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Upcoming Events

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 (Parent's Night)

Friday, Oct. 15

7 p.m.: Football at Sisseton

Saturday, Oct. 16

Oral Interp at Florence

State Soccer in Sioux Falls

Volleyball Tourney in Milbank (Groton vs. Sisseton at 9 a.m., vs. Sioux Valley at noon and Mobridge at 1 p.m. Finals are set for 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.)

Monday, Oct. 18

Volleyball at Langford. JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity.

Tuesday, Oct. 19

Volleyball hosts Northwestern. 7th/C match at 5 p.m., 8th/JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow

Wednesday, Oct. 20

Senior Scholarship Info Night at GHS Library Conference Room, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Oct. 21



First Round Football Playoffs

Friday, Oct. 22

End of First Quarter

Volleyball at Aberdeen Roncalli. (7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Saturday, Oct. 23

State Cross Country at Yankton Trail Park in Sioux Falls.

Oral Interp at NSU Invitational

ACT Testing at GHS, 8 a.m. to Noon

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.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Netters beat Tiospa Zina

Groton Area traveled to Agency Village on Tuesday and brought home a clean sweep win over the Wambdi. Groton Area won the varsity match, 25-15, 25-18 and 25-11.

Anna Fjeldheim had 10 kills and seven ace serves, Sydney Leicht had 11 kills and three ace serves, Aspen Johnson nine kills and a block, Elizabeth Flihs and Alyssa Thaler each had three ace serves and a kill, Madeline Flihs had three kills, Maddie Bjerke had one kill and Allyssa Locke had an ace serve.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-19 and 25-22. Faith Traphagen had three kills and two ace serves, Carly Guthmiller three ace serves, Lydia Meier five ace serves and two kills, Laila Roberts six kills and an ace serve, Shallyn Foertsch two ace serves and a kill and Marlee Tollifson and Emma Kutter each had two kills.

Both matches were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. Varsity sponsors were Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls and Bary Keith at Harr Motors.

Week 8 SDFBCA Coaches Poll

11AAA

Harrisburg (7) 59, 7-0
Brandon Valley (6) 58, 7-0
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 22, 3-4
Sioux Falls Lincoln 21, 5-2
Sioux Falls Jefferson 20, 4-3
Others: Sioux Falls Washington 10, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 5

11AA

Tea Area (11) 63, 7-0
Pierre T.F. Riggs (2) 52, 6-1
Brookings 38, 5-2
Yankton 19, 4-3
Watertown 14, 3-4
Others: Aberdeen Central 4

11A

Madison (12) 60, 7-0
Canton 40, 6-1
Vermillion 29, 5-2
Dell Rapids 18, 4-3
West Central 16, 4-3
Others: Lennox 4, Sioux Falls Christian 3

11B

Winner (11) 55 8-0
Sioux Valley 39, 6-1
Groton 19, 6-1
Mount Vernon/Plankinton 18, 6-1
Elk Point-Jefferson 13, 5-2
Others: Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 6, Woonsocket-Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 6,

9AA

1 Hanson (17) 85 7-0
2 Parkston 45 5-2
3 Chester Area 40 5-2
4 Canistota/Freeman 17 4-4
5 Timber Lake 15 7-1
Other Ipswich 14, Platte-Geddes 13, Florence-Henry 9, Garretson 9, Hamlin 9, Lyman 5

9A

1 De Smet (10) 78 7-0
2 Howard (6) 70 7-0
3 Herreid/Selby Area (1) 49 8-0
4 Wall (1) 42 7-0
5 Wolsey-Wessington 20 5-2
Other Warner 4, Gregory 2, North Central 1

9B

1 Avon (15) 77 7-0
2 Gayville-Volin 51 5-1
3 Faulkton Area (2) 49 6-2
4 Potter County 25 6-2
5 Hitchcock-Tulare 22 6-2
Other Dell Rapids St. Mary 18, Harding County/Bison 7, Alcester-Hudson 4

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South Dakota leading sunflower production state in US

USDA pegged 2021 sunflower production at 1.90 billion pounds, down 36 percent from the revised 2020 production of 2.98 billion pounds. USDA added 480,000 pounds to 2020 non-oil sunflower production and left oil type production unchanged from last year. Area planted, at 1.28 million acres, is down 7 percent from the June estimate and down 27 percent from last year. US sunflower growers are expected to harvest 1.22 million acres, down 27 percent from last year. The overall average yield for all sunflower types is forecast, at 1,554 pounds per acre. This is 236 pounds lower than last year's yield, if realized. The forecasted production in South Dakota would make it the leading sunflower producing state this year, at 793 million pounds, down 32 percent from 2020. In North Dakota, production is forecast at 755 million pounds down 43 percent from last year.

Conde National League

Oct. 4 Team Standings: Mets 11, Tigers 11, Pirates 9, Braves 7, Giants 6, Cubs 4

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 203, Ryan Bethke 201, Russ Bethke 200

Men's High Series: Russ Bethke 565, Butch Farmen 551, Ryan Bethke 528

Women's High Games: Nancy Radke 181, Vickie Kramp 164, Joyce Walter 163

Women's High Series: Joyce Walter 467, Vickie Kramp 466, Nancy Radke 440

Sept. 27 Team Standings: Mets 8, Tigers 7, Pirates 6, Braves 6, Giants 5, Cubs 4

Men's High Games: Austin Schulke 218, Ryan Bethke 189, 178, Butch Farmen 176

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 497, Butch Farmen 497, Russ Bethke 447

Women's High Games: Vickie Kramp 177, 176, 172; Joyce Walter 159, 156; Nancy Radke 151

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 525, Joyce Walter 457, Nancy Radke 403

Sept. 20 Team Standings: Mets 6, Giants 4, Pirates 4, Tigers 4, Braves 3, Cubs 3

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 176; Russ Bethke 171; Ryan Bethke 171, 161, 161; Dalton Locke 159

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 493, Russ Bethke 444, Butch Farmen 440

Women's High Games: Vickie Kramp 154; Michelle Johnson 153, 152; Joyce Walter 145

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 426, Michelle Johnson 412, Nancy Radke 401

Give Consumers a Choice With Their Data

By Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.)

Washington Examiner

For years now, the public has been rightfully concerned about the influence and power of Big Tech corporations and the potentially damaging effect they have on individuals' online experiences. That is why I have authored two bipartisan bills, the Filter Bubble Transparency Act and the Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency Act, that would provide for common-sense and much-needed Big Tech regulation. In light of recent revelations by a Big Tech whistleblower, which I heard firsthand, these bills must be enacted without delay.

Big Tech platforms use consumers' data in secretive ways through the use of algorithms to manipulate users' online experiences. They also use this data to find new ways to keep billions of people engaged on their platforms. This leads to mounting concerns about harmful biases, whether data is being handled responsibly, and the troubling real-world impacts these platforms appear to have on some users, particularly young people.

Little is known about how these companies use algorithms to amplify or suppress content or how they can affect users without their knowledge. For years, tech companies have been less than forthcoming about their practices. These algorithms are largely a black box to consumers, lawmakers, and regulators.

Because of the Facebook whistleblower, Frances Haugen, who testified on October 5 before a Senate Commerce subcommittee on which I serve, we now have more insight into Facebook's algorithms and its troubling practices with regard to how it amplifies or suppresses content. Worse yet, it appears Facebook often ignored internal warnings about harmful effects, and for that, there should be serious accountability.

Big Tech platforms are certainly free to deploy algorithms that select content based on what will keep each user engaged. But the platforms should not be free to keep their users unaware of the fact that an algorithm is controlling which content each consumer sees on the platform. With some rare exceptions, people aren't given a choice to easily opt out of a black-box algorithm that secretly selects the content they see.

We're learning more and more about what the problem is, and I have several solutions. I've introduced the bipartisan Filter Bubble Transparency Act, which would give consumers the privacy, choice, and transparency that has been absent on these platforms for too long.

Specifically, large-scale internet platforms would be required to notify users that their platform uses secret algorithms to select the content they see, what's often described as the "filter bubble." In addition, users would be given the choice to switch to a different version of the platform that is filter bubble-free.

The Federal Trade Commission would enforce these two simple requirements, and it would be authorized to seek civil penalties for those who knowingly violate them.

At the very least, users should have the option to engage on these platforms without being manipulated by secret algorithms.

There's also a growing bipartisan consensus that we need to shed a greater light on the secretive content moderation processes social media companies use. That's why I've introduced the bipartisan PACT Act, which would require internet platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to make biannual reports outlining material they've removed from their sites or chosen to deemphasize available to the public — and not just in intentionally complicated, hard-to-understand legalese. Sites would be required to provide an easily digestible disclosure of their content-moderation practices.

Tech companies would have to give each user due process protections by explaining their decisions when they remove material from being seen by consumers. If the user whose content was taken down disagreed with the platform's decision, the user would be entitled to an appeals process as well.

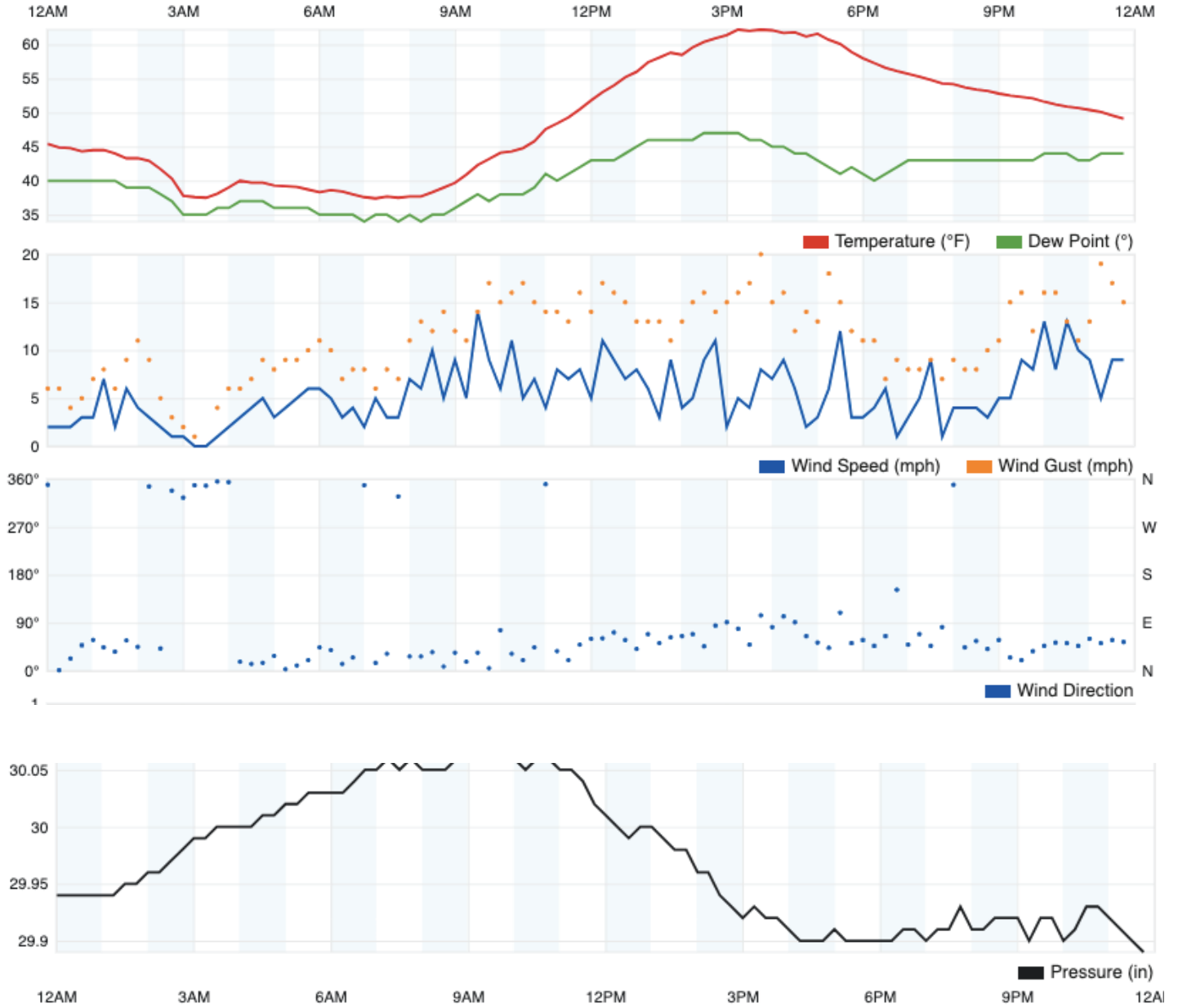
No more censoring stories without explanation or deplatforming people based on their political beliefs.

The people deserve to know much more about how Big Tech companies are handling their data and controlling the online experience. Big Tech has operated in the dark for too long. It's long past time that Congress enacts meaningful, bipartisan Big Tech regulation by passing the Filter Bubble Transparency Act and the PACT Act.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wednesday



Showers and Patchy Fog then Showers Likely and Breezy

High: 62 °F

Wednesday Night



Mostly Cloudy and Breezy

Low: 40 °F

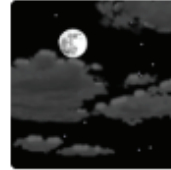
Thursday



Partly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy

High: 54 °F

Thursday Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 34 °F

Friday



Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy

High: 54 °F



Wet and Windy Today



Windy

56 to 62°

Total Rainfall around 0.5 to 1.5"
highest over N central SD



E to SE winds gusting up to 45 mph

weakening late this morning

Our Wet and Windy Wednesday continues. Rain will slowly end south to north, lingering near the North Dakota border through mid afternoon as a strong area of low pressure surges across central South Dakota and into North Dakota. A few rumbles of thunder will remain possible. Total rainfall will average around a half inch to an inch and a half, with the highest amounts over north central South Dakota. A couple of periods of very windy conditions can be expected today, ahead of and behind the area of low pressure. The strongest winds will gust to around 45 mph, will be over central South Dakota this afternoon.

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Today in Weather History

October 13, 1966: Late season thunderstorms brought hail and high winds to southeast South Dakota, causing extensive damage to some soybean fields. The greatest damage was in the Garretson area. The strong winds also damaged many utility lines along with many farm structures. Lightning struck a church at Lake Andes, and the resulting fire destroyed it. The storms occurred from late on the 13th to the morning of the 14th.

1846 - A great hurricane tracked across Cuba, Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia and Pennsylvania. The hurricane inflicted major damage along its entire path, which was similar to the path of Hurricane Hazel 108 years later. The hurricane caused great damage at Key West FL, and at Philadelphia PA it was the most destructive storm in thirty years. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1983: Severe weather in Falls Church, VA, produced 2-3 tornadoes and caused \$1 million in damages.

1986 - Four tornadoes struck southeastern Virginia late in the night causing three million dollars damage. Tornadoes at Falls Church VA caused a million dollars damage. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1987 - Fifteen cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Record lows included 34 degrees at Meridian MS, 28 degrees at Paducah KY, and 26 degrees at Beckley WV. Another surge of arctic air entered the north central U.S. bringing snow to parts of Wyoming and Colorado. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A total of forty-three cities in the eastern U.S. and the Upper Midwest reported record low temperatures for the date, including Elkins WV and Marquette MI where the mercury dipped to 18 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Sixteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 80s and low 90s from the Southern and Central Plains to the Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast. Evansville IND and North Platte NE reported record highs of 91 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2006: The October 2006 Buffalo storm was an unusual early-season lake effect snowstorm that hit the Buffalo, New York area, and other surrounding areas of the United States and Canada. Downtown Buffalo reported 15 inches from this event. Depew and Alden record 24 inches, the most from this lake effect storm.

2011: Three tornadoes hit central and Eastern Virginia on this day. One of the EF1 tornadoes caused damage to the Sylvania Plantation home that was built in 1746. The storm peeled the roof off the house.

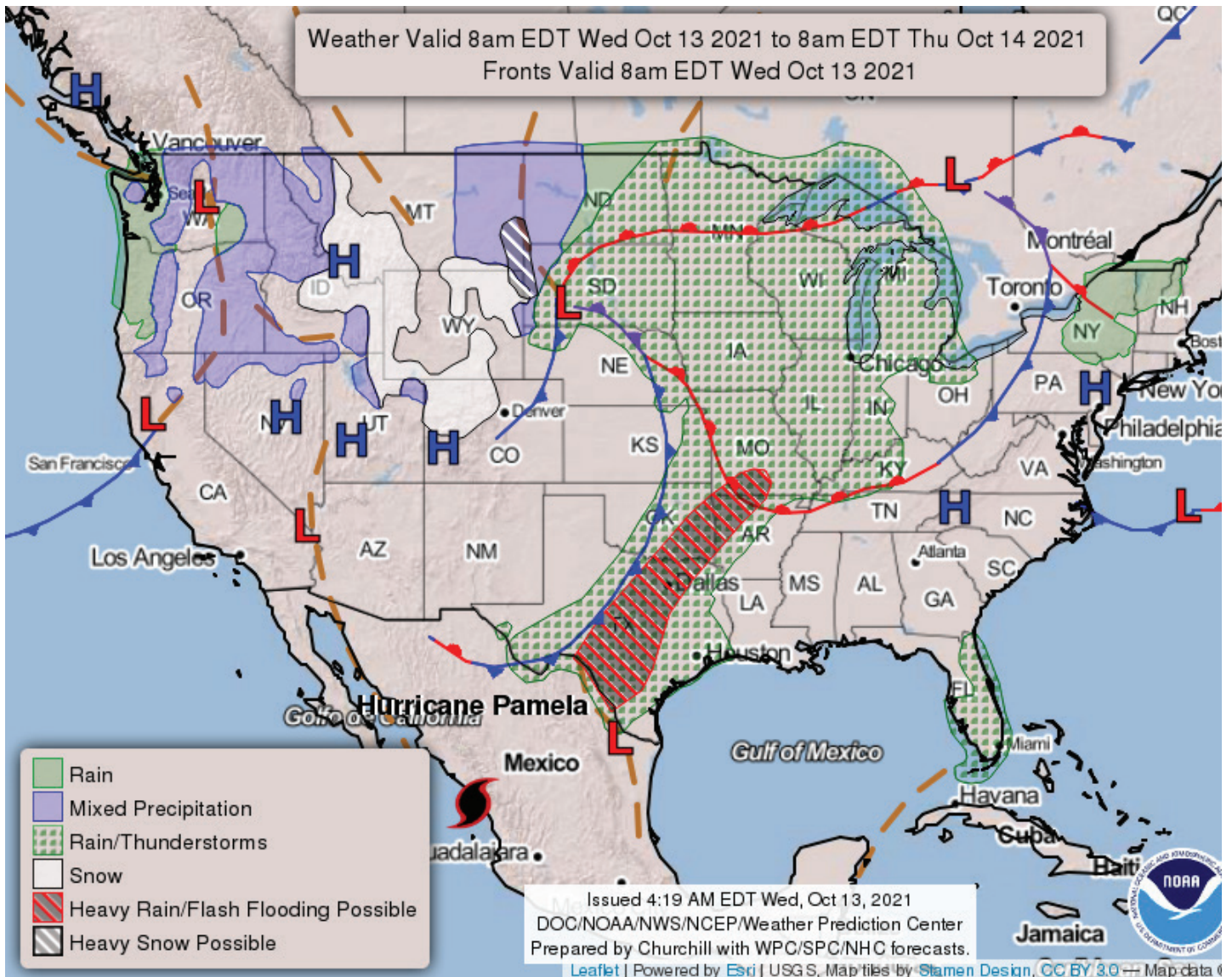
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 62.2 °F at 3:45 PM
Low Temp: 37.4 °F at 7:15 AM
Wind: 20 mph at 3:45 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 87° in 1958
Record Low: 10° in 1909
Average High: 61°F
Average Low: 35°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 0.98
Precip to date in Oct.: 1.30
Average Precip to date: 19.31
Precip Year to Date: 16.72
Sunset Tonight: 6:51:48 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46:31 AM



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WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT GOD?

"Wow!" said an associate as a group of us left a restaurant after a dinner meeting. "That was a really good meal!"

"Good?" questioned another. "What do you mean good? That's one of the worst meals I've ever paid for. It was horrible!"

"Not so fast," said a third. "Part of it was really bad, and part was fairly good. At least, that's my opinion."

"Good" is in the eye of the beholder. You and I might experience the same event together - as the meal mentioned above - but have entirely different opinions about it. But when the author of Psalm 100 was ending his thoughts about God, he said, "For the Lord is good and His love endures forever." He was convinced that "God was good." In fact, this entire Psalm is written as a Psalm that expresses his reasons to give thanks to God.

Years ago, when the Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christ, they searched for a word in their language that they could all agree upon that expressed the character of the divine Being of the Bible.

They described stories of His faithfulness, His grace, His holiness, His mercy, His power, His love, His salvation and asked, "What one word will express all of these words?" After a discussion they all agreed: "The good!" And "good" is the old English word for "God."

When we look at the "big picture" of all that God has done for us, to us, and in us, it is certainly appropriate for us to describe Him, as they did: "The Good."

