

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Upcoming Events

### Friday, Oct. 1

7 p.m.: Football vs. Dakota Hills Coop at Waubay  
(Livestreamed at [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM))

### Saturday, Oct. 2

9 a.m.: Gypsy Day Parade, Aberdeen  
2 p.m.: Boys soccer hosts Freeman Academy  
3 p.m.: Girls soccer at Dakota Valley with JV game at 1 p.m.

### Monday, Oct. 4

State Boys Golf Meet at Madison  
Oral Interp at Milbank Invitational  
5 p.m.: Junior Varsity Football hosts Sisseton (re-scheduled from 9-20-21)

### Tuesday, Oct. 5

State Boys Golf Meet at Madison  
Soccer Playoffs for boys and girls  
Junior High Volleyball at Redfield (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)

### Thursday, Oct. 7

10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Flu Shot Clinic at Groton Area  
1 p.m.: NEC Cross Country Meet at Webster  
4 p.m. to 8 p.m.: Parent/Teacher Conferences  
5 p.m.: Junior High Football hosting Webster Area

### Friday, Oct. 8 - NO SCHOOL

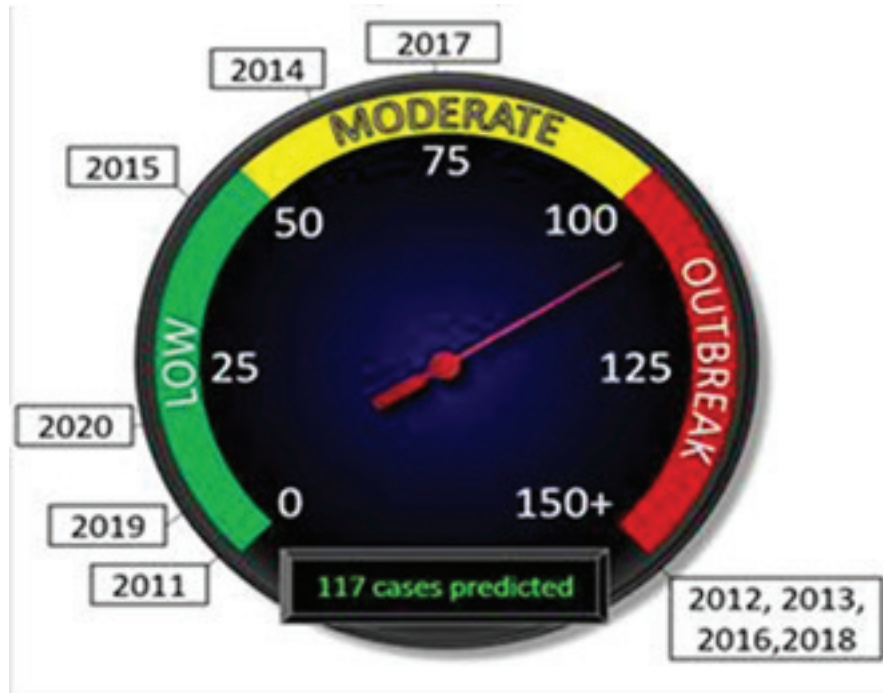
8 a.m. to Noon: Parent/Teacher Conferences  
10 a.m.: Lake Region Marching Festival in Groton  
Noon to 3:30 p.m.: Faculty Inservice



## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
© 2021 Groton Daily Independent

## West Nile Update This will be the final weekly update



SD WNV (as of September 29): 47 human cases reported (Beadle, Bon Homme, Brown, Charles Mix, Clark, Corson, Davison, Day, Dewey, Douglas, Hamlin, Hand, Hughes, Hutchinson, Kingsbury, Lake, Lawrence, Marshall, Minnehaha, Moody, Oglala Lakota, Potter, Roberts, Sanborn, Spink, Stanley, Tripp, Union, Walworth, Yankton) and 1 death

Positive blood donors (as of September 27): 5 (Clark, Charles Mix, Day, Hand, Roberts)

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

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

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2021, South Dakota (as of September 27)

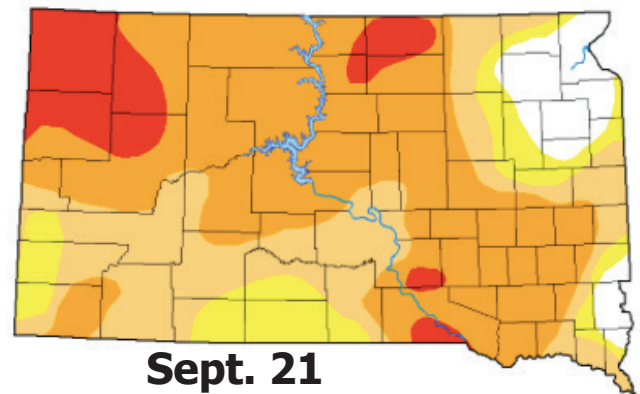
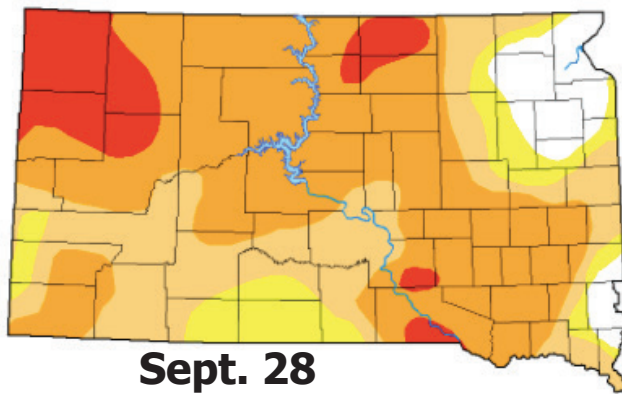
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## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



### High Plains

Almost the entire region was dry this week with only light precipitation recorded in portions of the region. Most all of the region was at or above normal for temperatures this week with the warmest readings in the Dakotas where temperatures were 6-8 degrees above normal. The dry weather coupled with the warm temperatures accelerated grain dry down and maturity, kickstarting harvest in the area. It also allowed for drought to both expand and intensify. Portions of northwest North Dakota had extreme drought conditions return. Moderate and severe drought were expanded over portions of eastern Colorado, northern and southern Kansas, western and central Nebraska, southwest South Dakota and southeast Wyoming. Severe and extreme drought were also expanded over north central Wyoming. The warm and dry conditions, especially in September, have been the catalyst for degradation over the region that has remained dry.

## Hamlin beats Groton Area in four sets

Hamlin took charge of the fourth set to claim the third win in volleyball action Thursday in Groton.

Hamlin won the first set, 25-19. That set was tied five times and the lead changed hands four times. Groton Area won the second set, 25-19. That set was tied four times with just one lead change early in the set as Groton Area took charge and never looked back. The third set was tied 10 times with the last tie at 20 and there were three lead changes as Hamlin won that one, 25-22. Hamlin quickly took charge of the fourth set, jumping out to a 3-0 lead, then 7-2. The Chargers won the set, 25-12.

Madeline Fliehs led the Tigers with 15 kills, two blocks and an ace serve. Aspen Johnson had 10 kills and a block. Sydney Liecht had seven kills and an ace serve. Anna Fjeldheim had five kills and two ace serves, Elizabeth Fliehs had four kills and two ace serves. Trista Keith and Megan Fliehs each had one kill. Alyssa Thaler had 26 digs while Leicht had 17 and Keith 13.

Ally Abraham led the Chargers with 19 kills and two blocks. Gracelyn Leiseth had nine kills and a block. Kami Wadsworth had six kills and two ace serves. Grace Everson had two ace serves and a kill. Addison Neuendorf had two kills and an ace serve. Ava Prouty had two kills and Alyssa West and Payton Welborg each had an ace serve.

The varsity match was broadcast live on GDLIVE.COM, sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls and the John Sieh Agency. The junior varsity match was also broadcast live on GDLIVE.COM, sponsored by an anonymous sponsor.

Hamlin won the junior varsity match, 25-21 and 25-17. Faith Traphagen and Lydia Meier each had three kills and an ace serve, Laila Roberts had two kills and an ace serve, Marlee Tollifson had three kills, Aspen Johnson had two kills and Hollie Frost had a block and a kill. Emily Everson led Hamlin with five kills and an ace serve and Ellyana Prouty had three kills and two ace serves.

Groton Area won the C match, 25-20 and 25-15.

## Public Power Week

If you live in the city of Groton, you are served by a community-owned, customer-focused, locally controlled municipal electric utility.

Groton is a public power community. Public power utilities do not serve stockholders. They are owned by the community and run as a division of local government.

The utility's priorities are customer focused and based on what's best for the community.

You get a say in those priorities because decisions are made right at home in Groton. Meetings are open to the public with an opportunity for you to provide comments.

Groton receives electricity from Heartland Consumers Power District, one of more than 2,000 public power utilities that provide electricity to more than 49 million people across the country.

As we celebrate Public Power Week October 3-9, we recognize the people behind the power, the hard-working and dedicated employees of Groton ensuring you have reliable electricity day in and day out.

We tip our hats to those who keep your community running and thank them for their tireless efforts to keep the lights on, no matter the circumstances.

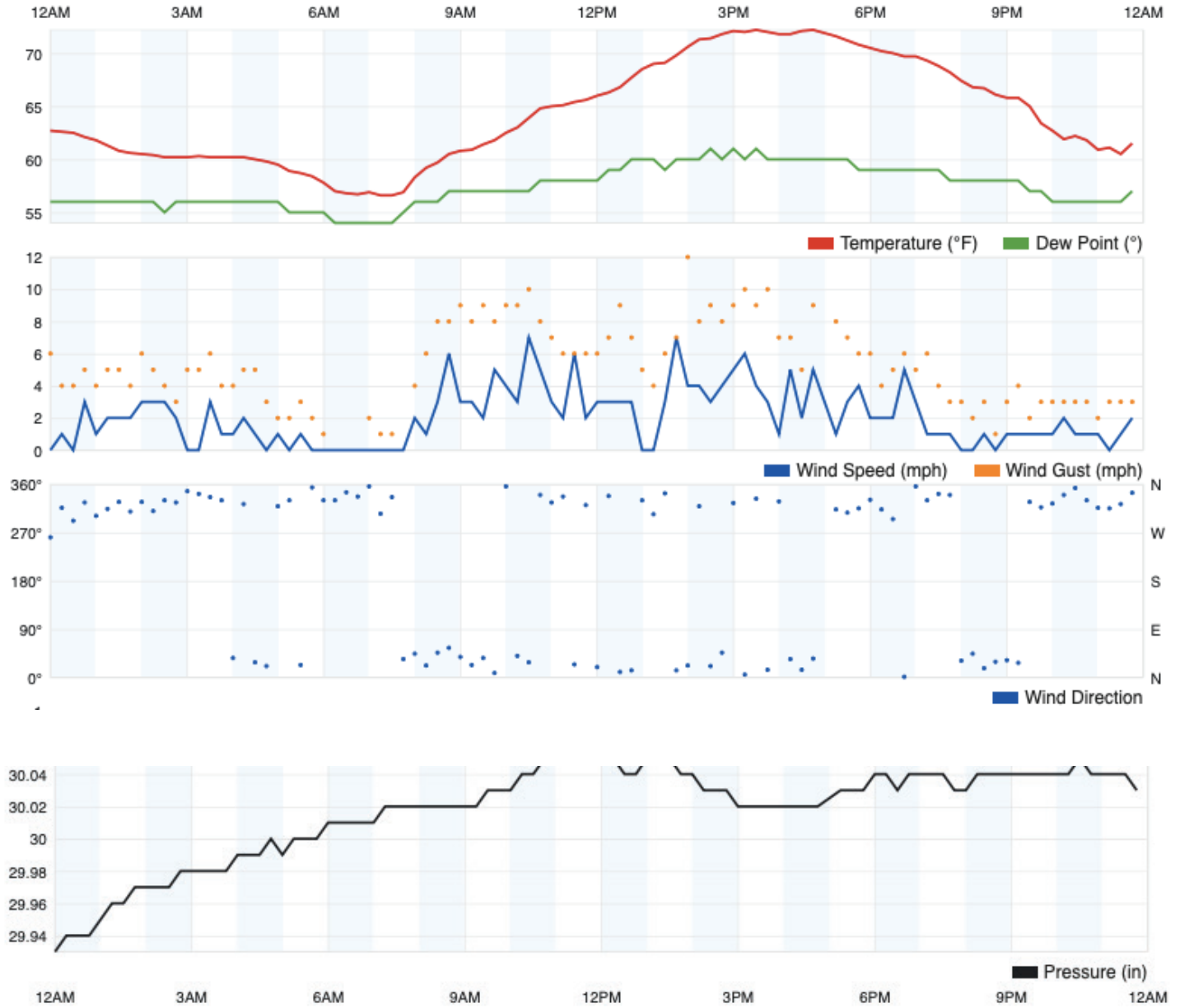
Russell Olson, CEO

Heartland Consumers Power District

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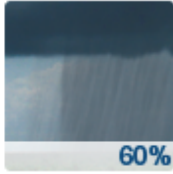
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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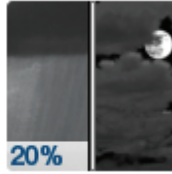
Today



60%  
Showers Likely and Patchy Fog

High: 68 °F

Tonight



20%  
Slight Chance Showers then Mostly Cloudy

Low: 50 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 75 °F

Saturday Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 45 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 75 °F

## Above Normal Temperatures into Next Week

### Maximum Temperature Forecast

	10/1	10/2	10/3	10/4	10/5	10/6	10/7	10/8	Maximum
	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	
Aberdeen	69	76	75	77	76	76	76	75	77
Britton	67	71	72	74	74	73	73	73	74
Eagle Butte	70	75	77	79	78	79	77	74	79
Eureka	67	75	76	78	77	77	76	74	78
Gettysburg	66	73	75	76	76	76	75	72	76
Kennebec	68	74	76	78	77	77	77	77	78
McIntosh	70	74	76	78	78	78	77	72	78
Milbank	69	71	72	73	72	72	72	74	74
Miller	67	73	75	77	76	75	75	75	77
Mobridge	72	77	80	81	81	79	79	75	81
Murdock	71	74	78	80	80	80	78	77	80



Showers and storms mainly east of the river today will end from west to east into tonight. Otherwise, Saturday through much of next week is expected to be dry with highs mostly in the 70s to the lower 80s.

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## Today in Weather History

October 1, 1971: A rare October tornado developed in Sully County during the evening hours. The brief tornado damaged a ranch home and large barn, 6 miles west-northwest of Onida.

October 1, 1999: A narrow band of heavy snow fell across portions of South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 4 to 8" were typical in the relatively narrow band, breaking many daily records.

October 1, 2012: Drought continued to intensify and expand across central and northeast South Dakota through October, resulting in severe to exceptional drought conditions. Many locations continued the trend of recording well below-average precipitation totals for the month. The exceptional drought conditions expanded into Stanley, Jones, and southern Lyman counties. Extreme drought conditions spread into southern Dewey, Sully, Hughes, Lyman, Jones, Southwest Hyde, Hamlin, Codington, Grant, and Deuel counties. Severe drought conditions spread into Corson, Dewey, northwest Hyde, Hand, Faulk, Edmunds, McPherson, Brown, eastern Clark, and southern Roberts Counties.

1890: The weather service is first identified as a civilian agency when Congress, at the request of President Benjamin Harrison, passes an act transferring the Signal Service's meteorological responsibilities to the newly-created U.S. Weather Bureau in the Department of Agriculture.

1893: On this day, the village of Caminadaville, Louisiana, was destroyed by a massive hurricane. Caminadaville was a vibrant fishing community in the late 19th century, located on Cheniere Caminada, adjacent to Grand Isle in coastal Jefferson Parish in Louisiana. It took five days for the news of this devastating hurricane to reach New Orleans.

1938: Grannis and Okay, Arkansas set an all-time high-temperature record for October for Arkansas with 105 degrees.

1945: While investigating a Category 1 typhoon over the South China Sea, the typhoon hunter plane was lost. This marks the first of only a few instances of the Hurricane/Typhoon plane was lost during their flight into the storm.

1958: NASA officially begins operations on October 1st, 1958.

1977: While an F3 tornado traveled less than one-mile through Montfort Heights or the greater Cincinnati area, it destroyed 12 homes and damaged 15 others. There were 17 injuries.

1752 - The second severe hurricane in two weeks hit the Carolinas. The Onslow County Courthouse was destroyed along with all its records, and Beacon Island disappeared. (David Ludlum)

1893 - The second great hurricane of the 1893 season hit the Mississippi Delta Region drowning more than 1000 persons. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A blast of cold arctic air hit the north central U.S. An afternoon thunderstorm slickened the streets of Duluth MN with hail and snow, and later in the afternoon, strong northerly winds reached 70 mph. Unseasonably warm weather continued in the Pacific northwest. Afternoon highs of 90 degrees at Olympia WA, 92 degrees at Portland OR, and 89 degrees at Seattle WA, were records for the month of October. For Seattle WA it marked the twenty-first daily record high for the year, a record total in itself. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather across central Oklahoma and the eastern half of Texas. Thunderstorms in Texas produced softball size hail northwest of Nocona, and baseball size hail at Troy and Park Springs. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S. through the daytime and evening hours. Severe thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, with seven of those tornadoes in Georgia. A tornado southwest of Moultrie, GA, killed two persons and injured a dozen others. Tornadoes also injured one person north of Graceville, FL, and two persons at Bartow, GA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

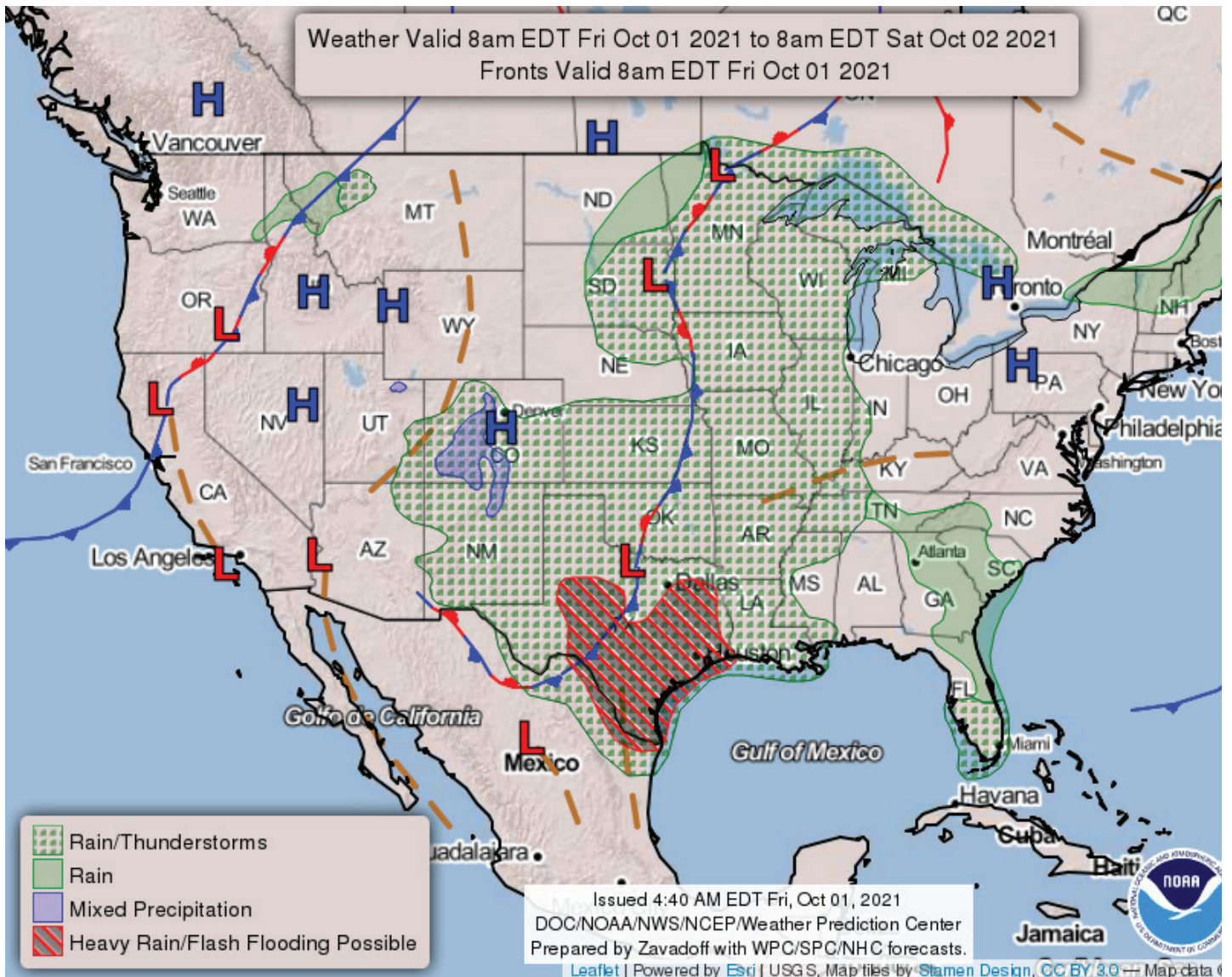
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 72.2 °F at 3:30 PM**  
**Low Temp: 56.6 °F at 7:15 AM**  
**Wind: 12 mph at 2:00 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

**Record High: 92° in 1922**  
**Record Low: 21° in 1974**  
**Average High: 68°F**  
**Average Low: 40°F**  
**Average Precip in Oct.: 0.08**  
**Precip to date in Oct.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 18.41**  
**Precip Year to Date: 15.42**  
**Sunset Tonight: 7:13:57 PM**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:31:04 AM**





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## HIS MASTER'S VOICE

There once was a dog named "Nipper," a terrier, who was very devoted to his master, Mark Barraud. The two were best friends and were rarely seen apart from each other. When Mark died, his brother Francis 'adopted' him and after a lengthy period of mourning, "Nipper" became very attached to Francis, who was an artist. Eventually they too developed a very close relationship.

Mark and Francis lived in the latter 1800s and at that time phonographs with wax cylinders were used for recording voices and music. Some of Francis' cylinders contained recordings of his voice and each time he played one of his recordings, "Nipper" would place his head near the phonograph and look intently into it as though he was looking for his master to appear. "Nipper's" pose inspired the artist, and he painted a picture of it that became one of the most famous and recognizable brands in all the world, called "His Master's Voice."

In Psalm 99:7 we read that "He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud." What an unusual means of communication. Imagine walking through a field and suddenly hearing a cloud call you by name and giving you a special message. Seems improbable, but that's what God did to Moses and Aaron. Yet, if necessary, He could do it today.

Our God is constantly trying to speak to us in different ways at different times and in different places every moment of every day. He does everything he can to get our attention to get us to hear "our Master's voice." However, we must be alert and attentive, waiting and willing to hear Him speak, and keep our eyes open to see Him in action.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to eliminate the noise in our ears and fog in our eyes so we can see You when You show up and hear You when You speak. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He spoke to Israel from the pillar of cloud, and they followed the laws and decrees he gave them. Psalm 99:7

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## 2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)  
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)  
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS  
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.  
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament  
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon  
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament  
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament  
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton  
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament  
**Cancelled** Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course  
08/29/2021 Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day at GHS Parking Lot (4-5 p.m.)  
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)  
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)  
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/29/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)  
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/04/2021 Olive Grove Tour of Homes  
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

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News from the  Associated Press

## Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Sisseton, 25-17, 25-17, 25-19  
Arlington def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 23-25, 23-25, 25-21, 25-22, 15-4  
Baltic def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-11, 25-10, 25-12  
Belle Fourche def. Bowman County, N.D., 25-17, 23-25, 25-16, 25-21  
Bison def. Dupree, 25-14, 25-12, 25-19  
Brandon Valley def. Aberdeen Central, 25-15, 25-14, 25-9  
Burke def. Boyd County, Neb., 25-14, 25-16, 25-12  
Chester def. Beresford, 25-14, 25-11, 25-21  
Clark/Willow Lake def. Deuel, 24-26, 25-14, 25-12, 25-22  
Colman-Egan def. Castlewood, 25-14, 20-25, 25-22, 25-11  
Corsica/Stickney def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-15, 26-24, 23-25, 25-21  
Custer def. Lead-Deadwood, 23-25, 25-19, 25-20, 25-10  
DeSmet def. Estelline/Hendricks, 23-25, 25-22, 25-18, 25-15  
Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Lake Preston, 25-10, 25-15, 25-17  
Dell Rapids def. Lennox, 22-25, 25-27, 25-7, 25-19, 15-12  
Deubrook def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-10, 25-9, 22-25, 19-25, 15-10  
Douglas def. Sturgis Brown, 25-22, 17-25, 27-25, 25-22  
Faith def. Harding County, 26-24, 17-25, 23-25, 25-16, 15-6  
Faulkton def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-19, 9-25, 25-22, 25-21  
Florence/Henry def. Tri-State, N.D., 25-18, 25-8, 25-7  
Freeman def. Ethan, 25-21, 25-22, 27-25  
Garretson def. Parker, 25-21, 25-22, 25-12  
Gregory def. Chamberlain, 25-16, 25-14, 25-13  
Harrisburg def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-17, 25-13, 25-14  
Hill City def. Rapid City Christian, 27-25, 14-25, 25-11, 26-24  
Howard def. Mitchell Christian, 25-3, 25-10, 25-7  
Huron def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-21, 16-25, 25-23, 18-25, 15-13  
Irene-Wakonda def. Centerville, 25-13, 25-20, 25-18  
Jones County def. Kadoka Area, 25-21, 25-14, 17-25, 25-18  
Kimball/White Lake def. Hanson, 25-21, 25-18, 14-25, 21-25, 15-8  
Langford def. Waubay/Summit, 25-15, 25-16, 25-23  
McCook Central/Montrose def. Tri-Valley, 25-17, 25-17, 25-9  
Menno def. Bon Homme, 25-22, 26-24, 25-27, 25-22  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Winner, 25-14, 18-25, 25-20, 22-25, 15-10  
Philip def. Sully Buttes, 25-15, 25-17, 25-17  
Platte-Geddes def. Lyman, 25-11, 25-9, 25-11  
Redfield def. Milbank, 23-25, 25-16, 22-25, 25-23, 15-11  
Sioux Falls Christian def. Elk Point-Jefferson, 25-15, 25-11, 25-9  
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 21-25, 25-20, 26-24, 25-21  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Pierre, 22-25, 25-14, 25-23, 25-20  
Sioux Valley def. Flandreau, 25-15, 26-24, 16-25, 22-25, 15-11  
St. Thomas More def. Red Cloud, 25-8, 25-9, 25-23  
Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. def. North Central Co-Op, 25-18, 25-7, 25-13

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Tea Area def. Canton, 20-25, 18-25, 25-15, 25-19, 16-14  
Warner def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-15, 25-15, 25-8  
Wilmot def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-8, 25-12, 25-14  
Yankton def. Vermillion, 25-15, 25-17, 25-8  
Dakota Valley Triangular=  
Dakota Valley def. Pierce, Neb., 25-20, 25-20, 21-25, 25-16  
Dakota Valley def. Ponca, Neb., 25-15, 25-14, 25-12

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

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

## Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined  
PREP FOOTBALL=  
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 38, Little Wound 28  
Sioux Falls Washington 35, Brookings 14  
Todd County 60, St. Francis Indian 36

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

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

## South Dakota AG passes plane inquiry to accountability board

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota attorney general says a request from a state lawmaker to investigate Gov. Kristi Noem's use of the state airplane should be handled by a board that's responsible for reviewing allegations of misconduct from state officials.

Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba in February asked the attorney general to investigate whether Noem had violated South Dakota law by flying on the state airplane to events hosted by political organizations. Noem flew in state planes to 2019 events hosted by political organizations like the National Rifle Association, Turning Point USA, and the Republican Jewish Coalition.

Noem had defended her travel to those events as part of her role as an "ambassador for the state" and said she has always used the plane according to state law. A voter-passed state law, spearheaded by Nesiba in 2006 before he was a legislator, stipulates that state-owned aircraft can only be used for state business.

In a letter dated Tuesday, Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg said he referred the request to the Government Accountability Board. If the four retired judges who sit on the board determine state laws were violated, they can request a criminal investigation.

Ravnsborg said in the letter that laws on state airplane use apply to the governor.

## Gov. Noem cuts ties with former Trump adviser Lewandowski

By STEPHEN GROVES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem is cutting ties with political adviser Corey Lewandowski after the longtime confidant to former President Donald Trump was accused of making unwanted sexual advances toward a GOP donor.

Lewandowski had been key to the Republican governor's political rise over the last year, joining her at political events across the country and helping her gain access to the former president's political orbit. But his time as her adviser was also marked by frequent staff departures from the governor's office.

Noem's spokesman Ian Fury said Lewandowski "will not be advising the Governor in regard to the cam-

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paign or official office.”

He added that Lewandowski’s role was as a “volunteer” and he was “never paid a dime” from Noem’s campaign or South Dakota government. Fury did not immediately respond to a question about whether Noem saw any of Lewandowski’s behavior at a Las Vegas fundraising event, where he was accused of the harassment.

A former top aide to Noem, Maggie Seidel, said in a Wednesday statement to The Associated Press that she thought it would be “outrageous for her to continue to associate with Corey Lewandowski.”

Politico reported Wednesday that Trashelle Odom alleges Lewandowski repeatedly touched her without her permission, made lewd comments and “stalked” her throughout the evening.

“He repeatedly touched me inappropriately, said vile and disgusting things to me, stalked me, and made me feel violated and fearful,” she said in a statement to the outlet. “I am coming forward because he needs to be held accountable.” Trashelle Odom is the wife of Idaho construction executive John Odom.

Politico also said it had spoken to four first-hand witnesses who corroborated Odom’s accusation as well as two people who had spoken with her about the alleged incidents.

Lewandowski was removed on Wednesday from his role running a Trump-supporting super PAC after Odom’s accusation.

“Corey Lewandowski will be going on to other endeavors and we very much want to thank him for his service. He will no longer be associated with Trump World,” Trump spokesman Taylor Budowich wrote in a statement.

He said Pam Bondi, the former attorney general of Florida and longtime Trump supporter who had been assisting with the group, “has our complete faith and confidence in taking over MAGA Action.”

Lewandowski and his lawyer did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The political operative was the former president’s first campaign manager in 2016 and remained one of his most vocal supporters and trusted outside advisers during his time at the White House, with Trump frequently turning to him at moments of crisis.

In March 2016, Lewandowski was accused by Michelle Fields, then a reporter for the right-wing Breitbart website, of roughly yanking her arm after a Trump news conference. But Lewandowski denied any wrongdoing and Trump repeatedly defended him, even after video emerged of the incident. Lewandowski was charged with battery, but it was later dropped.

Lewandowski was later fired from his job as Trump’s first campaign manager after clashing with Trump’s adult children, but the separation was only temporary.

He also advised Trump’s 2020 campaign, has served as a CNN political commentator, and has written three books on the former president.

In New Hampshire, Democrats have also been calling on Matt Mowers, a GOP congressional candidate who worked for Trump’s administration, to disavow Lewandowski after he endorsed the candidate. The Mowers campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

And in Nebraska, GOP candidate for governor Charles Herbster said Thursday he was cutting ties with Lewandowski, who had served as a senior adviser. Lewandowski recorded an endorsement video for the Falls City businessman three weeks ago where he praised him for always maintaining his support of Trump.

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Associated Press writers Michael Casey in Concord, N.H., and Josh Funk in Omaha, Nebraska, contributed. Colvin reported from New York.

## Caregiver enters not guilty pleas in death of toddler

WATERTOWN, S.D. (AP) — A Watertown woman has pleaded not guilty to felony charges in the death of a toddler who was in her care.

A Codington County grand jury indicted 30-year-old Amanda Walder on one count of second-degree murder, two counts of first-degree manslaughter and aggravated battery.

First responders answered a call about an unconscious child at Walder’s unlicensed day care July 14.

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Sixteen-month-old Liam Koistinen died later that day from trauma that resulted in a brain bleed and swelling.

In an interview with law enforcement, Walder admitted the child was being difficult in laying down for a nap, the Argus Leader reported. Walder admitted being firm with the child, but also said she could have unintentionally harmed him, according to court documents.

Judge Carmen Means determined that Walder is not a threat to the community and granted her non-supervised contact with her children.

Means on Wednesday adjusted Walder's bond to \$50,000 cash from \$100,000 and set a status hearing for Nov. 10. Trial is set to begin Nov. 19.

## Nation's most restrictive abortion law back in Texas court

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal judge on Friday will consider whether Texas can leave in place the most restrictive abortion law in the U.S., which since September has banned most abortions and sent women racing to get care beyond the borders of the nation's second-most populous state.

A lawsuit filed by the Biden administration seeks to land the first legal blow against the Texas law known as Senate Bill 8, which thus far has withstood an early wave of challenges — including the U.S. Supreme Court allowing it to remain in force.

"Abortion care has almost completely stopped in our state," Dr. Ghazaleh Moayed, a Texas abortion provider, told the U.S. House Oversight and Reform Committee during a hearing over abortion access Thursday.

The law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, prohibits abortions in Texas once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks, which is before some women know they are pregnant. In the short time since the law took effect Sept. 1, abortion providers say "exactly what we feared" has become reality, describing Texas clinics that are now in danger of closing while neighboring states struggle to keep up with a surge of patients now driving hundreds of miles from Texas. Other women, they say, are being forced to carry pregnancies to term.

U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman of Austin will hear arguments Friday over whether to temporarily halt the Texas law, which stands as the nation's biggest curb to the constitutional right to an abortion in a half-century.

The Justice Department has pushed for the court to act swiftly, but it is unclear how soon Pitman will decide.

It is also unclear how quickly any of Texas' nearly two dozen abortion clinics would move to resume normal operations if the law is set aside. Texas officials would likely seek a swift reversal from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which previously allowed the restrictions to take effect.

The Texas law is just one that is setting up the biggest test of abortion rights in the U.S. in decades and it is part of a broader push by Republicans nationwide to impose new restrictions on abortion.

On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court begins a new term, which in December will include arguments in Mississippi's bid to have the landmark Roe v. Wade decision guaranteeing a woman's right to an abortion overturned.

Last month, the court did not rule on the constitutionality of Texas' law in allowing it to remain in place. But abortion providers took that 5-4 vote as an ominous sign about where the court, its conservative majority fortified with three appointees of former President Donald Trump, might be heading on abortion.

Other states, mostly in the South, have passed similar laws that ban abortion within the early weeks of pregnancy, all of which judges have blocked. But a wrinkle to Texas' version has so far outmaneuvered courts: Enforcement is left to private citizens, not prosecutors.

Under the Texas law, anyone can file a lawsuit not only against abortion providers, but persons suspected of even helping a woman getting an abortion after cardiac activity is detected. The person bringing the lawsuit is entitled to at least \$10,000 in damages if they prevail, which critics say amounts to a bounty.

The Texas Attorney General's Office argued in court filings this week that even if the law was put on

hold temporarily, providers could still face the threat of litigation over violations that might occur in the time between a permanent ruling.

"The federal government's complaint is that the Heartbeat Act is difficult to effectively enjoin," the state wrote in objection to the lawsuit by the Biden administration. "But there is no requirement that a state write its laws to make them easily enjoined."

At least one Texas abortion provider has admitted to violating the law and been sued — but not by abortion opponents. Former attorneys in Illinois and Arkansas say they instead sued a San Antonio doctor in hopes of getting a judge who would invalidate the law.

## Past storms haven't fazed Facebook. Instagram Kids might

By AMANDA SEITZ and BARBARA ORTUTAY Associated Press

Nineteen-year-old Gigi Painter hopes Facebook's planned "Instagram Kids" never becomes a reality.

Growing up in a small Ohio town, Painter said she and most of her friends created Instagram accounts by lying about their ages years before they turned 13.

She recalls constant pressure to post good photos that would garner lots of "likes" or positive comments. And then there was the ever-present threat of bullying on the platform. Some people at her school would create anonymous Instagram accounts where they'd upload photos of other students with mean or sexualized captions.

She isn't alone. An unlikely alliance of congressional Democrats and Republicans, along with a host of child development experts and online advocacy groups, is now pressuring Facebook to scuttle Instagram Kids, a proposed service for tweens. Their reasoning could be summarized this way: A company that cannot keep human trafficking, hate speech and the live-streaming of suicides off its platform should not be trusted with making an app for children.

"This is serious," said Painter, who can rattle off all the social media accounts she has on her phone. "People are basing their whole view of themselves off of the feedback they get from a picture."

Instagram, a small but beloved photo sharing app when Facebook bought it for \$1 billion in 2012, is having its Facebook moment. It's not an enviable one. Damning newspaper reports based on the company's own research found that Facebook knew about the harms Instagram can cause to teenagers — especially teen girls — when it comes to mental health and body image issues.

In a swift PR offensive, Facebook tried to play down the reports — including its own research. It didn't work.

On Thursday, senators — one from each side of the aisle — called the first of several hearings on the subject. Antigone Davis, Facebook's head of global safety, defended Instagram's efforts to protect young people using its platform, insisting that Facebook cares "deeply about the safety and security of the people on our platform."

The Senate Commerce Subcommittee is examining how Facebook handled information from its own researchers on Instagram's potential threat to younger users while the company publicly played down the issue.

The episode threatens to rival the scale of Facebook's 2018 Cambridge Analytica debacle. Revelations at the time showed that the data mining firm had gathered details on as many as 87 million Facebook users without their permission, eventually leading to congressional hearings in which Facebook CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg testified for the first time.

But the Cambridge Analytica was complicated and hard to follow. During those hearings, some lawmakers didn't seem to have even a basic understanding on how social media works.

Thursday's hearing showed that they've done some homework. The fallout could put an end to the tech company's plan for a children's product — and might even spur lawmakers to regulate the company, if only they can agree on how.

"It's abundantly clear that Facebook views the events of the last two weeks purely as a PR problem," said Josh Golin, executive director of the children's online watchdog group Fairplay. The group, formerly

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known as the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, doesn't take money from Facebook or other corporations, unlike the nonprofits Facebook tends to bring in for expert advice on its products.

There is a good side to children's use of the internet, said Dr. Nusheen Ameenuddin, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on Communications and Media. It can be a great place for kids to talk with friends during a pandemic lockdown, explore a museum virtually or even make money as budding influencers.

But some of her pediatric patients have endured harassment or spend too much time scrolling through an endless stream of photos on apps like Instagram.

That's why she and other pediatricians want Facebook to do a better job of making sure young kids don't find their way onto sites like Instagram. And they want legislators to pass regulations on how tech companies can advertise to kids.

"I understand they're a businesses," Ameenuddin said. "(But) we don't have to exploit the most vulnerable members of society."

Legislators have failed to regulate the tech companies in a meaningful way, despite dozens of hearings in recent years in which politicians publicly assailed Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter for making big money off of Americans' data and privacy.

But Facebook had a harder time defending itself on Thursday to a U.S. senators who came prepared with research and tough questions, noted Brooke Erin Duffy, a communications professor at Cornell University. The hearing was starkly different from the Senate's 2018 grilling of Zuckerberg in which senators asked him basic questions — like how Facebook makes money.

"The focus on protecting children may be much more of a catalyst for regulation than other concerns and criticisms," Duffy said. "The senators deployed this knowledge of big tech in a way that I don't think we've seen before."

Roger McNamee, an early Facebook investor who is now one of the company's biggest critics, said it's important to remember how Instagram got its start. It was a photo sharing app, born in 2010 when smartphone cameras were pretty lousy by today's standards, its creators added photo filters so people could make them look better.

"The culture was from the start making things look better than in real life," McNamee said. "This created an entire culture of envy that was the original design of the product and they leaned into it every step of the way. Think about the whole influencer movement that began on Instagram. All that was designed for that envy model."

"We need to recognize, just as we did with food and pharma and chemicals that this industry cannot operate safely without regulation," McNamee said. "We are running out of time."

Now a college student, Painter says she cares less now about getting "likes" on Instagram. But she worries about younger relatives who seem anxious to post perfect pictures on the platform. Looking back on how Instagram was used when she went to school, she hopes it's different for them.

"Oh gosh, I don't want them to have to experience a lot of that stuff," Painter said.

## Merck says experimental pill cuts worst effects of COVID-19

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Merck & Co. said Friday that its experimental COVID-19 pill reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half in people recently infected with the coronavirus and that it would soon ask health officials in the U.S. and around the world to authorize its use.

If cleared, Merck's drug would be the first pill shown to treat COVID-19, a potentially major advance in efforts to fight the pandemic. All COVID-19 therapies now authorized in the U.S. require an IV or injection.

Merck and its partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics said early results showed patients who received the drug, called molnupiravir, within five days of COVID-19 symptoms had about half the rate of hospitalization and death as patients who received a dummy pill. The study tracked 775 adults with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who were considered higher risk for severe disease due to health problems such as obesity,



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diabetes or heart disease.

Among patients taking molnupiravir, 7.3% were either hospitalized or died at the end of 30 days, compared with 14.1% of those getting the dummy pill. There were no deaths in the drug group after that time period compared with eight deaths in the placebo group, according to Merck. The results were released by the company and have not been peer reviewed. Merck said it plans to present them at a future medical meeting.

An independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early because the interim results were so strong. Company executives said they are in discussions with the Food and Drug Administration and plan submit the data for review in coming days.

"It exceeded what I thought the drug might be able to do in this clinical trial," said Dr. Dean Li, vice president of Merck research. "When you see a 50% reduction in hospitalization or death that's a substantial clinical impact."

Side effects were reported by both groups in the Merck trial, but they were slightly more common among the group that received a dummy pill. The company did not specify the problems.

Earlier study results showed the drug did not benefit patients who were already hospitalized with severe disease.

The U.S. has approved one antiviral drug, remdesivir, specifically for COVID-19, and allowed emergency use of three antibody therapies that help the immune system fight the virus. But all the drugs have to be given by IV or injection at hospitals or medical clinics, and supplies have been stretched by the latest surge of the delta variant.

Health experts including the top U.S. infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci have long called for a convenient pill that patients could take when COVID-19 symptoms first appear, much the way the decades-old flu medication Tamiflu helps fight influenza. Such medications are seen as key to controlling future waves of infection and reducing the impact of the pandemic.

Merck's pill works by interfering with an enzyme the coronavirus uses to copy its genetic code and reproduce itself. It has shown similar activity against other viruses.

The U.S. government has committed to purchase 1.7 million doses of the drug if it is authorized by the FDA. Merck has said it can produce 10 million doses by the end of the year and has contracts with governments worldwide. The company has not announced prices.

Several other companies, including Pfizer and Roche, are studying similar drugs that could report results in the coming weeks and months.

Merck had planned to enroll more than 1,500 patients in its late-stage trial before the independent board stopped it early. The results reported Friday included patients enrolled across Latin America, Europe and Africa. Executives estimated about 10% of patients studied were from the U.S.

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## Migrants on new route to Europe get trapped between borders

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

BIALYSTOK, Poland (AP) — After enduring a decade of war in Syria, Boshra al-Moallem and her two sisters seized their chance to flee. Her brother, who escaped years earlier to Belgium, had saved enough money for their trip, and word was spreading online that a new migration route into Europe had opened through Belarus.

But the journey proved terrifying and nearly deadly. Al-Moallem became trapped at the border of Belarus and Poland for 20 days and was pushed back and forth between armed guards from each side in an area of swamps. She endured cold nights, mosquitoes, hunger and terrible thirst. Only after she collapsed from exhaustion and dehydration did Polish guards finally take her to a hospital.

"I didn't expect this to happen to us. They told us it's really easy to go to Europe, to find your life, to

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run (from) war," the 48-year-old said as she recovered this week in a refugee center in eastern Poland. "I didn't imagine I would live another war between the borders."

Al-Moallem is one of thousands of people who traveled to Belarus in recent weeks and were then pushed across the border by Belarusian guards. The European Union has condemned the Belarusian actions as a form of "hybrid war" against the bloc.

Originally from Homs, Al-Moallem was displaced to Damascus by the war. She said Belarusian officials tricked her into believing the journey into the EU would be easy and then used her as a "weapon" in a political fight against Poland. But she also says the Polish border guards were excessively harsh, denying her water and using dogs to frighten her and other migrants as the guards pushed them back across to Belarus, over and over again.

For years, people fleeing war in the Middle East have made dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, seeking safety in Western Europe. But after the arrival of more than a million people in 2015, European Union nations put up concrete and razor-wire walls, installed drone surveillance and cut deals with Turkey and Libya to keep migrants away.

The far less protected path into the EU through the forests and swamps of Eastern Europe emerged as a route only after the EU imposed sanctions on the regime of the authoritarian Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, following a flawed election and a harsh crackdown on protesters.

Suddenly people from Iraq, Syria and elsewhere were flying to Minsk, the capital of Belarus, on tourist visas and then traveling by car — many apparently aided by smugglers — to the border.

The three EU countries that border Belarus — Poland, Lithuania and Latvia — accuse Lukashenko of acting to destabilize their societies.

If that is indeed the aim, it is working. Poland denied entry to thousands of migrants and refused to let them apply for asylum, violating international human rights conventions. The country has had its behavior criticized by human rights groups at home and abroad.

Stanislaw Zaryn, a spokesman for Poland's special services, told The Associated Press that Polish forces always provide help to migrants if their lives are endangered. In other cases, while it might pain them not to help, Zaryn insisted that Poland must hold its ground and defend its border because it is being targeted in a high-stakes standoff with Belarus, which is backed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Poland is of the opinion that only by thoroughly securing our border with Belarus are we able to stop this migration route, which is a route artificially created by Lukashenko with Putin's support. It was artificially created in order to take revenge on the entire European Union," Zaryn said.

With six migrants found dead along the border so far and small children returned to Belarus this week, human rights workers are appalled. They insist Poland must respect its obligations under international law to allow the migrants to apply for asylum, and not push them back across the border.

"The fact that these are Lukashenko's political actions directed against Poland and directed against the European Union is obvious to us," said Marianna Wartecka with the refugee rights group Fundacja Ocalenie. "But this does not justify the actions of the Polish state."

Archbishop Wojciech Polak, the head of Poland's Roman Catholic Church, also weighed in, giving his support to medics seeking access to the border to help. "We should not allow our brethren to suffer and die on our borders," he said.

Lukashenko denies that his forces are pushing people into Poland, but his state media have seized on Poland's response to depict the EU as a place where human rights are not respected.

After traveling from Syria to Lebanon, al-Moallem, who was an English teacher in Syria, flew to Minsk, and from there took a taxi with her sisters and a brother-in-law to the border. Belarusian forces then guided the group to a spot to cross into Poland.

Crying as she told her story in English, Al-Moallem said that Belarusian forces told them: "It's a really easy way to get to Poland. It's a swamp. Just go through the swamp and up the hill, and you will be in Poland."

"And when we were trying to get up the hill, Polish border guards pushed us back. Families, women, men, children. The children were screaming and crying," she recalled. "I was asking Polish border guards, 'Please just a drop of water. I'm so thirsty. I've been here without a drop of water.'"

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But all they would do is snap back: "Go to Belarus. We are not responsible for you."

That happened repeatedly, with the Belarusian forces taking them back, sometimes giving them nothing more than some bread, and then returning them the next night.

During her ordeal, she took videos of the desperate migrants with her phone and posted some to Facebook. Her videos and her account to the AP provide rare eyewitness evidence of the crisis at the border.

Such scenes unfold largely out of public view because Poland, following Lithuania and Latvia, declared a state of emergency along the border, which prevents journalists and human rights workers from going there.

The Polish government's measures, which also involve bolstering border defenses with soldiers, are popular with many Poles. The conservative ruling party, which won power in 2015 on a strong anti-migrant platform, has seen its popularity strengthen in opinion polls amid the new crisis.

Despite Poland's efforts, there are reports that some asylum-seekers have managed to cross into the EU undetected and headed farther west, often to reunite with relatives in Germany.

Al-Moallem says she and her relatives plan to leave the center where they are staying now and travel across the EU's open borders to their brother in Belgium. They plan to seek asylum there. All she wants, she said, is for her family to be reunited after years of trauma and "to feel safe."

## Despite setback, Democrats try to save Biden \$3.5T plan

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite a long night of frantic negotiations, Democrats were unable to reach an immediate deal to salvage President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion government overhaul, forcing leaders to call off promised votes on a related public works bill. Action is to resume Friday.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi had pushed the House into an evening session and top White House advisers huddled for talks at the Capitol as the Democratic leaders worked late Thursday to negotiate a scaled-back plan that centrist holdouts would accept. Biden had cleared his schedule for calls with lawmakers, but it appeared no deal was within reach, particularly with Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin.

Manchin refused to budge, the West Virginia centrist holding fast to his earlier declaration that he was willing to meet the president less than halfway — \$1.5 trillion.

"I don't see a deal tonight. I really don't," Manchin told reporters as he left the Capitol.

Deeply at odds, the president and his party are facing a potentially embarrassing setback — if not politically devastating collapse of the whole enterprise — if they cannot resolve the standoff over Biden's big vision.

At immediate risk was a promised vote on the first piece of Biden's proposal, a slimmer \$1 trillion public works bill that is widely supported but has faltered amid stalled talks on his more ambitious package. Progressives were refusing to back the roads-and-bridges bill they view as insufficient unless there's progress on Biden's broader plan that's the heart of the Democratic agenda. With support, leaders canceled a promised Thursday night vote, and said the House would be back in session Friday,

Pelosi called it a "day of progress" in a letter to colleagues, but offered few other words on the path forward.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki released a statement saying: "A great deal of progress has been made this week, and we are closer to an agreement than ever. But we are not there yet, and so, we will need some additional time to finish the work, starting tomorrow morning first thing."

The political stakes could hardly be higher. Biden and his party are reaching for a giant legislative accomplishment — promising a vast rewrite of the nation's tax and spending plans — with a so-slim majority in Congress.

The president's sweeping proposal topped at \$3.5 trillion would essentially raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy and plow that money back into government health care, education and other programs, all of it touching the lives of countless Americans. He says the ultimate price tag is zero, because the tax revenue covers the spending costs.

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With Biden working the phones and top White House officials shuttling at the Capitol, talk swirled of the Democratic leaders trying to ease off the stalemate by reaching a broader deal, a compromise with Manchin and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, two centrist Democrats who are the linchpins to Biden's goals.

The idea was to produce the contours of an agreement over Biden's broader package, proceed with the \$1 trillion public works bill and negotiate the rest of Biden's big health care, education and climate change bill in the days to come. Lawmakers were told to stick around for possible late-night votes.

