

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Events

Monday, Oct. 4

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

Tuesday, Oct. 5

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

Thursday, Oct. 7

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

Friday, Oct. 8 - NO SCHOOL

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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Groton Area boys beat Freeman Academy in regular season finale

Groton Area boys had its regular season finale on Saturday, hosting Freeman Academy in soccer action. Keegen Tracy scored two goals in the first half as Groton Area took a 2-0 lead at half time. The Bobcats came back and scored three goals within six minutes, one by Chris Cardona and two by Jonathan Lopez, as Freeman Academy then took the lead, 3-2. Senior Jayden Zak scored with 22:01 left in the game to tie the game at three, and scored the game winning goal with 16:57 left as the Tigers won, 4-3.

Groton Area finishes the regular season with three wins, five loses and two ties. Freeman Academy finishes with two wins, four loses and one tie. The first round of the soccer playoffs is Tuesday.

The soccer parents sponsored the broadcast on GDILIVE.COM.



Braxton Imrie
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Jayden Zak
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Evin Nehls
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Groton Area's football team posted a 35-0 win over Dakota Hills Friday in Waubay

Groton Area scored two touchdowns in the first quarter, two in the second quarter and one in the third quarter, each for seven points for the 35 point spread that allowed for a continuous clock with 5:22 left in the third quarter to get the win.

	Groton Area	Dakota Hills
First Downs:	14	5
Rushing	24-112	34-51
	Pierce Kettering 4-36	J. Gubraa 12-45
	Kaden Kurtz 8-29	
	Andrew Marzahn 4-13	
	Jacob Lewandowski 3-16	
	Favian Sanchez 1-8	
	Taylor Diegel 1-12	
	Colby Dunker 1-5	
	Christian Ehresmann 1-(-4)	
	Korbin Kucker 1-(-3)	
Passing		
	Kaden Kurtz 11-18-152-2 TD	Trey Jurgens 2-7-16
	Korbin Kucker 0-2-0	
Receivers		
	Jordan Bjerke 3-56	Darius Small 1-13
	Favian Sanchez 2-55	Ben Kosucke 1-3
	Jackson Cogley 2-30	
	Andrew Marzahn 2-23	
	Ethan Gengerke 1-8	
	Pierce Kettering 1-1	
Fumbles	Had 2, lost 1	Had none
Penalties:	4-40	2-10
Tackles		
	Pierce Kettering 12	Trey Jergens 11
	Christian Ehresmann 7	Caleb Wehy 6
	Kaden Kurtz 6	Ben Kauske 6
	Andrew Marzahn 6	
	Evan Nehls 5	

Scoring

First Quarter

9:20: Pierce Kettering 3 yard run. Jackson Cogley kicked the PAT

0:23: Jordan Bjerke 34 yard pass from Kaden Kurtz. Jackson Cogley kicked the PAT

Second Quarter

9:02: Pierce Kettering 1 yard pass from Kaden Kurtz. Jackson Cogley kicked the PAT

1:35: Andrew Marzahn 1 yard run. Jackson Cogley kicked the PAT

Third Quarter

5:22: Kaden Kurtz 6 yard run. Jackson Cogley kicked the PAT

GDILIVE.COM Sponsors: Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., John Sieh Agency, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Doug Abeln Seed Company and the TD sponsor was Bahr Spray Foam.

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

First the bad news: We've passed 43 million cases. Did it on Monday night after I'd posted my last Update, and now we're all the way up to 43,348,265. The good news is that it took longer to get this last million than it's been taking lately for each new million—first time since mid-August that it's taken more than a week. There's a trend I like. Here's the history:

April 28, 2020 – 1 million – 98 days
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days
January 5 – 21 million – 5 days
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days
January 18 – 24 million – 5 days
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days
March 24 – 30 million – 17 days
April 8 – 31 million – 15 days
April 24 – 32 million – 16 days
May 18 – 33 million – 23 days
July 16 – 34 million – 59 days
July 31 – 35 million – 15 days
August 11 – 36 million – 11 days
August 17 – 37 million – 6 days
August 23 – 38 million – 6 days
August 30 – 39 million – 7 days
September 5 – 40 million – 6 days
September 12 – 41 million – 7 days

September 18 – 42 million – 6 days
September 27 – 43 million – 9 days

I kind of hate to bring this up for fear of jinxing things, but it is very much beginning to look as though we're turning some kind of corner here. I'm still not going to get overexcited just yet because I've been burned—several times—before during this pandemic; but we are looking better. At midday today, we were at a seven-day new-case average of just 111,210, lowest in just under two months. The two-week decline is 26 percent. We do still have some states in serious trouble, largely rural (a topic we're going to talk about in a few days) and in the West (plus a cluster of Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia, which despite the name isn't, you know, west). Even those, with the notable exceptions of Alaska and North Dakota, are making good progress. The South is looking at only a shadow of its former horrors. It's starting to feel better again. The stress is easing on hospitals as well—again with some serious exceptions as noted above. The seven-day average hospitalizations are at 80,565, a two-week decline of 17 percent.

Best of all, for the first time since mid-July, we're seeing a downward trend in seven-day average deaths. We're now below 2000 at 1927. That should continue to drop as long as new cases and hospitalizations do. We have the onset of winter and the upcoming holiday season to get through before I'll take a deep breath, but at some point, we're going to have pretty much everyone infected or vaccinated, which will buy us some time to tamp this thing down before reinfections become a serious threat. In the meanwhile, new cases will continue to trickle in as the virus mops up the remaining unvaccinated persons. We're doing this the hard way, but it does appear we're doing it. Evidence of just how hard this way is: We're going to top 700,000 deaths in this country before the next time we get together.

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I've seen a thing going around about how vaccinated people are just as likely to transmit this virus as the unvaccinated, so what's the point of vaccination? The short answer is that's wrong: Vaccinated people are far less likely to transmit, so stop it.

The longer answer has to do with the fact that vaccinated people are far less likely to have the virus in the first place; and if they don't have the virus, they can't transmit it. Additionally, if a vaccinated person does get the virus, they are quite likely contagious for a much shorter time and harbor less virus in their respiratory tract. That means, even when they do get infected (something we're less likely to see happening), they are not as likely to spread it to others. The conclusion is that vaccination inhibits transmission by quite a lot, and this argument against vaccination fails. Vaccinations are not perfect, so some folks will still become infected; but that's going to be a lot less common, and when it occurs, the risk of transmission is lessened. Try again, anti-vaxxers.

It's been a long time since we've talked about antivirals, that is, medications which interfere with a virus's ability to invade and replicate within host cells. Such a drug is more likely to be useful after exposure or after symptoms develop, whereas vaccines are intended to prevent the development of disease entirely. Therapeutics is a tricky field because, as we long ago discussed, viruses use your own cell processes to replicate. That means most things we can do to interfere with the virus will actually mess with your own cells' ability to function, and that wouldn't be good for you. This makes antivirals exceptionally difficult to develop. For a review of how that all works, check out my Update #25 posted March 20, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3443290772353971>.

We have three rather promising antivirals coming into late-stage clinical trials recently; we've talked about some of these before. They may all be given orally to outpatients, a major advantage over monoclonal antibodies which must be given by intravenous infusion, a far more labor-intensive and expensive formulation to administer, or by injection. Let's review their progress.

First up is molnupiravir from Merck and Company and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics. I mentioned it briefly back in January with an estimate we'd have final data by spring and again in my Update #380 posted on March 9, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4508361435846894>. Obviously, we missed that spring target for final data—not sure what went wrong, but hold-ups in clinical trials are not at all unusual. This is a drug initially developed for use against influenza, a nucleoside analog which introduces copying errors when the viral RNA replicates in host cells. These errors lead to nonfunctional viral particles being produced, particles that can't move on to infect other host cells. This reduces the viral load in the patient, shortening infection time and preventing the cytokine storms that characterize many severe cases. It also appears to have similar activity against other viruses, so it may have broader applicability than just Covid-19, not a big surprise when you consider it was originally developed for influenza. The drug needs to be given early in infection, within five days of first symptoms when disease is mild or moderate at worst; early studies have already showed no benefit to patients with severe disease or who are hospitalized.

Early-stage trials in the spring showed a rapid reduction in viral load, but there are questions about risk-benefit profile. The drug is a small molecule which is less specific and runs a higher risk of off-target side effects. That means, if there are major safety or tolerability concerns, then the drug could be restricted to high-risk patients. The only studies so far are phase IIa, which are too small to pick up the necessary safety signals. All that said, the early viral load reduction data were encouraging. A phase 3 placebo-controlled study of the drug in some 1550 non-hospitalized patients is underway and expected to yield data in the next few weeks, likely by November. This larger-scale trial will be useful. The company expects

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to seek Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) before the end of the year. If the drug proves useful and receives EUA, the federal government has agreed to purchase 1.7 million courses of treatment for \$1.2 billion, which comes to \$700 for the 40-pill treatment (four capsules twice day for 10 days), about a third of the cost for a monoclonal antibody treatment. The company has said it can produce 10 million courses of treatment by year's end; they do have contracts with some other governments as well.

I wrote the above on Monday night, then today there was further news as Merck made an announcement that they have stopped the above-mentioned trial early. It was planned to include 1550 people, but had enrolled only 775 who were at high risk for severe disease. The trial was stopped upon advice from the board of independent medical experts monitoring it. (This is a regular thing, the independent monitoring board, and an important safety factor.) The reason for stopping the trial is that the interim results are so strong. The company cited data showing that molnupiravir reduces the risk of hospitalization or death by half. In the trial, 14.1 percent of patients receiving placebo and 7.3 percent of patients receiving the drug were subsequently hospitalized or died. There were eight deaths in the placebo group and none in the treatment group. I'll caution you as usual that a company news release is not peer-reviewed research. If it holds up, this is an excellent outcome (and honestly, when the independent monitoring board stops research because the results were so good, that is a really good sign). Merck is preparing to apply for emergency use authorization (EUA) for the drug. We might see this one rather sooner than expected just a few days ago.

The next antiviral is Pfizer's romantically-named PF-07321332. We talked briefly about this one in my Update #429 posted on April 27, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4662909887058714>; it is a protease inhibitor which prevents the virus from producing functional proteins. Its planned use is for what is called post-exposure prophylaxis, that is, prevention of infection once someone has been exposed to the virus. A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled phase 2/3 trial is getting underway this week testing the drug alone and in combination with ritonavir for efficacy; safety has been established in other phase 2/3 trials.

The third one of these antivirals comes from Atea and Roche and has another fun name, AT-527. This is an RNA dependent RNA polymerase inhibitor, which prevents the virus from making copies of its genetic material, shutting down viral replication. In earlier studies, it has showed very promising results in clearing a host of virus. Results from phase 2 and 3 trials are expected yet this year, but preliminary results indicate it is very effective in reducing viral loads.

Pfizer/BioNTech submitted their pediatric trial data to the FDA on Tuesday; a company statement made at the time indicated the formal application for a modification to the EUA would be forthcoming. These data are from a trial with 2268 participants receiving 10-microgram doses; that is one-third of the dose approved for adults and older children. The smaller dose apparently was sufficiently immunogenic and, of course, carries a smaller risk for side effects, which are typically dose-related. The 5 to 11 age group in the US consists of around 28 million children. For the record, trials in ages 2 to 5 and ages 6 months to 2 are also underway with data expected before year's end.

A question has arisen about boosters/additional doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, one I hadn't thought about. The question is with reference to the immunocompromised people who were authorized to receive a third dose early on before boosters were authorized for a broader group, and it pertains to whether these folks need a "booster" after that third dose, that is, a fourth dose. The CDC considers three doses to be the primary series for immunocompromised people, so this deals with whether they need a booster six months after their final (third) dose in the same way people receiving a primary series of two doses need one six months after their final (second) dose. The answer appears, for the time being, to be no. They do not. Everyone agrees there is a whole lot we don't know, but at this time, the CDC is not

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recommending a fourth dose. I'll update you if I hear something different.

I get a lot of questions about the future and boosters, people wondering whether we're going to need annual booster shots as an ongoing thing. This is still an open question, but the strongest evidence we probably won't continue to need annual boosters comes from a funny place—a rival pharmaceutical company which is abandoning its work on an mRNA vaccine. French company Sanofi has been developing its mRNA offering and was ready to begin phase 3 trials when they announced on Tuesday that they're dropping the whole project in order to focus their attention on the more conventional adjuvanted protein-based Covid-19 vaccine they're working on with GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). This was not because their vaccine didn't work; on the contrary, it was looking extremely good for both safety and efficacy. But the company determined the "strong market presence" of the two mRNA vaccines currently in production would leave Sanofi without enough potential sales by the time they were in production to make the investment pay off; by the time they were up and running, they estimated 24 billion doses would already have been delivered. That would seem to meet the initial demand.

Now here's the interesting part: The company's head of the vaccines division was speaking with journalists at the time this announcement was made. He explained their reasoning—that they'd be too late to market. Then he was asked about all the repeat business in the future for annual boosters, whether that wouldn't pay off. He dismissed it, saying the evidence is that a third dose is producing a huge increase in the response and "[w]ith a fourth dose you'd have extremely high antibodies and you absolutely would not need an annual COVID-19 vaccine." So this large and savvy company full of vaccine scientists is making very consequential business decisions on the predicate that annual boosters will not be a thing. That's enough to make me think maybe annual boosters will not be a thing. It is at least pretty good evidence. In case you were wondering, Sanofi intends to take what they've learned about the mRNA vaccine platform and apply it to influenza vaccines, so they'll probably get their investment back anyhow, just not with Covid-19.

If you're eligible for a third dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine—or if you soon become eligible for a third dose of the Moderna vaccine—a thing you may have been considering is side effects, as in how they compare with whatever side effects you experienced after the first two doses. What we know about the first two doses is that (1) you're more likely to experience side effects after the second than the first, (2) younger people are somewhat more likely to experience side effects than older ones, and (3) most side effects have been relatively mild and occur the day after the shot was received. Many people—close to 80 percent—have experienced pain or swelling at the injection site. More systemic reactions like fever, chills, or headache occur in around 75 percent of people; these tended to be unpleasant, but not disabling (clinically, mild to moderate), and last a day or two with a few people reporting more severe symptoms or symptoms of longer duration. What we're seeing with third doses is pretty much the same thing with a somewhat smaller likelihood of adverse effects. In general, most people are feeling about the same as or somewhat better than they did after the second dose. As with most things, we don't have as much information about the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine as we do about the two mRNA vaccines; this is largely because so few people, relatively speaking (still around 15 million in the US) have received this vaccine. This has not been a highly reactogenic vaccine, but with a single dose, neither of the others would have been classified as such either; so we're just going to have to wait and see with this one. I'll fill you in as information becomes available.

One more thing on vaccines, and this one's interesting: There are several teams around the world working on a "universal" (or broadly applicable) coronavirus vaccine. Now you may remember from our earliest talks that coronaviruses are a class of viruses whose effects range from the common cold to SARS-CoV-2's devastating effects, with some viruses we haven't even identified yet which could in the future cause the next pandemic. That means there's a fair amount of interest in a future vaccine that covers more—or

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all—of them.

There is a group working at the University of Virginia (UVA) Medical Center, another at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, one at the University of California, Irvine, a group at Northwestern University, and others. They're all working on the same basic goal, a vaccine that covers coronaviruses in general. That would give us a great deal of confidence in facing many of the potential pandemic threats we can project in the world today.

UVA's work is particularly interesting at the moment. The team there was looking for a cheap and easy Covid-19 vaccine, one that would translate well all over the world where not-so-high-tech vaccine factories predominate. They used a killed whole-cell version of the bacterium *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), most of whose genes have been deleted so that it's an excellent vector for viral genetic information. They then engineered into this special bacterium a DNA version of the SARS-CoV-2 genetic material that codes for the so-called fusion peptide. They chose this gene after they discovered the spike (S) protein gene (the one all the other vaccines are targeting) was too big to fit on the surface of their specialized *E. coli* cells and went looking for a smaller gene to use.

So these folks made a vaccine that elicits an immune response to Covid-19 fusion peptide, and they gave it to pigs because pigs are susceptible to SARS-CoV-2. Thing is, pigs can also be infected with porcine epidemic diarrhea virus, another coronavirus; and the fusion peptide vaccine turned out to work against that one too.

Turns out, to their surprise, this is something in the coronavirus family that is constant across variants and new permutations, making it an excellent target for interference that would work to control these viruses. Fusion peptide is a string of amino acids which enables the virus to stick to host cell membranes and use them to enter the cell. You will recall that a virus is helpless and hopeless without the ability to enter a host cell and replicate within, so targeting a viral process that accomplishes these tasks turns out to be a good approach to stopping the virus. In addition, cell entry is such a fundamental process that it appears all of the known coronaviruses use the same fusion peptide in the same form. That starts to look essential to this entire family of viruses, and it might be that, if you mess with the function of that fusion peptide, you disable the virus, and not just one specific virus, but every virus that uses the same peptide for the purpose—the whole family. A vaccine against the fusion peptide might just work on every coronavirus—every variant and every future emerging member of the family. That could be a big thing.

It is possible this or one of the other projects underway will find a cheap approach to vaccine, one that can be brought to scale rapidly and protects against current and future threats. That would be the Holy Grail of coronavirus vaccines; and we can hope it's on the horizon.

Flu season's right around the corner, and the flu vaccine is available now. While I generally restrict the conversation here to matters related to Covid-19, I think it's appropriate to discuss influenza at the moment. Flu season runs October to May, and while the flu was close to nonexistent last winter due to lockdowns and Covid-19 precautions, that's not likely to happen again—in fact, some expect a sort of catch-up flu season, which could be pretty bad. The current recommendations are that everyone six-months of age and older receive flu vaccine, which reduces the risk for infection, hospitalization, and death from influenza. It would also help to reduce the load on hospitals faced with pandemic Covid-19 at crisis levels in some locations and avoid pushing other hospitals to crisis levels in upcoming months.

You do want your flu vaccine before cases surge, and it helps to remember it takes around two weeks after the vaccination until you're protected. We should also note that older people tend to have a some-

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what less robust response which wanes more quickly than that in the young; so it's not a bad idea for older people to hold off a bit yet—not forever, just until we're farther into October. That provides you a better opportunity to be well-protected through the worst months of the season. If you happen to be 65 or over, ask your physician about the flu vaccines specifically formulated for older people; these tend to elicit stronger responses. But take whatever vaccine's on offer and take the opportunity to be vaccinated because protection beats no protection.

Last year, we were advising you to allow two weeks between your Covid-19 vaccination and your flu vaccination. That's because there was a chance the response to one of these might suppress your response to the other and because we didn't know about the safety of administering the two too close together. There was also a concern that giving them together would fuzzy-up the picture of any side effects by making it impossible to know which vaccine caused them just as we were trying to form a full picture of any adverse events following from the Covid-19 vaccines. But we know more now, and the smart folks are sure it's just fine to receive both vaccinations the same day.

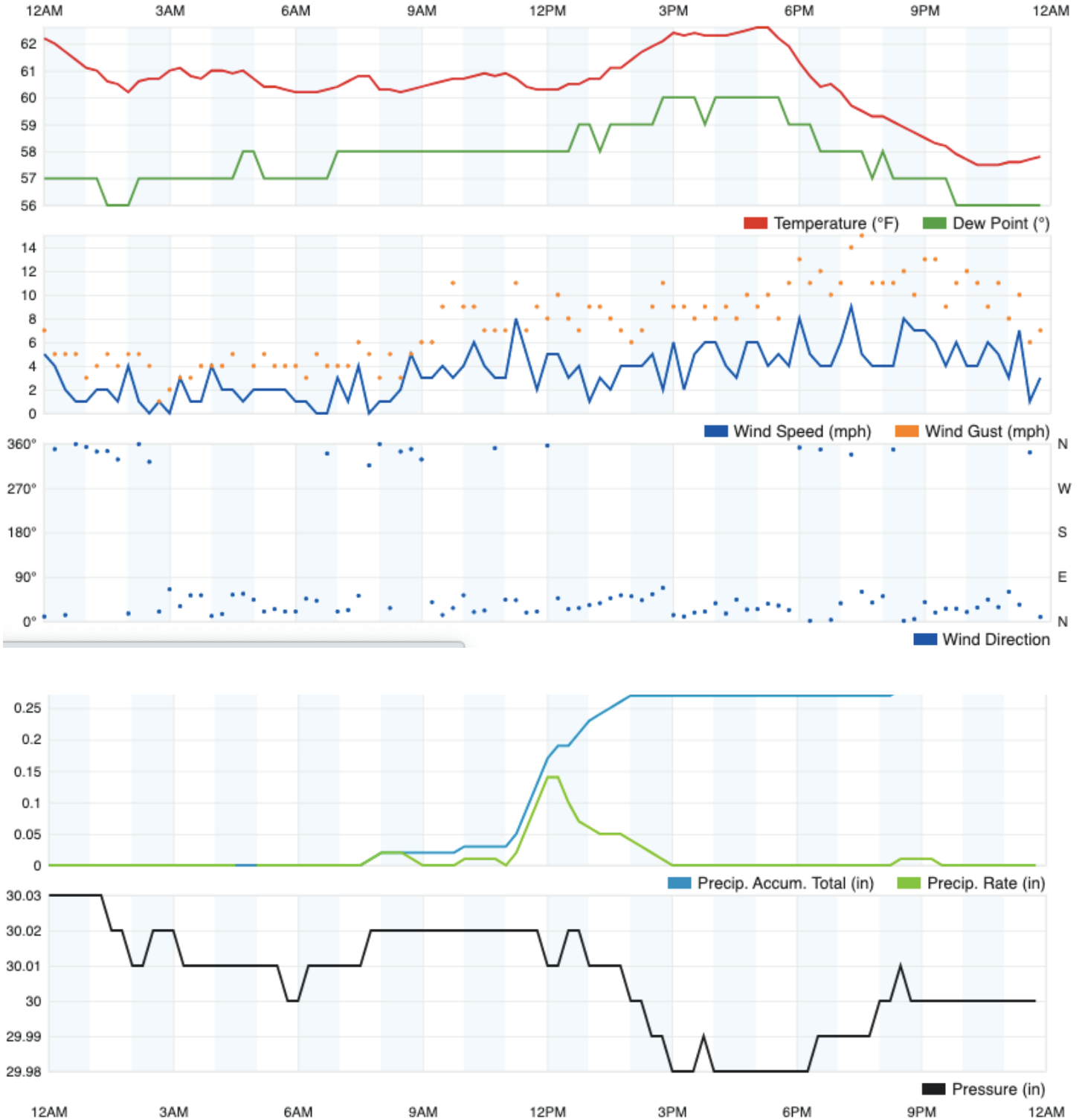
We recently have more solid data on that from the University of Bristol and the UK's National Health Service. I read the paper on The Lancet's pre-print server, which means it is not yet peer-reviewed. The team looked at 679 people who had received a first dose of Covid-19 vaccine between April and June, half of whom had their flu shot at the time of their second dose and half of whom received a placebo flu shot at the time of their second dose. (I just want to be clear that everyone received the real thing for their Covid-19 second dose; it was only the flu shot that was placebo for half of participants.) The authors report two things: (1) There were no safety concerns raised in the participants receiving both vaccines at the same time and no difference in side effects experienced. (2) Antibody testing did not show the combination of the two vaccines resulted in lower effectiveness. So there's no reason not to go ahead and have both at the same time. It will be more convenient, and it will reduce the number of vaccination appointments weighing down an already overburdened system.

And that's it for today. Be well, and we'll talk again in a few days.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
					
Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Clear	Sunny
Low: 42 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 44 °F	High: 77 °F	Low: 47 °F	High: 77 °F

 NWS ABERDEEN WEATHER.GOV/ABR 10/2/2021:50 PM

Sunny & Dry Weather Continues

Tonight Sunday & Monday

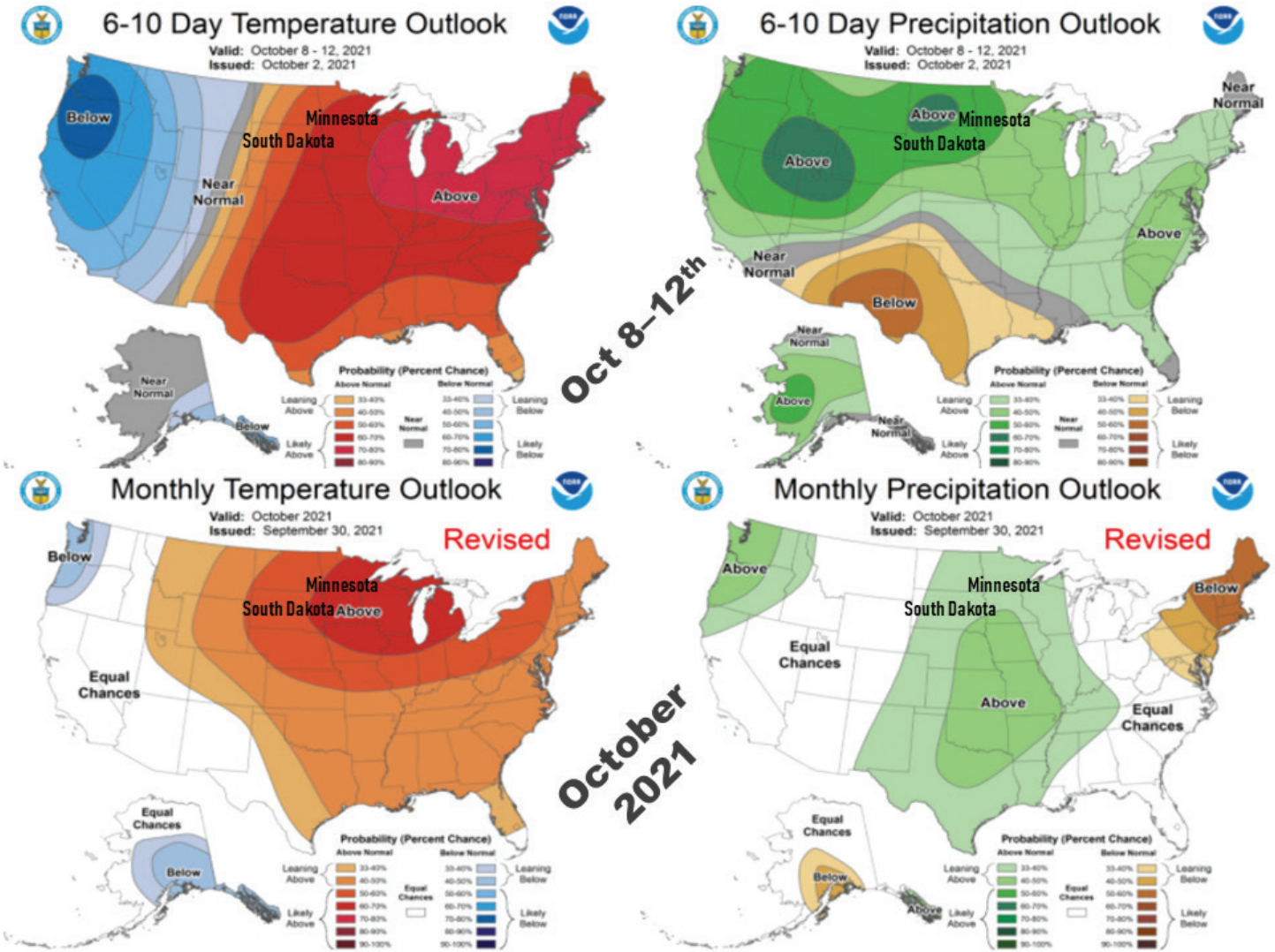
Low in **40s** **70 to 84°**



A ridge of high pressure aloft will bring mild and dry conditions to the region through early next week.
#sdwx #mnwx

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While dry weather is anticipated through much of the upcoming work-week, a wetter pattern may take shape thereafter. Generally above average temperatures are favored to continue. Find the latest outlooks here: <https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/>

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Today in Weather History

October 2, 1971: Heavy wet snow of over a foot fell in the northern Black Hills. The heavy snow was accompanied by high winds which caused extensive damage to trees and utility lines. The power company said it was one of the worst storms they had experienced.

1858: The only hurricane to impact California struck San Diego on this day. Two researchers with NOAA Michael Chenoweth and Christopher Landsea reconstructed the path of the storm using accounts from newspapers of the high winds. They estimated that if a similar storm were to have hit in 2004, it would have caused around \$500 million in damage.

1898: A Category 4 hurricane made landfall in Georgia on this day. This is the most recent major (Cat 3 or stronger) hurricane to make landfall in Georgia.

1894: A tornado passed over the Little Rock, Arkansas Weather Bureau office on this day.

1882 - An early season windstorm over Oregon and northern California blew down thousands of trees and caused great crop damage in the Sacramento Valley. (David Ludlum)

1959 - A tornado struck the town of Ivy, VA (located near Charlottesville). Eleven persons were killed, including ten from one family. (The Weather Channel)

1980 - The temperature at Blue Canyon, CA, soared to 88 degrees, an October record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1981 - Severe thunderstorms raked Phoenix, AZ, with heavy rain, high winds, and hail up to an inch and a half in diameter, for the second day in a row. Thunderstorms on the 1st deluged Phoenix with .68 inch of rain in five minutes, equalling their all-time record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A fast moving cold front produced snow flurries from Minnesota to the Appalachian Mountains, and gale force winds behind the front ushered cold air into the Great Lakes Region. Valentine NE reported a record low of 25 degrees. Temperatures recovered rapidly in the Northern High Plains Region, reaching the lower 80s by afternoon. Jackson, WY, warmed from a morning low of 21 degrees to an afternoon high of 76 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Early morning thunderstorms in Georgia produced three inches of rain at Canton and Woodstock. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Flooding due to thunderstorm rains in the southeastern U.S. on the last day of September and the first day of October caused the Etowah River to rise seven feet above flood stage at Canton GA. Thunderstorms produced up to ten inches of rain in northeastern Georgia, with six inches reported at Athens GA in 24 hours. One man was killed, and another man was injured, when sucked by floodwaters into drainage lines. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

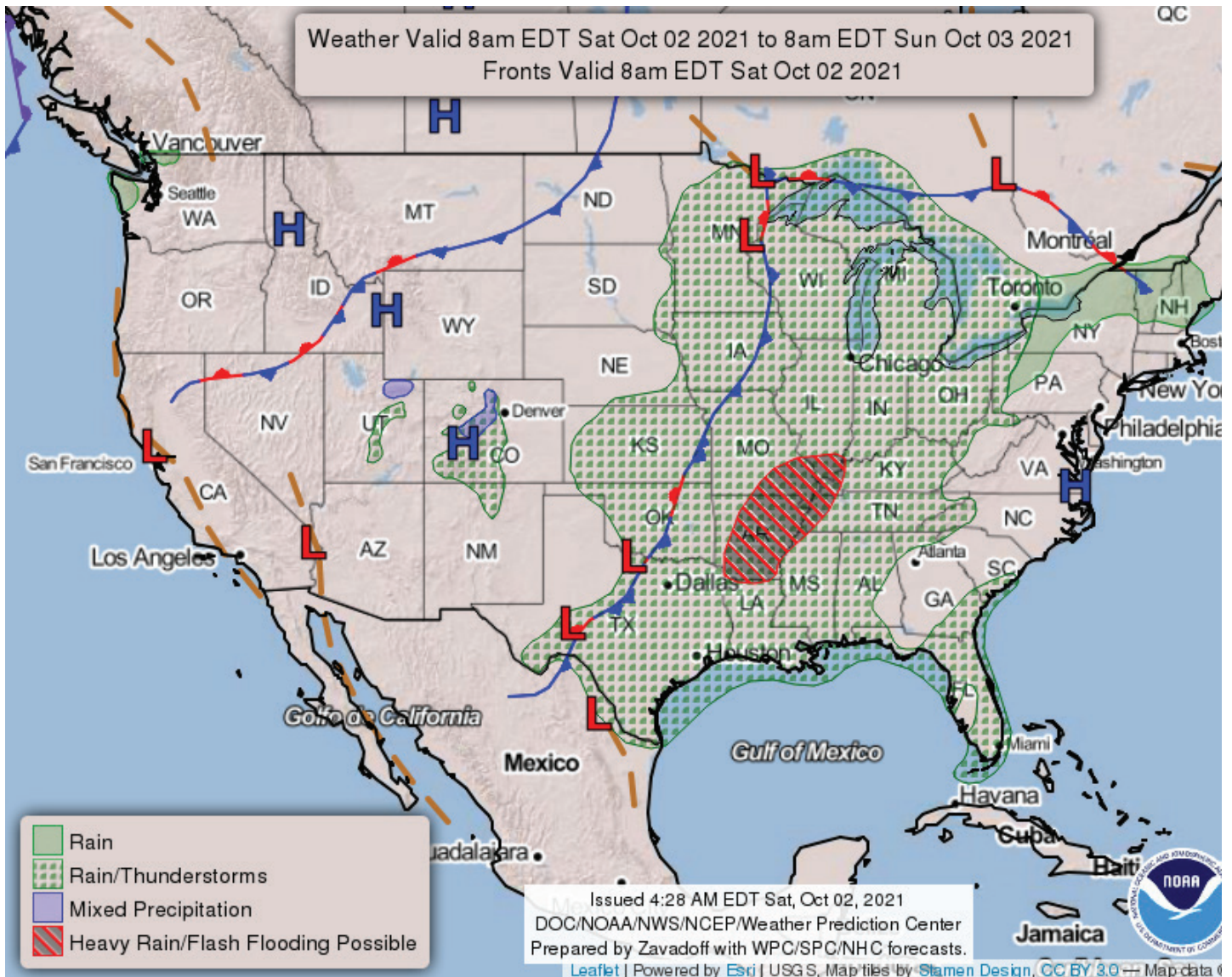
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 62.6 °F at 5:00 PM
Low Temp: 57.5 °F at 10:30 PM
Wind: 15 mph at 7:30 PM
Precip: 0.28

Record High: 91° in 1897
Record Low: 17° in 1974
Average High: 67°F
Average Low: 40°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 0.16
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.28
Average Precip to date: 18.49
Precip Year to Date: 15.70
Sunset Tonight: 7:09 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34 AM



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PARDONED AND SET FREE

A soldier in a combat zone learned that his wife was desperately ill and not expected to live. He applied for an "emergency leave" but was denied. After a sleepless night, he decided that he would desert his post and fellow soldiers and go to her bedside. As he was leaving his barracks, he was apprehended and placed in the stockade.