Prayer: Father, when we consider all Your ways and the wonders of Your works and wisdom we too agree: You are Good! And, You are our God! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:5

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Arlington def. Sioux Valley, 25-14, 25-17, 25-20

Bison def. McIntosh, 25-18, 25-8, 25-15

Bridgewater-Emery def. Colman-Egan, 25-20, 27-29, 16-25, 25-23, 16-14

Burke def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-13, 25-9, 25-10

Canton def. Gayville-Volin, 21-25, 25-17, 25-23, 26-24

Chester def. West Central, 25-13, 25-13, 25-10

Clark/Willow Lake def. Flandreau, 25-22, 10-25, 9-25, 25-21, 15-12

Corsica/Stickney def. Mitchell Christian, 25-1, 25-6, 25-15

Dakota Valley def. Lennox, 25-5, 25-10, 25-10

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Centerville, 25-20, 21-25, 25-16, 21-25, 15-9

Deubrook def. Dell Rapids, 25-16, 25-23, 25-23

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Deuel, 25-21, 25-17, 25-16

Ethan def. Howard, 25-18, 25-20, 25-10

Faulkton def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-13, 25-15, 25-14

Florence/Henry def. Estelline/Hendricks, 22-25, 25-18, 21-25, 25-21, 15-8

Garretson def. McCook Central/Montrose, 24-26, 25-13, 25-15, 25-18

Grant County, N.D. def. Lemmon, 25-6, 25-18, 25-20

Gregory def. Colome, 25-5, 25-11, 25-11

Groton Area def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-15, 25-18, 25-13

Hamlin def. DeSmet, 25-18, 25-10, 25-23

Hanson def. Menno, 22-25, 25-19, 27-25, 25-19

Irene-Wakonda def. Alcester-Hudson, 18-25, 16-25, 25-13, 25-18, 15-6

Jones County def. Lyman, 25-23, 25-11, 25-15

Madison def. Milbank, 25-14, 25-16, 25-17

Mobridge-Pollock def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 27-25, 25-20, 17-25, 18-25, 15-13

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland def. Freeman, 25-13, 25-15, 20-25, 25-16

Pierre def. Harrisburg, 17-25, 25-23, 20-25, 25-20, 15-13

Platte-Geddes def. Miller, 25-13, 25-8, 25-17

Ponca, Neb. def. Vermillion, 27-25, 25-15, 25-21

Potter County def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-8, 25-10, 25-9

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. James Valley Christian, 25-15, 25-17, 25-16

Scotland def. Bon Homme, 25-19, 25-18, 25-14

Sioux Falls Christian def. Tri-Valley, 25-6, 25-11, 25-8

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Mitchell, 25-20, 25-21, 25-19

Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Huron, 15-25, 28-30, 25-20, 25-10, 15-7

Sioux Falls Washington def. Brookings, 25-13, 25-17, 25-19

Sisseton def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-10, 25-12, 25-13

Sully Buttes def. Stanley County, 26-24, 15-25, 16-25, 25-17, 15-10

Tea Area def. Beresford, 23-25, 25-19, 25-16, 25-16

Viborg-Hurley def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 15-25, 25-8, 25-17, 25-16

Wagner def. Parkston, 25-16, 25-20, 21-25, 25-18

Warner def. Redfield, 25-23, 25-5, 25-11

Watertown def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-13, 26-24, 25-18

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Webster def. Langford, 23-25, 20-25, 25-21, 25-20, 16-14
Wessington Springs def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-19, 25-18, 25-12
White River def. Kadoka Area, 21-25, 26-24, 25-12, 25-19
Wilmot def. Waubay/Summit, 25-21, 25-7, 25-18
Winner def. Chamberlain, 25-20, 25-23, 25-14
Wolsey-Wessington def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-17, 25-22, 25-13
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Douglas vs. Rapid City Stevens, ppd.

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

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

21-26-56-61-65, Mega Ball: 4, Megaplier: 3

(twenty-one, twenty-six, fifty-six, sixty-one, sixty-five; Mega Ball: four; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$73 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$50 million

Texas order reflects growing GOP vaccine mandates hostility

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — With the governor of Texas leading the charge, conservative Republicans in several states are moving to block or undercut President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandates for private employers before the regulations are even issued.

The growing battle over what some see as overreach by the federal government is firing up a segment of the Republican Party base, even though many large employers have already decided on their own to require their workers to get the shot.

The dustup will almost certainly end up in court since GOP attorneys general in nearly half of the states have vowed to sue once the rule is unveiled.

The courts have long upheld vaccine mandates, and the Constitution gives the federal government the upper hand over the states, but with the details still unannounced and more conservative judges on the bench, the outcome isn't entirely clear.

On Monday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order barring private companies or any other entity from requiring vaccines. It was perhaps the most direct challenge yet to Biden's announcement a month ago that workers at private companies with more than 100 employees would have to get vaccinated or tested weekly for the coronavirus.

"No entity in Texas can compel receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine by any individual ... who objects to such vaccination," Abbott wrote in his order.

White House officials brushed off Abbott's order, saying the question of whether state law could supersede federal was settled 160 years ago during the Civil War. They said the Biden administration will push through the opposition and put the private workplace mandate into effect along with others it ordered for federal contractors and employees at health care facilities that receive Medicare or Medicaid reimbursements. All told, those mandates could affect up to 100 million Americans.

Noting the nation's COVID-19 death toll of more than 700,000, White House press secretary Jen Psaki accused the opposition of putting politics ahead of safety.

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"I think it's pretty clear when you make a choice that's against all public health information and data out there, that it's not based on what is in the interests of the people you are governing. It is perhaps in the interest of your own politics," she said.

Several large companies in Texas have already implemented their own vaccine mandates, and two Texas-based airlines, Southwest and American, indicated Tuesday they would follow the order of the Biden administration, saying federal action supersedes any state mandate or law.

Elsewhere, lawmakers in Arkansas have approved a measure creating vaccine-mandate exemptions. Though the GOP governor hasn't said whether he will sign it, it has prompted fears that businesses will be forced to choose whether to break federal or state law.

"We are tying the hands of Arkansas businesses that want to make their own decision in how best to keep their people safe," said Randy Zook, president of the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce. Some of the state's largest companies, including Walmart and Tyson Foods, have required some or all employees to get vaccinated.

Calls for special legislative sessions to counter vaccine mandates have been heard in states such as Wyoming, Kansas and South Dakota, where Republican Gov. Kristi Noem is so far resisting calls to immediately consider a bill that would guarantee people could opt out.

"I hear from people almost daily who are going to lose their jobs, are living in fear," said Republican state Rep. Scott Odenbach, who has clashed with Noem on the issue. "They shouldn't have to choose between feeding their family and their own medical freedom."

In Tennessee, Republican lawmakers pushing GOP Gov. Bill Lee to consider further loosening COVID-19 restrictions, including vaccine requirements, could undermine a \$500 million incentive deal to lure a Ford Motor Co. project, the House speaker told a local radio station.

In Indiana, Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb is also resisting a push from within his party to ban workplace vaccine mandates.

Bills are being introduced or drafted elsewhere, too, including Ohio and New Hampshire, where the Republican sponsor was elected House speaker after his predecessor died of COVID-19.

"We have made it clear that government mandates are not the path to successful vaccination rates and will only cause further division in this country," Speaker Sherm Packard said last month.

In Utah, lawmakers have not taken action, but a crowd of over 600 people packed a legislative hearing room last week.

Rob Moore, CEO of Salt Lake City-based Big-D Construction, said he supports vaccines but has questions about the mandate rollout. He already has a worker shortage on his job sites, and he said employee surveys tell him that nearly 20% of his workers don't want to get inoculated, so they would need to be tested weekly.

"That's heavy on our mind right now. I don't know if the federal government has thought through that all that well. The cost is going to be enormous," he said.

In other sectors, vaccine requirements have gone smoothly. In Utah, the NBA's Jazz is making its employees get vaccinated. It is also requiring fans at games to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test. So far, just a few ticket refunds have been needed, and the season opener is expected to be sold out by next week, said Jazz spokesman Frank Zang.

"I think there's understanding of what's at stake here, in terms of having a safe environment for people to enjoy sports and concerts and shows again," he said.

COVID-19 vaccinations have been given to more than 200 million Americans, and serious side effects have proved extremely rare. Experts say any risk from the vaccine is far lower than the danger posed by COVID-19.

Recent polling shows about half of Americans favor requiring workers in large companies to get vaccinated or tested weekly. But people are split based on their political party, with about 6 in 10 Republicans opposing the mandate for employees, according to the survey by The Associated Press and NORC-Center for Public Affairs Research.

Montana is the only state so far to pass a law banning private employers from requiring vaccines. The measure includes penalties for business owners of a \$500 fine or prison. It is facing two court challenges, from the Montana Medical Association and from a law firm that says the rule interferes with businesses' decisions about how to provide a safe working environment.

As judges weigh some of these cases, much will depend on exactly how the nationwide rule is written. It will be drafted as a temporary emergency rule by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which has broad power to regulate the workplace.

"They will have to frame it in a way that makes a case this is workplace-related and not just an attempt to raise vaccination rates in the United States more broadly," said Dorit Rubinstein Reiss, a professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. "I expect the main benefit to the mandate will be that it gives cover to companies that already want to do that."

Associated Press writers Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Stephen Groves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; David Koenig in Dallas; Zeke Miller in Washington; Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire; Iris Samuels in Helena, Montana; and others around the country contributed to this report.

South Dakota lawmaker to challenge Johnson's US House seat

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota state Rep. Taffy Howard formally announced Tuesday that she is challenging Dusty Johnson, the state's lone U.S. congressman, in next year's Republican primary.

Howard will try to capitalize on a shift within the Republican party that is largely based on loyalty to former President Donald Trump. The lawmaker, who has challenged the GOP establishment during her time in the Statehouse, has positioned herself to the political right of Johnson, a popular incumbent who has held the seat for three years.

Howard echoed Trump's discredited claims of widespread voter fraud and has criticized Johnson for voting to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election. She said she would like each state to conduct a thorough review of the election that goes beyond just a recount.

"I believe there was fraud in the last election that needs to be investigated," Howard said. "Our current congressman is not willing to admit that there was an issue."

Trump's own attorney general has said there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud in last year's election, and almost all of the legal challenges casting doubt on its outcome have been dismissed or withdrawn.

Johnson argued at the time of the vote in January that it was not Congress' role to judge the Electoral College votes.

He is known for constantly crisscrossing the state to attend events. His campaign has \$1.5 million to spend, while Howard said she has raised \$110,000. A federal campaign finance report for Howard was not yet available.

But Howard argued she has popular support, saying she decided to enter the race after hearing from "so many people that are clamoring for change."

The congressman has frequently touted his work with a bipartisan group in the U.S. House known as the "Problem Solvers Caucus." He also voted to keep Rep. Liz Cheney, the Wyoming congresswoman, in GOP House leadership.

"Scorecards rank me among one of the most conservative Members of Congress, and I've been a champion for fiscal responsibility," Johnson said in a statement. "I've delivered legislative victories for South Dakota and I'm going to keep doing so."

Howard, who has held a South Dakota House seat for five years, has a reputation for defying top Republicans and at times has clashed with Gov. Kristi Noem. The lawmaker has pushed some of the most conservative positions, both on social and fiscal issues, in the Statehouse. She listed gun rights, building

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a wall at the U.S. and Mexico border, and limiting the national debt as top priorities if she is elected.

Howard scheduled a pair of events to kick off her campaign Tuesday, but her intentions had been known for weeks as she set up a campaign website and filed to run for Congress.

The Republican primary is next June. Democrats have yet to announce a U.S. House candidate.

Pot legalization advocates launch ballot initiative campaign

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Advocates for legalizing recreational marijuana in South Dakota announced Tuesday they are trying for a second time to legalize cannabis possession and cultivation for adults through a ballot initiative.

South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws said it would launch a signature-gathering campaign in the coming days after the Secretary of State approved a ballot initiative proposal for circulation Tuesday. The group has less than a month to collect nearly 17,000 signatures from South Dakota voters to meet a deadline to place the issue on next year's ballot.

The proposed law would allow people 21 years old and over to use and grow pot for personal use. It would place a 1 ounce (28 gram) limit on the amount that people could use or share.

South Dakota voters last year approved a constitutional amendment to legalize cannabis, but a state circuit court judge overturned the law after it was challenged by Gov. Kristi Noem. The ruling was appealed to the state Supreme Court, but it has not reached a decision, meaning that recreational pot remains illegal in the state.

South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws, a marijuana industry group that sponsored the 2020 ballot initiative, is not fully counting on the Supreme Court's decision.

"We're confident that we can collect enough signatures because we know that South Dakota voters are very motivated to put this back on the ballot if need be," said Matthew Schweich, the campaign director for the group who also works with the Marijuana Policy Project. "Voters have had something taken away from them and our ballot petition is a means to get it back."

Schweich said the campaign already has a network of people in place from the 2020 ballot initiative and a subsequent campaign to place pressure on the Legislature to leave alone a separate ballot initiative that legalized medical marijuana.

The group had filed five potential ballot initiatives with the Secretary of State, but Schweich said it would only push one of those — a shorter proposed law that would not change the state constitution — because it would be the most likely to withstand a future legal challenge.

Pheasant season outlook could be hit or miss

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's pheasant season could be hit or miss for hunters this year.

The state's storied season opens Saturday but the outlook is dicey. The state Game, Fish and Parks Department hasn't done any brood reports for the 2020 or 2021 seasons. Extreme drought conditions this spring may have kept chick production down, according to Pheasants Forever, a nonprofit conservation organization.

Still, a mild winter and reports of birds afield from around the state could mean things aren't as bleak as they might look.

"We didn't have any significant snow events," Matt Morlock, acting director of Pheasants Forever in South Dakota, told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. "So birds could get out and feed in open fields and then tuck right back into thermal cover during the few cold snaps we had."

Weekend conditions look favorable, with forecasts calling for sunshine and temperatures in the 60s.

Some 121,000 hunters killed more than 1.1 million pheasants last season, according to the GFP. That's up from 111,000 hunters and 830,000 kills in 2019. The increase could be attributed to a longer season, which was extended from 79 days to 107 days.

The 2021 season will run until Jan. 31, 2022. Shooting is allowed from 10 a.m. until sunset all season long. Most public lands are open for hunting. Hunters can purchase licenses from 255 locations in South Dakota or online from the GFP.

Tribe asks federal judge to stop BIA from seizing money

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has asked a federal judge to stop the Bureau of Indian Affairs from seizing millions of dollars from the tribe in a dispute over accounting methods.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported the tribe filed a request for an injunction Friday, saying the federal government is pushing the tribe toward insolvency.

According to the filing, BIA auditors accepted the tribe's explanation for how it was using federal payments for future expenses. But the tribe's practices don't comply with new BIA guidelines, prompting the agency to issue a collection order for \$6.1 million. The agency has already seized more than \$4 million of that.

The tribe's attorney, John Hinrichs, said the money would have been used for COVID-19 relief, education and public services.

The federal government hasn't filed a response.

Human Rights Watch, an international nonprofit organization that works to highlight human rights abuses, released an investigation in 2015 that accused tribal leaders of diverting \$25 million earmarked for essential services between 2007 and 2013. The money went unaccounted.

That report led to several other federal audits that found misuse of grants, water projects and other programs.

Trace Adkins cancels November concert in South Dakota

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Country singer Trace Adkins has canceled a November concert in South Dakota.

The Rapid City Journal reported Monday that Adkins was scheduled to perform in at the Deadwood Mountain Grand resort on Nov. 11. His management team issued a statement saying he had to cancel the concert because he's been cast in a television show called "Monarch," due to premiere on Fox in January.

Fox's website describes the show as an "epic, multi-generational musical drama about America's first family of country music." Adkins will star opposite Susan Sarandon and Anna Friel.

The resort said it hopes to reschedule Adkins' concert in 2022.

Energy agency urges bigger global push to cut emissions

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The International Energy Agency is urging governments to make stronger commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions at an upcoming U.N. climate summit, warning the world is not on track to meet environmental goals and that new investment in clean energy was needed to "jolt the energy system onto a new set of rails."

The Paris-based international organization said Wednesday in its annual world energy outlook that great strides have been made to move away from fossil fuels by relying on more wind and solar energy, while electric vehicles are setting sales records.

But the economic rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic also has seen an increase in the use of coal and oil, the report said, as well as a leap in emissions. Burning fossil fuels produces carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas that scientists blame for climate change.

"The world's hugely encouraging clean energy momentum is running up against the stubborn incumbency of fossil fuels in our energy systems," said Fatih Birol, executive director of the 30-country IEA.

Governments at the summit needed to "give a clear and unmistakable signal that they are committed to rapidly scaling up the clean and resilient technologies of the future. The social and economic benefits of accelerating clean energy transitions are huge, and the costs of inaction are immense."

The report said the recovery was putting major strains on parts of the energy system, leading to sharp

rises in prices for natural gas, coal and electricity as worldwide energy demand is set to regain the ground lost last year during the pandemic.

Electricity demand in particular had come "roaring back" in Asia, leading to a rise in the use of coal-fired plants. Such energy crunches were a prelude of more disruption to come if investment in new sources of energy did not increase, according to the report.

Representatives of more than 200 countries will gather for the 26th U.N. Climate Change Conference, known as COP26, from Oct. 31 to Nov. 12 in Glasgow, Scotland, to discuss new targets for cutting or curbing the growth of emissions that contribute to climate change.

The goal under the 2015 Paris climate accord is to limit the rise of global temperatures to well below 2 degrees Celsius (35 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the rise to 1.5 degrees.

The U.N.'s scientific committee on climate change has said emissions must be cut to net zero — when greenhouse gases are balanced out by their removal from the atmosphere — by 2050 to reach the 1.5-degree limit.

Birol said governments' current pledges would result in only 20% of the reduction by 2030 needed to reach net zero emissions by 2050. He said investment in clean energy and infrastructure would have to triple over the next decade "to jolt the energy system onto a new set of rails." Most of that spending would have to come in emerging and developing economies, where financing can be scarce and which are still facing a public health crisis.

There remains only a "narrow but achievable" pathway to net zero, according to the agency.

The financial think tank Carbon Tracker Initiative said the report was "real guidance on managing the climate crisis" but cautioned that "it remains excessively cautious about falls in renewable energy costs and growth rates worldwide."

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

US talks global cybersecurity without a key player: Russia

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amid an epidemic of ransomware attacks, the U.S. is sitting down to talk cybersecurity strategy this week with 30 countries while leaving out one key player: Russia.

The country that, unwittingly or not, hosts many of the criminal syndicates behind ransomware attacks was not invited to a two-day meeting starting Wednesday to develop new strategies to counter the threat.

The virtual discussions will focus in part on efforts to disrupt and prosecute ransomware networks like the one that attacked a major U.S. pipeline company in May, a senior administration official said. The attack on Colonial Pipeline, which led to gas shortages along the East Coast, was attributed to a Russia-based gang of cybercriminals.

The exclusion of a country so closely tied to the global ransomware phenomena reflects the overall poor relations between Moscow and Washington.

Despite that, the U.S. has used a "dedicated channel" to address cybersecurity with Russia, said the official, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity to preview this week's meeting with around 30 countries and the European Union.

Since President Joe Biden raised the issue directly with President Vladimir Putin this summer in a summit and later phone call, there have been "candid discussions" about cybercriminals operating within Russia's borders, the official said.

"We've had several, and they continue, and we share information regarding specific criminal actors within Russia, and Russia has taken initial steps," the official said.

It is unclear what steps Putin's government has taken. Russia does not extradite its own citizens, and FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate told a security forum last month that he has seen "no indication that the Russian government has taken action to crack down on ransomware actors that are operating in the

permissive environment that they've created there."

The issue was expected to be on the agenda this week in Moscow as Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland met for talks with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov.

The Biden administration took office amid a massive cyberespionage campaign known as the SolarWinds attack, which U.S. officials have linked to Russian intelligence operatives. Ransomware attacks, perpetrated generally by criminal hacker gangs rather than state-sponsored groups, have caused tens of billions of dollars in losses to businesses and institutions and become a major source of tension between the two nations.

Ransomware payments reached more than \$400 million globally in 2020 and topped \$81 million in the first quarter of 2021, according to the U.S. government.

Actions taken by the Biden administration include imposing sanctions on a Russia-based virtual currency brokerage that officials say helped at least eight ransomware gangs launder virtual currency and issuing security directives that require pipeline companies to improve their cyber defenses.

Most of this week's ransomware meeting is expected to be private as participants attend sessions led by India, Australia, Britain and Germany and will focus on themes such as developing resilience to withstand ransomware attacks.

Other participants include Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore and Kenya.

US to reopen land borders in November for fully vaccinated

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. will reopen its land borders to nonessential travel next month, ending a 19-month freeze due to the COVID-19 pandemic as the country moves to require all international visitors to be vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Vehicle, rail and ferry travel between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico has been largely restricted to essential travel, such as trade, since the earliest days of the pandemic. The new rules, announced Wednesday, will allow fully vaccinated foreign nationals to enter the U.S. regardless of the reason for travel starting in early November, when a similar easing of restrictions is set to kick in for air travel into the country. By mid-January, even essential travelers seeking to enter the U.S., like truck drivers, will need to be fully vaccinated.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said he was "pleased to be taking steps to resume regular travel in a safe and sustainable manner" and lauded the economic benefits of it.

Both Mexico and Canada have pressed the U.S. for months to ease restrictions on travel that have separated families and curtailed leisure trips since the onset of the pandemic. The latest move follows last month's announcement that the U.S. will end country-based travel bans for air travel and instead require vaccination for foreign nationals seeking to enter by plane.

Senior administration officials had previewed the new land border policy late Tuesday. Both policies will take effect in early November, the officials said.

The new rules only apply to legal entry to the U.S. Officials cautioned that those seeking to enter illegally will still be subject to expulsion under so-called Title 42 authority, first invoked by former President Donald Trump, that has drawn criticism from immigration advocates for swiftly removing migrants before they can seek asylum. One of the officials said the U.S. was continuing the policy because cramped conditions in border patrol facilities pose a COVID-19 threat.

Travelers entering the U.S. by vehicle, rail and ferry will be asked about their vaccination status as part of the standard U.S. Customs and Border Protection admissions process. At officers' discretion, travelers will have their proof of vaccination verified in a secondary screening process.

Unlike air travel, for which proof of a negative COVID-19 test is required before boarding a flight to enter the U.S., no testing will be required to enter the U.S. by land or sea, provided the travelers meet the vaccination requirement.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. will accept travelers who have been

fully vaccinated with any of the vaccines approved for emergency use by the World Health Organization, not just those in use in the U.S. That means that the AstraZeneca vaccine, widely used in Canada, will be accepted.

Officials said the CDC was still working to formalize procedures for admitting those who received doses of two different vaccines, as was fairly common in Canada.