But as the night dragged on, it became clear that Manchin was not on board with a higher figure and chiseling away at that \$3.5 trillion topline risked losing progressive leaders who said they have already compromised enough and saw no reason to rush a deal to bring the centrists around to supporting the president's agenda.

"We've been fighting for transformative legislation as all of you know, these discussions have gone on for month after month after month," said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., the chairman of the Budget Committee and a leading progressive lawmaker. "This is not a baseball game. This is the most significant piece of legislation in 70 years."

All this on a day that saw a partial win for Democrats, with Congress passing and Biden signing legislation to keep the government running past Thursday's fiscal yearend deadline and avert a federal shutdown that had been threatened by Republican blockades.

The public works bill is one piece of that broader Biden vision, a \$1 trillion investment in routine transportation, broadband, water systems and other projects bolstered with extra funding. It won bipartisan support in the Senate but has now become snared by the broader debate.

Attention remains squarely focused on Manchin and Sinema, two centrist Democrats who helped steer that bipartisan bill to passage, but have concerns that Biden's overall bill is too big. The two senators have infuriated colleagues by not making any counter-proposals public.

Under scrutiny, Manchin called an impromptu press conference Thursday outside the Capitol, insisting he has been clear from the start.

"I'm willing to sit down and work on the \$1.5," Manchin told reporters, as protesters seeking a bigger package and Biden's priorities chanted behind him.

Manchin said he told the president as much during their talks this week, and confirmed that he put his views to paper during earlier talks this summer with Schumer.

It's not just Manchin's demands to reduce the overall size, but the conditions he wants placed on new spending that will rile his more liberal colleagues as he works to ensure the aid goes only to lower-income people, rather than broader swaths of Americans. Tensions spiked late Wednesday when Manchin sent out a fiery statement, decrying the broad spending as "fiscal insanity."

Sinema was similarly working to stave off criticism and her office said claims that she has not been forthcoming are "false" — though she has not publicly disclosed her views over what size package she wants and has declined to answer questions about her position.

Sinema has put dollar figures on the table and "continues to engage directly in good-faith discussions" with both Biden and Schumer, spokesman John LaBombard said in a statement.

Democrats' campaign promises on the line, the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, said exiting Pelosi's office that the progressives' views were unchanged -- they won't vote for one bill without the other and would stay all weekend to get a deal.

"Inaction is insanity," said Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., another progressive leader, pointing her criticism clear at Manchin's remarks.

"Trying to kill your party's agenda is insanity. Not trying to make sure the president we all worked so hard to elect, his agenda pass, is insanity."

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.

At the same time, Congress mostly resolved a more immediate crisis by passing legislation to provide government funding and avoid a federal shutdown, keeping operations going temporarily to Dec. 3. The

House quickly followed, and Biden signed the bill Thursday evening.

With Republicans opposed in lockstep to the president's big plan, deriding it as slide to socialist-style spending, Biden is reaching for a deal with members of his own party for a signature legislative accomplishment.

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.

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Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Brian Slodysko and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

## **'Anti-feminist' vandals in Israel deface images of women**

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The joyful glint in Peggy Parnass' eyes is so sharp it can be seen from the walls of Jerusalem's bustling Old City. Posted across the street at the gateway to City Hall, twin images of the Holocaust survivor and activist gaze out at the ancient warren of holy monuments of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

But just outside this center of spirituality, someone saw her image as a problem. Five times since the photos of Parnass were posted as part of an exhibition that began in April, vandals — widely believed to be ultra-Orthodox extremists — spray-painted over her eyes and mouth.

The graffiti was cleaned each time, leaving Parnass smiling again. For many Israelis, however, the short-term fix highlighted a familiar pattern that's all the more painful because the destruction is coming not from enemies across Israel's borders but from within.

"It's not anti-Semitic," said Jim Hollander, the curator of The Lonka Project art installation at Safra Square. "This is anti-feminist."

For all of its modernity, military firepower and high-tech know-how, Israel has for decades been unable to keep images of women from being defaced in some public spaces. Billboards showing women -- including soccer players, musicians and young girls -- have been repeatedly defaced and torn down by religious extremists in Jerusalem and other cities with large ultra-Orthodox populations over the past 20 years.

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel was erased from a 2015 photograph of world leaders in Paris published by an ultra-Orthodox newspaper.

The pattern is especially uncomfortable now.

"This is not Kabul, this is Jerusalem," said Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, a Jerusalem deputy mayor. "This is a concerted campaign by radicals to erase women from the public space, which belongs to all of us."

The double photo of 94-year-old Parnass, who lives in Germany, is posted on an outside wall of Jerusalem's City Hall complex.

Hollander said he specifically chose it among dozens of others posted around the complex to hang in the marquee spot because it projects vitality, perseverance and survival across one of Israel's most famous expanses. Its central location makes it visible to thousands every day.

The vandalism is widely blamed on a small number of fringe members of the insular ultra-Orthodox community, which emphasizes modesty among women and has traditionally carried outsized influence in Israeli politics. The photo is posted next to a street that borders an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood and is a popular walkway to the Old City's Western Wall, the holiest Jewish prayer site.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews make up about 12.6% of Israel's population of 9.3 million. That community's population is growing faster than those of other Israeli Jews and Arabs, according to the Israel Democracy Institute, a nonpartisan Jerusalem think tank. A majority of Jerusalem's Jewish community is ultra-Orthodox, the institute said.

There is a difference, one expert cautioned, between the more pragmatic mainstream ultra-Orthodox Judaism and the vandals defacing photos of women.

"In the mainstream, they know that the world outside is functioning in a different way," said Gilad Malach,

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who leads the ultra-Orthodox program at the Israel Democracy Institute. "And they know that in some situations, they need to cooperate with that."

In the mainstream Orthodox community, some women have begun to push back on social media.

"The men aren't in charge there," said Kerry Bar-Cohn, 48, an Orthodox chiropractor and performer who a few years ago started posting YouTube videos of herself singing children's songs. Recently, she tried to publish an ad in a local circular with her photo on it, and was refused.

"It's straight-out discrimination," said Bar-Cohn, wife of a rabbi and a mother of four. "I was thinking I want to sue them, but No. 1, who has the time? And No. 2, you don't want to be that person."

Advocates say erasing women carries dire societal risks.

"You don't see women, you don't hear their needs and their needs are not met," said Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll, 46.

Keats Jaskoll recently launched the subscription-only Jewish Life Photo Bank, a collection of what she calls "positive" images of Orthodox women for the Chochmat Nashim organization. The idea is to sell images of women that are acceptable to an Orthodox audience and better understood by people in general.

None of these initiatives has halted the constant wave of vandalism.

The Israel Religious Action Center, which is connected to the liberal Reform movement of Judaism, has tracked the vandalism and other attacks on women's images for five years and filed a court petition to compel the city of Jerusalem to crack down.

Over time, the municipality has responded by saying it is engaged in "massive, effective and focused enforcement" of city bylaws against vandalism, but it acknowledged difficulty in collecting testimony and prosecuting suspects.

"The Jerusalem municipality has and will continue to condemn any damage to public images and deals with the problem if appears on the spot," the city said in a statement.

Police say they investigate all complaints of vandalism and property damage and try to find those responsible, but had no information about the Parnass case.

By refusing or being unable to crack down, "the state sponsors this practice," said Ori Narov, an attorney for IRAC. "We keep getting this impression that they keep making excuses," ranging from a shortage of labor to even more limits due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The municipality said the Parnass photos have been restored and it has increased patrols around City Hall.

Parnass' niece, Keren-Or Peled, who lives in Israel, says Parnass has been told what happened. After her photos were cleaned for a third time, Peled traveled to Jerusalem to take a photo to send to her aunt.

By the time Peled got there, however, the set of photos had been defaced again. She helped clean it herself.

"They paint over your picture time and time again because you are a woman," Peled wrote to her aunt in an article published in Haaretz. "A beautiful, strong, confident 94-year-old woman."

Associated Press writer Ilan Ben Zion contributed.

## Dubai's Expo opens, bringing first World Fair to the Mideast

By AYA BATRAWY and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — After eight years of planning and billions of dollars in spending, the Middle East's first ever World Fair opened on Friday in Dubai, with hopes the months-long extravaganza draws both visitors and global attention to this desert-turned-dreamscape.

Named Expo 2020, the event was postponed by a year due to the outbreak of the coronavirus last year. While that could have an impact on how many people flock to the United Arab Emirates, the six-month-long exhibition offers Dubai a momentous opportunity to showcase its unique East-meets-West appeal as a place where all are welcome for business.

Not long ago, the site of the 1,080 acre (438 hectare) expo was barren desert. Less than a decade later, it is a buzzing futuristic landscape with robots, a new metro station, multi-million dollar pavilions

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and so-called districts with names like "sustainability" and "opportunity" — all built, like much of the Gulf, by low-paid migrant workers.

Organizers say 192 nations are represented at the expo. The U.S. pavilion will showcase a replica of the Space X Falcon 9 rocket. Italy's pavilion houses a 3-D replica of Michelangelo's biblical hero, David, that is 17 feet high (5.2 meters). Other attractions include an African food hall, a royal Egyptian mummy, concerts and performances from around the world, and the option to dine on a \$500 three-course meal with glow-in-the-dark cuisine.

Since first making a splash in London in 1851, world fairs have long been an opportunity for nations to meet, exchange ideas, showcase inventions, promote culture and build business ties.

For more than a century, these global exhibitions have captured the imagination and showcased some of humanity's most important innovations. The first World Fair held in the United States in 1876 debuted Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, the typewriter, a mechanical calculator and Heinz Ketchup. Held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that fair attracted nearly 10 million people at a time when the entire U.S. population was estimated to be just 40 million. One of its main buildings, Memorial Hall, is now a museum.

Other fairs showcased inventions like the sewing machine, the elevator, carbonated soda, the Ferris wheel and, in 1939 in New York, the television. People journeyed far for the chance at a glimpse of the world in ways they couldn't otherwise access.

This year's expo is happening amid a global pandemic, when untold numbers are still working and studying remotely — and connecting to the world virtually. It's unclear how many visitors Dubai can attract, and how much the expo will stimulate its tourism-driven economy.

To enter the expo site, visitors will need to show a negative PCR test or proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

So what is a World Fair in this not-quite-post-pandemic year of 2021?

Dubai's ruler and the force behind the emirate's transformation, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, says Expo 2020 is a chance to showcase the best of human excellence.

"It offers a platform to forge a united worldwide effort to build a more sustainable and prosperous future for all of mankind," he told guests at the expo's opening ceremony Thursday night.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince and de-facto ruler of the UAE's seat of power, Abu Dhabi, used his speech to emphasize "the ethos of this land" as a meeting point for cultures and tolerance.

Whether Iran or Israel, every nation is welcome at Dubai's expo.

Human Rights Watch, however, says organizers are promoting an inaccurate image of the UAE as an "open and tolerant country" for public relations purposes. Instead, it said in a scathing report that "abusive authorities forcefully bar all peaceful criticism and dissent" in the country, jailing activists and carrying out pervasive domestic surveillance programs.

"The UAE has embarked on a decades-long effort to whitewash its reputation on the international stage," the rights group said.

The expo site will attempt to dazzle visitors with a centerpiece dome, marketed as the world's largest 360-degree projection screen. Its construction required 8.5 miles (13.6 kilometers) of steel.

Some World Fair structures remain iconic markers of the human journey and our industrial evolution. None more so than the Eiffel Tower, which was constructed in Paris, not only to be the tallest structure in the world at the time, but to serve as the entrance to the 1889 World Fair. Millions are still drawn to this marvel of wrought-iron lattice work whose image today floods social media feeds.

The Space Needle in Seattle, Washington, built for the 1962 World Fair, is another structure with continued prominence and allure.

While most fairs were held in Europe and the United States, none have been hosted in the Middle East until now.

Follow Aya Batrawy on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/ayaelb> and Isabel DeBre at <https://twitter.com/IsabelDeBre>

## Activists, WHO in the frame as Nobel Peace guessing starts

By MARK LEWIS Associated Press

STAVANGER, Norway (AP) — The annual Nobel Peace Prize shines the brightest of lights on the person or group thought to have done most to promote peace. But guessing who it will be is just a stab in the dark.

That's because the secretive Norwegian Nobel Committee never drops any advance hints. In the past decade, winners have included diplomats, doctors, dissidents and presidents. Who were the other candidates? We can't know for sure — the panel keeps their ruminations in a vault for 50 years.

Bookmakers have the World Health Organization as the most likely winner for 2021, for its work during the pandemic.

But Rupert Adams at William Hill, one of Britain's biggest bookies, jokes that picking a winner is "the world's most difficult job," adding he "can't think of a harder market to price." The company has nailed it only once this century — Malala Yousafzai in 2014.

Still, people like to make guesses.

Henrik Urdal, director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, says the pandemic is an important backdrop to this year's prize. But he scrapped plans to make COVAX, the United Nations-sponsored vaccine equity organization, his top pick. Rollout of COVID-19 jabs to poor countries has been too slow, he says.

Instead, the Nobel tipster says "the problems of public disinformation" might be recognized by the panel. He picks Reporters Without Borders as his favorite, saying the committee could recognize an organization "focused on the importance of independent reporting and press freedom in the face of the dire risks."

As much as the winner always makes the headlines, the delayed nomination process means the judging panel are often sifting through candidates from yesterday's news. Nominations close at the end of February, meaning the longlist is dominated by movers and shakers from the previous year.

Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd in 2020 pushed the pandemic off the front pages, and may impress the awards panel. Norwegian lawmaker Petter Eide has said he nominated the group for raising the issue of racial justice around the world.

Headline maker Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya led peaceful protests in Belarus in 2020, as President Alexander Lukashenko won what many saw as a rigged election. She is the bookmakers' individual favorite. Alexei Navalny, the jailed Russian opposition leader, could also be a winner.

Less likely, thinks Urdal, is the selection of former foes who have come to the negotiating table, like 2016 winner Juan Manuel Santos, the Colombian president who cut a deal with rebels to end 50 years of civil war.

"The main reason we don't have these kinds of conventional candidates is that there are no peace processes that are sufficiently mature," Urdal said.

He also noted that the panel burnt its fingers in 2019, when it awarded the prize to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed "for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation." Abiy's image is today marred by a war that erupted in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November, triggering a hunger crisis.

"They are wary of engaging too early with any process that could backfire," says Urdal.

Perhaps that is why winners are often named a year after they are most hotly tipped.

Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani teenager who continued to campaign for girls' and women's rights after being shot in the head by the Taliban, was a favorite in 2013. But she only received the prize — alongside Indian children's rights campaigner Kailash Satyarthi — in 2014.

Likewise, Dennis Mukwege, the Congolese doctor treating victims of wartime sexual violence, was tipped for several years before finally getting the award, alongside another longtime favorite, campaigner Nadia Murad, in 2018.

A similar cooling-off period might pave the way for climate activist Greta Thunberg in 2021. The Swedish teenager was hotly tipped in 2020 after dominating the news agenda for much of the previous year.

A report in August from a former Nobel winner, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which predicted fires and floods, helped force the climate back on the news agenda.

In this atmosphere, a prize for Thunberg would electrify the world, said Urdal, even if he believes the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change would be a more worthy winner.

Unlike the other Nobels, which are handed out in Sweden, the Peace Prize is an all-Norwegian affair.



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Though the government has no say in the matter, this quirk put the whole country in hot water in 2010, when the independent panel enraged Beijing by awarding the prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo.

China suspended a bilateral trade deal and restricted imports of Norwegian salmon. Relations were only fully normalized in 2017.

If the five-person panel feels like stoking controversy in 2021, it could award the prize to Uyghur activist Ilham Tohti, who was jailed for life in 2014 on charges of promoting separatism. A prize to Nathan Law Kwun-chung would also likely upset Beijing. He is a leading figure in the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded on Friday, Oct. 8.

A week of Nobel Prizes kicks off on Oct. 4 with "Physiology or Medicine." Physics is on Oct. 5, Chemistry Oct. 6, Literature Oct. 7, and Economics Oct. 11.

## Trains packed with commuters as Japan fully ends emergency

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan fully came out of a coronavirus state of emergency for the first time in more than six months as the country starts to gradually ease virus measures to help rejuvenate the pandemic-hit economy as the infections slowed.

At Tokyo's busy Shinagawa train station, a sea of mask-wearing commuters rushed to their work despite an approaching typhoon, with some returning to their offices after months of remote work.

The emergency measures, in place for more than half of the country including Tokyo, ended Thursday following a steady fall in new caseloads over the past few weeks, helping to ease pressure on Japanese health care systems.

Outgoing Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga thanked the people for their patience and cooperation, and asked them to stick to their basic anti-virus measures.

"Once again, I seek your cooperation so that we can return to our daily lives feeling safe," he said.

The lifting of the emergency marked a fresh start for some people.

Office worker Akifumi Sugihara, 46, said he is back to the train station for the first time in about a year. "I had been working from home for more than a year, and I came to the office in Tokyo as (the emergency) was lifted today," he said. "It's really been a while. I feel it's a new start."

Another office worker, Kaori Hayashi, 37, said it was an ordinary Friday. "In my mind nothing really has changed," she said. "We still need to be careful. I will stay vigilant and carry on my life as usual."

Japan is eager to expand social and economic activities while balancing the need to prevent another wave of infections as the weather turns cooler. Officials say the government still needs time to create more temporary COVID-19 treatment facilities and continue vaccinations to prepare for any future resurgence.

The emergency measures have mainly involved requests for eateries to curb alcohol and hours. They can now serve alcohol and operate an hour longer but still have to close at 9 p.m.

Daily reported cases have fallen to below 1,600 as of Wednesday nationwide — less than one-tenth of the mid-August peak of around 25,000. Experts attributed the declining numbers to the progress of vaccinations and to people increased their social distancing efforts after being alarmed by the collapse of medical systems during the summer.

Nearly more than 59% of Japanese people have been fully vaccinated. Japan has had about 1.69 million cases and 17,641 deaths from COVID-19.

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Associated Press journalist Chisato Tanaka contributed to this report.

## Sick of weeds and trash piles, Rome to elect new mayor

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Curbside weeds in Rome grow so tall, they cover car door handles, giving new meaning

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to the term urban jungle. With sidewalks impassable because of piles of uncollected trash, people resort to pushing baby strollers down the middle of pothole-pocked streets. Overflowing garbage bins attract wild boars, terrifying passersby.

As for mass transit, some subway stations in the commercial heart of the city, awaiting sorely needed escalator repairs, have been closed for months.

Rome's first populist mayor, Virginia Raggi is running for a second term in an election Sunday and Monday, and the sorry state of basic municipal services such as trash pickup and street maintenance is a major issue in this city of ruins, just as it was the first time around.

In 2016, Raggi was a 37-year-old, little-known lawyer and city council member when elected. She quickly became one of the most prominent faces of the 5-Star Movement, a grass-roots populist phenomenon created a decade earlier by an Italian comic, and, as of 2018, the largest party in the national Parliament.

Raggi's election "was hailed as something savior-like. Great change was expected," said Paolo Conti, who for years has curated a letters-to-the-editors section, not surprisingly heavy with citizen complaints about trash and public transportation, in the Rome pages of the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

After five years of Raggi's administration, plagued by frequent turnover of city commissioners and heads of public agencies, "objectively, the city is in worse shape" than when she arrived, Conti said in an interview.

"Worse" is particularly damning, considering that when Romans elected her, they were desperate. They had taken to cleaning up Rome themselves, neighborhood by neighborhood, park by park, bagging trash, filling potholes and passing the hat to pay gardening businesses to pull weeds in playgrounds.

Romans then didn't even have a mayor. Raggi's predecessor, a surgeon-turned-politician, had resigned months earlier amid an expense account scandal in which he was later vindicated.

None of the 22 candidates for mayor this time is given any real chance of clinching more than 50% of the vote. That means the top two finishers will meet in a runoff two weeks later. Several polls, whose publication is banned in the last two weeks before the election, have indicated that at most, 15% of voters want five more years of Raggi, though a large percentage of people said they were undecided.

Nadia Titti, walking her dog in an overgrown field near towering low-income public housing in Tor Bella Monaca, a neighborhood on the city's eastern edge long considered the turf of drug dealers, said Raggi didn't get her vote the first time and won't get it now.

Titti lamented that people from other neighborhoods where garbage is piling up have taken to dumping their broken appliances and other trash along Tor Bella Monaca's streets.

Others argue Raggi deserves a second mandate.

Flavia Vauro, 21, was too young to vote in 2016 but is eager to cast a ballot for Raggi. "Errors were made, but there were also many accomplishments," she said.

Vauro, a university student, cited the brand-new buses she takes to campus, instead of the older vehicles that have been known to break down or burst into flames. "In these last five years there has been a tangible change" for the better, Vauro said.

Raggi and her rivals have been campaigning heavily in Tor Bella Monaca and other low-income neighborhoods. She owes her populist victory in 2016 largely to votes from these outlying areas, and she has pronounced herself the "mayor of peripheries."

"In these five years, I worked on a lot on the peripheries," Raggi recently said.

She boasted that she brought street lights for the first time to some of these neighborhoods. During one of her appearances in one such "periphery," she recalled, "people came out of their apartment buildings with tears in their eyes" in gratitude.

Raggi turns defensive about the out-of-control weeds. Since 2000, no new gardeners have been hired by the city, and when she took office, "they didn't even have the tools" to properly do their job tending to Rome's many parks and other green spaces, she said.

As for citizens' trashing of the municipal garbage collection agency Ama, Raggi said that when she became mayor, Ama was a debt-ridden mess. It had "13 years of falsified balance sheets. We worked a lot to clean up their finances," she said.

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Still, in January, Ama cut off funding to local districts to cut down the weeds.

When traffic practically vanished during the very first strict months of Italy's pandemic lockdown, road crews had a rare opportunity to work 24/7 filling crater-like potholes without causing tie-ups. But the lockdown is over and the holes largely remain, tripping up motor scooter riders, sometimes with fatal results.

Asked about the long closings of entire subway stations for maintenance work, Raggi shot back: "You can't order a new escalator on Amazon."

Three years ago, an escalator at a central subway station went out of control as Russian soccer fans, in town for a match, rode it, and several people were injured.

In Tor Bella Monaca, some residents expressed satisfaction at Raggi's campaign to evict undeserving tenants from public housing. A police roundup in September, for example, removed an alleged drug dealer with ties to organized crime.

After that eviction, "we are breathing easier," said Tiziana Ronzio, who lives in public housing and created a tenants association to foster pride in their building and neighborhood.

Still, Ronzio gave the mayor a mixed review. Raggi "didn't make the city function" well, she said. But she quickly added: "Whoever becomes mayor will have it hard."

AP journalist Andrea Rosa contributed to this report.

## McPherson makes FG as time expires, Bengals beat Jags 24-21

By MITCH STACY AP Sports Writer

CINCINNATI (AP) — Joe Burrow spoiled Urban Meyer's return to Ohio and kept his former college coach winless on an NFL sideline.

Burrow engineered four second-half scoring drives while passing for 348 yards and two touchdowns and the Bengals overcame a 14-0 halftime deficit to beat Meyer and the Jacksonville Jaguars 24-21 on Thursday night.

Evan McPherson won it with a 35-yard field goal as time ran out, culminating a 10-play, 73-yard drive that consumed the last 5 1/2 minutes.

Burrow, the top overall draft pick in 2020 out of LSU after transferring from Ohio State, outdueled the 2021 top pick, Jacksonville quarterback Trevor Lawrence, who looked at halftime as if he might direct his first NFL win and create a happy homecoming for his coach. Meyer grew up in northeastern Ohio, played safety at the University of Cincinnati and won the 2014 national championship coaching at Ohio State.

The Bengals (3-1) were shut out in the first half and couldn't get running back Joe Mixon loose. McPherson missed a 43-yard field-goal attempt, and Cincinnati punted on the next three possessions.

"We did not play great football, they generally beat us in all three phases" in the first half, Cincinnati coach Zac Taylor said. "But we get a whole second half to play, so there was no reason to panic. Nobody did. Everyone was calm, cool and collected. They knew we were going to get the ball to start the half where we are usually pretty efficient."

Cincinnati had two quick scoring drives to open the second. James Robinson's second rushing touchdown put Jacksonville up again early in the fourth quarter. Burrow answered with a 31-yard touchdown pass to tight end C.J. Uzomah to tie it again.

After the Jaguars punted, Burrow set up McPherson, who has the winning kick in two of Cincinnati's three victories.

"I'm really happy with my performance tonight," Burrow said. "I'm going to keep building on this and getting better and better."

The Jaguars scored in the first half on a 6-yard plunge by Robinson and a 7-yard keeper by Lawrence. It could have been worse for Cincinnati at the break. Lawrence was stopped by linebacker Logan Wilson on fourth-and-goal at the 1 with under a minute left in the half.

"When you control the game like we did in the first — and it should've been 21-0," Lawrence said. "The second half, we didn't do a good job of holding on to the ball. They scored the quick touchdown and then

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we went three-and-out.”

Lawrence was 17 for 24 for 204 yards.

“Trevor took care of the ball,” Meyer said. “Trevor played his best game. He’s coming alive.”

Tyler Boyd had nine receptions for 118 yards for the Bengals. Uzomah had five catches for 95 yards and two touchdowns.

Robinson rushed for a season-high 78 yards.

“We have to regroup a little,” Lawrence said. “This one hurts.”

