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Upcoming Events

Monday, Oct. 11

No School - Native American Day

Tuesday, Oct. 12

12:43 p.m. to 2:43 p.m.: PSAT Pre-Administration
Volleyball at Tiospa Zina (7th/C match at 5 p.m.,
8th/JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow)
7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Wednesday, Oct. 13

Elementary School LifeTouch Pictures, 8-11 a.m.
PSAT Testing for sophomores and juniors during
first hour

Thursday, Oct. 14

High School LifeTouch Pictures, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.
3:30 p.m.: Region 1A cross Country Meet in
Webster

4:00 p.m.: Junior High Football Jamboree in Groton

Volleyball hosts Milbank (7th/C match at 6:55 p.m.,
8th/JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow)

Friday, Oct. 15

7 p.m.: Football at Sisseton

Saturday, Oct. 16

Oral Interp at Florence
State Soccer in Sioux Falls
JV Volleyball Tourney in Milbank

Starting 10/24/21, you must dial the area code for all calls. This change supports 988 as the new 3-digit code to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Help Wanted

Applications will be accepted for skating rink manager and attendants for the City of Groton. Contact City Hall 397-8422 for an application or print one online at <http://city.grotonsd.gov/>. EOE.

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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This was the chuckle of the day. Joni Groeblichhoff drove by the elementary school and discovered the balls were blown off the roof and chilling by the building. (Photo by Joni Groeblichhoff)

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Rainbows by Debra McKiver

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Rainbows by Tanya Johnson

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Rainbows by Marie Miller

(and Marie is still looking for the pots of gold!)

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Rainbows by Kim Weber

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This big tree came crashing down in the alley behind Ron Rehfluss' place. It broke free the west phase of the line, but it did not cause an outage. This photo taken after the repair work was completed. The tree landed on the garage which received roof damage. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The flag poles at the Veteran's Circle in the Groton Union Cemetery were flattened by the wind. (Photo by Doug Hamilton)

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The home of Tony Garcia received some structure damage from downed tree branches.

(Photo by Wynella Abeln)

The Scientist Who Swallowed the Bacteria

In the last couple years, I have developed a renewed awe and appreciation of our scientists around the world who work for entire careers to advance science and medicine in their laboratories and beyond. One such scientist is Dr. Barry Marshall.

Marshall is an Australian physician scientist, who in the early 1980's along with his cohort Dr. Robin Warren, initiated a paradigm shift in the world's understanding of gastrointestinal disease when they discovered the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*. Prior to that, peptic ulcer disease was thought to be due entirely to lifestyle factors and stress. Marshall and Warren were ultimately able to show that *H. pylori* played a major role in maybe 80 percent of ulcers worldwide at that time.

H. pylori is an unusual bacterium in that it can grow and thrive in a highly acidic environment like the stomach, and for that reason it was difficult to grow in culture. It was found to be widespread around the world, partly due to poor water sanitation systems. The bacteria can invade the surface of the stomach and duodenum, causing inflammation of the stomach or gastritis, ulcers, and rarely, stomach cancer. We now know that if *H. pylori* is a causative factor in a patient's stomach ulcers, eradication of the bacteria is an essential part of curing the patient's disease.

Now here is the greatest piece of this science story. At the time Marshall and Warren made their discovery, the worldwide scientific community was skeptical that *H. pylori* was an important factor in peptic ulcer disease. *H. pylori* did not grow in mouse or rat stomachs, so there was not a good way to study it in a traditional lab. Famously, in 1984 Marshall underwent biopsy of his own stomach, proving he did not carry the bacteria nor have any stomach disease. Then, he drank a beaker of *H. pylori* culture broth. What followed was an acute gastric illness, and after 2 weeks he had another biopsy showing proven *H. pylori* infection and gastritis. He then cured himself with an antibiotic and bismuth.

After Marshall's case study was published, much further research ensued. Today, we can detect *H. pylori* in our patients with several noninvasive testing strategies, and if detected treat them with a combination of antibiotics and acid reducing medication. Surgery to remove a portion of ulcerated stomach, commonplace prior to this discovery, is now incredibly rare in the developed world. In 2005 Marshall and Warren were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology for their detective work.

I wonder, had Dr. Marshall not risked his own health for his experiment, would our understanding have shifted so quickly? Maybe, maybe not, but the story sure wouldn't be as captivating.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD

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Groton Area falls short of Bronze Title

Groton Area took part in the Redfield Volleyball Pool Play Tourney Saturday. The Tigers went 1-3 on the day.

The opening match was with Warner. The Monarchs won the first set, 25-8 which included an eight point run. In the second set, it was tied at three, four and five before the Monarchs went on a run and ended up scoring the last seven points of the set for the 25-12 win. Anna Fjeldheim had five kills and two blocks to lead the Tigers. Alyssa Thaler had 11 digs, Sydney Liecht had a block and an ace serve in addition to her six digs and one kill.

Groton	8	12			
Warner	25	25			
	Kills	Digs	Blocks	Aces	Assists
Madeline Flihs	1	2	0	0	0
Sydney Leicht	1	6	1	1	0
Aspen Johnson	2	0	0	0	0
Megan Flihs	0	0	0	0	0
Liz Flihs	1	1	0	0	7
Alyssa Thaler	0	11	0	0	1
Allyssa Locke	0	6	0	0	1
Trista Keith	0	3	0	0	0
Anna Fjeldheim	5	2	0	0	0

Belle Fourche jumped out to a 6-1 lead in the first set. Groton Area battled back to within one, 11-10, but Belle Fourche would rally for a 20-13 lead and would go on to win, 22-15. The second set was tied six times and there were two lead changes before Belle Fourche would get the upper hand and go on for the win, 25-17. Sydney Liecht had four kills and six digs. Elizabeth Flihs had 10 assists, three kills and three digs. Alyssa Thaler had the lone ace serve and she also had five digs.

Groton	15	17			
Belle Fourche	25	25			
	Kills	Digs	Blocks	Aces	Assists
Madeline Flihs	2	6	0	0	1
Sydney Leicht	4	6	0	0	0
Aspen Johnson	1	0	0	0	0
Maddie Bjerke	3	0	0	0	0
Liz Flihs	3	3	0	0	10
Alyssa Thaler	0	9	0	1	0
Allyssa Locke	0	1	0	0	0
Trista Keith	0	4	0	0	0
Anna Fjeldheim	2	0	0	0	0

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Groton Area had 19 kills, one block and 11 ace serves in its double win over Waverly/South Shore. The Tigers jumped out to a 10-4 lead in the first set and went for a 25-15 win. The Tigers jumped out to an 8-0 lead in the second set as Sydney Leicht had five consecutive ace serves down the stretch to help give Groton Area a 25-5 second set win. Sydney Leicht and Aspen Johnson each had six kills while Alyssa Thaler had six digs and Leicht five. Leicht had a block and five ace serves while Elizabeth Fliehs had 13 assists.

Groton	25	25			
Waverly/South Shore	15	5			
	Kills	Digs	Blocks	Aces	Assists
Madeline Fliehs	4	1	0	1	0
Sydney Leicht	6	5	1	5	0
Aspen Johnson	6	0	0	1	0
Maddie Bjerke	1	0	0	0	1
Liz Fliehs	0	2	0	2	13
Alyssa Thaler	0	6	0	1	0
Allyssa Locke	0	3	0	1	1
Trista Keith	0	2	0	0	0
Anna Fjeldheim	2	2	0	0	0

The final match would determine who would win the Bronze title as Groton Area and Webster Area were both 1-0 in the Bronze title. In the first set, Webster Area took a 3-0 lead before Groton Area came back to tie the set at four and five. The set was tied at 14, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 23. Webster scored the last two points for the 25-23 win. The Bearcats also took a 3-0 start in the second set, but after the set was tied at five, six and seven, the Bearcats took a 10-7 lead and went on to win, 25-19. Sydney Leicht had 11 digs. Aspen Johnson had seven kills and Madeline Fliehs had five kills. Fliehs and Anna Fjeldheim each had one block. Having one ace serve each were Fliehs, Allyssa Locke and Elizabeth Fliehs. Elizabeth also had 20 assists.

Groton	23	19			
Webster	25	25			
	Kills	Digs	Blocks	Aces	Assists
Madeline Fliehs	5	5	1	1	0
Sydney Leicht	2	11	0	0	0
Aspen Johnson	7	4	0	0	0
Maddie Bjerke	4	1	0	0	1
Liz Fliehs	0	5	0	1	20
Alyssa Thaler	0	6	0	0	0
Allyssa Locke	0	7	0	1	1
Trista Keith	0	6	0	0	0
Anna Fjeldheim	3	1	1	0	0

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

Another defibrillator moment for Vikings fans as their beloved purple give up 11 points late in the 4th quarter before Kirk Cousins hit three passes to move within range for a Greg Joseph 54-yard field goal as time expired. Place it back on the wall and get it ready for next week.

First Half:

The first half moved along quickly. The Lions took the opening kick down the field, mixing in the pass and run, to set up a Siebert 39-yard field. The Vikings returned the favor, with some precision sideline passes to Justin Jefferson and hard running by Alexander Mattison to set up a 38 yard Viking field goal. 3-3 after the first quarter.

The Vikings appeared to take control in the second quarter, adding another Joseph 38-yard field at the 9:50 mark on 11 plays for 55 yards. The Vikings' defense holds tight, and the offense puts together its only touchdown drive of the game, ending with a Mattison 15-yard catch. The Lions put together a nine-play drive to get a 53-yard field goal to finish the half - Vikings 13 Lions 6.

Second Half:

The Vikings have struggled to get the ball in the endzone since the first game versus Cincinnati. Today was no different. Instead, they settled for 3 Greg Joseph field goals.

The score remained 13-6 after three quarters.

The fourth quarter was quiet as well up until the 5-minute mark. The Vikings appeared to secure the win, going up by ten with 4:40 to go on another Joseph 55-yarder. After stopping the Lions, the Vikings moved within field goal range, only to have Joseph come up short. That seemed to breathe a little life back into the Lions, who drove down and got a field goal of their own.

With 2:20 to play and up by seven, the Vikings just needed to run out the clock. Well, that's never a given with this team. They got to the 2:00 minute warning. Then on third down, Mattison gets stripped, the Lions recover and have their best field position of the day. Starting at the Viking 20 yard line, it takes only three plays to punch it in and get within a point of tying the game. The Lions, looking for their first win, go for two and take a one-point lead with just 37 seconds to play.

A silenced and stunned crowd thought they had seen it all. But wait.

It was time for Kirk Cousins to earn his \$28 million contract. He quickly hit Adam Thielen for 20 over the middle. A quick pass to the sideline for Jefferson, unable to get out of bounds, costs the Vikings their final timeout. Cousins hit Thielen with another 20-yard gain over the middle to get the Vikings within range. Cousins then waited until two seconds were left on the clock and spiked the ball.

Joseph comes in to connect on his fourth field goal of the game, hitting a 54-yarder as time expired.

The final score of the game: Vikings 19 Lions 17.

Statistical Leaders:

Kirk Cousins 25 for 34, 275 yards, 1 TD pass

Alexander Mattison 25 carries for 113 yards rushing, 7 catches for 70 yards, 1 TD

Justin Jefferson 7 catches for 124 yards

The highlights of the day:

First-round draft pick Christian Darrisaw played in his first game of the year and was playing left tackle when the Vikings scored their only TD of the game. After missing 16 straight games, Anthony Barr returned to the starting line-up.

The irony of the day:

Sometimes it's nice to be on the winning end of games that come down to the wire, but then again, it was the Detroit Lions.

Next game: The Vikings will look to get back to .500 as they travel to Carolina to play the 3-2 Panthers. A lot hinges on whether or not the top two running backs in the NFC play: Christian McCaffery vs. Dalvin Cook. A 3-3 record heading into the bye week is just what the team needs to keep the playoffs in sight.

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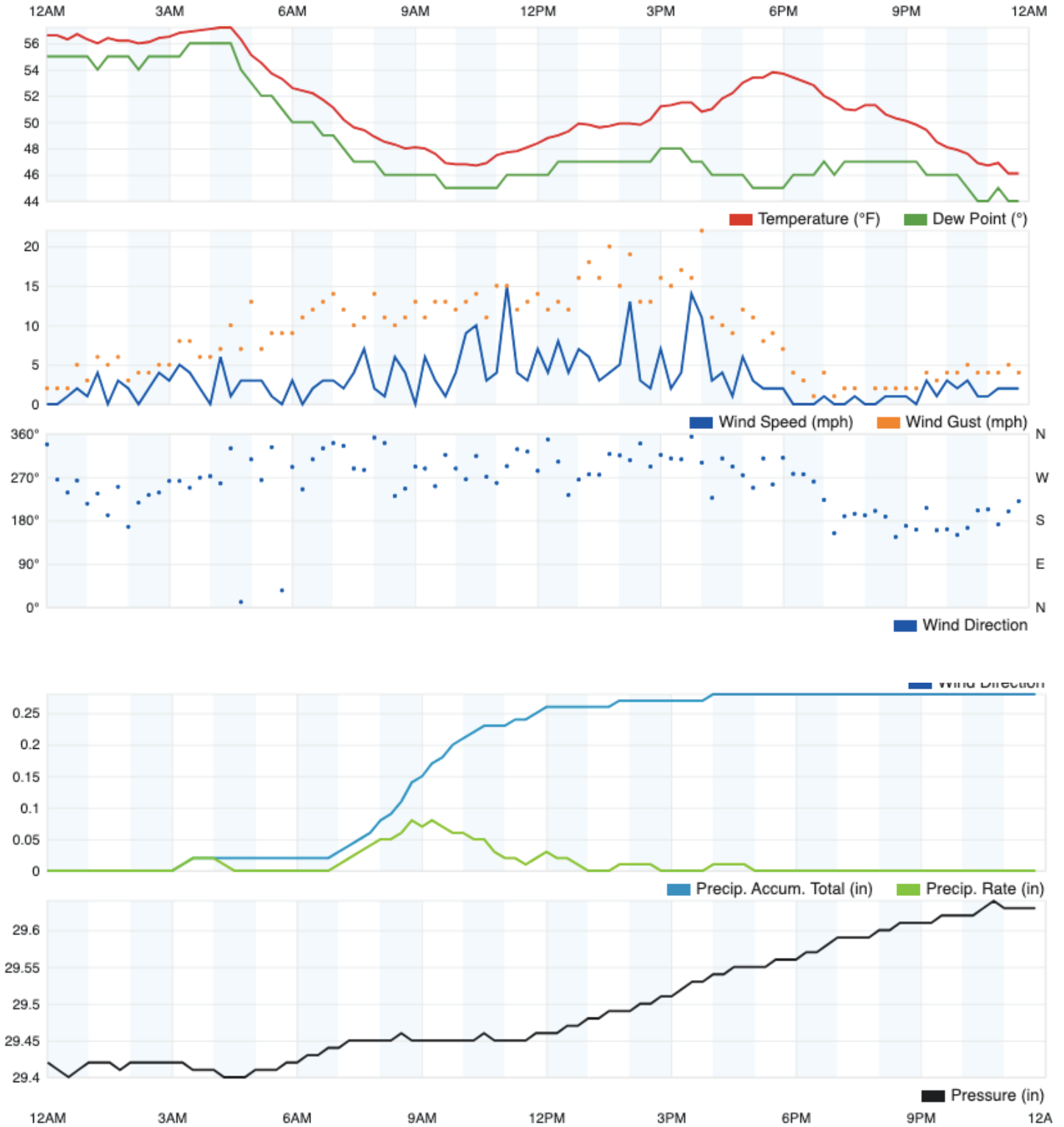


It was a scarlet sunset Sunday evening. (Photo by Julianna Kosel)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Columbus
Day



Sunny

High: 70 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 39 °F

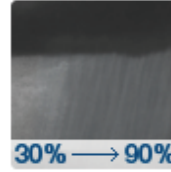
Tuesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 64 °F

Tuesday
Night



30% → 90%

Chance
Showers then
Showers and
Breezy

Low: 49 °F

Wednesday



100%

Showers and
Breezy

High: 62 °F

Dry Early Week, Wet Middle Week

Today

**Sunny, Highs
In the 60s**

Wednesday

**Rain likely, Highs
55 to 65°**

Tuesday

**Chc Rain West
Highs 55 to 65°**



Graphic issued 2:45 AM CDT Monday

A ridge of high pressure aloft will bring mild temperatures and dry conditions to the area today. However, on Tuesday, rain will start to move into western and central South Dakota, and then should spread across the state Tuesday night and Wednesday. #sdwx #mnwx

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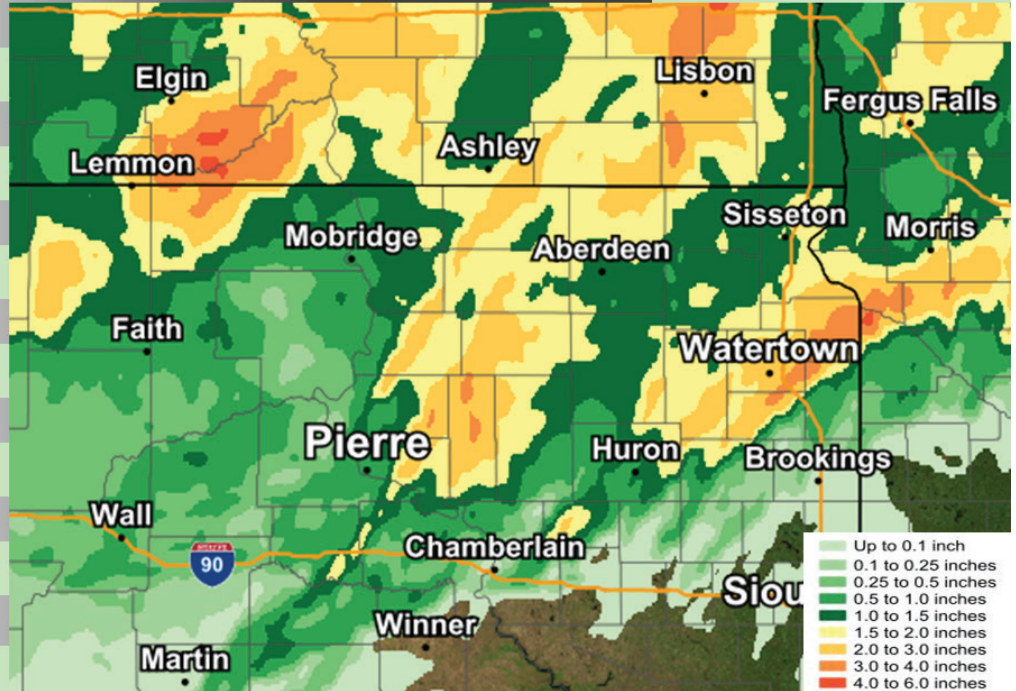
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Weekend Rainfall Totals

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 10/10/2021 9:24 PM Central

Valid as of 6pm October 10th, 2021. Measurements are listed, amounts are approximated on the map.

Odessa 1W	4.08"
Big Stone City 1W	3.24"
Milbank 7NE	3.15"
Frederick	2.74"
Watertown Muni Airport	2.27"
Hoven 2 N	1.70"
Aberdeen Rgnl Airport	1.30"
Mobridge Muni Airport	0.96"
Pierre Rgnl Airport	0.71"
Lantry 3NW	0.67"
Reliance	0.48"
Mound City 4SW	0.45"
Danforth 5E	0.32"
Whitehorse 2E	0.14"



Several inches of rainfall were reported in some spots of the region from this past weekend's storm system. Parts of west-central Minnesota into northeast and east-central South Dakota were again the locales that picked up the most. But, portions of the eastern side of the Missouri Valley saw some decent amounts. We'll have a couple of dry days ahead before another storm system moves our way toward midweek with the potential for more significant rainfall expected.

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Today in Weather History

October 11, 1997: High winds and hail caused nearly \$20,000 in damage to rural Meade County homes.

1846: A major hurricane, possibly a Category 5, moved through the Caribbean Sea. This Great Havana Hurricane struck western Cuba on 10 October. It hit the Florida Keys on 11 October, destroying the old Key West Lighthouse and Fort Zachary Taylor.

1906: Games 1 and 2 of all Chicago World Series were played amid snow flurries. Snow would not happen again in a World Series until 1997. The high temperature for game 3 played on this day was 43 degrees.

1925 - Widespread early season snows fell in the northeastern U.S., with as much as two feet in New Hampshire and Vermont. The heavy snow blocked roads and cancelled football games. (David Ludlum)

1954 - A deluge of 6.72 inches of rain in 48 hours flooded the Chicago River, causing ten million dollars damage in the Chicago area. (9th-11th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - More than thirty cities in the Upper Midwest reported record low temperatures for the date, including Waterloo IA and Scottsbluff NE where the mercury dipped to 16 degrees. Tropical Storm Floyd brought heavy rain to southern Florida, moisture from Hurricane Ramon produced heavy rain in southern California, and heavy snow blanketed the mountains of New York State and Vermont. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Low pressure brought gale force winds to the Great Lakes Region, with snow and sleet reported in some areas. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the north central U.S. The mercury hit 84 degrees at Cutbank MT and Worland WY. The temperature at Gunnison CO soared from a morning low of 12 degrees to a high of 66 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Much of the nation enjoyed "Indian Summer" type weather. Nine cities in the central U.S. reported record highs for the date as temperatures warmed into the 80s and 90s. Record highs included 90 degrees at Grand Island NE and 97 degrees at Waco TX. Strong winds along a cold front crossing the Northern High Plains Region gusted to 80 mph at Ames Monument WY during the early morning. (The National Weather Summary)

2005: A tropical depression, formerly Hurricane Vince, became the first tropical cyclone to make landfall in Spain since 1842.