The delay in the vaccination requirement for essential cross-border travel is meant to provide truck drivers and others with additional time to get a shot and minimize potential economic disruption from the vaccination mandate, officials said.

All told, the new procedures move toward a policy based on the risk profiles of individuals, rather than less targeted country-based bans.

The vaccination requirement for foreign nationals comes as the White House has moved to impose sweeping vaccination-or-testing requirements affecting as many as 100 million people in the U.S. in an effort to encourage holdouts to get shots.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Labor completed the initial draft of an emergency regulation that will require employers of 100 workers or more to demand their employees be vaccinated against COVID-19 or tested weekly. The Office of Management and Budget is now reviewing the order before its implementation.

Mexico has not put in place any COVID-19 entry procedures for travelers. Canada allows entry of fully-vaccinated individuals with proof of vaccination against COVID-19 as well as proof of a negative test conducted within 72 hours of entry to the country.

The Latest: US to drop 19-month ban on nonessential travel

By The Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration says the United States will reopen its land borders for non-essential travel next month, ending a 19-month freeze due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

New rules to be announced Wednesday will allow fully vaccinated foreign nationals entry to the U.S. regardless of the reason for travel.

That starts in early November, when a similar easing of restrictions is set to kick in for air travel. Senior administration officials previewed the new policy late Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to speak ahead of the formal announcement.

Vehicle, rail and ferry travel between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico has been largely restricted to essential travel, such as trade, since the earliest days of the pandemic. Both Mexico and Canada have pressed the U.S. for months to ease restrictions on non-essential travel that have separated families and curtailed leisure trips.

— By Zeke Miller

MORE ON THE PANDEMIC:

- Apostolic church leaders in Zimbabwe preach vaccines unrelated to Satanism
- US to reopen land borders in November to fully vaccinated vacation travelers
- Conservative state Republicans move to undercut private employer vaccine mandates
- Russia hits new record for COVID-19 deaths, resists lockdown

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

SEKE, Zimbabwe — The Apostolic church is one of Zimbabwe's most skeptical groups when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines. It is also one of the southern African nation's largest religious denominations.

But many of these Christian churches, which combine traditional beliefs with a Pentecostal doctrine, preach against modern medicine and demand followers seek healing or protection against disease through

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spiritual means like prayer and the use of holy water.

Some secluded Apostolic groups believe vaccines are linked to Satanism. To combat that, authorities have formed teams of campaigners who are also churchgoers to dispel misconceptions about the vaccines in their own churches.

Vaccine activist Yvonne Binda stands in front of a church congregation, all in pristine white robes, and tells them not to believe what they've heard about COVID-19 vaccines.

"The vaccine is not linked to Satanism," she says. The congregants are unmoved. But when Binda, a member of an Apostolic church herself, promises them soap, buckets and masks, there are enthusiastic shouts of "Amen!"

While slow and steady might be best in dealing with some religious hesitancy, the situation is urgent in Africa, which has the world's lowest vaccination rates. Zimbabwe has fully vaccinated 15% of its population, much better than many other African nations but still way behind the United States and Europe.

JUNEAU, Alaska--Two Alaska state senators have tested positive for COVID-19 and a third was not feeling well and awaiting test results, Senate President Peter Micciche said Tuesday.

He did not identify the lawmakers who had tested positive.

Lawmakers are in the second week of their fourth special session of the year. Six of the Senate's 20 members attended Tuesday's floor session, which was a so-called technical session where no formal business was taken up.

Micciche said along with the COVID-19 cases some senators had put off trips and were unable to be in Juneau Tuesday, prompting the technical session.

Masks are required at legislative facilities, including the Capitol, though individual lawmakers can decide if they want to wear masks in their respective offices. Legislators and legislative staff also are to participate in regular COVID-19 testing under a recently adopted policy.

SALT LAKE CITY — With the governor of Texas leading the charge, conservative Republicans in several states are moving to block or undercut U.S. President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandates for private employers before the regulations are even issued.

The growing battle over what some see as overreach by the federal government is firing up a segment of the Republican Party base, even though many large employers have already decided on their own to require their workers to get the shot.

The dustup will almost certainly end up in court since GOP attorneys general in nearly half of the states have vowed to sue once the rule requiring workers at private companies with more than 100 employees to get vaccinated or tested weekly is unveiled.

The courts have long upheld vaccine mandates, and the Constitution gives the federal government the upper hand over the states, but with the details still unannounced and more conservative judges on the bench, the outcome isn't entirely clear.

On Monday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order barring private companies or any other entity from requiring vaccines.

States weighing or advancing bills include Arkansas and Ohio, and there are calls for special sessions in Wyoming, Kansas, South Dakota, Indiana and Tennessee.

WASHINGTON — The Biden's administration's mandate that employers with 100 or more workers require coronavirus vaccinations or institute weekly virus testing has moved one step closer to enforcement.

On Tuesday, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration finalized the initial draft of the emergency order and sent it to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review. That's according to the Department of Labor.

OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs will conduct a standard review of the regulation.

Officials did not immediately provide an estimate for the OMB examination. The agency has 90 days to review the rule or send it back to OSHA for revision. Text of the proposed order won't be published until

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OMB completes its review.

Owing to the bureaucracy surrounding the rulemaking process, President Joe Biden has encouraged businesses to implement mandates ahead of the final rule being implemented.

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Rico's governor announced Tuesday that he would be lifting a curfew and a ban on alcohol sales as the U.S. territory reports a drop in the number of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths.

Current restrictions prohibit certain businesses from operating between midnight and 5 a.m. and also bar alcohol sales during that time, two measures that will be lifted Thursday.

However, Gov. Pedro Pierluisi said other restrictions, including an indoors mask requirement, remain in place.

He noted that 70% of the island's 3.3 million people are vaccinated, and that the positivity rate for coronavirus tests dropped to 3%, compared with 10% in August.

Puerto Rico has reported more than 150,500 confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 3,000 deaths from COVID-19, the disease that can be caused by the virus.

LEWISTON, Maine — Staffing shortages at one of Maine's biggest hospitals have forced it to halt pediatric and trauma admissions, sparking a renewed debate over the governor's vaccine mandate for health care workers.

Citing "acute staffing shortages," Central Maine Medical Center temporarily suspended but later reinstated heart attack admissions and will be reviewing trauma admissions on an ongoing basis, the hospital said in a statement Tuesday.

The neonatal intensive care unit is closing and the suspension of pediatric admissions will continue until further notice, the hospital said.

Earlier this month, the hospital's chief medical officer said about 70 employees left due to the COVID-19 vaccine requirement. The deadline was Oct. 1 but state officials said they would not start enforcing it until Oct. 29.

Republican leaders in the Maine Legislature sent a letter to Democratic leaders urging lawmakers to return to session to include a testing option for health care workers who don't want the vaccine.

SEATTLE — Boeing Co. has told employees they must be vaccinated against the coronavirus or possibly be fired.

The Seattle Times reports that the deadline for getting shots is Dec. 8.

The newspaper says an internal Boeing presentations says that employees failing to comply with the mandate "may be released from the company." Employees granted exemptions "due to a disability or sincerely held religious belief" will have to be tested frequently for the virus and be ready to "present a negative test result upon request."

The policy will apply to roughly 140,000 employees companywide, with about 57,000 of those in Washington state.

The white-collar union the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace says it is communicating with Boeing "to ensure implementation gives proper consideration to members' concerns."

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida has issued its first fine to a county it accuses of violating a new state law banning coronavirus vaccine mandates and for firing 14 workers who failed to get the shots.

The Florida Department of Health on Tuesday issued the \$3.5 million fine for Leon County, saying the home to the state capital of Tallahassee violated Florida's "vaccine passport" law that bars requiring people to show proof of vaccination.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis says that "no one should lose their jobs because of COVID shots."

The law is being challenged in court and conflicts with a Biden administration order that companies with

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more than 100 employees require their workers to be vaccinated or face weekly testing.

The Leon County administrator says the county believes its vaccination mandate is legally justifiable and necessary to keep people safe.

NEW YORK — NBA star Kyrie Irving can keep refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine, but he can't play for the Brooklyn Nets.

The Nets announced Tuesday that Irving wouldn't play or practice with the team until he could be a full participant, ending the idea he could play in only road games. Under a New York City mandate, professional athletes playing for a team in the city must be vaccinated against COVID-19 to play or practice in public venues.

Without mentioning his vaccination status, general manager Sean Marks said Irving has made a decision that keeps him from being a full member of the team. Irving hasn't said he isn't vaccinated, asking for privacy when he spoke via Zoom during the team's media day on Sept. 27.

Marks said he and owner Joe Tsai together made the decision, adding it came through discussions with Irving and his associates. NBA players are not required to be vaccinated, but they face more testing and social distancing. The league had said that players wouldn't be paid for games they miss because they are ineligible to play.

Marks said Irving will still be paid for road games.

WASHINGTON — Hunger and food insecurity across the United States have dropped measurably over the past six months, but the need remains far above pre-pandemic levels.

Specialists in hunger issues warn the situation for millions of families remains extremely fragile. An Associated Press review of bulk distribution numbers from hundreds of food banks across the country reveals a downward trend in the amount of food handed out by food banks across the country.

The decrease started in the spring as the COVID-19 vaccine rollout took hold and some closed sectors of the economy began to reopen.

However, Katie Fitzgerald of Feeding America says, "It's come down, but it's still elevated." Feeding America is a nonprofit organization that coordinates 200 food banks across the country and provided the AP with the national distribution numbers.

Fitzgerald says despite the recent decreases, the amount of food being distributed by Feeding America's partner food banks remained more than 55% above pre-pandemic levels.

Factors include the advancement of the delta variant, which has already delayed planned returns to the office for millions of employees and could threaten school closures and other shutdowns as the nation enters the winter flu season. Other obstacles include the gradual expiration of an eviction moratorium and expanded unemployment benefits.

BUCHAREST, Romania — Romania reported on Tuesday its highest number of coronavirus infections and deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Nearly 17,000 COVID-19 infections were confirmed Tuesday and 442 deaths, the first time the European Union country of 19 million has surpassed 400 virus deaths in a single day.

Romania's intensive care units for coronavirus patients are stretched to capacity in what is the European Union's second-least vaccinated nation. Only 34% of adults are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Romania has registered more than 1.3 million confirmed cases and 40,071 confirmed deaths.

NEW YORK — Many Americans who got Pfizer vaccinations are rolling up their sleeves for a booster shot. Meanwhile, millions who received the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine wait to learn when it's their turn.

Federal regulators begin tackling that question this week. On Thursday and Friday, the Food and Drug Administration convenes its independent advisers for the first stage in the process of deciding whether

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extra shots of the two vaccines should be dispensed and, if so, who should get them and when.

The final go-ahead is not expected for at least another week. After the FDA advisers give their recommendation, the agency will make an official decision on whether to authorize boosters. Then a panel convened by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will offer more specifics on who should get them.

The FDA meetings come as U.S. vaccinations have climbed back above 1 million per day on average, an increase of more than 50% over the past two weeks. The rise has been driven mainly by Pfizer boosters and employer vaccine mandates.

LONDON — The German biotechnology company CureVac says it has withdrawn its application for the approval of its coronavirus vaccine from the European Medicines Agency and will focus on making next-generation messenger RNA vaccines.

In a statement on Tuesday, CureVac says recent communications with the EU drug regulator suggested its COVID-19 vaccine might only be authorized in mid-2022. Earlier this year, the company described its initial vaccine results as “sobering,” after data suggested the shot was only about 47% effective.

CureVac says it will instead prioritize the development of second-generation mRNA vaccines with its partner GlaxoSmithKline and expects to be in “late-stage clinical development” by the middle of next year.

The EMA confirmed Tuesday it had ended the accelerated evaluation of the CureVac vaccine, a process started in February. COVAX, the U.N.-backed effort to share vaccines globally, had been waiting for possible doses from CureVac, which received funding from one of the COVAX partners.

White House: LA port going 24/7 to ease shipping backlog

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House said Wednesday it has helped broker an agreement for the Port of Los Angeles to become a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week operation, part of an effort to relieve supply chain bottlenecks and move stranded container ships that are driving prices higher for U.S. consumers.

President Joe Biden planned to discuss the agreement during a speech Wednesday afternoon about supply chain issues that have hampered the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The supply chain problem is tightly linked with the broader challenge of inflation confronting Biden.

Ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach, California, account for 40% of all shipping containers entering the U.S. As of Monday, there were 62 ships berthed at the two ports and 81 waiting to dock and unload, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California.

Commitments by the Los Angeles port’s operator, longshoremen and several of the country’s largest retail and shipping companies are expected to help relieve the backlog. Walmart, FedEx and UPS made commitments to unload during off-peak hours, making it easier for the LA port to operate nonstop and reduce the backlog. The Long Beach port has been operating 24 hours daily for seven days for roughly the past three weeks.

Before his speech, the Democratic president was scheduled to hold a virtual roundtable with the heads of Walmart, FedEx Logistics, UPS, Target, Samsung Electronics North America, the Teamsters Union and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, among other groups.

Republican lawmakers have frequently blasted Biden’s \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package for fueling higher prices. A recent analysis issued by the investment bank Goldman Sachs estimates that “supply-constrained goods” account for 80% of this year’s inflation overshoot, yet the political criticism continues to sting as housing and oil prices add to inflationary pressures.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell has made inflation one of his central criticisms of Biden, a sign that getting prices under control could be essential for Democrats trying to hold onto congressional seats in next year’s elections.

“The Democrats’ inflation is so bad that even though the average American worker has gotten a multiple-percentage-point pay raise over the last year, their actual purchasing power has been cut,” McConnell said in a Senate floor speech last week. “Even dollar stores are having to raise their prices. Just ask any

American family about their last few trips to the supermarket, the gas station or the toy store. Heaven forbid if they've had to participate in the housing market or the auto market anytime lately."

The Biden administration has argued that higher inflation is temporary. Yet the supply chain issues have persisted months after the economy began to reopen and recover after vaccines lessened many of the risks from the pandemic.

Economists expect that Wednesday's consumer prices report will show that prices climbed 5.3% from a year ago, significantly above the Federal Reserve's 2% target. Atlanta Fed president Raphael Bostic said in a Tuesday speech that he no longer calls inflation "transitory" as he expects this current "episode" of inflation could last into 2022 or longer.

'It's not Satanism': Zimbabwe church leaders preach vaccines

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

SEKE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Yvonne Binda stands in front of a church congregation, all in pristine white robes, and tells them not to believe what they've heard about COVID-19 vaccines.

"The vaccine is not linked to Satanism," she says. The congregants, members of a Christian Apostolic church in the southern African nation of Zimbabwe, are unmoved. But when Binda, a vaccine campaigner and member of an Apostolic church herself, promises them soap, buckets and masks, there are enthusiastic shouts of "Amen!"

Apostolic groups that infuse traditional beliefs into a Pentecostal doctrine are among the most skeptical in Zimbabwe when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines, with an already strong mistrust of modern medicine. Many followers put faith in prayer, holy water and anointed stones to ward off disease or cure illnesses.

The congregants Binda addressed in the rural area of Seke sang about being protected by the holy spirit, but have at least acknowledged soap and masks as a defense against the coronavirus. Binda is trying to convince them to also get vaccinated — and that's a tough sell.

Congregation leader Kudzanayi Mudzoki had to work hard to persuade his flock just to stay and listen to Binda speak about vaccines.

"They usually run away, some would hide in the bushes," he said.

There has been little detailed research on Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe but UNICEF studies estimate it is the largest religious denomination with around 2.5 million followers in a country of 15 million. The conservative groups adhere to a doctrine demanding that followers avoid medicines and medical care and instead seek healing through their faith.

Conversely, Tawanda Mukwenga, another religious Zimbabwean, welcomed his vaccination as a means of allowing him to worship properly. Mukwenga recently attended Mass at the Roman Catholic cathedral in the capital, Harare, his first in-person Sunday Mass in 10 months after the pandemic closed churches and forced services online. Zimbabwe has reopened places of worship, though worshippers must be vaccinated to enter.

"Getting vaccinated has turned out to be a smart idea," said Mukwenga, delighted to celebrate Mass at the cathedral again.

More than 80% of Zimbabweans identify as Christian, according to the national statistics agency, but the contrast in attitudes displayed by the Seke Apostolic members and Mukwenga means there's no one-size-fits-all solution to convincing hesitant religious citizens to get vaccinated.

While mandates — a blunt no vaccine, no entrance rule — is the way to go for some, there's a subtler approach for the Apostolic and other anti-vaccine Pentecostal groups, partly, but not only, because they are deeply suspicious of vaccines.

Apostolic groups generally have no formal church premises and members, striking in the long white robes they wear to services, worship outdoors in open scrubland or hillsides, in locations widely spread across the country.

That makes gatherings much harder to police and mandates almost impossible to enforce.

Binda is one of nearly 1,000 members of various religious groups recruited by the Zimbabwean govern-

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ment and UNICEF to try gently changing attitudes toward vaccines from within their own churches.

"We have to cajole them," Binda said of her fellow Apostolic churchgoers. "Bit by bit they finally accept." But it's rarely a quick conversion.

"We are accepting that the Holy Spirit may not be enough to deal with the virus," Seke Apostolic leader Mudzoki said. "We are seriously considering vaccines because others have done it. But our members have always been wary of injections.

"So for now we need soap, buckets, sanitizers and masks," he said. "Those are the things that will help protect us."

Churches have taken steps to address hesitancy in other parts of Africa. The United Methodist Church, based in the United States, plans to use a mass messaging platform to send text messages to the cell-phones of around 32,000 followers in Ivory Coast, Congo, Liberia and Nigeria. The initial aim is to dispel disinformation.

"There's quite a bit of messaging centered around reaffirming for people that the vaccine is safe, that it's been tested," said Ashley Gish of United Methodist Communications. "The ingredients are safe for use in humans and will not make you magnetic — that was a huge one that we heard from a lot of people."

Gish said her church plans to send out more than 650,000 messages with a "pro-vaccine bias." But the program will roll out over a few months in a process of "COVID sensitization" and the church is not demanding followers get the vaccine immediately, Gish said.

While slow and steady might be best in dealing with some religious hesitancy, the situation is urgent in Africa, which has the world's lowest vaccination rates. Zimbabwe has fully vaccinated 15% of its population, much better than many other African nations but still way behind the U.S. and Europe.

So Binda and her fellow campaigners are adaptable if it means changing attitudes a little bit quicker.

One problem they've encountered is stigmatization. Some church members are willing to get vaccinated but don't because they fear being ostracized by peers and leaders. The phenomenon led to campaigners advising the government not to bring mobile clinics to secluded Apostolic groups like the one in Seke, fearing that a public show of vaccinations would do more harm than good.

Instead, vaccine campaigners who normally advocate for openness sometimes encourage secrecy.

Alexander Chipfunde, an Apostolic member and vaccine campaigner who works alongside Binda, told the Seke congregants there was a way to avoid stigmatization.

"Go to the hospital, get vaccinated and keep quiet about it," he said to them. "It's your secret."

Associated Press writer Holly Meyer in Nashville, Tennessee, contributed to this report.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

China exports up 28% in September; surplus with US grows

BEIJING (AP) — China's exports rose at a slightly faster pace in September while demand for imports of iron ore and other commodities eased as a property construction boom cooled and authorities enforced curbs on energy use.

Customs data showed exports rose 28.1% to \$305.7 billion. That was slightly faster than the 26% increase logged in August, and above economists' forecasts. Imports rose 17.6% to \$240 billion, less than the previous month's 33% increase.

This year's trade figures have been distorted by comparison with 2020, when global demand plunged in the first half after governments shut factories and shops to fight the pandemic. Chinese exporters reopened after the ruling Communist Party declared the virus under control in March 2020, while their foreign competitors still were hampered by anti-virus curbs.

"China's foreign trade performance is leading the field among the world's major economies, and China has seen an increase in its international market share," said Li Kuiwen, a spokesman for the customs agency.

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"Taking into account the impact of the high base of foreign trade in 2020, the growth rate of imports and exports may fall in the fourth quarter of this year, but the overall upward trend of China's foreign trade will not change, and rapid growth throughout the year is still expected," Li said.

Still, economists have forecast that surging global demand for Chinese goods will level off as anti-disease controls ease and entertainment, travel and other service industries reopen.

"The bigger problem for exports is that foreign demand has been buoyed by large stimulus in developed economies and shifts in consumption patterns due to the pandemic, both of which are likely to unwind over the coming quarters," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a commentary.

He said imports are also likely to weaken as property construction slows and commodity prices retreat after surging in the initial rush of manufacturing as economies loosened pandemic-related restrictions.

China's global trade surplus rose to \$68 billion in September from \$52 billion in August. That was the highest level since 2015.

The politically sensitive trade surplus with the U.S. rose to \$42 billion in September from nearly \$38 billion in August, the report said.

Exports to the U.S. jumped 30% to \$57.4 billion, while imports from the U.S. rose nearly 17% to \$15.4 billion. American retailers are refilling bare store shelves, helping to keep demand strong, economists said.

More than three years after former U.S. President Donald Trump launched a tariff war against Beijing, his successor Joe Biden's administration has not said if it will agree to Chinese demands to roll back some of those punitive duties.

Some rancor between the two biggest economies has eased in recent weeks. But Biden's top trade official, Katherine Tai, said last week that she planned frank talks with Beijing about complaints over policies that foreign businesses say give their Chinese competitors an unfair advantage.

Southeast Asia was China's biggest export market in September, reflecting expanding trade ties as countries lower tariffs and dismantle some barriers as part of regional trade agreements.

The data released Wednesday showed strong growth in exports of vehicles, mobile phones, consumer electronics and auto parts in January-September.

Imports of metals and semiconductors weakened, partly due to shortages of computer chips that are used in a wide range of products manufactured in China.

The ruling Communist Party has been moving to curb rising levels of debt and cool a construction boom that has driven a large share of economic activity in recent years. That is slowing demand for construction materials.

