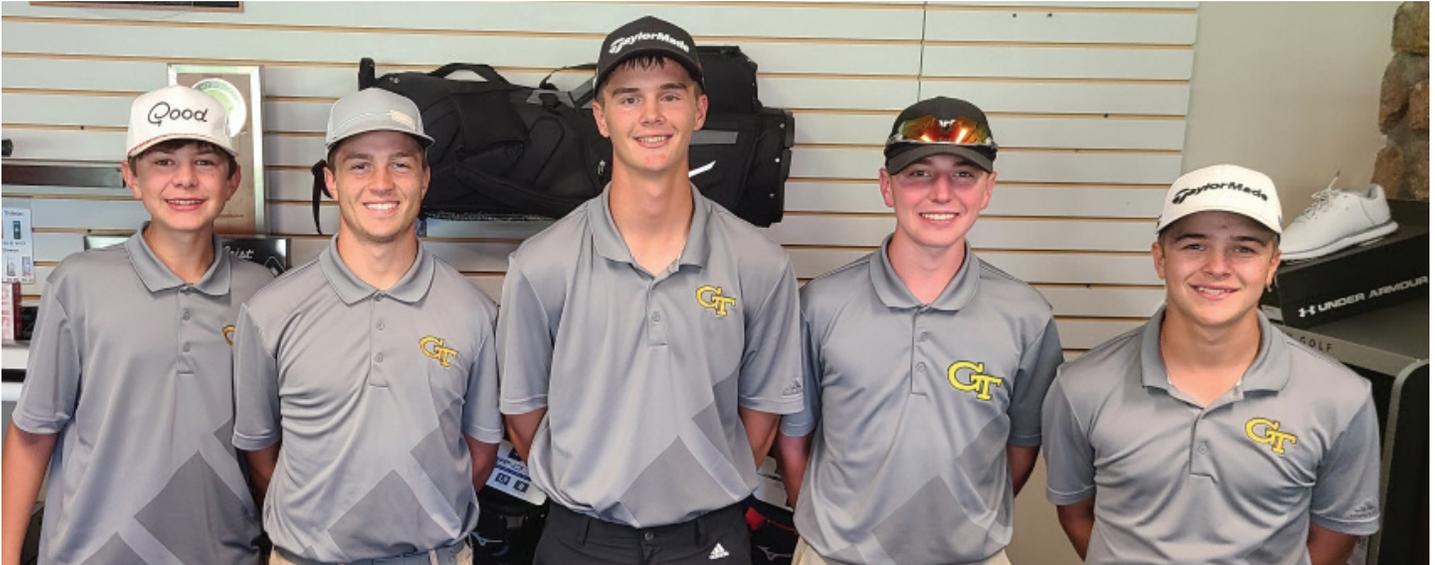
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Fliehs, Simon advance to state golf meet

Brevin Fliehs and Carter Simon have qualified for the state golf meet. Fliehs shot a 91 to place 20th and Simon a 93 for 22nd place. The top 23 advance to state. Also participating in the regional meet were Jackson Cogley with a 107, Cole Simon with a 113 and Tate Larson with a 116.



Region boys team. L to R. Carter Simon, Jackson Cogley, Tate Larson, Cole Simon. Brevin Fliehs. Brevin Fliehs and Carter Simon qualified for state in Madison next week Monday and Tuesday. (Submitted photo)

Netters lose to Faulkton Area

Groton Area's volleyball team lost a three-set match to Faulkton Area on Monday in Groton. Game scores were 25-14, 25-16 and 25-11.

Sydney Liecht had seven kills, one ace serve and 11 digs. Madeline Fliehs had six kills and two digs. Anna Fjeldheim had three kills and three digs. Aspen Johnson had three kills and one dig. Alyssa Thaler had one kill and 15 digs. Maddie Bjerke had one kill. Elizabeth Fliehs had five digs, Carly Guthmiller had seven, Trista Keith five and Allyssa Locke five.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 26-24 and 25-22. Aspen Johnson had four kills and a block, Faith Trahagen had five kills Lydia Meier had four ace serves and a kill, Marlee Tollifson had three kills, Carly Guthmiller two ace serves, Emma Schinkel an ace serve and a kill, Anna Fjeldheim had a kill and Laila Roberts an ace serve.

Faulkton won the C match, 23-25, 25-23 and 15-10.

#470 in a series
Covid-19 Update:
by Marie Miller

Nationally, things are looking up. At midday today, we had a total of 42,905,619 cases reported in the US with a seven-day new-case average of 119,883, down eight percent from the last time we talked and 18 percent over two weeks. Of course, this is uneven across the country, so we have states still setting records, even as others are climbing out of the critical situations they've been in.

I will also add that, even with these recent decreases, we're in a pack of trouble. The CDC classifies transmission, based on per capita new cases and test positivity, as High, Substantial, Moderate, or Low. Nearly the entire country is still classified as having High transmission with just a few isolated counties here and there showing Substantial transmission. There are just 14 counties in the entire country at Moderate transmission: one in New Mexico, one in Utah, one in North Dakota, four in South Dakota, one in Nebraska, one in Kansas, four in Texas, and one in Missouri. No counties are rated with Low transmission. That's a pretty awful picture.

Dr. Scott Gottlieb, former FDA Commissioner, told CNN he expects this surge to continue to increase in parts of the country for a few more weeks. He predicted the Northeast may yet get another surge as well with the on-coming cold weather before things die down, probably by Thanksgiving. Before you get too excited, he's defining dying down as around 20,000 new cases per day nationwide. That would be a big improvement, but it's not nothing and will likely continue until all of the holdouts have been infected. That's going to take a while yet, so we can expect those new



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cases to continue to trickle in over the winter. He also predicted an increasing demand for diagnostic tests as flu season comes on and people have a need to distinguish between the two diseases.

Hospitalizations have continued to decline too to 86,043, which is down 15 percent over two weeks. There is concern about what even a normal flu season will do to the health care system, strained as it is now. There's not much time for a respite before we begin to see the normal winter round of respiratory infections, some percentage of which call for hospitalization; winter is typically a busy season in health care. We didn't have much flu at all, really, last winter, but there's no way we're going to be locked down or taking the kinds of precautions we did last year, so the experts expect a normal to big year for flu. An easy flu season frequently is followed by a nasty one, so the experts are recommending that you get the flu vaccine and don't take your chances this winter.

One place where it doesn't look much like a recovery is the state of Washington, which is experiencing its highest hospitalization rate of the pandemic. All the things you've seen in other overwhelmed states—tent hospitals, temporary morgues, admitted patients occupying beds in the emergency room while they wait for space to become available, inability to expeditiously serve non-Covid patients—are happening there. Some of their problem is the patients they've accepted from neighboring Idaho, itself in the middle of a surge and on crisis standards of care; but much of it is home-grown. They've experienced the same shortages of hospital staff as the rest of the country, even before the pandemic and certainly before this fall. This current surge just exacerbates the issue. The more rural southwestern and eastern portions of the state have very low vaccination rates, some counties below 35 percent—far below the more populated areas.

The Memphis, Tennessee, area hospitals are also under stress due to high numbers of Covid-19 patients. A mass shooting last week in a suburb put things pretty much over the top. Before the shooting, 96 percent of ICU beds in the county were occupied with some hospitals in worse shape, from 97 to 100 percent full. There were only 15 ICU beds available in the five-county area around Memphis on Wednesday afternoon. The last thing overburdened hospitals needed was another dozen people coming in with bullets in them. This is another state with very low vaccination rates. Let's hope no other disaster befalls them before they can discharge some of their patients.

New cases and hospitalizations have declined; but deaths, on the other hand, continue to increase. We're still running over 2000 per day; at midday today, the seven-day average was 2031. This represents a 23 percent increase over two weeks and that's a whole lot of funerals. These numbers should begin to come down in the relatively near future, lagging the decreases in new cases and, more importantly, hospitalizations. We'll be looking for that.

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) finished its two-day meeting on Thursday. This was the meeting to recommend immunization practices with respect to third-dose (booster) shots of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. After numerous presentations reviewing the scientific evidence, they took several actions. In a unanimous decision, they recommended people 65 and over and those at risk for severe disease, including long-term care residents, receive a third dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Then, in a 13-2 vote, they recommended people 50 to 64 with underlying medical conditions also receive a third dose. And in a closer nine to six vote, they recommended people from 18 to 49 with an underlying medical risk consider receiving a third dose after assessing their individual benefit and risk in consultation with their medical care provider. Their final vote, 6 to 9, was against recommending third doses for people in occupational or institutional settings with high risk of exposure, based on a lack of evidence these people have not maintained a sufficient immune response to the first two doses.

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The next step, and the last one before doses start, was for the CDC to decide what to do with these recommendations. Unusually, on Friday, Dr. Rochelle Wolensky, director of the CDC, decided to adopt that last recommendation which was voted down instead of adopting the Committee's action. This means the CDC guidelines are going to match the FDA's EUA extension of third-dose eligibility to occupationally- and institutionally-exposed individuals younger than 50. She adopted the rest of their recommendations. It is important to understand that agreement between the two is not required: The FDA rules on whether a vaccine may be used in a given population; the CDC provides clinical guidance for its use. There are other vaccines approved for use in a wider population than is generally considered good practice, so we'd have been fine whether Walensky adopted all of the recommendations or not. Now that the decision-making is finished, here's what it all means to people who have been vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine:

First, those with weakened immune systems (organ or stem cell transplant recipients, cancer patients, primary immunodeficiency, untreated HIV, taking immunosuppressives) were already authorized to receive a third dose at least four weeks after their second dose. For these people, the three-dose immunization schedule is simply standard practice. This authorization was made a few weeks ago and remains in place. That means it's unrelated to last week's action, but I wanted to be sure we're all clear on this.

And then people 65 or over and those who live in long-term care, people over 50 at high risk for severe disease due to an underlying medical condition, and people whose jobs place them at risk of exposure are eligible for a third dose at least six months after their second dose. The agency advises those under 50 who have predisposing conditions to consult with their physicians in making a decision about a third dose based on their individual risk. The medical conditions the CDC lists as predisposing to severe disease are high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, cancer, chronic lung or kidney disease, heart disease, dementia, Down syndrome, HIV, various other immunodeficiency diseases, liver disease, obesity, pregnancy and postpartum, sickle cell disease, thalassemia, current or former smoking, stroke or cerebrovascular disease, and substance use disorders. The occupations listed thus far as high-risk include health care workers, grocery workers, workers in homeless shelters and prisons, and teachers and day care staff.

Mix and match—the same person receiving two different vaccines—is not authorized and is considered to be not yet established as safe. There need to be some studies on this; I think some may be underway. I know it's been a thing for people who've received the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine to go in and get a Pfizer dose; but I'm going to suggest that's a bad idea. If the data we've recently seen from Janssen/Johnson & Johnson holds up, it's looking like two doses of that vaccine is going to give much better results. We talked about this just the other day in my Update #469 posted September 23 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5131924053490626>. I don't think you'll be waiting too long.

When you go in for a third dose, you will apparently not be required to provide proof of an underlying medical condition, and I'm not sure but don't think you need provide proof of a high-risk occupation either. You should NOT seek a third dose sooner than six months after your second dose (unless you are in that immunocompromised group already authorized). This is not just a nicety; if you get the third dose too soon, it will not elicit an optimal response and will be sort of wasted. Side effects are looking like they're not a big deal; a survey done in Israel where third doses have been given for a while now found 88 percent of recipients said they felt the same or better after the third dose compared to how they felt after the second dose.

There's been a fair amount of controversy about using additional doses for already-vaccinated people (other than the immunocompromised) instead of getting unvaccinated people covered. This has two facets: ethical concerns about vaccine supply in countries which have as little as one percent of their population vaccinated and policy concerns about Americans who are unvaccinated. I am not about to wade into ei-

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ther of these here, so I will simply acknowledge that there are plenty of arguments to be made and point out that hospitalization rates are currently 10 to 22 times higher in the unvaccinated as opposed to the vaccinated, so we should absolutely be focusing some attention on reducing the number of unvaccinated people in the world. As I've said repeatedly throughout this, we're not really safe until everyone is safe.

On that subject, we've fallen from first in the world in vaccination rate to 36th. That's pitiful. Vaccinations in the US have slowed to the lowest point since July with just 55 percent of our population fully vaccinated, woefully short of the number needed to offer community immunity—which is why we can expect new cases to continue to trickle in all winter long. At the peak in April, over two and half million first shots were administered in a day; the rate tapered from there until July when case numbers spiked and scared some new folks into getting vaccinated. Doses have been declining since until Tuesday when fewer than 21,000 first doses went into arms. The seven-day average is still 272,000 (itself far too low), but that means Tuesday had to be something of an anomaly—lowest day since Christmas. I don't know what was operating on that day, but this is worrisome, especially as 85 to 90 percent of hospitalized Covid-19 patients are unvaccinated. It's becoming difficult to see those folks as other than willing volunteers.

We don't want to be too hasty, however, because it turns out, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, there's still something like 10 percent of the population who are willing to be vaccinated, but haven't done it yet. Why? Well, believe it or not, some still don't realize vaccination is free, and these are, for the most part, people who don't have any extra money lying around to pay for it. It's difficult to imagine that not everyone has access to the same information you do, but it happens and we shouldn't mock these folks, but educate them. We have others who don't have transportation; buses don't always run where people need them, especially poor people. There are folks who have difficulty scheduling around their work, especially those who carry two or three jobs. They may lack child care, and children are not permitted at many vaccination sites for good reason. And there are people who don't have sick leave and who can't afford to miss working days, which leaves them hesitant about side effects. There are language barriers for some or concerns about needing a Social Security number or other official identification; and before we get into a discussion of immigration policy, I will remind us that it is important to the safety of all of us to get folks vaccinated, whether they are documented or not. Some people don't know how to get a vaccine—where you go or what you have to do to arrange for it. Some are overwhelmed by all the information available and are having trouble sorting it out; they need one-on-one conversations with health workers to have their questions addressed. We haven't done a good job of reaching the homeless either. With so many different reasons for not being vaccinated, no one-size-fits-all approach is going to do the job here. You can't just set up a clinic in the neighborhood and figure folks will stream in.

This population is going to need some serious and labor-intensive outreach, and that costs money—less than hospitalization, certainly, but plenty nonetheless. Free and charitable clinics are doing much of the work and having some significant success, but they are seriously under-resourced even for their normal activities, much less an effort like this. They depend on grants and donations, as well as volunteers, and there's only so much of those to go around. What we do know is that these sorts of programs work because they are working where they are being tried. We've been willing to throw all kinds of money at this pandemic—and I'm not knocking that at all—but it may be time to focus some of that money on a highly solvable problem, one that solving will get us closer to protection for all. And while I'm on my soapbox, one policy area into which I will wade is my insistence that we need a fund to take care of missed work days for side effects among those who don't have sick leave to use.

I've had a look at a number of maps with overlays that show vaccination rates and hospitalization rates, and it is quite startling to see how closely those track with one another. I've looked at state after state

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with the same result: Where vaccinations are high, hospitalizations are low; where vaccinations are low, hospitalizations are high. There aren't really any outliers either; the pattern is strong. We seriously need to get more people vaccinated, the sooner the better.

Progress report: We now have 32 states with at least half of their residents fully vaccinated. Who's left? Here are the laggards: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. While these states are lagging, there are still plenty of cases to go around because even the high-vaccination states are well below the level needed to protect the community against transmission. Highest vaccination rates are in Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. At this point, 80 percent of the hospitalized are unvaccinated, which means they are putting a whole lot of vaccinated people at risk too. Be nice if folks stepped up.

The CEO of Pfizer, Albert Bourla, in an interview yesterday with ABC, said it will be a matter of days until they submit their data on children, aged 5 to 11; it sounds like it could happen this week yet. We know from earlier interviews with officials that the FDA is prepared to expedite its review of these data so a decision can be made as quickly as reasonably possible on an extension of the EUA to this population. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, told Good Morning America this morning that she hopes "in the order of weeks" to have her agency's review finished. For all the parents of school age children waiting to have them immunized, I think we can see it coming now.

From 2015 to 2020, there were just 789 FAA investigations into unruly passenger behavior; in 2021 (which I will remind you is only three-quarters over) there have been 4284 reports of such behavior. A large majority of those is due to conflicts over masking on planes, and 61 percent of them were passengers who used "racist, sexist, or homophobic slurs," according to Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants union. Nelson is encouraging the creation of a central no-fly list of passengers who would be barred from flying on any airline instead of the current lists kept by each airline. That seems like a laudable goal to me. However you might feel about mask mandates, can we agree that passengers refusing to follow reasonable instructions by flight crew can endanger everyone on a flight? I will remind us all that flying on an airplane is not a constitutional right, but a privilege.

We have some new research on a long-Covid symptom that has become more apparent with time: erectile dysfunction in men. A phenomenon which was at first attributed to psychological stress due to the pandemic is now looking physiological. The incidence of erectile dysfunction after Covid-19 is six times the incidence in those who were not infected; the constellation of male reproductive symptoms includes inability to have or maintain an erection, damage to the testes, testicular pain or swelling, inability to achieve orgasm, and low testosterone levels. Something that must be factored in is that many of the conditions that predispose to severe Covid-19 are also predisposing conditions for sexual dysfunction, things like high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease; but even after we correct for this correlation, we are still seeing sexual dysfunction above background levels in recovering individuals. Considering how vascular-dependent erections are and SARS-CoV-2's well-documented damage to blood vessels, it should come as no surprise that these issues are showing up. Tissue sampling in post-Covid patients showed virus in testicular tissue and half of these men with low sperm quality, as well as virus in penis tissue accompanied by damage to the endothelium (lining) of the blood vessels in the penis. Testicular tissue is shielded from immune responses in some important ways, so it is not unexpected that this virus could lurk there undetected. We're not sure whether this tissue could serve as a reservoir from which it could later activate. This effect can be compounded by a decrease in an enzyme, endothelial nitric oxide synthase, that helps dilate blood vessels which lead to erection, and heart or lung damage that will impair blood circulation. In a study of long-Covid patients, 18 percent had sexual dysfunction,

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13 percent reported testicular pain, and four percent had a decrease in the size of the penis or testicles. There is also evidence that long-Covid patients show lowered levels of testosterone which could account for reductions in sexual desire, a further factor in the effects seen.

We are seeing some disturbing associations between Covid-19 and cognitive decline like that seen in Alzheimer's disease. Covid-19 patients are exhibiting memory problems and biological markers like those in Alzheimer's—not surprising given both are associated with brain inflammation. People with persistent loss of smell were more prone to cognitive problems, and up to six months after the acute infection, were suffering from forgetfulness and other challenges. It is important to recognize that association is not causation, so we're not yet sure that Covid-19 is responsible for these changes. We are also not sure whether the problems will persist in the future, but it's good for patients to be aware.

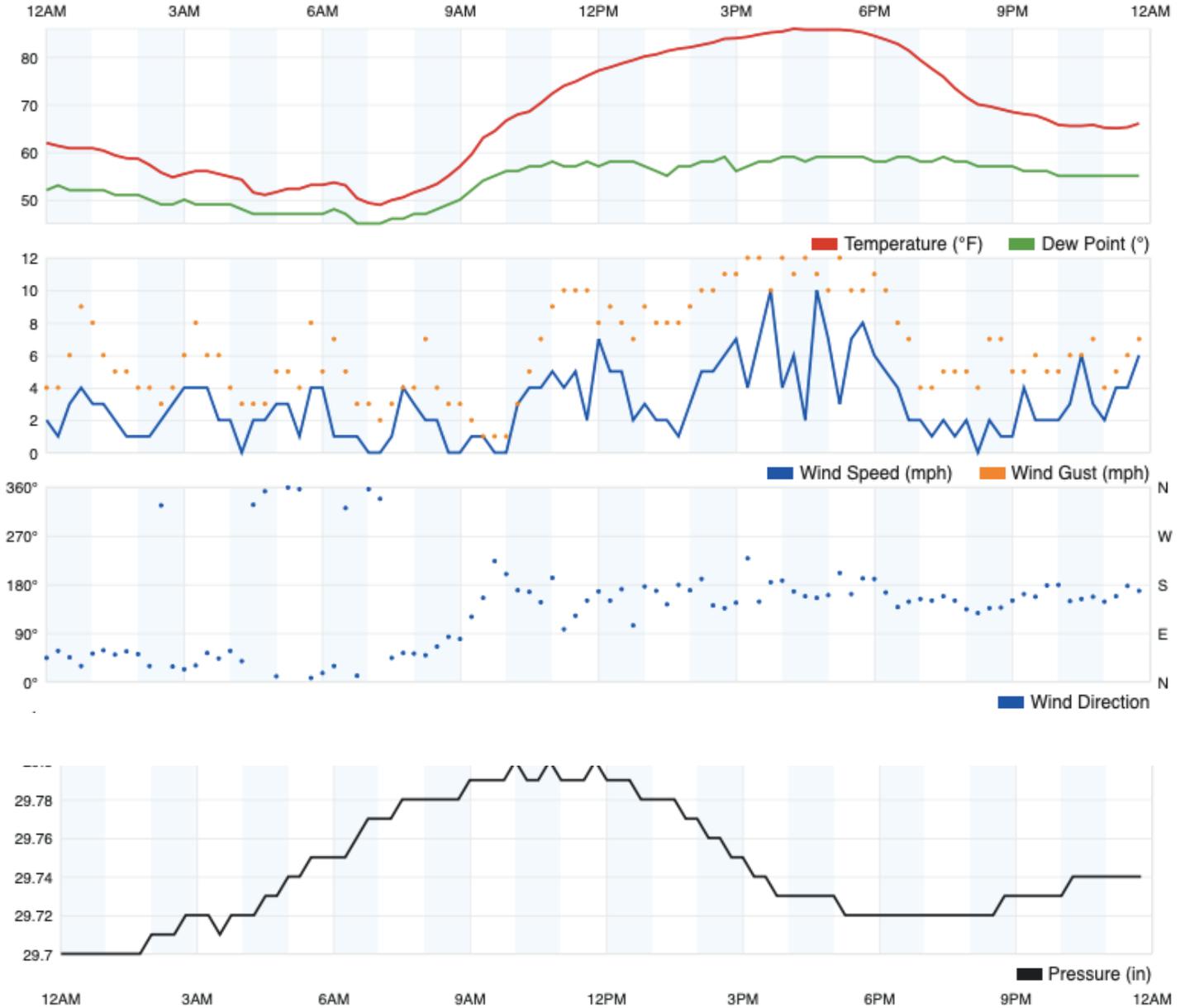
Something cool happened Friday: Dr. Katalin Kariko and Dr. Drew Weissman won the Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award for their work on Covid-19 vaccines. The Lasker awards are among the most prestigious in medicine, and winners frequently go on to win Nobels later. In order to understand why this is so cool, I recommend you look back at my Update #410 posted April 8, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4602832576399779>. This is one of my favorite of all the stories I've told over the past 19 months or so, and I am most delighted to see both of them, but most especially Dr. Kariko, receiving this long-overdue recognition.

With that, I'll sign off for the day. Take care. We'll talk again in a few days.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Hot	Increasing Clouds	Partly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Showers Likely	Chance Showers
High: 92 °F	Low: 65 °F	High: 81 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 68 °F

Another Hot Day Today



Hot, dry and breezy weather expected today. Highs in the 90s could be record to near-record for late September. A front will move through on Wednesday bringing showers, an isolated thunderstorm or two, and cooler temperatures.

What are the daily record high temps for Mon & Tue?

	Mon, Sept 27 th	Tue, Sept 28 th
Aberdeen	95° in 1952	*92° in 2011
Watertown	93° in 1956	*88° in 1897
Sisseton	96° in 1952	*88° in 2011
Wheaton	97° in 1952	*93° in 1952
Pierre	98° in 1956	*93° in 2011
Mobridge	101° in 1952	*88° in 1995
Timber Lake	97° in 1952	*85° in 2000
Kennebec	101° in 1956	99° in 1905

*Several of these are in jeopardy on Tuesday, as marked by the **
Visit www.weather.gov/abr for the latest forecast



High temperatures of 15 to 25 plus degrees above normal may approach or exceed daily records, until a transition to more seasonable temperatures takes place mid-week.

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Today in Weather History

September 28, 1951: During the early morning hours, near-record to record cold covered central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. Temperatures across the area fell into the upper teens and 20s. Aberdeen recorded a record low of 18 degrees; Kennebec dropped to 20 degrees, Pierre fell to 21 degrees while Timber Lake had a record low of 23 degrees. The overnight low in Mobridge was 23 degrees, 24 degrees at Watertown, and 26 degrees at Sisseton.

1836 - The first of three early season snows brought four inches of snow to Hamilton, NY, and two inches to Ashby MA. (David Ludlum)

1837: The first recorded storm to rake the entire Texas coast was Racer's Storm, named for a British sloop of war which encountered the system in the extreme northwestern Caribbean on September 28th. It is remembered as one of the most destructive storms of the nineteenth century due to its extreme duration and 2000 mile path of destruction.

1874: A strong category 1 hurricane went by Charleston and Georgetown, South Carolina. The tide was unprecedented height, inundating the entire riverfront of the city of Charleston.

1893 - Albuquerque, NM, was soaked with 2.25 inches of rain, enough to establish a 24 hour record for that city. (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A hurricane hit Pensacola, FL. Winds gusted to 95 mph, and the barometric pressure dipped to 28.50 inches. Winds at Mobile AL gusted to 75 mph. (The Weather Channel)

1929: A hurricane-spawned tornado hit Fort Lauderdale, Florida. While the path length of this estimated F2 tornado was 0.8 miles, it caused 16 injuries.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced up to ten inches of rain in southern Kansas and north central Oklahoma overnight. The Chikaskia River rose 2.5 feet above flood stage at Blackwell OK during the day causing flooding in Kay and Grant counties of north central Oklahoma. Early morning thunderstorms in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas produced 3.07 inches of rain in six hours at McAllen. Thunderstorms produced up to six inches of rain in southeastern Texas later in the day. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. produced severe weather from northern Texas to the Lower Missouri Valley during the late afternoon and evening hours. Hail three inches in diameter was reported at Nolan TX, and wind gusts to 80 mph were reported at Lawrence KS. Thunderstorms drenched downtown Kansas City MO with up to four inches of rain, leaving some cars stranded in water six feet deep. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms over northeastern Florida drenched Jacksonville with 4.28 inches of rain between midnight and 6 AM EDT. Unseasonably cool weather prevailed in the northeastern U.S. Five cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Binghamton NY with a reading of 30 degrees. Morning lows were in the 20s in northern New England. Unseasonably mild weather prevailed in the northwestern U.S., with afternoon highs in the upper 70s and 80s. In Oregon, Astoria reported a record high of 83 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: On the morning of September 28th, Hurricane George made landfall near Biloxi, Mississippi with maximum winds of 110 mph and a minimum pressure of 964 mb, making it a Category 2 hurricane. After landfall, Georges moved very slowly across southern Mississippi and weakened to a tropical depression by the morning of the 29th when the center was about 30 miles north-northeast of Mobile, Alabama. The storm dissipated near the northeast Florida/southeast Georgia coast by the morning of October 1, 1998.

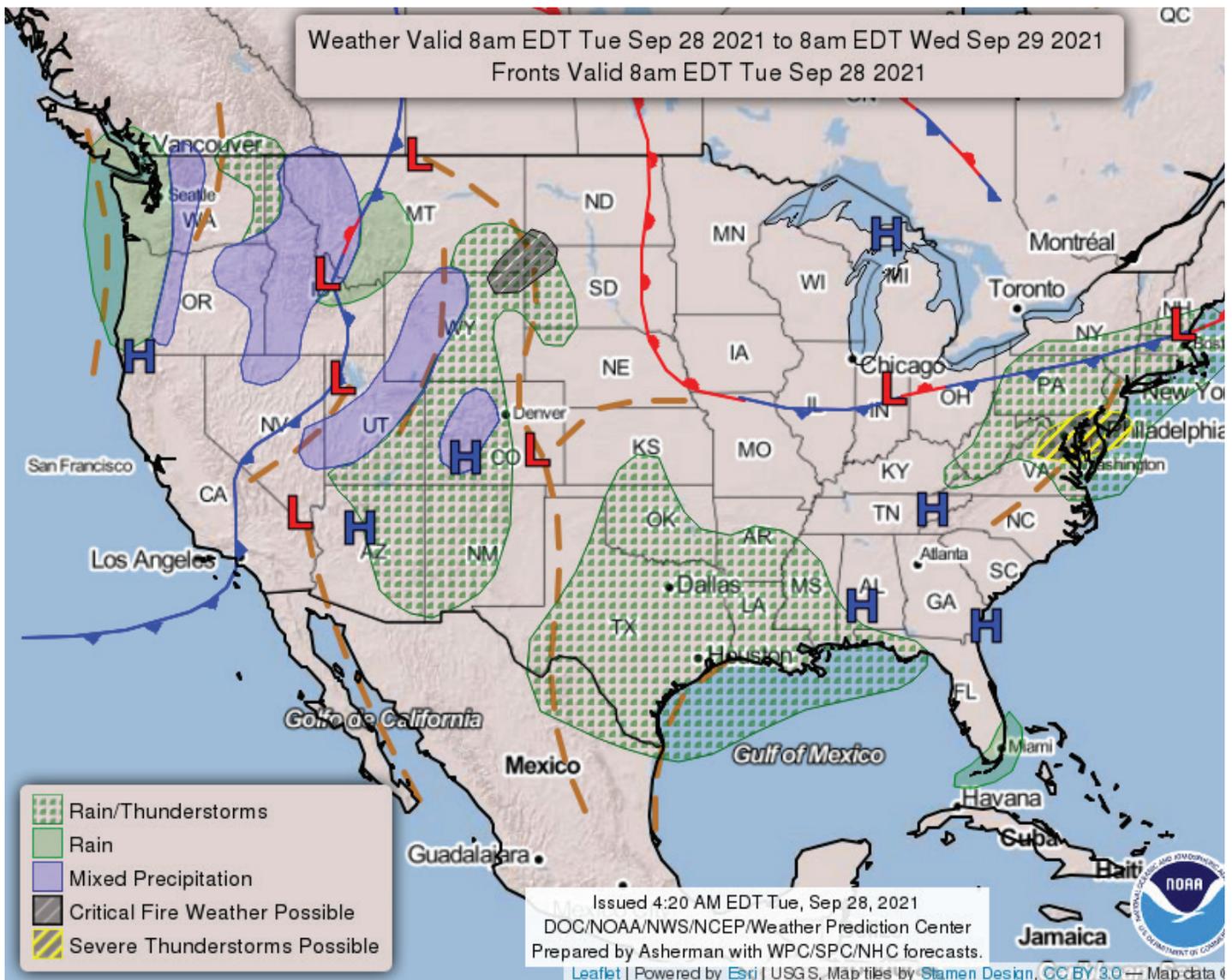
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 86 °F at 4:13 PM
Low Temp: 49 °F at 7:17 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 11:20 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 92° in 2011
Record Low: 18° in 1951
Average High: 70°F
Average Low: 42°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.86
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.58
Average Precip to date: 18.20
Precip Year to Date: 15.42
Sunset Tonight: 7:19:41 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:18 A



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SEEING IS BELIEVING

A youth pastor and his "Win One Now" team were passing out tracts and talking to a group of young people in New York one Saturday evening. A gang leader went up to him and shouted, "I'm sick and tired of you people talking about love. I've never seen love so if you've got it let me see it!"