A few weeks later he was ordered to stand trial. After the evidence was presented to the judge and jury, he was found guilty and condemned to death for leaving his post.

"I understand, Sir," he said to the judge "that I left my post and deserted my colors. I deserve the verdict of the court." The judge then asked, "Do you have anything more to say?"

"No, your honor," came the reply.

"Well, I do," said the judge. "There is something more to say. Let me tell you what it is." And he read the soldier a pardon.

Standing tall and filled with gratitude, he began to weep violently for the mercy the court offered him. In humility he offered his gratitude and saluted the judge. He was then restored to duty and returned to combat.

Our God is a holy God and cannot ignore our sins. And because we have sinned, we deserve to be punished. But because of His justice and great love He offers us a pardon through the death of His Son. It was His Son, Jesus, who on our behalf, accepted our punishment, rescued us and set us free from the penalty of death. The moment we accept His mercy we are pardoned and set free from our punishment.

Prayer: How grateful we are, Father, for the reminder that YOU are "the God who forgives!" May we accept that forgiveness through Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: O LORD our God, you answered them. You were a forgiving God to them. Psalm 99:8a

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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 **AP** Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP FOOTBALL=

Clark/Willow Lake 26, Webster 13

Dell Rapids St. Mary 52, Estelline/Hendricks 0

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

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

South Dakota pheasant season nears with promising numbers

SOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota pheasant hunting season gets underway in two weeks, and the numbers look more than promising.

According to the Game, Fish and Parks Department, last year's season was spectacular in South Dakota, with hunters harvesting over 1 million birds. While 2020 was incredible, the department says 2021 is shaping up to be even better. A mild winter plus a dry spring and summer have contributed to potentially record pheasant numbers.

Pheasant hunting in South Dakota is a long-standing tradition for many hunters across the country and the Midwest. Some believe the state could see even more out-of-state hunters this year because of its loose pandemic rules, KELO-TV reported.

"I think South Dakota is going to be a really big magnet for hunters this year again, we are going to stay open and that's a really big thing," hunter Alex Jensen said as he shot clay pigeons at the Hunters Pointe Shooting Complex near Humboldt. "We are going to use it as a way to get people here for tourism and just a good economic development opportunity."

With possible record pheasant numbers this year, officials expect businesses will flourish; which will be good news to some of the bars, restaurants and hotels that have struggled.

South Dakota's pheasant season runs from Oct. 16 to Jan. 31.

Midwest report: Business confidence in economy plummets

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Business leaders in nine Midwest and Plains states have seen their confidence in the economy plummet in recent weeks, according to a monthly survey released Friday that reflected leaders' lowest rate of confidence since the COVID-19 pandemic began last year.

The overall index for September of the Creighton University Mid-America Business Conditions dropped to 61.6 from August's 68.9. Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession.

But the survey's business confidence index, which looks ahead six months, fell more than 16 points from August's 53.5 to to 37 — the lowest level since March 2020.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, ticked off other concerns revealed in the latest survey, including that nearly 1 in 3 supply managers said finding and hiring qualified workers will be their greatest challenge over the next year. Survey respondents also noted continued pressure from supply chains bottlenecks and high inflation, which will affect the upcoming holiday shopping season.

"Almost 3 of 4, or 73.3%, of supply managers expect holiday and Christmas shoppers to face significantly higher prices and empty shelves this season," Goss said. "The message from supply managers is to order early."

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota,

Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Midwest Economy: September state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for September:

Arkansas: The overall index declined to 60.0 from 69.3 in August. Components from the September survey of supply managers were: New orders at 64.1, production or sales at 54.4, delivery lead time at 81.7, inventories at 44.8, and employment at 54.8. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Arkansas expanded by 4.9% over the last 12 months compared to 2.4% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

Iowa: The overall index dropped to 62.8 from August's 68.2. Components were: New orders at 64.6, production, or sales, at 55.6, delivery lead time at 84.4, employment at 58.0, and inventories at 51.1. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Iowa expanded by 1.7% over the last 12 months compared to 2.4% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

Kansas: The overall index declined to 62.0 from 70.4 in August. Components were: New orders at 64.5, production or sales at 55.3, delivery lead time at 83.6, employment at 57.1, and inventories at 49.3. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Kansas expanded by 2.2% over the last 12 months compared to 1.7% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

Minnesota: The state's overall index dropped to 68.5 — a regional high for this month — from August's 71.1. Components were: New orders at 65.7, production or sales at 58.1, delivery lead time at 90.1, inventories at 64.2, and employment at 64.5. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Minnesota expanded by 2.4% over the last 12 months compared to 5.6% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

Missouri: The overall index rose to 61.4 from 75.2 in August. Components were: New orders at 64.4, production or sales at 55.1, delivery lead time at 83.1, inventories at 48.0, and employment at 56.4. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Missouri expanded by 2.2% over the last 12 months compared to 3.4% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

Nebraska: The overall index sank to 65.5 from August's 68.6. Components of the index were: New orders at 65.1, production or sales at 56.8, delivery lead time at 87.1, inventories at 57.2, and employment at 61.1. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Nebraska expanded by 1.1% over the last 12 months compared to 5.2% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

North Dakota: The overall index slumped to 55.7, a regional low, from 63.6 in August. Components were: New orders at 63.3, production or sales at 52.6, delivery lead time at 77.4, employment at 50.0, and inventories at 35.1. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in North Dakota expanded by 4% over the last 12 months compared to 0.7% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The overall index expanded above growth neutral in September. However, it sank to 58.6 from 68.4 in August. Components were: New orders at 63.9, production or sales at 53.9, delivery lead time at 80.3, inventories at 41.8, and employment at 53.3. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in Oklahoma expanded by 5.3% over the last 12 months compared to 1.4% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

South Dakota: The overall index fell to 59.6 from 67.3 in August. Components were: New orders at 64.0, production or sales at 54.3, delivery lead time at 81.3, inventories at 43.9, and employment at 54.4. "Average hourly wages for all manufacturing workers in South Dakota expanded by 3.5% over the last 12

months compared to 1.3% for the same period between 2019 and 2020," Goss said.

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 in a statement that Lewandowski "will not be advising the Governor in regard to the campaign 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 the 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 did not immediately respond to requests for comment. His attorneys, David Chesnoff and Richard Schonfeld, said in a statement that: "Accusations and rumors appear to be morphing by the minute and we will not dignify them with a further response."

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 gubernatorial candidate 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.

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

Gov. Noem relaunches social study standards review

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said Friday that she will relaunch the state's review of social study standards after it was bogged in controversy.

Noem said she has "set aside" the standards proposed by the Department of Education and told the department to restart the process. The Republican governor said that everyone who has expressed concern about the process, including Native Americans, will be included in the do-over.

"Our kids deserve to learn both America's and South Dakota's true and honest history, taught in a balanced context that doesn't pit our children against each other on the basis of race, sex, or background," Noem said in a statement.

New standards are released every seven years. The governor's plan calls for a new workgroup of people from across the state to develop the standards. Members of the previous working group — appointed by the Department of Education — said in August they were caught by surprise on Friday when the department released a document with significant changes that cut references to Native American history and culture.

Conservatives have also criticized the Department of Education's proposed standards.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem defends daughter's licensure

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday defended her administration's handling of her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license, attempting to brush aside questions about a meeting she held last year that included her daughter, Cassidy Peters, and the state employee who was overseeing her application.

"I never once asked for special treatment for Cassidy," the Republican governor said in video posted on YouTube days after The Associated Press first reported on the meeting. "She is my daughter and I'm proud of her. I raised her to accomplish things on her own."

The meeting happened after the Department of Labor and Regulation moved to deny Peters the license. Four months later, in November 2020, Peters received her certification as a residential appraiser, according to the department.

A week after Peters received her license, the state employee who directed the agency was allegedly pressured to retire by Noem's Cabinet secretary. The state employee, Sherry Bren, eventually received a \$200,000 payment from the state to withdraw an age discrimination complaint and leave her job.

The state's attorney general, as well as Republican and Democratic lawmakers, are looking into the episode.

Until the video, Noem had released limited statements about the meeting, calling the AP's report a political attack and insisting she didn't seek special treatment for her daughter.

In the video, Noem did not mention the July 2020 meeting in her office or that the agency had indicated it would deny Peters her license. Noem said Peters had followed all the same steps as other appraisers, taking 200 hours of classroom education and gaining more than 1,500 hours of experience over the course of more than a year.

The Department of Labor and Regulation has denied a record request from the AP for agreements between the agency and Peters that would shed light on how Peters' application progressed and whether her work samples met federal standards.

Although the department acknowledged those records state they are open to public inspection, the

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agency's attorney argued that they were exempt. An appeals office later ruled that the department was right to deny the records.

However, Brad Johnson, an appraiser from Watertown, was riled by the department's decision to withhold the documents.

"Any appraiser understands that anything we sign with the state of South Dakota can be public," he said.

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

In a statement released with the video Friday, the governor's office said the shortage of appraisers is a nationwide problem that had been exacerbated in South Dakota due to barriers to getting certification. In the video, the governor said that since her daughter's certification, she has made "changes to the process to streamline it for the future." The certification program no longer requires people looking to get an entry-level license to take a test.

"My administration started fixing that process and it was way too difficult," she said. "Appraisers weren't getting certified and South Dakotans were having to wait much longer to buy a home than in other states."

However, the governor's ability to change the program is limited because the state must meet federal standards for certifying appraisers.

In its statement, the governor's office included quotes from three real estate professionals who praised Noem's move.

"It is way too tough for young folks to enter this field," said Brian Gatzke, an appraiser from Brookings who is a political backer of the governor and has donated to her congressional and gubernatorial campaigns.

However, Johnson, the appraiser from Watertown, said that the governor's "apparent interference" in the licensing of her daughter has worried other appraisers in the state. Federal regulators are currently auditing the certification program, raising concern that if they find something amiss, it could affect everyone with an appraiser license from South Dakota.

"Any appearance that something is not right in our appraiser certification program puts a black eye on the industry and we don't appreciate it," he said.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

21-25-36-62-63, Mega Ball: 6, Megaplier: 2

(twenty-one, twenty-five, thirty-six, sixty-two, sixty-three; Mega Ball: six; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$34 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$620 million

Podcast looks to tell story of mysterious South Dakota death

By CORA VAN OLSON Yankton Press and Dakotan

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — A podcast currently in development on the death of a Yankton teenager 29 years ago looks to shed new light on the facts of a case that has stymied investigators ever since.

A podcast exploring the unsolved 1992 death of Tammy Haas is expected to be released next spring, podcast creator Chad Zimmerman told the Yankton Press & Dakotan.

Zimmerman happened to find out about on the Haas case earlier this year when the FBI announced a

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reward in connection with information regarding her mysterious death during Yankton's homecoming week. Haas, who was 19 at the time of her death, was seen at several parties in connection with homecoming before vanishing.

Days later, the missing woman's body was found in a ravine at the Lakeview Golf Course in Crofton, Nebraska. A three-year investigation culminated in manslaughter charges being brought against Haas' boyfriend at the time, Erick Stukel.

Stukel's trial has held almost exactly 25 years ago. A Cedar County jury eventually exonerated him of the charges, and the case went cold.

There have been no new developments since, though there have been a lot of theories circulating about what happened.

"I've been trying to find a case that interested me, that I wanted to try to develop into a podcast," Zimmerman said. "I have some background in digging through case stuff."

Specifically, Zimmerman spent the better part of a decade studying the former President John F. Kennedy Jr. (JFK) assassination case, he said.

"I kind of went through all those rabbit holes," he said, adding that in 2004 he received permission from the Kennedy family attorney to view JFK's autopsy photographs and X-rays in College Park, Maryland.

Then, life changes, including marriage, children and relocating to Sioux City, Iowa, led Zimmerman to search for a new case to study.

"I've been trying to find a case that was more local, that I could actually visit the area and do the deep dive into," he said. "In April, it just happened to fall on me, and since then, I've gotten to know some of Tammy Haas's friends and her family and it's just kind of been snowballing."

Though Haas' friends and family were supportive of the idea of doing a podcast, said Zimmerman, the lack of any new evidence combined general fatigue regarding the case meant that a lot of doors would likely remain closed to him.

"Now, I'm out here trying to open the doors up," he said. "Being an independent person, I don't have a dog in the hunt, per se. I'm trying to gather the facts and do what I can to make sense of them so I can tell the story, the best that I can."

There were two autopsies done of Haas' body, one in Sioux Falls and a second in Sioux City, Zimmerman said, noting that the second autopsy was never made public.

Many theories are dispelled by the second autopsy report, he said, pulling out his copy of the report during the interview.

In order to gain understanding of why a person died, autopsy reports depict all marks and wounds found on a body by marking a diagram of the front and back of the subject. The autopsy also discusses those marks or wounds in detail to determine the cause of death.

"Most of what's on here is inconsequential — it's postmortem," Zimmerman said. "There's absolutely nothing of interest on the front side."

What actually happened to Haas, including several light, superficial scrapes, is visible on the back view of the body, he said.

"And then there (is) about a two-inch mark below the base of her head — this information came from the second autopsy, not the first," Zimmerman said. "Her head came into contact with — something — right here. This is what delivered the fatal blow."

In light of the second autopsy, Zimmerman said he realized that a lot of the theories about Haas' death are simply impossible.

"So, you look at these theories, like, she fell off (while) car surfing," he said. "Well, there would be impact marks, impact bruises. There would have been little bits of sand and gravel in the scrapes that they would have picked out."

The scrapes that have been theorized to be road burns were described in the autopsy report as un-abraded, not caused by rubbing or friction.

"These are smooth and straight, un-abraded," he said. "So, what she hit wasn't the pavement."

Zimmerman said that other scrapes shown and described in the autopsy appear consistent with having

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been dragged across a road.

Theories that Haas may have walked home alone and been raped and killed are not supported by the injuries she sustained, he said.

Also, the evidence doesn't support the theory that Haas was walking along the road alone and simply fell off the road and into the ravine, he said.

"That didn't happen," Zimmerman said. "When they analyzed her pants, there were yellow reflective-paint flakes that they found that came from having been dragged across the road."

The most frustrating error about the evidence in the case is that the cause of death is widely reported as a broken neck, Zimmerman said.

"She had a torn ligament in her neck. Her head had to have been forward, and something pushed (the ligament) beyond its natural limits," he said. "That extra stretch caused the bones to move a little too far, which irritated the very delicate spinal cord."

Haas would have been instantly paralyzed and would have lost the ability to breath, he said.

"According to the testimony, she would have been conscious for 20-30 second and then, she would have passed out," Zimmerman said. "Her heart would have stopped, due to lack of oxygen, within about a total of three minutes."

Zimmerman said he hopes a review of the case file will turn up more forgotten or misinterpreted evidence that could begin to show a better picture of what happened that night.

"I don't view it as though it's my position to try to solve something per se," he said. "My position is to tell the story, to be as accurate to that story as I can, but help to bring clarity."

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Lakota Nations Invitational=

Pool A=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte def. Marty Indian, 25-19, 25-22

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte def. Pine Ridge, 22-25, 27-15, 29-27

Crow Creek def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-18, 19-25, 25-15

Crow Creek def. Little Wound, 25-21, 25-22

Crow Creek def. Marty Indian, 25-10, 25-14

Pine Ridge def. Little Wound, 25-20, 25-14

Pine Ridge def. Marty Indian, 25-23, 25-7

Santee, Neb. def. Crow Creek, 25-17, 21-25, 25-22

Santee, Neb. def. Little Wound, 25-21, 25-16

Santee, Neb. def. Marty Indian, 25-10, 25-14

White River def. Crow Creek, 25-16, 25-10

White River def. Little Wound, 25-21, 25-14

White River def. Pine Ridge, 25-21, 21-25, 25-15

White River def. Santee, Neb., 25-13, 25-18

Wyoming Indian, Wyo. def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 20-25, 25-11, 25-23

Wyoming Indian, Wyo. def. Little Wound, 25-15, 25-16

Wyoming Indian, Wyo. def. Marty Indian, 25-13, 25-11

Wyoming Indian, Wyo. def. Pine Ridge, 15-25, 25-14, 25-16

Pool B=

Custer def. Crazy Horse, 25-6, 25-15

Custer def. Lower Brule, 25-14, 25-12

Custer def. Oelrichs, 25-10, 25-6

Custer def. Red Cloud, 25-16, 23-25, 25-23

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Custer def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-14, 25-13
Lower Brule def. Crazy Horse, 25-8, 25-13
Lower Brule def. St. Francis Indian, 19-25, 25-18, 25-23
Red Cloud def. Crazy Horse, 25-7, 25-9
Red Cloud def. Oelrichs, 25-14, 25-12
Red Cloud def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-21, 25-14
Red Cloud def. Todd County, 14-25, 25-10, 25-23
St. Francis Indian def. Crazy Horse, 25-6, 25-4
Tiospa Zina Tribal def. Oelrichs, 25-15, 25-15
Tiospa Zina Tribal def. St. Francis Indian, 25-19, 25-12
Todd County def. Crazy Horse, 25-10, 25-10
Todd County def. Lower Brule, 25-15, 25-21
Todd County def. Oelrichs, 25-15, 25-12
Todd County def. St. Francis Indian, 25-9, 25-15
Twin Cities Tournament=
Blue Pool=
Burns, Wyo. def. St. Thomas More, 25-11, 25-23
Gering, Neb. def. St. Thomas More, 22-25, 25-13, 25-9
Gold Pool=
Alliance, Neb. def. Rapid City Central, 20-25, 25-23, 28-26
Rapid City Central def. St. Thomas More, 25-20, 25-17
Sidney, Neb. def. Rapid City Central, 20-25, 25-19, 25-14
White Pool=
Chadron, Neb. def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-14, 25-23
Grand Island Northwest, Neb. def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-20, 25-12
Rapid City Stevens def. North Platte, Neb., 25-11, 25-15

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

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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined
PREP FOOTBALL=
Aberdeen Roncalli 19, Deuel 18, OT
Alcester-Hudson 28, Burke 27
Avon 50, Colome 14
Bennett County 58, Hill City 28
Beresford 23, Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 7
Brandon Valley 25, Sioux Falls Lincoln 22
Canistota 50, Irene-Wakonda 0
Canton 6, West Central 0
Castlewood 14, Arlington/Lake Preston 6
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 38, Little Wound 28
Crow Creek 64, Marty Indian 12
Faith 64, Newell 32
Flandreau 41, Parker 6
Gayville-Volin 57, Centerville 22
Groton Area 35, Dakota Hills 0

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Hanson 22, Chester 20
Harrisburg 49, Rapid City Stevens 25
Herreid/Selby Area 56, Sully Buttes 6
Hitchcock-Tulare 50, Britton-Hecla 18
Hot Springs 34, Custer 0
Ipswich 20, Faulkton 6
Jones County 45, Sunshine Bible Academy 22
Lennox 28, Sioux Falls Christian 12
Leola/Frederick 46, North Central Co-Op 0
Lower Brule 30, McLaughlin 22
Lyman 36, Kadoka Area 16
Madison 40, Tri-Valley 0
McCook Central/Montrose 54, Baltic 8
Milbank 36, Dakota Valley 13
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 28, Jim River 26
New Underwood 34, Philip 28
Northwestern 12, Great Plains Lutheran 8
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 57, Colman-Egan 8
Parkston 35, Kimball/White Lake 7
Pierre 61, Huron 7
Platte-Geddes 28, Bon Homme 0
Potter County 50, Langford 12
Redfield 28, Mobridge-Pollock 14
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 61, Rapid City Central 3
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 49, Sioux Falls Jefferson 21
Sioux Falls Washington 35, Brookings 14
Sioux Valley 34, Elk Point-Jefferson 28
St. Thomas More 22, Spearfish 21, OT
Stanley County 27, Lemmon/McIntosh 8
Sturgis Brown 45, Belle Fourche 21
Tea Area 63, Douglas 6
Timber Lake 42, Harding County 6
Tiospa Zina Tribal 50, Crazy Horse 6
Tripp-Delmont/Armour/Andes Central/Dakota Christian 31, Miller/Highmore-Harrold 18
Vermillion 33, Dell Rapids 28
Wall 57, White River 0
Warner 25, Florence/Henry 14
Watertown 30, Aberdeen Central 0
Winnebago, Neb. 62, Pine Ridge 12
Winner 32, Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 0
Wolsey-Wessington 28, Gregory 10
Yankton 45, Mitchell 0

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

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

Sioux Falls officers injured after fight with suspect

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SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police say an officer has a possible broken jaw after a suspect resisted arrest.

The Argus Leader reports two officers responded to a no-contact violation call at about 4 a.m. Friday and a 35-year-old man outside a house.

Police spokesman Sam Clemens says the officers tried to arrest the suspect, but he resisted and started fighting the officers.

Clemens says the man punched one officer in the face and struck the other officer in multiple places.

Officers used multiple measures to subdue the suspect, which included discharging a Taser, which was unsuccessful. The suspect was arrested at the scene.

Clemens says one officer has a possible broken jaw while the other officer has minor injuries

Both officers were taken to a hospital.

Philippine leader Duterte announces retirement from politics

By JIM GOMEZ and JOEAL CALUPITAN Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Saturday announced he was retiring from politics and dropping plans to run for vice president in elections next year, when his term ends, paving the way for his politician daughter to make a possible bid for the top post.

Speaking before reporters, Duterte said many Filipinos have expressed their opposition to his vice-presidential bid in surveys and public forums.

"The overwhelming sentiment of the Filipino is that I'm not qualified, and it would be a violation of the constitution," Duterte said. "I will follow what you wish, and today I announce my retirement from politics."

The 76-year-old leader, known for his deadly anti-drugs crackdown, brash rhetoric and unorthodox political style, earlier accepted the ruling party's nomination for him to seek the vice presidency in the May 9 elections. The decision outraged many of his opponents, who have described him as a human rights calamity in an Asian bastion of democracy.

Duterte announced his surprise withdrawal from the election after accompanying his former longtime aide, Sen. Bong Go, who registered his vice presidential candidacy instead under the ruling party at a Commission on Elections center.

Philippine presidents are limited by the constitution to a single six-year term, and opponents had said they would question the legality of Duterte's announced vice presidential run before the Supreme Court if he pursued it.

While two past presidents have run for lower elected positions and won after their terms ended in recent history, Duterte was the first to consider running for the vice presidency. If he did pursue the candidacy and win, that could elevate him back to the presidency if the elected leader dies or is incapacitated for any reason.

Duterte's withdrawal could pave the way for the possible presidential run of his daughter Sara Duterte, who is currently the mayor of southern Davao city. She has been prodded by many supporters to make a bid to succeed her father and has topped independent public opinion surveys on who should lead the country next.

But after her father initially declared that he would seek the vice presidency, Sara Duterte announced she would not run for president, saying she and her father have agreed that only one Duterte would run for a national office next year.

Shortly after Duterte announced he was backing out from the vice-presidential run, his daughter filed her papers for reelection in Davao city, although speculation remains rife that she will eventually withdraw from her mayoral reelection bid and seek the presidency.

President Duterte took office in 2016 and immediately launched a crackdown on illegal drugs that has left more than 6,000 mostly petty suspects dead and alarmed Western governments and human rights groups. The International Criminal Court has launched an investigation of the killings, but he has vowed never to cooperate with the inquiry and allow ICC investigators into the country.

Duterte was a former longtime Davao city mayor, government prosecutor and legislator in a colorful political career that spanned more than three decades. He will be remembered by many for his extra-tough approach to criminality that earned him monikers such as "Duterte Harry," after Clint Eastwood's police character who had little regard for the law.

When he exits from politics, he would likely be hounded by lawsuits arising from his violent anti-criminality campaign. He cited that concern in July as one of the reasons he accepted the ruling PDP-Laban party's nomination for him to be its vice-presidential aspirant.

A U.S.-based human rights group said Duterte would do everything in his power to support a friendly successor and would harness his lingering influence in retirement to shield himself from an array of potential criminal charges.

Duterte will back a candidate "who can give him that protection," said Carlos Conde of Human Rights Watch. "Eluding accountability for human rights abuses is Duterte's primary concern as his presidency winds down."

Associated Press journalists Kiko Rosario and Aaron Favila in Manila contributed to this report.

COVID-19 deaths eclipse 700,000 in US as delta variant rages

By TAMMY WEBBER and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

It's a milestone that by all accounts didn't have to happen this soon.

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 eclipsed 700,000 late Friday — a number greater than the population of Boston. The last 100,000 deaths occurred during a time when vaccines — which overwhelmingly prevent deaths, hospitalizations and serious illness — were available to any American over the age of 12.

The milestone is deeply frustrating to doctors, public health officials and the American public, who watched a pandemic that had been easing earlier in the summer take a dark turn. Tens of millions of Americans have refused to get vaccinated, allowing the highly contagious delta variant to tear through the country and send the death toll from 600,000 to 700,000 in 3 1/2 months.

Florida suffered by far the most death of any state during that period, with the virus killing about 17,000 residents since the middle of June. Texas was second with 13,000 deaths. The two states account for 15% of the country's population, but more than 30% of the nation's deaths since the nation crossed the 600,000 threshold.

Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who has analyzed publicly reported state data, said it's safe to say at least 70,000 of the last 100,000 deaths were in unvaccinated people. And of those vaccinated people who died with breakthrough infections, most caught the virus from an unvaccinated person, he said.

"If we had been more effective in our vaccination, then I think it's fair to say, we could have prevented 90% of those deaths," since mid-June, Dowdy said.

"It's not just a number on a screen," Dowdy said. "It's tens of thousands of these tragic stories of people whose families have lost someone who means the world to them."

Danny Baker is one of them.

The 28-year-old seed hauler from Riley, Kansas, contracted COVID-19 over the summer, spent more than a month in the hospital and died Sept. 14. He left behind a wife and a 7-month-old baby girl.

"This thing has taken a grown man, 28-year-old young man, 6'2", 300-pound man, and took him down like it was nothing," said his father, 56-year-old J.D. Baker, of Milford, Kansas. "And so if young people think that they're still ... protected because of their youth and their strength, it's not there anymore."

In the early days of the pandemic, Danny Baker, who was a championship trap shooter in high school and loved hunting and fishing, insisted he would be first in line for a vaccine, recalled his mother.

But just as vaccinations opened up to his age group, the U.S. recommended a pause in use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to investigate reports of rare but potentially dangerous blood clots. The news frightened him, as did information swirling online that the vaccine could harm fertility, though medical

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experts say there's no biological reason the shots would affect fertility.

His wife also was breastfeeding, so they decided to wait. Health experts now say breastfeeding mothers should get the vaccine for their own protection and that it may even provide some protection for their babies through antibodies passed along in breastmilk.

"There's just a lot of miscommunication about the vaccine," said his wife, 27-year-old Aubrea Baker, a labor and delivery nurse, adding that her husband's death inspired a Facebook page and at least 100 people to get vaccinated. "It's not that we weren't going to get it. We just hadn't gotten it yet."

When deaths surpassed 600,000 in mid-June, vaccinations already were driving down caseloads, restrictions were being lifted and people looked forward to life returning to normal over the summer. Deaths per day in the U.S. had plummeted to an average of around 340, from a high of over 3,000 in mid-January. Soon afterward, health officials declared it a pandemic of the unvaccinated.

But as the delta variant swept the country, caseloads and deaths soared — especially among the unvaccinated and younger people, with hospitals around the country reporting dramatic increases in admissions and deaths among people under 65. They also reported breakthrough infections and deaths, though at far lower rates, prompting efforts to provide booster shots to vulnerable Americans.

Now, daily deaths are averaging about 1,900 a day. Cases have started to fall from their highs in September but there is fear that the situation could worsen in the winter months when colder weather drives people inside.

In a statement Saturday, President Joe Biden lamented what he called the "painful milestone" of 700,000 COVID-19 deaths and said that "we must not become numb to the sorrow."

He renewed his pitch for people to get vaccinated, saying the country has "made extraordinary progress" against the coronavirus over the past eight months thanks to the vaccines.

"It can save your life and the lives of those you love," Biden said. "It will help us beat COVID-19 and move forward, together, as one nation."

Almost 65% of Americans have had at least one dose of vaccine, while about 56% are fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But millions are either refusing or still on the fence because of fear, misinformation and political beliefs. Health care workers report being threatened by patients and community members who don't believe COVID-19 is real.

The first known deaths from the virus in the U.S. were in early February 2020. It took four months to reach the first 100,000 deaths. During the most lethal phase of the disaster, in the winter of 2020-21, it took just over a month to go from 300,000 to 400,000 deaths.

The U.S. reached 500,000 deaths in mid-February, when the country was still in the midst of the winter surge and vaccines were only available to a limited number of people. The death toll stood about 570,000 in April when every adult American became eligible for shots.