The authorities also are imposing some curbs on use of coal as they strive to meet targets for reducing carbon emissions and clear smoggy skies. But rising prices for oil, coal and other commodities mean a less obvious impact on easing demand in dollar terms.

General Administration of Customs of China (in Chinese): www.customs.gov.cn

Capt. Kirk's William Shatner on cusp of blasting into space

By MARCIA DUNN and RICK TABER Associated Press

VAN HORN, Texas (AP) — Actor William Shatner counted down Wednesday to his wildest role yet: riding a rocket into space, courtesy of "Star Trek" fan Jeff Bezos.

Best known for his role as Captain Kirk, the 90-year-old Shatner joined three other passengers for the planned launch from West Texas.

Bezos' space travel company, Blue Origin, invited Shatner on the brief jaunt to the fringes of the final frontier, which will make him the oldest person in space.

It will be Blue Origin's second passenger flight, using the same capsule and rocket that Bezos used for his own launch three months ago. The trip should last just 10 minutes, with the fully automated capsule rearing a maximum altitude of about 66 miles (106 kilometers) before parachuting back into the desert.

Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson kicked off the U.S.-based space tourism boom on July 11, riding his own

rocketship to space. Bezos followed nine days later aboard his own capsule. Elon Musk stayed behind as his SpaceX company launched its first private flight last month, sending a billionaire, cancer survivor and two ticket winners into orbit.

And last week, the Russians sent an actor and film director to the International Space Station for movie-making.

"We're just at the beginning, but how miraculous that beginning is. How extraordinary it is to be part of that beginning," Shatner said in a Blue Origin video posted on the eve of his flight. "It looks like there's a great deal of curiosity about this fictional character, Captain Kirk, going into space. So let's go along with it and enjoy the ride."

Rounding out the crew: a Blue Origin vice president and two entrepreneurs who bid unsuccessfully for a seat on the previous flight with Bezos, the founder of Amazon. Blue Origin did not divulge their ticket prices.

Bezos was at the expansive launch and landing site near Van Horn, Texas, to see the four off.

Dunn reported from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

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

'Squid Game' strikes nerve in debt-ridden South Korea

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — "Squid Game," a brutal Netflix survival drama about desperate adults competing in deadly children's games for a chance to escape severe debt, hit a little too close to home for Lee Chang-keun.

The show has captivated global audiences since its September debut on its way to becoming Netflix's biggest hit ever. It has struck raw nerves at home, where there's growing discontent over soaring personal debt, decaying job markets and stark income inequalities worsened by financial crises in the past two decades.

In the dystopian horrors of "Squid Game," Lee sees a reflection of himself in the show's protagonist Seong Gi-hun, a laid-off autoworker coping with a broken family and struggling with constant business failures and gambling problems.

Seong gets beaten by gangster creditors into signing off his organs as collateral, but then receives a mysterious offer to play in a series of six traditional Korean children's games for a shot at winning \$38 million.

The South Korea-produced show pits Seong against hundreds of other financially distressed players in a hyper-violent competition for the ultimate prize, with losers being killed at every round.

It is raising disturbing questions about the future of one of Asia's wealthiest economies, where people who once crowed about the "Miracle of the Han River" now moan about "Hell Joseon," a sarcastic reference to a hierarchical kingdom that ruled Korea before the 20th century.

"Some scenes were very hard to watch," said Lee, a worker at South Korea's Ssangyong Motors who struggled with financial difficulties and depression after the carmaker laid him and 2,600 other employees off while filing for bankruptcy protection in 2009.

After years of protests, court battles and government intervention, Lee and hundreds of other Ssangyong workers returned to work in recent years. But not before a spate of suicides among co-workers and family members who were plunged into financial misery.

"In 'Squid Game,' you see characters scrambling to survive after being laid off at work, struggling to operate fried chicken diners or working as 'daeri' drivers," who get paid for driving drunk people home in their own cars, Lee said. "That reminded me of my co-workers who died."

Lee said he and his colleagues struggled to find work and were backlisted by other auto companies that considered them militant labor activists.

A 2016 report by Korea University medical researchers said at least 28 laid-off Ssangyong workers or their

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relatives died of suicide or severe health problems, including those linked to post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Squid Game" is one of many South Korean shows inspired by economic woes. Its dark tale of inequality and class has drawn comparisons with Bong Joon-ho's Oscar-winning "Parasite," another pandemic-era hit with stunning visuals and violence exposing the underside of South Korea's economic success story.

Netflix tweeted Wednesday that "Squid Game" has become its biggest original series launch after reaching 111 million fans.

South Korea's rapid rebuilding from the devastation of the 1950-53 Korean War has been spectacular — from Samsung's emergence as a global technology giant to the immense popularity of K-pop and movies that's expanding beyond Asia — though millions of South Koreans now grapple with the dark side of that rise.

"Class problems are severe everywhere in the world, but it seems South Korean directors and writers tackle the issue with more boldness," said Im Sang-soo, a film director.

In "Squid Game," Seong's troubles trace back to his firing a decade earlier from the fictional Dragon Motors, a nod to Ssangyong, which means "double dragon."

Hundreds of workers, including Lee, occupied a Ssangyong plant for weeks in 2009 to protest the layoffs before being dispersed by riot police who besieged them, assaulted them with batons, shields and water-cannons and dropped liquified tear gas by helicopter.

That violent standoff injured dozens and is woven into the "Squid Game" narrative. Seong has flashbacks about a Dragon coworker killed by strikebreakers while organizing fellow game participants to create barricades with dormitory beds to block murderous sneak night attacks by more vicious opponents looking to eliminate the competition.

Ultimately, it's every person for themselves in a cruel battle royale between hundreds of people willing to risk even their lives for a shot at freeing themselves from the nightmare of insurmountable debts.

The show features other crushed or marginalized characters, like Ali Abdul, an undocumented factory worker from Pakistan with severed fingers and a boss who refuses to pay him, epitomizing how the country exploits some of the poorest people in Asia while ignoring dangerous working conditions and wage theft.

And Kang Sae-byeok, a pickpocketing North Korean refugee who had known nothing but rough life on the streets and is desperate for money to rescue her brother from an orphanage and to smuggle her mother out of the North.

Many South Koreans despair of advancing in a society where good jobs are increasingly scarce and housing prices have skyrocketed, enticing many to borrow heavily to gamble on risky financial investments or cryptocurrencies.

Household debt, at over 1,800 trillion (\$1.5 trillion), now exceeds the country's annual economic output. Tough times have pushed a record-low birth rate lower as struggling couples avoid having babies.

Squid Game's global success is hardly a cause for pride, Se-Jeoung Kim, a South Korean lawyer based in Poland, wrote in a Seoul Shinmun newspaper column.

"Foreigners will come to you, saying they too watched Squid Game with fascination, and may ask whether Ali's situation in the drama could really happen in a country that's as wealthy and neat as South Korea, and I would have nothing to say," she said.

Kim Jeong-wook, another Ssangyong worker who spent months with Lee perched atop a chimney at a Ssangyong factory in 2015, demanding the company to rehire the fired workers, said he couldn't watch Squid Game after episode one.

"It was too traumatic for me," he said.

AP Entertainment Writer Juwon Park contributed to this story.

Art or censorship? Expo shows just top of famed David statue

By MALAK HARB Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — One of the most talked about attractions at the world's fair under

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way in Dubai is a towering statue made of marble dust that's raising eyebrows just as the original did more than 500 years ago.

At Italy's pavilion, a 3D replica of Michelangelo's David stands tall, his gaze intense and defiant. For most visitors, though, David's head is all they will see as they tour the pavilion. Only VIPs with special access will be able to catch a view of the statue from head to toe while it's on display for the next six months at Dubai's Expo 2020.

The original David is nude and some visitors see the limited view offered as a form of censorship. Others say the way David is displayed at the Expo is a form of artistic expression.

"It is no coincidence that David is not seen from the bottom to the top, as it normally is, but it welcomes people by looking at them in the face," said David Rampello, the director of art at the Italian pavilion.

An art historian in Rome said choosing who can view the statue in full and who cannot creates a hierarchy.

"What the rich, the great and the good can see and what the ordinary folk can see shouldn't be two different things," said Professor Paul Gwynne, who teaches medieval and renaissance studies at the American University of Rome.

It took a team of Italian experts 40 hours of digital scanning to create the replica, made with what organizers describe as one of the world's largest 3D printers. Artists used filaments from recycled plastic material, then a mix of resins and marble dust to create it.

At its home in Florence's Galleria dell'Accademia since 1873, the original David draws gasps from onlookers to this day. Michelangelo's mastery and his passion for human anatomy, from the contracted muscles of David's abdomen to the flexing of his right thigh muscles, make the piece unforgettable for those looking up at the towering work of art.

In Dubai, those details get lost. David stands in the center of a narrow octagonal shaft, presented from his chest up and surrounded by replicas of Roman columns. Visitors in the public area can see parts of David's torso if they lean over a railing.

The rest of his body sits inside a clear partition on the separate floor. His genitals and buttocks find themselves between the floors, though fully visible if an onlooker stands near the partition and peers up.

That position drew the ire of a La Repubblica reporter writing on Expo's opening.

"Why can't you see the whole body of the biblical hero, because you only see the head, the magnetic eyes staring at you silently? And where is the rest?" an article in the daily newspaper read, at one point referring to David's "beheading."

David's nudity has been part of a centuries-old debate about art pushing boundaries and the rules of censorship. In the 1500s, metal fig leaves covered the genitals of statues like David when the Roman Catholic Church deemed nudity as immodest and obscene.

Nudity even bumps up against mores in the modern era. Controversy erupted in 2016 when officials erected wooden panels to shield nude statues at Rome's Capitoline Museums during a visit by Iran's then-President Hassan Rouhani. That spurred some politicians to accuse the government of caving in to "cultural submission" though Rouhani himself thanked Italians as being "very hospitable people" when asked about the gesture.

In the wider United Arab Emirates, a few nude artworks can be seen at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, though the museum largely caters to more conservative pieces.

Expo visitor Calli Schmitz from Germany she said she didn't think the way the replica was displayed at the Expo did it much justice.

"I think it was not as exposed as it should have been," she said. "I think because of the gold everywhere, people did not really realize it was the statue of David."

Italian visitor Ricardo Mantarano offered another take.

"It's a different way of approaching the same sculpture and putting it in another perspective," he said. Dinara Aksyanova, a 31-year-old visitor from Moscow, however, wasn't as forgiving.

"Why was it only half? It makes no sense," she said. "The most interesting part is underneath."

Follow Malak Harb on Twitter at www.twitter.com/malakhARB.

The AP Interview: James Shaw wants climate talks to deliver

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The coronavirus pandemic has shown that humans are very good at responding to an immediate crisis, says New Zealand's Climate Change Minister James Shaw. But when it comes to dealing with a slower-moving threat like climate change, he says, we're "terribly bad."

Shaw spoke to The Associated Press on Wednesday ahead of a key climate summit that starts in Glasgow, Scotland, on Oct. 31. Many environmentalists say the U.N. summit, known as COP26, represents the world's final chance to avert a climate catastrophe.

Shaw said that at Glasgow, he intends to announce a more ambitious target for New Zealand's emissions reductions over the coming decade, and he hopes many other countries also aim higher.

He said a top priority will be to ensure that a promise made by wealthier nations to provide \$100 billion a year to help poorer countries switch to cleaner energy is fulfilled.

"The developed world so far has not delivered on that promise," Shaw said.

That has led to a breakdown in trust and a fraying of the consensus reached with the 2015 Paris Agreement, he said. It's also giving an excuse to authoritarian regimes to disrupt international cooperation, he added.

Shaw said the pandemic had accelerated the transition to cleaner energy in some countries. But in many developing nations it had slowed improvements, he said, because they were struggling simply to cope with the massive financial and social impacts from the disease.

Shaw said he has doubts whether some of the positive environmental changes made by people during the pandemic — like working from home more and driving less — will endure.

"I think those are possibilities, but I also think human beings tend to revert to type," Shaw said. "I know when we're in the middle of it, it feels like the world has changed fundamentally."

New Zealand's government has promised the country will become carbon-neutral by 2050. But it has also faced criticism for talking a lot about climate change and not taking action quickly enough. Greenhouse gas emissions in the nation of 5 million reached an all-time high just before the pandemic hit.

Shaw said lawmakers have passed many new bills in recent years that will have a positive impact over time, including a ban on new offshore oil and gas exploration, tougher emissions standards for cars, a subsidy scheme for electric vehicles, and the establishment of a climate change commission.

"Is it enough? No. And the thing is, it never will be enough," Shaw said. "We know that every single year, we are going to have to continue to take new and further actions on climate change because this is a multi-generational battle over the course of the next 30 years and beyond. It's going to involve every part of our economy, every part of our society."

Climate scientist James Renwick said he thinks New Zealand and other nations need to bring more urgency to their actions.

"The countries of the world have talked about this issue for many years, but we still haven't really seen the action, and time has got extremely short now," said Renwick, a professor at the Victoria University of Wellington. "We've got to see emissions reduction starting immediately, 2022, and we have to get emissions down really fast in the next decade."

Almost half of New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture — think millions of cows burping methane gas — in an economy that relies on exporting food. Many environmentalists say farmers are essentially getting a free pass from lawmakers.

Shaw said farmers will be subject to new emissions rules that will come into effect by 2025, and that many are finding innovative ways to reduce their carbon footprints.

He said an important part of his trip to Glasgow will be to stand alongside colleagues from low-lying Pacific islands who are already feeling extensive effects from climate change through more severe cyclones and rising sea levels.

He said the Cook Islands, for instance, spends about a quarter of its national budget on mitigating the effects of climate change.

Shaw acknowledges the irony that thousands of people from around the world will be burning many tons of fossil fuels to fly to Glasgow for the talks.

"Unfortunately, it's the only way that we can practically get there and proactively participate," Shaw said.

Renwick said that aspect didn't bother him too much.

"We all live in the world we live in, the one that's been created over the last century or more," Renwick said. "I think it's just the way it is. You have to burn a bit of fossil fuel to work out how to stop doing that."

Ransomed and beaten: Migrants face abuse in Libyan detention

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

ONBOARD THE GEO BARENTS OFF LIBYA (AP) — Osman Touré was crying from the pain of repeated beatings and torture as he dialed his brother's cellphone number.

"I'm in prison in Libya," Touré said in that August 2017 call. "They will kill me if you don't pay 2,500 dinars in 24 hours."

Within days, Touré's family transferred the roughly \$550 demanded to secure his freedom from a government detention center in Libya. But Touré was not let go — instead, he was sold to a trafficker and kept enslaved for four more years.

Touré is among tens of thousands of migrants who have endured torture, sexual violence and extortion at the hands of guards in detention centers in Libya, a major hub for migrants fleeing poverty and wars in Africa and the Middle East, hoping for a better life in Europe.

The 25-year-old Guinean, along with two dozen other migrants, spoke to The Associated Press aboard the Geo Barents, a rescue vessel operated by the medical aid group Doctors without Borders in the Mediterranean off Libya. Most had been held in trafficking warehouses and government detention centers in western Libya over the past four years.

They were among 60 migrants who fled Libya on Sept. 19 in two unseaworthy boats and were rescued a day later by the Geo Barents. The AP also obtained testimonies from many others collected in recent months by the aid group, known by its French acronym MSF.

The European Union has sent 455 million euros to Libya since 2015, largely channeled through U.N. agencies and aimed at beefing up Libya's coast guard, reinforcing its southern border and improving conditions for migrants.

However, huge sums have been diverted to networks of militiamen and traffickers who exploit migrants, according to a 2019 AP investigation. Coast guard members are also complicit, turning migrants intercepted at sea over to detention centers under deals with militias or demanding payoffs to let others go.

The practice continues unabated and U.N.-commissioned investigators said in a 32-page report last week that "policies meant to push migrants back to Libya to keep them away from European shores ultimately lead to abuses," including possible crimes against humanity.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants hoping to reach Europe have made their way through Libya, where a lucrative trafficking business has flourished in a country without a functioning government, split for years between rival administrations in the east and west, each backed by armed groups and foreign governments.

The migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, told the AP that detention center guards beat and tortured them, then extorted money from their relatives, supposedly in exchange for their freedom. Their bodies showed traces of old and recent injuries, and signs of bullet and knife wounds on their backs, legs, arms and faces.

On paper, the detention centers are run by the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration, which is overseen by the Interior Ministry and Libya's interim authorities, who took power earlier this year under U.N. auspices to carry out national elections by the end of the year. But on the ground, notorious militias remain in control, according to migrants and the U.N. investigators.

"Migrants are detained for indefinite periods without an opportunity to have the legality of their deten-

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tion reviewed, and the only practical means of escape is by paying large sums of money to the guards or engaging in forced labor or sexual favors inside or outside the detention," the U.N. report said.

Spokespeople for Libya's government, the Interior Ministry, the directorate and the coast guard did not answer phone calls or respond to messages seeking comment.

Touré, the youngest of seven siblings abandoned by their father, said that as an adolescent he watched others from his small Guinean town of Kindia make it to Europe and help pull their families out of poverty.

He began his own attempt in March 2015, taking odd jobs along the way to finance the trip. Traffickers held him captive for months twice, in Niger and Algeria, before he crossed into Libya in April 2017, he said.

Four months later, Touré embarked from Libya, only to be intercepted by the coast guard and returned to Tripoli. At the port, he and other migrants attempted to flee but were caught by security forces and taken to the al-Nasr Martyrs detention center in Zawiya.

That's when the torture started. He described how guards would hang them upside down and whip their bare feet. At times other migrants were forced or given incentives to take part in the violence.

"A migrant from Ghana refused to beat us, but there was a Cameroonian who was really cruel," Touré said.

His second week in prison, six guards approached him. One slapped him hard on the right side of his face. The rest kicked and beat him. Then he was handed a cellphone and ordered to call his family.

Ten others in the cell were forced to do the same. Three were taken out by the guards in the next few days. He doesn't know what became of them, he said.

The money sent by captives' relatives was usually transferred via Western Union or an informal system of personal accounts to a trafficker in coordination with the guards. In some cases, like Touré's, families sent money to the detained migrant and guards took them to withdraw it.

Touré was taken from his cell three days after the phone call. He thought he would walk free. Instead, the guards sold him to a trafficker in Zawiya. He spent the next four years enslaved, working in the trafficker's warehouse.

Finally his luck changed in September when the trafficker's wife took pity on him and persuaded her husband to set him free, he said. Within days he was on a small inflatable boat with 55 others attempting the Mediterranean crossing.

Overladen, the boat did not make it far. Those onboard were rescued by the Geo Barents 48 nautical miles off Libya's coast. They were taken to Sicily, where Italian authorities permitted the rescue ship to dock on Sept. 27 and let the migrants apply for asylum. They could still be returned to their home countries if their requests are denied.

Touré and other migrants said that besides plain cruelty, there was racism behind their abuse in Libya. The U.N. report found the same — that Black sub-Saharan Africans were likely to be subjected to harsher treatment than others.

"Libya isn't a safe place for Black Africans," Touré said.

The point of arrival at one of Libya's ports was the first opportunity for Libya's security forces to extract payment from migrants trying to reach Europe.

For some, particularly Arab migrants, the ordeal ended there without detention, as long as they paid. Waleed, a Tunisian, told the AP he bribed guards four times at the Tripoli port and walked free. Three other times he was taken to detention centers, where he found a way to get enough money to the guards and was released.

Mohammed, a Moroccan, also said he was released at port in 2020 by handing over 3,000 dinars (\$660). Both men gave only their first names out of fear for the safety of family members still inside Libya.

The Libyan coast guard, which is trained and equipped by the European Union, has intercepted some 87,000 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea since 2016, including about 26,300 so far this year, according to U.N. figures. But only about 10,000 are in detention centers, according to the U.N. migration agency, raising concerns that many are in the hands of criminal groups and traffickers, and others are dead.

Not all have enough money to pay bribes. Mohammed Salah, a 20-year-old migrant from the Ivory Coast, told the AP he was intercepted and returned to Libya in January 2020. He didn't have the 3,000 dinars (\$660) demanded for his freedom.

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After he argued over the bribe, he was beaten at the police station and suffered a broken leg. Detention center guards then handed him over to a trafficker, who enslaved him for over a year, he said.

Valentin Najang of Cameroon was detained in the Zawiya detention center after being captured early last month. The guards repeatedly beat him and other migrants with sticks and plastic tubing, the 18-year-old told the AP. Once, he watched two guards beat a young migrant from Mauritius unconscious. A week into his detention, his family paid 500,000 Cameroonian francs (over \$880) for his freedom.

At the heart of the abuses against migrants remains the question of who can be held accountable. The U.N. report did not name suspects, saying more investigation is needed to determine who was culpable.

But migrants and others inside Libya say the issue is clear cut: It's the militias and warlords who have become powerful government figures in many areas.

The coastal town of Zawiya, where the al-Nasr Martyrs detention center is located, is controlled by the Nasr Martyrs militia, which have "the final word on all the town's security and military matters," said a former senior official at the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The militia is led by Mohammed Kachlaf, who was sanctioned in 2018 by the U.N. Security Council, which called his network "one of the most dominant in the field of migrant smuggling and the exploitation of migrants in Libya."

Zawiya's coast guard unit is commanded by Abdel-Rahman Milad, who was also sanctioned in 2018 by the U.N. Security Council for human trafficking. U.N. experts said Milad and other coast guard members "are directly involved in the sinking of migrant boats using firearms." Milad has denied any links to human smuggling.

And Tripoli's Abu Salim neighborhood, where a detention center with the same name is located, is controlled by a militia led by Abdel-Ghani al-Kikli. Though Amnesty International has accused him of war crimes and other serious rights violations, he was named this year as the head of the government's so-called Stability Support Authority with even broader arrest powers.

"It is a well-connected mafia with influence in each corner of the government," the former Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration official said.

AP video journalist Ahmed Hatem contributed from aboard the Geo Barents.

Dodgers beat Giants 7-2, force decisive Game 5 in NLDS

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Facing a second elimination game in less than a week, the Los Angeles Dodgers kept the same calm and cool approach.

