

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Events

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

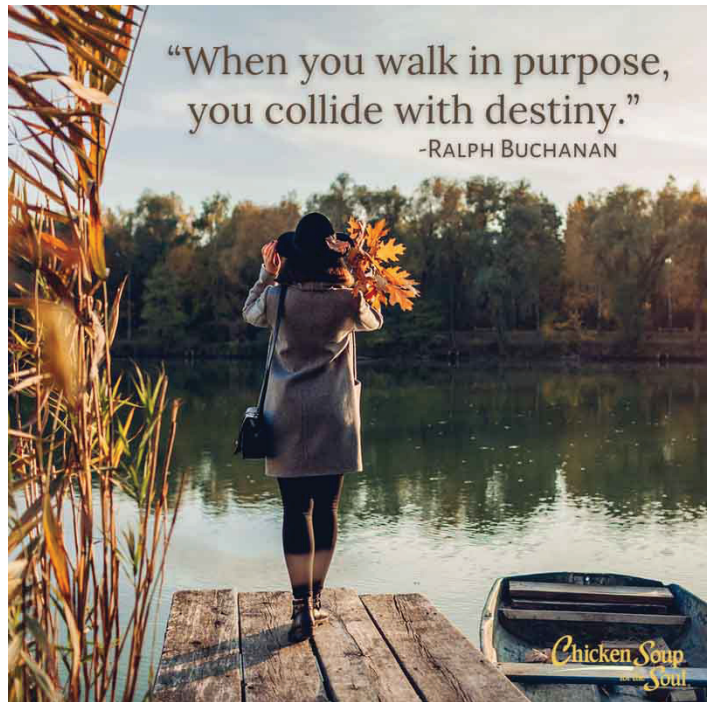
7 p.m.: Football vs. Dakota Hills Coop at Waubay

Saturday, Oct. 2

9 a.m.: Gypsy Day Parade, Aberdeen

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)

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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Netters challenge Falcons in all three sets

Groton Area's volleyball team played its best match of the year, according to Coach Chelsea Hanson. The Tigers faced a very tough Florence/Henry squad Tuesday in Henry. The Falcons swept the series in close games, 25-23, 25-19 and 25-20.

There were seven ties and five lead changes during the night.

Elizabeth Fliehs had five ace serves and two kills, Madeline Fliehs had five kills, Anna Fjeldheim had four kills and an ace serve, Aspen Johnson had three kills and a block, Sydney Leicht had four kills, Megan Fliehs three kills and Alyssa Thaler had one kill.

Caylin Kelly led the Falcons with 12 kills and two blocks, Carlie Moe had six kills, three blocks and an ace serve and Macey Lane had three kills and five ace serves.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 23-25, 25-20 and 17-15. Anna Fjeldheim had four kills and two ace serves, Emma Schinkel four kills, Faith Traphagen three kills and an ace serve, Lydia Meier four kills and three ace serves, Laila Roberts five kills and two ace serves, Shalyn Foertsch one kill and three ace serves, Hollie Frost one block and one kill, and Aspen Johnson had five kills, three ace serves and a block.

Groton Area won the C match, 2-0.

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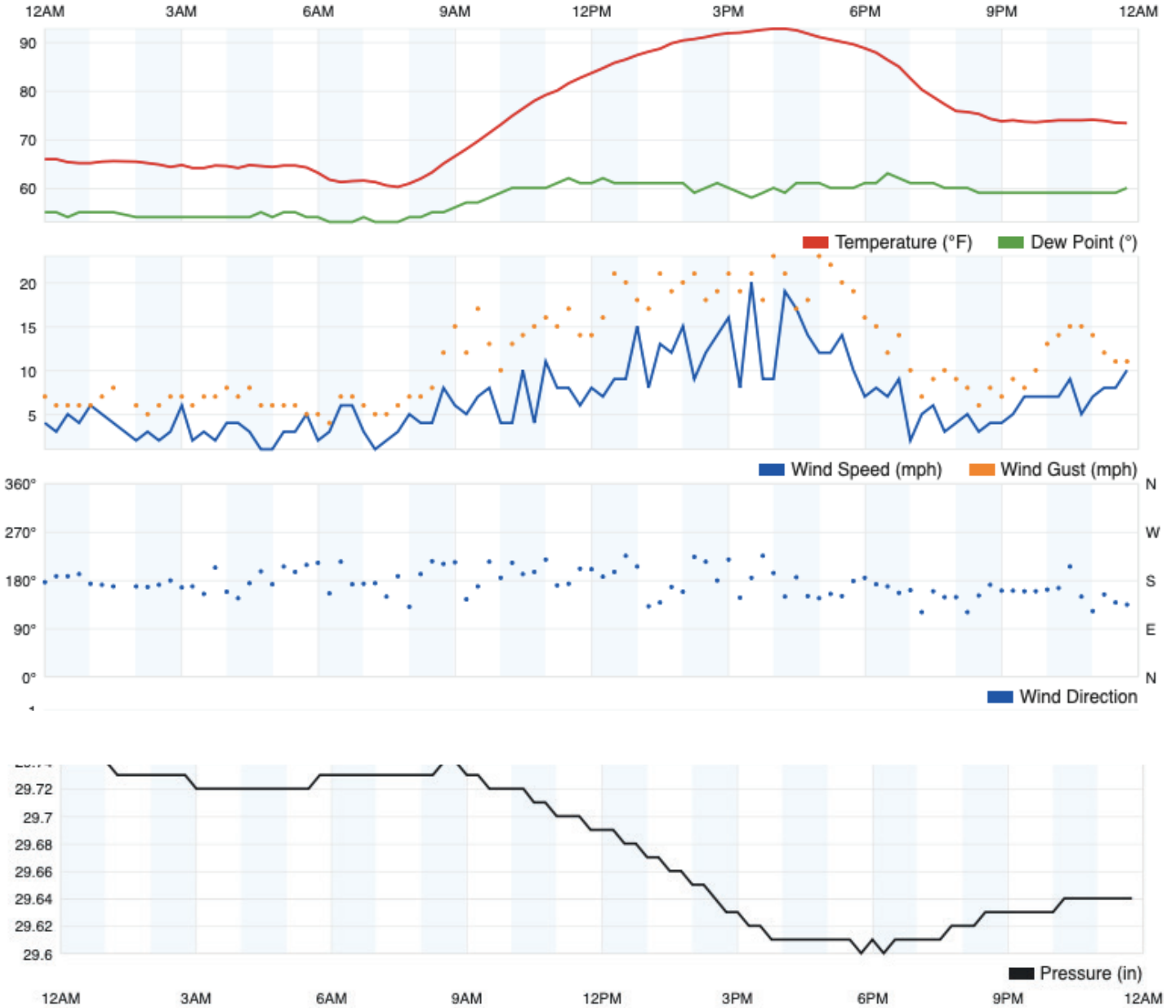
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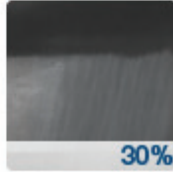

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



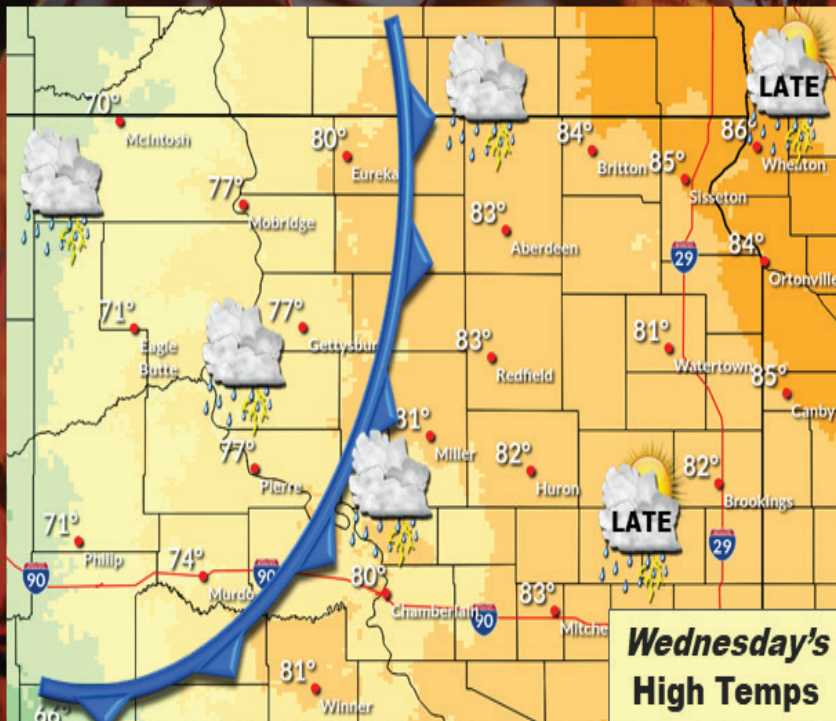
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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
30%	70% 50%	20%	30%	20%
Partly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Showers Likely then Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms	Chance Showers	Slight Chance Showers
High: 84 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 73 °F

Showers & Storms Possible Today

- *Today*: Becoming mostly cloudy, showers and storms developing
- *Thursday*: Showers & storms possible, highs in the upper 60s to low 70s



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 9/29/2021 5:11 AM Central

A cold front will slowly make its way into the central portion of South Dakota today. Clouds will be thickening through the morning with showers and thunderstorms developing through the latter half of the day. Some locally heavy downpours will be possible with the best chances for heavy rainfall across the southern and southeastern portion of South Dakota. Temps will be cooling off behind with front, but out ahead of it readings will warm into the 80s this afternoon. More chances of rain will continue tonight into Thursday.

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Today in Weather History

September 29, 1982: An early snowfall in the Black Hills resulted in the breakage of tree branches and caused power outages in parts of Lead and Nevada Gulch.

1927 - An outbreak of tornadoes from Oklahoma to Indiana caused 81 deaths and 25 million dollars damage. A tornado (possibly two tornadoes) cut an eight-mile long path across Saint Louis MO, to Granite City IL, killing 79 persons. The damage path at times was a mile and a quarter in width. The storm followed a similar path to tornadoes which struck in 1871, 1896, and 1959. (The Weather Channel)

1959 - A storm produced 28 inches of snow at Colorado Springs, CO. (David Ludlum)

1983 - Heavy rains began in central and eastern Arizona which culminated in the worst flood in the history of the state. Eight to ten inch rains across the area caused severe flooding in southeastern Arizona which resulted in thirteen deaths and 178 million dollars damage. President Reagan declared eight counties of Arizona to be disaster areas. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A week of violent weather began in Oklahoma which culminated in one of the worst flooding events in the history of the state. On the first day of the week early morning thunderstorms caused more than a million dollars damage in south Oklahoma City. Thunderstorms produced 4 to 7 inches of rain from Hobart to Ponca City, and another round of thunderstorms that evening produced 7 to 10 inches of rain in north central and northeastern sections of Oklahoma. (Storm Data)

1987 - A slow moving cold front produced rain from the Great Lakes Region to the Central Gulf Coast Region. A late afternoon thunderstorm produced wind gusts to 62 mph at Buffalo NY. Warm weather continued in the western U.S. In Oregon, the afternoon high of 96 degrees at Medford was a record for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - High pressure brought freezing temperatures to parts of Vermont and New York State. Burlington VT dipped to 30 degrees, and Binghamton NY reported a record low of 34 degrees. The high pressure system also brought cold weather to the Central Rocky Mountain Region. Alamosa CO reported a record low of 18 degrees, and Gunnison CO was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of just five degrees above zero. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date, as readings soared into the 80s and low 90s in the Northern Plateau and Northern Plains Region. Record highs included 91 degrees at Boise ID, and 92 degrees at Sheridan WY. The high of 100 degrees at Tucson AZ marked their 51st record high of the year, and their 92nd day of 100 degree weather. (National Weather Summary)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 93 °F at 4:03 PM (RECORD HIGH!)

Low Temp: 60 °F at 7:39 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 1:05 PM

Precip: 0.00

Record High: 95° in 1897

Record Low: 11° in 1939

Average High: 69°F

Average Low: 41°F

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.92

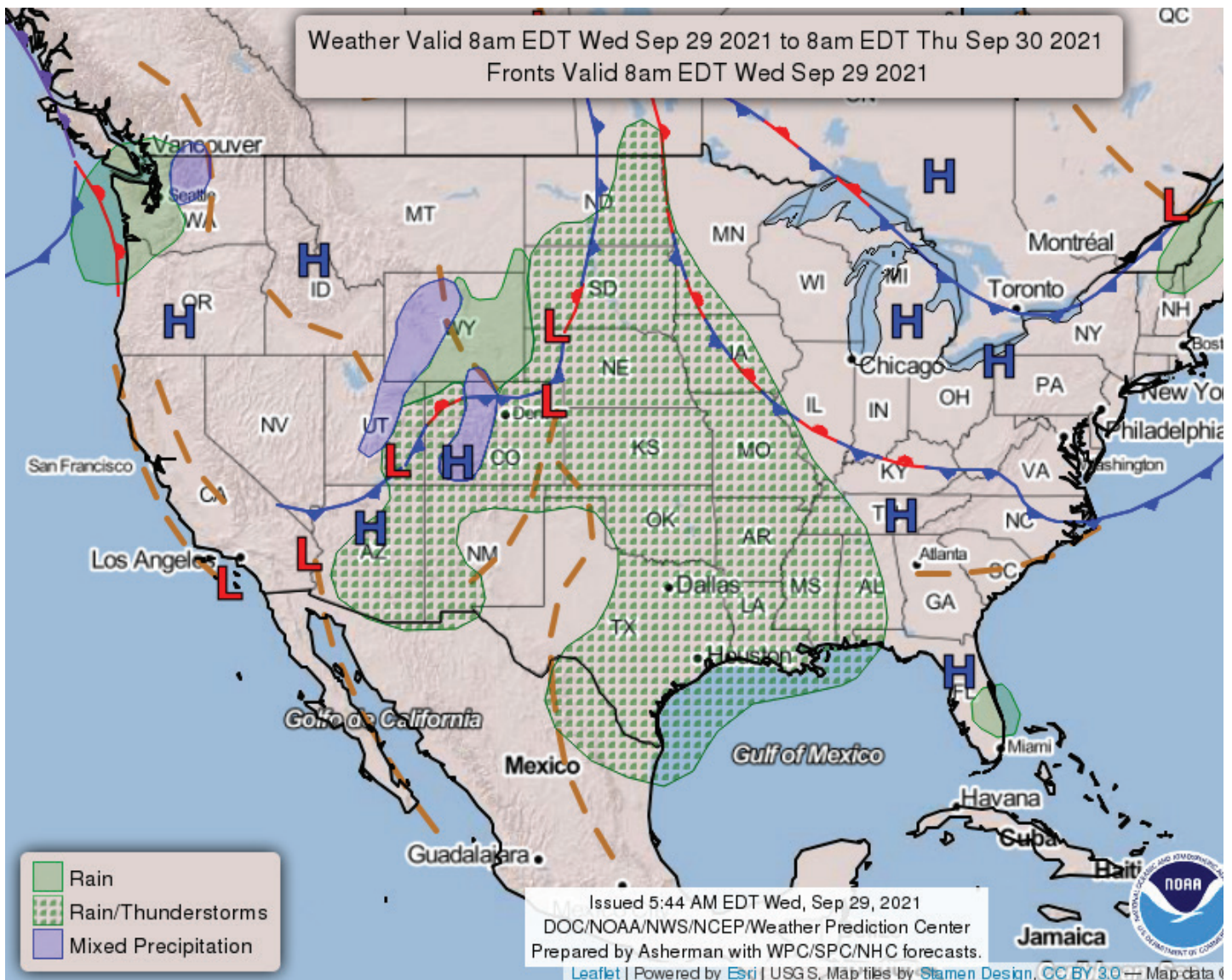
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.58

Average Precip to date: 18.26

Precip Year to Date: 15.42

Sunset Tonight: 7:17:46 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:28:33 AM



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WHEN DOES NEVER END?

Can you remember a time in your life when you thought, "God has abandoned me! I can't find Him anywhere! When I pray, my words bounce back from the sky, and when I cry, God won't wipe away my tears. What did I do to deserve this?"

Often in our journey to become disciples of Christ, we resent the discipline that comes with our calling. We want the journey to be sunshine and flowers and not lightning and thunderstorms. Yet, in the midst of those times of struggle, we do indeed wonder. No doubt that's why the Psalmist gave us some choice words of comfort: "The Lord will not abandon or reject His people, He will never forsake His inheritance."

The Bible tells us of two men who "went out from the presence of the Lord." One was Cain and the other Jonah. When Cain went out, the Lord left Him alone. He chose not to go after him and bring him back into His presence. But when Jonah went out, the Lord did not choose to leave him alone. Why the difference? Cain was not one of the Lord's - but Jonah was.

Jonah was disobedient to the calling of God but was finally willing to accept God's discipline. He had a terrible time surrendering to God, but God never left him because he did want God's will for his life. God stayed with Jonah and disciplined him because he accepted God's plan for his life. Cain was different. He refused to honor God and do what was right. And God rejected him because he would not give God his best. What about you? Are you willing to become like Jonah? The results are amazing.

Prayer: Father, may our hearts always be open to hear Your voice and answer You in sincerity and love. May we be accepting to obey Your call. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord will not abandon or reject His people, He will never forsake His inheritance. Psalm 94:14

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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

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian def. Colome, 25-19, 7-25, 25-7, 26-24

Avon def. Scotland, 25-17, 25-19, 25-23

Baltic def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-15, 25-19, 21-25, 22-25, 15-12

Bridgewater-Emery def. Ethan, 25-13, 25-21, 25-20

Britton-Hecla def. Sisseton, 25-20, 17-25, 23-25, 25-23, 15-3

Brookings def. Watertown, 20-25, 26-24, 25-23

Canton def. West Central, 25-16, 25-15, 25-20

Colman-Egan def. Howard, 25-14, 25-9, 25-19

Corsica/Stickney def. Wessington Springs, 20-25, 25-20, 25-13, 28-26

DeSmet def. Clark/Willow Lake, 20-25, 25-23, 25-16, 22-25, 15-10

Dell Rapids def. McCook Central/Montrose, 19-25, 25-18, 19-25, 25-20, 15-8

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Flandreau, 25-12, 25-17, 25-17

Estelline/Hendricks def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-19, 25-8, 25-10

Faulkton def. Langford, 25-15, 25-13, 25-20

Florence/Henry def. Groton Area, 25-23, 25-19, 25-20

Gayville-Volin def. Bon Homme, 25-19, 29-31, 25-12, 25-14

Great Plains Lutheran def. Lake Preston, 25-19, 25-15, 25-17

Hamlin def. Deuel, 25-14, 25-14, 25-18

Harrisburg def. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, 15-25, 25-23, 25-20, 11-25, 15-13

Hill City def. Philip, 25-20, 25-11, 25-12

Hitchcock-Tulare def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-10, 25-12, 25-15

Kadoka Area def. Bennett County, 25-10, 25-7, 25-17

Kimball/White Lake def. Lyman, 25-16, 20-25, 25-17, 25-19

Lemmon def. Bison, 13-25, 25-17, 25-21, 25-8

Lennox def. Beresford, 25-22, 22-25, 25-22, 25-21

Madison def. Parker, 15-25, 25-27, 25-10, 25-13, 15-4

Menno def. Irene-Wakonda, 21-25, 21-25, 25-18, 25-23, 19-17

Miller def. Chamberlain, 25-12, 25-13, 25-21

Mobridge-Pollock def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-9, 25-9, 25-11

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Platte-Geddes, 25-14, 25-17, 18-25, 26-28, 15-10

Northwestern def. Redfield, 25-16, 25-22, 25-17

Pierre def. Rapid City Christian, 21-25, 25-9, 25-13, 25-14

Potter County def. Sully Buttes, 25-18, 25-12, 25-23

Red Cloud def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-23, 25-23, 25-22

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-16, 25-20, 22-25, 25-13

Sioux Falls Christian def. Vermillion, 25-7, 25-10, 25-12

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Yankton, 25-11, 21-25, 25-18, 25-19

Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Mitchell, 25-14, 25-18, 25-16

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Aberdeen Central, 25-17, 25-16, 25-18

Sioux Falls Washington def. Huron, 25-22, 25-20, 25-23

St. Thomas More def. Spearfish, 25-20, 23-25, 21-25, 25-16, 15-11

Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Marty Indian, 25-12, 25-11, 25-10

Wagner def. Hanson, 25-14, 25-22, 25-9

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Wall def. Jones County, 25-20, 25-19, 14-25, 25-15
Warner def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 25-22, 25-14, 25-21
Webster def. Waubay/Summit, 25-14, 25-17, 25-14
White River def. Gregory, 18-25, 25-20, 13-25, 25-19, 17-15
Edgemont Triangular=
Edgemont def. Hay Springs, Neb., 25-5, 15-25, 24-26, 25-18, 15-9
Edgemont def. Oelrichs, 25-8, 25-13, 25-12

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

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

18-30-43-68-69, Mega Ball: 22, Megaplier: 4

(eighteen, thirty, forty-three, sixty-eight, sixty-nine; Mega Ball: twenty-two; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$22 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$570 million

South Dakota AG reviewing Noem's meeting with daughter

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's attorney general said Tuesday he is reviewing concerns from state lawmakers over a meeting Gov. Kristi Noem held last year that included both her daughter and a state employee who was overseeing her daughter's application to become a certified real estate appraiser.