"I remember when we broke that 100,000-death mark, people just shook their heads and said 'Oh, my god,'" said Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association. "Then we said, 'Are we going to get to 200,000?' Then we kept looking at 100,000-death marks," and finally surpassed the estimated 675,000 American deaths from the 1918-19 flu pandemic.

"And we're not done yet," Benjamin said.

The deaths during the delta surge have been unrelenting in hotspots in the South. Almost 79 people out of every 100,000 people in Florida have died of COVID since mid-June, the highest rate in the nation.

Amanda Alexander, a COVID-19 ICU nurse at Georgia's Augusta University Medical Center, said Thursday that she'd had a patient die on each of her previous three shifts.

"I've watched a 20-year-old die. I've watched 30-year-olds, 40-year-olds," with no pre-existing conditions that would have put them at greater risk, she said. "Ninety-nine percent of our patients are unvaccinated. And it's just so frustrating because the facts just don't lie and we're seeing it every day."

Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan, and Hollingsworth from Mission, Kansas. Associated Press

Medical Writer Carla K. Johnson and data journalist Justin Myers contributed to this story.

Authorities: Body of missing Florida college student found

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Authorities say they have found the body of a missing Florida college student who disappeared a week ago. A maintenance worker who entered her apartment unauthorized the day she disappeared and later killed himself is the prime suspect.

Orange County Sheriff John Mina said Saturday that authorities found Miya Marcano's body in a wooded area near an apartment building. Authorities said the 19-year-old vanished on the same day a maintenance man improperly used a master key to enter her apartment. Her family reported her missing after she missed a flight home to South Florida on Sept. 24.

The sheriff previously said Armando Caballero, a maintenance worker at the apartment complex where Marcano lived and worked, is considered the "prime suspect." Caballero, 27, apparently killed himself; his body was found three days after Marcano was last seen.

Marcano had repeatedly "rebuffed" romantic advances by Caballero. Detectives spoke to Caballero after the Valencia College student was reported missing, but had no evidence to detain him at that time. They obtained a warrant for his arrest after learning he had entered her apartment before she disappeared. His body was then found inside a garage.

Cellphone records from Caballero led them to the apartment complex near where Marcano was found and showed he was there for about 20 minutes the night she was reported missing, Sheriff Mina said. At one point, Caballero also previously lived at that apartment complex.

"Nothing in the records indicate that he ever returned there before he killed himself," he said, adding deputies are not looking for any other suspects.

The FBI and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement were among the hundreds of authorities searching for Marcano. Meanwhile, friends and family held a prayer vigil and passed out flyers desperate to find the missing teen.

"At this time, we cannot identify a cause of death, so I don't want to speculate on that," Mina said of Marcano's death during a news conference Saturday.

Mina says they notified her parents just hours ago, adding "our hearts are broken."

"Everyone wanted this outcome to be different," he said. "As a sheriff, as a father, obviously we are grieving at the loss of Miya."

Caballero's criminal history revealed one prior arrest in 2013 for using a destructive device resulting in property damage and discharging a weapon on school property, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

An arrest report said Polk County sheriff's deputies were called to the campus of Warner University after a report of a bomb going off inside a dorm. The explosive turned out to be a toilet bowl cleaner concoction inside a plastic drink bottle. The report said Caballero admitted to using the improvised explosive as a "prank" on other residents of the dorm. No one was injured.

The apartment complex where Marcano and Caballero worked, Arden Villa, released a statement saying "all potential employees are vetted through a national background check services provider," and no records of burglary or sexual assault were found involving Caballero.

Trump asks US judge to force Twitter to restore his account

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump has asked a federal judge in Florida to force Twitter to restore his account, which the company suspended in January following the deadly storming of the U.S. Capitol.

Trump's attorneys on Friday filed a motion in U.S. District Court in Miami seeking a preliminary injunction against Twitter and its CEO, Jack Dorsey. They argue that Twitter is censoring Trump in violation of

his First Amendment rights, according to the motion.

Twitter declined to comment Saturday on Trump's filing.

The company permanently banned Trump from its platform days after his followers violently stormed the Capitol building to try to block Congress from certifying Joe Biden's presidential win. Twitter cited concerns that Trump would incite further violence. Prior to the ban, Trump had roughly 89 million followers on Twitter.

Trump was also suspended from Facebook and Google's YouTube over similar concerns that he would provoke violence. Facebook's ban will last two years, until Jan. 7, 2023, after which the company will review his suspension. YouTube's ban is indefinite.

In July, Trump filed lawsuits in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida against all three tech companies and their CEOs, claiming that he and other conservatives have been wrongfully censored. The motion for a preliminary injunction was filed as part of Trump's case against Twitter.

Dwindling Alaska salmon leave Yukon River tribes in crisis

By NATHAN HOWARD and GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

STEVENS VILLAGE, Alaska (AP) — In a normal year, the smokehouses and drying racks that Alaska Natives use to prepare salmon to tide them through the winter would be heavy with fish meat, the fruits of a summer spent fishing on the Yukon River like generations before them.

This year, there are no fish. For the first time in memory, both king and chum salmon have dwindled to almost nothing and the state has banned salmon fishing on the Yukon, even the subsistence harvests that Alaska Natives rely on to fill their freezers and pantries for winter. The remote communities that dot the river and live off its bounty — far from road systems and easy, affordable shopping — are desperate and doubling down on moose and caribou hunts in the waning days of fall.

"Nobody has fish in their freezer right now. Nobody," said Giovanna Stevens, 38, a member of the Stevens Village tribe who grew up harvesting salmon at her family's fish camp. "We have to fill that void quickly before winter gets here."

Opinions on what led to the catastrophe vary, but those studying it generally agree human-caused climate change is playing a role as the river and the Bering Sea warm, altering the food chain in ways that aren't yet fully understood. Many believe commercial trawling operations that scoop up wild salmon along with their intended catch, as well as competition from hatchery-raised salmon in the ocean, have compounded global warming's effects on one of North America's longest rivers.

The assumption that salmon that aren't fished make it back to their native river to lay eggs may no longer hold up because of changes in both the ocean and river environments, said Stephanie Quinn-Davidson, who has worked on Yukon River salmon issues for a decade and is the Alaska Venture Fund's program director for fisheries and communities.

King, or chinook, salmon have been in decline for more than a decade, but chum salmon were more plentiful until last year. This year, summer chum numbers plummeted and numbers of fall chum — which travel farther upriver — are dangerously low.

"Everyone wants to know, 'What is the one smoking gun? What is the one thing we can point to and stop?'" she said of the collapse. "People are reluctant to point to climate change because there isn't a clear solution ... but it's probably the biggest factor here."

Many Alaska Native communities are outraged they are paying the price for generations of practices beyond their control that have caused climate change — and many feel state and federal authorities aren't doing enough to bring Indigenous voices to the table. The scarcity has made raw strong emotions about who should have the right to fish in a state that supplies the world with salmon, and underscores the powerlessness many Alaska Natives feel as traditional resources dwindle.

The nearly 2,000-mile-long (3,200-kilometer) Yukon River starts in British Columbia and drains an area larger than Texas in both Canada and Alaska as it cuts through the lands of Athabaskan, Yup'ik and other tribes.

The crisis is affecting both subsistence fishing in far-flung outposts and fish processing operations that

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employ tribal members in communities along the lower Yukon and its tributaries.

"In the tribal villages, our people are livid. They're extremely angry that we are getting penalized for what others are doing," said P.J. Simon, chairman and chief of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, a consortium of 42 tribal villages in the Alaska interior. "As Alaska Natives, we have a right to this resource. We have a right to have a say in how things are drawn up and divvied up."

More than a half-dozen Alaska Native groups have petitioned for federal aid, and they want the state's federal delegation to hold a hearing in Alaska on the salmon crisis. The groups also seek federal funding for more collaborative research on effects that ocean changes are having on returning salmon.

Citing the warming ocean, Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy requested a federal disaster declaration for the salmon fishery this month and has helped coordinate airlifts of about 90,000 pounds (41,000 kilograms) of fish to needy villages. The salmon crisis is one of the governor's top priorities, said Rex Rock Jr., Dunleavy's advisor for rural affairs and Alaska Native economic development.

That's done little to appease remote villages that are dependent on salmon to get through winter, when snow paralyzes the landscape and temperatures can dip to minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 29 C) or lower.

Families traditionally spend the summer at fish camps using nets and fish wheels to snag adult salmon as they migrate inland from the ocean to the place where they hatched so they can spawn. The salmon is prepared for storage a variety of ways: dried for jerky, cut into fillets that are frozen, canned in half-pint jars or preserved in wooden barrels with salt.

Without those options, communities are under intense pressure to find other protein sources. In the Alaska interior, the nearest road system is often dozens of miles away, and it can take hours by boat, snow machine or even airplane to reach a grocery store.

Store-bought food is prohibitively expensive for many: A gallon (3.8 liters) of milk can cost nearly \$10, and a pound of steak was recently \$34 in Kaltag, an interior village about 328 air miles (528 kilometers) from Fairbanks. A surge in COVID-19 cases that has disproportionately hit Alaska Natives has also made many hesitant to venture far from home.

Instead, villages sent out extra hunting parties during the fall moose season and are looking to the upcoming caribou season to meet their needs. Those who can't hunt themselves rely on others to share their meat.

"We have to watch our people because there will be some who will have no food about midyear," said Christina Semaken, a 63-year-old grandmother who lives in Kaltag, an Alaska interior town of fewer than 100 people. "We can't afford to buy that beef or chicken."

Semaken hopes to fish next year, but whether the salmon will come back remains unknown.

Tribal advocates want more genetic testing on salmon harvested from fishing grounds in Alaska waters to make sure that commercial fisheries aren't intercepting wild Yukon River salmon. They also want more fish-tracking sonar on the river to ensure an accurate count of the salmon that escape harvest and make it back to the river's Canadian headwaters.

Yet changes in the ocean itself might ultimately determine the salmon's fate.

The Bering Sea, where the river meets the ocean, had unprecedented ice loss in recent years, and its water temperatures are rising. Those shifts are throwing off the timing of the plankton bloom and the distribution of small invertebrates that the fish eat, creating potential chaos in the food chain that's still being studied, said Kate Howard, a fisheries scientist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Researchers have also documented warming temperatures in the river that are unhealthy for salmon, she said.

Because salmon spend time in both rivers and the ocean during their unique life cycle, it's hard to pin down exactly where these rapid environmental changes are most affecting them — but it's increasingly clear that overfishing is not the only culprit, Howard said.

"When you dig into all the available data for Yukon River salmon," she said, "it's hard to explain it all unless you consider climate change."

Alaska Natives, meanwhile, are left scrambling to fill a hole in their diet — and in centuries of tradition

built around salmon.

On a recent fall day, a small hunting party zoomed along the Yukon River by motorboat, scanning the shoreline for signs of moose. After three days, the group had killed two moose, enough to provide meat for seven families, or about 50 people, for roughly a month in their small community of Stevens Village.

At the end of a long day, they butchered the animals as the Northern Lights blazed a vibrant green across the sky, their headlamps piercing the inky darkness.

The makeshift camp, miles from any road, would normally host several dozen families harvesting salmon, sharing meals and teaching children how to fish. On this day, it was eerily quiet.

"I don't really think that there is any kind of bell out there that you can ring loud enough to try to explain that type of connection," said Ben Stevens, whose ancestors founded Stevens Village. "Salmon, to us, is life. Where can you go beyond that?"

3rd Alaska hospital invokes crisis care mode in COVID spike

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — A third Alaska hospital has instituted crisis protocols that allow it to ration care if needed as the state recorded the worst COVID-19 diagnosis rates in the U.S. in recent days, straining its limited health care system.

According to data collected by Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering, one in every 84 people in Alaska was diagnosed with COVID-19 from Sept. 22 to Sept. 29. The next highest rate was one in every 164 people in West Virginia.

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital said Friday it activated the Crisis Standards of Care policy because of a critical shortage of beds, staffing and monoclonal antibody treatments, along with the inability to transfer patients to other facilities.

In mid-September, Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage, the state's largest hospital, invoked the policy as did the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. for its hospital in Bethel, in southwest Alaska.

"The move to Crisis Standards of Care is not something we take lightly," Fairbanks Chief Medical Officer Dr. Angelique Ramirez said in a statement. "This is in response to a very serious surge of COVID in our community."

The move came the same day the state reported 1,044 new cases, 108 of them in the Fairbanks area. The hospital says 35% of its patients on Saturday were being treated for COVID-19.

Since March 2020, there have been 110,850 total COVID-19 cases in Alaska, which has a population of about 731,000. There were more than 24,000 new cases reported in September as the delta variant drove a spike in cases in Alaska, which has never had a statewide mask mandate.

The state health department said in all, 2,432 people have been hospitalized, and 557 Alaskans have died.

Statewide, 60% of eligible Alaskans are fully vaccinated. The Fairbanks North Star Borough is the third worst region for vaccination rates in Alaska, with just under 52% of eligible residents vaccinated.

Officials at Foundation Health Partners, which owns Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, have encouraged those in the community to wear masks and get vaccinated if able.

Ramirez said the decision to move to crisis standards was because of many factors, including community spread caused by the low vaccination rates and a high number of patients waiting to be admitted.

"This impacts all patient care, those with broken bones, traumas, heart attacks, strokes, COVID, anyone needing medical care," Ramirez said. "The care we are able to provide is highly fluid and can change day by day and even hour by hour depending on the availability of resources within our system and stateside."

She also stressed that people not delay medical care even if the system is at capacity. "You will always receive the best, most compassionate care that we can provide in the moment," Ramirez said.

The state has contracted with nearly 500 medical professionals from the Lower 48 to help ease the staffing shortage.

The Latest: 3rd Alaska hospital institutes crisis protocols

By The Associated Press undefined

Three Alaska hospitals have now instituted crisis protocols that would allow them to ration care if needed as the state recorded the worst COVID-19 diagnosis rates in the U.S. in recent days.

According to data collected by Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering, one person in every 84 in Alaska was diagnosed with COVID-19 from Sept. 22 to 29. The next highest rate was one in every 164 people in West Virginia.

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital activated the protocol Friday because of a critical shortage of bed capacity and staffing, along with the inability to transfer patients to other facilities. Two other Alaska hospitals, in Anchorage and Bethel, have invoked the same protocol.

Fairbanks Chief Medical Officer Dr. Angelique Ramirez said the decision to move to crisis standards was because of many factors, including community spread caused by the low vaccination rates and a high number of patients waiting to be admitted.

Statewide, 60% of eligible Alaskans are fully vaccinated. The Fairbanks North Star Borough is the third-worst region for vaccination rates in Alaska, with just under 52% of eligible residents vaccinated.

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- COVID-19 deaths eclipse 700,000 in US as delta variant rages
- Russia: Antibody tests for COVID-19 remain popular, factor in low vaccine rate
- Far-right protesters in Romania reject virus restrictions
- California to require COVID-19 vaccines for schoolchildren

See all of AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

ATLANTA — Four parents are suing the Cobb County school district on behalf of their children, saying the failure of Georgia's second-largest school district to require masks means their students cannot safely attend in-person classes because of their disabilities.

The suit was filed Friday in federal court in Atlanta. It says the 107,000-student suburban Atlanta district is violating federal law governing how students with disabilities are treated in public schools. The lawsuit asks a judge to order the district to follow CDC guidelines on masks and other issues. The district has defended its stance amid repeated protests.

"Rather than using the known and available tools to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 and protect plaintiffs' access to school services, programs, and activities, the district has acted with deliberate indifference to plaintiffs' rights to inclusion, health, and education," the complaint alleges.

The lawsuit asks that U.S. District Judge Timothy Batten Sr. order the district to follow CDC guidelines, including not only on masks but on issues like ventilation, physical distancing and contact tracing.

Whether to require masks in Cobb schools has been the focus of protest for months. Like many in Georgia, Cobb lifted its mask order at the end of last year. Many districts reimposed mask orders as school began this August, because of the rapid spread of the delta variant of COVID-19. Cobb, though, dug in saying that masks would only be strongly recommended.

LAS CRUCES, N.M. (AP) — New Mexico State University says less than a third of its students submitted proof of vaccination for COVID-19 by a Thursday deadline to otherwise undergo weekly testing or leave the university.

While 72.3% of the university's employees provided proof of vaccination, only 30% of students did, officials said Friday.

It's not clear how many students who didn't submit proof of vaccination by the deadline plan to submit weekly test results, officials said.

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"We're not where we want to be with our vaccinated students," said Jon Webster, the school's COVID-19 project manager. "We want to make sure we're protecting all of our students."

Failure to submit vaccination information or weekly test results can result in student suspension or staff termination, officials said.

Students can get vaccinated at any point in the semester and cease the weekly required testing once achieving full vaccination, Webster said.

He said the university was continuing to reach out to students through text message, email, social media and other channels.

Several students said Friday they were unaware of the mandate's details, the Las Cruces Sun-News reported.

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden mourned "the painful milestone" of 700,000 American deaths from COVID-19, a day after the U.S. surpassed that mark on Friday.

The president says in a statement "the astonishing death toll is yet another reminder of just how important it is to get vaccinated." He says the nation has "made extraordinary progress" in the fight against the coronavirus in the past eight months because of vaccines.

Biden says thanks to vaccines, "hundreds of thousands of families have been spared the unbearable loss that too many Americans have already endured during this pandemic."

He notes more than three-quarters of all Americans age 12 and up have received at least one vaccine dose, including nearly 94% of all seniors.

Biden says: "If you haven't already, please get vaccinated. It can save your life and the lives of those you love. It will help us beat COVID-19 and move forward, together, as one nation."

RENO, Nev. -- Employees at all public universities and colleges in Nevada are required to get COVID-19 vaccinations by Dec. 1 or face potential termination.

All new hires must prove their vaccination status under the new policy. Meanwhile, coronavirus case trends are improving in urban areas but have worsened in most rural parts of the state where vaccination rates are the lowest.

The Desert Research Institute has the highest vaccination rate at 87% followed by the University of Nevada Reno at 82%. UNLV reported 75%. Rural Elko-based Great Basin College had the worst rate at 66%.

On Wednesday, about 64% of all state employees had been fully vaccinated, in accordance with Gov. Steve Sisolak's order in July that required shots or proof of negative coronavirus tests, says DuAne Young, the governor's policy director.

Nearly 65% of residents age 12 and older have one vaccination and 56% are fully vaccinated, according to state data.

SALT LAKE CITY — The president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints thanked members who have followed church guidance, which has been to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Church President Russell M. Nelson spoke Saturday at a conference taking place again without full attendance due to the pandemic. For the first time in two years, leaders were back at the faith's 20,000-seat conference center, with several hundred people watching in person and others on television. The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square returned to the conference.

The Utah-based faith has repeatedly encouraged its 16 million members worldwide to limit the spread by getting vaccines and wearing masks. Last week, church officials announced masks will be required inside temples to limit the spread of the virus.

Utah experienced a summer surge among unvaccinated residents, causing hospital ICUs to reach near capacity in early September. Data from the Utah Health Department showed in late September that state residents who are unvaccinated are nearly six times more likely to die from COVID-19 and seven times more likely to be hospitalized than those who are vaccinated.

About 64% of Utah residents ages 12 and older were fully vaccinated.

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BUCHAREST, Romania — More than 5,000 far-right protesters have gathered in Romania's capital of Bucharest to reject new pandemic measures following a surge of coronavirus infections.

Daily infections in the nation of 19 million have skyrocketed from approximately 1,000 cases a day a month ago to a record 12,590 new cases on Saturday.

That was Romania's highest daily number of infections since the start of the pandemic. The increase is putting hospitals under pressure as intensive care units reach their capacity.

The mostly mask-less marchers blocked traffic, honked horns and chanted "Freedom!"

PHOENIX — Arizona reported nearly 100 COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, a day after the state's pandemic death toll passed 20,000.

The state coronavirus dashboard reported 95 deaths and 2,942 confirmed cases, increasing Arizona's pandemic totals to 20,134 confirmed deaths and 1.1 million cases.

Arizona's seven-day rolling average of daily deaths rose by a third in the past two weeks, increasing from 33 on Sept. 16 to 43 on Thursday, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The rolling average of daily new cases declined during the same period, dropping from 2,742 to 2,621.

The state also reported the number of COVID-19 patients occupying hospital beds increased slightly to 1,798 on Friday.

JACKSON, Miss. — The leader of a Mississippi pediatricians' organization is urging school districts to keep mask mandates in place to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Dr. Anita Henderson of Hattiesburg is president of the Mississippi Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She says about 30% of youths ages 12 to 17 in the state are vaccinated, and "now is not the time to let our guard down."

Mississippi has reported nine pediatric deaths from COVID-19. Some school districts are repealing mask mandates. Among them are the Madison County and Rankin County districts in central Mississippi and the Ocean Springs district on the Gulf Coast.

Mississippi had a significant surge in COVID-19 cases, deaths and hospitalizations starting in July. Numbers have slowly decreased in recent weeks. However, Mississippi is among the lowest vaccinated states in the nation.

TOPEKA, Kan. — Data from the Kansas state health department shows mostly rural counties have youth coronavirus vaccination rates far below the national average.

A school pandemic workgroup received data from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment this week showing in about a quarter of the state's counties, less than 20% of vaccine-eligible children ages 12 to 17 had received at least one dose as of Sept. 24.

Most of the low-vaccine counties are in western Kansas or other rural areas. U.S. regulators in May expanded the use of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to children as young as 12.

The national vaccination rate for youth is 57%, according to a presentation by Marci Nielsen, a special adviser to Kelly.

NEW YORK — Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor denied an emergency appeal from a group of teachers to block New York City's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for public school teachers and other staff from going into effect.

Sotomayor ruled on Friday, after the teachers filed for the injunction with her on Thursday to keep the mandate from going into effect.

Under the mandate, the roughly 148,000 school employees had until 5 p.m. Friday to get at least their first vaccine shot. Those who didn't face suspension without pay when schools open on Monday.

An original deadline this week was delayed after a legal challenge, but a federal appeals panel said New

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York City could go ahead with the mandate in the nation's largest school district.

In August, Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett also denied an emergency appeal from students at Indiana University to block that institution's vaccine mandate.

WARSAW, Poland — A gala concert on Saturday will open the 18th edition of the prestigious Frederic Chopin international piano competition that was postponed by a full year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Oct. 2-23 competition was scheduled for the fall of 2020, but authorities put off the popular event, expecting the coronavirus and social distancing would prevent the usual crowds from attending.

The 87 participants from around the world begin Sunday with the performance of Xuanyi Mao from China. The winner gets a gold medal and a prize of 40,000 euros (\$45,000) and prestigious recording and concert contracts.

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 has eclipsed 700,000, with 100,000 people dying in the past three months when vaccines were available to any American over age 12.

The milestone reached late Friday is deeply frustrating to doctors, nurses and public health officials and Americans who watched a pandemic that had been easing earlier in the summer take a dark turn.

Tens of millions of people in the U.S. have refused to get vaccinated, allowing the highly contagious delta variant to tear through the country and send the death toll from 600,000 to 700,000 in 3 1/2 months.

Florida suffered by far the most deaths of any state during that period, with the virus killing about 17,000 residents since the middle of June. Texas was second with 13,000 deaths.

The two states account for 15% of the country's population, but more than 30% of the nation's deaths since the nation crossed the 600,000 threshold.

MOSCOW — Antibody tests to detect the proteins produced by the body to fight coronavirus infection are cheap, widely available and actively marketed in Russia. Yet Western health experts say the tests are unreliable for diagnosing the coronavirus or assessing immunity to it.

When Russians talk about the coronavirus over dinner or in hair salons, the conversation often turns to "antitela," the Russian word for antibodies. President Vladimir Putin referred to them while bragging to Turkey's leader about why he avoided infection even though dozens of people around him contracted the coronavirus.

But the antibodies the popular tests look for can only serve as evidence of a past infection, and scientists say it's still unclear what level of antibodies indicates protection from the virus and for how long.

In Russia, it's common to get an antibody test and share the results. Their use appears to be a factor in the country's low vaccination rate even as the country reports record daily deaths and rising infections.

Both the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommend vaccination regardless of previous infection.

American Airlines, Alaska Airlines and JetBlue are joining United Airlines in requiring employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, as the Biden administration steps up pressure on major U.S. carriers to require the shots.

The airlines provide special flights, cargo hauling and other services for the government. The companies say that makes them government contractors who are covered by President Joe Biden's order directing contractors to require that employees be vaccinated.

American Airlines CEO Doug Parker told employees late Friday that the airline is still working on details, but "it is clear that team members who choose to remain unvaccinated will not be able to work at American Airlines."

The pilot union at American recently estimated that 4,200 — or 30% — of the airline's pilots are not vaccinated.

Earlier, White House coronavirus adviser Jeffrey Zients talked to the CEOs of American, Delta Air Lines

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and Southwest Airlines about vaccine mandates.

NEW YORK — The Broadway hit “Aladdin” is trying to keep COVID-19 contained. Disney Theatrical Productions said it will cancel all shows until Oct. 12 after “additional breakthrough COVID-19 cases were detected.”

The show reopened Tuesday following some 18 months of being shuttered due to the pandemic, but was forced to close Wednesday when breakthrough COVID-19 cases were reported within the musical’s company. There was a Thursday performance before Friday’s was canceled.

It was the first Broadway COVID-19 cancellation since shows resumed with Bruce Springsteen’s concert returning in July and “Pass Over” as the first play to debut in August.

So-called breakthrough infections are detected in vaccinated people and tend to be far less dangerous than those unvaccinated. In many ways, the temporary closure proves that the monitoring system is working.

“Aladdin” opened on Broadway in March 2014 and has become one of its highest grossing shows.

HARTFORD, Conn. - A retired Connecticut physician and surgeon voluntarily surrendered her license to practice medicine on Friday after being accused of providing fraudulent medical exemption forms through the mail.

Dr. Sue McIntosh had her license suspended last week by the Connecticut Medical Examining Board during an emergency hearing. A full hearing on the merits of the case was scheduled for Oct. 5.

State officials, who had received an anonymous complaint about the doctor, allege McIntosh provided an unknown number of blank, signed forms exempting people from the COVID-19 and other vaccines, as well as mandatory mask-wearing and routine COVID testing to people who sent her a self-addressed envelope.

McIntosh, who hadn’t treated the patients, signed a letter included in the packet of bogus forms with the phrase “Let freedom ring!” She didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Christopher Boyle, a spokesperson for the Connecticut Department of Public Health, said officials are considering whether to refer the case to state and federal law enforcement agencies.

MINNEAPOLIS — A decline in COVID-19 cases across the United States over the past several weeks has given overwhelmed hospitals some relief, but administrators are bracing for yet another possible surge as cold weather drives people indoors.

Health experts say the fourth wave of the pandemic has peaked overall in the U.S., particularly in the Deep South, where hospitals were stretched to the limit weeks ago. But many Northern states are still struggling with rising cases, and what’s ahead for winter is far less clear.

Unknowns include how flu season may strain already depleted hospital staffs and whether those who have refused to get vaccinated will change their minds. An estimated 70 million eligible Americans remain unvaccinated, providing kindling for the highly contagious delta variant.

“If you’re not vaccinated or have protection from natural infection, this virus will find you,” warned Mike Osterholm, director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.

Nationwide, the number of people now in the hospital with COVID-19 has fallen to somewhere around 75,000 from over 93,000 in early September. New cases are on the downswing at about 112,000 per day on average, a drop of about one-third over the past 2 1/2 weeks.

Desmond Ridder, No. 7 Cincinnati beat No. 9 Notre Dame 24-13

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Desmond Ridder threw two touchdown passes and ran for score late in the fourth quarter as No. 7 Cincinnati capitalized on its big opportunity and beat No. 9 Notre Dame 24-13 Saturday in a game the Bearcats hope can be the centerpiece of College Football Playoff resume.

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Cincinnati (4-0) wanted to use its first Top 10, regular-season matchup as a statement game, heading into its American Athletic Conference schedule. No team from outside the Power Five conferences has ever reached the playoff. Never even came close.

To break that barrier Bearcats almost certainly needs to go undefeated and this trip to Notre Dame (4-1) stood as the toughest test on the schedule. Not to mention the biggest stage they'll appear on this season.

The Bearcats were not quite dominant, but they were plenty good enough in their first trip to South Bend since 1900 to snap Notre Dame's 26-game home winning streak.

When told how loud the crowd can be at Notre Stadium this week, Ridder quipped that it wouldn't be for long.

The senior delivered, going 19 for 32 for 297 yards. He hooked up with Alec Pierce six times for 144 yards, and was at his best after Notre Dame cut the lead to 17-13 with 8:20 left in the fourth quarter.

Ridder went 3 for 3, with a bullet down the middle for 36 yards to Leonard Taylor, on the ensuing drive. He capped it off with a 6-yard TD run around left end that made it 24-13.

Cincinnati took advantage of three turnovers by Notre Dame in the first half to jump out to 17-0 lead. The miscues by the Irish were killers.

Jack Coan's pass was intercepted in the red zone by Ahmad Gardner on ill-advised throw under pressure that ended Notre Dame first and best drive of the half.

The Irish tried freshman Tyler Buchner at quarterback for a couple of series, hoping his mobility could spark the running game. But Buchner's pass was picked off by DeShawn Pace while getting hit, and Pace set up Cincinnati in the red zone.

Ridder flipped a 1-yard pass to Taylor to make it 7-0 early in the second quarter.

Chris Tyree fumbled the ensuing kickoff back to Cincinnati and the Bearcats turned that into a 23-yard field goal by Cole Smith.

Ridder and the Bearcats put together their best late in the second quarter, going 80 yards for a touchdown. Ridder was 3 for 4 on the drive, each completion for more than 20 yards, including the 27-yard touchdown to Tre Tucker that beat Irish All-America safety Kyle Hamilton.

The Bearcats were up 17-0 with 40 seconds left in the first half and for the third time Cincinnati fans, decked in red in the upper reaches of the south end zone, were chanting "Let's Go Bearcats!"

THE TAKEAWAY

Cincinnati: The defense locked up Notre Dame for most of the game, getting a shut-down game from All-America cornerback Gardner and good pressure from Myjai Sanders and Darrian Beavers.

Notre Dame: Drew Pyne, who took over last week in the second half against Wisconsin when Jack Coan went out with an ankle injury, came off the bench in the third quarter again for the Irish — this time just to provide a spark.

Pyne was OK, showing some Ian Book-ish mobility and getting rid of the ball a little more quickly than Coan. The sophomore was 9 for 22 for 143 yards and his 32-yard touchdown pass to Braden Lenzy with 8:28 left in the fourth quarter cut the lead to 17-13. Jonathan Doerer missed the point after.

UP NEXT

Cincinnati: Host Temple on Friday.

Notre Dame: At Virginia Tech on Saturday.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at <https://twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP> and listen at <http://www.appodcasts.com>

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-football> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25. Sign up for the AP's college football newsletter: <https://apnews.com/cfbtop25>

New landmark recognizes Chinese contributions to Yosemite

Associated Press undefined

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — A century-old building originally used as a laundry by Chinese

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workers at Yosemite's iconic Wawona Hotel has been restored and turned into a visitor's attraction, recognizing Chinese Americans' contributions to the early history of the national park.

Officials unveiled a new sign Friday marking the Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite Valley, the Fresno Bee reports. New exhibits inside tell the story of Chinese workers who helped build Tioga Road and Wawona Road, critical infrastructure that made tourism to the park possible.

The building — later used as a storage facility — is part of a cluster of structures that will make up the new Yosemite History Center, which will tell the histories of immigrants who made the park what it is today, said Park Ranger Adam Ramsey.

"Chinese people have been a big part of communities throughout the Sierra Nevada for a really long time, and it's about time that we started sharing that history here in Yosemite," Ramsey said.