It was their 52,935 fans who went bonkers, celebrating a 7-2 victory over the San Francisco Giants on Tuesday night to force a decisive Game 5 in their NL Division Series.

Mookie Betts homered and drove in three runs, and Will Smith also went deep to keep the season alive for the defending World Series champions. The Dodgers beat St. Louis in the NL wild-card game last Wednesday.

"Everybody was kind of chill, relaxed and wanted to play," Betts said. "It's not like we're all of a sudden going to start hitting it harder or throwing it further or throwing it faster or whatever. It's the same game we have been playing. It's just a win-or-go-home situation."

Next, the 106-win Dodgers head back to San Francisco to play the 107-win Giants one more time Thursday night, with the winner advancing to face Atlanta in the NL Championship Series. The Braves eliminated Milwaukee earlier Tuesday.

"They know us, we know them really well," Smith said. "It's going to come down to who wants it a little more."

San Francisco won the NL West by one game over the Dodgers in an historic race that went down to the final day of the regular season. Now, these storied rivals are set for a winner-take-all showdown.

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"This is what baseball wants," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "We're going to be the only show in town. If you have a pulse or you're a sports fan, you better be watching Dodgers-Giants."

The Dodgers managed just five hits during a 1-0 loss in Game 3 — the second time they were shut out in this series — to reach the brink of elimination. Los Angeles had that many by the second inning Tuesday and pounded out 12 in all to back a brief but effective outing from Buehler on three days' rest.

"Tonight's a great example of kind of 26 guys coming together and figuring out a way to survive," Buehler said.

Buehler went to Roberts as early as the Dodgers' 9-2 victory in Game 2 and said he wanted the ball in Game 4 to start on short rest for the first time in his career. The right-hander allowed one run and three hits in 4 1/3 innings. He struck out four and walked two on 71 pitches.

"I actually felt great," Buehler said. "Probably the best I have in the second half of the year. We'll see how I feel tomorrow, but for tonight I felt pretty good."

After giving up a leadoff single to Evan Longoria and walking pinch-hitter Steven Duggar, Buehler exited to a standing ovation from blue towel-waving fans.

The Dodgers chased starter Anthony DeSclafani in the second. He gave up two runs and five hits and struck out two.

The Giants ran through six pitchers by the fifth, leaving them with just three relievers. By the seventh, only backup catcher Curt Casali was available off the bench and he pinch-hit in the eighth.

The Giants have been outscored 16-9 in the series. They had seven hits Tuesday.

"This time of year you're going to face great pitching night-in and night-out," All-Star catcher Buster Posey said. "You're hoping that when you do get some traffic out there, you can get a big hit because sometimes those opportunities are limited. Hopefully that's something we will be able to do on Thursday."

The biting, steady wind that prevailed throughout Game 3 was gone, leaving just a slight breeze to ruffle the center-field flags.

Smith hit a two-run homer to center in the eighth, extending the lead to 7-2.

Betts homered in the fourth, and his bases-loaded sacrifice fly scored Cody Bellinger in the fifth for a 5-1 lead.

"I told him after the homer that's the best swing he's taken all year," Roberts said.

The Giants' runs came in the top of the fifth on Darin Ruf's RBI groundout off winner Joe Kelly, and Kris Bryant's RBI groundout in the eighth. Posey, a career .257 hitter in the postseason, went 0 for 4.

Buehler was safe at first leading off the fourth when his shot went off reliever Jarlin Garcia's leg for an error. Betts followed with a two-run homer to the right-field pavilion, extending the lead to 4-0.

The Dodgers got on the board in the first with NL batting champion Trea Turner's RBI double to right-center that rolled to the wall, scoring Corey Seager, who singled.

Chris Taylor's sacrifice fly made it 2-0 in the second.

San Francisco had runners at the corners in the second on consecutive one-out singles by Bryant and LaMonte Wade Jr. But Buehler got out of the jam, retiring Longoria on a swinging strike and Mike Yastrzemski on a liner to second.

Last postseason, the Dodgers went 3-0 in elimination games, rallying from a 3-1 deficit to beat Atlanta in the NLCS.

LIGHTNING FAST

Dodgers reliever Brusdar Graterol pitched the sixth, when six of his seven pitches clocked 101 mph or better. He retired three of four batters, with only Bryant reaching on an infield single to first. Graterol retired Posey, pinch-hitter Wilmer Flores and Longoria on groundouts.

DELAY

The game was delayed briefly to start the eighth when a fan ended up on the warning track in the right-field corner. Multiple security guards pounced on the intruder, who was handcuffed and escorted off.

UP NEXT

Giants: RHP Logan Webb starts Game 5 on Thursday. He dominated the Dodgers in the series opener, striking out 10 over 7 2/3 innings to beat Buehler 4-0.

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Dodgers: LHP Julio Urías starts the winner-take-all game. The majors' lone 20-game winner this season led MLB with an .870 winning percentage and then pitched Los Angeles to a 9-2 victory in Game 2.

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

Pamela could be hurricane again as it makes Mexico landfall

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Tropical Storm Pamela is picking up momentum in the Pacific off Mexico and forecasters say it should be back to hurricane strength again before striking the coast north of the port of Mazatlan on Wednesday.

After weakening to a tropical storm Tuesday afternoon, Pamela was centered about 170 miles (275 kilometers) west-southwest of Mazatlan late Tuesday and was moving north-northeast at about 12 mph (19 kph), the U.S. National Hurricane Center said. The storm had maximum winds of about 70 mph (110 kph).

Pamela was forecast to pass well to the south of the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula during the night while accelerating its forward movement toward the coast and regaining wind strength.

The hurricane center warned of the possibility of life-threatening storm surges, flash floods and dangerous winds around the impact area.

Pamela was then forecast to weaken while crossing over northern Mexico and could approach the Texas border as a tropical depression by Thursday. The center said remnants of the storm could carry heavy rain to central Texas and southeast Oklahoma.

Unsupported 'sickout' claims take flight amid Southwest woes

By DAVID KOENIG and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — When Southwest Airlines canceled more than 2,000 flights over the weekend, citing bad weather and air traffic control issues, unsupported claims blaming vaccine mandates began taking off.

Conservative politicians and pundits, including Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, alleged the flight disruptions resulted from pilots and air traffic controllers walking off their jobs or calling in sick to protest federal vaccination requirements.

The airline, its pilots' union and the Federal Aviation Administration denied that.

"The weekend challenges were not a result of Southwest employee demonstrations," Southwest spokesman Chris Mainz said Monday.

Still, Twitter posts claiming airline employees were "standing up to medical tyranny" and participating in a "mass sickout" amassed thousands of shares. Vague and anonymous messages on social media speculated that Southwest was hiding the real reason for its disruptions. And anti-vaccine rallying cries such as #DoNotComply, #NoVaccineMandate and #HoldTheLine were among the 10 most popular hashtags tweeted in connection to Southwest over the weekend, according to a report from media intelligence firm Signal Labs.

Even as flights appeared to be running closer to normal on Tuesday, the Texas-based airline remained at the center of the latest front in the vaccine mandate culture war, its challenges exploited by opponents of vaccine requirements.

Neither the company nor its pilots' union has provided evidence to back up their explanations for why nearly 2,400 flights were canceled from Saturday through Monday. Southwest has only said that bad weather and air traffic control issues in Florida on Friday triggered cascading failures in which planes and pilots were trapped out of position for their next flight.

The crisis peaked on Sunday, when the airline canceled more than 1,100 flights, or 30% of its schedule. By Tuesday evening, it had canceled fewer than 100 flights, or 2% of its schedule, although more than 1,000 flights were delayed, according to tracking service FlightAware.

"When you get behind, it just takes several days to catch up," CEO Gary Kelly said Tuesday on CNBC. "We were significantly set behind on Friday."

Southwest struggled all summer with delays and cancellations. A senior executive admitted to employees

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Sunday that the airline is still understaffed and might need to reduce flights in November and December.

Despite repeated requests, the company and the union have declined to say how many employees missed work during the crisis. They have said that absentee rates were similar to those over a typical summer weekend, but they have not put out numbers to support that argument. It is also unclear how many Southwest pilots are unvaccinated.

"We don't know, and the company doesn't know," said Casey Murray, president of the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association.

Meanwhile, speculation from prominent Conservative politicians and pundits has flooded into the void. Many shared the unsubstantiated theory, but few provided details, facts or examples of employees walking off the job to protest the vaccine.

"Joe Biden's illegal vaccine mandate at work!" Cruz tweeted Sunday. "Suddenly, we're short on pilots & air traffic controllers. #ThanksJoe."

The Republican senator wrote in another tweet Monday that he met last week with leaders of pilot unions who "expressed deep concern over the vaccine mandates." A spokeswoman for Southwest pilots said no one at the union had talked to Cruz. A spokesperson for Cruz did not respond to emailed questions from The Associated Press about whether the Republican senator had any firsthand knowledge of pilots or air traffic controllers skipping work.

Republican U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs of Arizona and U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin also posted the rumors on social media, without offering proof.

Vague, familiar-looking "friend of a friend" stories are a dangerous form of misinformation because they "feel like insider information being shared by individuals directly involved in the action," according to Rachel Moran, a misinformation scholar at the University of Washington.

Similar unsupported claims circulated online in August, when social media users falsely claimed that flight delays and cancellations out of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport were the result of vaccine mandates. In September, false internet rumors swirled that 40% of employees at defense contractor General Dynamics had declined the vaccine and threatened to quit.

Some Twitter users connected Southwest's flight problems to news that on Friday the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association had asked a federal judge in Dallas to block the airline's vaccine mandate. The union said under federal labor law, Southwest must bargain with the union before making changes affecting working conditions. The judge has not ruled yet.

Asked on Tuesday to respond to claims that vaccine mandates have reduced the workforce and contributed to supply-chain disruptions, White House press secretary Jen Psaki took a jab at Cruz — sarcastically labeling him a "world-renowned business, travel and health expert" — before defending Biden's policy.

"I know there was a little hubbub over the course of the last few days about Southwest Airlines," Psaki said. "We now know that some of those claims were absolutely false and actually the issues were completely unrelated to vaccine mandates."

Biden's order, which is still being finalized, would require employers with 100 or more workers to get vaccinated or tested weekly for COVID-19. Airlines, however, are government contractors because they perform work such as emergency flights for the Defense Department that carried Afghanistan refugees to the U.S. in August. That makes airlines subject to a tougher standard under the Biden order: mandatory vaccinations with no opt-out for getting tested.

Following the lead of other airlines, Southwest told employees last week that it would require them to be vaccinated by Dec. 8.

While some staff at airlines and other large companies have spoken out against vaccine requirements, comments on social media have created an exaggerated sense of the dissent, according to Moran, the misinformation scholar at the University of Washington.

"In reality, it's quite a small number of people who are protesting employment-based mandates for the vaccine," Moran said. "People are more vulnerable to misinformation in times of crisis, and these labor shortages and supply-chain delays either create a real sense of crisis or are manipulated by misinforma-

tion spreaders to make it appear like we are heading towards crisis.”

Swenson reported from New York. Amanda Seitz in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report. David Koenig can be reached at www.twitter.airlinewriter

Typhoon prompts Hong Kong to close schools, stock market

BEIJING (AP) — Hong Kong suspended classes, stock market trading and government services as a typhoon passed south of the city Wednesday.

Heavy rain from Typhoon Kompasu could flood low-lying areas and residents should take precautions, the Hong Kong Observatory said.

The typhoon had sustained winds of 83 kilometers per hour (51 miles per hour) and gusts up to 101 kilometers per hour (63 miles per hour).

Winds were expected to gradually weaken in the afternoon, the observatory said.

The typhoon was expected to move across the northern portion of the South China Sea toward China's southern island province of Hainan and then make landfall in northern Vietnam, the observatory said.

Kompasu earlier set off landslides and flash floods in the northern Philippines, leaving at least 11 people dead and seven missing, officials said Tuesday.

EXPLAINER: Why Social Security COLA will jump next year

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rising inflation is expected to lead to a sizeable increase in Social Security's annual cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, for 2022. Exactly how much will be revealed Wednesday morning after a Labor Department report on inflation during September, a data point used in the final calculation.

Over the last 10 years, the Social Security COLA has averaged about 1.7% annually as inflation remained low. But the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic has triggered rising prices for a wide range of goods and services, and that's expected to translate to bigger checks for retirees.

WHY ARE SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS ADJUSTED?

Policymakers say the COLA works to preserve the purchasing power of Social Security benefits, and shouldn't be seen as a pay hike for retirees.

At one time Congress had to approve inflation increases, but starting in the mid-1970s lawmakers turned that function over to nonpartisan experts within the government bureaucracy. The annual review is now tied to changes in an official measure of inflation and proceeds automatically and with no political brinkmanship.

HOW BIG AN INCREASE FOR 2022?

Stay tuned.

The Great Recession saw a COLA increase of 5.8% for 2009, and the number for next year may rival that.

This summer, government economic experts predicted a COLA in the range of 6%. If that's the case, it would be the biggest Social Security hike the vast majority of baby boomer retirees have seen. Up to now, they've collected meager to modest annual adjustments, not counting three years for which there was no COLA because inflation barely showed a pulse.

A 6% COLA would increase the average Social Security payment for a retired worker by close to \$93 a month, to \$1,636 next year. Compare that to this year's COLA, worth only about \$20 a month.

WHAT'S CHANGED OVER THE PAST YEAR?

As the economy recovers from the shock of coronavirus shutdowns, prices are rising at a pretty good clip.

Gas serves as an ever-present reminder, above \$3 a gallon in most states, \$4 a gallon in California and Hawaii. But food had already been going up and so are labor costs as employers compete to hire choosy workers seeking higher pay and better benefits. Add to the mix supply chain problems that have slowed deliveries of everything from refrigerators to running shoes.

All that gets sifted into the prices that consumers pay for their everyday needs.

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WHO'S AFFECTED?

The COLA is big enough to have an impact on the overall economy.

It affects the household budgets of about 1 in 5 Americans, including Social Security recipients, disabled veterans and federal retirees, about 70 million people.

About half of seniors live in households where Social Security benefits account for at least 50% of their income, and one-quarter rely on their monthly payment for all or nearly all their earnings. For this latter group, the COLA can literally make a difference in what they're able to put on the table.

DO PRIVATE PENSIONS ALSO PROVIDE A COLA?

Inflation protection is central to Social Security's benefit design, but it's not so common among traditional private pensions. Benefits paid by most employer plans gradually lose some of their purchasing power over the years.

Social Security not only increases retiree checks to compensate for inflation, but it then adds that amount to a person's underlying benefit so it grows with compounding as future COLAs are factored in.

CAN SOCIAL SECURITY AFFORD TO KEEP PAYING COLAS?

Proposals have been floated both to increase or trim back COLAs in the context of a broader Social Security overhaul. Many advocates for older people argue that the inflation index currently used does not adequately reflect the higher health care costs faced by the aging.

On the other side, groups pressing to reduce federal deficits urge switching to an alternate inflation measure that factors in consumers' habit of substituting cheaper goods when prices rise. That would yield slightly lower estimates of cost-of-living changes.

Social Security trustees said in their report this year that the program's long-term fiscal imbalance is casting a longer shadow.

For the first time in 39 years, the cost of delivering benefits will exceed Social Security's total income from payroll tax collections and interest. From here on in, Social Security will have to tap its savings to pay full benefits.

The report also moved up the exhaustion date for Social Security's massive trust fund by one year, to 2034. At that point, the program will be able to pay only 78% of scheduled benefits, the report said.

Such a reduction would represent a major hardship for most people who depend on Social Security, even middle-class retirees.

But hardly anyone with political power in Washington is talking about fixes.

"Social Security is an issue that really needs to be addressed together by both parties," said David Certner, legislative policy director at AARP. "It is very difficult to do bipartisan work on something as big and important as Social Security in what is a very partisan atmosphere."

House sends debt limit hike to Biden, staving off default

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House has approved a short-term increase to the nation's debt limit, ensuring the federal government can continue fully paying its bills into December and temporarily averting an unprecedented default that would have decimated the economy.

The \$480 billion increase in the country's borrowing ceiling cleared the Senate last week on a party-line vote. The House approved it Tuesday so President Joe Biden can sign it into law this week. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had warned that steps to stave off a default on the country's debts would be exhausted by Monday, and from that point, the department would soon be unable to fully meet the government's financial obligations.

A default would have immense fallout on global financial markets built upon the bedrock safety of U.S. government debt. Routine government payments to Social Security beneficiaries, disabled veterans and active-duty military personnel would also be called into question.

The relief provided by passage of the legislation will only be temporary though, forcing Congress to revisit the issue in December — a time when lawmakers will also be laboring to complete federal spending

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bills and avoid a damaging government shutdown. The yearend backlog raises risks for both parties and threatens a tumultuous close to Biden's first year in office.

"I'm glad that this at least allows us to prevent a totally self-made and utterly preventable economic catastrophe as we work on a longer-term plan," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.

Republicans signaled the next debt limit debate won't be any easier and warned Democrats not to expect their help.

"Unless and until Democrats give up on their dream of a big-government, socialist America, Republicans cannot and will not support raising the debt limit and help them pave the superhighway to a great entitlement society," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

Procedurally, the House took a single vote Tuesday that had the effect of passing the Senate bill. The measure passed by a party-line vote of 219-206.

The present standoff over the debt ceiling eased when Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., agreed to help pass the short-term increase. But he insists he won't do so again.

In a letter sent Friday to Biden, McConnell said Democrats will have to handle the next debt-limit increase on their own using the same process they have tried to use to pass Biden's massive social spending and environment plan. Reconciliation allows legislation to pass the Senate with 51 votes rather than the 60 that's typically required. In the 50-50 split Senate, Vice President Kamala Harris gives Democrats the majority with her tiebreaking vote.

Lawmakers from both parties have used the debt ceiling votes as leverage for other priorities. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi threatened to vote against raising the debt ceiling when President Donald Trump was in office, saying she had no intention of supporting lifting the debt ceiling to enable Republicans to give another tax break to the rich. And Republicans in 2011 managed to coerce President Barack Obama into accepting about \$2 trillion in deficit cuts as a condition for increasing the debt limit — though lawmakers later rolled back some of those cuts.

Pelosi told reporters Tuesday that over the years Republicans and Democrats have voted against lifting the debt ceiling, "but never to the extent of jeopardizing it."

Pelosi offered her hope that Congress would lift the debt ceiling in a bipartisan way this December because of the stakes involved. But she also floated a bill sponsored by Rep. Brendan Boyle, D-Pa., that would transfer the duty of raising the debt limit away from Congress and vest it with the Treasury secretary, saying, "I think it has merit."

In his focus on the debt limit, McConnell has tried to link Biden's big federal government spending boost with the nation's rising debt load, even though they are separate and the debt ceiling will have to be increased or suspended regardless of whether Biden's \$3.5 trillion plan makes it into law.

"Your lieutenants on Capitol Hill now have the time they claimed they lacked to address the debt ceiling through standalone reconciliation, and all the tools to do it," McConnell said in a letter to the president. "They cannot invent another crisis and ask for my help."

McConnell was one of 11 Republicans who sided with Democrats to advance the debt ceiling reprieve to a final vote. Subsequently, McConnell and his GOP colleagues voted against final passage.

The debate over the debt ceiling has at times gotten personal. McConnell last week suggested that Democrats were playing "Russian roulette" with the economy because they had not dealt with the debt ceiling through the process he had insisted upon. He called out Pelosi for traveling to Europe last week.

"I can only presume she hopes the full faith and credit of the United States will get sorted out," McConnell said.

Pelosi did not let the shot pass. "Russian roulette from Moscow Mitch. Interesting," she said.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said Tuesday's vote marked the 50th time dating back to President Ronald Reagan that he has voted on extending the debt limit.

"Nobody has clean hands when it comes to the debt limit," he said.

Because the Senate bill only allowed for a stopgap extension, Hoyer called it a "lousy deal."

"And then we're going to play this game one more time, a despicable and irresponsible act for adults

who know better," Hoyer said.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said he wanted to "thank" Hoyer for sharing that he had previously voted for raising the debt ceiling 49 times.

"When he came into this body, the debt was about a trillion dollars," Roy said. "Thank you, I guess, on behalf of the people of America who are staring at 28-and-a-half trillion dollars of debt."

The current debt ceiling is \$28.4 trillion. Both parties have contributed to that load with decisions that have left the government rarely operating in the black.

The calamitous ramifications of default are why lawmakers have been able to reach a compromise to lift or suspend the debt cap some 18 times since 2002, often after frequent rounds of brinkmanship.

The AP Interview: McAuliffe wants Democrats to 'get it done'

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Terry McAuliffe, the Democratic candidate for Virginia governor, on Tuesday called on leaders in Washington from both parties — including President Joe Biden — to "get their act together," while pushing Senate Democrats to scrap the filibuster if needed to enact the party's priorities on infrastructure spending and voting rights.

The harsh words from McAuliffe during an interview with The Associated Press come just three weeks before Election Day in Virginia. The former governor is facing Republican newcomer Glenn Youngkin in a race that represents a critical early test of the Democrats' political strength in the first year of Biden's presidency.

Polls suggest the race is close, adding to McAuliffe's sense of urgency to campaign on a robust list of his party's accomplishments. The McAuliffe campaign confirmed Tuesday that Biden and former President Barack Obama would rally voters in the state later in the month at separate events.

Despite the outside support, McAuliffe has been deeply frustrated by his party's inability to fulfill key campaign promises since taking control of the White House and both chambers of Congress in January. In Tuesday's interview, the 64-year-old lamented the Democrats' inability to protect voting rights against a wave of Republican-backed legislation, but he saved his sharpest comments for the stalled federal infrastructure package.

"They all got to get their act together and vote," McAuliffe said. Asked specifically if he was calling out Biden, McAuliffe said, "I put everybody there."