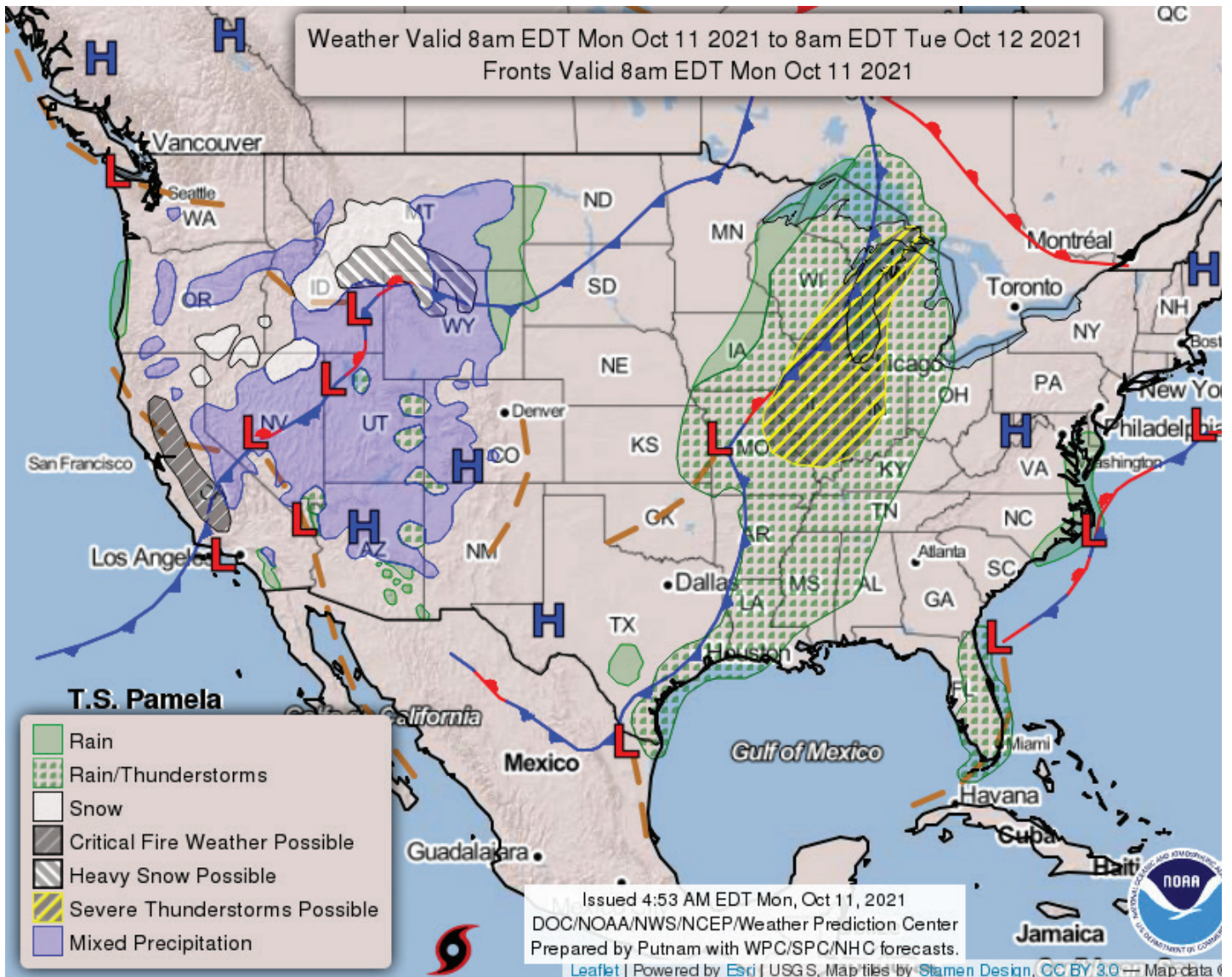
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 57.2 °F at 4:30 AM
Low Temp: 46.1 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 22 mph at 4:00 PM
Precip: 0.28

Record High: 93° in 2015
Record Low: 16° in 1935
Average High: 62°F
Average Low: 36°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 0.83
Precip to date in Oct.: 1.30
Average Precip to date: 19.16
Precip Year to Date: 16.72
Sunset Tonight: 6:57:12 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42:35 AM



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NEVER CHANGING!

Dan and his Dad were sitting together looking at a family photo album. Looking at a picture of a young man who had a head full of hair he asked, "Who's that guy, Dad?"

"Me," he replied. "That's how I used to look."

"What happened?" he asked curiously.

Things change. People change. Times change. The universe changes. The heavens, admitted the Psalmist, "will grow old." God will change them as a man putting on new clothing and throwing away the old. And then he wrote with confidence, "But You will remain the same, and Your years will never end!"

Everyone is familiar with change. It is a part of life. There are times when it is welcome, and there are times when we fight against anything that is new and different, untried and unproven. There are days when everything is turned upside down and inside out. Some mornings begin with peace and calm and then turn into a tempest by lunch. We assume that we will escape every illness and live long only to be diagnosed with cancer. We know that our marriage will last a lifetime only to be told our spouse wants a divorce.

Is there any news that could be more welcome - more comforting - more desired - more important - more joy producing than these words of the Psalmist: "You - O Lord - will remain the same?" Your character will remain throughout eternity.

No matter the day or the difficulty, the problem or the pain, His love and His faithfulness guard us! How fortunate we are to have a God Who is and will always be!

Prayer: We are comforted to know, Father, that if we believe in Your Word we can trust You to honor it. Great is Your faithfulness and Your love! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But You will remain the same, and Your years will never end. Psalm 102:27

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2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

South Dakota school turns to locally grown produce for lunch

By DEB HOLLAND Black Hills Pioneer

STURGIS, S.D. (AP) — Rhonda Ramsdell knows you can't beat fresh, local produce.

But even Ramsdell, the Meade School District Food Service Director, was surprised at the response of students when she recently offered locally-grown cucumbers for lunch.

"I never thought I would have to ration cucumbers for school lunch," she said.

The Meade School District is working through the Black Hills Farmers Market to develop the Farm-to-School program, Ramsdell said. In addition to cucumbers, the school district has offered fresh sweet corn and tomatoes.

Ramsdell said the less time that passes between farm and table, the fewer nutrients fresh produce can lose. Also, serving local produce is a way to get students excited about healthy eating, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

Securing locally-grown items starts with a questionnaire which local producers must complete to determine if they qualify.

"That includes a lot of safety questions and things that are generally included in GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification for farmers," Ramsdell said.

Once a producer becomes qualified, the school district can buy their products through the Black Hills Farmers Market wholesale program.

The Farmers Market is open to the general public Wednesdays and Saturdays 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. through October, and 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays November through April.

The wholesale program is done through an online portal. Ramsdell logs in on Mondays, determines what is available and what would fit into that week's lunch menus. She then submits her order, and the items are picked up on Wednesday and used in lunches that week.

"Anytime you can purchase locally, that's a good thing for the local economy. Also, the produce is fresher," she said. "What we buy from our suppliers doesn't look like that. It's nowhere near as fresh or as flavorful."

The students agree.

Amy Brandner, an eighth-grader at Sturgis Williams Middle School, said it's great to have fresh produce.

"Hopefully, if they offer more fresh produce, people will eat more vegetables," Brandner said.

Robert Sperling, also an eighth-grader at SWMS, said he appreciated the fresh option.

"I'm usually pretty hungry. It tasted good," he said.

SWMS Food Service Site Manager Alicia Harris, said the reaction from students concerning the fresh produce has been positive.

"Oh, my goodness! The kids loved it," she said.

It does take a little more preparation time in the kitchen to serve up local produce, but it's well worth it, Harris said. Some students even asked when they might have sweet corn again, she said.

Harris put the cucumbers and tomatoes on the self-service fruit and veggie cart at the middle school. Students devoured 15 pounds of cucumbers in two days, she said.

The sweet corn came from Cox's Farm Stand of Vale, the cucumbers from DC Gardens (Dale Castell) of Vale and the tomatoes from Richard and Sophia Meyer of Piedmont.

Buying local produce is a win/win, Ramsdell said. Sometimes producers have product that might ripen before it gets to the general public at market. But, the school district can buy and serve large quantities of the produce while it's still fresh.

"Things that might go to waste otherwise, we can pick up at a reasonable price, put it out the next day and feed our 2,000 students," Ramsdell said.

When the pheasant hunt is over, it's time to cook and eat

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By TRAVIS SVIHOVEC The Bismarck Tribune

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Thousands of hunters will take to the fields over the weekend for the opening of North Dakota's pheasant season, which means any number of birds could be headed for the pot, pan or kettle by day's end.

"You gotta eat what you bring home," Bismarck hunter Darryl Howard said.

Hunters shot more than 330,000 pheasants last season, an uptick from an off year in 2019 in which the harvest was just short of 257,000. Those numbers have tailed off in recent years, falling from 590,000 in 2015, as habitat has diminished.

The 2021 pheasant population forecast is sketchy, hampered by drought and the long-term loss of cover once provided by Conservation Reserve Program grassland acres that have been turned back to more profitable crops in recent years. Still, hunters and dogs will find birds, and the end of any successful hunt can also mark the start of a unique meal, The Bismarck Tribune reported.

Howard's approach is a meat and potatoes style, something he adapted after starting to hunt the birds in the 1990s. He grew up in Rugby and spent a dozen years in Minnewaukan before moving to Bismarck and finding better pheasant hunting opportunities.

"I like it breaded and fried in a cast iron skillet," Howard said. His side dishes might include green beans, spaghetti squash "or just a plain old baked potato."

Howard, 55, rolls the pheasant breasts and legs in seasoned flour before frying. The seasoning options are only limited by "how brave you are," he said, adding that the popular boxed mix Shore Lunch works well.

Howard's wife makes pheasant enchiladas and enchilada soup, always browning the meat as a first step. Pheasant can be substituted for chicken in many recipes but requires a little more patience, he said.

"Cooking slower is better than faster because it can get tough and chewy," he said.

At an end-of-season gathering of hunting buddies or at fundraisers in the Hettinger area, people anticipate Loren Luckow's pheasant liver pate.

"I'm not much on liver, but I've made that several times," said Luckow, 75. "A lot of my friends enjoy it."

The recipe uses a pound of pheasant livers, which calls for a donation from about 16 roosters. Many hunters take only a bird's breast and legs, so finding livers isn't difficult, he said.

A simpler recipe but one just as popular is pheasant rollups. Cubed pheasant breasts are marinated overnight in Allegro, wrapped in bacon, then grilled, broiled, or cooked on a George Foreman grill and served as an appetizer.

"I can't make them fast enough," Luckow said.

Luckow in the 1980s organized the Cedar Creek Pheasants Forever chapter. He hunts nearly every weekend of the season with a group of men ranging in age from 60 to nearly 80. It's as much a gathering as it is a hunt, Luckow said.

"If we have six guys and get six birds we're happy," he said. "We're not diehards."

The group meets at the end of the season for a pheasant feed, which likely will include pheasant casserole. The recipe starts with the simmering of six pheasant breasts or two whole pheasants.

Howard added this advice, which should be heeded before cooking any pheasant recipe: "Make sure you get all the pellets," he said.

Pheasant hunters pour tens of millions of dollars into the state's economy -- particularly in the southwest -- by paying for lodging, food and drink, gas, ammunition and accessories.

License sales so far in 2021 are down from last year in most hunting categories, but 2020 was a record year as people were looking for outdoor activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, said Randy Meissner, Game and Fish Department licensing manager.

Department data shows 2,473 nonresident 14-day small game licenses have been sold in 2021, down from 2,646 at this time in 2020. Resident small game license sales stand at 6,987, down from 7,556 last year. Resident combination licenses are up just more than 1%, going from 60,640 in 2020 to 61,336 this year.

EXPLAINER: How US states help rich foreigners shield assets

By RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

DOVER, Del. (AP) — A mention of “tax havens” typically conjures images of sun-soaked Caribbean escapes like the Cayman Islands or the buttoned-down banks of Switzerland. Not South Dakota.

But a report detailing how world leaders and some of the planet’s wealthiest people hide their riches has drawn new scrutiny to the growth of tax havens in the United States.

The release of the “Pandora Papers” report by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists has shed light on the financial dealings of the elite and the corrupt and how they have used offshore accounts and tax havens to shield trillions of dollars in assets.

Along with the familiar offshore havens, the report also disclosed secret accounts in trusts scattered throughout the United States, including 81 in South Dakota, 37 in Florida and 35 in Delaware.

According to the report, among those who have used South Dakota trusts as tax havens are Guillermo Lasso, president of Ecuador, and family members of Carlos Morales Troncoso, a sugar industry magnate and former vice president of the Dominican Republic.

David Tassillo, the co-owner of Pornhub, one of the world’s largest online porn sites, was linked in the Pandora Papers to two shell companies registered in Delaware.

Here’s a look at some of the ways some U.S. states have established themselves as attractive places for wealthy people to park billions of dollars:

HOW DID IT START?

South Dakota launched its financial industry in 1980, an era of double-digit interest rates that had banks paying higher rates to borrow money than the interest rates they were allowed under usury laws to charge on credit cards and consumer loans. In an effort to help South Dakota banks and boost the state’s moribund economy, officials eliminated the state’s usury limit on banks. It then invited New York-based Citibank, which was struggling financially, to set up a credit card operation, which it did the following year. More banks, and a booming trust industry, soon followed.

By 2019, the state had more than 100 trust companies holding combined assets of about \$370 billion. A single company, South Dakota Trust Company LLC, boasts on its website of having more than \$100 billion in assets under administration, with more than 100 billionaire and 300 “centimillionaire” clients. International families from 54 countries account for 15% of its clientele, according to the website.

Delaware launched its credit card and financial services industry in 1981. The state now oversees 47 state and national trust companies with about \$3.8 billion in assets. It is also the corporate home more than 1.6 million business entities, including limited liability companies whose membership and operations typically are not subject to public scrutiny. Franchise taxes on business entities represent the state’s second-largest source of revenue after personal income taxes, netting almost \$1.3 billion last year.

WHAT ATTRACTS MONEY TO THESE STATES?

A key reason many wealthy people turn to certain states as tax havens is that their lawmakers have abolished the “rule against perpetuities.” Eliminating the rule has allowed the establishment of so-called dynasty trusts, in which wealth can be passed from generation to generation while avoiding federal estate taxes.

Laws in South Dakota and Delaware also allow “asset protection trusts,” which protect wealth from claims against creditors. Such trusts can be attractive to wealthy lawyers and doctors as a way to shield their assets from malpractice claims. They can also be used to protect assets from ex-spouses, future spouses, disgruntled business partners or angry clients. Both states have a host of other laws that provide wealthy people with considerable flexibility in establishing, controlling and modifying trusts as they see fit.

Tax avoidance is another big draw. While most states levy a tax on trust income, trusts established in Delaware are not subject to state income tax if the beneficiaries are not Delaware residents. South Dakota does not tax personal income, corporate income or capital gains.

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WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY PROTECTIONS?

The Pandora Papers revealed how hundreds of politicians, celebrities, religious leaders and drug dealers have used shell companies and trusts to hide their wealth and investments.

"The Pandora Papers is all about individuals using secrecy jurisdictions, which we would call tax havens, when the goal is to evade taxes," said Steve Wamhoff, director of federal tax policy at the left-leaning Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy in Washington.

South Dakota provides extensive privacy protections for assets held in trusts, including the sealing of trust-related court documents and court proceedings. Delaware is a popular venue for registering limited liability companies, which can include shell companies set up specifically to hide assets or financial transactions. Delaware law does not require the public disclosure of the names of LLC owners or members.

HOW DO THE STATES BENEFIT?

The trust industry can be lucrative, not just for wealthy people and the companies that help them shield assets, but also for government coffers.

In South Dakota, the fund balance from the state's bank franchise tax, which included franchise taxes paid by trust companies, totaled more than \$44.6 million in fiscal 2020, up from \$34.7 million the previous year and more than double the balance in 2015.

Delaware collected almost \$81 million in franchise taxes from banks and trust companies in fiscal 2020. Bank franchise tax payers are exempt from Delaware's corporate income tax. But the overall impact of the trust industry is much greater. A 2011 report commissioned by a coalition of Delaware law firms and banking institutions estimated that out-of-state trusts had contributed between \$600 million and \$1.1 billion per year to Delaware's economy.

IS ANYTHING BEING DONE ABOUT IT?

While some in Congress are calling for tighter scrutiny of trust companies working with foreign clients, the response to the Pandora Papers in Delaware has thus far been muted.

Rony Baltazar, a spokesman for the Delaware Department of State, said the agency is unaware of any call by legislators or tax fairness groups to change how the state manages the registration of corporations or trusts.

Federal officials, meanwhile, have taken aim at some privacy protections with enactment earlier this year of the Corporate Transparency Act. The act requires many businesses to identify their "beneficial owners" who exercise substantial control over an entity, or who own or control at least 25% of the ownership interests, to the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, or FinCEN.

The law is aimed at banning anonymous shell companies that criminals and foreign officials have used to hide financial dealings and launder money, but it includes exemptions and exceptions. Among other things, the term "beneficial owner" does not apply to a person whose only interest in the entity is through a right of inheritance.

Sioux Falls woman charged with falsely reporting shooting

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls woman has been charged with false reporting after calling in a fake report of a person with a gunshot wound in the chest because she wanted to get in contact with a police detective.

The Argus Leader reports the 48-year-old woman first called 911 Thursday afternoon, asking to be put in contact with the detective, police spokesman Sam Clemens said. Dispatch told her they couldn't give the number.

The woman said she would call back, Clemens said. She then called 911 twice to report someone had been shot in the chest.

Police quickly figured out no one had been shot and that there were no threats. Instead, they found

the woman who wanted to speak with the detective.

It's unknown why the woman wanted to speak with the detective, Clemens said. The detective didn't respond to the call.

Right-sizing the force: Army offers armor for smaller troops

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Army Capt. Kim Pierre-Zamora remembers the protective vest she was issued when she went to basic training a number of years ago. It was a size medium that hung down too far and made it difficult for her to even bend over to pick up something.

"Whenever I tried to move or tried to shoulder my weapon or shoot on a pop-up range really quickly, I would have to physically pick up the vest and move it in order to shoulder my weapon," Pierre-Zamora said.

It's a common complaint from female soldiers and small-stature men who have struggled with the bulky armor they've worn over two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in recent weeks, the Army for the first time has begun handing out armor in three additional sizes: extra small short, small short and small long. The armor can be adjusted in multiple ways to fit better and allow soldiers to move faster and more freely.

The "modular scalable vest" was distributed to more than 4,500 soldiers so far in the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, over the past few weeks. Female soldiers also will be able to get new versions of the combat shirt more tailored for a woman's shape. Those shirts are given out only when soldiers deploy.

Army researchers have been working on the changes for years, trying to come up with combat gear that is lighter and fits better.

Initially, the effort to add more sizes was in response to complaints from female soldiers, who are increasingly moving into combat jobs previously open only to men. As more women deployed to a war zone, they often found that they were shorter and smaller than many of the men and needed armor that allows for narrower shoulders, a bust and hips.

Early on, however, the Army made the decision to make the vests unisex, The decision, said Lt. Col. Stephen Miller, was based on the belief that smaller male soldiers who might need a short or small sized vest would refuse to take anything that was "stamped female." He's product manager for soldier protective equipment at PEO Soldier, an Army organization that coordinates the fielding of armor, weapons and other equipment.

That move has proved to be a success.

Nearly 25 percent or 1,200, of the 82nd Airborne soldiers so far have gotten armor in the three new sizes, said Pierre-Zamora, who works as an assistant product manager at PEO Soldier. Of those 1,200, about 100 have been women.

There are five other regular sizes that have been available previously — extra small, small, medium, large and extra large.

Pierre-Zamora said the new short and long versions fit many soldiers better. As an example, she said that she and another female soldier appear to be about the same size. But, she said she wears an extra small, while the other soldier wears an extra small short.

"Outwardly we both look like we're about the same size, but her torso is a little bit shorter than mine," she said.

The vest, she said, also allows soldiers to move the ballistic armor plates that can be inserted for additional protection. The soft pockets that hold the plates can be shifted up, so they don't rest on female soldiers' hip bones, impeding quick and agile movement. The shoulder straps are also adjustable.

The small long version of the vest better fits some thinner men.

"There are a lot of small men who were probably wearing a vest that was too big for them," Miller said. Miller said he was one of them.

"I've always been given a large or a medium in the past," he said. But he was given a size small in the

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new version "because someone who knew what they were doing fitted me for it, and said, 'No, the way the MSV (modular scalable vest) fits, this is where it goes.'"

Another soldier he knows, he said, is more than 6 feet tall, but is also very thin. He's usually gotten a medium or large based on his height and the length needed, but he now is using the small long — one of the new sizes just made available.

The new combat shirt, however, has a new version specifically for female soldiers, because the problem was the shape, not the sizes. Miller said it has shorter sleeves, a flare at the bottom, and added protection along the sides of the bust.

The new one, he said, eliminated the problem that female soldiers had with the shirt riding up on their hips. But women who have more of a straight build can still get the unisex version.

Acknowledging that complaints about the Army's body armor have been circulating for years, Miller said it took time to find vendors who could change the size and shape of the ballistic plates, while also making them lighter and effective in protecting soldiers from blasts.

"Stopping bullets is a complex problem," Miller said. "It's really taken a lot of deliberate effort to adapt the system to something that weighs less, gets after a better form factor, as well as to get after the soldiers who weren't specifically accounted for in the previous systems."

The major difficulty, he said, was cutting the weight of the plates. The new ones weigh about a pound less. So far, he said, just two vendors met the lesser weight goal without sacrificing protection.

Eventually, more than 6,000 soldiers in the 82nd Airborne Division's three brigades are expected to get the new armor. Miller said each soldier is individually fitted by trained personnel. Soldiers go through a 30-minute class to learn how the armor can be adjusted.

Cyberattacks concerning to most in US: Pearson/AP-NORC poll

By ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Most Americans across party lines have serious concerns about cyberattacks on U.S. computer systems and view China and Russia as major threats, according to a new poll.

The poll by The Pearson Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that about 9 in 10 Americans are at least somewhat concerned about hacking that involves their personal information, financial institutions, government agencies or certain utilities. About two-thirds say they are very or extremely concerned.

Roughly three-quarters say the Chinese and Russian governments are major threats to the cybersecurity of the U.S. government, and at least half also see the Iranian government and non-government bodies as threatening.

The broad consensus highlights the growing impacts of cyberattacks in an increasingly connected world and could boost efforts by President Joe Biden and lawmakers to force critical industries to boost their cyber defenses and impose reporting requirements for companies that get hacked. The poll comes amid a wave of high-profile ransomware attacks and cyber espionage campaigns in the last year that have compromised sensitive government records and led to the shutdown of the operations of energy companies, hospitals, schools and others.

"It's pretty uncommon nowadays to find issues that both large majorities of Republicans and Democrats" view as a problem, said David Sterrett, a senior research scientist at The AP-NORC Center.

Biden has made cybersecurity a key issue in his young administration and federal lawmakers are considering legislation to strengthen both public and private cyber defenses.

