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Upcoming Events

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) ([Livestreaming JV and Varsity matches on GDILIVE.COM](#))

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-

"To live with fear and not be afraid is the final test of maturity."

-EDWARD WEEKS



Chicken Soup
for the Soul

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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Happy Autumn, Tourism Friends!

by Jim Hagen, Secretary of Tourism

The changing color of leaves, harvest, and shorter days & cooler nights can only mean one thing: Shoulder season has officially arrived in the land of Great Faces and Great Places!

What a past couple of months we have had. Whew, huh?! I was just out in Custer State Park for the annual Buffalo Roundup and the number of visitors in our state was still astounding. The record-breaking attendance at the Buffalo Roundup was clear proof that our busy season of hosting visitors is not yet over. CONGRATULATIONS to our great friends and partners at Custer State Park and the Department of Game, Fish & Parks for welcoming more than 22,450 visitors to the Buffalo Roundup. It was an incredible event with picture-perfect weather. Now, in a few, short weeks, we will be welcoming pheasant hunters to our state, another incredibly busy time for us. Let me extend a huge THANK YOU to our entire industry for all your hard work and welcoming hospitality these past months. We are proud of what you accomplished this summer while facing the pandemic and workforce shortages.

Okay, we have some important items we need your help with, so let me get right to them:

1. As part of Governor Noem's Annual Invitational Pheasant Hunt, the Department of Tourism is coordinating a South Dakota Showcase on October 22 & 23 at the Sioux Falls Convention Center & Arena. We are actively seeking vendors and exhibitors who will give attendees a true South Dakota experience. We are looking for fine artists, artisans & crafters, specialty food vendors, and outdoor businesses with a focus on fishing, hunting, recreation and agritourism. We are also in search of vendors and exhibitors who are kid-friendly and can provide fun experiences for attendees of all ages, from 5 years old to 100! Help us celebrate all things that make South Dakota special. More information about the South Dakota Showcase and a vendor & exhibitor online application form can be found at SouthDakotaShowcase.com. The application deadline is Tuesday, October 12 (with a little wiggle room to accommodate any last-minute participants). If you would like more details or have questions, please reach out to Thad Friedeman or Kirk Hulstein.

2. It won't be too much longer before you see more details about the 2022 Governor's Conference on Tourism, January 18-20, in Pierre. Be on the lookout for ways you can sponsor different sessions and events at the conference. Also, now is the time to be submitting names for the annual Tourism Awards. More information about the awards and access to the online nomination forms can be found [here](#). The deadline for nominations is November 19.

3. As we previously mentioned, pheasant hunting season is upon us, and we will soon be rolling out the orange carpet to hunters from every corner of the country. Be sure and check out the fun & new 2021 Rooster Rush logo. You can access the 2021 Rooster Rush Toolkit and download files of the new logo [here](#).

4. A reminder that our Online Hospitality Program has insightful lessons for keeping your team members apprised of all the latest and greatest tips on customer service. As your schedules begin to slow down a bit in the coming months, it's a good time to encourage your managers and frontline works to avail themselves of this free training. If you have any suggestions for future training topics, please contact Bailey Carlsen.

There is a load of great information and updates in this newsletter highlighting items we are working on in the department. Be sure you continue reading so you are up-to-speed on all of the latest news.

Finally, continue to visit our COVID-19 health and hygiene resource page in your efforts to keep our visitors safe all while providing them with a memorable experience in our state. On behalf of the entire team, we wish you all a very successful fall shoulder season. Remember, we are just a phone call or email away if we can be of any assistance to you. We hope to see you soon!

All our best,
Jim Hagen

Noem Administration Submits Permit Application for 2022 Mount Rushmore Fireworks

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, on behalf of Governor Kristi Noem, the South Dakota Department of Tourism submitted its application for a special use permit for the 2022 Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration. The application was submitted to the National Parks Service (NPS).

“There truly is no better place to celebrate America’s birthday than Mount Rushmore, our nation’s enduring Shrine to Democracy,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Despite their arbitrary decision to cancel the 2021 Fireworks Celebration, the Biden Administration has an opportunity to work with us to celebrate next year and for the years to come.”

Under Governor Noem’s leadership, the Fireworks Celebration was returned to Mount Rushmore in 2020 after being canceled for more than a decade. Unfortunately, NPS rejected the permit application for the 2021 celebration, and Governor Noem is currently in litigation with NPS over that rejection. The name of that lawsuit is Noem v. Haaland.

The Fireworks Celebration would occur in conjunction with the Memorandum of Agreement signed on May 6, 2019, between the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior and Governor Noem.

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock’s September Column Community Support

Edith Wharton once said, “there are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”

Thank you to our South Dakota communities for being both to veterans. Their lit candles light the pathways for our veterans and their mirror reflects aspiration for them to continue to succeed and supports them along their path.

Communities play an important role in every aspect of our lives. We have communities in our friends, our families, our employment, our neighborhoods, and in so many other places. Having a sense of community unites us. Being a part of a community can make us feel as though we are a part of something greater than ourselves.

A strong community is a place of opportunity. Big or small, a community can provide countless chances for growth and experience. With a community of people looking out for your best interests and working together for a common goal, there is no shortage of opportunities to succeed.

Communities have played a major role in all our veterans’ lives. The individuals who form our communities are the ones who are there when our young men and women deploy, they are there to assist families when loved ones are serving, they are there when our heroes return from deployments, and they are there to help them adjust back into their civilian lives.

Community leaders hire our veterans. They know our veterans are devoted, disciplined, hardworking, loyal and have a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience.

Let’s continue to work together as a community to spread the light for all.

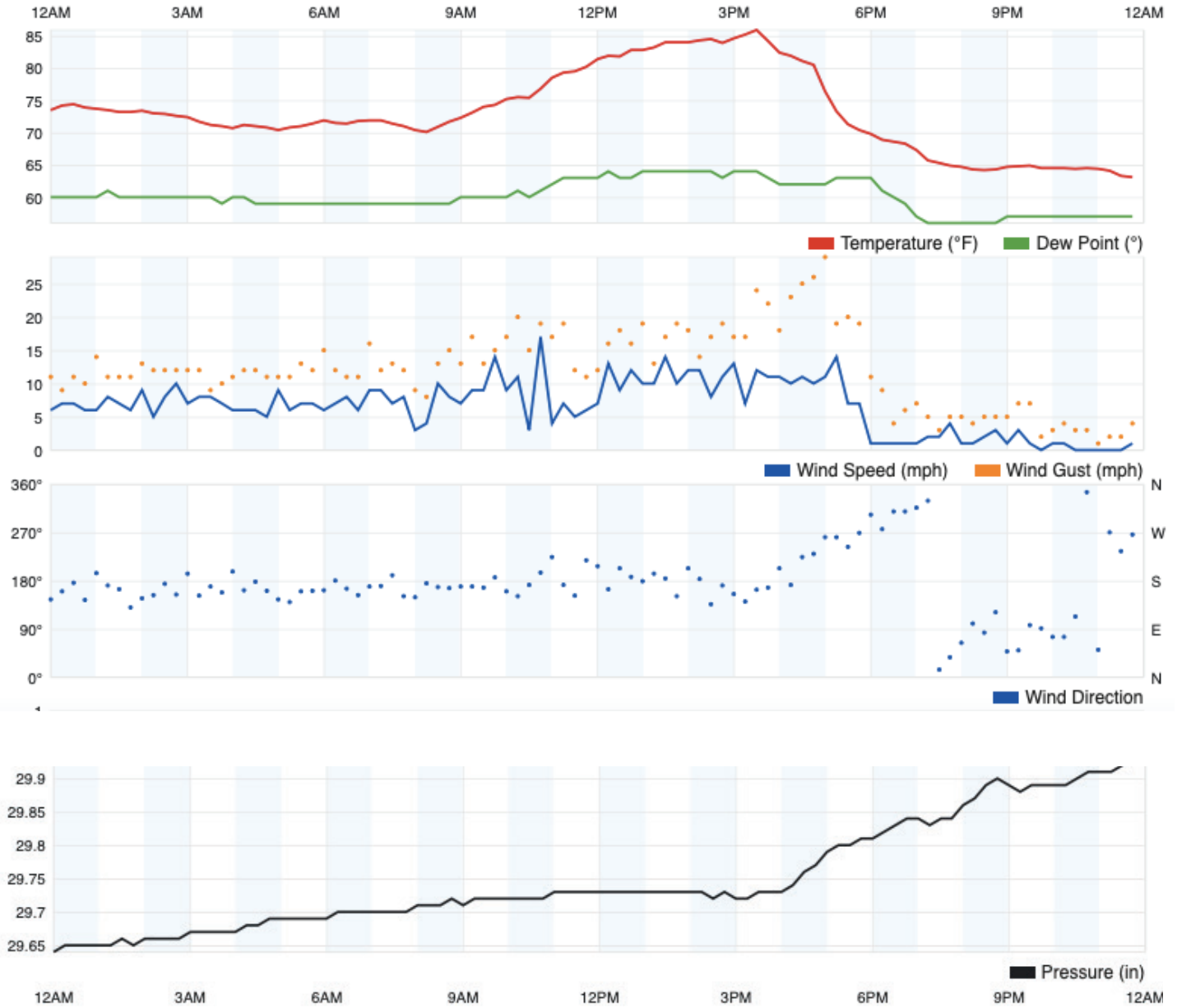
Greg Whitlock, Secretary

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

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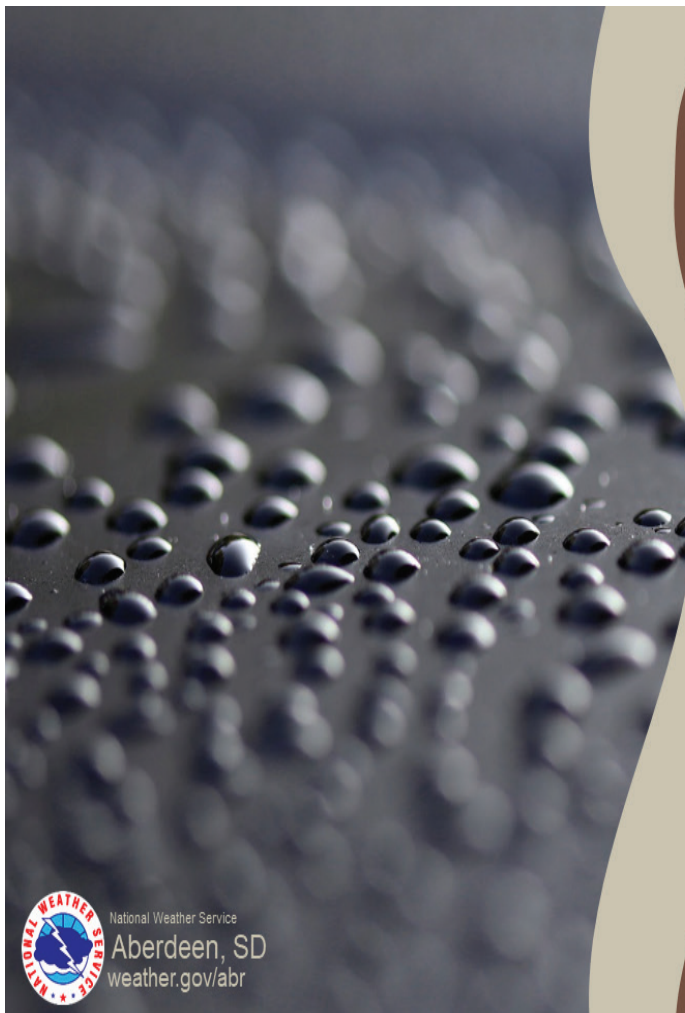
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Chance Showers then Slight Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms then Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Mostly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 74 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 74 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 74 °F




Thursday

70s
Scattered Showers & Isolated Thunderstorms

Friday

70s
Scattered Showers & Isolated Thunderstorms



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr

Unsettled weather will continue through Friday with on and off showers and even an isolated thunderstorm or two. The clouds and rain will keep highs in the 70s which is still above average for late September/early October.

Today in Weather History

September 30, 2006: Severe to exceptional drought conditions improved dramatically by the end of the month across central and north central South Dakota as above normal rainfall was recorded for the month of September.

1896: A hurricane formed on September 22 and lasted until September 30. It formed directly over the Lesser Antilles and hit Cuba, Florida, Georgia, South and North Carolina, Virginia, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. Its maximum sustained winds were at 130 mph. The heaviest rainfall deposited in association with the storm was 19.96 inches at Glennville, Georgia. This hurricane was responsible for an estimated 130 deaths and \$1.5 million in damage (1896 dollars).

1959 - Three tornadoes spawned by the remnants of Hurricane Gracie killed 12 persons at Ivy VA. (The Weather Channel)

1970 - A nineteen month drought in southern California came to a climax. The drought, which made brush and buildings tinder dry, set up the worst fire conditions in California history as hot Santa Anna winds sent the temperature soaring to 105 degrees at Los Angeles, and to 97 degrees at San Diego. During that last week of September whole communities of interior San Diego County were consumed by fire. Half a million acres were burned, and the fires caused fifty million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1977 - The temperature at Wichita Falls, TX, soared to 108 degrees to establish a record for September. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - Thunderstorms, which had inundated northern sections of Oklahoma with heavy rain, temporarily shifted southward producing 4 to 8 inches rains from Shawnee to Stilwell. Baseball size hail and 80 mph winds ripped through parts of southeast Oklahoma City, and thunderstorm winds caused more than half a million dollars damage at Shawnee. (Storm Data)

1987 - Afternoon thunderstorms in Michigan produced hail an inch in diameter at Pinckney, and wind gusts to 68 mph at Wyandotte. A thunderstorm in northern Indiana produced wet snow at South Bend. Seven cities in the northwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including readings of 98 degrees at Medford OR and 101 degrees at downtown Sacramento CA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed over Florida, and in the western U.S. The afternoon high of 94 degrees at Fort Myers FL was their tenth record high for the month. Highs of 98 degrees at Medford OR and 99 degrees at Fresno CA were records for the date, and the temperature at Borrego Springs CA soared to 108 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thirteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date, as readings soared into the upper 80s and 90s from the Northern and Central High Plains Region to Minnesota. Bismarck ND reported a record high of 95 degrees, and the temperature reached 97 degrees at Broadus MT. Afternoon thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced wind gusts to 60 mph at Wendover UT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992: The past month was the coldest September ever recorded in interior Alaska. Fairbanks averaged a frigid 31.7° which was 13.2° below normal and the first below freezing September ever. Beginning on the 9th and on every day for the rest of the month, a new record low was set for either low minimums or low maximums, or both. On this date, the city plunged to 3° to set a new all-time record low for September. Snowfall for the month totaled 24.4 inches which was more than three times the previous record for September.

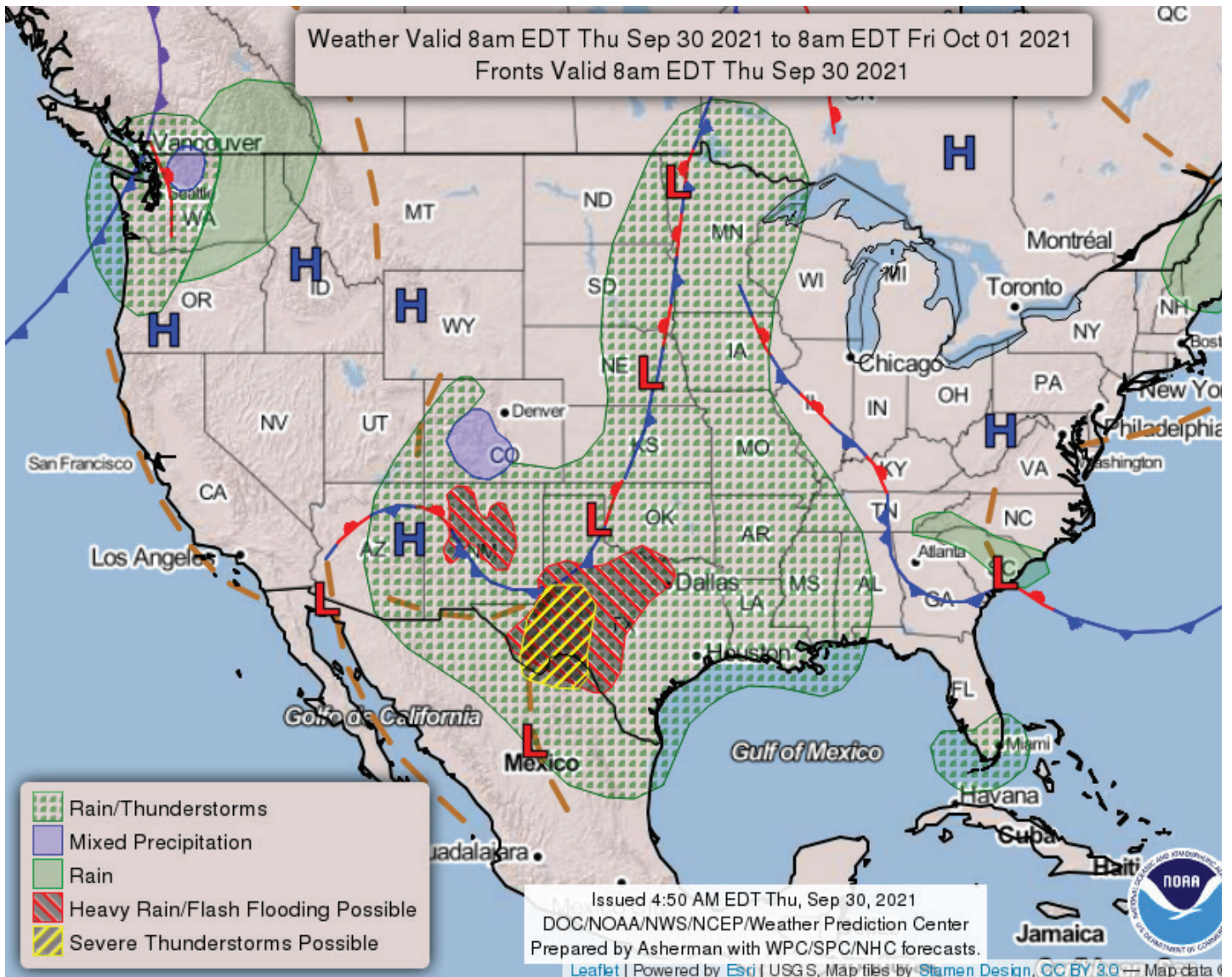
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 85.9 °F at 3:30 PM
Low Temp: 63.1 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 29 mph at 5:00 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 92° in 1989
Record Low: 15° in 1939
Average High: 69°F
Average Low: 41°F
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.99
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.58
Average Precip to date: 18.33
Precip Year to Date: 15.42
Sunset Tonight: 7:15:52 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:29:48 AM



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WE ARE WHAT WE WORSHIP

There are some religions in the Orient that follow practices that are condemned by Scripture and society. A member of one of those religions was jailed for robbery and murder which was part of his "faith." While imprisoned he was visited by a missionary who shared with him the message of salvation. After he accepted Christ, the missionary gave him a Bible which became his dearest possession.

When he appeared before the judge, he testified that he had been brought up to be a worshiper of Kali. As a young child he was taught that if he shed the blood of the victims he robbed, he would please Kali - a Hindu goddess - and win her favor. He faithfully practiced his belief and worshiped this goddess all his life.

When the judge confronted him with his crime, he broke down and began to weep. After a few moments he was able to speak and with tears streaming down his face told the judge that he had committed many murders - more than he could remember.

"How could you be guilty of such enormities like these?" asked the judge.

Taking his worn Bible from his pocket and holding it up for the judge to see, he replied, "Had I but received this Book as a child, this book of Jesus, my Savior whom I now worship, I would not have done such horrible things." God's Word changed His life.

"Exalt the Lord, our God, and worship at His footstool; He is holy," proclaims the Psalmist. A lonely missionary serving in a remote country shared God's Word and a life was redeemed. Whose life can you change by sharing His words of hope today?

Prayer: We pray, Father, that we will open our hearts to the message of Your Word and share its truth. May we work with You to bring life and hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Exalt the Lord, our God, and worship at His footstool; He is holy. Psalm 99:5

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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

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

09-12-13-22-31

(nine, twelve, thirteen, twenty-two, thirty-one)

Estimated jackpot: \$112,000

Lotto America

13-31-32-45-46, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 2

(thirteen, thirty-one, thirty-two, forty-five, forty-six; Star Ball: seven; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$3.05 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$34 million

Powerball

02-07-11-17-32, Powerball: 11, Power Play: 3

(two, seven, eleven, seventeen, thirty-two; Powerball: eleven; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$570 million

Indigenous filmmaker's 'every breath' a fight for his people

By SAM METZ AP / Report for America

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) — Myron Dewey, a filmmaker and journalist who helped draw worldwide attention to the concerns of Native Americans fighting an oil pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, has died.

Dewey, a citizen of the Walker River Paiute Tribe, passed away Sunday when his car crashed in rural Nevada, the Nye County sheriff said. The 49-year-old had posted footage on Twitter a day earlier from a central Nevada military installation where he and other members of local tribes have long protested the proposed expansion of a U.S. Navy bombing range.

Dewey won acclaim for his live footage of the 2016 demonstrations over the Dakota Access Pipeline near the Standing Rock Reservation, which straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border. His visuals of Native Americans being sprayed with water cannons in freezing weather were viewed by hundreds of thousands after appearing online and in the news.

He later co-directed the documentary "Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock," which outlined the demonstrators' motivations — to preserve the environment and fight for clean water.

Friends and relatives said they will remember Dewey for his commitment to advocating for Native Americans, for being a devoted friend and family member and for the authenticity of his work.

"He was able to show a perspective and viewpoint that was simply being ignored because of the systemic oppression our people have encountered as long as we've been here," said Dewey's cousin Lance West. "It was his story to tell, and only someone like him could share it in a manner that really spoke to us."

Dewey was among a group of Native journalists arrested during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests when he filmed employees of the company constructing the pipeline. The Morton County sheriff accused him of stalking private security workers using a drone video recorder, but prosecutors ultimately dropped the charges.