McAuliffe's frustration underlies a bigger concern for Democrats nationally entering the first midterm election season of the Biden presidency. The president's approval ratings are sagging, and there are signs in Virginia and elsewhere that rank-and-file Democrats aren't energized to vote.

A bad result for Democrats in Virginia, where former President Donald Trump lost by 10 points last fall, would likely signal a far more painful election next year, when control of Congress and dozens of governor's offices are at stake.

But with a stalled legislative agenda in Washington, Democratic voters don't appear excited to participate in Virginia's off-year election — particularly with Trump no longer in office or on the ballot. Trump has endorsed Youngkin, but he has played a low-profile role in the Virginia contest so far.

"I tell Democrats: Donald Trump is desperate for a win here," McAuliffe said. "If Glenn Youngkin wins, it's a win for Donald Trump, and you're going to begin his political comeback."

In the interview, McAuliffe waded into the high-stakes debate over Senate rules that allow the minority party to block legislation that doesn't muster at least 60 votes, a process known as the filibuster. Biden said last week that Democrats are considering a change to the filibuster rules in order to quickly approve lifting the nation's debt limit and avoid what would be a devastating credit default.

On the debt limit, voting rights and the infrastructure package, McAuliffe said Democrats should do "whatever it takes to get it done."

"They got to get their work done. People are counting on them. Do your job. I don't care what you call it or what mechanism you use," he said. "I'm for doing whatever the Senate has to do to pass meaningful

legislation that will move this country forward.”

US to reopen land borders in November for fully vaccinated

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. will reopen its land borders to nonessential travel next month, ending a 19-month freeze due to the COVID-19 pandemic as the country moves to require all international visitors to be vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Vehicle, rail and ferry travel between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico has been largely restricted to essential travel, such as trade, since the earliest days of the pandemic. The new rules, to be announced Wednesday, will allow fully vaccinated foreign nationals to enter the U.S. regardless of the reason for travel starting in early November, when a similar easing of restrictions is set to kick in for air travel into the country. By mid-January, even essential travelers seeking to enter the U.S., like truck drivers, will need to be fully vaccinated.

Senior administration officials previewed the new policy late Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to speak ahead of the formal announcement.

Both Mexico and Canada have pressed the U.S. for months to ease restrictions on travel that have separated families and curtailed leisure trips since the onset of the pandemic. The latest move follows last month's announcement that the U.S. will end country-based travel bans for air travel, and instead require vaccination for foreign nationals seeking to enter by plane.

Both policies will take effect in early November, the officials said. They did not specify a particular date.

The new rules only apply to legal entry to the U.S. Officials cautioned that those seeking to enter illegally will still be subject to expulsion under so-called Title 42 authority, first invoked by former President Donald Trump, that has drawn criticism from immigration advocates for swiftly removing migrants before they can seek asylum. One of the officials said the U.S. was continuing the policy because cramped conditions in border patrol facilities pose a COVID-19 threat.

According to the officials, travelers entering the U.S. by vehicle, rail and ferry will be asked about their vaccination status as part of the standard U.S. Customs and Border Protection admissions process. At officers' discretion, travelers will have their proof of vaccination verified in a secondary screening process.

Unlike air travel, for which proof of a negative COVID-19 test is required before boarding a flight to enter the U.S., no testing will be required to enter the U.S. by land or sea, provided the travelers meet the vaccination requirement.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. will accept travelers who have been fully vaccinated with any of the vaccines approved for emergency use by the World Health Organization, not just those in use in the U.S. That means that the AstraZeneca vaccine, widely used in Canada, will be accepted.

Officials said the CDC was still working to formalize procedures for admitting those who received doses of two different vaccines, as was fairly common in Canada.

The delay in the vaccination requirement for essential cross-border travel is meant to provide truck drivers and others with additional time to get a shot and minimize potential economic disruption from the vaccination mandate, officials said.

All told, the new procedures move toward a policy based on the risk profiles of individuals, rather than less targeted country-based bans.

The vaccination requirement for foreign nationals comes as the White House has moved to impose sweeping vaccination-or-testing requirements affecting as many as 100 million people in the U.S. in an effort to encourage holdouts to get shots.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Labor completed the initial draft of an emergency regulation that will require employers of 100 workers or more to demand their employees be vaccinated against COVID-19 or tested weekly. The Office of Management and Budget is now reviewing the order before its implementation.

Mexico has not put in place any COVID-19 entry procedures for travelers. Canada allows entry of fully-

vaccinated individuals with proof of vaccination against COVID-19 as well as proof of a negative test conducted within 72 hours of entry to the country.

Pilot in deadly California crash repeatedly warned to climb

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

The air traffic controller repeated the warnings to the pilot more than a half-dozen times. Stop drifting, keep on course and a chilling, urgent plea: "Low altitude alert, climb immediately, climb the airplane."

Instead, the twin-engine plane plowed into a San Diego suburb, killing the pilot and a delivery driver on the ground and burning homes. Now, federal investigators must try to figure out what caused the crash that left a shocked and damaged neighborhood.

The Cessna 340 nose-dived and clipped a UPS van in Santee after noon Monday as it was preparing to land at Montgomery-Gibbs Executive Airport in San Diego.

An elderly couple suffered burns when their home went up in flames. Neighbors helped the woman out of a window. Nearly a dozen other homes in the eastern San Diego suburb were damaged.

The plane was owned and piloted by Dr. Sugata Das, a cardiologist who worked in Yuma, Arizona, and commuted to his home in San Diego, according to the website for a non-profit charity group he directed called the Power of Love Foundation.

On a recording made by LiveATC, a website that monitors and posts flight communications, an air traffic controller repeatedly warns Das that he needs to climb in altitude. He also cautioned that a C-130, a large military transport plane, was overhead and could cause turbulence.

Das responded he was aware.

The controller later is heard saying, "It looks like you're drifting right of course, are you correcting?"

"Correcting," Das responds.

Das asks if he has been cleared for the runway. The controller says "I need you to fly," warning him that he is coming in too low.

Das tells him he is climbing. The controller urges him to climb again, and Das says he is ascending.

"Ok. It looks like you're descending sir. I need to make sure you are climbing, not descending," the controller says.

Then the controller speaks with more urgency.

"Low altitude alert, climb immediately, climb the airplane," he says. "Climb the airplane please."

The controller repeatedly urged the plane to climb to 5,000 feet (1,524 meters), and when it remained at 1,500 feet (457 meters), the controller warned: "You appear to be descending again, sir."

There is no response.

An investigator from the NTSB arrived at the crash scene Tuesday morning and will review radar data, weather information, air traffic control communication, airplane maintenance records and the pilot's medical records, agency spokeswoman Jennifer Gabris said.

Al Diehl, a former National Transportation Safety Board investigator, said the recording indicates the pilot was trying to deal with a major distraction or significant emergency on his own — breaking a basic rule that aviators should always tell controllers everything.

"The first thing you do when you're in trouble is call, climb and confess — and he did not do any of the three," Diehl said. "These are very basic rules that flight instructors tell their students."

Diehl, who helped design a Cessna cockpit, said the aircraft has a complex system that could lead to deadly mistakes.

Clouds and windy weather may have complicated Das' ability to handle the aircraft, Diehl said. Investigators also will look at whether there could have been a medical emergency, something an autopsy should help reveal.

Diehl noted the plane at the last minute made a sweeping turn to the right as if trying to switch back to another airport that was closer because something was wrong. Das didn't mention that to air traffic control.

Robert Katz, a certified flight instructor, said he believed Das "was totally disoriented." Katz said the

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clouds were low enough that the pilot had to use an instrument landing system while approaching.

"He does not know which way is up," Katz told CBS8 in San Diego.

Das grew up on the western coast of India and earned a medical degree from the University of Pune. He went to Yuma in 2004 and established a cardiovascular practice, according to the Power of Love Foundation. He leaves a wife and two sons.

UPS driver Steve Krueger, 61, lived in the Ocean Beach neighborhood of Ocean Beach and was on his regular route when he was killed. He planned to retire on Oct. 22, said his brother, Jeffrey Krueger.

He was immensely popular with his customers, the brother said.

"At Christmastime, he really liked sweets and they would always bombard him with stuff," he told KNSD-TV. "They really appreciated him, and he always had fun with them. He was that kind of guy."

"He was very much, you gotta be positive," Jeff Kreuger said. "Things will always get better and don't take life so serious that it gets you down. Have fun with things."

Krueger also liked skiing and other sports. He had bought a home near Mammoth Lakes.

Krueger sent pictures of himself wearing his brown uniform and holding a UPS package while water-skiing and posing with the mammoth mascot for the Mammoth Mountain ski resort, his brother said.

On Tuesday, UPS held a moment of silence of honor of Krueger, and the flag outside a UPS customer service center in San Diego was lowered to half-staff.

"Those who knew Steve said he took pride in his work," said a company statement, "And his positive attitude and joyful laugh made the hardest days a little lighter."

Associated Press writers Elliot Spagat in San Diego and Christopher Weber in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

M-V-Free! Freeman HR sends Braves to NLCS, 5-4 over Brewers

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Freddie Freeman and the Atlanta Braves will get another chance to finish the job they came agonizingly close to achieving a year ago.

It doesn't matter at all that they had fewer wins than any other playoff team.

Freeman hit an improbable, tiebreaking homer off Milwaukee closer Josh Hader with two outs in the eighth inning and the Braves advanced to the NL Championship Series for the second year in a row, finishing off the Brewers 5-4 on Tuesday night.

The Braves won the best-of-five Division Series three games to one, advancing to face either the 107-win San Francisco Giants or the 106-win Los Angeles Dodgers with a trip to the World Series on the line.

"I've had a lot of cool moments in my career," Freeman said. "I think that's gonna top 'em all. Hopefully it's not the last one and I've got a couple more in these playoffs."

The game was tied at 4 when the Brewers brought on Hader to make sure it stayed that way. The hard-throwing lefty struck out Eddie Rosario and Dansby Swanson, but he couldn't get past the 2020 NL MVP.

Freeman caught up with an 84-mph slider, launching a 428-foot drive into the seats in left-center — only the fourth homer all season off Hader, and first since July 28.

Freeman became the first left-hander to homer off Hader since Jason Heyward in 2020.

"The first two guys went down, so I just tried to get a pitch up and he hung a slider and I put a good swing on it," Freeman said. "There was no rhyme or reason to it."

Freeman celebrated wildly on his way around the bases, and popped back out of the dugout for a curtain call as the crowd of 40,195 roared. He became the first player in franchise history to hit a go-ahead home run in the eighth inning or later in a series-clinching win, ESPN Stats & Info said.

"When Freddie hit that ball, I mean, I lost my poise. Everybody in the dugout was going crazy," teammate Ozzie Albies said.

Will Smith pitched a scoreless ninth for his third straight save in the series, getting Christian Yelich to look at strike three with a runner on first for the final out. Tyler Matzek claimed the win with a perfect eighth.

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"Freddie! Freddie! Freddie!" the crowd chanted as the Braves celebrated in the center of the field.

Despite having fewer wins (88) than any other playoff team — and even two teams that didn't make the postseason — the NL East champion Braves are headed back to the NLCS for the second season in a row.

A year ago, manager Brian Snitker's team had a 3-1 series lead, only to lose three straight games to the eventual World Series champion Dodgers.

Atlanta hasn't been to the World Series since 1999, and hasn't won it all since 1995.

But this team, which floundered under .500 until Aug. 6, overcame so much adversity to clinch its fourth straight division title in the final week.

A season-ending injury to star Ronald Acuña Jr. and legal issues that sidelined Marcell Ozuna forced the Braves to acquire a whole new outfield before the trade deadline.

It paid off.

"We've been feeling really good about ourselves in the second half, playing really good baseball," Freeman said. "We carried it over to the postseason."

After the Braves and the Brewers combined for just nine runs through the first 30 innings of the series, the offenses suddenly came to life in the fourth.

The NL Central champ Brewers touched home for the first time since Game 1, getting RBI singles from Omar Narváez and Lorenzo Cain to snap a 22-inning scoreless streak. Narváez's hit also broke an 0-for-20 performance by 95-win Milwaukee with runners in scoring position in the series.

But the Braves bounced back in the bottom half, even though Milwaukee may have caught a huge break on a deflected foul popup that was ruled a catch even though it appeared to hit the dirt. Pinch-hitter Eddie Rosario came through with a two-out, two-run single to center.

Milwaukee surged ahead again in the fifth, this time on Rowdy Tellez's second two-run homer of the series. His first, way back in the seventh inning of Game 1, had produced the Brewers' only runs of the series until Tuesday. This second one off Huascar Ynoa was a massive shot, plopping into the fountain beyond the center-field wall.

Back came the Braves, who put up another two-spot in their half. Joc Pederson drove in one with a forceout and Travis d'Arnaud delivered a two-out single to right to bring home another.

Pitching on three days' rest, Charlie Morton lasted just 3 1/3 innings for the Braves. He surrendered four hits and was charged with Milwaukee's first two runs.

The Brewers decided not to use ace Corbin Burnes, who had gotten the win over Morton in Game 1. He was all set to go in Game 5 in Milwaukee.

Unfortunately for the Brewers, they don't play again until 2022.

"We're all really disappointed," manager Craig Counsell said. "In the end, we had big goals. We didn't quite get there. But we did win 95 games. It's a special group. They did accomplish some special things."

Milwaukee starter Eric Lauer made his first appearance of the series, but didn't get much farther than Morton. He went 3 2/3 innings, also charged with two runs on four hits.

FOLLOW THE BOUNCING BALL

The Braves may have had a bigger inning in the fourth if not for what appeared to be a blown call on Adam Duvall's popup.

Snitker tried to challenge, but the umpires told him that only fly balls and line drives to an outfielder are subject to a video review.

Things really got confusing when the scoreboard proclaimed the call was "Overturned," but that was an error on the operator.

The call stood, even through a replay appeared to show the ball bouncing off Narváez's catcher's mitt and barely striking the dirt just before third baseman Luis Urias grabbed the deflection.

SOLER PULLED

Braves right fielder and leadoff hitter Jorge Soler was removed from the lineup shortly before the game after testing positive for COVID-19.

Outfielder Cristian Pache took Soler's spot on the 26-man roster.

Soler was replaced at the top of the order by Swanson. Pederson, slated to start in left field, shifted to

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right. Guillermo Heredia was inserted in center field, batting eighth, and Duvall switched from center to left. Soler was among the players acquired before the trade deadline as the Braves totally rebuilt their starting outfield. He hit a combined .223 with 27 homers and 70 RBIs with Kansas City and Atlanta during the regular season.

Soler had just one hit in 11 at-bats through the first three games against the Brewers.

UP NEXT

Brewers: Begin the 2022 season at home against the Arizona Diamondbacks on March 31.

Braves: Open the NLCS on Saturday, with Max Fried set to make the start. If the Giants beat the Dodgers, the series would open in San Francisco. If Los Angeles prevails, the first two games would be in Atlanta.

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Altuve, Astros going back to ALCS after routing White Sox

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — It was Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa and Alex Bregman once again.

The Houston Astros are going to the AL Championship Series for the fifth straight year. Their October-tested stars led the way.

Altuve hit a three-run homer and scored four times, and Houston eliminated the Chicago White Sox with a 10-1 victory in Game 4 of their AL Division Series on Tuesday.

"We don't get tired of this moment," Correa said. "They're special, and we perform our best when October comes."

Correa and Bregman each hit a two-run double as the Astros bounced back from Sunday night's 12-6 loss with their usual relentless brand of baseball. Michael Brantley had three hits and two RBIs.

Next up for Altuve and company is Game 1 of the ALCS against former Astros bench coach Alex Cora and the Boston Red Sox on Friday in Houston. The Red Sox eliminated Tampa Bay with a 6-5 victory in Game 4 on Monday night.

"We're playing another good team," Altuve said.

It's Houston's second ALCS under 72-year-old manager Dusty Baker, whose club got the best of 77-year-old Chicago skipper Tony La Russa. Baker replaced A.J. Hinch, who was fired in the fallout from the Astros' 2017 sign-stealing scandal that also resulted in a one-year ban for Cora.

A testy La Russa argued with umpire Tom Hallion after he felt Houston reliever Kendall Graveman hit reigning AL MVP José Abreu intentionally with two out in the eighth. Abreu was plunked 22 times during the regular season.

"There is a character choice there that they should answer for," La Russa said. "Stupid, too.

"I'll be interested to see if they admit it. If they don't admit it, then they're very dishonest."

Baker, who has sparred with La Russa in the past, said his team did not throw at Abreu intentionally.

"There was no reason for us to hit Abreu," Baker said. "He hadn't done anything to us."

Gavin Sheets connected for Chicago, becoming the third rookie in franchise history to homer in a post-season game. But Carlos Rodón was knocked out in the third inning of his first start since Sept. 29, and the AL Central champions left eight runners on base.

The White Sox also lost in the first round of the 2020 playoffs, dropping two of three in Oakland. Before this year, the franchise had never made consecutive postseason appearances.

"It was a fun ride. Ended a little short," Rodón said.

The Astros are looking for the franchise's second championship after winning it all in 2017, a title that still evokes a strong reaction around the game after the team was punished for using electronics to steal signs.

The crowd at Guaranteed Rate Field chanted "Cheater! Cheater!" at times during the two games in Chi-

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cago, and White Sox reliever Ryan Tepera implied late Sunday night that Houston may have been stealing signs in Games 1 and 2.

But the Astros, used to dealing with boos since fans returned to the stands this season, brushed it all off. "We've been constantly bombarded by negatives, especially on the road," Baker said. "But these guys, they come to play and they love each other."

Correa put Houston ahead to stay with his two-out double in the third, pulling Rodón's high 0-2 fastball into left. The Astros loaded the bases on two walks and a fastball that hit Altuve, drawing a round of cheers from the crowd of 40,170.

Correa pointed to his left wrist and then pounded his chest and yelled "It's my time!" as he stood on second after the big hit in his 67th career postseason game.

"You know what time it is, baby. It's October," Correa said after the victory. "So yeah, I was happy with that."

That was it for Rodón, who was limited down the stretch because of shoulder soreness and fatigue. Running his fastball into the upper 90s again after another extended break, the left-hander was charged with two runs and three hits in his first career playoff start.

"He gave us everything he had," La Russa said.

Houston added three more in the fourth for a 5-1 lead. Kyle Tucker singled and swiped second and third — the latter without a throw — before coming home on Martín Maldonado's first hit of the series.

Bregman drove in Maldonado and Altuve with his two-out double on a 3-0 pitch from Garrett Crochet. The left-handed reliever then struck out the lefty-batting Yordan Alvarez, ending the inning.

The big hits by Correa and Bregman supplied more than enough offense for Lance McCullers Jr., who departed with right forearm tightness after four effective innings. Yimi García got three outs for the win.

McCullers also pitched 6 2/3 scoreless innings in Houston's 6-1 victory in Game 1 on Thursday. If he can't go in the ALCS, it would be a big blow for the Astros.

"I don't think it has anything to do with my ligament," he said. "We'll have to just wait and see how I feel tomorrow and if we're going to get any imaging done, things like that."

Altuve punctuated Houston's big day with his 19th career postseason homer, a three-run shot off All-Star closer Liam Hendriks in the ninth.

"We've been here five times," Altuve said. "And we just try to pass it on to the guys who are getting here for the first time."

Sheets' drive in the second bounced off the top of the wall and over. Astros center fielder Jake Meyers crashed into the wall trying to make a leaping grab, and then departed with left shoulder discomfort.

The White Sox lost their center fielder when Luis Robert left with right leg tightness before the Astros batted in the seventh.

Jay Cohen can be reached at <https://twitter.com/jcohenap>

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

3 employees killed in shooting at postal facility in Memphis

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Two U.S. Postal Service workers were fatally shot Tuesday at a postal facility in Memphis and a third employee identified as the shooter died from a self-inflicted gunshot, authorities said. It was the third high-profile shooting in or near that west Tennessee city in weeks.

U.S. Postal Inspector Susan Link said the three postal workers were found dead after the shooting at the East Lamar Carrier Annex in a prominent Memphis neighborhood. FBI spokeswoman Lisa-Anne Culp said the shooting was carried out by a third postal service worker, who shot him or herself.

No identities or motive were released by Link or Culp at a brief news conference late Tuesday afternoon.

The shooting occurred at a post office facility in the historic Orange Mound neighborhood, southeast of

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downtown Memphis. The carrier annex is only used by employees.

The street leading to the complex was blocked by police Tuesday afternoon following the shooting, and the FBI, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and other federal authorities went to investigate. Bystanders watching the police activity talked near a convenience store at an intersection. Nearby, officers had blocked the street with yellow crime scene tape and barricades. Some cars slowed down as they drove past police and reporters.

A white four-door car was towed from the scene, but it was not clear who it belonged to.

"The Postal Service is saddened at the events that took place today in Memphis," USPS said in a statement. "Our thoughts are with the family members, friends and coworkers of the individuals involved. The Postal Service will be providing resources to all employees at the East Lamar Carrier Annex in the coming days and weeks."

The violence follows other shootings in the Memphis area in recent weeks. The franchise owner of a sushi counter inside a Kroger grocery store in the suburb of Collierville fatally shot one person and wounded 14 others before killing himself on Sept. 23, investigators said. A week later, a teenage boy was shot and critically wounded inside a Memphis school and police detained a second boy believed to be the shooter.

U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, a Memphis Democrat, called the post office "the latest site of gun violence" in the Memphis area.

"Today's shooting at the postal facility in Orange Mound is yet another example of why I am concerned that too many guns are out there and in possession of people who aren't able to control their anger," Cohen said in a statement. "I express my profound condolences to all those affected by this terrible event."

Tuesday's incident comes 11 years after another fatal post office shooting in West Tennessee. On Oct. 18, 2010, two mail workers were fatally shot during a robbery at a post office in the rural town of Henning, located about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of Memphis. That post office was named in honor of slain employees Paula Robinson and Judy Spray last week.

House sends debt limit hike to Biden, staving off default

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Members of the House on Tuesday pushed through a short-term increase to the nation's debt limit, ensuring the federal government can continue fully paying its bills into December and temporarily averting an unprecedented default that would have decimated the economy.