## DOWN TIME

Both team will have 10 days to ruminate on Thursday night’s game. Meyer said that will be especially tough for the winless Jags.

“That’s a heartbroken locker room,” he said. “We’ve got to get them back.”

The Bengals have extra time to prepare for Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers after winning twice in five days. Cincinnati beat Pittsburgh 24-10 last Sunday.

“It is critical to get this momentum going into a 10-day work week against an opponent who’s been in the last two AFC championship games,” Taylor said.

## RING OF HONOR

The Bengals inducted four into the team’s new Ring of Honor. The inaugural class included Paul Brown, the team’s founder and first coach; Hall of Fame tackle Anthony Munoz (1980-92); quarterback Ken Anderson (1971-86) and cornerback Ken Riley (1969-83).

## INJURIES

Jaguars: WR DJ Chark broke an ankle on the third play of the game and didn’t return. ... Guard A.J. Cann (knee) was injured in the second quarter but the seriousness of it wasn’t clear.

Bengals: None reported.

## UP NEXT

Jaguars: Host Tennessee on Oct. 10.

Bengals: Host Green Bay on Oct. 10.

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More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_NFL](https://twitter.com/AP_NFL)

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Follow Mitch Stacy at <http://twitter.com/mitchstacy>

## Africa internet riches plundered, contested by China broker

By ALAN SUDERMAN, FRANK BAJAK and RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Outsiders have long profited from Africa’s riches of gold, diamonds, and even people. Digital resources have proven no different.

Millions of internet addresses assigned to Africa have been waylaid, some fraudulently, including through insider machinations linked to a former top employee of the nonprofit that assigns the continent’s addresses. Instead of serving Africa’s internet development, many have benefited spammers and scammers, while others satiate Chinese appetites for pornography and gambling.

New leadership at the nonprofit, AFRINIC, is working to reclaim the lost addresses. But a legal challenge by a deep-pocketed Chinese businessman is threatening the body’s very existence.

The businessman is Lu Heng, a Hong Kong-based arbitrage specialist. Under contested circumstances, he obtained 6.2 million African addresses from 2013 to 2016. That’s about 5% of the continent’s total — more than Kenya has.

The internet service providers and others to whom AFRINIC assigns IP address blocks aren’t purchasing them. They pay membership fees to cover administrative costs that are intentionally kept low. That left lots of room, though, for graft.

When AFRINIC revoked Lu’s addresses, now worth about \$150 million, he fought back. His lawyers in late July persuaded a judge in Mauritius, where AFRINIC is based, to freeze its bank accounts. His company

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also filed a \$80 million defamation claim against AFRINIC and its new CEO.

It's a shock to the global networking community, which has long considered the internet as technological scaffolding for advancing society. Some worry it could undermine the entire numerical address system that makes the internet work.

"There was never really any thought, particularly in the AFRINIC region, that someone would just directly attack a foundational element of internet governance and just try and shut it down, try and make it go away," said Bill Woodcock, executive director of Packet Clearing House, a global nonprofit that has helped build out Africa's internet.

Lu told The Associated Press that he's an honest businessman who broke no rules in obtaining the African address blocks. And, rejecting the consensus of the internet's stewards, he says its five regional registries have no business deciding where IP addresses are used.

"AFRINIC is supposed to serve the internet, it's not supposed to serve Africa," Lu said. "They're just bookkeepers."

In revoking Lu's address blocks, AFRINIC is trying to reclaim internet real estate critical for a continent that lags the rest in leveraging internet resources to raise living standards and boost health and education. Africa has been allocated just 3% of the world's first-generation IP addresses.

Making things worse: the alleged theft of millions of AFRINIC IP addresses, involving the organization's former No. 2 official, Ernest Byaruhanga, who was fired in December 2019. It's unclear whether he was acting alone.

The registry's new CEO, Eddy Kayihura, said at the time that he'd filed a criminal complaint with the Mauritius police. He shook up management and began trying to reclaim wayward IP address blocks.

Lu's legal gains in the case have stunned and dismayed the global internet-governance community. Network activists worry they could help facilitate further internet resource grabs by China, for starters. Some of Lu's major clients include the Chinese state-owned telecommunication firms China Telecom and China Mobile.

"It doesn't seem like he's running the show. It seems like he's the face of the show. I expect that he has got quite a significant backing that's actually pulling the strings," said Mark Tinka, a Ugandan who heads engineering at SEACOM, a South Africa-based internet backbone and services provider. Tinka worries Lu has "access to an endless pile of resources."

Lu said allegations he's working for the Chinese government are "wild" conspiracy theories. He said he's the victim of ongoing "character assassination."

While billions use the internet daily, its inner workings are little understood and rarely subject to scrutiny. Globally, five fully autonomous regional bodies, operating as nonprofit public trusts, decide who owns and runs the internet's limited store of first-generation IP address blocks. Founded in 2003, AFRINIC was the last of the five registries to be created.

Just shy of a decade ago, the pool of 3.7 billion first-generation IP addresses, known as IPv4, was fully exhausted in the developed world. Such IP addresses now sell at auction for between \$20 and \$30 each.

The current crisis was precipitated by the uncovering of the alleged fraud at AFRINIC. The misappropriation of 4 million IP addresses worth more than \$50 million by Byaruhanga and perhaps others was discovered by Ron Guilmette, a freelance internet sleuth in California, and exposed by him and journalist Jan Vermeulen of the South African tech website MyBroadband.

But that was far from all of it.

Ownership of at least 675,000 wayward addresses is still in dispute. Some are controlled by an Israeli businessman, who has sued AFRINIC for trying to reclaim them. Guilmette calculates that a total of 1.2 million stolen addresses remain in use.

Someone had tampered with AFRINIC's WHOIS database records — which are like deeds for IP addresses — to steal so-called legacy address blocks, Guilmette said. It's unclear if it was Byaruhanga alone or if other insiders or even hackers were involved, he added.

Many of the misappropriated address blocks were unused IP space stolen from businesses, including

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mining giant Anglo American.

Many of the disputed addresses continue to host websites that have nonsense URL address names and contain gambling and pornography aimed at an audience in China, whose government bans such online businesses.

When Kayihura fixed his sights on Lu this year, he told him in writing that IP address blocks allocated to his Seychelles-registered company were not “originating services from within the AFRINIC service region — contrary to the justification provided.”

Lu would not discuss the justifications he provided to AFRINIC for the IP addresses he’s obtained, but said he’s never broken any of AFRINIC’s rules. Such justifications are part of what is typically an opaque, confidential process. Kayihura would not comment on them, citing the legal case. Nor would the two men who were AFRINIC’s CEOs when Lu received the allocations.

Emails obtained by the AP show that in his initial request for IP addresses in 2013, Lu made clear to AFRINIC that his customers would be in China. In those emails, Lu said he needed the addresses for virtual private networks — known as VPNs — to circumvent the Chinese government’s firewall that blocks popular websites like Facebook and YouTube there.

He said he discussed this with Adiel Akplogan, AFRINIC’s first CEO, in Beijing in a 2013 meeting cited in the emails. Akplogan, who stepped down in 2015, would not comment on any discussions he may have had with Lu on the subject.

Akplogan’s successor, South African internet pioneer Alan Barrett, would say only that “all appropriate procedures were followed.”

By that time, in 2016-17, Lu said his company, Cloud Innovation, had quit the VPN business and shifted into leasing address space.

Lu notes that other regional registries — including RIPE in Europe and ARIN, the North American registry — routinely allocate address blocks outside their regions.

That may be so, experts say, but Africa is a special case because it’s still developing and vulnerable to exploitation — even if AFRINIC’s bylaws don’t explicitly ban geographical outsiders from obtaining IP space.

Unlike at other regional registries, AFRINIC’s stewards neglected to forge strong alliances with governments on the continent with the resources to fend off legal challenges from wealthy usurpers, said Woodcock of the Packet Clearing House.

“The governmental relationships necessary to get it treated as critical infrastructure were never prioritized in the African region,” he added. “This is not a threat coming from Africa. This is a threat from China.”

The international registry community has rallied to the aid of AFRINIC’s embattled reformers.

ARIN’s president, John Curran, said in a statement of support that the Mauritian court should also consider whether any fraud was committed in awarding the IP addresses to Lu. His legal battle “has potential for significant impact to the overall stability of the Internet number registry system,” he wrote.

A mutual assistance fund of more than \$2 million created by the regional registries is helping keep AFRINIC running during the court fight.

The AP found several pornography and gambling sites aimed at a Chinese audience using IP addresses that Lu got from AFRINIC. While those sites are banned in China, they can still be accessed there via VPNs.

Lu said such sites make up a minuscule part of the websites using his IP addresses and his company has strict policies against posting illegal material like child pornography and terrorism-related content. He said he does not actively police the content of millions of websites hosted by those leasing from his company, but all actionable complaints of illegal activity are immediately forwarded to law enforcement.

It is not clear whether the police investigation into Byaruhanga has advanced. Mauritian police did not respond to attempts to determine if they have even sought to question him. Byaruhanga is believed to be living in his native Uganda but could not be located for comment.

Akplogan, his former boss, said he was not aware at the time of Byaruhanga’s alleged misappropriation of addresses.

“I don’t know how he did it,” said Akplogan, who is Togolese and now based in Montreal. “And for those

who know the reality about my management of AFRINIC they know very well that it's not something that I will have known and let it go (on)."

Inducted two years ago into the Internet Society's Hall of Fame, Akplogan is currently vice president for technical engagement at ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), the California-based body that oversees the global network address and domain name businesses.

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Bajak reported from Boston and Suderman from Richmond, Virginia.

## 4th year since Las Vegas massacre stirs emotions, ceremonies

By KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Jill Winter remembers the barrage of rapid-fire gunshots raining into a Las Vegas Strip country music concert crowd during what became the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history four years ago.

Like many around her, she thought at first it was fireworks. Then, people fell dead and wounded. Winter ducked for cover until police SWAT officers arrived and told her to run. She remembers yelling, "Make him stop! Make him stop!"

Winter, 49, lived in San Diego then. She now lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and counsels others she calls "the Router family" who experienced the deadly night a gunman perched in a hotel killed 58 people at the Route 91 Harvest Festival. "Router" sounds better than "survivor," Winter explained. The deaths later of at least two others have brought the unofficial death toll to 60.

"There is a lot of healing taking place," Winter said this week. "There are a lot of people who are still struggling. There are 22,000 of us that were there. That doesn't even include other people that were impacted ... first responders, hospital employees, average citizens who were driving down the Strip. All those people and all those different stories."

This is the first year since the shooting that Winter won't be in Las Vegas to mark the anniversary at memorials like a sunrise ceremony at the Clark County Government Center and a 10:05 p.m. reading at a downtown Las Vegas Community Healing Garden of the names of those killed in the Oct. 1, 2017, massacre.

The 7 a.m. ceremony is set to feature comments from elected officials and Dee Ann Hyatt, whose brother Kurt von Tillow died in the shooting. Singer Matt Sky, who worked with Adam Levine on NBC's "The Voice," will sing "Four Years After," a song composed for the anniversary by Mark R. Johnson and released with multi-Grammy award winner Alan Parsons.

In Southern California, "So Cal Route 91 Heals" will host a live-stream of the sunrise remembrance and an afternoon ceremony at Conejo Creek Park in Thousand Oaks.

Tennille Pereira, director of the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center, a Las Vegas program set up to support those affected by the shooting, noted that about 60% of tickets sold to the fateful concert were purchased by California residents.

Next year's fifth anniversary may feature the dedication of a new memorial, Pereira said, at a corner of the former concert venue across Las Vegas Boulevard from the Mandalay Bay resort, where the shooter spent several days gathering an arsenal of assault-style rifles before breaking out windows of his 32nd floor suite and unleashing carnage.

The gunman, Stephen Paddock, a 64-year-old retired postal service worker, accountant and real estate investor who had become a high-stakes casino video poker player, killed himself before police reached him. Local and federal investigators concluded he meticulously planned the attack and appeared to seek notoriety, but they said they could not identify a clear motive.

Authorities including police, elected and government officials and people involved with the resiliency center refuse now to use his name.

MGM Resorts International, owner of the hotel and the concert venue, is donating 2 acres (0.8 hectare) for the memorial — just off the Strip at a spot near a church where people took cover during the shooting.

"1 October was a tragedy that forever changed our community, and we continue to grieve with and

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support those impacted by that senseless act of violence," the company said in a statement.

MGM Resorts and its insurers have almost finished paying \$800 million to more than 4,000 claimants in an out-of-court settlement reached a year ago that avoided negligence trials in several states. The company acknowledged no liability.

"It's good for the community and the victims that the case is resolved," Robert Eglet, a Las Vegas attorney who spent a year arranging the settlement, said Thursday. "And it was the right thing for MGM to do."

Pereira also is chairwoman of a Clark County committee developing plans for the permanent memorial. She said this week that she felt a softening of emotions around the anniversary.

"Four years. This year marker seems different to me," she said. "Where people are in their healing is different. Where the community is different. Maybe it's because we just came out of this (coronavirus) pandemic and we're starting to feel a regular pace again."

"It's a bit softer," Pereira said. "We're not as emotional. We still remember, we still respect, we still honor. But it's not raw like it was, and jarring. It just feels more hopeful and peaceful."

Winter said she planned to gather on Friday with other "Routers" at a friend's restaurant in Memphis, Tennessee.

"It's always emotional. But it's also really heartwarming," she said. "The fact that we've come together and not let evil win is so amazing."

"There are so many people who think we should be over it," she added. "This is not something you ever get over. It's forever changed us."

## AP FACT CHECK: GOP claim of broken Biden pledge not so clear

By JOSH BOAK and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economic Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Blasting a \$3.5 trillion social spending bill that Democrats hope to salvage, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy asserted the legislation would break President Joe Biden's campaign promise not to tax Americans who earn less than \$400,000 a year. That's technically accurate yet also misleading.

McCarthy also falsely suggested Thursday that a Biden administration proposal to help pay for the legislation by boosting IRS tax enforcement would amount to spying targeted at everyday Americans.

A look at the claims and reality:

MCCARTHY: "Joe Biden said: 'No one making under \$400,000 will see their federal taxes go up.' That's a lie: In fact, under his plan, an average family who earns over \$50,000 will see a tax increase." — news conference Thursday.

BIDEN: "I give you my word as a Biden: If you make under \$400,000 a year, I'll never raise your taxes one cent. But, I'm going to make those at the top start to pay their share in taxes." — tweet Sunday.

RONNA MCDANIEL, head of the Republican National Committee, replying to Biden's tweet: "Not true — according to the Joint Committee on Taxation, Biden's plan will hike taxes on families making \$50K or more a year." — tweet Monday.

THE FACTS: Biden's pledge defies simple analysis. Republicans can legitimately ding the president for violating his campaign pledge to not raise taxes on anyone making less than \$400,000. But Republican leaders also rely on an economic model in which any tax that clearly targets companies and wealthy stockholders can be interpreted as a middle-class tax hike.

So let's skip the politics and focus on what is really going on here.

Congress' Joint Committee on Taxation and other analysts use the idea of "tax incidence" when estimating how much people pay. This is an economic model about who bears the expense of tax changes. When companies face higher taxes, much of the cost is borne by shareholders. But some of the cost comes at the expense of workers in the form of lower salaries, and that's a major reason why the Democrats' policies can be portrayed as a middle-class tax hike.

Nearly 17% of taxpayers will pay more in 2023, including people earning less than Biden's target, according to the Joint Committee's analysis. This is a function of how economic models work, which seldom



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conform perfectly to the messaging of political candidates. Biden's tax policies are clearly designed to get most of their revenue from companies and the wealthy.

But is McCarthy right that an average family earning \$50,000 will see a tax increase? Not quite.

The Tax Policy Center has released an extensive analysis by income quintile. It found that the middle 40% to 60% of earners will get on average a cut of \$630. This is true even though 70% of the tax units in this group would get a slight tax increase averaging about \$230. How is that possible?

Well, the increases largely reflect how corporate tax hikes could reduce wages. But Biden's plan also includes an expanded child tax credit that would help households with dependents under the age of 18. The tax credit ranges from \$3,000 to \$3,600 per child. This credit only goes to people with children. The credits are so large that the entire package nets out as a tax cut for people who think of themselves as middle class.

The Tax Policy Center analysis also makes clear that the increases are targeted at the wealthy. The top 0.1% of earners would owe an additional \$1.1 million next year, enough to raise a total of \$132.2 billion.

**MCCARTHY:** "Now Democrats want to spy on anything you earn or buy that is more than \$600. By hiring 85,000 new IRS agents to dig through every aspect of your life the Democrats want to enlist a bureaucratic army to achieve their goal of a big-government socialist nation."

**THE FACTS:** That's an exaggeration. There is no spying nor monitoring of individual transactions as McCarthy describes it.

As part of its efforts to crack down on tax evasion by the wealthy, the Biden administration has proposed to have banks report total money flows into and out of bank accounts each year that are greater than \$600, or for accounts with at least \$600 in them. But the banks would not report individual transactions. The Treasury Department estimates that \$600 billion a year is lost to tax evasion, equal to all the income taxes paid by the bottom 90% of taxpayers.

The Treasury Department has explained that while most Americans have their pay reported to the IRS on W-2 forms, many high-income Americans receive income from legal or financial partnerships that is often not directly reported to the IRS. This allows many wealthy Americans to avoid paying the taxes they would otherwise owe.

By receiving data on total annual flows into and out of a bank account, the Biden administration argues, the IRS would have a better sense of who might be receiving large incomes that they aren't reporting.

The idea has been one of many tax proposals that Democrats have been considering to help pay for the social spending bill to invest in climate programs, child care and education.

The American Bankers' Association has objected to the plan, saying it would create unmanageable reporting burdens on the industry. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal has suggested in recent days that Democrats might ultimately raise the reporting threshold from \$600 to \$10,000.

Associated Press writer Hope Yen contributed to this report.

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

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## Biden signs bill to avert partial government shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With only hours to spare, President Joe Biden signed legislation to avoid a partial federal shutdown and keep the government funded through Dec. 3. Congress had passed the bill earlier Thursday.

The back-to-back votes by the Senate and then the House averted one crisis, but delays on another

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continue as the political parties dig in on a dispute over how to raise the government's borrowing cap before the United States risks a potentially catastrophic default.

The House approved the short-term funding measure by a 254-175 vote not long after Senate passage in a 65-35 vote. A large majority of Republicans in both chambers voted against it. The legislation was needed to keep the government running once the current budget year ended at midnight Thursday. Passage will buy lawmakers more time to craft the spending measures that will fund federal agencies and the programs they administer.

"There's so much more to do," Biden said in a statement after the signing. "But the passage of this bill reminds us that bipartisan work is possible and it gives us time to pass longer-term funding to keep our government running and delivering for the American people."

The work to keep the government open and running served as the backdrop during a chaotic day for Democrats as they struggled to get Biden's top domestic priorities over the finish line, including a bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure bill at risk of stalling in the House.

"It is a glimmer of hope as we go through many, many other activities," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

With their energy focused on Biden's agenda, Democrats backed down from a showdown over the debt limit in the government funding bill, deciding to uncouple the borrowing ceiling at the insistence of Republicans. If that cap is not raised by Oct. 18, the U.S. probably will face a financial crisis and economic recession, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Republicans say Democrats have the votes to raise the debt limit on their own, and Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky is insisting they do so.

The short-term spending legislation will also provide about \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for those recovering from Hurricane Ida and other natural disasters. Some \$10 billion of that money will help farmers cover crop losses from drought, wildfires and hurricanes. An additional \$6.3 billion will help support the resettlement of Afghanistan evacuees from the 20-year war between the U.S. and the Taliban.

"This is a good outcome, one I'm happy we are getting done," Schumer said. "With so many things to take care of in Washington, the last thing the American people need is for the government to grind to a halt."

Once the government is funded, albeit temporarily, Democrats will turn their full attention to the need to raise the limit on federal borrowing, which now stands 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. He reiterated that warning as the Senate opened on Thursday, even as Democrats have labeled that option a "nonstarter."

"We're able to fund the government today because the majority accepted reality. The same thing will need to happen on the debt limit next week," McConnell said.

House Democrats pushed through a stand-alone bill late Wednesday that would suspend the debt limit until December 2022. Schumer said he would bring the measure to the Senate floor, but the bill is almost certain to be blocked by a Republican filibuster.

The arguments made in both chambers about the debt ceiling have followed similar themes.

"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."

Undaunted, Republicans 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.

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.

## American Dream unveils luxury wing as virus still looms

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — If you build it during a pandemic, will they still come?

American Dream put that to the test when it opened the new luxury shopping wing of its megamall in September featuring Saks Fifth Avenue, Dolce & Gabbana, Hermes and other luxury stores, along with exotic fish ponds, gardens and 16-foot sculptures.

Like everything about American Dream, the timing has been less than ideal. The new wing comes as the world grapples with the highly contagious delta variant of the coronavirus, which continues to threaten life — and business — from returning to normal.

American Dream took nearly two decades — and lots of fits and starts in between — to become a reality. When it finally did open its doors in October 2019, the giant shopping and entertainment complex was forced to close five months later as the coronavirus bore down on the globe.

It reopened last October with new safety protocols in place. But the pandemic has complicated its outlook, delayed expansion plans, cut off its cash flow and stolen international visitors. American Dream also lost a handful of key partners that either filed for bankruptcy — like Barneys New York, Century 21 and Lord & Taylor — or pulled out like high-end retailer Montcler.

The new luxury wing marks the final construction phase of American Dream's retail and entertainment offerings; it still has plans to add hotels. The luxury wing is expected to be a key highlight to the 3 million square feet of leasable space, more than half of which is dedicated to over a dozen entertainment attractions like a 16-story indoor ski slope and a waterpark. By year-end, it will have leased more than 85% of its space, according to an American Dream representative.

Ken Downing, chief creative officer of the mall's owner Triple Five Group, acknowledged a bumpy start but says he's optimistic about American Dream's future. The spring and summer months were "very popular" as people were looking for a safe place to shop, dine and get away, he said.

American Dream's website says it's constantly cleaning the facility. Employees are required to wear a mask regardless of vaccination status while tenants and visitors are encouraged to do the same. The company delayed full-service indoor dining until the opening of a high-end Italian restaurant in its luxury wing.

Saks Fifth Avenue, which just re-entered the New Jersey market with its store here, is focusing on making nervous shoppers comfortable.

John Antonini, director of stores for Saks Fifth Avenue, said that the pandemic forced it to be "obsessed" with services that offer more shopping options for people who either don't want to go to Manhattan or go to any physical store.

It's testing a service at the store where shoppers can sit in a private room with a big flat screen TV in the personal shopping area and virtually shop the latest collection at its Manhattan store with one of its style advisers. Customers looking to buy shoes but want to try them on in their home can text their style adviser and someone will arrive with an assortment for selection.

On a recent weekday, the sound of drills and presence of construction workers working on the interior of stores were a reminder that American Dream is still a work in progress. The mall had a constant stream of people, many of them masked, but it was clearly not crowded.

Cristal Fernandez, 24, from Wayne, New Jersey, visited American Dream for the first time during the

luxury wing's opening. She said she felt safe and liked the overall experience.

"It seems like they're definitely on top of keeping things clean," said Fernandez, who bought a few items like cosmetics. "People seem to be pretty good about masks and staying at a distance."

Downing says the weekends bring 75,000 people to American Dream, which features a mix of high- and low-price retail tenants. When it first opened, American Dream said the initial goal was 45 million to 50 million visitors in the first year. Officials didn't directly address whether they met that goal. Downing says people are traveling from greater New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia area and as far as California and Florida, but that he's looking forward to international visitors, which should account for 20% of the overall base.

Triple Five, a Canada-based mall and entertainment conglomerate, took over American Dream in 2011 from two developers and reimagined it as a community hub for tourists and locals, taking a page from two other malls it had developed: West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada and Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota — the two largest malls in North America.

But the nearly seven-month closure of American Dream caused the company to default on an underlying mortgage. Meanwhile, the Mall of America has a \$1.4 billion loan on its mortgage, according to Trepp, a New York-based research firm that tracks the commercial mortgage-backed securities.

The pandemic has hurt malls in general. Still, analysts say the high-end ones have been more resilient while low-end malls have suffered, with moderate-priced department store chains like J.C. Penney shuttering stores.

The average vacancy rate for all malls across the country climbed by around 2.2 percentage points from the end of 2019 to the second quarter of 2021 and now hovers at 7.4%, says CoStar Group, a real estate research firm. The top-tier malls are seeing vacancies average 4.5% as of this year's second quarter, while the bottom-tier have experienced a much greater slowdown, with an average of around 13%.

Daniel Hodges is CEO and founder of Retail Store Tours, which offers tours to retail executives at prime destinations to inform them of best retail practices. He says he's bullish on American Dream, noting a combination of entertainment and its attention to detail like a meandering design that doesn't overload shoppers, use of natural light and amenities like plenty of seating.

"It is a very stressful time for retail, especially when you are doing epic retail like American Dream but all the fundamentals are strongly entrenched," he said. "This is the future of retail."

Downing said "the sucker punch that the pandemic gave the entire world was something none of us were expecting."

But, he added, "It's time to open it. And whatever the world has in front of us, we'll deal with that at that time."

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## Venezuela introduces new currency with 6 fewer zeros

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JORGE RUEDA Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — A new currency with six fewer zeros debuts Friday in Venezuela, whose currency has been made nearly worthless by years of the world's worst inflation.