"I have been contacted by concerned citizens and legislators," Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg said in a statement. "I am actively reviewing their concerns and I will be following the steps prescribed in codified law in relation to those questions."

Ravnsborg didn't immediately respond to a question about what steps he might take. The attorney general is tasked under state law with issuing legal opinions to lawmakers.

The Associated Press reported Monday that Noem held the meeting shortly after the state agency had moved to deny her daughter the license last year. Noem's daughter eventually received her license four months later. Afterward, the state employee who directed the agency was allegedly pressured to retire by Noem's cabinet secretary. The state employee, Sherry Bren, eventually received a \$200,000 payment from the state to withdraw the complaint and leave her job.

Ethics experts said the episode raised concerns that the governor had abused the power of her office.

The governor's office declined to answer detailed questions from the AP, and Noem's spokesman dismissed the AP's report as a political attack on the governor.

Noem, 49, is seen among a handful of early GOP hopefuls for the White House in 2024. In just her first term as governor after nearly a decade in Congress, her star has risen as she has honed a message of more freedom and less government — particularly during the coronavirus pandemic, when she decried restrictions being put in place elsewhere. Though Noem has said she's focused on re-election in 2022, she's visited key early presidential states Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina and shown a willingness to jab at potential rivals.

Though Ravnsborg and Noem are both Republicans, they have become political enemies over the last year after the governor pressured Ravnsborg to resign following a car crash in which he struck and killed a man walking on a highway. The attorney general pleaded no contest to two misdemeanors in the crash.

The Legislature is planning to convene in November to consider whether to proceed with impeaching Ravensborg.

Democrats in the Legislature, who hold just a handful of seats, have also called for an investigation into the governor's conduct during her daughter's appraiser certification application.

Rapid City-area homeowners sue county over sinkhole risks

BLACK HAWK, S.D. (AP) — More than 150 homeowners in a development outside Rapid City are suing Meade County over risks to their properties after a sinkhole exposed an abandoned gypsum mine.

The federal complaint filed Monday by Hideaway Hills residents in Black Hawk seeks damages to be determined by a jury and other relief "allowed by law or equity."

The sinkhole forced about 40 residents from 15 homes in April 2020. Geotechnical studies show there could be water flowing through the abandoned mine and toward Interstate 90 and there is the potential for future sinkholes, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The complaint alleges several violations of the state Constitution. It says the decision to approve the subdivision by the county Planning Commission and the Meade County Commission put homeowners at risk.

"Without the decisions to approve the subdivision, issue building permits and certificates of occupancy, the opportunity for harm would not have existed," the complaint states.

Developers allegedly informed the county in 2001 of an underground gypsum mine and discussed taking steps to determine if it was safe to build on. The commission approved the subdivision proposal in 2003.

Katelyn Cook, an attorney for the county, said her legal team does not comment on pending litigation.

Panel tables idea to split House districts on reservations

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A panel of lawmakers putting the final touches on North Dakota's new legislative map delayed action Tuesday on a proposal to create separate House districts on two of the state's five American Indian reservations.

Some members of the 14-member Republican-led committee said they wanted more legal guidance before voting on the motion. The committee is scheduled to meet again Wednesday.

A North Dakota legislative district now has one senator and two House members, each elected to represent the entire area. In a subdistrict, the senator would still represent the entire district. It would be split in half for House representation, with one House member representing each half.

Some North Dakota tribal leaders appealed to lawmakers this month to split legislative House districts that include reservations, a move they believe will increase the odds for electing American Indians to the Legislature.

Tribal leaders say such an arrangement would result in better representation and communication in the Legislature, where Republicans wield supermajority control.

Only two of the five American Indian reservation in North Dakota — Fort Berthold and Turtle Mountain — have the needed population to split House districts, which is about 8,450 people at present.

Grand Fork GOP Sen. Ray Holmberg, who has served on redistricting committees since 1981 said the Legislature may have no choice to create subdistricts on the qualifying reservations to meet federal law.

"I'm not a fan of subdistricts," Holmberg said. "Sometimes you do have to respect reality."

Holmberg said the subdistricts likely would be created by the courts if the Legislature fails to create them.

During the Legislature's redistricting effort in 1991, the Three Affiliated Tribes filed a federal lawsuit in an attempt to force lawmakers to create subdistricts on the now oil-rich Fort Berthold reservation. A federal judge dismissed the lawsuit, saying a subdistrict would lack a majority of American Indian voters.

Holmberg said subdistricts on Turtle Mountain and Fort Berthold now "appear to meet that threshold."

"At the end of the day, I believe it will happen," Holmberg told the committee.

GOP Rep. Terry Jones, whose current district is part of the Fort Berthold reservation, urged the redistricting panel to scrap the idea of subdistricts, calling it "nothing more than an attempt to divide us, rather

than unify us.”

The Legislature currently has three lawmakers who claim Native American or Alaska Native heritage: Fargo Democratic Rep. Ruth Buffalo, a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes; Minot GOP Sen. Oley Larsen, a member of Alaska’s Sealaska Corp.; and Sen. Richard Marcellais, a Democrat from Belcourt and member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. Only Marcellais lives on a reservation.

South Dakota already has special subdistricts aimed at giving American Indians a better chance at additional representation in its state Legislature. One of them includes all of the Cheyenne River and part of the Standing Rock Sioux Indian reservations. Another includes the Rosebud Indian Reservation.

Associated Press writer Stephen Groves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, contributed to this report.

Guilty plea to manslaughter in fatal Aberdeen stabbing

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — An Aberdeen man has changed his plea in a fatal stabbing as part of an agreement with prosecutors.

Jacob Lane Lee Bad Wound, 24, has pleaded guilty to felony manslaughter in the death of Higinio Anthony Santiago who was found stabbed at an Aberdeen home on Aug. 26, 2020.

Bad Wound was initially charged with murder, pleaded not guilty in February and asked for a jury trial.

Court documents on the plea agreement say Bad Wound admitted causing the death of the 37-year-old man by using a knife. The agreement does not stipulate a sentencing agreement, just that the prison term cannot be more than 40 years, the Aberdeen American News reported.

The murder charge carried a mandatory life sentence.

The defense and prosecution will give arguments at a sentencing hearing Nov. 5.

Bad Wound remains in custody on a \$1 million bond.

Rags to riches: Boxing great Pacquiao announces retirement

By KIKO ROSARIO Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Boxing legend Manny Pacquiao is officially hanging up his gloves.

The eight-division world champion and Philippine senator on Wednesday announced his retirement from the ring.

“I would like to thank the whole world, especially the Filipino people, for supporting Manny Pacquiao. Goodbye boxing,” the 42-year-old said in a video posted on his Facebook page. “It is difficult for me to accept that my time as a boxer is over. Today I am announcing my retirement.”

Pacquiao finished his 26-year, 72-fight career with 62 wins, eight losses and two draws. Of those 62 wins, 39 were by knockout and 23 by decision. He won 12 world titles and is the only fighter in history to win titles in eight different weight classes.

His retirement from boxing followed a disheartening defeat to Yordenis Ugas in Paradise, Nevada, on Aug. 21. The younger Cuban boxer beat Pacquiao by unanimous decision, retaining his WBA welterweight title. It was Pacquiao’s first fight in more than two years.

“Thank you for changing my life. When my family was desperate, you gave us hope, you gave me the chance to fight my way out of poverty,” Pacquiao said in the video. “Because of you, I was able to inspire people all over the world. Because of you I have been given the courage to change more lives.”

Pacquiao had hinted at retirement recently. It had also been expected because he is setting his sights on a bigger political battlefield. Earlier this month, he accepted his political party’s nomination and declared he will run for Philippines president in elections next May.

He has accused the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, his former ally, of making corruption worse in the Philippines. He promised to fight poverty and warned corrupt politicians they will soon end up in jail.

Pacquiao’s rags-to-riches life story and legendary career brought honor to his Southeast Asian nation, where he is known by the monikers Pacman, People’s Champ and National Fist.

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He left his impoverished home in the southern Philippines as a teenager and stowed away on a ship bound for Manila. He made his professional boxing debut as a junior flyweight in 1995 at the age of 16, fighting his way out of abject poverty to become one of the world's highest-paid athletes.

Eddie Banaag, a 79-year-old retiree, said Pacquiao was his idol as a boxer and he watched almost all of his fights. But he believes the boxing icon should have retired earlier.

"He should have done that right after his victory over (Keith) Thurman," Banaag said of Pacquiao's win over Thurman on July 20, 2019, in Las Vegas, Pacquiao's second-to-last fight. "It would have been better if he ended his boxing career with a win rather than a loss."

Still, Pacquiao believes he will always be remembered as a winner. Hundreds of millions of dollars in career earnings and his record in the ring leave no doubt.

"I will never forget what I have done and accomplished in my life," Pacquiao said Wednesday. "I just heard the final bell. The boxing is over."

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Lava from La Palma eruption reaches the Atlantic

By DANIEL ROCA and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE, Canary Islands (AP) — A bright red river of lava from the volcano on Spain's La Palma island finally tumbled over a cliff and into the Atlantic Ocean, setting off huge plumes of steam and toxic gases that required local residents outside the evacuation zone to remain indoors on Wednesday.

The immediate area had been evacuated for several days as authorities waited over a week for the lava that began erupting Sept. 19 to traverse the 6.5 kilometers (4 miles) to the island's edge. On the way down from the Cumbre Vieja volcanic ridge, the flows have consumed at least 656 buildings, mostly homes that turned out to be in its unstoppable march to the sea.

The meeting of molten rock and sea water finally came at 11 p.m. on Tuesday. By daybreak, a widening promontory of newborn land could be seen forming under plumes of steam rising high into the area.

Experts had warned that the arrival of the lava at the ocean would likely produce small explosions and release toxic gases that could damage lungs. Authorities established a security perimeter of 3.5 kilometers (2.1 miles) and asked residents in the wider area to remain indoors with windows shut to avoid breathing in gases.

No deaths or serious injuries have been reported from the island's first eruption in 50 years, thanks to the prompt evacuations of over 6,000 people in the first hours after the earth cracked open following weeks of tremors.

The flattening of the terrain as it approached the coast had slowed down the flow of the lava, causing it to widen out and do more damage to villages and farms. The local economy is largely based on agriculture, above all the cultivation of the Canary plantain.

Just before it poured down a cliff into the sea at a local point known as Los Guirres, the lava rolled over the coastal highway, cutting off the last road in the area that connects the island to several villages.

La Palma, home to about 85,000 people, is part of the volcanic Canary Islands, an archipelago off northwest Africa. The island is roughly 35 kilometers (22 miles) long and 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide at its broadest point.

Cleaning crews swept up ash in the island's capital, Santa Cruz, while more small earthquakes that have rumbled under the volcano for weeks were registered by geologists.

Flights to the airport on La Palma, an important tourist destination along with its neighboring islands, remained canceled due to a huge ash cloud that Spain's National Geographic Institute said reached up to seven kilometers.

However, Laura Garcés, the director of Spain air navigation authority ENAIRE, said that she does not foresee any major problems for other airports on the archipelago or major air routes.

Experts have said that it impossible too early to determine how long the eruption will last. Previous

eruptions in the archipelago have lasted weeks, even months.

___ Wilson reported from Barcelona.

The AP Interview: Ethiopia crisis 'stain on our conscience'

By CARA ANNA and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The crisis in Ethiopia is a "stain on our conscience," the United Nations humanitarian chief said, as children and others starve to death in the Tigray region under what the U.N. has called a de facto government blockade of food, medical supplies and fuel.

In an interview with The Associated Press Tuesday, Martin Griffiths issued one of the most sharply worded criticisms yet of the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade after nearly a year of war. Memories of the 1980s famine in Ethiopia, which killed some 1 million people and whose images shocked the world, are vivid in his mind, "and we fervently hope is not happening at present," he said.

"That's what keeps people awake at night," Griffiths said, "is worrying about whether that's what is in prospect, and in prospect soon."

He described a landscape of deprivation inside Tigray, where the malnutrition rate is now over 22% — "roughly the same as we saw in Somalia in 2011 at the start of the Somali famine," which killed more than a quarter-million people.

The war in Ethiopia began last November on the brink of harvest in Tigray, and the U.N. has said at least half of the coming harvest will fail. Witnesses have said Ethiopian and allied forces destroyed or looted food sources.

Meanwhile just 10% of needed humanitarian supplies have been reaching Tigray in recent weeks, Griffiths said.

"So people have been eating roots and flowers and plants instead of a normal steady meal," he said.

"The lack of food will mean that people will start to die."

Last week the AP, citing witness accounts and internal documents, reported the first starvation deaths since Ethiopia's government imposed the blockade on the region of 6 million people in an attempt to keep support from reaching Tigray forces.

But the problem is not hunger alone.

The U.N. humanitarian chief, who recently visited Tigray, cited the lack of medical supplies and noted that vulnerable children and pregnant or lactating mothers are often the first to die of disease. Some 200,000 children throughout the region have missed vaccinations since the war began.

And the lack of fuel — "pretty well down to zero now," Griffiths said — means the U.N. and other humanitarian groups are finding it all but impossible to reach people throughout Tigray or even to know the true scale of need.

Phone, internet and banking services have also been cut off.

Billene Seyoum, the spokeswoman for Ethiopia's Nobel Peace Prize-winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, did not respond to questions. The government has blamed problems with humanitarian aid delivery on the Tigray forces, who long dominated the national government before Abiy sidelined them. Abiy's government also has alarmed U.N. officials and others by accusing humanitarian workers of supporting the Tigray fighters.

Griffiths called such allegations unacceptable and unfair. He said he has told the government to share any evidence of misconduct by humanitarian workers so the U.N. can investigate, but "so far as I'm aware, we haven't had such cases put to us."

Humanitarian workers boarding flights to Tigray are told not to bring items including multivitamins, can openers and medicines, even personal ones. The U.N. humanitarian chief said he too was searched when he visited Tigray, with authorities examining everything in his bag and even questioning why he was carrying earphones.

Ethiopia's crisis has led the U.N., the United States and others to urge the warring sides to stop the fighting and take steps toward peace, but Griffiths warned that "the war doesn't look as if it's finishing

any time soon.”

On the contrary, in recent weeks it spread into the neighboring Amhara region. Griffiths said the active battle lines are making it challenging to get aid to hundreds of thousands more people.

Ethiopia will see the formation of a new government next week with another five years in office for the prime minister. Griffiths, who said he last spoke with Abiy three or four weeks ago, expressed hope for a change of direction.

“We’d all like to see is with that election inauguration, that we would see new leadership leading Ethiopia away from the abyss that it’s peering into at the moment, that the national dialogue process which he discussed with me in the past, and his deputy discussed with me last week, that needs to happen,” Griffiths said.

“It needs to be coherent, it needs to be inclusive and it needs to be soon.”

Anna reported from Nairobi, Kenya.

Teflon leader: Party’s big loss won’t tarnish Merkel’s image

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Angela Merkel will leave office in the coming months with her popularity intact among voters and widely admired beyond Germany as a chancellor who deftly steered her country, and Europe, through numerous crises.

Her center-right political bloc, on the other hand, is in shambles.

The once-dominant Christian Democratic Union and their Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union, suffered their worst-ever national election result Sunday. The Union bloc took home less than a quarter of the vote and may find itself relegated to the role of opposition after 16 years in power.

The blame for that has been placed largely on her party’s uninspiring candidate, Armin Laschet, a state governor whose gaffes and chummy demeanor contrasted with Merkel’s image as a calm, professional stateswoman.

But observers say the long-time leader bears at least some responsibility for the dire straits that her party is now in.

“Merkel has focused on governing in recent years and neglected her party work,” said Klaus Stuewe, a political scientist at the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt.

After stepping down as party leader in 2018, Merkel largely stood back while the Christian Democrats underwent a series of painful leadership contests. The turmoil detracted from its efforts to lay out a coherent party program — which for years was focused largely Merkel’s persona — and many voters lost faith in its competence in key areas such as foreign and economic policy.

Even after Laschet won the Union bloc’s nomination in a hotly contested battle in April, Merkel remained aloof. That left some in her party wondering whether she cared what happened to it once she left. What could have been a gracious political decision to have younger politicians take the reins as the 67-year-old leader transitioned to elder stateswoman apparently backfired, leaving a huge void. It is also not known how Merkel felt about Laschet as a would-be successor.

“For a long time, she did not campaign for Laschet at all, supporting him only at the very end before the Bundestag election, when it was already too late,” said Stuewe.

As the party’s dismal election result became apparent late Sunday, Laschet said “no one had an incumbent bonus in this election” — an acknowledgement that he had failed to gain from Merkel’s worldwide stature.

The Union bloc is still angling for a chance to lead the next government with two smaller parties — the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats — but its second-place finish in Sunday’s election behind the center-left Social Democrats makes that very difficult to justify.

Some party members have suggested it may be better to go for a period of renewal.

“Of course we’re ready for talks,” said Bavarian governor Markus Soeder, who leads the Christian Social Union and was beaten by Laschet to be the bloc’s chancellor candidate.

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But Soeder made it clear that his faction within the Union bloc is also prepared to go into opposition, adding: "We won't try to get a government together at any cost."

The poor result for her party is unlikely to tarnish most voters' favorable views of Merkel as she stays on as a caretaker chancellor — possibly for several months — while Germany's coalition talks play out, said Julia Reuschenbach, a political scientist at the University of Bonn.

"As long as the formation of a new government lasts, she will presumably remain the seasoned, experienced politician who now needs to lead the country through a transition period," said Reuschenbach.

In some ways Merkel's politics will outlive her reign.

Olaf Scholz, who led the Social Democrats to a narrow victory, successfully adopted Merkel's calm, factual style during his campaign. Her strong commitment to European integration and the trans-Atlantic alliance with the United States will also endure under Scholz or Laschet, experts say.

"In domestic policy, her successor will have to prove himself above all as a moderator between three coalition parties," said Frank Brettschneider, a specialist in communications theory at the University of Hohenheim.

In doing so, Germany's next chancellor may also need to address one of the biggest criticisms of Merkel's step-by-step approach to politics: that it failed to keep pace with the big changes happening in the country and beyond.

While some viewed Merkel as an anchor of stability, particularly in turbulent times, others saw in her a source of stagnation.

Much-needed reforms — from the digitalization of schools and government services to the greening of Germany's heavy industry — were hardly attempted under Merkel. And despite frequent, vocal protests to speed up Germany's response to climate change, she made that sure the country's powerful auto industry was shielded from tough measures.

"During Trump's presidency, she was a projection screen for many of a more liberal and cosmopolitan, yet at its core conservative, approach to politics," said Stuewe, the political scientist.

Follow Frank Jordans at <http://www.twitter.com/wirereporter>

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

Ex-diplomat Kishida wins Japan party vote, to become new PM

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida won the governing party leadership election on Wednesday and is set to become the next prime minister, facing the imminent task of addressing a pandemic-hit economy and ensuring a strong alliance with Washington to counter growing regional security risks.

Kishida replaces outgoing party leader Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who is stepping down after serving only one year since taking office last September.

As new leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, Kishida is certain to be elected the next prime minister on Monday in parliament, where his party and its coalition partner control both houses.

In his victory speech, Kishida vowed to tackle Japan's "national crises" including COVID-19, the economy battered by the pandemic and the declining population and birthrate, while pursuing "important issues related to Japan's future" through a vision of "a free and open Indo-Pacific" that counters China's assertiveness in the region.

Kishida beat popular vaccinations minister Taro Kono in a runoff after finishing only one vote ahead of him in the first round where none of the four candidates, including two women, was able to win a majority.

His 257-170 landslide win in the second round showed a consensus-building Kishida garnered more support from party heavyweights who apparently chose stability over change advocated by Kono, who is known as something of a maverick and a reformist.

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The new leader is under pressure to change the party's high-handed reputation worsened by Suga, who angered the public over his handling of the pandemic and insistence on holding the Summer Olympics in Tokyo despite the surging infections.

The long-ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party desperately needs to quickly turn around plunging public support ahead of lower house elections coming within two months.

During the past year, Kishida said he heard from many voters complaining they were being ignored. "I felt our democracy is in a crisis," he said in his speech. "I, Fumio Kishida, have a special skill of listening to people. I am determined to make an effort toward making a more open LDP and a bright future for Japan together with you all."

The 64-year-old former foreign minister was once seen as an indecisive moderate. Lately, however, he has shifted to a security and diplomatic hawk as he sought support from influential conservatives to win the party election.

Kishida has called for a further increase in Japan's defense capability and budget, and vowed to stand up to China in tensions over self-ruled Taiwan that China claims as part of its territory, and Beijing's crack-down on dissent in Hong Kong.

On the economy, Kishida has called for a "new capitalism" of growth and distribution to narrow income gaps between the rich and the poor that have widened under Japan's longest-serving former leader Shinzo Abe, and only worsened during the pandemic.

He also pledged to promote clean energy technology to turn climate change measures into growth and proposed a generous economic recovery package.

Overall, 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.