How many others want to see "it?" We talk about love, sing about love, preach about love but the world is still trying to discover what love looks like. Someone once said they wanted to see "love with skin on it." And that's what God's love is all about. He did not speak of an empty, self-serving love - but a love that can be seen and studied and shared and duplicated and, by God's grace, passes all human understanding.

The Psalmist said that "The Lord has made His salvation known." How? Through God's faithfulness to protect and provide for the well-being of the children of Israel. He made His salvation known by His faithfulness and the fulfillment of His covenant with His children. There are no short cuts to proving what true love, God-love, is. It is not emotionally driven or sentimental. It sustained and supported Israel. That was then.

This is now. Years ago, God sent His one and only begotten Son to be born in a manger, live a sinless life, die on a despised cross and after suffering, scorned, stabbed, and shamed, be resurrected from a borrowed tomb. Then, once again, made "His salvation known." This is His love - a love we can see. It is "love with skin on it!"

If the world cannot see this love, we who are His disciples have only ourselves to blame. All around us are people waiting and wanting to see "love with skin on it."

Prayer: Forgive us who profess to be Christians, Father, if we fail to show Your love. May we live Your "love with skin on it" so others can know You! In Jesus's Name, Amen!

Scripture For Today: The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. Psalm 98:2

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Powerball

21-22-39-44-60, Powerball: 12, Power Play: 2

(twenty-one, twenty-two, thirty-nine, forty-four, sixty; Powerball: twelve; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$545 million

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Arlington def. Florence/Henry, 25-22, 25-13, 25-27, 25-11

Burke def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-22, 25-13, 18-25, 25-13

Crow Creek def. Stanley County, 25-15, 25-12, 26-24

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn., 25-19, 25-20, 26-24

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Sioux Valley, 25-19, 25-16, 22-25, 22-25, 15-12

Flandreau Indian def. Flandreau, 25-15, 25-15, 25-23

Howard def. Viborg-Hurley, 23-25, 25-14, 25-23, 25-10

Menno def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-22, 25-20, 25-23

Waubay/Summit def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 23-25, 17-25, 25-20, 25-21, 15-12

Waverly-South Shore def. Tri-State, 25-14, 25-14, 25-14

Wilmot def. Britton-Hecla, 25-21, 27-25, 25-23

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

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

As daughter sought state license, Noem summoned agency head

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Just days after a South Dakota agency moved to deny her daughter's application to become a certified real estate appraiser, Gov. Kristi Noem summoned to her office the state employee who ran the agency, the woman's direct supervisor and the state labor secretary.

Noem's daughter attended too.

Kassidy Peters, then 26, ultimately obtained the certification in November 2020, four months after the meeting at her mother's office. A week after that, the labor secretary called the agency head, Sherry Bren, to demand her retirement, according to an age discrimination complaint Bren filed against the department. Bren, 70, ultimately left her job this past March after the state paid her \$200,000 to withdraw the complaint.

Exactly what transpired at the July 27, 2020, meeting in the governor's office isn't clear. Noem declined an interview request and her office declined to answer detailed questions about the meeting.

"The Associated Press is disparaging the Governor's daughter in order to attack the Governor politically — no wonder Americans' trust in the media is at an all-time low," spokesman Ian Fury said.

Still, government ethics experts who reviewed the series of events at the AP's request said Noem's decision to include her daughter in the meeting created a conflict of interest regardless of what was discussed.

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While Peters was applying for the certification, Noem should have recused herself from discussions on the agency, especially any that would apply to her daughter's application, said Richard Painter, a professor at the University of Minnesota Law School who was the chief ethics lawyer for former President George W. Bush.

"It's clearly a conflict of interest and an abuse of power for the benefit of a family member," he said.

Peters began working as a state-registered appraiser – an entry-level job – in 2016. She worked under the supervision of a certified appraiser to get the experience necessary to apply for her own residential appraiser certification. It's not an easy hurdle; applicants must show they can perform appraisals to national standards, putting to use 200 hours of classroom education and months of experience.

While trainees make as little as \$10 an hour, certified residential appraisers can launch their own businesses and can make more than \$50,000 a year.

In September 2019, Peters applied to become a certified residential appraiser. But in late July 2020, the Appraiser Certification Program moved to deny the license, according to a July 27 letter from Peters' supervisor that was obtained by AP. The certification is denied when an applicant's work samples don't meet minimum compliance with national standards, according to the agency's upgrade procedures.

Bren, who had directed the Appraiser Certification Program for three decades, told the AP that she received a text on July 26 from her supervisor telling her to be at the governor's office the next morning, ready to discuss "appraiser certification procedures."

Besides Noem and Peters, Bren said the meeting included Labor Secretary Marcia Hultman; Bren's supervisor; the governor's general counsel; and, participating by telephone, Noem's chief of staff and a lawyer from the state's Department of Labor and Regulation.

Bren remembered it lasting close to an hour and including questions from Noem on how certification works.

After consulting with her attorney, Bren declined to discuss with AP further meeting details, including whether Peters' upgrade was discussed. The settlement of her age discrimination complaint includes a clause barring her from disparaging state officials.

However, Bren did confirm that at the meeting she was presented with a letter from Peters' supervisor, Kristine Juelfs, who wrote that she disagreed with the denial and charged that Peters had run up against an "inefficient process."

"In the past week I was notified that my trainee, State Registered Appraiser Kassidy Peters, was denied upgrade of her license to State Certified Residential Appraiser," Juelfs wrote. "This came as quite a shock to myself as she has represented the knowledge and skills necessary."

Juelfs' letter blasted the application evaluation for lacking "timeliness and professionalism" and said the examiner reviewing Peters' work had "acted unprofessional when conversing with Kassidy."

Peters agreed with the criticism in a statement to AP.

"My upgrade to become a Certified Residential Appraiser was very lengthy and I was expected to navigate through many obstacles from the very beginning," she said. "I'm glad I have it now and that I have the privilege to serve my clients in South Dakota."

Bren declined to discuss the certification of any individual appraisers, including Peters. However, speaking broadly about the agency, she said she hoped to help applicants succeed while making sure they met federal requirements.

"You also want to be fair and consistent and treat all your appraisers the same," she said.

Labor Secretary Hultman, in response to questions from the AP, declined to delve into details of Peters' application or explain the discrepancy between Juelfs' letter, which said the upgrade had been denied, and department records, which showed a denial was not ultimately issued.

"Kassidy Peters went through the same process as other appraisers. There was no denial," Hultman said in a statement. "Mrs. Peters completed the requirements to become licensed, and she was subsequently certified in November."

Bren's troubles began to mount almost immediately after Peters' Nov. 25 certification. One day earlier, Hultman had called Bren to discuss "concerns about the Appraiser Certification Program," according to

Bren's age discrimination complaint. On Dec. 1, the complaint alleged, Hultman called Bren to demand her retirement, saying she had shown an "inability to change gears."

Hultman told Bren that the phone call was to be kept a secret from her direct supervisor to make it appear Bren's retirement was her choice, the complaint alleged.

Over the ensuing weeks, Hultman did not yield in demanding a retirement date, even after Bren asked if there was any way to keep her job, emails obtained by the AP show.

Bren filed her age discrimination complaint at the end of December and, three months later, received the \$200,000 settlement agreement to withdraw the complaint and leave her job. When asked about Bren, Hultman declined to discuss "the specifics of personnel decisions."

Mark Miller, the governor's current general counsel, said in a statement, "Neither party admitted fault, and no agency affirmed her claim. This sideshow regarding Cassidy Peters speaks for itself."

Fury, the governor's spokesman, cast the episode as an example of how Noem "won't allow bureaucratic red tape to get in the way of South Dakota's sustained economic growth."

"Having more quality appraisers in the market will help keep our housing market moving and home prices down," he said.

A few days before signing the agreement, Bren sent an email to industry colleagues expressing worry about the future of the program.

"I have been forced to retire by the Secretary of the Department of Labor and Regulation at the behest of the Administration," she wrote, then added, "I want each of you to know that I have sincerely done everything possible to avoid this unfortunate circumstance."

This story corrects and expands governor's spokesman's quote to show he said episode was example of how Noem won't allow red tape to get in the way of growth.

Non-coronavirus patients wait for intensive care unit bed

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The coronavirus patients that fill the intensive care unit at a Rapid City hospital are forcing other patients in need of an ICU bed to wait.

The director of the ICU nursing unit at Monument Health hospital, George Sazama, said one man in need of open heart surgery was told he would have to wait longer than expected.

"That's one of the hardest things we have to do right now because of all the COVID-19 patients needing care first," said Sazama.

The man was angry, but at least understanding, Sazama said.

"He's been trying to get in to have open heart surgery for over a month and we can't get him in to do (it)," Sazama said.

ICU nurse Daniel Warnke says those infected with coronavirus are staying longer in the unit than regular patients, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"Most of our ICU patients that are non-COVID we'll have here today or two days, sometimes a little bit longer. For our COVID patients, we are sitting on them for 20 to 30 to 40 days. And you know, we just had one pass yesterday that's been with us for awhile," Warnke said.

Warnke doesn't know what the light at the end of the tunnel may be.

"We thought the vaccine would be in all honesty," Warnke said. "I think the people in health care, myself personally, thought that was it."

Toshiba's Teresa Sternhagen Wins Stevie Award for Woman Executive of the Year

MITCHELL, S.D. & LAKE FOREST, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep 27, 2021--

Affirming her extraordinary leadership at Toshiba America Business Solutions and within her community, Teresa Sternhagen has won this year's Silver Stevie® Award for Woman Executive of the Year in the 18

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th annual Stevie Awards for Women in Business.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210927005145/en/>

Toshiba's Teresa Sternhagen Wins Stevie Award for Woman Executive of the Year (Photo: Business Wire)

The Stevie Awards have been hailed as the world's premier business awards. Gold, Silver, and Bronze Stevie Award winners were determined by the average scores of more than 160 business professionals around the world, working on eight juries.

Leading by Example

Upon joining the company in 2008, the general manager of Toshiba's toner products division has established a reputation for leadership by successfully deploying supply chain, inventory control and procurement tactics and strategies. Beginning July 1, 2019, Sternhagen has quarterbacked efforts ensuring premium levels of quality, environmental and occupational health and safety standards at Toshiba. This encompasses implementing local, state and national regulatory mandates including current ISO Certifications (ISO 9001:2015 Quality, 14001:2015 Environmental, 45001:2018 and 45001:2019 Health and Safety). She also serves on Toshiba's Executive Leadership Team, which charts the company's strategic direction.

Maggie Gallagher Miller, president of the Stevie Awards, says, "We thought the remarkable stories of achievement we saw in last year's awards couldn't be topped, but we were wrong. Women-owned and -run organizations have contributed significantly to the increase in innovation and entrepreneurial activity we've seen globally since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The nominations submitted to the 18th Stevie Awards for Women in Business that attest to this are inspiring, humbling, and motivating. We celebrate Toshiba's Teresa Sternhagen for embodying these positive characteristics to benefit both her company and community."

Eco Champion

Sternhagen led Toshiba's recent sustainability project centering on a one-acre parcel at the company's Mitchell, South Dakota facility. Toshiba employees across levels and departments took part in planting indigenous flowers and grasses spawning increasing numbers of bee and butterfly pollinators. This project further enhances biodiversity education and awareness for local students.

Sternhagen is moreover a 15-year board member of the Bon Homme School District 4-2 in Tyndall, S.D. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts from Dakota Wesleyan University and CPIM (Certified in Production and Inventory Management), while completing coursework for her CSCP and CLTD, Certified Supply Chain Professional and Certified in Logistics, Transportation, and Distribution, respectively.

"Teresa is the consummate leader at work and within her community, and we are thrilled for her to receive this wonderful recognition for her efforts," says Toshiba America Business Solutions President and Chief Executive Officer Larry White. "She leads our toner products division by demonstrating the highest levels of professionalism, positivity and compassion to Toshiba's employees, business partners as well as the Mitchell community."

Click-to-Tweet: Toshiba's Teresa Sternhagen Wins Stevie Award for Woman Executive of the Year

About the Stevie Awards

Stevie Awards are conferred in eight programs: the Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards, the German Stevie Awards, the Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards The American Business Awards®, The International Business Awards®, the Stevie Awards for Great Employers, the Stevie Awards for Women in Business, and the Stevie Awards for Sales & Customer Service. Stevie Awards competitions receive more than 12,000 entries each year from organizations in more than 70 nations. Honoring organizations of all types and sizes and the people behind them, the Stevies recognize outstanding performances in the workplace worldwide. Learn more about the Stevie Awards at <http://www.StevieAwards.com>.

About Toshiba America Business Solutions, Inc.

Toshiba America Business Solutions (TABS) is a workplace solutions provider delivering an extensive portfolio of industry-recognized workflow and document management products for businesses of all sizes across the United States, Mexico, and Central and South America.

TABS supports the diverse needs of today's professionals through award-winning e-STUDIO™ multi-function printers, label and receipt printers, digital signage, managed print services, and cloud solutions. Toshiba continuously focuses on the clients and communities it serves, is committed to sustainability and is recognized as a Wall Street Journal Top 100 Sustainable Company. To learn more, please visit business.toshiba.com. Follow TABS on Facebook, Twitter,

Japan to lift all coronavirus emergency steps nationwide

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's government announced Tuesday that the coronavirus state of emergency will end this week to help rejuvenate the economy as infections slow.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the emergency will end Thursday and virus restrictions will be eased gradually "in order to resume daily lives despite the presence of the virus." He said the government will create more temporary COVID-19 treatment facilities and continue vaccinations to prepare for any future resurgence.

Government officials are also instituting other plans such as vaccine passports and virus tests, Suga said.

With the lifting, Japan will be free of emergency requirements for the first time in more than six months.

Japan's current state of emergency, declared in April, was repeatedly extended and expanded. Despite public weariness and frustration over the measures, Japan has managed to avoid the more restrictive lockdowns imposed elsewhere while recording about 1.69 million cases and 17,500 deaths from COVID-19.

The emergency has mainly involved requests for restaurants and bars to reduce their hours and not serve alcohol. Governors in Tokyo, Osaka, Hyogo and Kyoto have said they plan to keep those requests in place while closely monitoring the virus situation.

Japan is eager to expand social and economic activities while balancing the need to prevent another wave of infections. The government, which is in transition as the governing party chooses a replacement for Suga later this week, is under pressure to maintain an effective virus strategy ahead of parliamentary elections in two months.

Eateries and other commercial establishments currently requested to close early should gradually return to their normal hours while the authorities reinforce health care systems, officials said.

"Lifting of the emergency doesn't mean we are 100% free," Dr. Shigeru Omi, top medical adviser for the government, told reporters. "The government should send a clear message to the people that we can only relax gradually."

He urged the authorities to quickly tighten controls if there are early signs of a resurgence ahead of holiday periods.

Infections started to worsen in July and peaked in mid-August after the Tokyo Olympics, surging above 5,000 daily cases in Tokyo alone and topping 25,000 nationwide. Thousands of patients unable to find hospital beds had to recover from the illness at home.

Olympics and government officials deny the Games directly caused the upsurge, but experts said the festive atmosphere made people more socially active and was indirectly responsible.

Suga decided to step down from party leadership and the premiership after facing criticism over his government's virus measures and his insistence on holding the Olympics during the pandemic despite public opposition.

Daily reported cases have fallen to around 2,000 nationwide — less than one-tenth of the mid-August peak. Experts attributed the declining numbers to the progress of vaccinations — 58% of the population is fully vaccinated — and to people increasing their social distancing efforts after being alarmed by the collapse of medical systems.

Vaccinations minister Taro Kono recently said Japan is preparing to start administering boosters — a third shot for those who have already received two — to medical personnel by the end of this year and to elderly people early next year.

EXPLAINER: Why Facebook is holding off on kids' Instagram

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Bowing — perhaps only for a moment — to pressure from lawmakers, critics, the media and child development experts, Facebook said Monday it will “pause” its work on a kids’ version of its photo and video-oriented Instagram app.

But what’s not yet clear is just how seriously Facebook is taking the concerns of experts and parents. Its decision to merely pause the project suggests it still plans to expose a much younger audience to Instagram, its well-documented harms and possibly the user profiling that feeds Facebook’s targeted ad machine. That ad machine, of course, has made the company one of the most profitable on the planet.

WHY IS FACEBOOK DOING THIS NOW?

The company’s move follows an explosive mid-September report by The Wall Street Journal that found Facebook knew from its own research that Instagram was harming some teens, especially girls, leading to mental health and body image problems and in some cases eating disorders and suicidal thoughts.

In public, however, Facebook has consistently played down the app’s negative side and until now has barreled ahead with the kids’ version despite alarms from experts, lawmakers and its own research. It has also relentlessly criticized the Journal article as cherry-picking from Facebook’s research, though it did not dispute the facts. That story, however, was based on internal research leaked by a whistleblower at the company.

It’s likely not a coincidence that on Thursday, a panel of the Senate Commerce Committee will hold a hearing examining the “toxic effects” of Facebook and Instagram on young people. It’s the latest of several hearings to look at whether Big Tech companies are hiding what they know about the harms their products cause.

SO IS INSTA FOR KIDS CANCELED?

Facebook has very specifically not said that it will abandon the project. Instead, Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, said in a blog post Monday that the company will use its pause time “to work with parents, experts and policymakers to demonstrate the value and need for this product.”

Translation: Expect Facebook to sharpen its message on the “benefits” of Instagram for Kids in hopes that the furor will die down.

Consider that Facebook had already said it was working with parents, experts and policymakers back in July when it introduced safety measures for teens on its main Instagram platform. In fact, the company has been “working with” experts and other advisors for another product aimed at children — its Messenger Kids app that launched in late 2017.

“Critics of Instagram Kids’ will see this as an acknowledgement that the project is a bad idea,” Mosseri wrote. “That’s not the case.”

WHO ARE THE EXPERTS WORKING WITH FACEBOOK?

Four years ago, Facebook said it gathered a group of experts in the fields of online safety, child development and children’s media to “share their expertise, research and guidance.” The group it calls Youth Advisors include some well-known and some lesser-known nonprofit groups, including the Family Online Safety Institute, Digital Wellness Lab, MediaSmarts, Project Rokit and the Cyberbullying Research Center.

All of these groups receive some form of funding from Facebook, according to their websites. Meanwhile, some of the best-known children’s online advocacy groups — and Facebook’s biggest critics on this matter — such as Common Sense Media and Fairplay (formerly known as the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood) are notably absent.

Critics acknowledge that many of the cooperative experts mean well, but say their influence has been negligible. “Facebook has shown time and time again that it is incapable of governing or advising itself with any integrity,” said Kyle Taylor, program director for the Real Facebook Oversight Board, a group critical of the social network. “Facebook’s funding of research and civil society is hugely problematic, and prevents the kind of direct, open process that is required for any real change to occur.”

When Facebook seeks feedback for its projects, Taylor added, “the decks are always stacked with ex-

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perts who have a financial interest or who will never criticize Facebook's core issues - their algorithm and their profit margin."

COULD FACEBOOK STILL PULL THE PLUG?

Fairplay executive director Josh Golin argues that Instagram for Kids may have already sunk beneath the waves. The "pause," he said, is a good way for Facebook to save face and hope that after a while people will forget about it.

He acknowledges that his group and other advocates failed to pressure Facebook into canceling its kids' messaging product, but says Instagram for Kids is different.

"Instagram is a much much worse platform for children" than Messenger, he said, noting Facebook's own internal research and a "wealth of evidence" supporting this point. The climate has also changed since 2017 and 2018, when the "techlash" against Big Tech's harmful effects on society was just emerging. Now, it's in full force and much more organized. Finally, there's tech product inertia.

"With Messenger Kids, the backlash didn't start until it had already come out," he said. "It is much easier for a corporation to walk back a product that doesn't yet exist than to take a product off the market,"

WHAT ABOUT OTHER PLATFORMS?

Facebook, of course, is not the only tech platform whose products have caused ripples of concern about the well-being of children. And creating kids' versions in the face of these concerns is a popular response. After getting in trouble with U.S. regulators for violating children's privacy rules, for instance, TikTok created a "limited, separate app experience" for users who are under 13. They can't share videos, comment on other people's videos or message people. But as with any other app, if kids enter a fake birthdate when they register with the app, they can get around that provision.

YouTube has a kids version too. Lawmakers earlier this year called it a "wasteland of vapid consumerist content" and launched an investigation that's still ongoing.

AP Technology Writer Tali Arbel contributed to this story.

Jan. 6 trials slowed by mounting evidence in US Capitol riot

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

In the nearly nine months since Jan. 6, federal agents have tracked down and arrested more than 600 people across the United States believed to have joined in the riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Getting those cases swiftly to trial is turning out to be an even more difficult task.

Investigators have collected a mountain of evidence in the attack and are working to organize it and share it with defense attorneys. And that mountain keeps growing with new arrests still happening practically every week.

Washington's federal court, meanwhile, is clogged with Jan. 6 cases, which more than double the total number of new criminal cases filed there all of last year. Further complicating things are limitations the court has put on trials because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The court delays are dragging out a process already called into question by some right-wing lawmakers, who argue it's a waste of time and money to prosecute people accused of low-level crimes. As the court cases continue to stall, so do answers to what happened that day and the possibility for consequences from the most violent assault at the Capitol in a generation. Meanwhile, Democrats in the House are subpoenaing former President Donald Trump's aides and have requested a trove of documents as a select committee also probes the insurrection.

While it's not unusual for federal cases to take a year or more to work through the system, some defense lawyers and judges are raising concerns that defendants with a right to a speedy trial may end up waiting a long time before getting their day in court.

"The reason for the delay has not changed or become even remotely concrete. It remains as amorphous today as it was months ago," an attorney wrote in court documents opposing prosecutors' request to cancel the scheduled November trial for Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, an ex-Army reservist described by co-workers

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as a known Nazi sympathizer.

So far, only about 80 cases have been resolved by guilty pleas — largely by those who were charged only with misdemeanor offenses. Scores of others face serious felony charges including conspiracy, assaulting officers and obstructing of an official proceeding that call for lengthy sentences behind bars.

The Justice Department has called it the largest investigation in American history, with probes open in 55 out of 56 FBI field offices. Evidence collected in the attack includes thousands of hours of video footage, hundreds of thousands of tips from the public and more than 1 million Parler posts, replies and data. The Justice Department is building massive databases to share all evidence stemming from the attack with defense attorneys.

In the most high-profile case brought so far, involving more than a dozen members and associates of the far-right extremist group the Oath Keepers, prosecutors recently told a judge that a January trial date for the first set of defendants is looking increasingly unrealistic given how much evidence they still need to get into defense attorneys' hands.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta said if they have to wait until prosecutors turn over "every single scrap of evidence" they've collected in the Jan. 6 investigation — rather than just that which relates to a specific defendant — there won't be trials in any of these cases before 2023. And three of the Oath Keepers defendants, accused of conspiring to block the certification of Joe Biden's presidential election victory over Trump, are behind bars.

"I have to keep their interests in a speedy trial in mind here," Mehta said. "I am concerned about a lengthy pretrial detention period," he added. He didn't immediately rule but signaled that the first Oath Keepers trial would likely be pushed to April, with the second scheduled for July.

At least one of those roughly 70 defendants who are locked up pretrial has already pointed to the delays in an effort to get out of jail. Kelly Meggs, described by authorities as the leader of the Florida chapter of the Oath Keepers, said in an unsuccessful motion for release that with a January trial looking unlikely, he's effectively being held in "indefinite pre-trial detention which, under the circumstances, is tantamount to a human rights violation."

Prosecutors say they are working as quickly as possible under unprecedented challenges to share all evidence that could potentially help the defense and keep the cases moving forward. But new evidence is still being unearthed with each new arrest or as analysis is completed on the thousands of hours of video taken during that chaotic day.

In the case of Robert Reeder, armchair detectives who call themselves Sedition Hunters unearthed new evidence just before he was supposed to be sentenced last month with a recommendation of probation. The video appears to show Reeder scuffling with a police officer, running counter to his assertion that he had not been part of any violence that day. Reeder's attorney called the clip problematic. A new sentencing is set for Oct. 8.

The coronavirus is only making matters worse.

Cases were already backed up because of the pandemic, and the court has said no more than three trials can be held at once at least until the end of October to allow for social distancing. A judge in one case recently warned attorneys there's no guarantee they will be going to trial as planned in February if COVID-19 numbers tick up.

The pandemic has also made it harder for defendants held behind bars to safely work with their lawyers — a problem that's plagued the entire criminal justice system.

"The defense attorneys just aren't really able to consistently meet with their clients, aren't able to consistently share data or prepare defense with them in an engaged, consistent way," said Jon Lewis, a research fellow who's been following the Jan. 6 cases for the Program on Extremism at George Washington University. "It's a very real issue."

Some defendants, like Hale-Cusanelli, say they don't want to wait any longer for their chance to defend themselves in court. Hale-Cusanelli is scheduled for trial on Nov. 9, but prosecutors say there's no way that's possible. A judge has set a hearing for next week to decide whether to keep that date in place.

A lawyer for the former Army reservist accused prosecutors of seeking more time only to "further ce-

ment their case" against his client, "despite having allegedly sufficient evidence to indict" him. Prosecutors called that assertion "wholly without foundation."

"The government has presented eminently reasonable explanations for the delay: its strenuous efforts to meet the challenges imposed by the enormous amount of relevant evidence that it must review, process, categorize, and organize into a format that will make it accessible and useful to the defense," they wrote in court documents.

Prosecutors say Hale-Cusanelli, who worked as a security contractor at a Navy base, used his military training to avoid the effects of pepper spray and tactical hand signals to urge fellow rioters forward on Jan. 6. He later described the day as exhilarating to a tipster, praising the "the adrenaline, the rush, the purpose" he felt, according to court documents.

Hale-Cusanelli's attorney has noted that he is not accused of hurting anyone that day. The defense has called him an "opinionated individual" who "fully exercised his right to speak freely before being imprisoned."

Richer reported from Boston, and Whitehurst reported from Salt Lake City.

German lawmakers meet to mull fallout from election

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's newly elected lawmakers are holding their first meetings on Tuesday as their parties digest the fallout of the election that reduced outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's bloc to its worst-ever result and start the process of putting together a new government.

The narrow winners of Sunday's parliamentary election, the center-left Social Democrats of Olaf Scholz, underlined their hopes of a quick start to talks with the likely kingmakers in a new government. And several prominent figures in Merkel's Union bloc questioned an initial push by election loser Armin Laschet to lead a new administration.

Since neither of the traditional big parties wants to renew their outgoing "grand coalition" of rivals, the third- and fourth-placed parties — the environmentalist Greens and the business-friendly Free Democrats — appear to hold the keys to a parliamentary majority. Leaders of those parties plan to meet each other this week to search for common ground before entertaining advances from potential suitors.

"The Greens and Free Democrats have been invited by us to hold exploratory talks with us this week already if they want," Social Democratic parliamentary group leader Rolf Muetzenich said before a gathering of his party's newly elected and outgoing lawmakers.

Scholz, the outgoing vice chancellor, said Monday that he wants a new government before Christmas if possible. Forming a government can take weeks or months in Germany as parties thrash out in detail the new coalition's plans.

Laschet's Union bloc also is holding a meeting of its lawmakers later Tuesday, with recriminations likely after a disastrous campaign. After saying Sunday night that it would do "everything we can" to form a new administration, Laschet made clear Monday that he still hopes to lead one — but sounded more reserved, arguing that voters gave no party a mandate.

Hesse state governor Volker Bouffier said that "we have no entitlement to take government responsibility." The head of the Union's youth wing, Tilman Kuban, said that "we lost the election, period." He argued that the mandate to form a government lies with the Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats.

A top lawmaker with the Free Democrats called for all parties to be ready for talks by the end of this week, and for the Union to figure out what it wants to do. Marco Buschmann, the party's chief whip, told Deutschlandfunk radio that "very different signals are being sent in the Union. Some want to govern, I think — others don't."

The full 735-member new Bundestag, or lower house of parliament, is expected to hold its first meeting next month.

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

Going Dutch: Look out, German coalition talks could be long

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — As Europe's economic powerhouse Germany embarks on the task of piecing together a new ruling coalition after Sunday's knife-edge election, observers need only look to its neighbors, Belgium and the Netherlands, to see how tricky the process can be.

Olaf Scholz, leader of the center-left Social Democrats that narrowly beat outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Union bloc on Sunday sounded upbeat the morning after the vote.

"My idea is that we will be very fast in getting a result for this government, and it should be before Christmas if possible," Scholz told reporters in Berlin. "Germany always has coalition governments and it was always stable."

But with both parties finishing with well under 30% of the vote, the keys to power appear to be in the hands of two opposition parties — raising questions over the stability of a future government.

The Netherlands has a similar history with coalition building. Dutch political leaders resumed meetings this week — again — in a bid to find a constellation of parties willing to rule the country for the next four years. They've been at it — on and off — for more than six months now and no end is in sight.

Leaders of the largest parties have failed to cobble together a coalition able to command a majority in the lower house of parliament and are now looking at forming a minority government. So far, no possible coalition has gained enough traction to even merit moving to the next phase of negotiations, hammering out a policy blueprint for the next four years.

Sigrid Kaag, leader of the centrist D66 that won enough seats in the election to become the second largest party in parliament behind Prime Minister Mark Rutte's conservative VVD, said Sunday: "I don't have a magic wand."

Even so, she attempted to breathe new life into the negotiations by saying she is prepared to sit down for talks with six parties, including the faith-based Christian Union. Her party had previously ruled out a coalition with the Christian Union because of their opposing stances on issues including euthanasia and assisted suicide.