The highest denomination until now was a 1 million bolivar bill that was worth a little less than a quarter as of Thursday. The new currency tops out at 100 bolivars, a little less than \$25 — until inflation starts to eat away at that as well.

The million-to-1 change for the bolivar is intended to ease both cash transactions and bookkeeping calculations in bolivars that now require juggling almost endless strings of zeros.

"The most important and fundamental reason is that the payment systems are already collapsed because the number of digits make the payment systems and doing the math practically unmanageable," said Jose Guerra, an economics professor at the Central University of Venezuela. "These debit card payment processing systems or an accounting system for companies... are not intended for hyperinflation, but for

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a normal economy.”

Under the old system, a two-liter bottle of soda pop could cost more than 8 million bolivars — and many of those bills were scarce, so a customer might have to pay with a thick wad of paper.

Banks allowed customers to withdraw a maximum of 20 million bolivars in cash per day, or sometimes less if the branch was running short.

So, consumers have come to rely on U.S. dollars and digital payment methods, such as Zelle and PayPal, to make purchases. Nowadays, most transactions are made electronically, and Guerra said, more than 60% are made in U.S. dollars.

When Venezuela’s Central Bank announced the currency change last month, officials said payment systems will be modernized to expand digital use of the bolivar.

They also underscored that the elimination of six zeros doesn’t otherwise affect the value of the currency. The bolivar “will not be worth more or less; it is only to facilitate its use on a simpler monetary scale,” according to a Central Bank statement.

This is the third time Venezuela’s socialist leaders have lopped zeros off the currency. The bolivar lost three zeros in 2008 under the late President Hugo Chávez, while his successor, current President Nicolás Maduro, eliminated five zeros in 2018.

After more than four years of hyperinflation, many Venezuelans think the new bills will be short-lived as well. The central bank does not publish inflation statistics anymore, but the International Monetary Fund estimates that Venezuela’s rate at the end of 2021 will be 5,500%.

“I only had 3 million bolivars in my account, with that you don’t buy a single (piece of bread), said Elena Díaz, a 28-year-old cleaning worker standing outside a supermarket. “When they remove the six zeros, with those 3 bolivars, I won’t be able to buy anything either.”

The use of greenbacks accelerated after Maduro’s government two years ago gave up its long and complicated efforts to restrict transactions in dollars in favor of the local currency — restrictions that only fed inflation.

Dollar bills flow into Venezuela through a network of foreign bank account holders who charge commissions or via people traveling home with cash.

Ahead of the change, some stores already had begun to display three prices for each product, in U.S. dollars as well as new and old bolivars.

Banks said they would freeze operations for several hours between Thursday and Friday to make adjustments for the change.

Guerra, who was an adviser to a former opposition presidential candidate, said Venezuelans are now used to currency adjustments — and more may be coming unless government policies change.

“Basically, if there is no economic program to stop hyperinflation, this will happen again...,” Guerra said. “The problem is that hyperinflation was so aggressive in 2018 and 2019 that the reconversion of 2018 (when five zeros were trimmed off) was lost in a year and a half.”

Garcia Cano reported from Mexico City.

## Asian shares skid after S&P 500 logs 1st monthly drop of '21

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

Asian markets tumbled Friday on the tail of Wall Street’s worst monthly loss since the beginning of the pandemic.

Tokyo skidded 2% and Australia’s benchmark sank 2.3%. Markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong were closed for holidays.

The S&P 500 ended September down 4.8%, its first monthly drop since January and the biggest since March 2020.

After climbing steadily for much of the year, the stock market has become unsettled in recent weeks with the spread of the more contagious delta variant of COVID-19, surging long-term bond yields and word

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that the Federal Reserve may start to unwind its support for the economy.

A quarterly survey by the Bank of Japan found business sentiment among Japanese manufacturers has risen to its highest level in nearly three years.

The results of the "tankan" survey, released Friday, found sentiment among large manufacturers rose to 18 from 14. That's the highest level since late 2018. The reading for nonmanufacturers edged up only slightly, to 2 from 1.

However, it and various other surveys have found manufacturers struggling with shortages of computer chips and other components, amid disruptions to supply chains and shipping that might crimp the recovery from the pandemic.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 590.83 points to 28,861.83, while the S&P/ASX 200 declined 2.3% to 7,165.10. The Kospi in Seoul lost 1.4% to 3,026.87. Shares also fell in Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

The S&P 500 lost 1.2% on Thursday, ending the month 4.8% lower in its first monthly drop since January and the biggest since March 2020, when the viral outbreak rattled markets as it wreaked havoc with the global economy.

The benchmark index is still up 14.7% for the year.

The S&P 500 fell 51.92 points to 4,307.54. The Dow Jones Industrial Average shed 1.6% to 33,843.92, while the Nasdaq slid 0.4% to 14,448.58. Small company stocks also lost ground. The Russell 2000 index declined 0.9% to 2,204.37.

Bond yields edged lower. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note, a benchmark for many kinds of loans, fell to 1.48% from 1.50% from late Wednesday. It was as low as 1.32% just over a week ago.

All the sectors in the S&P 500 ended in the red Thursday, with technology stocks, banks and a mix of companies that provide consumer goods and services accounting for much of the pullback. More than 90% of the stocks in the index fell.

In recent weeks, economic data has revealed that the highly contagious delta variant has crimped consumer spending and the job market's recovery.

The Labor Department reported that unemployment applications rose for the third straight week and were higher than economists anticipated. The Commerce Department upgraded its estimate of economic growth during the second quarter to 6.7%, which was slightly better than economists expected, but it expects growth to slow to 5.5% during the third quarter.

Inflation is another cause for concern. A wide range of companies has issued warnings about the impact of rising prices on their finances. Sherwin-Williams and Nike are among the many companies that have warned investors about supply chain problems, higher raw material costs and labor issues.

Investors are still trying to gauge whether those issues are temporary and part of the economic recovery or could linger longer than expected. The upcoming round of corporate earnings reports could shed light on how companies are dealing with those problems.

On Thursday, a bill to fund the U.S. government through Dec. 3 and avoid a partial federal shutdown cleared Congress. But the dispute between Democrats and Republicans over extending the nation's debt limit remains unresolved.

Homebuilders fell broadly following a report showing average long-term mortgage rates climbed this week above 3% for the first time since June. Mortgage rates tend to track the direction in the 10-year Treasury yield. The average rate for a 30-year mortgage rose to 3.01%, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac. The rate averaged 2.88% last week and a year ago.

Higher mortgage rates limit the purchasing power of homebuyers, potentially pricing out some would-be homeowners. LGI Homes fell 5.1% and PulteGroup slid 4.2%.

In other trading Friday, U.S. benchmark crude oil lost 23 cents to \$74.80 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It rose 18 cents to \$75.03 per barrel on Thursday.

Brent crude oil gave up 29 cents to \$78.02 per barrel.

The dollar was virtually unchanged at 111.28 Japanese yen. The euro slipped to \$1.1578 from \$1.1580.

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AP Business Writers Alex Veiga and Damian J. Troise contributed.

## Vote delayed, Democrats struggle to save Biden \$3.5T bill

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite a long night of frantic negotiations, Democrats were unable late Thursday to reach an immediate deal to salvage President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion government overhaul, forcing leaders to call off promised votes on a related public works bill. Action is to resume Friday.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi had pushed the House into an evening session and top White House advisers huddled for talks at the Capitol as the Democratic leaders worked to negotiate a scaled-back plan that centrist holdouts would accept. Biden had cleared his schedule for calls with lawmakers but it appeared no deal was within reach, particularly with Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin.

Manchin refused to budge, the West Virginia centrist holding fast to his earlier declaration that he was willing to meet the president less than halfway — \$1.5 trillion.

"I don't see a deal tonight. I really don't," Manchin told reporters as he left the Capitol.

Deeply at odds, the president and his party are facing a potentially embarrassing setback — if not politically devastating collapse of the whole enterprise — if they cannot resolve the standoff over Biden's big vision.

At immediate risk was a promised vote on the first piece of Biden's proposal, a slimmer \$1 trillion public works bill that is widely supported but has faltered amid stalled talks on his more ambitious package. Progressives were refusing to back the roads-and-bridges bill they view as insufficient unless there's progress on Biden's broader plan that's the heart of the Democratic agenda. With support, leaders canceled a promised Thursday night vote, and said the House would be back in session Friday,

Pelosi called it a "day of progress" in a letter to colleagues, but offered few other words on the path forward.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki released a statement saying: "A great deal of progress has been made this week, and we are closer to an agreement than ever. But we are not there yet, and so, we will need some additional time to finish the work, starting tomorrow morning first thing."

The political stakes could hardly be higher. Biden and his party are reaching for a giant legislative accomplishment — promising a vast rewrite of the nation's tax and spending plans — with a so-slim majority in Congress.

The president's sweeping proposal topped at \$3.5 trillion would essentially raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy and plow that money back into government health care, education and other programs, all of it touching the lives of countless Americans. He says the ultimate price tag is zero, because the tax revenue covers the spending costs.

With Biden working the phones and top White House officials shuttling at the Capitol, talk swirled of the Democratic leaders trying to ease off the stalemate by reaching a broader deal, a compromise with Manchin and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, two centrist Democrats who are the linchpins to Biden's goals.

The idea was to produce the contours of an agreement over Biden's broader package, proceed with the \$1 trillion public works bill and negotiate the rest of Biden's big health care, education and climate change bill in the days to come. Lawmakers were told to stick around for possible late-night votes.

But as the night dragged on, it became clear that Manchin was not on board with a higher figure and chiseling away at that \$3.5 trillion topline risked losing progressive leaders who said they have already compromised enough and saw no reason to rush a deal to bring the centrists around to supporting the president's agenda.

"We've been fighting for transformative legislation as all of you know, these discussions have gone on for month after month after month," said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., the chairman of the Budget Committee and a leading progressive lawmaker. "This is not a baseball game. This is the most significant piece of legislation in 70 years."

All this on a day that saw a partial win for Democrats, with Congress passing and Biden signing legislation to keep the government running past Thursday's fiscal yearend deadline and avert a federal shutdown

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that had been threatened by Republican blockades.

The public works bill is one piece of that broader Biden vision, a \$1 trillion investment in routine transportation, broadband, water systems and other projects bolstered with extra funding. It won bipartisan support in the Senate but has now become snared by the broader debate.

Attention remains squarely focused on Manchin and Sinema, two centrist Democrats who helped steer that bipartisan bill to passage, but have concerns that Biden's overall bill is too big. The two senators have infuriated colleagues by not making any counter-proposals public.

Under scrutiny, Manchin called an impromptu press conference Thursday outside the Capitol, insisting he has been clear from the start.

"I'm willing to sit down and work on the \$1.5," Manchin told reporters, as protesters seeking a bigger package and Biden's priorities chanted behind him.

Manchin said he told the president as much during their talks this week, and confirmed that he put his views to paper during earlier talks this summer with Schumer.

It's not just Manchin's demands to reduce the overall size, but the conditions he wants placed on new spending that will rile his more liberal colleagues as he works to ensure the aid goes only to lower-income people, rather than broader swaths of Americans. Tensions spiked late Wednesday when Manchin sent out a fiery statement, decrying the broad spending as "fiscal insanity."

Sinema was similarly working to stave off criticism and her office said claims that she has not been forthcoming are "false" — though she has not publicly disclosed her views over what size package she wants and has declined to answer questions about her position.

Sinema has put dollar figures on the table and "continues to engage directly in good-faith discussions" with both Biden and Schumer, spokesman John LaBombard said in a statement.

Democrats' campaign promises on the line, the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, said exiting Pelosi's office that the progressives' views were unchanged -- they won't vote for one bill without the other and would stay all weekend to get a deal.

"Inaction is insanity," said Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., another progressive leader, pointing her criticism clear at Manchin's remarks.

"Trying to kill your party's agenda is insanity. Not trying to make sure the president we all worked so hard to elect, his agenda pass, is insanity."

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.

At the same time, Congress mostly resolved a more immediate crisis by passing legislation to provide government funding and avoid a federal shutdown, keeping operations going temporarily to Dec. 3. The House quickly followed, and Biden signed the bill Thursday evening.

With Republicans opposed in lockstep to the president's big plan, deriding it as slide to socialist-style spending, Biden is reaching for a deal with members of his own party for a signature legislative accomplishment.

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.

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Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Brian Slodysko and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

## **Biden signs bill to avert partial government shutdown**

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With only hours to spare, President Joe Biden on Thursday evening signed legislation to avoid a partial federal shutdown and keep the government funded through Dec. 3. Congress had passed the bill earlier Thursday.



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The back-to-back votes by the Senate and then the House averted one crisis, but delays on another continue as the political parties dig in on a dispute over how to raise the government's borrowing cap before the United States risks a potentially catastrophic default.

The House approved the short-term funding measure by a 254-175 vote not long after Senate passage in a 65-35 vote. A large majority of Republicans in both chambers voted against it. The legislation was needed to keep the government running once the current budget year ended at midnight Thursday. Passage will buy lawmakers more time to craft the spending measures that will fund federal agencies and the programs they administer.

"There's so much more to do," Biden said in a statement after the signing. "But the passage of this bill reminds us that bipartisan work is possible and it gives us time to pass longer-term funding to keep our government running and delivering for the American people."

The work to keep the government open and running served as the backdrop during a chaotic day for Democrats as they struggled to get Biden's top domestic priorities over the finish line, including a bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure bill at risk of stalling in the House.

"It is a glimmer of hope as we go through many, many other activities," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

With their energy focused on Biden's agenda, Democrats backed down from a showdown over the debt limit in the government funding bill, deciding to uncouple the borrowing ceiling at the insistence of Republicans. If that cap is not raised by Oct. 18, the U.S. probably will face a financial crisis and economic recession, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Republicans say Democrats have the votes to raise the debt limit on their own, and Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky is insisting they do so.

The short-term spending legislation will also provide about \$28.6 billion in disaster relief for those recovering from Hurricane Ida and other natural disasters. Some \$10 billion of that money will help farmers cover crop losses from drought, wildfires and hurricanes. An additional \$6.3 billion will help support the resettlement of Afghanistan evacuees from the 20-year war between the U.S. and the Taliban.

"This is a good outcome, one I'm happy we are getting done," Schumer said. "With so many things to take care of in Washington, the last thing the American people need is for the government to grind to a halt."

Once the government is funded, albeit temporarily, Democrats will turn their full attention to the need to raise the limit on federal borrowing, which now stands 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. He reiterated that warning as the Senate opened on Thursday, even as Democrats have labeled that option a "nonstarter."

"We're able to fund the government today because the majority accepted reality. The same thing will need to happen on the debt limit next week," McConnell said.

House Democrats pushed through a stand-alone bill late Wednesday that would suspend the debt limit until December 2022. Schumer said he would bring the measure to the Senate floor, but the bill is almost certain to be blocked by a Republican filibuster.

The arguments made in both chambers about the debt ceiling have followed similar themes.

"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."

Undaunted, Republicans 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.

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.

## Scarlett Johansson, Disney settle lawsuit over 'Black Widow'

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Scarlett Johansson and the Walt Disney Co. on Thursday settled her lawsuit over the streaming release of "Black Widow," bringing a swift end to what had begun as the first major fight between a studio and star over recent changes in rollout plans for films.

Johansson filed the lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court two months ago, saying the streaming release of the Marvel movie breached her contract and deprived her of potential earnings.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed, but the two sides released a joint statement in which they pledged to continue working together.

"I am happy to have resolved our differences with Disney," said Johansson, who has played Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow, in nine movies going back to 2010's "Iron Man 2." "I'm incredibly proud of the work we've done together over the years and have greatly enjoyed my creative relationship with the team. I look forward to continuing our collaboration."

Alan Bergman, chairman of Disney Studios Content, said he is "pleased that we have been able to come to a mutual agreement."

"We appreciate her contributions to the Marvel Cinematic Universe and look forward to working together on a number of upcoming projects," Bergman said.

The lawsuit said Johansson's contract guaranteed an exclusive theatrical release, with her potential earnings tied to the box office performance of the film.

But as it has with other recent releases since the coronavirus pandemic began, Disney released the film simultaneously in theaters and through its streaming service Disney+ for a \$30 rental.

The rhetoric of the lawsuit and Disney's response suggested a long and ugly battle was ahead.

"In the months leading up to this lawsuit, Ms. Johansson gave Disney and Marvel every opportunity to right their wrong and make good on Marvel's promise," the lawsuit said. "Disney intentionally induced Marvel's breach of the Agreement, without justification, in order to prevent Ms. Johansson from realizing the full benefit of her bargain with Marvel."

Disney at the time said the lawsuit had "no merit whatsoever," adding that it was "especially sad and distressing in its callous disregard for the horrific and prolonged global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Disney said the changed release plan "significantly enhanced her ability to earn additional compensation on top of the \$20M she has received to date."

Delayed more than a year because of COVID-19, "Black Widow" debuted to a what was then a pandemic-best of \$80 million in North America and \$78 million from international theaters on July 9. But theatrical grosses declined sharply after that. In its second weekend in release, the National Association of Theater Owners issued a rare statement criticizing the strategy.

Revised hybrid release strategies have occasionally led to public spats between stars, filmmakers and financiers who are unhappy with potential lost revenues and their lack of say in such strategies.

But none were as big or as public as Johansson's lawsuit.

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

## Ethiopia expels UN officials amid Tigray blockade pressure

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia said Thursday it is kicking out seven United Nations officials whom it accused of “meddling” in the country’s internal affairs, as pressure grows on the government over its deadly blockade of the Tigray region.

The expulsions are the government’s most dramatic move yet to restrict humanitarian access to the region of 6 million people after nearly a year of war. The U.N. has become increasingly outspoken as the flow of medical supplies, food and fuel has been brought to a near-halt.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was “shocked” by the announcement and expressed “full confidence” in U.N. staff, saying they are guided by impartiality and neutrality. In a statement, he said the U.N. is engaging with Ethiopia’s government “in the expectation that the concerned U.N. staff will be allowed to continue their important work.”

Ethiopia’s government has accused humanitarian workers of supporting the Tigray forces who have been fighting its soldiers and allied forces since November. Aid workers have denied it. Thousands of people have died in the conflict marked by gang rapes, mass expulsions and the destruction of health centers, with witnesses often blaming Ethiopian soldiers and those of neighboring Eritrea.

The U.N.’s humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths, this week told The Associated Press that the crisis in Ethiopia is a “stain on our conscience” as children and others starve to death in Tigray under what the U.N. calls a de facto government blockade. Just 10% of needed humanitarian supplies have been reaching Tigray in recent weeks, he said.

The remarks were one of the sharpest criticisms so far of the world’s worst hunger crisis in a decade, with some 400,000 people facing famine conditions. Memories of the 1980s famine in Ethiopia, which killed around 1 million people and produced images that shocked the world, are vivid in his mind, Griffiths said, “and we fervently hope (this) is not happening at present.”

The AP, citing witness accounts and internal documents, last week reported the first starvation deaths since Ethiopia’s government imposed the blockade in June in an attempt to keep support from reaching Tigray forces.

A statement from Ethiopia’s foreign ministry said the seven U.N. officials must leave the country within 72 hours. Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman Dina Mufti didn’t respond to a request for details of their alleged interference.

The U.S. condemned the expulsions, with White House press secretary Jen Psaki agreeing that Ethiopia’s crisis is “a stain on our collective conscience” that must stop.

“Depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable,” she said, and warned that Washington could impose financial sanctions “on those who obstruct humanitarian assistance to the people of Ethiopia.”

Asked why the Biden administration isn’t taking action now, Psaki responded that “absent clear and concrete changes, we will.” She added that the White House is looking to see “meaningful steps” within weeks toward a negotiated ceasefire.

“On September 17, President Biden issued an Executive Order establishing a new sanctions regime that authorizes the imposition of targeted economic sanctions in connection with the crisis in northern Ethiopia,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement Thursday. “We will not hesitate to use this authority or other tools to respond to those who obstruct humanitarian assistance to the people of Ethiopia.”

The people expelled include five with the U.N. humanitarian agency, including deputy coordinator Grant Leaiti, one from the U.N. human rights office and the one UNICEF representative in the country, Adele Khodr. A spokesperson for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and some of the individuals expelled didn’t immediately comment.

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Findings from a joint investigation into the war by the U.N. human rights office and the government-created Ethiopian Human Rights Commission — a rare setup that has drawn concern and criticism — are scheduled for release on Nov. 1. It wasn't immediately clear if the probe will be affected by the expulsion of a U.N. member of the joint team, Sonny Onyegbula.

The expulsions come as the U.N. also responds to the war's spread into Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced. "What is chilling and revealing about the U.N. officials' expulsion is that it comes when the U.N. and other aid agencies are needed most in most parts of Ethiopia," tweeted Mehari Taddele Maru, a professor of governance at the European University Institute.

Earlier, Ethiopia's government suspended the operations of two major international aid groups — Doctors Without Borders and the Norwegian Refugee Committee — accusing them of spreading "misinformation" about the war.

The government is so wary that humanitarian workers boarding rare flights to Tigray have been told they couldn't bring such items as can openers, multivitamins and medicine, even personal ones, as well as the means to document the crisis, including hard drives and flash drives.

Griffiths told the AP he too was searched, with authorities examining everything in his bag and questioning why he was carrying earphones.

For months, humanitarian workers have been increasingly hesitant to speak openly about the government's blockade of Tigray for fear of losing access to the region. But the lack of fuel and other supplies has left many without the means to help as some people starve.

"They've got their fists around our throats with white knuckles strangling us," one humanitarian worker told the AP this week on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. "They just let us gasp from time to time so we don't die."

## Britney's father is out, but scrutiny of him just beginning

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears and her attorney successfully drove her father from the conservatorship that has run the singer's life and controlled her money, but they say they are not done scrutinizing him and the actions he took over the past 13 years.

After a Los Angeles Superior Court judge suspended James Spears as conservator, attorney Mathew Rosengart said his legal team would perform a "top-to-bottom" examination of his behavior now that they have access to years of books and records. Some allegations, he added, could bring a "hard look" from law enforcement.

"Jamie Spears and others are going to face even more serious ramifications for his misconduct," Rosengart said Wednesday outside court.

But legal acts may pose problems too. Experts say some of the allegations that have emerged have exposed the shortcomings of the conservatorship system, which gives conservators vast control over people deemed mentally incapable of making major life decisions, as Britney Spears was found to be in 2008.

"There are safeguards in place," said Sarah Wentz, a probate attorney who works on many conservatorship cases. "I think the failings in this case show us where they can be manipulated. I am disappointed in our system."

Few of the allegations against James Spears, which range from mismanagement of funds to fierce control of his daughter's every move, have been publicly proven. His attorneys say they range from unsubstantiated to impossible, and that he only ever acted in her best interest.

Judge Brenda Penny was legally allowed to suspend the elder Spears at her discretion and held no fact-finding hearing before ousting him, citing only the "toxic environment" that he created around his daughter. His suspension could now allow evidence to be gathered, however.

"They needed to have him out of the way," Wentz said. "He has too direct a conflict."

Rosengart argued in court that James Spears had "reaped millions of dollars" from the conservatorship,

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and said in court filings that in recent years he has been spending her money excessively on attorneys and strategists whose central goal was to bolster his reputation and maintain the conservatorship at all costs.

"She's the breadwinner. Everything belongs to her," said Richard Kaplan, a criminal attorney who specializes in defending white-collar clients. "And if there was mismanagement, that's ripe for investigation."

Neither Kaplan nor Wentz is involved in the Spears case.

James Spears' attorneys argued that all his actions were subject to the scrutiny of the court, which closely examines required quarterly financial reports and frequently investigates the moves of conservators.

That isn't necessarily sufficient, however.

"He can't just use that as a defense," Wentz said. "He wasn't court appointed to oppress her or abuse her or torment her."

Required court monitoring hasn't stopped others from taking advantage of conservatorships and facing criminal investigation.

"It's not uncommon that a conservator mismanages money and profits off of that," Kaplan said. "That's why probate courts have to look so closely at these things."

Rosengart also said James Spears had crossed "unfathomable" lines by engaging in illegal surveillance of his daughter, including communications with her children, her boyfriend and her lawyer, as reported in "Controlling Britney Spears," a recent documentary from The New York Times and the FX network.

James Spears' lawyer, Vivian Thoreen, dismissed those allegations in court as "rhetoric from a TV show" that could be dispensed with quickly on closer investigation.

By himself or with a partner, James Spears was the overseer of both his daughter's life decisions and finances from 2008 to 2019, when he gave up the role of so-called conservator of her person while continuing to control her finances alone.

His attorneys said that means his daughter's complaints about her health care and controls on her relationships are not her father's responsibility at all but that of Jodi Montgomery, a court-appointed professional who serves as conservator of her person. Britney Spears aired those complaints in a pair of passionate speeches to the court over the summer.

Wentz said beyond the surveillance issue, she is even more troubled by a 2016 document leaked to the Times documentary makers in which Britney Spears told a court investigator she wanted an end to the conservatorship, which was "based in a lot of fear" and enabled her father's "oppressive" control of every aspect of her life.

There were no apparent changes made.

"The fact that the court did nothing about that is appalling," Wentz said. "I have been asked by people about reform in the conservatorship system, and I say, 'How about just following the rules?' They asked the court to end things, and it seemed like nobody wanted this to end. Why?"