Kishida also supports close Japan-U.S. security ties and partnerships with other like-minded democracies in Asia and Europe, in part to counter China and nuclear-armed North Korea.

Wednesday's vote was 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 shifted the party to the right.

Kishida has called for party reforms by limiting terms for executive positions, but is seen as a choice who could prolong an era of unusual political stability amid fears that Japan could return to "revolving door" leadership.

"Concern is not about individuals but stability of Japanese politics," Michael Green, senior vice president for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told a telephone briefing ahead of the vote. "It's about whether or not we are entering a period in Japanese politics of instability and short-term prime ministership," he said. "It makes it very hard to move forward on agenda."

Green said voters will be watching if Kishida is easily swayed by power politics in his party or if he is attuned to the public.

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.

Kishida lost to Suga in the 2020 party leadership race, which was a done deal determined by party heavyweights even before the vote. A third-generation politician from Hiroshima, Kishida has a reputation among his fellow lawmakers as polite and honest.

He was first elected to parliament in 1993. An advocate for nuclear disarmament, he escorted former President Barack Obama during his 2016 visit to Hiroshima, the city that was obliterated together with Nagasaki in the U.S. atomic bombings in the closing days of World War II.

As foreign minister under Abe, he struck a 2015 agreement with South Korea to resolve a bilateral row over the issue of World War II women who were sexually abused by Japan's wartime military — part of legacy that still hampers relations between the two countries.

The banker-turned-lawmaker enjoys drinking sake and is a staunch supporter of his hometown professional baseball team, Hiroshima Carp.

North African migrants, adrift, tell of last-minute rescue

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

ABOARD GEO BARENTS (AP) — The small fiberglass boat had begun to take on water not long after the engine stopped working. Its six passengers started bailing it out, not knowing how long they could keep the sea at bay.

Waleed, a Tunisian man who, along with five others, was hoping to cross the Mediterranean for a better life in Europe, estimates they removed water from the boat for roughly five hours.

"We were so desperate," he said.

Then, at first daylight on Sept. 20, the crew of a rescue vessel spotted them through binoculars. They saw Waleed and the others waving and directing a laser light at them.

The migrants were a few miles away from the Geo Barents, a rescue vessel operated by the charity Doctors Without Borders. It had been patrolling the Central Mediterranean off conflict-wracked Libya since earlier that month. A team from the charity, known by its French acronym MSF, was immediately dispatched.

They found six men: three Libyans, two Tunisians and a Moroccan. The group had embarked a day earlier from Libya's coastal town of Zawiya, a major launching point for migrants attempting the dangerous voyage. All six say they were fleeing difficult or threatening situations in Libya, where three of them had relocated years before due to economic troubles at home.

North African Arabs represent a large and seemingly growing proportion of the migrants who are trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean.

According to recent numbers published by Italy's Interior Ministry, three of the top 10 countries of origin for migrants arriving in the country in 2021 were North African. Tunisians alone accounted for 29% of the migrants, followed by Egyptians with 9% and Moroccans with 3%.

Late on Monday, the newest influx to Italy came by sea when around 700 migrants crammed into a rusty fishing boat reached the Italian island of Lampedusa, located mid-way between Tunisia and the Italian mainland. Many appeared to be men from North Africa or the Middle East.

Their increasing numbers also point to precarious situations in their home countries, where government resources are strained by burgeoning youth populations. Many have already spent harrowing years inside Libya, once a destination for migrant labor because of its relative wealth.

Libya's descent into war and lawlessness over the past decade has made it a hub for African and Middle Eastern migrants fleeing war and poverty in their countries and hoping to reach Europe. The oil-rich country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

This month's sea crossing was Waleed's eighth attempt to reach Europe since 2013, he said. For the past 17 years, the 42-year-old father of two from the city of Tunis had worked as a chef in neighboring Libya. He described life there recently as nightmarish.

"Any Libyan can beat you, insult you, take your savings, and you (as a foreigner) can't do anything," he said.

Waleed spoke to The Associated Press aboard the Geo Barents as he and other migrants waited for disembarkation at a port in the Italian town of Augusta, where they will first face quarantine for coronavirus and then processing, at which point they claim asylum.

Waleed's ship mates included another Tunisian, Kamal Mezali, who had worked as a sailor in Libya, and Mohamed, a 30-year-old Moroccan barber. Waleed and the barber asked to be identified only by their first names, to avoid endangering friends still in Zawiya.

Hailing from Morocco's ancient city of Fez, Mohamed arrived in Libya in March 2019 and settled in the western town of Sabratha. Last year, militias stormed his house and seized his passport and savings. That's when he decided to leave.

His first attempt to cross the Mediterranean was in May 2020, but he was intercepted by the Libyan coast guard, which he said released him for a bribe upon returning to port. He was reluctant to try again, fearing he could drown.

His resolve came back when an enraged Libyan customer pulled a gun on him for allegedly failing to

answer calls to set up a hair appointment. He was going to kill me," the migrant said. "Libya isn't a place to live."

Mohamed got a spot on a small boat, just 4 meters (13 feet) in length. The six men had a 40-horsepower motor and a smaller 25-horsepower one as a spare.

First their main motor gave out, then the spare while they were still not far from Libya's coast. One of the Libyan passengers called a contact, who brought a replacement. But none of the motors were designed for such a lengthy trip, and a few hours later the third motor went quiet.

By the time the rescue crew reached them, they were nearly 40 nautical miles off the Libyan coast and the boat was low in the water. They had only one frayed life jacket on board.

According to the United Nations, over 1,100 migrants were reported dead or presumed dead off Libya this year, but that number is believed to be higher. Around 25,300 others have been intercepted and returned to Libya's shore since January. That's more than double the number from 2020, when about 11,890 migrants were brought back. The spike comes after overall arrivals, but not deaths, declined during the height of the pandemic in 2020.

Italy says that 44,778 migrants have arrived on its shores so far this year, double the amount from the first nine months of last year, and roughly five times the number from 2019. The increases come after a route through the Eastern Mediterranean via Turkey was blocked, and while the movement restrictions and economic fallout of the pandemic are at play.

Mid- to late summer is typically a peak time for attempts on the Central Mediterranean route because of good weather. Rescues along this route have become routine during the warmer months.

In recent years, the European Union has partnered with Libya's coast guard to stem sea crossings. Rights groups say those policies leave migrants at the mercy of the sea, armed groups or confined in detention centers run by militias that are rife with abuses.

The other three passengers on the boat with Waleed, all Libyans in their 20s, said they risked their lives in the Mediterranean because of the deadly power wielded by militias in the country. Though not statistically a large number of migrants, Libyans have their share of horror stories.

When east-based military commander Khalifa Hifter launched his offensive on Tripoli in April 2019, militias in western Libya mobilized and recruited fighters to counter the attack. Mohammed, a 29-year-old engineer, spoke out against joining the fighting. He asked only to be identified by his first name for the safety of his family back in Libya.

Then he received death threats from militias. In March 2021, he said armed men opened fire at him while he was driving near Tripoli. He narrowly escaped with his life.

Earlier this month, a friend offered him a seat on the boat. He left behind a 19-month-old baby and a pregnant wife, deciding he'd rather die at sea than be killed at home.

And that's what he thought was going to happen when the group grew exhausted hauling water from the boat.

"We all were tired and powerless," he said. "We thought that this is the end."

Zimbabwe's vaccine mandates squeeze some of world's poorest

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — For months, Acholo Jani was told to get a COVID-19 vaccination because it might save his life. He hesitated, fearful of potential side effects. But the moment he was told it would save his job, Jani got in line.

The 43-year-old mechanic's employer is among many in Zimbabwe mandating shots for their staff, including the government, which is requiring the vaccine for its 500,000 employees. That sets the southern African nation apart from nearly every other on the continent, where the most immediate challenge is still simply acquiring enough doses.

Zimbabwe, by contrast, says it has ample supply for now, mostly purchased from China, but that hesitancy is holding back its campaign — a problem that has also troubled other African countries, partly driven by

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a general distrust of authorities. But Zimbabwe's strategy is raising worrying rights questions.

Critics say that, unlike in richer countries that have made use of mandates, Zimbabwe's rollout isn't up to the task. Vaccination centers sometimes run out of supply, and poor urban townships and rural areas have often been starved of doses in recent months.

What's more, they say, it's cruel to put at risk the livelihoods of people who are some of the world's most vulnerable and already suffering during the pandemic.

"The Zimbabwe government should first focus on making sure that vaccines are equally available to all people without any obstacles before considering making them mandatory," said Dewa Mavhinga, southern Africa director for Human Rights Watch.

Mavhinga called for addressing vaccine hesitancy "in a way that builds public trust and confidence in the vaccines without the use of force."

But the government, known for being authoritarian, appears ready to double down. It already requires vaccines at places of worship and has suggested extending the mandates to public buses — a critical mode of transportation for the country's poor. Access to informal markets, on which millions rely to buy or sell goods, might also be restricted.

Those measures would effectively make the vaccine a requirement for the vast majority of Zimbabwean adults, even the two-thirds of the working population with informal jobs unlikely to be touched by employer mandates.

At Jani's workplace, a vaccination card, a pocket-sized booklet with the government's emblem on the front, is now "your gate pass," he said.

"There is nowhere to hide," he said while waiting for his vaccine on a dusty road outside a clinic in the Mufakose township of the capital, Harare.

Jani eventually got his first shot — after joining the line at 5 a.m. and waiting for seven hours — but others are not so lucky.

Some have waited hours on end only to be told the vaccination center was closing early because of limited supplies or a lack of staff. People eligible for second shots have also complained of being turned away from centers giving preference to those seeking first doses. A new batch of vaccines arrived recently, and lines appear to be shortening.

Around 15% of Zimbabwe's 15 million people are fully vaccinated — well above the overall African rate of 4% but far from the government's goal of 60%. The country has so far received 12 million doses, mainly of the Chinese Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines, which require two shots. Just over 5 million have been administered, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Peter Mutasa, the president of Zimbabwe's largest labor federation, said that the government is mainly at fault for not vaccinating enough people.

"Workers have been trying to get vaccinated," he said.

Mutasa's organization, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, is fighting mandates for workers in court, one of the only organizations in the country to be publicly opposed to them. Other groups appear unwilling to speak out for fear of being labeled anti-vaccination.

Mutasa is not against the shots but said linking them to employment means jobs will be lost "unnecessarily" in a nation where employment is precious after the economy collapsed just over 10 years ago with record levels of inflation and many live a precarious existence. Nearly half Zimbabwe's population live on less than \$1.90 a day.

Mandates will cause "carnage," he said.

Dr. Agnes Mahomva, the chief coordinator of the government's COVID-19 response, defended mandates, saying they are aimed at "protecting everyone" and arguing they remain voluntary in a way.

"If one doesn't want to be vaccinated, no one is going to come to their house to grab them and vaccinate them," she said.

But Mutasa noted that workers desperate for a paycheck have "no way to say no."

Zimbabwe has reported nearly 130,000 virus cases and about 4,600 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins.

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While those tolls, as elsewhere, are likely to be undercounts, the virus has not weighed particularly heavily in Zimbabwe, a fact that may be contributing to a lack of urgency in getting vaccinated.

Dr. Johannes Marisa, the president of Zimbabwe's Medical and Dental Private Practitioners Association says that as a result mandates are critical.

"You have to sort of coerce people if you are to make any headway," Marisa said. "Human rights are important, but public health takes precedence."

Marisa believes other African countries will follow suit, as the biggest challenge on the continent moves from acquiring vaccines to getting them into the arms of the hesitant. Given the outcry from African leaders pleading for more vaccine equity at the U.N. last week — a situation the Namibian president called "vaccine apartheid" — that moment seems a way off.

Even Zimbabwe's neighbor South Africa, which has by far the continent's most COVID-19 deaths with more than 87,000 and a more urgent need to vaccinate people, has shied away from any government directives.

Instead, South Africa is moving toward incentives. President Cyril Ramaphosa said the fully vaccinated may soon be allowed to attend sports events and concerts for the first time since the start of the pandemic.

But some private companies have indicated mandates are coming. Health insurance and financial services giant Discovery, which employs over 14,500 workers in South Africa, said it will require all its people to be vaccinated by the start of next year to enter its offices.

While many countries around the world are confronting the debate over mandates, in Zimbabwe the stakes are often higher.

Jani can't go back to work until he's fully vaccinated. That means at least a few weeks selling whatever he can on the streets to scratch out a living while he misses out on his usual pay.

"How are you going to survive without a vaccination card in this country?" he asked. He has to find a way.

Associated Press writer Mogomotsi Magome in Johannesburg contributed to this report.

North African migrants, adrift, tell of last-minute rescue

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

ABOARD GEO BARENTS (AP) — The small fiberglass boat had begun to take on water not long after the engine stopped working. Its six passengers started bailing it out, not knowing how long they could keep the sea at bay.

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fishing boat reached the Italian island of Lampedusa, located mid-way between Tunisia and the Italian mainland. Many appeared to be men from North Africa or the Middle East.

Their increasing numbers also point to precarious situations in their home countries, where government resources are strained by burgeoning youth populations. Many have already spent harrowing years inside Libya, once a destination for migrant labor because of its relative wealth.

Libya's descent into war and lawlessness over the past decade has made it a hub for African and Middle Eastern migrants fleeing war and poverty in their countries and hoping to reach Europe. The oil-rich country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

This month's sea crossing was Waleed's eighth attempt to reach Europe since 2013, he said. For the past 17 years, the 42-year-old father of two from the city of Tunis had worked as a chef in neighboring Libya. He described life there recently as nightmarish.

"Any Libyan can beat you, insult you, take your savings, and you (as a foreigner) can't do anything," he said.

Waleed spoke to The Associated Press aboard the Geo Barents as he and other migrants waited for disembarkation at a port in the Italian town of Augusta, where they will first face quarantine for coronavirus and then processing, at which point they claim asylum.

Waleed's ship mates included another Tunisian, Kamal Mezali, who had worked as a sailor in Libya, and Mohamed, a 30-year-old Moroccan barber. Waleed and the barber asked to be identified only by their first names, to avoid endangering friends still in Zawiya.

Hailing from Morocco's ancient city of Fez, Mohamed arrived in Libya in March 2019 and settled in the western town of Sabratha. Last year, militias stormed his house and seized his passport and savings. That's when he decided to leave.

His first attempt to cross the Mediterranean was in May 2020, but he was intercepted by the Libyan coast guard, which he said released him for a bribe upon returning to port. He was reluctant to try again, fearing he could drown.

His resolve came back when an enraged Libyan customer pulled a gun on him for allegedly failing to answer calls to set up a hair appointment. He was going to kill me," the migrant said. "Libya isn't a place to live."

Mohamed got a spot on a small boat, just 4 meters (13 feet) in length. The six men had a 40-horsepower motor and a smaller 25-horsepower one as a spare.

First their main motor gave out, then the spare while they were still not far from Libya's coast. One of the Libyan passengers called a contact, who brought a replacement. But none of the motors were designed for such a lengthy trip, and a few hours later the third motor went quiet.

By the time the rescue crew reached them, they were nearly 40 nautical miles off the Libyan coast and the boat was low in the water. They had only one frayed life jacket on board.

According to the United Nations, over 1,100 migrants were reported dead or presumed dead off Libya this year, but that number is believed to be higher. Around 25,300 others have been intercepted and returned to Libya's shore since January. That's more than double the number from 2020, when about 11,890 migrants were brought back. The spike comes after overall arrivals, but not deaths, declined during the height of the pandemic in 2020.

Italy says that 44,778 migrants have arrived on its shores so far this year, double the amount from the first nine months of last year and roughly five times the number from 2019.

Mid- to late summer is typically a peak time for attempts on the Central Mediterranean route because of good weather. Rescues along this route have become routine during the warmer months.

In recent years, the European Union has partnered with Libya's coast guard to stem sea crossings. Rights groups say those policies leave migrants at the mercy of the sea, armed groups or confined in detention centers run by militias that are rife with abuses.

The other three passengers on the boat with Waleed, all Libyans in their 20s, said they risked their lives in the Mediterranean because of the deadly power wielded by militias in the country. Though not statisti-

cally a large number of migrants, Libyans have their share of horror stories.

When east-based military commander Khalifa Hifter launched his offensive on Tripoli in April 2019, militias in western Libya mobilized and recruited fighters to counter the attack. Mohammed, a 29-year-old engineer, spoke out against joining the fighting. He asked only to be identified by his first name for the safety of his family back in Libya.

Then he received death threats from militias. In March 2021, he said armed men opened fire at him while he was driving near Tripoli. He narrowly escaped with his life.

Earlier this month, a friend offered him a seat on the boat. He left behind a 19-month-old baby and a pregnant wife, deciding he'd rather die at sea than be killed at home.

And that's what he thought was going to happen when the group grew exhausted hauling water from the boat.

"We all were tired and powerless," he said. "We thought that this is the end."

Britney Spears hearing may mean freedom from court or father

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Judge Brenda Penny has been the calm eye of the storm surrounding Britney Spears and the conservatorship that controls her life.

Now all eyes are on her.

The Los Angeles Superior Court Judge has thus far been able to act more as a caretaker than a dictator in the case, but at a potentially pivotal hearing on Wednesday afternoon, she will be pressed to make major decisions on whether to keep Spears' father on as her conservator, or whether to end the conservatorship altogether.

Spears' attorney Mathew Rosengart has been aggressively pushing for the ouster of her father James Spears since moments after Penny allowed her to hire Rosengart in July. Penny denied Rosengart's request for an emergency hearing on the issue, telling the attorney it could wait until Wednesday.

And in a major reversal, James Spears, who first sought the conservatorship in 2008 and has been its primary overseer ever since, has filed a petition to end it altogether. He urged the judge to make a decision on the issue Wednesday and make questions of his status moot.

Britney Spears and Rosengart said in a subsequent filing that they agree with her father that the conservatorship should end, marking the first time she has called for an end to the arrangement in court documents.

They emphasized, however, that it is more important to her that her father be removed, calling it a necessary first step toward her freedom and "ending the Kafkaesque nightmare imposed upon her."

Rosengart said in another filing this week that James Spears "crossed unfathomable lines" by engaging in illegal surveillance of her, including communications with her lawyer, as reported in "Controlling Britney Spears," a documentary from the New York Times and the FX network, one of two dueling documentaries released on the eve of the hearing.

Britney Spears was also engaged to her longtime boyfriend Sam Asghari earlier this month, which means putting together a prenuptial agreement that her father should not be involved in, her court filings said.

James Spears in 2019 stepped aside as the so-called conservator of his daughter's person, with control over her life decisions, maintaining only his role as conservator of her estate, with control over her finances. He and his attorneys have said that renders many of his daughter's complaints about his control over her life meaningless.

Jodi Montgomery, a court-appointed professional, now acts as conservator of Britney Spears' person, and Rosengart said in court documents that Montgomery also consents to ending the conservatorship so long as it can be done safely and smoothly.

It is not clear whether Britney Spears will take part in Wednesday's hearing. At two recent hearings she gave dramatic speeches decrying her status that rallied even more fans and fellow celebrities to her cause, and intensified the already loud calls to #FreeBritney.

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James Spears has denied acting in anything but his daughter's best interest, and has declined Rosengart's demands that he resign immediately, saying in a court filing that in his 13 years in the conservatorship, "to the best of Mr. Spears' knowledge and belief, not a single medical professional nor the report of a single probate investigator has recommended that Mr. Spears' presence as Conservator was harming Ms. Spears or that he should be replaced."

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

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>

North Korea says hypersonic missile made 1st test flight

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Wednesday it successfully tested a new hypersonic missile it implied was being developed as nuclear capable, as it continues to expand its military capabilities and pressure Washington and Seoul over long-stalled negotiations over its nuclear weapons.

The missile test early Tuesday was North Korea's third round of launches this month and took place shortly before North Korea's U.N. envoy accused the United States of hostility and demanded the Biden administration permanently end joint military exercises with South Korea and the deployment of strategic assets in the region.

A photo published in North Korea's state media showed a missile mounted with a finned, cone-shaped payload soaring into the air amid bright orange flames. The official Korean Central News Agency said the missile during its first flight test met key technical requirements, including launch stability and the maneuverability and flight characteristics of the "detached hypersonic gliding warhead."

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed the missile to be at an early stage of development and said North Korea would need "considerable time" to be able to deploy it operationally.

The North's announcement came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries said they detected North Korea firing a missile into its eastern sea. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launch highlighted "the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program."

In a separate report, KCNA said the North's rubber-stamp parliament opened a session on Tuesday and discussed domestic issues such as economic policies and youth education and that the meetings would continue. Some experts speculate the North might use the session to address the deadlock on nuclear diplomacy, but the state media report did not mention any comments made toward Washington and Seoul.

At a ruling party meeting in January, leader Kim Jong Un named hypersonic glide vehicles, which are launched from a rocket before gliding into a target, among a wish-list of sophisticated military assets. KCNA described the new missile as an important addition to the country's "strategic" weaponry, implying that the system is being developed to deliver nuclear weapons.

The report also said the test confirmed the stability of the missile's fuel capsule, indicating a technology to add liquid propellant beforehand and keep it launch-ready for years. And a North Korean official said the North planned to expand the system to all its liquid-fuel missiles.