According to research conducted by Park Ranger Yenyen Chan, in 1883 Chinese workers helped build the 56-mile (90-kilometer) Tioga Road in just 130 days. The stunning route across the Sierra Nevada reaches 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in elevation and serves as one of the park's main roads.

Chinese workers were also employed in Yosemite as cooks, laundry workers and gardeners.

Many first came to California during the Gold Rush, bringing with them skills learned in China about construction, engineering, agriculture, medicine and textiles that made a significant impact in America's early success, Chan said.

She said Yosemite's Chinese history and their contributions were erased from memory because of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress to prevent any more Chinese from entering this country in search of work. The law blocked Chinese immigration for 60 years in this country.

Members of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, who supported the building's renovation, said they were gratified to see Yosemite include the Chinese in the park's origin story.

"Something like this really resonates with a lot of people in my generation," said Eugene Moy, a past president of the society. "We've been here since the 1870s, so to be able to see this has deep meaning, because a lot of us, oftentimes, are relegated to the margins. We aren't always perceived as being full-fledged Americans when the reality is that people have been here for three, four, five generations, for 150 years."

Mormon president: Church leaders speak 'pure truth'

By BRADY McCOMBS Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints urged members Saturday to listen to the faith's leaders when they seek "pure truth" and expressed gratitude for those who have followed church guidance during the pandemic, which has been to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

President Russell M. Nelson acknowledged at a church conference that the world is "still dealing with the ravages of COVID-19 and its variants." And while he didn't mention vaccines specifically, he thanked members for following the advice of church leaders, medical experts and government officials.

The Utah-based faith has repeatedly encouraged its 16 million members worldwide to limit the spread by getting vaccines and wearing masks.

"Contrary to the doubts of some, there really is such a thing as right and wrong. There really is absolute truth — eternal truth," said Nelson, speaking from inside a mostly empty conference center in Salt Lake City. "One of the plagues of our day is that too few people know where to turn for truth. I can assure you that what you will hear today and tomorrow constitutes pure truth."

The conference is taking place again without full attendance due to the pandemic, but for the first time in two years leaders were back at the faith's 20,000-seat conference center with several hundred people watching in person.

The church's well-known Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square was also back in person. However, it had fewer members than normal to allow for social distancing, and all members had been vaccinated, the church said.

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Leaders spoke at the previous three conferences inside a smaller building with no choir and no attendees. Those conferences were the first to take place without full attendance in more than 70 years.

Most members of the faith known widely as the Mormon church are watching speeches during the two-day conference on TVs, computers and tablets from their homes around the world. Before the pandemic, the event would bring about 100,000 people to the church's headquarters to listen to five sessions over two days.

The church push for people to get vaccinated has divided the faith, similar to larger society. Members who support the stance say they fear that some Latter-day Saints who refuse to get vaccinated are allowing their political views to supersede their loyalty to a faith that largely prioritizes unity and obedience. Other church members are upset that their leaders aren't letting them exercise their own personal decision-making about vaccines and masks.

About 65% of Latter-day Saints who responded to a survey earlier this year said they were vaccine acceptors, meaning they've gotten at least one dose or plan to soon. Another 15% identified as hesitant, and 19% said they would not get the vaccine, according to the survey this summer from the Public Religion Research Institute, a polling organization based in Washington, and Interfaith Youth Core.

The survey found 79% of white Catholics and 56% of white Evangelical Protestants identified as vaccine acceptors.

In Utah, where The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is based and members account for nearly two-thirds of the 3.2 million residents, a summer surge of the virus among unvaccinated residents pushed hospitals to near capacity. Cases reached a peak in mid-September before declining over the past few weeks, mirroring national trends. About 65% of Utah residents 12 and older have been fully vaccinated, according to state data.

The pandemic wasn't a central topic in conference speeches Saturday, with most speakers focusing on issues of spiritual guidance. Several speeches were prerecorded by international members of middle-tier leadership panels who couldn't travel to the U.S. due to the pandemic.

In one of those, Erich W. Kopschke of Germany pleaded with members to better understand mental health issues and avoid being judgmental toward those struggling with such illnesses. He spoke about his son's struggle with panic attacks, anxiety and depression that prevented him from finishing his church mission and caused him to consider suicide.

Kopschke acknowledged that he and his wife worried about what others would think and were disappointed and sad their son couldn't complete a mission. Missions are considered a rite of passage for young members of the faith, and coming home early has long caused anguish for youth and their parents.

"It can be difficult for parents to identify their children's struggles, but we must educate ourselves. How can we know the difference between the difficulties associated with normal development and signs of illness? As parents, we have the sacred charge to help our children navigate life's challenges; however, few of us are mental health specialists," Kopschke said. "We, nevertheless, need to care for our children by helping them learn to be content with their sincere efforts as they strive to meet appropriate expectations."

Ulisses Soares of Brazil, who in 2018 became the first-ever Latin American member of a top governing panel called the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, also encouraged members to be compassionate with others.

"We should never make harsh and cruel judgment of our fellow men and women, because we are all in need of understanding and mercy for our imperfections from our loving Heavenly Father," Soares said.

Bonnie H. Cordon, president of the church's program for young women, told young members to always remember God's love for them. She was the only two woman who spoke during the sessions Saturday.

"Remembering this love can help you push back the confusion of the world that tries to weaken your confidence in your divine identity and blind you of your potential," Cordon said.

Dallin H. Oaks issued a stern reminder for members to attend church regularly. He is the church's second-highest ranking member as a first counselor to Nelson and member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

"If we cease valuing our churches, for any reason, we threaten our personal spiritual life, and significant numbers separating themselves from God reduces his blessings to our nations," Oaks said.

Queen Elizabeth reflects on 'deep' affection for Scotland

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Queen Elizabeth II opened the sixth session of the Scottish Parliament on Saturday and reflected on the “deep and abiding affection” she and her late husband, Prince Philip, shared for Scotland.

The 95-year-old monarch arrived for the ceremony with her son, Prince Charles, and his wife, Camilla, who in Scotland are known as the Duke and Duchess of Rothesay. The ceremony in Edinburgh began with the royal mace and the Crown of Scotland being brought into the chamber.

“I have spoken before of my deep and abiding affection for this wonderful country and of the many happy memories Prince Philip and I always held of our time here,” the queen told lawmakers.

The couple spent many summers at the royal residence in Scotland, Balmoral Castle, often joined by members of the royal family. The queen arrived in Edinburgh from the castle.

It is the first time she has opened a new session of the Scottish Parliament without Philip by her side. The prince, who was officially known as the Duke of Edinburgh, died in April at the age of 99.

“The beginning of a new session is a time for renewal and fresh thinking, providing an opportunity to look to the future and our future generations,” the queen said during her remarks to lawmakers.

That opportunity is especially ripe this year, she said, with the United Nations’ annual climate summit scheduled to take place between Oct. 31 and Nov. 12 in Glasgow, Scotland’s biggest city Glasgow. The queen said she will be attending the event, known as COP26 for short.

“The eyes of the world will be on the United Kingdom — and Scotland, in particular — as leaders come together to address the challenges of climate change,” she said.

In response to the queen’s speech, Scotland’s first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, offered her “deep sympathy and shared sorrow” over Philip’s death, and thanked the monarch for being a “steadfast friend” of the Scottish Parliament since its establishment in 1999.

“As we battle through the storm of a global pandemic, hope and the hankering for change is perhaps felt more strongly by more people than at any time in our recent history,” she said.

Though Sturgeon’s Scottish National Party wants the country to be independent from the U.K., its policy is to retain the monarchy. However, many of its members say they would prefer an elected head of state.

The queen, Charles and Camilla were also due to meet Scots who have been recognized for their community contributions during the coronavirus pandemic.

US envoy says climate summit can yield 'enormous progress'

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said Saturday he thinks “enormous progress” can be made at the upcoming U.N. climate talks in Scotland but more governments must come up with concrete commitments in the next 30 days.

Kerry attended a preparatory meeting in Milan where delegates from around the world sought to identify where progress can be made before the U.N. climate change starts in Glasgow on Oct. 31.

The 12-day summit aims to secure more ambitious commitments to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius with a goal of keeping it to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. The event also is focused on mobilizing financing and protecting vulnerable communities and natural habitats.

“The bottom line is, folks, as we stand here today, we believe we can make enormous progress in Glasgow, moving rapidly towards the new goals that the science is telling us we must achieve,” Kerry said. That means achieving a 45% reduction in carbon emissions in the next 10 years.

“This is the decisive decade,” Kerry said.

Kerry, a former U.S. senator and secretary of state, said that countries representing 55% of the world’s gross domestic product — Britain, Canada, Japan, the United States and the 27 European Union members — have submitted plans that hit the 1.5 degrees target by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

But the American diplomat also noted that the 89 new national submissions ahead of the summit would

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only cut emissions by 12%, and that the sum of all 191 submissions as they are currently written would increase emissions between now and 2030 by 16%.

Kerry declined to single out any country but said there are ways to achieve lower emissions that aren't that expensive, including organizing power grids and making transmissions more efficient.

China is the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, and the United States is second. Kerry said U.S. President Joe Biden has had "constructive" talks on the subject with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Kerry also highlighted commitments by India's leader to install 450 gigawatts of renewable power over the next decade.

"Glasgow, my friends, is around the corner. It is the starting line of the race of centuries and the race of this decade," he said. "All countries have to sprint and join together to understand that we are all in this together."

Kerry added "This is the test of collective multilateralism to the highest level that I have seen in my public career."

The European commissioner for climate action, Frans Timmermans, separately underlined the importance of meeting the \$100 billion annual funding commitment to help vulnerable countries fight climate change during 2020-2025, as demanded by youth activists who met earlier in Milan.

Timmermans said the financing needs going forward would be much greater than that amount and that public funding alone would not be able to cover the anticipated price tag, which runs in the trillions.

Already the Earth has seen a 1 degree Celsius temperature change and unpredictable weather patterns that have destroyed harvests and killed livelihoods around the world, Timmermans said.

"So there can be no doubt in anybody's mind that we are fighting for the survival of humanity, and that the climate crisis and the threatening ecocide are the biggest threat humanity faces," Timmermans said. "We need to change, and we need to change radically and we need to change fast. That's going to be bloody hard. That's the bad news."

Alok Sharma, Britain's president for COP26, said "delivering on (the) \$100 billion is absolutely a matter of trust." He also said the presence of youth delegates and activists, including Greta Thunberg and Vanessa Nakate, ahead of the climate summit preparatory meetings had energized the process.

"As we go forward of the next few weeks and into COP, we must always keep the voices of the young people foremost in our minds and think about what their response would be to the outcomes that we reach," Sharma said.

Follow all AP stories on climate change at <https://apnews.com/hub/Climate-change>.

Pharmacies face 1st trial over role in opioid crisis

By MARK GILLISPIE Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — So many prescription painkillers were dispensed in Lake County, Ohio, between 2012 and 2016 that the amount equaled 265 pills for every resident. Just to the south, the flood of prescription opioids during the same period equated to 400 pills for every resident of Trumbull County.

Attorneys say efforts to address the ensuing overdose epidemic has cost each of the financially struggling counties at least \$1 billion. Now those counties want major national pharmacy chains that were involved in much of that distribution to pay.

In a bellwether federal trial starting Monday in Cleveland, Lake and Trumbull counties will try to convince a jury that the retail pharmacy companies played an outsized role in creating a public nuisance in the way they dispensed pain medication into their communities.

This will be the first time pharmacy companies, in this case CVS, Walgreens, Giant Eagle and Walmart, have gone to trial to defend themselves in the nation's ongoing legal reckoning over the opioid crisis. The trial, which is expected to last around six weeks, could set the tone for similar lawsuits against retail pharmacy chains by government entities across the U.S.

The trial will center on the harm to the counties and the response by the pharmacy chains, which have

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argued in court filings that their pharmacists were merely filling prescriptions written by physicians for legitimate medical needs. The trial also has a human dimension, watched closely by those whose family members are part of the roughly 500,000 Americans whose deaths are attributed to opioid abuse over the past two decades.

"People need to realize that drug addiction is a family disease, and everyone in the family is affected by it," said Sharon Grover, whose daughter died after becoming addicted to prescription pain pills and then heroin. "I'm never going to be the same."

Grover, who lives in the small Trumbull County community of Mesopotamia Township, said she believes her daughter, Rachael Realini, started using prescription painkillers around 2013, but missed any signs of her addiction. By 2016, she told her mother she needed help. When pain pills became scarce, she turned to heroin to feed her habit.

"She looked terrible," Grover said of her daughter, a registered nurse and mother of two small children. "We hugged, and I told her we would get through this."

Attempts at rehabilitation in Ohio and Florida failed. Realini was found dead at her home in April 2017 from a fentanyl overdose, an autopsy showed. No other drugs were found in her system.

An attorney for the counties, Frank Gallucci, said that is similar to the pattern seen throughout their communities: Heroin and synthetic fentanyl have largely replaced prescription painkillers, which have been harder to obtain as the industry has been forced to dial back on dispensing.

Another major pharmacy chain, Rite-Aid, settled with Lake and Trumbull counties, which are located outside Cleveland. The Trumbull settlement was \$1.5 million; the Lake County amount has not been disclosed.

The trial starting Monday before U.S. District Judge Dan Polster is part of a broader constellation of federal opioid lawsuits — about 3,000 in all — that have been consolidated under the judge's supervision.

Jim Misocky, an attorney and special projects coordinator in Trumbull County, along with Lake County Administrator Jason Boyd, said the ongoing opioid crisis has been a burden financially. They cited increased costs for their courts, jails, foster care, law enforcement and addiction treatment.

The financial burden is especially acute in Trumbull County, where there have been thousands of job losses in recent years in steelmaking, auto manufacturing and automotive supply companies.

"It's been a big hit on the budget," Misocky said. "We don't have a lot of wealth in this community."

Trumbull County has had to hire a part-time pathologist in the county coroner's office, Misocky said. When the county morgue fills up, bodies are sent to Cleveland or Lake County for autopsies.

Lake County's Boyd said addiction treatment facilities there are "well beyond capacity."

"That's an issue we hear about continuously," he said. "Where are we going to treat these people?"

Attorneys for the two counties say 80 million prescription painkillers were dispensed in Trumbull between 2012 and 2016, according to data made public earlier through the court. In Lake County, it was 61 million pills. In trial briefs, the pharmacy companies argue that they followed guidelines established by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the state of Ohio in how their stores dispensed painkillers.

Attorneys for CVS, based in Rhode Island, said the allegations against the company "are completely unfounded."

"The evidence presented at trial will show not only that CVS met the legal requirements for distributing prescription opioid medications in Lake and Trumbull Counties, but that it exceeded them," attorneys for the company wrote.

Attorneys for Illinois-based Walgreens said the two counties were using "confused and contradictory legal theories against other defendants before they landed on the idea to sue retail pharmacy chains."

The trial will be the fourth in the U.S. this year to test claims brought by governments against different players in the drug industry over the toll of prescription painkillers. Verdicts or judgments have not yet been reached in the others.

With trials ongoing and others queued up, many of the most prominent defendants have already reached settlements. Sometimes, they involve a small number of governments or just one defendant such as Rite Aid.

The nation's three largest drug distribution companies, AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKes-

son, along with drugmaker Johnson & Johnson, reached a \$26 billion nationwide settlement earlier this year. A federal bankruptcy judge recently approved a settlement for Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin, that is potentially worth \$10 billion. The global consulting firm McKinsey & Company earlier this year agreed to pay nearly \$600 million for its role in advising drug makers on how to boost sales of prescription opioid painkillers.

And in Ohio, lawsuits filed by two larger counties, Cuyahoga and Summit, against drug distribution companies were settled for \$260 million before the start of trial in November 2019.

Grover believes the pharmacy giants bear a large responsibility for her daughter's addiction and is glad they're on trial.

"The pharmacy companies are the biggest drug dealers there are," Grover said. "They're white collar drug dealers, and they need to be held accountable."

Associated Press writer Geoff Mulvihill contributed to this article from Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

Dubai Expo 2020 offers conflicting figures on worker deaths

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Dubai's Expo 2020 on Saturday offered conflicting figures for how many workers had been killed on site during construction of the massive world's fair, first saying five and then later three.

In a later statement, Expo apologized and described the initial figure as a "mistake." Authorities had refused for months to publicly provide any figures for construction-related casualties in the run-up to the \$7 billion fair rising from the desert outside Dubai, designed to burnish the city's reputation abroad and draw millions of visitors.

The inconsistent statements came as the event and the United Arab Emirates as a whole long has faced criticism from human rights activists over poor treatment of the low-paid migrant laborers from Africa, Asia and the Middle East who keep the country's economy humming.

When pressed to provide a number for worker deaths at a news conference Saturday morning, Expo spokesperson Sconaid McGeachin said without hesitation that "we have had five fatalities now," adding, "you know, that is obviously a tragedy that anybody would die."

But just after 5 p.m. Saturday and hours after an Associated Press report quoted McGeachin, Expo put out a statement that said: "Unfortunately, there have been three work-related fatalities (and) 72 serious injuries to date." Just after 7 p.m., Expo issued another statement apologizing for "the inaccuracy."

Expo said that its 200,000 laborers who built the vast fairgrounds from scratch worked over 240 million hours. Over the past year, authorities had not offered any overall statistics previously on worker fatalities, injuries or coronavirus infections despite repeated requests from the AP and other journalists.

The admission comes after the European Parliament urged nations not to take part in Expo, citing the UAE's "inhumane practices against foreign workers" that it said worsened during the pandemic. Ahead of Expo, businesses and construction companies are "coercing workers into signing untranslated documents, confiscating their passports, exposing them to extreme working hours in unsafe weather conditions and providing them with unsanitary housing," the resolution last month said.

McGeachin also acknowledged that authorities were aware of cases involving contractors "withholding passports," engaging in suspect "recruitment practices" and violating workplace safety codes.

"We have taken steps to ensure those have been addressed and very much intervened in cases on that," she said, without elaborating.

Laborers in the UAE are barred from unionization and have few protections, often working long hours for little pay and living in substandard conditions. Most foreign workers, hoping to earn more than they would at home, come to the UAE and other oil-rich Arab states through recruitment agencies, part of a sponsorship system that ties their residency status to their jobs and lends their employers outsized power.

Dubai's searing early autumn heat proved hazardous even for those visiting the site on its opening day

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Friday, with some tourists fainting in the 40 degree Celsius (104 degree Fahrenheit) humid weather.

On the fairgrounds Saturday to mark France's National Day at Expo, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told a news conference that his government was "not part" of the European Parliament resolution urging the boycott of Dubai's world's fair.

"Our relation with the United Arab Emirates is a strategic one, it's very close," Le Drian said when asked about concerns over labor abuses on site. "If we need to say something to the United Arab Emirates' government we do so behind closed doors."

There was no Emirati official present at the press conference.

Tesla reports stronger-than-expected Q3 sales

PALO ALTO, Calif. (AP) — Tesla says it delivered 241,300 electric vehicles in the third quarter even as it wrestled with a global shortage of computer chips that has hit the entire auto industry.

The Palo Alto, California, company's sales from July through September beat Wall Street estimates of 227,000 sales worldwide, according to data provider FactSet.

Third-quarter sales rose 72% over the 140,000 deliveries Tesla made for the same period a year ago.

So far this year, Tesla has sold around 627,300 vehicles. That puts it on pace to soundly beat last year's total of 499,550.

Wedbush analyst Daniel Ives wrote in a note to investors that the pace of electric vehicle deliveries in the U.S. and China has been strong for the past month or so. That means an "eye-popping growth trajectory heading into 4Q and 2022 for (CEO Elon) Musk & Co."

Still, Ives estimated that the chip shortage will knock 40,000 vehicles from Tesla's annual delivery number. He estimates the deliveries to be at least 865,000 vehicles, with a bull case of around 900,000.

"In a nutshell, with chip shortage headwinds, China demand still recovering from earlier this year, and EV competition coming from all angles, Tesla's ability to navigate these challenges this quarter have been very impressive," he wrote.

In the third quarter, the smaller Model 3 sedan and Y SUV led the way with 232,025 sales, followed by the larger Models S and X at 9,275. Tesla said it produced 237,823 vehicles for the quarter.

'Everybody is frustrated,' Biden says as his agenda stalls

By LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Saturday acknowledged frustrations as Democrats strain to rescue a scaled-back version of his \$3.5 trillion government-overhaul plan and salvage a related public works bill after frantic negotiations failed to produce a deal.

"Everybody's frustrated, it's part of being in government, being frustrated," Biden told reporters before leaving the White House for a weekend stay at his home in Wilmington, Delaware. He pledged to "work like hell" to get the two pillars of his domestic agenda passed into law, but refrained from laying out a new deadline.

The president had gone to Capitol Hill on Friday for a private meeting with House Democrats that was partly a morale booster for the disjointed caucus of lawmakers. According to lawmakers in the room, he discussed a \$1.9 trillion to \$2 trillion-plus price tag for the larger package that would expand the country's social safety net.

The White House and its allies in Congress are prepared for protracted negotiations. Biden said he would soon travel around the country to promote the legislation and he acknowledged concerns that the talk in Washington had become too focused on the trillions in new spending and taxes in the bill.

He pledged to do more to educate the public about the plan's new and expanded programs, which he contended have the support of the vast majority of the electorate.

"I'm going to try to sell what I think the American people will buy," Biden said Saturday, adding, "I believe that when the American people are aware of what's in it we'll get it done."

The president said he believed the legislation will be signed into law with "plenty of time to change the

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tax code for people next year.”

It’s a pivotal time for Biden and the party. His approval ratings have dropped and Democrats are restless, eager to deliver on his signature campaign promise of rebuilding the country. His ideas go beyond roads-and-bridges infrastructure to delivering dental, vision and hearing care for seniors, free prekindergarten, major efforts to tackle climate change and other investments that would touch countless American lives.

Holdout Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia had dashed hopes for a swift compromise on a framework when he refused to budge late Thursday on his demands for a smaller overall package, about \$1.5 trillion.

Without a broader deal, prospects for a vote on the companion public works bill stalled out as progressives refused to commit until senators reached agreement. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told colleagues that “more time is needed” as they shape the broader package.

The House on Friday night passed a 30-day measure to keep transportation programs running during the stalemate, essentially setting a new deadline for talks, Oct. 31. The Senate approved it without debate during a brief Saturday session, to halt the furloughs of more than 3,500 federal transportation workers, a byproduct of the political impasse.

Pelosi, keeping her promise to centrists, had insisted earlier Friday that there would be a “vote today” on the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that is popular but is snared in the debate over Biden’s broader measure. But with Democratic progressives refusing to give their support for that slimmer roads-and-bridges bill unless advances were made on the president’s big bill, Pelosi was unwilling to call for a vote.

“Out of respect for our colleagues who support the bills and out of recognition for the need for both,” Pelosi said in a letter Saturday to House Democrats that she would not bring the smaller measure “to the floor to fail.”

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, a key centrist Democrat who helped steer the public works bill to Senate passage but has concerns that Biden’s overall bill is too big, was dismayed by the delay on the bipartisan package negotiated with the president.

In a statement Saturday, she said the canceled vote was “inexcusable, and deeply disappointing” and “erodes” the trust needed for “good-faith negotiations.”

With Republicans solidly opposed to Biden’s sweeping vision, the president and Democrats are reaching for a giant legislative accomplishment on their own — all to be paid for by rewriting federal balance sheets with tax increases on corporations and the wealthy, those earning more than \$400,000 a year.

The larger of Biden’s proposals is a years-in-the-making collection of Democratic priorities with an ultimate price tag he says is zero, because the tax revenue would cover the spending costs.

“We will and must pass both bills soon,” Pelosi said in her letter. “We have the responsibility and the opportunity to do so. People are waiting and want results.”

The White House and Democrats also are focusing on raising the nation’s borrowing limit before the United States risks defaulting on its obligations — a deadline the Treasury Department estimates will be reached no later than Oct. 18. The House has already acted, but Republican senators have indicated they will not provide votes for bipartisan passage and want Democrats to go it alone.

“I hope that the Republicans won’t be so irresponsible as to refuse to raise the debt limit and to filibuster the debt limit,” Biden said Saturday. “That would be totally unconscionable. Never been done before. And so I hope that won’t happen.”

Russians flock to antibody tests; West notes tool’s limit

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — When Russians talk about the coronavirus over dinner or in hair salons, the conversation often turns to “antitela,” the Russian word for antibodies — the proteins produced by the body to fight infection.

Even President Vladimir Putin referred to them this week in a conversation with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan, bragging about why he avoided infection even though dozens of people around

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him caught the coronavirus, including someone who spent a whole day with the Kremlin leader.

"I have high titers," Putin said, referring to the measurement used to describe the concentration of antibodies in the blood. When Erdogan challenged him that the number Putin gave was low, the Russian insisted, "No, it's a high level. There are different counting methods."

But Western health experts say the antibody tests so popular in Russia are unreliable either for diagnosing COVID-19 or assessing immunity to it. The antibodies that these tests look for can only serve as evidence of a past infection, and scientists say it's still unclear what level of antibodies indicates protection from the virus and for how long.

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention says such tests should not be used to establish an active COVID-19 infection because it can take one to three weeks for the body to make antibodies. Health experts say tests that look for the virus's genetic material, called PCR tests, or ones that look for virus proteins, called antigen tests, should be used to determine if someone is infected.

In Russia, it's common to get an antibody test and share the results. The tests are cheap, widely available and actively marketed by private clinics nationwide, and their use appears to be a factor in the country's low vaccination rate even as daily deaths and infections are rising again.

In Moscow and the surrounding region, millions of antibody tests have been done at state-run clinics that offered them for free. Across the country, dozens of chains of private labs and clinics also offer a wide variety of antibody tests for COVID-19, as well as tests for other medical conditions.

"In some cities I went to, I needed to take a PCR test and it wasn't possible, but I could take an antibody test -- it was much easier," said Dr. Anton Barchuk, head of the epidemiology group at the European University in St. Petersburg and an associate professor at the Petrov National Cancer Center there.

Antibody tests for COVID-19 were first widely publicized in Moscow in May 2020, shortly after Russia lifted its only nationwide lockdown, although many restrictions remained in place. Mayor Sergei Sobyenin announced an ambitious program to test tens of thousands of residents for antibodies.

Many Muscovites greeted this enthusiastically. Contrary to Western experts, some believed antibodies represented immunity from the virus and saw a positive test as a way out of restrictions.

The test looked at two different types of antibodies: ones that appear in one's system soon after infection, and ones that take weeks to develop. To their surprise, some of those who tested positive for the former were handed a COVID-19 diagnosis and ordered to quarantine.

Irina Umarova, 56, spent 22 days confined to her studio apartment, without experiencing any symptoms. Visiting doctors took six PCR tests that came back negative. But they also took more antibody tests, which continued to show a certain level of antibodies.

"They kept telling me I was infected and needed to stay home," she said.

More interest in antibody testing came this summer when Russia had a surge of infections. The demand for tests spiked so sharply that labs were overwhelmed and some ran out of supplies.

That's when dozens of regions made vaccinations mandatory for certain groups of people and restricted access to various public spaces, allowing in only those who were vaccinated, had had the virus, or had tested negative for it recently.

Daria Goryakina, deputy director at the Helix Laboratory Service, a large chain of testing facilities, said she believed the increased interest in antibody testing was connected to the vaccination mandates.

In the second half of June, Helix performed 230% more antibody tests than in the first half, and the high demand continued into the first week of July. "People want to check their antibody levels and whether they need to get vaccinated," Goryakina told The Associated Press.

Both the World Health Organization and the CDC recommend vaccination regardless of previous infection.

Guidance in Russia has varied, with authorities initially saying that those testing positive for the antibodies weren't eligible for the shot, but then urging everyone to get vaccinated regardless of their antibody levels. Still, some Russians believed a positive antibody test was a reason to put off vaccination.

Maria Bloquert recovered from the coronavirus in May, and a test she took shortly after revealed a high antibody count. She has put off her vaccination but wants to get it eventually, once her antibody levels

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start to wane. "As long as my antibody titers are high, I have protection from the virus, and there is no point in getting injected with more protection on top of it," the 37-year-old Muscovite told AP.

High-profile officials, like Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov and Valentina Matviyenko, speaker of the upper house of parliament, both have been quoted as saying they didn't need to get vaccinated due to having high levels of antibodies, but they eventually decided to get their shots.

Contradicting guidelines may have contributed to Russia's low vaccination rate, said Dr. Anastasia Vasiyeva, leader of the Alliance of Doctors union.

"People don't understand (what to do), because they're constantly given different versions" of recommendations, she said.

Even though Russia boasted of creating the world's first vaccine, Sputnik V, only 32.5% of its 146 million people have gotten at least one shot, and only 28% are fully vaccinated. Critics have principally blamed a botched vaccine rollout and mixed messages the authorities have been sending about the outbreak.

Dr. Simon Clarke, an associate professor in cellular microbiology at the University of Reading in England, said antibody tests shouldn't influence any health-related decisions.

Getting an antibody test "is for your own personal satisfaction and curiosity," he added.

Barchuk, the St. Petersburg epidemiologist, echoed his sentiment, saying there are too many gaps in understanding how antibodies work, and the tests offer little information beyond past infection.

But some Russian regions disregarded that advice, using positive antibody tests to allow people access to restaurants, bars and other public places on par with a vaccination certificate or a negative coronavirus test. Some people get an antibody test before or after vaccination to make sure the shot worked or see if they need a booster.

Dr. Vasily Vlassov, an epidemiologist and a public health expert with the Higher School of Economics, says this attitude reflects Russians' distrust of the state-run health care system and their struggle to navigate the confusion amid the pandemic.

"People's attempt to find a rational way of acting, to base their decision on something, for example the antibodies, is understandable -- the situation is difficult and bewildering," Vlassov said. "And they opt for a method that's available for them rather than for a good one. Because there is no good method to make sure that you have immunity."

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Follow all of AP's pandemic coverage:
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Flooded Tennessee town wrestles with how, where to rebuild

By JONATHAN MATTISE and TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

WAVERLY, Tenn. (AP) — In the 100 years that Jim Traylor's family had lived in his house in rural Waverly, Tennessee, it hadn't once flooded. The normally shallow Trace Creek where he had fished and swam as a kid had never crossed the one-lane road that separated it from his home.

That changed on Aug. 21, when more than 17 inches (43 centimeters) of rain just upstream transformed the usually placid waterway into a roiling river that rushed into his house and devastated the town, killing 20 people before it receded.

The water was already halfway up his tires by the time the 79-year-old decided to flee.

"Sitting here in the car and just watching it, how fast it was coming this way — it'd blow your mind," he said recently. "It's unreal. You can't imagine."

Traylor's family got out safe, dogs and all, but the home his grandfather bought in 1921 may have seen its last days, barring help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He doesn't have the money to repair it and doesn't want a loan.

"At (almost) 80 years old, I can't see it," Traylor said. "I'd love to save the old house. That's why I put so much money into it. Because it was home."

A hundred years ago, the massive flood would have been seen as a fluke of nature, a once-in-a-lifetime

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event. Residents could have built back without fear. But today, climate change is making the type of flood-producing rainfall that inundated Waverly more common, experts say.

And so now, the roughly 4,000 people who live there face a dilemma. With more than 500 homes and 50 businesses damaged, Waverly will likely see massive losses in property and sales tax revenue even as it prepares to spend millions on debris removal and infrastructure repairs. If those homes and businesses don't return, the town could slowly die.

But if they build back along the creek, are they risking another disaster?

Janey Smith Camp, a Vanderbilt University engineering professor, said there are a number of options for communities that risk a repeat of devastating floods, including the need to "really think about whether or not it makes sense to rebuild in some areas."