She suggested that states could implement a mandatory reporting requirement for conservatorships that triggers bigger investigations of the sort that happen when a teacher or therapist hears of possible child abuse.

In the weeks leading up to Wednesday's hearing, James Spears reversed course and petitioned to have the conservatorship terminated.

Judge Penny rejected that petition in favor of Rosengart's plan, which was to first suspend James Spears before moving to end the conservatorship entirely, possibly by the next hearing in November.

Thoreen gave a broad defense of her client in a statement to The Associated Press on Thursday, saying James Spears' ouster was "a loss" for Britney Spears. She said he loves his daughter unconditionally and has tried for 13 years "to do what is in her best interests, whether as a conservator or her father."

Thoreen said Spears' love for his daughter has "meant biting his tongue and not responding to all the false, speculative and unsubstantiated attacks."

## School board group asks US for help policing threats

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

A group representing school board members around the country asked President Joe Biden on Thursday for federal assistance to investigate and stop threats made over policies including mask mandates, likening the vitriol to a form of domestic terrorism.

The request by the National School Boards Association demonstrates the level of unruliness that has engulfed local education meetings across the country during the pandemic, with board members regularly confronted and threatened by angry protesters.

School board members are largely unpaid volunteers, parents and former educators who step forward to shape school policy, choose a superintendent and review the budget, but they have been frightened at how their jobs have suddenly become a culture war battleground. The climate has led a growing number to resign or decide against seeking reelection.

"Whatever you feel about masks, it should not reach this level of rhetoric," NSBA Interim Executive Director Chip Slaven told The Associated Press by phone.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said responsibility for protecting school boards falls largely to local law enforcement but "we're continuing to explore if more can be done from across the administration."

"Obviously these threats to school board members is horrible. They're doing their jobs," she said during a press briefing.

The association asked for the federal government to get involved to investigate cases where threats or violence could be handled as violations of federal laws protecting civil rights. It also asked for the Justice Department, FBI, Homeland Security and Secret Service to help monitor threat levels and assess risks to students, educators, board members and school buildings.

"As these acts of malice, violence, and threats against public school officials have increased, the classification of these heinous actions could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism and hate crimes," the association wrote.

The association represents more than 90,000 school board members in 14,000 public school districts.

The letter documents more than 20 instances of threats, harassment, disruption, and acts of intimidation in California, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Ohio and other states. It cites the September arrest of an Illinois man for aggravated battery and disorderly conduct for allegedly striking a school official at a meeting. In Michigan, a meeting was disrupted when a man performed a Nazi salute to protest masking.

"We are coming after you," a letter mailed to an Ohio school board member said, according to the group. "You are forcing them to wear mask—for no reason in this world other than control. And for that you will pay dearly."

It called the member "a filthy traitor."

Last week, a crowd of up to 200 protesters who banged on doors and shouted at police shut down a school board meeting in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where members planned to consider a temporary COVID-19 mask mandate.

At a U.S. Senate committee hearing on Thursday, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona decried the hostility against school board members and praised their "unwavering support" to reopen schools safely. He said the lack of civility in some meetings is disappointing and, in some places, it has been "very dangerous."

He made the comments in response to questions from Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind., a former school board member who said contentious meetings are a part of civic engagement.

The threats have gone beyond board meetings.

The father of an Arizona elementary school student was arrested after he and two other men brought zip ties to the campus, threatening to make a "citizen's arrest" on the school principal over a COVID-19 quarantine. In California, a parent barged into his daughter's elementary school and punched a teacher in the face over mask rule.

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Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Aamer Madhani in Washington and Collin Binkley in Boston contributed to this report.

## Senators push Facebook exec on Instagram policies for youth

By MARCY GORDON and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senators fired a barrage of criticism Thursday at a Facebook executive over the social-networking giant's handling of internal research on how its Instagram photo-sharing platform can harm teens.

The lawmakers accused Facebook of concealing the negative findings about Instagram and demanded a commitment from the company to make changes.

During testimony before a Senate Commerce subcommittee, Antigone Davis, Facebook's head of global safety, defended Instagram's efforts to protect young people using its platform. She disputed the way a recent newspaper story describes what the research shows.

"We care deeply about the safety and security of the people on our platform," Davis said. "We take the issue very seriously. ... We have put in place multiple protections to create safe and age-appropriate experiences for people between the ages of 13 and 17."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the subcommittee chairman, wasn't convinced.

"I don't understand how you can deny that Instagram is exploiting young users for its own profit," he told Davis.

The panel is examining Facebook's use of information from its own researchers that could indicate potential harm for some of its young users, especially girls, while it publicly downplayed the negative impacts. For some of the Instagram-devoted teens, the peer pressure generated by the visually focused app led to mental-health and body-image problems, and in some cases, eating disorders and suicidal thoughts, the research showed.

The revelations in a report by The Wall Street Journal, based on internal research leaked by a whistleblower at Facebook, have set off a wave of anger from lawmakers, critics of Big Tech, child-development experts and parents.

Comparisons to the tobacco industry's coverups of cigarettes' harmful effects abounded in a session that united senators of both parties in criticism of the giant social network and Instagram, the photo-sharing juggernaut valued at around \$100 billion that Facebook has owned since 2012.

Said Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass.: "Instagram is that first childhood cigarette meant to get teens hooked early. Facebook is just like Big Tobacco, pushing a product they know is harmful to the health of young people."

The episode is quickly burgeoning into a scandal for Facebook approaching the level of the Cambridge Analytica debacle. Revelations in 2018 that the data mining firm had gathered details on as many as 87 million Facebook users without their permission similarly led to a public-relations offensive by Facebook and congressional hearings.

"It's abundantly clear that Facebook views the events of the last two weeks purely as a PR problem, and that the issues raised by the leaked research haven't led to any soul-searching or commitment to change," said Josh Golin, executive director of the children's online watchdog group Fairplay. The group, formerly known as the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, doesn't take money from Facebook or companies, unlike the nonprofits Facebook tends to bring in for expert advice on its products.

Facebook's public response to the outcry over Instagram was to put on hold its work on a kids' version of Instagram, which the company says is meant mainly for tweens aged 10 to 12. On Monday, Instagram head Adam Mosseri said in a blog post that the company will use its time out "to work with parents, experts and policymakers to demonstrate the value and need for this product."

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

Pressed by senators, Davis wouldn't say how long the pause would last. "I don't have a specific date but I do have a commitment" that Facebook executives will consult with parents, policymakers and experts,

she said. "We want to get this right."

Blumenthal and Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, the panel's senior Republican, also plan to take testimony next week from a Facebook whistleblower, believed to be the person who leaked the Instagram research documents to the Journal. An interview with the whistleblower is set to air on CBS' "60 Minutes" program Sunday.

Davis, a one-time middle school teacher and aide in the Maryland attorney general's office, insisted that the research on Instagram's impact on young people "is not a bombshell."

"This research is a bombshell," Blumenthal countered. "It is powerful, gripping, riveting evidence that Facebook knows of the harmful effects of its site on children, and that it has concealed those facts and findings."

The research documents released Wednesday by the Wall Street Journal: <https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/teen-girls-body-image-and-social-comparison-on-instagram.pdf>

Ortutay reported from Oakland, California. Associated Press writer Amanda Seitz in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

Follow Marcy Gordon at <https://twitter.com/mgordonap>

This story has been corrected to show that Fairplay is a children's online watchdog group, not a children's online advertising group.

## Dre, Snoop, Eminem, Blige, Lamar to perform at Super Bowl

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Mary J. Blige and Kendrick Lamar will perform for the first time on stage together at the Pepsi Super Bowl Halftime Show.

The NFL, Pepsi and Roc Nation announced Thursday that the five music icons will perform on Feb. 13 at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. Dre, Snoop Dogg and Lamar are Southern California natives.

Dre emerged from the West Coast gangster rap scene alongside Eazy-E and Ice Cube to help form the group N.W.A., which made a major mark in the hip-hop culture and music industry with controversial lyrics in the late 1980s. Dre is responsible for bringing forth rap stars such as Snoop Dogg, Eminem, 50 Cent and Lamar. Dre also produced Blige's No. 1 hit song "Family Affair."

"The opportunity to perform at the Super Bowl Halftime show, and to do it in my own backyard, will be one of the biggest thrills of my career," Dre said in a statement. The seven-time Grammy winner added that their halftime performance will be an "unforgettable cultural moment."

The Super Bowl returns to the Los Angeles area for the first time since 1993. It's the third year of collaboration between the NFL, Pepsi and Roc Nation.

Roc Nation and Emmy-nominated producer Jesse Collins will serve as co-producers of the halftime show. The game and halftime show will air live on NBC.

The five music artists have a combined 44 Grammys. Eminem has the most with 15.

Roc Nation founder Jay-Z said in a statement that their show will be "history in the making."

Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Blige and Lamar join a list of celebrated musicians who have played during Super Bowl halftime shows, including Beyoncé, Madonna, Coldplay, Katy Perry, U2, Lady Gaga, Michael Jackson, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira and most recently The Weeknd.

NFL and Pepsi will join together to support the launch of Regional School #1, a magnet high school in south Los Angeles. It's set to open for students next fall as part of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The high school is based on the USC Iovine and Young Academy, a program founded by Jimmy Iovine and Andre "Dr. Dre" Young. It will offer an educational model focused on the theme of integrated design, technology and entrepreneurship.



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"This effort will help develop and inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators," said Megan K. Reilly, the LA Unified Interim Superintendent. "We are excited about the additional opportunities this partnership will bring to our students."

## **EXPLAINER: What Kilauea's history tells us about its future**

By CALEB JONES Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Kilauea, one of the most active volcanos on Earth, began erupting on Hawaii's Big Island Wednesday. The eruption is not in an area with homes and is entirely contained within Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Officials said increased earthquake activity and ground swelling before the eruption put them on high alert. Fissures then opened in the summit area and sent lava fountaining into the sky. Now the area has filled with molten rock, creating a lake of lava in the volcano's crater.

The new lava is an expected evolution of a volcano that is recharging after a huge eruption in 2018 drained much of its magma.

The 2018 eruption destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced thousands of residents. But experts say this latest eruption is not expected to flow into residential areas.

Here's an overview of the latest eruption at Kilauea:

### **DID SCIENTISTS KNOW IT WAS COMING?**

Scientists at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory noticed a surge of earthquakes about 5 miles (8 kilometers) east of the summit's caldera early Wednesday. By the afternoon another series of earthquakes accompanied by ground swelling prompted them to increase the alert level.

"We picked up a series of earthquakes down the east rift zone, so on the order of about 5 miles from the summit. And these kind of came in what we would call a small swarm. So one after another," said Ken Hon, the USGS scientist in charge of Hawaii Volcano Observatory. "They were enough of an alert that we became suspicious that pressure was building within the system."

The agency raised its alert level "to orange or watch, anticipating that there might be an eruption," Hon said. "And 20 minutes later, in fact, there was an eruption."

It's not uncommon for Kilauea to have earthquakes, which often indicate magma is moving underground or parts of the volcanos are shifting. Earthquakes and ground swelling at the same time can be a precursor to an eruption.

### **ARE ERUPTIONS RARE?**

Eruptions on Kilauea are not uncommon. In fact, the volcano erupted nearly continuously for decades, but mostly not in densely populated residential areas before the 2018 eruption. That event destroyed more than 700 homes and displaced thousands of residents.

Kilauea had been active since 1983 and streams of lava occasionally covered rural farms and homes. During that time, the lava sometimes reached the ocean, causing dramatic interactions with the water.

The same area of the volcano that began erupting Wednesday also erupted in December and lasted until May.

Hawaiian chants and stories tell the stories of countless eruptions. In Hawaiian tradition, Kilauea is home to the volcano goddess Pele. Kilauea has erupted 34 times since 1952.

### **HOW MUCH LAVA?**

Hon said that within hours of Wednesday's eruption the volcano's summit crater floor had been covered in more than 6 feet (2 meters) of lava.

Over four months in 2018, Kilauea spewed enough lava to fill 320,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools, burying an area more than half the size of Manhattan in up to 80 feet (24 meters) of now-hardened lava. The molten rock reduced landmarks, streets and neighborhoods to a vast field of blackened boulders and volcanic shard.

The eruption in December created a lava lake with enough molten rock to fill 10 Hoover dams.

After the 2018 eruption, a summit lava lake in the same area stopped erupting and for the first time in

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recorded history began to fill with water, creating a fresh water lake tinged with volcanic material.

## WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park remained open to the public and officials expected tens of thousands of visitors to come see the new eruption.

National park spokesperson Jessica Ferracane said that while the lava itself is far from where people can hike or drive, other hazards still exist.

Gases that emanate from the volcano can be dangerous if inhaled, and while the plume is billowing away from people, the wind could change and send it over areas where the public gathers.

Ferracane said people with certain health conditions should avoid the gas.

She also noted that there are huge cracks in the ground that people can fall into and that visitors should avoid approaching the edge of the caldera. There is a nearly 500-foot (152.4-meter) drop from the crater rim to the floor.

Ferracane added that large crowds need to be mindful of pandemic concerns.

"This eruption is going to draw many people to the park, we're already seeing people come into the park, drive in after dark tonight," Ferracane said. "Really need people to remember that we are in the middle of a pandemic and they need to stay safe and to keep us safe, too."

She said people must keep 6 feet (1.8 meters) apart and wear masks.

## WHERE DID THE ERUPTION HAPPEN?

It occurred at the summit of Kilauea volcano, an uninhabited area within Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island. This is about 200 miles (322 kilometers) southeast of Honolulu, which is on a different island called Oahu.

"All signs indicate that it will stay within the crater," said Hon, the USGS scientist. "We're not seeing any indications that lava is moving into the lower part of the east rift zone where people live. Currently all the activity is within the park."

The site is miles from the nearest town. The park has closed off this part of the summit to the public since 2008.

The 2018 eruption was in the lower east rift zone. Fissures opened across Leilani Estates and other populated areas of the island's Puna district. Lava from that eruption snaked to the Pacific Ocean, destroying homes and farms along the way. Lava evaporated a fresh water lake and created a new black sand beach.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Because much of the magma that had fueled Kilauea for years erupted in 2018, the volcano is now recharging and will erupt again in the future.

Hon said these types of small eruptions could be happening for years as the volcano fills up.

"The magma keeps coming in to Kilauea at a pretty constant rate and so it's either filling the inside of the volcano ... or it's coming out to the surface," he said.

## A 'dangerous cabal'? Alito says high court is no such thing

By CASEY SMITH and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press/Report for America

Justice Samuel Alito pushed back Thursday against criticism, including some from colleagues, that recent Supreme Court actions in major cases have been done hastily and in the shadows. "A dangerous cabal" improperly deciding important matters — hardly, he said.

Alito, in remarks at the University of Notre Dame, took aim at critics of three recent decisions in which the court's conservatives prevailed over dissents by liberals.

In rapid succession beginning in late August, the court reinstated a Trump-era immigration program, allowed evictions that had been paused by the coronavirus pandemic to resume and let a Texas law severely limiting abortion go into effect.

All three cases came to the court as emergency motions, and were decided quickly and without the court's more typical full briefing and oral argument. That process has been called the court's "shadow docket."

"Our decisions in these three emergency matters have been criticized by those who think we should

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have decided them the other way, and I have no trouble with fair criticism of the substance of those decisions," Alito said.

He added: "My complaint concerns all the media and political talk about our sinister shadow docket. The truth of the matter is that there was nothing new or shadowy about the procedures we followed in those cases — it's hard to see how we could handle most emergency matters any differently."

Alito noted that it's not up to the court but to the parties in cases when they bring emergency motions. He said the recent criticism has suggested that "a dangerous cabal is deciding important issues in a novel, secretive, improper way in the middle of the night, hidden from public view, without waiting for the lower courts to consider the issues."

Alito said that "picture is very sinister and threatening, but it is also very misleading."

The string of recent emergency decisions began with a 6-3 vote to reinstate a Trump administration program that forces people to wait in Mexico while seeking asylum in the United States. A majority of the court said the Biden administration likely violated federal law in trying to end the program.

Days later, the justices, again on a 6-3 vote, blocked the Biden administration from enforcing a temporary ban on evictions that was put in place because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Most recently, the high court on a 5-4 vote declined to block a Texas law that has resulted in a near-total ban on abortion in the state. The unsigned majority opinion in that case was issued around midnight and was not even two full pages. Unlike the previous two emergency cases, Chief Justice John Roberts joined his liberal colleagues.

Alito said it was "false and inflammatory" for critics to claim that the conservatives in the Texas case effectively nullified the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision guaranteeing a woman's right to an abortion. Critics have said that by letting the law take effect, the court has allowed the state to sharply curtail abortions in the nation's second-largest state.

It was also in that decision that Alito's colleague, Justice Elena Kagan, said the majority's ruling "illustrates just how far the Court's 'shadow-docket' decisions may depart from the usual principles of appellate process."

The majority made a significant ruling without any guidance from an appeals court and then after reviewing "only the most cursory party submissions, and then only hastily," Kagan wrote. She accused her colleagues of barely bothering to explain their conclusion.

"In all these ways, the majority's decision is emblematic of too much of this Court's shadow docket decisionmaking — which every day becomes more unreasoned, inconsistent, and impossible to defend," she said.

Roberts also criticized the case's path to the court, saying the justices were asked to "resolve these novel questions — at least preliminarily — in the first instance, in the course of two days" without oral argument, additional briefs and guidance from lower courts.

Alito went through and rejected 10 different criticisms of the court's emergency practices, from the argument that emergency orders are "secretive" to the fact that they aren't typically signed by the justice who wrote them.

Alito acknowledged there have been more emergency motions in recent years but he attributed that to an influx of civil cases brought about by President Donald Trump's initiatives, as well as issues sparked by the coronavirus, including those relating to prisons and religious freedom.

Alito said he wasn't suggesting "that our current practice is perfect and that possible changes should not be considered." But he said that the recent portrayal of the court "feeds unprecedented efforts to intimidate the court or damage it as an independent institution."

Alito's speech came just days before the justices' planned return to their courtroom for oral arguments, more than a year and a half after the in-person sessions were halted because of the coronavirus pandemic. The justices had been hearing cases by phone during the pandemic but are currently on their summer break.

Justice Clarence Thomas also recently spoke at Notre Dame, where Justice Amy Coney Barrett attended law school and taught for many years.

Gresko reported from Washington. Casey Smith, who reported from South Bend, Indiana, 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.

## Military suicides rise 15% as senior leaders call for action

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of U.S. military suicides jumped by 15% last year, fueled by significant increases in the Army and Marine Corps that senior leaders called troubling. They urged more effort to reverse the trend.

According to data released Thursday, there were 580 suicides last year compared with 504 the prior year. Of those, the number of suicides by Army National Guard troops jumped by about 35%, from 76 in 2019 to 103 last year, and the active duty Army saw a nearly 20% rise. Marine Corps suicides went up by more than 30%, from 47 to 62; while the Marine Corps Reserves went from nine deaths to 10.

"The findings are troubling," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said. "Suicide rates among our service members and military families are still too high, and the trends are not going in the right direction."

Suicide has long been a problem in the U.S. military. While the causes of suicide are complex and not fully understood, military leaders have previously said they believed the COVID-19 pandemic was adding stress to an already strained force. Troops last year were called to help provide testing and later vaccines while struggling with the virus themselves and among relatives and friends. They also dealt with continued war-zone deployments, national disasters and often violent civil unrest.

Behavioral research has linked military suicides to a range of personal issues, including financial and marital stress.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby acknowledged the Defense Department cannot fully explain the increases in suicides in recent years.

"One of the things that is bedeviling about suicide is that it's often very hard to connect dots in causality — what leads somebody to make that decision," Kirby said. "It's difficult to denote specific causality with suicide on an individual basis, let alone on an institutional basis. And I think that's why it's so difficult for us to speak to it with any specificity, except to say we take this very, very seriously."

Military leaders for a number of years have sought to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health assistance.

That message was conveyed in a remarkable public statement last year by Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He said he sought help while heading U.S. Strategic Command from 2016 to 2019. He didn't reveal details but said he saw a psychiatrist — a rare public admission by a senior officer.

Army leaders on Thursday called suicide a significant challenge for the service, noting that the trend has been increasing for the last five years.

"While there is no clear understanding of what is causing the increase in suicides, we realize we have to do better in preventing suicide and ensure resources are available and readily accessible," said Army Secretary Christine Wormuth and Gen. James C. McConville, Army chief of staff, in a statement.

The total number of Navy suicides dipped from 81 to 79, and the Air Force stayed the same, at 109.

Defense officials told Pentagon reporters Thursday that the rate of suicides per 100,000 service members did not increase by a "statistically significant" amount, saying it was within the margin of error. Department data showed that the rates increased across the board for the active duty, Guard and Reserves, by between two and seven suicides per 100,000.

Army Maj. Gen. Clement Coward, acting executive director for the Force Resiliency office, said the department did not see a "statistical change in suicide rates" to indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact.

But, he added, that they are still looking at the issue. "We have always known that COVID, and the measures to respond to it, have presented unique challenges that would include risk factors for some

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folks," he said.

He and Karin Orvis, director of the department's suicide prevention office, acknowledged that the overall trend indicates the department must do more to reduce the stigma of seeking help.

"Preventing suicide across our total forces is top priority," said Orvis. "These trends do not rest well with me, or the department. I fully realize we have more work to do."

According to the Pentagon, enlisted male service members under the age of 30 were most at risk for suicide. While they make up less than 42% of the total force, men under 30 accounted for about 63% of the suicide deaths.

By far, the most common method of suicide was a gun, followed by hanging or asphyxiation.

Coward said the military suicide rates were comparable to civilian U.S. rates. The use of a firearm was more frequent within the military than the civilian population.

## Congressional members share own abortion stories at hearing

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

Three Democratic members of Congress on Thursday offered deeply personal testimony about their own abortions as a congressional committee examined how to respond to conservative states that are passing laws limiting abortion access.

Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri said she was raped on a church youth trip. Rep. Barbara Lee of California said she received a "back-alley" abortion in Mexico after a teenage pregnancy. And Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington said she opted for an abortion after being told her pregnancy would be high risk for her and the baby.

"Choosing to have an abortion was the hardest decision I had ever made, but at 18 years old, I knew it was the right decision for me," Bush told the House Committee on Oversight Reform.

The hearing comes weeks after a Texas law took effect that bans abortions after six weeks of pregnancy with no exception for rape or incest. Other conservative states are considering similar measures.

Meanwhile, a federal appeals court is weighing the fate of a Missouri law that bans abortions after eight weeks of pregnancy, also with no rape or incest exceptions. And, the U.S. Supreme Court in December will hear arguments over a Mississippi law that would ban abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

The hearing also looked at what the federal government can do to ensure abortion access. Options include ending the Hyde Amendment, which restricts government funding for most abortions, and passing a law guaranteeing a woman's right to an abortion. The House passed that measure last week, but Republican opposition would almost certainly doom it in the Senate.

Committee Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, a Democrat from New York, said the majority of Americans support abortion rights.

"But with a hostile Supreme Court, extremist state governments are no longer chipping away at constitutional rights -- they are bulldozing right through them," Maloney said.

Republican Rep. James Comen of Kentucky said the oversight committee should focus on problems with President Joe Biden's administration, not a state matter over which it "has absolutely no jurisdiction." Another Republican, Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, said abortion "only compounds the sorrow."

"Whether a pregnancy is planned or unplanned, or even the result of horrific circumstances, ending that child's life with an abortion to empower or protect the, quote, freedom, end quote, of the mother is not an answer," Foxx said.

Bush, a 45-year-old first-term lawmaker from St. Louis, testified that she had just graduated from high school in the summer of 1994 and went on a church youth trip to Mississippi. She said she befriended a man who was about 20. She said they flirted and he asked to go to the room she was sharing with another girl. Her roommate was already asleep when the man showed up.

"I answered the door and quietly told him he could come in, imagining that we would talk and laugh like we had done over the phone," Bush said. "But the next thing I knew, he was on top of me, messing with my clothes, and not saying anything at all."

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When it was over, Bush said, she was "confused."

"I was embarrassed, I was ashamed," she said. "I asked myself, 'Was it something I'd done?'"

About a month later, soon after she turned 18, Bush learned she was pregnant.

"To all the Black women and girls who have had abortions or will have abortions -- know this: We have nothing to be ashamed of," Bush said.

Jayapal said her first child, Janak, now 25, was born prematurely and weighed less than 2 pounds, which resulted in medical conditions that frequently required his hospitalization. Jayapal said other stresses combined with the sick baby resulted in postpartum depression so bad that she contemplated suicide.

She said that when she became pregnant again, she consulted with doctors "who told me that any future pregnancy would likely also be high risk to me and the child, similar to what I had gone through with Janak."

"I very much wanted to have more children," she said, "but I simply could not imagine going through that again."

Ending the pregnancy was "the most difficult choice I've made in my life, but it was my choice," Jayapal said.

Lee became pregnant at age 16 in the mid-1960s. Abortion in California was illegal at the time so a family friend helped send her to a "back-alley clinic in Mexico," she said.

She had no ill effects from the procedure, but she said many other women weren't so lucky in that era.

"In the 1960s, unsafe septic abortions were the primary killer — primary killer — of African American women," Lee said.

A Republican lawmaker had her own personal story about an abortion that didn't happen.

Rep. Kat Cammack of Florida said her mother suffered a stroke while pregnant with Cammack's older sister. Years later, when pregnant with Cammack, Cammack's mother was urged by doctors to have an abortion.