Liquid-fuel missiles are more vulnerable than solid-fuel missiles because they need to be fueled separately and transported to launch sites using trucks that can be seen by enemy satellites or other military assets.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said North Korea is trying to improve the mobility of these weapons.

North Korea last week made offers to improve relations with South Korea under certain conditions, apparently returning to its pattern of mixing weapons demonstrations with peace overtures to wrest outside concessions.

Negotiations over its nuclear program have been in a stalemate since February 2019. North Korea has demanded the lifting of U.S.-led sanctions while insisting it has the right to nuclear weapons. U.S. officials

have made it clear the sanctions will stay in place until the North takes concrete steps toward denuclearization.

Kim Jong Un in recent political speeches has vowed to bolster his nuclear program as a deterrent to the U.S. His government has so far rejected the Biden administration's offer to resume talks without preconditions, saying that Washington must abandon its "hostile policy" first, a term North Korea mainly uses to refer to sanctions and joint U.S.-South Korea military drills the North considers to be an invasion rehearsal.

Kim's influential sister reached out to Seoul twice last week, saying her country was open to resuming talks and reconciliatory steps if conditions are met.

Analysts say North Korea is using the South's desire for inter-Korean engagement to pressure Seoul to extract concessions from Washington on Kim's behalf as he renews an attempt to leverage his nuclear weapons for badly needed economic and security benefits.

North Korea's weapons displays could also be aimed at shoring up domestic unity as Kim faces perhaps his toughest moment nearing a decade in rule, with pandemic border closures unleashing further shock on an economy battered by sanctions and decades of mismanagement.

Experts say the North will likely continue its testing activity in the coming months as it dials up its pressure campaign, at least until China begins pushing for calm ahead of the Beijing Olympics early next year.

The AP Interview: Capitol Police chief sees rising threats

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The newly installed chief of the U.S. Capitol Police says the force, still struggling six months after an insurrection that left its officers battled, bloodied and bruised, "cannot afford to be complacent." The risk to lawmakers is higher than ever. And the threat from lone-wolf attackers is only growing.

In an interview with The Associated Press, J. Thomas Manger said his force is seeing a historically high number of threats against lawmakers, thousands more than just a few years ago. He predicts authorities will respond to close to 9,000 threats against members of Congress in 2021 — more than 4,100 had been reported from January to March.

"We have never had the level of threats against members of Congress that we're seeing today," Manger said. "Clearly, we've got a bigger job in terms of the protection aspect of our responsibilities, we've got a bigger job than we used to."

Manger touted changes that have been made in intelligence gathering after the department was widely criticized for being woefully underprepared to fend off a mob of insurrectionists in January. Officials had compiled intelligence showing white supremacists and other extremists were likely to assemble in Washington on Jan. 6 and that violent disruptions were possible. Police officers were brutally beaten in the insurrection. Five people died.

The events of that day have redefined how the U.S. Capitol police and other law enforcement agencies in Washington approach security. Extreme measures put into place two weeks ago for a rally in support of those jailed in the riot aren't a one-off, they might be the new normal. Propelled by former President Donald Trump, the awakening of domestic extremist groups and the continued volatility around the 2020 election have changed the calculus.

Manger said putting up temporary fencing around the Capitol and calling in reinforcements was a prudent decision. It may not be the same for every demonstration.

"It's really going to depend on the intelligence we have beforehand," he said. "It's going to depend on the potential for violence at a particular demonstration."

With Manger, the police force got a longtime lawman. He served as chief in Maryland's Montgomery County, outside Washington, from 2004 to 2019. Before that, he led the Fairfax County, Virginia, police department. Those jobs, as well as a leadership position in the Major Cities Chiefs Association, have made him a familiar face in Washington law enforcement circles and on Capitol Hill.

He took over in late July, months after the former chief resigned amid the fallout from the insurrection.

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The Sept. 18 rally was Manger's first test — and he was taking no chances.

"We just were in a position where we could not allow another January 6th," he said. "And I really needed to ensure that the men and women of the Capitol Police department understood that we had the resources we need, the training that we needed, the equipment that we needed, and the staffing that we needed to ensure that they could do their job and do it safely."

In the end, police far outnumbered the protesters and the Capitol officers were mocked by some for going overboard. But Michael Chertoff, a Homeland Security secretary during the George W. Bush administration, said it's just smart policing to learn from mistakes and be better prepared the next time, and so what if there's too many police milling around — if the result is no one is killed or hurt.

"When you get demonstrations that are advertised or pitch to right wing or left wing extremists, I think you're going to see that they're going to lean into a visible show of protection, maybe more than they need but enough to make it clear they won't be overwhelmed again," he said.

Chertoff, who now runs the Chertoff Group security and cybersecurity risk management, said such fortifications won't be necessary for every free speech event planned in the nation's capital, but law enforcement must be better prepared when it comes to people who have expressed sympathy for Jan. 6, because there is strong reason to believe they're sympathetic to the idea of using violent force to disrupt government. Because it already happened.

The Capitol Police are part security agency, part local police — it has an annual budget of approximately \$460 million and about 2,300 officers and civilian employees to police the Capitol grounds and the people inside the building, including all the lawmakers and staff. By contrast, the entire city of Minneapolis has about 800 sworn officers and a budget of roughly \$193 million.

A scathing internal report earlier this year found that serious gaps in tactical gear including weapons, training and intelligence capabilities contributed to security problems during the Jan. 6 melee. In his report, obtained by the AP, Capitol Police Inspector General Michael A. Bolton cast serious doubt on the force's ability to respond to future threats and another large-scale attack.

But then a second task force later charged with reviewing Jan. 6 said the Capitol Police already has the ability to "track, assess, plan against or respond" to threats from domestic extremists who continue to potentially target the building.

The report recommended a major security overhaul, including the funding of hundreds of new officer positions and establishing a permanent "quick response force" for emergencies.

But those changes would require massive influx of money. In a \$2.1 billion measure in July, Congress delegated nearly \$71 million, with much of that funding going to cover overtime costs.

Still, Manger said, "I think that what we have in place today is an improvement over what we had a year ago or nine months ago."

The event, which Republican lawmakers and Trump and his allies have sought to downplay and dismiss, has prompted a surge in applications to join the force. Manger likened it to police and firefighter applications after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Manger also defended keeping on Yogananda Pittman, the Capitol Police official who led intelligence operations for the agency ahead of January's attack. Pittman, who was elevated to acting chief with a tenure marred by a vote of no-confidence from rank-and-file officers on the force and questions about intelligence and leadership failures, is back in charge of intelligence and protecting congressional leaders.

"This notion that I should come in and just fire everybody on the leadership team because they failed on January 6th ... first of all, this department was in enough chaos without me firing everybody," he said, "and then where would I have been without any experience on my leadership team to rely on and to assist me going forward?"

Sign of progress, Biden digs in to strike deal on \$3.5T plan

By LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressure mounting but with signs of progress, President Joe Biden will hunker

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down at the White House to try to strike a deal and win over two holdout Democratic senators whose support is needed for his potentially historic \$3.5 trillion government overhaul.

With Republicans solidly opposed and no Democratic votes to spare, Biden canceled a Wednesday trip to Chicago that was to focus on COVID-19 vaccinations so he could dig in for another day of intense negotiations with lawmakers ahead of crucial votes.

The stakes are as high as ever as Biden and his party try to accomplish a giant legislative lift, promising a vast rewrite of the nation's balance sheet with an oh-so-slim majority in Congress. His idea is to essentially raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy and use that money to expand government health care, education and other programs — an impact that would be felt across countless American lives.

As if that wasn't enough, Biden's focus is gaining traction at the same time Congress courts a crisis. Republicans refuse to approve routine legislation to keep the government funded past Thursday's fiscal yearend and raise the nation's debt limit to avoid a dangerous default on borrowing. More votes are expected Wednesday and are likely to at least temporarily head off a catastrophe.

With Biden and his party reaching for what would be a signature policy accomplishment, there is a "strong sense" that progress is being made, said an administration official who requested anonymity to discuss the private talks.

All eyes are on Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who say the price tag for Biden's plan is too big but are publicly quiet about a number they can live with.

The president met separately with the two centrist senators at the White House on Tuesday and Democrats are poised to trim the huge measure's tax proposals and spending goals to meet the overall size they are demanding.

"Really good, honest, straightforward negotiations," Manchin told reporters back at the Capitol after his White House meeting with Biden. He said he did not give the president a new topline figure.

Biden's problems with fellow Democrats aren't just in the Senate. A small number of centrist House Democrats are bristling at the far-reaching scope of his domestic agenda and demanding changes. But progressive lawmakers warn against cutting too much, saying they have already compromised enough.

Applying pressure, progressives are threatening to withhold support for a companion bill, a \$1 trillion public works measure heading to a vote Thursday, that they say is too meager without Biden's bigger package assured.

"We're obviously at a very sensitive time," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. The president, she said, is "not going to tell anyone what to do. He's going to have a discussion, have an engagement."

Taken together, it's all putting the entire Biden agenda perilously closer to collapse, with consequences certain to shape his presidency and the lawmakers' political futures.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Congress in a letter Tuesday that Oct. 18 is a critical date — the day the Treasury Department will likely exhaust all of its "extraordinary measures" being taken to avoid a default on the government's obligations.

Yellen urged Congress to "protect the full faith and credit of the United States by acting as soon as possible" to either raise the debt limit or suspend it.

Faced with Republican opposition to linking the routine government funding with the debt limit vote, Democrats are separating the two, stripping out the more-heated debate over the debt limit for another day, closer to a separate October deadline.

The Senate is poised to vote swiftly to provide government funding to avoid a federal shutdown after the Sept. 30 fiscal year end, keeping operations flowing temporarily to Dec. 3. The House could quickly follow.

The House is also preparing a possible vote to extend the debt limit through through Dec. 16, something Democrats are likely to support. But even if it is approved by the House, it's unclear if it could pass the Senate in the face of GOP obstruction.

Tensions are flaring at the Capitol as the contours of Biden's big agenda come into focus amid standoff over normally routine votes over government operations.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell grew testy with reporters when asked about Yellen's warning

that Congress must swiftly resolve the issue.

"Of course the debt ceiling has to be raised," McConnell said. But he insisted Democrats shoulder the unpopular vote on their own.

Meanwhile, the behind-the-scenes action over the \$3.5 trillion measure is testing Biden's grip on his party, as he seeks a once-in-a-generation reworking of the nation's tax priorities and spending goals.

With all Republicans opposed to the big bill, 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.

Physically holding up the bill of 2,000-plus pages, Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming warned it was nothing but "big government socialism."

Biden insists the price tag actually will be zero because the expansion of government programs would be largely paid for with higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy — businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and individuals earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

To lower the price tag and win over centrist Democrats, it's not necessary that any specific programs be get axed, those familiar with the process have said. Rather, lawmakers are eyeing ways to adjust the scope and duration of some of Biden's proposals.

Still, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said they have the votes to derail the other bill unless it comes with Biden's broader one — tacit pressure on the holdouts to arrive at a deal. Backing that position, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., also urged a no vote.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Kevin Freking, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Conservative Koch network disavows critical race theory bans

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — As conservative political groups mobilize to ban in schools what they call critical race theory, one prominent backer of Republican causes and candidates is notably absent.

Leaders in the network built by the billionaire Koch family say they oppose government bans and efforts to recall school board members over teaching about race and history in schools. While they note they don't agree with the ideas at the center of the fight, they argue the government bans, now enacted in 11 states, stifle debate essential to democracy.

"Using government to ban ideas, even those we disagree with, is also counter to core American principles — the principles that help drive social progress," said Evan Feinberg, executive director of the Koch-affiliated Stand Together Foundation.

That position is in line with the network's long-held libertarian streak. But it has sparked fresh charges of hypocrisy from the megadonor's critics. After spending years pouring money into conservative groups, the Koch groups cannot distance themselves from the movement it helped build, they argue.

"They have this nice position they want to tout from a P.R. standpoint. But their money has gone to these groups that have the opposite effect on that agenda," said Lisa Graves, board president for the liberal watchdog group Center for Media and Democracy.

The Koch organization first went public with its position last spring, as state lawmakers and conservative groups began passing legislation that bans from classrooms specific concepts, including the idea that racism is systemic in society and the U.S. legal system.

The efforts were prompted in part by backlash to The 1619 Project, a New York Times Magazine initiative aimed at rethinking the role of slavery in the nation's history and development.

In a letter published in The Chronicle of Higher Education in May, Charlie Ruger, the Charles Koch Foundation's vice president of philanthropy, described Republicans' push to ban these concepts from schools as a gag on free expression.

"Both learning and research require openness to new ideas and the ability to argue productively," Ruger wrote. "That requires standing against censorship."

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The Koch political behemoth — a multibillion-dollar umbrella of foundations and a political action committee — was built by brothers Charles and David Koch out of the family's Kansas-based business empire during the 1980s and 1990s. Though David Koch died in 2018, the network has continued to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into organizations and politics that push for small government, lower taxes, deregulation, free speech, academic freedom and a conservative judiciary.

The organization's opposition to the race and education bans has not kept the groups it has long supported out of the fight. In Wisconsin, parents seeking to recall school board members have received help this year from the Koch-supported Wisconsin Institute for Liberty and Law. The Milwaukee law firm received \$310,000 from the Charles Koch Foundation for five years through 2019, the last year with public records available and before critical race theory flared as a GOP rallying point. The money was in the form of grants that were aimed at protecting free speech on college campuses, a Koch spokesman said.

The foundation and the Charles Koch Institute also contributed over the same period about \$75,000 to State Policy Network, a conservative think tank that has promoted the bans. However, the grants, also before the 2021 wave of legislation, helped sponsor an annual meeting, an internship and a panel discussion on business, the Koch spokesman said.

Among the most prominent drivers behind the legislative bans was another Koch-backed group, the American Legislative Exchange Council. The Chicago-based conservative policymaking group provides model legislation for conservative lawmakers and has promoted measures to ban critical race theory in schools this year.

The Stand Together Foundation and its related groups contributed \$2.7 million to ALEC between 2015 and 2019.

None of it was targeted for limiting schools' curriculum on history and race, and was awarded before the issue became a Republican priority, Stand Together spokesman Bill Riggs said.

In 2020, ALEC continued to receive money from two Koch foundations, donations that were earmarked for trade, regulatory and fiscal policy, as well as advocating free speech and providing scholarships, Riggs said.

Riggs did not disclose the 2020 total given. Only contributions through 2019 are searchable through publicly available tax documents. Contributions for 2020 won't be available to the public until mid-November.

Riggs accused Koch critics of a "misinformation game" that suggests the network is secretly supporting a policy it does not. He noted Koch groups give to a broad spectrum of organizations that align with some of its founders' values, if not all of their views.

The Charles Koch Foundation contributed to the Democratic-leaning Brookings Institution in 2018 and 2019 on issues related to foreign policy, Riggs said. Last year, the Koch network helped create Heal America, a faith-based program aimed at fighting "racial injustice with love and redemption," according to its website. Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban and television commentator Van Jones, a Democrat, have both participated in events.

Riggs declined to say whether the Koch network would refuse to contribute to groups supporting bans on teaching critical race theory, such as ALEC, noting it prescribes in grant agreements the purpose of the money. He also declined to say whether they would rethink support for political candidates who also back the policy.

The Koch-backed political action committee Americans for Prosperity Action spent at least \$9.7 million backing North Carolina Republican Thom Tillis in his tough campaign for reelection to the Senate last year, according to Federal Election Commission reports.

Tillis was prominent sponsor of a measure this year to prohibit using of federal money to teach the 1619 Project in elementary, middle and high school. The bill has not advanced in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Endorsements by Americans for Prosperity Action are based on several factors including voting records, statements, how they lead on lead on key issues, "as well as how they distinguish themselves as leaders capable of bringing people together to drive solutions," Riggs said.

"But there is no single litmus test issue. We recognize no one is going to agree on everything," he said.

Biden caught between allies and critics on border policy

By BEN FOX and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is caught between a hard place and an even harder one when it comes to immigration.

Biden embraced major progressive policy goals on the issue after he won the Democratic nomination, and he has begun enacting some. But his administration has been forced to confront unusually high numbers of migrants trying to enter the country along the U.S.-Mexico border, and the federal response has inflamed both critics and allies.

Much of the anger is centered on the administration's immigration point person, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

"Getting hit from both sides in the matter of immigration is no surprise," Mayorkas said on NBC last weekend. "We are in the epicenter of the country's divide, regrettably."

The result is that immigration has become an early and unwanted distraction for an administration that would rather focus on the pandemic, the economy and other policy priorities.

Just 35% of Americans approve of Biden's handling of immigration, down from 43% in April, when it was already one of Biden's worst issues, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Immigration is a relative low point for Biden within his own party with just 60% of Democrats saying they approve.

Images of Border Patrol agents on horseback blocking Haitian migrants from crossing the Rio Grande only added to the angst. While the widely shared photos incorrectly suggested that agents were using their reins to whip at mostly Black migrants, Mayorkas and Biden expressed outrage at the tactics and Homeland Security is investigating.

The outcry was such that Mayorkas was asked if his department was a "rogue agency." He responded, "I couldn't disagree more vehemently."

Some of Biden's strongest supporters on Capitol Hill and among outside immigrant advocates had already been expressing outrage about the administration's continued reliance on a Trump-era public health authority, known as Title 42, to rapidly expel migrants, including thousands of Haitians.

Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center and onetime co-chair of a task force on immigration meant to unite Biden supporters with more progressive primary backers of Sen. Bernie Sanders, noted that the White House "has appointed some of the best people in our movement" to help run immigration programs.

But she is among those opposed to Title 42, which the Trump administration invoked early in the pandemic, ostensibly to slow the spread of COVID-19. It prevents people from making claims for U.S. asylum.

"This is the moment when friends need to have those courageous conversations with friends," Hincapié said. "When they're making the wrong decision."

The administration's refusal to halt Title 42 — even appealing a court order to stop relying on it to expel families — along with the lack of progress in Congress on a sweeping immigration bill that Biden introduced upon taking office has prompted supporters to warn of a return to the enforcement-heavy policies of President Barack Obama.

"They've been there for eight months," said Todd Schulte, president of FWD.us, an immigration advocacy group backed by some of the nation's largest tech companies. "The policies that they are actively pursuing are very different than the ones they promised. The policies they are actively pursuing are failing. Yet the continued direction is in the wrong direction."

The Obama administration in its early years drastically increased the number of migrants it deported in hopes of showing Republicans it had stepped up enforcement while trying to get its own comprehensive immigration package through Congress. Officials ultimately expelled a record 3 million people, which led some activists to label Obama "deporter-in-chief" but still didn't produce congressional action on an immigration overhaul.

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"The calculation that the administration is making at the moment is that they will have a better chance of getting Congress to act on broader-based immigration reforms if they can get the border 'under control,'" said Theresa Cardinal Brown, managing director of immigration and cross-border policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center. "That was really the theory of the Obama administration."

As did the Obama and Trump administrations, the Biden administration has been confronting an increase in the number of migrants trying to cross the border, either illegally or to present themselves to Border Patrol agents so they can claim asylum.

The total number of encounters with migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border reached just over 208,000 for August, a slight decline from July but still the highest since March 2000 and the highest since the last big increase in 2019, under President Donald Trump.

The current total is inflated by Title 42, with about a quarter of the encounters involving people who have been recaptured after they were previously expelled under the public health authority. The numbers also have been rising due to factors that include COVID-19 ravages on Latin American economies and a perception that Biden will be more welcoming than Trump.

Biden's response has been to try to address the "root causes" of migration by increasing aid to Central America, which was cut under Trump, and restoring a program that enabled children from the region to apply for visas to join their families in the U.S.

His administration has also used newly proposed federal rules for steps like reinforcing legal protections for immigrants brought to the country illegally as children.

"I'm confident that the president will use every tool at his disposal, but the administrative tools are not sufficient to fix what needs to be fixed," said Cecilia Muñoz, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council under Obama. She blames staunch Republican congressional opposition, and Senate rules she says were incorrectly applied, for the expectation that immigration reform will not pass Congress as part of the budgeting process.

Legislative efforts aside, the administration has stopped the Trump-era practice of expelling children crossing alone from Mexico under Title 42, and has allowed thousands of migrant families to remain in the U.S. while they pursue asylum claims — a process that frequently ends in denial but can take years for a final decision.

It has, however, continued to use Title 42 to expel many families and nearly all solo adults, with Mayorkas repeatedly insisting it is a necessary public health measure, aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities.

Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, policy counsel at the American Immigration Council, argues that relying on Title 42 causes more trouble than it's worth by inflating the total number of encounters, which are still far below what they were 20 years ago.

"Title 42 has created a significant amount of churn at the border, and the end result of this churn hasn't been a more secure border," Reichlin-Melnick said. "It's been a reduction in the ability of people to seek protection and an overstressed Border Patrol, which doesn't have the capacity to deal with that level of activity."

A federal judge, ruling in a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union and others, recently declared the reliance on Title 42 to deny people the right to seek asylum is likely illegal, and said he would issue a preliminary injunction halting its use. The Biden administration appealed, further infuriating the critics.

Anthony Romero, the ACLU's executive director, said at a forum Monday that he is broadly supportive of administrative actions on immigration and of Mayorkas. But he said the ACLU, which filed more than 400 legal actions under Trump, won't hesitate to keep challenging Biden on Title 42 and other matters.