His footage from the fight's front lines was one episode in a long career of chronicling Indigenous and environmental issues throughout North America.

Dewey founded the media production company Digital Smoke Signals, which produced work about schools on reservation land in Nevada and about tribal land management practices in the Pacific Northwest.

In recent months, he participated in demonstrations against a proposed lithium mine near the Nevada-Oregon border and the Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation. Environmentalists and local Native Americans oppose the project, saying it would desecrate land the Northern Paiute and Western Shoshone consider sacred and have adverse environmental impacts on the region's residents.

Dewey, who primarily resided in Schurz, Nevada, on the Walker River Paiute Reservation, started his career as a wildland firefighter in Nevada. He also worked as a professor, teaching courses on film at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies and on digital media at Northwest Indian College in Washington state. He leaves behind a wife, Deborah Parker, five children and a nephew whom he considered a son.

"His every breath was a fight for his people," Parker told Indian Country Today, noting Dewey also was passionate about sharing his experiences as a Native American boarding school survivor. "He didn't want to be silent when others wanted him to be. He didn't want the atrocities to go unnoticed or unrecognized."

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

South Dakota lawmakers question Noem's meeting with daughter

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republican and Democratic legislators alike said Wednesday that they want more details from Gov. Kristi Noem's administration about a meeting last year that included the governor, her daughter and state employees overseeing an agency that had moved to deny her daughter's application to become a certified real estate appraiser.

In response to the report from The Associated Press this week, the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee will look into the matter when it meets at the end of October, according to the committee chairman, state Sen. Kyle Schoenfish. The Republican governor has dismissed the report as an attack on her family, but lawmakers from within her party said they want answers from her administration about what happened.

Schoenfish, a Republican, said the committee is still working out the details of how it will address the issue. Republicans, who hold supermajorities in the Legislature, will ultimately determine how far-ranging the inquiry is.

The AP reported Monday that Noem last year summoned to her office a state employee who was overseeing her daughter's appraiser license application just days after the agency moved to deny her the license. After the meeting, Noem's daughter, Cassidy Peters, was not denied a license, according to the Department of Labor and Regulation. Peters received her certification four months later, on Nov. 25, 2020.

A week after Peters received her license, 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 an age discrimination complaint and leave her job.

The governor's office declined to answer questions from the AP about what was discussed in the meeting. On Wednesday, Noem took to Twitter with a pair of tweets that defended her actions but didn't detail what took place at the meeting.

"I never asked for special treatment for Cassidy. Others went through the same process that Cassidy did," the governor wrote. "I have heard for years how difficult it is to become an appraiser in South Dakota, making it harder for South Dakotans to purchase a home. I have been working for years to fix that process, and I signed legislation to that effect this past session."

Noem's spokesman, Ian Fury, did not respond to a request for comment about the Legislature's decision to look into the episode.

"I want to know specifically in that meeting, what were the discussions?" said Democratic state Rep. Linda Duba, adding that the meeting would have been "extremely intimidating" for the state employee who was overseeing Peters' application.

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Republican state Rep. Randy Gross, who is the vice-chair of the committee, said he was refraining from any speculation as to what happened, but that he wanted to hear from Noem's administration to get "a reliable sequence of activities or events."

"I want to be accurately informed," he said.

Noem, 49, has generated speculation about a possible 2024 White House bid by forming a federal political action committee, assisting with campaigns across the country and attending many of the same events as other potential GOP hopefuls. Though Noem has said she's focused on reelection in 2022 and hasn't publicly indicated that she plans to run for president, she has visited the key early presidential campaigning states of Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, and shown a willingness to jab at potential rivals.

In 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.

Bren had limited her comments about the episode because the settlement of her age discrimination complaint includes a clause barring her from disparaging state officials.

The committee has the power to subpoena documents from state government, said Democratic state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, but he added that whether lawmakers choose to wield that power will depend on Republican support. He said he will also be looking into how the state government paid the \$200,000 to Bren to settle her age discrimination complaint.

Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg, a Republican, has said he is reviewing the episode. However, he has become a political enemy of the governor, who called for his resignation following a car crash in which he struck and killed a man walking on a highway.

Democrats said the Government Operations and Audit Committee and the Appropriations Committee were the right place to start an inquiry, but they acknowledged that they would need Republicans to help delve into the issue.

"I think it takes a lot of courage," Duba said. "There's a lot of concern because it doesn't pass the smell test at all."

This story has been updated to correct the first name of state Sen. Kyle Schoenfish.

Minimum security South Dakota inmate placed on escape status

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a minimum security inmate at the South Dakota State Penitentiary walked away from a community service work assignment on Wednesday.

Eric Blue Bird, 29, was placed on escape status after leaving the Sioux Falls Community Work Center.

Blue Bird is serving sentences for aggravated assault from both Jackson County and Minnehaha County. He faces an additional five years in prison on a charge of second-degree escape.

South Dakota attorney general, widow ink deal in fatal crash

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The widow of a man who died last year after being struck by a car driven by South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg has reached an out-of-court settlement after threatening a lawsuit, the two sides confirmed Wednesday.

Ravnsborg pleaded no contest to a pair of traffic misdemeanors in the crash that killed Joseph Boever, who was walking alongside a rural highway late the night of Sept. 12, 2020. Ravnsborg was ordered to pay \$500 fines on each charge, as well as court costs.

Matthew Tysdal, an attorney for Jenny Boever, and Mike Deaver, spokesman for Ravnsborg, confirmed the settlement but would not reveal any terms. Tysdal said neither he nor his client would have any further comment.

"They have reached a settlement with the insurance company and Mr. Ravnsborg," Deaver told The Associated Press. "It happened fairly quickly. So there won't be any kind of civil suits or anything else, as it was an accident."

Prosecutors said Ravnsborg was on his phone roughly a minute before the crash, but phone records

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showed it was locked at the moment of impact. Ravensborg told investigators that the last thing he remembered before impact was turning off the radio and looking at his speedometer.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has repeatedly called for Ravensborg to resign. The GOP-controlled Legislature will consider whether to try to impeach the Republican attorney general during a special session that starts Nov. 9.

South Dakota reapplies for Mount Rushmore fireworks permit

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is again applying to hold a fireworks display over Mount Rushmore to celebrate Independence Day.

The Department of Tourism submitted its application for a special use permit to the National Parks Service Wednesday on behalf of Noem for fireworks next year.

The Parks Service in March denied the state's application for a fireworks display this year, citing safety concerns. South Dakota had been dealing with drought and wildfires that burned within the monument's boundaries earlier this year, forcing the park to close for several days.

Noem argued that if the fireworks were allowed, conditions would be monitored and organizers could cancel the show if the fire risk was too great.

Local Native American tribes also opposed holding the celebration on land they hold as sacred and were concerned about the spread of COVID-19.

Noem is currently in litigation with the U.S. Department of Interior over that rejection.

"Despite their arbitrary decision to cancel the 2021 Fireworks Celebration, the Biden Administration has an opportunity to work with us to celebrate next year and for the years to come," the Republican governor said in a statement.

Noem successfully pushed for a return of the event in 2019 after a decadelong hiatus. It gave former President Donald Trump an opportunity to be featured in a patriotic display attended by thousands of people during the pandemic. Noem has said there were no COVID-19 outbreaks linked to last year's event.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Black Hills Pioneer. September 24, 2021.

Editorial: Local foods can fuel our youth

When food tastes better, kids are more likely to eat it, providing them with the nutrition they need.

And with the fall bounty of produce upon us, we know that tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet corn and other products taste much better when we buy them from local producers.

Area food service directors have realized the same. Belle Fourche, Spearfish, Newell and the Meade School District all have purchased locally-produced foods in the past for their food service programs.

In the Meade School District, students recently devoured 15 pounds of cucumbers in two days at one school and were pleasantly surprised to find local sweet corn on the cob on the menu on another day.

Working through the Black Hills Farmers Market, the Meade School District is able to provide such produce through its Farm to School Program.

District officials believe, as do we, that this program is a win/win for all involved. Schools can buy local fresh produce to feed to appreciative students while at the same time pumping money into the local economy.

Dakota Rural Action has been working on Farm to School issues across South Dakota since 2010. They believe also that the Farm to School movement which serves to connect schools to local farmers and increases learning about food production in schools statewide.

They have focused on three main areas of Farm to School: 1) serving local foods in the school cafeteria, 2) implementing school and youth gardens, and 3) encouraging students to learn about the food system through in class activities and on-farm field trips.

Farm to School benefits students, farmers, communities, and the environment. Students get hands-on

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experience with agriculture, and studies show Farm to School Programs increase fruit and vegetable consumption at school and at home, and even increased physical activity and self-esteem as students gain new life skills.

And, increasing children's interest in healthier foods has been shown to impact parents' food shopping choices as well.

We're sold on the program. We hope that the Northern Hills schools who do purchase local produce will continue to do so, and encourage other districts to explore the possibilities of this program.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. September XX, 2021.

Editorial: College Enrollments Parked In Neutral

The newest enrollment numbers released last week for South Dakota's public universities indicate the state's higher education system is still struggling to build some traction as we embark on the third decade of the 21st century.

To be sure, overall enrollment didn't fall greatly, which is a good thing. The figures released last week by the Board of Regents show that the university system saw an overall decrease of 121 students, a mild decline of 0.35%. However, the number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) students dropped by 621 students, or 2.53%.

Overall, it could be said that the system remains in a holding pattern, a plateau of relative stability that shows neither promising growth nor worrisome declines.

And perhaps there is a little bit of encouragement there.

South Dakota's university system, like colleges nationwide, has been dealing with some serious headwinds the last several years. They include the skyrocketing price of a college education (which can translate into a crushing long-term debt), coupled with other educational options such as technical education. Also, demographics suggest there is simply a smaller pool of traditional college-age students, and those diverse options (including online learning) have created a tough road for colleges in general.

On that note, the University of South Dakota (USD) announced its fall enrollment — its overall head count went up by five but FTEs declined by 2.66% — by emphasizing the gains made in attracting international students, setting a record in that category. Also, the school reported increases among graduate, law and medical students. USD also showed some growth in attracting students from Iowa and Minnesota.

"Especially when taken in the context of national enrollment trends, the status of enrollment at USD is encouraging," USD President Sheila K. Gestring said in the press release.

Of course, one must also consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university attendance.

"Enrollments are substantially flat and that is about what we expected, since we still see impacts from the ongoing pandemic," Brian L. Maher, the regents' executive director and CEO, said in the press release.

Overall, the news from the regents regarding enrollment could have been worse, but it needs to get better. In order for the state's public universities to continue offering a top-level education and to remain innovative and, yes, relevant, they must grow their student base, and the process needs to start soon. The fact that so many colleges across the country are in the same boat may be of some consolation, but at some point, real answers must be found.

END

US mine safety grants totaling \$1M awarded to 13 recipients

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Thirteen grants totaling \$1 million have been awarded to promote U.S. mine safety.

The U.S. Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration announced the funding Tuesday through its Brookwood-Sago grant program.

The program was established in 2006 in honor of 25 miners who died in 2001 in Brookwood, Alabama, at the Jim Walter Resources No. 5 mine and in 2006 in Buckhannon, West Virginia, at the Sago Mine.

Among the grants awarded were \$140,000 to the University of Arizona in Tucson for the development of

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app-based training materials, \$130,000 to Marshall University Research Corp. in Huntington, for production of a video on safety and emergency preparedness, and \$120,000 to the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City to provide virtual reality training materials.

Other grant recipients include schools, state agencies and other groups in Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

Former Nazi camp secretary in German trial, 96, on the run

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A former secretary for the SS commander of the Stutthof concentration camp was being sought on an arrest warrant Thursday after skipping the planned start of her trial in Germany on more than 11,000 counts of accessory to murder, officials said.

The 96-year-old woman left the home where she lives in a taxi on Thursday morning, heading for a subway station on the outskirts of Hamburg, German news agency dpa quoted Itzehoe state court spokeswoman Frederike Milhoffer as saying. Her destination wasn't known.

Presiding judge Dominik Gross said the court had issued an arrest warrant, and it remained to be seen whether she would be caught.

Prosecutors argue that the woman was part of the apparatus that helped the Nazi camp function during World War II more than 75 years ago.

The court said in a statement before the trial that the defendant allegedly "aided and abetted those in charge of the camp in the systematic killing of those imprisoned there between June 1943 and April 1945 in her function as a stenographer and typist in the camp commandant's office."

Despite her advanced age, the German woman was to be tried in juvenile court because she was under 21 at the time of the alleged crimes. German media identified her as Irmgard Furchner.

Efraim Zuroff, the head Nazi hunter at the Simon Wiesenthal Center's office in Jerusalem, said the defendant had claimed in a recent letter to the court that she was too frail to appear for trial.

"Apparently, that's not exactly the case," he said.

"If she is healthy enough to flee, she is healthy enough to be incarcerated," Zuroff told The Associated Press. Her flight, he added, "should also affect the punishment."

The case against Furchner relies on German legal precedent established in cases over the past decade that anyone who helped Nazi death camps and concentration camps function can be prosecuted as an accessory to the murders committed there, even without evidence of participation in a specific crime.

A defense lawyer told Der Spiegel magazine that the trial would center on whether the 96-year-old had knowledge of the atrocities that happened at the camp.

"My client worked in the midst of SS men who were experienced in violence — however, does that mean she shared their state of knowledge? That is not necessarily obvious," lawyer Wolf Molkentin said.

According to other media reports, Furchner was questioned as a witness during past Nazi trials and said at the time that the former SS commandant of Stutthof, Paul Werner Hoppe, dictated daily letters and radio messages to her.

Furchner testified she was not aware of the killings that occurred at the camp while she worked there, dpa reported.

Initially a collection point for Jews and non-Jewish Poles removed from Danzig — now the Polish city of Gdansk — Stutthof from about 1940 was used as a so-called "work education camp" where forced laborers, primarily Polish and Soviet citizens, were sent to serve sentences and often died.

From mid-1944, tens of thousands of Jews from ghettos in the Baltics and from Auschwitz filled the camp, along with thousands of Polish civilians swept up in the brutal Nazi suppression of the Warsaw uprising.

Others incarcerated there included political prisoners, accused criminals, people suspected of homosexual activity and Jehovah's Witnesses.

More than 60,000 people were killed there by being given lethal injections of gasoline or phenol directly to their hearts, or being shot or starved. Others were forced outside in winter without clothing until they

died of exposure, or were put to death in a gas chamber.

Frank Jordans and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: How conservatorships like Britney Spears' work

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears has successfully ousted her father from the conservatorship that controls her life and money, and she is likely to be freed to make her own decisions in November.

Here's a look at how conservatorships operate, what's unusual about hers, and why she and so many fans have worked to #FreeBritney.

HOW DO CONSERVATORSHIPS WORK?

When a person is considered to have a severely diminished mental capacity, a court can step in and grant someone the power to make financial decisions and major life choices for them.

California law says a conservatorship, called a guardianship in some states, is justified for a "person who is unable to provide properly for his or her personal needs for physical health, food, clothing, or shelter," or for someone who is "substantially unable to manage his or her own financial resources or resist fraud or undue influence."

The conservator, as the appointee put in charge is called, may be a family member, a close friend or a court-appointed professional.

HOW DOES SPEARS' WORK?

With a fortune of more than \$50 million comes secrecy, and the court closely guards the inner workings of Spears' conservatorship.

Some aspects have been revealed in documents. The conservatorship has the power to restrict her visitors. It arranges and oversees visits with her sons, ages 14 and 15; father Kevin Federline has full custody. It has the power to take out restraining orders in her name, which it has used more than once to keep away interlopers deemed shady. It has the power to make her medical decisions and her business deals. She said at a June hearing that she has been compelled to take drugs against her will, has been kept from having an intrauterine device for birth control removed and has been required to undertake performances when she didn't want to.

Spears said at the June hearing that she had been denied the right to get married, but she has since gotten engaged to longtime boyfriend Sam Asghari. The conservatorship will make a prenuptial agreement a necessity if she is still under it when she marries.

Legally, Spears can get married, but the conservatorship must approve it as with other major life decisions. Spears said Wednesday that she wants to get married and have another child, but has been denied the chance to do either.

Like all California conservatorships, it's subject to annual accountings and reviews from a court investigator.

WHO HAS POWER OVER SPEARS?

The ultimate power in the conservatorship falls to Judge Brenda Penny, who exercised it by suspending James Spears, and is likely to use it again to terminate the legal arrangement entirely in November, something she has been free to do at any time.

Before his suspension, her father had the lion's share of day-to-day power over his daughter's choices for 13 years. In 2019, he gave up the role of conservator over her life decisions, maintaining control only over her finances. He has now been replaced by John Zabel, an accountant chosen by Britney Spears and her attorney.

Jodi Montgomery, a court-appointed professional, has acted as conservator over her personal matters since 2019.

WHY ARE SO MANY CALLING TO #FREEBRITNEY?

Fans who dote on Britney Spears' social media posts and public statements, trying to decipher her every utterance, dance move or shared meme, have increasingly coalesced into a movement after becoming

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convinced she was being controlled unfairly. Key were two women who in 2017 turned their hobby of picking apart Spears' Instagram posts into a podcast, "Britney's 'Gram." It would help birth the hashtag #FreeBritney.

Hearings can bring dozens of protesters to the courthouse, carrying signs like "CONSERVATORSHIP IS SLAVERY" and "THIS IS TOXIC."

James Spears has called the group conspiracy theorists, and says those who shout #FreeBritney don't understand the totality of the situation.

Fans in the movement have increasingly felt vindicated by Britney Spears herself, especially after two dramatic speeches in court this summer in which the singer confirmed many of their statements and suspicions about her.

And they believe their voices were key in bringing attention to the conservatorship and helping to bring about its probably end.

WHY WAS IT IMPOSED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

In 2007 and 2008, shortly after she became a mother, she began to have very public mental struggles, with media outlets obsessed over each moment. Hordes of paparazzi aggressively followed her every time she left her house, and she no longer seemed able to handle it.

She attacked one cameraman's car with an umbrella. She shaved her head at a salon. She lost custody of her children. When she refused to turn over her boys after a visit, she was hospitalized and put on a psychiatric hold. The conservatorship was put in place within days.

WHY HAS IT GONE ON SO LONG?

A conservatorship can always be dissolved by the court, though it's rare that a person successfully asks to be released, which Spears is on the verge of doing.

They can last decades because the circumstances that lead to them, like traumatic brain injury, Alzheimer's, or dementia, are not things people just bounce back from. The mandatory secrecy of medical records has kept murky the reasons why Britney Spears has had to remain in hers for so many years, but it's clear that it involves psychiatric issues. A recent filing said that she wasn't capable of giving consent for medical treatment.

Spears' father and his attorneys justified the continued conservatorship by arguing that she was especially susceptible to people who seek to take advantage of her money and fame.

HOW DOES SPEARS FEEL ABOUT ALL OF THIS?

For years it was largely a mystery. But allowed to speak publicly in court in June, she called the conservatorship "abusive" and "stupid" and says it does her "way more harm than good."

But she was clear that more important even than ending the conservatorship was seeing her father removed from it.

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

Sarkozy convicted by French court in campaign financing case

By SYLVIE CORBET and NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was convicted Thursday and sentenced to a year of house arrest for illegal campaign financing of his unsuccessful 2012 reelection bid, will appeal the ruling, his lawyer said.

The court said Sarkozy would be allowed to serve the one-year sentence at home by wearing an electronic monitoring bracelet.

Sarkozy's lawyer, Thierry Herzog, noted that the sentence corresponds to the maximum his client faced. He said he had spoken with Sarkozy, who had asked him to appeal.

"The verdict won't be enforceable" pending appeal, he added.

Sarkozy, France's president from 2007 to 2012, had vigorously denied wrongdoing during the trial in May and June.

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Sarkozy wasn't present at the Paris court for the ruling. He is accused of having spent almost twice the maximum legal amount of 22.5 million euros (\$27.5 million) on the reelection bid that he lost to Socialist Francois Hollande.

The court stated that Sarkozy "knew" the legal limit was at stake and "voluntarily" failed to supervise additional expenses.

Thursday's verdict comes after Sarkozy, 66, was found guilty on March 1 of corruption and influence peddling in another case. He was given a year in prison, and two years suspended, in that case but is free pending appeal.

It is the first time in France's modern history that a former president has been convicted and sentenced to a prison term for actions during his term. Sarkozy's predecessor, Jacques Chirac, was found guilty in 2011 of misuse of public money during his time as Paris mayor and was given a two-year suspended prison sentence.

In the campaign financing case, prosecutors concluded that Sarkozy knew weeks before the 2012 election that his expenses — which are strictly limited under French law — were getting close to the legal maximum. They accused him of having ignored two notes from his accountants warning about the money issue.

The court on Thursday said despite being aware of the risk of exceeding the limit, he chose to organize many rallies, including giant ones. "These rallies have been approved by Nicolas Sarkozy and he took advantage of them," the court said.

During the trial, Sarkozy told the court the extra money didn't go into his campaign, but instead helped make other people richer. He denied any "fraudulent intent." He also insisted he didn't handle the day-to-day organization because he had a team to do that and therefore couldn't be blamed for the amount of spending.

In addition to the former president, 13 other people went on trial, including members of his conservative Republicans party, accountants and heads of the communication group in charge of organizing the rallies, Bygmalion.

They have all been found guilty, with sentences going from a suspended prison sentence to two years of house arrest with an electronic bracelet. Various charges include forgery, fraud and complicity in illegal campaign financing.

Some have acknowledged wrongdoing and detailed the system of false invoices that aimed to cover up the overspending.

Sarkozy retired from active politics in 2017, but is still playing a role behind the scenes. French media have reported that he is involved in the process of choosing a conservative candidate ahead of France's presidential election next year.

Singapore strategy of living with COVID raises concern, hope

By DAVID RISING and ANNABELLE LIANG Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — Living through the coronavirus pandemic in Singapore, Joys Tan followed the rules that helped the city-state keep its cases low: keeping her distance from others, wearing a mask and getting herself vaccinated.