"Conventional wisdom in negotiations is that you should never be the first to move. The famous saying: don't blink first," Kaag said in a speech Sunday. "But I'm going to do it."

Whether it leads to a breakthrough remains to be seen.

If the Dutch look like they're dragging their heels, just across the border, Belgium, with its linguistic and regional divides, has perhaps Europe's most unenviable post-electoral record.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo's government was formed on Oct. 1, 2020, ending almost 500 days of talks, caretaker cabinets and a minority coalition rubber stamped to see the country through the start of the COVID pandemic.

But even that marathon process fell short of the Belgian record that was set in December 2011, when a government was finally cobbled together after 541 days of negotiations.

The low countries are not the only nations that have wrestled with piecing together a coalition from a splintered and polarized political landscape.

Throughout Israel's 73-year history, no single party has ever controlled the parliamentary majority. That has resulted in a string of coalition governments, usually led by the largest party in parliament.

In some cases, coalitions are comprised of partners with similar ideologies on key issues like relations with the Palestinians. But many times, rivals must make concessions and reach compromises in order to work together.

Israel's current government, however, is unlike anything seen before. Formed after four inconclusive elections in two years, it includes eight parties spanning the spectrum of Israeli politics, from hard-line ultranationalists that oppose Palestinian statehood to dovish parties that support a two-state solution with the Palestinians and, for the first time in Israeli history, an Arab party.

Naftali Bennett, leader of a small hard-line religious party, is the current prime minister, but in two years,

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he has agreed to swap places with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, head of a larger secular, centrist party. The parties have so far managed to work well together, focusing on issues where there is common ground, such as the economy, while largely avoiding more contentious issues like the conflict with the Palestinians.

Germany may have fewer parties at the negotiating table, but with the Social Democrats only narrowly beating Merkel's center-right bloc on Sunday, the leaders of both are laying claim to leading the next government.

This much is clear: Whether Scholz or Armin Laschet of Merkel's party succeeds the veteran German Chancellor, they will likely have to enlist the support of the environmentalist Greens and the business-friendly Free Democrats — parties that traditionally belong to rival ideological camps.

The Netherlands and Belgium, with their history of post-election coalition building, have found ways of running their countries without a fully functioning government. In The Hague, Rutte's outgoing four-party administration has been in caretaker mode since the March 17 election, taking only essential decisions and making no major policy changes beyond what has been necessary to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

The same is true for Germany, where Merkel's government will remain in office while talks continue to forge a new coalition, and that could take some time. After all, the previous German election was on Sept. 24, 2017, but it was March 14, 2018, before the Bundestag elected Merkel for her fourth term.

Associated Press writers Lorne Cook in Brussels and Josef Federman in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Far-right cryptocurrency follows ideology across borders

By ERIKA KINETZ and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The Daily Stormer website advocates for the purity of the white race, posts hate-filled, conspiratorial screeds against Blacks, Jews and women and has helped inspire at least three racially motivated murders. It has also made its founder, Andrew Anglin, a millionaire.

Anglin has tapped a worldwide network of supporters to take in at least 112 Bitcoin since January 2017 — worth \$4.8 million at today's exchange rate — according to data shared with The Associated Press. He's likely raised even more.

Anglin is just one very public example of how radical right provocateurs are raising significant amounts of money from around the world through cryptocurrencies. Banned by traditional financial institutions, they have taken refuge in digital currencies, which they are using in ever more secretive ways to avoid the oversight of banks, regulators and courts, finds an AP analysis of legal documents, Telegram channels and blockchain data from Chainalysis, a cryptocurrency analytics firm.

Anglin owes more than \$18 million in legal judgments in the United States to people whom he and his followers harassed and threatened. And while online, he remains visible — most days, dozens of stories on the Daily Stormer homepage carry his name — in the real world, Anglin's a ghost.

His victims have tried — and failed — to find him, searching at one Ohio address after another. Voting records place him in Russia in 2016 and his passport shows he was in Cambodia in 2017. After that, the public trail goes cold. He has no obvious bank accounts or real estate holdings in the U.S. For now, his Bitcoin fortune remains out of reach.

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.

Beth Littrell, a lawyer for the Southern Poverty Law Center who is helping represent one of Anglin's victims, says it's grown harder to use the legal system to stamp out hate groups because now they operate with online networks and virtual money. "We were able to sue the Ku Klux Klan, a terrorist organization, in essence out of existence," she said. Doing the same today is much harder, she said. "The law is evolving

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but lagging behind the harm.”

CURRENCY OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

In August 2017, a week after the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Anglin received 14.88 Bitcoins, an amount chosen for its oblique references to a 14-word white supremacist slogan and the phrase “Heil Hitler” because H is the eighth letter of the alphabet. Worth around \$60,000 at the time, it was his biggest Bitcoin donation ever and would be valued at over \$641,000 at today’s exchange rate. The source of the funds remains a mystery. Anglin now faces charges in U.S. court for conspiring to plan and promote the deadly march.

By the time of Charlottesville, Anglin had been cut off by credit card processors and banned by PayPal so Bitcoin was his main source of funding. In his “Retard’s Guide to Using Bitcoin,” published in April 2020, he claimed to have funded the Daily Stormer exclusively through Bitcoin for four years.

“I’ve got money now. I’ve got money to pay for the site for the foreseeable future,” he wrote in December 2020, as Bitcoin’s price surged.

Anglin’s former lawyer, Marc Randazza, argued that political censorship by financial authorities drove Anglin to cryptocurrency by shutting him out of traditional banking, which he said is “more Nazi-like than Andrew Anglin could ever hope to be.”

“Don’t create a black market and then be surprised there’s a black market,” Randazza added.

While Anglin likely turned to Bitcoin for practical reasons, part of the appeal of cryptocurrency to the radical right is ideological.

Bitcoin was developed in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis when distrust of the global financial system was running high. It offers an alternative that doesn’t depend on banks. Instead, transactions are validated and recorded on a decentralized digital ledger called the blockchain, which derives its authority from crowdsourcing rather than a class of elite bankers.

As one white nationalist cryptocurrency guide circulating on Telegram puts it: “We all know the Jews and their minions control the global financial system. When you are caught having the wrong opinion, they will take it upon themselves to shut you out of this system making your life very difficult. One alternative to this system is cryptocurrency.”

Richard Spencer, an American white supremacist, has dubbed Bitcoin the “currency of the alt-right.”

It’s hard to tell how large a role cryptocurrency plays in overall financing for the far right. Merchandise sales, membership fees, donations in fiat currencies, concerts, fight clubs and other events, as well as criminal activity, are also common sources of revenue, government and academic research has shown.

What is clear is that early adopters of Bitcoin, like Anglin, have profited handsomely from its increase in value over the years. Bitcoin prices are notoriously volatile. Since April, the currency has shed a third of its value against the U.S. dollar, then took a further drubbing last week when China declared cryptocurrency transactions illegal.

Chainalysis collected data for a sample of 12 far-right entities in the U.S. and Europe that publicly called for Bitcoin donations and showed significant activity. Together, they took in 213 Bitcoin — worth more than \$9 million at today’s value — between January 2017 and April 2021.

These groups embrace a range of ideologies and include white nationalists, white supremacists, neo-Nazis and self-described free-speech advocates. They are united by a shared desire to fight the perceived progressive takeover of culture and the state.

“These people have real assets. People with access to hundreds of thousands of dollars can start doing real damage,” said John Bambenek, a cybersecurity expert who has been tracking the use of cryptocurrency by far-right actors since 2017.

Andrew “Weev” Auernheimer, Anglin’s webmaster for the Daily Stormer, has raked in Bitcoin worth \$2.2 million at today’s values. The Nordic Resistance Movement, a Scandinavian neo-Nazi movement that’s been banned in Finland, Counter-Currents, a U.S.-based white nationalist publishing house, and the recently banned French group Génération Identitaire have each received Bitcoin that’s now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, Chainalysis data shows.

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Two social media platforms that have been embraced by the far right, Gab and Bitchute, received a surge in Bitcoin funding in the lead up to the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection. Since 2017, Bitchute has gotten Bitcoin worth nearly \$500,000 at today's values, about a fifth of which rolled in during the month of December 2020. Gab has gotten more than \$173,000; nearly 40% came in during December 2020 and January 2021, Chainalysis data shows. On Aug. 1, Gab announced it was stepping up its fight against "financial censorship" and creating its own alternative to PayPal to "fight against the tyranny of the global elites."

PRIVACY COIN

While cryptocurrencies have a reputation for secrecy, Bitcoin was built for transparency. Every transaction is indelibly — and publicly — recorded on the blockchain, which enables companies like Chainalysis to monitor activity. Individuals can obscure their identities by not publicly linking them to their cryptocurrency accounts, but with Bitcoin they cannot hide the transactions themselves.

Because of that public footprint, Anglin in November 2020 — just as Donald Trump lost the U.S. presidential election — abandoned Bitcoin and asked his supporters to send him money only in Monero, a "privacy coin" designed to enhance anonymity by hiding data about users and transactions. He published a new guide in February 2021 on how to use Monero, which included instructions for non-U.S. donors.

"Every Bitcoin transfer is visible publicly. Generally, your name is not attached to the address in a direct way, but spies from the various 'woke' anti-freedom organizations have unlimited resources to try to link these transactions to real names. With Monero, the transactions are all hidden." Anglin wrote.

Monero, Anglin advised, "is really easy. Most importantly, it is safe."

Others have reached the same conclusion.

Thomas Sewell, an Australian neo-Nazi currently facing charges, is soliciting donations in Monero for his legal defense fund. Jaz Searby, a martial arts instructor who headed an Australian chapter of the Proud Boys, is seeking donations — Monero only — to help "spread our message to a generation of young Aryan men that may feel alone or fail to understand the forces that are working against us." The Nordic Resistance Movement and Counter-Currents also solicit donations in other cryptocurrencies, including Monero, and NRM has experimented with letting supporters mine Monero directly on their behalf.

"Do you really think how we operate our economy is any of your business?" Martin Saxlind, the editor of NRM's magazine, Nordfront, asked AP in an email. "Swedish banks have abused their control of the economy to deny us and others regular banking accounts for political reasons. That's why we use cryptocurrency ... you should investigate the corrupt banks instead of doing what I assume is some retarded hit piece on white dissidents."

The Global Minority Initiative, which describes itself as a "prison relief charity" for American white nationalists also takes donations only in Monero or by postal money order. And France's Democratie Participative, a racist, anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQ website that was banned by French courts in 2018, also solicits donations in Monero only, warning supporters not to contribute via a mainstream cryptocurrency exchange.

"Money is the sinew of war," the site says on its fundraising page. "Thanks to your support we can continue to prevent Jews and their allies from sleeping soundly."

The AP reached out to all the groups and individuals named in this article. Most did not reply to requests for comment. A few were unreachable. Others replied anonymously, sending anti-Semitic and pornographic content. One email, for example, read: "Stay the f--- out of our crypto you demonic k--- ... DIE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

GOING GLOBAL

Shortly before his suicide, in December 2020, a French computer programmer named Laurent Bachelier sent 28.15 Bitcoins — then worth over \$520,000 — to 22 far-right entities. The bulk went to Nick Fuentes, an American white nationalist influencer who would spend the coming weeks encouraging his tens of thousands of followers to lay siege to the U.S. Capitol. One bitcoin went to a Daily Stormer account.

"I care about what happens after my death," Bachelier wrote in his suicide note. "That's why I decided to leave my modest wealth to certain causes and people. I think and hope that they will make a better use of it."

Since getting Bachelier's money, Fuentes has ramped up recruiting for his America First livestream and

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expanded the reach of his political nonprofit, the America First Foundation, which says in corporate registration documents it advocates for “conservative values based on principles of American Nationalism, Christianity, and Traditionalism.”

The transactions only became public because of a tip to a journalist at Yahoo News and the fact that Bachelier happened to leave digital traces that linked his Bitcoin address with his email. The money trail offered clear evidence that domestic extremism isn't purely domestic and showed how wealthy donors can use cryptocurrency to fund extremists around the world with little scrutiny.

Bachelier's money slipped quietly into the U.S., not triggering alerts it might have had it landed via traditional banking channels. That's because much of it — notably the Bitcoin donation to Fuentes, then worth \$250,000 — passed through accounts that were not hosted by regulated cryptocurrency exchanges, according to Chainalysis.

Those exchanges, which can convert Bitcoin into U.S. dollars and other currencies, are generally regulated like banks, allowing authorities to get access to information or funds.

But cryptocurrency wallets can also be “unhosted,” which means that users themselves control access. Unhosted wallets — like Fuentes' — are akin to cash. They don't have to go through banks or exchanges that could flag suspicious transactions, verify a user's identity or hand over money to satisfy a court judgment.

Financial regulators around the world are waking up to the threat. The Financial Action Task Force, a Paris-based multilateral organization that sets global guidelines to protect against money laundering and terrorism financing, in June released its first report on far-right fundraising, which highlighted the groups' use of cryptocurrencies and warned that transnational links among such actors are growing. The FATF also said there is a dearth of information about both cross-border fundraising and the scale of cryptocurrency use.

“Similar to their jihadist counterparts, many of these groups have used the internet and social media to share propaganda and recruit ideologically-aligned supporters from around the world. They also may be looking to forge financial links,” the report said. “This trend has posed a challenge for law enforcement or security services which are used to combating ERWT (extreme right-wing terrorism) as a domestic threat with few transnational links.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic sealed borders, white nationalists continued to gather in virtual communities that allowed them to connect with people from around the world.

On Telegram, posts tagged with different flags stream together: There's a burly “White Boys Club” in Kyiv, a group of “nationalists” in Minnesota and a cluster of men with pixelated faces in Greece, each posing around “White Lives Matter” banners. Images of people stomping on or burning colorful LGBTQ buttons and flags roll in from Poland, Slovakia, Russia, Croatia. Men with skull masks and rifles pose after tactical training in the woods in Poland. A person with a fascist flag stands in the rain in France, and a man draped with a swastika banner looks out from a high hill somewhere in the woods of America.

“The transnational links make people feel they are part of a much larger community, they can inspire each other and network,” said Marilyn Mayo, a senior research fellow at the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

They can also raise money.

Blockchain data shows that Andrew Anglin's donors are part of a global community of believers who sent money to entities in multiple countries. Donors to Anglin since 2017 have also given Bitcoin to 32 other far-right groups and people in at least five different countries, according to Chainalysis data.

The data also shows that money flowed into the sample of 12 far-right groups from cryptocurrency exchanges that serve customers all over the world, with Western and Eastern European-focused exchanges playing a growing role. Chainalysis uses web traffic data and economic activity patterns to estimate where the customers that use a given exchange are located.

European groups like the Nordic Resistance Movement and Génération Identitaire also received donations from North America-focused exchanges. Similarly, U.S. entities like American Renaissance, Daily Stormer and WeAreChange got money via exchanges that serve customers in Western and Eastern Europe.

Kimberly Grauer, Director of Research at Chainalysis, said the shift to using global exchanges “certainly

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could be in order to obfuscate detection, but it could also be a sign that increasingly donations are coming in from all over the world.”

VIRTUAL JUSTICE

While Andrew Anglin remains physically hidden and his money remains virtually untouchable, his debt grows. Each day that ticks by, he owes Tanya Gersh, a Jewish real estate agent in Montana, another \$760.88, interest on a \$14 million court judgment he has failed to pay.

After Gersh got in a dispute with the mother of white supremacist Richard Spencer in 2016, Anglin published her contact information and used his website to whip up an army of trolls against her.

She received death threats, threats against her as a Jew and threats against her child. Sometimes she'd pick up the phone and hear a gunshot. Gersh's hair started falling out. She had panic attacks, sought trauma counseling and seriously considered fleeing.

The balm for all that came in 2019, when a federal court made clear that targeted anti-Semitic hate speech is not protected by the First Amendment. But since that fleeting moment of victory, nothing has happened. Gersh has yet to see a penny of her \$14 million.

She is not the only one.

Anglin also owes Muslim comedian Dean Obeidallah \$4 million, and he's supposed to pay Taylor Dumpson, the first Black student body president of American University, \$725,000 — all the results of civil litigation in U.S. courts over libel, invasion of privacy, inflicting emotional distress and intimidation on the Daily Stormer.

Last September, Gersh's legal team sent requests to six Ohio addresses and four emails demanding that he disclose his assets. Four were returned as undeliverable, one was refused. He didn't respond to the rest. The court then ordered Anglin to hand over information about his finances, but the April 1 deadline for that came and went. Her lawyers moved to hold him in contempt of court, which could lead to his arrest.

Anglin's Bitcoin is his most visible asset. Gersh's lawyers can see Anglin's virtual fortune but so far they haven't been able to touch it. He also keeps his cryptocurrency in unhosted wallets, according to Chainalysis, complicating collection efforts.

Meanwhile, Gersh is running up legal bills at a rate of \$980 an hour.

“The problem with an unhosted wallet is what is your pain point?” said Amanda Wick, who served as a senior policy adviser for the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network and as a federal prosecutor before joining Chainalysis as chief of legal affairs. “The only thing we have is civil contempt or criminal conviction. If someone is willing to sit in jail and the money is theirs on the other side because no one can access it, that's a problem.”

The hunt for Anglin — and his pain point — continues. He may not be in the United States, but he is out there somewhere, Littrell said, and he's not untouchable.

“He will be held accountable,” she said. “We will get his cryptocurrency.”

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

North Korea launches missile as diplomat decries US policy

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired a short-range missile into the sea Tuesday at nearly the same moment its U.N. diplomat was decriing the U.S.'s “hostile policy” against it, in an apparent return to its pattern of mixing weapons displays with peace overtures to wrest outside concessions.

The launch, its third round of weapons firings this month, came only three days after North Korea repeated its offer for conditional talks with South Korea. Some experts say the latest missile launch was likely meant to test how South Korea would respond as North Korea needs Seoul to persuade Washington to ease economic sanctions and make other concessions.

In an emergency National Security Council meeting, the South Korean government expressed regret over what it called “a short-range missile launch” by the North. South Korea's military earlier said the object fired from North Korea's mountainous northern Jagang province flew toward the waters off the North's

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eastern coast. Further details of the launch were being analyzed.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launch didn't pose an immediate threat but highlighted "the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program." Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said North Korea fired "what could be a ballistic missile" and that his government stepped up its vigilance and surveillance.

A ballistic missile launch would violate a U.N. Security Council ban on North Korean ballistic activities, but the council typically doesn't impose new sanctions on North Korea for launches of short-range weapons.

The launch came after Kim Yo Jong, the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, reached out to Seoul twice on Friday and Saturday, saying her country was open to resuming talks and reconciliatory steps if conditions are met. She criticized Seoul for calling Pyongyang's previous missile tests a provocation and demanded it abandon "unfair double-dealing standards" and "hostile policies."

Her overture followed the North's two previous rounds of missile launches this month — the first one with a newly developed cruise missile and the other with a ballistic missile fired from a train, a new launch platform. Those launches demonstrated North Korea's ability to attack targets in South Korea and Japan, both key U.S. allies where a total of 80,000 American troops are stationed.

Tuesday's launch "was like testing the South Korean government to see if it would impose a double standard and call it a provocation," said analyst Shin Beomchul with the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. He said North Korea's status as a nuclear state would be solidified if South Korea and others fail to respond strongly.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said North Korea may have tested a new missile such as a hypersonic glide vehicle that was among an array of high-tech weapons Kim Jong Un has vowed to procure.

South Korea has called Kim Yo Jong's openness to talks "meaningful" but urged North Korea to restore communication channels before any talks between the rivals can be arranged.

The inter-Korean communication lines have remained largely dormant for about 15 months, so restoring them could be a yardstick to assess how serious the North is about its offer. Seoul's Unification Ministry said Tuesday North Korea remains unresponsive to South Korea's attempts to exchange messages over the channels.

At nearly the same time as Tuesday's launch, North Korean Ambassador Kim Song used his speech on the last day of the U.N. General Assembly's annual high-level meeting to justify his country's development of a "war deterrent" to defend itself against U.S. threats.

"The possible outbreak of a new war on the Korean Peninsula is contained not because of the U.S.'s mercy on the DPRK, it is because our state is growing a reliable deterrent that can control the hostile forces in an attempted military invasion," Kim said. DPRK refers to Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name.

Kim Yo Jong's offer of conditional talks was a response to South Korean President Moon Jae-in's renewed calls for a political declaration to end the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula in a technical state of war.

The three-year conflict pitted South Korea and U.S.-led U.N. forces against North Korea and China and killed 1 million to 2 million people. In his own speech at the U.N. last week, Moon proposed the end-of-the-war declaration be signed among the two Koreas, the U.S. and China.

After the North's launch Tuesday, Moon ordered officials to examine its latest weapons firing and previous outreach in a comprehensive manner before formulating countermeasures, according to Moon's office.

A U.S.-led diplomatic effort aimed at convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons in return for economic and political benefits has been stalled 2½ years. U.S. officials have repeatedly expressed hopes for further talks but have also made it clear the long-term sanctions imposed on North Korea will stay in place until the North takes concrete steps toward denuclearization.

While North Korea has tested short-range weapons and vowed to continue building its nuclear arsenal, Kim Jong Un has maintained a moratorium on testing longer-range weapons capable of reaching the

American homeland, an indication he wants to keep the chances for future diplomacy with the U.S. alive.

Associated Press writers Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

'The Big Delete:' Inside Facebook's crackdown in Germany

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Days before Germany's federal elections, Facebook took what it called an unprecedented step: the removal of a series of accounts that worked together to spread COVID-19 misinformation and encourage violent responses to COVID restrictions.

The crackdown, announced Sept. 16, was the first use of Facebook's new "coordinated social harm" policy aimed at stopping not state-sponsored disinformation campaigns but otherwise typical users who have mounted an increasingly sophisticated effort to sidestep rules on hate speech or misinformation.

In the case of the German network, the nearly 150 accounts, pages and groups were linked to the so-called Querdenken movement, a loose coalition that has protested lockdown measures in Germany and includes vaccine and mask opponents, conspiracy theorists and some far-right extremists.

Facebook touted the move as an innovative response to potentially harmful content; far-right commenters condemned it as censorship. But a review of the content that was removed — as well as the many more Querdenken posts that are still available — reveals Facebook's action to be modest at best. At worst, critics say, it could have been a ploy to counter complaints that it doesn't do enough to stop harmful content.

"This action appears rather to be motivated by Facebook's desire to demonstrate action to policymakers in the days before an election, not a comprehensive effort to serve the public," concluded researchers at Reset, a U.K.-based nonprofit that has criticized social media's role in democratic discourse.

Facebook regularly updates journalists about accounts it removes under policies banning "coordinated inauthentic behavior," a term it created in 2018 to describe groups or people who work together to mislead others. Since then, it has removed thousands of accounts, mostly what it said were bad actors attempting to interfere in elections and politics in countries around the world.

But there were constraints, since not all harmful behavior on Facebook is "inauthentic"; there are plenty of perfectly authentic groups using social media to incite violence, spread misinformation and hate. So the company was limited by its policy on what it could take down.

But even with the new rule, a problem remains with the takedowns: they don't make it clear what harmful material remains up on Facebook, making it difficult to determine just what the social network is accomplishing.

Case in point: the Querdenken network. Reset had already been monitoring the accounts removed by Facebook and issued a report that concluded only a small portion of content relating to Querdenken was taken down while many similar posts were allowed to stay up.

The dangers of COVID-19 extremism were underscored days after Facebook's announcement when a young German gas station worker was fatally shot by a man who had refused to wear a mask. The suspect followed several far-right users on Twitter and had expressed negative views about immigrants and the government.

Facebook initially declined to provide examples of the Querdenken content it removed, but ultimately released four posts to the Associated Press that weren't dissimilar to content still available on Facebook. They included a post falsely stating that vaccines create new viral variants and another that wished death on police that broke up violent protests against COVID restrictions.

Reset's analysis of comments removed by Facebook found that many were actually written by people trying to rebut Querdenken arguments, and did not include misinformation.

Facebook defended its action, saying the account removals were never meant to be a blanket ban of Querdenken, but instead a carefully measured response to users who were working together to violate its rules and spread harmful content.

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Facebook plans to refine and expand its use of the new policy going forward, according to David Agranovich, Facebook's director of global threat disruption.

"This is a start," he told The AP on Monday. "This is us extending our network disruptions model to address new and emerging threats."

The approach seeks to strike a balance, Agranovich said, between permitting diverse views and preventing harmful content to spread.

The new policy could represent a significant change in the platform's ability to confront harmful speech, according to Cliff Lampe, a professor of information at the University of Michigan who studies social media.

"In the past they've tried to squash cockroaches, but there are always more," he said. "You can spend all day stomping your feet and you won't get anywhere. Going after networks is a smart try."

While the removal of the Querdenken network may have been justified, it should raise questions about Facebook's role in democratic debates, said Simon Hegelich, a political scientist at the Technical University of Munich.

Hegelich said Facebook appears to be using Germany as a "test case" for the new policy.

"Facebook is really intervening in German politics," Hegelich said. "The COVID situation is one of the biggest issues in the election. They're probably right that there's a lot of misinformation on these sites, but nevertheless it's a highly political issue, and Facebook is intervening in it."

Members of the Querdenken movement reacted angrily to Facebook's decision, but many also expressed a lack of surprise.

"The big delete continues," one supporter posted in a still-active Querdenken Facebook group, "See you on the street."

—
Klepper reported from Providence, R.I. Associated Press writer Barbara Ortutay contributed to this report from Oakland, California.

Reparations draw UN scrutiny, but those who'd pay say little

By SALLY HO Associated Press

More than a year after Black Lives Matter protests launched a worldwide reckoning about the centuries of racism that Black people continue to face, the question of reparations emerged — unevenly — as a high-profile issue at this year's largest gathering of world leaders.

At the U.N. General Assembly, African and Caribbean countries that stand to benefit from reparations were backed by other nations, though those most responsible for slavery and colonialism said little about what they might owe to African descendants.

Leaders from Africa (South Africa and Cameroon) to the Caribbean (Saint Kitts & Nevis and Saint Lucia) were joined by representatives of countries that are unlikely to be tapped to pay up — Cuba and Malaysia among them — in explicitly endorsing the creation of reparation systems.

Those missing from the renewed global conversation on the topic, though, were noteworthy as well: the United States, Britain and Germany, wealthy and developed nations built from conquests of varying kinds.

"Caribbean countries like ours, which were exploited and underdeveloped to finance the development of Europe, have put forward a case for reparations for slavery and native genocide, and we expect that case to be treated with the seriousness and urgency it deserves," said Philip J. Pierre, prime minister of Saint Lucia. "There should be no double standards in the international system in recognizing, acknowledging and compensating victims of crimes against humanity."

A look at who is and isn't talking about the issue this past week is a sign that while the movement supporting literal payback to the African continent and the forced diaspora that ravaged it is growing, the substantive engagement of major powers — however apologetic — is limited.

U.S. President Joe Biden, for example, made no mention of it in his address, though the White House earlier this year said it supported studying reparations for Black Americans. And the office of its U.N. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who is African American, wouldn't comment on the recent reparations

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discussions.

Monetary atonement for America's history of slavery is a seminal question in the world's attempt to reconcile with what South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called "one of the darkest periods in the history of humankind, and a crime of unparalleled barbarity."

"Its legacy persists in the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, and in Africa itself," Ramaphosa said at a meeting on reparations during the General Assembly. "Millions of the descendants of Africans who were sold into slavery remain trapped in lives of underdevelopment, disadvantage, discrimination and poverty."

Slavery in what became the United States began more than 400 years ago with slaves forcibly transported by ship from Africa. The debate about reparations has been ongoing ever since slavery was abolished in 1865.

In recent years, the issue has languished in Congress for more than three decades, though reparations have gained traction in a smattering of cities and local governments as the country continues to grapple with fallout from the death of George Floyd in 2020.

Carla Ferstman, an international law expert who studies reparations as a professor at the University of Essex, said the U.N. talks this session mark a significant milestone for the global reparations movement that has been brewing for 20 years.

What remains to be seen is how it unfolds between individual nations — and how transformative the results are. While each reparations program would specifically be between the perpetrators and the victims' descendants, the conversation to rectify wrongs in history has now become universal.

"It's universal," Ferstman said, "because inequity is universal."

Valued reparations to address harm could come in the form of direct financial payments for individuals, developmental aid for countries, the return of colonized land, treasured artifacts and cultural items, systemic corrections of policies and laws that may still oppress, and the kind of full-throated apologies and acknowledgements that wipe aside certain historical figures that were once celebrated as national heroes.

"People perceive their harms in very different ways — this perception of how the wrongs happened and how they manifested in terms of later generations," Ferstman said. "One needs to be sensitive to what is important and how to best rectify."

The latest discussions on reparations came as the U.N. commemorated an important but contentious 2001 anti-racism conference in South Africa that resulted in what is known as the Durban Declaration.

A new resolution adopted at the commemoration meeting last Wednesday acknowledged some progress but deplored what it called a rise in discrimination, violence and intolerance directed at people of African heritage and many other groups — from the Roma to refugees, the young to the old, people with disabilities to displaced people.

There was even a discussion devoted to reparations, though it didn't go unnoticed during that talk that last week's new declaration stopped short of demanding nations must pay reparations to those their government harmed.

It said only that there should be a way for descendants to seek "just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered." That was despite the U.N. Human Rights Council's explicit recommendation for reparations in a major milestone report in June.

"While reparations could not compensate or right all the wrongs that had been done against the people of African descent, they could go a long way in addressing systemic racism that still lingers in the society today, in bringing about a level playing field to realize their true potentials," Syed Mohamad Hasrin Aidid, head of Malaysia's U.N. mission, said at Wednesday's meeting.

The United States, Britain and Germany were among the dozens of countries that didn't attend the Durban commemoration last week because of persisting grievances about the conference 20 years ago, when the U.S. boycotted it over references to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. U.N. officials for Britain and Germany didn't immediately respond for requests to comment.

But Germany's president, in his General Assembly address, also didn't mention reparations, though his

is one of the few countries that have directed money to make up for its colonial-era actions.

Early this year, Germany officially recognized the massacre of tens of thousands of people in Namibia as genocide and agreed to provide 1.1 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) for projects that are expected to stretch over 30 years to help the communities affected. That announcement pointedly did not label Germany's initiative as formal reparations.