"I think litigation is as important in holding the feet to the fire of our quote 'allies' as it is about fighting the foes of civil liberties and civil rights," Romero said, "because that is what creates the political will."

Associated Press writer Emily Swanson contributed to this report.

US says ivory-billed woodpecker, 22 other species extinct

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Death's come knocking a last time for the splendid ivory-billed woodpecker and 22 more birds, fish and other species: The U.S. government is declaring them extinct.

It's a rare move for wildlife officials to give up hope on a plant or animal, but government scientists say they've exhausted efforts to find these 23. And they warn climate change, on top of other pressures, could make such disappearances more common as a warming planet adds to the dangers facing imperiled plants and wildlife.

The ivory-billed woodpecker was perhaps the best known species the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Wednesday will announce is extinct. It went out stubbornly and with fanfare, making unconfirmed appearances in recent decades that ignited a frenzy of ultimately fruitless searches in the swamps of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida.

Others such as the flat pigtoe, a freshwater mussel in the southeastern U.S., were identified in the wild only a few times and never seen again, meaning by the time they got a name they were fading from existence.

"When I see one of those really rare ones, it's always in the back of my mind that I might be the last one to see this animal again," said Anthony "Andy" Ford, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in Tennessee who specializes in freshwater mussels.

The factors behind the disappearances vary — too much development, water pollution, logging, competition from invasive species, birds killed for feathers and animals captured by private collectors. In each case, humans were the ultimate cause.

Another thing they share: All 23 were thought to have at least a slim chance of survival when added to the endangered species list beginning in the 1960s. Only 11 species previously have been removed due to extinction in the almost half-century since the Endangered Species Act was signed into law. Wednesday's announcement kicks off a three-month comment period before the species status changes become final.

Around the globe, some 902 species have been documented as extinct. The actual number is thought to be much higher because some are never formally identified, and many scientists warn the earth is in an "extinction crisis" with flora and fauna now disappearing at 1,000 times the historical rate.

It's possible one or more of the 23 species included in Wednesday's announcement could reappear, several scientists said.

A leading figure in the hunt for the ivory-billed woodpecker said it was premature to call off the effort, after millions of dollars spent on searches and habitat preservation efforts.

"Little is gained and much is lost" with an extinction declaration, said Cornell University bird biologist John Fitzpatrick, lead author of a 2005 study that claimed the woodpecker had been rediscovered in eastern Arkansas.

"A bird this iconic, and this representative of the major old-growth forests of the southeast, keeping it on the list of endangered species keeps attention on it, keeps states thinking about managing habitat on the off chance it still exists," he said.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, a Switzerland-based group that tracks extinctions globally, is not putting the ivory-billed woodpecker into its extinction column because it's possible the birds still exist in Cuba, said the group's Craig Hilton-Taylor.

Hilton-Taylor said there can be unintended but damaging consequences if extinction is declared prematurely. "Suddenly the (conservation) money is no longer there, and then suddenly you do drive it to extinction because you stop investing in it," he said.

Federal officials said the extinctions declaration was driven by a desire to clear a backlog of recommended status changes for species that had not been acted upon for years. They said it would free up resources for on-the-ground conservation efforts for species that still have a chance for recovery.

What's lost when those efforts fail are creatures often uniquely adapted to their environments. Freshwater mussel species like the ones the government says have gone extinct reproduce by attracting fish with

a lure-like appendage, then sending out a cloud of larvae that attach to gills of fish until they've grown enough to drop off and live on their own.

The odds are slim against any mussel surviving into adulthood — a one in a million chance, according to Ford of the wildlife service — but those that do can live a century or longer.

Hawaii has the most species on the list — eight woodland birds and one plant. That's in part because the islands have so many plants and animals that many have extremely small ranges and can blink out quickly.

The most recent to go extinct was the teeny po'ouli, a type of bird known as a honeycreeper discovered in 1973.

By the late 1990s just three remained — a male and two females. After failures to mate them in the wild, the male was captured for potential breeding and died in 2004. The two females were never seen again.

The fate of Hawaii's birds helped push Duke University extinction expert Stuart Pimm into his field. Despite the grim nature of the government's proposal to move more species into the extinct column, Pimm said the toll would probably have been much higher without the Endangered Species Act.

"It's a shame we didn't get to those species in time, but when we do, we are usually able to save species," he said.

Since 1975, 54 species have left the endangered list after recovering, including the bald eagle, brown pelican and most humpback whales.

Climate change is making species recovery harder, bringing drought, floods, wildfires and temperature swings that compound the threats species already faced.

How they are saved also is changing. No longer is the focus on individual species, let alone individual birds. Officials say the broader goal now is to preserve their habitat, which boosts species of all types that live there.

"I hope we're up to the challenge," said biologist Michelle Bogardus with the wildlife service in Hawaii. "We don't have the resources to prevent extinctions unilaterally. We have to think proactively about ecosystem health and how do we maintain it, given all these threats."

Follow Matthew Brown on Twitter: @MatthewBrownAP

Petito's dad: Give same attention to all missing people

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The family of slain traveler Gabby Petito on Tuesday implored the public and news media to put the same energy into helping find other missing people as they did Petito, a 22-year-old woman who vanished on a cross-country trip with her boyfriend.

Petito's parents and stepparents spoke to reporters at a news conference in Bohemia, New York — showing off fresh tattoos based on her designs and mantra "Let it be" — as authorities in Florida continued searching for her boyfriend, Brian Laundrie, who is a person of interest in her disappearance and remains unaccounted for.

A lawyer for Petito's family, Richard Stafford, renewed calls for Laundrie to turn himself in and criticized his parents for what he said was a lack of cooperation in the search that turned up Petito's remains. The Laundries released a statement Monday saying they weren't helping him flee.

"The Laundries did not help us find Gabby, they sure are not going to help us find Brian," Stafford said. "For Brian, we're asking you to turn yourself in to the FBI or the nearest law enforcement agency."

Petito's body was discovered Sept. 18 in a remote area in northwestern Wyoming. A memorial service was held Sunday on Long Island, where Laundrie and Petito grew up before moving to Florida in recent years. Her family announced it was starting a foundation to support people searching for missing loved ones.

Petito's case has led to renewed calls for people to pay greater attention to cases involving missing Indigenous women and other people of color, with some commentators describing the intense coverage of her disappearance as "missing white woman syndrome."

Joseph Petito thanked the news media and social media for spotlighting his daughter's disappearance,

but he said all missing persons deserved the same attention.

"I want to ask everyone to help all the people that are missing and need help. It's on all of you, everyone that's in this room to do that," he said, pointing to reporters and cameras in front of him. "And if you don't do that for other people that are missing, that's a shame, because it's not just Gabby that deserves it."

The search for Laundrie is also generating a frenzy, with TV personalities like Duane Chapman — known as Dog the Bounty Hunter — and longtime "America's Most Wanted" host John Walsh working to track him down.

Stafford said Petito's family welcomed everybody's help in finding Laundrie and encouraged people with information on his whereabouts to contact the FBI or local police.

Petito was reported missing Sept. 11 by her parents after she didn't respond to calls and texts for several days while she and Laundrie visited parks in the West.

Her death has been ruled a homicide, but authorities in Wyoming haven't disclosed how she died pending further autopsy results. Petito's stepfather, Jim Schmidt, said Wyoming authorities still had possession of her remains.

Petito and Laundrie posted online about their trip in a white Ford Transit van converted into a camper. They got into a physical altercation Aug. 12 in Moab, Utah, that led to a police stop, which ended with police deciding to separate the quarreling couple for the night. No charges were filed, and no serious injuries were reported.

Investigators have been searching for Laundrie in Florida, and searched his parents' home in North Port, about 35 miles (56 kilometers) south of Sarasota.

Last week, federal officials in Wyoming charged Laundrie with unauthorized use of a debit card, alleging he used a Capital One Bank card and someone's personal identification number to make unauthorized withdrawals or charges worth more than \$1,000 during the period in which Petito went missing. They did not say who the card belonged to.

Joseph Petito said the Gabby Petito Foundation is in the formative stages and will seek to fill in any gaps that exist in the work of finding missing people. He said they would work with organizations that helped them, like the AWARE Foundation and We Help The Missing.

"We need positive stuff to come from the tragedy that happened," Joseph Petito said. "We can't let her name be taken in vain."

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at twitter.com/mikesisak

A jury convicted R. Kelly; will his music face consequences?

By ANDREW DALTON, GARY GERARD HAMILTON and KRISTIN M. HALL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Will a criminal conviction do to R. Kelly's music what years of ugly allegations couldn't?

It's unlikely that Monday's moment of justice — when a federal jury in New York found the 54-year-old R&B superstar guilty of all nine counts in a sex trafficking trial — will mean much for his fans, given all the awful things they had learned already, some observers say.

"The lines have already been drawn," said Jem Aswad, deputy music editor for the trade publication *Variety*, who has been covering R. Kelly for 20 years. "The people that are going to listen to R. Kelly's music are still listening to it. I don't think a guilty verdict is going to change their minds."

Still, advocates hope the criminal conviction brings a moral reckoning.

Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement, understands how irresistible the music of R. Kelly can be for people who grooved to songs like "Ignition," but said, "People should just have a second thought about the message that it sends."

"This generation is very clear about who R. Kelly is, right? These young people have come up with the information that this person is a perpetrator, right?" Burke said. "And if we can't push past our personal likes and desires to dance to a song for the sake of sending a message to these little girls and little boys, at some point I'm just going to draw a line."

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"I don't want to support somebody who will cause this kind of harm in my community. I just urge people to think about that," she continued. "Is it really worth it?"

Kelly had long managed to avoid professional consequences amid decades of reports of sexual abuse of young women and children, from his illegal marriage to R&B phenom Aaliyah in 1994, when she was just 15, to a 2002 arrest in which he was accused of recording himself sexually abusing and urinating on a 14-year-old girl.

The #MeToo era and the 2019 docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly" saw his music downgraded by streaming services and subjected to boycotts, and Kelly dropped by his label, but it still remains widely available and draws millions of weekly streams.

The Grammy winner, once called the King of R&B, has had a dozen albums reach platinum or multiple platinum status. His biggest hits include "I Believe I Can Fly" and "Bump N' Grind." His songs ranged from explicit to romantic, popular both in the clubs and at weddings.

The people he has worked with are a who's who of popular music, among them Jay-Z, Lady Gaga, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, Quincy Jones, Toni Braxton and Janet Jackson.

His popularity took a hit as allegations mounted in the past five years. His last three songs to chart on Billboard's Hot 100 peaked in 2013, including a duet with Lady Gaga called "Do What U Want" and "PYD" with Justin Bieber. He hasn't had a hit reach the Hot 100 since then, despite releasing two albums and several singles. He has had more success on other charts.

According to MRC Data, formerly Nielsen Music, a data provider that powers Billboard's charts, Kelly's airplay spins and audience dropped significantly between 2017 and 2021, and digital sales followed a similar pattern.

However, his streaming on-demand numbers have remained about the same, averaging more than 6 million per week for most of 2021.

A group of fans who continue to back him blasted his music outside the courthouse Monday, with one shouting, "We're not giving up on R. Kelly!"

Neither Spotify nor Apple Music responded to questions Tuesday about whether they would modify their use of R. Kelly's music on their platforms.

Spotify has made such a move before but got pushback.

In 2018, amid the momentum of the #MeToo movement and a campaign to #MuteRKelly, the service removed his music from playlists after establishing a new policy on hate content and hateful conduct. His music was still available, but Spotify stopped promoting it.

Yet as many pointed out at the time, the history of pop, R&B and rock music is overloaded with artists who not only sexually abused underaged girls, but also celebrated it in their songs.

And legendary producer Phil Spector, whose hands are on classic hits available everywhere, was a convicted murderer.

"These sort of lines of morality are hard to draw, and Spotify found that out very quickly," Aswad said. "You're looking at where you draw the line. If it's going to be, Did someone get convicted? Convicted of what? A felony? What if someone stole a car?"

But when Lifetime aired "Surviving R. Kelly" early in 2019, moves against him were inevitable. His RCA label dropped him, and Lady Gaga apologized for working with him and took their duet off streaming platforms.

At the peak of Kelly's success, Aswad said, the fortune he amassed helped him fight the stories about him, and people who made money with him made them less likely to abandon him.

But his finances appear to have been in serious decline. Crain's Chicago Business reported that a \$2.9 million foreclosure was filed on Kelly's suburban Chicago mansion in 2011, and it was auctioned off in 2013 for \$950,000. The Chicago Sun-Times reported at the time that he owed the IRS more than \$4.8 million.

He was evicted from two Atlanta-area homes over more than \$31,000 in 2018, and the following year he told a judge he couldn't pay \$161,000 in back child support.

Kelly's audience is also aging, and he's unlikely to make any new music, with a long prison sentence a possibility and more prosecutions awaiting in other states.

It could be that time alone may do what convictions, allegations and boycotts couldn't.

"I think as generations go on, it might get muted more because it will fade into the background," said Gail Mitchell, executive director, R&B/Hip-Hop at Billboard Magazine. "As more generations, younger generations come up of age, there'll be a separation. It'll be a bookmark that people can access. But the music probably will kind of fade away."

Dalton reported from Los Angeles. Hall reported from Nashville.

See the AP's full coverage of the investigations into R. Kelly.

On climate change, Biden \$3.5T plan making up for lost time

By MATTHEW DALY and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Joe Biden visited one disaster site after another this summer — from California wildfires to hurricane-induced flooding in Louisiana and New York — he said climate change is "everybody's crisis" and America must get serious about the "code red" danger posed by global warming.

In many ways, the president is making up for lost time.

Biden and Democrats are pursuing a sweeping \$3.5 trillion federal overhaul that includes landmark measures to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in what would be the most consequential environmental policies ever enacted, after years of fits and starts.

Sidelined after the former administration withdrew from the landmark Paris climate accord — the 2015 global effort to confront climate change — the U.S. has returned to the arena, with Biden promising world leaders in April that the U.S. would cut carbon pollution in half by 2030.

But following through on Biden's climate goals depends in large part on passage of the Democratic package, and it will take the White House's heft to close the deal between centrist and progressive lawmakers, including disputes over its climate provisions.

"That's where he earns his legacy," Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., said of Biden.

As Democrats rush to finish a package that touches almost all aspects of American life, the proposals related to climate change are proving to be a sticking point, particularly among key centrist lawmakers.

The president met separately Tuesday with Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona as Democrats chip away at the package's overall price tag and marshal support. With Republicans in lockstep against the plan, Democrats have few votes to spare as they try to pass it on their own.

"This is Speaker Pelosi's grand socialist agenda to destroy freedom and embolden our enemies on the backs of American families," said Rep. Cathy McMorris Rogers of Washington state, the top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce panel.

Yet, for many Democrats, and voters who elected them — the climate provisions are among the most important elements of the sweeping bill. A poll last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows 83% of Democrats are very concerned about climate change, compared with just 21% of Republicans.

"This is a 'code red' moment, but Democrats are answering the call," said Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Florida, chairwoman of a special House committee on climate change.

"Our only hope to avoid catastrophe is to act with urgency — to act now," Castor said Tuesday at the Capitol. She called climate change "a clear and present danger to American families who are facing brutal heat waves, devastating floods, failed electric grids and historic wildfires."

The Democratic plan will make historic investments in clean energy, climate resilience and environmental justice, she said. "We have to get this right."

Included in the massive legislation is a nationwide clean-electricity program that is intended to eliminate climate-damaging fossil fuel emissions from U.S. power plants by 2035 — catching up to requirements already set in some states.

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The proposal would spend billions to install 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations and upgrade the power grid to make it more resilient during hurricanes and other extreme weather events that are increasing and intensifying as a result of climate change.

The measure also would create a New Deal-style Civilian Climate Corps to unleash an army of young people to work in public lands and restoration projects.

"The climate crisis is here, and the cost of inaction is already staggering," said Energy and Commerce Chair Frank Pallone, D-N.J. The U.S. had 22 climate and weather disasters in 2020 with losses exceeding \$1 billion each. Hurricane Ida and other recent disasters are likely to cost tens of billions more.

A slimmer \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill the House is set to consider Thursday addresses some of these priorities, with money for climate resiliency, water system upgrades and other provisions.

But progressive Democrats say a far more comprehensive approach is needed if the U.S. is to have a chance to achieve Biden's goal of cutting the nation's greenhouse gas emissions in half, leaving both packages at a standstill as talks continue behind the scenes.

"It's about the livability of this planet," said Huffman, a progressive caucus member who said Democrats were "unwilling to just be steamrolled on that."

But Manchin has said he will not support a number of clean energy and climate provisions. As the powerful chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Manchin has vowed to protect jobs in his coal and gas-producing state and said the price tag for the Democratic bill is too high. Manchin said after the White House meeting he did not give Biden a new topline figure.

Manchin and Sinema are not alone in raising objections. Seven House Democrats from Texas said provisions in the Democratic plan could cost thousands of jobs in the energy industry and increase energy costs for Americans.

"These taxes and fees, as well as the exclusion of natural gas production from clean energy initiatives, constitute punitive practices," the Texas lawmakers said in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The letter was signed by Reps. Henry Cuellar, Vicente Gonzalez, Lizzie Fletcher, Sylvia Garcia, Marc Veasey, Filemon Vela and Colin Allred.

Overall, the Biden package aims to provide more than \$600 billion to tackle climate change and lower greenhouse gas emissions, funded in large part by taxes on corporations, the wealthy and other fees, keeping to Biden's pledge not to raise taxes on anyone earning less than \$400,000 a year.

One alternative for raising revenues would be to impose a carbon tax. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said Monday he is developing legislation "that would make polluters pay for the costs of the climate crisis."

But Wyden and others are mindful of Biden's pledge not to hit pocketbooks of Americans and the senator said the carbon tax is being developed as part of a menu of options for consideration.

Environmental groups have hailed the overall package, calling it a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

"Investing in new clean energy technologies is one of the best things we can do to create good jobs for regular people right now while reaping long-term benefits and a healthier planet for decades to come," said Matthew Davis of the League of Conservation Voters.

The clean-energy standard alone could create millions of jobs, while driving the U.S. electricity sector toward zero-carbon emissions, Davis and other advocates said.

With elections around the corner, approval of the bill is crucial, Democrats say.

"If we miss this moment," said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., referring to Democratic control of Congress and the White House, "it is not clear when we will have a second chance."

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this story.

The AP Interview: Haiti PM plans to hold elections next year

By DÁNICA COTO, JOSHUA GOODMAN and PIERRE-RICHARD LUXAMA Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Struggling with political turmoil and the aftermath of an earthquake,

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Haiti's prime minister said Tuesday that he plans to hold a referendum to modify the country's constitution by February, and he hopes to organize presidential and legislative elections early next year.

In an interview with The Associated Press at his official residence, Ariel Henry dismissed opponents who accuse him of wanting to stay in power and said that mistrust is one of the biggest challenges he faces.

The referendum is a priority, Henry said, because the current constitution is rejected by a majority of political figures and civil society leaders. He said an electoral council that will be responsible for setting dates has yet to be named after he recently dissolved the previous provisional council.

"The elections must be held as soon as possible," he said as he lamented the lack of trust among Haitians. "People don't believe what is being said."

Just hours after he spoke, members of the provisional council that Henry dissolved issued a statement saying they plan to contest the prime minister's actions and accused him of violating Haitian law because only a president has the power to dismiss them. The council added that it will continue to work on organizing the upcoming elections.

After being postponed several times this year, presidential and legislative elections were scheduled to be held Nov. 7, along with the constitutional referendum. But the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse at his private home on July 7 upended those plans.

One proposed constitutional change would bar a president from serving more than two terms, although it does not specify whether those would be consecutive, as stated in the current constitution. Other changes include compulsory military service for those age 18, the creation of a vice presidential position to replace that of prime minister and the establishment of a unicameral legislature to replace the current Senate and Chamber of Deputies.

Thousands protested in the streets when the referendum was first proposed, with many accusing Moïse of a power grab.

Henry still faces opposition to the referendum, as well as criticism from those who do not consider him a legitimate leader.

As part of a political agreement with opponents, Moïse selected Henry, a trained neurosurgeon, to become Haiti's next prime minister shortly before his assassination. But the president was killed before Henry could be sworn in. The 71-year-old was finally ushered into power over the outgoing prime minister, Claude Joseph, after foreign diplomats belonging to the so-called Core Group endorsed his rule, giving rise to criticism that he was a pawn of the U.S. government with a long history of meddling in Haiti's affairs.

"He's a puppet," said Monique Clesca, a Haitian writer, activist and former U.N. official. "Bottom line, he has no legitimacy or credibility."

Clesca and several leaders of Haiti's civil society are calling for a two-year transitional government with a president and prime minister chosen by political parties and civil society to stabilize the country before holding elections.

"We have wanted a Haitian solution," she said. "It is time that the international community says to us, 'We are listening,' rather than push down our throat somebody that they put there."

Henry said he has always been a legitimate prime minister despite not being elected. He views his position as a mission to oversee a renaissance of Haitian society.