Michael Daniel, CEO of the Cyber Threat Alliance and a former top cybersecurity official during the Obama administration, said the poll shows the public is firmly aware of the kind of threats posed online that cybersecurity experts have been stressing for years.

"We don't need to do a whole lot more awareness raising," he said.

The explosion in the last year of ransomware, in which cyber criminals encrypt an organization's data and then demand payment to unscramble it, has underscored how gangs of extortionist hackers can

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disrupt the economy and put lives and livelihoods at risk.

One of the cyber incidents with the greatest consequences this year was a ransomware attack in May on the company that owns the nation's largest fuel pipeline, which led to gas shortages along the East Coast. A few weeks later, a ransomware attack on the world's largest meat processing company disrupted production around the world.

Victims of ransomware attacks have ranged from key U.S. agencies and Fortune 500 companies to small entities like Leonardtown, Maryland, which was one of hundreds of organizations affected worldwide when software company Kaseya was hit by ransomware during the Forth of July weekend.

"We ended up being very lucky but it definitely opened our eyes that it could happen to anyone," said Laschelle McKay, the town administrator. She said Leonardtown's I.T. provider was able to restore the town's network and files after several days.

The criminal syndicates that dominate the ransomware business are mostly Russian-speaking and operate with near impunity out of Russia or countries allied with Russia. The U.S. government has also blamed Russian spies for a major breach of U.S. government agencies known as the SolarWinds hack, so named for the U.S. software company whose product was used in the hacking.

China has also been active. In July, the Biden administration formally blamed China for a massive hack of Microsoft Exchange email server software and asserted that criminal hackers associated with the Chinese government have carried out ransomware attacks and other illicit cyber operations.

"The amount of Chinese cyber actors dwarfs the rest of the globe, combined," Rob Joyce, the director of cybersecurity at the National Security Agency, said at a recent conference. "The elite in that group really are elite. It's a law of large numbers."

Both Russia and China have denied any wrongdoing.

Older adults are much more likely to view Russia and China as serious threats. A large majority of adults over 60 say the Russian and the Chinese governments are a big threat, but only about half of those under 30 agree.

Democrats — at 79% — are somewhat more likely than Republicans — at 70% — to say the Russian government is a big threat. Former President Donald Trump, a Republican, has routinely downplayed Russian aggression. In his first comments after the SolarWinds hack was discovered in December, Trump contradicted his secretary of state and other top officials and suggested without evidence that China was behind the campaign.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,071 adults was conducted Sept. 9-13, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Omnibus, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Huge fire extinguished at oil facility in southern Lebanon

By FADI TAWIL Associated Press

ZAHRANI, Lebanon (AP) — Firefighters extinguished a huge blaze that broke out in a storage tank at one of Lebanon's main oil facilities in the country's south Monday after it sent orange flames and a thick black column of smoke into the sky.

Energy Minister Walid Fayad said the fire broke out when workers were transferring gasoline from one storage tank to another in the coastal town of Zahrani. He said nearly 250,000 liters of gasoline were burnt during the blaze, which lasted more than three hours. No one was reported hurt.

The fire came as cash-strapped Lebanon struggles through a serious power crisis partly due to severe shortages in fuel that has resulted in electricity cuts lasting up to 22 hours a day.

"The situation now is almost under full control," Fayad told reporters at the facility. He said earlier that the storage tank was for the Lebanese army.

State-run National News Agency said it was not immediately clear what caused the fire.

Lebanese troops had closed the highway linking Beirut with southern Lebanon that passes through

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Zahrani. The road was reopened after the fire was extinguished.

The Zahrani Oil Installation is about 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Beirut. It is close to one of Lebanon's main power stations, which stopped functioning two days ago due to a fuel shortage.

Earlier in the day, the head of the civil defense, Raymound Khattar, told the local MTV station that they believe there were 300,000 liters of gasoline in the tanker. Khattar added that work focused on extinguishing the fire and cooling down a nearby tanker, to keep it from igniting.

In August 2020, a blaze at Beirut's port triggered a massive explosion that killed at least 215 people, wounded thousands and destroyed the facility and nearby neighborhoods. The blast at Beirut's port, one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever reported, was caused by hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive material used in fertilizers that had been improperly stored for years.

Earlier this year, a German company found dangerous nuclear material stored at the facility in Zahrani. Eight small containers that weigh less than 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) containing depleted uranium salts were removed shortly afterward.

The material has been stored at the facility since the 1950s, when it was run by the Mediterranean Refinery Company, or Medreco. Medreco was an American company whose main shareholders were Mobil and Caltex and it was active in Lebanon for four decades until the late 1980s.

3 US-based economists win Nobel prize for societal research

By DAVID McHUGH and DAVID KEYTON Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — A U.S.-based economist won the Nobel prize for economics Monday for pioneering research that showed an increase in minimum wage does not lead to less hiring and immigrants do not lower pay for native-born workers, challenging commonly held ideas. Two others shared the award for creating a way to study these types of societal issues.

Canadian-born David Card of the University of California, Berkeley, was awarded one half of the prize for his research on how minimum wage, immigration and education affect the labor market, while the other half was shared by Joshua Angrist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Dutch-born Guido Imbens from Stanford University for their framework for studying issues that can't rely on traditional scientific methods.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said the three have "completely reshaped empirical work in the economic sciences."

"Card's studies of core questions for society and Angrist and Imbens' methodological contributions have shown that natural experiments are a rich source of knowledge," said Peter Fredriksson, chair of the Economic Sciences Committee. "Their research has substantially improved our ability to answer key causal questions, which has been of great benefit for society."

Card looked at what happened when New Jersey raised its minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$5.05, using restaurants in bordering eastern Pennsylvania as a comparison group.

Contrary to previous studies, he and his late research partner Alan Krueger found that an increase in the minimum wage had no effect on the number of employees. Card later did further work on the issue. Overall, the research concluded that the negative effects of increasing the minimum wage are small and significantly smaller than believed 30 years ago, the Nobel committee said.

Card also found that incomes of those who are native born to a country can benefit from new immigrants, while immigrants who arrived earlier are the ones at risk of being negatively affected.

Angrist and Imbens won their half of the award for working out the methodological issues that allow economists to draw solid conclusions about cause and effect even where they cannot carry out studies according to strict scientific methods.

Speaking by phone from his home in Massachusetts, Imbens told reporters that he had been asleep "after a busy weekend" when the call came.

"I was just absolutely stunned then to get a telephone call," he said. "And then I was just absolutely thrilled to hear the news ... that I got to share this with Josh Angrist and and David Card," whom he called

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"both very good friends of mine." Imbens said Angrist was best man at his wedding.

Krueger, who worked with Card on some of the research that won the Nobel, died in 2019 at age 58. He taught at Princeton for three decades and was chief U.S. Labor Department economist under then-President Bill Clinton. He served in the U.S. Treasury Department under then-President Barack Obama, then as Obama's chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. Nobel prizes are not awarded posthumously.

The award comes with a gold medal and 10 million Swedish kronor (over \$1.14 million).

Unlike the other Nobel prizes, the economics award wasn't established in the will of Alfred Nobel but by the Swedish central bank in his memory in 1968, with the first winner selected a year later. It is the last prize announced each year.

Last week, the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to journalists Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov of Russia for their fight for freedom of expression in countries where reporters have faced persistent attacks, harassment and even murder.

Ressa was the only woman honored this year in any category.

The Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to U.K.-based Tanzanian writer Abdulrazak Gurnah, who was recognized for his "uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee."

The prize for physiology or medicine went to Americans David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian for their discoveries into how the human body perceives temperature and touch.

Three scientists won the physics prize for work that found order in seeming disorder, helping to explain and predict complex forces of nature, including expanding our understanding of climate change.

Benjamin List and David W.C. MacMillan won the chemistry prize for finding an easier and environmentally cleaner way to build molecules that can be used to make compounds, including medicines and pesticides.

Read more stories about Nobel Prizes past and present by The Associated Press at <https://www.apnews.com/NobelPrizes>

Boston Marathon set to begin after pandemic hiatus

HOPKINTON, Mass. (AP) — Fast-moving, light rain and weather in the 50s greeted the runners gearing up for the Boston Marathon, which is happening Monday for the first time since the pandemic began.

It's been 30 months since athletes raced 26.2 miles (42.2 kilometers) to Copley Square in Boston, the 125th edition of the Boston Marathon, which is the world's oldest and most prestigious annual marathon.

Race Director Dave McGillivray sent a group of about 30 from the Massachusetts National Guard that walks the course annually out at 6 a.m., announcing the start of the event. McGillivray said after that he was relieved to finally be back.

"It's a great feeling to be out on the road," he said. "Everyone is excited. We're looking forward to a good day."

Last year's race was postponed until September because of the pandemic, then called off for the first time in its history. Registered runners were encouraged to complete the distance by themselves as a virtual event. This year's race was moved from Patriots' Day in April in hopes that the pandemic would abate.

Everything is different. It's the first fall edition of the marathon ever. Runners had to show proof that they're vaccinated or they had to test negative for COVID-19. They're being bused from Boston at staggered times for a rolling start. They're not waiting and stretching in the traditional athletes' village before lining up in corrals. They're expected to walk to the start and go. Masks are required until they cross the start line.

Doug Flannery, a 56-year-old Illinois resident, was at the start, waiting to run his sixth Boston Marathon. He said the COVID-19 procedures went smoothly at the medical tent and it's great to be toeing the line at a race again.

"I love that we're back to races across the country and the world," he said. "It gives people hope that

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things are starting to come back.”

For social distancing, the field is about one-third smaller, with roughly 18,000 runners instead of 30,000. It includes more Americans than normal since many athletes from countries with strict quarantine rules couldn't attend. Nearly 30,000 people are running the virtual event.

The crowds along the course are expected to be smaller. Wellesley College students have been told not to kiss the runners as they pass the school's iconic "scream tunnel" near the halfway mark.

Taylor Willwerth and Erin Winsor, both 23, were at the town common to cheer on Annie Dumas, 23, who is running her first marathon. The friends grew up in Hopkinton and often cheered on the runners as kids. They said they wouldn't miss the race and they felt comfortable being there because they're vaccinated.

There was a heavy police presence with patrol cars driving down the streets and officers congregated throughout the race's path. In 2013, two bombs killed three spectators and maimed more than 260 others at the Boston Marathon.

Dumas said that even with smaller crowds, "the spirit will still be there." She's running with the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in honor of her mother, who is being treated there.

Lawrence Cherono and Worknesh Degefa are not returning to defend their titles from 2019. But 13 past champions and five Paralympic athletes who won gold in Tokyo are competing in the elite field, according to the Boston Athletic Association.

That group includes Lelisa Desisa, who won the men's race in 2013 and 2015 and finished second in 2019 by two seconds; Desiree Linden, who in 2018 became the first U.S. woman to win since 1985; Yuki Kawauchi who in 2018 earned Japan's first Boston title since 1987; reigning women's wheelchair champion and course record holder Manuela Schär; and reigning men's wheelchair champion Daniel Romanchuk, who won at the Chicago Marathon just yesterday.

Massachusetts native Shalane Flanagan, a New York City Marathon winner, is expected to run Boston as part of a quest to complete the six major marathons consecutively this autumn. Flanagan, who retired from professional running in 2019, ran the third race in the series, the Chicago Marathon, yesterday. Retired race car driver Danica Patrick plans to run the Boston Marathon for the first time.

Associated Press writer Jennifer McDermott in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, contributed to this report.

Tornadoes cause damage in Oklahoma; storms rock central US

COWETA, Okla. (AP) — Several reported tornadoes ripped through Oklahoma late Sunday into early Monday morning, causing damage but no immediate word of deaths or injuries.

The severe weather system also brought heavy rain, lightning and wind to parts of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Texas, and more stormy weather is predicted for later this week in parts of the central U.S.

Severe weather is not unusual in the Southern Plains in October, said Chuck Hodges, senior meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Tulsa. But Sunday's storm "was kind of more of a spring setup," he said.

"We had unusually high moisture and a very, very strong weather system that came through," he said.

Tornado warnings and reports of damage popped up across Oklahoma beginning Sunday afternoon, and survey crews with the weather service will head out Monday to determine how many tornadoes struck, Hodges said.

A possible tornado hit the Tulsa suburb of Coweta late Sunday causing significant damage to a high school, homes and a gas station, news outlets reported, and Coweta Public Schools classes were canceled Monday.

Earlier, baseball-sized hail shattered windows and dented cars in Norman, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of Oklahoma City.

No deaths or injuries were immediately reported.

Oklahoma Gas & Electric said in a statement that crews were actively working to restore power outages. Lightning that appeared to be from the same line of storms delayed an NFL game between the Buffalo

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Bills and the Chiefs in Kansas City, Missouri, for about an hour Sunday night.

On Monday, severe storms are possible in parts of Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan while another round of storms is predicted Tuesday in Kansas and Oklahoma, the Storm Prediction Center said.

Early results show record low turnout in Iraq's election

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Voter turnout in Iraq's elections was 41 percent, according to preliminary results announced Monday, a record low in the post-Saddam Hussein era, signaling widespread distrust of the country's leaders and the vote for a new parliament.

The weekend's election was held months ahead of schedule as a concession to a youth-led popular uprising against corruption and mismanagement. But the vote was marred by widespread apathy and a boycott by many of the same young activists who thronged the streets of Baghdad and Iraq's southern provinces in late 2019, calling for sweeping reforms and new elections.

The Independent High Electoral Commission on Monday said preliminary results show turnout from Sunday's election was 41 percent. That's down from 44 percent in the 2018 elections, which was an all-time low.

Tens of thousands of people protested in late 2019 and early 2020, and were met by security forces firing live ammunition and tear gas. More than 600 people were killed and thousands injured within just a few months.

Although authorities gave in and called the early elections, the death toll and the heavy-handed crack-down - as well as a string of targeted assassinations - prompted many protesters to later call for a boycott of the vote.

More definitive results were expected later Monday, with groups drawn from Iraq's majority Shiite Muslim factions expected to come out on top as has been the case since 2003. Influential Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who was the major winner in the 2018 elections, was expected to sweep up more seats. Still, none of the parties were expected to win a clear majority, and negotiations to choose a prime minister tasked with forming a government were expected to drag on for weeks or even months.

The Fatah Alliance, led by paramilitary leader Hadi al-Ameri, was expected to come in second. The alliance is comprised of parties and affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group of mostly pro-Iran Shiite militias that rose to prominence during the war against the Sunni extremist Islamic State group. It includes some of the most hardline Iran-backed factions, such as the Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia.

Al-Sadr, a black-turbaned nationalist leader, is also close to Iran, but publicly rejects its political influence.

The election was the sixth held since the fall of Saddam Hussein after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many were skeptical that independent candidates from the protest movement stood a chance against well-entrenched parties and politicians, many of them backed by powerful armed militias.

There was a marked reluctance among young Iraqis - the country's largest demographic - to get out and vote. Many expressed views that the system is immune to reforms and that the election would only bring back the same faces and parties responsible for the corruption and mismanagement that has plagued Iraq for decades. The problems have left the country with crumbling infrastructure, growing poverty and rising unemployment rates.

Under Iraq's laws, the party that wins the most seats gets to choose the country's next prime minister, but it's unlikely any of the competing coalitions can secure a clear majority. That will require a lengthy process involving backroom negotiations to select a consensus prime minister and agree on a new coalition government.

Iraq's current prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, has played a key role as a mediator in the region's crises, particularly between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia. Many in the region and beyond will be watching to see if he will secure a second term.

The new parliament will also elect Iraq's next president.

UK police won't act against Prince Andrew over abuse claim

LONDON (AP) — British police have announced they will not take any action against Prince Andrew after a review prompted by a Jeffrey Epstein accuser who claims that he sexually assaulted her.

Virginia Giuffre claims she was trafficked by Epstein to have sex with Andrew in London in 2001, when she was age 17 and a minor under U.S. law. She is suing the prince in a U.S. court.

Andrew, the second son of Queen Elizabeth II, denies the allegations. He told the BBC in a 2019 interview that he never had sex with Giuffre, saying: "It didn't happen."

In August, London's Metropolitan Police force began a review of allegations connected to late convicted sex offender Epstein. Police chief Cressida Dick said at the time that "no one is above the law."

The force said in a statement late Sunday that its "review has concluded and we are taking no further action."

It also said it would take no action over allegations, first reported by Channel 4 News, that Epstein's alleged accomplice, Ghislaine Maxwell, trafficked, groomed and abused women and girls in the U.K.

Maxwell, a British socialite, is in a U.S. jail awaiting trial on charges that she recruited teenage girls for Epstein to abuse.

The force said it is continuing to liaise with other law enforcement agencies who are leading the investigation into matters associated with Epstein.

After weeks of legal skirmishing, lawyers for Andrew acknowledged late last month that the prince had formally been served with Giuffre's lawsuit. The prince must file responses to the claims by Oct. 29.

Andrew, 61, has been banished from public royal duties amid the scandal over his friendship with convicted pedophile Epstein, who killed himself in a federal detention center in New York in August 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

German companies urge next government to step up on climate

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Dozens of large German companies have urged the country's next government to put in place ambitious policies to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris climate accord.

The 69 companies said in an open letter Monday that the next government needs to put Germany "on a clear and reliable path to climate neutrality" with a plan for doing so within its first 100 days in office.

The signatories included chemicals company Bayer, steelmaker ThyssenKrupp and sportswear firm Puma.

The center-left Social Democrats narrowly beat outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative Union bloc in an election last month. They are due to meet Monday with the environmentalist Greens party and the pro-business Free Democrats to discuss forming a coalition government.

"Climate protection was the decisive topic in the federal election and the parties must place it at the top of their agenda in building the new federal government," said Michael Otto, board chairman of mail order company Otto Group and president of the Foundation 2 Degrees, which organized the letter.

Earlier this year, Merkel's government adopted a plan to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions to "net zero" by 2045, five years earlier than previously planned.

But official figures show that Germany is slipping behind on its ambitions for cutting greenhouse gases, with 2021 emissions forecast to rebound sharply after a pandemic-related economic slump.

The signatories, which have an annual turnover of about 1 trillion euros (\$1.16 trillion) and employ more than 5 million people worldwide, want the next government to support the rollout of renewable energy and enact a climate-friendly tax reform that includes a strengthened carbon pricing system to prevent investments in power-hungry industries going abroad.

Pointing toward the upcoming U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, and Germany's presidency of the Group of Seven major economies next year, the companies said the government must also work to set international standards for the global financial system and climate-neutral products.

"As businesses, we are prepared to fulfil our central role in climate action. We call upon the new German government to make the transformation to climate neutrality the central economic project of the

coming legislative period," they said.

Follow AP's coverage of climate change at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-change>

Merck asks US FDA to authorize promising anti-COVID pill

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Drugmaker Merck asked U.S. regulators Monday to authorize its pill against COVID-19 in what would add an entirely new and easy-to-use weapon to the world's arsenal against the pandemic.

If cleared by the Food and Drug Administration — a decision that could come in a matter of weeks — it would be the first pill shown to treat COVID-19. All other FDA-backed treatments against the disease require an IV or injection.

An antiviral pill that people could take at home to reduce their symptoms and speed recovery could prove groundbreaking, easing the crushing caseload on U.S. hospitals and helping to curb outbreaks in poorer countries with weak health care systems. It would also bolster the two-pronged approach to the pandemic: treatment, by way of medication, and prevention, primarily through vaccinations.

The FDA will scrutinize company data on the safety and effectiveness of the drug, molnupiravir, before rendering a decision.

Merck and its partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutic said they specifically asked the agency to grant emergency use for adults with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who are at risk for severe disease or hospitalization. That is roughly the way COVID-19 infusion drugs are used.

"The value here is that it's a pill so you don't have to deal with the infusion centers and all the factors around that," said Dr. Nicholas Kartsonis, a senior vice president with Merck's infectious disease unit. "I think it's a very powerful tool to add to the toolbox."

The company reported earlier this month that the pill cut hospitalizations and deaths by half among patients with early symptoms of COVID-19. The results were so strong that independent medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early.

Side effects were similar between patients who got the drug and those in a testing group who received a dummy pill. But Merck has not publicly detailed the types of problems reported, which will be a key part of the FDA's review.

U.S. officials continue to push vaccinations as the best way to protect against COVID-19. But with some 68 million eligible Americans still unwilling to get the shots, effective drugs will be critical to controlling future waves of infection.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, health experts have stressed the need for a convenient pill. The goal is for something similar to Tamiflu, the 20-year-old flu medication that shortens the illness by a day or two and blunts the severity of symptoms like fever, cough and stuffy nose.

Three FDA-authorized antibody drugs have proved highly effective at reducing COVID-19 deaths, but they are expensive, hard to produce and require specialty equipment and health professionals to deliver.

Assuming FDA authorization, the U.S. government has agreed to buy enough of the pills to treat 1.7 million people, at a price of roughly \$700 for each course of treatment. That's less than half the price of the antibody drugs purchased by the U.S. government — over \$2,000 per infusion — but still more expensive than many antiviral pills for other conditions.

Merck's Kartsonis said in an interview that the \$700 figure does not represent the final price for the medication.

"We set that price before we had any data, so that's just one contract," Kartsonis said. "Obviously we're going to be responsible about this and make this drug as accessible to as many people around the world as we can."

Kenilworth, New Jersey-based Merck has said it is in purchase talks with governments around the world and will use a sliding price scale based on each country's economic means. Also, the company has

signed licensing deals with several Indian generic drugmakers to produce low-cost versions of the drug for lower-income countries.

Several other companies, including Pfizer and Roche, are studying similar drugs and are expected to report results in the coming weeks and months. AstraZeneca is also seeking FDA authorization for a long-acting antibody drug intended to provide months of protection for patients who have immune-system disorders and do not adequately respond to vaccination.

Eventually some experts predict various COVID-19 therapies will be prescribed in combination to better protect against the worst effects of the virus.

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A bird stars in rare feel-good tale about Afghan evacuations

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The mynah bird squawks from a new cage in the French ambassador's sunlit living room in Abu Dhabi, a far cry from its life as the pet of a young Afghan woman who has since found refuge in France.

Talkative, yellow-beaked "Juji" had a brief star turn on social media, its story of survival amid the frenzied evacuations from Taliban-run Afghanistan striking a nerve with a global audience.