The \$480 billion increase in the country's borrowing ceiling cleared the Senate last week on a party-line vote. The House approved it swiftly so President Joe Biden can sign it into law this week. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had warned that steps to stave off a default on the country's debts would be exhausted by Monday, and from that point, the department would soon be unable to fully meet the government's financial obligations.

A default would have immense fallout on global financial markets built upon the bedrock safety of U.S. government debt. Routine government payments to Social Security beneficiaries, disabled veterans and active-duty military personnel would also be called into question.

The relief provided by passage of the legislation will only be temporary though, forcing Congress to revisit the issue in December — a time when lawmakers will also be laboring to complete federal spending bills and avoid a damaging government shutdown. The yearend backlog raises risks for both parties and threatens a tumultuous close to Biden's first year in office.

"I'm glad that this at least allows us to prevent a totally self-made and utterly preventable economic catastrophe as we work on a longer-term plan," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.

Republicans signaled the next debt limit debate won't be any easier and warned Democrats not to expect their help.

"Unless and until Democrats give up on their dream of a big-government, socialist America, Republicans cannot and will not support raising the debt limit and help them pave the superhighway to a great entitlement society," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

Procedurally, the House took a single vote Tuesday that had the effect of passing the Senate bill. The

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measure passed by a party-line vote of 219-206.

The present standoff over the debt ceiling eased when Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., agreed to help pass the short-term increase. But he insists he won't do so again.

In a letter sent Friday to Biden, McConnell said Democrats will have to handle the next debt-limit increase on their own using the same process they have tried to use to pass Biden's massive social spending and environment plan. Reconciliation allows legislation to pass the Senate with 51 votes rather than the 60 that's typically required. In the 50-50 split Senate, Vice President Kamala Harris gives Democrats the majority with her tiebreaking vote.

Lawmakers from both parties have used the debt ceiling votes as leverage for other priorities. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi threatened to vote against raising the debt ceiling when President Donald Trump was in office, saying she had no intention of supporting lifting the debt ceiling to enable Republicans to give another tax break to the rich. And Republicans in 2011 managed to coerce President Barack Obama into accepting about \$2 trillion in deficit cuts as a condition for increasing the debt limit — though lawmakers later rolled back some of those cuts.

Pelosi told reporters Tuesday that over the years Republicans and Democrats have voted against lifting the debt ceiling, "but never to the extent of jeopardizing it."

Pelosi offered her hope that Congress would lift the debt ceiling in a bipartisan way this December because of the stakes involved. But she also floated a bill sponsored by Rep. Brendan Boyle, D-Pa., that would transfer the duty of raising the debt limit away from Congress and vest it with the Treasury secretary, saying, "I think it has merit."

In his focus on the debt limit, McConnell has tried to link Biden's big federal government spending boost with the nation's rising debt load, even though they are separate and the debt ceiling will have to be increased or suspended regardless of whether Biden's \$3.5 trillion plan makes it into law.

"Your lieutenants on Capitol Hill now have the time they claimed they lacked to address the debt ceiling through standalone reconciliation, and all the tools to do it," McConnell said in a letter to the president. "They cannot invent another crisis and ask for my help."

McConnell was one of 11 Republicans who sided with Democrats to advance the debt ceiling reprieve to a final vote. Subsequently, McConnell and his GOP colleagues voted against final passage.

The debate over the debt ceiling has at times gotten personal. McConnell last week suggested that Democrats were playing "Russian roulette" with the economy because they had not dealt with the debt ceiling through the process he had insisted upon. He called out Pelosi for traveling to Europe last week.

"I can only presume she hopes the full faith and credit of the United States will get sorted out," McConnell said.

Pelosi did not let the shot pass. "Russian roulette from Moscow Mitch. Interesting," she said.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said Tuesday's vote marked the 50th time dating back to President Ronald Reagan that he has voted on extending the debt limit.

"Nobody has clean hands when it comes to the debt limit," he said.

Because the Senate bill only allowed for a stopgap extension, Hoyer called it a "lousy deal."

"And then we're going to play this game one more time, a despicable and irresponsible act for adults who know better," Hoyer said.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said he wanted to "thank" Hoyer for sharing that he had previously voted for raising the debt ceiling 49 times.

"When he came into this body, the debt was about a trillion dollars," Roy said. "Thank you, I guess, on behalf of the people of America who are staring at 28-and-a-half trillion dollars of debt."

The current debt ceiling is \$28.4 trillion. Both parties have contributed to that load with decisions that have left the government rarely operating in the black.

The calamitous ramifications of default are why lawmakers have been able to reach a compromise to lift or suspend the debt cap some 18 times since 2002, often after frequent rounds of brinkmanship.

Texas order reflects growing GOP vaccine mandates hostility

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — With the governor of Texas leading the charge, conservative Republicans in several states are moving to block or undercut President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandates for private employers before the regulations are even issued.

The growing battle over what some see as overreach by the federal government is firing up a segment of the Republican Party base, even though many large employers have already decided on their own to require their workers to get the shot.

The dustup will almost certainly end up in court since GOP attorneys general in nearly half of the states have vowed to sue once the rule is unveiled.

The courts have long upheld vaccine mandates, and the Constitution gives the federal government the upper hand over the states, but with the details still unannounced and more conservative judges on the bench, the outcome isn't entirely clear.

On Monday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order barring private companies or any other entity from requiring vaccines. It was perhaps the most direct challenge yet to Biden's announcement a month ago that workers at private companies with more than 100 employees would have to get vaccinated or tested weekly for the coronavirus.

"No entity in Texas can compel receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine by any individual ... who objects to such vaccination," Abbott wrote in his order.

White House officials brushed off Abbott's order, saying the question of whether state law could supersede federal was settled 160 years ago during the Civil War. They said the Biden administration will push through the opposition and put the private workplace mandate into effect along with others it ordered for federal contractors and employees at health care facilities that receive Medicare or Medicaid reimbursements. All told, those mandates could affect up to 100 million Americans.

Noting the nation's COVID-19 death toll of more than 700,000, White House press secretary Jen Psaki accused the opposition of putting politics ahead of safety.

"I think it's pretty clear when you make a choice that's against all public health information and data out there, that it's not based on what is in the interests of the people you are governing. It is perhaps in the interest of your own politics," she said.

Several large companies in Texas have already implemented their own vaccine mandates, and two Texas-based airlines, Southwest and American, indicated Tuesday they would follow the order of the Biden administration, saying federal action supersedes any state mandate or law.

Elsewhere, lawmakers in Arkansas have approved a measure creating vaccine-mandate exemptions. Though the GOP governor hasn't said whether he will sign it, it has prompted fears that businesses will be forced to choose whether to break federal or state law.

"We are tying the hands of Arkansas businesses that want to make their own decision in how best to keep their people safe," said Randy Zook, president of the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce. Some of the state's largest companies, including Walmart and Tyson Foods, have required some or all employees to get vaccinated.

Calls for special legislative sessions to counter vaccine mandates have been heard in states such as Wyoming, Kansas and South Dakota, where Republican Gov. Kristi Noem is so far resisting calls to immediately consider a bill that would guarantee people could opt out.

"I hear from people almost daily who are going to lose their jobs, are living in fear," said Republican state Rep. Scott Odenbach, who has clashed with Noem on the issue. "They shouldn't have to choose between feeding their family and their own medical freedom."

In Tennessee, Republican lawmakers pushing GOP Gov. Bill Lee to consider further loosening COVID-19 restrictions, including vaccine requirements, could undermine a \$500 million incentive deal to lure a Ford Motor Co. project, the House speaker told a local radio station.

In Indiana, Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb is also resisting a push from within his party to ban workplace

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vaccine mandates.

Bills are being introduced or drafted elsewhere, too, including Ohio and New Hampshire, where the Republican sponsor was elected House speaker after his predecessor died of COVID-19.

"We have made it clear that government mandates are not the path to successful vaccination rates and will only cause further division in this country," Speaker Sherm Packard said last month.

In Utah, lawmakers have not taken action, but a crowd of over 600 people packed a legislative hearing room last week.

Rob Moore, CEO of Salt Lake City-based Big-D Construction, said he supports vaccines but has questions about the mandate rollout. He already has a worker shortage on his job sites, and he said employee surveys tell him that nearly 20% of his workers don't want to get inoculated, so they would need to be tested weekly.

"That's heavy on our mind right now. I don't know if the federal government has thought through that all that well. The cost is going to be enormous," he said.

In other sectors, vaccine requirements have gone smoothly. In Utah, the NBA's Jazz is making its employees get vaccinated. It is also requiring fans at games to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test. So far, just a few ticket refunds have been needed, and the season opener is expected to be sold out by next week, said Jazz spokesman Frank Zang.

"I think there's understanding of what's at stake here, in terms of having a safe environment for people to enjoy sports and concerts and shows again," he said.

COVID-19 vaccinations have been given to more than 200 million Americans, and serious side effects have proved extremely rare. Experts say any risk from the vaccine is far lower than the danger posed by COVID-19.

Recent polling shows about half of Americans favor requiring workers in large companies to get vaccinated or tested weekly. But people are split based on their political party, with about 6 in 10 Republicans opposing the mandate for employees, according to the survey by The Associated Press and NORC-Center for Public Affairs Research.

Montana is the only state so far to pass a law banning private employers from requiring vaccines. The measure includes penalties for business owners of a \$500 fine or prison. It is facing two court challenges, from the Montana Medical Association and from a law firm that says the rule interferes with businesses' decisions about how to provide a safe working environment.

As judges weigh some of these cases, much will depend on exactly how the nationwide rule is written. It will be drafted as a temporary emergency rule by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which has broad power to regulate the workplace.

"They will have to frame it in a way that makes a case this is workplace-related and not just an attempt to raise vaccination rates in the United States more broadly," said Dorit Rubinstein Reiss, a professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. "I expect the main benefit to the mandate will be that it gives cover to companies that already want to do that."

Associated Press writers Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Stephen Groves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; David Koenig in Dallas; Zeke Miller in Washington; Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire; Iris Samuels in Helena, Montana; and others around the country contributed to this report.

FDA authorizes first e-cigarette, cites benefit for smokers

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time, the Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday authorized an electronic cigarette, saying the vaping device from R.J. Reynolds can help smokers cut back on conventional cigarettes.

E-cigarettes have been sold in the U.S. for more than a decade with minimal government oversight or

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research. Facing a court deadline, the FDA has been conducting a sweeping review of vaping products to determine which ones should be allowed to remain on the market.

The agency said in September it had rejected applications for more than a million e-cigarettes and related products, mainly due to their potential appeal to underage teens. But regulators delayed making decisions on most of the major vaping companies, including market leader Juul, which is still pending.

Tuesday's decision only applies to Vuse's Solo e-cigarette and its tobacco-flavored nicotine cartridges. The agency said data from the company showed the e-cigarette helped smokers significantly reduce their exposure to the harmful chemicals in traditional cigarettes.

While the products can now be legally sold in the U.S., the FDA stressed they are neither safe nor "FDA approved," and that people who don't smoke shouldn't use them.

Launched in 2013, Vuse Solo is a rechargeable metallic device that's shaped like a traditional cigarette. The FDA said it rejected 10 other requests from the company for other flavored products. The agency is still reviewing the company's request to sell a menthol-flavored nicotine formula.

"Today's authorizations are an important step toward ensuring all new tobacco products undergo the FDA's robust, scientific premarket evaluation," said Mitch Zeller, director of the FDA's tobacco center, in a statement.

"The manufacturer's data demonstrates its tobacco-flavored products could benefit addicted adult smokers who switch to these products – either completely or with a significant reduction in cigarette consumption."

E-cigarettes first appeared in the U.S. around 2007 with the promise of providing smokers with a less harmful alternative to smoking traditional tobacco cigarettes. The devices heat a nicotine solution into a vapor that's inhaled.

But there has been little rigorous study of whether e-cigarettes truly help smokers quit. And efforts by the FDA to begin vetting vaping products and their claims were repeatedly slowed by industry lobbying and competing political interests.

In recent years, the vaping market grew to include hundreds of companies selling an array of devices and nicotine solutions in various flavors and strengths. But the vast majority of the market is controlled by a few companies including Juul Labs, which is partially owned by Altria, and Vuse.

Vuse is the No. 2 vaping brand in the U.S. behind Juul, accounting for about a third of all retail sales. Its parent company R.J. Reynolds sells Newport, Camel and other leading cigarettes.

A company spokesperson said in a statement that the FDA decision confirms "that Vuse Solo products are appropriate for the protection of the public health, underscoring years of scientific study and research."

The company said it is still awaiting an FDA decision on its more popular vaping device, Vuse Alto.

To stay on the market, companies must show that their products benefit public health. In practice, that means proving that adult smokers who use the products are likely to quit or reduce their smoking, while teens are unlikely to get hooked on them.

Kenneth Warner, a tobacco expert at the University of Michigan's school of public health, said the news was a positive step for reducing the harms of smoking. But he lamented that only a vaping device backed by a Big Tobacco company was able to win the FDA's endorsement.

"The demands the FDA places on companies filing these applications are so extraordinary difficult to meet that only those with huge resources and personnel — in terms of scientists, lawyers, researchers — are able to file successfully," said Warner.

He said smaller companies and vape shops should have a separate path to get their products authorized.

The FDA declared underage vaping an "epidemic" in 2018 and has taken a series of measures aimed at the small cartridge-based devices that first sparked the problem, including limiting their flavors to tobacco and menthol. Separately, Congress raised the purchase age for all tobacco and vaping products to 21.

Survey data collected earlier this year showed Vuse was the second-most popular e-cigarette brand among high schoolers who vape, preferred by 10%. Juul was the fourth-most popular e-cigarette, cited by less than 6%.

FDA said it was aware of the data on Vuse's popularity but decided to authorize its tobacco flavor "be-

cause these products are less appealing to youth and authorizing these products may be beneficial" for adult smokers.

The most popular brand among teens was a disposable e-cigarette called Puff Bar that comes in flavors like pink lemonade, strawberry and mango. Disposable e-cigarettes are not subject to the tight flavor restrictions of products like Juul.

Overall, the survey showed a drop of nearly 40% in the teen vaping rate as many kids were forced to learn from home during the pandemic. Still, federal officials cautioned about interpreting the results because they were collected online for the first time, instead of in classrooms.

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To oldly go: Shatner, 90, inspires with real-life space trip

By CODY JACKSON and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

VAN HORN, Texas (AP) — As William Shatner prepares to be beamed up Wednesday for his first real-life spaceflight, and to become at 90 the oldest person ever to enter the final frontier, he's bringing out the awe in the small handful of people around a rural Texas spaceport.

Shatner's 10-minute trip with three others on the second passenger flight from Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin will be more like the first space launches of the 1960s than the fictional galactic voyages of the Starship Enterprise on "Star Trek," but the very idea of him leaving the atmosphere is powerful.

"It's time Captain Kirk actually physically got up into space. I'm kind of excited about that," said Becky Brewster, mayor of Van Horn, a rural town of about 1,800 people on what was once desolate desert ranchland in far West Texas that has been transformed by the presence of the Blue Origin spaceport facilities 25 miles away.

The mayor, a lifelong "Star Trek" fan, said she was disappointed she wasn't invited to the launch site but is savoring the moment anyway. She's planning to watch from her backyard with the livestream playing.

"He and Mr. Spock were the ones that got me interested in space and science fiction and everything else," Brewster said. "So, from junior high age up to now where William Shatner is actually in our town fixing to go up into space. You know, it's kind of like the whole circle now for me."

Beyond his celebrity identity, Shatner being space-bound at his age is a kick for close observers.

Joseph Barra, who works as a bartender for a Los Angeles catering company, heard only that he was getting an unusual gig at a remote Texas launch site.

"I'm like stop. You had me at space. Had no clue what else," Barra said. "And then all I heard was their gonna send some 90-year-old man into space. And I'm like, Dang, that sounds intense. Like, I wonder who that is. Then you get in site and I'm like, Oh, it's William Shatner."

Barra said the experience of serving drinks to Shatner and his crew mates has been surreal and then some.

"We're seeing that the man who in a sense like made space popular or made or gave everybody dreams of going to space," Barra said. "Now he's the one going to space and he's the one setting the bar. It's inspiring. Some like here, this man is 90 years old, proving that no matter how old you are, you still have more to do and accomplish on this Earth, and you can still give people an inspiration and a source and something to aspire to."

Barra said he heard Shatner say he plans to just gaze out the window at Earth during his minutes of weightlessness.

But he has a bit more planned apparently.

A Twitter user asked Shatner, an avid tweeter, on Tuesday whether he will post from space.

"I cannot bring my phone but I've prearranged a little something," Shatner replied with a wink emoji.

Earlier in the week he tweeted a photo of himself and his fellow crew members in blue flight suits that are far more futuristic than the yellow leotard-style uniform he wore on the original "Star Trek."

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"Aren't we all adorbs!" Shatner said.

Bezos, who was on Blue Origin's debut flight in July, is also a big "Star Trek" fan, and invited Shatner to take the flight as a guest.

He'll join three others — two of them paying customers in the burgeoning business of space tourism — aboard a Blue Origin capsule.

The fully automated flight, delayed by a day due to weather, will take them no higher than about 66 miles (106 kilometers). The capsule will parachute back to the desert floor, not far from where it took off.

Shatner plans to get right back to his work as Captain Kirk once he's back down to Earth.

"I'm doing Space, then Indiana Comic Con, & then on Sunday Wizard World Chicago," he tweeted.

Dalton reported from Los Angeles.

Fewer in US turn to food banks, but millions still in need

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hunger and food insecurity across the United States have dropped measurably over the past six months, but the need remains far above pre-pandemic levels. And specialists in hunger issues warn that the situation for millions of families remains extremely fragile.

An Associated Press review of bulk distribution numbers from hundreds of food banks across the country revealed a clear downward trend in the amount of food handed out across the country, starting in the spring as the COVID-19 vaccine rollout took hold and closed sectors of the economy began to reopen.

"It's come down, but it's still elevated," said Katie Fitzgerald, COO of Feeding America, a nonprofit organization that coordinates the efforts of more than 200 food banks across the country and that provided the AP with the national distribution numbers. She warned that despite the recent decreases, the amount of food being distributed by Feeding America's partner food banks remained more than 55% above pre-pandemic levels. "We're worried (food insecurity) could increase all over again if too many shoes drop," she said.

Those potential setbacks include the advance of the delta variant of the coronavirus, which has already delayed planned returns to the office for millions of employees and which could threaten school closures and other shutdowns as the nation enters the winter flu season. Other obstacles include the gradual expiration of several COVID-19-specific protections such as the eviction moratorium and expanded unemployment benefits.

All told, families facing food insecurity find themselves still dependent on outside assistance and extremely vulnerable to unforeseen difficulties.

"There are people going back to work, but it's slow going and God forbid you should need a car repair or something," said Carmen Cumberland, president of Community Harvest Food Bank in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Nationally, the food banks that work with Feeding America saw a 31% increase in the amount of food distributed in the first quarter of 2021 compared with the first quarter of 2020, just before the global pandemic reached America.

When the nationwide closures of offices and schools began in March 2020, the impact was immediate. Feeding America-affiliated food banks distributed 1.1 billion pounds of food in the first quarter on 2020; in the second quarter, the number jumped 42% to more than 1.6 billion pounds. The third quarter saw a smaller 5% increase up to nearly 1.7 billion pounds of food. While distributions declined from the end of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021, recent data suggests that the decline has leveled off.

The national data is mirrored in the experiences of individual food banks across the country. At the Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland, California, the level of community need spiked in winter and early spring of this year. In February 2021, the organization set a record with 5 million pounds of food distributed. That record stood for one month as March 2021 saw 6 million pounds distributed.

After the March peak, the numbers started dropping steadily — down to 4.6 million pounds in August 2021. But that's still compared with 2.7 million pounds in June 2019.

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"The recovery is going to be very, very long and steep for families who are typically reliant on food banks," said Michael Altfest, the food bank's director of community engagement. Altfest said the coronavirus pandemic was an additional trauma for families already suffering from food insecurity, and it introduced a whole new category of client who had never used food banks before but had been pushed over the financial edge by the pandemic. Both categories are projected to remain in need of assistance well into next year.

"Things are not getting any easier here for low- and moderate-income households, and we don't expect it to for a while," Altfest said.

Among those newcomers to the food bank system is Ranada James. The 47-year-old child care professional had received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits in the past but never dealt with a food bank before the pandemic. On a recent overcast Wednesday, James was one of a few dozen people lining up in their cars for a weekly drive-through food pantry operated by a local charity called The Arc in southeast Washington, D.C., the poorest and most virus-ravaged part of the city. Volunteers loaded her backseat with pre-prepared hot meals, lunch sacks, fresh vegetables from The Arc's garden and sealed boxes of durable goods.

"I never thought I would need it," she said. "It helped tremendously, and it still really helps."

Even as the situation slowly improves, James finds herself in need. She has two grandchildren and two nieces living with her, and she's keeping them from attending in-person school out of fear of the pandemic — which means she can't go back to work.

"They really do eat," she said with a laugh, adding that broccoli and fresh string beans were household favorites. "They're growing, and they're picky."

Other food banks across the country are reporting similar trends: a gradual decrease this year, starting in about April, but still far higher than any pre-pandemic numbers. At the Central California Food Bank in Fresno, the numbers have "leveled off" in recent months but remain 25% higher than in 2019, said the food bank's co-CEO, Kym Dildine.

"Many people are still out of work, particularly women, who are the primary caregivers in the home," she said.

At the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, D.C., the amount of food distributed in July 2021 was 64% higher than in the same month in 2019.

"COVID isn't over by any means," said the food bank's president, Radha Muthiah. "We're still seeing existing need."

Just how long the elevated level of need will last is a matter of debate, with the most conservative estimates projecting it will last well into next summer. Some are predicting that the country's food banks may never return to normal.