It's not the first time Henry has assumed a caretaker role. In 2004, he was part of the so-called Council of Sages that, with U.S. backing, tried to stabilize Haiti in the aftermath of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's overthrow in a coup. He previously served as health minister and briefly as interior minister under former President Michel Martelly.

In other comments, Henry criticized how the U.S. government recently treated Haitian migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border, where it expelled more than 2,300. He said that action was not "suitable."

"We don't understand the way that our compatriots were treated," he said.

Henry's remarks came just hours before the arrival in Port-au-Prince of Assistant Secretary of State Brian Nichols, the top U.S. diplomat to Latin America, who is seeking to contain the fallout from the abrupt resignation last week of the U.S. special envoy to Haiti.

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Daniel Foote, a career diplomat, quit the high-profile post over the deportations at the border, saying it was inhumane to return the migrants, many of whom fled the island following the devastating 2010 earthquake, to a country buffeted by gang violence, a collapsed economy and political turmoil.

Foote, in his resignation letter, also criticized the U.S. for standing by what he considers a "corrupt government with gang alliances" instead of embracing a broad-based coalition of civil society groups that have come up with their own blueprint for stabilizing the country.

Henry declined to comment on Foote's resignation, saying it was a foreign affair, but he said he does not think the situation will affect the relationship between the U.S. and Haiti, which he said would continue and deepen.

Henry added that the government is working on a draft of a potential program to help the thousands of migrants who have been expelled. He said one proposal is to give the migrants access to credit so they can launch their own small businesses.

"We're trying to do that immediately," he said.

He acknowledged that Haiti is mired in a deep economic crisis and faces multiple other challenges, including a rise in gang-related violence and kidnappings and a housing crisis in the aftermath of a 7.2-magnitude earthquake. The Aug. 14 quake killed more than 2,200 people and damaged or destroyed tens of thousands of homes.

Another priority is to find the masterminds behind Moïse's killing. Henry said he does not know why the president was slain. He also dismissed allegations made by a chief prosecutor — whom he fired — that there were two phone calls between him and a key suspect just hours after the assassination.

Henry said he has no recollection of speaking with Joseph Badio, who was fired from the government's anti-corruption unit in May and remains a fugitive, according to police, who seek him on charges including murder.

"If that conversation took place, I do not remember it," he said. "For me, that conversation never happened."

Henry said he dismissed Port-au-Prince's chief prosecutor, Bed-Ford Claude, and former Justice Minister Rockfeller Vincent, because they did not respect the law and tried to politicize the situation.

"They don't have any ethics, and they are not credible," he said.

Coto reported from San Juan, Puerto Rico. Goodman reported from Washington.

Big pressure on Biden, Dems to trim \$3.5T federal overhaul

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressure mounting, President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress strained Tuesday to trim back his potentially historic \$3.5 trillion government overhaul to win support from two key holdout senators ahead of make-or-break deadlines for votes.

With Republicans solidly opposed and no votes to spare, Biden canceled a Wednesday trip to Chicago that was to focus on COVID-19 vaccinations so he could continue working on a deal, according to a White House official granted anonymity to discuss the planning.

Democrats are poised to adjust the huge measure's tax proposals and spending goals to meet the overall size demanded by party colleagues Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. The two say Biden's plan is too big but are publicly quiet about a number they can live with.

The president met separately with them Tuesday at the White House, making apparent progress before a Thursday test vote.

As the legislation comes into focus, the adjustments will follow — child care subsidies could be offered for several years, or just a few. Funding to expand health care programs could start later or end sooner. Tax hikes on corporations and the wealthy may be adjusted. And provisions to fight climate change or curb prescription drug prices could change.

Assuming nothing, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters at the Capitol, "In the next day or so we

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hope to come to a place where we can all move forward.”

The stakes are as high as ever as Biden and his party try to accomplish a giant legislative lift, promising a vast rewrite of the nation’s tax priorities and spending goals with an oh-so-slim majority in Congress.

Biden is under pressure to close the deal with centrist Sens. Manchin and Sinema who are seen as linchpins for the final package.

“Really good, honest, straightforward negotiations,” Manchin told reporters back at the Capitol after his White House meeting with Biden. He said he did not give the president a new topline figure.

Biden’s problems with fellow Democrats aren’t just in the Senate. A small number of House Democrats also are bristling at the far-reaching scope of his domestic agenda and demanding changes.

“We’re obviously at a very sensitive time,” said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

The president, she said, is “not going to tell anyone what to do. He’s going to have a discussion, have an engagement.”

The closed-door talks come after Republican senators for a second time blocked a bill to keep the government operating past Thursday and allow federal borrowing, risking a federal shutdown and devastating debt default — though both seem highly unlikely.

Democrats said they will try again before Thursday’s deadline to pass a bill funding government operations past the Sept. 30 fiscal year-end, likely stripping out the more-heated debate over the debt limit for another day, closer to a separate October deadline.

Taken together, it’s all putting the entire Biden agenda perilously closer to collapse, with consequences certain to shape his presidency and the lawmakers’ political futures.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Congress in a letter Tuesday that Oct. 18 is a critical date — when the Treasury Department will likely exhaust all of its “extraordinary measures” being taken to avoid a default on the government’s obligations.

Yellen urged Congress to “protect the full faith and credit of the United States by acting as soon as possible” to either raise the debt limit or suspend it.

Meanwhile, the behind the scenes action over the \$3.5 trillion measure is testing Biden’s grip on his party, as he seeks a once-in-a-generation reworking of the nation’s balance sheets.

Applying pressure, progressives are unwavering so far in their refusal to go along with a vote expected Thursday on a companion bill, a \$1 trillion public works measure that they say is too meager without Biden’s bigger package assured.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said they have the votes to derail the smaller bill unless it comes with Biden’s broader one — tacit pressure on the holdouts to arrive at a deal. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., urged a no vote.

“It won’t be the end of the world Thursday if we vote it down,” said Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., a progressive caucus member. He said the House will just wait for the Senate to act on Biden’s plan, “and then we’ll vote again.”

With all Republicans opposed to the big bill, 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.

Physically holding up the 2,000-plus page bill, Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming warned it was nothing but “big government socialism.”

“This bill represents Bernie Sanders’ socialist dream. It is a nightmare for American taxpayers,” he said.

Biden insists the price tag actually will be zero because the expansion of government programs would be largely paid for with higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy — businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and individuals earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

To lower the price tag and win over centrist Democrats, it’s not necessary that any specific programs be get axed, those familiar with the process have said.

Rather, lawmakers are eyeing ways to adjust the scope and duration of some of Biden’s proposals.

For example, instead of more immediately launching the massive expansion of the Medicare program for seniors by allowing them to qualify for vision, dental and hearing aid benefits, changes might be spaced

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out to save money. Or similarly, funding to expand Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act could have an end-date rather than continue on.

The corporate tax hikes, proposed to spike from 21% to 26.5% under the House's version of Biden's bill, could shift again in talks with the Senate Democrats.

Failing to fund all the program expansions indefinitely could well be seen as a loss for Democrats. But some see the built-in deadlines as a chance to revisit the issues again — likely during election years when both sides can argue their cases to voters.

Tensions are flaring at the Capitol as the contours of Biden's big agenda come into focus at the same time as a Democrat-Republican standoff over normally routine votes to fund the government and prevent a federal debt default.

For a second day on Tuesday, Senate Republicans rejected an effort to ease the nation's debt limit to avoid a dangerous default on its payments for past bills.

Republican leader Mitch McConnell grew testy with reporters when asked about Yellen's warning that Congress must swiftly resolve the issue.

"Of course the debt ceiling has to be raised," he said. But he insisted Democrats shoulder the unpopular vote on their own.

On Monday, Republicans had rejected the Democrats' effort to link the debt ceiling vote to the must-pass funding bill to keep government running.

An exasperated Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said, "It is clear insanity and disaster are now the Republican party line."

Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Zeke Miller, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Wyoming city reflects vaccine hesitancy in conservative US

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

GILLETTE, Wyo. (AP) — As her beloved grandmother's health declined, Lauren Pfenning's family insisted that she get a COVID-19 vaccine before paying her a final visit.

She spent over a week researching vaccines on the internet and anguished over the decision during and after 12-hour shifts at her job hauling coal in an open-pit mine near Gillette, Wyoming. Her grandmother died earlier this month before she made a decision, but Pfenning stands by her choice to not get vaccinated.

Pfenning embodies the fiercely independent, deeply conservative Wyoming way of life that has defined the state's response to the pandemic and made it the second-least vaccinated state as of Tuesday, behind only West Virginia. Only 23% of residents in her county have been vaccinated, putting it among the bottom handful of places in America that have not cracked 25% with their COVID-19 immunization rates.

The vaccine hesitancy in Gillette is emblematic of the live-free, mind-your-own-business mentality toward the pandemic that is dominant across conservative America at a time when the delta variant is tearing through unvaccinated communities.

For every 100 people spotted around town in Gillette, the number wearing masks can be counted on one hand. Among a group of six people on a smoke break downtown, all said they had too many concerns about the vaccine to mess with it. Down the street, a black shirt displayed in a storefront warned, "ATTENTION SNOWFLAKES: THIS IS NOT A SAFE PLACE."

People bristle at the workplace vaccine mandate being pushed by President Joe Biden. When asked about workplace mandates and the option to bypass the requirement with regular virus testing, Pfenning's immediate response: "Test away!"

Anger over presidential meddling in Wyoming's affairs is dominant across the state, but in Gillette, it gets personal.

The area's vast coal industry has suffered a decade of decline amid competition from renewable energy and inexpensive natural gas, and coal regulations imposed by President Barack Obama — and lifted by

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President Donald Trump — have provoked fury among residents.

"It just feels like one attack after another. I think we're just wanting to fight back harder at this point. Wyoming as a whole is just sick of being pushed around," said Pfenning.

All the while, COVID-19 patients have been filling several of Wyoming's hospitals including the one in Gillette, the state's third-largest city.

At Campbell County Memorial Hospital, 17 of 27 intensive care and medical-surgical unit patients recently had severe COVID-19, leaving just two beds open while the very worst coronavirus cases got flown to more intensive treatment in neighboring states.

Meanwhile, a local surge — up 34% in a week — drove up COVID-19 cases to almost four times the national rate, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Statewide, more than 96% of those hospitalized with COVID-19 were unvaccinated. Yet the daily flow of COVID-19 failed to persuade many Campbell County Memorial Hospital employees to get the vaccine.

Only 39% of the hospital's workforce is vaccinated, and there are no plans to require or incentivize it, said the hospital's chief medical officer, Dr. Attila Barabas. Wyoming's statewide vaccination rate of 41% is well below the national rate of 55%.

"I'm a big believer in freedom of choice. I honestly think that's a fundamental aspect of being an American. And I think mandates can be troublesome and can cause a pushback to some degree," Barabas said.

The doctor got the vaccine and has encouraged relatives and patients to do the same. Ultimately, though, "that has to be a choice that you make," Barabas said.

Wyoming's view of vaccine mandates could come to a head soon. Wyoming officials are promising a vigorous fight against Biden's vaccine mandate, with talk about using the president's coronavirus relief funds to compensate businesses for fines levied against them for defying the mandate.

At the same time, they are gently encouraging people to get the jab.

In a television ad showing people line dancing to country music, a woman says she got vaccinated to be able to have "ladies' night out." Wyoming has spent \$900,000 and plans to spend another \$685,000 on such ads, according to the Wyoming Department of Health.

Striving for balance with COVID-19 policies has whipsawed Republican Gov. Mark Gordon at times. Preparing to impose an unpopular statewide mask mandate last year, Gordon lashed out at people who refused to take steps to control the virus, calling them "knuckleheads."

This year, as the delta variant brought more death and illness to the state, Gordon promised no mask mandate but said people should get vaccinated "if you're willing."

Vaccine resistance during the pandemic reflects a broader dilemma for public health officials in a region where prevailing attitudes cause high smoking and low flu immunization, cancer screening and seat belt use rates, said the department's interim director, Stefan Johansson.

"We just have a population that I think is indicative of the Mountain West culture that, you know, lives free and doesn't always take the health advice," Johansson said.

For Pfenning, the coal mine worker, the decision to not vaccinate came down to her belief that the approval process was rushed and there are too many risky side effects, despite the fact that hundreds of millions of people have safely gotten the shots and avoided serious illness and hospitalization.

"It has nothing to do with politics. I'm even picky on what I give my horses, I'm picky on what I give my dogs. And we over-vaccinate," said Pfenning.

And while Pfenning said her decision wasn't political, politics pervades. In November, Wyoming gave Trump his widest margin of victory of any state, 70%. Campbell County gave Trump his one of his widest margins of victory in Wyoming, 87%.

"The people are so conservative here that they have these grass roots of saying, 'Look, I don't like the government regulating my life,'" summed up Campbell County Commissioner Del Shelstad.

Scott Clem, pastor of Gillette's Central Baptist Church, is among the many in the city who are not vaccinated. The former Republican legislator led a mask-burning protest at the Wyoming Capitol in Cheyenne in January and says he trusts his immune system to protect him.

"It's none of your business whether I'm vaccinated or not," said Clem. "That, I think, in some sense,

is being a busybody in other men's matters. I think that's some of the sentiment out here in Wyoming. We're pretty rugged individuals out here in the West."

Follow Mead Gruver at <https://twitter.com/meadgruver>

Theranos CEO wooed investors while lab director saw trouble

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Fallen Silicon Valley star Elizabeth Holmes convinced media mogul Rupert Murdoch and other billionaires to invest in her biotechnology startup despite warnings its unconventional blood tests were dangerously unreliable, according to evidence presented Tuesday during her criminal trial.

The revelations emerged during the eighth day of a high-profile trial revolving around allegations Holmes duped investors, customers and unwitting patients as CEO of Theranos, a company she founded after dropping out of college in 2003 when she was 19.

Holmes briefly became a Silicon Valley sensation while peddling the premise she had invented a breakthrough technology scan for an array of health problems using just a few drops of blood taken with a finger prick.

But Adam Rosendorff, a medical doctor who oversaw Theranos' clinical laboratory from September 2013 through November 2014, drew a darker picture Tuesday while testifying as witness for the federal government prosecutors trying to convince a jury to convict Holmes on 12 counts of fraud.

Holmes, 37, has pleaded innocent, maintaining she poured nearly 15 years of her life pursuing a great idea that simply didn't pan out. She could be sentenced to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Rosendorff insisted that he repeatedly tried to warn Holmes and Theranos' chief operating officer and Holmes' former lover, Ramesh "Sunny" Balwani, that the tests were so rampantly inaccurate that he was being besieged by complaints from doctors.

But Holmes and Balwani seemed more interested in cultivating Theranos' image as a potentially game-changing company than protecting people's health, according to Rosendorff.

"The number and severity of issues had reached a crescendo," Rosendorff testified in the San Jose, California, courtroom, explaining why he decided to leave Theranos rather than risk breaking his oath as a doctor to "do no harm." He said he was so appalled that he refused to shake Balwani's extended hand when he finally left Theranos.

Prosecutors also displayed a series of text messages exchanged between Holmes and Balwani, attempting to prove they were more interested in pursuing fame and fortune than protecting people's health.

At the same time Rosendorff was raising objections about Theranos' blood-testing technology, Holmes sent a text to Balwani to let him know that she had completed deals securing about \$150 million from Murdoch and the Walton family, which is behind Walmart.

"They are not investing in our company," Balwani texted back. "They are investing in our destiny."

Those investments helped value privately held Theranos at \$9 billion, with Holmes holding a \$4.5 billion stake.

Just a few weeks after Rosendorff left Theranos in protest, Holmes texted Balwani in December 2014 to share her optimism about the upcoming new year.

"This year is our year," Holmes texted Balwani. "We can never forget that tiger."

Holmes, who is now married to a different man, has accused Balwani of inflicting "intimate partner abuse," that affected some of her actions and statements while she was running Theranos. Balwani's lawyer has vehemently denied those allegations. Balwani is also facing fraud charges in a separate trial scheduled to begin next year.

The year 2015, however, turned out to be the beginning of the end for Theranos.

In October of that year, The Wall Street Journal published a series of explosive articles that exposed flaws with Theranos' technology and triggered government investigations that led to the company's downfall and led to the current trial. Rosendorff testified that he was among the sources who provided

information for those articles.

The Wall Street Journal is owned by Murdoch, who is on the government's list of witnesses to be called to testify during a trial scheduled to continue through mid-December.

One of Holmes' lawyers, Lance Wade, attempted to poke holes in Rosendorff's testimony by pointing to several meetings he held with federal prosecutors and other government officials before taking the stand. Wade noted some discrepancies between Rosendorff's statements during the trial and other sworn testimony he has given in other civil lawsuits brought against Theranos.

"I endeavored earnestly to fulfill my obligations as a lab director," Rosendorff maintained while Wade questioned his motives.

Rosendorff is scheduled to return to the witness stand Wednesday when the trial resumes.

COVID-related attacks prompt hospital to issue panic buttons

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

Nurses and hundreds of other staff members will soon begin wearing panic buttons at a Missouri hospital where assaults on workers tripled after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cox Medical Center Branson is using grant money to add buttons to identification badges worn by up to 400 employees who work in the emergency room and inpatient hospital rooms. Pushing the button will immediately alert hospital security, launching a tracking system that will send help to the endangered worker. The hospital hopes to have the system operational by the end of the year.

A similar program was successfully tested last year at CoxHealth's Springfield hospital, spokeswoman Kaitlyn McConnell said Tuesday.

Hospital data showed that the number of "security incidents" at the Branson hospital rose from 94 in 2019 to 162 in 2020. Assaults rose from 40 to 123 during that same period, and injuries to health care workers rose from 17 to 78. Data for 2021 was not available.

The delta variant of the virus hit hard in southwestern Missouri starting in June, leaving hospitals so full that many patients were sent to other facilities hundreds of miles away. The hospital in Branson, the popular tourist town known for its many shows and attractions, has been at or near capacity for four months.

CoxHealth's director of safety and security, Alan Butler, said the panic buttons "fill a critical void."

"Personal Panic Buttons are one more tool in the battle to keep our staff safe and further demonstrate this organization's commitment to maintaining a safe work and care environment," Butler said in a statement.

The Missouri hospital isn't alone. The Texas Tribune reported earlier this month about the rising number of assaults at Texas hospitals, incidents that officials believe are fueled by a surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations.

Jane McCurley, chief nursing executive for Methodist Healthcare System in Texas, said at a news conference in August that staff members at the San Antonio hospital "have been cursed at, screamed at, threatened with bodily harm and even had knives pulled on them."

Worldwide, a February report by the Geneva-based Insecurity Insight and the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center identified more than 1,100 threats or acts of violence against health care workers and facilities last year. Researchers found that about 400 of those attacks were related to COVID-19, many motivated by fear or frustration.

Assaults on health care workers have been a concern for years, Missouri Hospital Association spokesman Dave Dillon said, but COVID-19 "has changed the dynamic in a number of ways." Among them: The effort to slow the spread of the virus means relatives often can't accompany a sick person, raising already-high stress levels.

Jackie Gatz, vice president of safety and preparedness for the Missouri Hospital Association, said the use of a button alert is among many steps hospitals are taking to protect workers. Security cameras are being added, and some security personnel are wearing body cameras. CoxHealth added security dogs late last year in Springfield.

The Missouri Hospital Association also provides training to help workers protect themselves, including training on how to recognize and de-escalate when someone becomes agitated. Gatz said nurses and

staff also are encouraged to stand between the hospital bed and the door.

"You can control your environment without necessarily placing physical barriers," Gatz said.

Couple celebrating 50th anniversary died in train derailment

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Don Varnadoe spent months watching videos about train trips on his office computer in preparation for a special cross-country vacation to celebrate his and Margie Varnadoe's 50th wedding anniversary.

He phoned his co-workers in coastal Georgia, where he sold real estate for decades, from the first leg of their trip Friday to let them know it was turning into a dream vacation.

"He had called the office and said how excited they were," said Robert Kozlowski, managing broker at Coldwell Banker Access Realty in the port city of Brunswick. "They were in Washington, D.C., and headed west."

A day later, the couple died when an Amtrak train they were on derailed in rural Montana.

They were among three people who died along with a 28-year-old Illinois man named Zachariah Schneider, according to the Liberty County Sheriff's Office in Montana. Schneider was a software developer and big Green Bay Packers fan. He was traveling to Oregon with his wife, Rebecca Schneider, who survived and filed a lawsuit Tuesday against Amtrak and BNSF Railway.

The Amtrak train was going just under the speed limit at about 75 mph (121 kph) when it went off the track along a gradual curve, possibly ejecting passengers, U.S. investigators said Monday. The Amtrak Empire Builder that was en route from Chicago to Seattle crashed Saturday afternoon near Joplin, a town of about 200 near the Canadian border.

The train, carrying 141 passengers and 16 crew members, had two locomotives and 10 cars, eight of which derailed, with some tipping onto their sides. Residents in the farm community mobilized that day to help injured passengers.

Investigators do not know the cause of the derailment, but they are studying video from the train and another locomotive that went over the same track a little over an hour earlier, National Transportation Safety Board Vice Chairman Bruce Landsberg said Monday. The derailed train also had a black box that records everything happening in the train, he said. One possibility is a problem with the tracks, perhaps from heat-induced buckling, railroad crash experts speculate.