Nobody in her family had contracted the virus, and it was with confidence that she had dinner at her godmother's house earlier this month, even with infections rising rapidly, fueled by the delta variant, as the government pushed ahead with a strategy of "living with COVID" as an endemic disease with a gradual relaxation of restrictions.

Two days later, Tan learned her godmother had tested positive for COVID-19, forcing her into precautionary quarantine herself. As she lived in a hotel room away from her husband and 2-year-old son for nearly a week, the 35-year-old graphic designer began to wonder, like many Singaporeans, if living with COVID-19 means living with permanent anxiety about possible infections.

"I am worried all the time, super worried all the time, because of not knowing what lasting effects COVID

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has on the body; and when you have a young kid, it's constantly on your mind," she said. "I'm trying to embrace the endemic mindset that the government is transitioning into, but it's very hard."

With a hard-line "circuit-breaker" lockdown early in the pandemic, the major business and trade hub of Singapore was able to keep the spread of new coronavirus cases to the single or low double-digits for nearly a year. Now as it's embarking on a high-profile test of reopening, they're skyrocketing, and hit a new record of 2,258 on Wednesday, laying bare the challenges faced.

But behind the headline figures, there is evidence the plan is working, with its focus more on the severity of infections and hospitalizations than the number of daily cases.

With about 82% of the population over age 12 fully vaccinated, according to the Health Ministry, hospitals have not become overwhelmed, with 98% of new cases either asymptomatic or with mild symptoms.

Only 0.2% of infected people have required ICU care and 0.1% have died — more than 65% of whom were either unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated.

And the overall figures, while high for Singapore, are still extremely low.

Singapore reported a total of 93 deaths from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic through Wednesday. Across the narrow Straits of Johor, neighbor Malaysia counted more than double that number on Wednesday alone.

Malaysia has reported 798 COVID-19 deaths per million residents since the start of the pandemic; Singapore fewer than 16.

After one of the most successful vaccination rollouts in the world, and the pandemic brought well under control with strict regulations and aggressive testing and tracking, Singapore began in August what it calls a "transition journey to a COVID-19 resilient nation."

In doing so, the wealthy Southeast Asian nation of 5.5 million people tacitly conceded that reducing cases to zero was not a possible long-term solution, and instead decided it could start a gradual return to everyday life, said Tikki Pang, a visiting professor of infectious diseases at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore and a former World Health Organization researcher.

"In the longer term, it is really going to become the norm," he said of the approach. "Because I think most governments of most countries will accept the fact that this virus is not going to go away, it's going to become endemic and we're just going to have to learn to live with it like the flu."

Officials calculated that Singapore's testing is comprehensive enough to detect new outbreak clusters rapidly, its vaccinations are comprehensive enough to prevent widespread hospitalizations, and its health care system robust enough to deal with any increase in patients.

What they hadn't reckoned with was the proliferation of the highly transmissible delta variant, and though they clamped down quickly on outbreaks in a group of karaoke lounges and a huge seafood market, it wasn't possible to stop, Pang said.

"They came down pretty hard, they delayed the spread of the delta variant a bit, but it was already out there," he said in a telephone interview from Geneva, where he splits his time with Singapore.

A month into the plan, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung sought to allay growing concerns among ordinary Singaporeans, saying the wave was expected and should be seen as a "rite of passage" for any country hoping to live with the disease.

"We are on a path of transition to a new normal of living with COVID-19," the minister said.

Leo Yee Sin, executive director of the National Center for Infectious Diseases and head of Singapore's pandemic response, told The Associated Press that the surge has reinforced evidence the delta variant can evade resistance to COVID-19 and that her office has determined it is important for at-risk individuals to get a booster dose.

And while vaccines have meant milder symptoms for most, even asymptomatic people carry the same amount of the virus in their respiratory tract and can easily spread it, she said.

"This is why safe management measures continue to remain important," she said. "And if one experiences even mild symptoms, they should seek medical attention and get tested immediately."

The Health Ministry has predicted daily cases could exceed 3,200 by the end of the week at the current rate of spread, and experts say they could hit more than double that before starting to come back down.

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The government last week tightened some lockdown measures in response, reducing the group sizes for social gatherings and for dining in restaurants. Officials said the number of people needing oxygen and ICU care were "within expectations" but that many patients with mild symptoms were also seeking help at hospitals, and the medical system was growing strained.

The prime minister's wife, Ho Ching, urged patience in a Facebook post this week, reminding people that the measures were nothing like last year's "circuit breaker" shutdown.

"With vaccination, COVID is no longer a dangerous infection," Ho wrote. "Those of us who are vaccinated can afford to be patient for a while more, and to have a heart for those who are still coming forward to be vaccinated."

From Tan's own experience trying to get medical advice on what to do after her godmother, who was vaccinated and is recovering at home, tested positive, she said it was obvious that the system was becoming taxed.

"It took so long for me to come into this quarantine facility, as much as the government is trying to be conscientious in its efforts," she said.

Still, she said, she was "very thankful" that Singapore has systems in place with someone to call to help with such arrangements, even if it did take time.

Singapore's experience could "serve as a cautionary note" for other governments as they attempt to achieve a balance between "lives versus livelihoods," said Ooi Peng Lim Steven, a senior consultant with the National Center for Infectious Diseases.

"Cautious reopening with phased periods of heightened alert has proven viable as governments attempt to reopen their economies and put an end to crippling lockdowns," the epidemiologist said.

"The key to COVID-19 control for any country is to successfully combine vaccinations, sustainable testing, and contact tracing with community hygiene measures and safe distancing into an effective system that works."

___ Rising reported from Bangkok.

UK families see hard times ahead as COVID programs end

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Diana Gaglio has been in the economic crosshairs of the pandemic for the past 18 months.

The 53-year-old from Bedfordshire, north of London, was furloughed from her job as entertainment manager for a holiday company when COVID-19 gutted the travel industry, then lost her job altogether just before Christmas. Now her temporary job at a virus testing center is coming to an end, just as the government scraps the emergency program that provided an income the last time she was out of work.

"The market is going to be flooded," Gaglio said. "If it wasn't hard already, it's going to be harder."

Gaglio is one of millions of people across the U.K. who are facing a long, bleak winter as the rising cost of living collides with the end of government programs that once shielded households from the economic fallout of COVID-19.

The biggest of those programs, which sought to preserve jobs by subsidizing the wages of workers whose hours were cut due to the pandemic, ends on Thursday. Some 1.6 million people were still supported by the so-called furlough program this month, down from a high of 8.9 million in May of last year.

Also, a temporary increase in welfare payments ends next week, cutting benefits by almost 1,100 pounds (\$1,480) a year; and protections for renters squeezed by the pandemic are being phased out. All of this comes as 15 million households face a 12% jump in energy bills, adding to consumer price inflation that reached the highest level in more than nine years last month.

Adding to the sense of gloom, drivers are facing long lines to fill their tanks after a truck driver shortage curtailed fuel deliveries. Newspapers warn of a scarcity of everything from toys to turkeys this Christmas unless the crisis is resolved soon.

"The country and the labor market is in for a really bumpy autumn," said Charlie McCurdy, an economist

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at the Resolution Foundation, a think-tank focused on improving living standards for those on low to middle incomes. "We can expect a living standard squeeze for families across the country."

With front page headlines screaming "Prepare for winter of discontent" and "Boris in battle to save Xmas," the bad news is fueling concerns about Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership and heaping pressure on him to do more to help struggling consumers.

Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition Labour Party, on Wednesday mocked Johnson's promise to "level up" incomes and economic opportunity.

"Level up?" Starmer said during a speech at the party's annual conference. "You can't even fill up."

The government has resisted calls to reverse course, saying the economy is rebounding from the pandemic and it is time to end emergency support programs.

Treasury chief Rishi Sunak said Thursday that other programs, including job training, recovery loans for businesses and a recent increase in housing benefits would remain in place. The government has spent 400 billion pounds to support the economy during the pandemic.

"With the recovery well underway, and more than 1 million job vacancies, now is the right time for the scheme to draw to a close," he said of the furlough program. "But that in no way means the end of our support."

The U.K. economy has recovered strongly since the depths of the pandemic, although gross domestic product remains about 2.1% smaller than it was in February 2020, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The recovery has pushed job vacancies to record levels as employers hire staff to meet increasing demand.

But while the future may look bright for truck drivers and hospitality workers, things are a lot less hopeful for other professions.

The surge in vacancies has been driven by openings for low-paid workers, with more than two-thirds of unemployed jobseekers facing increased competition for jobs, according to the London-based Institute for Fiscal Studies.

The situation is particularly bad for older workers. Data released Thursday by the IFS showed that just 35% of workers over 50 had found work six months after being laid off during the pandemic, compared with 64% of younger workers.

Stuart Lewis, founder of Rest Less, a digital community for people over 50, said his members are anxious about the darkening financial situation.

"We're seeing there's concerns around the pandemic and the health risks that are still lingering for some," he said. "There's additional concerns, as well, around affordability, around the financial impact as people run into Christmas. There's a perfect storm of challenges that many people are concerned about in the coming months."

Gaglio is one of them.

Before the pandemic she was a respected manager, booking cabaret performers, comedians and singers for an international holiday company and spending much of her year abroad. Now she's back in England, renting a room in someone else's house to keep costs down as she tries to get her career back on track.

But she fears that recruiters and employers don't look beyond her age to see the vivacious, curious and confident woman she remains.

"Other people see your face and your skin and it's older — they have a perception of you," she said. "Maybe they need to get to know me better."

Employers are also in a bind.

Take Tool Shop, a hardware chain that had 12 shops and 50 employees before high property taxes and the shift toward online shopping closed three stores in 2019.

The pandemic added to those pressures, forcing Tool Shop to close five more outlets and merge two others last year, leaving it with just three shops and 11 staff members. The company used to draw up a multi-year strategy targeting growth and expansion. Now the planning horizon is three months.

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Tool Shop is hoping customers will return as the pandemic eases and people return to their usual routines, said Sara Edmiston, the company's human resources director.

Tool Shop employee Martin Matio, 69, is betting people will recognize that personal service is valuable and seeing what you are buying is better than looking at a tiny picture on a website.

Matio quickly illustrates his understanding of the London household, together with instant recall on where items can be found in a shop packed to the rafters.

Got a moth problem? He's got just the thing. Mold? No problem.

Returns? No questions asked. Jokes? Part of the service.

"I believe physical contact is the most important thing; customers want to know what they are buying" he said, comparing retail transactions to courtship. "If I'm going to get married, I want to see the girl."

Associated Press Writer Khadija Kothia contributed.

Congress moves to avert partial government shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is moving to avert one crisis while putting off another with the Senate poised to approve legislation that would fund the federal government into early December.

The House is expected to approve the measure following the Senate vote Thursday, preventing a partial government shutdown when the new fiscal year begins Friday.

Democrats were forced to remove a suspension of the federal government's borrowing limit from the bill at the insistence of Republicans. If the debt limit isn't raised by Oct. 18, the country would likely face a financial crisis and economic recession, says Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Republicans say Democrats have the votes to raise the debt ceiling on their own, and Republican leader Mitch McConnell is insisting that they do so.

But the most immediate priority facing Congress is to keep the government running once the current fiscal year ends at midnight Thursday. The bill's expected approval will buy lawmakers more time to craft the spending bills that will fund federal agencies and the programs they administer.

Meanwhile, Democrats are struggling over how to get President Joe Biden's top domestic priorities over the finish line. Those include a bipartisan infrastructure bill that contains \$550 billion in new spending for roads, bridges, broadband and other priorities, as well as a \$3.5 trillion slate of social, health and environmental programs.

"With so many critical issues to address, the last thing the American people need right now is a government shutdown," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

Schumer said the stopgap spending legislation will also provide aid for those reeling from Hurricane Ida and other natural disasters as well as funding to support Afghanistan evacuees from the 20-year war between the U.S. and the Taliban.

Action in the final hours to avoid a partial government shutdown has become almost routine, with lawmakers usually able to fashion a compromise. The funding bill was slowed this time by disagreement over allowing the government to take on more debt so that it could continue to meet its financial obligations. Currently the borrowing cap is set at \$28.4 trillion.

The U.S. has never defaulted on its debts in the modern era, and historically both parties have voted to raise the limit. Democrats joined the Republican Senate majority in doing so three times during Donald Trump's presidency. This time Democrats wanted to take care of both priorities in one bill, but Senate Republicans blocked that effort Monday.

Raising or suspending the debt limit allows the federal government to pay obligations already incurred. It does not authorize new spending. McConnell has argued that Democrats should pass a debt limit extension with the same budgetary tools they are using to try to pass a \$3.5 trillion effort to expand social safety net programs and tackle climate change.

"There is no tradition of doing this on a bipartisan basis. Sometimes we have and sometimes we haven't,"

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McConnell told reporters about past debt ceiling increases.

House Democrats complained about the steps they were being forced to take as they approved a stand-alone bill late Wednesday that would suspend the debt ceiling until December 2022. That bill now heads to the Senate, where it is almost certain to be blocked by a Republican filibuster.

"You are more interested in punishing Democrats than preserving our credit and that is something I'm having a real tough time getting my head around," House Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern, D-Mass., told Republicans. "The idea of not paying bills just because we don't like (Biden's) policies is the wrong way to go."

But Republicans were undaunted. They argued that Democrats have chosen to ram through their political priorities on their own, and thus are responsible for raising the debt limit on their own.

"So long as the Democratic majority continues to insist on spending money hand over fist, Republicans will refuse to help them lift the debt ceiling," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

McGovern said Republicans ballooned the debt under Trump and now are washing their hands of the consequences.

"Republicans have now rediscovered the issue of the debt," McGovern said. "Where the hell were you the last four years?"

The Treasury has taken steps to preserve cash, but once it runs out, it will be forced to rely on incoming revenue to pay its obligations. That would likely mean delays in payments to Social Security recipients, veterans and government workers, including military personnel. The Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank, projects that the federal government would be unable to meet about 40% of payments due in the several weeks that follow.

Associated Press writer Brian Slodysko contributed to this report.

For migrants in Greece, road to new life is through Albania

By COSTAS KANTOURIS Associated Press

IEROPIGI, Greece (AP) — In the early 1990s, tens of thousands of impoverished Albanian migrants slogged through the oak woods near the village of Ieropigi, dodging Greek border patrols to seek work in Greece after the collapse of communism in Albania.

Thirty years later, the cross-border flow is reversed, though on a much smaller scale. Now it's people from the Middle East and Africa who flit through the same oak woods, moving from Greece to Albania this time, halfway through their long trek to Europe's heartland.

Since 2018, migrants and refugees who'd rather try their luck somewhere richer than Greece have made this relatively smooth bit of the rugged border the main way out of the country by land.

Shepherd Michalis Trasias, 69, who grazes his sheep on the Greek side of the border, told The Associated Press he sees groups heading into Albania every day.

"Very many refugees cross — in their hundreds," he said. "The frontier's just a hundred meters (yards) from here. Those that the Albanians catch they send back. Those who manage it continue, where to, they alone know."

Migrants or refugees who don't want to stay in Greece have several options, all illegal: To stow away on a ferry — or buy a berth on a smuggling boat — for Italy; use fake papers to catch a flight out; or walk through Bulgaria, North Macedonia or Albania.

And with Bulgaria being seen as too dangerous, and North Macedonia increasingly well guarded, large numbers are opting for Albania, even though its patrols are strengthened by officers from the European Union's Frontex border agency. Police data show Albania has seen a rise in arrests for illegal entry this year, while North Macedonia — outside which 10,000 people had camped five years ago waiting to sneak in — reports a decline.

Albanian interior ministry spokesman Ardian Biti said his country is "doing its utmost to fight the organized crime" groups that help traffic migrants, and has arrested "a considerable number" of smugglers this year.

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The main base for the crossings is an abandoned army guard house — filthy and decrepit — and the surrounding woods a few hundred meters from the border, a half-hour's walk from the closest Greek village of Ieropigi and 220 kilometers (140 miles) west of Greece's second-largest city, Thessaloniki. There's water from a pumping station, from which some also tap electricity to charge their phones.

About 50 people were camped in the area during a visit by the AP, waiting to make their crossing attempt alone or with the paid help of smugglers. The population can rise up to a few hundred, most of whom are periodically rounded up and removed by Greek police. Few stay long.

Among those who do is Shaikh Musa Abdallah from Sudan who's stayed in the decrepit former guard-house for 50 days, with his wife and five children, ages 5-15.

"I have tried six times so far to cross" into Albania, hoping to continue to Serbia, he told the AP. "But Frontex stopped me. For others it is very easy to cross, but for families it is very difficult."

Abdallah said he's lived in Greece for the past three years, and now proposes to abandon his efforts to move on.

Mohammad Nour Mahmood Al Damad from Syria has also been turned back, six times in the past seven days. But he's traveling without children and is determined to persist, after being refused asylum in Greece.

"I want to leave, to go to any other country," he said, baking potatoes under the trees with a fellow Syrian. "I don't want to go to Europe, just Albania or Kosovo. I want a good life."

Husam Hderi, 30, wants the same but proposes to seek it further abroad.

"I want to go to Albania, then to Kosovo and from there to Bosnia to reach Italy," the Palestinian from Syria said. "I have a family, two children in Syria. Once I get there I will bring them so that we can live together."

Hderi reached Greece a month ago, slipping across the land border from Turkey and then being driven by people smugglers to Thessaloniki. He said that so far he has paid smugglers 2,200 euros (\$2,570) to reach Ieropigi, and he is determined to continue north.

"Frontex is a big problem," he said. "For a month I've been constantly trying to enter (Albania) and they keep sending me back."

Llazar Semini in Tirana, Albania, and Konstantin Testorides in Skopje, North Macedonia, contributed to this story.

Follow Kantouris on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/CostasKantouris>

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

The Latest: Denmark seems to fall short of vaccination goal

By The Associated Press undefined

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Denmark seems to have failed to reach its target of 90% of people over the age of 12 having been vaccinated twice by Oct. 1 as the latest official figures show 84.9% have gotten both shots.

The latest official figures by Danish Health Authorities show that 4,366,235 people have gotten both shots.

Those who have gotten the first shot — 4,453,321 people — represent 86.6% of those over the age of 12.

The vaccine is voluntary and free of charge in Denmark, which on Sept. 10, declared that it no longer considers COVID-19 as "a socially critical disease" because of the large number of vaccinations. All restrictions have since been removed.

The Scandinavian country has a total population of 5.8 million.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

— Primetta Giacomini's life began in one pandemic and was ended by another

— As COVID-19 deaths rise, vaccine opponents find a foothold in Bosnia

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- Am I fully vaccinated without a COVID-19 vaccine booster?
- Singapore's strategy of living with COVID-19 raises concerns, hope
- Japan's next leader sees higher wages as cure for pandemic doldrums
- Australian state's sudden 50% jump in COVID-19 cases blamed on sport fans
- See all of AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

VUNG TAU, Vietnam — Vietnam will lift the lockdown in its largest city on Friday, ending nearly three months of restrictions on movement to curb a coronavirus surge.

People in Ho Chi Minh City will be able to leave their homes, but the government will still enforce social distancing and travel in and out of the city will be controlled.

The delta variant infected 770,000 people and killed over 19,000 in three months, with Ho Chi Minh City accounting for the majority of deaths.

Vietnam is speeding up vaccinations by prioritizing big cities and squeezing the shots into a shorter timeframe to get both doses into more people.

Almost half of Ho Chi Minh City's adults have received both shots, while Vietnam's overall vaccination rate is low.

SANTA FE, N.M. — County jails across New Mexico are contending with a high-risk environment for COVID-19 infection at the same time that many more beds are filling with inmates.

County governments' association attorney Grace Philips warned legislators on Wednesday that overall coronavirus vaccination rates among staff at county detention centers are lower than the statewide average — 61% versus about 71% for adults in general.

Inmates are far less likely to be vaccinated as they arrive in increasing numbers at county detention facilities.

The statewide county jail population has increased by more than a quarter since May 2020.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A second hospital in Alaska is beginning to ration health care as the state deals with a spike in coronavirus cases.

Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corp. in Bethel announced the move Wednesday as it reported it is operating at capacity.

Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage, which is the state's largest hospital, has already been rationing care.

Coronavirus infections in Alaska have risen 42% in the last week.

The president of the Bethel region hospital says it did everything possible to delay rationing but had to take the step.

Hospital CEO Dan Winkelman is urging "every resident of the Yukon-Kuskokwim region to get vaccinated, wear a mask in indoor public areas, and social distance." He warns that "this is our last stand against this virus."

MELBOURNE, Australia — Victoria state in Australia has reported 1,438 new coronavirus cases — almost 500 more than the previous high set a day just earlier.

Australia's second-most populous state on Thursday also reported five more deaths from COVID-19 in the latest 24-hour period. Victoria on Wednesday reported 950 new infections and a daily record of seven deaths.

Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg says the national government remains determined to end lockdowns in Australia despite the worsening situation in the Victoria's capital of Melbourne.

Frydenberg is a Melbourne resident and says the city has become despondent after spending 242 days in lockdown.

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The government has said its payments to workers who have lost hours due to lockdowns will end two weeks after 80% of the people in a state or territory are fully vaccinated.

The government says 49% of Victoria's target population is fully vaccinated

HONOLULU -- Over 160 Oahu business operators have been cited, warned or arrested in the weeks since Honolulu imposed new pandemic safety rules. The Honolulu Star-Advertiser reports that most of the cases involved warnings.

The Liquor Commission issued six notices of violation, included three for serving alcohol after 10 p.m., two for not checking vaccination status and one for failing to conduct contact tracing.

Police also issued citations or made arrests for people not wearing masks and not observing required physical distances.

Honolulu Police Department spokesperson Michelle Yu says city officials could not immediately break down the number of arrests vs. citations because they are compiled together in the same records-keeping category.

City spokesperson Tim Sakahara says the great majority of businesses are in compliance with the rules.

Woman who survived Spanish flu, world war succumbs to COVID

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

She lived a life of adventure that spanned two continents. She fell in love with a World War II fighter pilot, barely escaped Europe ahead of Benito Mussolini's fascists, ground steel for the U.S. war effort and advocated for her disabled daughter in a far less enlightened time. She was, her daughter said, someone who didn't make a habit of giving up.