Sally Ho, based in Seattle, is a member of The Associated Press' Race & Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at http://twitter.com/_sallyho

Two Europes: Low vaccine rates in east overwhelm ICUs

By STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — In a packed intensive care unit for coronavirus patients in Romania's capital, Bucharest, 55-year-old Adrian Pica sits on his bed receiving supplementary oxygen to help him breathe. "I didn't want to get vaccinated because I was afraid," he said.

Around 72% of adults in the 27-nation European Union have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, but a stubbornly low uptake of the shots in some eastern EU nations now risks overwhelming hospitals amid a surge of infections due to the more contagious delta variant.

"Until now I didn't believe in COVID-19," Pica, who said his early symptoms left him sweating and feeling suffocated, told The Associated Press. "I thought it was just like the flu. But now I'm sick and hospitalized. I want to get a vaccine."

Bulgaria and Romania are lagging dramatically behind as the EU's two least-vaccinated nations, with just 22% and 33% of their adult populations fully inoculated. Rapidly increasing new infections have forced authorities to tighten virus restrictions in the two countries, while other EU nations such as France, Spain, Denmark and Portugal have all exceeded 80% vaccine coverage and eased restrictions.

Stella Kyriakides, the EU's health commissioner, said the "worrying gap" on vaccinations needs urgently addressing. Slovakia, Croatia and Latvia have vaccinated around 50% of all their adults. But jab uptake in many Central and Eastern European countries has remained weak or declined.

In Norway, which has vaccinated around 70%, authorities on Saturday scrapped restrictions that Prime Minister Erna Solberg called "the strictest measures in peacetime." Nordic neighbor Denmark lifted virus restrictions on Sept. 10, while the U.K. has also abandoned most pandemic restrictions due to high vaccine rates.

In contrast, at Bucharest's Marius Nasta Institute of Pneumology, the ICU's chief doctor, Genoveva Cadar, says its beds are now at 100% capacity and around 98% of all its virus patients are unvaccinated.

"In comparison to previous waves, people are arriving with more severe forms" of the disease, she said, adding that many patients in this latest surge are younger than in previous ones. "Very quickly they end up intubated — and the prognosis is extremely bleak."

Daily new coronavirus infections in Romania, a country of 19 million, have grown exponentially over the last month, while vaccine uptake has declined to worrying lows. Government data shows that 91.5% of COVID-19 deaths in Romania between Sept. 18-23 were people who had not been vaccinated.

On Sunday, 1,220 of Romania's 1,239 ICU beds for virus patients were occupied. In many cases, only death was freeing up ICU beds. At the Marius Nasta Institute, a mobile ICU that stands on hospital grounds opened on Monday, and is already full with patients.

"I don't know how we're going to get over the next period, but we're definitely going to be here," hospital manager Beatrice Mahler told the AP. "We're going to do everything we can (but) we don't have a winning recipe."

Vlad Mixich, a Romanian public health specialist, told the AP that a "historic distrust of authorities" together with what he said was a very weak government vaccination campaign has contributed to the low vaccine uptake among his compatriots.

"During the vaccination campaign, unfortunately the politicians were the main communicators," he said,

adding that a frequent turnover in the country's health ministers has had a massive impact on efforts to inoculate Romanians.

In neighboring Bulgaria, an alarming 23% of people said they do not want to get vaccinated, compared with only 9% across the bloc, according to a Eurobarometer survey.

Sabila Marinova, the ICU manager at a hospital in Bulgaria's northern town of Veliko Tarnovo, says none of its COVID-19 patients is vaccinated.

"We are very exhausted," she said. "It seems that this horror has no end."

The vice president of Romania's national vaccination committee, Andrei Baciuc, said that fake news has been a key factor in keeping people from getting jabbed.

"There is and was a culture that promotes fake news. We are working with a team of specialists to combat (it) ... right now there is a high number of (infections) due to low vaccination rates," he said, adding that the government is looking to increase ICU capacity.

Sometimes medical workers in Eastern Europe face additional risks. In September in Bulgaria's port city of Varna, a group opposed to vaccines attacked a medical team at a mobile vaccination station. Health Minister Stoycho Katsarov condemned the attack, saying "we will not allow our medics to be insulted, publicly harassed and humiliated" for trying to save lives.

The implementation of vaccine passports, which allow people to show their vaccine status to carry out day-to-day activities, may be one of few options left for European governments at a loss on how to encourage their vaccine-hesitant citizens to get jabbed.

Experts say vaccine skeptics in parts of Europe could hamper the entire continent's efforts to end the pandemic.

Back at the Marius Nasta Institute, Nicoleta Birtea, a 63-year-old unvaccinated COVID-19 patient who had previous health issues, says she woke up a month ago feeling dizzy and ill and called for an ambulance.

"I hope that I got here on time," she said, adding "I understand very clearly that the vaccine can't protect you."

Follow all AP stories on the global pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

Japan's next PM must work quickly on virus, economy, China

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The stakes are high as Japanese governing party members vote Wednesday for four candidates seeking to replace Yoshihide Suga as prime minister. The next leader must address a pandemic-battered economy, a newly empowered military operating in a dangerous neighborhood, crucial ties with an inward-focused ally, Washington, and tense security standoffs with an emboldened China and its ally North Korea.

For the long-governing Liberal Democratic Party that often chooses its leaders in backroom negotiations, this election promises to be wide open. Because of the party's control of parliament, its leader will become prime minister.

Whoever wins, the party desperately needs new ideas to quickly turn around plunging public support ahead of lower house elections coming within two months, observers say.

Unusually, two women — conservative Sanae Takaichi and more liberal Seiko Noda — are competing against front-running Taro Kono, the vaccinations minister, and former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida.

Takaichi, with the crucial backing of Suga's predecessor, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose conservative vision and revisionist stance she supports, has risen fast, while Noda's chances are fading.

Abe's backing of Takaichi may be an attempt to improve the party's sexist image and divert votes from Kono, considered something of a maverick and a reformist, political watchers say.

Little change is expected in key diplomatic and security policies under the new leader, said Yu Uchiyama, a political science professor at the University of Tokyo.

All of the candidates support close Japan-U.S. security ties and partnerships with other like-minded

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democracies in Asia and Europe, in part as a way to counter China's growing influence.

Kono and Kishida are former top diplomats. They and Noda have stressed the need for dialogue with China as an important neighbor and trade partner. All four candidates support maintaining close "practical ties" with Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as its own, and its intention of joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade bloc and other international organizations.

At a series of policy debates, the four candidates discussed diplomacy, the economy, energy and defense issues, but also gender equality and sexual diversity, which the male-dominated conservative party has rarely discussed in the past.

Inclusion of gender and diversity signals that the party knows it cannot keep neglecting the issues, said Ryosuke Nishida, a sociology and public policy professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

Takaichi alone opposes changing a law that forces married couples to use only one surname — almost always the husband's. She also has vowed to make official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, which honors World War II dead, including war criminals, and is considered by many in China and the Koreas as proof of Japan's lack of remorse over its wartime actions.

The other candidates are likely to refrain from visiting Yasukuni because of the fallout in relations with China and South Korea.

Support for Suga's government nosedived over his handling of the coronavirus and his insistence on hosting the Tokyo Olympics during the pandemic. Part of his loss of support has also been linked by analysts to the party's sense of complacency and increasingly high-handed approach forged during Abe's long years of leadership.

Wednesday's vote is seen as a test of whether the party can move out of Abe's shadow. His influence in government and party affairs has largely muzzled diverse views and steadily shifted the party to the right, experts say.

"What's at stake is the state of democracy in Japan, and if or how the new leader is willing to listen to the people's voices and take them into political consideration," Uchiyama said. "Prime Minister Suga obviously had a problem with communicating with the people and did not provide accountability."

Unlike the previous vote, when Suga's selection was largely a done-deal orchestrated by party leaders, the vote on Wednesday is more unpredictable, with most factions allowing free voting by their member lawmakers, a rare move for the party.

Many general voters are watching the party vote, and governing party lawmakers in turn are paying close attention to public opinion in their quest to be re-elected in the upcoming parliamentary election.

The party vote could end an era of unusual political stability — despite corruption scandals and strained security ties with China and the Koreas — and bring a return to Japan's "revolving door" leadership by short-lived prime ministers, starting with Suga.

Suga is leaving only a year after taking office as a pinch hitter for Abe, who suddenly resigned over health problems, ending his nearly eight-year leadership, the longest in Japan's constitutional history.

Support ratings for Suga and his government have slightly recovered since his resignation announcement in early September, when virus infections also started to slow. The number of new daily cases dropped to 2,129 on Sunday, about one-tenth the level in mid-August. Japan has recorded about 1.69 million cases and 17,500 deaths.

Much of the sharp drop in cases is attributed to vaccination progress; about 56% of the country has now been fully vaccinated.

The government is expected to lift a monthslong coronavirus state of emergency on Sept. 30, and people look forward to returning to their daily lives. Opposition parties, meanwhile, have not been able to position themselves as vehicles for viable change.

"Many people tend to react to issues that directly affect their daily lives but pay little attention to political views and issues like national security," Nishida said. "Once the infections slow, virus fears will fade quickly and even the Olympics will be remembered favorably."

Dubai to find out if pandemic-delayed Expo 2020 will pay off

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A computer-graphic-soaked advertisement featuring Australian actor and Hollywood heartthrob Chris Hemsworth beckons the world to Dubai's upcoming Expo 2020, promising a "world of pure imagination" as children without facemasks race across a futuristic carnival scene.

Reality, however, crashes into the frame in all capital-letters caption at the bottom of the screen, saying: "THIS COMMERCIAL WAS FILMED IN 2019."

Delayed a year over the coronavirus pandemic, Dubai's Expo 2020 opens on Friday, pushing this city-state all-in on its bet of billions of dollars that the world's fair will boost its economy. The sheikhdom built what feels like an entire city out of what once were rolling sand dunes on its southern edges to support the fair, an outpost that largely will be disassembled after the six-month event ends in March.

But questions about the Expo's drawing power in the modern era began even before the pandemic. It will be one of the world's first global events, following an Olympics this summer that divided host nation Japan and took place without spectators. Though Dubai has thrown open its doors to tourists from around the world and has not required vaccinations, it remains unclear how many guests will be coming to this extravaganza.

For some, Expo 2020 has become a \$7-billion metaphor for the United Arab Emirates — a futuristic site to draw the world's well-to-do, built by low-paid foreign workers, to fête a federation of sheikhdoms where speech and assembly remains strictly controlled.

Expo 2020 declined to make any official available to speak to The Associated Press prior to the opening. The organizers also did not respond to a series of questions by the AP about the event, instead emailing back a brief statement.

"We have built an innovative, people-first community that meets the demands of a new world economy, supported by the latest advances in technology and human-centric design," the statement said.

Modern wonders are what makes the expos shine since their creation in the 1850s. Paris unveiled its Eiffel Tower at the 1889 fair. Chicago became the "White City" in 1893 as electric lights bathed its world's fair site, which also boasted the first Ferris wheel. Telephones, television broadcasts and X-rays also wowed crowds.

In recent decades, however, many expos have not received the same attention — or at least not the positive kind. The 1984 world's fair in New Orleans went bankrupt and required a government bailout. Expo 2000 in Germany drew 18 million visitors, well short of the 40 million expected. Milan's 2015 Expo saw rioting over corruption allegations.

Dubai, which won the rights to host the Expo in the years after FIFA awarded Qatar the 2022 World Cup, will be the Arab world's first. It had banked on the Expo providing a needed boost to its economy after its real estate market crashed during the Great Recession.

Auditors EY estimated in 2019 that Dubai would spend \$7 billion alone on construction projects for the Expo. Relying on a projection of 25 million visitors, EY estimated a \$6 billion boost during the event. EY told the AP it hadn't updated any of its 2019 figures for the Expo.

But that was before the coronavirus pandemic forced Dubai's long-haul carrier Emirates to ground its fleet of jumbo jets as lockdowns and quarantines seized the world. While the airline is restarting more flights and hiring thousands of cabin crew members, worldwide travel is still ailing.

The UAE, which has grown closer to China in recent years, likely counted on Chinese visitors to the Expo. Shanghai's 2010 Expo saw over 73 million visitors, a record. But betting on China seems out at the moment as those returning to the country face weeks of quarantines and testing that can include anal swabs.

In recent weeks, Expo officials have begun referring to an expected "25 million visits" to the site, including those watching events online.

"It's become 'How do we do the biggest, the best Expo to the world's ever seen in the Middle East' to 'How do we put on an Expo for a very different world?'" said Robert C. Mogielnicki, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "Getting to 25 million visitors under the current

circumstances seems like a pretty difficult target to meet.”

The Emirates also planned splashy announcements around the Expo, perhaps none bigger than its diplomatic recognition of Israel. After delaying the Expo, the UAE last year went ahead with the recognition anyway.

But the event has also become entangled in politics.

Activists raised concerns over workers’ rights issues, as low-wage laborers from South Asia have long faced abuse in the Emirates and across the rest of the oil-rich Arab states, working long hours in intense heat and humidity. In October 2019, an Expo official acknowledged two workers had been killed on the site, and there had been 43 other “serious incidents” resulting in injuries.

It also remains unclear how many laborers fell ill from the coronavirus. In an abrupt change, Expo officials also in recent days announced visitors will be required to prove they were vaccinated or take a coronavirus test before entry. That’s even as the UAE has one of the world’s top per-capita vaccination rates.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament this month urged nations not to take part in the Expo, citing human rights abuses, the jailing of activists and the autocratic government’s use of spyware to target critics.

“There is systematic persecution of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and teachers speaking up on political and human rights issues in the UAE,” the European Parliament said.

While the Emirati Foreign Ministry described the parliament’s statement as “factually incorrect,” even Expo press staff repeatedly tried to force visiting journalists to sign forms that imply they could face criminal prosecution for not following their instructions on site.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.

Where women took shelter from abuse, Taliban now in control

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — When the Taliban seized power, the operator of the only women’s shelter in a northern Afghan city ran away. Left abandoned were 20 women who had fled a variety of domestic horrors, some abused by husbands or family, others forced into early marriages with older men.

Soon after, the Taliban arrived at the shelter in the city of Pul-e-Kumri.

They gave the women two options: Return to their abusive families — some of whom had threatened them with death for leaving — or go with the Taliban, recalled one of the women, Salima, who asked only that her first name be used.

Most of the women chose to return home, fearing the Taliban more than their families. Salima said she knew of at least one who was since killed, likely by an angry family member.

But Salima decided to leave with the Taliban. She didn’t know what they would do, but she had nowhere else to go, having fled her abusive, drug-addicted husband months earlier. Now she finds herself housed in a prison — but protected and safe, she says.

Whether under Taliban rule or not, women in Afghanistan’s deeply conservative and often tribal society are often subject to archaic codes of behavior that hold them responsible for the honor of their families. They can be killed for simply marrying a man of their choice. They are often married at puberty. Fleeing even an abusive husband is considered shameful. Hundreds of women are jailed for so-called “morality crimes,” including adultery or running away from home, even though they are not officially crimes under the Afghan penal code.

Over the past two decades, activists set up dozens of women’s shelters around Afghanistan. But even before the Taliban takeover, conservative Afghans, including government officials, viewed them with suspicion, as places that help women and girls defy their families or abet “moral crimes.”

Women’s shelters are just one of a myriad of social changes that became more prevalent in the past 20 years or didn’t even exist when the Taliban last took power in 1996 — everything from social media and the internet to businesswomen and women judges. Now since overrunning Kabul and sweeping into power on Aug. 15, the hard-line militant group is wrestling with how to deal with the changes, with the Taliban leadership at times uncertain and fighters on the ground acting on their own.

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Salima was taken to Kabul, along with another woman, Razia, who had lived in the shelter nearly a year after fleeing a predatory brother-in-law.

With nowhere to put them, the Taliban put them in the abandoned women's section of Afghanistan's main prison, called Pul-e-Charkhi. The prison was empty because when the Taliban took over Kabul, they freed all the inmates, including thousands of men, 760 women and more than 100 children, according to the prison's new Taliban administrator, Mullah Abdullah Akhund.

The Associated Press was given rare access to the women in the prison. Now there are only six women there, including Salima and Razia.

A massive steel gate leads to the women's prison. Rolls of barbed wire are strung atop the 20-foot-high walls. Inside, the women move freely with their children. Salima's 5-year-old daughter Maria and son Mohammad, 6, spend most of their day in a main, large, carpeted room. There is no school and just a giant red teddy bear and a few small toys for their amusement.

"We mostly pray and read the Quran all day," said Salima.

Salima said that she has no idea what the future holds, but for the present, with no money and no family, she said she feels safe here.

But Mujdha, another woman in the prison, said she wants her freedom. She had been pregnant by a boyfriend but her family refused to let her marry him, and instead forced her to marry a relative. She ran away. "I told them I would never stay with him" she said. The family reported her to the Taliban, who arrested her and her boyfriend.

Mujdha gave birth in prison to a baby daughter 15 days ago, soon after her arrest. She hasn't seen her boyfriend, jailed elsewhere in the prison, and he has yet to meet his infant daughter.

"I want to leave, but they say I can't," she said.

Akhund said a court will decide whether to charge her, adding, "It is wrong that she left her husband. She has no right."

Since taking power, the Taliban's response to women's shelters has varied. In the western city of Herat, several have been shut down, said Suraya Pakzad, a women's rights activist from Herat who opened several shelters.

Pakzad said Friday in text messages from a place in hiding that she faces threats from all sides — from the Taliban and from the families of the women who found refuge in her shelters.

For the past several years, Pakzad and other women pressed for a voice in the negotiations between the U.S.-backed government of the time and the advancing Taliban. They hoped to ensure rights for women in any final arrangement. Now, in one fell swoop, they are scrambling for their own safety.

Pakzad shared an arrest warrant for her and seven other activists and journalists from western Afghanistan, issued by the new Taliban police chief in Herat. The warrant accuses the eight of "spreading propaganda against the Islamic Emirate" and accuses Pakzad of "involvement with Western countries to spread prostitution."

But Mahboba Suraj, who runs a shelter for 30 women in Kabul, said the Taliban have come and investigated the shelter and let the women remain there unharmed. She said she was visited by various departments of the new Taliban government, including senior officials.

"The higher ups were absolutely the best. They want to protect us ... and understand that they have problems within their own people" who may not be as supportive of women's shelters, she said.

For now, "they want to have protection for us," she said. "Thank God, I do believe that. I honestly do."

In Murdaugh family scandal, tiny South Carolina town shaken

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

HAMPTON, S.C. (AP) — Ask any of the 2,600 residents in this South Carolina town whether they know Alex Murdaugh, and you'll probably get a quick nod. Nearly everyone does in Hampton, a tiny place where every road in has just two lanes.

Ask them to tell you about Murdaugh, though, and you'll get a firm head shake, followed by: "You're not going to quote me, are you?" No one wants to talk about the influential lawyer whose wife and son were

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killed and who's now accused in a string of controversies — at least, not in the open.

For the past century, the Murdaughs have steered much of the legal world in this remote corner of South Carolina — north of Savannah, Georgia, and far from the interstate or just about anything else. Running the prosecutor's office and a large civil law firm allowed the Murdaughs to do it quietly, until recently.

Murdaugh's wife, Maggie, and son Paul were killed June 7, shot multiple times at the family's sprawling estate. No one's been arrested in their deaths, which brought scrutiny into every nook of Murdaugh's life.

Six investigations are underway, over the killings, stolen money, death coverups and a Sept. 4 shooting in which a bullet grazed Murdaugh's head on a lonely highway. Police said he tried to arrange his own death and make sure a \$10 million life insurance policy would pay off for his surviving son.

The man charged with shooting Murdaugh is Curtis "Eddie" Smith, a former client from a workplace accident case. Smith said they became friends, and he was stunned to find himself dismissed as a callous drug dealer by Murdaugh's lawyers.

"With a friend like that, who needs enemies," Smith said as he limped around his property in Walterboro, checking on his shop and rescue dogs. He wouldn't say anymore, insisting he was done discussing Murdaugh and the case — for now.

Like many people in town, Smith got entangled with the Murdaughs in a courtroom in Hampton County, population 20,000, where the family is used to being in power, not being questioned.

If you stole something or had something stolen from you, the Murdaughs ran your case for the state. Alex Murdaugh's father, grandfather and great-grandfather were the elected prosecutors for 87 years straight.

If you got hurt on the job, the Murdaughs took you on as a client. The family founded a law firm a century ago. It now employs several dozen lawyers, and its brick headquarters takes up a whole city block. There's no sign out front; everyone knows it's the Murdaughs' firm.

And if you had a charity or other cause, the Murdaughs donated. The family has given millions to all sorts of projects. Alex Murdaugh's father was grand marshal of the parade of the town's marquee Watermelon Festival several years ago.

But plenty of people tell hushed stories of what happened if the Murdaughs were crossed.

Connor Cook said that in 2019, he knew his friend Paul Murdaugh was intoxicated when he drove a boat that crashed, killing a 19-year-old passenger. But the Murdaughs tried to pin him as the driver, Cook said, according to a wrongful death lawsuit.

In a deposition, Cook said he feared the family: "Just anything they get in, they get out of. I've always been told that."

The night of the crash, Alex Murdaugh and his father visited the hospital. Murdaugh scrutinized a board where staff kept track of patients and tried to talk to everyone who'd been on the boat, nurses told investigators.

The crash bought the kind of attention the Murdaughs always tried — and for decades, succeeded — to avoid. It took months to charge Paul Murdaugh with boating under the influence causing death, the local newspaper noted. Many around town wondered whether the family was wielding their sizeable influence.

Paul Murdaugh was awaiting trial when he died. Now, state police are investigating whether the Murdaughs obstructed that investigation. They're also looking into the 2018 death of family housekeeper Gloria Satterfield.

She died after falling in the Murdaughs' home, but the death wasn't reported to the coroner. Documents appear to show Murdaugh's insurance paid more than \$4 million in wrongful-death claims. But a lawyer for Satterfield's sons said they haven't seen a dime since agreeing to use an attorney who was Murdaugh's college buddy to handle the legal work and another banker friend as estate executor.

The documents have signatures purported to be from judges, but some were never entered into publicly searchable court records. Others don't appear to have followed state rules for settlements.

Despite long staying out of headlines, the Murdaughs aren't strangers to their own legal troubles. Alex Murdaugh's great-grandfather, Randolph, founded the family law firm and in 1920 became the elected prosecutor for the five-county region that includes Hampton County. Randolph Murdaugh died when his

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car was hit by a train as he headed home from a poker game in 1940.

His son, Randolph "Buster" Murdaugh Jr., took over the law firm and prosecutor position; he served for 46 years, with the exception of several months awaiting federal trial over tipping off a local moonshiner to move his still. Eighteen of 23 defendants were found guilty.

But "Buster" was acquitted and returned to office — even as the judge noted that, if he were Murdaugh, he "could not go back and face his people much less resume public office," according to federal records.

"Buster" was larger than life in court, admonished more than once by the state Supreme Court for improper arguments — telling juries he wouldn't try another death penalty case or would release rapists awaiting trials if verdicts didn't go his way.

Randolph Murdaugh III followed his father, taking over in 1986 and serving almost 20 years. Neither of his sons followed him into the solicitor's chair, although Alex Murdaugh worked as a volunteer prosecutor before his law license was suspended in September as he was fired from the family's PMPED law firm over millions of dollars turning up missing.

In civil law, the Murdaughs were known for suing railroads. A now-repealed South Carolina law allowed anyone who wanted to sue a railroad to choose any state county. The Murdaughs found sympathetic juries and made Hampton County known for seven-figure verdicts.

The PMPED firm has dozens of lawyers and practices in all of South Carolina's 46 counties. Its website lists 14 cases with awards of more than \$1 million — railroad companies that didn't cut vegetation at crossings, a cancer patient hurt by chemotherapy, a 9-year-old burned by a SUV's gas tank.

Alex Murdaugh's brother, Randolph Murdaugh IV, still works at the firm. He didn't answer an email asking about his family.

The law firm issued a statement saying many of their lawyers grew up in the area and are closely involved in their communities and churches. The firm said no one they have spoken to knew that Alex Murdaugh was addicted to drugs and no employees were involved in his "scheme."

"He lied and he stole from us," the PMPED statement said.

Alex Murdaugh, 53, remains in an out-of-state rehab facility awaiting trial on charges of insurance fraud and filing a false police report.

Through his lawyer, Murdaugh adamantly denied having anything to do with the deaths of wife Maggie, 52, and son Paul, 22. When Murdaugh found their bodies, he'd just returned from visiting his terminally ill father, his brothers said on "Good Morning America."

While people around Hampton remain careful in speaking about the Murdaughs, hints about their influence pop up. An addendum at the top of the wrongful death lawsuit over the housekeeper's death includes these lines, in all capital letters.

"THE PLAINTIFFS ARE VICTIMS. THE PLAINTIFFS ARE VULNERABLE. THE PLAINTIFFS ARE SCARED."

Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP>.

In R. Kelly verdict, Black women see long-overdue justice

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, decades even, allegations swirled that R&B superstar R. Kelly was abusing young women and girls, with seeming impunity.

They were mostly young Black women. And Black girls.

And that, say accusers and others who have called for him to face accountability, is part of what took the wheels of the criminal justice system so long to turn, finally leading to his conviction Monday in his sex trafficking trial. That it did at all, they say, is also due to the efforts of Black women, unwilling to be forgotten.

Speaking out against sexual assault and violence is fraught for anyone who attempts it. Those who work in the field say the hurdles facing Black women and girls are raised even higher by a society that hypersexualizes them from a young age, stereotyping them as promiscuous and judging their physiques, and in

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a country with a history of racism and sexism that has long denied their autonomy over their own bodies. "Black women have been in this country for a long time and ... our bodies were never ours to begin with," said Kalimah Johnson, executive director of the SASHA Center in Detroit, which provides services to sexual assault survivors.

"No one allows us to be something worthy of protection," she said. "A human that needs love, and sacredness." It's as if, she said, "there's nothing sacred about a Black woman's body."

In a 2017 study from the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, adults were asked about their perceptions of Black girls in comparison with white girls of the same age in terms of their needs for nurturing and protection, as well as their knowledge of adult topics like sex.

At all ages, Black girls were perceived as more adult than white girls, needing less protection and knowing more about sex. The gap was widest between Black and white for girls between the ages of 10 and 14, followed by girls between the ages of 5 and 9.

"We don't value Black girls, and they are dehumanized, and they are also blamed for the sexual violence that they experienced to a greater extent than white girls are," said Rebecca Epstein, executive director of the center and one of the study's authors.

For years, girls suffering at R. Kelly's hands were treated as more of a punchline than a travesty, even during a trial on child pornography charges where a video, allegedly of him abusing a girl, was shown. He was acquitted in 2008.

Music writer Jim DeRogatis couldn't understand it. He and a colleague were the first to report on R. Kelly's interactions with girls, in December 2000, and DeRogatis continued writing about it for years after.

Every time something came out, like the video, DeRogatis thought, that had to be it — that had to be the thing that would finally make a difference. And every time, it wasn't.

It brought a realization home to DeRogatis, a middle-aged white man: the injustice that "nobody matters less in our society than young Black girls."

And the girls and women he interviewed knew it, he said. The first thing he heard from the dozens he has interviewed, he said, was, "Who's going to believe us? We're Black girls."

And so, R. Kelly continued on for years, making hit songs, performing with other artists, even at times calling himself the "Pied Piper" but professing he didn't know the story about the musician who kidnapped a town's children.

Those who welcomed Monday's conviction, which came after several weeks of disturbing testimony and now carries the possibility that Kelly will spend decades in prison, said it's a testament to the strength and perseverance of Black women, who have been the driving force, especially in recent years, of speaking out against him and demanding attention remain on him.

Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement against sexual abuse, pointed to the #MuteRKelly campaign, a protest started by two Black women in Atlanta in 2017 to put pressure on radio stations to stop playing his music and venues to stop allowing him to perform.

And the most widespread public condemnation followed in the wake of the 2019 docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly," executive produced by dream hampton, a Black woman.

"I think it says that you have to believe in the power of your own community, because this would not have happened if not for Black women staying the course," Burke said. "It was Black women who decided, 'We are not going to let this fall on deaf ears.' It was Black women who decided, 'If nobody else is going to care, we're going to care for Black women and girls in our community.'"

Associated Press journalist Gary Hamilton contributed to this report. Hajela is a member of the AP's team covering race and ethnicity. She's on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/dhajela>.

Prescott, Cowboys beat Eagles in 1st home game since injury

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Pro Football Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Dak Prescott ran toward the tunnel, raising his arms to the fans and tossing

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them souvenirs after the Dallas Cowboys manhandled the Philadelphia Eagles in prime time.

The scene was a stark contrast to almost a year earlier, when the star quarterback was in tears as he rode on a cart through the same spot after the gruesome ankle injury that ended his season.

Prescott threw for three touchdowns in his first home game since the injury, Trevon Diggs returned an interception 59 yards for a score and the Cowboys beat the Eagles 41-21 on Monday night.

"Just thankful for everything that I've been through, all of the hard work that made me account for just to be back out here doing what I love," Prescott said. "It's the greatest place to play football."

Ezekiel Elliott ran for a season-high 95 yards and two touchdowns, and tight end Dalton Schultz had the first two-TD game of his career.

Except for a fumble in the end zone that gave the Eagles (1-2) their first touchdown, Prescott was efficient, going 21 of 26 for 238 yards without an interception in the first NFC East game for both teams.

Prescott's first game at AT&T Stadium since the season-ending compound fracture and dislocation of his right ankle in Week 5 last year against the New York Giants was also the return to full capacity after the pandemic-imposed limits last season. There were 93,267 fans inside with the retractable roof open at the \$1.2 billion facility.

"A guy like Dak, he's going to be psyched regardless," Elliott said. "There's not any extra he can get besides just the competitor he is, the player he is."

The Cowboys (2-1) had a 19-1 edge in first downs late in the first half, but the Eagles were down just 20-7 at the break. After Javon Hargrave forced Prescott's fumble and caught the ball for the score, the Eagles stuffed the QB on a fourth-down sneak at the other end.

Diggs stepped in front of a pass from Hurts to the sideline on the third play of the second half and ran untouched for his first career TD while becoming the first Dallas player with a pick in each of the first three games since Everson Walls in 1985.

Diggs and Cincinnati's Logan Wilson share the NFL lead with three interceptions.

Hurts had completions of 41 yards to Quez Watkins, 38 yards to tight end Dallas Goedert and 27 yards to tight end Zach Ertz while finishing 25 of 39 for 326 yards with two TDs and two interceptions. Plenty of the Texas native's passing yards, and the second TD, came with the game out of reach.