Kozlowski was arriving at church Sunday in Georgia when he got a text message alerting him of a rumor circulating that a tragedy had befallen the Varnadoes. A phone call to a family member confirmed the terrible news that the couple had been killed in the derailment.

Everybody at the office knew about the big trip and were excited for the couple. One co-worker joked that Don Varnadoe, 74, might have to leave Margie Varnadoe, 72, at home when he struggled with his computer to print out her ticket.

"He said, 'This is our trip of a lifetime and we're so looking forward to it,'" recalled Kozlowski, his boss of 18 years.

The Varnadoes had lived 45 years on St. Simons Island, home to about 15,000 people just over an hour's drive south of Savannah. Kozlowski said Don Varnadoe loved to tell the story of how the moving truck arrived on July 4, 1976 — the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Margie Varnadoe was retired from the Glynn County public school system, where she had long worked as a teacher and an administrator. Her husband sold real estate for more than four decades, and showed no sign of slowing down.

Kozlowski said Don Varnadoe worked every day and often led the sales staff in prayer before meetings. His wife was beloved at the office, where she often brought flowers, brownies and other gifts. She dropped off one last pan of brownies just before leaving on their anniversary trip.

"If you want an example of how to treat people, Don and Margie were them," Kozlowski said. "With their faith and the way they treated people, they're in a good place, I think."

The lawsuit filed by Rebecca Schneider, who was also hurt in the derailment, acknowledged the investiga-

tion is in its early stages but contends the the train operator failed react to whatever caused the derailment.

Shortly before the derailment, Zachariah Schneider left her in the sleeping car and went to sit in the viewing car, where he was "horribly maimed" and killed, the lawsuit said. The couple, who rescued dogs and fostered kittens awaiting adoption, met at Southern Illinois University and had been married for nearly five years, the lawsuit said.

"Sadly, what was supposed to be a joyous vacation turned tragic because of the failures of Amtrak and BNSF to fulfill their safety responsibilities," said her attorney, Jeffrey P. Goodman, in a news release.

Officials with Amtrak and BNSF Railway didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about the lawsuit.

This story has been corrected to show Zachariah Schneider is 28 years old, not 29.

Associated Press writers Amy Beth Hanson in Helena, Montana, and Don Babwin in Chicago contributed to this report.

Maryland newspaper gunman gets more than 5 life prison terms

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Selene San Felice said she often questioned how or why she survived the shooting that left five others dead at a Maryland newspaper. Montana Winters Geimer described the grievous loss she and the community suffered when her mother, longtime local journalist Wendi Winters, was killed in the attack.

San Felice and Winters Geimer were among several survivors and relatives of victims of the June 2018 killings at the Capital Gazette newspaper who testified in court Tuesday before a judge sentenced the shooter to more than five life terms without the possibility of parole.

"We lost the storyteller of our family, and as a community we lost the storyteller for everyone that is an Annapolitan," Winters Geimer said.

Judy Hiaasen spoke of how difficult it was to even talk about the loss of her younger brother, Rob Hiaasen, who was an editor and columnist at the paper. She described his ability to keep memories of their mother and father alive. Now, she said, "That story has been taken from me."

"My little brother was slaughtered, and the impact of that loss is indescribable," she said. "It is unique, and it is never-ending."

Anne Arundel Circuit Court Judge Michael Wachs described shooter Jarrod Ramos' actions as a "cold-blooded, calculated attack on the innocent employees of a small-town newspaper." Ramos used a shotgun to kill his victims.

"The impact of this case is just simply immense," Wachs said. "To say that the defendant exhibited a callous and complete disregard for the sanctity of human life is simply a huge understatement."

Wachs gave Ramos an additional 345 years to underscore the fact that he would never be released from prison. And he ordered another life sentence for the attempted murder of photographer Paul Gillespie, who had previously testified that Ramos barely missed him with a shotgun blast as he ran out of the newsroom.

While Gillespie said he didn't believe there could have been a better outcome at the sentencing hearing, he doubted a full sense of closure would ever be possible after losing his five colleagues.

"I was almost killed myself," Gillespie said outside the courthouse. "It's something that haunts me every day."

In July, a jury took less than two hours to reject arguments from Ramos' lawyers during a 12-day trial that he was not criminally responsible due to mental illness for killing Winters, Hiaasen, John McNamara, Gerald Fischman and Rebecca Smith.

Ramos had pleaded guilty but not criminally responsible to all 23 counts against him in 2019, using Maryland's version of an insanity defense. The case was delayed several times before and during the coronavirus pandemic.

"The judge was crystal clear that Jarrod Ramos should never be allowed to walk out of prison — ever," Anne Arundel County State's Attorney Anne Colt Leitess said of the sentence handed out Tuesday.

San Felice, who watched one of her colleagues get shot and survived one of the deadliest attacks on a newsroom in U.S. history by hiding under her desk, testified that she and other survivors were determined to "press on" and not let the traumatic attack stop them.

"Remember this," she said, as Ramos sat on the other side of the courtroom. "You cannot kill the truth."

Ramos declined to make a statement in court when asked by his attorney, Katy O'Donnell.

Prosecutors said Ramos, 41, acted out of revenge against the newspaper after it published a story about his guilty plea to a misdemeanor charge of harassing a former high school classmate in 2011. Prosecutors said his long, meticulous planning for the attack — which included preparations for his arrest and long incarceration — proved he understood the criminality of his actions.

They also highlighted how Ramos called 911 from the newsroom after the shooting, identified himself as the gunman and said he surrendered — evidence, they said, that he clearly understood the criminality of his actions.

This story has been edited to correct the spelling of McNamara.

Pfizer vaccine for kids may not be available until November

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer has submitted research to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on the effectiveness of its COVID-19 vaccine in children but the shots may not be available until November.

The company said Tuesday it provided health regulators with data from a recent study of its vaccine in children 5 to 11 years old. Officials had said previously they would file an application with the FDA to authorize use in the coming weeks.

Once the company files its application, U.S. regulators and public health officials will review the evidence and consult with their advisory committees in public meetings to determine if the shots are safe and effective enough to recommend use.

That process may mean the shots may not be available until closer to Thanksgiving, according to a person familiar with the process but not authorized to discuss it publicly. But it is possible that, depending on how quickly the FDA acts, the shots could become available earlier in November, the person said.

The drugmaker and its partner, Germany's BioNTech, say they expect to request emergency use authorization of their vaccine in children ages 5 to 11 "in the coming weeks." The companies also plan to submit data to the European Medicines Agency and other regulators.

The two-shot Pfizer vaccine is currently available for those 12 and older. An estimated 100 million people in the U.S. have been fully vaccinated with it, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Pfizer tested a lower dose of the shots in children. The drugmaker said last week that researchers found the vaccine developed coronavirus-fighting antibody levels in children that were just as strong as those found in teenagers and young adults getting regular-strength doses.

Earlier this month, FDA chief Dr. Peter Marks told the AP that once Pfizer turns over its study results, his agency would evaluate the data "hopefully in a matter of weeks" to decide if the shots are safe and effective enough for younger kids.

Pfizer's updated timetable was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Another U.S. vaccine maker, Moderna, also is studying its shots in elementary school-aged children. Results are expected later in the year.

Joint Chiefs chairman calls Afghan war a 'strategic failure'

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top U.S. military officer called the 20-year war in Afghanistan a "strategic

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failure" and acknowledged to Congress on Tuesday that he had favored keeping several thousand troops in the country to prevent a collapse of the U.S.-supported Kabul government and a rapid takeover by the Taliban.

Republicans on the Senate Armed Services Committee pointed to the testimony by Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as evidence that President Joe Biden had been untruthful when, in a television interview last month, he suggested the military had not urged him to keep troops in Afghanistan.

Milley refused to say what advice he gave Biden last spring when Biden was considering whether to comply with an agreement the Trump administration had made with the Taliban to reduce the American troop presence to zero by May 2021, ending a U.S. war that began in October 2001. Testifying alongside Milley, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin also refused to reveal his advice to Biden.

Milley told the committee, when pressed, that it had been his personal opinion that at least 2,500 U.S. troops were needed to guard against a collapse of the Kabul government and a return to Taliban rule.

Defying U.S. intelligence assessments, the Afghan government and its U.S.-trained army collapsed in mid-August, allowing the Taliban, which had ruled the country from 1996 to 2001, to capture Kabul with what Milley described as a couple of hundred men on motorcycles, without a shot being fired. That triggered a frantic U.S. effort to evacuate American civilians, Afghan allies and others from Kabul airport.

Gen. Frank McKenzie, who as head of Central Command was overseeing U.S. troops in Afghanistan, said he shared Milley's view that keeping a residual force there could have kept the Kabul government intact.

"I recommended that we maintain 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, and I also recommended early in the fall of 2020 that we maintain 4,500 at that time, those were my personal views," McKenzie said. "I also had a view that the withdrawal of those forces would lead inevitably to the collapse of the Afghan military forces and eventually the Afghan government."

The six-hour Senate hearing marked the start of what is likely to be an extended congressional review of the U.S. failures in Afghanistan. The length and depth of the hearing stood in contrast to years of limited congressional oversight of the war and the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars it consumed.

"The Republicans' sudden interest in Afghanistan is plain old politics," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, who supported Biden's decision to end U.S. involvement there.

Austin and Milley are scheduled to appear Wednesday before the House Armed Services Committee to review the war.

The hearing at times was contentious, as Republicans sought to portray Biden as having ignored advice from military officers and mischaracterized the military options he was presented last spring and summer.

Several Republicans tried unsuccessfully to draw Milley, McKenzie and Austin into commenting on the truthfulness of Biden's statement to ABC News on Aug. 18, three days after the Taliban took control of Kabul, that no senior military commander had recommended against a full troop withdrawal when it was under discussion in the first months of Biden's term.

When asked in that interview whether military advisers had recommended keeping 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, Biden replied, "No. No one said that to me that I can recall." He also said the advice "was split."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that Biden was referring to having received a range of advice.

"Regardless of the advice, it's his decision, he's the commander in chief," she said.

In a blunt assessment of a war that cost 2,461 American lives, Milley said the result was years in the making.

"Outcomes in a war like this, an outcome that is a strategic failure — the enemy is in charge in Kabul, there's no way else to describe that — that is a cumulative effect of 20 years," he said, adding that lessons need to be learned, including whether the U.S. military made the Afghans overly dependent on American technology in a mistaken effort to make the Afghan army look like the American army.

Republican Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas asked Milley why he did not choose to resign after his advice was rejected.

Milley, who was appointed to his position as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by President Donald Trump and retained by Biden, said it was his responsibility to provide the commander in chief with his

best advice.

"The president doesn't have to agree with that advice," Milley said. "He doesn't have to make those decisions just because we are generals. And it would be an incredible act of political defiance for a commissioned officer to resign just because my advice was not taken."

Austin defended the military's execution of a frantic airlift from Kabul in August and asserted it will be "difficult but absolutely possible" to contain future threats from Afghanistan without troops on the ground.

Milley cited "a very real possibility" that al-Qaida or the Islamic State group's Afghanistan affiliate could reconstitute in Afghanistan under Taliban rule and present a terrorist threat to the United States in the next 12 to 36 months.

It was al-Qaida's use of Afghanistan as a base from which to plan and execute its attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, that triggered the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan a month later.

"And we must remember that the Taliban was and remains a terrorist organization and they still have not broken ties with al-Qaida," Milley said. "I have no illusions who we are dealing with. It remains to be seen whether or not the Taliban can consolidate power or if the country will further fracture into civil war."

Austin questioned decisions made over the 20-year course of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. In retrospect, he said, the American government may have put too much faith in its ability to build a viable Afghan government.

"We helped build a state, but we could not forge a nation," he told the Senate committee. "The fact that the Afghan army we and our partners trained simply melted away – in many cases without firing a shot – took us all by surprise. It would be dishonest to claim otherwise."

Asked why the United States did not foresee the rapid collapse of the Afghan army, Milley said that in his judgment the U.S. military lost its ability to see and understand the true condition of the Afghan forces when it ended the practice some years ago of having advisers alongside the Afghans on the battlefield.

"You can't measure the human heart with a machine, you have to be there," Milley said.

Milley defends calls to Chinese at end of Trump presidency

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top U.S. military officer told Congress on Tuesday that he knew former President Donald Trump wasn't planning to attack China and that it was his job to reassure the Chinese of this in the phone calls that have triggered outrage from some lawmakers.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, delivered a vehement defense of two calls he made to his Chinese counterpart, saying he was responding to a "significant degree of intelligence" that China was worried about a U.S. attack.

"I know, I am certain, that President Trump did not intend to attack the Chinese. ... And it was my directed responsibility by the secretary to convey that intent to the Chinese," Milley told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "My task at that time was to de-escalate. My message again was consistent: Stay calm, steady, and de-escalate. We are not going to attack you."

Milley has been at the center of controversy after reports that he made two calls to Gen. Li Zuocheng of the People's Liberation Army to assure him that the United States was not suddenly going to go to war with or attack China. Details of the calls were first aired in excerpts from the recently released book "Peril" by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa.

While Tuesday's hearing largely focused on the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the chaotic evacuation of Americans, Afghans and others from the country, a few senators condemned Milley for what they saw as inappropriate communications with Li.

In his most extensive comments to date on the matter, Milley said the calls on Oct. 30 and Jan. 8 were fully coordinated with the defense secretaries at the time as well as other U.S. national security agencies. And he said that such military-to-military communications are critical to prevent war between great powers that possess nuclear weapons.

The calls came during Trump's turbulent last months in office as he challenged the results of the 2020

election. The second call came two days after Jan. 6, when a violent mob attacked the U.S. Capitol in an effort to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's White House victory.

Milley said the October call was made at the direction of then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper and the second was done at the request of the Chinese and coordinated with then-acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller's office.

Asked if he spoke with the book's authors and if his remarks were "accurately represented," Milley said he spoke with Woodward and that he has not read the book but has seen press reports on it.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., asked that he provide more answers once he's read the book. She and Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., questioned whether Milley shared private presidential conversations with the authors.

Milley said he did not leak private conversations he had with Trump, and said he routinely speaks with the media to provide information and transparency to the American people.

Milley also addressed a call he received from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. He said Pelosi "called me to inquire about the president's ability to launch nuclear weapons. I sought to assure her that nuclear launch is governed by a very specific and deliberate process."

He said he assured her that while the president is the sole nuclear launch authority, "he doesn't launch them alone." He said that as chairman he is part of the launch decision process.

"There are processes, protocols and procedures in place, and I repeatedly assured her there is no chance of an illegal, unauthorized or accidental launch," Milley said.

The book asserts that during the call, Milley agreed with Pelosi's statement that Trump was suffering a mental decline after the election. During Tuesday's hearing, Milley appeared to discount that, saying "I am not qualified to determine the mental health of the president of the United States."

He said that after the call was over, he had a short meeting with staff to go over the process. He also said he informed Miller of the call at the time.

"At no time was I attempting to change or influence the process, usurp authority or insert myself in the chain of command, but I am expected, I am required, to give my advice and ensure that the president is fully informed," Milley said.

This story has been corrected to show Chris Miller was acting defense secretary, not secretary.

Yellen says infrastructure overhaul will US boost economy

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday that President Joe Biden's spending proposals will address long-overdue U.S. infrastructure needs and prepare the country to meet future challenges.

In remarks before the National Association for Business Economists, Yellen called on Congress to support the Biden administration's \$3.5 trillion "Build Back Better" initiative that would expand the social safety net and attack climate change. She also urged support for a \$1 trillion bipartisan bill to address more traditional infrastructure, such as roads and bridges .

"The investments in the president's agenda would be a sweeping overhaul of our national infrastructure," Yellen said.

She listed among the improvements a new electric grid and power structure, new passenger and freight rail systems, as well as fixes for roads and bridges that she have been "in disrepair and unsafe for decades." She also listed broadband, new schools, clean drinking water and environmental remediation steps to help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Yellen spoke as the administration and Democratic leaders are struggling behind the scenes in Congress to round up the votes for the two infrastructure bills as well as an increase in the debt limit and a stop-gap spending bill that needs to pass before Friday to avert a government shutdown.

"Over the course of American history, we have seen inflection points where policymakers had the courage to think big and act big to address longstanding flaws in the prevailing economic landscape," Yellen

said. "We face a similarly significant moment today where Congress can think big and act big to decisively send us down a better path."

Yellen said that all the investments would be fully paid for through higher taxes on large, profitable corporations, improved enforcement of the existing tax system and savings from reforms to government health care programs.

However, the Biden "Build Back Better" program is facing strong opposition from Republicans who contend that the \$3.5 trillion price tag is too high and who object to the increased taxes.

In a question and answer session, Yellen defended the administration's efforts to establish a global corporate minimum tax, something that Republicans on Capitol Hill have opposed.

"If you look at corporate tax rates globally, you see a steady downward progression over decades," Yellen said. "That reflects a competitive race to the bottom."

Yellen said the administration is close to getting support from 140 countries to establish a minimum corporate tax of at least 15%. She said countries that seek to be tax havens such as Ireland, Estonia and Hungary have refused to join in this agreement but "we are working hard to find ways to bring them on board."

She said she hoped to get a political endorsement from world leaders at a meeting of the Group of 20 major industrial countries in late October. She said provisions for changes that need to be made in U.S. law have been included in the \$3.5 trillion spending plan the administration is trying to push through Congress relying only on Democratic votes.

Scars from 2015 Paris stadium bombing still pain victims

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — It is almost the forgotten attack of Nov. 13, 2015: France's national stadium was the sole site outside Paris to come under assault that night from Islamic State extremists.

The three suicide bombers who struck killed one man out of the 130 people who died that night around the city. But for those who survived, the explosions are seared into their bodies and their minds, in the form of projectiles still embedded beneath their skin and unfading trauma in their psyche.

Victims of the November 2015 terror attacks on Paris began testifying Tuesday, the first day of five weeks of testimony about that night from those at the soccer stadium, the cafés and bars, and the Bataclan concert hall.

Fourteen people are on trial in Paris, including the only surviving member of the Islamic State group cell that attacked the city that night in 2015. Another six people are being tried in absentia.

Bilal Mokono, who went to the match with his teenage son, was wheeled into the courtroom, his powerful torso dominating the stand and a mix of fury at the attackers and gratitude for his life on his face. He crossed paths with two of the bombers that night before the first explosion knocked him off his feet.

He carried one bleeding woman to the gendarmes, and then started desperately searching for his 13-year-old. Both son and father were convinced the other was dead for endless minutes.

When they spotted each other just outside the security perimeter "I was the one weeping in my son's arms. I was devastated. He had never seen his father cry," Mokono testified. Adrenaline carried him through the night but by the next day the injuries to his shoulder and legs were overwhelming.

Mokono half-turned to the stand where the defendants sat quietly.

"I am Muslim. I pray five times a day and when I hear people say we're doing this for Allah ... The first rule is not to kill," he said. "I have a hard time forgiving. I know I've been taught to forgive, but it is difficult."

Another victim, who has avoided speaking publicly about the attack, said she went from a hard-charging fearless young woman into someone she barely recognized. She held up a plastic vial containing shrapnel that was pulled out of her and handed it over to the judges.

"I didn't want my life to be built around this, that this event that so radically changed my life become the essential of who I am," she said. And yet, she added, it has robbed her of her closest relationships, as well as series of jobs that she can no longer hold down as the sounds of the city appear intolerable to her.

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"The only answer was to move to the country, but I found in the country that the reality of the attacks wasn't the same as for people in Paris," she said. "They would say 'Oh the stadium, something happened there, right.' People don't know, they don't really care. It happened to someone else."

The only person to die that night was Manuel Dias, a Portuguese retiree who drove busloads of fans to the stadium to earn a little extra money. Dias died nearly instantly in the first bombing – mounted gendarmes came across his body moments later.

His daughter, Sophie, was in Portugal planning her wedding when the attacks started. It took until the following day to learn that her father was among the dead. It is still treated too often as an afterthought, she said.

"I will labor to make sure it is not forgotten, not as the bystander as is sometimes reported, but Manuel Dias, the only victim of the Stade de France."

The gendarmes, who numbered 13 that night, were working crowd control outside the stadium for the France-Germany match and absorbed the shockwaves from those explosions. Many went home that night with flesh and debris embedded in their uniforms. At least two came across Dias' body and said they were forever changed.

The unit's commander, Jonathan, said he fought his superiors for months to get psychological support for the 12 mounted men and women. Under court rules, last names of most police officials are withheld.

"I was alone, facing the unknown and the incomprehension of my direct supervisors," he testified. "We are gendarmes, we are trained for this. When I see the state this put us into, then I can imagine what it must have done to the victims and their families."

Panel finds 80 alleged abuse cases tied to WHO's Congo work

By MARIA CHENG and AL-HADJI KUDRA MALIRO Associated Press

BENI, Congo (AP) — Twenty-one workers for the World Health Organization in Congo have been accused of sexually abusing people during a Ebola outbreak, a WHO-commissioned panel said Tuesday in a report that identified 83 alleged perpetrators connected to the 2018-2020 mission.

The panel released its findings months after an Associated Press investigation found senior WHO management was informed of multiple abuse claims in 2019 but failed to stop the harassment and even promoted one of the managers involved.