And then this month, at age 105, Primetta Giacopini's life ended the way it began — in a pandemic.

"I think my mother would have been around quite a bit longer" if she hadn't contracted COVID," her 61-year-old daughter, Dorene Giacopini, said. "She was a fighter. She had a hard life and her attitude always was ... basically, all Americans who were not around for World War II were basically spoiled brats."

Primetta Giacopini's mother, Pasquina Fei, died in Connecticut of the Spanish flu in 1918 at age 25. That pandemic killed about 675,000 Americans — a death toll eclipsed this month by the 2020-21 coronavirus pandemic.

Primetta was 2 years old when her mother died. Her father, a laborer, didn't want to raise Primetta or her younger sister, Alice. He sent Alice back to Italy, their ancestral homeland, and handed Primetta to an Italian foster family that then relocated to Italy in 1929.

"The way Mom talked about it, he didn't want to raise those kids alone, and men didn't do that at that time," Dorene recalled. "It's ridiculous to me."

Primetta supported herself by working as a seamstress. Raven-haired with dark eyes and sharp features, she eventually fell in love with an Italian fighter pilot named Vittorio Andriani.

"I didn't see too much of him because he was always fighting someplace," Primetta told the Golden Gate Wing, a military aviation club in Oakland, California, in 2008.

Italy entered World War II in June 1940. The local police warned Primetta to leave because Mussolini wanted American citizens out of the country. Primetta refused. Several weeks later, the state police told her to get out, warning her that she could end up in a concentration camp.

In June 1941, Andriani was missing in action; Primetta learned later that he had crashed and died near Malta. While he was missing, she joined a group of strangers making their way out of Italy on a train to Portugal.

"In Spain, one can still see, after 2-3 years, the traces of the atrocities of the past," Primetta wrote in a letter to a friend in the midst of her flight. "At Port Bou, the Spanish border, not one house is left standing; everything got destroyed because the town is an important train transit point that brought supplies to the "Reds", the enemy . . . I've seen so much destruction that I've had enough. The day after tomorrow, I get on the ship, and I'm sure all will go well."

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In Lisbon she boarded a steamer bound for the United States. She returned to Torrington, bought a Chevrolet sedan for \$500 and landed a job at a General Motors plant in Bristol grinding steel to cover ball bearings for the war effort. She met her husband, Umberto "Bert" Giacopini, on the job. They stayed married until he died in 2002.

Primetta gave birth to Dorene in 1960 and received devastating news: The infant had been born with spina bifida, a birth defect in which the spinal cord doesn't fully develop. For the first 50 years of her life, Dorene needed crutches to walk. Worried that Dorene would slip during Connecticut's winters, the family moved to San Jose in 1975.

"My folks were born a long time ago," she said. "Their attitude about disability, and my mother's attitude about disability, was it was lucky I was smart and I should get a good job I really liked because I probably wouldn't be getting married or have children. They did not take parenting classes."

But Primatta was "pushy," Dorene said, and never stopped fighting for her.

She once convinced school officials to move accelerated classes from the third floor of Dorene's school to the first floor so Dorene could participate. During the springs in Connecticut, she demanded that city sweepers clear their street of salt and sand so Dorene wouldn't slip.

This year, during a visit on Sept. 9, Dorene noticed her mother was coughing. She knew her mother's caretaker had been feeling sick after her husband returned from a wedding in Idaho. All three had been vaccinated. But as she drove away, Dorene guessed that her mother had contracted COVID-19.

"I made sure we said 'I love you.'" She did the 'See you later, alligator.' I think we both said 'After a while, crocodile,'" Dorene said. "That was the last time I saw her."

Two days later, Primetta was in the emergency room. Her oxygen levels dropped steadily over the next six days until nurses had to put an oxygen mask on her.

She became confused and fought them so hard she had to be sedated, Dorene said. Chest X-rays told the story: pneumonia. Faced with a decision of whether to put Primetta on a ventilator — "They said nobody over 80 makes it off a ventilator," Dorene said — she decided to remove her mother's oxygen.

Primetta died two days later, on Sept. 16. She was 105 years old.

"She had such a strong heart that she remained alive for more than 24 hours after they removed the oxygen," Dorene said. "I'm full of maybes, what I should have done with the ventilator . . . (but) it broke through three vaccinated people."

She added: "I'm reminding myself that she was 105. We always talk about ... my grandmother and mother, the only thing that could kill them was a worldwide pandemic."

Follow Todd Richmond on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/trichmond1>

AP: Military units track guns using tech that could aid foes

By JAMES LAPORTA, JUSTIN PRITCHARD and KRISTIN M. HALL Associated Press

Determined to keep track of their guns, some U.S. military units have turned to a technology that could let enemies detect troops on the battlefield, The Associated Press has found.

The rollout on Army and Air Force bases continues even though the Department of Defense itself describes putting the technology in firearms as a "significant" security risk.

The Marines have rejected radio frequency identification technology in weapons for that very reason, and the Navy said this week that it was halting its own dalliance.

RFID, as the technology is known, is infused throughout daily civilian life. Thin RFID tags help drivers zip through toll booths, hospitals locate tools and supermarkets track their stock. Tags are in some identity documents, airline baggage tags and even amusement park wristbands.

When embedded in military guns, RFID tags can trim hours off time-intensive tasks, such as weapon counts and distribution. Outside the armory, however, the same silent, invisible signals that help automate inventory checks could become an unwanted tracking beacon.

The AP scrutinized how the U.S. armed services use technology to keep closer control of their firearms

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as part of an investigation into stolen and missing military guns — some of which have been used in street violence. The examination included new field tests that demonstrated some of the security issues RFID presents.

The field tests showed how tags inside weapons can be quickly copied, giving would-be thieves in gun rooms and armories a new advantage.

And, more crucially, that even low-tech enemies could identify U.S. troops at distances far greater than advertised by contractors who install the systems.

Which is why a spokesman for the Department of Defense said its policymakers oppose embedding tags in firearms except in limited, very specific cases, such as guns that are used only at a firing range — not in combat or to guard bases.

“It would pose a significant operations security risk in the field, allowing an adversary to easily identify DOD personnel operating locations and potentially even their identity,” Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Uriah Orland told AP.

Spokespeople at the headquarters of the Air Force and Army said they did not know how many units have converted their armories.

AP found five Air Force bases that have operated at least one RFID armory, and one more that plans a retrofit. Executives at military contracting companies said many more units have sought proposals.

A Florida-based Army Green Berets unit, the 7th Special Forces Group, confirmed it uses the technology in “a few” arms rooms. Special forces soldiers can take tagged weapons into the field, said Maj. Dan Lessard, a special forces spokesman. A separate pilot project at Fort Bragg, the sprawling Army base in North Carolina, was suspended due to COVID-19.

The Navy told AP one armory on a base up the coast from Los Angeles was using RFID for inventory. Then this week, after extended questioning, spokesman Lt. Lewis Aldridge abruptly said that the technology “didn’t meet operational requirements” and wouldn’t be used across the service.

Momentum for RFID built within the Air Force after a 2018 case in which a machine gun disappeared from the 91st Security Forces Group, which guards an installation that houses nuclear-tipped missiles. Authorities recovered the weapon, but the incident reverberated across the service.

With Air Force commanders looking to bolster armory security, defense contractors offered a familiar technology — one with a military pedigree.

The origins of RFID trace to World War II and the development of radar. In the U.S. military, use grew in the 1990s, after the first Gulf War showed a need to untangle vast supply chains of shipping containers.

The U.S. military is not alone in employing RFID for firearms management: Government armories in Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere have been outfitted.

Armory conversions cost thousands of dollars, and sometimes more. Convenience is a big selling point. Instead of hand-recording firearm serial numbers on paper or scanning barcodes one-by-one like a cashier, an armorer can read tags in a rack of firearms with the wave of a handheld reader — and without having to see each weapon. The tags tucked inside don’t even need batteries.

Contractors that retrofit armories say tags can be read only within a limited range, typically a few dozen feet or less. But in field testing for AP, two prominent cybersecurity experts showed that a tag inside a rifle can be read from significantly farther, using inexpensive components that fit inside a backpack.

While the hackers who devised the experiments observed U.S. government restrictions on transmitting signals, enemies who would not be so constrained could detect tags miles away, they said.

Some within the military share the tracking concern.

The Marine Corps has, according to a spokesman, decided across the service not to tag guns.

“The use of RFID tags on individual weapons systems increases the digital signature of Marines on a battlefield, increasing the security/force protection risks,” said Capt. Andrew Wood.

A top weapons expert from the Corps said he saw how tags can be read from afar during training exercises in the Southern California desert in December 2018.

“RFID tags on tanks, weapons, magazines, you can ping them and find the disposition of where units

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are," said Wesley Turner, who was a Marine chief warrant officer 5 when he spoke in a spring interview. "If I can ping it, I can find it and I can shoot you."

The Air Force and Army did not answer detailed questions about use of the technology in firearms. In written statements, spokespeople said unit commanders can add RFID systems as a further layer of accountability, but no service-wide requirement is planned.

Policy experts within the Office of the Secretary of Defense appeared unaware that the services have been tagging firearms with RFID.

Asked why service branches can field a technology that Pentagon planners consider so risky, Defense Department spokesman Orland first said that the services told the Pentagon they are not tagging guns due to security concerns.

Informed that AP found units which acknowledge using the technology, the Pentagon revised its statement and said it allows service branches to explore innovative solutions. The Defense Department "tries to balance pre-emptive prohibitions due to current security risks with flexibility to adopt new technologies when they mature and those risks decrease," Orland said.

HACKERS ON THE HUNT

The two hackers had locked onto their target: The rifle held by a man walking away from them under the scorching summer sun.

"Still reading, still reading, still reading," called out one, Kristin Paget, whose prowess has landed her jobs at tech titans including Apple and Tesla — as well as the nickname "Hacker Princess."

Here in California's San Joaquin Valley, in a sloping field surrounded by almond orchards, Paget and her hacking partner Marc Rogers were testing the limits of an RFID system they'd cobbled together for about \$500. To see how far they could detect a tag in the rifle, they were telling the man, firearms trainer Michael Palombo, to keep going.

By now more than half a football field away, the hackers had to shout or wave hands to communicate.

Because the hackers were following Federal Communications Commission regulations that limit the power of radio signals, their antenna lost the tag at 210 feet (64 meters).

That is nowhere near the farthest distance possible, according to Paget. She theorizes that a reader with enough of a power boost could detect an RFID tag on the outside of the International Space Station, 250 miles (402 kilometers) above.

What's more, Paget said, it doesn't take a Chinese or Russian cyber army to take advantage — a tinkerer with YouTube access could learn the needed skills.

"It's one of those situations that in the security world we say it keeps honest people honest, or it's secure unless there's an attack," said Paget.

Paget warned publicly about the vulnerabilities of RFID in 2010, during presentation at the annual DEF CON hacker convention. From a stage in Las Vegas, Paget broke down a test that read a tag 217 feet (66 meters) away.

Dale "Woody" Wooden, who at the time was part of naval special warfare, saw that presentation and warned fellow service members.

"If the disease is missing weapons and the cure is RFID tags, then you have a cure that is worse than the disease," said Wooden, who after 20 years in the Navy founded Weathered Security, which teaches digital protection to the military and law enforcement. "They're prioritizing convenience over service member lives."

In the California field tests, Paget and Rogers were prepared to demonstrate what they see as other vulnerabilities created by putting RFID in firearms. They thought about showing how a tag could trigger a roadside bomb, but settled on something more mundane: inventory checks.

One benefit of RFID is that it can reduce daily weapon count drudgery. Instead of cataloging dozens of guns one-by-one, an armorer at the end of an aisle can read all their tags at once.

Rogers demonstrated his doubts by showing how a thief could defeat the system.

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Aiming his RFID reader at a rifle inside a hard carry case, Rogers replicated the rifle's tag with the lid still closed. Palombo then removed the firearm and Rogers put the cloned tag inside. As a clone, that tag had all the same data as the rifle's tag — and indeed, with the case again closed, the RFID reader was fooled into thinking the original tag, and thus the rifle, was still inside.

It took Rogers less than two minutes.

"It's the ultimate false sense of security," said Rogers, who designed the hacks on the TV show "Mr. Robot" and is now vice president of cybersecurity at Okta. "It lists all the weapons and tells you that they're there, but you've never actually seen the weapon."

Executives at two companies that have installed RFID armories at Air Force bases agreed that a corrupt insider could trick the technology.

"RFID is not truly an anti-theft system," said Cody Remington, president of Enasys.

The executives also said they had never heard anything like the 210 feet (64 meters) that the hackers achieved.

Remington suggested there might be ways to mitigate the risk, but said he deferred to the Pentagon. "Our expertise certainly isn't on the battlefield," he said, "our expertise is inside the buildings and tracking where items are."

Another executive said he had been hearing the concern about troop tracking for years. Eric Collins, the CEO of Trackable Solutions, said it wasn't a real life problem because a reader would need a stronger power source, and even then couldn't exceed several dozen feet.

Collins said RFID in weapons poses "absolutely no risk at all," especially if the guns stay on base.

He said he didn't believe a tag could be detected from more than 100 feet (30 meters), making the Pentagon's security concerns invalid. "The leadership needs their staff to give them better guidance," Collins said, "because that's not good guidance."

THE LURE OF RFID

RFID is a relatively expensive solutions for armory management, but the payoff is enticing.

Consider normal inventories. Between physical inspections and voluminous paperwork, counting all the guns on just one base can stretch to days or even weeks. Meanwhile, time seems to stop when a weapon is lost or stolen, as the installation shuts down and search parties launch to find it.

RFID offers a simpler, more efficient system. Which is why two airmen went to an Air Force 2020 Innovation Rodeo — an ideas competition patterned after the TV show "Shark Tank" — to pitch a project to a panel of senior officers.

The airmen offered another scenario, one service members dread and that RFID promises to eliminate: A thousand troops suddenly need to deploy overseas, fast. To get the weapons they will carry, each must wait in a line that snakes around the building and barely seems to move.

"We need to get on board with the 21st century," Staff Sgt. Nicholas Mullins said from the stage.

Though the proposal didn't win that competition, with the support of another federal program it found a home at an armory for security forces that patrol Eglin Air Force Base in Florida's Panhandle.

Open with "full operational capability," the RFID armory is a success as promised, according to spokeswoman Jasmine Porterfield. The new system cuts inventory time in half, limiting the need for two armorers and creating more schedule flexibility and training opportunities.

The maximum distance tags can be read, according to experts on the base: about 8 feet (2 meters).

LaPorta reported from Hickman, California, Pritchard reported from Los Angeles, and Hall reported from Nashville, Tennessee. Also contributing were Serginho Roosblad in San Francisco and Martha Mendoza in Santa Cruz, California.

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Beset by inflation, Iranians struggle with high food prices

By MOHAMMAD NASIRI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Mehdi Dolatyari watched with dread in recent months as once-affordable goods at his central Tehran supermarket soared out of reach for his customers. Iranians who previously bought sacks of staple foods at the store now struggle to scrape together enough for meals, as the country's currency sinks to new lows against the dollar.

"Rice is awfully expensive," Dolatyari said, describing how its price has nearly doubled.

With U.S. sanctions still strangling the economy, record-breaking inflation has hit ordinary Iranians where it hurts most. Stunned shoppers are cutting meat and dairy from their diets, buying less and less each month.

The Iranian rial is now about 270,000 to the dollar — compared with 32,000 rials for \$1 at the time of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. That has decimated people's salaries and savings.

Inflation has soared to 45%, the highest level since 1994, while food prices have skyrocketed by nearly 60%.

The causes are multiple and overlapping. Among them: a sinking economy devastated by years of sanctions linked to Iran's nuclear program; supply chain disruptions from the coronavirus pandemic; and a steady decline in local production.

Gross domestic product plunged by almost 60% from 2017 to 2020, the Chamber of Commerce reported last week, with its head Gholamhossein Shafeie describing the drop as a "serious warning for the future of Iran's economy."

Families now find their money increasingly worthless and must forgo foods once considered staples.

Compared with a year ago, the price of milk, yogurt and eggs has swelled by nearly 80%. The cost of vegetables and meat has risen by some 70%, and the cheapest basics like bread and rice by more than 50%, according to the government statistics agency.

"We see prices get more and more expensive every day," said Ozra Edalat, 63, an exasperated shopper. "It's terrible. How is it possible to get by with such low salaries?"

Many Iranians say they're shopping less than ever before.

"Now I can only buy groceries once a month," said Ghane Khiabani, a mother of three in Tehran. "We have to be pinching pennies."

Severe sanctions were reimposed by the U.S. in 2018 when then-President Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the landmark nuclear accord, and hope that world powers will find a path back to the deal remains elusive. Negotiations in Vienna over the agreement's resurrection paused in June just before hard-line Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi took office, with no date set for their resumption.

Iran's weak economy suffered from mismanagement for decades, experts say, but sanctions, particularly on the crucial energy sector that block the government from selling crude oil abroad, have hastened the decline.

"The main cause of the current high inflation is internal, bureaucratic and executive inefficiencies," said economist Morteza Afghahi. "However, since we are dependent on selling crude oil ... and on foreign currencies earned through oil revenues, we have become more vulnerable under sanctions."

The shortage of dollars has prompted the government to print more and more rials to pay what it owes, stimulating the economy but stoking inflation.

As a result, many Iranians have been pushed into poverty. In the past year, the number of citizens living under the official poverty line — bringing home less than the equivalent of \$46 a month — increased by nearly 40%, the government's own figures show.

Another casualty of inflation may be the Iranian grocery store itself.

The explosion of major chains and online shopping, along with increasingly rising rents, slim profit mar-

gins and dwindling customers, have left small- and medium-sized shops struggling to survive, unable to compete with the discounts on bulk buying found in big franchises.

"It's not economical to run the shop anymore," said Ali Donyaie, 71, who opened his grocery store in Tehran more than four decades ago.

At stake is not only the price of goods, but the fate of thousands of cashiers, fruit sellers and meat cutters. The layoffs will ripple across the economy, warned Saeed Derakhshani, head of Iran's supermarkets union, dealing yet another blow to those who already can only afford a few essentials.

"A retailer won't be able to survive," Derakhshani said. "What happens to their business, their families and those who labor for them?"

Associated Press journalist Mohsen Ganji contributed.

Follow Mohammad Nasiri on Twitter at www.twitter.com/moenasiri.

In crisis-struck Lebanon, school year is gripped by chaos

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — This fall, the academic year in Lebanon is gripped by the same chaos that has overwhelmed everything else in the country in its financial and economic meltdown.

Thousands of teachers are on strike, demanding salary adjustments to cope with hyperinflation and the currency's free-fall. A month's pay is now barely enough to fill a vehicle's gas tank twice.

With severe fuel shortages, it is not even certain they can fill up. School buses are no longer a given, and heating for classes in the cold winter months is far from guaranteed.

The start of school has been postponed several times as the cash-strapped government negotiates with the teachers' union for an adjustment package estimated at about \$500 million.

As a result, while some private schools have begun classes, most of Lebanon's 1.2 million students still don't know when they will go back to school. Meanwhile, teachers have been quitting in droves, looking for better opportunities abroad.

Many fear not just a missed academic year, but a lost generation in a country that prided itself in competing globally with the number of scientists and engineers it graduated.

Schools have already been disrupted the past two years by a series of events — protests starting in late 2019 that interrupted the academic year, the switch to largely online classes in 2020 because of the pandemic, and rising poverty. Some 400,000 children were not in school in 2020, according to UNICEF.

Struggling parents have moved their children from private schools, usually touted as first-class education, to public schools. More than 50,000 students transferred last year, and the number is likely much higher this year, said Alaa Hmaid, of Save the Children.

This pressures the under-resourced public sector, likely at the expense of enrollment of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, who rely on Lebanon's public system.

"We don't want to create a potential gap in the future where a full generation would be without education," Hmaid said, calling for more resources for education.

According to U.N. figures, 55% of Lebanon's population now lives in poverty, compared to 28% in 2018, effectively wiping out the once large middle class. Salaries plummeted as the currency lost 90% of its value against the dollar.

No fewer than 15% of Lebanon's 53,000 private school teachers have left the country, creating a large shortage, said Rodolph Abboud, the head of the Teachers Union.

Adding to the woes, last year's Beirut port explosion, which devastated the capital, damaged more than 180 educational facilities.

Amid the hardships, parents are resolutely searching for ways to keep their children in schools.

Lara Nassar, 38, has been managing her family's slow descent into poverty.

She was once an Arabic kindergarten teacher, her husband ran a thriving food business, and their three

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children went to private school. But the past three years, to cut costs, she was forced to move her two boys, now 18 and 15, out of a top-end private school, first to a cheaper school, then to a public school.

It was a tough decision, but she wanted to ensure she could afford to keep her youngest, now in 5th grade, in private school until the end of her primary education.

"I am keeping her in the picture. She knows that in two years, I will have to move her to a public school. We can't continue like that," Nassar said.

Nassar was laid off last year because of the reduction in face-to-face classes during the pandemic. Because of the financial crisis, her husband had to lay off his staff and scale back his business dramatically. Instead of preparing home-cooked meals, he runs a small, basic grocery with no fuel and unreliable refrigeration.

Nassar is now his only employee. Amid the teachers strikes, Nassar's kindergarten offered her her job back. But she declined so she could help her husband.

"We are living drip by drip," she said.

She was able to secure financial assistance from her daughter's school -- a 50% reduction in the fees. A week before classes start, she is still searching for second-hand books at local charities.

She broke down in tears talking about her sons' love of basketball. They used to save their allowance to buy new shoes every year. Now she can barely get them shoes for school — their cost is worth nearly a month's salary at the national minimum wage.

"See what kind of things we have to worry about?" she said.

Naima Sadaka said she watched the economic crisis unfold on the Facebook page she set up three years ago to help figure out which schools to enroll her kids in, after she returned from Saudi Arabia with her family.