"But because of her strength," Cammack said, "she chose life."

Salter reported from O'Fallon, Missouri.

## After 15 years in prison, man cleared in deaths of 5 kids

By ED WHITE Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — Murder charges were dismissed Thursday against a man who spent 15 years in prison for the fire-related deaths of five children in suburban Detroit, the climax of an investigation that found misconduct by police and prosecutors.

Juwan Deering will not face a second trial, Oakland County prosecutor Karen McDonald said. A judge granted her request to close the case a week after Deering's convictions and life sentences were thrown out at her urging.

Wearing a three-piece suit, Deering, 50, walked into court shackled at the waist but departed as a free man with no restraints.

"It's been a hard uphill battle. ... The sun couldn't shine on not a brighter day. This is the brightest for me," Deering said moments later as family members clung to him on a cloudless morning and other Detroit-area men exonerated of crimes stood nearby.

Deering praised the new prosecutor for her "exceptional" work.

"I told her it took a lot of strength to step up against the status quo," he said.

McDonald, a former judge who was elected in 2020, took a fresh look at Deering's case at the request of the University of Michigan law school's Innocence Clinic.

Favorable evidence, including statements by a fire survivor, was not shared with his defense lawyer before the 2006 trial, and jurors didn't know that jail informants were given significant benefits for their testimony against Deering, McDonald said.

Deering has insisted he was innocent in a fire that killed children in his neighborhood in Royal Oak Town-

ship in 2000. No one could identify him as being at the house. Authorities at the time said the fire was revenge for unpaid drug debts.

The prosecutor said a dozen law enforcement professionals last week unanimously determined there was insufficient evidence to tie Deering to the fire. The investigation between 2000 and 2006 was "totally compromised by misconduct," McDonald said.

"There is only one ethical and constitutional remedy," she said in dropping the case.

Law students earlier had been trying to get a new trial for Deering, arguing that the fire analysis was based on "junk science." Those requests were unsuccessful in Michigan's appellate courts.

McDonald said it's possible the fire was not an arson as Deering's legal team has long maintained. She said state police are investigating it again.

"Once there was a belief that it was intentionally set, it was solve it at all costs. There was an unchecked culture here," said Imran Syed of the law school. "Cutting corners has enormous consequences."

Deering could be eligible for more than \$700,000 from the state, under a law that pays \$50,000 for every year spent in prison if new evidence is cited in a wrongful conviction.

Follow Ed White at <http://twitter.com/edwritez>

## US stem cell clinics boomed while FDA paused crackdown

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hundreds of clinics pushing unproven stem cell procedures caught a big break from the U.S. government in 2017: They would have three years to show that their questionable treatments were safe and worked before regulators started cracking down.

But when the Food and Drug Administration's grace period expired in late May — extended six months due to the pandemic — the consequences became clear: Hundreds more clinics were selling the unapproved treatments for arthritis, Alzheimer's, COVID-19 and many other conditions.

"It backfired," says Leigh Turner, a bioethicist at the University of California, Irvine. "The scale of the problem is vastly larger for FDA today than it was at the start."

The continuing spread of for-profit clinics promoting stem cells and other so-called "regenerative" therapies — including concentrated blood products — illustrates how quickly experimental medicine can outpace government oversight. No clinic has yet won FDA approval for any stem cell offering and regulators now confront an enormous, uncooperative industry that contends it shouldn't be subject to regulation.

Although emerging research suggests stem cells could someday have broad use for a number of medical conditions, experts say they should not be used outside of well-controlled studies or a handful of established uses. For instance, stem cells collected from blood or bone marrow have long been used to treat leukemia and other blood diseases.

Many clinics use so-called adult stem cells collected from tissue like fat or bone marrow — not the more versatile but controversial stem cells from embryos used in research.

Turner and other experts have tracked the growth of the clinics for nearly a decade. Clinics charge between \$2,000 to \$25,000 for adult stem cell injections and other infusions which they advertise for an assortment of diseases, including diabetes, autism, cancer, multiple sclerosis and vision problems. Some clinics use stem cells derived from fat, harvested via liposuction then reinjected into patients, aiming to repair joints or fight disease. Others use bone marrow or blood taken from umbilical cords after birth.

There is no government tally of how many clinics operate in the U.S. But Turner counted more than 1,200 of them in 2019, up from the 570 clinics he and a co-author identified in 2016. He's working on an update but says the number has consistently grown.

The FDA has repeatedly warned Americans to steer clear of unapproved and unproven stem cell therapies, which have occasionally caused blindness, bacterial infections and tumors. During FDA's three-plus years of "enforcement discretion," the agency sent formal warning letters to more than a dozen businesses performing the riskiest procedures. Regulators also prevailed in a Florida court case to shutdown a major clinic offering unproven treatments. Another case against a similar prominent company is pending

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in California.

"It's time to actually get the data we need," to assess clinics' stem cell procedures, FDA's Dr. Peter Marks said at an industry conference in June. He pointed to a multiyear effort by FDA to help clinics through the review process.

Many stem cell doctors continue to argue that their in-office procedures are outside FDA's purview. But FDA has concluded that processing stem cells and giving them to patients with serious diseases amounts to creating a new drug, which the agency regulates.

The FDA hasn't disclosed how many clinics sought approval since 2017, but public comments suggest it was troublingly low.

"We have been very disappointed in the number of clinics that have come in," FDA's Dr. Wilson Bryan said at the same conference.

Bryan, who directs FDA's cell therapies division, added that he is "extremely concerned" by how many stem cell and related offerings remain available.

Tracking injuries from the procedures is difficult. Drugmakers and hospitals are required to report drug-related complications to the FDA, but no such requirements exist for individual doctors. And patients often don't know where to report problems.

David Stringham of Provo, Utah, says undergoing a procedure for joint pain at a local clinic was "the worst decision of my life."

In 2018, Stringham was looking for an alternative to surgery for chronic pain in his right shoulder and elbows after years of weightlifting. He paid \$2,400 for injections of so-called platelet-rich plasma at a clinic. It doesn't involve stem cells but the procedure is similar: doctors take a blood sample, process it to concentrate the platelets and then reinject them into the patient's problem areas in an attempt to speed healing.

The procedure went smoothly, but within hours Stringham was wracked by pain in his back, shoulder and arms.

"It was a crazy amount of pain and I kept calling them saying 'something is not right,'" said the 51-year-old. "And to this day I'm not right."

The clinic gave Stringham medication for the pain and told him to be patient. But things didn't improve, even after months of physical therapy. Since then, a neurologist has told Stringham he probably suffered nerve damage at the places where he was injected.

His case was included in a Pew Charitable Trusts review of 360 reported injuries from stem cell and other regenerative procedures between 2004 and 2020. Nearly all the reports came from medical journals, government publications, social media or news reports. Just five came from FDA's database for medical injuries.

"There are a lot of holes in the safety system," said Liz Richardson of Pew, who led the project.

The FDA didn't clearly assert its authority over such clinics until 2017. The next year, it began sending form letters to some 400 clinics, warning that they may be violating FDA rules. But the names of the clinics haven't been publicized, and such warnings are often ignored.

Traditional medical researchers welcome the FDA actions but say it's impossible to gauge their effect.

"The business model is this: 'We can keep offering these products until things get serious with the FDA — and then we can just take down our website,'" said Laertis Ikononou, a stem cell researcher at the University of Buffalo who also heads a task force on the topic for the International Society for Cell and Gene Therapy.

He and other specialists say the clinics have damaged the reputation of legitimate stem cell research while also siphoning off patients who might otherwise enroll in studies.

Lawyers representing stem cell clinics say they have no choice but to resist FDA regulation.

"FDA is pushing them into this drug development pathway, which nobody is adopting because it requires a million dollars' worth of toxicology and animal studies just to show something is safe for human use," said Marc Scheineson, a former FDA attorney.

For now, people on both sides are waiting to see what FDA does.



"We shouldn't feel too confident that the FDA has this wrapped up" said Turner, the bioethicist. "They really have invested some resources and they are trying to do something here but I think they're just outmatched and overwhelmed."

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP\_FDWriter

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## Big drop in US teen vaping seen with COVID school closures

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Teen vaping plummeted this year as many U.S. students were forced to learn from home during the pandemic, according to a government report released Thursday.

U.S. health officials urged caution in interpreting the numbers, which were collected using an online questionnaire for the first time. But outside experts said the big decrease in electronic cigarettes use is likely real and makes sense given that young people often vape socially.

"They found a dramatic drop from last year and it's hard to imagine that doesn't represent a real decrease in use among high school and middle school students," said Dr. Nancy Rigotti of Harvard University, who was not involved in the research.

In the national survey, 11% of high school students and less than 3% of middle school students said they were recent users of e-cigarettes and other vaping products, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

That's a roughly 40% drop from last year, when nearly 20% of high school students and 5% of middle schoolers said they'd recently vaped.

If this year's numbers hold up, it would be the second big drop in a row, from a peak of 28% for high schoolers in 2019.

Even before the pandemic, a number of new restrictions were curtailing underage use of e-cigarettes. In late 2019, a new federal law raised the purchase age for all tobacco and vaping products from 18 to 21. Shortly afterward, the FDA banned nearly all flavors from small, cartridge-based e-cigarettes, which first sparked the teen vaping craze.

Also, some kids may have been scared off by an outbreak of vaping-related illnesses and deaths; most were tied to a filler in black market vaping liquids that contained THC, the chemical in marijuana that makes users feel high.

For months, tobacco experts have speculated about the potential effect of school closures on vaping, given most teens vape with their friends and get e-cigarettes from their peers.

Rigotti said the decline will have to be confirmed by other surveys due out later this year. It's also hard to predict whether vaping could rebound now that most schools have returned to in-person classes.

"I'm sure schools are working hard to ensure that doesn't happen," she said.

Previously, the survey was always conducted in classrooms. This year's was done online from January through May to accommodate students both at home and in school. Anti-tobacco advocates point out that students who completed the survey in school reported higher rates of vaping — 16% compared to 8% for students learning at home.

Overall, government officials estimate about 2 million U.S. teens and adolescents are vaping, a number they say is far too high. "E-cigarette use among youth remains a serious public health concern," said CDC specialist Dr. Karen Hacker, in a statement.

Thursday's report comes as the FDA is poised to potentially place even bigger limits on the vaping industry. The agency is in the midst of a sweeping federal review to decide which e-cigarette brands and products can stay on the market, after years of regulatory delays.

Earlier this month, the agency announced a ban on thousands of products, but it has not yet ruled on a handful of major manufacturers that account for most sales, including Juul and Vuse.

The new government numbers show teen vaping habits are shifting away from those brands. The top brand cited by high schools students is a disposable e-cigarette called Puff Bar that comes in flavors like pink lemonade, strawberry and mango. Disposable e-cigarettes are not subject to the tight flavor restrictions of products like Juul, which is only available in menthol and tobacco. Only 6% of students who vape said they prefer Juul.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP\_FDWriter

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## Gloria Estefan says she was molested at music school at 9

By SIGAL RATNER-ARIAS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Gloria Estefan has revealed that, at the age of 9, she was sexually abused by someone her mother trusted.

The Cuban-American superstar spoke for the first time publicly about the abuse and its effects on her during an episode of the Facebook Watch show "Red Table Talk: The Estefans" that aired Thursday.

"He was family, but not close family. He was in a position of power because my mother had put me in his music school and he immediately started telling her how talented I was and how I needed special attention, and she felt lucky that he was focusing this kind of attention on me," the singer said.

Estefan, who was born in Cuba and moved to Miami with her family when she was a toddler, revealed the abuse at the top of the show, which featured Clare Crawley, the first Latina "Bachelorette." On the episode, called "Betrayed by Trusted Adults," Crawley talked about child abuse she experienced at the hands of a priest.

The Associated Press does not typically identify victims of sexual abuse unless they agree to be named or share their stories publicly.

Sitting at the round red table with her co-hosts — daughter Emily Estefan and niece Lili Estefan — Estefan opened by saying that "93% of abused children know and trust their abusers, and I know this, because I was one of them."

"You've waited for this moment a long time," her niece told her.

"I have," Estefan replied.

The three held hands with teary eyes.

She did not name her abuser but described how she tried to stop him. She said the abuse started little by little before moving fast, and that she knew that she was in a dangerous situation after confronting him.

"I told him, 'This cannot happen, you cannot do this.' He goes: 'Your father's in Vietnam, your mother's alone and I will kill her if you tell her,'" Estefan said. "And I knew it was crazy, because at no point did I ever think that it was because of me that this was happening. I knew the man was insane and that's why I thought he might actually hurt my mother."

Estefan said she started making up excuses to avoid going to music lessons. Her daughter Emily asked if her grandmother had any inkling something was going on. People didn't talk about those things back then, Estefan replied.

She tried to reach her dad, with whom she exchanged voice tapes while he was posted in Vietnam.

Recordings in Spanish from when Estefan was 9 were played at the show with English subtitles:

Gloria: "I'm taking guitar lessons. I like them but the exercises are a little hard."

Her dad: "Mommy told me that the owner of the academy where you're taking your guitar lessons is very proud of you."

Gloria: "I like the notes, but it's a little boring to study the notes".

Her dad: "Mommy tells me that he said that you are a born artist."

Estefan said the level of anxiety made her lose a "circle of hair."

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"I couldn't take it anymore," she said, so one night she ran to her mother's bedroom at 3 a.m. and told her what was going on.

Her mother called the police, but the officers advised her not to press charges because the trauma of testifying would be too harmful.

Both Crawley and Estefan said during the show that they didn't like to be called victims. Crawley called herself a survivor.

Estefan said she didn't tell the producers she was going to reveal her story on Thursday's episode. No one knew about the abuse except for her family, said the singer, who has been married to music producer Emilio Estefan for over four decades.

She also said that, when her mother started inquiring about this man within the family, an aunt shared that he had abused her years back in Cuba.

The Associated Press asked the show's publicist if Estefan could answer some questions, including if the man was still alive. The publicist told the AP that she would not make further comments.

On "Red Table Talk," Estefan recalled almost going public in the mid-80s, when her hit "Conga" with the Miami Sound Machine was at the top of the Billboard charts and "this predator, who was a respected member of the community," had the audacity to write a letter to a paper criticizing her music.

"At that moment, I was so angry that I was about to blow the lid off of everything," she said. "And then I thought: 'My whole success is gonna turn into him!'"

"It's manipulation and control, but that's what they do, they take your power," she added, also admitting the fear that there could be other victims makes her feel bad.

After introducing Crawley and telling her that she didn't want to sit quietly while she shared her story, Estefan said she had been waiting for the right opportunity and space to tell hers.

The show was that space.

"This is one of the reasons why I said yes to the '(Red) Table (Talk)' at all, because we wanted to create this space where we talk about important things that hopefully will make a difference to everybody that's watching out there."

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Sigal Ratner-Arias is on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/sigalratner>.

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This story corrects the spelling of Clare Crawley, not Claire Crowley.

## Prisons, border wall: How GOP is looking to use COVID money

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — When Democrats passed President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, Republicans called it liberal "pet projects" disguised as pandemic aid.

But now that Republican governors and local leaders have the money in hand, they are using it for things on their wish lists, too.

Alabama lawmakers are advancing a plan to use \$400 million of the state's share toward building prisons in what Gov. Kay Ivey says is a great deal for taxpayers. In Texas, a Republican-led county is sending deputies to assist police along the U.S.-Mexico border and pledged to help Gov. Greg Abbott revive former President Donald Trump's plans for a border wall.

In other places, the money has been used to score political points or as leverage in partisan fights over COVID-19 precautions.

Decrying a "defund the police, soft on crime" liberal agenda, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp announced \$1,000 bonuses for first responders paid for with the relief money. In Wyoming, a Republican legislative leader suggested the money could be used to pay the federal fines of businesses that defy Biden's vaccine mandate.

This probably isn't what the bill's supporters had in mind when Democrats approved the American Rescue Plan along party lines in March, and some Democrats have complained that Republicans are misusing the money. But it's the inevitable result of Washington sending money with few strings attached to places

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with very different and partisan ideas about how best to spend public dollars.

Democrats also are using the cash to fund their priorities, including expanding Medicaid benefits, putting in place a child tax credit and offering \$4 billion in debt forgiveness for farmers of color. In Illinois, Republicans blasted the Democrats who control state government for handing out over \$1 billion for capital projects and groups in Democrat-held districts. That included \$250,000 for Black Lives Matter to do youth mentoring and \$300,000 for a suburban Chicago drill team and drum corps.

The federal aid package provided \$350 billion to states, counties, towns and tribes. It was billed as money for fighting the coronavirus, providing economic relief to small businesses and households, replacing revenue that governments lost during the pandemic and improving local water, sewer and broadband infrastructure. It also allowed for premium pay for essential workers, such as police officers, who faced the biggest health risks.

There were some clear restrictions, such as prohibiting funds from being used toward pensions or to cut taxes, and that led Republican attorneys general to sue. But the money came with more flexibility than most federal funding and a longer deadline for spending it. Officials say that will enable governments to deal with the current crisis and make more innovative, longer-term investments.

The Treasury Department says it has received roughly 1,000 public comments on proposed rules outlining how the money may be spent, including requests for clarifications of eligible uses. The department is monitoring expenditures and will require governments to repay any federal dollars that were used inappropriately, an official said.

But what qualifies as fighting COVID-19 or promoting economic recovery is often left up to the people spending the money.

In Galveston County, Texas, Republican county commissioners approved a plan to spend \$6.6 million of its total \$27 million in coronavirus relief money for security roughly 350 miles (560 kilometers) away on the U.S.-Mexico border. They say the money will protect residents from COVID-19 and other dangers brought by people entering the United States illegally. They approved a disaster declaration that says "extraordinary measures must be taken," given an increase in the number of border crossings.

"We have a deliberate public health and humanitarian crisis unfolding on our southern border that the Biden administration refuses to address," County Judge Mark Henry said.

So far, the county has spent \$165,000 to send three constable's deputies and five sheriff's deputies to the border, including to Del Rio, where thousands of Haitians convened recently at a makeshift encampment after crossing the Rio Grande. Galveston County plans to apply for reimbursement from the state, spokesman Zach Davidson said, after Texas legislators voted to approve reimbursements for counties that assist on the border.

In some places, lawmakers say American Rescue Plan dollars intended to make up for lost revenue are fair game to use as they see fit. That's the argument Ivey and other Republicans made as a plan advanced in the statehouse to use \$400 million of Alabama's \$2.2 billion share toward prison construction. After Democratic Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, wrote Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday seeking to block the \$1.3 billion construction plan as a misuse of money, Ivey shot back with a letter of her own.

"The fact is, the American Rescue Plan Act allows these funds to be used for lost revenue and sending a letter in the last hour will not change the way the law is written," Ivey said. "These prisons need to be built, and we have crafted a fiscally conservative plan that will cost Alabamians the least amount of money to get to the solution required."

Asked Wednesday about Alabama's plan, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "I would be surprised if that was the intention of the funding."

Democrats in Texas' congressional delegation want Yellen to block Abbott from using coronavirus relief money for the border wall. They sent a letter after Abbott announced new, tougher plans to fight illegal immigration, including shifting \$250 million in state money toward finishing Trump's border wall.

The "costly monstrosity certainly should not be paid for directly or indirectly" with coronavirus relief money, the Democrats wrote.

Texas legislators are expected to debate how to use the state's share of funds during a special session now underway.

In northwest Iowa, the Republican-led Woodbury County Board of Supervisors voted to use about \$15 million in rescue funds to cover higher-than-projected costs for a new jail in Sioux City. Some residents said the money could be put to better use, but board members contended that it was a proper use of the money because the larger facility will allow inmates to be less crowded, helping prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In Wyoming, GOP Senate Majority Floor Leader Ogden Driskill suggested to a conservative online publication that a more creative approach to using the money would be to push back against Biden's vaccine mandate by paying any fines imposed on businesses that ignore it.

"It's obviously COVID-related," Driskill said.

Associated Press writers Kim Chandler in Montgomery, Alabama, Mead Gruver in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Paul Weber in Austin, Texas, contributed to this report.

## **Powell sees inflation cooling, evading 'difficult situation'**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Thursday that current high levels of inflation are likely to fade next year and won't prevent the Fed from pushing toward its goal of full employment.

Powell spoke earlier this week about "tension" between the Fed's two goals of maximum employment and keeping prices stable. In periods of high unemployment, inflation is typically low, and vice versa. But right now inflation has jumped above the Fed's 2% target while the unemployment rate remains elevated, at 5.2%.

That can complicate the Fed's mission, because keeping its benchmark short-term interest rate low — it is currently pegged near zero — can help boost hiring, but it could also allow inflation to worsen.

In comments before the House Financial Services Committee, however, Powell said he believes inflation will decline without higher rates from the Fed raising.

Current inflation "is a function of supply side bottlenecks over which we have no control," Powell said. "But I would say that we do expect in the first half of next year to see some relief, depending on the bottleneck in question, and inflation should move down."

The Fed chair also said that "we are far away from full employment, so that gives us an incentive" to keep interest rates low. Lower rates can encourage more borrowing and spending by consumers and businesses and ultimately lift hiring. Last week, Fed officials projected that their first interest hike won't come until late next year.

Powell has also said that if there were indications that inflation could rise to unsustainable levels, the Fed would hike rates to bring it under control.

"We just have to balance the two," Powell said Thursday. "But I would say our expectation is that inflation will come down and we won't ultimately face that difficult trade-off of having the two goals in tension."

Powell's comments came in response to questions from Republican members of the committee who said that Americans are worried about rising inflation. Prices jumped 4.2% in July compared with a year earlier, according to the Fed's preferred gauge, the largest increase in three decades.

In response to a question from Rep. Joyce Beatty, Democrat from Ohio, Powell pledged to take diversity into account as the Fed replaces two presidents of regional banks who retired on Monday after financial trades they made last year came under sharp scrutiny.

"I can absolutely guarantee you that we will work hard ... to find and give a fair shot to diverse candidates for both of those jobs," Powell said.

## **Surging natural gas prices: Threat to consumers this winter?**

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By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Brace for a rude surprise on your winter heating bills.

After years of unusually inexpensive levels, the price of natural gas in the United States has more than doubled since this time last year. In Europe and Asia, wholesale prices are more than five times what they were a year ago.

The surging costs have coincided with a robust recovery from the pandemic recession, with more homes and businesses burning all forms of fuel. That intensified demand is poised to contribute to higher heating costs in many areas of the world.

Having enjoyed a prolonged period of low prices, consumers of natural gas are facing the burden of far more expensive fuel — and the prospect of much higher heating bills this winter.

“Consumers got used to very low prices last year, because with the pandemic everything was shut down,” said Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association. “Now, everything’s coming back online, industry is returning and natural gas is being used again in very large quantities. And that’s pushing up the price.”

In Europe and Asia, some companies that rely on natural gas have been forced out of business because of the higher prices. Four small British energy companies failed in recent weeks. Fertilizer producers, which use natural gas as a feedstock, are struggling. So are heavy industries that require significant heat, such as aluminum or cement producers.

Power companies in Europe and Asia are engaged in bidding wars over shiploads of liquid natural gas, thereby driving up the cost. Prices are also spiking in the U.S., which converts some of its natural gas into liquid and ships it to Europe and Asia. Those higher costs are showing up in gas bills for consumers around the globe. Analysts expect those prices to rise further through winter, when customers are most reliant on the fuel.

The main reason natural gas prices have jumped is that demand for fuel has accelerated as economies have recovered from the damage caused by the pandemic. But there’s another key factor too: There’s simply less gas on the market.

The factors that have diminished the supply are varied. When the pandemic was raging, oil prices tumbled and producers ran low on money to drill. Once they curtailed drilling for oil, they also retrieved less gas, because most wells pump both oil and gas out of the ground at the same time.

What’s more, Europe burned through significant natural gas last winter to heat homes during frigid weather, leaving storage tanks with little fuel. Then the summer was less windy than usual, so wind turbines didn’t generate as much energy as expected. That, in turn, led nations to burn more natural gas, further depleting reserves.

At the same time, Russia reduced its natural gas supply to Europe, noted Carlos Torres Diaz, an analyst at Rystad Energy. All those factors combined to send natural gas prices in Europe skyrocketing to roughly \$26 per million BTUs, compared with just \$4 at the same time last year.

A similar pattern occurred in China and Japan: Power plants burned more natural gas than usual to cool homes on a series of unusually hot days. Prices surged to \$29 per million BTU in Asia, Rystad Energy calculated, from \$5 a year ago.

Ira Joseph, an analyst at S&P Global Platts, noted that demand for liquid natural gas has been robust, even at much higher prices. In Japan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Taiwan and Indonesia, prices are so high that power companies will likely burn oil instead, according to Rystad. For the earth’s environment, that could become an alarming trend. Burning oil generates more climate-harming emissions than burning natural gas.

The wholesale price of natural gas in the U.S. has exceeded \$5, up sharply from \$2 to \$3 during most of the past two years. That’s the highest price since 2014, though it’s well below levels reached in the 2000s, when prices surpassed \$10 per million BTU.

And drought-stricken places such as Brazil have been left with less hydropower and are burning more natural gas instead, adding to global demand and leaving even less gas on the market.

For customers in the U.S., Europe and Asia, winter heating bills could be sharply higher. In the U.S.,

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according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, natural gas bills could be as much as 30% more for consumers this winter, with the average cost to heat a home rising to \$750, from \$572 over the same months last winter.