"I didn't do a good enough job of leading," Hurts said. "I didn't do a good enough of running our offense, doing the things I need to do. This one's on me."

Prescott's 19-yard touchdown pass to Schultz put the Cowboys ahead for good at 14-7 late in the first quarter, and a 2-yarder to Cedrick Wilson on fourth down essentially put the game away at 34-14 early in the fourth.

Any doubt was erased when rookies Micah Parsons and Osa Odighizuwa shared a sack of Hurts on a desperation try on fourth-and-9 midway through the fourth quarter. Odighizuwa had his first career sack in the first half, dropping Hurts for an 11-yard loss.

Schultz, who led Dallas with 80 yards receiving, scored again on a 22-yarder in the fourth quarter.

Tony Pollard added 60 yards rushing on 11 carries as the Cowboys finished with 160 yards on the ground against the NFL's No. 2 run defense.

"They had a good game plan to run the ball, we were second and 4, second and 3," Eagles defensive tackle Fletcher Cox said. "One thing we're known for is stopping the run. We couldn't get off the field."

HALL OF FAME RINGS

Jimmy Johnson, who coached the Cowboys to a pair of Super Bowl titles in the 1990s, made a rare appearance on their home field when he was presented his Pro Football Hall of Fame ring at halftime along with safety Cliff Harris and receiver Drew Pearson. All three were inducted this summer.

Johnson started his speech by thanking owner Jerry Jones and ended it with the famous line he first shouted after an NFC championship game win over San Francisco during the 1992 season: "How 'bout them Cowboys!" Johnson and Jones split acrimoniously after another Super Bowl title to finish the 1993 season. The two hugged before Jones put the ring on Johnson.

INJURIES

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Eagles: LG Isaac Seumalo was taken off on a cart after injuring his right foot in the fourth quarter. The Eagles were already without LT Jordan Mailata (knee) and RG Brandon Brooks (chest strain). S K'Von Wallace injured his left shoulder in the first quarter trying to tackle Elliott and didn't return.

UP NEXT

Eagles: Defending AFC champion Kansas City visits Sunday with the Chiefs coming off consecutive losses for the first time since October 2019.

Cowboys: Carolina visits Sunday with the Panthers seeking their first 4-0 start since the 2015 season, when they started 14-0 and lost to Denver in the Super Bowl.

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

Pentagon leaders to face Congress on Afghan pullout decision

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In their first public testimony since the U.S. completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, top Pentagon leaders will face sharp questions in Congress about the chaotic pullout and the Taliban's rapid takeover of the country.

Republicans in particular have intensified their attacks on President Joe Biden's decision to pull all troops out of Afghanistan by Aug. 30, saying it left the U.S. more vulnerable to terrorism. They are demanding more details on the suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 13 American service members in the final days of the withdrawal.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, are slated to testify Tuesday in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee and then on Wednesday before the House Armed Services Committee. Gen. Frank McKenzie, who as head of Central Command oversaw the withdrawal, will testify as well.

The Senate committee's ranking Republican, James Inhofe of Oklahoma, has peppered the Pentagon with a lengthy list of questions about multiple aspects of the withdrawal, including the suicide bombing on Aug. 26 at Kabul's international airport that killed 169 Afghans in addition to the American service members. He also is demanding information about decision-making over the summer as it became apparent that the Taliban were overwhelming U.S.-backed Afghan forces.

"We need a full accounting of every factor and decision that led us to where we are today and a real plan for defending America moving forward," Inhofe wrote last week.

The withdrawal ended the longest war in U.S. history. The Biden administration, and some Democrats in Congress, have argued that former President Donald Trump bears some of the blame for the war ending in a Taliban victory, since his administration signed a deal with the Taliban in 2020 that promised a full American withdrawal by May 2021. They also have pointed to a yearslong U.S. failure to build an Afghan military that could stand up to the Taliban.

"This is not a Democratic or a Republican problem. These failures have been manifesting over four presidential administrations of both political parties," Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., said the day after the Taliban took over Kabul on Aug. 15.

Although Tuesday's hearing was scheduled to focus on Afghanistan, other topics will likely come up, including Milley's actions during the final months of Trump's presidency.

Some in Congress have accused Milley of disloyalty for what the book "Peril," by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, reported as assurances to a Chinese general that the U.S. had no plan to attack China, and that if it did, Milley would warn him in advance. In the days following news accounts of the book's reporting, Milley declined to comment in detail, instead telling reporters that he would lay out his answers directly to Congress. His only comments have been that the calls with the Chinese were routine and within the duties and responsibilities of his job.

Both Milley and Austin have defended the U.S. military's execution of an Afghanistan withdrawal that Biden ordered in April. The pullout was largely completed by early July, but several hundred troops were

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kept in Kabul, along with some defensive equipment, to protect a U.S. diplomatic presence in the capital. The State Department initially said the diplomats would remain after the military withdrawal was completed by Aug. 31, but when the Afghan forces collapsed and President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, leaving the Taliban in charge, a frantic evacuation began.

The Pentagon has defended its execution of an airlift from Kabul airport that transported more than 120,000 people, while acknowledging that it got off to a chaotic start and was under near-constant threat of terrorist attack.

"The Biden administration's avalanche of incompetence has damaged our international reputation and humiliated the United States on the world stage," Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks of Iowa, both Republicans, wrote in the Des Moines Register. "Yet, our president and secretary of state continue to pretend that the withdrawal from Afghanistan was a historic success."

Cotton and others have questioned the viability of U.S. plans to contain al-Qaida and the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate by using intelligence-collection assets and attack planes based outside of Afghanistan.

GOP blocks bill to keep government going; new try ahead

By LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican senators blocked a bill to keep the government operating and allow federal borrowing, but Democrats aiming to avert a shutdown pledged to try again — at the same time pressing ahead on President Joe Biden's big plans to reshape government.

The efforts are not necessarily linked, but the fiscal yearend deadline to fund the government past Thursday is bumping up against the Democrats' desire to make progress on Biden's expansive \$3.5 trillion federal overhaul.

It's all making for a tumultuous moment for Biden and his party, with consequences certain to shape his presidency and the lawmakers' own political futures.

Success would mean a landmark accomplishment, if Democrats can helm Biden's big bill to passage. Failure — or a highly unlikely government shutdown and debt crisis — could derail careers.

"You know me, I'm a born optimist," Biden told reporters Monday, as he rolled up his sleeve for a COVID-19 booster shot. "We're gonna get it done."

Monday's 50-48 vote against taking up the bill fell well short of the 60 needed to proceed over a GOP filibuster. Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer switched his vote to "no," a procedural step to allow him to bring the measure back for consideration, which he said would happen this week.

With days to go, Democrats said they will try again before Thursday's deadline to pass a bill funding government operations past the Sept. 30 fiscal yearend, stripping out the debate over the debt limit for another day, closer to a separate October deadline.

Meanwhile, the real action is unfolding behind the scenes over the \$3.5 trillion measure, with Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress seeking a once-in-a-generation reworking of the nation's balance sheets.

From free pre-kindergarten and child care subsidies for families with small children to dental care and hearing aids for seniors with Medicare, there's a lot in the president's proposal — all to be paid for with higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy.

With Republicans solidly opposed, Democrats are rushing to trim the total and win holdouts within their own party.

"We just have to make difficult choices," Speaker Nancy Pelosi told House Democrats during an evening caucus meeting, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the private session.

As the overall price tag comes down, Pelosi said the president is "working on that piece," referring to talks underway with the Senate. Despite the rush to amass votes, Pelosi said the House Democrats would not move ahead on a bill until it is acceptable to their colleagues in the Senate. "We're not there yet," she said.

Exiting the caucus meeting, Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., the chairman of the Way & Means Committee, said as momentum builds toward Thursday, he was expecting a new total amount: "Let's pop the number."

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Building on a separate \$1 trillion bipartisan public works package that's already cleared the Senate and is heading for a House vote, also Thursday, Biden is seeking major spending for health care, education and efforts to tackle climate change. The total price tag, he contends, is actually "zero" — covered by the expected increase in tax revenue.

He is personally calling fellow Democrats in Congress an effort to resolve differences and bring his sweeping domestic policy vision forward.

Ticking off the weighty list of goals along with meeting the other deadlines, Biden said, "If we do that, the country's going to be in great shape."

Biden, Pelosi and Schumer conferred in the afternoon on the path forward and will "continue their close coordination over the coming days," the White House said in a readout of the call.

But Republicans say it's real spending that can't be afforded, and a reflection of the Democrats' drive to insert government into people's lives.

And so far, the bill is also too big for key Democrats whose votes are needed in the face of the GOP opposition. Two Democratic holdouts, Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have said they won't support a bill of that size. Manchin has previously proposed spending of \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion.

Progressive lawmakers said they've already compromised enough with more centrist Democrats, but in one potential development, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, confirmed she and Sinema have been in talks.

With all Republicans opposed, Democratic leaders can't spare a single vote in the 50-50 Senate, relying on Vice President Kamala Harris to break a tie to pass the eventual package.

All this comes as other deadlines swirl this week to pay for government operations and allow more borrowing or risk a devastating federal shutdown or debt default — though those dire scenarios appear unlikely.

The bill Senate Republicans rejected Monday night would have funded government operations temporarily, to early December, while also providing emergency funds for Hurricane Ida and other disaster relief and for Afghan refugees.

Republican leader Mitch McConnell rejected that approach because Democrats also included a provision to suspend the debt limit, which would allow continued borrowing to pay off the nation's bills.

Once a routine matter, raising the debt limit is now a political weapon of choice wielded by Republicans to attack Democrats — even though both parties have been responsible for piling on debt.

"The Democrats will do the responsible thing — the right thing, the thing that has been done for decades by both parties — and vote yes," said Schumer ahead of the vote.

He called the Republican opposition "unhinged."

McConnell has said he wants to fund the government and prevent a devastating debt default, but wants to force Democrats to split the package in two and take the politically uncomfortable debt ceiling vote on their own.

"Republicans are not rooting for a shutdown or a debt limit breach," he said.

The House began debating the public works bill late Monday, and while it won bipartisan support in the Senate, House Republican leaders are wary of supporting it. Donald Trump, the former president who tried and failed to secure an infrastructure deal when he was in the White House, is rallying opposition to it.

As Pelosi huddled privately Monday with House Democrats, it was clear she is pressing ahead to move as swiftly as possible on Biden's broader package.

Biden's proposal is to be paid for by increasing the corporate tax rate, from 21% to 26.5% on businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and raising the top rate on individuals from 37% to 39.6% for those earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

While Democrats are largely in agreement on Biden's vision — many ran their campaigns on the long-standing party priorities — stubborn disputes remain, including how to push toward cleaner energy or to lower prescription drug costs.

—

Associated Press writers Hope Yen, Alan Fram and Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

After 5 years, Obamas to break ground on Presidential Center

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — After five years of legal battles, gentrification concerns and a federal review, Barack and Michelle Obama were expected to attend a celebratory groundbreaking Tuesday on their legacy project in a lakefront Chicago park.

Construction on the site along Lake Michigan, near the Obama family home and where the former president started his political career on Chicago's South Side, officially began last month. Work on the Obama Presidential Center is expected to take about five years.

The Obamas were scheduled to host an event, which will be streamed online to limit crowds amid the coronavirus pandemic, with Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker.

"With your help, we can make this center a catalyst for economic opportunity, a new world-class destination on the South Side and a platform for young people to drive change," Obama said in a video announcement ahead of the groundbreaking.

The presidential center, which will sit on 19 acres of the 540-acre Jackson Park, will be unique among presidential libraries.

Obama's presidential papers will be available in digital form. The sprawling campus center will include a museum, public library branch, athletic center, test kitchen and children's play area.

The initial cost the center was projected at \$500 million, but documents released by the Obama Foundation last month showed it is now roughly \$830 million. Funds are being raised through private donations.

Progress on the center has been delayed by lawsuits and a federal review required because of the location of Jackson Park, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. At the same time, fears about displacing Black residents in the area developed into a yearslong battle resulting in city-approved neighborhood protections, including for affordable housing.

Obama chose Chicago over several cities including Honolulu, where he spent his early years. The former president has said he hopes the center will help jumpstart the economic engine of the city's South Side.

It's a part of the city that has special significance for the Obamas. The center is near the University of Chicago where Obama taught law and where the Obamas got married and raised their two daughters. Michelle Obama also grew up on the South Side.

"When it came time to plan the Obama Presidential Center, we wanted to give something back to the place that gave us so much," Michelle Obama said in a video announcement.

Follow Tareen on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sophiatareen>.

Taliban issue no-shave order to barbers in Afghan province

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban banned barbershops in a southern Afghanistan province from shaving or trimming beards, claiming their edict is in line with Shariah, or Islamic, law.

The order in Helmand province was issued Monday by the provincial Taliban government's vice and virtue department to barbers in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital.

"Since I have heard (about the ban on trimming beards) I am heart broken," said Bilal Ahmad, a Lashkar Gah resident. "This is the city and everyone follows a way of living, so they have to be left alone to do whatever they want."

During their previous rule of Afghanistan, the Taliban adhered to a harsh interpretation of Islam. Since overrunning Kabul on Aug. 15 and again taking control of the country, the world has been watching to see whether they will re-create their strict governance of the late 1990s.

Some indication came on Saturday, when Taliban fighters killed four alleged kidnappers and later hung their bodies in the public squares of the western city of Herat.

"If anyone violates the rule (they) will be punished and no one has a right to complain," said the order

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issued to the barbers. It wasn't immediately clear what penalties the barbers could face if they don't adhere to the no shaving or trimming rule.

During the Taliban's previous rule, the conservative Islamists demanded that men grow beards. Since being ousted from power following the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, many men have opted for no or cleanly trimmed beards.

Barbershop owner Jalaluddin, who like many Afghans goes by only one name, said he hoped the Taliban would reconsider their demands.

"I request our Taliban brothers to give freedom to people to live the way they want, if they want to trim their beard or hair," he said. "Now we have few clients coming to us, they are scared, they don't want to trim their hair or beards, so I request them let people free, so we have our business and people can freely come to us."

Another barbershop owner, Sher Afzal, also said the decree hurts the bottom line. "If someone comes for a haircut, they will come back to us after 40 to 45 days, so it is affecting our business like any other businesses," he said.

GOP blocks bill to keep government going; new try ahead

By LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican senators blocked a bill Monday night to keep the government operating and allow federal borrowing, but Democrats aiming to avert a shutdown pledged to try again — at the same time pressing ahead on President Joe Biden's big plans to reshape government.

The efforts are not necessarily linked, but the fiscal yearend deadline to fund the government past Thursday is bumping up against the Democrats' desire to make progress on Biden's expansive \$3.5 trillion federal overhaul.

It's all making for a tumultuous moment for Biden and his party, with consequences certain to shape his presidency and the lawmakers' own political futures.

Success would mean a landmark accomplishment, if Democrats can helm Biden's big bill to passage. Failure — or a highly unlikely government shutdown and debt crisis — could derail careers.

"You know me, I'm a born optimist," Biden told reporters Monday, as he rolled up his sleeve for a COVID-19 booster shot. "We're gonna get it done."

Monday's 50-48 vote against taking up the bill fell well short of the 60 needed to proceed over a GOP filibuster. Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer switched his vote to "no," a procedural step to allow him to bring the measure back for consideration, which he said would happen this week.

With days to go, Democrats said they will try again before Thursday's deadline to pass a bill funding government operations past the Sept. 30 fiscal yearend, stripping out the debate over the debt limit for another day, closer to a separate October deadline.

Meanwhile, the real action is unfolding behind the scenes over the \$3.5 trillion measure, with Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress seeking a once-in-a-generation reworking of the nation's balance sheets.

From free pre-kindergarten and child care subsidies for families with small children to dental care and hearing aids for seniors with Medicare, there's a lot in the president's proposal — all to be paid for with higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy.

With Republicans solidly opposed, Democrats are rushing to trim the total and win holdouts within their own party.

"We just have to make difficult choices," Speaker Nancy Pelosi told House Democrats during an evening caucus meeting, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the private session.

As the overall price tag comes down, Pelosi said the president is "working on that piece," referring to talks underway with the Senate. Despite the rush to amass votes, Pelosi said the House Democrats would not move ahead on a bill until it is acceptable to their colleagues in the Senate. "We're not there yet," she said.

Exiting the caucus meeting, Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., the chairman of the Way & Means Committee, said as momentum builds toward Thursday, he was expecting a new total amount: "Let's pop the number."

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Building on a separate \$1 trillion bipartisan public works package that's already cleared the Senate and is heading for a House vote, also Thursday, Biden is seeking major spending for health care, education and efforts to tackle climate change. The total price tag, he contends, is actually "zero" — covered by the expected increase in tax revenue.

He is personally calling fellow Democrats in Congress an effort to resolve differences and bring his sweeping domestic policy vision forward.

Ticking off the weighty list of goals along with meeting the other deadlines, Biden said, "If we do that, the country's going to be in great shape."

Biden, Pelosi and Schumer conferred in the afternoon on the path forward and will "continue their close coordination over the coming days," the White House said in a readout of the call.

But Republicans say it's real spending that can't be afforded, and a reflection of the Democrats' drive to insert government into people's lives.

And so far, the bill is also too big for key Democrats whose votes are needed in the face of the GOP opposition. Two Democratic holdouts, Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have said they won't support a bill of that size. Manchin has previously proposed spending of \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion.

Progressive lawmakers said they've already compromised enough with more centrist Democrats, but in one potential development, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, confirmed she and Sinema have been in talks.

With all Republicans opposed, Democratic leaders can't spare a single vote in the 50-50 Senate, relying on Vice President Kamala Harris to break a tie to pass the eventual package.

All this comes as other deadlines swirl this week to pay for government operations and allow more borrowing or risk a devastating federal shutdown or debt default — though those dire scenarios appear unlikely.

The bill Senate Republicans rejected Monday night would have funded government operations temporarily, to early December, while also providing emergency funds for Hurricane Ida and other disaster relief and for Afghan refugees.

Republican leader Mitch McConnell rejected that approach because Democrats also included a provision to suspend the debt limit, which would allow continued borrowing to pay off the nation's bills.

Once a routine matter, raising the debt limit is now a political weapon of choice wielded by Republicans to attack Democrats — even though both parties have been responsible for piling on debt.

"The Democrats will do the responsible thing — the right thing, the thing that has been done for decades by both parties — and vote yes," said Schumer ahead of the vote.

He called the Republican opposition "unhinged."

McConnell has said he wants to fund the government and prevent a devastating debt default, but wants to force Democrats to split the package in two and take the politically uncomfortable debt ceiling vote on their own.

"Republicans are not rooting for a shutdown or a debt limit breach," he said.

The House began debating the public works bill late Monday, and while it won bipartisan support in the Senate, House Republican leaders are wary of supporting it. Donald Trump, the former president who tried and failed to secure an infrastructure deal when he was in the White House, is rallying opposition to it.

As Pelosi huddled privately Monday with House Democrats, it was clear she is pressing ahead to move as swiftly as possible on Biden's broader package.

Biden's proposal is to be paid for by increasing the corporate tax rate, from 21% to 26.5% on businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and raising the top rate on individuals from 37% to 39.6% for those earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

While Democrats are largely in agreement on Biden's vision — many ran their campaigns on the long-standing party priorities — stubborn disputes remain, including how to push toward cleaner energy or to lower prescription drug costs.

Associated Press writers Hope Yen, Alan Fram and Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Ford to add 10,800 jobs making electric vehicles, batteries

By TOM KRISHER and BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ky. (AP) — Ford and a partner company say they plan to build three major electric-vehicle battery factories and an auto assembly plant by 2025 — a dramatic investment in the future of EV technology that will create an estimated 10,800 jobs and shift the automaker's future manufacturing footprint toward the South.

The factories, to be built on sites in Kentucky and Tennessee, will make batteries for the next generation of Ford and Lincoln electric vehicles that will be produced in North America. Combined, they mark the single largest manufacturing investment the 118-year-old company has ever made and are among the largest factory outlays in the world.

Notably, the new factories will provide a vast new supply of jobs that will likely pay solid wages. Most of the new jobs will be full time, with a relatively small percentage having temporary status to fill in for vacations and absent workers.

Together with its battery partner, SK Innovation of South Korea, Ford says it will spend \$5.6 billion in rural Stanton, Tennessee, where it will build a factory to produce electric F-Series pickups. A joint venture called BlueOvalSK will construct a battery factory on the same site near Memphis, plus twin battery plants in Glendale, Kentucky, near Louisville. Ford estimated the Kentucky investment at \$5.8 billion and that the company's share of the total would be \$7 billion.

With the new spending, Ford is making a significant bet on a future that envisions most drivers eventually making the shift to battery power from internal combustion engines, which have powered vehicles in the United States for more than a century. Should that transition run into disruptions or delays, the gamble could hit the company's bottom line. Ford predicts 40% to 50% of its U.S. sales will be electric by 2030. For now, only about 1% of vehicles on America's roads are powered by electricity.

In an interview Monday, CEO Jim Farley said it would be up to the workers at the new plants to decide whether to be represented by the United Auto Workers union. That question could set up an epic battle with union leaders, who want employees of the future to join the union and earn top UAW production wages of around \$32 per hour. It represents a high-stakes test for the UAW, which will need jobs for thousands of members who will lose work in the transition away engines and transmissions for petroleum-powered vehicles.

Ford's move also could put the company at odds with President Joe Biden's quest to create "good-paying union jobs" in a new, greener economy.

Farley said it's too early to talk about pay or unionization at the new factories. He stressed that Ford will maintain a geographic manufacturing balance when the company's investments in Ohio and Michigan are included. Ford and General Motors have UAW-represented plants in Kentucky and Tennessee, states where it is common for political leaders to actively campaign against unionization.

"We love our UAW partners," Farley said. "They've been incredible on this journey of electrification so far. But it's up to the employees to decide."

Just four months ago, Ford said it would build two new battery plants in North America. But Farley said demand for the electric Mustang Mach E SUV and over 150,000 orders for the F-150 electric pickup convinced the company to increase battery output.

Farley said Ford intends to lead the world in electric vehicles, a title now held by upstart Tesla Inc., which is adding jobs at a third factory now under construction near Austin, Texas.

Ford picked the Kentucky and Tennessee sites in part because of lower electricity costs, Farley said, as well being less exposed to flooding and hurricanes than other states. Battery factories use five times the electricity of a typical assembly plant to make cells and assemble them into packs, so energy costs were a big factor, Farley said.

The company also needed huge tracts of land for the plants that weren't available in other states, Farley

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said.

Both Southern states also have skilled labor forces and are willing to train workers for the new jobs, he said.

"These jobs are very different than the jobs we've had in the past," Farley said. "We want to work with states who are really excited about doing that training and giving you access to that low energy cost."

The Tennessee Valley Authority, which serves the Memphis-area site, sells industrial electricity at a price that's lower than 93% of competitors nationwide, said CEO Jeff Lyash. Rates have stayed flat for the past decade and are planned to stay flat for the next 10 years, he said.

Combined, the three new battery plants will be able to supply enough batteries to power 1 million vehicles per year, about 129 gigawatts of power, Ford Chief Operating Officer Lisa Drake said.

Shares of Ford Motor Co., which is based in Dearborn, Michigan, rose more than 4% in extended trading after the new factories were announced late Monday.

Reaction from the union was tempered Monday, with officials seemingly optimistic about organizing the factories.

"We look forward to reaching out and helping develop this new workforce to build these world-class vehicles and battery components," union President Ray Curry said in a statement.

Kristin Dzciczek, a senior vice president at the Center for Automotive Research who follows labor issues, said the union's future depends largely on organizing the new plants.

"It's imperative that the UAW organize these if they're going to have a stake in the electrification of this industry," she said.

Union representation of the plants could become a contentious issue in the next round of national contract talks with the union in two years.

When General Motors first announced joint venture battery factories over the past few years, its executives said workers would decide on unionization. UAW officials howled in protest. In May, GM said it would support union organizing at the plants.

The Kentucky site is only about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Louisville, where Ford has plants that make SUVs and trucks now powered by internal combustion engines. Ford wouldn't comment on whether those plants eventually would make electric vehicles, but Dzciczek said converting at least one would make sense. One plant makes the Ford Escape small SUV, in the most popular segment of the U.S market, she said.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said in an interview that Ford's 5,000 jobs at the Glendale battery plants is the largest single employment announcement in state history. And he said it will also bring jobs with suppliers that make components for the plants. Earlier this month state legislators approved \$410 million worth of economic development incentives.

Beshear said Ford would get a loan of up to \$250 million to draw on through construction. It's forgivable if the company hits completion milestones. The package also includes the cost of the Glendale land, plus up to \$36 million in training incentives, he said.

Ford will formally announce the plants with ceremonies on Tuesday at both sites. In Glendale's one-block downtown on Monday evening, there were no signs of pending dramatic changes in the economy from the new jobs. All was quiet in the town where the primary businesses are antique shops and corn and soybean fields that stretch in all directions.

The Tennessee assembly plant is to be built on a site about 50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Memphis that's almost six square miles (15.5 square kilometers). Combined, the assembly plant, to be run by Ford, and the battery factory, would employ about 5,800 workers.

State officials have been trying to develop the site for years without success. Gov. Bill Lee said Tennessee offered Ford \$500 million in incentives to win a contest with 15 other states. Lee said he is confident legislators will approve the spending.

Krisher reported from Detroit. Associated Press Writer Kimberlee Kruesi contributed from Nashville, Tennessee.

China: 2 Canadians in prisoner swap freed for health reasons

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China's Foreign Ministry said Monday that two Canadians detained in late 2019 who were allowed to return to Canada in a prisoner swap were released on bail for health reasons.

A ministry spokesperson made the comment as Beijing sought to downplay the connection between their release and the return to China of a long-detained executive of Huawei Technologies.

Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig were detained in December 2019, days after Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, was arrested in Canada at the request of U.S. authorities.

Many countries labeled China's action "hostage politics," while China accused Canada of arbitrary detention. The two Canadians were jailed for more than 1,000 days.

Meng fought the U.S. demand for extradition from Canada. She landed in China on Saturday after reaching a deal with the U.S. Justice Department that led to a prisoner swap.

"The case of Meng Wanzhou is completely different from that of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in nature," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said at a daily briefing on Monday.

The two men were suspected of endangering national security, Hua said.

Spavor, an entrepreneur, had been sentenced to 11 years in prison, accused of spying. Kovrig had not yet been sentenced but was facing similar charges.

China released the two Canadians on bail after a "diagnosis by professional medical institutions, and with the guarantee of the Canadian ambassador to China," Hua said.

Hua did not answer questions from journalists about whether the prisoner releases were entirely unrelated and what the health reasons were.

Canada has maintained that Kovrig and Spavor were innocent of any charges.

"We continue to oppose the way these two citizens were treated," Canadian Foreign Minister Marc Garneau told the U.N. General Assembly meeting of world leaders Monday.

He said Spavor and Kovrig "paid a heavy price" because their country "observed the rule of law" in responding to the U.S. extradition request.

Representatives for the two countries traded retorts later Monday on the assembly floor, with China rejecting Canada's take on the affair. Canada continued to insist Kovrig and Spavor were mistreated.

Meng reached an agreement with U.S. federal prosecutors that will drop fraud charges against her next year. In return, she is accepting responsibility for misrepresenting the company's business dealings in Iran.

U.S. White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters Monday that the decision to allow Meng to return to China was an independent law enforcement matter decided by the U.S. Justice Department. She added that President Joe Biden's administration has advocated for the release of the two Canadians but stressed that the White House was not involved.

She said Biden raised concerns about the Canadians' detention when he spoke with President Xi Jinping earlier this month.

Meng's return to China was broadcast live on the country's state broadcaster, CCTV. She wore a red dress the shade of China's flag and thanked Xi and the ruling Communist Party.

On Monday, Hua, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said Meng was a victim of "political persecution" and was able to return to China thanks to the "government's unrelenting efforts."

In contrast, the release of the Canadians was reported by the state-owned tabloid Global Times, and while the news spread online, it was not carried by more authoritative state media agencies such as CCTV or Xinhua News Agency.

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.

Former President Donald Trump's 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.

Associated Press video producer Liu Zheng, and Associated Press writer Jennifer Peltz at the United Nations, contributed to this report.

California to mail every voter a ballot in future elections

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Every registered California voter will get a ballot mailed to them in future elections under a bill signed Monday by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.

The law makes permanent a change adopted during the pandemic for the 2020 election and the recent recall against Newsom. California, the nation's most populous state, joins several other Western states in mailing all voters a ballot, including Utah, Colorado, Washington and Oregon. Republicans who hold a minority in the state Legislature opposed the expansion of voting by mail.

Under the new law, ballots in California must go out at least 29 days before the election. Voters still have the option to drop off their ballot or vote in person. Prior to the pandemic, many Californians were already voting by mail.

"Voters like having options for returning their ballot whether by mail, at a secure drop box, a voting center or at a traditional polling station. And the more people who participate in elections, the stronger our democracy and the more we have assurance that elections reflect the will of the people of California," California Secretary of State Shirley Weber, a Democrat, said in a statement.

Newsom signed 10 other voting-related bills on Monday, crafting them as part of an effort to expand voting rights and access. Voting rights have become a major political flashpoint nationally. Democrat-led states are pushing legislation aimed at expanding voting access while many Republican-led states are trying to tighten it amid baseless accusations of widespread voter fraud by former President Donald Trump and other GOP leaders.

"As states across our country continue to enact undemocratic voter suppression laws, California is increasing voter access, expanding voting options and bolstering elections integrity and transparency," Newsom, a Democrat, said in a statement.

Mail-in voting put California Republicans in a tricky spot during the recent recall election against Newsom, which he handily defeated. Many Republicans didn't trust the process, leaving party leaders to both encourage their voters to cast ballots while promising they were closely monitoring claims of fraud. There has been no evidence of widespread fraud in the recall.

California Republican Party Chairwoman Jessica Millan Patterson didn't state a clear position on the bill.

"The California Republican Party is committed to ensuring elections are safe, fair and secure, giving voters the confidence they need to cast a ballot," she said in a statement.

Another proposal Newsom signed relaxes the rules around ballot signatures, giving officials more leeway to accept ballots if the signature doesn't exactly match what's on file. The legislation by Democratic Sen. Josh Becker bars election officials from taking a voter's party preference into account when evaluating their signature. Republicans in the state Legislature also opposed the bill.