Over the last few months, membership in the "Schools in Lebanon" page grew by 50% to 12,000. The queries and comments changed from parents seeking recommendations for private schools to posts advertising second-hand books or arranging car-pools amid shortages of school buses.

Many reached out to Sadaka in private messages asking for second-hand school uniforms, too embarrassed to post on the page, Sadaka said.

A parent should be worried about their kids' development and skill set, but "here, we worry about just getting them to school," said Sadaka, who lives in the southern city of Sidon.

There is almost no public transportation, school bus fees have tripled and government officials are no help; so Sadaka had to figure out rides to school for her three kids on her own.

For her 9- and 10-year-olds, she arranged rides with a neighbor who works near the school they attend, which is funded by an Islamic charity. For her daughter, a first grader in a public school, Sadaka accepted a job there teaching French, which basically pays for gas. Her husband drops her and their daughter off there every morning.

Once a teacher in Saudi Arabia, Sadaka said she regrets coming back. "It is as if I went back 15 years," accepting a meager salary, she said.

After Lebanon's banks and hospitals, once a source of national pride and cash, were crippled by the economic crisis, she said, "if they don't save the education sector, then we will have nothing."

Maya, a mother of two, took no chances. She decided to leave in August after fuel shortages become so severe and no date for a return to school was set.

She and her husband left to Cyprus, where she enrolled her 6- and 8-six-year-old kids in an English language school. The island's only French school has been overwhelmed by recently arriving Lebanese students. Speaking by phone from Cyprus, she asked that her last name not be used to maintain her privacy as she adjusts in the new community,

At her kids' private school in Lebanon, at least 50 teachers and half of the students in her daughter's class have left, she said.

"Who will teach our kids? What friends will they have left? This is what I worried about. It is not the same standard anymore."

Takeaways from Trump aide's account of chaotic White House

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By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ferocious tantrums. Family gossip. Petty nicknames.

Stephanie Grisham, once a White House press secretary and chief of staff to first lady Melania Trump, is out with a book next week that paints a deeply unflattering picture of Donald Trump — a man with a “terrifying” temper who ogled a young aide and tried to impress dictators while president, she writes.

Grisham, who holds the distinction of having never held a press briefing while serving as White House press secretary, charts her path from low-level press wrangler to the Trumps’ inner circles, and her gradual disillusionment with the family and eventual resignation following the Jan. 6 insurrection.

As have the many books critical of Trump, Grisham’s “I’ll Take Your Questions Now: What I Saw at the Trump White House” has drawn Trump’s ire. He bashed the book and its author in deeply personal terms, saying in a statement that Grisham was “paid by a radical left-leaning publisher to say bad and untrue things.”

Highlights of the book include:

ON MELANIA TRUMP

Grisham describes the former first lady as a Marie Antoinette figure who refused to condemn the violence at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 as Trump’s supporters stormed the building to try to halt certification of the 2020 election results.

Grisham writes that she texted Melania Trump as the scene unfolded. “Do you want to tweet that peaceful protests are the right of every American, but there is no place for lawlessness and violence?” she says she asked. She writes that “literally one minute later and while she was preparing a photo shoot of a new rug she had selected — yes, you read that right — Melania Trump sent me back a one-word response: ‘No.’”

It was a breaking point for Grisham, who both praises the former first lady’s off-camera temperament and offers insight into her peculiarities. She writes that Melania Trump’s habit of avoiding public appearances was so “extreme” that the “Secret Service unofficially dubbed her ‘Rapunzel’ because she remained in her tower, never descending.”

She also writes that Melania Trump responded to the saga of adult film star Stormy Daniels and allegations of her husband’s infidelity by tweeting a photo of herself on the arm of a handsome military aide and insisting at one point that she travel alone.

“I do not want to be like Hillary Clinton,” Melania Trump reportedly told Grisham. “She walked to Marine One holding the hands with her husband after Monica news and it did not look good.”

ON TRUMP

“His temper was terrifying. And it could be directed at anyone, whether he or she deserved it or not,” Grisham writes. “He questioned people’s confidence, their looks, their intelligence — whatever he thought would do the most damage to someone’s psych.”

Trump had particular contempt, she says, for the White House lawyers. “He didn’t like them telling him that things he wanted to do were unethical or illegal.”

Staff, she recounts, often deceived Trump to avoid his wrath, and tried to temper his worst impulses by stalling or distracting in a White House “where everything was like a clown car on fire running at full speed into a warehouse full of fireworks.”

#METOO

Grisham writes that, while serving as press secretary, she noticed Trump “taking an unusual interest in a young, highly attractive press wrangler” on her team, asking where the woman was, whether she would be traveling with him on foreign trips, and asking Grisham to bring the aide to his office cabin on Air Force One.

“Put her on TV. Keep her happy, promote her,” she claims Trump would tell her. “Let’s bring her up here and look at her ass,” she says she was told he had once said.

Grisham also recalls uncomfortable encounters she had with the president, including him noting one day that she didn’t wear pantyhose. On one occasion, she writes, he asked her then-boyfriend whether she was “good in bed.”

“On still another occasion, he asked me to reach out to a prominent supporter in Arizona. He wanted

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me to advise her to no longer wear sleeveless dresses and tops, saying they weren't flattering to her and it wasn't 'a good look.'"

"You talk to her though," he allegedly told her. "I can't with MeToo and all."

AN AWKWARD CALL

Trump allegedly felt compelled to respond to Daniels' charges about the size of his genitalia. Grisham says she received an awkward telephone call from the president from aboard Air Force One, who assured her that "everything down there is fine."

"Uh, yes, sir," she says she replied. "Not in two million years had I ever thought I'd have a conversation with the president of the United States about his penis. Thankfully the call ended shortly after that."

DICTATORS

"He always seemed to want dictators to respect him," Grisham writes, pointing in particular to Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom staff suspected of arranging for an attractive interpreter and coughing to throw Trump off-guard.

She described one encounter at the meeting of the Group of 20 nations in Osaka in 2019 when Trump seemed intent on placating the Russian leader. "Okay, I'm going to act a little tougher with you for a few minutes. But it's for the cameras, and after they leave we'll talk. You understand," she recounts Trump saying.

Grisham also writes that Trump "frequently said insane things to foreign leaders" that ranged from absurd to disconcerting.

"Trump loved to order cabinet secretaries, staff, or whoever else was sitting near him to give this dictator or that whatever it was he wanted," she writes. "I believe he must have thought it made him look tough and powerful. As for us? We generally slow walked or ignored the president and very rarely did exactly what he asked."

JEALOUSY

The book describes deep jealousy among staff and within the Trump family. Melania Trump had a nickname for Ivanka Trump, the president's eldest daughter and senior White House adviser: "The Princess," she claims.

"Princess always runs to her father," Grisham recounted the first lady as often complaining.

Grisham recalls how she and her husband, Jared Kushner, had jockeyed to be part of an official greeting ahead of a state dinner in the United Kingdom hosted by Queen Elizabeth II.

"Jared and Ivanka thought they were the royal family of the United States — on the same level as William and Kate in the United Kingdom," she writes. She also blames Kushner for Trump's loss last November.

ON HER ROLE

One reason, Grisham writes, that she didn't want to hold formal press briefings was that she knew that "sooner or later the president would want me to tell the public something that was not true or that would make me sound like a lunatic."

Indeed, at one point, she says, Trump asked her to reenact his "perfect phone call" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, which led to his first impeachment, and "use two voices" on the briefing room "stage." She writes that Trump also asked her constantly whether the press could be removed from the White House.

THE HAIR

Trump's hair, she writes, "is much longer than I had imagined, like multiple inches from end to end. He cuts it himself with a pair of huge scissors that could probably cut a ribbon at an opening of one of his properties."

And as for his distinctive hue? She says there was no tanning bed in the White House. "The president's look was created with makeup that he put on his face every morning, as if he were going to be appearing on a TV show. Which, in a sense, he was."

Why climate change is making it harder to chase fall foliage

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By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Droughts that cause leaves to turn brown and wither before they can reach peak color. Heat waves prompting leaves to fall before autumn even arrives. Extreme weather events like hurricanes that strip trees of their leaves altogether.

For a cheery autumnal activity, leaf peeping is facing some serious threats from the era of climate change.

Leaf peeping, the practice of traveling to watch nature display its fall colors, is a beloved annual activity in many corners of the country, especially New England and New York. But recent seasons have been disrupted by weather conditions there and elsewhere, and the trend is likely to continue as the planet warms, said arborists, conservationists and ecologists.

Typically, by the end of September, leaves cascade into warmer hues throughout the U.S. This year, many areas have yet to even pivot from their summer green shades. In northern Maine, where peak conditions typically arrive in late September, forest rangers had reported less than 70% color change and moderate leaf drop on Wednesday.

Across the country in Denver, high temperatures have left “dead, dry edges of leaves” early in the season, said Michael Sundberg, a certified arborist in the area.

“Instead of trees doing this gradual change, they get thrown these wacky weather events. They change all of a sudden, or they drop leaves early,” Sundberg said. “It’s been a few years since we’ve had a really good leaf year where you just drive around town and see really good color.”

The reason climate change can be bad for fall foliage has a bit to do with plant biology. When fall arrives, and day length and temperature drop, the chlorophyll in a leaf breaks down, and that causes it to lose its green color. The green gives way to the yellows, reds and oranges that make for dramatic autumn displays.

Achieving those peak colors is a delicate balance, and one jeopardized by changes in the environment, said Paul Schaberg, a research plant physiologist with the U.S. Forest Service based in Burlington, Vermont. Warm fall temperatures can cause leaves to remain green longer and delay the onset of what leaf peepers look for in terms of fall color, he said.

Worse, dry summers can stress trees and cause their leaves to miss the fall color turn altogether, Schaberg said. A 2003 study in the journal *Tree Physiology* that Schaberg cowrote stated that “environmental stress can accelerate” leaf deterioration.

“If climate change is going to mean significant drought, that means trees are going to shut down, and many trees are just going to drop their leaves,” he said. “Severe droughts that really mean that the tree just can’t function — that doesn’t improve color.”

It’s happening already. This summer’s heatwave in the Pacific Northwest brought temperatures of over 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 Celsius) to Oregon, and that led to a condition called “foliage scorch,” in which leaves prematurely browned, said Chris Still, a professor at the Forest Ecosystems & Society department at Oregon State University.

The leaves’ pigment was degraded and they fell shortly thereafter, Still said. That will lead to a less scenic fall season in parts of Oregon.

“That’s a really big example of color change just due to heatwave shock,” Still said.

Climate change also poses longer-term threats that could disrupt leaf peeping. The spread of diseases and invasive pests and the northward creep of tree species are all factors tied to warming temperatures that could make for less vibrant fall colors, said Andrew Richardson, a professor of ecosystem science at Northern Arizona University.

The onset of fall colors, which has been drifting later into the fall, could also continue to arrive later, said Jim Salge, foliage expert for *Yankee* magazine.

“My observations in the last decade have had more years that were later than what we would consider historical averages,” he said.

The economic impact of poor leaf peeping seasons could also be consequential. Officials throughout New England have said fall tourism brings billions of dollars into those states every year.

Conservationists say that’s a good reason to focus on preserving forests and reducing burning fossil fuels.

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Recent fall seasons have been less spectacular than typical in Massachusetts, but leaf peeping can stay a part of the state's heritage if forests are given the protections they need, said Andy Finton, landscape conservation director and forest ecologist for The Nature Conservancy.

"If we can keep the big, important forests intact, they will provide what we've depended on — clean air, clean water, clean forests, as well as fall inspiration," Finton said.

Democrats divided: Progressives, centrists say trust is gone

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In their fight over trillions of dollars, their paramount policy goals and perhaps their political fate, this isn't helping: Democratic progressives and centrists say they don't trust each other. They're tossing around words like "stupid" and "insanity" and they're drawing lines in the sand.

Congressional majorities of both parties have rich histories of infighting when it comes to enacting their priorities, even when they control the White House and both chambers of Congress. Democrats had to overcome stark internal divisions in 2010 to enact President Barack Obama's health care law. The GOP fell short in 2017 when it failed to repeal that statute, President Donald Trump's top goal.

This time, Democrats' internal battling over a 10-year, \$3.5 trillion package of social and environmental initiatives comes with virtually no margin for error and lots at stake.

They'll need every Democratic vote in the 50-50 Senate and all but three in the House to succeed. Facing that arithmetic, public declarations of distrust for each other do little to promote the healing they'll need to avoid sending the legislative essence of Joe Biden's presidency down in flames, with potential long-term consequences.

"It's not healthy for the Democrats to be issuing ultimatums about tactics" against each other, said Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt. "It's politically, existentially important to us to be successful. We fail, we're doomed."

Those ultimatums were coming to a head Thursday, the day House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has said her chamber would vote on another measure pivotal to Biden's domestic vision — a \$1 trillion package of highway, high-speed internet and other infrastructure improvements. She's suggested, though, that the showdown vote might be delayed.

While Democrats overwhelmingly want both bills to pass and much of what is said should be considered posturing, the push is at a delicate moment.

In return for moderates' support for an earlier budget measure, Pelosi began debate this week on the infrastructure bill, which tops their wish list.

But progressives dominating the House are promising to derail it by voting no because they lack confidence that the centrists will back the separate \$3.5 trillion legislation, which progressives treasure.

Centrists consider the larger bill too expensive and oppose some of its spending increases and tax boosts on the wealthy and corporations to help pay for it. Reflecting the need for a deal between the two factions, that bill's ultimate size is certain to shrink.

Progressives want Democratic leaders to stand by earlier statements that both bills would move through Congress together. That was to be a kind of mutually assured destruction moment, letting each of the party's wings hold the other's priority hostage until both could pass.

Right now, there's no compromise version of the larger bill in sight, so that won't work. With two centrist Democratic senators — West Virginia's Joe Manchin and Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema — the major obstacles to such a deal, the sniping is pitting House and Senate Democrats against each other as well.

"We are not blindly trusting that these bills are going to get done in the Senate, without actually having that be guaranteed," said Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., a leader of House progressives. The guarantee she and other progressives want is a Senate-passed, compromise \$3.5 trillion measure that progressives support and can pass the House.

"My father told me when I was growing up, there's a fine line between being a good guy" and a "fool," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass. "I don't want to be rolled." He said House progressives want "an assurance" that the Senate will send a compromise bill to the House.

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Yet instead of waiting for that accord to be struck, House leaders were honoring "some stupid, arbitrary deadline" that moderates demanded to debate and vote on the infrastructure bill this week, complained Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., who heads the nearly 100-member Congressional Progressive Caucus.

As for moderates, Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., told reporters Wednesday that she wanted Biden, party leaders and outside allies like labor unions to lobby House Democrats to back the infrastructure measure.

"If the vote were to fail tomorrow or be delayed, there would be a significant breach in trust that would slow the momentum in moving forward in delivering the Biden agenda," said Murphy, leader of the centrist House Blue Dog Coalition.

Later Wednesday, Manchin, perhaps the centrist whom party progressives most resent, piqued them further with his latest salvo against the \$3.5 trillion package. Spending that much at a time of inflation and a ballooning national debt is "the definition of fiscal insanity," Manchin said.

"I assume he's saying that the president is insane, because this is the president's agenda," Jayapal said.

None of this is a surprise to John Lawrence. He was Pelosi's chief of staff when Obama's health care overhaul moved through Congress.

That measure was enacted over solid Republican opposition, when Democrats had much larger majorities than today. But first, Democrats in the House and Senate spent months fighting over issues like whether to include government-run "public option" health coverage, which ended up being dropped.

Distrust between the two chambers ran "very, very deep," Lawrence recalled in an interview. To address that, then Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., privately gave House Democrats a letter signed by Democratic senators promising to support provisions in a House-passed bill that embodied parts of the overhaul.

As was true a decade ago, letting Democrats' internal disputes sink Biden's agenda risks damage in next year's congressional elections by alienating voters, Lawrence said.

"It either shows Democrats can be trusted to govern" or not, he said of how the party will handle the current fight.

"It's like the gunfight at the OK Corral," Lawrence said. "Everybody has their guns pointed at each other. You either pull the trigger or go back into the saloon and try to work this thing out."

Agonizing choices as Dems debate shrinking health care pie

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are debating how to divide up what could be a smaller serving of health care spending in President Joe Biden's domestic policy bill, pitting the needs of older adults who can't afford their dentures against the plight of uninsured low-income people in the South.

"There's always a battle of where you place your priorities," Rep. Jim Clyburn, the No. 3 House Democratic leader, said Wednesday. "We don't means-test Medicare, which means that pretty wealthy people will be getting both dental care (and) vision care while poor people will be denied. ... I don't know that that's a real good choice."

Clyburn explained that more than 100,000 of his fellow South Carolinians remain uninsured because Republicans in charge of state government have refused to expand Medicaid to low-income working adults under the Affordable Care Act.

Health care is foundational to Biden's \$3.5 trillion domestic policy bill, which touches everything from taxes to climate change, child care to community college.

When budget screws get applied, entire proposals can disappear from legislative wish lists, or they can get authorized for a shortened time period, a fiscal tactic akin to wading in the water as opposed to swimming.

For now, nothing has been dropped from Democrats' health care agenda, which includes new dental, vision and hearing coverage under Medicare, richer subsidies that reduce premiums for "Obamacare" plans, a federal work-around to expand Medicaid in a dozen states still refusing, improved post-partum Medicaid coverage for low-income women, and a permanent extension of the popular Children's Health Insurance Program.

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The health care upgrades amount to a major renovation of federal programs covering more than 145 million Americans and part of the Democratic political legacy.

"The health care elements are the tip of the spear, the most important, the most popular, and the most politically salient, and we simply have to get that done," said Brad Woodhouse, executive director of Protect Our Care. The advocacy group, which is urging Democrats to go big, sponsored a teleconference with lawmakers Wednesday.

The plan has been to pay for health care improvements with savings reaped by authorizing Medicare to negotiate prices for the costliest prescription drugs. But there's a dilemma. Just as with the overall price tag for the legislation, Democrats have disagreements over Medicare negotiations. A Senate bill still in the works may not go as far as the measure pending in the House.

And there's another element to factor in: Biden is pushing for a major expansion of home-based long-term care services under Medicaid, an alternative to institutional placement in nursing homes.

Tensions are simmering between Senate Budget Chairman Bernie Sanders and some House Democrats. The Vermont independent is pushing hard to keep expanded Medicare benefits for dental, vision and hearing care at the front of the line, but Democratic veterans in the House who labored to pass and preserve the Obama-era health law see improving it as unfinished business that is their calling to complete.

Under the umbrella of the Obama law, closing the so-called Medicaid coverage gap has become a rallying cry for Black and Latino lawmakers, as well as for advocates for the poor. Some 2 million people in states refusing the health law's Medicaid expansion make too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to be eligible for HealthCare.gov plans. Three out of 5 are Black or Hispanic. Texas and Florida, states Democrats would like to flip, could see the biggest gains in coverage if the federal government steps in.

The intraparty political dynamics differ from the House to the Senate. While many House Democrats represent districts that would benefit from closing the Medicaid coverage gap, only three Democratic senators come from states that have not already expanded their programs. They are Sens. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin and Georgians Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff. They represent a sliver of the Democratic caucus in the Senate, but also the edge that gives Democrats control of the evenly divided chamber. Warnock, who faces reelection next year, has made closing the Medicaid gap his signature issue.

Advocates are worried that lawmakers will pare back the Medicaid fix to save money and apply it only for a brief period of several years, leaving it to a future Congress to make the change permanent.

"If the policy isn't permanent, it's important that it extend long enough to get the federal Medicaid program up and running," said Judy Solomon of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonprofit that advocates on behalf of low-income people. Medicaid is one of the most complex government programs and splicing in a new federal component for a limited number of states could be a time-consuming process.

For now, Democrats are hoping they don't have to slice and dice their health care ambitions to fit new budget constraints.

"Obviously negotiations are ongoing," said Rep. Lauren Underwood, D-Ill. "I'm sure that these critical health care topics have come up in discussion. I think that what we know for sure is that you can't 'build back better' without protecting folks' health care and lowering out-of-pocket costs, period."

Am I fully vaccinated without a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Am I fully vaccinated without a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

Yes, people who got a two-dose vaccine or the single-dose Johnson & Johnson shot are considered fully vaccinated — even without a booster.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says you're fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving a second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or one dose of the J&J.

The vaccines offer strong protection against serious illness. But U.S. health officials now recommend boosters for some people at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 based on evidence that protection against milder disease can wane, especially among older adults.

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The CDC says people 65 and older, long-term care residents and others ages 50 to 64 with health problems such as diabetes or heart disease should get boosters if they got Pfizer shots at least six months ago.

The agency stopped short of recommending boosters for people 18 to 49 with health problems, but says they can also get the shot after considering their individual risk. The same is true for anyone 18 to 64 whose job could put them at higher risk for infection, such as health care workers, teachers, first responders, agriculture workers and public transit workers.

People who got the Moderna and J&J vaccines aren't eligible for boosters yet, but that's likely coming soon.

The availability of boosters varies around the world. Britain and Israel have also been giving boosters, despite objections from the World Health Organization that poor countries still don't have enough for their initial doses.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: FactCheck@AP.org. Read more here:

Is the delta variant of the coronavirus worse for kids?

Can I get 'long COVID' if I'm infected after vaccination?

What is a COVID-19 vaccine passport, and do I need one?

Biden can't budge fellow Dems with big overhaul at stake

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — His government overhaul plans at stake, President Joe Biden appeared unable to swiftly strike agreement with two wavering Democratic senators trying to trim back his potentially historic \$3.5 trillion measure that will collapse without their support.

With Republicans solidly opposed and no Democratic votes to spare, Biden on Wednesday canceled a trip to Chicago that was to focus on COVID-19 vaccinations so he could dig in for a full day of intense negotiations ahead of crucial votes. Aides made their way to Capitol Hill for talks, and late in the day supportive House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer met with Biden at the White House.

The risks were clear, but so was the potential reward as Biden and his party reach for a giant legislative accomplishment — promising a vast rewrite of the nation's balance sheet with an ever-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 in countless American lives.