"I fully realize that we're talking about people's lives, their homes — and some of them may be multi-generational," Camp said. "It's a tough thing to swallow. But there's a point that we need to start saying, 'It's not safe to live here anymore.'"

Camp said similar tough discussions are happening elsewhere, including in Nebraska, where an entire town is considering relocating to a higher elevation after 2019 floods. Over the past decade, weather-related storms, fires and floods have displaced about 23 million people a year globally, according to the World Meteorological Organization. After Waverly was ravaged, more than a dozen Tennessee mayors formed a group aimed at bolstering communities against flooding.

Before Aug. 21, Mayor Buddy Frazier thought Waverly was thriving.

Unlike many small towns, its downtown was alive with a mix of local businesses and chain stores. It even boasts a family-owned movie theater across from the courthouse that just celebrated 85 years of operation. On a recent Thursday, it was showing the latest Marvel hit, "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings."

Frazier, a lifelong Waverly resident who has served the city since 1975 in roles ranging from police chief to town manager, is now among those contemplating a rebuild. A rental home he owned took on 7 feet (2 meters) of water. The brick frame survived, but the interior had to be gutted. Like many of the town's damaged homes, his wasn't within the 100-year flood plain and didn't have flood insurance.

As a landlord, the only federal assistance he qualifies for is a low-interest Small Business Administration loan, Frazier said. At 68, he's not sure he wants to take that on.

"The jury's still out," he said.

State and federal officials said they're willing to help if more funding is needed, without making specific commitments yet.

Already, Humphreys County commissioners have said they won't push to rebuild a low-income public housing complex near the creek after families testified that they don't want to go back. Residents suggested a memorial for neighbors who lost their lives.

Tennessee's top emergency management official has pledged to help the town rebuild in a way that keeps the community intact. He says decisions loom on everything from homes to two schools that were flooded — luckily, on a Saturday.

"A lot of that housing there was lower income, and it is a sad fact that those with the least resources often find themselves most vulnerable to these hazards," Patrick Sheehan told The Associated Press in August. "We want to make sure that we work with them to reduce that."

The government could buy out damaged homes and raze them to create open space. But buyouts are expensive and — while they would help address the issue of future flooding — Waverly would have significantly fewer homes and a smaller tax base. Elevating rebuilt homes and businesses is another expensive possibility.

Many in town hope the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will solve their problem. The Corps has surveyed the flooded area and is seeking funding for an analysis, but any follow-up would require some local money. That could be a big ask for a small town.

Gretchen Turner is among those looking to the Corps for a solution before she commits to rebuilding her house, originally built in 1912. She and her teenage daughter spent the flood saving original artwork

by her late mother-in-law before taking shelter on the second floor. Right now, the interior is stripped to the floor beams.

Turner has received \$9,000 in FEMA aid, though she's not sure what exactly it's for. She estimates it could take \$100,000 to \$200,000 to rebuild the historic, Craftsman-style home her family has lived in for more than a quarter-century.

"I love this house, and feel like I'm the conservator of this house," she said. "I want it to be OK."

Jack Buchanan worries about another flood. He owned his two-bedroom home outright and had planned to live there for the rest of his life, envisioning a retirement filled with hunting, fishing and watching his grandchildren play baseball. Now the home sits gutted. Like many others, he didn't have flood insurance. He'd like to stay in Waverly, where he grew up, but is weighing alternatives.

"I'm nearly 70 years old, and I'm looking at starting over like a 20-year-old," Buchanan said.

He's thinking about parking a camper on his property. For now he alternates between staying with his two children and a close friend. But he also considers himself lucky.

"A lot of people are in worse shape than I am," he said. "A lot of people lost loved ones. A lot of people don't have anywhere to go."

UN agency for Palestinian refugees has urgent budget crisis

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees is facing an "existential" budget crisis and appealing for urgent funding of \$120 million to keep essential education, healthcare and other services running, the agency's chief said Friday.

"We keep struggling, running after cash," Philippe Lazzarini told a small group of reporters.

"The financial situation is a real existential threat on the organization, and we should not underestimate this because it might force the organization to decrease services," he added, and if that happens "we risk to collapse very quickly."

At stake is the agency's ability to keep 550,000 children in school, provide health care for thousands, and pay the salaries for its 28,000 staffers in November and December, Lazzarini explained.

The U.N. Relief and Works Agency known as UNRWA was established to provide education, health care, food and other services to the 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were forced from their homes during the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948.

Lazzarini added that it wasn't clear for agency officials "if yes or no we will be able to keep our activities in November and December."

He emphasized the importance of the United States returning as a major donor to UNRWA this year after former president Donald Trump stopped all funding in 2018. The Biden administration announced in April it would provide a total of \$235 million to projects in the West Bank and Gaza as well as to UNRWA.

But Lazzarini said the U.S. funding has been offset by decreased funding from other donors as a result of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and no information from potential donors in the Middle East.

He pointed to the United Kingdom's decrease in its overseas aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP, and the decline in Arab support to UNRWA from \$200 million in 2018 to about \$89 million in 2019 and \$37 million in 2020.

He said UNRWA's uncertain funding has generated anxiety among Palestinian refugees that the "lifeline" provided by the agency could be weakened, and a feeling of being abandoned by the international community.

In an effort to reverse this trend, Lazzarini said Sweden and Jordan will be co-hosting a conference in mid-November in Brussels whose main aim is to ensure more predictable multi-year funding for the agency.

He said UNRWA is seeking \$800 million a year for three years for its "core" activities — education, health care, and social protection and safety nets.

UNRWA also has a separate emergency budget which provides humanitarian aid to Gaza and Syria, he

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said. This year that budget was around \$500 million, and he said it will probably be similar in 2022.

There are now 5.7 million Palestinian refugees, including their children and grandchildren, but Lazzarini said UNRWA only helps the 550,000 in school and 2.8 million who have health benefits.

European-Japanese space mission gets 1st glimpse of Mercury

BERLIN (AP) — A joint European-Japanese spacecraft got its first glimpse of Mercury as it swung by the solar system's innermost planet while on a mission to deliver two probes into orbit in 2025.

The BepiColombo mission made the first of six flybys of Mercury at 11:34 p.m. GMT (7:34 p.m. EST) Friday, using the planet's gravity to slow the spacecraft down.

After swooping past Mercury at altitudes of under 200 kilometers (125 miles), the spacecraft took a low resolution black-and-white photo with one of its monitoring cameras before zipping off again.

The European Space Agency said the captured image shows the Northern Hemisphere and Mercury's characteristic pock-marked features, among them the 166-kilometer-wide (103-mile-wide) Lermontov crater.

The joint mission by the European agency and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency was launched in 2018, flying once past Earth and twice past Venus on its journey to the solar system's smallest planet.

Five further flybys are needed before BepiColombo is sufficiently slowed down to release ESA's Mercury Planetary Orbiter and JAXA's Mercury Magnetospheric Orbiter. The two probes will study Mercury's core and processes on its surface, as well as its magnetic sphere.

The mission is named after Italian scientist Giuseppe 'Bepi' Colombo, who is credited with helping develop the gravity assist maneuver that NASA's Mariner 10 first used when it flew to Mercury in 1974.

Abortion, guns, religion top a big Supreme Court term

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The future of abortion rights is in the hands of a conservative Supreme Court that is beginning a new term Monday that also includes major cases on gun rights and religion.

The court's credibility with the public also could be on the line, especially if a divided court were to overrule the landmark Roe v. Wade decision from 1973 that established a woman's right to an abortion nationwide.

The justices are returning to the courtroom after an 18-month absence caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and the possible retirement of 83-year-old liberal Justice Stephen Breyer also looms.

It's the first full term with the court in its current alignment.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the last of former President Donald Trump's three high-court appointees, is part of a six-justice conservative majority. Barrett was nominated and confirmed last year amid the pandemic, little more than a month after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Trump and Republicans who controlled the Senate moved quickly to fill the seat shortly before the 2020 presidential election, bringing about a dramatic change in the court's lineup that has set the stage for a potentially law-changing term on several high-profile issues.

With abortion, guns and religion already on the agenda, and a challenge to affirmative action waiting in the wings, the court will answer a key question over the next year, said University of Chicago law professor David Strauss. "Is this the term in which the culture wars return to the Supreme Court in a big way?" Strauss said.

No issue is bigger than abortion.

The justices will hear arguments Dec. 1 in Mississippi's bid to enforce a ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. Lower courts blocked the law because it is inconsistent with high court rulings that allow states to regulate but not prohibit abortion before viability, the point around 24 weeks of pregnancy when a fetus can survive outside the womb.

Mississippi is taking what conservative commentator Carrie Severino called a "rip-the-Band-Aid-off" approach to the case by asking the court to abandon its support of abortion rights that was laid out in Roe and the 1992 case of Planned Parenthood v. Casey.

Mississippi is among 12 states with so-called trigger laws that would take effect if Roe is overturned and

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ban abortion entirely.

By a 5-4 vote in early September, the court already has allowed a ban on most abortions to take effect in Texas, though no court has yet ruled on the substance of the law.

But that vote and the Mississippi case highlight the potential risk to the court's reputation, said David Cole, the American Civil Liberties Union's legal director. The arguments advanced by Mississippi were considered and rejected by the Supreme Court in 1992, Cole said.

"The only difference between then and now is the identity of the justices," he said.

Jeff Wall, a top Justice Department lawyer under Trump, said the court could sharply expand gun rights and end the use of race in college admissions, but only abortion is likely to move public perception of the court. "I still don't think that's going to create some groundswell in the public, unless it's accompanied by some kind of watershed ruling on abortion," Wall said.

In early November, the court will take up a challenge to New York restrictions on carrying a gun in public, a case that offers the court the chance to expand gun rights under the Second Amendment. Before Barrett joined the court, the justices turned away similar cases, over the dissents of some conservative members of the court.

Until Barrett came along, some justices who favor gun rights questioned whether Chief Justice John Roberts would provide a fifth, majority-making vote "for a more expansive reading of the Second Amendment," said George Washington University law professor Robert Cottrol, who said he hoped the court would now broaden gun rights.

More than 40 states already make it easy to be armed in public, but New York and California, two of the nation's most populous states, are among the few with tighter regulations.

The case has gun control advocates worried.

"An expansive Second Amendment ruling by the Supreme Court could restrict or prohibit the sensible solutions that have been shown can end gun violence," said Jonathan Lowy, vice president and chief counsel at the gun violence prevention group Brady. Lowy included state laws requiring a justification to carry a gun as examples of such "sensible solutions."

A case from Maine gives the court another opportunity to weigh religious rights in the area of education. The state excludes religious schools from a tuition program for families who live in towns that don't have public schools.

Since even before Ginsburg's death, the court has favored religion-based discrimination claims and the expectation among legal experts is that parents in Maine who sued to be able to use taxpayer money at religious schools will prevail, though it's not clear how broadly the court might rule.

Affirmative action is not yet on the court's agenda, but it could still get there this term in a lawsuit over Harvard's use of race in college admissions. Lower courts upheld the school's policy, but this is another case in which the change in the composition of the court could prove decisive. The court upheld race-conscious admission policies as recently as five years ago but that was before Trump's three appointments accentuated the court's conservative tilt.

Among other notable cases, the justices will consider reinstating the death sentence for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The Biden administration is pushing for the capital sentence, even as it has suspended federal executions and President Joe Biden has called for an end to the federal death penalty.

The court will also weigh two cases involving "state secrets," the idea that the government can block the release of information it claims would harm national security if disclosed. One case involves a Guantanamo Bay detainee who a lower court said was tortured in CIA custody. The other involves a group of Muslim residents of California who allege the FBI targeted them for surveillance because of their religion.

Decisions in the most of the big cases won't come before spring because the justices typically spend months drafting and revising majority opinions and dissents.

Around then, Breyer might signal whether he is planning to retire from a job he has held since 1994. Retirement announcements often come in the spring, to give the president and the Senate enough time to choose and confirm a nominee before the court returns from its summer break and begins hearing cases again in October.

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The consequences of Ginsburg's decision to remain on the court through Barack Obama's presidency and her death while Trump was in the White House can't be lost on Breyer, said Tom Goldstein, the founder of the Scotusblog website and a frequent advocate before the court.

"It's overwhelmingly likely he'll retire this term," Goldstein said.

The courthouse still is closed to the public, but live audio of the court's arguments will be available and reporters who regularly cover the court will be in attendance. The tradition-bound court first provided live audio in May 2020, when the court began hearing arguments by telephone during the pandemic.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh will participate remotely from his home next week during oral arguments after testing positive for COVID-19 despite being vaccinated. The court said Friday that the 54-year-old justice has no symptoms.

Associated Press writer Jessica Gresko contributed to this report.

Bash back better: Here's what governing by crisis looks like

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Washington's tempestuous week of walking, chewing gum, juggling balls and spinning plates at the same time is giving rise to apocalyptic rhetoric about the state and future of the country.

Four big things are happening at once, all attended by hyperventilation.

The White House talks of a "cataclysmic economic threat" if Republicans don't start cooperating. Republicans assail Democrats for unleashing a "big-government socialist nation." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer says: "Insanity and disaster are now the Republican Party line."

It's a contest to see which side can bash back better. This is what governing by crisis looks like. It may be the only way anything gets done.

The government has essential housekeeping to do this time of year. Yet no deal comes until it absolutely must. Why act at the 11th hour when you've got 59 minutes left?

There are a couple of must-do's.

The government needed a law to keep itself open in the budget year that began Friday morning. That happened, with a few hours to spare. It also needs to raise or suspend its borrowing ceiling to cover current expenses and avoid a default on its debt payments over the next two weeks, something that has never happened.

Then there are the want-to-do's.

President Joe Biden, many Democrats and a sizable number of Republicans want to build or restore roads, bridges, broadband and more in an ambitious public works package. Biden and many Democrats, but no Republicans, also want to supercharge social and climate spending, potentially costing upward of three times more than the infrastructure one.

Action on that front came to a halt Friday despite Biden's visit to the Capitol to try to break the logjam between liberal and moderate Democrats over the two packages and get Congress to move on his overall agenda. He said he was confident his agenda would prevail whether it takes "six minutes, six days or six weeks," though the way forward was murky.

The crises arose, as they typically do in Washington, when one matter was linked to another or another and the things that must be done were held hostage to things lawmakers want done.

It may defy logic. It's also how big change often happens.

A sense of dancing at the precipice persisted all week in a capital with a 50-50 Senate, a closely divided House, a pushy left Democratic flank, obstinate Democratic centrists, gleefully obstructionist Republicans and a president struggling to deliver on his promise to restore competence and normalcy after the Donald Trump years.

In large measure, Democratic moderates want the infrastructure plan, liberals want the ultimate package and Biden wants both. The divisions bared inside the party over this agenda could leave him with neither.

As negotiations with lawmakers proceeded in private midweek, Biden press secretary Jen Psaki joked that the outcome would determine whether the Biden administration was living in an idealistic drama or

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a farce.

"Maybe 'The West Wing' if something good happens," she said. "Maybe 'Veep' if not."

Republicans hurled their favorite insult with abandon, branding Democrats as wannabe socialists, and leveraged the disarray to try to define Biden as an inept leader.

The House Republican leader, Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California, ticked off the "border crisis," "inflation crisis," "labor crisis," "China crisis" and "foreign policy crisis" as all converging at once. "Democrats want to enlist a bureaucratic army to achieve their goal of a big government socialist nation," he said.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, called Biden's agenda an "accelerator to socialism."

Words were no less heated on the other side.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, arguing for lifting the debt ceiling, accused resistant Republicans of leaving the country vulnerable to a "cascading catastrophe of unbelievable proportions" that could "damage America for 100 years." Pelosi, D-Calif., was quoting JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon in her House speech.

Few doubt that the consequences of a U.S. debt default would be severe. Not lifting the debt ceiling could drive up interest rates on car and home loans, for example. But few expect that to be allowed to happen.

When members of the tea party class of 2011 first threatened debt default, they were outliers. Now, it's standard operating procedure in the GOP to keep that long-unthinkable threat alive, even if Republicans may not be serious about letting it unfold.

Avoiding default is just one of the procedural steps or routine tasks that have become weaponized in Congress, particularly in the Senate by Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who always exacts a price for cooperating with Democrats even if it's just to embarrass them.

Partial government shutdowns, though, are a line that lawmakers have been willing to cross. The longest shutdown in history happened under Trump, 35 days stretching into January 2019, when Democrats refused to approve money for his U.S-Mexico border wall. Trump backed down.

Trump's immigration policy also sparked a three-day shutdown a year earlier. In 2013, a Republican attempt to torpedo money for the Obama-era health law set off a shutdown that lasted 16 days and, as in the other cases, furloughed hundreds of thousands of federal workers.

This time, lawmakers sealed a deal in the last hours to finance the government until Dec. 3, when they'll have to reckon with it again. Instead of defusing the bomb, Stephen Colbert cracked on "The Late Show," "they just hit the bomb's snooze button."

Some experts in the workings of government see parallels in the 1983 Social Security showdown — undeniably a crisis because the program was only months from insolvency until an agreement was reached.

This is worse, said Paul Light, a New York University professor of public service and author most recently of "The Government-Industrial Complex," which tracks the operations and scale of government over the last 35 years.

"Back then, you only had to get the speaker, the majority leader, and the president to the table," he said. "Now it's 15 heavy-hitters, chosen or self-anointed, who have to sign off.

"These kinds of moments are quite rare," Light added. "We drift along year after year with declines in the number of bills introduced and passed, but still manage to get the budget done close to on time and occasional bills enacted. This one makes the 1983 crisis seem like child's play."

Even as the insults flew this past week, stirrings of agreement could be seen here and there, as could weariness over all the posturing.

For all his body-slamming of the other side, Cornyn said during the negotiations that ultimately, "Democrats don't want to shut down the government, Republicans don't want to shut down the government. That will supply the result that we all expect, which is to keep the lights on." His prediction was correct.

On the Democratic divide over infrastructure and Biden's even bigger plan, Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii was reaching exasperation.

"It's that kind of thing where it happens when it happens," Hirono said. "So meanwhile I say, everybody, get real. Tell us what it is that you can support and we can have something to talk about and argue about and come to a conclusion about."

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Party crowds spark effort to turn down volume in South Beach

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Miami Beach wants to turn down the volume in the city's South Beach party neighborhood, citing increasingly raucous crowds, public drinking and growing violence, but efforts to curb the carousing have raised complaints about racism, classism and business practices along one of the nation's most glamorous waterfronts.

The 10-block stretch of Ocean Drive known for art deco hotels, restaurants and bars is sandwiched between two areas that cater to more affluent tourists. The tension has been bubbling for years as party crowds grew from a few weekends a year into a year-round presence. The situation worsened during the pandemic when city officials closed the main drag to vehicles and allowed restaurants to offer more outdoor seating, which invited a carnival atmosphere on the street.

More than 1,000 people were arrested during this year's spring break, when the city imposed a rare 8 p.m. curfew. Authorities sent military style vehicles to disperse predominantly Black crowds with rubber bullets, prompting criticism from Black activists and spawning a parody on "Saturday Night Live."

"We cannot accept this as our normal," Mayor Dan Gelber said. "What we have called an entertainment district has become an incredible magnet for crime and disorder, and whatever it provides in revenue is just not worth the heartache."

Last month, the city increased the number of police and code-enforcement officials covering the neighborhood to their largest number in history. The mayor called it a stop-gap measure, saying the city cannot afford to increase the number of police permanently.

His long-term proposal would rebrand the blocks known as the entertainment district by hosting higher-end concerts and fairs, focusing on family-friendly events and marketing the city's often-overlooked but impressive museums and symphony. He also wants to limit loud music and halt alcohol sales at 2 a.m.

The area has waxed and waned over many decades. It fell into decline after a midcentury heyday, but TV shows like "Miami Vice" made it cool again in the 1980s, and supermodels gathered at fashion designer Gianni Versace's oceanfront estate in the 1990s. More recently, rap lyrics have immortalized South Beach.

The Ocean Drive closure, which remains in effect as the city maps out its future, has wrought financial havoc on hotels and restaurants.

Tom Glassie, longtime owner of the Avalon Hotel, has been meeting with city officials and residents for the past two years, wrestling with "what do we want to be when we grow up."

"The nightlife took over. We were the best nightlife," he said. "There was nothing wrong with that, but it just got overbranded" and eclipsed arts and culture.

The mayor's proposal also seeks to increase office and residential space and cut the number of bars and clubs.

Zoning regulations allow both residential and commercial spaces, but no buildings can be taller than five levels, which deters investors who would rather build luxury high-rises. In addition, the art deco facades that provide glamorous backdrops have historic building protections, making the cost of renovations prohibitive for some developers.

Instead, low-end bars and hookah lounges flourish while blocks away, several high-end New York restaurateurs have opened new businesses.

Other businesses like the legendary Clevelander hotel and bar and the Mango's nightclub complain that they have been caught in the crosshairs and unfairly lumped in with bars and nightclubs that cause trouble.

"We're tired of being made into the bad guy, to continue to blame a 30-year-old business that is one of the largest taxpayers in the city and one of the largest employers," said Joshua Wallack, chief operating officer of Mango's Tropical Cafe.

"People come off these cruise ships dreaming of dancing salsa at Mango's."

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Alexander Tachmes, attorney for the Clevelander, accused the mayor of "really turning up the heat on the Ocean Drive anti-business rhetoric" last summer and essentially trying to siphon off established businesses while the city attempts to rebrand and court more cultural businesses.

The Clevelander sued the city over the 2 a.m. alcohol ban in May and won a temporary injunction until a trial starts this fall. The owners also sought in court to have Ocean Drive reopened, arguing that pandemic restrictions were no longer necessary, but they were unsuccessful.

The bar said the chaos in the street has made it difficult to maintain a nightlife business. The Clevelander checks IDs and pays for security, yet it has been a victim of vandalism and fights that spill over from nearby crowds. The bar voluntarily shut down early in March as the city struggled to gain control during spring break.

The majority of "problem tourists" are not college students, but come from out of state looking for trouble, city officials have said.

Some Black activists have accused the city of using overly harsh police tactics to disperse crowds and, on a larger scale, trying to attract only certain types of visitors, while discouraging others.

Ruban Roberts, former head of the NAACP's Miami chapter, called police tactics "callous" and "overzealous" in an op-ed published in the Miami Herald after a disastrous 2020 spring break. Roberts alleged Black tourists were treated "as second-class citizens."

Part of South Beach also caters to middle-income customers, on the opposite side of the higher-end playground that includes the Fontainebleau, Delano and Faena hotels.

"If you can't afford \$200 for two people for dinner, you have the right to eat and have a nice drink and watch a football game," said Tachmes, who also represents two upscale restaurants. "You don't have to have a Michelin restaurant in order to eliminate crime."

During notoriously crowded weekends, some websites dish on the best party spots and exclusive poolside parties, while other sites offer tips to residents and vacationers looking to avoid the melee.

In an attempt to discourage large crowds, the city canceled all programs amid the pandemic, leaving a void where tens of thousands of people gathered with nothing to do. An initial lack of police created an anything-goes atmosphere, and businesses complained that crowds were using marijuana, drinking and treating the area like a house party.

Ken Koppel, chairman of SoBe Safe, a group of 400 concerned residents, said some tourists are merely "gun-toting drug sellers who disrespect cops and misdemeanor statutes" and gather in crowds that are too large for police to control.

And even with the increased police presence, which Koppel said many residents support, "who wants to live in or pay for an armed camp forever?"

An earlier version of this report had an incorrect spelling of Gianni Versace's name.

Biden administration urges judge to block Texas abortion law

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Biden administration on Friday urged a federal judge to block the nation's most restrictive abortion law, which has banned most abortions in Texas since early September and sent women racing to get care beyond the borders of the second-most populous state.

But even if the law is put on hold, abortion services in Texas may not instantly resume because doctors still fear that they could be sued without a more permanent legal decision.

That worry underscores the durability of Senate Bill 8, which has already withstood a wave of challenges. U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman of Austin, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, presided over a nearly three-hour hearing but did not say when he will rule.

The law bans abortions once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually around six weeks, before some women know they are pregnant. To enforce the law, Texas deputized private citizens to file lawsuits against violators and has entitled them to at least \$10,000 in damages if successful.

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The Biden administration says Texas has waged an attack on a woman's constitutional right to abortion. "A state may not ban abortions at six weeks. Texas knew this, but it wanted a six-week ban anyway, so the state resorted to an unprecedented scheme of vigilante justice that was designed to scare abortion providers and others who might help women exercise their constitutional rights," Justice Department attorney Brian Netter told the court.

So far, abortion providers trying to block the Texas law have been rejected at every turn. That makes the lawsuit filed by the Justice Department their best chance yet to deliver the first legal blow to the GOP-engineered restrictions, which were signed into law by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May and took effect Sept. 1.

Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of Whole Woman's Health, said some of the 17 physicians at her four clinics are ready to resume normal abortion services if the law is put on hold. Preparations began this week when some doctors gave patients found to have cardiac activity information to comply with another restriction — requiring a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion — so that they would be ready to be called back.

"It's not the hundreds of people we've had to turn away," Hagstrom Miller said in an interview. "But there is a significant group of people who have said, 'Please, let me do whatever I can. Keep me on a list, and call me if you get an injunction.'"

But the majority of her physicians, Hagstrom Miller said, remain wary and fear lawsuits absent a permanent court ruling. Clinic staff are also worried. "Of course, we understand that," she said.

Abortion providers say their fears have become reality in the short time the law has been in effect. Planned Parenthood says the number of patients from Texas at its Texas clinics decreased nearly 80% in the two weeks after the law took effect.

Some providers have described Texas clinics that are now in danger of closing while neighboring states struggle to keep up with a surge of patients who must drive hundreds of miles. Other women, they say, are being forced to carry pregnancies to term.

"This is not some kind of vigilante scheme," said Will Thompson, defending the law for the Texas Attorney General's Office. "This is a scheme that uses the normal, lawful process of justice in Texas."

If the Justice Department prevails, 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 has set 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 overturn 1973's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision guaranteeing a woman's right to an abortion.

Mississippi has told the court it should overrule *Roe* and the 1992 decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* that prevent states from banning abortion before viability, the point at which a fetus can survive outside the womb, around 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Last month, the court did not rule on the constitutionality of the 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 might be heading on abortion after its conservative majority was fortified with three appointees of former President Donald Trump.

Ahead of the new Supreme Court term, Planned Parenthood on Friday released a report saying that if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, 26 states are primed to ban abortion. This year alone, nearly 600 abortion restrictions have been introduced in statehouses nationwide, with more than 90 becoming law, according to Planned Parenthood.

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 Texas' version has so far outmaneuvered courts because it leaves enforcement to private citizens, not prosecutors, which critics say amounts to a bounty.

Texas officials argued in court filings this week that even if the law were put on hold temporarily, providers

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could still face the threat of litigation over violations that might occur between then and a permanent ruling.

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.

Biden vows to 'get it done,' but talks drag on \$3.5T plan

By LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden pledged Friday at the Capitol to “get it done” as Democrats strained to rescue a scaled-back version of his \$3.5 trillion government-overhaul plan and salvage a related public works bill after days of frantic negotiations.

But it’s not getting done right now.

Biden huddled with House Democrats on their home ground in a private meeting that was part instructional, part morale booster for the tattered caucus of lawmakers, telling them he wanted both bills passed regardless of the time it takes. He discussed a compromise topline of \$1.9 trillion to more than \$2 trillion for his bigger vision, according to lawmakers in the room.

But it was clear they are all now in it for the long haul as the White House and its allies in Congress prepared for protracted negotiations.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s six minutes, six days or six weeks — we’re going to get it done,” Biden declared to reporters as he left his late-afternoon meeting at the Capitol.

It’s a pivotal time for both president and party, as Biden’s approval ratings have dropped and Democrats are restless, eager to deliver on his signature campaign promise of rebuilding the country. His ideas go beyond roads-and-bridges infrastructure to delivering dental, vision and hearing care for seniors, free pre-kindergarten for youngsters, major efforts to tackle climate change and other investments that would touch countless American lives.

Biden’s sudden excursion to Capitol Hill was aimed at giving the legislation a needed boost toward the finish line. Holdout Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia had sunk hopes for a swift compromise on a framework when he refused to budge late Thursday on his demands for a smaller overall package, around \$1.5 trillion, despite hours of shuttle diplomacy with White House aides.

Without a broader deal, prospects for a Friday vote on the companion public works bill stalled out, progressives refusing to lend their votes until senators reach agreement. Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a late-evening letter to colleagues that “more time is needed” as they shape the broader package.

Instead the House passed a 30-day stopgap measure to keep transportation programs running during the stalemate, essentially setting a new deadline for talks, Oct. 31. The Senate was set to follow with a vote Saturday, to halt the furloughs of more than 3,500 federal transportation workers, a byproduct of the political impasse.

With Republicans solidly opposed to Biden’s sweeping vision, the president and his party are reaching for a giant legislative accomplishment on their own — all to be paid for by rewriting federal balance sheets with tax hikes on corporations and the wealthy, those earning more than \$400,000 a year.

As action ground to a halt Friday in Congress, Biden appeared to offer no particular new legislative strategy. Keeping her promise to centrists, Pelosi had insisted there would be a “vote today” on the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that is popular but is snared in the debate over Biden’s broader measure.

With Democratic progressives refusing to give their support for that slimmer roads-and-bridges bill unless advances are made on the president’s big bill, Pelosi — with an oh-so-slim House majority — was unwilling to call for a vote.

Biden, by insisting that both bills pass, gave a nod to the progressives’ strategy, while floating the lower numbers meant acknowledging the compromise with centrists to come.

“He was really clear that we need to get both bills done,” said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., a leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Attention returned to Manchin and to some extent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, two centrist Demo-

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crats who helped steer the \$1 trillion public works bill to Senate passage but have concerns that Biden's overall bill is too big. The two senators have infuriated colleagues with their close-to-the-vest negotiations that could tank Biden's effort — and their own campaign promises.

After hours of negotiations that stretched near midnight Thursday, Manchin said he could not yet compromise beyond his \$1.5 trillion offer.

Biden, a former six-term senator making his first in-person visit to a House Democratic caucus, told the lawmakers Friday that "I know a little bit about the legislative process," according to a person familiar with the private remarks and granted anonymity to discuss them. Even a smaller bill can make historic investments in such areas as childcare, daycare and clean energy, he said.

Biden also relayed a story that seemed to mark the moment.

The president told them that when his White House office was renovated, it was hung with pictures of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, presidents who led a "deeply divided country and the biggest economic transformation — and that's just the kind of moment we're in," said Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I.

The White House said the president plans to travel next week to other cities to make his case that his historic measures would help the American people.

Biden's bigger proposal is a years-in-the-making collection of Democratic priorities with an ultimate price tag he says is zero, because the tax revenue would cover the spending costs — higher rates on businesses earning more than \$5 million a year, and individuals earning more than \$400,000 a year, or \$450,000 for couples.

Tensions spiked late Wednesday when Manchin sent out a fiery statement, decrying the broad spending as "fiscal insanity."

It's not just Manchin's demands to reduce the overall size, but the conditions he is insisting on that are riling his more liberal colleagues. For example, he wants to ensure the aid goes only to lower-income people, rather than broader swaths of Americans. And he's resisting some of the bolder efforts to tackle climate change.

Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., another progressive leader, shot back: "Trying to kill your party's agenda is insanity," she said.

The total legislative effort is testing not just Biden, but Pelosi and some of the leading figures in the Democratic Party whose legacies will be shaped by whether they succeed or fail.

"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."

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Jonathan Lemire, Kevin Freking, Brian Slodysko and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.