While searing scenes from the American-led airlift from Kabul after 20 years of war — such as those of Afghans falling to their deaths after trying to cling to the wheels of a military transport jet — gripped the world, France also was intensely involved in evacuating those who had risked their lives to cooperate with its government over the years.

French Ambassador Xavier Chatel was scrambling to support the efforts at Al-Dhafra air base in the United Arab Emirates. Thousands of Afghan evacuees flooded the base near the UAE capital, along with military bases across the region, to be screened by American, French and other authorities over 12 sweltering days in August.

"There were many exhilarating stories because there were artists, there were musicians, there were people who were so relieved that they could be evacuated," Chatel told The Associated Press Sunday from his residence overlooking the turquoise waters of the Persian Gulf. "But at the same time there was also an outpouring of distress."

Some 2,600 Afghan interpreters, artists, journalists, activists and military contractors squeezed onto flights out of Kabul to Abu Dhabi on their way to Paris with barely enough time to consider all they'd left behind. French authorities had started evacuations around a year ago, with 2,400 people airlifted from Kabul in the months before the fall, Chatel said.

In the midst of the chaos at Al-Dhafra, Chatel received a security alert. Officers, on the lookout for al-Qaida and Islamic State extremist threats, had discovered illegal cargo on board.

A woman no older than 20 appeared, clutching a mystery cardboard box. Packed inside was her beloved pet with clipped wings — the famously chatty mynah, common in its range across Southeast Asia.

But because of sanitary concerns, there was no way she could bring the small bird, the only possession she'd apparently taken with her from Kabul, to Paris.

She started to cry, Chatel said. He declined to disclose details about the young woman and her circumstances for privacy reasons, except to say that "she had lost everything. She had lost her country. She had lost her house, she had lost her life."

Chatel's story of what happened next took hold on Twitter last week and turned Juji into a minor sensation, providing an uplifting counterpoint to the economic and humanitarian crises afflicting Afghanistan amid the Taliban takeover.

After receiving detailed instructions about Juji's dietary preferences — cucumbers, grapes, bread slices and the occasional potato — Chatel decided to adopt the bird, promising he'd take good care of it.

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The young woman found the ambassador on Twitter soon after landing in France. Top of her mind upon starting a new life as a refugee was her pet stranded on the Arabian Peninsula.

Chatel replied with videos of Juji snacking on fruit, flitting around its white cage and even learning French from his marble-floored living room. After chirping in Pashto for its first few days in Abu Dhabi, Juji had managed to utter something akin to "Bonjour."

"(The woman) told me something which still remains with me," Chatel said. "The fact that the bird was still alive and that he was well looked after gave her faith and and hope to start again."

Exactly why the story was so avidly embraced on social media remains a mystery, Chatel said. But there were no good news days out of Afghanistan during the anguished withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces.

A suicide bomber blew himself up at Kabul airport in late August, killing scores of Afghans and 13 U.S. service members, and those who managed to escape their homes for new lives abroad were grappling with feelings of bewilderment and guilt. With the country's economy in free fall, ordinary people have struggled to survive.

At Al-Dhafra air base in August, you could see the fear in people's faces, Chatel said. Children cried at the sound of popping balloons. One woman said she had "forgotten" her parents in a traumatic haze at Kabul airport. Parents arrived with stories of children they'd abandoned.

Until Chatel can devise a way to reunite Juji with its former owner, he said the black-winged bird remains a reminder to France of those frantic days — the courage of those embarking on new lives and the emotional toll of so many left behind.

"In the middle of this," Chatel said, "in the middle of these hundreds of people arriving here, there was this girl and there was this bird."

Fiona Hill, a nobody to Trump and Putin, saw into them both

By LYNN BERRY and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vladimir Putin paid scant attention to Fiona Hill, a preeminent U.S. expert on Russia, when she was seated next to him at dinners. Putin's people placed her there by design, choosing a "nondescript woman," as she put it, so the Russian president would have no competition for attention.

Fluent in Russian, she often carefully took in the conversations of men who seemed to forget she was there and wrote it all down later, she recalled in an Associated Press interview. "Hey, if I was a guy, you wouldn't be talking like this in front of me," she remembered thinking. "But go ahead. I'm listening."

Hill expected not to be similarly invisible when she later went to work for another world leader, Donald Trump, as his Russia adviser in the White House. She could see inside Putin's head, had co-written an acclaimed book about him, but Trump did not want her counsel, either. He ignored her in meeting after meeting, once mistaking her for a secretary and calling her "darlin'."

Again, though, she was listening. She was reading Trump like she had read Putin.

The result is "There Is Nothing for You Here," her book out last week. Unlike other tell-all authors from the Trump administration, she isn't obsessed with the scandalous. Much like her measured but riveting testimony in Trump's first impeachment, the book offers a more sober, and thus perhaps more alarming, portrait of the 45th president.

If Hill's tone is restrained, it is damning by a thousand cuts. It lays out how a career devoted to understanding and managing the Russian threat crashed into her revelation that the greatest threat to America comes from within.

In fly-on-the-wall detail, she describes a president with a voracious appetite for praise and little to no taste for governing — a man so consumed with what others said about him that U.S. relations with other countries rose or fell according to how flattering foreign leaders were in their remarks.

"From his staff and everyone who came into his orbit, Trump demanded constant attention and adulation," she writes. Particularly in international affairs, "The president's vanity and fragile self-esteem were a point of acute vulnerability."

Hill describes Putin manipulating Trump by offering or withholding compliments, a maneuver she said

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was more effective with this president than getting dirt and blackmailing him would have been. At their joint news conference in Finland, when Trump appeared to side with Putin over his own intelligence agencies on Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election, Hill almost lost it.

"I wanted to end the whole thing," she writes. "I contemplated throwing a fit or faking a seizure and hurling myself backward into the row of journalists behind me. But it would only have added to the humiliating spectacle."

Yet in Trump she saw a rare if ultimately wasted talent. He spoke the language of many average people, disdained the same things, operated without a filter, liked the same food and gleefully shredded the tiresome norms of the elite. While Hillary Clinton sipped champagne with donors, Trump was out there pitching coal and steel jobs — at least that was the impression.

"He clearly had a feel for what people wanted," she told the AP. "He could talk the talk even if he couldn't walk the walk in having their experiences. But he understood it."

Yet that skill was squandered, in her view. Where it could have been used to mobilize people for good, it was instead used only in service of himself — "Me the People" as a chapter title puts it.

Trump's vanity also doomed his Helsinki meeting with Putin and any chances for a coveted arms control deal with Russia. The questions at the news conference "got right to the heart of his insecurities," Hill writes. If Trump had agreed that Russia had interfered in the election on his behalf, in his mind he might as well have said "I am illegitimate."

It was clear to Putin that the resulting backlash would undermine even the vague commitments he and Trump had made. "On his way out the door from the conference," Hill writes, "he told his press secretary, within earshot of our interpreter, that the press conference was 'bullshit.'"

Trump admired Putin for his wealth, power and fame, seeing him, in Hill's words, as the "ultimate badass." During the course of his presidency, Trump would come to resemble the autocratic and populist Russian leader more than he resembled any recent American presidents, she writes, and "Sometimes even I was startled by how glaringly obvious the similarities were."

Putin's ability to manipulate the Russian political system to potentially stay in power indefinitely also made an impression. "Trump sees that and says what's there not to like about that kind of situation?" Hill told the AP.

Trump, a Republican, was impeached by the House in late 2019 for trying to use his leverage over Ukraine to undermine Joe Biden, his eventual Democratic rival, among the first of his efforts to stay in office by unconventional means, stretching to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol by a mob he had told to "fight like hell."

Hill had served as the national intelligence officer for Russia from early 2006 until late 2009 and was highly respected in Washington circles, but it was only during the impeachment hearings that she was introduced to the nation. She became one of the most damaging witnesses against the president she had served, undercutting his defense by testifying that he had sent his envoys to Ukraine on a "domestic political errand" that had nothing to do with national security policy.

She began her testimony by describing her improbable journey as the daughter of a coal miner from an impoverished town in northeast England to the White House. She also explained her desire to serve a country that "has offered me opportunities I never would have had in England."

Much of her new book expands on that personal journey, a story told with self-deprecating humor and kindness. Along the way, Hill the Brookings Institution scholar weaves in a study of the changing societies she witnessed over the decades as a child in Britain, a student and researcher in Russia and finally as a citizen of the United States.

The changes in all three countries are strikingly similar, due in part to the destruction of heavy industry. The result is what she calls a "crisis of opportunity" and the rise of populist leaders like Putin, Trump and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson able to tap into the fears and grievances of those feeling left behind.

She said she went into the White House worried about what Russia was doing and "came out, having realized fully watching all of this, that actually the problem was the United States ... and the Russians

were just exploiting everything.”

Hill calls Russia a cautionary tale, “America’s Ghost of Christmas Future,” if the U.S. is unable to heal its political divisions.

Hailing from a more civil form of politics, President Joe Biden is trying to bring the country together and advance its reputation abroad, she said, but “he’s, in a way, a kind of man standing alone and people are not pulling behind him.”

AP video journalist Nathan Ellgren contributed to this report.

French actor breaks silence on child sex abuse within church

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — At the age of eight, Laurent Martinez was sexually abused by a priest. Forty years later, he has chosen to make his story into a play, to show the devastating consequences and how speaking out can help victims heal and rebuild.

The play called “Pardon?” is drawn from the French author and actor’s own life, describing how he felt devoured from the inside by the abuse and struggled with daily life after it.

Martinez’s play was shown to bishops earlier this year, ahead of the presentation of a groundbreaking report last week that estimated that about 330,000 children in France were sexually abused over the past 70 years within France’s Catholic Church.

Despite the shocking revelations, Martinez deplored that “there is no — absolutely no — sense of urgency” within the church.

“They are clearly slammed by the numbers” but “they are just talking, talking, talking,” he said in an interview with The Associated Press.

For Martinez, now 52, memories of the abuse remain vivid.

The priest who was teaching his catechism classes found pretexts to see the 8-year-old Martinez alone, kissing and touching his genitals, he said. One day, Martinez recalls, the abuser invited him to his apartment and forced the boy to engage in oral sex. Under French law, that would be classified as rape.

Martinez later told his parents, who alerted the diocese, and the priest was moved away. He believes the priest is now dead. Like most victims of sex abuse in the church, particularly before the church abuse scandals of the 2000s, Martinez didn’t seek legal recourse. Now it would be too late because of statutes of limitations.

For decades, Martinez buried the abuse inside him, only speaking about it to his two wives.

“For me, sexual relationships were marked in me as something forbidden. So it’s been very difficult for me to go through it, and I had to find very patient partners,” he said.

The play shows how the abuse affected his emotional and sexual life as an adult, making him sometimes grow aggressive or overreact to everyday worries — but also how it led him to be very protective towards children.

Martinez said he spent 40 years “wearing the mask of someone else” and “seeking to hide something that was like a cancer inside me.”

A few years ago, he felt he needed to speak out because he was fed up with keeping the trauma inside him.

“I thought: I need to do something. It’s not possible to continue like that,” he said.

The play was shown for the first time at the Avignon arts festival in 2019. That is also when he first told his two sons, now 21 and 11, about the abuse. Since then, Martinez’s play has been playing in theaters in Paris and across France and a performance of it was shown on France’s Catholic television network KTO.

“I’ve been in pain for so long, and now I’m an actor so ... I’m acting my pain. I’m not in it anymore,” he said.

In recent weeks, Martinez, who lost his faith following the abuse, made a new, decisive step. After much hesitation, he asked the head of the Conference of Bishops of France, Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, whether

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he could seek Martinez' forgiveness in the name of his abuser.

"He accepted and it was tremendous emotionally for everybody that night," Martinez remembers. "I gave my forgiveness to the priest that raped me."

After that, "I felt really completely free of the whole burden of anger, of the desire of revenge. All the bad feelings I had just had vanished, just because I had forgiven," he said.

"Little by little the trauma is disappearing," Martinez added. "What helped more was to be able to forgive the priest."

The actor had been previously in touch with Moulins-Beaufort, who supported the play and offered to show it to French bishops as part of the church's efforts to face up to shameful secrets that were long covered up.

The offer is evidence of the Catholic hierarchy's belated realization that listening to survivors is a fundamental part of the church's own process of coming to terms with the problem and helping them heal.

Pope Francis came to that realization at a 2019 summit he convened with the heads of all the world's bishops conferences, which featured wrenching testimonies from victims about abuse and the lifelong trauma it caused. For many bishops, it was the first time they had ever actually listened to a survivor, since so often the church ignored victims or treated them as an enemy out to harm the institution.

Among many recommendations in last week's report about church abuse in France are measures that would institutionalize ways for church hierarchy to better help and hear victims. The report estimates that at least 2,900-3,200 male clergy members were responsible for sexual abuse of children in France since the 1950s, and accuses the church of a systemic coverup.

Martinez knows that his play is helping other people who suffered similar ordeals, and hopes it encourages them to speak out and seek help.

Some "come to see me and say: 'Thank you so much, because, you know, this is also my story. And you are the first person I'm telling that to.'"

"The most difficult thing is to say it once," Martinez stressed. "Then you get the strength to say it again and again and again. And then you're free, or at least you are on the good path to freedom."

Jeffrey Schaeffer in Paris and Nicole Winfield in Rome contributed.

Murano glassblowing model shattered by methane price surge

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — The glassblowers of Murano have survived plagues and pandemics. They transitioned to highly prized artistic creations to outrun low-priced competition from Asia. But surging energy prices are shattering their economic model.

The dozens of furnaces that remain on the lagoon island where Venetian rulers transferred glassblowing 700 years ago must burn around the clock, otherwise the costly crucible inside the ovens will break. But the price for the methane that powers the ovens has skyrocketed fivefold on the global market since Oct. 1, meaning the glass-blowers face certain losses on orders they are working to fill, at least for the foreseeable future.

"People are desperate," said Gianni De Checchi, president of Venice's association of artisans Confartigianato. "If it continues like this, and we don't find solutions to the sudden and abnormal gas prices, the entire Murano glass sector will be in serious danger."

A medium-size glassblowing business like that of Simone Cenedese consumes 12,000 cubic meters (420,000 cubic feet) of methane a month to keep his seven furnaces hissing at temperatures over 1,000 degrees Celsius (1,800 degrees Fahrenheit) 24 hours a day. They shut down just once a year for annual maintenance in August.

His monthly bills normally range from 11,000 euros to 13,000 euros a month, on a fixed-price consortium contract that expired Sept. 30. Now exposed to market volatility, Cenedese is projecting an increase in methane costs to 60,000 euros (\$70,000) in October, as the natural gas market is buffeted by increased

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Chinese demand, uncertain Russian supply and worryingly low European stockpiles.

Artisans like Cenedese now must factor in an insurmountable increase in energy costs as they fill orders that had promised to lift them out of the pandemic crisis that stilled the sector in 2020.

"We cannot increase prices that have already been set. ... That means for at least two months we are forced to work at a loss," said Cenedese, a third-generation glassblower who took over the business his father started. "We sell decorations for the house, not necessities, meaning that if the prices are not accessible, it is obvious that there will be no more orders."

Cenedese, like others on the island, is considering shutting down one of his furnaces to confront the crisis. That will cost 2,000 euros for the broken crucible. It also will slow production and imperil pending orders.

His five glass-blowers move with unspoken choreographed precision to fill an order of 1,800 Christmas ornaments speckled with golden flakes bound for Switzerland.

One starts the process with a red-hot molten blob on the end of a wand that he rolls over gold leaf, applying it evenly before handing the form to the maestro, who then re-heats it in one oven before gently blowing into the wand to create a perfect orb. It is still glowing red when he cuts it from the wand, and another glassblower grabs it with prongs to add the final flourish, a pointy end created from a dab of molten glass applied by an apprentice.

As that dance progresses, another starts, weaving and bobbing into the empty spaces. Together, they can make 300 ornaments a day, working from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"No machine can do what we do," said maestro Davide Cimarosti, 56, who has been working as a glassblower for 42 years.

Murano glassblowers decades ago transitioned from wood ovens, which created uneven results, to methane, which burns at temperatures high enough to create the delicate crystal clarity that makes their creations so highly prized. And it is the only gas that the glassblowers are permitted to use, by law. They are caught in a global commodities Catch-22.

For now, artisans are hoping the international market calms by the end of the year, although some analysts believe volatility could persist into the spring. If so, damage to the island's economy and the individual companies could run deep.

The Rome government has offered relief to Italian families confronting high energy prices but so far nothing substantial to the Murano glassblowers, whose small scale and energy intensity make them particularly vulnerable. The artisans' lobby is meeting with members of parliament next week in a bid to seek direct government aid, which De Checchi said is possible under new EU rules put in place after the pandemic.

Beyond economic losses, the islanders fear losing a tradition that has made their island synonymous with artistic excellence.

Already, the sector has scaled back from an industry with thousands of workers in the 1960s and 1970s to a network of mostly small and medium-sized artisanal enterprises employing a total of some 300 glassblowers. Venice's glassblowing tradition dates back 1,200 years, and on Murano it has been passed down from father to son for generations. But even at its reduced size and despite its creative rewards, it struggles to attract young people to toil in workshops where summertime temperatures can reach 60 degrees Celsius (140 degrees Fahrenheit).

"The value of this tradition, this history and this culture is priceless, it goes beyond the financial value of the glass industry in Murano," said Luciano Gambaro, co-owner of Gambaro & Tagliapietra. "Over 1,000 years of culture can't stop with a gas issue."

García, Grandal star as White Sox beat Astros 12-6 in ALDS

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Two big swings by pint-sized Leury García. A rule-testing run by Yasmani Grandal. Solid relief work from Liam Hendriks and company.

Right when the Chicago White Sox got in big trouble, they found a way.

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García and Grandal homered, and Grandal's borderline baserunning helped the White Sox top the Houston Astros 12-6 on Sunday night to stay alive in their AL Division Series.

Backed by a boisterous crowd of 40,288, the AL Central champions erased a 5-1 deficit in the franchise's first home playoff game in 13 years, trimming Houston's series edge to 2-1. Tim Anderson collected three more hits, and Ryan Tepera started a stellar finish for Chicago's bullpen after Dylan Cease and Michael Kopech (1-0) struggled.

"It's a real tough-minded bunch," White Sox manager Tony La Russa said, "and sometimes you get rewarded with a comeback like that."

Houston was hoping to sweep its way into its fifth consecutive appearance in the AL Championship Series. The AL West champions got off to a fast start behind Kyle Tucker, but they went down in order in the last five innings.

Game 4 of the best-of-five series is scheduled for Monday afternoon, but there is rain in the forecast.

"I don't say anything to them. They know. They know the importance of tomorrow," Astros manager Dusty Baker said. "They know the importance of today. These guys have been here many, many times."

The playoff-tested Astros rolled into Chicago after a pair of impressive victories at home, then jumped out to a 5-1 lead in Game 3. The sweet-swinging Tucker hit a two-run double off Cease in the second and a two-run homer off Kopech in the third.

Houston's fast start silenced the towel-waving crowd, but it got revved up again in the bottom half of the third.

After Grandal's two-run shot just over the wall in left made it 5-3, Yoán Moncada and Gavin Sheets reached on two-out singles. Leury García then looked at two balls from Luis Garcia before Baker replaced his starting pitcher with Yimi García (0-1).

The winner of the Garcia trilogy was Leury, listed at 5-foot-8 and 190 pounds. The versatile veteran drove a 3-1 pitch from Yimi García deep to center for a 436-foot homer.

"I mean that ball was scalded," La Russa said.

The game was tied at 6 when the White Sox went ahead to stay with three runs in the fourth — highlighted by a memorable run by Grandal that rankled Baker and the Astros.

After José Abreu's tiebreaking RBI single put runners on the corners with none out, Grandal hit a bouncer to Yuli Gurriel at first. Gurriel tried to come home, but his throw went off Grandal as the catcher sprinted up the line in the infield grass.

"I wish I could tell you it was a heads-up play," Grandal said. "I was just trying to get to first. It takes me a long time to get there."

Luis Robert scored, taking out umpire Tom Hallion in the process, and Gurriel was charged with an error. The Astros lobbied for an interference call on Grandal, but the umpires huddled and left the play in place.

Baker then had a long argument with Hallion before returning to the dugout.

"Clearly, he was running inside," Baker said. "I mean, that's interference, you know, in itself. That was a big play because we didn't get an out."

The 77-year-old La Russa, who became the oldest manager in major league history to win a postseason game, said the umpires made the correct call.

"I guarantee you that there was no intent to interfere with that play. I can guarantee it," La Russa said.

Eloy Jiménez capped the big fourth with his second RBI single, and the White Sox put it away with three more runs in the eighth. Leury García doubled in Andrew Vaughn and scored on Anderson's single.

The 16-hit attack for Chicago — a franchise postseason record — overshadowed perfect relief by Ryan Tepera, Aaron Bummer, Craig Kimbrel and Hendriks. Tepera worked two innings before Bummer got five outs. Kimbrel got the last out of the eighth before Hendriks finished.

"All I can say really is it was a lot of fun," Tepera said.

NOT BAD AT ALL

Anderson has 16 hits in six career playoff games, the most by any player in a six-game postseason span.

UP NEXT

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Carlos Rodón starts Game 4 for the White Sox. Rodón went 13-5 with a 2.37 ERA in 24 starts this year, but he was limited down the stretch because of shoulder soreness and fatigue. The Astros will start José Urquidy, who was 8-3 with a 3.62 ERA in 20 starts.

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More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

New Zealand's doctors and teachers must soon be vaccinated

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — Most of New Zealand's health care workers and teachers will soon be legally required to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, the government announced Monday.

A new mandate compels doctors, pharmacists, community nurses and many other health care workers to be fully vaccinated by December. Teachers and other education workers must be fully vaccinated by January.

COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said many in those professions had already gotten their jabs but they couldn't leave anything to chance, especially because those people deal with sick patients and young children who aren't yet approved for the vaccine themselves.

"It's not an easy decision, but we need the people who work with vulnerable communities who haven't yet been vaccinated to take this extra step," Hipkins said.

New Zealand already requires many people who work at the border to be vaccinated.

The announcement comes as New Zealand battles an outbreak of the highly transmissible delta variant in its largest city, Auckland.

The initial responses from groups representing affected workers were in favor of the mandate.

"Given the speed at which delta is spreading throughout our country, this is a bold, but necessary call to make," said Dr. Samantha Murton, president of The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Monday that Auckland would stay in lockdown for at least another week, while the nearby regions of Waikato and Northland could come out of lockdown on Thursday if no significant spread of the virus was found in those places.