"This is the biggest finding of sexual abuse perpetrated during a single U.N. initiative in one area or one country during the time-bound period of a U.N. response effort," said Paula Donovan, co-director of the Code Blue Campaign, which is campaigning to end sexual exploitation by U.N. peacekeepers.

Panel member Malick Coulibaly said investigators uncovered a total of nine rape allegations. The women interviewed said their attackers used no birth control, resulting in some pregnancies. Some women said their rapists had forced them to have abortions, Coulibaly said.

The youngest of the alleged victims, identified in the report only as "Jolianne" and believed to be 13, recounted that a WHO driver stopped on a roadside in the town of Mangina where she was selling phone cards in April 2019 and offered to give her a ride home.

"Instead, he took her to a hotel where she says she was raped by this person," according to the report.

The panel recommended WHO provide reparations to victims and set up DNA testing to establish paternity and enable women to assert their rights and those of their children.

Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus appointed the panel's co-chairs to investigate last October after media reports claimed unnamed humanitarian officials sexually abused women during the Ebola outbreak that began in Congo in 2018.

He called the report "harrowing" reading and a "dark day" for the UN. health agency. Tedros said four people have been fired and two placed on administrative leave as a result of the scandal, but he did not name them.

The WHO chief also declined to say if he would consider resigning; Germany, France and several other European countries nominated Tedros for a second term last week.

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Lawrence Gostin, chair of global health law at Georgetown University, said he wouldn't call for Tedros to resign unless he knew of, or could have reasonably known of such abuse.

Tedros traveled to Congo 14 times during the outbreak, repeatedly said he was personally responsible for the response and publicly commended one of the alleged rapists for his heroic work.

"It is unconscionable that this should ever have happened, and the sheer scale of the sexual assaults is shocking," Gostin said.

The panel's investigators said they identified 83 alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation, both Congolese nationals and foreigners. In 21 cases, the review team established with certainty that the alleged abusers were WHO employees during the Ebola response.

The AP published evidence in May showing that Dr. Michel Yao, a senior WHO official overseeing the Congo outbreak response was informed in writing of multiple sex abuse allegations. Yao was later promoted and recently headed WHO's response to the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, which ended in June.

WHO doctor Jean-Paul Ngandu and two other agency officials also signed a contract promising to buy land for a young woman Ngandu allegedly impregnated; Ngandu told the AP he was pressured to do so to protect WHO's reputation.

The panel said that during its interview with Tedros, he said he was made aware of the sex abuse allegations when they were revealed in the press and had not heard of the incident involving Ngandu until the AP published its story.

The panel's report also faulted WHO's Andreas Mlitzke, head of the agency's compliance, risk management and ethics divisions, and David Webb, who directs the office of internal oversight.

When informed of Ngandu's alleged misconduct, Mlitzke and Webb attempted to determine if the woman accusing the doctor of impregnating her should be designated as a "beneficiary," given her legal contract with Ngandu. Webb said no investigation was needed since the issue had been settled with an "amicable agreement."

Shekinah, a young Congolese woman who accepted an offer to have sex with WHO's Boubacar Diallo in exchange for a job, said she hoped he would be sanctioned by the U.N. health agency and barred from working for WHO again.

"I would like him and other doctors who will be charged to be punished severely so that it will serve as a lesson to other untouchable doctors of the WHO," said Shekinah, who declined to give her last name for fear of retribution.

Julie Londo, a member of the Congolese Union of Media Women, a women's organization that works to counter rape and sexual abuse of women in Congo, applauded WHO for punishing staffers involved in the abuse allegations but said more was needed.

"WHO must also think about reparation for the women who were traumatized by the rapes and the dozens of children who were born with unwanted pregnancies as a result of the rapes," she said.

Sophie Harman, a professor of international politics at Queen Mary University London, said she was concerned the allegations involving more than 80 suspects were only the beginning.

"More cases are bound to come forward across the world," Harman said, calling for the focus to shift to helping abuse survivors. "This requires both prosecution of perpetrators, but full accountability on the part of WHO leadership who knew about the rumors and reports, and yet took years to act on this issue."

Cheng reported from London. Jamey Keaten contributed reporting from Geneva.

EXPLAINER: Why and how the UK is experiencing a fuel crisis

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Long lines are snaking down streets across the U.K. as drivers struggle to fill up their cars, causing widespread traffic misery and worries over whether the emergency services can do their work.

The British army has been put on standby to help out. And the government is blaming the public, urging people not to panic. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, people hear the word panic and do just that — panic-buying fuel on a scale not seen since September 2000 when a similar crisis brought the country to a virtual standstill.

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Here's a look at how the crisis is unfolding:

WHAT IS GOING ON?

In recent months, many companies have reported shortages, including fast-food chains KFC, McDonald's and Nando's. Supermarket shelves have also run dry.

At first, the shortages drew a shrug. An inconvenience for some, but hardly the stuff to shake an economy or a government. But Thursday's news from oil giants BP and ExxonMobil that they were having to close some gas stations as a result of a truck driver shortage changed that.

People, especially those with memories of the 2000 crisis, knew where this could end and headed to the pump. Rationally they'd say. Others, seeing what was unfolding, whether live or on television or social media, have followed suit.

IS THERE A FUEL SHORTAGE?

The British government insists there is not.

That's true, but the process of keeping the country's gas stations flowing involves the seamless interaction of a number of activities. So when one or more aspects of the process are out of kilter, the whole system can grind to a halt.

Critics say Prime Minister Boris Johnson is also to blame for failing to address the issue of a lack of truckers — he has been warned for months that there is a shortage of around 100,000 drivers across the trucking sector overall.

Replenishing stocks becomes even more difficult if the driver shortage remains and people persist in their changed routines. It's a self-perpetuating crisis that can — as 2000 showed — lead to the economy chugging to a halt in a matter of days.

IS BREXIT TO BLAME FOR THE SHORTAGE OF TRUCK DRIVERS?

The pro-Brexit Conservative government is keen to downplay talk that the truck driver shortage is a result of Britain's departure from the European Union.

However, when the country left the economic orbit of the EU at the start of this year, one of the bloc's main tenets ceased to apply — the freedom of people to move within the EU to find work. With Brexit, many tens of thousands of drivers left the U.K. to go back to their homes in the EU, further pressuring an industry already facing long-term staffing issues.

WHAT OTHER FACTORS ARE TO BLAME?

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the staffing issues, prompting thousands of EU drivers to leave the U.K. The series of lockdown restrictions also led to difficulties in training and testing new home-grown drivers to replace those who left.

In addition, the pandemic accelerated the number of British drivers, many of whom were nearing retirement age, calling it a day. Relatively low pay, changes in the way truck drivers' incomes are taxed and a paucity of facilities — toilets and showers, for example — have also diminished the job's appeal to younger workers. In short, it's been a perfect storm.

WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT TRYING TO DO IN THE SHORT-TERM?

Everyone agrees there are no quick fixes. The main thrust from government appears to be to get motorists to go back to their normal routines — go to the pump only when needed.

There are few signs of that happening, prompting warnings about how the crisis is compromising patient care as doctors and nurses struggle to get to work.

Johnson appeared on Tuesday to dial down blaming the public, acknowledging how "frustrating and infuriating" it must be to worry about shortages of fuel. He said the situation is "starting to improve" as supplies return and urged people to "go about their business in a normal way."

WHAT ABOUT THE MEDIUM TO LONGER TERM?

The government is trying to entice former British drivers back into the industry, as well as to accelerate the training of new drivers. And it has put army personnel on standby to drive the fuel tankers.

It's also offering visas to 5,000 foreign drivers to come to the U.K for three months. Whether many will opt to come for such a short time and then face a race to get back home for Christmas remains to be seen.

WILL IT WORK?

The hope is that the demand-and-supply balance will get back to normal soon, partly because so many people will have filled up their cars already. Over the coming months, the structural issues facing the trucking industry will remain and there are fears that similar disruptions to supplies will hit other sectors.

It's not just the trucking industry facing labor shortages following Brexit and the pandemic. There are concerns within the farming community, for example, that much of this year's harvest will be left to rot because there aren't enough agricultural workers around.

Will there be enough turkeys for Christmas?

Young activists bemoan climate inaction, demand more say

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Youth climate activists Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg chastized global leaders Tuesday for failing to meet funding pledges to help poor nations adapt to a warming Earth and for delivering too much “blah blah blah” as climate change wreaks havoc around the world.

They even cast doubt on the intentions behind a youth climate gathering where they were speaking in Milan.

Four hundred climate activists from 180 countries were invited to Italy's financial capital for a three-day Youth4Climate summit that will send its recommendations to a major United Nations climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, that begins on Oct. 31. But participants are demanding more accountability from leaders and a bigger official role for young people.

“They invite cherry-picked young people to pretend they are listening to us,” Thunberg said. “But they are not. They are clearly not listening to us. Just look at the numbers. Emissions are still rising. The science doesn't lie.”

“Leaders like to say, ‘We can do it.’ They obviously don't mean it. But we do,” the Swedish activist said.

Nakate, a 24-year-old activist from Uganda, said pledges of 100 billion euros (\$117 billion) a year to help countries particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change have not materialized, even as wildfires in California and Greece and floods in Germany and Belgium show that “loss and damage is now possible everywhere.”

“In fact, funds were promised by 2020, and we are still waiting,” she said. “No more empty conferences. It's time to show us the money. It's time, it's time, it's time.”

Nakate dramatically underlined how climate change is affecting Africa, “which is ironic given that Africa is the lowest emitter of CO2 emissions of any continent except Antarctica.”

Just last week, she said she saw police taking away a body that had been washed away by violent storms in the Ugandan capital of Kampala, while others searched for more victims. Her mother told her that one man dragged off by the water had been trying to protect the goods he was selling.

Nakate collapsed in tears after her emotional speech, getting comfort from Thunberg, who followed her to the podium, which was too tall for her small stature.

Thunberg, who coalesced the global protest movement Fridays for Future, said it wasn't too late to reverse climate trends. But she has clearly heard enough from leaders, whom she said have been talking for 30 years while half of all carbon emissions have occurred since 1990, one-third since 2005.

“This is all we hear from our so-called leaders: words. Words that sound great but so far have led to no action. Our hopes and dreams drown in their empty words and promises. Of course we need constructive dialogue, but they have now had 30 years of blah, blah blah. And where has this led us?” she said.

Saoi O'Connor, an Irish activist in the Fridays for Future movement, said the youth meeting in Milan was orchestrated by governments who chose the participants and drafted the document that the delegates will “edit.” As a result, she said, the closing document will not represent “what the strikers want.”

“They have people in the rooms who are watching what we say. The topics we have been split into have been decided for us,” she said.

The three-day Youth4Climate Summit will be followed by a two-day pre-COP meeting before Glasgow aimed at finding common ground on sticking points among countries, which range from the world's big carbon emitters to developing nations that are lagging both economically and technologically.

Hopes for a successful Glasgow summit have been boosted by announcements from the world's two biggest economies and largest carbon polluters. Chinese President Xi Jinping said his country will no longer fund coal-fired plants abroad while U.S. President Joe Biden announced a plan to double financial aid for green growth to poorer nations.

In addition, Turkey has said it would adhere to the Paris protocols and South Africa announced more ambitious emissions targets.

"These are good steps," said Italy's minister for ecological transition, Roberto Cingolani, who is hosting the Milan meetings. "They mean that they are moving in the right direction. ... I never expect quantum jumps in this gigantic operation on a world level. But the indicators are all good."

Cingolani said he agreed with the criticism that many promises had been broken, including for financing climate change adaptations, but that he also saw a convergence in the sense of urgency. "It's true, we have to work harder," he said.

He also clarified a previous reference he made to "radical chic" activists, saying he was not referring to climate protesters but to those who will not make sacrifices to have renewable energy facilities in their neighborhoods.

The youth delegates were trying to maintain realistic expectations for the meeting.

"What we can do is hope for the best," said 16-year-old Zainab Waheed of Pakistan, who is campaigning to include climate in the national school curriculum. "But looking at the past, and relying on the science of deduction, and learning from history, we have seen even ministers from COP26 countries not keep their promises."

Rose Kobusinge, a 27-year-old Ugandan with a masters degree in environmental change and management from the University of Oxford, said the Glasgow meeting needs to come up with concrete action if fighting climate change is to maintain any credibility. She also thinks the youth delegates should be invited as participants — not just to send a message.

"Let it not stop from negotiations in Glasgow. If it stops, then I guess COP won't be necessary any more because what is it? Just coming and discussing and go back to your countries?" she said.

This story corrects the spelling of Vanessa Nakate's last name in several paragraphs.

Follow all AP stories on climate change at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-change>.

'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.

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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.

Dozens of far-right extremists use Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter to promote their brands, new research shows. By carefully toeing the line of propriety, key architects of Germany’s far-right harness the power of mainstream social media to promote festivals, fashion brands, music labels and mixed martial arts tournaments that can generate millions in sales and connect like-minded thinkers from around the world. But simply cutting off such groups could have unintended, damaging consequences.

All told, there are at least 54 Facebook profiles belonging to 39 entities that the German government and civil society groups have flagged as extremist, according to research shared with The Associated Press by the Counter Extremism Project, a non-profit policy and advocacy group formed to combat extremism. The groups have nearly 268,000 subscribers and friends on Facebook alone.

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.

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 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

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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.

The U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said it did not dispute the horrors of slavery and colonialism, but that it was focused on solving today's problems. It said in a statement: "While we acknowledge that the wounds run very deep, we believe that the most effective way for the U.K. today to respond to the cruelty of the past is to ensure that current and future generations do not forget what happened, and to address modern-day slavery and racism."

Germany's president, in his General Assembly address, 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.

Facing journalists this week at the United Nations who sought answers on Namibia, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said his country continues to negotiate proposals with the African leaders.

"(T)he results that have been achieved have been achieved with the desire to finally reach an outcome, though not a conclusion, with regard to this truly difficult chapter of German history," Maas said. "For in fact, it is only the beginning of a period of very, very intensive cooperation between Germany and Namibia."

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, where about 70% of the population has been vaccinated, 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 the beds are now at 100% capacity and around 98% of all the 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."

New daily coronavirus cases in Romania, a country of 19 million residents, have grown exponentially over the last month, while the number of people getting vaccinated has declined to worrying lows.

Romanian officials reported 11,049 new cases on Tuesday, the highest daily tally since the pandemic started. Government data shows that 91.5% of COVID-19 deaths in Romania during Sept. 18-23 involved unvaccinated patients.

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

"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 Baci, 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>.

Germany sees calls for quick decisions on new government

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Pressure grew for a quick start to talks on Germany's next government as newly elected lawmakers held their first meetings on Tuesday and tensions simmered in outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's bloc, which declined to its worst-ever result in the country's election.

Olaf Scholz and his center-left Social Democrats, the narrow winners of Sunday's parliamentary election, underlined their hopes of talks soon on forming a coalition with the two parties that are likely to be kingmakers.

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.

Hopes in Merkel's center-right Union bloc of holding on to the chancellery appeared to be fading, with the rival who lost out to Armin Laschet to be the bloc's candidate to succeed Merkel sounding pessimistic.

"At the moment, Olaf Scholz clearly has the best chances of becoming chancellor," Markus Soeder said Tuesday.

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.

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."

There have been some calls for Laschet to resign as leader of the Christian Democratic Union, the dominant party in the Union bloc, but not so far from prominent figures.

Soeder, who leads the Union's smaller party, the Bavaria-only Christian Social Union, congratulated Scholz on finishing ahead. He said the Social Democrats should have the first crack at forming the government "and if that doesn't work, then we are ready for talks."

The CSU's top lawmaker in the parliament underlined frustration over the election outcome. "It is one of the most unnecessary defeats of recent decades," Alexander Dobrindt said.

Anton Hofreiter, one of the Greens' parliamentary leaders, noted as their much-increased group met that his party, the Social Democrats, and the Free Democrats made gains in the election while the Union lost significant ground.

"We will of course talk with all democratic parties, but that's why it's more likely that in the end there will be a 'traffic light,'" he said, using the German shorthand — based on the parties' colors — for a Social Democrat-Green-Free Democrat alliance.

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>

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 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

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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.

Lisa Van Allen, who testified against Kelly in 2008, told ABC's "Good Morning America" in an interview broadcast Tuesday that she "almost cried" when she learned of Monday's verdict. "You know, this is what I was looking for back in 2008," Van Allen said. "So I would say that the difference this time around is that there's power in numbers. A lot of people came forward."

Asked if she believed the accusers were initially not believed because they were Black women, Van Allen said, "Yes I do believe that that's the main reason why."

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.

Asked about the guilty verdict Tuesday on "CBS This Morning," hampton said, "You know, I want to believe that this means that Black women survivors will be heard, but I don't want it to be dependent on a piece of media going viral or being successful." She said she thinks about "all of the stories of everyday Black girls in neighborhoods like the ones that I grew up in Detroit who don't have a predator, who don't have an abuser that was famous or rich."

Burke, who was interviewed for "Surviving R. Kelly," said, "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. 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>.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined
Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 29, the 272nd day of 2021. There are 93 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

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On Sept. 29, 1789, the U.S. War Department established a regular army with a strength of several hundred men.

On this date:

In 1829, London's reorganized police force, which became known as Scotland Yard, went on duty.

In 1918, Allied forces began their decisive breakthrough of the Hindenburg Line during World War I.

In 1938, British, French, German and Italian leaders concluded the Munich Agreement, which was aimed at appeasing Adolf Hitler by allowing Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland.

In 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Italian Marshal Pietro Badoglio signed an armistice aboard the British ship HMS Nelson off Malta.

In 1962, Canada joined the space age as it launched the Alouette 1 satellite from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The musical "My Fair Lady" closed on Broadway after 2,717 performances.

In 1978, Pope John Paul I was found dead in his Vatican apartment just over a month after becoming head of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1982, Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules laced with deadly cyanide claimed the first of seven victims in the Chicago area. (To date, the case remains unsolved.)

In 1986, the Soviet Union released Nicholas Daniloff, an American journalist confined on spying charges.

In 2000, Israeli riot police stormed a major Jerusalem shrine and opened fire on stone-throwing Muslim worshippers, killing four Palestinians and wounding 175.

In 2001, President George W. Bush condemned Afghanistan's Taliban rulers for harboring Osama bin Laden and his followers as the United States pressed its military and diplomatic campaign against terror.

In 2005, John G. Roberts Jr. was sworn in as the nation's 17th chief justice after winning Senate confirmation.

In 2006, U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, R-Fla., resigned after being confronted with sexually explicit computer messages he'd sent to former House pages.

Ten years ago: Germany kept alive hopes that the 17-nation euro currency could survive the debt crisis as lawmakers in Europe's largest economy voted overwhelmingly in favor of expanding the powers of the eurozone's bailout fund.

Five years ago: A New Jersey Transit commuter train slammed into the Hoboken station, killing one person and injuring more than 100 others.

One year ago: The first debate between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden deteriorated into bitter taunts and near chaos, as Trump repeatedly interrupted his opponent with angry and personal jabs and the two men talked over each other. Trump refused to condemn white supremacists who had supported him, telling one such group known as Proud Boys to "stand back, stand by." Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was buried in a private ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. The NFL saw its first COVID-19 outbreak in the season's fourth week, as three Tennessee Titans players and five other personnel tested positive; the Titans' next scheduled game against the Steelers would be postponed. Death claimed country star Mac Davis in Nashville and "I Am Woman" singer Helen Reddy in Los Angeles, both were 78.

Today's Birthdays: Conductor Richard Bonyng is 91. Writer-director Robert Benton is 89. Singer Jerry Lee Lewis is 86. Soul-blues-gospel singer Sherman Holmes is 82. Former Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., is 79. Actor Ian McShane is 79. Jazz musician Jean-Luc Ponty is 79. Nobel Peace laureate Lech Walesa (lehk vah-WEN'-sah) is 78. Television-film composer Mike Post is 77. Actor Patricia Hodge is 75. TV personality Bryant Gumbel is 73. Rock singer-musician Mark Farner is 73. Rock singer-musician Mike Pinera is 73. Country singer Alvin Crow is 71. Actor Drake Hogestyn is 68. Olympic gold medal runner Sebastian Coe is 65. Singer Suzzy Roche (The Roches) is 65. Comedian-actor Andrew "Dice" Clay is 64. Rock singer John Payne (Asia) is 63. Actor Roger Bart is 59. Singer-musician Les Claypool is 58. Actor Jill Whelan is 55. Actor Ben Miles is 55. Actor Luke Goss is 53. Actor Erika Eleniak is 52. R&B singer Devante Swing (Jodeci) is 52. Country singer Brad Cotter (TV: "Nashville Star") is 51. Actor Emily Lloyd is 51. Actor Natasha Gregson Wagner is 51. Actor Rachel Cronin is 50. Country musician Danick Dupelle (Emerson Drive) is 48. Actor

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Alexis Cruz is 47. Actor Zachary Levi is 41. Actor Chrissy Metz (TV: "This Is Us") is 41. Actor Kelly McCreary (TV: "Grey's Anatomy") is 40. Rock musician Josh Farro is 34. NBA All-Star Kevin Durant is 33. Actor Doug Brochu is 31. Singer Phillip Phillips is 31. Pop singer Halsey is 27. Actor Clara Mamet is 27.