NWSL Commissioner Baird resigns amid scandal

By ANNE M. PETERSON and ROB HARRIS AP Sports Writers

National Women's Soccer League Commissioner Lisa Baird resigned after some 19 months on the job amid allegations that a former coach engaged in sexual harassment and misconduct.

Baird's resignation was announced by the league late Friday, a day after The Athletic published the accounts of two former players who claimed misconduct, including sexual coercion, by North Carolina coach Paul Riley.

Riley was fired by the Courage on Thursday and the allegations touched off a wave of condemnation by players that forced this weekend's games to be called off.

Additionally, FIFA on Friday opened an investigation into the case. It is rare that soccer's international governing body gets involved in a controversy involving a member association. U.S. Soccer also announced an independent investigation on Friday.

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U.S. Soccer was instrumental in founding the NWSL in 2013 and helped support the league until last year, when it became independent. The federation continues its financial support of the league.

"Player safety and respect is the paramount responsibility of every person involved in this game. That is true across every age, competition and ability level," U.S. Soccer President Cindy Cone said in a statement. "We owe it to each athlete, each fan and the entire soccer community to take every meaningful action in our power to ensure nothing like this ever happens again."

U.S. Soccer suspended Riley's coaching license Thursday after The Athletic published claims of abuse made by former NWSL players Sinead Farrelly and Mana Shim.

FIFA told The Associated Press it was "deeply concerned" by the case and will now be seeking further details from American soccer authorities about the issues raised.

"Due to the severity and seriousness of the allegations being made by players, we can confirm that FIFA's judicial bodies are actively looking into the matter and have opened a preliminary investigation," FIFA said in a statement to the AP. "As part of this, FIFA will be reaching out to the respective parties, including US Soccer and NWSL, for further information about the various safeguarding concerns and allegations of abuse that have been raised."

The alleged harassment of Farrelly started in 2011 when she was a player with the Philadelphia Independence of the now-defunct Women's Professional Soccer league.

She told the website the harassment continued when Farrelly was with the Portland Thorns. Shim, a former Thorns player, also allegedly experienced harassment. The Thorns said Thursday that the team investigated claims about Riley and passed those on to the league when he was dismissed.

Riley told The Athletic the allegations were "completely untrue."

Outcry over the allegations rocked the league and forced this weekend's games to be called off. The NWSL Players' Association said it hoped fans would understand and support the decision.

"It is OK to take space to process, to feel and to take care of yourself," the union said. "In fact, it's more than OK, it's a priority. That, as players, will be our focus this weekend."

Baird became commissioner of the NWSL in February, 2020, after serving as chief marketing officer of the United States Olympic Committee. She was praised for bringing new sponsors to the NWSL and increasing the league's visibility on the national stage.

OL Reign midfielder Jess Fishlock, who has been playing in the NWSL since its inception in 2013, suggested the league, and women's sports overall, are in the midst of a reckoning.

"I think women athletes specifically have gone through so much over the years, not just women's football," Fishlock said. "I think everybody knows what's happened with USA Gymnastics that has gone on, and this is something that has been happening in women's sports over and over and over again for years and years and years. And we've never felt safe enough to talk about it, and if we ever felt brave enough to talk about it, then it would just get swept under the rug, or we were told that we were in the wrong ... and I think we're at a point now where we're just done."

Riley was head coach of the Thorns in 2014 and 2015. After he was let go by the Thorns, he became head coach of the Western New York Flash for a season before the team was sold and moved to North Carolina.

In its ninth season, the NWSL has been rocked by a series of recent scandals involving team officials.

Washington Spirit coach Richie Burke was fired after a Washington Post report detailed verbal and emotional abuse of players. The league formally dismissed Burke and sanctioned the Spirit on Tuesday after an independent investigation.

Gotham FC general manager Alyse LaHue was fired in July after an investigation connected to the league's antiharassment policy. She has denied any wrongdoing.

Racing Louisville coach Christy Holly was fired in September but the reasons for his dismissal were not made public.

OL Reign coach Farid Benstiti abruptly resigned in July. On Friday, OL Reign chief executive officer and minority owner Bill Predmore said Benstiti was asked to step down after an undisclosed incident during practice.

Benstiti had previously been accused by U.S. national team midfielder Lindsay Horan of sexist behavior during his time as coach of Paris Saint-Germain. Horan has said she was berated by Benstiti because of her weight.

AP Sports Writer Eddie Pells contributed to this report.

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

California to require COVID-19 vaccines for schoolchildren

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — California will become the first U.S. state to require COVID-19 vaccinations for children to attend public and private schools in person in a mandate that could effect millions of students.

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Friday announced that the coronavirus shot will be added to 10 other immunizations already required for school kids, including those for measles and mumps.

Exemptions would be granted for medical reasons or because of religious or personal beliefs but the exemption rules haven't been written yet pending public comment.

Any student without an exemption who refuses to get the vaccine would be forced to do independent study at home.

"We want to end this pandemic. We are all exhausted by it," Newsom said during a news conference at a San Francisco middle school after visiting with seventh graders.

"Vaccines work. It's why California leads the country in preventing school closures and has the lowest case rates," Newsom said.

The mandate will be phased in as the U.S. government grants final vaccine approval for age groups. Currently, children 12 to 15 can only get the Pfizer vaccine under an emergency authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Vaccines for children 5 to 11 are still in the testing stage.

Under California's mandate, students in seventh to 12th grades would have to be vaccinated by the semester following full U.S. approval of the shots for their age group, probably meaning by next July. It will be even longer for children in kindergarten through sixth grades.

The mandate eventually will affect more than 6.7 million public and private school students in the nation's most populous state. California already has a mask requirement for schoolchildren.

Until now, Newsom had left the decision on student vaccine mandates to local school districts, leading to a variety of different orders. In Los Angeles, a vaccine mandate for eligible students is set to take effect in January.

The announcement drew swift reaction from parents, including some who said they should have the final choice of whether to vaccinate their children.

"I'm furious. On so many levels," said Jenny Monir, a Los Angeles mother of two who said she felt Newsom's mandate was made more for political than public health reasons. "We're just pawns in an elite game."

Janet Meadows, whose children are in first grade and preschool, said she'd consider homeschooling her children before vaccinating them. The 41-year-old from Kern County said she's worried about the health effects of the not-yet-approved shots for children.

"I don't think we know enough about the vaccine to make our children get it," she said. "There's just a lot of unknowns. We don't need to rush into this right now."

Others praised Newsom's announcement.

"I'm delighted to see that we're trying to get this health crisis under control," said Andrew Patterson, father of an elementary school student in San Francisco. "And we have lots of other vaccine requirements. I don't see why this one would be any different."

California has one of the highest vaccine rates in the country — 84% of people 12 and older have gotten at least one shot, and 70% are fully vaccinated. But only 63.5% of children ages 12 to 17 have received a dose and the state has a vocal minority skeptical of both the vaccine and the government's assurances of its safety.

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Newsom has been one of the most aggressive governors on coronavirus restrictions, issuing the nation's first statewide stay-at-home order in March 2020 that was soon followed by 41 other states. More recently, Newsom required California's roughly 2.2 million health care workers and most state employees to get vaccinated to keep their jobs.

The governor was emboldened after easily defeating a recall effort last month fueled by anger over his handling of the pandemic. He says he interpreted his landslide victory as an endorsement of his vaccine policies.

Newsom hasn't backed all vaccine mandates, however. He recently opposed a requirement for prison guards that a federal judge imposed. Critics used that example to say Newsom is driven more by politics than science, noting the labor union of corrections officers had donated to his campaign to defeat the recall.

"California kids made the mistake of not giving millions to his campaigns," Republican Assemblyman Kevin Kiley tweeted Friday. Kiley was among 46 candidates who ran to replace the governor during the recall election.

Newsom's announcement comes as COVID-19 infections in most of California have dropped markedly. The statewide positivity rate for the last week was 2.8%, and the average number of daily cases was about 6,355, roughly half what it was when the latest surge peaked in mid-August. Hospitalizations have fallen by 40%.

In Los Angeles County — the nation's largest, with more than 10 million residents — just 1.7% of people tested for the virus have it, and daily infections are down by half in the last month, when most kids went back to school.

California's largest teachers unions back the vaccination mandate, as does the California Association of School Boards.

Associated Press journalists Jocelyn Gecker and Haven Daley in San Francisco, Amy Taxin in Orange County and Terry Chea contributed.

Justice department urges judge to halt Texas abortion law

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal judge is deciding whether to block the nation's most restrictive abortion law, which has banned most abortions in Texas since early September and sent women racing hundreds of miles to get care outside the state.

The Biden administration on Friday urged U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman to suspend the law, saying Texas has waged an attack on a woman's constitutional right to abortion. But even if the law is put on hold, abortion services in the second-most populous state may not instantly resume because doctors still fear that they could be sued without a more permanent legal decision.

That worry underscores the durability of Senate Bill 8, which has already withstood a wave of challenges. Pitman, based in Austin and who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, presided over a nearly three-hour hearing Friday but did not say when he will rule.

The law bans abortions once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually around six weeks, before some women know they are pregnant. To enforce the law, Texas deputized private citizens to file lawsuits against violators, and has entitled them to at least \$10,000 in damages if successful.

"A state may not ban abortions at six weeks. Texas knew this, but it wanted a six-week ban anyway, so the state resorted to an unprecedented scheme of vigilante justice that was designed to scare abortion providers and others who might help women exercise their constitutional rights," Justice Department attorney Brian Netter told the court.

So far, abortion providers trying to block the Texas law have been rejected at every turn. That makes the lawsuit filed by the Justice Department their best chance yet to deliver the first legal blow to the GOP-engineered restrictions, which were signed into law by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May and took effect Sept. 1.

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Amy Hagstrom Miller, president of Whole Woman's Health, said some of the 17 physicians at her four clinics are ready to resume normal abortion services if the law is put on hold. Preparations began this week when some doctors gave patients found to have cardiac activity information to comply with another restriction — requiring a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion — so that they would be ready to be called back.

"It's not the hundreds of people we've had to turn away," Hagstrom Miller said in an interview. "But there is a significant group of people who have said, 'Please, let me do whatever I can. Keep me on a list, and call me if you get an injunction.'"

But the majority of her physicians, Hagstrom Miller said, remain wary and fear lawsuits absent a permanent court ruling. Clinic staff are also worried. "Of course, we understand that," she said.

Abortion providers say their fears have become reality in the short time the law has been in effect. Planned Parenthood says the number of patients from Texas at its Texas clinics decreased nearly 80% in the two weeks after the law took effect.

Some providers have described Texas clinics that are now in danger of closing while neighboring states struggle to keep up with a surge of patients who must drive hundreds of miles. Other women, they say, are being forced to carry pregnancies to term.

"This is not some kind of vigilante scheme," said Will Thompson, defending the law for the Texas Attorney General's Office. "This is a scheme that uses the normal, lawful process of justice in Texas."

If the Justice Department prevails, 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 has set 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 overturn 1973's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision guaranteeing a woman's right to an abortion.

Last month, the court did not rule on the constitutionality of the 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 might be heading on abortion after its conservative majority was fortified with three appointees of former President Donald Trump.

Ahead of the new Supreme Court term, Planned Parenthood on Friday released a report saying that if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, 26 states are primed to ban abortion. This year alone, nearly 600 abortion restrictions have been introduced in statehouses nationwide, with more than 90 becoming law, according to Planned Parenthood.

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 Texas' version has so far outmaneuvered courts because it leaves enforcement to private citizens, not prosecutors, which critics say amounts to a bounty.

Texas officials argued in court filings this week that even if the law were put on hold temporarily, providers could still face the threat of litigation over violations that might occur in the time between a permanent ruling.

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.

Judge questions whether Jan. 6 rioters are treated unfairly

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rejecting the recommendation of prosecutors, a federal judge sentenced a Jan. 6 rioter to probation on Friday and suggested that the Justice Department was being too hard on those who broke into the Capitol compared to the people arrested during anti-racism protests following George Floyd's murder.

U.S. District Court Judge Trevor McFadden questioned why federal prosecutors had not brought more

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cases against those accused in 2020 summertime protests, reading out statistics on riot cases in the nation's capital that were not prosecuted.

"I think the U.S. attorney would have more credibility if it was even-handed in its concern about riots and mobs in this city," McFadden said during Danielle Doyle's sentencing for entering the Capitol on Jan. 6 with a throng of other rioters. Prosecutors recommended two months of home confinement for Doyle, who is from Oklahoma.

The statements by McFadden, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, were a major departure from the other federal judges overseeing insurrection cases so far, despite other Trump appointees on the court assigned to the hundreds of cases. They have generally discussed seriousness of the crime and its unique place in American history - different from other violent free speech protests because it sought to disrupt the peaceful transition of power.

The Associated Press analyzed more than 300 criminal cases stemming from the protests incited by Floyd's murder, showing that many leftist rioters had received substantial sentences, rebutting the argument that pro-Trump defendants were treated more harshly than Black Lives Matter protesters.

As McFadden sentenced Doyle, he said he thought she was "acting like all those looters and rioters last year. That's because looters and rioters decided the law did not apply to them."

Despite these concerns, McFadden said Doyle's behavior was not excusable. He called it a "national embarrassment," and again likened it to the police brutality protests following the death of George Floyd last year that made "us all feel less safe."

By contrast, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg on Friday sentenced another rioter, Andrew Ryan Bennett, to three months of home confinement, accepting the request by prosecutors. Bennett was accused of espousing conspiracy theories about the election and used "pugnacious rhetoric" in posting about his plans to be in Washington. The mob on Jan. 6 attacked and beat an overwhelmed police force, sent lawmakers running for their lives and did more than \$1 million in damage to the building.

"I can't emphasize enough, as I've said before, that the cornerstone of our democratic republic is the peaceful transfer of power after an election," the judge told Bennett. "And what you and others did on Jan. 6 was nothing less than an attempt to undermine that system of government."

Earlier this week, Boasberg, appointed by former President Barack Obama, sentenced Derek Jancart and Erik Rau, friends from Ohio, to 45 days in jail.

All three men had pleaded guilty to misdemeanors punishable by a maximum of six months' imprisonment. Like Jancart and Rau, Bennett wasn't accused of personally engaging in violence or property destruction.

Bennett said he was not thinking clearly and was "pumped up on adrenaline" when he joined the mob that stormed the Capitol after driving to Washington from his home in Columbia, Maryland, that morning.

"What I did was wrong and I hold myself accountable for my actions that day," he said.

Doyle, too, was not accused of violence in the mob. She climbed through a broken window and spent 24 minutes inside the building. She told the judge she had no intention of harming anyone, and she was sorry that a peaceful rally changed when people started breaking into the building.

"I love this country," she said. "So many people came here to represent things that were important to us but in the blink of an eye, all of those things were overshadowed," she said. "For that I'm sorry, because it overshadowed the things that were good."

Meanwhile, a retired U.S. Special Forces soldier and onetime Florida congressional candidate was arrested for his role in the insurrection. Jeremy Brown was accused of a misdemeanor charge of entering restricted grounds. FBI officials received photos of Brown in tactical gear at the Capitol from an acquaintance of Brown's, and a rioter who pleaded guilty also confirmed to agents that Brown was there, according to court papers. He has said that federal officials called him and tried to get him to inform on others.

Brown ran for Congress in 2020 as a Republican in the 14th District, which includes Tampa and the surrounding area, but dropped out of the race in March 2020.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Md.

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Mexico displays pre-Hispanic artifacts recovered from abroad

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Two Mexican museums have opened a massive show this week of 1,525 pre-Hispanic and historical artifacts, more than half of which were recovered from abroad.

Mexico has long had a problem with collectors or traffickers taking artifacts out of the country, even though that has been illegal since 1972.

But 881 of the sculptures, vessels and other artifacts on display in Mexico City were returned, either voluntarily by foreign collectors or through police seizures abroad. They were returned from the United States, Italy, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

For most, it is the first time they have been seen in Mexico.

Many of the other 644 pieces had been seized in Mexico or had long sat in warehouses. Forty-six of them are on loan from museums abroad.

"What is being gained here is the possibility for us Mexicans to see these pieces again, or even to see them for the first time," said Miguel Angel Trinidad, one of the curators.

One example, an impressive Mayan stela, shows a warlord grasping a captured rival. It had previously been on display in Los Angeles, California.

The show is called "The Greatness of Mexico," and the pieces on display come from pre-Hispanic cultures like the Mayas, Aztecs and Olmecs, as well as later pieces. The pieces will be on display in Mexico City's National Anthropology Museum and the colonial-era museum of the Public Education Department.

The show coincides with the 500th anniversary of the 1521 conquest of Mexico City by the Spanish, and the 200th anniversary of the consummation of Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821.

US auto sales slump, stalled by car computer chip shortage

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — In a normal month before the pandemic, Con Paulos' Chevy dealership in Jerome, Idaho, sold around 40 new vehicles. In September, it was only six. Now he's got nothing new in stock, and every car, truck or SUV on order has been sold.

Last month, what happened at his dealership about 115 miles (185 kilometers) southeast of Boise was repeated across the country as factory closures due to a worsening global shortage of computer chips crimped U.S. new vehicle shipments.

U.S. new vehicle sales tumbled about 26% in September as chip shortages and other parts-supply disruptions cut into the selection on dealer lots and raised prices once again to record levels. That sent many frustrated consumers to the sidelines to wait out a shortage that has hobbled the industry since late last year.

Automakers sold just over 1 million vehicles during the month, according to Edmunds.com, a figure that included estimates for Ford and others that didn't report numbers Friday. September was the lowest sales month of the year, Edmunds said.

For the third quarter, sales were 3.4 million, down 13% from the same period a year ago.

Automakers on Friday reported some pretty poor numbers. General Motors, which only reports sales by quarter, said its deliveries were off nearly 33% from July through September of last year. Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler, saw quarterly sales dip 19%, while Nissan sales were down 10% for the quarter.

Honda's U.S. sales fell almost 25% last month, and were down 11% for the quarter. At Toyota, sales were off 22% for September but up just over 1% in the third quarter. Hyundai reported sales off 2% last month but up 4% for the third quarter. Volkswagen third-quarter sales were down 8%.

"September results show that there are simply not enough vehicles available to meet consumer demand," said Thomas King, president of data and analytics at J.D. Power.

The average sales price of a new vehicle hit a record \$42,802 last month, breaking the old record of \$41,528 set in August, J.D. Power said. The average U.S. price is up nearly 19% from a year ago, when it broke \$36,000 for the first time, J.D. Power said. The auto price increases have helped to drive up U.S. inflation.

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General Motors, hit hard by temporary plant closures last quarter, expressed some optimism, though. Steve Carlisle, president of GM North America, said the computer chip shortage is improving.

"As we look to the fourth quarter, a steady flow of vehicles held at plants will continue to be released to dealers, we are restarting production at key crossover and car plants, and we look forward to a more stable operating environment through the fall," he said in a statement.

The shortage and crazy high prices for both new and used vehicles began with the eruption of the pandemic last year, when many states issued stay-at-home orders. Prices plummeted, and automakers shuttered factories for eight weeks. The resulting decline in supply came just as many cooped-up consumers wanted a new or used vehicle to commute to work or to take road trips without coming in contact with others.

While the auto plants were shut down in April and May last year, computer chip makers shifted production to satisfy wild demand for laptops, gaming devices and tablets. That created a shortage of automotive-grade chips, a problem that might not be fully resolved until next year.

Because of the high prices, dealers big and small are reporting record profits, but Paulos fears those days might be over. He's paying the bills and making money with used car sales, as well as service as people keep their vehicles longer. He's hoping the new auto shortage has hit bottom and says GM appears to be bringing more factories back online.

"We won't be having any inventory to show people here," Paulos says. "If we don't get some supply to the dealers, the record profits we were making are going to turn into record losses, I'm afraid. It's hard to sustain yourself with no new flow."

Analysis: Beyond Biden, budget tests Dems' power to deliver

By ZEKE MILLER, JONATHAN LEMIRE and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Joe Biden proposed a massive expansion of federal services for Americans this year, he laid out lofty stakes — not only for his own presidential legacy but far beyond.

The imperative, he said in an April address to Congress, is to show "that our government still works — and can deliver for the people."

It was an apt pitch for the long-held Democratic vision of government as a force for good, and for the idea that Washington has an obligation to improve the lot of Americans held back.

But five months later, the capital is locked in an intra-party showdown over the president's agenda that underscores the larger question of whether Democrats can keep their pledge to make government make things better for people.

"For the last few decades, the country has seen that government struggled to deliver in a way that affects their lives," said Democratic strategist Jesse Ferguson, who advises groups that support pieces of Biden's agenda. "We have to show that there is a role for government in delivering for people who are working for a living."

This is the bedrock question as Democrats struggle to come together behind a \$1.5 trillion to \$3.5 trillion package that would raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy, and use that money to expand government health care, education and climate change initiatives. The debate has also delayed action on a \$1 trillion public works bill that has stood to be one of the rare bright spots of bipartisanship in Washington.

In the closed-door meeting Friday with House Democrats, Biden tried to rally his party behind a common strategy, warning them not to squander the opportunity on the legislation, and reminding them that the world is watching to see whether democracy can deliver, according to a person familiar with his remarks who was not authorized to speak publicly about them.

White House officials contended that the disparate Democratic coalition — which holds the slimmest of majorities in Congress — was closer than ever to reaching a deal, after successive rounds of closed-door talks and public pronouncements from lawmakers. And they argued the American public will judge the results not by the messiness of the legislative sausage-making, but by the eventual benefits once new government programs are enacted.

In public and in his private conversations with lawmakers, Biden has framed passage of the two bills as

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his party's best chance to make the case for government action as a positive force in Americans' lives. To prove it can still do big things.

To be sure, Biden already has managed to push through a \$1.9 trillion economic relief bill and has leveraged the full force of the federal government to distribute COVID-19 vaccines in an effort to bring the coronavirus pandemic under control.

But the country remains in a "tough spot," in the words of former Secretary of State and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Biden "is really trying to kind of fight against all of these trends, you know, to come up with legislation that will make a difference in the country, show people that our government can actually work again, instead of being in a constant state of paralysis and an absolute, you know, nothing to show for it," she said Thursday at a conference organized by The Atlantic.

In his private talks with legislators, Biden has suggested a Democratic defeat on the current bills would be a gift to Republicans, empowering a party that he has judged a threat to democracy itself. Defeat, he has warned, would embolden the same forces who tacitly blessed the origins of the Jan. 6th insurrection and are now balking at helping to lift the national debt ceiling to avoid a government default.

The ramifications are likely to filter through ballot booths for years — in this fall's Virginia governor's race, where Democrat Terry McAuliffe is largely aligned with Biden's agenda in his race against Republican Glenn Youngkin. In the midterm elections next year, where Democrats will be defending their slim margins in the House and Senate. In 2024, when the country will decide whether to ratify the Democrats' approach or veer rightward in the presidential race once again.

Beyond politics, Biden has portrayed the success or failure of his agenda as an inflection point for the United States, determining whether it has the investments and policies to remain the world's leading economic and military power.

To believe Biden and his team, the big safety net bill is a make-or-break moment for the country:

If it fails, child poverty in America doubles. Expanded health care, education and other federal programs touching the lives of millions are at risk. Efforts to tackle menacing climate change are limited. The IRS still lacks the money to provide basic customer service and enforce tax laws on the wealthy. Internationally, the government falls short in foreign investments, allowing China a smoother path to becoming a dominant world power.

"People want to see their government doing things," said Rep. Danny Davis, D-Ill. "And I think if they go to vote in midterm elections, feeling that government has done things for them, that benefit them, then I think they will respond in favor to the policies and practices of that government."

Republicans, unsurprisingly, frame the question in an entirely different light.

"There's no doubt government can do things," said Rep. Brian Mast, R-Fla. "But can they do it better than you can do it with your money or I can do it with my money? This is a moment where government is saying to the American people: 'You do more with less. And we'll do less with more.'"

The debate over the how much government should or shouldn't do is not new.

Biden was born as the New Deal was bearing fruit under Franklin Roosevelt, and he was a young adult when the Great Society took shape under Lyndon Johnson. As vice president, he whispered in President Barack Obama's ear that his big new healthcare law was a big deal, albeit in more colorful language.

Trust in government has flagged nonetheless.

In an April survey by Pew Research Center, only about a quarter of Americans said they trust the federal government to do what is right at least most of the time. That's ticked up from last year, driven by an increase in trust among Democrats following the presidential election, but it still remains low.

About three-quarters of Americans trusted the government to do the right thing at least most of the time in the late 1950s and early 1960s. But that trust has not exceeded 30% for 15 years.

Still, the poll showed a majority of Americans say the government should do more, not less to solve problems.

"We've had decades and decades of inaction on things that are really, really important," says Sen. Deb-

bie Stabenow, D-Mich., harking back to Ronald Reagan's message in the 1980s that government is the problem. "And so we now are in a situation, what we're doing is really trying to tackle those things that have been neglected for a long time."

The seriousness of that message has so far failed to unify the diverse coalition of congressional Democrats that has shown itself to be prone to infighting and grandstanding, raising particular worries that could make a difficult midterm election cycle even more difficult.

"Going into a tough midterm without delivering on an agenda would be like going into a battle and voluntarily leaving your best weapons at home," says Democratic strategist Ferguson. "We know the public supports this agenda, and we know people are looking to Democrats to deliver on what they promised."

AP writers Hannah Fingerhut, Brian Slodysko and Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington and Steve Peoples in New York contributed.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Zeke Miller has covered the White House since 2012. Jonathan Lemire has covered the White House since 2017. Josh Boak covers the White House and has covered the economy for The AP since 2013.

Broadway's 'Aladdin' goes dark for days as it battles virus

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Broadway hit "Aladdin" is trying to keep COVID-19 contained.

Disney Theatrical Productions said it will cancel Friday's performance and all shows until Oct. 12 after "additional breakthrough COVID-19 cases were detected."

The show reopened Tuesday following some 18 months of being shuttered due to the pandemic, but was forced to close Wednesday when breakthrough COVID-19 cases were reported within the musical's company. It restarted Thursday but Friday proved too much. In many ways, the temporary closure proves that the monitoring system is working.

"This 12-day pause allows the 'Aladdin' company ample time to ensure that people with breakthroughs recover, and any other potential breakthroughs are identified before the 'Aladdin' company gathers again," Dr. Blythe Adamson, the epidemiologist working with Disney Theatrical Productions, said in a statement.

So-called breakthrough infections are detected in vaccinated people and tend to be far less dangerous than those unvaccinated.

Adamson said she believes "these positive cases are most likely related to an exposure from one positive case." She has instituted daily PCR testing. The show vowed to support "affected 'Aladdin' company members as they recover."

"Aladdin," a musical adaptation of the 1992 animated movie starring Robin Williams, opened on Broadway in March 2014 and has become one of its highest grossing shows.

It was the first Broadway COVID-19 cancellation since shows resumed with Bruce Springsteen's concert returning in July and "Pass Over" as the first play to debut in August.

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

All tickets for the canceled performances will be refunded at the original point of purchase.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

California pushes 1st US vaccine mandate for schoolchildren

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — California is poised to impose the nation's first coronavirus vaccine mandate

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for schoolchildren, a move announced Friday that could push other states to follow as many did after Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered the first statewide stay-at-home order in the U.S. during the early days of the pandemic.

Newsom said the mandate won't take effect for all children until the U.S. government has finished fully vetting the vaccine for two age groups — 12 to 15 and 5 to 11. That means those in seventh to 12th grades probably will have until July to get their shots. It will be even longer for children in kindergarten through sixth grades because the government has yet to approve any COVID-19 vaccine for that age group.

California law requires all children enrolled in public and private schools to have 10 immunizations, with exceptions for medical reasons. For the coronavirus vaccine, California will grant exemptions for medical reasons, plus religious and personal beliefs. The rules for those exemptions will be written after the state hears comments from the public. Any student without an exemption who refuses to get the vaccine would be forced to do independent study at home.

The mandate eventually will affect more than 6.7 million public and private school students in the nation's most populous state. California already has a mask requirement for schoolchildren.

"We have to do more," the Democratic governor said during a news conference at a San Francisco middle school after visiting with seventh-graders. "We want to end this pandemic. We are all exhausted by it."

The federal government has fully approved coronavirus vaccines for anyone over 16 and has given emergency authorization to vaccinate those 12 to 15. Full endorsement for that age group is likely within a few months. Vaccines for children 5 to 11 are still in the testing stage.

California has one of the highest vaccine rates in the country — 84% of people 12 and older have gotten at least one shot, and 70% are fully vaccinated. But the state has a vocal minority skeptical of both the vaccine and the government's assurances of its safety. Last month, more than a thousand people gathered at the state Capitol to protest vaccine mandates.

"I just think it's a parent's decision, you know. Period," said Fabio Zamora, the father of an eighth-grader at Edna Brewer Middle School. "The government in no shape or form should be having mandates like that. I don't care for that. I'm a veteran. I served this country, and I fought for those rights."

A small number of school districts nationwide have imposed their own vaccine mandates, including five in California. Among those are the state's two largest districts — Los Angeles and San Diego.

Other states have resisted imposing pandemic rules in schools, including a new law in Kentucky that overturned a statewide mask mandate.

Newsom has been one of the most aggressive governors on coronavirus restrictions, issuing the nation's first statewide stay-at-home order in March 2020 that was soon followed by 41 other states. More recently, Newsom required California's roughly 2.2 million health care workers and most state employees to get vaccinated to keep their jobs.

The governor was emboldened after easily defeating a recall effort last month fueled by anger over his handling of the pandemic. He says he interpreted his landslide victory as an endorsement of his vaccine policies.

Newsom hasn't backed all vaccine mandates, however. He recently opposed a requirement for prison guards that a federal judge imposed. Critics used that example to say Newsom is driven more by politics than science, noting the labor union of corrections officers had donated to his campaign to defeat the recall.

"California kids made the mistake of not giving millions to his campaigns," Republican Assemblyman Kevin Kiley tweeted Friday. Kiley was among 46 candidates who ran to replace the governor during the recall election.

Newsom's announcement comes as COVID-19 infections in most of California have dropped markedly. The statewide positivity rate for the last week was 2.8%, and the average number of daily cases was about 6,355, roughly half what it was when the latest surge peaked in mid-August. Hospitalizations have fallen by 40%.

In Los Angeles County — the nation's largest, with more than 10 million residents — just 1.7% of people tested for the virus have it, and daily infections are down by half in the last month, when most kids went

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back to school.

"These numbers are amazingly low given that 3,000-plus schools are now open countywide," county Health Director Barbara Ferrer said Thursday. She noted that although the number of outbreaks in schools has increased slightly in recent weeks, the overall number is small and largely related to youth sports.

California's largest teachers unions back the vaccination mandate, as does the California Association of School Boards.

"This is not a new idea. We already require vaccines against several known deadly diseases before students can enroll in schools," said Dr. Peter N. Bretah, president of the California Medical Association. "The Newsom administration is simply extending existing public health protections to cover this new disease, which has caused so much pain and suffering across our state, our nation and the entire globe over the last 18 months."

Until now, Newsom had left the decision on student vaccine mandates to local school districts, leading to a variety of different orders. In Los Angeles, a vaccine mandate for eligible students is set to take effect in January.

Newsom's plan does not override those plans. He said districts can "accelerate" the requirements, and he expected many will.

The vaccine mandate also would apply to teachers and staff in K-12 public and private schools. Newsom already had required them to either get vaccinated or submit to weekly testing, but once the mandate for students takes effect, the testing option won't be available for teachers anymore.