Auckland has been in lockdown for nearly two months, since the outbreak was discovered. Thirty-five new local cases were found in the city on Monday, bringing the total number of cases in the outbreak to a little over 1,600.

Last week Ardern acknowledged that the virus was in New Zealand to stay, and it wouldn't be completely wiped out by measures including lockdowns and contact tracing, which had succeeded in eliminating previous outbreaks.

Ardern has been urging people to get vaccinated as a step toward the nation reopening.

This coming weekend, the government is planning a "Super Saturday" vaccination drive that it likens to an Election Day, when vaccination centers will be open throughout the day and into the evening.

About 68% of New Zealanders have had at least one dose of the vaccine and 47% are fully vaccinated. Among those aged 12 and over, the figures rise to 82% and 57% respectively.

The government on Monday also announced an advanced purchase agreement for 60,000 courses of an experimental new pill by drug maker Merck, pending approval by New Zealand regulators.

The pill, molnupiravir, would be the first shown to treat COVID-19, if it's approved by regulators including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

India, China army talks to defuse border tensions fail

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Talks between Indian and Chinese army commanders to disengage troops from key friction areas along their border have ended in a stalemate and failed to ease a 17-month standoff that

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has sometimes led to deadly clashes, the two sides said Monday.

The continuing standoff means the two nations will keep troops in the forward areas of Ladakh for a second consecutive winter in dangerously freezing temperatures.

India's defense ministry, in a statement, said it gave "constructive suggestions" but the Chinese side was "not agreeable" and "could not provide any forward-looking proposals." A statement from a Chinese military spokesperson said "the Indian side sticks to unreasonable and unrealistic demands, adding difficulties to the negotiations."

The commanders from both armies met for the talks Sunday after a gap of two months at Moldo on the Chinese side in the Ladakh area.

Since February, both India and China have withdrawn troops from some faceoff sites on the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso, Gogra and Galwan Valley, but they continue to maintain extra troops as part of a multi-tier deployment.

Troops have been added at Demchok and Depsang Plains, Indian media reports say.

Sunday's talks came amid frustration expressed by the Indian army chief at what he called the massive deployment of troops and weaponry by the Chinese side.

"Yes, it is a matter of concern that the large-scale buildup has occurred and continues to be in place, and to sustain that kind of a buildup, there has been an equal amount of infrastructure development on the Chinese side," Gen. M.M. Naravane said on Saturday.

"So, it means that they (China) are there to stay. We are keeping a close watch on all these developments, but if they are there to stay, we are there to stay, too," he said.

The Chinese statement from Senior Col. Long Shaohua of the Western Theater Command said "China's determination to safeguard its sovereignty is unwavering, and China hopes India will not misjudge the situation."

Temperatures in the forward areas in Ladakh drop to 30 below zero Celsius (22 below zero Fahrenheit) around January. The troops from both sides used to retreat to their traditional summer holding positions around this time, but since the faceoff started in May 2020 have continued to remain close to the disputed border.

Both countries have stationed tens of thousands of soldiers backed by artillery, tanks and fighter jets along the de facto border called the Line of Actual Control. Last year, 20 Indian troops were killed in a clash with Chinese soldiers involving clubs, stones and fists along the disputed border. China said it lost four soldiers.

The Line of Actual Control separates Chinese and Indian-held territories from Ladakh in the west to India's eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims in its entirety. India and China fought a deadly war over the border in 1962.

Since the standoff began last year, the Chinese have been building build dozens of large weather-proof structures along the LAC in eastern Ladakh for their troops to stay in during the winter. New helipads, widening of airstrips, new barracks, new surface-to-air missile sites and radar locations have also been reported by Indian media.

Associated Press writer Ken Moritsugu in Beijing contributed to this report.

Southern California beach set to reopen after oil spill

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif. (AP) — A Southern California beach that had been closed since an undersea pipeline leaked crude into ocean waters last week is set to reopen Monday, officials announced Sunday night.

City and state beaches in Huntington Beach will reopen after water quality tests revealed no detectable levels of oil associated toxins in the ocean water, the city of Huntington Beach and California State Parks said in a news release. They are still urging visitors to avoid areas that smell of oil and not to touch any

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oiled materials that wash ashore.

That news will likely please surfers and beach-goers like Richard Beach, who returned to the waves in Huntington Beach with his bodyboard — until lifeguards jet skis chased him out on Sunday. He trekked back across the beach, passing workers in hazmat suits tasked with clearing the sand of sticky, black blobs that washed ashore after the spill.

"The water's perfect," said Beach, 69. "Clear all the way to the bottom."

Huntington Beach and nearby coastal communities have been reeling from last week's spill that officials said sent at least about 25,000 gallons (95,000 liters) and no more than 132,000 gallons (500,000 liters) of oil into the ocean. It was caused by a leak about 5 miles (8 kilometers) off the coast in a pipeline owned by Houston-based Amplify Energy that shuttles crude from offshore oil platforms to the coast.

The spill was confirmed on Oct. 2, a day after residents reported a petroleum smell in the area. The cause is under investigation and officials said they believe the pipeline was likely damaged by a ship's anchor several months to a year before it ruptured. It remains unknown when the slender, 13-inch (33-centimeter) crack in the pipeline began leaking oil.

On Sunday, there was no smell of oil and the sand looked largely clear by the Huntington Beach pier, where workers combed the sand for tar. But local officials worry about the environmental impact of the spill on wetlands, wildlife and the economy. With the ocean off limits in the community dubbed Surf City USA, relatively few people were at the beach and shops that cater to them have been hurting.

Officials in the city of 200,000 people have been testing the water to ensure it's safe for people to get back in and said they'll continue the testing for at least two more weeks.

Since the spill, residents have been allowed to walk on the sand in Huntington Beach but not on the shoreline or enter the water, and parking was blocked off for nearby state beaches. Popular surfing and swimming spots in Newport Beach and Laguna Beach have also been closed.

In Huntington Beach, shops selling everything from bikinis and stars-and-stripes boogie boards to sand toys and fishing gear have been taking a hit. Marian Johnson, who owns "Let's Go Fishing" on the pier, said sales have been halved since the spill.

Mike Ali, who owns the nearby shop Zack's, said since the water closure he had to shut three of his four locations and slash his workers' hours. People are coming in for bike rentals and food to his one store that remains open, but without surf lessons, event catering and beach bonfires, business has tanked 90%, he said.

"It could be a year to two years to get the tourism to come back," Ali said, adding that a 1990 oil spill wound up diverting would-be visitors to beaches south and north of the city.

Rich Toro, 70, still took his regular 25-mile (40 kilometers) bike ride down to Huntington Beach on Sunday. But he said he wouldn't race to get back into the water in light of the spill and worries about the impact on wildlife. Since the incident, officials have reported 38 dead birds and nine dead fish, while 27 oiled birds have been recovered and are being treated.

On Sunday morning, only a handful of people played beach volleyball in Huntington Beach while a few others did exercises or laid on the sand.

But the water closures didn't deter everyone. While fishing is barred along the shore of virtually all of Orange County, Michael Archouletta, 29, said he came down from East Los Angeles and saw no signs on the pier preventing him from dropping a line. A school of fish swam beneath the pier nearby.

"If this was so dangerous, the fish would be dead," Archouletta said.

Ground Rule Trouble: Red Sox bounce Rays in 13 on odd call

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Kevin Kiermaier's line drive sailed over right fielder Hunter Renfroe's head and bounced off the short wall in front of the Boston bullpen and back onto the warning track. It ricocheted off Renfroe and into the air.

The Red Sox right fielder waved at it desperately -- and unsuccessfully -- to keep it from going out of play.

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It's a good thing he couldn't.

Saved by an obscure rule and a bounce that was weird even for quirky Fenway Park, the Red Sox staggered Tampa Bay 6-4 Sunday night on Christian Vázquez's 13th-inning walk-off homer to move one victory from eliminating the 100-win Rays from the AL Division Series.

"I was speechless," said center fielder Kiké Hernández, who had come over to back up Renfroe. "I don't know if you guys have seen that before. I've never seen that before in my life.

"I wasn't sure what was going to get called. I wasn't sure if the runners had to return. ... Like, I had no idea," he said. "Luckily, it went our way. And you call it home-field advantage if you want — call it whatever you want — but we won."

The wild-card Red Sox took a 2-1 edge in the best-of-five matchup. Game 4 is Monday at Fenway -- Marathon Day in Boston -- with Game 5 in St. Petersburg, Florida, on Wednesday, if necessary.

Tampa Bay rallied from a 4-2 deficit to tie it in the eighth inning and it was still 4-all when Yandy Diaz singled with one out in the 13th.

Then came the play that had the umpires scurrying for the rulebook and the Rays scratching their heads.

Diaz was halfway from second to third when Kiermaier's ball bounced over the 5-foot-high wall, and he easily would have scored had it remained in play. But the umpires conferred and went to the headsets before awarding Kiermaier a double and sending Diaz back to third.

Baseball Rule 5.05(a)(8) states: "Any bounding fair ball is deflected by the fielder into the stands, or over or under a fence on fair or foul territory, in which case the batter and all runners shall be entitled to advance two bases."

"If I stayed at second, that's fine," Kiermaier said. "But I was hoping to see that Yandy scored, because he would have scored obviously. ... It's incredible that it worked out to their advantage just like that."

Rays manager Kevin Cash said he watched the replay and it was obvious Renfroe didn't knock it over the wall on purpose.

"That's just the rule. That's the way it goes. It was very unfortunate for us," he said. "I think it was fairly obvious that K.K. or Yandy was going to come around to score, but it didn't go our way."

Said umpire crew chief Sam Holbrook: "It's in the rulebook. It's a ground-rule double. There's no discretion that the umpires have."

"There's no, 'He would have done this, would have done that.' It's just flat-out in the rule book, it's a ground-rule double," he said.

When play resumed, Nick Pivetta struck out Mike Zunino to end the inning and came bounding off the mound in celebration.

Renfroe walked with one out in the bottom half, then Vázquez hit the first pitch from Luis Patiño over the Green Monster to end it.

Hernández and Kyle Schwarber each had three hits, including a homer, for Boston.

Hernández singled in the first, singled in the third and homered in the fifth to give him seven consecutive hits in the series. He went 5 for 6 with a home run and three doubles in Boston's Game 2 win, becoming the first Red Sox player ever with four extra-base hits in a postseason game.

Red Sox ace Nate Eovaldi allowed Austin Meadows' two-run homer in the top of the first, but Schwarber led off the bottom half with a home run. Hernández's fifth-inning homer gave Boston a 4-2 lead, but the Rays tied it in the eighth when Wander Franco hit a solo homer and Meadows and Randy Arozarena doubled.

Garrett Whitlock struck out Zunino to end the inning.

LATE THREATS

With a runner on first in the 10th, J.D. Martinez fouled off five pitches with two strikes and then hit one to straightaway center, where Kiermaier pulled it in right in front of the 379-foot marker. (The wind was blowing in.)

In the 11th, Arozarena stole second and was caught in a rundown on his way to third, but he scrambled back to the bag safely. But he was stranded there when Pivetta struck out Zunino and Jordan Luplow to end the inning.

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Boston had a runner on first in the 11th when Hernández hit a chopper into the hole between short and third. Franco went to his right to field it, then made a long throw that first baseman Luplow picked out of the dirt for the third out.

SCHWARBER TIME

Schwarber, a star of the Cubs' 2016 World Series title who homered in the wild-card game against the Yankees, also singled and scored in the third, when Boston scored a pair of runs to chase Drew Rasmusen and take a 3-2 lead. He singled in the ninth before leaving for a pinch-runner.

But it was Schwarber's play in the field that endeared him to the Fenway fans.

After earning an error when he lobbed the ball over pitcher Nathan Eovaldi's head on a grounder in the third inning, Schwarber was tested on a similar play made a more accurate toss in the fourth.

He celebrated by raising both arms in the air and giving a fist pump, then tipping his cap to the cheering fans. Schwarber turned toward the dugout and laughed.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rays: Arozarena slipped on his way to second base on his eighth-inning double, then limped into the dugout while the Red Sox changed pitchers. But he remained in the game.

Red Sox: RHP Hansel Robles appeared to be experiencing discomfort after striking out Diaz for the second out in the eighth. He winced and stretched his shoulder, then gave up Arozarena's double to tie it 4-4.

UP NEXT

The teams play again on Monday night, with the starters to be announced. Nick Pivetta had been expected to start for Boston and Patiño for the Rays, but both pitched in Game 3. Red Sox manager Alex Cora said it would most likely be Eduardo Rodriguez.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/tag/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Fall will test leaders' ability to keep Congress on rails

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Year-end pileups of crucial legislation and the brinkmanship that goes with them are normal behavior for Congress. This autumn, lawmakers are barreling toward battles that are striking for the risks they pose to both parties and their leaders.

Though few doubt that Congress will again extend the government's borrowing authority when it expires in December, no one seems certain of how they'll do it. Democrats don't have the votes yet to enact President Joe Biden's top priorities into law. And Republicans are nervous that Democrats may weaken the filibuster rule that lets the Senate's minority party derail legislation.

Miscalculate and there could be a calamitous federal default, a collapse of Biden's domestic agenda and, for good measure, a damaging government shutdown. Stir in lawmakers whose nerves are already frayed and are looking to tee up issues for next year's midterm elections, and it's a recipe for confrontations that could damage each party if leaders aren't careful.

Here are gambles each side faces:

DEBT LIMIT

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., blinked last week. And then he said he wouldn't blink again.

McConnell said since summer that Republicans wouldn't supply the votes majority Democrats needed to extend the federal debt limit. But Thursday night, 11 Republicans including McConnell joined Democrats in narrowly overcoming a procedural hurdle so the Senate could subsequently approve \$480 billion in fresh borrowing.

The vote staved off until December a first-ever federal default that could disrupt the global economy, delay government checks to Social Security recipients and others and unleash voters' wrath on lawmakers.

But the partisan dispute will resume in two months.

Republicans want Democrats to raise the debt ceiling on their own to underscore their argument that Biden's multitrillion-dollar social and environment agenda is unaffordable. Democrats want Republicans to

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put their imprint on the borrowing limit increase, arguing that the \$28 trillion national debt is for unpaid bills already incurred, including \$7 trillion under former President Donald Trump.

By enabling a two-month reprieve on the fight, McConnell angered Republicans who wanted a tougher stance against Democrats including Trump, still an intimidating force in the GOP. Even usual McConnell ally Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., called it "complete capitulation."

Demonstrating the political sensitivities in play, eight of the 11 Republicans who Thursday helped Democrats approve the debt limit increase are either retiring or not seeking reelection until 2024 or later.

Friday night, McConnell said he "will not provide such assistance again," citing "grave concerns" over Democrats' huge domestic bill and "hysterics" by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. More on that later.

Come December, something has to give. But it's unclear how that will happen, and the stakes will be high for leaders to ensure a partisan stare down doesn't tumble out of control.

Oh — by Dec. 3, federal agencies will shut down unless Congress approves legislation financing them.

BIDEN'S AGENDA

Democratic progressives and centrists are fighting over the final size and contents of Biden's proposed 10-year, \$3.5 trillion package of social safety net, climate change and tax initiatives. The longer their battles rage, the more the party risks letting the struggles themselves define the effort, distracting from the widely popular programs they hope to include.

Due to Senate moderates like Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, Biden has conceded that the final price tag will likely be much smaller, around \$2 trillion. Money for priorities like the environment, health care and education will have to shrink accordingly.

Facing unanimous Republican opposition and paper-thin congressional majorities, Democrats will need near unanimity to succeed. The political consequences for Democrats would be jolting if Biden's highest priority bill, along with an accompanying \$1 trillion infrastructure package, crumble with his party holding the White House and Congress.

"I hope to God that is not the case," Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said Friday. He predicted both bills would pass but conceded "a horrible possibility" of failure.

FILIBUSTER FEARS

Democrats have become increasingly open to the idea of weakening filibusters, Senate procedures that have let Republicans wreak legislative havoc by requiring 60 votes in the 50-50 chamber to pass most bills. Manchin and Sinema have said they oppose that change, stymying that option.

GOP leaders worry that if a debt limit standoff moves to the brink of a default, Schumer might be able to persuade Manchin and Sinema to support erasing filibusters for debt limit increases. And that might lead to later, additional exceptions for voting rights or other Democratic priorities.

Those fears are Republicans' "most obvious challenge" in calculating how stubborn to be in the debt limit standoff, said Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D.

SOUR MOOD

Congress is an angry place these days. Four years of Trump's bellicose presidency, the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by his supporters and the high stakes for Democrats pushing Biden's programs have taken a toll.

Frayed relationships are everywhere.

Manchin said Wednesday that he didn't want Democrats' huge domestic programs bill, of which Sanders is a leading author, to make the U.S. "an entitlement society."

Sanders criticized Manchin's desire to curb climate change and health care provisions in the bill. "Does Senator Manchin not believe that our children and grandchildren are entitled to live in a country and a world that is healthy and is habitable?" Sanders asked.

The two represent opposite ends of Democrats' political spectrum. Still, it was a highly unusual public airing of internal differences, and at a crucial moment.

In a letter to Biden, McConnell unleashed a remarkably bitter personal attack on Schumer. McConnell

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said Schumer's "childish behavior" alienated Republicans who'd just helped pass the short-term debt limit extension, adding, "It has poisoned the well even further."

"There's a lot of stress being felt, there's a lot of things at stake here in terms of causes that many of us fought for, for a lifetime," said No. 2 Senate Democratic leader Richard Durbin of Illinois. He added, "So the sooner we get this done, the better."

Sydney opens to vaccinated after 100-plus days of lockdown

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Sydney hairdressers, gyms, cafés and bars reopened to fully vaccinated customers on Monday for the first time in more than 100 days after Australia's largest city achieved a vaccination benchmark.

Sydney planned to reopen on the Monday after 70% of the New South Wales state population aged 16 and older were fully vaccinated.

By Monday, 73.5% of the target population was fully vaccinated and more than 90% have received at least one dose.

Some businesses opened at midnight due to demand from people impatient to enjoy their freedom.

More pandemic restrictions will be removed at the 80% benchmark, and New South Wales residents will be free to travel overseas for the first time since March last year.

New South Wales reported 496 new infections in the latest 24-hour period and eight COVID-19 deaths.

The infection rate will rise as Sydney residents return to work and become more mobile.

New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said the infection rate and numbers of COVID-19 patients being admitted to hospitals were lower than modeling had predicted.

"So that's positive and gives hope and confidence as we open up in a measured way we're in a very good position to keep people safe," Perrottet said.

"There's still restrictions in place. It's not a free for all. It is opening up in a measured way and if everyone can look after each other and respect each other, we can get people back into work, we can get businesses open, while at the same time keeping people safe," he added.

While Sydney infections have been trending down in recent weeks, they have yet to peak in Melbourne, Australia's second-most populous city.

Victoria state, which includes Melbourne, reported 1,612 new infections on Monday and eight deaths.

Sydney's lockdown began on June 26 and the outbreak of the delta variant spread from Sydney to Melbourne, which has been locked down since Aug. 5, and the national capital Canberra, which has been locked down since Aug. 12.

Most of the rest of Australia is largely free of COVID-19, although authorities warn that delta cannot be kept out of any state or territory.

The Australian Capital Territory, which includes Canberra and two villages, and New South Wales are the only parts of the country to achieve the 70% benchmark. Canberra will reduce pandemic restrictions on Friday. More than 95% of the target population has had at least one dose and 72.8% are fully vaccinated.

Victoria remains a week or two behind. In Victoria, 85.5% has had a least one vaccine dose and 58.6% are fully vaccinated.

Navy nuclear engineer charged with trying to pass secrets

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Navy nuclear engineer with access to military secrets has been charged with trying to pass information about the design of American nuclear-powered submarines to someone he thought was a representative of a foreign government but who turned out to be an undercover FBI agent, the Justice Department said Sunday.

In a criminal complaint detailing espionage-related charges against Jonathan Toebbe, the government said he sold information for nearly the past year to a contact he believed represented a foreign power.

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That country was not named in the court documents.

Toebe, 42, was arrested in West Virginia on Saturday along with his wife, Diana, 45, after he had placed a removable memory card at a prearranged "dead drop" in the state, according to the Justice Department.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the Toebbes, who are from Annapolis, Maryland, have lawyers. The Navy declined to comment Sunday.

The FBI says the scheme began in April 2020 when Jonathan Toebe sent a package of Navy documents to a foreign government and wrote that he was interested in selling to that country operations manuals, performance reports and other sensitive information.

Authorities say he also provided instructions for how to conduct the furtive relationship, with a letter that said: "I apologize for this poor translation into your language. Please forward this letter to your military intelligence agency. I believe this information will be of great value to your nation. This is not a hoax."

That package, which had a return address in Pittsburgh, was obtained by the FBI last December through its legal attache office in the unspecified foreign country. The court documents don't explain how the FBI came to receive the package or from whom.

In any event, the FBI used Toebe's outreach as the launching pad for a monthslong undercover operation in which an agent posing as a representative of a foreign contact made contact with Toebe and agreed to pay thousands of dollars in cryptocurrency for the information that Toebe was offering.

After weeks of back and forth over email, the undercover agent in June sent Toebe about \$10,000 in cryptocurrency, describing it as a sign of good faith and trust, the FBI says.

Weeks later, federal agents watched as the Toebbes arrived at an agreed-upon location in West Virginia for the exchange, with Diana Toebe appearing to serve as a lookout for her husband during a dead-drop operation for which the FBI paid \$20,000.

The FBI recovered a blue memory card wrapped in plastic and placed between two slices of bread on a half of a peanut butter sandwich, court documents say. The records on the memory card included design elements and performance characteristics of Virginia-class submarine reactors.

The Justice Department describes those submarines as "cruise missile fast-attack submarines, which incorporate the latest in stealth, intelligence gathering, and weapons systems technology."

The memory card also included a typed message that said, in part: "I hope your experts are very happy with the sample provided and I understand the importance of a small exchange to grow our trust."

The FBI conducted similar dead-drop exchanges over the next several months, including one in August in eastern Virginia for which Toebe was paid roughly \$70,000. In that instance, prosecutors say, he concealed in a chewing gum package a memory card that contained schematic designs for the Virginia-class submarine.

The complaint alleges violations of the Atomic Energy Act, which restricts the disclosure of information related to atomic weapons or nuclear materials.