In order to reject a signature, two other election officials must also determine if the signature differs in obvious ways from the signature in the person's registration record.

Other bills Newsom signed:

- Increase penalties for improper use of campaign funds.
- Ban political contributions from foreign governments or foreigners in state elections. Federal law already prohibits this, but the law gives the state's campaign regulatory body the ability to enforce it.
- Changes a new law requiring candidates for governor to submit copies of their tax returns, giving candidates more time to provide documents and fix errors. That bill also expands the distance at which campaign activities are blocked outside of polling places.

Gas blowout near Los Angeles leads to up to \$1.8B settlement

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Thousands of families sickened and forced from their Los Angeles homes after the nation's largest-known natural gas leak have reached a settlement of up to \$1.8 billion with a utility, attorneys said Monday.

The settlement with Southern California Gas Co. and its parent company, Sempra Energy, will compensate 35,000 plaintiffs from the 2015 blowout that took nearly four months to control.

The Aliso Canyon blowout led to the largest-known release of methane in U.S. history and was blamed for sickening thousands of residents who moved out of homes near the San Fernando Valley to escape a sulfurous stench and maladies including headaches, nausea and nose bleeds.

The plaintiffs alleged personal injury for their illnesses and property damage to their homes. SoCalGas spent more than \$1 billion on the the blowout — with most going to temporarily relocate 8,000 families. The utility has faced more than 385 lawsuits on behalf of 48,000 people.

"Our goal has always been obtaining justice for the men, women and children who were failed by SoCalGas throughout every turn of this catastrophe," attorney Brian Panish said in a statement.

Plaintiffs alleged they suffered personal injury and property damage after a natural gas storage well failed and uncontrollably released nearly 100,000 tons of methane and other substances into the atmosphere over 118 days.

SoCalGas said it would record an after-tax charge of approximately \$1.1 billion this month and expects total settlement payments of up to \$1.85 billion. The agreement is subject to about 97% of plaintiffs accepting it and could be reduced if fewer agree.

"These agreements are an important milestone that will help the community and our company work toward putting this difficult chapter behind us," said Scott Drury, CEO of SoCalGas.

Matt Pakucko, founder of Save Porter Ranch, issued a statement repeating his call for the permanent shutdown of the facility, where natural gas is stored beneath a mountain in vacant, old oil wells.

"You can't put a price tag on human suffering," he said. "SoCalGas' devastating blowout will never be behind us until the Aliso Canyon storage facility is shut down and the danger it poses to the community is permanently eliminated. We are nowhere near a resolution."

State regulators found the gas company failed to investigate previous well failures at the storage site and didn't adequately assess its aging wells for disaster potential before the Oct. 23, 2015, blowout.

SoCalGas previously reached a \$120 million court settlement with the state attorney general and agreed to a \$4 million settlement with Los Angeles County prosecutors after being convicted in Los Angeles Superior Court of failing to quickly report the leak to state authorities.

R&B superstar R. Kelly convicted in sex trafficking trial

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — R. Kelly, the R&B superstar known for his anthem "I Believe I Can Fly," was convicted Monday in a sex trafficking trial after decades of avoiding criminal responsibility for numerous allegations of misconduct with young women and children.

A jury of seven men and five women found Kelly, 54, guilty of all nine counts, including racketeering, on their second day of deliberations. Kelly wore a face mask below black-rimmed glasses, remaining motionless with eyes downcast, as the verdict was read in federal court in Brooklyn.

Prosecutors alleged that the entourage of managers and aides who helped Kelly meet girls — and keep them obedient and quiet — amounted to a criminal enterprise. Two people have been charged with Kelly in a separate federal case pending in Chicago.

He faces the possibility of decades in prison for crimes including violating the Mann Act, an anti-sex trafficking law that prohibits taking anyone across state lines "for any immoral purpose." Sentencing is scheduled for May 4.

One of Kelly's lawyers, Deveraux Cannick, said he was disappointed and hoped to appeal.

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"I think I'm even more disappointed the government brought the case in the first place, given all the inconsistencies," Cannick said.

Several accusers testified in lurid detail during the trial, alleging that Kelly subjected them to perverse and sadistic whims when they were underage.

For years, the public and news media seemed to be more amused than horrified by allegations of inappropriate relationships with minors, starting with Kelly's illegal marriage to the R&B phenom Aaliyah in 1994 when she was just 15.

His records and concert tickets kept selling. Other artists continued to record his songs, even after he was arrested in 2002 and accused of making a recording of himself sexually abusing and urinating on a 14-year-old girl.

Widespread public condemnation didn't come until a widely watched docuseries, "Surviving R. Kelly," helped make his case a signifier of the #MeToo era, and gave voice to accusers who wondered if their stories were previously ignored because they were Black women.

"To the victims in this case, your voices were heard and justice was finally served," Acting U.S. Attorney Jacquelyn Kasulis said Monday.

Gloria Allred, a lawyer for some of Kelly's accusers, said outside the courthouse that of all the predators she's gone after — a list including Harvey Weinstein and Jeffrey Epstein — "Mr. Kelly is the worst."

At the trial, several of Kelly's accusers testified without using their real names to protect their privacy. Jurors were shown homemade videos of Kelly engaging in sex acts that prosecutors said were not consensual.

The defense labeled the accusers "groupies" and "stalkers."

Kelly's lawyer, Cannick, questioned why women stayed in relationships with Kelly if they thought they were being exploited.

"You made a choice," Cannick told one woman who testified, adding, "You participated of your own will."

Kelly, born Robert Sylvester Kelly, has been jailed without bail since in 2019. The New York case is only part of the legal peril facing the singer. He also has pleaded not guilty to sex-related charges in Illinois and Minnesota. Trial dates in those cases have yet to be set.

At the trial, prosecutors painted the singer as a pampered man-child and control freak. His accusers said they were under orders to call him "Daddy," expected to jump and kiss him anytime he walked into a room, and to cheer only for him when he played pickup basketball games in which they said he was a ball hog.

The accusers alleged they were ordered to sign nondisclosure forms and were subjected to threats and punishments such as violent spankings if they broke what one referred to as "Rob's rules." Some said they believed the videotapes he shot of them having sex would be used against them if they exposed what was happening.

Among the other more troubling tableaux: Kelly keeping a gun by his side while he berated one of his accusers as a prelude to forcing her to give him oral sex in a Los Angeles music studio; Kelly giving several accusers herpes without disclosing he had an STD; Kelly coercing a teenage boy to join him for sex with a naked girl who emerged from underneath a boxing ring in his garage; and Kelly shooting a shaming video of one alleged victim showing her smearing feces on her face as punishment for breaking his rules.

Of 14 possible racketeering acts considered in the trial, the jury found only two "not proven." The allegations involved a woman who said Kelly took advantage of her in 2003 when she was an unsuspecting radio station intern.

She testified he whisked her to his Chicago recording studio, where she was kept locked up and was drugged before he sexually assaulted her while she was passed out. When she realized she was trapped, "I was scared. I was ashamed. I was embarrassed," she said.

Other testimony focused on Kelly's relationship with Aaliyah. One of the final witnesses described seeing him sexually abusing her around 1993, when Aaliyah was only 13 or 14.

Jurors also heard testimony about a fraudulent marriage scheme hatched to protect Kelly after he feared he had impregnated Aaliyah. Witnesses said they were married in matching jogging suits using a license falsely listing her age as 18; he was 27 at the time.

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Aaliyah, whose full name was Aaliyah Dana Haughton, worked with Kelly, who wrote and produced her 1994 debut album, "Age Ain't Nothing But A Number." She died in a plane crash in 2001 at age 22.

Kelly had been tried once before, in Chicago in a child pornography case, but was acquitted in 2008.

For the Brooklyn trial, U.S. District Judge Ann Donnelly barred people not directly involved in the case from the courtroom in what she called a coronavirus precaution. Reporters and other spectators had to watch on a video feed from another room in the same building, though a few were allowed in the courtroom for the verdict.

Associated Press writer Michael R. Sisak contributed to this report. See the AP's full coverage of the investigations into R. Kelly.

Hospitals fear staffing shortages as vaccine deadlines loom

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

Hospitals and nursing homes around the U.S. are bracing for worsening staff shortages as state deadlines arrive for health care workers to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

With ultimatums taking effect this week in states like New York, California, Rhode Island and Connecticut, the fear is that some employees will quit or let themselves be fired or suspended rather than get the vaccine.

"How this is going to play out, we don't know. We are concerned about how it will exacerbate an already quite serious staffing problem," said California Hospital Association spokesperson Jan Emerson-Shea, adding that the organization "absolutely" supports the state's vaccination requirement.

New York health care employees had until the end of the day Monday to get at least one dose, but some hospitals had already begun suspending or otherwise taking action against holdouts.

Erie County Medical Center Corp. in Buffalo said about 5% of its hospital workforce has been put on unpaid leave for not being vaccinated, along with 20% of staff at its nursing home. And the state's largest health care provider, Northwell Health, said it has begun removing unvaccinated workers from its system, though it said its workforce is nearly 100% vaccinated.

"To those who have not yet made that decision, please do the right thing," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said.

Some New York hospitals prepared contingency plans that included cutting back on noncritical services and limiting nursing home admissions. The governor also drew up plans to summon help from National Guard members with medical training, retirees or vaccinated workers from outside the state.

About a dozen states have vaccination mandates covering health care workers in hospitals, long-term care facilities or both. Some allow exemptions on medical or religious grounds, but those employees often must submit to regular COVID-19 testing.

States that have set such requirements tend to have high vaccination rates already. The highest rates are concentrated in the Northeast, the lowest ones in the South and Midwest.

The Biden administration also will require the roughly 17 million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid to be fully vaccinated under a rule still being developed.

That has worried some hospital officials, particularly in rural communities where vaccination rates tend to be lower.

"We are looking at the need to reallocate staff, in some cases just to maintain services that are essential, and there are going to be some delays" in care, said Troy Bruntz, president and CEO at Community Hospital in McCook, Nebraska.

He said 25 of the hospital's 330 employees said they would definitely resign if they were required to be vaccinated. The remainder of the approximately 100 unvaccinated employees — a group that includes nurses as well as cleaning and maintenance staff — haven't decided.

He also worries that it will be difficult to hire new workers when the hospital is already short-handed.

"It doesn't make us feel too confident that this isn't going to turn into something short of a nightmare for American health care," he said.

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Many hospitals and nursing homes are already suffering staff shortages because many nurses and others have quit as a result of pandemic-related burnout or have left for lucrative jobs traveling from state to state.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki noted that hospitals in Houston and Maine lost a relatively small number of employees recently after requiring employees to get vaccinated.

"We're seeing in a lot of places that this is working, it's effective. It's creating more certainty and protection in their workforces," Psaki said.

In California, where health care workers have until Thursday to get fully vaccinated, some hospitals are anticipating firings, suspensions or the moving of people to other positions, Emerson-Shea said. She said many traveling nurses have declined assignments in California because of the state's vaccine requirement.

But with a statewide mandate, health workers won't be able to just quit their jobs and go to other hospitals, said Dr. Jeff Smith, CEO and executive vice president of hospital operations at Los Angeles-based Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

He expects that about 97 percent of Cedars-Sinai's almost 17,000 employees affected by the vaccine mandate will comply by the deadline. Another 1 percent have applied for medical or religious exemptions. Those who don't comply by Friday will be suspended for a week, and fired on Oct. 8 if they don't comply or if there are not extenuating circumstances, he said.

The hospital also was able to hire over 100 nurses in the past month and uses some travel nurses.

"We're in a good place but don't want to minimize the challenges other hospitals are likely facing," Smith said.

In Rhode Island, where the vaccine mandate takes effect Friday, the state said hospitals can allow unvaccinated employees to keep working 30 days past the deadline in cases where firing them would compromise patient safety. The mandate is being challenged in court because it doesn't allow religious exemptions.

In states that don't have mandates, some hospitals are imposing their own.

Ginger Robertson, a registered nurse who works in a mental health clinic at a hospital in Bismarck, North Dakota, has requested a religious exemption from her hospital's vaccination requirement. She said she will look for other work if she doesn't get it.

"Honestly, I really love my job. I am good at it. I enjoy my patients. I enjoy where I am at," she said. "So this is a really hard place, to have to choose between two things I don't want to do. I don't want to leave, and I don't want to get the vaccine."

She said other nurses are also considering leaving over what she called the "insulting" mandate.

"We feel demoralized, like as though we aren't intelligent enough to make these choices for ourselves," Robertson said.

A North Carolina-based hospital system announced Monday that more than 175 of its 35,000-plus employees have been fired for failing to comply with its COVID-19 vaccination requirement.

Last week, Novant Health announced 375 workers had been suspended and given five days to comply. Nearly 200 of them did so — including those who submitted approved exemptions — before the Friday deadline, spokesperson Megan Rivers said.

Massachusetts' mandate, issued by Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, applies only to rest homes, assisted living facilities, hospice programs and home care programs. It allows for medical and religious exemptions but doesn't require regular testing. The deadline is Oct. 31.

In Connecticut, a vaccine mandate for employees of state-run hospitals took effect on Monday. It does not apply to privately run hospitals, some of which are imposing their own requirements. Medical and religious exemptions are possible, but anyone else who fails to get vaccinated will be barred from the workplace.

About 84% of over 450,000 hospital workers in New York were fully vaccinated as of Wednesday, according to state data. Nursing home data through Sunday showed about 89% of nursing home workers fully vaccinated.

New York City's hospital system reported a 95% vaccination rate for nurses and a higher rate for doctors.

In Missouri, which became a severe COVID-19 hot spot over the summer, the Mercy hospital system is requiring vaccinations among staff at its hundreds of medical centers and clinics in Missouri and neighboring states by Thursday.

Anyone who doesn't comply by then will be placed on a 30-day unpaid suspension, said Mercy spokeswoman Bethany Pope.

Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan, and Hollingsworth from Mission, Kansas. Philip Marcelo and Mark Pratt in Boston; Michael Melia in Hartford, Connecticut; Michael Hill in Albany, New York; Skip Foreman in Charlotte, North Carolina; and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this story.

UK readies soldiers to help ease gas shortages at pumps

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government put dozens of soldiers on standby Monday to help ease fuel supply problems caused by a shortage of truck drivers, a situation that has spurred panic buying of gasoline across the country.

As unions called for emergency workers to be given priority for fuel supplies, the government said it was placing British army tanker drivers in "a state of readiness in order to be deployed if required to deliver fuel to where it is needed most."

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said Britain had "strong supplies of fuel."

"However, we are aware of supply chain issues at fuel station forecourts and are taking steps to ease these as a matter of priority," he said.

Long lines of vehicles have formed at many gas stations around Britain since Friday, causing spillover traffic jams on busy roads. Tempers have frayed as some drivers waited for hours.

The Petrol Retailers Association, which represents almost 5,500 independent outlets, said Sunday that about two-thirds of its members had run out of fuel, as the truck driver shortage set off rounds of gas panic-buying.

The Conservative government insisted blamed the problems on consumer behavior.

"The only reason we don't have petrol on the forecourts is that people are buying petrol they don't need," said Environment Secretary George Eustice.

Major fuel firms, including BP, Shell and Esso, said in a joint statement that they expected demand for gas to "return to its normal levels in the coming days."

"We would encourage people to buy fuel as they usually would," the statement said.

But critics urged the government to get fuel flowing so the shortage does not have damaging spillover effects on health care, police operations and other crucial sectors.

Dr. Chaand Nagpaul at the British Medical Association said health care workers and other essential services staff should be "given priority access to fuel so they can continue their crucial work and guarantee care to patients."

Christina McAnea, general secretary of the Unison trade union, urged the government to use its emergency powers to designate gas stations for key workers.

"Ambulance crews, nurses, care workers, teaching assistants, police staff and other key workers mustn't be left stranded or forced to queue for hours simply to get to a pump," she said.

The haulage industry says the U.K. is short as many as 100,000 truckers, due to a perfect storm of factors including the coronavirus pandemic, an aging workforce and an exodus of foreign workers following Britain's departure from the European Union last year. Post-Brexit immigration rules mean EU citizens can no longer live and work visa-free in Britain, as they could when the U.K. was a member of the bloc.

Several other countries, including the United States and Germany, also are experiencing a shortage of truck drivers, but the problem has been especially visible in Britain, where it has contributed to empty supermarket shelves and shuttered gas pumps.

Roland McKibbin, an electrician in London, said he has had to cancel jobs because he couldn't get gas.

"No fuel means I can't drive, which means I can't get to jobs with my tools," he said. "So, basically, the panic-buying idiots have lost me income and directly taken food off the table for my wife and 5-year-old son, because I can't wire people's houses from home."

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In an effort to ease the gas crunch, the government said it was temporarily suspending competition laws so fuel firms can share information and target areas where supplies are running low.

It is also bringing in military driving examiners to help clear a backlog of new truckers awaiting tests, And, after weeks of mounting pressure over shortages, the U.K.'s Conservative government announced Saturday that it will issue 5,000 emergency visas to foreign truck drivers to help prevent a Christmas without turkey or toys for many British families.

But that falls far short of the number needed, and critics also said the 3-month visas were too short to entice European truck drivers.

Ruby McGregor-Smith, president of the Confederation of British Industry, said the visas were "the equivalent of throwing a thimble of water on a bonfire."

Radu Dinescu, general secretary of the National Union of Road Transporters in Romania, said Romanian drivers — who worked in the U.K. in large numbers before Brexit — now "prefer EU stability." Romania is a member of the EU and Dinescu said its drivers can earn high salaries working in France or Germany.

"The U.K. seems to be experiencing a paradox ... British citizens do not want to practice the job of truck driver, while at the same time they do not want other non-U.K. citizens to come to do this job," he told The Associated Press.

Olaf Scholz, leader of Germany's Social Democrats, the party that came first in the country's election on Sunday, also linked Britain's worker shortages to Brexit.

"The free movement of labor is part of the European Union, and we worked very hard to convince the British to not leave the union," he said. "Now they decided different, and I hope they will manage the problems coming from that."

Associated Press writer Stephen McGrath in Bucharest contributed to this report.

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John Hinckley, who shot Reagan, to be freed from oversight

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

A federal judge said Monday that John Hinckley Jr., who tried to assassinate President Ronald Reagan four decades ago, can be freed from all remaining restrictions next year if he continues to follow those rules and remains mentally stable.

U.S. District Court Judge Paul L. Friedman in Washington said during a 90-minute court hearing that he'll issue his ruling on the plan this week.

Since Hinckley moved to Williamsburg, Virginia, from a Washington hospital in 2016, court-imposed restrictions have required doctors and therapists to oversee his psychiatric medication and therapy. Hinckley has been barred from having a gun. And he can't contact Reagan's children, other victims or their families, or actress Jodie Foster, who he was obsessed with at the time of the 1981 shooting.

Friedman said Hinckley, now 66, has displayed no symptoms of active mental illness, no violent behavior and no interest in weapons since 1983.

"If he hadn't tried to kill the president, he would have been unconditionally released a long, long, long time ago," the judge said. "But everybody is comfortable now after all of the studies, all of the analysis and all of the interviews and all of the experience with Mr. Hinckley."

Friedman said the plan is to release Hinckley from all court supervision in June.

A 2020 violence risk assessment conducted on behalf of Washington's Department of Behavioral Health concluded that Hinckley would not pose a danger if he's unconditionally released.

The U.S. government had previously opposed ending restrictions. But it recently retained an independent expert to examine Hinckley and took a different position Monday, with attorneys saying they would agree to unconditional release if Hinckley follows the rules and shows mental stability for the next nine months.

Kacie Weston, an attorney for the U.S. government, said it wants to make sure Hinckley can adapt to living on his own for the first time in 40 years.

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He recently moved out his mother's house, which sits along a golf course in a gated community in Williamsburg. She died in July. Attorneys did not say where Hinckley is currently living.

"Mr. Hinckley does have a history of turning inward, and toward isolation," Weston said.

Another concern is the impending retirement of one of Hinckley's therapists and the looming end to a therapy group, which has provided much support and social interaction. Weston said Hinckley will likely face challenges finding a similar group in the future.

"All we have to do is wait a few more months and see," Weston said. "And we'll have actual hard data. We'll have information in real time to see how Mr. Hinckley adapts."

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute said in a statement that it was "saddened" by the court's plan.

"Contrary to the judge's decision, we believe John Hinckley is still a threat to others and we strongly oppose his release," the foundation said. "Our hope is that the Justice Department will file a motion with the court leading to a reversal of this decision."

Hinckley was 25 when he shot and wounded the 40th U.S. president outside a Washington hotel. The shooting paralyzed Reagan press secretary James Brady, who died in 2014. It also injured Secret Service agent Timothy McCarthy and Washington police officer Thomas Delahanty.

Hinckley did not attend Monday's hearing. But Barry Levine, his attorney, said Hinckley wanted to express his "heartfelt" apologies and "profound regret" to the people he shot and their families as well as to Foster and the American people.

"Perhaps it is too much to ask for forgiveness," Levine said. "But we hope they have an understanding that the acts that caused him to do this terrible thing (were caused by) mental illness."

Hinckley was suffering from acute psychosis. When jurors found him not guilty by reason of insanity, they said he needed treatment and not a lifetime in confinement.

Such an acquittal meant that Hinckley could not be blamed or punished for what he did, legal experts have said. Hinckley was ordered to live at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington.

In the 2000s, Hinckley began making visits to his parents' home in Williamsburg. A 2016 court order granted him permission to live with his mom full time after experts said his mental illness had been in remission for decades.

Friedman, the judge, has loosened some of Hinckley's restrictions over the years. For instance, Hinckley was granted the right to publicly display his artwork and allowed to move out of his mother's house. But he's still barred from traveling to places where he knows there will be someone protected by the Secret Service.

Hinckley must give three days' notice if he wants to travel more than 75 miles (120 kilometers) from home. He also has to turn over passwords for computers, phones and online accounts such as email.

In recent years, Hinckley has sold items from a booth at an antique mall that he's found at estate sales, flea markets and consignment shops. He's also shared his music on YouTube.

"I would hope that people will see this as a victory for mental health," Levine, Hinckley's attorney, said Monday. "That is the real message in this case — that people who have been ravaged by mental disease, with good support and access to treatment, can actually become productive members of society."

EXPLAINER: What's behind all the drama in Congress?

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The drama and deadlines driving action on Capitol Hill right now can be disorienting. Democrats are trying to pass more than \$4 trillion in infrastructure and social programs at the center of President Joe Biden's agenda — and at the same time avert a government shutdown and prevent a federal default that could send financial markets crashing.

"The next few days will be a time of intensity," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi wrote in a letter to colleagues over the weekend. That might be an understatement.

Adding to the challenges for Democrats are their thin advantages in both chambers, the end of the fis-

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cal year and intraparty disagreements over the size and scope of Biden's signature social spending and climate legislation. Republican leaders have encouraged their members to reject almost all of it, leaving Democrats to go it alone.

Biden has been meeting with fellow Democrats as they navigate the political obstacle course.

"We've got three things to do: the debt ceiling, the continuing resolution and the two pieces of legislation," Biden said Monday. "If we do that, the country's going to be in great shape."

A guide to understanding it all:

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Averting a government shutdown at midnight on Sept. 30 — the end of the fiscal year — has become an anxiety-inducing ritual in Washington. This year is no different.

The House last week passed a measure to keep the government open and suspend the debt limit by a party-line vote of 220-211. The Senate was to hold a procedural vote on that bill Monday evening, but Republicans were expected to block it after Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell said his members wouldn't help raise the debt limit.

One possible path to avoiding a shutdown: Democrats could separate government funding from the debt limit. McConnell says Republicans would support that.

The stopgap spending legislation includes bipartisan priorities, including \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for Hurricane Ida and other extreme weather events and \$6.3 billion to support Afghanistan evacuees after the end of the 20-year war.

DEBT LIMIT

Congress has a bit longer to resolve the debt limit issue, as the U.S. is not at risk of defaulting on its accumulated debt load of roughly \$28 trillion for a few weeks. But it is unclear, for now, how Democrats will get around Republican opposition.

The U.S. has never defaulted on its debts in the modern era, and historically both parties have voted to raise the limit. Democrats joined the then-Republican Senate majority in doing so several times during Donald Trump's presidency, including a suspension of the debt limit that expired in August.

But now that Democrats have unified control of Washington, McConnell has ruled out returning the favor.

McConnell has blamed the proposed \$3.5 trillion tax and spending bill and other Democratic priorities for the need to increase the debt limit. But that formula has it backward. Raising the debt limit is needed to make good on past — not future — spending decisions, including the Republicans' \$1.5 trillion, deficit-financed tax overhaul that Trump signed into law in 2017 and additional trillions in coronavirus relief that passed with GOP support.

The legislation passed so far by the House would cover borrowing authority through the end of 2022.

\$1 TRILLION BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

Democrats and Republicans in the Senate joined together in a rare bipartisan moment over the summer to pass the public works measure. It has been bottled up in the House ever since, on hold while the Democratic Party's moderate and progressive wings have sparred over the details of the much larger separate package, which would spend \$3.5 trillion over a decade.

House progressives say they won't vote for the infrastructure bill unless there is agreement on the larger bill. With no deal in hand, Pelosi pushed a vote on the infrastructure bill to Thursday to buy time for negotiations.

Despite the 19 Senate Republicans who voted for the \$1 trillion measure — and the money it would bring to their districts — House Republican leaders are encouraging their members to oppose it. That's because Democrats are linking it to the larger legislation with social and environmental priorities.

The infrastructure measure would authorize nearly \$550 billion in new spending over five years for public works in all corners of the country. There's money to rebuild roads and bridges, shore up coastlines against climate change, protect public utility systems from cyberattacks and modernize the electric grid. It would also pay for new public transit projects, upgrades and repairs to airports and railroads and the replacement of lead drinking water pipes.

\$3.5 TRILLION IN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

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Democrats are trying to pass the separate \$3.5 trillion measure on their own by using an elaborate process called budget reconciliation. Using it allows the bill to bypass an otherwise certain GOP filibuster. But Democrats can't move forward until they reach agreement among themselves on what the legislation should contain.

The bill as drafted includes an assortment of long-time Democratic priorities, including an expansion of existing health, education and child care programs for Americans young and old. Republicans are lockstep opposed to the plan, which would be paid for by increasing the corporate tax rate, from 21% to 26.5% on businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and by raising the top rate on individuals from 37% to 39.6% for those earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

Besides the disagreements in the House, moderate Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona are making a stand of their own, saying they can't support a package that totals \$3.5 trillion, even if Democrats succeed in covering the cost with tax increases and other revenue. Manchin has previously proposed spending \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion.

Asked Sunday on ABC if she agrees the final number on the so-called reconciliation bill will be "somewhat smaller" than \$3.5 trillion, Pelosi responded: "That seems self-evident."

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaró, Alan Fram and Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Biden rule to shield 'Dreamers' seeks to bypass Congress

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Monday renewed efforts to shield hundreds of thousands of immigrants who came to the United States as young children from deportation, the latest maneuver in a long-running drama over the policy's legality.

The administration proposed a rule that attempts to satisfy concerns of a federal judge in Houston who ruled in July that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was illegal, largely because the Obama administration bypassed procedural requirements when it took effect in 2012. The new rule mirrors the Obama-era initiative, recreating the 2012 policy and seeking to put it on firmer ground by going through the federal regulatory process.

U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen, an appointee of President George W. Bush, said the Obama administration overstepped its authority and did not properly seek public feedback. He allowed for renewals to continue but prohibited new enrollments. The Biden administration is appealing.

The 205-page proposal solicits public feedback to address Hanen's concern, though it is unclear if that would be enough. The proposed regulation will be published Tuesday in the Federal Register, triggering a 60-day comment period and ensuring that it is unlikely to take effect for several months.

The office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who challenged DACA with eight other states before Hanen, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Obama administration created DACA with a memo issued by then-Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. It was intended as a stopgap measure until Congress legislated a permanent solution, which never occurred.

And because DACA isn't the product of legislation, it falls into a category of policies that can more easily be changed from one administration to the next. President Donald Trump tried to rescind the DACA memo and end the program, but the Supreme Court concluded he did not go about it properly.

In attempting to shore up DACA through a formal rule — which is a more rigorous process than the original memo, though still not legislation — the Biden administration hopes to gain a legal stamp of approval from the courts.

It seems possible, if not likely, that the Supreme Court will once again be called upon to weigh in, unless Congress acts first.

The Biden administration's move comes as congressional Democrats struggle to include immigration provisions in their 10-year, \$3.5 trillion package of social and environment initiatives. Language in that

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bill helping millions of immigrants remain permanently in the U.S. has been a top goal of progressive and pro-immigration lawmakers, and Democrats cannot afford to lose many votes.

But the Senate's nonpartisan parliamentarian said earlier this month the immigration provisions couldn't remain in the sweeping bill because it violated the chamber's budget rules.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas called again on Monday for Congress to act swiftly to provide "the legal status they need and deserve."

"The Biden-Harris Administration continues to take action to protect Dreamers and recognize their contributions to this country," said Mayorkas, using a commonly used term for immigrants who came to the U.S. with their parents as young children. "This notice of proposed rulemaking is an important step to achieve that goal."

Some pro-immigration advocates echoed Mayorkas' view that the onus is on Congress.

"A more formalized version of DACA will stabilize the lives of DACA-eligible Dreamers but legislative action is still needed to fully solidify DACA recipients' contributions, expand protections to other Dreamers and build a pathway to permanent legal status," said Ali Noorani, president of the National Immigration Forum. "Formalizing DACA is a positive step, but it's not a permanent fix."

The Democratic-run House passed legislation earlier this year creating a way for Dreamers to become legal permanent residents, but the bill has gone nowhere in the Senate, where Republicans have blocked it and bipartisan talks have stalled. The Senate parliamentarian's ruling further dampened legislative prospects. Advocates have said they would present alternative immigration provisions in hopes they would be permitted in the bill, but it's not clear that would succeed.

Stephen Yale-Loehr, a professor of immigration law practice at Cornell Law School, said the administration's proposal carries no major changes and "is an effort to bulletproof the existing program from litigation challenges."

The proposal adheres to the same criteria, which include arriving in the country before age 16, continuously residing in the United States since arrival and being in the country on June 15, 2012.

Since 2012, more than 825,000 immigrants have enrolled in DACA.

Spagat contributed from San Diego. Associated Press reporters Alan Fram in Washington and Paul Weber in Austin, Texas, contributed.

Beyond, Impossible join crowded plant-based chicken market

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods found success with realistic plant-based burgers. Now, they're hoping to replicate that in the fast-growing but crowded market for plant-based chicken nuggets.