"We're never going to get to eradication with this virus, but the higher the immunity, the better," said Dr. Monica Gandhi, an infectious disease doctor and professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

Associated Press journalists Jocelyn Gecker and Terry Chea contributed.

4th year since Las Vegas massacre: 'Be there for each other'

By KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — People who are healing and some still struggling gathered Friday to remember those who died and were injured during the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history four years ago on the Las Vegas Strip.

"I was wounded. Those physical wounds have healed," said Dee Ann Hyatt, whose daughter also was hurt and whose brother died in the Oct. 1, 2017, shooting. "But the lasting scars for our family remain."

Hyatt spoke to several hundred people during a sunrise ceremony at the Clark County Government Center in Las Vegas.

She remembered her slain brother, Kurt von Tillow, a trucker from Northern California, before a screen at an outdoor amphitheater that displayed photos of the dead. Fifty-eight people were killed that night, and two others died later. More than 850 were injured.

"We continue to live the impact of all that happened that night, four years later," Hyatt said. "People thrive and people struggle to live with the physical and mental pain, and our lives are forever changed."

The morning memorial featured a song, "Four Years After," sung by Matt Sky, that was composed for the anniversary by Mark R. Johnson and released with multi-Grammy award winner Alan Parsons.

The event was the first of several scheduled Friday in Las Vegas and elsewhere, including a livestream to California's Ventura County hosted by a support group called "So Cal Route 91 Heals." The group also planned a ceremony at a Thousand Oaks park.

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.

The names of the dead will be read beginning at 10:05 p.m., the time the shooting started, at a downtown Las Vegas Community Healing Garden.

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Pereira also is chairwoman of a Clark County committee developing plans for a permanent memorial. She said next year's fifth anniversary may feature a dedication of the memorial at a corner of the former concert venue across Las Vegas Boulevard from the Mandalay Bay resort. That's 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.

Jill Winter of Nashville, Tennessee, remembers the nearly 10-minute barrage of rapid-fire gunshots into the open-air concert crowd.

Like many around her, Winter 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, now 49, counsels others she calls the "Router family" who experienced the deadly night at the Route 91 Harvest Festival. "Router" sounds better than "survivor," she explained.

"There is a lot of healing taking place," she said in a telephone interview this week. "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."

The gunman, Stephen Paddock, a 64-year-old retired postal service worker, accountant and real estate investor who became 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 sought refuge and medical help during the shooting.

The company 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 said this week that she felt a softening of emotions around the anniversary.

"Maybe it's because we just came out of this (coronavirus) pandemic and we're starting to feel a regular pace again," Pereira said. "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."

This was the first year since the shooting that Winter wasn't in Las Vegas to mark the anniversary. She said she would gather 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."

Hyatt, speaking at the memorial, said four years have taught her that some things can't be fixed.

"All you can do is be there for each other," she said. "Listen, cry, hug, love and support one another. You just need to be patient and loving and caring to everyone you meet, because you don't know what they're going through."

Georgia's ex-president arrested after returning home

By SOPHIKO MEGRELIDZE Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Former President Mikheil Saakashvili was arrested after returning to Georgia, the government said Friday, a move that came as the ex-leader sought to mobilize supporters ahead of national municipal elections seen as critical to the country's political makeup.

The announcement by Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili came hours after Saakashvili, who was convicted

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in absentia on abuse of power charges and has lived in Ukraine in recent years, posted on Facebook that he was back in the country.

Details of the arrest were not immediately clear, but Georgian TV on Friday evening broadcast video of Saakashvili in handcuffs, with a wide smile on his face, being taken into custody by police.

In earlier Facebook video, Saakashvili said he was in Batumi, the Black Sea port and resort that is Georgia's second-largest city. Georgian officials earlier in the day had denied he was in the country.

In the posts, Saakashvili said Saturday's elections were "crucial" for Georgia and had called for a rally in Tbilisi on Sunday, promising to join it.

Saakashvili's attempts to rally Georgians could upend the ruling party's plans to secure dominance in the balloting for mayors and local assemblies that is widely regarded as a vote of confidence in the national government and could trigger early elections next year.

The European Union brokered a deal in April to ease a political crisis between the ruling Georgian Dream party and opposition groups, including Saakashvili's United National Movement, the second-biggest political force in the country.

The agreement stipulated that snap parliamentary elections should be called in 2022 if Georgian Dream receives less than 43% of all proportional votes in the local elections in the country's 64 municipalities.

It is unclear whether the EU deal will be followed, however. In July, Georgian Dream withdrew from the agreement because United National Movement hadn't signed onto it by then. The opposition party finally signed this month, and Saakashvili has urged supporters to turn out in force at the polls.

Saakashvili's intense grin in police custody underlined his penchant for public drama, particularly his bold entrances into unwelcoming places.

He first gained international attention in the 2003 Rose Revolution protests when he led a crowd of demonstrators that broke into a parliament session, forcing then-President Eduard Shevardnadze to flee; Shevardnadze, a former Soviet foreign minister, resigned a day later.

In 2017, he forced his way with a crowd of supporters into Ukraine from Poland, after his Ukrainian citizenship was rescinded.

By going back to Georgia even though he faced certain arrest, Saakashvili also echoed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who returned to Moscow from Germany in January, was arrested on arrival and later sent to prison.

Hours after his arrest on Friday, a video was posted on his Facebook page in which he and Ukrainian parliament member Yelizaveta Yasko declared they were in love and "together." They said the video was recorded ahead of his departure for Georgia.

Saakashvili was president in 2004-13 and was renowned for his energetic efforts against Georgia's endemic corruption, but Georgians became increasingly uneasy with what they saw as his authoritarian inclinations and his sometimes-mercurial behavior.

Saakashvili left the country soon after the 2013 election, in which he could not run, was won by the candidate from Georgian Dream.

In 2018, Georgian courts convicted and sentenced him to up to six years in prison.

Saakashvili moved to Ukraine, where he became governor of the corruption-plagued Odesa region, and obtained Ukrainian citizenship, which nullified his Georgian citizenship. However, he fell out with then-President Petro Poroshenko, resigned his post and was stripped of Ukrainian citizenship.

He forced his way back into Ukraine in 2017, but was eventually deported to Poland. After Poroshenko's successor Volodymyr Zelenskyy came to power, Saakashvili returned to Ukraine and was named to a top corruption-fighting position.

"Zelenskyy is concerned by this news," his spokesman Serhiy Nikiforov said. "Ukraine is appealing to Georgia for explanations of all circumstances and the reasons for this move in regards to this Ukrainian citizen."

The Georgian prosecutor's office said a case had been opened against Saakashvili for illegally crossing the border, although the basis for such a charge is unclear because Ukrainian citizens do not need visas

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to enter Georgia.

Associated Press writer Jim Heintz in Moscow contributed.

Pat Robertson steps down as host of long-running '700 Club'

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Pat Robertson, who turned a tiny Virginia television station into a global religious broadcasting network, is stepping down after a half-century running the "700 Club" on daily TV, the Christian Broadcasting Network announced on Friday.

Robertson, 91, said in a statement that he hosted the network's flagship program for the last time on Friday, and that his son Gordon Robertson will take over the weekday show starting Monday.

"I will no longer be the host of the '700 Club,'" Robertson said on the show Friday, although he vowed to return from time to time, if he's had a "revelation" he needs to share. "I thank God for everyone that's been involved. And I want to thank all of you."

Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network started airing on Oct. 1, 1961 after he bought a bankrupt UHF television station in Portsmouth, Virginia. The "700 Club" began production in 1966.

Now based in Virginia Beach, CBN says its outreach extends to more than 100 countries and territories in dozens of languages through TV and video evangelism, online ministry and prayer centers. The "700 Club" talk show can be seen in the vast majority of U.S. television markets.

"Pat Robertson had an enormous impact on both American religion and American politics," said John C. Green, an emeritus political science professor at The University of Akron.

One of Robertson's innovations with the "700 Club" was to use the secular talk-show format, which was a break from more traditional broadcasts of revival meetings or church services.

"Here's a well educated person having sophisticated conversations with a wide variety of guests on a wide variety of topics," Green said. "It was with a religious inflection to be sure. But it was an approach that took up everyday concerns."

Robertson attracted a large audience and went on to have several U.S. presidents as guests, including Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, the network said.

Robertson was the son of a U.S. senator and received a law degree from Yale. He ran for president in 1988 and also founded the Christian Coalition, galvanizing American evangelicals into a conservative political force.

"He opened up a path that many people have followed," Green said. "Surveys show that lots and lots of people view — in one format or another — religious broadcasting these days. But in politics, I think what he did was help cement the alliance between conservative Christians and the Republican Party."

As "700 Club" host, Robertson sometimes found himself in hot water for his on-air pronouncements. In 2005, he called for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and warned residents of a rural Pennsylvania town not to be surprised if disaster struck them because they voted out school board members who favored teaching "intelligent design."

But Robertson also called for ending mandatory prison sentences for marijuana possession convictions. He later said on "The 700 Club" that marijuana should be legalized and treated like alcohol because the government's war on drugs had failed.

After President Trump lost to Joe Biden in 2020, Robertson said Trump was living in an "alternate reality" and should "move on," news outlets reported.

Robertson will still appear on a monthly, interactive episode of The 700 Club and will come on the program "occasionally as news warrants," the network said.

Gordon Robertson, 63, is a Yale-educated former real estate lawyer who is less known than his father, if at all controversial. He is chief executive of CBN and has served as executive producer of the "700 Club" for 20 years, and even longer as a co-host. He's also been hosting a show called "700 Club Interactive."

He told The Associated Press on Friday that viewers should expect little to change about the show, which

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airs live from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on weekdays.

The younger Robertson said he hopes to host politicians from both sides of the aisle, while focusing on news and other topics from a Christian perspective.

He said he always wanted the show to be "a beacon of light of what can happen when people get together and say, 'Let's do some good in the world today.'"

"Let's feed the poor," he continued. "Let's clothe the naked. Let's give shelter to people in need. When disasters strike, let's strike back with love and compassion."

This story has been corrected. Gordon's surname is Robertson, not Peterson.

US tries to make nice with France after Australia sub snub

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit France next week as the Biden administration tries to smooth over hurt feelings and potentially more lasting damage caused by its exclusion of America's oldest ally from a new Indo-Pacific security initiative, the State Department said Friday.

The department said Blinken will visit Paris starting Monday for an international economic conference but highlighted that he will also meet with French officials to discuss the rupture in relations.

The administration has been scrambling to mend fences with France and the European Union more broadly since the Sept. 15 announcement of the Australia-U.S.-UK agreement, known as AUKUS, which canceled a multibillion-dollar Australian-France submarine deal.

All sides agree it will take time to repair those ties. The State Department said Blinken's talks will be aimed at "further strengthening the vital U.S.-France relationship on a range of issues including security in the Indo-Pacific region."

Ahead of his visit, Blinken met Friday with French Ambassador Philippe Etienne on his return to Washington after having been recalled to Paris by French President Emmanuel Macron. The recall was an unprecedented display of anger to protest the exclusion of France and the European Union from AUKUS, which is aimed at countering China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific.

The State Department said Blinken and Etienne "discussed the way forward in the U.S.-French bilateral relationship" and previewed the secretary's upcoming travel to France for the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Ministerial Council Meeting. The two also talked about ways to enhance U.S. and French cooperation globally, it said.

But, U.S. officials remain concerned about the potential damage done to the relationship.

"We recognize this will take time and it will take hard work," said Karen Donfried, the newly confirmed top U.S. diplomat for Europe.

In Paris, the French foreign ministry said Blinken and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian would meet on Tuesday for a "deep exchange in the continuity of their meeting in New York Sept. 23, to identify steps that could allow them to restore trust between our two countries."

"The exit from the crisis will take time and require action. That is also the conclusion our American interlocutors reached," it said.

Other matters to be discussed will include "the climate crisis, economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Transatlantic relationship, and working with our Allies and partners to address global challenges and opportunities," the State Department said.

Friday's announcement came a day after the White House announced that national security adviser Jake Sullivan had met with Etienne to try to restore trust between the countries. French officials have said AUKUS was a "stab in the back."

Those discussions followed a Sept. 22 phone call between President Joe Biden and Macron and the New York meeting between Blinken and Le Drian on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly. Biden and Macron are due to meet in Europe later this month.

The ostensible reason for Blinken's trip to France, which had been planned well before the AUKUS ruckus,

is to co-chair a ministerial meeting of the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on Tuesday and Wednesday about climate change and security.

Former Secretary of State and current U.S. climate envoy John Kerry will also attend the Paris talks, which will take place just weeks before the next U.N.-backed international conference on climate, in Glasgow, Scotland.

Subpoenas could shed light on how Jan. 6 rally came together

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and RICHARD LARDNER Associated Press

The House committee investigating the violent Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, with its latest round of subpoenas, may uncover the degree to which former President Donald Trump, his campaign and White House were involved in planning the rally — which had been billed as a grassroots demonstration — that preceded the riot.

The 11 subpoenas sent this week went to people who organized or worked at the rally at the Ellipse where Trump encouraged the crowd to march to the Capitol and told them “you’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong.”

Most of the organizers had worked on Trump’s presidential campaign or in his administration and could provide new details of how the rally that launched the violent attack came together.

The committee’s demands included materials having to do with planning, funding and participation in the event at the Ellipse, which was organized to protest the results of the November elections, as well as events that led up to it, including a bus tour and marches in Washington in November and December. The committee said it also asked for communications with Trump administration officials and lawmakers, which could show whether and how deeply government officials were involved in the day’s planning.

One of the people subpoenaed, whose firm was hired to provide event security that day, told The Associated Press he planned to cooperate.

“We have every intention of complying with the House select committee,” said Lyndon Brentnall, who runs Florida-based RMS Protective Services. “As far as we’re concerned, we ran security at a legally permitted event run in conjunction with the U.S. Secret Service and the Park Police.”

It was not clear whether the others would turn over documents by Oct. 13 or testify in depositions scheduled from late October through the beginning of November, as the committee has demanded. The AP sent emails and text messages, called phone listings or sent messages to online accounts for every person subpoenaed, but only Brentnall provided comment.

Brentnall said staff who worked security with him at the event were vetted by the Secret Service and Park Police. Their names, phone numbers and Social Security numbers were submitted in advance, he said.

“We literally ran the event security and the transport of VIPs from the hotel into the event, and then from the event into the hotel. That’s literally all we did,” he told AP.

Two people familiar with the planning of the event have told the AP that the White House coordinated with event organizers after Trump became aware of the plans for the rally in mid-December. They weren’t authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Nearly all the people subpoenaed were listed on the permit for the event, which was issued to Women for America First, a pro-Trump group with roots in the tea party movement. Three people currently or previously involved with the group were subpoenaed: Amy Kremer, her daughter, Kylie Jane Kremer, and Cindy Chafian.

Chafian had obtained a permit for Women for America First for a Dec. 12 rally at Freedom Plaza that grabbed Trump’s attention. Trump drew huge cheers from the crowd below as the presidential helicopter, Marine One, passed over the rally on its way to the Army-Navy football game in New York.

Within days, several groups that had come together under the umbrella of “Stop the Steal” began planning their next move, this time tied to the Jan. 6 vote certification in Congress, according to Kimberly Fletcher, founder of Moms for America, a member of the coalition. Fletcher told the AP in January that the groups began planning around mid-December. Trump soon caught wind of the plan.

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"Big protest in D.C. on January 6th," Trump tweeted to his millions of followers on Dec. 19. "Be there, will be wild!"

"When the president said, 'Come to D.C.,' then it ... just whooh!" Fletcher recalled to The AP in January. The AP reported at that time that numerous people listed in staff positions on the permit for the Jan. 6 rally had been on the Trump campaign payroll or had close connections to the White House. Seven of the people subpoenaed had worked for the Trump campaign, and at least three had previously worked in the Trump administration.

As Trump's interest piqued in the Jan. 6 event, people closely affiliated with his presidential campaign became involved, including Caroline Wren, a national finance consultant for Trump Victory, a joint fundraising organization run by Trump's reelection campaign and the RNC. Wren is among the people subpoenaed by the committee.

She and her Texas-based consulting company, Bluebonnet Fundraising, received \$892,000 between April 2017 and November 2020 from the Trump presidential campaign, the Republican National Committee and Trump Victory, according to Federal Election Commission records.

The former president wasn't on the original rally schedule, but soon after New Year's Day, it became clear that he would attend in person, recalled people involved in organizing the events on Jan. 5 and 6, including Fletcher.

With Trump all but certain to be the main speaker, who would share the stage with him sparked heated arguments among the rally's organizers and people close to the White House, according to individuals knowledgeable of the discussions. They weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Katrina Pierson, a longtime Trump ally and presidential campaign adviser, was brought in to coordinate with the White House and iron out a list of speakers who would share the stage with Trump. The former president wanted a small group — members of Congress, family members and people affiliated with Women for America First. Pierson was close to the Kremers, who were battling with Wren over control of the event.

Pierson is one of two people subpoenaed this week who was not listed on the final permit issued Jan. 5. The other was Chafian. FEC records show the Trump campaign paid Pierson \$10,000 every two weeks from September 2019 to December 2020.

Others who were subpoenaed included Maggie Mulvaney, a niece of former top Trump aide Mick Mulvaney. She was listed on an attachment to the permit as the "VIP Lead." Mulvaney was director of finance operations for the Trump campaign in 2020, getting paid \$5,000 every two weeks through mid-November. Her LinkedIn profile describes her as external affairs manager for the Trump campaign.

Maggie Mulvaney is also now working as a senior adviser to Rep. Carol Miller, R-W.Va., according to a staff directory on the congresswoman's website. The AP called Mulvaney's congressional office and sent emails to her personal and congressional email addresses, but she did not reply.

Mulvaney is one of at least two rally organizers who landed a job in the U.S. House of Representatives within weeks of the deadly attack that left halls and offices of Congress ransacked. Another, Kiran Menon, listed as an operations associate at the Jan. 6 rally, was on the Trump campaign payroll from July to November 2020. Menon is not among those subpoenaed by the committee. According to congressional directories and LinkedIn, Menon secured a position in February with Ohio Republican Rep. Jim Jordan.

Menon forwarded a request for comment to Jordan spokesperson Russell Dye, who called him "a talented and dedicated member of our staff who had no role in the events at the Capitol" and an "outstanding young conservative." Dye said in a statement that it was irresponsible and dangerous for AP to print Menon's name.

Also subpoenaed this week were Hannah Salem Stone and Megan Powers, both of whom served in the Trump administration and worked at various points on the Trump campaign. Stone was the rally's "operations manager for logistics and communications," listed under the name "Hannah Salem." She said on a recent podcast about event security that she was a special assistant to the president and director of press advance at the White House under Trump, leaving in February 2020. FEC records show she and

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her company, Salem Strategies, did work for the Trump campaign into 2020.

Powers first started working for the Trump campaign before Trump announced his presidential run in June 2015. She later worked in the White House and at NASA. In January 2021, Powers was the Trump campaign's director of operations, according to her LinkedIn profile, and FEC records show Powers was being paid \$8,500 every two weeks. She was listed on the permit as "operations manager for scheduling and guidance" for the Jan. 6 rally. In February, several months after Trump lost the 2020 election to President Joe Biden, the pro-Trump Make America Great Again PAC paid Powers more than \$19,000 for administrative consulting, according to the campaign finance records.

Two people involved in the management and production company Event Strategies were also subpoenaed: Tim Unes, the firm's founder and president, and Justin Caporale, formerly a top aide to first lady Melania Trump.

Caporale, listed on the permit as the event's project manager, was on the Trump campaign payroll for most of 2020 and earned \$7,500 every two weeks, according to FEC records. Unes was the "stage manager" for the rally, according to the permit paperwork.

Unes has longstanding ties to Trump, a connection he highlights on his company's website. Unes and Event Strategies were paid more than \$3.4 million by the Trump campaign, Trump Victory and the Republican National Committee for consulting, audio visual and event production services between January 2016 and December 2020, according to the campaign finance records.

Smith reported from Providence, Rhode Island.

US official in Haiti apologizes for treatment of migrants

By EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A top U.S. official on Friday apologized for how Haitian migrants were treated along the U.S.-Mexico border, saying it's not how border officials or the Department of Homeland Security behave.

The comments from Juan Gonzalez, the U.S. National Security Council's senior director for the Western Hemisphere, came during a two-day official visit to Haiti to talk with local leaders about migration and other issues.

"I want to say that it was an injustice, that it was wrong," he said. "The proud people of Haiti and any migrant deserve to be treated with dignity."

The U.S. government recently came under fire for its treatment of Haitian migrants, with images showing men on horseback, corralling Haitian asylum seekers.

Gonzalez was visiting with Brian Nichols, U.S. assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs, amid ongoing expulsions of Haitians from the U.S. to their homeland. Since Sept. 19, the U.S. has expelled some 4,600 Haitian migrants from Del Rio, Texas on 43 flights, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Gonzalez said the gathering of migrants along the border is a public health emergency and warned those who are thinking of leaving not to risk their lives.

"The danger is too great," he said.

Gonzalez and Nichols previously met with Haitian Americans and Cuban Americans in Miami on Wednesday and with Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, members of the civil society and political leaders in Haiti on Thursday to talk about migration, public safety, the pandemic and efforts to help those affected by the 7.2-magnitude earthquake that struck the country's southern region in mid-August.

Nichols said that during their visit, they heard many people talk about the challenges that Haiti faces, noting that there's a "surprising" amount of agreement on potential solutions.

"There is no solution that will work for Haiti and its people that will be imposed from the outside," he said, referring to recent criticism about the involvement of the U.S. and other countries in Haitian affairs as it tries to recover from the earthquake and from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse at his private home. "However, we in the United States are committed to providing the Haitian people the

support they need to succeed and implement their own vision.”

Nichols said the conversation with the prime minister was constructive, adding that the U.S. is encouraging consensus and a holistic vision.

“The future of Haiti depends on its own people,” he said. “The United States is committed to working with the people of Haiti to support as they work to bring prosperity and security back to their country.”

Nichols said a technical team from the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement will visit next week as Haiti struggles with a spike in gang-related violence, with the bureau’s assistant secretary visiting in upcoming weeks. He said later this month, the undersecretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights will visit with other senior officials to talk about police and security issues.

Associated Press writer Dánica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico contributed to this report.

Merck says COVID-19 pill cuts risk of death, hospitalization

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a potential leap forward in the global fight against the pandemic, drugmaker Merck said Friday that its experimental pill for people sick with COVID-19 reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half.

If cleared by regulators, it would be the first pill shown to treat COVID-19, adding a whole new, easy-to-use weapon to an arsenal that already includes the vaccine.

The company said it will soon ask health officials in the U.S. and around the world to authorize the pill’s use. A decision from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration could come within weeks after that, and the drug, if it gets the OK, could be distributed quickly soon afterward.

All other COVID-19 treatments now authorized in the U.S. require an IV or injection. A pill taken at home, by contrast, would ease pressure on hospitals and could also help curb outbreaks in poorer and more remote corners of the world that don’t have access to the more expensive infusion therapies.

“This would allow us to treat many more people much more quickly and, we trust, much less expensively,” said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University who was not involved in the research.

Merck and its partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics said early results showed patients who received the drug, molnupiravir, within five days of COVID-19 symptoms had about half the rate of hospitalization and death as those who received a dummy pill.

The study tracked 775 adults with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who were considered high risk for severe disease because of health problems such as obesity, diabetes or heart disease. The results have not been reviewed by outside experts, the usual procedure for vetting new medical research.

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. After that time period, there were no deaths among those who received the drug, compared with eight in the placebo group, according to Merck.

The results were so strong that an independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early.

Company executives said they plan to submit the data to the FDA in the coming days.

Even with the news of a potentially effective new treatment, experts stressed the importance of vaccines for controlling the pandemic, given that they help prevent transmission and also reduce the severity of illness in those who do get infected.

White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients said that vaccination will remain the government’s main strategy for controlling the pandemic. “We want to prevent infections, not just wait to treat them when they happen,” he said.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government’s foremost authority on infectious diseases, called the results from Merck “very good news.”

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Merck only studied its drug in people who were not vaccinated. But FDA regulators may consider authorizing it for broader use in vaccinated patients who get breakthrough COVID-19 symptoms.

Andrew Pekosz of Johns Hopkins University predicted vaccines and antiviral drugs would ultimately be used together to protect against the worst effects of COVID-19.

"These shouldn't be seen as replacements for vaccination — the two should be seen as two strategies that can be used together to significantly reduce severe disease," said Pekosz, a virology specialist.

Patients take four pills of molnupiravir twice a day for five days. Side effects were reported by both groups in the Merck trial, but they were slightly more common among those who 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. That's not surprising, given that antiviral drugs are most effective when used before the virus ramps up in the body.

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

The antibody drugs have been shown to reduce hospitalization and death by roughly 70% when given to high-risk patients, roughly 20 percentage points more than Merck's pill. But experts cautioned against comparing results from the two, given the preliminary nature of Merck's data.

Health experts, including Fauci, have long called for a convenient pill that patients could take when COVID-19 symptoms first appear, much the way Tamiflu is given to help speed recovery from the flu.

Like other antivirals, Merck's pill works by interfering with the virus's ability to copy its genetic code and reproduce itself.

The U.S. government has committed to purchasing enough pills to treat 1.7 million people, assuming the FDA authorizes the drug. Merck said it can produce pills for 10 million patients 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 and 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 across Latin America, Europe and Africa. Executives estimated 10% of patients studied were from the U.S.

This story has been updated to correct that patients take eight pills per day, not two.

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

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 —

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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 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

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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 Byahuranga 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 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 available — and has been offered — should AFRINIC need it to keep 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. Byahuranga 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 Byahuranga'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.

Scientists decipher Marie Antoinette's redacted love notes

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — "Not without you." "My dear friend." "You that I love."

Marie Antoinette sent these expressions of affection — or more? — in letters to her close friend and rumored lover Axel von Fersen. Someone later used dark ink to scribble over the words, apparently to dampen the effusive, perhaps amorous, language.

Scientists in France devised a new method to uncover the original writing, separating out the chemical composition of different inks used on historical documents. They tested their method by analyzing the private letters between the French queen and the Swedish count, which are housed in the French national archives.

That allowed them to read the original words and even identify the person who scratched them out — Fersen himself.

"It's always exciting when you discover that you can know more about the past than you thought you could," said historian Rebecca L. Spang, who studies the French Revolution at Indiana University, and was not involved in the study.

The letters were exchanged between June 1791 and August 1792 — a period when the French royal family was kept under close surveillance in Paris, after having attempted to flee the country. Soon the French monarchy would be abolished, and the next year both Marie Antoinette and her husband, Louis XVI, would be beheaded.

"In this time, people used a lot of flowery language — but here, it's really strong, really intimate language. We know with this text, there is love relationship," said Anne Michelin, a material analyst at the Sorbonne's Research Center for Conservation and co-author of the research published Friday in the journal *Science Advances*.

The wide-ranging letters, penned on thick cotton paper, discuss political events and personal feelings. The redacted phrases, such as "madly" and "beloved," don't change the overall meaning, but tone of the relationship between the sender and receiver.

Marie Antoinette and Fersen met in France when they were both 18. They kept in touch until her death.

"In 18th century western Europe, there's a kind of cult of the letter as a form of writing that gives you access to a person's character like no other," said Deidre Lynch, a historian who studies the period's literary culture at Harvard and was not involved in the study.

"Like a metaphorical state of undress, they've let their hair down and show are who they really are," she said.

But savvy writers were also aware that their letters may be read by multiple audiences. Some correspondents in 18th century Europe famously employed secret codes and so-called "invisible ink" to hide their full meaning from certain eyes.

The letters exchanged between Marie Antoinette and Fersen, who never married, were altered after the fact. Certain portions of text were scribbled out in dark ink. His family kept the correspondence until

1982, when the letters were purchased by the French national archives.

In eight of the 15 letters the researchers analyzed, there were sufficient differences in the chemical composition of the inks — the proportion of iron, copper and other elements — that they could map out each layer separately, and thus recover the original text.

"This is amazing," said Ronald Schechter, a historian who studies Marie Antoinette's library at William & Mary and was not involved in the study. He said that the technique could also help historians decipher redacted or censored "phrases and passages in diplomatic correspondence, sensitive political correspondence, and other texts that have eluded historical analysis due to redactions."

Michelin said the most surprising finding was that her team could also identify the person who censored the letters. It was Fersen, who used the same inks to write and redact some of the letters.

His motivations, however, remain a matter of speculation.

"I bet he was trying to protect her virtue," said Harvard's Lynch. "To throw out her letters would be like throwing out a lock of her hair. He wants two incompatible things: He wants to keep the letters, but he also wants to change them."

Follow Christina Larson on Twitter: @larsonchristina

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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 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

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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.'"

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."

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

Biden's approval slumps after a slew of crises: AP-NORC poll

By JOSH BOAK and EMILY SWANSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's popularity has slumped after a slew of challenges in recent weeks at home and abroad for the leader who pledged to bring the country together and restore competence in government, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Fifty percent now say they approve of Biden, while 49% disapprove. Fifty-four percent approved in August, and 59% did in July. The results come as Americans process the harried and deadly evacuation from Afghanistan, mounted border patrol agents charging at Haitian refugees, the unshakable threat of the coronavirus with its delta variant and the legislative drama of Biden trying to negotiate his economic, infrastructure and tax policies through Congress.

Since July, Biden's approval rating has dipped slightly among Democrats (from 92% to 85%) and among independents who don't lean toward either party (from 62% to 38%). Just 11% of Republicans approve of the president, which is similar to July.

Approval also dipped somewhat among both white Americans (49% to 42%) and Black Americans (86% to 64%).

In follow-up interviews, some of those who had mixed feelings about Biden's performance still saw him as preferable to former President Donald Trump. They said that Biden was dealing with a pandemic that began under the former president, an Afghanistan withdrawal negotiated on Trump's behalf and an economy that tilted in favor of corporations and the wealthy because of Trump's tax cuts.

"Trump had a lot to do with what's going on now," said Acarla Strickland, 41, a health care worker from Atlanta who voted for Biden yet now feels lukewarm about him.

As a mother of four, Strickland said she has benefited from the monthly child tax credit payments that are flowing as part of Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. But she feels the government needs to do more to help Americans. Strickland said she borrowed \$66,000 to get a master's degree and fears the debt will never be repaid.

Just 34% of Americans say the country is headed in the right direction, down from about half who said that through the first months of Biden's presidency. Trump supporters such as Larry Schuth feel as though Biden is damaging the nation by seeking to enlarge government and mismanaging the southern border. The Hilton, New York, resident added that he would like to travel to Canada but can't because of COVID-19 restrictions.

"If he had a plan to destroy this country and divide this country, I don't know how you could carry it out any better," said Schuth, 81. "We're spending way too much money. We're planning on spending even more. We don't have a southern border."

The poll shows that 47% of Americans approve of how Biden is handling the economy, down from a high of 60% in March but similar to where it stood in August.

The initial burst of optimism from Biden's rescue package has been met with the hard realities of employers struggling to find workers and higher-than-expected inflation as supply chain issues have made it harder to find automobiles, household appliances and other goods. The rise of the delta variant and reluctance by some Americans to get vaccinated also slowed hiring in August.

Roni Klass, a tutor in her 70s living in Miami, said she was glad to vote Trump out, but she's worried about inflation given her dependence on Social Security and wages that have yet to rise.

"When I go to the grocery store, the prices have really shot up," she said. "My money coming in is not keeping up with the money that I have to spend going out, and I have to cut back as much as I can."