"We take it one step at a time," Pelosi, told reporters.

Attention is focused on Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, centrist Democrats. They share a concern that the overall size of Biden's plan is too big, but have infuriated colleagues by not making any counter-proposals public.

In a possibly ominous sign, Manchin sent out a fiery statement late Wednesday, decrying the broad spending as "fiscal insanity" and warning it would not get his vote without adjustments. "I cannot — and will not — support trillions in spending or an all-or-nothing approach," he said.

Together, the two senators hold the keys to unlocking the stalemate over Biden's sweeping vision, the heart of his campaign pledges. While neither has said no to a deal, they have yet to signal yes — but they part ways on specifics, according to a person familiar with the private talks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

Manchin appears to have fewer questions about the revenue side of the equation — the higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy — than the spending plans and particular policies, especially those related to climate change that are important to his coal-centric state. He wants any expansion of aid programs to Americans to be based on income needs, not simply for everyone.

Though Sinema is less publicly open in her views, she focuses her questions on the menu of tax op-

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tions, including the increased corporate rate that some in the business community argue could make the U.S. less competitive overseas and the individual rate that others warn could snare small business owners.

With Democrats' campaign promises on the line, the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington state said of Manchin, "He needs to either give us an offer or this whole thing is not going to happen."

Pelosi suggested she might postpone Thursday's vote on a related \$1 trillion public works measure that Manchin, Sinema and other centrists want but that progressives are threatening to defeat unless there's movement on Biden's broader package.

Thursday's vote has been seen as a pressure point on the senators and other centrist lawmakers to strike an agreement with Biden. But with Manchin and Sinema dug in, that seemed unlikely.

"Both bills are must-pass priorities," according to a White House readout of the president's meeting with the congressional leaders.

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Democrats are separating the government funding and debt ceiling vote into two bills, 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 Thursday to provide government funding to avoid a federal shutdown, keeping operations going temporarily to Dec. 3. The House is expected to quickly follow.

With Biden and his party stretching to achieve what would be a signature policy achievement, there is a strong sense that progress is being made on the big bill, said an administration official who requested anonymity to discuss the private talks.

The president is highly engaged, meeting separately with Manchin and Sinema at the White House this week and talking by phone with lawmakers shaping the package. He even showed up at Wednesday evening's annual congressional baseball game, a gesture of goodwill during the rare bipartisan event among lawmakers.

To reach accord, Democrats are poised to trim the huge Biden measure's tax proposals and spending goals to reach an overall size Manchin and Sinema are demanding.

"I think it's pretty clear we're in the middle of a negotiation and that everybody's going to have to give a little," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Psaki said members of Congress "are not wallflowers" but have a range of views. "We listen, we engage, we negotiate. But ultimately, there are strong viewpoints and what we're working to do is get to an agreement."

Besides senators, Biden's problems with fellow Democrats also include a small number of centrist House Democrats who are also bristling at the far-reaching scope of his domestic agenda, which would expand health care, education and climate change programs, all paid for by the higher tax rates.

Progressive lawmakers warn against cutting too much, saying they have already compromised enough, and threatening to withhold support for the companion \$1 trillion public works measure that they say is too meager without Biden's bigger package assured.

But centrists warned off canceling Thursday's vote as a "breach of trust that would slow the momentum in moving forward in delivering the Biden agenda," said Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., a leader of the centrist Blue Dog Democrats.

Republicans are opposed to Biden's bigger vision, deriding the \$3.5 trillion package as a slide toward socialism and government intrusion on Americans lives.

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.

The House did vote Wednesday to extend the debt limit through through Dec. 16, but it's doubtful that Democratic bill will pass the Senate in the face of GOP opposition — shelving that debate for another day.

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Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has told Congress it has until Oct. 18, when her department will likely exhaust all of its "extraordinary measures" being taken to avoid a default on the government's obligations.

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

Ecuador declares prison emergency after 116 killed in riot

By GABRIELA MOLINA Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — Ecuador's president has declared a state of emergency in the prison system following a battle among gang members in a coastal lockup that killed at least 116 people and injured 80 in what authorities say was the worst prison bloodbath ever in the country.

Officials said at least five of the dead were found to have been beheaded.

President Guillermo Lasso decreed a state of emergency Wednesday, which will give the government powers that include deploying police and soldiers inside prisons. The order came a day after bloodshed at the Litoral penitentiary in Guayaquil that officials blamed on gangs linked to international drug cartels fighting for control of the facility.

Lasso, visibly moved by the carnage, said at a news conference that what had happened in the prison was "bad and sad." He also said he could not guarantee that authorities had regained control of the lockup.

"It is regrettable that the prisons are being turned into territories for power disputes by criminal gangs," he said, adding that he would act with "absolute firmness" to regain control of the Litoral prison and prevent the violence from spreading to other penitentiaries.

Images circulating on social media showed dozens of bodies in the prison's Pavilions 9 and 10 and scenes that looked like battlefields. The fighting was with firearms, knives and bombs, officials said. Earlier, regional police commander Fausto Buenaño had said that bodies were being found in the prison's pipelines.

Outside the prison morgue, the relatives of inmates wept, with some describing to reporters the cruelty with which their loved ones were killed, decapitated and dismembered.

"In the history of the country, there has not been an incident similar or close to this one," said Ledy Zúñiga, the former president of Ecuador's National Rehabilitation Council.

Zúñiga, who was also the country's minister of justice in 2016, said she regretted that steps had not been taken to prevent another massacre following deadly prison riots last February.

Earlier, officials said the violence erupted from a dispute between the "Los Lobos" and "Los Choneros" prison gangs.

Col. Mario Pazmiño, the former director of Ecuador's military intelligence, said the bloody fighting shows that "transnational organized crime has permeated the structure" of Ecuador's prisons, adding that Mexico's Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels operate through local gangs.

"They want to sow fear," he told The Associated Press on Wednesday, urging the government to temporarily cede control of the prisons to the National Police. "The more radical and violent the way they murder," the more they achieve their goal of control, he added.

Ecuador's president said that care points had been set up for relatives of the inmates with food and psychological support. He added that a \$24 million program to address the country's prisons will be accelerated, starting with investments in infrastructure and technology in the Litoral prison.

The former director of Ecuador's prison bureau, Fausto Cobo, said that inside penitentiaries authorities face a "threat with power equal to or greater than the state itself." He said that while security forces must enter prisons with shields and unarmed, they are met by inmates with high-caliber weapons.

In July, the president decreed another state of emergency in Ecuador's prison system following several violent episodes that resulted in more than 100 inmates being killed. Those deaths occurred in various prisons and not in a single facility like Tuesday's massacre.

Previously, the bloodiest day occurred in February, when 79 prisoners died in simultaneous riots in three prisons in the country. In July, 22 more prisoners lost their lives in the Litoral penitentiary, while in Sep-

tember a penitentiary center was attacked by drones leaving no fatalities.

Health workers once saluted as heroes now get threats

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and GRANT SCHULTE Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — More than a year after U.S. health care workers on the front lines against COVID-19 were saluted as heroes with nightly clapping from windows and balconies, some are being issued panic buttons in case of assault and ditching their scrubs before going out in public for fear of harassment.

Across the country, doctors and nurses are dealing with hostility, threats and violence from patients angry over safety rules designed to keep the scourge from spreading.

"A year ago, we're health care heroes and everybody's clapping for us," said Dr. Stu Coffman, a Dallas-based emergency room physician. "And now we're being in some areas harassed and disbelieved and ridiculed for what we're trying to do, which is just depressing and frustrating."

Cox Medical Center Branson in Missouri started giving panic buttons to up to 400 nurses and other employees after assaults per year tripled between 2019 and 2020 to 123, a spokeswoman said. One nurse had to get her shoulder X-rayed after an attack.

Hospital spokeswoman Brandei Clifton said the pandemic has driven at least some of the increase.

"So many nurses say, 'It's just part of the job,'" Clifton said. "It's not part of the job."

Some hospitals have limited the number of public entrances. In Idaho, nurses said they are scared to go to the grocery store unless they have changed out of their scrubs so they aren't accosted by angry residents.

Doctors and nurses at a Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, hospital have been accused of killing patients by grieving family members who don't believe COVID-19 is real, said hospital spokeswoman Caiti Bobbitt. Others have been the subject of hurtful rumors spread by people angry about the pandemic.

"Our health care workers are almost feeling like Vietnam veterans, scared to go into the community after a shift," Bobbitt said.

Over Labor Day weekend in Colorado, a passerby threw an unidentified liquid at a nurse working at a mobile vaccine clinic in suburban Denver. Another person in a pickup truck ran over and destroyed signs put up around the clinic's tent.

About 3 in 10 nurses who took part in a survey this month by an umbrella organization of nurses unions across the U.S. reported an increase in violence where they work stemming from factors including staff shortages and fewer visitor restrictions. That was up from 2 in 10 in March, according to the National Nurses United survey of 5,000 nurses.

Michelle Jones, a nurse at a COVID-19 ICU unit in Wichita, Kansas, said patients are coming in scared, sometimes several from the same family, and often near death. Their relatives are angry, thinking the nurses and doctors are letting them die.

"They cry, they yell, they sit outside our ICU in little groups and pray," Jones said. "Lots of people think they are going to get miracles and God is not passing those out this year. If you come into my ICU, there is a good chance you are going to die."

She said the powerful steroids that have shown promise often make patients angrier.

"It is like 'roid rage on people," she said. "I've worked in health care for 26 years. and I've seen anything like this. I've never seen the public act like this."

Across the U.S., the COVID-19 crisis has caused people to behave badly toward one another in a multitude of ways.

Several people have been shot to death in disputes over masks in stores and other public places. Shouting matches and scuffles have broken out at school board meetings. A brawl erupted earlier this month at a New York City restaurant over its requirement that customers show proof of vaccination.

Dr. Chris Sampson, an emergency room physician in Columbia, Missouri, said violence has always been a problem in the emergency department, but the situation has gotten worse in recent months. Sampson said he has been pushed up against a wall and seen nurses kicked.

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Dr. Ashley Coggins of St. Peter's Health Regional Medical Center in Helena, Montana, said she recently asked a patient whether he wanted to be vaccinated.

"He said, 'F, no,' and I didn't ask further because I personally don't want to get yelled at," Coggins said. "You know, this is a weird time in our world, and the respect that we used to have for each other, the respect that people used to have for caregivers and physicians and nurses — it's not always there, and it makes this job way harder."

Coggins said the patient told her that he "wanted to strangle President Biden" for pushing for vaccinations, prompting her to change the subject. She said security guards are now in charge of enforcing mask rules for hospital visitors so that nurses no longer have to be the ones to tell people to leave.

The hostility is making an already stressful job harder. Many places are suffering severe staffing shortages, in part because nurses have become burned out and quit.

"I think one thing that we have seen and heard from many of our people is that it is just really hard to come to work every day when people treat each other poorly," said Dr. Kencee Graves, a physician at the University of Utah hospital in Salt Lake City.

"If you have to fight with somebody about wearing a mask, or if you aren't allowed to visit and we have to argue about that, that is stressful."

Follow Grant Schulte on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/GrantSchulte>

Associated Press writer Rebecca Boone contributed to this report from Boise, Idaho. Hollingsworth reported from Mission, Kansas.

Iris Samuels contributed to this report from Helena, Montana. Samuels is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Reopening of 'Aladdin' on Broadway halted by COVID-19 cases

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The hit Broadway show "Aladdin" was canceled Wednesday night when breakthrough COVID-19 cases were reported within the musical's company, a day after the show reopened following some 18 months of being shuttered due to the pandemic. It was a worrying sign for Broadway's recovery.

"Through our rigorous testing protocols, breakthrough COVID-19 cases have been detected within the company of 'Aladdin' at the New Amsterdam Theatre," the show announced on social media. "Because the wellness and safety of our guests, cast and crew are our top priority, tonight's performance, Wednesday, Sept. 29, is canceled."

It was the first Broadway COVID-19 cancellation since shows resumed with Bruce Springsteen's concert returning in July and "Pass Over" as the first play to debut in August. "Aladdin" said the status of future performances "will be updated."

The pandemic forced Broadway theaters to abruptly close on March 12, 2020, knocking out all shows and scrambling the spring season. Several have restarted, including the so-called big three of "Wicked," "Hamilton" and "The Lion King."

Biden can't budge fellow Dems with big overhaul at stake

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — His government overhaul plans at stake, President Joe Biden appeared unable Wednesday night to swiftly strike agreement with two wavering Democratic senators trying to trim back his potentially historic \$3.5 trillion measure that will collapse without their support.

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

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crucial votes. Aides made their way to Capitol Hill for talks, and late in the day supportive House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer met with Biden at the White House.

The risks were clear, but so was the potential reward as Biden and his party reach for a giant legislative accomplishment — promising a vast rewrite of the nation's balance sheet with an ever-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 in countless American lives.

"We take it one step at a time," Pelosi, told reporters.

Attention is focused on Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, centrist Democrats. They share a concern that the overall size of Biden's plan is too big, but have infuriated colleagues by not making any counter-proposals public.

In a possibly ominous sign, Manchin sent out a fiery statement late Wednesday, decrying the broad spending as "fiscal insanity" and warning it would not get his vote without adjustments. "I cannot — and will not — support trillions in spending or an all-or-nothing approach," he said.

Together, the two senators hold the keys to unlocking the stalemate over Biden's sweeping vision, the heart of his campaign pledges. While neither has said no to a deal, they have yet to signal yes — but they part ways on specifics, according to a person familiar with the private talks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

Manchin appears to have fewer questions about the revenue side of the equation — the higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy — than the spending plans and particular policies, especially those related to climate change that are important to his coal-centric state. He wants any expansion of aid programs to Americans to be based on income needs, not simply for everyone.

Though Sinema is less publicly open in her views, she focuses her questions on the menu of tax options, including the increased corporate rate that some in the business community argue could make the U.S. less competitive overseas and the individual rate that others warn could snare small business owners.

With Democrats' campaign promises on the line, the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington state said of Manchin, "He needs to either give us an offer or this whole thing is not going to happen."

Pelosi suggested she might postpone Thursday's vote on a related \$1 trillion public works measure that Manchin, Sinema and other centrists want but that progressives are threatening to defeat unless there's movement on Biden's broader package.

Thursday's vote has been seen as a pressure point on the senators and other centrist lawmakers to strike an agreement with Biden. But with Manchin and Sinema dug in, that seemed unlikely.

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To reach accord, Democrats are poised to trim the huge Biden measure's tax proposals and spending

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At least 116 dead in gang battle at Ecuador jail; 5 beheaded

By GABRIELA MOLINA Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — A battle between gangs in a prison killed at least 116 people and injured 80 in what authorities are calling the worst penitentiary massacre in Ecuador's history. At least five dead were reported beheaded, officials said Wednesday.

President Guillermo Lasso decreed a state of emergency in Ecuador's prison system, allowing the government to deploy the police and soldiers to penitentiaries among other powers. Authorities attributed Tuesday's bloodshed at the Litoral penitentiary in the coastal city of Guayaquil to gangs linked to international drug cartels fighting for control of the lockup.

Lasso, visibly affected, said at a news conference that what was happening in the Guayaquil prison was "bad and sad" and he could not for the moment guarantee that authorities had regained control of the lockup.

"It is regrettable that the prisons are being turned into territories for power disputes by criminal gangs," he said, adding that he would act with "absolute firmness" to regain control of the Litoral prison and prevent the violence from spreading to other penitentiaries.

Images circulating on social media showed dozens of bodies in the prison's Pavilions 9 and 10 and scenes that looked like battlefields. The fighting was with firearms, knives and bombs, officials said. Earlier, regional police commander Fausto Buenaño had said that bodies were being found in the prison's pipelines.

Outside the prison morgue, the relatives of inmates wept, with some describing to reporters the cruelty with which their loved ones were killed, decapitated and dismembered.

"In the history of the country, there has not been an incident similar or close to this one," said Ledy Zúñiga, the former president of Ecuador's National Rehabilitation Council.

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Zúñiga, who was also the country's minister of justice in 2016, said she regretted that steps had not been taken to prevent another massacre following deadly prison riots last February.

Earlier, officials said the violence erupted from a dispute between the "Los Lobos" and "Los Choneros" prison gangs.

Col. Mario Pazmiño, the former director of Ecuador's military intelligence, said the bloody fighting shows that "transnational organized crime has permeated the structure" of Ecuador's prisons, adding that Mexico's Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels operate through local gangs.

"They want to sow fear," he told The Associated Press on Wednesday, urging the government to temporarily cede control of the prisons to the National Police. "The more radical and violent the way they murder," the more they achieve their goal of control, he added.

Ecuador's president said that care points had been set up for relatives of the inmates with food and psychological support. He added that a \$24 million program to address the country's prisons will be accelerated, starting with investments in infrastructure and technology in the Litoral prison.

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Previously, the bloodiest day occurred in February, when 79 prisoners died in simultaneous riots in three prisons in the country. In July, 22 more prisoners lost their lives in the Litoral penitentiary, while in September a penitentiary center was attacked by drones leaving no fatalities.

Hurricane Ida devastation lingers in Louisiana 1 month later

By STACEY PLAISANCE Associated Press

IRONTON, La. (AP) — The land on which Audrey Trufant Salvant's home sits in the small Louisiana town of Ironton has become an island in a sea of mud and snake-infested marsh grass. Nearby houses are disconnected from their foundations, a refrigerator is lodged sideways in a tree, and dozens of caskets and tombs from two nearby cemeteries are strewn across lawns for blocks. The entire town is without power and running water.

A month after Hurricane Ida roared ashore with 150-mph (241-kph) winds, communities all along the state's southeastern coast — Ironton, Grand Isle, Houma, Lafitte and Barataria — are still suffering from the devastating effects of the Category 4 storm.

Many, like Trufant Salvant, are bunking with relatives until they can get back into their homes. Others are staying in hotels or have left the state, she said. Some residents have returned to pick up what few belongings may have survived the flood, but she says they aren't finding much to salvage — the storm surge generated by Ida rose as high as some homes' rooftops.

"The day that they allowed folks to come back in here, it was like a funeral," she said. "Everybody was just heartbroken, because we had seen devastation before ... but we had never seen anything like this."

Churches and charity organizations are working to help, but the destruction is so far-reaching, there don't seem to be enough donations to go around, said Michael Williamson, head of the United Way of Southeast Louisiana, which covers seven parishes hit by Ida.

The storage room in the United Way's New Orleans headquarters — typically filled with donated food, water, tarps and cleaning supplies for residents in storm-battered communities — is nearly bare. Donations have been slow to trickle in compared to previous storms, even smaller ones, and there's not enough to meet the demand, Williamson said.

When it comes to tarps and cleaning supplies — bleach, buckets, mops and rakes — "we can't get enough of them," he said.

The United Way is also managing unique cases including that of firefighter Warren Myers, whose 5-year-

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old special needs daughter, Ameah, requires a specific formula administered through a feeding tube, medicine to control seizures, and diapers, all of which are expensive and have been hard to get since Ida.

Store shelves haven't been as well stocked, and deliveries haven't arrived as regularly as usual, said Crystal Hagger, Myers' fiancée, who helps care for Ameah.

Ameah is unable to stand or walk on her own, so the couple carry her everywhere either in their arms or on their backs with a harness-style carrier.

The family was recently told the United Way found a donor willing to fit Ameah for a pediatric wheelchair.

"Every little act of kindness goes a long way," Hagger said, her voice choked with emotion. "We are very grateful."

The need is visually evident everywhere.

In Ironton, Trufant Salvant's house is one of only about eight in her neighborhood not swamped by Ida's floodwaters. After Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, she was able to raise her home, which now sits 12 feet (3.6 meters) off the ground. She spoke to a visitor while sitting on a stool in a small area beneath the house that had been cleared of mud and debris.

Other homes nearby had shifted or moved off their foundations entirely. One house landed in the middle of the street after floodwaters receded.

"This one hit us worse than Katrina," she said.

Williamson says the recovery from Ida will be a long one — yearslong for some. Families that have been able to return are in various stages of cleanup as they wait for insurance adjusters to assess damage and federal assistance funds to come through.

Justin and Lesley Landry of Lafitte are hoping to receive grant funds to elevate their home, which was built about 2 feet (0.61 meters) off the ground in the 1980s and had never flooded until Ida.

The couple got married on Aug. 29, 2020, a year to the day before the storm. Ida's anniversary gift: nearly 2 feet of water in their house. Waterlines on the outside walls and on the walls of a nearby shed indicate that Ida's floodwaters rose at one point to about 4 feet (1.2 meters), which is chest-high for Justin. At the height of the storm, the tidal surge was likely even higher than that, he said.

Four days passed before the Landrys could return home to salvage what few belongings were spared in the three-bedroom house, including a handful of unopened wedding gifts that had been on an upper shelf in one of the closets.

Justin and a friend dismantled the sections of the house that flooded or were growing mold, which amounted to the bottom 4 feet of every wall. He said the most painful part was gutting his daughter's nursery, which he had just finished putting together before Ida hit. The freshly painted pastel blue walls are now half-gone, and the bottom of the flowy white curtains have been tinted brown by muddy floodwater. Baby Adley arrived two weeks ago.

"I'm trying to stay positive," Justin said. "Some people don't even have a house anymore."

Despite the extended hardships wrought by the storm, Trufant Salvant said she can't envision living anywhere else. She belongs to the fifth generation of a family that has resided in Ironton for more than two centuries.

The community of about 200, contained within about four residential blocks, was founded by freed slaves in the 1800s. The area didn't get sewers and tapwater until the 1980s, after an activist group brought in civil rights workers and the parish government's refusal to extend those systems made national news.

The town's cemetery contains the remains of many of Trufant Salvant's relatives, including a brother who was buried just one day before Ida made landfall.

"As terrible as it leaves you at the moment, when it happens ... this is home," she said. "I just feel this earthly connection to this piece of property."

Lava from La Palma eruption finally 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

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La Palma island finally tumbled over a cliff and into the Atlantic Ocean, setting off huge plumes of steam and possibly toxic gases that forced local residents outside the evacuation zone to remain indoors on Wednesday.