Beyond Meat said Monday that its new tenders, made from fava beans, will go on sale in U.S. groceries in October. Walmart, Jewel-Osco and Harris Teeter will be among the first to offer them.

Impossible Foods began selling its soy-based nuggets this month at Walmart, Kroger, Albertsons and other groceries. They'll be in 10,000 stores by later this year.

The rival startups, both based in California, helped redefine what plant-based burgers could be. Beyond burgers were the first to be sold in grocery aisles next to conventional meat in 2016; Impossible burgers joined them a few years later.

But this time, Beyond and Impossible will be stacked in freezers already bursting with plant-based chicken options. More than 50 brands of plant-based nuggets, tenders and cutlets are already on sale in U.S. stores, according to the Good Food Institute, which tracks plant-based brands.

Some, like Morningstar Farms and Quorn, have been making plant-based meat for decades. But Beyond and Impossible have also spawned a host of imitators making realistic products marketed to omnivores, not just vegans and vegetarians. Fifteen percent of those 50 brands were new to the U.S. market in 2020, like Nuggs, from New York startup Simulate, and California's Daring Foods.

They're all trying to grab a slice of the plant-based market, which is still dwarfed by the conventional

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meat market but growing fast. U.S. sales of frozen, plant-based chicken tenders and nuggets jumped 29% to \$112 million in the 52 weeks ending Aug. 28, according to Nielsen IQ. Sales of conventional frozen tenders and nuggets rose 17% to \$1.1 billion in the same period.

Globally, retail sales of meat substitutes are expected to grow 2% to 4.6 million metric tons between 2021 and 2022, according to the market research firm Euromonitor. Processed animal meat sales are expected to stay flat in the same period, at 18.9 million metric tons.

Tom Rees, an industry manager with Euromonitor, said plant-based meat sales were already growing before the coronavirus hit. In Euromonitor surveys, nearly a quarter of consumers worldwide say they are limiting meat intake for health reasons.

But the pandemic gave plant-based meat a boost as consumers looked for new things to cook at home. Rees said meat shortages and coronavirus outbreaks at meat production facilities also made consumers think twice about the animal meat market.

Meat or no meat, breaded nuggets aren't exactly a health food. One serving of Beyond's chicken tenders have 12 grams of fat, 450 milligrams of sodium, 11 grams of protein and 210 calories. Impossible's nuggets have 10 grams of fat, 320 milligrams of sodium, 10 grams of protein and 200 calories. By comparison, a similar size serving of Pilgrim's chicken nuggets contains 14 grams of fat, 10 grams of protein, 460 milligrams of sodium and 220 calories.

Impossible Foods Vice President of Product Innovation Celeste Holz-Schietinger said it was important to start with plant-based burgers because beef production is a bigger contributor to climate change. But Impossible spent the past year developing the plant-based tenders as part of a goal is to replace all animal agriculture with more sustainable alternatives by 2035.

Beyond Meat has been experimenting with chicken for even longer. The El Segundo, California-based company launched chicken strips in 2012. But it pulled them from the market in 2019, citing the need to devote more manufacturing capacity to its burgers.

Unlike the new fava bean-based tenders, Beyond's burgers are made with pea protein. Beyond President and CEO Ethan Brown said the company has spent more than a decade researching various protein sources and their attributes and doesn't want to limit itself to just one.

Dariusz Ajami, Beyond's chief innovation officer, said mimicking the fibrous texture and fat distribution in chicken was the biggest challenge with the new tenders. The company is still far from perfecting a plant-based chicken breast or a marbled steak, but has 200 scientists and engineers working on it, he said.

"The goal is to reduce that gap between our product and animal meat," he said.

There's also a price gap. Beyond Meat's suggested retail price for an 8-ounce package is \$4.99, while Impossible's 13.5-ounce package costs \$7.99. Tyson Foods sells a 2-pound bag of chicken nuggets at Walmart for \$5.76.

But it's clear many people are eager to try plant-based foods. In July, Panda Express quickly sold out of Beyond Meat orange chicken in a trial run at locations in Los Angeles and New York. Panda Express says it's exploring a wider rollout of the product, which was specially developed for the brand.

Jasmine Alkire recently tried Beyond Meat orange chicken at a Panda Express in Los Angeles. Alkire became a vegetarian seven years ago, but the Beyond chicken tasted similar to the orange chicken she grew up eating.

"It was flavorful and didn't have a weird aftertaste or off-putting texture," she said.

For now, Beyond Meat has several advantages. It has partnerships with big brands like KFC and McDonald's and has already opened its first manufacturing plant in China, where Impossible's products aren't yet sold.

Impossible is still waiting for regulatory approval to sell its burgers in Europe and China because they contain genetically modified ingredients. But Impossible's chicken doesn't contain those same ingredients. Both companies plan to sell their chicken overseas.

Impossible is confident that consumers will gravitate to its nuggets. In company taste tests, it found that most consumers preferred its product to actual chicken.

"It's better for you, it's better for the environment and it tastes better than the animal," said Impossible Foods President Dennis Woodside. "So we think that's a pretty strong value proposition."

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Other brands insist they'll defend their turf. Morningstar Farms, the current plant-based poultry sales leader in the U.S., launched a separate brand called Incogmeato in 2019 with products that closely replicate meat. Sara Young, the general manager of plant-based proteins at Kellogg Co., which owns Morningstar, said the brand has the biggest product portfolio and the highest repeat-buyer rate in the plant-based category. "We've been at this for a long time," she said.

Terence Chea contributed from Redwood City, California.

'SNL' returning with all but one incumbent cast member

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After an off-season of some mystery involving several favorite performers, "Saturday Night Live" said it was returning for its 47th year this weekend with all but one of its incumbent cast members on board.

Only Beck Bennett, known for impersonations of former Vice President Mike Pence and a buff Russian leader Vladimir Putin, is exiting.

Aidy Bryant, Kate McKinnon, Cecily Strong, Kenan Thompson and Pete Davidson, all busy cast members whose returns were considered questionable, will be coming back.

The show's longtime executive producer, Lorne Michaels, likes to keep an aura of mystery around his cast until the last minute. But speculation about dramatic cast changes was fueled by an emotional season finale last May.

Instead of a comic monologue, that episode opened with Bryant, McKinnon, Strong and Thompson speaking seriously about the challenges of producing the show during the COVID pandemic.

During "Weekend Update," Davidson told the audience, "I'm very grateful to be here, and it's been an honor to grow up in front of you guys." Strong had a show-stopping appearance as one of her most notable characters, Jeanine Pirro, singing a wine-soaked version of "My Way."

The returns illustrate a new-found flexibility for the show, and its importance to NBC in a changing television environment.

Instead of demanding a full-time commitment, Michaels has been allowing cast members to take time off during the season for other projects, and that will continue this year. McKinnon is to produce and star in the upcoming Peacock series "Joe Exotic," and Thompson's NBC sitcom, "Kenan," will return for a second season.

Thompson is the longest-running "Saturday Night Live" cast member with 18 seasons, and he told Entertainment Weekly this summer that he sees no reason to leave.

"I keep saying I'm trying to get to 20," Thompson told the magazine. "So if they don't throw me out of there before, I'm trying to get to 20. And then, I don't know if it makes sense for me to leave even after that point."

Bryant helped develop and performed in the Hulu series "Shrill," while Strong was in the Apple+ series "Schmigadoon."

It's also a long time since the original "Saturday Night Live" cast was dubbed the "Not Ready for Prime Time Players." The show now frequently gets more viewers than much of NBC's prime-time fare and is seen live on the West Coast — in prime time.

Bennett, in an Instagram post on Monday, wrote, "Love you, SNL. Gonna miss you so much. Thank you for 8 years of remarkable people and incredible experiences that completely changed my life."

He didn't elaborate on why he was leaving but it was believed to be his choice.

The crowded "SNL" stage will begin its season with 16 cast members and five featured performers. One featured performer from last year, Lauren Holt, is leaving. Three new ones will be added: Aristotle Athari, James Austin Johnson and Sarah Sherman.

Owen Wilson is the host of Saturday's season-opener, with Kacey Musgraves as musical guest.

Uncertain start to post-Merkel era after close German vote

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The party that narrowly beat outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel's bloc pushed Monday for a quick agreement on a coalition government, but Europe's biggest economy could still be in for weeks of uncertainty after an election that failed to set a clear direction.

Olaf Scholz, the candidate of the center-left Social Democrats, called for Merkel's center-right Union bloc to go into opposition after its worst-ever result in a national election. Both parties finished with well under 30% of the vote, and that appeared to put the keys to power in the hands of two opposition parties — raising questions over the stability of a future government.

Armin Laschet, the Union's candidate, rejected the idea that the election gave any party a clear mandate and made clear he still hopes to lead a new government. But he sounded considerably less confident Monday than he did a day earlier, when he said his bloc would do "everything we can" to form one — and some allies hinted at skepticism that would happen.

Whoever becomes chancellor will lead Germany into a new era. During Merkel's 16 years in office, she was seen abroad not just as Germany's leader but in many ways as Europe's, helping steer the European Union through a series of financial and political crises and ensuring her country maintained a high profile on the international stage. It remains to be seen whether the next chancellor will match her global standing.

The unclear result, combined with an upcoming French presidential election in April, creates uncertainty — at least for now — in the two economic and political powers at the center of the EU, just as the bloc struggles with how to counter Russia and China, revamp its relationship with the United States and address questions about its future from populist leaders in eastern countries.

Scholz, the current finance minister and vice chancellor, pulled his party out of a long poll slump to win on Sunday. Laschet, the governor of North Rhine-Westphalia state, stumbled in a campaign that was strewn with missteps.

But the kingmakers are likely to be the two prospective junior partners in any coalition, the environmentalist Greens and the business-friendly Free Democrats. The Greens traditionally lean toward the Social Democrats and the Free Democrats toward the Union, but neither ruled out going the other way.

"Voters have spoken very clearly," Scholz said Monday. "They strengthened three parties — the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Free Democrats — so this is the visible mandate the citizens of this country have given: These three parties should lead the next government."

Laschet said his party also wants to lead a coalition with the two smaller parties. The only other option that would have a parliamentary majority is a repeat of the outgoing "grand coalition" of the Union and Social Democrats. That is the combination that has run Germany for 12 years of Merkel's 16-year tenure but has often been marred by squabbling, and there is little appetite for it now.

Scholz and others were keen to dispel concerns that lengthy haggling and a new, multiparty government would mean unstable leadership in Europe's biggest economy.

"My idea is that we will be very fast in getting a result for this government, and it should be before Christmas if possible," Scholz told reporters in Berlin. "Germany always has coalition governments, and it was always stable."

Scholz, an experienced and pragmatic politician whose calm, no-frills style is in some ways reminiscent of Merkel's, pointed to continuity in foreign policy. He said a priority will be "to form a stronger and more sovereign European Union."

"But doing so means also to work very hard on the good relationship between ... the European Union and the United States," he added. "The trans-Atlantic partnership is of (the) essence for us in Germany ... and so you can rely on continuity in this question."

Scholz made clear that the rival Union bloc should bow out of government. He said the bloc "received the message from citizens that they should no longer be in government, but go into opposition."

But Laschet held out the possibility that he might form a coalition despite what he called "painful losses," for which he said he bears a "personal share" of the blame.

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Other senior center-right figures were more skeptical.

Markus Soeder, the more popular rival Laschet beat to secure the Union's nomination to run for chancellor, said a second-place party has "no entitlement" to form a government, "so we can only make an offer." He said there can't be an alliance with the Greens and Free Democrats "at any price."

Laschet also faces calls from within his own party to resign after a disastrous election night that saw the Union bloc lose dozens of parliamentary seats — including the constituency Merkel had held since 1990.

The Greens made significant gains in the election to finish third but fell far short of their original aim of taking the chancellery, while the Free Democrats improved slightly on a good result from 2017.

Merkel's outgoing government will remain in office until a successor is sworn in, a process that can take weeks or even months. Merkel announced in 2018 that she wouldn't seek a fifth term.

The Free Democrats and Greens indicated they plan to speak to each other first before entertaining approaches from the bigger parties. The Free Democrats' leader, Christian Lindner, said he wants to discuss with the Greens whether they could "become the progressive center of a new coalition, for all our differences."

Associated Press writer Kirsten Grieshaber and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

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Lower death rates for Black moms is goal of California bill

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California has among the lowest death rates nationally among pregnant women and new mothers, but the numbers for Black mothers tell a different story.

They were six times more likely to die within a year of pregnancy than white women from 2014 to 2016 and had a higher rate of death than Black women nationally from 2014 to 2017, the most recent time frame for which data is available.

A bill before Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom aims to change that. Nicknamed the "Momnibus" bill, it would collect more details about pregnancy-related deaths, diversify the experts looking at that data and require them to recommend ways to reduce racial gaps. It also would expand access to doulas and midwives, whose presence can drive better care.

"If you really want to address the issue, it is going to take a serious investment and resources, whether that means providing every Black mother a doula or really investigating what's happening when Black mothers die," said Jen Flory, policy advocate for the Western Center on Law and Poverty, which supports the bill.

Newsom backed past efforts to improve care for Black pregnant women by requiring implicit bias training for health care workers involved in perinatal care, and he's made support for women and mothers a priority for his administration. But his Department of Finance opposes the bill because the \$6.7 million price tag for expanded data collection wasn't included in the state budget. Newsom hasn't said whether he'll sign it.

Among wealthy nations, the United States ranks poorly in maternal death rates, and California's effort is part of a national push to improve outcomes. During his campaign, President Joe Biden lauded California's efforts to reduce deaths, and in April he proclaimed Black Maternal Health Week.

There are two ways to track deaths: The maternal mortality rate, used globally, counts deaths during pregnancy and within 42 days of giving birth. The pregnancy-related mortality rate, used in California and some other states, tracks deaths within a year of giving birth. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention looks at both, though data lags and isn't available to compare across states for the latter measure.

Earlier this month, the California Department of Public Health released a report tracking California's outcomes from 2008 to 2016. Maternal deaths within a year of pregnancy hit a low in 2012, with fewer than 10 per 100,000 live births. It ticked up to about 14 deaths in 2016, slightly behind the national rate of almost 17 deaths. Using the maternal mortality rate, California ranked only behind Illinois for lowest

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death rates in 2019.

But the rate for Black women was far higher. From 2014 to 2016 in California, about 56 Black women died per 100,000 live births, compared to 13 Asians, 11 Latinas and fewer than 10 whites. Nationally, Black women died at a rate of nearly 42 per 100,000 live births from 2014 to 2017. California's Black women died at six times the rate of white women, up from three times the rate in 2008.

"The reality is there is a disparity between Black and white women and it's not getting better," said Kimberly D. Gregory, director of maternal fetal medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and former member of the California's pregnancy surveillance committee.

The committee plans to release data on pregnancy-related deaths through 2020 by next year. It relies on grant funding.

The bill by Democratic Sen. Nancy Skinner aims to write the committee into state law and strengthen its data collection and duties. It would require the committee to have 13 members, including doctors, midwives, doulas and community advocates and would include a tribal representative. Most of its current members are doctors.

The committee would investigate every maternal death and allow for voluntary interviews of family members to better understand what happened. The committee would have to publish its findings and recommendations every three years. It would also look into pregnancy-related deaths among LGBTQ people.

"We can make better decisions about prevention, intervention, systems changes, not only at the hospital level but at the community level," said Mashariki Kudumu, director of maternal and infant health initiatives for the March of Dimes, Greater Los Angeles, which is a cosponsor of the bill. "What comes with diverse and different perspectives are better changes to systems that improve care."

Kudumu is also trained as a doula. Newsom in his state budget made doulas a covered benefit under Medi-Cal, the state's health insurance program for low-income people, following states including New York and Illinois. Doulas are trained to assist and advocate for women in pregnancy and during and after birth. Research shows their presence reduces pregnancy complications and low birthweight babies.

The benefit takes effect next year, and the bill before Newsom would establish a group to study its use. The proposal also expands training for midwives.

Kudumu said she's helped women stick to their birthing plans in the face of pressure from doctors and provided them with breastfeeding and lactation support.

She knows the value from personal experience. When Kudumu delivered her son prematurely she felt disrespected by the doctor because she's a Black woman who was on Medi-Cal at the time while she was in graduate school.

Kudumu had to fight to ensure her son got breastmilk instead of formula while he was in the newborn intensive care unit. She remembers the doctor's attitude changing when another doula at the hospital came up to greet her.

"We want to make sure that this resource — that evidence shows improves health outcomes — is more accessible to people," she said.

Gen. Milley: Whisperer to presidents, target of intrigue

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gen. Mark Milley has been the target of more political intrigue and debate in two years as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff than any of his recent predecessors were in four. One after another, firestorms have ignited around him — unusual for an officer who by law is a whisperer to presidents and by custom is careful to stay above the fray.

From racial injustice and domestic extremism to nuclear weapons and the fitness of Donald Trump as commander in chief, Milley has become entangled in politically charged issues, regularly thrusting him into the news headlines.

Milley is expected to face tough questioning on those and other issues when he testifies with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at a Senate hearing Tuesday and a House panel Wednesday. The hearings origi-

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nally were meant to focus on the Afghanistan withdrawal and the chaotic evacuation from Kabul airport last month.

But since then, Milley has come under fire from Republicans for his portrayal in a new book as having taken unusual — some say illegal — steps to guard against Trump potentially starting a war with China or Iran or ordering an unprovoked nuclear attack in the final months of his presidency. Milley was reported to have agreed with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's assertion in a January phone call that Trump was "crazy."

Even during Milley's swing through Europe last week, headlines dogged him and reporters quizzed him. Mostly he batted questions away or buried them in detailed historical precedent.

Burly and square-jawed, with a bushy slash of eyebrows over often mischievous eyes, Milley is quick with a quip and frequently a curse. Born in a Boston suburb, Milley has Irish roots and an oversized personality that belies a sharp intellect and a penchant for digging deep into military history. The Princeton-educated Milley often meets simple questions with a deep dive into history that can reach as far back as the Greeks, cover long stretches of both world wars, and expound upon the context and concepts of war.

So as he faced accusations of disloyalty for what the book "Peril," by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, reported as assurances to a Chinese general that he would warn him of a U.S. attack, Milley gripped his identity as a soldier who answers to civilian leaders. He declined to make his case in the media, instead telling reporters that he will lay out his answers directly to Congress. His only brief comments have been that the calls with the Chinese were routine and within the duties and responsibilities of his job.

"I think it's best that I reserve my comments on the record until I do that in front of the lawmakers who have the lawful responsibility to oversee the U.S. military," Milley said. "I'll go into any level of detail Congress wants to go into."

While some in Congress have charged that he overstepped his authority, President Joe Biden has stood by him.

Loren Thompson, a longtime observer of the U.S. defense establishment as chief operating officer of the nonprofit Lexington Institute, says Milley is a victim of Washington's extreme partisanship and perhaps of his own efforts to shape his public image.

"His views and descriptions of his behavior behind closed doors, pop up too frequently in tell-all books like the Woodward and Costa book," Thompson said. "So perhaps Milley has taken a more active approach to trying to shape his image, and that has not served him well."

Not all of Milley's controversies have been related to Trump. At a House hearing in June, Milley passionately defended the military's openness to allowing young officers to study ideas they might not agree with, such as "critical race theory," and he said he wanted to understand "white rage" and the motivations of those who participated in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Joint Chiefs chairmen traditionally keep a low public profile. Of the 19 who preceded Milley, none was fired, nor does it appear he will be. Among recent chairmen, only Marine Gen. Peter Pace served fewer than four years when the George W. Bush administration did not tap him for another two-year term, citing the divisiveness of his association with the Iraq war.

Created in 1949, the job of chairman is to advise the president and the defense secretary. By law, the chairman commands no troops. The role has grown in public prominence during the two decades of U.S. warfighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Milley commanded troops during tours in both wars. Those battles, where he lost many soldiers, helped chart his path as he rose from an armor officer in 1980 to Army chief of staff 35 years later.

His move into the chairman's office on Sept. 30, 2019, came with an unusual twist.

Nearly a year before he was sworn in and just days before James Mattis resigned as defense secretary, Trump announced that Milley was his choice to succeed Gen. Joseph Dunford as chairman. The timing was unusually early in Dunford's tenure, and it may have had as much to do with Trump's antagonism toward Mattis as his belief that Milley was right for the job.

That's how Trump described it when he lashed out at Milley this summer following reports that Milley had feared last year that Trump might use the military in a coup. Trump said he picked him as chairman

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to spite Mattis, who he believed didn't like Milley. In fact, Mattis had recommended the Air Force's top general for the job, not Milley.

Milley's gregarious nature might have initially appealed to Trump, but he soon soured on him. In June 2020, Milley privately opposed Trump's talk of invoking the Insurrection Act to put active-duty troops in the streets of Washington to counter protests sparked by the killing by Minneapolis police of a Black man, George Floyd.

Milley also expressed public regret at being part of a Trump entourage that strolled across Lafayette Square on June 1, 2020, to be positioned near a church where Trump held up a Bible for photographers. Critics hit Milley for appearing to be a political pawn. Days later, Milley said he had made a big mistake. Through the months that followed, he seemed at risk of being sacked by Trump.

In the book "I Alone Can Fix It," Washington Post reporters Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker reported that on the day President Joe Biden was sworn in, Milley expressed relief to former first lady Michelle Obama. "No one has a bigger smile today than I do," Milley said.

Facebook puts Instagram for kids on hold after pushback

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Facebook is putting a hold on the development of a kids' version of Instagram, geared toward children under 13, to address concerns that have been raised about the vulnerability of younger users.

"I still firmly believe that it's a good thing to build a version of Instagram that's designed to be safe for tweens, but we want to take the time to talk to parents and researchers and safety experts and get to more consensus about how to move forward," said Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, in an interview Monday on NBC's "Today" show.

The announcement follows a investigative series by The Wall Street Journal which reported that Facebook was aware that the use of Instagram by some teenage girls led to mental health issues and anxiety.

Yet the development of Instagram for a younger audience was met with broader opposition almost immediately.

Facebook announced the development of an Instagram Kids app in March, saying at the time that it was "exploring a parent-controlled experience." Two months later, a bipartisan group of 44 attorneys general wrote to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, urging him to abandon the project, citing the well being of children.

They cited increased cyberbullying, possible vulnerability to online predators, and what they called Facebook's "checkered record" in protecting children on its platforms. Facebook faced similar criticism in 2017 when it launched the Messenger Kids app, touted as a way for children to chat with family members and friends approved by parents.

Josh Golin, executive director of children's digital advocacy group Fairplay, urged the company Monday to permanently pull the plug on the app. So did a group of Democratic members of Congress.

"Facebook is heeding our calls to stop plowing ahead with plans to launch a version of Instagram for kids," tweeted Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey. "But a 'pause' is insufficient. Facebook must completely abandon this project."

The Senate had already planned a hearing Thursday with Facebook's global safety head, Antigone Davis, to address what the company knows about how Instagram affects the mental health of younger users.

Mosseri maintained Monday that the company believes it's better for children under 13 to have a specific platform for age-appropriate content, and that other companies like TikTok and YouTube have app versions for that age group.

He said in a blog post that it's better to have a version of Instagram where parents can supervise and control their experience rather than relying on the company's ability to verify if kids are old enough to use the app.

Mosseri said that Instagram for kids is meant for those between the ages of 10 and 12, not younger. It will require parental permission to join, be ad free, and will include age-appropriate content and features.

Parents will be able to supervise the time their children spend on the app, oversee who can message them, who can follow them and who they can follow.

While work is being paused on Instagram Kids, the company will be expanding opt-in parental supervision tools to teen accounts of those 13 and older. More details on these tools will be disclosed in the coming months, Mosseri said.

This isn't the first time Facebook has received backlash for a product aimed at children. Child development experts urged the company to shut down its Messenger Kids app in 2018, saying it was not responding to a "need" as Facebook insisted but creating one instead.

In that case, Facebook went ahead with the app.

AP Technology Writers Matt O'Brien and Barbara Ortutay contributed to this report.

Faith groups aid Haitian migrants, denounce mistreatment

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and PETER SMITH Associated Press

Faith-based groups — many of them longtime advocates for a more welcoming immigration policy -- have been scrambling to keep up with fast-paced developments in the Haitian migrant crisis, trying to assist those in need while assailing the harsh Border Patrol tactics employed against them.

Before thousands of Haitian migrants dispersed last week from a camp in the border city of Del Rio, Texas, a coalition of churches and other groups was providing them with sandwiches, water and other essentials. Since dispersing, many of the migrants have received help from faith-based groups in Houston and El Paso as they seek to connect with relatives and sponsors throughout the United States.

Immigration hardliners criticize some of the efforts by religious activists, saying their efforts encourage still more migrants to come. But those providing the assistance see it as an extension of their religious mandate to help the needy.

"We are apolitical," said Carlos Villareal, a Houston-area leader in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which has mobilized volunteers at a short-term transition center in Houston to assist hundreds of migrants arriving from Del Rio.

"Our concern is mainly with the families, that we can help them," Villareal said. "It's also the Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have done unto you."

The transition center was set up earlier this year at the request of the White House in response to earlier migrant surges, Villareal said. It provides the families with a place to shower, have a meal, and contact sponsors who would pay for their plane or bus tickets to join them while their cases go through the immigration process.

Most of the Haitian migrants are expected to ask immigration judges for asylum or some other legal status — requests that could be denied and lead to eventual deportation.

Villareal says he encounters migrants with stories similar to that of his parents, who immigrated from Mexico in search of a better life, not to be a burden on society.

"These people are just here seeking an opportunity," he said.

Mobilization of faith-based groups began almost from the start of the sudden migrant surge in Del Rio, with Haitians converging from various Latin American countries to which they had fled from their beleaguered Caribbean homeland.

Volunteers from a coalition of Christian churches and other groups in that region along the U.S.-Mexico border prepared more than 10,000 sandwiches for Haitian migrants camping under the bridge that connects Del Rio with Mexico's Ciudad Acuña, said Shon Young, president of the Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition.

Their work began with about 20 churches and grew to more than 100 churches and other organizations, said Young, who is associate pastor at City Church Del Rio.

His church also collected donations, and the coalition set up an Amazon wish list that included juices, hand sanitizer and snacks. The response – from U.S. and Haitian organizations and from far-flung individual

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donors – has been overwhelming, Young said.

The camp held more than 14,000 people at its peak. Many of the Haitian migrants are being expelled and flown back to Haiti, but many others who gathered in Del Rio have been released in the United States, according to two U.S. officials.

The Department of Homeland Security bused Haitians from Del Rio to El Paso, Laredo and the Rio Grande Valley along the Texas border, and added flights to Tucson, Arizona, one of the officials said. They are processed by the Border Patrol at those locations.

The El Paso Baptist Association has been offering migrants COVID-19 testing and providing food, clothes and a place to sleep while they contact their family members or others sponsors. Since late July, the association has assisted more than 300 migrants, most of them Haitian, and was expecting many more to arrive from Del Rio, said Larry Floyd, the group's executive director.

Catholic-led and other faith-based nonprofits have long been at the forefront of efforts to support migrants and asylum seekers along the Mexican border, providing crucial services on both sides of the Rio Grande.

Pope Francis has praised the work of Sister Norma Pimentel, the executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley. Other well-known groups include Jewish Family Service of San Diego, which provides housing and other assistance to migrants, and Annunciation House in El Paso, which provides shelter to migrants while they arrange travel to other U.S. cities.

Annunciation House, which says its mission is based on Catholic social justice teaching, has geared up to receive several hundred migrants coming from Del Rio, said executive director Ruben Garcia.

"First they're tested," Garcia said. "Once they're COVID tested, we begin to accommodate them."

At times, faith-based groups have injected themselves into a polarizing national debate over immigration policies. Although many praise their work to help migrants, some critics say it encourages more people to come to the U.S.

"A lot of these religious groups conflate two issues ... they are rendering assistance to people who are in front of them who need help. That's different from advocating government policy that would import more people like that," said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies. The center favors more restrictive immigration policies.

Many religious leaders joined a call last week organized by the national nonprofit network Faith in Action urging President Joe Biden's administration to stop deporting migrants to Haiti without giving them a chance to seek asylum in the U.S. and to protest their treatment after images surfaced of Border Patrol agents on horseback using aggressive tactics.

"That is unconscionable and cannot be tolerated today," said the Rev. Alvin Herring, Faith in Action's executive director.

The Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice has called for more oversight of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The network's government relations director, Ronnate Asirwatham, says CBP has a "history of systemic abuse and racism."

The group joined more than 160 Catholic organizations in a letter asking Biden to end Title 42 authority, named for a section of a 1944 public health law that then-President Donald Trump used in March 2020 to effectively end asylum at the Mexican border.

Herring, who traveled to Del Rio with other faith leaders to assess the situation first-hand, says it is vital to press for Biden's administration to make good on its commitments to migrants.

"We see the singling out of our Haitian brothers and sisters for this despicable abuse, which we believe is racist and immoral," he said.

Contributing to this report, from Santa Fe, New Mexico, was Cedar Attanasio, a reporter with The Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative.

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Anita Hill still waits for change, 30 years after testimony

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

America had yet to really understand sexual harassment when Anita Hill testified against Clarence Thomas in front of an all-male Senate panel in October 1991. He was confirmed to the Supreme Court anyway, but Hill's work was just beginning.

Now, three decades later, what does 65-year-old Hill wish she could have told 35-year-old Hill, the young professor in the bright blue suit who testified calmly and deliberately that day but had utterly no idea what lay ahead?

"I wish I had known then that the work would take a long time," she says now. "That I should be patient — diligent, but patient." As a lawyer, she had thought institutions would do their job, she says. "What I wasn't understanding was our culture of denial."

It's safe to say the soft-spoken Hill, an exceedingly private person who has spent her entire adult life in the classroom, didn't grow up planning to become an activist. But the Thomas hearings set her on a different path, and when the #MeToo reckoning exploded in 2017, she was automatically a potent symbol. She still teaches gender, race and law at Brandeis University and also chairs the Hollywood Commission, which fights harassment in the entertainment industry, along with other advocacy work.

So it seems appropriate that Hill's latest project is one that combines her paths of academia and activism. Her new book, "Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence," is a heavily researched look at gender violence — tracing its roots, measuring its impact, and suggesting ways to fight it.

Sitting down last week with The Associated Press to discuss the book — her third — Hill said the project gained urgency in early 2020 as the pandemic took hold. She was disturbed to hear that intimate partner violence had surged in the early days of the pandemic.