The Toebbes are expected to have their initial court appearances Tuesday in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

Jonathan Toebe has worked for the U.S. government since 2012, holding a top-secret security clearance and specializing in naval nuclear propulsion, the FBI says. He has also been assigned to a government-owned laboratory in the Pittsburgh area that officials say works on nuclear power for the U.S. Navy.

No one answered at the Toebe residence on Sunday afternoon in a waterside Annapolis community by the South River. An outside light was on above the door of their home, and a dog barked inside.

John Cooley, who lives across the street from the Toebbes, said he counted more than 30 FBI agents on his block on Saturday from about 2:30 p.m. until after dark. He said agents went inside the home.

Associated Press writers Brian Witte in Annapolis, Robert Burns in Washington and Adrian Sainz in Memphis contributed to this report.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Taliban says US will provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The U.S. has agreed to provide humanitarian aid to a desperately poor Afghanistan on the brink of an economic disaster, while refusing to give political recognition to the country's new Taliban rulers, the Taliban said Sunday.

The statement came at the end of the first direct talks between the former foes since the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops at the end of August.

The U.S. statement was less definitive, saying only that the two sides "discussed the United States' provision of robust humanitarian assistance, directly to the Afghan people."

The Taliban said the talks held in Doha, Qatar, "went well," with Washington freeing up humanitarian aid to Afghanistan after agreeing not to link such assistance to formal recognition of the Taliban.

The United States made it clear that the talks were in no way a preamble to recognition of the Taliban, who swept into power Aug. 15 after the U.S.-allied government collapsed.

State Department spokesman Ned Price called the discussions "candid and professional," with the U.S. side reiterating that the Taliban will be judged on their actions, not only their words.

"The U.S. delegation focused on security and terrorism concerns and safe passage for U.S. citizens, other foreign nationals and our Afghan partners, as well as on human rights, including the meaningful participation of women and girls in all aspects of Afghan society," he said in a statement.

Taliban political spokesman Suhail Shaheen also told The Associated Press that the movement's interim foreign minister assured the U.S. during the talks that the Taliban are committed to seeing that Afghan soil is not used by extremists to launch attacks against other countries.

On Saturday, however, the Taliban ruled out cooperation with Washington on containing the increasingly active Islamic State group in Afghanistan.

IS, an enemy of the Taliban, has claimed responsibility for a number of recent attacks, including Friday's suicide bombing that killed 46 minority Shiite Muslims. Washington considers IS its greatest terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan.

"We are able to tackle Daesh independently," Shaheen said when asked whether the Taliban would work with the U.S. to contain the Islamic State affiliate. He used an Arabic acronym for IS.

Bill Roggio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies who tracks militant groups, agreed the Taliban do not need Washington's help to hunt down and destroy Afghanistan's IS affiliate, known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, or ISKP.

The Taliban "fought 20 years to eject the U.S., and the last thing it needs is the return of the U.S. It also doesn't need U.S. help," said Roggio, who also produces the foundation's Long War Journal. "The Taliban has to conduct the difficult and time-consuming task of rooting out ISKP cells and its limited infrastructure. It has all the knowledge and tools it needs to do it."

The IS affiliate doesn't have the advantage of safe havens in Pakistan and Iran that the Taliban had in its fight against the United States, Roggio said. However, he warned that the Taliban's longtime support for al-Qaida make them unreliable as counterterrorism partners with the United States.

The Taliban gave refuge to al-Qaida before it carried out the 9/11 attacks. That prompted the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan that drove the Taliban from power.

"It is insane for the U.S. to think the Taliban can be a reliable counterterrorism partner, given the Taliban's enduring support for al-Qaida," Roggio said.

During the meeting, U.S. officials were expected to press the Taliban to allow Americans and others to leave Afghanistan. In their statement, the Taliban said without elaborating that they would "facilitate principled movement of foreign nationals."

AP Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee in Washington contributed.

Facebook unveils new controls for kids using its platforms

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By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Facebook, in the aftermath of damning testimony that its platforms harm children, will be introducing several features including prompting teens to take a break using its photo sharing app Instagram, and “nudging” teens if they are repeatedly looking at the same content that’s not conducive to their well-being.

The Menlo Park, California-based Facebook is also planning to introduce new controls for adults of teens on an optional basis so that parents or guardians can supervise what their teens are doing online. These initiatives come after Facebook announced late last month that it was pausing work on its Instagram for Kids project. But critics say the plan lacks details and they are skeptical that the new features would be effective.

The new controls were outlined on Sunday by Nick Clegg, Facebook’s vice president for global affairs, who made the rounds on various Sunday news shows including CNN’s “State of the Union” and ABC’s “This Week with George Stephanopoulos” where he was grilled about Facebook’s use of algorithms as well as its role in spreading harmful misinformation ahead of the Jan. 6 Capitol riots.

“We are constantly iterating in order to improve our products,” Clegg told Dana Bash on “State of the Union” Sunday. “We cannot, with a wave of the wand, make everyone’s life perfect. What we can do is improve our products, so that our products are as safe and as enjoyable to use.”

Clegg said that Facebook has invested \$13 billion over the past few years in making sure to keep the platform safe and that the company has 40,000 people working on these issues. And while Clegg said that Facebook has done its best to keep harmful content out of its platforms, he says he was open for more regulation and oversight.

“We need greater transparency,” he told CNN’s Bash. He noted that the systems that Facebook has in place should be held to account, if necessary, by regulation so that “people can match what our systems say they’re supposed to do from what actually happens.”

The flurry of interviews came after whistleblower Frances Haugen, a former data scientist with Facebook, went before Congress last week to accuse the social media platform of failing to make changes to Instagram after internal research showed apparent harm to some teens and of being dishonest in its public fight against hate and misinformation. Haugen’s accusations were supported by tens of thousands of pages of internal research documents she secretly copied before leaving her job in the company’s civic integrity unit.

Josh Golin, executive director of Fairplay, a watchdog for the children and media marketing industry, said that he doesn’t think introducing controls to help parents supervise teens would be effective since many teens set up secret accounts any way. He was also dubious about how effective nudging teens to take a break or move away from harmful content would be. He noted Facebook needs to show exactly how they would implement it and offer research that shows these tools are effective.

“There is tremendous reason to be skeptical,” he said. He added that regulators need to restrict what Facebook does with its algorithms.

He said he also believes that Facebook should cancel its Instagram project for kids.

When Clegg was grilled by both Bash and Stephanopoulos in separate interviews about the use of algorithms in amplifying misinformation ahead of Jan. 6 riots, he responded that if Facebook removed the algorithms people would see more, not less hate speech, and more, not less, misinformation.

Clegg told both hosts that the algorithms serve as “giant spam filters.”

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, who chairs the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Competition Policy, Antitrust, and Consumer Rights, told Bash in a separate interview Sunday that it’s time to update children’s privacy laws and offer more transparency in the use of algorithms.

“I appreciate that he is willing to talk about things, but I believe the time for conversation is done,” said Klobuchar, referring to Clegg’s plan. “The time for action is now.”

Follow Anne D’Innocenzio: <http://twitter.com/ADInnocenzio>

Iraq's parliamentary vote marred by boycott, voter apathy

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqis voted Sunday in parliamentary elections held months ahead of schedule as a concession to a youth-led popular uprising against corruption and mismanagement.

But the voting was marked by widespread apathy and a boycott by many of the young activists who thronged the streets of Baghdad and Iraq's southern provinces in late 2019. Tens of thousands of people took part in the mass protests and were met by security forces firing live ammunition and tear gas. More than 600 people were killed and thousands injured within just a few months.

Although authorities gave in and called the early elections, the death toll and the heavy-handed crackdown - as well as a string of targeted assassinations - prompted many who took part in the protests to later call for a boycott of the vote.

Polls closed at 1500 GMT (1800 local time) following 11 hours of voting. Results are expected within the next 24 hours, according to the independent body that oversees Iraq's election. But negotiations to choose a prime minister tasked with forming a government are expected to drag on for weeks or even months.

The election was the sixth held since the fall of Saddam Hussein after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many were skeptical that independent candidates from the protest movement stood a chance against well-entrenched parties and politicians, many of them backed by powerful armed militias.

Minutes after polls closed, fireworks organized by Baghdad's municipality went off in the city's landmark Tahrir Square, where demonstrators had set up tents for several months starting in October 2019. The protests fizzled out by February of the following year, due to the security crackdown and later, the coronavirus pandemic.

Today, the square stands largely empty. The country faces huge economic and security challenges, and although most Iraqis long for change, few expect it to happen as a result of the elections.

Muna Hussein, a 22-year-old cinematic makeup artist, said she boycotted the election because she did not feel there was a safe environment "with uncontrolled weapons everywhere," a reference to the mainly Shiite militias backed by neighboring Iran.

"In my opinion, it isn't easy to hold free and fair elections under the current circumstances," she said.

Amir Fadel, a 22-year-old car dealer, disagreed. "I don't want these same faces and same parties to return," he said after casting his ballot in Baghdad's Karradah district.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, whose chances for a second term will be determined by the results of the election, urged Iraqis to vote in large numbers.

"Get out and vote, and change your future," said al-Kadhimi, repeating the phrase, "get out" three times after casting his ballot at a school in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, home to foreign embassies and government offices.

Under Iraq's laws, the winner of Sunday's vote gets to choose the country's next prime minister, but it's unlikely any of the competing coalitions can secure a clear majority. That will require a lengthy process involving backroom negotiations to select a consensus prime minister and agree on a new coalition government. It took eight months of political wrangling to form a government after the 2018 elections.

Groups drawn from Iraq's majority Shiite Muslims dominate the electoral landscape, with a tight race expected between Iraq's influential Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, and the Fatah Alliance, led by paramilitary leader Hadi al-Ameri, which came in second in the previous election.

The Fatah Alliance is comprised of parties and affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group of mostly pro-Iran Shiite militias that rose to prominence during the war against the Sunni extremist Islamic State group. It includes some of the most hard-line Iran-backed factions, such as the Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia. Al-Sadr, a black-turbaned nationalist leader, is also close to Iran, but publicly rejects its political influence.

Earlier Sunday, al-Sadr cast his ballot in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, swarmed by local journalists. He then drove away in a white sedan without commenting. Al-Sadr, a populist who has an immense following

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among Iraq's working class Shiites, came out on top in the 2018 elections, winning a majority of seats.

The election is the first since the fall of Saddam to proceed without a curfew in place, reflecting the significantly improved security situation in the country following the defeat of IS in 2017. Previous votes were marred by fighting and deadly bomb attacks that have plagued the country for decades.

More than 250,000 security personnel across the country were tasked with protecting the vote. Soldiers, police and anti-terrorism forces fanned out and deployed outside polling stations, some of which were ringed by barbed wire. Voters were patted down and searched.

As a security precaution, Iraq closed its airspace and land border crossings and scrambled its air force from Saturday night until early Monday morning.

In another first, Sunday's election is taking place under a new election law that divides Iraq into smaller constituencies — another demand of the activists who took part in the 2019 protests — and allows for more independent candidates.

The 2018 elections saw just 44% of eligible voters cast their ballots, a record low, and the results were widely contested. There are concerns of a similar or even lower turnout this time.

In a tea shop in Karradah, one of the few open, candidate Reem Abdulhadi walked in to ask whether people had cast their vote.

"I will give my vote to Umm Kalthoum, the singer, she is the only one who deserves it," the tea vendor quipped, referring to the late Egyptian singer beloved by many in the Arab world. He said he will not take part in the election and didn't believe in the political process.

After a few words, Abdulhadi gave the man, who asked to remain anonymous, a card with her name and number in case he changed his mind. He put it in his pocket.

"Thank you, I will keep it as a souvenir," he said.

At that moment, a low-flying, high-speed military aircraft flew overhead making a screeching noise. "Listen to this. This sound is terror. It reminds me of war, not an election," he added.

Associated Press writer Abdulrahman Zeyad contributed reporting.

No. 2 House Republican refuses to say election wasn't stolen

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House's second-ranking Republican, Rep. Steve Scalise, repeatedly refused to say on Sunday that the 2020 election wasn't stolen, standing by Donald Trump's lie that Democrat Joe Biden won the White House because of mass voter fraud.

More than 11 months after Americans picked their president and almost nine months since Biden was inaugurated, Scalise was unwilling during a national television interview to acknowledge the legitimacy of the vote, instead sticking to his belief that the election results should not have been certified by Congress.

"I've been very clear from the beginning," he said. "If you look at a number of states, they didn't follow their state-passed laws that govern the election for president. That is what the United States Constitution says. They don't say the states determine what the rules are. They say the state legislatures determine the rules," the Louisiana congressman said on "Fox News Sunday."

Pressed by moderator Chris Wallace on whether the election went beyond a few irregularities to be considered "stolen," Scalise responded: "It's not just irregularities. It's states that did not follow the laws set which the Constitution says they're supposed to follow."

Trump left office in January a few weeks after a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol in a violent riot in an attempt to prevent Congress from formally declaring Biden the winner.

As Trump mulls a 2024 presidential bid, he has been intensifying efforts to shame — and potentially remove — members of his party who are seen as disloyal to his bogus claims that last year's election was illegitimate. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California, who is vying to become speaker if the GOP takes control after the 2022 midterm election, continues to defend Trump and his false assertions.

At a rally Saturday in Iowa, Trump spent almost 30 minutes arguing falsely that he had won Arizona,

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Georgia and Pennsylvania. Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds stood by and welcomed his return to their state.

In fact, no election was stolen from Trump. His former attorney general, William Barr, found no evidence of widespread election corruption. Allegations of massive voting fraud also have been dismissed by a succession of judges and refuted by state election officials and an arm of the Homeland Security Department during the Trump administration.

Scalise on Sunday appeared to be referring to the legal argument, made in several lawsuits backed by Trump before and after last November's election, that the Constitution gives the power of election administration exclusively to state lawmakers. The suits sought to invalidate a number of pandemic-era accommodations including expanded mail voting that were put in place by governors, state election officials and judges.

The high court ultimately turned away the cases, declining to rule on the matter. There's no indication in any of the suits that changing the COVID-19 accommodations would have altered a state's election results.

Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., who is serving on a House committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, on Sunday slammed Scalise for spreading Trump's "Big Lie."

"Millions of Americans have been sold a fraud that the election was stolen," Cheney tweeted. "Republicans have a duty to tell the American people that this is not true. Perpetuating the Big Lie is an attack on the core of our constitutional republic."

Craig's final Bond takes \$56 million at domestic box office

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

After over 18 months of pandemic delays, "No Time to Die" opened on target. The final James Bond film of the Daniel Craig era grossed \$56 million from 4,407 North American theaters, according to studio estimates on Sunday, to easily take the first-place spot.

It didn't break any pandemic or 007 records, but it didn't fall significantly short either and is in fact the fourth-best opening in the 25-film series. James Bond isn't Marvel when it comes to opening weekends. Bond has always had an older audience which is typically less inclined to rush out for the first weekend. In fact, the best Bond opening ever didn't even crack \$100 million. It was \$88.4 million for "Skyfall" which debuted in 2012.

"It's been a long time coming to get this movie on the big screen," said Erik Lomis, the head of distribution for United Artists Releasing. "It's right where we thought it would be and right where tracking predicted it would be."

Cary Joji Fukunaga directed this installment, which co-stars Lea Seydoux, Ben Whishaw, Naomie Harris, Ana de Armas, Lashana Lynch and Rami Malek, as the antagonist. Both critics and audiences have responded positively (84% on Rotten Tomatoes and an A- CinemaScore). According to exit data, audiences were heavily male (64%) and over 35 (57%).

"I'm just really, really relieved that it's in the cinemas and people are getting a chance to see it," Craig said Sunday from the Charlotte Motor Speedway. "I am incredibly proud of it, as I am of all the movies, but I was just desperate for people to go and see this in a big group, like coming here today. It's what we do. We're a social species, we need to get together."

Craig was the honorary starter at the NASCAR playoff race where he waved the green flag.

Unlike many films released during the pandemic, a streaming or hybrid release was never even a consideration for "No Time to Die." In addition to being the longest Bond film ever at two hours and 43 minutes, it was also an expensive one with a reported production budget of around \$250 million. And that doesn't include marketing costs, which reportedly exceeded \$100 million.

"Michael Wilson and Barbara Broccoli are huge believers in the theatrical experience," Lomis said of the film's producers. "They delivered us a terrific movie and together we held it for theatrical. That was hugely important to us, to them and to the theater owners. And when you see this kind of result, it's very gratifying."

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According to North American distributor United Artists Releasing, 25% of moviegoers returned to theaters for the first time in 18 months this weekend, suggesting that the film will have legs.

"That, I thought, was a pretty significant statistic," Lomis added.

He said he's been getting calls from theater owners around the country saying that audiences have been regularly applauding at the end of the movie.

But the profitability of Bond movies ultimately comes down to international, which in the Craig era has regularly accounted for over 70% of the global total. "No Time to Die" launched abroad last weekend, with Universal handling some territories and MGM others, and as of Sunday global grosses were estimated to be over \$313.3 million.

"This movie became bigger than life because it was really the first high profile movie to move off of its release date when the pandemic began," said Paul Dergarabedian, Comscore's senior media analyst. "To have Bond still be appealing and viable and relevant some 60 years on is quite amazing."

In second place was last week's No. 1 film "Venom: Let There Be Carnage," which fell 64% from its record \$90 million launch, earning \$32 million in its second weekend. The Sony sequel, which is also playing exclusively in movie theaters, has earned \$185.6 million globally to date.

Aside from Bond, it was a relatively quiet week at the box office. Other newcomers included A24's haunting Icelandic film "Lamb," which earned \$1 million from only 583 theaters and Bleecker Street's "Mass," which opened on four screens to \$14,457.

Meanwhile, Disney is expecting on Monday to cross the \$2 billion in global box office earnings in 2021. And the momentum should keep going through October, with "Halloween Kills" and "Dune," which has already made \$117 million internationally, on the horizon.

"A year ago we were in dire straits," Dergarabedian said. "The year to date is now 32% up from last year. We're gaining ground here and we have a lot of big movies on the way. The industry is chugging along and 'Halloween Kills' could be much bigger than anyone expects."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "No Time to Die," \$56 million.
2. "Venom: Let There Be Carnage," \$32 million.
3. "The Addams Family 2," \$10 million.
4. "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," \$4.2 million.
5. "The Many Saints of Newark," \$1.5 million.
6. "Free Guy," \$1.3 million.
7. "Lamb," \$1 million.
8. "Dear Evan Hansen," \$1 million.
9. "Candyman," \$700,000.
10. "Jungle Cruise" \$214,000.

AP Reporter Jenna Fryer contributed from Concord, North Carolina

Czech president hospitalized; Could affect forming new govt

By KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — Czech President Milos Zeman was rushed to the hospital on Sunday, a day after the country held parliamentary election in which populist Prime Minister Andrej Babis' party surprisingly came in second and Zeman has a key role in establishing a new government.

The Czech presidency is largely ceremonial but the president chooses which political leader can try to form the next government. Earlier Sunday, Zeman met with Babis, his close ally, but the prime minister made no comment as he left the presidential chateau in Lany, near Prague.

On Saturday, the centrist ANO (Yes) party led by Babis, a populist billionaire, narrowly lost the Czech Republic's election, which could spell the end of the euroskeptic leader's reign in the European Union

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nation of 10.7 million people.

A liberal-conservative three-party coalition named Together captured 27.8% of the vote, beating Babis' ANO, which won 27.1%. In a second blow to the populists, another center-left liberal coalition received 15.6% to finish third.

The winning coalition won 71 seats while its third-place partner captured 37 seats to have a comfortable majority of 108 seats in the 200-seat lower house of Parliament, and they pledged to work together. Babis's party won 72 seats, six less than in the 2017 election.

But Zeman earlier indicated he would first appoint the leader of the strongest party, not the strongest coalition, to try to form the government. That would give Babis a chance to give it a try to find a majority for his possible new government.

If he fails, as expected, and his latest government doesn't win a mandatory confidence vote in the house, Zeman could ask him to try to create a new government again.

That has happened before. With no deadlines for the president's move, the country faced a long term of political instability from the October 2017 election until July the following year, when Babis' second Cabinet finally won the confidence vote.

"It would be no surprise if the election's loss wouldn't become reality for Babis for the following months," said analyst Petr Just from Metropolitan University Prague.

But unlike in 2017, this latest election produced a clear winner. Petr Fiala, the leader of Together and its candidate for prime minister, urged Zeman to accept the election results.

"The opposition has gained a clear majority in the lower house," Fiala said. "The Constitution clearly says that a government needs support of a majority. We'll see what steps President Zeman is to take but it's essential that he cannot ignore that."

In his only post-election comment, Zeman congratulated the election winner and all elected lawmakers.

If Zeman is not able to act due to his illness or other reasons, the prime minister and the speakers of both houses of parliament will take over his presidential powers. If that happens, the new speaker of the lower house selects the premier. The parliament has to meet within 30 days of the election to select the speaker and other officials.

In other election results, the anti-migrant and anti-Muslim force in the Czech Republic, the Freedom and Direct Democracy party, which wants the country to leave the EU, finished fourth with 9.6% support, or 20 seats. In another surprise, the Social Democrats and the Communists, the country's traditional parliamentary parties, both failed to win seats in parliament for the first time since the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993.

Prague's military hospital confirmed that Zeman was transported there Sunday. Zeman, 77, is a heavy smoker and drinker who has suffered from diabetes. He has trouble walking and has been using a wheelchair.

"The reason for his hospitalization are the complications that accompany the chronic disease for which we treat him here," said Dr. Miroslav Zavoral, the director of the clinic. He declined to elaborate.

Jiri Ovcacek, the president's spokesman, later said his current stay in hospital doesn't threaten the country's post-election negotiations and his Constitutional duties. He said Zeman has asked to receive media monitoring on a daily basis.

Zeman was previously admitted on Sept. 14 for what his office described later as a planned examination. The office said the president was only dehydrated and slightly exhausted. Zeman was released after eight days, his longest hospital stay.

He spent four days in the same hospital in 2019 for similar reasons.

AP Top 25: Georgia is No. 1, Big Ten grabs half of top 10

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Georgia was the new No. 1 in The Associated Press college football poll Sunday by a unanimous vote, taking the top spot during the regular season for the first time since November 1982.