The immediate area had been evacuated for several days as authorities waited for the lava that began erupting Sept. 19 to traverse the 6½ kilometers (four miles) to the island's edge. On the way down from the Cumbre Vieja volcanic ridge, the lava flows have engulfed at least 656 buildings, mostly homes and farm buildings, 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.

Even though initial air quality reading showed no danger in 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 3½ kilometers (about two miles) and asked residents in the wider area to remain indoors with windows shut to avoid breathing in any 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 after the ground 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.

"We hope that the channel to the sea that has opened stops the lava flow, which widened to reach 600 meters (2,000 feet) at one point, from continuing to grow, because that has caused tremendous damage," Ángel Víctor Torres, president of the Canary Islands regional government, told Cope radio.

Torres said his government is working to house those who have lost their dwellings. Authorities have plans to purchase over 100 currently unoccupied homes. Torres cited one village, Todoque, home to 1,400 people, which was wiped out.

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.

Favorable weather conditions allowed the first flight in five days to land at airport on La Palma, an important tourist destination along with its neighboring Canary islands, despite a huge ash cloud that Spain's National Geographic Institute said reached up to seven kilometers (nearly 4½ miles) high.

Laura Garcés, the director of Spain's air navigation authority ENAIRE, said she doesn't foresee any major problems for other airports on the archipelago because of the ash.

While the red tongue of lava lolled off the coast, the two open vents of the volcano continued to belch up more magma from below.

Experts say it's impossible to determine how long the eruption will last. Previous eruptions in the archipelago have lasted weeks, even months.

"We don't know when this will be over," volcano scientist Stavros Meletlidis of Spain's National Geographic Institute told state broadcaster TVE. "Volcanos are not friends of statistics."

___ Joseph Wilson reported from Barcelona, Spain.

Study highlights difficulty of stopping antidepressants

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

A study of British patients with a long history of depression highlights how difficult it can be to stop medication, even for those who feel well enough to try.

Slightly more than half the participants who gradually discontinued their antidepressants relapsed within

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a year. By contrast, the relapse rate was lower — almost 40% — for those who remained on their usual medication during the study.

Both groups had been taking daily doses of common antidepressants, had recovered from their most recent bout of depression and felt healthy enough to consider stopping the drugs.

Previous research has also shown relapse is common, and an editorial published with the study Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine suggests medication for life may be advised for some patients with several previous bouts.

Counseling and behavior therapy are other options for patients who want to stop antidepressants, and studies show those treatments combined with medication work well for many.

Few of the British patients in the government-funded study were receiving any kind of psychological treatment. Though the United Kingdom's national health system offers it, it is difficult to access because of long waiting times for treatment, said Gemma Lewis, the study's lead author and a researcher at University College London. Patients in the study were being treated for depression by primary care doctors, which is common in the U.K., Lewis said.

Depression is a mood disorder that can include persistent, debilitating feelings of sadness, hopelessness and loss of interest in usual activities. It affects about 5% of adults worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Reported rates are slightly lower in the U.K. and higher in the U.S. but Lewis said differing ways that depression is assessed makes comparisons between countries difficult.

The study enrolled 478 patients in four cities in England, most of them middle-aged white women. All were taking a common class of antidepressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, which include drugs known by the brand names Prozac and Zoloft. Half were randomly assigned to gradually discontinue the drugs, the others made no medication changes. Whether similar results would be found in other patients taking other antidepressants isn't known.

While 56% of the patients who discontinued their medication relapsed during the study, Lewis emphasized that a sizeable portion did not, including most who remained on their antidepressants.

"There are many people who would like to stay on their antidepressants and the paper shows that for many people that is an appropriate decision," Lewis said.

Editorial author Dr. Jeffrey Jackson of Milwaukee's Veterans Affairs Medical Center, called the study results important but disappointing. But he also suggested that discontinuing antidepressants is possible for some patients.

"I encourage patients with a single bout of depression, especially episodes that are triggered by a life event, such as loss of a loved one, to consider weaning antidepressant treatment after at least 6 months of remission," Jackson wrote in the editorial.

Follow AP Medical Writer Lindsey Tanner at @LindseyTanner.

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

Fighting wave of misinfo, YouTube bans false vaccine claims

By AMANDA SEITZ The Associated Press

YouTube announced a sweeping crackdown of vaccine misinformation Wednesday that booted popular anti-vaccine influencers from its site and deleted false claims that have been made about a range of immunizations.

The video-sharing platform said it will no longer allow users to baselessly speculate that approved vaccines, like the ones given to prevent the flu or measles, are dangerous or cause diseases.

YouTube's latest attempt to stem a tide of vaccine misinformation comes as countries around the globe struggle to convince a somewhat vaccine hesitant public to accept the free immunizations that scientists say will end the COVID-19 pandemic that began 20 months ago. The tech platform, which is owned by

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Google, already tried to ban COVID-19 vaccine misinformation last year, at the height of the pandemic.

"We've steadily seen false claims about the coronavirus vaccines spill over into misinformation about vaccines in general, and we're now at a point where it's more important than ever to expand the work we started with COVID-19 to other vaccines," YouTube said in a blog post.

Up until Wednesday, anti-vaccine influencers, who have thousands of subscribers, had used YouTube to stoke fears around vaccines that health experts point out have been safely administered for decades. The YouTube channel of an organization run by environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was one of several popular anti-vaccine accounts that was gone by Wednesday morning.

In an emailed statement to The Associated Press, Kennedy criticized the ban: "There is no instance in history when censorship and secrecy have advanced either democracy or public health."

YouTube declined to provide details on how many accounts were removed in the crackdown.

Under its new policy, YouTube says it will remove misinformation about any vaccine that has been approved by health authorities, such as the World Health Organization, and is currently being administered. False claims that those vaccines are dangerous or cause health issues, like cancer, infertility or autism — theories that scientists have discredited for decades but have endured on the internet — should also be removed.

"The concept that vaccines harm — instead of help — is at the foundation of a lot of misinformation," said Jeanine Guidry, a media and public health professor at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine.

She added that, if enforced properly, the new rules could stop bad information from influencing a new parent who is using the internet to research whether or not to vaccinate their child, for example.

But, as is common when tech platforms announce stricter rules, loopholes remain for anti-vaccine misinformation to spread on YouTube.

Claims about vaccines that are being tested will still be allowed. Personal stories about reactions to the vaccine will also be permitted, as long as they do not come from an account that has a history of promoting vaccine misinformation.

Despite tech companies announcing a string of new rules around COVID-19 and vaccine misinformation during the pandemic, falsehoods have still found big audiences on the platforms.

In March, Twitter began labelling content that made misleading claims about COVID-19 vaccines and said it would ban accounts that repeatedly share such posts. Facebook, which also owns Instagram, had already prohibited posts claiming COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility or contain tracking microchips, and in February announced it would similarly remove claims that vaccines are toxic or can cause health problems such as autism.

Yet popular anti-vaccine influencers remain live on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, where they actively use the platforms to sell books or videos. On Facebook and Instagram alone, a handful of anti-vaccine influencers still have a combined 6.4 million followers, according to social media watchdog group the Center for Countering Digital Hate. And COVID-19 vaccine misinformation has been so pervasive on Facebook that President Joe Biden in July accused influencers on the platform of "killing people" with falsehoods about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Other platforms have taken a harder line. Pinterest, for example, prohibited any kind of vaccine misinformation even before the pandemic began. Now, if users search for content about vaccines on the site, they are directed to visit authoritative websites operated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the WHO. ____

Associated Press writers David Klepper in Providence, Rhode Island, and Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, California, contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: Why coffee could cost more at groceries, cafes

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — As if a cup of coffee wasn't expensive enough, a confluence of factors is driving up farmers' costs to grow the beans and it could begin filtering down to your local cafe before the

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end of the year.

After hovering for years near \$1 per pound, coffee futures — the price large-volume buyers agree to pay for coffee upon delivery months down the road — doubled in late July, reaching heights not seen since 2014. Though prices have eased a bit, they remain elevated at about \$1.90 per pound.

Coffee lovers already paying \$8 or more for a bag in the supermarket or up to \$5 for a cup may despair over even-higher prices, but a spike in coffee prices on the international futures market doesn't always trickle down to the consumer.

Here's a look at some factors that could determine whether Americans will be paying more for their morning jolt in the near future.

WHAT HAPPENED?

A sustained drought followed by two July frosts blew a hole in Brazil's coffee output, immediately sending wholesale prices for the popular Arabica bean to more than \$2 per pound. The frost will significantly affect the 2022-23 harvest, said Carlos Mera, who analyzes the coffee markets at Rabobank.

The Brazil frosts followed COVID-related supply chain snarls, a dearth of shipping containers, labor shortages and other production hiccups. Add in rising costs for virtually everything and you have a bitter cup brewing for coffee drinkers.

"This is unprecedented," said Alexis Rubinstein, the managing editor of Coffee & Cocoa for commodities brokerage StoneX Group. "It's never been this perfect storm before. It's usually just been a supply-and-demand scenario.

"We've never been dealing with a supply and demand issue on top of a logistics issue, on top of labor issues, on top of a global pandemic."

WHY MIGHT RETAIL PRICES RISE?

While it's difficult to determine the size of the crop loss in Brazil, Mera said estimates vary between 2 million and 6 million fewer bags of coffee. That's about 12% of the output from the world's largest producer of Arabica, the bean used for most coffee sold around the world. Lower supplies almost always mean higher prices.

Grace Wood, an industry analyst for market research firm IBISWorld, said if consumers don't see coffee prices rise by the end of this year, they almost certainly will in 2022, as per capita demand is expected to increase.

"That is just going to contribute to more demand that is going to further disrupt operations and make it more difficult for operators who are already experiencing supply issues," Wood said.

Mera said people who buy coffee beans in the grocery store will likely see a more noticeable increase in prices because about half the cost of that bag on the shelf comes solely from the bean itself. However, in large coffee shops, he added, the cost of the bean only represents about 5% of your cup of hot coffee, so roasters "may not need to carry over the increases right away."

IS IT A CERTAINTY THAT RETAIL PRICES WILL RISE?

It seems likely, although higher coffee prices on the international future market is not a guarantee that prices at your favorite roaster will go up. The damaged crop in Brazil is still more than a year from harvest, plenty of time for many factors to reverse course.

Rubinstein said higher prices on the international market can often stimulate production — farmers will have more money to invest in their crop — and if there's more coffee on the market, prices will retreat. But that will also depend on whether the big roasters have enough beans hoarded to get them through however long prices remain elevated.

Starbucks, the world's biggest coffee retailer, suggested that it won't need to raise its prices because of Brazil's lower output. On a call with investors at the height of the Arabica price spike, the Seattle-based coffee chain's President and CEO Kevin Johnson said his company has 14 months of supply, which he says will get it through 2021 and most of fiscal 2022.

WHAT ABOUT MY LOCAL ROASTER?

Even smaller, independent specialty roasters sign contracts to buy their beans well in advance, enough so that when shortages like the ones in Brazil happen, it doesn't paralyze them. They also source from

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countries all around the world, so gaps from one place can often be filled by another.

Chris Vigilante, co-owner of Vigilante Coffee with stores in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., said most specialty roasters don't buy beans on the same international commodities market with the big players like Nestle and Keurig Dr. Pepper. "So we're not as impacted by (Brazil), but we will feel the pressure of it," Vigilante said.

Vigilante said he pays between \$3.50 and \$5.50 per pound for most of his beans, which are higher quality and produced by smaller farms. He has no plans to raise prices, but if other small shops raise theirs, he said it's likely because the cost for other essentials have risen.

"I've seen other specialty coffee roasters talking about raising their prices, but I think that's more not because of the cost of coffee, but maybe because the cost of some of our other supplies, like cups and equipment," Vigilante said.

Marcelo Silva de Sousa contributed to this report from Brazil.

US general: Afghan collapse rooted in 2020 deal with Taliban

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senior Pentagon officials said Wednesday the collapse of the Afghan government and its security forces in August could be traced to a 2020 U.S. agreement with the Taliban that promised a complete U.S. troop withdrawal.

Gen. Frank McKenzie, the head of Central Command, told the House Armed Services Committee that once the U.S. troop presence was pushed below 2,500 as part of President Joe Biden's decision in April to complete a total withdrawal by September, the unraveling of the U.S.-backed Afghan government accelerated.

"The signing of the Doha agreement had a really pernicious effect on the government of Afghanistan and on its military — psychological more than anything else, but we set a date-certain for when we were going to leave and when they could expect all assistance to end," McKenzie said.

He was referring to a Feb. 29, 2020, agreement that the Trump administration signed with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, in which the U.S. promised to fully withdraw its troops by May 2021 and the Taliban committed to several conditions, including stopping attacks on American and coalition forces. The stated objective was to promote a peace negotiation between the Taliban and the Afghan government, but that diplomatic effort never gained traction before Biden took office in January.

McKenzie said he also had believed "for quite a while" that if the United States reduced the number of its military advisers in Afghanistan below 2,500, the Kabul government inevitably would collapse "and that the military would follow." He said in addition to the morale-depleting effects of the Doha agreement, the troop reduction ordered by Biden in April was "the other nail in the coffin" for the 20-year war effort because it blinded the U.S. military to conditions inside the Afghan army, "because our advisers were no longer down there with those units."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, testifying alongside McKenzie, said he agreed with McKenzie's analysis. He added that the Doha agreement also committed the United States to ending airstrikes against the Taliban, "so the Taliban got stronger, they increased their offensive operations against the Afghan security forces, and the Afghans were losing a lot of people on a weekly basis."

Wednesday's hearing was politically charged, with Republicans seeking to cast Biden as wrongheaded on Afghanistan, and Democrats pointing to what they called ill-advised decisions during the Trump years.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had said a day earlier in a similar hearing in the Senate that the war in Afghanistan was a "strategic failure," and he repeated that on Wednesday.

Milley told the Senate committee, when pressed Tuesday, 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

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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.

This week's House and Senate hearings marked the start of what is likely to be an extended congressional review of the U.S. failures in Afghanistan, after 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.

Tuesday's hearing also was contentious at times, 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.

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 Tuesday, 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."

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.

Climate activist Nakate seeks immediate action in Glasgow

By CHARLENE PELE Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate said Wednesday that youth delegates meeting in Milan want to see immediate action from leaders at the U.N. climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland — not cheap, last-ditch grasps at supporting polluting fuels before getting down to business.

Nakate is among 400 activists invited to Italy's financial capital for a three-day Youth4Climate meeting that will draft a document for the 26th Climate Change Conference of the Parties, which opens on Oct. 31.

"If leaders and governments are going to talk about net zeroes or cutting emissions, halving emissions by 2030 or 2040 or 2050, that means it has to start now," Nakate told The Associated Press.

"It doesn't mean, if we are going to do it by 2030, between now and 2030 let's open a coal power plant, you know, let's frack some gas, or let us construct an oil pipeline. That is not the real climate action that we want," she said. "If you are to go net zero by 2030, it has to start now."

Although the activists have traveled to Milan from 180 countries, Nakate said many have the feeling that their suggestions for the closing document that will be published Thursday are not welcome. She said the dynamic was "concerning."

"It really feels like everything has been decided for us," Nakate, a 24-year-old with a degree in business administration. Swedish activist Greta Thunberg similarly accused the organizers on Tuesday of bringing in "cherry-picked" delegates and pretending to listen.

But she said young people were speaking up, and had created their own working group on fossil fuels. "Hopefully it's something they can accept," she said.

Nakate gave an emotional opening speech to the gathering on Tuesday, calling out leaders for failing

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to meet financial pledges and describing the devastating impact of climate change at home in Uganda. While she said she was overwhelmed by the support she has received after her speech, she rejected the media's tendency to dub leaders of the movement.

"It's how people portray the climate movement," Nakate said. "It is not just one face or two faces. It's communities. It is people who are organizing in different countries. I think that is the true face of the climate movement. The people who are standing up for the planet and a better future."

In 2020, Nakate was cropped out of an Associated Press photo at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The AP apologized and acknowledged mistakes in how it initially responded.

Pope Francis on Wednesday praised young environmental activists for challenging global leaders to make good on promises to curb emissions and insisted that political leaders make wise decisions to promote "a culture of responsible sharing."

Francis thanked the activists for their "dreams and good projects" and encouraged them to form an educational alliance to help "rebuild the fabric" of humanity through care for the planet.

"This vision is capable of challenging the adult world, for it reveals that you are prepared not only for action, but also for patient listening, constructive dialogue and mutual understanding," he said.

Francis has made care for "our common home" of the Earth a hallmark of his papacy and devoted an entire encyclical to the issue in 2015. The Scottish bishops conference has said it expects Francis to attend the Glasgow climate summit, though the Vatican hasn't yet confirmed his presence.

"It is time to take wise decisions so that we can make use of the many experiences gained in recent years, in order to make possible a culture of care, a culture of responsible sharing," Francis said in the message.

Follow all AP stories on climate change at <https://apnews.com/hub/Climate-change>

Some fear boosters will hurt drive to reach the unvaccinated

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The spread of COVID-19 vaccination requirements across the U.S. hasn't had the desired effect so far, with the number of Americans getting their first shots plunging in recent weeks. And some experts worry that the move to dispense boosters could just make matters worse.

The fear is that the rollout of booster shots will lead some people to question the effectiveness of the vaccine in the first place.

"Many of my patients are already saying, 'If we need a third dose, what was the point?'" said Dr. Jason Goldman, a physician in Coral Springs, Florida.

The average daily count of Americans getting a first dose of vaccine has been falling for six weeks, plummeting more than 50% from about 480,000 in early August to under 230,000 by the middle of last week, according to the most recently available federal data.

An estimated 70 million vaccine-eligible Americans have yet to start vaccinations, despite a summer surge in infections, hospitalizations and deaths driven by the delta variant.

This is the case despite a growing number of businesses announcing vaccination requirements for their employees, including Google, McDonald's, Microsoft and Disney. Also, big cities such as New York and San Francisco are demanding people be vaccinated to eat at restaurants or enter certain other businesses.

Separately, President Joe Biden announced sweeping new vaccine requirements for as many as 100 million Americans on Sept. 9. Employees at businesses with more than 100 people on the payroll will have to get vaccinated or undergo weekly testing. But the mandates have yet to go into effect; the necessary regulations are still being drawn up.

Allie French, of Omaha, Nebraska, said the move toward booster shots only reinforced her strong belief that vaccinations aren't necessary, particularly for people who take care of themselves.

"It comes back to a mindset of not needing your hand held through every situation," said French, founder of a small advocacy group called Nebraskans Against Government Overreach.

Tara Dukart, a 40-year-old rancher from Hazen, North Dakota, and a board member for Health Freedom

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North Dakota, an organization that has fought mask and vaccine mandates, said: "I think that there is a tremendous amount of hesitancy because why get a third shot if the first two shots didn't work?"

Scientists have emphasized that the vaccine remains highly effective against serious illness and death from COVID-19, noting that the unvaccinated account for the vast majority of the dead and hospitalized recently. But experts have also seen signs that the vaccine's protection may be slipping, and they want to get out ahead of the problem.

Experts have long said the key to ending the U.S. epidemic is vaccinating the vast majority of the American public — perhaps as much as 90%. But of the more than 283 million Americans age 12 and older who are eligible for shots, only about 65% — 184 million — are fully vaccinated, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data. Children under 12 are not yet eligible to get vaccinated, meaning only about 55% of the U.S. public is fully protected.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said Tuesday that health officials have not lost sight of that problem. The booster effort "will not distract us from our most important focus — to get as many people as possible vaccinated with a primary series," she said.

White House officials said they doubt the need for boosters is a real concern among the vast majority of the unvaccinated, who for a variety of reasons, including misinformation, have continued to resist getting their shots despite nearly a year's worth of data showing their lifesaving potential.

They argue, too, that as the pool of unvaccinated Americans gradually shrinks, there will be declines in the numbers of new people getting shots. They say the latest numbers should not be read as a sign that mandates aren't working, noting that most businesses haven't yet put in place the Biden administration's vaccinate-or-test policy.

Indeed, despite the downward vaccination trends seen in CDC data, they say there is evidence employer mandates are already working. White House officials cited a number of success stories, including strong increases in the percentage of vaccinated employees at the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, United Airlines and the Defense Department.

Noel Brewer, a University of North Carolina professor of health behavior, said the mandates show promise and there is good reason to be optimistic.

"I think we're heading into a great season for vaccinations. Everything is lining up in a good way," said Brewer, who advises the CDC and the World Health Organization on COVID-19 vaccination policy.

Last week, the Food and Drug Administration and the CDC authorized booster doses of Pfizer's vaccine for tens of millions of Americans who are 65 and older, have underlying health conditions or work in jobs that put them at high risk. The extra dose would be given six months after the two-shot regimen.

Regulators have yet to take up the question of booster shots for people who got the Moderna or the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

More than 400,000 Americans got boosters at drugstores over the weekend, and 1 million more have signed up for them, according to White House officials.

But some members of an expert panel that advises the CDC worried last week that the booster discussion was a distraction from the more pressing need to get more Americans vaccinated.

"We have a very effective vaccine, and it's like saying, 'It's not working,'" said Dr. Pablo Sanchez of Ohio State University.

At that meeting, a CDC official presented unpublished data from a recent 1,000-person survey that suggested that offering boosters would make 25% of unvaccinated Americans much less likely to get a shot. This week, a Kaiser Family Foundation poll of more than 1,500 adults found that 71% of the unvaccinated say the recent news about boosters is a sign that the vaccines aren't working.

Some outside experts saw this coming.

Dr. James Conway, a pediatric infectious diseases expert at the University of Wisconsin, said last week that if vaccine-hesitant people "start to get the idea that this is only going to last for six or eight or 10 months," they may be further soured on the whole idea.

Meanwhile, the pandemic's summer surge has shown signs of easing. Deaths are still running high at over 2,000 a day on average, but cases and hospitalizations are trending down.

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While any ebb in COVID-19's toll is welcome, it also may undercut health officials' effort to instill a sense of urgency in the unvaccinated. That could be a difficult task even when cases were exploding.