Through a mix of academic studies, legal analysis, anecdotes and interviews, Hill looks at different spheres of society and finds that although there's surely a better understanding of sexual harassment and gender violence now than three decades ago — when Wyoming Sen. Alan Simpson referred at the hearing to "that sexual harassment crap" — there's a lack of comprehension of how deeply rooted the problems are.

She also says it's unrealistic to expect a younger generation's more evolved values will be enough to eradicate gender violence, an idea she calls "the myth of the woke generation." First of all, beliefs in any generation are mixed, but also, it's the institutions and systems that need to change, she says.

"It's really dangerous for us to think that gender violence is not a huge problem, that it is not a problem that's affecting (all of us)," Hill says. "There's probably not anyone who doesn't have a story about something that happened to them or to someone they know."

And, she says, despite the power of millions of #MeToo tweets sharing such experiences that launched the movement in 2017, a year later at Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court hearing, "Christine Blasey Ford testified about her own experience with sexual assault ... and the Senate seemed to refuse to even do a thorough investigation. So, it is endemic and it's systemic." And men can experience gender violence as well, she points out — often when they don't conform to conventional notions of masculinity or gender expression.

Her reference to Ford's testimony in the book is especially poignant. On the day Ford, a fellow academic, testified, Hill was watching from far off at the University of Utah, where she was speaking to a women's studies class. But they met a year later. Hill says they share a unique bond.

"She and I are the two people in the world who have gone through it," she says. "I knew this was going to change her life forever, and wanted to hear from her just on a personal basis, how things were going, how she was handling it, and to reassure her things would get better." (Ford recently participated in a new podcast with Hill, "Because of Anita").

One thing Hill can identify with only too well: the condemnation and threats that Ford received. "Certainly there were years that I felt threatened," Hill says. "I felt fortunate that I didn't have children ... I did have elderly parents that I feared for and felt very protective of."

She got through it, she says, "by just being out in the world, not hiding from it, going out and doing

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public speaking, being engaged." And by listening to victims' stories — "knowing that there was something bigger and something more important, and that I could make a difference in the lives of the people who were suffering."

What Hill has learned, she says, is that attitudes may have evolved, but systems and institutions haven't kept pace. "It's not enough for us as a society to change," she says. "If we keep the same systems in place, the problem's going to keep repeating itself."

She is, though, buoyed by what she calls the thorough investigation conducted by New York Attorney General Letitia James into accusations of harassment against New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, which led to his resignation. That probe, she says, should serve as "a model" for future such cases.

Hill is also concerned about the dual impact of racism and sexism, and the intersection of two struggles that she, like #MeToo founder Tarana Burke, feels need to be addressed together. She points out that statistics show "the risk of being a victim of gender violence is enhanced depending on your race. How can you resolve that problem without looking at both? You cannot resolve the problems that women of color face unless you're attending to the problem of racism in this country."

Another point Hill addresses in her book: the long-awaited apology offered her in 2019 by Joe Biden, who had chaired a skeptical Senate Judiciary Committee in 1991 when she testified that Thomas had harassed her when she worked for him at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Hill has said the committee refused to seriously examine her accusations and, crucially, did not allow testimony from other potential witnesses.

Hill jokes in the book that she and her husband used to say, when their doorbell would ring unexpectedly in Massachusetts, that it was Biden coming to apologize. When he finally called just before entering the presidential campaign, she writes that she asked him to take on, as a calling, ending gender-based violence.

"I'm not sure he heard me," she writes.

But Hill has hopes that Biden, now that he holds the highest office in the land, can make good on her request. "I believe that President Biden has a special role in the history of these issues that that gives him an opportunity to make good on his responsibilities," she says now.

Asked whether she actually expects it to happen, Hill replies: "I'm always a very hopeful person." But, she adds, "I will continue to advocate whether it's this president or the next president. That is something that I imagine I'll be doing for the rest of my life."

Jailed Belarus opposition leader wins European rights prize

BRUSSELS (AP) — The Council of Europe on Monday awarded its major human rights prize to jailed Belarus opposition leader Maria Kolesnikova, who was arrested last year after she tore up her passport at the border to prevent her forced expulsion from the country.

Earlier this month, a court in Minsk found her guilty of conspiring to seize power, creating an extremist organization and of calling for actions damaging state security and sentenced her to 11 years in prison.

At a ceremony in Strasbourg, France, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe awarded her its ninth Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize, which honors outstanding civil society action in the defense of human rights. The award is worth 60,000 euros (\$70,160).

Belarus was rocked by months of protests after President Alexander Lukashenko was awarded a sixth term after the August 2020 presidential vote that the opposition and the West denounced as a sham. He ordered a huge crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested and thousands beaten by police.

"In standing up against a regime which has chosen force and brutality against peaceful and legitimate protest, Ms. Kolesnikova showed that she is ready to risk her own safety for a cause greater than herself — she has shown true courage," assembly President Rik Daems said as he presented the award.

Accepting the prize on her sister's behalf, Tatsiana Khomich said: "This award is a sign of solidarity of the entire democratic world with the people of Belarus. It is also a sign to us, Belarusians, that the international community supports us, and that we are on the right track."

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Kolesnikova, 39, has been a key opposition activist. She appeared at political rallies, fearlessly walking up to lines of riot police and making her signature gesture — a heart formed by her hands.

The former flautist in the Belarus philharmonic orchestra led the campaign of Viktor Babariko, the head of a Russian-owned bank who made a bid to challenge Lukashenko, but he was barred from the race after being jailed on money laundering and tax evasion charges that he dismissed as political.

Kolesnikova then joined forces with former English teacher Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was running in place of her jailed husband Sergei, an opposition blogger, as the main candidate against Lukashenko, and Veronika Tsepkalo, the wife of another potential top contender who fled the country fearing arrest.

The three appeared together at colorful campaign events that came in stark contrast to Lukashenko's Soviet-style gatherings.

In September 2020, KGB agents drove Kolesnikova to the Belarus-Ukraine border in an attempt to expel her. In the neutral zone between the two countries, she managed to rip up her passport, broke out of the car and walked back into Belarus, where she was immediately arrested.

The Council of Europe has 47 member countries, including Russia but not Belarus, and is the continent's leading human rights body. It is not part of the European Union.

Small islands caught between tourism economy, climate change

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Come visit the Maldives, its president entreated the world at this year's United Nations General Assembly, moments before switching to an impassioned plea for help combating climate change. The adjacent appeals illustrated a central dilemma for many small island developing states: their livelihoods, or their lives?

The United Nations recognizes 38 member states, scattered across the world's waters, as small island developing states grouped together because they face "unique social, economic and environmental challenges."

This bloc is particularly vulnerable to climate change. This bloc is also particularly dependent on tourism — a significant driver of climate change, accountable for 8% of global carbon dioxide emissions alone, according to sustainable tourism expert Stefan Gössling — and an industry devastated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The predicament these islands find themselves in is essentially recursive: Attract tourism for economic survival, which in turn contributes to climate change, which in turn bleaches the colorful reefs and destroys the pristine beaches that attract tourists. As is, by the end of the century, these low-lying islands could drown entirely.

"The difference between 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees is a death sentence for the Maldives," President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih told the U.N. General Assembly last week.

The annual summit is an opportunity for each of the international body's 193 members to step into the spotlight on the world stage. But the Maldives — perhaps best known globally as an Indian Ocean playground for moneyed honeymooners and Bollywood celebrities — had a particularly high-profile platform this year. Its foreign minister is serving as the General Assembly's president and Solih was speaking third overall — just after U.S. President Joe Biden.

But the climate change appeals are nothing new, made year after year as these islands are pummeled by storms and the seas rise like a "slow-moving killer," as Colgate University's April Baptiste puts it.

Baptiste, a professor of environmental studies as well as Africana and Latin American studies, researches environmental justice in the Caribbean region. She says the island states' appeals had gone ignored for years because they were essentially seen as "dispensable." With little land, political power and financial capital, it was easy to overlook their plight. These are also islands with a history of exploitation that dates back centuries and states whose full-time residents — not tourists — are primarily Black and brown.

"You have that layer of race, racism, marginality to take into consideration," she said. "I absolutely believe that's at the heart of the conversation as to why small island developing states are not taken seriously."

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People and governments have taken matters into their own hands over recent years.

One man from the island nation of Kiribati sought refugee status in New Zealand on the basis that climate change posed an existential threat to his homeland, though he was eventually deported. This past week, Vanuatu announced it would seek to bring climate change before the International Court of Justice. Although largely symbolic — any ruling would not be legally binding — the move, as intended by the government, seeks to clarify international law.

Last month, a group of Pacific island nations — contending with encroaching saltwater that destroys crops and pollutes freshwater supplies — took the step of declaring their traditional sea boundaries would remain intact, even if their coastlines shrank beneath the waves.

Gössling, a professor at Sweden's Linnaeus University School of Business and Economics, and Daniel Scott, a geography and environmental management professor at Canada's University of Waterloo, are two creators of the Climate Change Vulnerability Index for Tourism. With the aim of bringing the issue to policymakers' attention, they identified the countries with tourism economies most at risk from climate change. The small island developing states made up a substantial portion of the list.

"The Maldives identified this years ago and they pointed out: 'We're going to continue our tourism development, because that's the only way we can make money in the next couple decades before our islands are lost,'" Scott said.

For the small island developing states, this central climate change tension between lives and livelihood is mirrored in their response to the coronavirus pandemic. To prevent the virus' spread and save lives, they closed their borders, and their tourism-focused economies were accordingly ravaged over the past 18 months.

Mauritius isn't wholly dependent on tourism, but that sector does make up a significant amount of its foreign revenue, the permanent representative to the United Nations for the tiny Indian Ocean island east of Madagascar says. Its borders fully reopen in October, and Jagdish Koonjul said Mauritius hopes to attract 650,000 tourists between then and next summer.

Mauritius, Koonjul said, is "very lucky" compared to others in the bloc because of its economic diversification, relatively high land and coral reef that prevents erosion.

But it's not safe from climate change. Mauritius and other small island developing states are looking to the bigger, more industrialized countries to buy into an ambitious commitment at the upcoming United Nations climate conference in Glasgow.

"We miss this train now, and we are doomed," Koonjul said.

The scores of speeches at this year's U.N. General Assembly tended to follow a rubric. They opened with pleasantries directed at the General Assembly's president and then touched on a laundry list of topics: perhaps a pet issue, but definitely conflict, coronavirus and climate change. The rhetoric often blended together, but the speeches from the leaders of the small island developing states — with the most to lose in the near future — stood out with stark eloquence echoing Koonjul.

"Will Tuvalu remain a member state of the U.N. if it is finally submerged? Who will help us?" asked Kausea Natano, the prime minister of the Pacific Ocean country, on Saturday.

The states had specific asks, including immediate and significant reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, debt restructuring and financial assistance — especially given the impact of the coronavirus on their tourism-dependent economies.

"Industrialized countries have an obligation to assist the states most affected by climate change because they created a problem in the first instance," Gaston Browne, prime minister of the Caribbean Sea's Antigua and Barbuda, said Saturday.

The same day, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves cast the major powers' actions thus far as little more than "pious mouthings and marginal tinkering."

"On this, humanity is at the midnight hour. Can we meet the challenge? We may not live to find out the answer if the usual continues," the Caribbean nation's premier said.

Salvaging the economic fate of these countries is complex. Baptiste says there's no overarching policy

aimed at retraining people whose livelihoods are vulnerable in new trades.

And Gössling argues that, while they're not the culprits behind global warming, the small island developing states aren't directly confronting the friction between climate change prevention measures and their tourism reliance.

"I also think there's never been serious efforts by the SIDS to actually also consider different economic sectors, because very often it's been very self-evident that you would focus on tourism, you would develop for tourism and that you, by definition, then almost would become dependent on tourism," he said. "And I think the strange thing — this conflict has never been vocalized by SIDS."

What has been vocalized is a clarion call for substantive action taken by rich, developed countries. Now that the ramifications of climate change have reached countries that could long pretend it didn't exist, the small island developing states hope the message is finally getting through.

The poet John Donne wrote that "no man is an island entire of itself." In the same vein, Solih drove home the point the island nations have been making for years: "There is no guarantee of survival for any one nation in a world where the Maldives cease to exist."

Associated Press reporter Nick Perry contributed to this report from Wellington, New Zealand. Follow Mallika Sen on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mallikavsen>

Haitians returning to a homeland that's far from welcoming

By ALBERTO ARCE and RODRIGO ABD Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Deported from the United States, Pierre Charles landed a week ago in Port-au-Prince, a capital more dangerous and dystopian than the one he'd left four years before. Unable to reach his family, he left the airport alone, on foot.

Charles was unsure how to make his way to the Carrefour neighborhood through a city shrouded in smoke and dust, often tolling with gunfire from gangs and police. On the airport road, the 39-year-old laborer tried unsuccessfully to flag down packed buses. He asked motorcycle drivers to take him but was told again and again that the trip was too risky.

Finally, someone agreed to take him as far as a bus stop.

"I know there are barricades and shootings," Charles said as he took off into the unknown, "but I have nowhere else to go."

This story is part of a series, Haiti: Business, politics and gangs, produced with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

At least 2,853 Haitians deported from Texas have landed here in the last week with \$15-\$100 in cash handouts and a "good luck out there" from migration officials -- many setting foot in the country for the first time in years, even decades.

More than a city, Port-au-Prince it is an archipelago of gang-controlled islands in a sea of despair. Some neighborhoods are abandoned. Others are barricaded behind fires, destroyed cars and piles of garbage, occupied by heavily armed men. On Saturday, a local newspaper reported 10 kidnappings in the previous 24 hours including a journalist, a singer's mother and a couple driving with their toddler, who was left behind in the car.

Even before the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July, the government was weak -- the Palace of Justice inactive, congress disbanded by Moïse and the legislative building pocked by bullets. Now, although there is a prime minister, it is absent.

Most of the population of Port-au-Prince has no access to basic public services, no drinking water, electricity or garbage collection. The deportees join thousands of fellow Haitians who have been displaced from their homes, pushed out by violence to take up residence in crowded schools, churches, sports centers and makeshift camps among ruins. Many of these people are out of reach even for humanitarian organizations.

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Of the more than 18,000 people the United Nations counts among those displaced in Port-au-Prince since gang violence began to spike in May, the International Organization for Migration only has access "to about 5,000, maybe 7,000," said Giuseppe Loprete, head of the IOM mission here. "We are negotiating access to the rest."

This is the Port-au-Prince that awaits the deportees. Here are snapshots of a city that is far from welcoming.

Elice Fleury didn't pay much attention to the people running and shouting outside his bakery until he heard the bursts of gunfire. When he looked out the door on June 2, he saw heavily armed masked men pulling people out of their homes and taking control of his Martissant neighborhood.

The main road in Martissant is a strategic artery that connects the Haitian capital with the south of the country. The gang wanted control. They had surrounded the neighborhood that lies between mountains and the sea in a well-planned occupation, and were firing on the police station. When Fleury saw the officers fleeing instead of facing the armed men, he called his wife.

"I can't get out," she told him.

Fleury spent that night in a nearby square with other neighbors, talking to his wife by telephone -- their children crying in the background -- as she explained that the gunmen had fired tear gas, searched house by house and were patrolling the streets.

A day later, the family escaped, leaving everything behind, and reunited in a temporary shelter.

Three months later, the Fleurys languish in that temporary shelter, sleeping on the floor of a sports center a few miles from the house to which they neither can nor want to return.

Martissant has become one of the disconnected islands in the capital. Buses carrying people and merchandise from Port-au-Prince to the south of the country form convoys to travel through Martissant, often waiting for hours and sometimes overnight until they pay the gang members for clearance to travel, according to drivers.

Doctors Without Borders was forced to shut down its hospital in Martissant, where the agency had provided care for the last 15 years.

Seidina Ousseni, Head of the mission, describes the situation on the ground of Port-au-Prince in two words: "Urban warfare."

Most of the city "in different degrees is facing the same circumstances," Ousseni said. "Residents organize themselves to defend their neighborhoods and when they are not capable of doing it, they have to abandon the place."

Two weeks after the Martissant attack, gunmen laid siege to an encampment called La Piste along the coast north of the capital, a neighborhood of deaf and disabled Haitians relocated there by the International Red Cross after the 2010 earthquake leveled the capital.

This time it was the police leading an assault at dusk, according to residents and a United Nations account.

"My son was playing cards outside when I heard the gunshots," said Marie Jaquesmel, 70. "The police entered from different directions and started firing tear gas and shooting, we could only run."

With 139 houses set fire behind her, she lost track of her 28-year-old son, who is deaf and cannot speak. "I don't know if he is dead or alive, the only thing I saw is that those men were policemen."

Now she is twice displaced, this time without her son to help provide food. She shares a cramped school with 315 families from La Piste, living in despair. Jaquesmel holds a photo of her son to her forehead and weeps. "Can you please help me find him?"

Joseph Dieu Faite, 56, a blind leader of the displaced residents of La Piste looks toward the horizon with eyes wide open, as if he were seeing a monster. The attack, he explains, was police retaliation against civilians living in a gang-controlled neighborhood.

"There were some gangsters there, I have to acknowledge that, but the police did not ask, did not say a word, did not make a difference, just evicted us and then took matches and gasoline and burned our houses one by one," Faite said.

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Justin Pierre June, 31, an articulate law student who arrived in Port-au-Prince on the first deportee flight last Sunday stood up to the IOM officers receiving them at the airport.

"This is not the right moment to deport us to Haiti. Haiti is not ready to receive deportees because its situation is chaotic," he shouted. "This country is in a political, social, security and economic crisis, we are surrounded by gangs from all sides. ... We should have been allowed to apply to become refugees"

More than 100 fellow deportees clapped in support. His sentiments were seconded 72 hours later by Philipo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who questioned the US "mass expulsions of individuals...without screening for protection needs." Grandi said that international law forbids the return of individuals to a country in such dangerous chaos.

The US has had a checkered history with the nation since Haitians freed themselves from slavery and French colonial rule at the start of the 19th century. Americans occupied Haiti for nearly two decades in the 20th Century. Since then, through coups and earthquakes, US leaders and the international community have both contributed to chaos and tried unsuccessfully to rebuild the country.

All the while, Haitian immigrants made their way to US shores by sea to Florida or through Mexico to Texas.

On Thursday, the US Special Envoy to Haiti, Dan Foote, resigned, saying he could not defend a policy of deporting Haitians back to "a country where American officials are confined to secure compounds because of the danger posed by armed gangs to daily life." The policy will backfire, he said: "Surging migration to our borders will only grow as we add to Haiti's unacceptable misery."

There could be as many as 100 gangs in Port-au-Prince; no one has an exact count and allegiances often are violently fluid. One of the most powerful groups is the G9 coalition of gangs led by Jimmy Cherizier, alias "Barbecue," a former policeman turned gangster. His power seems to have increased since the assassination of the president last July, which he condemned, and there is even talk he may enter politics.

Downtown, Barbecue's gang coalition controls the empty streets around the judiciary and legislative buildings, and all streets east to the coast. They open and close movement through the city center at will. Not far from the National Palace, residents of the adjoining Bel Air neighborhood don't support Barbecue's gang any more than they do the police, so they defend themselves against both.

Jean Baptiste Nevelson, 49, a spokesperson for Bel Air, nods toward the sea and G9's territory and says, "We are afraid of the group down there, they put pressure on us every day."

Nevelson, who holds no weapon but gives orders to some men who do, adds, "We do not trust any government, we do not trust the police. We only have ourselves ... to be honest, we arrived at a point where this neighborhood can only be defended by our weapons."

In half an hour of conversation, punctuated by several rounds of gunfire not too far away, he links the violence they are suffering to poverty and politics. "The state does not provide, we have no water, no schools, no electricity, no jobs. Many people used to go sell in the market and now they have been cut off by our enemies and cannot get there, so they stay here jobless. They are hungry."

Gangs control access to and from the port -- and, therefore, 80% of everything consumed in the island nation, according to port and business leaders. Merchandise coming out of the port is consolidated into convoys that must cross gang-controlled areas and face daily assaults as well as extortions. Sometimes groups of teenagers jump onto one of the trucks and cut the plastic, sending bags of cement and other goods to the street, where they are whisked away to houses.

The drivers don't dare stop.

The wealthy of Port-au-Prince live in the hillside eastern suburb of Petion-Ville in gated and privately guarded homes, largely protected from the violence and cost of payoffs. But the poor suffer rising prices and bottlenecks. When food and fuel deliveries are stalled, prices rise and lines at gas stations grow into the hundreds.

In La Saline, in front of the main port entrance, a neighborhood partially burned by a gang two years ago, dozens of kids are barefoot, even naked, and beg for food and water. Warehouses and police stations

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have been looted. Traffic circles have burned tires and material piled up for barricades.

The city's main food market, Croix des Bosalles, extends from the southern entrance of the port to the parliament, on ground where enslaved people were sold before independence. To enter the market today, one must walk through a gang gauntlet. First, one passes half a dozen young men with long weapons, phones in hand, earphones in one ear. Then, by a larger group sitting atop of the burned-out box of a trailer.

The floor of the market is thick with decomposing trash and, in some places, small fires of burning trash. Each footstep on the spongy ground seems to release fumes of decay into already fetid air.

Although the market is crowded, only about a third of the previous vendors and shoppers have been able to make their way out of their neighborhoods or through downtown to get there. The atmosphere is dense, angry, and full of resentment. Women alternately shout "go away from here," or beckon an outsider to take a closer look: "How can a person live in these conditions?"

In a matter of minutes, a 30-year-old man dressed in black and dreadlocks identifies himself as "security" and offers a guided walk through areas that would not be possible to access without his company. Andy -- he only gives one name -- points to bananas, carrots, lettuce or lemon. They are sold from broken stalls or piles on the ground, not far from discarded chicken feet, entrails and empty plastic water bags. "Look at how we live in Haiti. The government has left us in this state. No human being deserves this. That's why we have to organize ourselves," Andy said.

His polite tour comes to an abrupt end when other "security" men approach and tell him to stop. His tone changes just as suddenly. "There could be an attack at any moment, you can't be here, go away, go away, go away, go away."

Indeed, it seems that violence can breakout at any time, in any random corner of the city. Angry mobs gather and dissolve, reunite and prepare for a new confrontation, while bystanders await the unexpected. They do not foresee a better life.

Nevelson, the Bel Air community leader's prediction: "The future will be bad, chaotic, violent."

US officials: Biden aide to meet Saudi crown prince on Yemen

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan is traveling to Saudi Arabia on Monday to meet with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as the U.S. presses for a cease-fire in the yearslong war between the kingdom and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Sullivan will be the highest-ranking Biden administration official to visit Saudi Arabia. Besides seeing the crown prince, often referred to by his initials, MBS, Sullivan is expected to meet with deputy defense minister Khalid bin Salman, a brother to the crown prince, according to two senior administration officials. The officials were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The Biden White House has largely steered clear of the crown prince since making public in February a CIA report that showed MBS likely approved the killing of Washington Post columnist and Saudi critic Jamal Khashoggi in a 2018 operation at the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul.

But the White House has resolved that bringing an end to perhaps the world's most complex conflict can't be done without engaging with the most senior Saudi officials face to face, one senior administration official said.

National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne said Sullivan was traveling to Riyadh on Monday and would also visit the United Arab Emirates, a Saudi ally in the war, but did not provide additional details. Axios first reported that Sullivan was planning on traveling to the region.

Sullivan is being dispatched at a moment when the situation in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, has further deteriorated. Fighting has intensified in the key city of Marib, as Iran-backed rebels have sought to oust the Saudi-backed government from the oil-rich city in the country's north.

International efforts to end the war have been fruitless. Tim Lenderking, the U.S. special envoy for Yemen, called out the Houthis in July for continuing "to refuse to engage meaningfully on a cease-fire and political talks." Saudi Arabia offered a cease-fire proposal to Yemen's Houthi rebels earlier this year as it

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looked to rehabilitate its image with the Biden administration.

The Saudis have drawn international criticism for airstrikes killing civilians and embargoes exacerbating hunger in a nation on the brink of famine.

The new U.N. special envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, recently declared that the country is “stuck in an indefinite state of war” and resuming negotiations to end the more than six-year conflict won’t be easy.

Yemen’s war began in September 2014, when the Iranian-backed Houthis seized Sanaa and began a march south to try to seize the entire country. Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates and other countries, entered the war alongside Yemen’s internationally recognized government in March 2015.

The U.S. sold bombs and fighter jets to Saudi Arabia that the kingdom later used in strikes on Yemen that also killed civilians. The Obama administration in 2015 initially offered U.S. targeting assistance to Saudi Arabia’s command-and-control operations that was supposed to minimize civilian casualties in airstrikes. It didn’t, and Obama ultimately cut back on the program.

Under President Donald Trump, targeting assistance continued although his administration later stopped U.S. refueling operations for Saudi jets.

Biden announced weeks into his administration that he was ending all American support for “offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales.” But there has been little progress on the ground in resolving what the United Nations says is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

White House officials are hopeful that the appointment of Grundberg will bring a new dynamic and put pressure on all sides to bring an end to the conflict, according to two senior administration officials.

Sullivan is being joined for the talks with the Saudis and the UAE by Lenderking and NSC senior director for the Middle East Brett McGurk. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin planned to travel to Saudi Arabia earlier this month while he was in the region but postponed due to what the administration said were scheduling issues.

The high-level White House push comes after Lenderking traveled to Saudi Arabia and Oman, which has pressed for an end to the war. In addition, Secretary of State Antony Blinken had talks with his counterpart members of the Gulf Cooperation Council on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly.

Sullivan’s visit to Saudi Arabia also comes as the administration is looking for ways to resurrect the Iran nuclear deal. The Saudis and the UAE fiercely oppose returning to the deal with Iran that was originally brokered in 2015 by the Obama administration only to be scrapped by Trump in 2018.

Addressing the U.N. General Assembly on Friday, Iran’s new foreign minister Hossain Amir Abdollah said the country will return to nuclear negotiations in Vienna “very soon.” But he accused the Biden administration of sending contradictory messages by saying it wants to rejoin the pact while slapping new sanctions on Tehran and not taking “an iota of positive action.”

Biden and his team have made a U.S. return to the deal — to which Britain, France, Russia, China, Germany and Iran are signatories — one of their top foreign policy priorities. But the U.S. has made limited headway in indirect talks, and Tehran has bristled at Biden administration officials’ call for a “longer and stronger” deal than the original, which expires at the end of 2030.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 28, the 271st day of 2021. There are 94 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Sept. 28, 1920, eight members of the Chicago White Sox were indicted for allegedly throwing the 1919 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds. (All were acquitted at trial, but all eight were banned from the game for life.)

On this date:

In 1066, William the Conqueror invaded England to claim the English throne.

In 1781, American forces in the Revolutionary War, backed by a French fleet, began their successful

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siege of Yorktown, Va.

In 1787, the Congress of the Confederation voted to send the just-completed Constitution of the United States to state legislatures for their approval.

In 1850, flogging was abolished as a form of punishment in the U.S. Navy.

In 1924, three U.S. Army planes landed in Seattle, having completed the first round-the-world trip by air in 175 days.

In 1928, Scottish medical researcher Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, the first effective antibiotic.

In 1939, during World War II, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a treaty calling for the partitioning of Poland, which the two countries had invaded.

In 1962, a federal appeals court found Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett in civil contempt for blocking the admission of James Meredith, a Black student, to the University of Mississippi. (Federal marshals escorted Meredith onto the campus two days later.)

In 1991, jazz great Miles Davis died in Santa Monica, Calif., at age 65.

In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat signed an accord at the White House ending Israel's military occupation of West Bank cities and laying the foundation for a Palestinian state.

In 2000, capping a 12-year battle, the government approved use of the abortion pill RU-486.

In 2019, voters in Afghanistan went to the polls to elect a president for the fourth time since a U.S.-led coalition ousted the Taliban regime in 2001; the vote was marred by violence, Taliban threats and widespread allegations of mismanagement. (After a series of delays, the country's independent election commission announced months later that Ashraf Ghani had won a second term as president.)

Ten years ago: The Obama administration formally appealed a federal appeals court ruling striking down a key provision of President Barack Obama's health care law requiring Americans to buy health insurance or pay a penalty. (The U.S. Supreme Court later upheld the individual mandate.)

Five years ago: In a resounding rebuke, Democrats joined with Republicans to hand Barack Obama the first veto override of his presidency, voting overwhelmingly to allow families of 9/11 victims to sue Saudi Arabia in U.S. courts for its alleged backing of the attackers. Israeli statesman Shimon Peres, 93, died of complications from a stroke.

One year ago: The worldwide death toll from the coronavirus pandemic topped 1 million, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University. The University of Notre Dame's president, the Rev. John I. Jenkins, apologized for not wearing a mask at a White House Rose Garden ceremony for Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett after pictures surfaced that showed him shaking hands and sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with people without one. Northern California's wine country was on fire, as strong winds fanned flames, destroying homes and prompting orders for nearly 70,000 people to be evacuated. Brayden Point scored his playoff-best 14th goal and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Dallas Stars 2-0 to win the Stanley Cup and finish off a postseason that was staged nearly entirely in quarantine because of the pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brigitte Bardot is 87. Actor Joel Higgins is 78. Singer Helen Shapiro is 75. Actor Vernee Watson is 72. Movie writer-director-actor John Sayles is 71. Rock musician George Lynch is 67. Zydeco singer-musician C.J. Chenier (sheh-NEER') is 64. Actor Steve Hytner is 62. Actor-comedian Janeane Garofalo (juh-NEEN' guh-RAH' fuh-loh) is 57. Country singer Matt King is 55. Actor Mira Sorvino is 54. TV personality/singer Moon Zappa is 54. Actor-model Carre Otis is 53. Actor Naomi Watts is 53. Country singer Karen Fairchild (Little Big Town) is 52. Singer/songwriter A.J. Croce is 50. Country singer Mandy Barnett is 46. Rapper Young Jeezy is 44. World Golf Hall of Famer Se Ri Pak is 44. Actor Peter Cambor is 43. Writer-producer-director-actor Bam Margera is 42. Actor Melissa Claire Egan is 40. Actor Jerrika Hinton is 40. Neo-soul musician Luke Mossman (Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats) is 40. Pop-rock singer St. Vincent is 39. Comedian/actor Phoebe Robinson is 37. Rock musician Daniel Platzman (Imagine Dragons) is 35. Actor Hilary Duff is 34. Actor Keir Gilchrist is 29.