Oil prices, too, have surged — to nearly \$80 a barrel in Europe and \$75 in the U.S. Just as with natural gas, a key reason is that producers sharply curtailed drilling during the pandemic. Another reason is that some power providers switch to burning oil for power generation if the price of natural gas goes too high, thereby increasing demand for oil and driving prices still higher. The cost to warm homes with heating oil or propane could surge 40%, according to NAEDA.

All of that could cause hardships for customers who were already struggling. The energy assistance association helped a record 1.2 million households pay their cooling bills over the summer — a level of aid up 46% from last year and the most in the program's 40-year history. The increase was due in part to the higher temperatures that many experts have attributed to climate change.

The need for assistance through the winter will likely grow for low-income families, with federal unemployment aid having recently run out.

"The ending of unemployment, for those families, puts them at greater risk for all expenses, not just energy bills," Wolfe said.

Natural gas producers in the U.S. might benefit from higher prices for gas sold in the United States or overseas. Yet there's a limit to how much they can export to Europe and Asia. Facilities along the U.S. Gulf Coast that export liquid natural gas, or LNG, are all shipping at capacity.

Some companies have wanted to expand those export facilities or build new ones. But because gas prices were so low over the past few years, these companies couldn't find enough buyers who wanted to sign long-term contracts. That could change, though, as buyers scramble for fuel.

"A lot of them might be rethinking their strategy and say, 'OK, maybe it's worth signing long-term contracts at a more certain price, rather than being a risk and try to get gas or LNG in this volatile market,'" Diaz said.

Once those export facilities line up more long-term contracts, they could land the additional investment they need to complete the projects.

## **NLRB memo: College football players are employees**

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

College athletes who earn millions for their schools are employees, the National Labor Relations Board's top lawyer said in guidance released Wednesday that would allow players at private universities to unionize and negotiate over their working conditions.

NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo also threatened action against schools, conferences and the NCAA if they continue to use the term "student-athlete," saying that it was created to disguise the employment relationship with college athletes and discourage them from pursuing their rights.

"The freedom to engage in far-reaching and lucrative business enterprises makes players at academic institutions much more similar to professional athletes who are employed by a team to play a sport," Abruzzo wrote.

In a statement, the NCAA disputed the characterization of its athletes as employees and said that its member schools and conferences "continue to make great strides in modernizing rules to benefit college athletes."

"College athletes are students who compete against other students, not employees who compete against other employees," said the nation's largest college sports governing body, with oversight of some 450,000 athletes. "Like other students on a college or university campus who receive scholarships, those who participate in college sports are students. Both academics and athletics are part of a total educational experience that is unique to the United States and vital to the holistic development of all who participate."

Abruzzo's memo does not immediately alter the dynamic between the schools and their athletes, who can receive scholarships and limited cost of attendance funding in exchange for playing sports. Instead,

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it is legal advice for the NLRB should a case arise.

That could be triggered by an effort by a team to unionize, a claim of an unfair labor practice or even by a school using the term "student-athlete" to mislead players about their employment status, Abruzzo said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"It just perpetuates this notion that players at academic institutions are not workers that have statutory protection," she said. "It is chilling workers' rights to engage with one another to improve their terms and conditions of employment."

Gabe Feldman, the director of the Tulane Sports Law Program, said the memo is "yet another threat" to the NCAA and its business model, which relies on unpaid athletes to reap billions in revenue that is distributed to its 1,200 member schools.

"All signs point to an increasingly at-risk and fragile system of college athletics," he said.

Although football in the five largest conferences is college sports' biggest money-maker, the memo would extend protections to all athletes who meet the legal definition of an employee: someone who performs services for an institution and is subject to its control.

The NLRB has authority only over private schools; public university athletes would have to look to state legislatures or Congress for workplace protections. But the NCAA and the conferences could be viewed as joint employers if they control some essential terms of conditions of employment, Abruzzo told the AP.

"If they're engaged in commerce in the private sector, they are subject to that statute," she said.

The NLRB's new stance — which reinstates an old opinion that had been rescinded during President Donald Trump's administration — is the latest test for the NCAA and the infrastructure of U.S. college sports.

This spring, a unanimous Supreme Court said the NCAA cannot limit education-related benefits while hinting at the end of the NCAA's business model. A few weeks later the organization, under pressure from multiple states, cleared the way for athletes to earn money based on their celebrity.

Since March, the NCAA has also faced criticism over the disparity between the resources, branding and support afforded its men's and women's basketball tournaments. The organization is planning to overhaul its constitution, parts of which have been in place for a century.

Abruzzo also wrote that players across the country had engaged in collective action following the killing of George Floyd — action that "directly concerns terms and conditions of employment, and is protected concerted activity." Players likewise banded together during the recent pandemic — both by arguing for games to go forward, and for rules to protect themselves once they did.

"Players at academic institutions have gained more power as they better understand their value in generating billions of dollars in revenue for their colleges and universities, athletic conferences, and the NCAA," she wrote.

"And this increased activism and demand for fair treatment has been met with greater support from some coaches, fans, and school administrators. Players at academic institutions who engage in concerted activities to improve their working conditions have the right to be protected from retaliation."

The nine-page NLRB memo revisited a case involving Northwestern football players who were thwarted from forming a union when the board in 2015 said that taking their side "would not promote stability in labor relations."

Much has changed since then, including the collective social justice awakening and the Supreme Court's Alston decision that Abruzzo said "clearly stated that this was a for-profit enterprise and wasn't amateurism."

If cases similar to the Northwestern one come before the NLRB, she said, it could be decided differently.

"I don't think the board can or should punt," she told the AP. "I think we have more information that they are statutory employees."

The memo issued by Abruzzo, who was appointed by President Joe Biden, reversed a 2017 opinion by her predecessor. That memo had, in turn, rescinded a memo issued by President Barack Obama's appointee, when Abruzzo was a deputy general counsel.

Southeastern Conference Commissioner Greg Sankey noted that the repeated reversals and conflicting court rulings make it difficult for institutions to plan.



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"Considering the resulting uncertainty and to address the many other challenges facing college athletics, we hope that Congress will step in and provide clear and uniform legal standards consistent with recent court decisions," he said.

AP College Football Writer Ralph D. Russo contributed to this report.

Jimmy Golen is a Boston-based sports writer for The Associated Press and a former Knight Journalism Fellow at Yale Law School. Follow him at <https://twitter.com/jgolen>

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## 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

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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.

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 presented a letter to nervous House Democrats that he said committed Democratic senators to supporting 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."

## **Biden vaccine mandate splits US on party lines: AP-NORC poll**

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

A survey of Americans on President Joe Biden's plan to require most workers to get either vaccinated or regularly tested for COVID-19 finds a deep and familiar divide: Democrats are overwhelmingly for it, while most Republicans are against it.

With the highly contagious delta variant driving deaths up to around 2,000 per day, the poll released Thursday by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed that overall, 51% say they approve of the Biden requirement, 34% disapprove and 14% hold neither opinion.

About three quarters of Democrats, but only about a quarter of Republicans, approve. Roughly 6 in 10 Republicans say they disapprove. Over the course of the outbreak, Democrats and Republicans in many places have also found themselves divided over masks and other precautions.

"I don't believe the federal government should have a say in me having to get the vaccine or lose my job or get tested," said 28-year-old firefighter Emilio Rodriguez in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Republican is not vaccinated.

Democrat and retired school secretary Sarah Carver, 70, strongly approves of the Biden mandate. The suburban Cleveland resident said she wants more people vaccinated to protect her 10-year-old grand-

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son, who is too young to get the shot, and her vaccinated husband, who has breathing problems and Alzheimer's disease.

"I believe Dr. Fauci," Carver said, referring to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease specialist. Carver has had two doses of the Moderna vaccine.

Sixty-four percent of vaccinated Americans say they approve of the mandate, while 23% disapprove. Among unvaccinated Americans, just 14% are in support, while 67% are opposed. Most remote employees approve, but in-person workers are about evenly divided.

Exactly how the mandate will work is still being hammered out by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Some health experts have said weekly testing is a poor substitute for vaccination but a necessary part of the policy.

"Testing is used here to make it inconvenient" to avoid vaccination, said immunologist Gigi Gronvall, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. The choice will be: "You can get your two doses of vaccine, or here's what you're going to be doing every week."

The hope, Gronvall said, is that mandates will force people who have procrastinated to join the 56% of the U.S. population now fully vaccinated.

The testing choice makes the Biden workplace mandate more palatable to Cassie Tremant, a 32-year-old volunteer for a wildlife rescue group in Austin, Texas. She agrees with the mandate as long as people can opt out by getting tested weekly. A Democrat, she is fully vaccinated. Her grandmother was hospitalized with COVID-19.

"Personally, I would prefer everybody to be vaccinated," Tremant said. The Biden plan "gives people an option. If they don't comply, it's on them to get tested. I think it's a fair rule."

Roughly two-thirds of Americans say they are at least somewhat worried about themselves or family members becoming infected with the virus, though intense worry has declined. About 3 in 10 are now very or extremely worried, compared with about 4 in 10 in mid-August.

About two-thirds of Americans are at least somewhat confident the COVID-19 vaccines will be effective against virus variants.

Americans remain most trusting of health professionals for information about the vaccines, largely unchanged from December. Roughly 8 in 10 trust their doctors and other health care providers at least a moderate amount.

Rodriguez, the Corpus Christi firefighter, said he distrusts government vaccine information because it appears to him to be overly rosy.

"I've heard nothing negative about getting it at all," he said. "Nothing about side effects. It's 'No, everything's fine. Go ahead and go get it.'"

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does list common side effects of the vaccines such as tiredness, muscle pain, fever, chills and nausea. Serious problems are rare, including heart inflammation that can occur in young men.

If he is subject to a workplace mandate, Rodriguez said, he will consult his doctor, whom he trusts.

Public trust in the top U.S. science agencies for vaccine information is also relatively high. Roughly 7 in 10 trust the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration at least a moderate amount.

"They're the scientists and they know what they're talking about," said Ohio retiree Carver. "They're not quacks like some you see on the internet."

In contrast, only about 4 in 10 Americans say they trust the news media a moderate amount or more for information about the vaccines; about 6 in 10 have little or no trust in the media.

A majority of Americans approve of Biden's handling of COVID-19, though his rating is lower than it was during the first six months of his presidency. Fifty-seven percent approve, while 43% disapprove. That's similar to his ratings last month. As recently as July, roughly two-thirds approved of Biden's handling of the pandemic.

Close to half don't trust the president for information about vaccines. That includes Democrat Tremant, the Austin wildlife rescue volunteer.

"Politicians say really dumb stuff," Tremant said. "I would never trust any medical guidance or advice from any politician, even if they're my favorite politician in the world."

The AP-NORC poll of 1,099 adults was conducted Sept. 23-27 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.2 percentage points.

## It's flu vaccine time, even if you've had your COVID shots

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Amid all the focus on COVID-19 vaccinations, U.S. health experts have another plea: Don't skip your flu shot.

Flu cases have dropped to historically low levels during the pandemic. The U.S. and Europe experienced hardly any flu last winter, and the Southern Hemisphere just ended its second flu season of the coronavirus pandemic with little to report.

But with U.S. schools and businesses reopened, international travel resuming and far less masking this fall, flu could make a comeback. The big question is whether it will trickle in or roar back and put extra pressure on hospitals already struggling with COVID-19 surges.

"People are sick to death of hearing about having to roll on out and get vaccines of any sort," said flu specialist Richard Webby of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis.

Yet after 18 months of little influenza exposure, "we probably as a population don't have as much immunity against this virus as we typically might," Webby said. "It makes absolute sense to go on out and get that vaccine and at least prepare for something that, you know, could be quite severe."

Here are some things to know:

Q: Who should get a flu vaccine?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says just about everybody needs an annual flu vaccination, starting with 6-month-old babies. Influenza is most dangerous for adults over age 65, young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions, such as heart or lung disease.

Q: Why do I need one this year, since flu hasn't been a threat during the pandemic?

A: COVID-19 restrictions including masking and staying home — especially for children, who are flu's biggest spreaders — clearly had a side benefit of tamping down influenza and other respiratory bugs. But as soon as masks started to come off, the U.S. experienced an unusual summer surge of children hospitalized with a different virus, named RSV, that usually strikes in the winter. That's a worrying sign of what to expect if flu returns.

Q: What's the forecast for flu this winter?

A: Flu is notoriously difficult to predict. But there's a little more circulating in some countries this fall than last, including a recent uptick in China, said Webby, who directs a World Health Organization flu center. And people may be a little more vulnerable: Before the pandemic, 15% to 30% of the population was exposed to flu each year, a missing bump in immunity, he said.

"If flu does at least get a foothold in, it's going to have more opportunity of spreading this season," he said.

Q: When should I get a flu vaccine?

A: Now. The CDC encourages people to get their vaccine by the end of October. Doctors' offices, retail pharmacies and local health departments have millions of doses in hand. And most Americans with health insurance can get it with no co-pay.

Q: I already got a COVID-19 vaccine. Do I really need a flu shot, too?

A: COVID-19 vaccines prevent the coronavirus and flu vaccines prevent influenza. They don't overlap. But you can catch both viruses at the same time, or one after the other.

"Avoid the double whammy" and get both vaccines, advised the American College of Emergency Physicians. For now, COVID-19 vaccines are available for anyone 12 and older.

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Flu vaccines aren't as powerful as vaccines against some other diseases but if people do get influenza anyway, they tend to have a much milder illness.

Q: Can I get a flu vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine at the same visit?

A: Yes, the CDC says it's fine to pair a flu vaccine with either a primary COVID-19 shot or a booster dose.

Q: What's the best flu vaccine to get?

A: Flu constantly evolves, and each year's vaccine is made to fight the strains that international experts deem most likely to circulate. This year all the flu vaccines offered in the U.S. offer protection against all four of those strains. Options include traditional shots or a nasal spray vaccine. There also are shots specifically designed to rev up seniors' age-weakened immune systems, either with a higher dose or an added immune booster. There are also options for people allergic to eggs, which are used to make some flu shots.

Q: How much flu vaccine is available?

A: The CDC expects vaccine manufacturers to deliver 188 million to 200 million doses. Nearly 194 million doses were distributed last winter, a record.

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## US unemployment claims rise third straight week to 362,000

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose for the third straight week, a sign that the highly contagious delta variant may be slowing a recovery in the job market.

Claims rose unexpectedly by 11,000 last week to 362,000, the Labor Department said Thursday, though economists had been expecting claims to go in the opposite direction. The four-week moving average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week ups and downs, rose for the first time in seven weeks to 340,000.

Since topping 900,000 in early January, applications had fallen fairly steadily as the economy bounced back from last year's shutdowns. But they've been rising along with coronavirus infections.

The applications, which are a proxy for layoffs, remain elevated: Before the pandemic hit the United States hard in March 2020, they were typically coming in at around 220,000 a week.

America's employers have rapidly increased their hiring since they slashed 22 million jobs in March and April 2020 as the coronavirus outbreak — and the shutdowns meant to contain it — brought economic activity to a near-standstill. Since then, the economy has recovered about 17 million jobs as businesses to open or expand hours and Americans to return to bars, restaurants and hotels.

But hiring, which has averaged more than 585,000 jobs a month this year, slowed to just 235,000 in August as the delta variant disrupted the recovery. Restaurants and bars cut nearly 42,000 jobs last month, the first drop this year. Hiring is expected to pick up to more than 560,000 this month; the Labor Department issues the September jobs report next week.

In a research note, Contingent Macro Advisors said that technical factors — seasonal adjustments and processing backlogs in California, where claims soared by nearly 18,000 — were responsible for last week's increase in filings. "Overall, the jump in claims in the last three weeks bears close watching but is not yet alarming," Contingent said.

Altogether, 2.8 million Americans were receiving some type of jobless aid the week of Sept. 18, down by 18,000 from the week before. Earlier this month, the federal government stopped additional aid — including \$300 a week on top of traditional state benefits — that was meant to ease the economic impact of the pandemic.

## As deaths rise, vaccine opponents find a foothold in Bosnia

By ELDAR EMRIC and SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Hospitals across Bosnia are again filling with COVID-19 patients

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gasping for air, and the country's pandemic death toll is rising. Yet vaccination sites are mostly empty and unused coronavirus vaccines are fast approaching their expiration dates.

When the European Union launched its mass vaccination campaign, non-member Bosnia struggled along with most other Balkan nations to get supplies. By late spring, however, hundreds of thousands of doses started pouring into the country.

But after an initial rush of people clamoring to get jabbed, demand for shots quickly slowed. It is now down to a trickle even though Bosnia has Europe's highest coronavirus mortality rate at 4.5%, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

Dr. Edin Drljevic, an infectious disease specialist at one of Bosnia's largest hospitals, in Sarajevo, thinks the disconnect is partly a result of authorities failing to properly promote vaccination against COVID-19.

"At first, we only had negative publicity because of the failure to secure vaccines, but once the vaccines finally started arriving, mainly through donations, people became picky," he said.

So far, just under 13% of Bosnia's 3.3 million people have been fully vaccinated, among the lowest shares in Europe. Even people willing to get inoculated are putting off shots so they can choose the vaccine they want instead of receiving whichever one is available.

Bosnia currently administers the Pfizer-BioNTech, Sputnik V, Sinopharm and AstraZeneca vaccines. AstraZeneca's product, while the most widely available, appears to enjoy the least trust because of extensive news coverage when numerous European countries temporarily suspended its use due to concerns about possible, rare side effects.

"The bottom line is, people are poorly informed and lack up-to-date knowledge," Drljevic said.

With so few takers, over 50,000 AstraZeneca vaccine doses have already expired; an additional 350,000 doses are set to expire in October.

The pandemic has amplified the many problems of the Balkan nation, which is still struggling to recover from a devastating interethnic war in 1992-95. Nearly half of Bosnia's people live under or close to the poverty line.

The country has an extreme shortage of doctors and nurses, as well as rampant public corruption. Several elected and appointed government officials are under investigation or on trial for suspected malfeasance in the procurement of needed medical equipment and supplies during the pandemic.

The high-profile cases make Bosnians susceptible to claims that their leaders are acting in concert with corrupt pharmaceutical companies and are "happy to sacrifice them" for personal gain, according to Slavo Kukic, a sociology professor at Mostar University in southern Bosnia.

"People in Bosnia generally distrust the authorities. They (have been) lied to and manipulated for the past 30 years, and it makes it easier (for the anti-vaccine movement) to convince them that it is wise to not protect themselves from the virus, that it is a risk worth taking," Kukic said.

While vaccine hesitancy in Bosnia might be among the most extreme globally, the country is not the only one in Europe facing that problem.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies voiced concern Thursday at low immunization rates in parts of the continent, calling for urgent action to tackle vaccine hesitancy and misinformation.

In a press release, it warned that disinformation about vaccines' side effects and potential risks, coupled with the introduction of vaccine passes was "sparking anger and violence" and has led to "concerning incidents against medical services, media and the general public" in the United Kingdom and numerous EU member including Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and France.

"Without addressing people's concerns and fears, vaccines may not find their way into the arms of those most at risk, even where doses are available," IFRC regional director for Europe Birgitte Bischoff Ebbesen said. "Increased community engagement is needed to tackle vaccine hesitancy, myths and disinformation."

In Bosnia, health professionals and vaccine recipients note the absence of a coordinated, hard-hitting national campaign to counter vaccine hesitancy. There are no public service ads, billboards, incentives or mass mailings encouraging people to get vaccinated or advising them how to do it.

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Meanwhile, activists with strong anti-vaccine opinions dominate the discussion on social networks and in the comment sections of news sites.

An opposition lawmaker, Lana Prlic, announced on Facebook last week that she had received her second dose of AstraZeneca vaccine and urged followers to get their shots as soon as possible "to protect themselves and others." Her post attracted over 28,000 comments in 24 hours, most of them filled with insults and misinformation.

Jagoda Savic, Bosnia's most vocal anti-vaccination activist for over a decade, asserts with pride that her profile has grown during the pandemic.

"People stop me in the street to say hello, to congratulate me and ask me to keep up the good work," she said. "I get so many messages (of support) on Facebook that I can no longer respond to all of them."

Savic claims that coronavirus vaccines were not put through standard safety testing before being approved for use, and that they have caused severe adverse reactions in 1.2 million people in the European Union, the U.K. and the United States.

Similar claims have been made in other countries, and scientists and health authorities have repeatedly rejected them. Savic countered that information from reputable sources may cause doubts about the "dangers" of vaccines, but "in their heart and soul, people know the truth."

Bosnia has reported close to 240,000 confirmed cases and more than 10,500 deaths in the pandemic. Savic asserts the figures are inflated, arguing incorrectly that that molecular PCR tests — the primary method for diagnosing COVID-19 — produce a huge number of false positives.

"Unfortunately, I have the impression that we are simply letting anti-vaccination lobbies and movements hijack the public debate and spread misinformation that discourages people from getting immunized," Bakir Nakas, a retired infectious disease specialist, said.

While waiting to get her second coronavirus vaccine shot in Sarajevo last week, cancer patient Mirjana Golijanin said she thinks some fellow Bosnians are refusing because they perceive such behavior as a way of opposing the powerful and rich.

"I think it is simply an expression of the need to offer some sort of resistance, even if all they are resisting is a vaccine," Golijanin said.

Follow all of AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 1, the 274th day of 2021. There are 91 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 1, 2017, a gunman opened fire from a room at the Mandalay Bay casino hotel in Las Vegas on a crowd of 22,000 country music fans at a concert below, leaving 58 people dead and more than 800 injured in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history; the gunman, 64-year-old Stephen Craig Paddock, killed himself before officers arrived.

On this date:

In 1908, Henry Ford introduced his Model T automobile to the market.

In 1910, the offices of the Los Angeles Times were destroyed by a bomb explosion and fire; 21 Times employees were killed.

In 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China during a ceremony in Beijing. A 42-day strike by the United Steelworkers of America began over the issue of retirement benefits.

In 1957, the motto "In God We Trust" began appearing on U.S. paper currency.

In 1961, Roger Maris of the New York Yankees hit his 61st home run during a 162-game season, compared to Babe Ruth's 60 home runs during a 154-game season. (Tracy Stallard of the Boston Red Sox gave up the round-tripper; the Yankees won 1-0.)

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In 1971, Walt Disney World opened near Orlando, Florida.

In 1982, Sony began selling the first commercial compact disc player, the CDP-101, in Japan.

In 1987, eight people were killed when an earthquake measuring magnitude 5.9 struck the Los Angeles area.

In 1994, National Hockey League team owners began a 103-day lockout of their players.

In 1996, a federal grand jury indicted Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski in the 1994 mail bomb slaying of advertising executive Thomas Mosser. (Kaczynski was later sentenced to four life terms plus 30 years.) The federal minimum wage rose 50 cents to four dollars, 75 cents an hour.

In 2015, a gunman opened fire at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, killing nine people and then himself.

In 2019, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was diagnosed with a heart attack at a Las Vegas hospital, where he'd been taken after experiencing chest discomfort at a campaign event; doctors inserted two stents to open up a blocked artery. A white former Dallas police officer, Amber Guyger, was convicted of murder in the shooting death of her Black neighbor, Botham Jean; Guyger said she had mistaken his apartment for hers.

Ten years ago: More than 700 Occupy Wall Street protesters were arrested after they swarmed the Brooklyn Bridge and shut down a lane of traffic for several hours in a tense confrontation with police.

Five years ago: The New York Times reported that Donald Trump had reported losses of more than \$900 million on his 1995 income tax returns that experts said could have allowed him to forgo paying federal income taxes for nearly two decades; Hillary Clinton's campaign seized upon the report as evidence of "the colossal nature of Donald Trump's past business failures."

One year ago: President Donald Trump attended a fundraiser at his New Jersey golf club hours before announcing that he had the coronavirus. White House aide Hope Hicks tested positive for the coronavirus; she was among those who accompanied Trump to Minnesota for a fundraiser the previous day. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott dramatically reduced the state's number of drop-off sites for mail-in ballots, a move the Republican said was needed to ensure election security, while Democrats quickly blasted it as an effort to suppress voters.

Today's Birthdays: Former President Jimmy Carter is 97. Actor-singer Julie Andrews is 86. Actor Stella Stevens is 83. Rock musician Jerry Martini (Sly and the Family Stone) is 78. Baseball Hall-of-Famer Rod Carew is 76. Jazz musician Dave Holland is 75. Actor Yvette Freeman is 71. Actor Randy Quaid is 71. Rhythm-and-blues singer Howard Hewett is 66. Former British Prime Minister Theresa May is 65. Alt-country-rock musician Tim O'Reagan (The Jayhawks) is 63. Singer Youssou N'Dour is 62. Actor Esai Morales is 59. Retired MLB All-Star Mark McGwire is 58. Actor Christopher Titus is 57. Actor-model Cindy Margolis is 56. Producer John Ridley is 56. Rock singer-musician Kevin Griffin (Better Than Ezra) is 53. Actor Zach Galifianakis is 52. Singer Keith Duffy is 47. Actor Sherri Saum is 47. Actor Katie Aselton is 43. Actor Sarah Drew is 41. Actor Carly Hughes is 39. Actor-comedian Beck Bennett is 37. Actor Jurnee Smollett is 35. Actor Brie Larson is 32. Singer/songwriter Jade Bird is 24. Actor Priah Ferguson is 15. Actor Jack Stanton is 13.