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The Bulldogs (62 first-place votes) moved up one spot in the AP Top 25 presented by Regions Bank, a day after preseason No. 1 Alabama lost at Texas A&M. The defending national champion Crimson Tide slipped four spots to No. 5 after its first loss of the season.

After falling out of the rankings last week for the first time this season, the Aggies are back in at No. 21. Alabama was one of two top-five teams to lose Saturday, opening the door for several teams to rise to rare heights.

Iowa is No 2, up one spot after winning a top-five matchup with Penn State. The Hawkeyes have their best ranking since they reached No. 1 in 1985.

No. 3 Cincinnati has its best ranking ever.

No. 4 Oklahoma moved up two spots after a come-from-behind victory against Texas in the Red River Rivalry.

No. 5 Alabama had a run of 14 straight polls at No. 1 snapped. It is out of the top three for the first time since 2019.

The Big Ten dominates the back half of the top 10 with Ohio State at No. 6, Penn State at No. 7, Michigan at eighth and Michigan State 10th. The Big Ten has five top-10 teams for the first time in the history of the AP poll, which dates to 1936.

Oregon slipped in at No. 9. Kentucky moved up five spots to No. 11 for the Wildcats' best ranking since 2011.

POLL POINTS

—The last time Georgia was No. 1 was the 2008 preseason poll, but the Bulldogs slipped after the first week of games — even though they won — and has not been back.

This is the 16th time overall the Bulldogs have held the top ranking and the first time they have been a unanimous No. 1.

OUT

Auburn dropped out of the rankings after losing for the second time this season. The Tigers were the latest team smothered by Georgia's dominant defense.

Auburn did manage to score an offensive touchdown against the Bulldogs, just the second one this season yielded by Georgia.

CONFERENCE CALL

The only other league that has had half the top 10 in the rankings is the Southeastern Conference, which has done it 23 times, according to ESPN.

Not including last season when some FBS teams were ineligible for the poll early in the season because their conferences were not planning on playing a fall schedule, the last time the SEC had five top-10 teams was the final regular-season poll of 2019.

SEC — 7 (Nos. 1, 5, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21).

Big Ten — 5 (Nos. 2, 6, 7, 8, 10).

Big 12 — 3 (Nos. 4, 12, 25).

ACC — 2 (Nos. 16, 22).

American — 2 (Nos. 3, 23).

Pac-12 — 2 (Nos. 9, 18).

Mountain West — 1 (No. 24).

Sun Belt — 1 (No. 15).

Independent — 2 (Nos. 14, 19).

RANKED vs RANKED

No. 11 Kentucky at No. 1 Georgia. The de facto SEC East championship.

No. 12 Oklahoma State at No. 25 Texas. The Longhorns get a crack at the other undefeated Big 12 team this week after a crushing loss to Oklahoma on Saturday.

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

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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>

Paul McCartney: John Lennon responsible for Beatle breakup

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Paul McCartney has revisited the breakup of The Beatles, flatly disputing the suggestion that he was responsible for the group's demise.

Speaking on an episode of BBC Radio 4's "This Cultural Life" that is scheduled to air on Oct. 23, McCartney said it was John Lennon who wanted to disband The Beatles.

"I didn't instigate the split," McCartney said. "That was our Johnny."

The band's fans have long debated who was responsible for the breakup, with many blaming McCartney. But McCartney said Lennon's desire to "break lose" was the main driver behind the split.

Confusion about the breakup was allowed to fester because their manager asked the band members to keep quiet until he concluded a number of business deals, McCartney said.

The interview comes ahead of Peter Jackson's six-hour documentary chronicling the final months of the band. "The Beatles: Get Back," set for release in November on Disney+, is certain to revisit the breakup of the legendary band. McCartney's comments were first reported by The Observer.

When asked by interviewer John Wilson about the decision to strike out on his own, McCartney retorted: "Stop right there. I am not the person who instigated the split. Oh no, no, no. John walked into a room one day and said, 'I am leaving The Beatles.' Is that instigating the split, or not?"

McCartney expressed sadness over the breakup, saying the group was still making "pretty good stuff."

"This was my band, this was my job, this was my life. So I wanted it to continue," McCartney said.

La Palma's volcanic eruption is going strong 3 weeks later

LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE, Canary Islands (AP) — Three weeks since its eruption upended the lives of thousands, the volcano on Spain's La Palma island is still spewing out endless streams of lava with no signs of ceasing.

Authorities on Sunday monitored a new stream of molten rock that has added to the destruction of over 1,100 buildings. Anything in the path of the lava — homes, farms, swimming pools and industrial buildings in the largely agricultural area — has been consumed.

The collapse Saturday of part of the volcanic cone sent a flood of bright red lava pouring down from the Cumbre Vieja ridge that initially cracked open on Sept. 19. The fast-flowing stream carried away huge chunks of lava that had already hardened. An industrial park was soon engulfed.

"We cannot say that we expect the eruption that began 21 days ago to end anytime soon," said Julio Pérez, the regional minister for security on the Canary Islands.

La Palma is part of Spain's Canary Islands, an Atlantic Ocean archipelago off northwest Africa whose economy depends on the cultivation of the Canary plantain and tourism.

The new rivers of lava have not forced the evacuation of any more residents since they are all so staying within the exclusion zone that authorities have created. Some 6,000 residents were promptly evacuated after the initial eruption.

Government experts estimated that the largest of the lava flows measures 1.5 km (.9 miles) at its widest point, while the delta of new land being formed where lava is flowing into the Atlantic has reached a surface of 34 hectares (84 acres).

The scientific committee advising the government said that if the delta continues to grow outwards into the sea, parts of it could break off. That would generate explosions, gas emissions and large waves, committee spokeswoman José María Blanco said, but should not represent a danger to those outside the no-go zone.

The Canary Islands' tourism industry was already hard hit by the pandemic, and officials were urging tourists not to keep staying away.

"This eruption is impacting a part of the island, but La Palma is still a safe place and can offer a lot to

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those who visit," said Mariano Hernández, the island's leading authority.

The last eruption on La Palma 50 years ago lasted just over three weeks. The last eruption on all the Canary Islands occurred underwater off the coast of El Hierro island in 2011 and lasted five months.

Read all AP stories on the La Palma volcano at <https://apnews.com/hub/volcanic-eruptions>

Thousands march in Brussels to demand tougher climate action

BRUSSELS (AP) — Dressed as endangered fish or tigers or wearing toy polar bears on their heads, demonstrators marched through Brussels on Sunday to push world leaders to take bolder action to fight climate change at the U.N. climate summit in Glasgow starting this month.

Thousands of people and 80 organizations took part in the protest, aiming for the biggest such event in the European Union's capital since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, which stopped the climate movement's weekly marches in its tracks.

Cyclists, families with children and white-haired demonstrators filled city streets, chanting slogans demanding climate justice and waving banners in English, French and Dutch. One carried a stuffed polar bear on her head, and others were dressed as animals endangered by human-caused climate change.

"After you've seen all the disasters we have seen this summer, it's really crucial that we move now. Because everybody knows what the problem is," said Xavier De Wannemaeker, a protester with Extinction Rebellion.

Scientists say there's little doubt that fuel emissions are contributing to extreme weather events like the droughts, fires, floods that have hit regions around the world this summer.

Demonstrator Lucien Dewanaga asked, "What do we do when we destroy the planet? We have nothing else. Human beings have to live in this world. And there is only one world."

Environmentalists worry that the U.N.'s 26th Climate Change Conference of the Parties, known as the COP26, in Glasgow starting Oct. 31 will produce policies that don't do enough to slash carbon emissions and slow the warming of the planet.

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 to fight climate change and protecting vulnerable communities and natural habitats.

The crowd at Sunday's protest included a mix of people with and without masks. With one of the world's highest vaccination rates, Belgium is starting to ease virus restrictions and allow such gatherings again.

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

Small businesses navigate ever-changing COVID-19 reality

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For a brief moment this summer, it seemed like small businesses might be getting a break from the relentless onslaught of the pandemic. More Americans, many of them vaccinated, flocked to restaurants and stores without needing to mask up or socially distance.

But then came a surge in cases due to the delta variant, a push for vaccine mandates and a reluctant return to more COVID-19 precautions. Now, small business owners are left trying to strike a balance between staying safe and getting back to being fully open.

Navigating ever-changing coronavirus reality comes with a number of risks, from financial hardship to offending customers to straining workers. Those challenges could intensify as winter approaches and outdoor alternatives become limited. Still, small business owners say the whiplash is worth it to keep customers and employees as safe as possible.

"Just weeks ago, small business owners hoped that a return to normalcy would help jump start our

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recovery," said Jessica Johnson-Cope, Chair of Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Voices National Leadership Council and owner of a small business herself, Johnson Security Bureau in New York.

New York City ordered a vaccine mandate for customers in August. For Dan Rowe, CEO of Fransmart, which runs the Brooklyn Dumpling Shop, the mandate has been a financial burden, and a headache. Brooklyn Dumpling Shop first opened in May and has six staffers. It's pandemic-friendly format is contactless and automated.

"It was engineered to be a restaurant with less employees," Rowe said. Glass separates the kitchen and staff from customers, who order food from an app. When the kitchen is finished making the food, it's placed an automat-style window, so workers don't come into contact with customers.

"We've engineered this great low labor restaurant, and the government is making us go backward," he said.

Rowe had to hire another staffer to check vaccine cards at the door, increasing his overhead. His complaint is that retail stores and groceries with prepared foods like Whole Foods don't face the same restrictions.

"It's not fair what's going on and it's not practical," he said.

The changing rules can cause customer confusion – and even some resentment. Suzanne Lucey has owned Page 158 Books bookstore in Wake Forest, N.C., for six years. When the pandemic began, the store was closed for three months. Page 158 Books reopened last July, and gradually increased store capacity from 5 to 12, abiding by state guidelines. Capacity limits were lifted ahead of the holidays last year.

When case numbers started crawling up this summer, Lucey's zip code became the third highest in the state for COVID-19 cases. They have a sign in the window that says a mask is required inside the store, but without state or city rules to back them up, they're not enforcing it.

Lucey said only about one or two people a month disregard the rule.

"It's hard. You don't want to turn people away. But I want my staff to feel secure," Lucey said, especially since two of her staff have medical conditions that make them more vulnerable. "I don't want my staff to feel like they have to be combative. So that's how we're handling it. Most people are pretty respectful."

Allison Glasgow, director of operations for McNally Jackson bookstores in New York, echoed Lucey's sentiment.

Her stores follow state and city rules for restrictions. One store has a cafe, which must follow the New York City mandate for customers being vaccinated. The bookstores also require vaccination proof at events. Otherwise, masks are optional, though recommended, if customers and staff are vaccinated.

"You can seem antagonistic when you're trying to monitor people's vaccination status," she said. "It's not 'Hey, welcome in!' which is what you have always wanted to do -- it's a bit of a roadblock there."

Although safety is the priority for everyone, the changes can be draining for owners and staff alike. Jennifer Williams, founder and CEO of closet organization company the Saint Louis Closet Co., said the company scrambled at first to implement a COVID-19 plan, including masking and increased sanitization.

"We don't have the option to 'work from home,' our business happens in our manufacturing plant and in our client's homes, so we had to adjust quickly at the onset of the pandemic with Covid precautions," she said.

She nixed the mask requirement July 1, after her staff was fully vaccinated, COVID-19 cases were declining and the CDC recommendations changed. But that was short-lived.

In early August, Missouri was one of the top three states of coronavirus cases. Williams re-implemented the mask mandate.

Williams' staffers can spend up to eight hours a day in a mask installing closet organizing systems in a customer's home. "The mental drain on employees has been extreme," Williams said.

Jessica Benhaim, owner of Lumos Yoga & Barre, an independent fitness studio in Philadelphia, gradually increased size limits of classes from late spring into the summer, but capped them at 12, short of pre-pandemic levels of 18 students for yoga and 14 for barre.

Even though the city has lifted capacity restrictions, she's keeping it capped in case restrictions come back. She lifted mask requirements for vaccinated students on June 15 but reinstated them when Phila-

delphia implemented a mask mandate in mid-August. Vaccinated students can remove their masks when they reach their mats.

"The constant adjustments over the last 18 months have been draining," Benhaim said. "More than anything, it's been stressful balancing making adjustments with trying to keep a sense of normalcy for my staff and clients."

Doctors claim Brazil hospitals gave dodgy COVID-19 care

By DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Irene Castilho didn't even have a day to grieve after her husband died of COVID-19. She was sick, too, coughing and struggling to breathe; he was barely gone when she started using his oxygen mask. The same day, on March 22, she was admitted to a hospital in Sao Paulo.

The 71-year-old had followed doctors' instructions to the letter — dutifully taking her doses of hydroxychloroquine. She also took ivermectin and a battery of anti-inflammatories and vitamins in the so-called "COVID kit" that her health care company, Prevent Senior, mailed to her home.

Still, her condition had deteriorated.

At the hospital, Castilho received dialysis and was intubated. When physicians consulted Castilho's daughters about giving her flutamide — a drug typically used for prostate cancer — they declined, worried about possible side effects for their mother who recently had liver cancer.

They later saw a nurse administering flutamide; she told them it had been prescribed despite their objection.

Castilho died in late April, 33 days after her husband, and her daughters scattered her ashes upon his grave.

"You know that passionate couple? That was them," her daughter Kátia Castilho told the Associated Press in a video call from northeastern city Joao Pessoa. "That's what keeps me from staying silent. That's what makes me unafraid. It's a truth that I wish were a lie. It's a wound that will never scar."

Castilho's case is one of a series of examples that have led to explosive accusations against Prevent Senior, which operates 10 hospitals in Sao Paulo, that have scandalized Brazil since mid-September.

Whistleblowing doctors, through their lawyer, testified at the Senate last week that Prevent Senior enlisted participants to test unproven drugs without proper consent and forced doctors to toe the line on prescribing unproven drugs touted by President Jair Bolsonaro as part of a "COVID kit."

Some senators have said it appears Prevent Senior falsified death certificates to omit COVID-19 as cause of death. Authorities are also investigating the complaints the company conducted research without proper permission.

The case underscores the resilient rift in polarized Brazil over proper treatment of COVID-19 patients, with many in the nation — including the unvaccinated president — bucking global scientific recommendations. And there's concern that other providers likewise implemented dodgy policies.

Two weeks ago, Pedro Batista Júnior, Prevent Senior's executive director, testified to senators that doctors were free to make their own prescriptions for treatment of COVID-19 and said patients had freely agreed to take their COVID kits.

In response to more than a dozen questions from the AP, Prevent Senior denied all wrongdoing, irregularities at its facilities or having conducted unapproved trials. It said all patients or family members consented before receiving treatment.

It didn't respond to questions about how many patients received the COVID kits.

Brazil has a public health care system, though service is often subpar. Many middle-class Brazilians have private plans, but costs for the elderly are high.

Prevent Senior seemed to help fill that gap. It was founded in 1997 and grew among those who couldn't afford premium care; its monthly cost is about \$300, half that of some competitors. The company has more than 500,000 clients, with an average age of 68.

Three doctors formerly employed by Prevent Senior — George Joppert, Alessandra Joppert and Walter

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Correa de Souza Neto — told television program “Fantastico” on Oct. 3 that doctors received instructions from company officials to prescribe hydroxychloroquine. Until that interview, all had remained anonymous.

Souza Neto repeated that assertion in Senate testimony on Thursday: “Between the end of March and April (2020), (Prevent Senior) instituted a protocol to prescribe hydroxychloroquine for patients. There was no autonomy for the doctor; it was mandatory.”

The antimalarial has been given glowing endorsements by Bolsonaro and his allies, who are among few remaining global champions for the drug. While a few studies at the pandemic’s onset suggested it might be promising, they were largely conducted in lab dishes, not people. Extensive worldwide research has long since found it to be ineffective and potentially dangerous for COVID-19.

The doctors also said they were told to prescribe ivermectin, an anti-parasite drug whose effectiveness for COVID-19 remains unproven. The American Medical Association recommends against prescribing it outside of formal trials.

Both drugs are part of what President Jair Bolsonaro and his allies refer to as “early treatment” for COVID-19. The president defended “early treatment” as recently as Sept. 20 at the U.N. General Assembly. He and his lawmaker son have also cited the healing potential of proxalutamide, an anti-androgen similar to flutamide that is still undergoing trials as a potential COVID-19 medication.

Pressure to prescribe hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin is corroborated by internal Prevent Senior chat groups on WhatsApp obtained by The Associated Press, and which were previously shared with the Senate committee investigating the nation’s COVID-19 response.

They include messages sent by Benedito Júnior and another executive, two current clinic directors, one former clinic director, and an unnamed physician.

Both drugs are also relatively inexpensive. One of the directors sent messages demanding their prescription while highlighting Prevent Senior’s slipping finances.

“We can’t lose focus. We’ve started having bad revenues again,” a director named Rodrigo Esper wrote to doctors in May 2020 while urging use of the drugs. “We still haven’t hit the peak of the pandemic and we’re losing revenue.”

Lawyer Bruna Morato, who represents 12 doctors currently or previously employed by Prevent Senior, told senators on Sept. 28 that her clients were repeatedly told to choose between prescribing dubious drugs or losing their jobs.

In polarized Brazil, perspectives on COVID-19 have assumed ideological contours, particularly as Bolsonaro repeatedly downplayed the disease’s severity and undermined governors’ and mayors’ measures to control its spread.

Armchair epidemiologists have shown themselves willing to excoriate anyone who voices trust in the so-called global experts or expresses doubt about the effectiveness of the COVID kit prescribed by doctors at Prevent and elsewhere. Bolsonaro claims that the Senate committee is politically motivated and working unfairly to pin the pandemic’s deaths on him.

The press office of Brazil’s presidency didn’t respond to requests for comment for this story.

In response to questions from the AP, Prevent Senior insisted that doctors had been free to prescribe the COVID kit or not.

But that medical autonomy has been challenged by the three doctors interviewed by “Fantastico,” Senate testimony by the lawyer of 12 doctors and five of the messages reviewed by the AP.

On March 21 this year, a doctor sent a message saying an executive named Rafael had told her that prescription of the COVID kit was mandatory.

“Rafael told me prescription of the COVID kit is obligatory, but I don’t feel comfortable with that. I’d like to know how I should proceed,” the doctor wrote to a recipient who was not identified. The message was one of those shared with Senate investigators.

Some patients other than Castilho also were given flutamide — though with consent.

Luiz Cesar Pereira said he had initially resisted a doctor urging him to use the drug for his mother after he researched on the internet and found it wasn’t scientifically proven.

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"Trust me, we're going to recover your mom," Pereira recalled the doctor saying. He finally relented, and gave consent.

"In my blessed ignorance, I believed. ... Because I don't know anything. I don't have any friend who's a doctor," said Pereira, 45, who sells construction materials.

His mother eventually died.

Dr. José Davi Urbaz, president of the capital's society of infectious disease specialists, said he believes Prevent Senior's use of unproven treatments is just "the tip of the iceberg."

"What was done with 'early treatment' is criminal, and not limited to Prevent," he said. "There needs to be a very precise investigation of this, and punishment should be exemplary, because it underscores failure in the ethics of medical practice."

Prevent Senior told the AP that it wasn't formally testing flutamide, but said doctors were allowed to administer it. The company maintained that the drug can be helpful in treating COVID-19.

Jorge Venâncio, commissioner of Brazil's National Research Ethics Commission, told the AP that the only application Prevent Senior made for COVID-19 research was related to the prescription of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin, an anti-inflammatory that also hasn't proven helpful.

He said the council approved that request to start trials in April 2020 and the hospital published its results just three days later, indicating the study had already been done.

Prevent Senior told the AP it was not a scientific study, but rather an "observational report" comparing patients who received hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin with others who didn't take the drugs, and which started in March.

"They published a pre-print with the results of the research, with 636 patients, which is impossible; there's no way to do that," Venâncio said. "Even if it were observational research, as they're saying now, it would have to be registered."

Prevent Senior disputed the need for registration with the commission.

But the research council gave that information to prosecutors in Sao Paulo who are investigating the healthcare provider, and who have received complaints from doctors and patients. The Senate committee is also sharing information with prosecutors.

The lawmakers are also investigating possible fraud in death certificates. In May 2020, the Health Ministry issued guidelines stating that a death stemming from COVID-19 should still be classified as such on a death certificate, even if the patient had stopped testing positive for the virus itself.

"If the person was admitted for COVID, COVID has to be on the death certificate," said Daniel Dourado, a doctor, lawyer and researcher at the University of Sao Paulo.

But that didn't always happen. Luciano Hang, a department store magnate who is a fervent Bolsonaro supporter, told the Senate committee his mother was admitted to a Prevent Senior facility in Sao Paulo with COVID-19. Yet the disease doesn't appear on her death certificate, a copy of which the AP reviewed.

It remains unclear whether that means patients' deaths were omitted from state and national tallies of COVID-19 deaths.

Prevent Senior's press office told the AP that this didn't interfere with compulsory notification to authorities.

Sen. Randolfe Rodrigues, who sits on the committee, told the AP he believes it did affect the tallies, but there will be no way to prove that for months. Others agree.

"Prevent hid COVID-19 deaths. And that was intentional. I have never seen anything of this scale," said Dr. Gonzalo Vecina, one of the founders of Brazil's health regulator. "They committed crimes and we need to identify who produced false information that fed into the public health care system."

Neither Sao Paulo state's health secretariat nor Brazil's Health Ministry confirmed whether patients who died from COVID-19 at Prevent Senior facilities factored into the nation's death toll, which is the world's second highest at more than 600,000.

Like Urbaz, many say the revelations from Prevent Senior reflect what is going on elsewhere. Similar allegations have emerged regarding Hapvida, the nation's third-largest healthcare provider, with almost 5 million clients.

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The major newspaper O Globo published messages indicating Hapvida directors pressured doctors to prescribe hydroxychloroquine as recently as January. Several doctors confirmed this to the paper, without revealing their names.

Felipe Peixoto Nobre, a former Hapvida doctor in Ceara state, told television station Globo that he was red-flagged for not prescribing the COVID kit, and was told he ran the risk of being fired if his refusal continued.

Hapvida said in a statement to the AP that, at the start of the pandemic, hydroxychloroquine was understood to be beneficial and "there was significant adherence in our network," but that it never amounted to the majority of prescriptions. It said it no longer recommends hydroxychloroquine "because there is no scientific proof of its effectiveness."

The government regulator of private health care plans said in a statement to the AP it is investigating Hapvida, Prevent Senior and another provider, Unimed Fortaleza. Sao Paulo's medical council also told the AP it is investigating Prevent Senior.