Dr. Alex Jahangir, director of orthopedic trauma surgery at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the head of a coronavirus task force in Nashville, Tennessee, recalled operating on an elderly man injured in a car wreck over the summer. The man survived those injuries but ended up dying from COVID-19.

Jahangir said he was struck by how the man's family seemed to absorb the facts about the COVID-19's dangers only at the very end.

"Only when they were negatively impacted did they seek the truth," Jahangir said.

Associated Press writers Zeke Miller in Washington; Grant Schulte in Omaha, Nebraska; and Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, contributed to this story.

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

US diversity lottery winners wait on visas as time runs out

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

Dorisnelly Fuentes Matos may have won the U.S. visa lottery on paper, but she still isn't close to reaching the United States.

The 27-year-old Cuban economics student was notified more than a year ago that she won a coveted spot to seek one of up to 55,000 visas that the U.S. government gives out each year in a lottery to increase the country's diversity. She filed the paperwork to a State Department processing center in Kentucky and waited to be scheduled for an interview at the U.S. embassy in Guyana, which handles Cubans' visa applications.

But the interview never came. Now, the visas are set to expire Thursday, leaving her and her husband in limbo.

"We are desperate, asking for someone to help us because we are here in the middle of nowhere," said Fuentes Matos, who is waiting in Guyana for an appointment and is one of thousands suing the U.S. government over the delays. "We are stuck in this country, and we can't even go back to Cuba."

More than 20,000 people have sued after they were declared winners of the visa lottery and turned in the required paperwork but never got an interview or a shot at coming to the United States. The government has issued about a quarter of the visas allotted for the fiscal year ending in September after processing was halted during the coronavirus pandemic and then resumed at a much slower pace as other visa applications got priority, their attorneys said.

A State Department official said the pandemic led to "profound reductions" in its capacity to process visas. While embassies and consulates have been instructed to try to prioritize the lottery cases, the U.S. likely won't issue the number of visas it could for the soon-to-be-ending fiscal year, the official said.

That is what worries Fuentes Matos. As the deadline approached for visas to be issued, she grew nervous she would be asked to quickly attend a meeting with a U.S. consular officer in Guyana. So she and her husband gave up their jobs, sold their home and bought plane tickets to travel a circuitous route via Spain and Panama to Georgetown, where they have been staying in a hostel and waiting for the interview that still hasn't come.

Winning the lottery is already a stretch. Millions of people sign up each year, and only up to 55,000 visas are awarded. The chance of getting a winning ticket is infinitesimal, and from there, they must wait in a line for a consular interview. Even in a typical year, not everyone will get one before the U.S. runs out of visas for the year.

For years, the U.S. was largely issuing the diversity visas that were allotted, with most going to people from Africa and Europe. After the pandemic hit, the Trump administration put a freeze on many green cards issued outside of the United States, including these visas. Some of the affected lottery applicants sued,

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and a federal judge last year ordered the administration to reserve 9,000 diversity visas into the next year. The Biden administration lifted the freeze on green cards this year. But the State Department still hasn't issued most of this fiscal year's diversity visas, so another group of lottery winners now faces a similar predicament.

Curtis Lee Morrison, an immigration attorney representing thousands of diversity visa applicants, said some of his clients have sold cars and homes to pay for costs associated with the application, such as traveling to a third country for a consular interview. Applicants who are selected as winners and submit all the required paperwork showing they are eligible are still finding themselves out of luck due to the delays, he said. Morrison said clients found his firm via social media and despite the large number of plaintiffs, the suit did not have class-action status.

"When the diversity visa program was put into place, it was put into place as a diplomatic tool," Morrison said. "The credibility of our tool, we're losing it. Instead, we're looking like fraudsters."

Attorneys for the applicants have again asked a judge to reserve visas so they don't expire. The U.S. government opposes the move, saying setting aside a large number of visas will give the plaintiffs better odds at getting a visa than lottery winners would normally have. U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta in Washington said he will make a decision before the visas are set to expire Thursday.

Fuentes Matos is counting on the judge to keep her hope of moving to the U.S. alive but said she was only given permission to stay in Guyana for three months. She said she is one of four families there waiting for a consular interview and doesn't know what she will do if it doesn't come through.

She decided to enter the visa lottery in the hope of building a better life for herself and her husband, who was working as a taxi driver in Havana.

"We left nothing in Cuba," Fuentes Matos said. "We are going through very difficult times."

From paints to plastics, a chemical shortage ignites prices

By PAUL WISEMAN and TOM KRISHER AP Business Writers

In an economy upended by the coronavirus, shortages and price spikes have hit everything from lumber to computer chips. Not even toilet paper escaped.

Now, they're cutting into one of the humblest yet most vital links in the global manufacturing supply chain: The plastic pellets that go into a vast universe of products ranging from cereal bags to medical devices, automotive interiors to bicycle helmets.

Like other manufacturers, petrochemical companies have been shaken by the pandemic and by how consumers and businesses responded to it. Yet petrochemicals, which are made from oil, have also run into problems all their own, one after another: A freak winter freeze in Texas. A lightning strike in Louisiana. Hurricanes along the Gulf Coast.

All have conspired to disrupt production and raise prices.

"There isn't one thing wrong," said Jeremy Pafford, managing editor for the Americas at Independent Commodity Intelligence Services (ICIS), which analyzes energy and chemical markets. "It's kind of whack-a-mole — something goes wrong, it gets sorted out, then something else happens. And it's been that way since the pandemic began."

The price of polyvinyl chloride or PVC, used for pipes, medical devices, credit cards, vinyl records and more, has rocketed 70%. The price of epoxy resins, used for coatings, adhesives and paints, has soared 170%. Ethylene — arguably the world's most important chemical, used in everything from food packaging to antifreeze to polyester — has surged 43%, according to ICIS figures.

The root of the problem has become a familiar one in the 18 months since the pandemic ignited a brief but brutal recession: As the economy sank into near-paralysis, petrochemical producers, like manufacturers of all types, slashed production. So they were caught flat-footed when the unexpected happened: The economy swiftly bounced back, and consumers, flush with cash from government relief aid and stockpiles of savings, resumed spending with astonishing speed and vigor.

Suddenly, companies were scrambling to acquire raw materials and parts to meet surging orders. Panic

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buying worsened the shortages as companies rushed to stock up while they could.

"It's such a bizarre scenario," said Hassan Ahmed, a chemicals analyst with Alembic Global Advisors, a research firm. "Inventories are lean, and supply is low. Demand will exceed supply growth."

Against the backdrop of tight supplies and surging demand came a series of events that struck Pafford as Murphy's Law in action: Anything that could go wrong did. In 2020, Hurricanes Laura and Zeta pounded Louisiana, a hub of petrochemical production.

Then, in February, a winter storm hit Texas, with its many oil refining and chemical manufacturing facilities. Millions of households and businesses, including the chemical plants, lost power and heat. Pipes froze. More than 100 people died.

A July lightning strike temporarily shut down a plant in Lake Charles, Louisiana, that makes polypropylene, used in consumer packaging and auto manufacturing.

The industry was just beginning to recover when Hurricane Ida struck the Gulf Coast in August, once again damaging refineries and chemical plants. As if that weren't enough, Tropical Storm Nicholas caused flooding.

"Some of these downstream petrochemical plants in the Gulf Coast regions are still shut down from Hurricane Ida," said Bridgette Budhlall a professor of plastics engineering at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell.

"Anything related to base chemicals — they've had a hell of a year," said Tom Derry, CEO of the Institute for Supply Management, an association of purchasing managers.

"It's been the hardest year for logistics and supply chain managers," Pafford said. "They always say the most stressful job in the world is being an air traffic controller at any airport ... I'd venture to say that being a supply chain manager is that — or worse — this year."

Ford Motor Co., hampered by an industrywide shortage of computer chips, is now running short of other parts, too, some of them based on petrochemicals.

"I think we should expect, as business leaders, to continue to have supply chain challenges for the foreseeable future," CEO Jim Farley said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The shortages are slowing production at two leading paint makers, Sherwin-Williams and PPG. Both have raised prices and downgraded their sales guidance, saying the outlook for additional supply remains dim.

Though Sherwin-Williams reported strong second-quarter profits, it said that a lack of raw materials cut sales by 3.5% for the period. CEO John Morikis said Sherwin-Williams raised prices in the Americas by 7% in August and an additional 4% this month. More increases are possible next year, he said.

The chemical shortages, combined with a near-doubling of oil prices in the past year to \$75 a barrel of U.S. benchmark crude, mean higher prices for many goods.

"The consumer is going to have to pay," said Bill Selesky, a chemicals analyst for Argus Research, who suggested that many households, armed with cash from government aid and built-up savings, will be willing to pay higher prices.

In the meantime, the supply problem isn't getting any better. A W.S. Jenks & Son hardware store in Washington, D.C., is receiving only 20% to 30% of the paint it needs to meet customer demand without backordering. In normal times, that rate usually runs 90%, says Billy Wommack, the purchasing director.

"Nobody's happy about it," Wommack said. "There are a lot of 'I'm sorrys' out there."

The shortage is generally felt most by big contractors that need, say, the same-colored paint for numerous apartment complexes and other major projects. Individual homeowners can typically be more flexible.

Duval Paint & Decorating, with three stores in the Jacksonville, Florida, area, is scrambling to fill orders, especially for big contractors who need a lot of paint, said John Cornell, a sales clerk who orders paint for the stores.

"We're struggling," Cornell said. "Sometimes you have to grab products and sit on them for weeks or months so that when the job starts we have it."

Andrew Moore, a clerk at Ricciardi Brothers in Philadelphia, said the store has been running short of lower-grade paints that large contractors use, though here's ample supply of higher grades. Demand is so high that the store is having a record year, with sales up 20% over last year. Prices are up as high as

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15% for some brands, Moore said.

The problems in the petrochemical supply chain have been compounded by shortages of labor and shipping containers and by overwhelmed ports. Some Asian ports have been shut down by COVID-19 outbreaks. In the United States, ports like the one in Long Beach, California, are struggling with backlogs of ships waiting to be unloaded.

"I think this is going to go on for a really long time because there are so many factors at play here," said Kaitlin Wowak, a management professor at the University of Notre Dame. "And it's across the board in so many products."

It's also forcing manufacturers to rethink some of their practices. For decades, companies moved production to China to capitalize on lower labor costs. They also held down expenses by keeping inventories to a minimum. Using a "just-in-time" strategy, they bought materials only as needed to fill orders. But as the recession and recovery showed, keeping inventories threadbare carries risk.

"Supply chains have changed forever," said Bindiya Vakil, CEO of the supply chain consultancy Resilinc. The old management philosophy, she said, was to "get everything to the lowest possible price point... What we are dealing with right now is a consequence of those decisions. Companies have lost hundreds of millions, in some cases billions, of dollars in (forgone) profits because of that, because their supply chains failed."

The petrochemical experience, Vakil said, will teach companies to monitor the lowliest links in their supply chains. It's always easier, she said, to track only the big-ticket items — engines, say, or electronics.

But simple plastics are vital, too. Imagine trying to market breakfast cereal without a cheap plastic bag to hold corn flakes or wheat bran.

"You can't just dump the cereal into the cardboard and ship it," Vakil says. "The plastic bag is just as critical an ingredient as the actual (product) and the cardboard and everything else. But supply chain practitioners traditionally have not considered it to be just as critical. And nowadays plastics are ubiquitous."

Analysts expect the petrochemical crunch to last well into 2022.

"You really have to put COVID truly in the rearview mirror for this logistics situation to normalize," Pafford said. "You can't simply just throw more ships and more containers on the water. ...We've got to get them loaded. If ports are going to be shut down because of a COVID lockdown — good luck."

Wiseman reported from Washington, Krisher from Detroit.

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

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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.

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

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.

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."

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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. 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.

On Jan. 6 at least nine people who were there died during and after the rioting, including a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber and three other Trump supporters who suffered medical emergencies. Two police officers died by suicide in the days that immediately followed, and a third officer, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, collapsed and died after engaging with the protesters. A medical examiner later determined he died of natural causes.

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

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.

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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.

Manger pointed to Pittman's decision as acting chief to implement recommendations from the inspector general and to expand the department's internal intelligence capabilities so officers wouldn't need to rely so heavily on intelligence gathered by other law enforcement agencies. A number of top officials had left their posts after January's attack.

But Manger shot back at critics who have said Pittman should have been let go after her stint as acting chief because she was the top official in charge of intelligence before the insurrection.

"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," Manger said, "and then where would I have been without any experience on my leadership team to rely on and to assist me going forward?"

AP-NORC poll: Virus fears linger for vaccinated older adults

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Bronwyn Russell wears a mask anytime she leaves her Illinois home, though she wouldn't dream of going out to eat or to hear a band play, much less setting foot on a plane. In Virginia, Oliver Midgette rarely dons a mask, never lets COVID-19 rouse any worry and happily finds himself in restaurants and among crowds.

She is vaccinated. He is not.

In a sign of the starkly different way Americans view the coronavirus pandemic, vaccinated older adults are far more worried about the virus than the unvaccinated and far likelier to take precautions despite the protection afforded by their shots, according to a new poll out Wednesday from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

While growing numbers of older unvaccinated people are planning travel, embracing group gatherings and returning to gyms and houses of worship, the vaccinated are hunkering down.

"I'm worried. I don't want to get sick," says Russell, a 58-year-old from Des Plaines, Illinois, who is searching for part-time work while collecting disability benefits. "The people who are going about their lives are just in their own little bubbles of selfishness and don't believe in facts."

As the virus' delta variant has fueled new waves of infection, the poll of people age 50 or older found 36% are very or extremely worried that they or a family member will be infected, roughly doubled since June. The increase is fueled by the vaccinated, who are especially likely to be highly worried. Just 25% of vaccinated Americans, but 61% of unvaccinated Americans, say they are not worried.

That worry is taking a toll: Those concerned about COVID-19 are less likely to rate their quality of life, mental and emotional health, and social activities and relationships as excellent or very good.

The dichotomy is at once peculiar and pedestrian: Though the unvaccinated stand most at risk of infection, their refusal of the shots shows many are convinced the threat is overblown.

Midgette, a 73-year-old retired electronics salesman in Norfolk, Virginia, sees the government as the culprit in fueling fear, but he's not buying into it. He says "life is normal" again and the only thing he's missing out on is going on a cruise with his wife because of vaccination requirements. It won't convince him.

"I grew up in the old days. I ate dirt. I drank water from a hose. I played outside. I don't live in a cage right now," he says.

About two-thirds of people age 50 or older say they rarely or never feel isolated, but about half of those most worried about COVID-19 say they've felt that way at least sometimes in the last month.

Kathy Paiva, a 70-year-old retired bartender from Palm Coast, Florida, says she's feeling the weight of staying home so much.

"My life is more limited than it ever was," Paiva says. "I'm scared to go anywhere right now. I'd like to

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go out to eat, too, but I'm not going to put anyone's life in danger, especially my own."

Her son died of a heart attack in January. In July, she and her closest confidant, her 67-year-old sister, both fell ill with COVID-19. Paiva, who is vaccinated, survived. Her sister, who wasn't, did not.

About 1 in 4 older adults, including roughly a third of those who are most worried about COVID-19, say their social lives and relationships worsened in the past year.

The poll found vaccinated older adults are more likely than the unvaccinated to say they often avoid large groups, wear a mask outside their home and avoid nonessential travel. Compared with June, vaccinated people were less likely to say they would travel or visit bars and restaurants in the next few weeks.

Dr. Irwin Redlener, a public health expert and founding director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University, said unvaccinated people's fear of the virus is lower because of their "disregard for science."

"Vaccinated people have generally bought into the scientific realities of risk. They're reading the reports of new variants or mutations, they're reading stories about breakthroughs," he said.

All of that is fueling anxiety for the vaccinated, Redlener said, compounded by a loss of confidence in experts and officials and their shifting guidance, most recently on the issue of booster shots.

Lee Sharp, a 54-year-old information technology consultant from Houston, who was so seriously ill with COVID-19 last year that he made sure his wife knew how to access all his accounts, initially thought he would get vaccinated as soon as shots were available. But as the months went by, the forcefulness with which vaccines have been pushed has made him not want to get one.

"As time has passed, I have less and less and less trust. 'Masks don't do anything!' 'Masks do something!' 'You need two masks!' 'No, you need four masks!' 'You need disposable masks!' 'No, cloth masks are OK!'" he said in exasperation. "What the heck?"

Linda Wells, a 61-year-old retired high school administrator in San Francisco, says that defiance has been discouraging. She got her shots and a booster, but because of an arthritis medication she takes, has been told by her doctors she's in the "nebulous area of not knowing whether I'm protected."

She'd like to go to a community pool to swim or hop on a plane to see a play in Los Angeles or to visit nieces in Arizona. She'd like to dine in a restaurant or take a leisurely shopping trip. She doesn't, for fear of infection.

"I'm dependent on what other people do and, you know, I've done everything I could do. I wear a mask. I got the vaccine. And for people to be so selfish to not do this, it's ridiculous," she says. "A stubborn point of view keeps them from resolving a health crisis."

The AP-NORC poll of 1,015 people age 50 or older was conducted Aug. 20-23, using a nationally representative sample drawn from the probability-based Foresight 50+ Panel, developed by NORC at the University of Chicago. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Sedensky can be reached at msedensky@ap.org and at <https://twitter.com/sedensky>. Associated Press writer Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

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 on 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

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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, effectively hiding the crisis from the world. The Mekele University community in the regional capital warned in a letter to the U.N., European Union and others that Tigray “is experiencing a man-made form of famine that belittles the 1984 famine in its severity.”

In the letter, shared Wednesday by the Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, the community called for urgent intervention.

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

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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.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 30, the 273rd day of 2021. There are 92 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 30, 1962, James Meredith, a Black student, was escorted by federal marshals to the campus of the University of Mississippi, where he enrolled for classes the next day; Meredith's presence sparked rioting that claimed two lives.

On this date:

In 1777, the Continental Congress — forced to flee in the face of advancing British forces — moved to York, Pennsylvania.

In 1938, after co-signing the Munich Agreement allowing Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain said, "I believe it is peace for our time."

In 1947, the World Series was broadcast on television for the first time; the New York Yankees defeated the Brooklyn Dodgers 5-3 in Game 1 (the Yankees went on to win the Series four games to three).

In 1949, the Berlin Airlift came to an end.

In 1954, the first nuclear-powered submarine, the USS Nautilus, was commissioned by the U.S. Navy.

In 1955, actor James Dean, 24, was killed in a two-car collision near Cholame, California.

In 1972, Roberto Clemente hit a double against Jon Matlack of the New York Mets during Pittsburgh's 5-0 victory at Three Rivers Stadium; the hit was the 3,000th and last for the Pirates star.

In 1984, the mystery series "Murder, She Wrote," starring Angela Lansbury, premiered on CBS.

In 1986, the U.S. released accused Soviet spy Gennadiy Zakharov, one day after the Soviets released American journalist Nicholas Daniloff.

In 2001, under threat of U.S. military strikes, Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban rulers said explicitly for the first time that Osama bin Laden was still in the country and that they knew where his hideout was located.

In 2014, the first case of Ebola diagnosed in the U.S. was confirmed in a patient who had recently traveled from Liberia to Dallas. California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the nation's first statewide ban on single-use plastic bags at grocery and convenience stores.

In 2017, Monty Hall, the long-running host of TV's "Let's Make a Deal," died of heart failure at his home in Beverly Hills at the age of 96.

Ten years ago: A U.S. drone airstrike in Yemen killed two American members of al-Qaida, cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and recruiting magazine editor Samir Khan.

Five years ago: Alabama's Court of the Judiciary permanently suspended state Chief Justice Roy Moore for defying federal court rulings on gay marriage, saying he had violated judicial ethics. Scottish boxer Mike Towell, 25, died after suffering severe bleeding and swelling to his brain during a televised fight against Dale Evans in Glasgow.

One year ago: Authorities in California said they had arrested and charged a man in connection with the shooting earlier in the month that wounded two Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies as they sat in their squad car. (Deonte Lee Murray has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder and other charges.) Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves announced he was ending a statewide mask mandate, but the Republican governor said he would still require people to wear masks in school to curb the spread of novel coronavirus. A court approved a settlement totaling \$800 million from casino company MGM Resorts International and its insurers to more than 4,400 relatives and victims of the 2017 Las Vegas Strip shooting that left 58 people dead.

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Serena Williams' latest bid for a record-tying 24th Grand Slam title ended when she was unable to play a second-round match at the French Open because of an injury.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Angie Dickinson is 90. Singer Cissy Houston is 88. Singer Johnny Mathis is 86. Actor Len Cariou is 82. Singer Marilyn McCoo is 78. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is 76. Pop singer Sylvia Peterson (The Chiffons) is 75. Actor Vondie Curtis-Hall is 71. Actor Victoria Tennant is 71. Actor John Finn is 69. Rock musician John Lombardo is 69. Singer Deborah Allen is 68. Actor Calvin Levels is 67. Actor Barry Williams is 67. Singer Patrice Rushen is 67. Actor Fran Drescher is 64. Country singer Marty Stuart is 63. Actor Debrah Farentino is 62. Former Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., is 61. Actor Crystal Bernard is 60. Actor Eric Stoltz is 60. Rapper-producer Marley Marl is 59. Country singer Eddie Montgomery (Montgomery-Gentry) is 58. Rock singer Trey Anastasio is 57. Actor Monica Bellucci is 57. Rock musician Robby Takac (Goo Goo Dolls) is 57. Actor Lisa Thornhill is 55. Actor Andrea Roth is 54. Actor Amy Landecker is 52. Actor Silas Weir Mitchell is 52. Actor Tony Hale is 51. Actor Jenna Elfman is 50. Actor Ashley Hamilton is 47. Actor Marion Cotillard is 46. Actor Christopher Jackson is 46. Actor Stark Sands is 43. Actor Mike Damus is 42. Actor Toni Trucks is 41. Former tennis player Martina Hingis is 41. Olympic gold medal gymnast Dominique Moceanu is 40. Actor Lacey Chabert is 39. Actor Kieran Culkin is 39. Singer-rapper T-Pain is 37.