The poll finds 57% approve of Biden's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. That number is similar to August but remains significantly below where it stood as recently as July, when 66% approved. Still, it remains Biden's strongest issue in the poll. Close to 9 in 10 Democrats approve of Biden's handling of the

pandemic, compared with about 2 in 10 Republicans. In July, about 3 in 10 Republicans said they approved.

More also approve than disapprove of Biden's decision to require that most U.S. workers be vaccinated or face regular testing, 51% to 34%, with 14% saying they neither approve nor disapprove. About 8 in 10 Democrats approve; roughly 6 in 10 of Republicans disapprove.

Biden struggles on several issues related to foreign policy. Forty-three percent say they approve of his handling of foreign policy overall, and only 34% approve of his handling of the situation in Afghanistan. Even among Democrats, only 54% say they approve of Biden's handling of Afghanistan. Just 10% of Republicans say the same.

At the same time, Americans are slightly more likely to approve than disapprove of the decision to remove the last remaining U.S. troops from Afghanistan at the end of August, with 45% saying they approve of that decision and 39% saying they disapprove. About two-thirds of Democrats approve of the decision to withdraw troops, compared with about a quarter of Republicans. Roughly two-thirds of Republicans disapprove.

Forty-six percent of Americans approve of Biden's handling of national security, while 52% disapprove.

The poll was conducted just after tensions emerged with France over a submarine deal with Australia, but it finds 50% approve of how Biden is handling relationships with allies — similar to his approval rating overall.

Just 35% of Americans approve of Biden's handling of immigration, down from 43% in April, when it was already one of Biden's worst issues. Immigration is a relative low point for Biden within his own party with 60% of Democrats saying they approve, along with 6% of Republicans.

The president has committed himself toward humane immigration policies, yet the persistent border-crossings and flow of refugees from Haiti and Afghanistan has led to challenging debates and troubling images. Immigration poses a challenge because voters are divided over whether to welcome more foreigners or focus the government more on the needs of existing citizens.

"There isn't enough money to take care of our own, why do we have to take care of some other country?" said Anthony Beard, 48, a chef from Lansing, Michigan.

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.

New landmark recognizes Chinese contributions to Yosemite

Associated Press undefined

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — A century-old building originally used as a laundry by Chinese workers at Yosemite's iconic Wawona Hotel has been restored and turned into a visitor's attraction, recognizing Chinese Americans' contributions to the early history of the national park.

Officials unveiled a new sign Friday marking the Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite Valley, the Fresno Bee reports. New exhibits inside tell the story of Chinese workers who helped build Tioga Road and Wawona Road, critical infrastructure that made tourism to the park possible.

The building — later used as a storage facility — is part of a cluster of structures that will make up the new Yosemite History Center, which will tell the histories of immigrants who made the park what it is today, said Park Ranger Adam Ramsey.

"Chinese people have been a big part of communities throughout the Sierra Nevada for a really long time, and it's about time that we started sharing that history here in Yosemite," Ramsey said.

According to research conducted by Park Ranger Yen-Yen Chan, in 1883 Chinese workers helped build the 56-mile (90-kilometer) Tioga Road in just 130 days. The stunning route across the Sierra Nevada reaches 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in elevation and serves as one of the park's main roads.

Chinese workers were also employed in Yosemite as cooks, laundry workers and gardeners.

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Many first came to California during the Gold Rush, bringing with them skills learned in China about construction, engineering, agriculture, medicine and textiles that made a significant impact in America's early success, Chan said.

She said Yosemite's Chinese history and their contributions were erased from memory because of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress to prevent any more Chinese from entering this country in search of work. The law blocked Chinese immigration for 60 years in this country.

Members of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, who supported the building's renovation, said they were gratified to see Yosemite include the Chinese in the park's origin story.

"Something like this really resonates with a lot of people in my generation," said Eugene Moy, a past president of the society. "We've been here since the 1870s, so to be able to see this has deep meaning, because a lot of us, oftentimes, are relegated to the margins. We aren't always perceived as being full-fledged Americans when the reality is that people have been here for three, four, five generations, for 150 years."

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Vaccinated people do not carry more coronavirus than the unvaccinated

CLAIM: People who are vaccinated against COVID-19 carry a "heavier viral load" if infected with the disease than those who are unvaccinated.

THE FACTS: Scientists have found that vaccinated people who get so-called breakthrough infections can carry about the same amount of coronavirus as those who did not receive the shots, not more. Social media users are misrepresenting comments made by Dr. Leana Wen, former Baltimore health commissioner, to make the false claim. One widely circulating post falsely states, "Dr. Leana Wen, one of the MSM's biggest lap dogs, is confirming what has been said by us all along. The vaccinated carry a heavier viral load." In the image, a syringe is used rather than the word "vaccinated." The post supports the false claim using a short clip from a 25-minute interview Wen did with the news program "Democracy Now!" In the segment, she discusses the delta variant and the new issues surrounding it. "We know that a person infected with the delta variant carries a thousand times the viral load than someone infected with the previous variant," Wen said in the full clip. "What that means is the person can transmit a lot more virus." But the post leaves that information out, using only a portion of the video where Wen discusses how the vaccinated can also spread the disease. "Those who are vaccinated, we now know based on the CDC, are now able with the delta variant, because they carry so much more virus, they could transmit it to their unvaccinated family members," Wen said in the edited clip. "I, for example, even though I'm fully vaccinated, my children are not because they're too young to be vaccinated. So I need to be careful for my children because of all the unvaccinated people around us." Previously, vaccinated people who got infected were thought to have low levels of virus and to be unlikely to pass it to others. But, according to AP reporting, more recent data shows that is not the case with the delta variant. In July, after the delta variant began spreading more widely, the CDC highlighted a study that found that the vaccinated can carry as much of the coronavirus as the unvaccinated. According to the CDC, the greatest risk of coronavirus transmission is among the unvaccinated, who are much more likely to get infected, and therefore transmit the virus.

— Associated Press writer Terrence Fraser in New York contributed this report.

No truth to claims that 86K voters 'don't appear to exist' in Arizona

CLAIM: A cybersecurity firm hired by Arizona's Republican-controlled Senate to review 2020 election results in the state's largest county was unable to identify 86,391 voters, showing that these voters don't

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appear to exist.

THE FACTS: A Sept. 24 report that spun falsehoods about the 2020 presidential election in Maricopa County reverberated online this week, as social media users took the report's claims out of context to spread false claims of their own. In one section of the report, Cyber Ninjas explained that it checked voter information in the county's Final Voted File against a private commercial identity database called Personator, by the company Melissa. It said reviewers could not find the identity records of 86,391 voters in Personator, but acknowledged that this didn't prove any of the voters were not real. "It is expected that most if not all of these individuals are in fact real people with a limited public record and commercial presence," the report said. Conservative websites stretched the claim further, holding up that report section to suggest thousands of votes were cast by fake people. "AZ Audit Could Not Find the Identity of 86,391 Voters – They Don't Appear to Exist," read one widely shared headline. The claim misrepresents the information in the Personator data tool, which is private, doesn't belong to the government and does not include all voters, according to Greg Brown, Melissa's vice president of global marketing. Brown said the company estimates its database includes about 80% of U.S. adults. It is "continually edited" with opt-out requests from law enforcement officials and others, he said. "Being absent from the Personator data tool is not an indicator that an individual does not exist," Brown said. The AP has debunked several other erroneous claims relating to the review that spread on social media, including the false claim that the "verified and approved" stamp that is supposed to be used after signatures are verified on mailed ballot envelopes was actually "pre-printed" on the envelopes. County election officials and an election services firm that works with the county explained that the scans of the envelopes being referenced were captured in binary format to prevent the file from being too large, which makes it appear that the stamp is behind an arrow pointing to the signature box in the scanned image, when it is not.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report, with additional reporting from Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia.

Mileage tax study, not actual mileage tax, proposed in infrastructure bill

CLAIM: President Joe Biden has called for a "driving tax" that is estimated to be 8 cents per mile.

THE FACTS: Biden has not proposed that tax. As members of Congress mull a bipartisan, \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that was approved by the Senate in August, social media users are misrepresenting one aspect of the massive legislation. An image repeatedly shared on Facebook shows a screenshot of a Newsmax report on "Biden tax increases" that refers to a "driving tax." The screenshot shows bullets saying "per-mile user fee," "estimated to be 8 cents per mile," and "amounts vary depending on vehicles." Text above the screenshot reads: "Just to put this in perspective, if you drive 26,000 miles X 0.08 per mile = \$2,080.00. (now get mad)." But the Biden administration has not proposed such a mileage tax, as the image falsely suggests. What has been proposed is a pilot program that would study the mechanics of such a tax, said Andy Winkler, director of infrastructure projects at the Bipartisan Policy Center. That program — a "National motor vehicle per-mile user fee pilot" — is included in the infrastructure package still before Congress. "It is not a tax, it is not on everybody and it is voluntary," Winkler said. The idea, he said, is that volunteers with passenger and commercial vehicles across the country would participate in the program that would provide insights into how such a per-mile fee could be collected. Such a tax has been weighed as a potential replacement for the gas tax, he said. Likewise, Ulrik Boesen, a senior policy analyst at the Tax Foundation, said in an email the "purpose of this program is to study (vehicle miles traveled) taxes to understand how they could work." The proposal for the pilot program also does not include an "8 cents per mile" rate, or any rate for that matter, Boesen said. It's unclear why that specific rate was referenced. An inquiry to Newsmax about its report was not returned.

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

Walmart is not requiring customers to be vaccinated

CLAIM: Walmart recently announced it will require customers in its stores to be vaccinated for COVID-19 starting Nov. 1.

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THE FACTS: TikTok videos and a fake press release image circulated online this week with the false claim that Walmart was planning a vaccine requirement for its in-store customers. "So Walmart came out and said the other day that by November 1, anybody who is not vaccinated will not be allowed to shop in a Walmart supermarket," a man told the camera in one widely shared TikTok video. Social media users across platforms also shared a fake press release from "Walmart of Canada," which featured the Walmart logo alongside the message "Proof of Vaccination Required." Walmart spokesperson Charles Crowson told the AP, "That claim is false." Walmart Canada also confirmed the claims are false with a statement posted in multiple social media comments. "This information is not true," the statement read. "Customers do not have to show proof of vaccination to shop at our stores. We continue to work with governments across the country and are following required restrictions." A search of Walmart's public social media accounts and news releases found the company has not announced any requirement for customers to get vaccinated.

— Ali Swenson

Michael Baden did not perform Gabby Petito autopsy

CLAIM: Dr. Michael Baden was the medical examiner for Gabby Petito's autopsy and also served in the same role for President John F. Kennedy, George Floyd, Jeffrey Epstein, Martin Luther King Jr. and Phil Spector.

THE FACTS: Baden, a former New York City chief medical examiner and forensic pathologist known for investigating prominent and controversial cases, did not perform the autopsy of Petito, a 22-year-old woman who was killed while on a cross-country road trip with her boyfriend, nor did he serve as the medical examiner for the other cases. In the weeks since Petito was reported missing, a number of theories surrounding her disappearance and death have circulated online. Social media posts falsely alleging her autopsy was performed by Baden gained popularity after he spoke about Petito's case on Fox News on Sept. 21. Some social media users sharing the claim have baselessly suggested Baden has been involved in coverup schemes, including in the deaths of Kennedy, King and Epstein. However, Baden did not perform those autopsies, nor did he perform Petito's. In his Fox News appearance, Baden described how autopsies are performed and explained that insects present on Petito's body could help investigators determine her time and place of death. Baden did not suggest he was involved with the proceedings. Brent Blue, the coroner in Teton County, Wyoming, identified Petito's remains and determined she was a homicide victim. Blue has not disclosed a cause of death pending final autopsy results. Petito's body was found Sept. 18 near an undeveloped camping area in remote northern Wyoming along the border of Grand Teton National Park. Authorities are still searching for her boyfriend, Brian Laundrie, who has been named a person of interest in the case and charged with unauthorized use of a debit card. The incorrect assertion that Baden performed Epstein's autopsy has been circulating since 2019, but he just attended it as an independent observer at the request of Epstein's lawyers. Early in his career, Baden was top pathologist for a congressional committee probing the Kennedy and King killings, though he didn't perform those autopsies either. He made a name for himself testifying in high-profile cases, including for the defense in O.J. Simpson's 1995 murder trial, and for record producer Phil Spector in his first murder trial in the 2003 death of actress Lana Clarkson. But different medical examiners were tasked with performing the official autopsies for the murder victims in those cases. More recently, Baden performed private autopsies in the police killings of Michael Brown and George Floyd.

— Associated Press writer Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

Canadian health official's remarks about COVID-19 misrepresented online

CLAIM: Alberta's top doctor said that if you're feeling unwell and you don't have a COVID-19 test, you're still counted as a positive case.

THE FACTS: Posts online are misrepresenting comments made by Alberta's chief medical officer for health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw. During a Sept. 23 news conference, Hinshaw was answering questions around how to manage outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools. Hinshaw was asked by a reporter to explain "why parents

don't have the right to know if there are COVID cases in their child's school." Hinshaw responded that because the current framework in schools does not require mandatory quarantine or close contact tracing for respiratory illnesses, disclosure of a student's positive COVID-19 test would violate privacy rules. She said schools are using the same outbreak protocols for all cases of respiratory illnesses, regardless of whether there is a known COVID-19 diagnosis. "If individuals choose to not get tested for COVID but are home with an illness, they are now counted in the list as now being part of that outbreak. It is less dependent on needing a test to be a part of identifying where there is an issue," she said in the clip being shared online. "We are working with education to determine if there are any adjustments that need to be made to this framework." Some social media users shared the brief clip without making it clear that she was referring to school protocols for tracking respiratory illness in general, not official COVID-19 case counts. Posts online falsely claimed the clip showed Alberta would now count anyone who feels unwell as a positive COVID-19 case. "That report is false," Tom McMillan, assistant director of communications for Alberta Health, said in an email. "Dr. Hinshaw was simply referring to outbreak management protocols in school settings, where all respiratory viruses are treated similarly by the current protocols in place, which helps reduce the chance of onward spread." McMillan said those staying home from school are not counted automatically as positive COVID-19 cases. "All cases reported in the province are those that are confirmed COVID-19 cases or those who've been tested and are awaiting results," he said. The posts online are a part of a broader conspiracy theory that claims that COVID-19 case numbers are being inflated around the globe, which experts have repeatedly debunked.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

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Pivotal bridge from Winnie the Pooh series to be auctioned

By KHADIJA KOTHIA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The adventures of the honey-loving bear "Winnie the Pooh" have captivated children — and their parents — for nigh-on 100 years. Fans now have a chance to own a central piece of Pooh's history, when a countryside bridge from southern England goes up for auction next week.

The author of the hugely popular Pooh series of books, A. A. Milne, often played with his son, Christopher Robin, at the bridge in the 1920s. It became a regular setting for the adventures of Pooh and his friends in the series that launched in 1926.

"Offering it at auction is probably the biggest opportunity globally for people to reach out and be able to buy it and put it in a museum," said James Rylands of Summer Place Auctions, which has previously auctioned items including 20 tons of the Berlin Wall.

Rylands described the bridge as "one of the most important iconic literary objects there is," and laid out hope that it could go for 250,000 pounds, way beyond the 40,000 to 60,000-pound estimate placed on Tuesday's auction.

"When you actually talk about history and add in the emotion and the happiness that 'Winnie the Pooh' has brought to generations as children and adults over the years, it is very difficult to price it," Rylands said. "If it fetches a quarter of a million pounds, then I won't be surprised."

The bridge, originally called Posingford Bridge, was built around 1907 and officially renamed Poohsticks Bridge in 1997 by the late author's son, whose toy animals were the basis of the Pooh series.

It was then taken down in 1999 after being worn out by visitors and was replaced by a newer structure funded largely by the Disney corporation.

The original bridge was dismantled and stored in Ashdown Forest Centre in the southern county of East Sussex, until the local Parish Council recently gave permission for it to be restored and rescued. The bridge, which measures 8.87 meters long by 4.5 meters wide (29 feet by 15 feet), has now been fully restored

using local oak for any missing elements.

The auction coincides with the centenary of Pooh's arrival in the world when Christopher Robin received a fluffy teddy bear from the luxury department store Harrods on his first birthday.

Rylands said there's been interest from around the world, but hoped that the bridge stays local.

"I do hope it stays in Sussex because it obviously has great relevance to the locality," he said. "But if it does end up in the United States or indeed Japan, I have no doubt it will be a little bit loved over there as well."

Spears case spotlights state efforts to rein in conservators

DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Britney Spears' fight to end the conservatorship that controlled vast aspects of her life is putting the spotlight on ongoing efforts throughout the U.S. to reform state laws that advocates say too often harm the very people they were meant to protect.

Already this year, New Jersey cracked down on the circle of people who could petition for someone to be placed under a guardian. New Mexico created an independent review process to oversee how conservatorships are being handled, including the ability to check bank records. And Oregon is ensuring that anyone placed under a guardian gets free legal help.

On Thursday, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, signed into law a set of changes prompted by the attention generated by Spears' legal battle to free herself from a 13-year conservatorship run by her father.

The law includes greater oversight of professional fiduciaries, such as those who controlled Spears' life and financial decisions. It will increase scrutiny of financial, physical or mental abuse, which could result in \$10,000 fines.

The new law also will allow people placed under a conservatorship to choose their own attorneys, which Spears was finally allowed to do in July.

California lawmakers had passed a series of reforms to the state's conservatorship system in 2006, but they were never implemented by the courts because of budget cuts during the recession in 2008 — the same year Spears was placed in the conservatorship after suffering a mental health crisis.

Her ordeal caught the attention of Congress, which held a Senate Judiciary committee hearing this week examining ways to reshape conservatorships.

The system "is failing people from every walk of life, whether they are a global superstar whose struggles unfortunately play out in public or a family unsure of how to take care of an elderly parent," said state Assemblyman Evan Low, a Democrat who introduced the bill after watching the recent documentary "Controlling Britney Spears."

Low added: "This bill saw unanimous, bipartisan support throughout the process because it's painfully clear that we can and should do better."

Changes to conservatorship laws in other states also have sought to protect assets and provide less severe alternatives to conservatorships, which also are referred to as guardianships.

In New Jersey, lawmakers introduced legislation that would eliminate a "catch-all" category that lets virtually anyone who claims to have concern for the financial or personal well-being of another adult petition the court to strip their decision-making power.

Studies have found that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, or those with mental illnesses, dementia and Alzheimer's disease are at high risk of being placed under a guardianship.

"Let's say some wealthy woman is worth millions and millions, and their nephew is going around saying she's not all there and she needs to be taken care of. Well, under current law you can do that," said New Jersey Assemblywoman Carol Murphy, a Democrat who was a primary sponsor of the bill. "I want it to be hard for somebody to be a conservator and take money from somebody without adequate protections for that person."

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High-profile cases of guardians exploiting vulnerable people in their care led Nevada and New Mexico to overhaul their laws governing conservatorships.

New Mexico reformed its system, starting in 2018, amid rising public complaints and a federal investigation that found 1,000 clients lost more than \$10 million in a multi-year embezzlement scheme perpetrated by the Albuquerque-based company Ayudando Guardians. In July, a married couple that helped operate the company were sentenced to a combined 62 years in prison on fraud, theft and money laundering convictions. A judge said their conduct left former clients destitute and homeless.

Initial legislation provided greater access to secretive guardianship records and court proceedings. It also prohibited guardians from placing limits on visitation with the elderly and infirm after families complained they weren't allowed to visit or communicate with their loved ones. The state has added bonding requirements and training for conservators, new rights for the incapacitated and a grievance process to challenge court decisions.

New Mexico state Sen. Gerald Ortiz y Pino said he's glad Spears' legal battle thrust the conservatorship process into the spotlight. The Democrat cosponsored successful legislation that pays for judicial staff to review conservator and guardianship accounts.

"It really goes to the heart of the matter," Ortiz y Pino said. "You're taking away basic civil rights from a person, and it's not that apparent to the casual observer if a person is capable of managing their own affairs any longer. That's why you have someone evaluate the person's mental acuity. You have someone check whether there are less restrictive options. You try to build in some protections."

In March, New Mexico lawmakers gave the state auditor's office new authority to review conservator and guardianship annual reports, conduct audits and subpoena bank records.

"That's not necessarily public transparency, but transparency in the sense of third eyes are looking at what the conservator is doing, besides the judge," said Democratic state Rep. Marian Matthews, a co-sponsor of the legislation.

After a guardian was charged in 2017 with siphoning more than half a million dollars from hundreds of people she had been appointed by courts to protect, Nevada lawmakers enshrined a right to legal counsel for adults under guardianship, created a system to allow people to pre-nominate guardians in case they became incapacitated and formed a compliance office to crack down on abuse.

Karen Kelly, who heads the Clark County Public Guardian's office, said the number of private guardianships have plummeted since the reforms went into effect and more people challenged proposed arrangements.

In June, Oregon's Democratic governor signed a bill that provides legal counsel — paid by the state — for people potentially being placed into guardianship.

"Protected persons currently don't have a right to representation, which obviously sets up people without means for potential abuse," said Sen. Michael Dembrow, a Democrat who was one of the measure's sponsors.

Delaware, Oklahoma, Texas and Wisconsin area among a growing number of states seeking to provide a less restrictive alternative to full guardianship, a step that is intended to allow people to direct their own lives.

The laws, backed by advocates for people with disabilities, require the courts to consider "supported decision-making" agreements. They allow a person with a disability to choose someone who can help with critical tasks such as reviewing a lease, but cannot make a decision for them.

"We're not calling for abolishing conservatorships, but changing the paradigm in which we see people with disabilities and see their ability to make choices in their own lives," said Judy Mark, president of Disability Voices United, a Southern California advocacy group.

Dennis Borel, executive director of the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, said that approach applies "the lightest possible touch" to the process of formal oversight.

Borel said it's extremely hard for someone to be removed from a guardianship. In one memorable case, he recalled a man with an intellectual disability who had the support of his caretakers in a state institution to move into a community housing facility.

But the move was initially denied because the man remained under guardianship of his grandmother — even though she had died years before.

“It’s still harder to get your rights restored than to never go under unnecessary guardianship,” he said.

Associated Press writers Michael Catalini in Trenton, New Jersey; Kathleen Foody in Chicago; Morgan Lee in Santa Fe, N.M.; Samuel Metz in Carson City, Nevada, Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City, and Andrew Selsky in Salem, Oregon contributed reporting.

Southern Baptists press for sex abuse review to advance

By HOLLY MEYER The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A top Southern Baptist Convention committee is facing mounting pressure from within the denomination to move forward without further delay an investigation into how it handled sexual abuse allegations.

Many seminary presidents, state convention leaders and pastors in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination are frustrated with the Executive Committee’s inaction.

The critics, growing in number, have called for the committee to accept the terms of the investigation set by thousands of Southern Baptist delegates in June. Some have warned a failure to do so risks financial contributions from churches, erodes trust within the convention and runs counter to the evangelical denomination’s bottom-up structure.

The Executive Committee, which acts on behalf of the convention when it is not holding a national meeting, is facing a crisis of confidence, said the Rev. Adam Greenway, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. The Executive Committee is at this point because of a “colossal failure of leadership,” he said.

“We’re seeing play out before a watching world something that should never have been allowed to escalate to this point,” Greenway said.

The Executive Committee is facing a third-party investigation into allegations it mishandled sexual abuse cases, resisted reforms and intimidated survivors, but it is divided on the terms of the review, including a request to waive its attorney-client privilege that protects some communications with its lawyers. The waiver is viewed as a key demand of the delegates, known as messengers, who put the investigation in motion.

This is the latest tension point in the SBC’s reckoning with its abuse scandal. A 2019 report from the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News showed the scope of the issue by documenting hundreds of cases in Southern Baptist churches, including several in which alleged perpetrators remained in ministry.

The recent wave of pushback includes a letter signed by 25 Southern Baptist pastors in South Carolina. They called on the Executive Committee to submit to a thorough, independent assessment and said they plan to consider directing their churches’ financial support of the committee elsewhere if it does not comply.

“This work necessitates waiving attorney-client privilege — as the messengers directed — in order to unequivocally support a transparent investigation, engender trust from the churches and messengers, and, most importantly, show Christ-like love to victims of sexual abuse,” says the letter, posted Thursday on Twitter.

A statement attributed to an Executive Committee spokesperson said investigators will be given “appropriate access” to documents and the committee thinks the delegates’ intentions can be achieved without exposing the SBC to unnecessary damage. They are concerned too many of the statements inaccurately reflect the Executive Committee’s motives.

At the national SBC gathering in June, thousands of delegates sent the message that they did not want the Executive Committee to oversee an investigation of its own actions. Instead, delegates voted overwhelmingly to create a task force charged with providing oversight of a third-party review, which will be conducted by investigative firm Guidepost Solutions. The delegates also want the firm’s findings given to the task force and made public ahead of next year’s annual meeting.

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The divided Executive Committee has held two meetings with hours of discussion on the investigation. Although it approved allocating \$1.6 million for the assessment, the committee has twice delayed finalizing an agreement for the investigation in favor of further negotiations between its officers and task force representatives. Pushback among many Southern Baptists has grown with each deferral.

The task force has urged the Executive Committee to waive attorney-client privilege for the investigation. But attempts to do so have failed to get enough votes during the top panel's two recent meetings. Some Executive Committee members are wary of taking that step, saying it could jeopardize their insurance policies, while others are concerned about the consequences of not doing what the delegates have asked.

The task force is not budging on the privilege waiver and shared a revised contract Friday, emphasizing the waiver as a priority for the investigation.

"We believe the outcry of Southern Baptists this week has reinforced that position," the task force said in a statement.

In a letter Friday to Southern Baptists, Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd urged the members of the committee, the task force and Guidepost Solutions to cooperate and "find a way forward together." Floyd wrote that Executive Committee members are weighing how to do their job without harming the SBC.

"No one is trying to defy the will of the messengers, rather to prayerfully and carefully fulfill the will of the messengers," Floyd said.

The Rev. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, issued a statement Wednesday saying the question facing the Executive Committee is not whether to comply with the delegates' mandate, but how.

"This is not just a matter of sentiment, it must be a matter of action, and time has run out," said Mohler, who leads the SBC's flagship seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

The board of trustees and officers of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan also spoke out. They passed a resolution this week calling on the Executive Committee to abide by the delegates' terms, including waiving attorney-client privilege.

The Rev. Jerome Taylor, recording secretary for the Michigan convention, said he supported the resolution because "the voice of the messenger is so much of a primary emphasis in our polity and how we believe church governance should go." Taylor said the investigation is about justice and prevention as well as kindness and care for those harmed.

The Rev. Grant Gaines, the Tennessee pastor who proposed creation of the task force in June, told The Associated Press any investigatory agreement must include waiving privilege and an unredacted report of the findings. Gaines and several other Tennessee pastors also signed a letter urging the Executive Committee to act.

"The groundswell of pushback to the Executive Committee's refusal to waive attorney-client privilege is happening because Southern Baptists want justice for survivors and because Southern Baptists want to preserve our democratic polity," Gaines said. "When an overwhelming majority of SBC messengers vote to do something, we want it to be done."

The Executive Committee is expected to meet again next week.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Oct. 2, the 275th day of 2021. There are 90 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 2, 1869, political and spiritual leader Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in Porbandar, India.

On this date:

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In 1890, comedian Groucho Marx was born Julius Marx in New York.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson suffered a serious stroke at the White House that left him paralyzed on his left side.

In 1941, during World War II, German armies launched an all-out drive against Moscow; Soviet forces succeeded in holding onto their capital.

In 1944, German troops crushed the two-month-old Warsaw Uprising, during which a quarter of a million people had been killed.

In 1967, Thurgood Marshall was sworn as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court as the court opened its new term.

In 1970, one of two chartered twin-engine planes flying the Wichita State University football team to Utah crashed into a mountain near Silver Plume, Colorado, killing 31 of the 40 people on board.

In 1984, Richard W. Miller became the first FBI agent to be arrested and charged with espionage. (Miller was tried three times; he was sentenced to 20 years in prison, but was released after nine years.)

In 1986, the Senate joined the House in voting to override President Reagan's veto of stiff economic sanctions against South Africa.

In 2002, the Washington, D.C.-area sniper attacks began, setting off a frantic manhunt lasting three weeks. (John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo were finally arrested for killing 10 people and wounding three others; Muhammad was executed in 2009; Malvo was sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2005, a tour boat, the Ethan Allen, capsized on New York's Lake George, killing 20 elderly passengers. Playwright August Wilson died in Seattle at age 60. Actor-comedian Nipsey Russell died in New York at age 87.

In 2017, rock superstar Tom Petty died at a Los Angeles hospital at the age of 66, a day after suffering cardiac arrest at his home in Malibu, California.

In 2019, House Democrats threatened to make White House defiance of a congressional request for testimony and documents potential grounds for an article of impeachment against President Donald Trump. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo acknowledged for the first time that he had been on the phone call in which Trump pressed Ukraine's president to investigate Democrat Joe Biden.

Ten years ago: Syrian dissidents formally established a broad-based national council designed to overthrow President Bashar Assad's regime, which they accused of pushing the country to the brink of civil war.

Five years ago: Colombians rejected a peace deal with leftist rebels by a razor-thin margin in a national referendum, scuttling years of painstaking negotiations and delivering a stunning setback to President Juan Manuel Santos. Hall of Fame broadcaster Vin Scully signed off for the last time, ending 67 years behind the mic for the Dodgers, as he called the team's 7-1 loss to the Giants in San Francisco.

One year ago: Stricken by COVID-19, President Donald Trump was injected with an experimental drug combination at the White House before being flown to a military hospital, where he was given Remdesivir, an antiviral drug. Trump campaign manager Bill Stepien also tested positive for the coronavirus. Two Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Mike Lee of Utah, said they had tested positive for the coronavirus, as the Senate prepared for confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett. Hall of Famer Bob Gibson, the dominating St. Louis Cardinals pitcher who won seven consecutive World Series starts, died of cancer in his hometown of Omaha, Nebraska; he was 84.

Today's Birthdays: Retired MLB All-Star Maury Wills is 89. Movie critic Rex Reed is 83. Singer-songwriter Don McLean is 76. Cajun/country singer Jo-el Sonnier (sahn-YAY') is 75. Actor Avery Brooks is 73. Fashion designer Donna Karan (KA'-ruhn) is 73. Photographer Annie Leibovitz is 72. Rock musician Mike Rutherford (Genesis, Mike & the Mechanics) is 71. Singer-actor Sting is 70. Actor Robin Riker is 69. Actor Lorraine Bracco is 67. Country musician Greg Jennings (Restless Heart) is 67. Rock singer Phil Oakey (The Human League) is 66. R&B singer Freddie Jackson is 65. Singer-producer Robbie Nevil is 63. Retro-soul singer James Hunter is 59. Rock musician Bud Gaugh (Sublime, Eyes Adrift) is 54. Folk-country singer Gillian Welch is 54. Country singer Kelly Willis is 53. Actor Joey Slotnick is 53. R&B singer Dion Allen (Az Yet) is

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51. Actor-talk show host Kelly Ripa (TV: "Live with Kelly and Ryan") is 51. Rock musician Jim Root (AKA #4 Slipknot) is 50. Singer Tiffany is 50. Rock singer Lene Nystrom is 48. Actor Efren Ramirez is 48. R&B singer LaTocha Scott (Xscape) is 49. Gospel singer Mandisa (TV: "American Idol") is 45. Actor Brianna Brown is 42. Rock musician Mike Rodden (Hinder) is 39. Former tennis player Marion Bartoli is 37. Actor Christopher Larkin is 34. Rock singer Brittany Howard (Alabama Shakes) is 33. Actor Samantha Barks is 31. Actor Elizabeth McLaughlin is 28.