Meanwhile, the Senate committee aims to release its final report within two weeks and some lawmakers have already signaled they want to make an example of Prevent Senior.

Sen. Renan Calheiros, who is assigned to write the committee report, said in an interview, "Prevent Senior is the most shocking case investigated by this committee from a humanitarian and civilizational perspective," and accused it of giving some patients medicine without their consent. "This isn't a health care plan, but an operator of death stimulated by the president of the republic." ___ AP journalists Tatiana Pollastri and Mauricio Savarese contributed from Sao Paulo

Right-sizing the force: Army offers armor for smaller troops

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Army Capt. Kim Pierre-Zamora remembers the protective vest she was issued when she went to basic training a number of years ago. It was a size medium that hung down too far and made it difficult for her to even bend over to pick up something.

"Whenever I tried to move or tried to shoulder my weapon or shoot on a pop-up range really quickly, I would have to physically pick up the vest and move it in order to shoulder my weapon," Pierre-Zamora said.

It's a common complaint from female soldiers and small-stature men who have struggled with the bulky armor they've worn over two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in recent weeks, the Army for the first time has begun handing out armor in three additional sizes: extra small short, small short and small long. The armor can be adjusted in multiple ways to fit better and allow soldiers to move faster and more freely.

The "modular scalable vest" was distributed to more than 4,500 soldiers so far in the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, over the past few weeks. Female soldiers also will be able to get new versions of the combat shirt more tailored for a woman's shape. Those shirts are given out only when soldiers deploy.

Army researchers have been working on the changes for years, trying to come up with combat gear that is lighter and fits better.

Initially, the effort to add more sizes was in response to complaints from female soldiers, who are increasingly moving into combat jobs previously open only to men. As more women deployed to a war zone, they often found that they were shorter and smaller than many of the men and needed armor that allows for narrower shoulders, a bust and hips.

Early on, however, the Army made the decision to make the vests unisex. The decision, said Lt. Col. Stephen Miller, was based on the belief that smaller male soldiers who might need a short or small sized vest would refuse to take anything that was "stamped female." He's product manager for soldier protective equipment at PEO Soldier, an Army organization that coordinates the fielding of armor, weapons and other equipment.

That move has proved to be a success.

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Nearly 25 percent or 1,200, of the 82nd Airborne soldiers so far have gotten armor in the three new sizes, said Pierre-Zamora, who works as an assistant product manager at PEO Soldier. Of those 1,200, about 100 have been women.

There are five other regular sizes that have been available previously — extra small, small, medium, large and extra large.

Pierre-Zamora said the new short and long versions fit many soldiers better. As an example, she said that she and another female soldier appear to be about the same size. But, she said she wears an extra small, while the other soldier wears an extra small short.

"Outwardly we both look like we're about the same size, but her torso is a little bit shorter than mine," she said.

The vest, she said, also allows soldiers to move the ballistic armor plates that can be inserted for additional protection. The soft pockets that hold the plates can be shifted up, so they don't rest on female soldiers' hip bones, impeding quick and agile movement. The shoulder straps are also adjustable.

The small long version of the vest better fits some thinner men.

"There are a lot of small men who were probably wearing a vest that was too big for them," Miller said.

Miller said he was one of them.

"I've always been given a large or a medium in the past," he said. But he was given a size small in the new version "because someone who knew what they were doing fitted me for it, and said, 'No, the way the MSV (modular scalable vest) fits, this is where it goes.'"

Another soldier he knows, he said, is more than 6 feet tall, but is also very thin. He's usually gotten a medium or large based on his height and the length needed, but he now is using the small long — one of the new sizes just made available.

The new combat shirt, however, has a new version specifically for female soldiers, because the problem was the shape, not the sizes. Miller said it has shorter sleeves, a flare at the bottom, and added protection along the sides of the bust.

The new one, he said, eliminated the problem that female soldiers had with the shirt riding up on their hips. But women who have more of a straight build can still get the unisex version.

Acknowledging that complaints about the Army's body armor have been circulating for years, Miller said it took time to find vendors who could change the size and shape of the ballistic plates, while also making them lighter and effective in protecting soldiers from blasts.

"Stopping bullets is a complex problem," Miller said. "It's really taken a lot of deliberate effort to adapt the system to something that weighs less, gets after a better form factor, as well as to get after the soldiers who weren't specifically accounted for in the previous systems."

The major difficulty, he said, was cutting the weight of the plates. The new ones weigh about a pound less. So far, he said, just two vendors met the lesser weight goal without sacrificing protection.

Eventually, more than 6,000 soldiers in the 82nd Airborne Division's three brigades are expected to get the new armor. Miller said each soldier is individually fitted by trained personnel. Soldiers go through a 30-minute class to learn how the armor can be adjusted.

Controversial father of Pakistan nuclear bomb dies at age 85

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Abdul Qadeer Khan, a controversial figure known as the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, died Sunday of COVID-19 following a lengthy illness, his family said. He was 85.

Khan, who launched Pakistan on the path to becoming a nuclear weapons power in the early 1970s, died in a hospital in the capital Islamabad, Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad said.

Thousands of people attended a state funeral at the massive white-marble Faisal Mosque in the capital. His body was carried by an honor guard and military and political dignitaries offered funeral prayers.

Flags in Pakistan flew at half-staff.

Khan was mired in controversy that began even before he returned to Pakistan from the Netherlands

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in the 1970s, where he had worked at a nuclear research facility.

He was later accused of stealing the centrifuge uranium enrichment technology from the Netherlands facility that he would later use to develop Pakistan's first nuclear weapon, according to research done by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Khan, who held a doctorate in metallurgical engineering from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, offered to launch Pakistan's nuclear weapons program in 1974 after neighbor India conducted its first "peaceful nuclear explosion."

He reached out to then-Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto offering technology for Pakistan's own nuclear weapons program. Still smarting from the 1971 loss of East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh, as well as the capture of 90,000 Pakistani soldiers by India, Bhutto embraced the offer. He famously said: "We (Pakistanis) will eat grass, even go hungry, but we will have our own (nuclear bomb)."

Since then, Pakistan has relentlessly pursued its nuclear weapons program in tandem with India. Both are declared nuclear weapons states after they conducted tit-for-tat nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

Pakistan's nuclear program and Khan's involvement have long been the subject of allegations and criticism. Khan was accused by the U.S. of trading nuclear secrets to neighbor Iran and to North Korea in the 1990s after Washington sanctioned Pakistan for its nuclear weapons program. For 10 years during the Soviet occupation of neighboring Afghanistan, successive U.S. presidents certified Pakistan was not developing nuclear weapons. The certification was necessary under American law to allow U.S. aid to anti-communist Afghan rebels through Pakistan.

But in 1990, just months after the 1989 withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Washington slapped Pakistan with crippling sanctions ending all aid to the country, including military and humanitarian.

Pakistan was accused of selling nuclear weapons technology to North Korea in exchange for its No-Dong missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. A 2003 Congressional Research Report said that while it was difficult to pinpoint the genesis of Pakistan's nuclear cooperation with North Korea, it likely began in the mid-1990s.

At home in Pakistan, Khan was heralded as a hero and the father of the nuclear bomb. Radical religious parties called him the father of the only Islamic nuclear bomb.

Khan was rejected by Pakistan's dictator President Gen. Pervez Musharraf after 2001, when details of Khan's alleged sales of nuclear secrets came under renewed scrutiny. Khan bitterly denounced Musharraf and his attempt to distance the state from his activities, always denying he engaged in any secret selling or clandestine nuclear weapons technology exchanges.

In recent years, Khan mostly lived out of the public eye and tributes from fellow scientists and Pakistani politicians began soon after his death.

Prime Minister Imran Khan called him a "national icon," whose nuclear weapons program "provided us security against an aggressive much larger nuclear neighbor. For the people of Pakistan he was a national icon."

Fellow scientist Dr. Samar Mubarakmand said Khan was a national treasure who defied Western attempts to stifle Pakistan's nuclear program.

"It was unthinkable for the west that Pakistan would make any breakthrough but finally they had to acknowledge Dr. Khan's achievement of making the country's nuclear weapons," he said.

Khan passed at the KRL Hospital in Islamabad.

Associated Press writer Zarar Khan contributed to this report

Texas abortion law foes target lawmakers' corporate donors

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

Foes of Texas' strict abortion ban are taking aim at companies that donated money to the bill's sponsors, hoping consumers will pressure corporate America to join the fight against a surge of restrictions.

The television and digital ads begun this past week by the groups Corporate Accountability Action and American Bridge 21st Century, the Democratic Party's opposition research arm, highlight AT&T's contribu-

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tions to Texas Republican lawmakers. There are plans to expand the campaign to Florida, where a similar abortion proposal has been introduced.

Abortion rights supporters in Texas are confronting the nation's strictest abortion law in one of the most populous states, as well as a conservative-majority U.S. Supreme Court and a wave of GOP lawmakers who want their states to be next. Democrats and their allies on this issue are looking for new ways to harness frustration into leverage.

"This is a moment in our country where there is no middle ground. You really can't be on the sidelines," said Cecile Richards, past president of Planned Parenthood and current co-chair of American Bridge 21st Century.

The Texas law greatly slowed the number of abortions, forcing clinics to turn away hundreds of women and leading patients to seek the procedure in other states, which has created growing backlogs.

Texas had roughly two dozen abortion clinics before the law took effect Sept. 1. At least six clinics resumed performing abortions after six weeks of pregnancy after a federal judge blocked the law on Wednesday, according to the Center for Reproductive Rights. But late Friday, an appeals court allowed the restrictions to resume pending further arguments. The Biden administration, which had sued, has until Tuesday to respond.

The ads in Texas aim at AT&T, which Corporate Accountability Action found donated more than \$645,000 over the past two years to nearly 22 lawmakers who sponsored the measure. The Dallas-based telecom company also donated thousands to Democratic lawmakers.

In Florida, the group is criticizing corporations such as Walt Disney for its \$262,000 in donations to among the more than two dozen lawmakers who sponsored proposed abortion restrictions over the past two years. NBC Universal gave \$83,500 to those legislators, and some \$88,000 in Texas, CAA found.

AT&T said in a statement it does not take a position on the issue of abortion or endorse the law known as Senate Bill 8, and gave money to legislators on both sides.

Representatives for NBC and Walt Disney, which have also donated to Democrats at other times, did not immediately respond to email messages seeking comment.

The two groups eventually plan to expand the campaign to the dozen states where legislators have said they want to model their own laws based on the Texas measure.

The Texas ban prohibits abortions once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks, which is before many women know they are pregnant. The law's unusual enforcement mechanism kept it from being blocked by the Supreme Court: Private citizens, not the state, have the power to enforce the law through civil suits that can net them \$10,000.

Pressuring corporations to pull support and business from states that pass controversial laws has some record of success. North Carolina lost \$3.76 billion in business after passing a law blocking transgender people from using the bathroom that aligns with their identity in 2016. That pressure led to a repeal.

This year, the effect was more muted on GOP-backed election-overhaul bills that critics called attempts to suppress Democratic votes. Republicans such as Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp stuck by the measure there, even after Major League Baseball's decision to move the 2021 All-Star Game out of Atlanta.

Some companies, including the customer-management firm Salesforce, dating app Bumble and ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft, pushed back against the Texas abortion law after it went into effect a month ago.

But that didn't deter Tesla CEO Elon Musk from announcing Thursday he would move the electric car-maker's headquarters from the San Francisco Bay area to Austin, a tech hub and the capital of Texas.

The company didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Friday, but on Sept. 2, Musk tweeted that he believes "government should rarely impose its will upon the people, and, when doing so, should aspire to maximize their cumulative happiness. That said, I would prefer to stay out of politics."

The anti-abortion group Texas Right to Life pointed out that companies making donations might not support everything for which candidates stand. "We hope that people in Texas and companies in Texas will not bow down to 'cancel culture,'" spokeswoman Kimberlyn Schwartz said.

Abortion rights advocates say the companies it is calling out are backing politicians whose positions

contradict the public messages the corporation use to lure consumers.

"You can't on the one hand say 'empower women', and on the other hand, your political funds going to people who are actually literally disempowering women," Richard said. "That kind of accountability is frankly it's long overdue."

Advocates, lawmakers push hospitals to help more with bills

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

Swamped with medical bills? The hospital that treated you may be able to help.

Whether you learn about this before those bills wind up in debt collections is another matter.

Medical bills often represent large, unexpected shocks that can crash personal budgets. Roughly 1 in 7 U.S. residents with a credit record has medical debt in collections, according to the nonprofit Urban Institute.

Hospitals have ways to keep more people from joining those ranks. Those can include income-based discounts, payment plans, help finding health insurance or waiving a bill and writing it off as charity care.

But people frequently miss notices in their bills about assistance or have trouble plowing through the paperwork to qualify, patient counselors say. They say hospitals need to do more to ensure patients know about available help.

"We need a whole new mindset," said Elisabeth Benjamin, a vice president with the nonprofit Community Service Society of New York. "A hospital's a charity ... (it) should be figuring out why a patient isn't able to pay a bill."

The Affordable Care Act requires nonprofit hospitals to tell patients about financial help, but it leaves the details for how that gets done or the extent of the assistance largely up to them. Patient counselors see little consistency.

Hospitals say they often notify patients several times about available help. They've also eased income limits for assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some have smoothed out cumbersome applications.

But it can be hard to identify everyone who needs help, said Rick Gundling, a senior vice president with the Healthcare Financial Management Association, which consults with hospitals.

"I think many times when the patient doesn't have the money, they retreat or they don't ask for help, when the hospital can help," Gundling said.

Assisting people in the middle of a medical crisis can be difficult. Patients often have no idea when they receive care what it will ultimately cost and how much help they will need. A slew of insurance notices and bills that arrive later can sow more confusion.

Benjamin said she once helped a patient who had one kidney stone removed and received 28 bills.

Hospitals frequently post notices about financial help on emergency rooms walls or in bills sent to patient homes. But those can be overlooked or forgotten.

"People never read the whole bill. They're scary and overwhelming," said Benjamin, who would like to see hospitals include a one-page financial aid form with their bills.

Other advocates say information about financial assistance should be included on paper that's a different color and more noticeable. They also want hospitals to check back in with patients to see if they need help once a bill becomes overdue.

Communication often is the biggest barrier low-income patients face in dealing with hospitals, according to Ilda Hernandez, a community health worker at the advocacy group Enlace Chicago.

Most patients, Hernandez said, are never informed about available assistance or even that hospitals have interpreters.

"They're not told that they can ask for a social worker at a hospital," she said "and so patients don't ask."

Hernandez and Enlace helped a Spanish-speaking janitor resolve nearly \$100,000 in medical debt that had gone to collections after his wife had two strokes last year.

The janitor, Arturo, is a 43-year old Mexican immigrant who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition that it not publish his last name because he fears being deported. He said he tried talking about bills

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with one of the hospitals that treated his wife. But he never heard back about a possible debt resolution until Enlace got involved.

"When you are treated, it calms you down a bit ... but once the bills come, where's the help?" he asked.

Hospitals often post information about available help online. But that can be hard to find.

Jared Walker, who runs a nonprofit called Dollar For that helps people with medical debt, posted a TikTok video in January that shows how to search for financial assistance on hospital websites. It has since been viewed more than 20 million times.

"Hospitals aren't shouting from the rooftops that you can apply for charity care, that's for damn sure," said Walker.

Some hospitals — and state lawmakers — are trying to make improvements.

Oregon Health & Science University slimmed its application for assistance a couple years ago.

When someone requests help paying for emergency or medically necessary care, the Portland academic health center now just asks for patient income, which it verifies with a soft credit check. That approach replaced a paper application that required several documents.

"We're here to take care of people. We're not here to have people worry about their medical bills," said Kristi Cushman, the center's director of patient access services.

Several states have laws that require hospitals to offer a range of free or discounted care, usually based on income, according to the National Consumer Law Center.

A new Maryland law requires hospitals to show that they provided information on financial assistance and made a good-faith effort to set up a payment plan before they sue over a medical debt.

That makes the hospital prove it has done all it can to make patient payments affordable, said Marceline White, executive director of the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition.

"It shifts the burden appropriately to the hospital, the multimillion-dollar entity, as opposed to the person making \$40,000," she said.

No such burdens have shifted in Tennessee, where Debra Smith worries she may be denied future medical care because of her bills.

The Spring Hill resident figures she has more than \$10,000 in unpaid medical bills from a string of hospital stays over the past year, even though she has coverage through Medicare. She hasn't been able to make much progress paying them off.

Smith sought help from Williamson Medical Center in nearby Franklin earlier this year for a \$1,500 bill, but they couldn't settle on a payment plan that fit her budget.

Health problems prevent Smith from working. Living expenses and prescriptions consume most of the \$2,300 a month the 57-year-old gets from a pension and Social Security.

She found the hospital's application for financial help online, but she never completed it. That form asks for copies of bank statements, utility and credit card bills, car payments and other paperwork. To Smith, it felt like they wanted reasons to reject her.

Medical center spokesman Mike Alday said he couldn't comment on a specific patient's situation. But he did say the medical center has to confirm a patient's financial need before providing help, and the information it requests is standard among hospitals.

Alday said the medical center makes financial counselors available and offers discounts and payment plans if patients don't complete financial aid applications. It would give someone with a \$1,500 outstanding balance 18 months to pay it off. That amounts to monthly payments of around \$83.

Smith figures she can handle about \$10 a month, which she said the hospital rejected.

"I know the hospitals needs their money but ... I am in need too," she said. "I don't want anything for free, but under the circumstances a little understanding would be nice."

Associated Press writer Suman Naishadham contributed to this story.

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Oct. 11, the 284th day of 2021. There are 81 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 11, 1968, Apollo 7, the first manned Apollo mission, was launched with astronauts Wally Schirra (shih-RAH'), Donn Fulton Eisele and R. Walter Cunningham aboard.

On this date:

In 1779, Polish nobleman Casimir Pulaski, fighting for American independence, died two days after being wounded during the Revolutionary War Battle of Savannah, Georgia.

In 1884, American first lady Eleanor Roosevelt was born in New York City.

In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered the city's Asian students segregated in a purely "Oriental" school. (The order was later rescinded at the behest of President Theodore Roosevelt, who promised to curb future Japanese immigration to the United States.)

In 1968, the government of Panama was overthrown in a military coup.

In 1975, Bill Clinton and Hillary Diane Rodham were married in Fayetteville, Arkansas. "NBC Saturday Night" (later "Saturday Night Live") made its debut with guest host George Carlin.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev opened two days of talks in Reykjavik, Iceland, concerning arms control and human rights.

In 1991, testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Anita Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexually harassing her; Thomas re-appeared before the panel to denounce the proceedings as a "high-tech lynching."

In 2001, in his first prime-time news conference since taking office, President George W. Bush said "it may take a year or two" to track down Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network in Afghanistan, but he asserted that after a five-day aerial bombardment, "we've got them on the run."

In 2002, former President Jimmy Carter was named the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2005, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said it had finished pumping out the New Orleans metropolitan area, which was flooded by Hurricane Katrina six weeks earlier and then was swamped again by Hurricane Rita.

In 2006, the charge of treason was used for the first time in the U.S. war on terrorism, filed against Adam Yehiye Gadahn (ah-DAHM' YEH'-heh-yuh guh-DAHN'), also known as "Azzam the American," who'd appeared in propaganda videos for al-Qaida. (Gadahn was killed by a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan in Jan. 2015.)

In 2014, customs and health officials began taking the temperatures of passengers arriving at New York's Kennedy International Airport from three West African countries in a stepped-up screening effort meant to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus.

Ten years ago: Presidential challenger Mitt Romney accused President Barack Obama of failing to lead in a time of economic peril but sounded less conservative than his Republican rivals in their debate in Hanover, New Hampshire, defending the 2008-2009 Wall Street bailout and declaring he could work with "good" Democrats. The U.S. women rolled to their third title at the world gymnastics championships held in Tokyo.

Five years ago: Samsung Electronics said it was stopping production of Galaxy Note 7 smartphones permanently, a day after halting global sales of the ill-fated devices amid reports that batteries were catching fire.

One year ago: President Donald Trump declared he was healthy enough to return to the campaign trail after treatment for the coronavirus. The Los Angeles Lakers beat the Miami Heat 106-93 to win the NBA finals in six games; LeBron James scored 28 points as the NBA wrapped up a season that sent players to a "bubble" at Walt Disney World in Florida for three months because of the pandemic. Rafael Nadal

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beat Novak Djokovic 6-0, 6-2, 7-5 in the French Open final to win his 20th Grand Slam title, tying Roger Federer's record for most major tennis championships by a man. Joe Morgan, the Hall of Fame second baseman who was the sparkplug of Cincinnati's "Big Red Machine" teams in the 1970s, died at 77. The NFL juggled its regular-season schedule due to coronavirus outbreaks with the Tennessee Titans and New England Patriots; nine teams were affected.

Today's Birthdays: Former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry is 94. Actor Amitabh Bachchan is 79. Country singer Gene Watson is 78. Singer Daryl Hall (Hall and Oates) is 75. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., is 71. R&B musician Andrew Woolfolk is 71. Actor-director Catlin Adams is 71. Country singer Paulette Carlson is 70. Original MTV VJ Mark Goodman is 69. Actor David Morse is 68. Actor Stephen Spinella is 65. Actor-writer-comedian Dawn French is 64. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Steve Young is 60. Actor Joan Cusack is 59. Rock musician Scott Johnson (Gin Blossoms) is 59. Comedy writer and TV host Michael J. Nelson is 57. Actor Sean Patrick Flanery is 56. Actor Lennie James is 56. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL player Chris Spielman is 56. Country singer-songwriter Todd Snider is 55. Actor-comedian Artie Lange is 54. Actor Jane Krakowski is 53. Actor Andrea Navedo is 52. Actor Constance Zimmer is 51. Rapper MC Lyte is 51. Bluegrass musician Leigh Gibson (The Gibson Brothers) is 50. Figure skater Kyoko Ina is 49. Actor Darien Sills-Evans is 47. Actor/writer Nat Faxon is 46. Actor Emily Deschanel is 45. Actor Matt Bomer is 44. Actor Trevor Donovan is 43. Actor Robert Christopher Riley is 41. Actor Michelle Trachtenberg is 36. Actor Lucy Griffiths is 35. Golfer Michelle Wie is 32. Rapper Cardi B is 29.