Parallel government food assistance programs like SNAP benefits, commonly known as food stamps, also saw a pandemic-fueled spike in usage. The Department of Agriculture, which administers SNAP, reports that the number of SNAP users increased by 7 million between 2019 and 2021. In August, President Joe Biden instituted a permanent 25% boost in SNAP benefits, starting this month.

But the SNAP program doesn't come close to covering every family in need. Muthiah said many of the clients who depend on food banks for their nutrition are either ineligible for SNAP benefits, intimidated by the bureaucratic paperwork or fearful of applying due to their immigration status. That leaves food banks as the primary source of aid for millions of hungry people.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack told the AP that at the peak of the pandemic, 14% of American adults were receiving SNAP benefits. That number is now down around 8%, but the need remains highly elevated, and nonprofit charitable options like food banks serve a vital role in papering over the remaining holes in millions of family budgets, he said.

"We just need to understand what this pandemic has done in terms of significant disruption of what was probably a pretty fragile system to begin with," said Vilsack, who also filled the same Cabinet post under former President Barack Obama. "It has exposed the fragility of the system, which makes programs like SNAP, programs like summer feeding programs, school feeding programs, food bank assistance ever

more important.”

Vilsack said the Biden administration has moved to strengthen the national food bank infrastructure by devoting \$1 billion in June to help fund refrigerated trucks and warehouses that will allow food banks to store and provide more fresh fruits, vegetables and dairy products.

Now the country's food bank network is busy trying to project the level of need going forward, factoring in multiple influences — positive and negative. Theoretically, the boosted Child Tax Credit payments, which started in July, are meant to alleviate the monthly burden for lower-income and middle-class families by providing money to use as the families see fit. But food bank executives and researchers estimate that it could take six to 12 months to see a real impact on food security as families initially devote those funds to issues like rent or car repairs.

And the end of the nationwide eviction moratorium looms as a major pressure point that could push vulnerable families back into crisis.

The Biden administration allowed the federal moratorium to expire in late August, and Congress did not extend it. While the federal government now focuses on pumping money into rental assistance programs, the national moratorium has devolved into a patchwork of localized moratoriums, in places like Washington, D.C., Boston and New York state — all expiring on different schedules.

At the southeast Washington drive-through food pantry, volunteers there have developed friendships with some of the regulars, including Rob and Devereaux Simms. A retired bus driver and a school aide, both in their 70s, they consider themselves solidly middle class and had never used food stamps. But when the pandemic hit and two of their children were laid off, “things started running short,” Devereaux Simms said.

Now, with three grandchildren living at home, they're fixtures at the Wednesday drive-through. They even make a point of taking home extra supply boxes to distribute to needy neighbors and recently took small gifts for the volunteers.

“God's been good to us,” Devereaux Simms said, “and you should never be too proud to accept help.”

Associated Press writer Michael Casey in Boston and data journalist Camille Fassett in Oakland, California, contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to fix Katie Fitzgerald's job title from CEO to COO.

Slain reporter's father takes on Facebook over violent video

By MATT O'BRIEN and MARCY GORDON AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The family of a slain journalist is asking the Federal Trade Commission to take action against Facebook for failing to remove online footage of her shooting death.

Andy Parker said Tuesday the company is violating its own terms of service in hosting videos on Facebook and its sibling service Instagram that glorify violence.

His daughter, TV news reporter Alison Parker, and cameraman Adam Ward, were killed by a former co-worker while reporting for Roanoke, Virginia's WDBJ-TV in August 2015. Video footage of the shooting — some of which was taken by the gunman — repeatedly resurfaces on Facebook and Instagram despite assurances from top executives that it will be removed, says a complaint filed Tuesday by Parker and attorneys with the Georgetown Law Civil Rights Clinic.

“The reality is that Facebook and Instagram put the onus on victims and their families to do the policing of graphic content — requiring them to relive their worst moments over and over to curb the proliferation of these videos,” says the complaint.

The complaint says Facebook is engaging in deceptive trade practices by violating its own terms of service and misrepresenting the safety of the platform and how hard it is for users to get harmful and traumatic content removed.

Facebook, which is based in Menlo Park, California, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

Andy Parker said during a news conference announcing the FTC complaint that he also wants to see ac-

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tion from Congress. That echoed some of the calls made last week by whistleblower and former Facebook employee Frances Haugen, who has accused the company of harming children, inciting political violence and fueling misinformation.

"Alison's murder, shared on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, is just one of the egregious practices that are undermining the fabric of our society," Parker said.

Parker said he agreed with Haugen on the need for Congress to impose new curbs on the long-standing legal protections for speech posted on social media platforms.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers have called for stripping away some of the protections granted by a 25-year-old law — in a provision known as Section 230 — that shields internet companies from liability for what users post. In her Senate testimony last week, Haugen urged lawmakers to remove the protections in cases where dominant content driven by computer algorithms favors massive engagement by users over public safety.

Parker previously worked with the Georgetown law clinic to file a similar FTC complaint last year against Google and its YouTube service. The FTC declined to comment on the latest filing and doesn't typically disclose whether or not it has decided to investigate a complaint. Parker said he hoped that Lina Khan, the new head of the FTC appointed by President Joe Biden, would take the complaints more seriously.

But Eric Goldman, a law professor at Santa Clara University and co-director of its High Tech Law Institute, said he sees problems with the case that Parker is making by alleging violations of Facebook's terms of service. The social media platforms' terms of service don't provide a solid promise that everything on their sites will meet the standards, he said, and in fact they include caveats that, "We can't do a perfect job."

The FTC is legally able to ignore complaints filed by non-government parties, Goldman noted. As a result, such complaints "are often just for show," he said.

In this case, Parker used the platform of announcing the complaint to appeal to Congress to curb the liability protections for social media under Section 230.

Peter Romer-Friedman, an attorney who has brought several cases against Facebook, said the deceptive trade practices and false promises of online safety alleged in Parker's complaint "are viable claims."

"The FTC has broad authority to investigate and prosecute deceptive practices," said Romer-Friedman, who heads the civil rights and class-actions practice at law firm Gupta Wessler in Washington.

Attorneys and advocates working with Parker, who said he's never watched the videos of his daughter's killing, detailed on Tuesday the extent to which they've tried to take those videos down, including appeals to Facebook's chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg.

Advocates for the Coalition for a Safer Web said they created their own software with the ability to find the videos, but some of the videos reported to Facebook earlier this month were still up just before the group filed its FTC complaint.

"Facebook wants the public to self-police. They want you to report, they want me to report. They want me to watch the videos and report them," Parker said. "And even when you do report it, they ignore you."

O'Brien reported from Providence, Rhode Island.

Coroner: Gabby Petito strangled 3-4 weeks before body found

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Cross-country traveler Gabby Petito was strangled, a Wyoming coroner announced Tuesday.

Petito, 22, died three to four weeks before her body was found Sept. 19 near an undeveloped camping area along the border of Grand Teton National Park in remote northern Wyoming, Teton County Coroner Dr. Brent Blue said in a news conference.

It wasn't clear if the determination might lead to additional charges against Petito's boyfriend and traveling partner, Brian Laundrie, who is considered a person of interest in her disappearance and remains unaccounted for.

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Blue declined to say more about the autopsy or the case overall, saying he was prevented by Wyoming law that limits what coroners can release.

Petito had been on a cross-country trip with Laundry, visiting Colorado, Utah and other states. She was reported missing Sept. 11 by her parents after she did not respond to calls and texts for several days while the couple visited national parks in the West.

Blue previously classified Petito's death as a homicide — meaning her death was caused by another person — but had not disclosed how she was killed pending further autopsy results.

A "detailed analysis" led to his conclusion Petito was strangled, Blue said.

"Nothing is obvious in a case like this," he said.

Blue said little more about Petito's physical condition — including whether she may have been strangled directly by somebody's hands, a rope or some other item — but noted when asked that she wasn't pregnant.

The three to four weeks her body was believed to be in the wilderness, however, put her death around the Aug. 27-30 period investigators believe Petito and Laundry had traveled to the area.

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

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

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

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

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

Asked about the coroner's determination, the attorney for the Laundry family, Steven Bertolino, in a statement noted his client only faces the fraud charge in the case.

"At this time Brian is still missing and when he is located we will address the fraud charge pending against him," Bertolino said.

In Florida, FBI-led search teams have been looking in a vast nature preserve for any sign of Laundry. Weeks of searching in the swampy Carlton Reserve south of Sarasota — where Laundry's parents say he went after returning home from the West — have turned up nothing.

This story has been updated to correct that Petito's first name is Gabby, not Gaby.

Federal immigration agents to end practice of worksite raids

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Federal immigration agents will end mass workplace arrests of immigrant employees suspected of living in the U.S. without legal permission, according to a memo issued Tuesday by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Instead, the focus will shift to pursuing "unscrupulous employers who exploit the vulnerability of undocumented workers" and emphasize fighting worker abuse including paying substandard wages, unsafe working conditions and human trafficking.

The three-page memo directs the heads of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection and Citizenship and Immigration Services to draw up a plan within two months to increase employer penalties, encourage workers to report unscrupulous practices without fear and coordinate with

other agencies, such as the Department of Labor.

Mass worksite raids were common under former President Donald Trump, including a 2019 operation targeting Mississippi chicken plants, the largest such operation in over a decade. Trump and other Republican presidents defended raids as strong deterrents against illegal immigration, while workers groups called them unfair and discriminatory. For instance, most of the 680 workers arrested at chicken plants run by companies including Illinois-based Koch Foods were Latino.

Tuesday's move away from raids more closely resembles the approach by former President Barack Obama, who largely avoided such operations, limiting workplace immigration efforts to low-profile audits.

"The deployment of mass worksite operations, sometimes resulting in the simultaneous arrest of hundreds of workers, was not focused on the most pernicious aspect of our country's unauthorized employment challenge: exploitative employers," Mayorkas wrote. "These highly visible operations misallocated enforcement resources while chilling, and even serving as a tool of retaliation for, worker cooperation in workplace standards investigations."

Along with ending mass worksite arrests, Mayorkas said immigration authorities should also immediately start using "prosecutorial discretion" when it comes to encouraging workers to speak up about workplace exploitation and preventing employers from using retaliatory threats of deportation.

Workers rights groups applauded the move, saying immigrant workers, particularly those without legal permission to live in the U.S., are especially vulnerable. Industries such as meatpacking and chicken processing are particularly reliant on immigrant labor for backbreaking work often set in rural areas with limited access to attorneys.

During the initial weeks of the pandemic, Trump ordered meatpacking plants to remain open amid concerns about the nation's food supply, even as COVID-19 outbreaks were closing plants.

"It is long past time for DHS to stop enabling employers who use the threat of deportation as a tool to facilitate exploitation and evade accountability," Nadia Marin-Molina an executive director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network said in a statement. "Immigrant workers kept the lights on in this country during a pandemic, and they were essentially told by the government they should work to death without basic rights so that others could live."

Large immigration raids were also common under former President George W. Bush, including in 2006 when immigration agents swept Swift & Co. plants, netting about 1,300 immigrant worker arrests. It was the largest single-worksite raid in U.S. history.

Follow Tareen on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sophiatareen>.

Advice shifting on aspirin use for preventing heart attacks

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

Older adults without heart disease shouldn't take daily low-dose aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke, an influential health guidelines group said in preliminary updated advice released Tuesday.

Bleeding risks for adults in their 60s and up who haven't had a heart attack or stroke outweigh any potential benefits from aspirin, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force said in its draft guidance.

For the first time, the panel said there may be a small benefit for adults in their 40s who have no bleeding risks. For those in their 50s, the panel softened advice and said evidence of benefit is less clear.

The recommendations are meant for people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity or other conditions that increase their chances for a heart attack or stroke. Regardless of age, adults should talk with their doctors about stopping or starting aspirin to make sure it's the right choice for them, said task force member Dr. John Wong, a primary-care expert at Tufts Medical Center.

"Aspirin use can cause serious harms, and risk increases with age," he said.

If finalized, the advice for older adults would backtrack on recommendations the panel issued in 2016 for helping prevent a first heart attack and stroke, but it would be in line with more recent guidelines from other medical groups.

The task force previously said certain people in their 50s and 60s may want to consider a daily aspirin to prevent a first heart attack and stroke, and that they might get protection against colorectal cancer, too. The updated guidance says more evidence of any benefit for colorectal cancer is needed.

Doctors have long recommended daily low-dose aspirin for many patients who already have had a heart attack or stroke. The task force guidance does not change that advice.

The guidance was posted online to allow for public comments until Nov. 8. The group will evaluate that input and then make a final decision.

The independent panel of disease-prevention experts analyzes medical research and literature and issues periodic advice on measures to help keep Americans healthy. Newer studies and a re-analysis of older research prompted the updated advice, Wong said.

Aspirin is best known as a pain reliever but it is also a blood thinner that can reduce chances for blood clots. But aspirin also has risks, even at low doses — mainly bleeding in the digestive tract or ulcers, both of which can be life-threatening.

Dr. Lauren Block, an internist-researcher at Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research in Manhasset, New York, said the guidance is important because so many adults take aspirin even though they have never had a heart attack or stroke.

Block, who is not on the task force, recently switched one of her patients from aspirin to a cholesterol-lowering statin drug because of the potential harms.

The patient, 70-year-old Richard Schrafel, has high blood pressure and knows about his heart attack risks. Schrafel, president of a paperboard-distribution business, said he never had any ill effects from aspirin, but he is taking the new guidance seriously.

Rita Seefeldt, 63, also has high blood pressure and took a daily aspirin for about a decade until her doctor told her two years ago to stop.

"He said they changed their minds on that," recalled the retired elementary school teacher from Milwaukee. She said she understands that science evolves.

Wong acknowledged that the backtracking might leave some patients frustrated and wondering why scientists can't make up their minds.

"It's a fair question," he said. "What's really important to know is that evidence changes over time."

Follow AP Medical Writer Lindsey Tanner: @LindseyTanner

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Biden to meet Kenya president as war roils nearby Ethiopia

By AAMER MADHANI and CARA ANNA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to hold his first one-on-one, in-person talks as president with an African leader on Thursday, hosting Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta as war and a humanitarian crisis roil neighboring Ethiopia, according to the White House.

The Oval Office talks come just weeks after Biden signed an executive order threatening to levy sanctions against Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other leaders involved in a conflict gripping the Tigray region if steps aren't taken soon to wind down the 11-month-old war.

But the situation appears to have only worsened on the ground, with Tigray forces saying Ethiopia's government has launched a long-threatened major military offensive against them in an attempt to end the war. A statement from the Tigray external affairs office earlier this week alleged that hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian "regular and irregular fighters" launched a coordinated assault on several fronts.

Kenya, which shares a border with Ethiopia, has long had a strong relationship with the U.S., partnering with Washington in efforts to thwart Islamic terrorism.

Kenya currently holds the presidency of the U.N. Security Council, a post that rotates monthly, one

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reason why Kenyatta is in the United States. Kenya also has been relatively vocal among African nations on the war in Ethiopia.

Speaking to reporters at the U.N. on Tuesday, Kenyatta said the two sides need to come to "a political resolution because we do not believe that there is any military solution."

The Biden administration is conducting an interagency review as it considers targets that might be hit by sanctions. The review is, in part, to make certain all agencies are "fully on board" with proposed targets, according to a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the internal deliberations.

The Biden administration has said it would move forward with sanctions quickly if there is not a dramatic shift on the ground. The United Nations has warned that hundreds of thousands are living in human-made famine-like conditions as the conflict festers.

With Ethiopia's government rejecting international "meddling" in its affairs, recent emphasis has been placed on trying to find an African solution to the crisis that has killed thousands, some now by starvation.

The U.S. and United Nations say Ethiopian troops have prevented passage of trucks carrying food and other aid. Scores of people have starved to death, The Associated Press has reported.

The meeting with Kenyatta comes as the Kenyan leader has faced scrutiny over his and his family's offshore holdings uncovered in the Pandora Papers.

Kenyatta is one of more than 330 current and former politicians identified as beneficiaries of the secret accounts unveiled in recent reporting by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. The ICIJ found that as Kenyatta publicly campaigned against corruption, his family stowed away about \$30 million in offshore wealth.

The Pandora Papers revelations are expected to be brought up during the Oval Office meeting, the administration official said.

Anna reported from Nairobi. Associated Press writer Edith Lederer contributed reporting.

Big picture, big data: Swiss unveil VR software of universe

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — The final frontier has rarely seemed closer than this — at least virtually. Researchers at one of Switzerland's top universities are releasing open-source beta software on Tuesday that allows for virtual visits through the cosmos including up to the International Space Station, past the Moon, Saturn or exoplanets, over galaxies and well beyond.

The program — called Virtual Reality Universe Project, or VIRUP — pulls together what the researchers call the largest data set of the universe to create three-dimensional, panoramic visualizations of space.

Software engineers, astrophysicists and experimental museology experts at the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne, or EPFL, have come together to concoct the virtual map that can be viewed through individual VR gear, immersion systems like panoramic cinema with 3D glasses, planetarium-like dome screens, or just on a PC for two-dimensional viewing.

"The novelty of this project was putting all the data set available into one framework, when you can see the universe at different scales — nearby us, around the Earth, around the solar system, at the Milky Way level, to see through the universe and time up to the beginning — what we call the Big Bang," said Jean-Paul Kneib, director of EPFL's astrophysics lab.

Think a sort of Google Earth — but for the universe. Computer algorithms churn up terabytes of data and produce images that can appear as close as one meter (about three feet), or almost infinitely far away — as if you sit back and look at the entire observable universe.

VIRUP is accessible to everyone for free — though it does require at least a computer and is best visualized with VR equipment or 3D capabilities. It aims to draw in a broad array of visitors, both scientists looking to visualize the data they continue to collect and a broad public seeking to explore the heavens virtually.

Still a work in progress, for now, the beta version can't be run on a Mac computer. Downloading the

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software and content might seem onerous for the least-skilled computer users, and space — on a computer — will count. The broader-public version of the content is a reduced-size version that can be quantified in gigabytes, a sort of best-of highlights. Astronomy buffs with more PC memory might choose to download more.

The project assembles information from eight databases that count at least 4,500 known exoplanets, tens of millions of galaxies, hundreds of millions of space objects in all, and more than 1.5 billion light sources from the Milky Way alone. But when it comes to potential data, the sky is literally the limit: Future databases could include asteroids in our solar system or objects like nebulae and pulsars farther into the galaxy.

To be sure, VR games and representations already exist: Cosmos-gazing apps on tablets allow for mapping of the night sky, with zoom-in close-ups of heavenly bodies; software like SpaceEngine from Russia offers universe visuals; NASA has done some smaller VR scopes of space.

But the EPFL team says VIRUP goes much farther and wider: Data pulled from sources like the Sloan Digital Sky Survey in the United States, and European Space Agency's Gaia mission to map the Milky Way and its Planck mission to observe the first light of the universe, all brought together in a one-stop-shop for the most extensive data sets yet around.

And there's more to come: when the 14-country telescope project known as the Square Kilometer Array starts pulling down information, the data could be counted in the petabytes — that's 1,000 terabytes or 1 million gigabytes.

Strap on the VR goggles, and it's a trippy feeling seeing the Moon — seemingly the size of a giant beach ball and floating close enough to hold — as the horizon rotates from the sunny side to the dark side of the lunar surface.

Then speed out to beyond the solar system and swing by Saturn, then up above the Milky Way, swirling and flashing and heaving — with exoplanets highlighted in red. And much farther out still, imagine floating through small dots of light that represent galaxies as if the viewer is an unconscionably large giant floating in space.

"That is a very efficient way of visiting all the different scales that compose our universe, and that is completely unique," says Yves Revaz, an EPFL astrophysicist. "A very important part of this project is that it's a first step toward treating much larger data sets which are coming."

Entire galaxies seem to be strung together by strands or filaments of light, almost like representation of neural connections, that link up clusters of light like galaxies. For one of the biggest pictures of all, there's a colorful visualization of the Cosmic Microwave Background — the radiation left behind from the Big Bang.

"We actually started this project because I was working on a three-dimensional mapping project of the universe and was always a little frustrated with the 2D visualization on my screen, which wasn't very meaningful," said Kneib, in a nondescript lab building that houses a panoramic screen, a half-dome cinema with bean-bag seating, and a hard-floor space for virtual-reality excursions.

"It's true that by showing the universe in 3D, by showing these filaments, by showing these clusters of galaxies which are large concentrations of matter, you really realize what the universe is," he added.

¹This story reflects the fact that EPFL has corrected its initial press release to say "terabytes" rather than "tens of terabytes."

Alexander Hamilton letter at center of legal fight returned

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

A letter written by founding father Alexander Hamilton during the Revolutionary War and believed stolen decades ago from the Massachusetts state archives has been returned following a federal appeals court decision, top state officials said Tuesday.

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Galvin hailed the homecoming, after last week's decision by the Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a previous ruling by a district court judge.

The letter was reputedly stolen between 1938 and 1945 by a "kleptomaniacal cataloguer" who worked

at the archives, according to the court decision.

Hamilton wrote the letter to the Marquis de Lafayette, a French aristocrat who served as a general in the Continental Army. Dated July 21, 1780, the letter resulted in Massachusetts sending troops to Rhode Island "to bolster the embattled French forces," the appeals court wrote.

Galvin, whose office oversees the archives and the Commonwealth Museum, said he was pleased the court ruled "that this historical treasure belongs to the people." The letter is expected to be put on display at the museum for special events, including the annual Independence Day celebration, Galvin said.

The letter from Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury whose profile has soared because of the hit Broadway musical, appears to detail the movements of British forces.

"We have just received advice from New York through different channels that the enemy are making an embarkation with which they menace the French fleet and army," Hamilton wrote to de Lafayette. "Fifty transports are said to have gone up the Sound to take in troops and proceed directly to Rhode Island."

It's signed "Yr. Most Obedt, A. Hamilton, Aide de Camp."

That cataloguer who likely stole the letter was eventually arrested, but was thought to have pilfered multiple rare documents, some of which were sold to dealers throughout the U.S.

The letter resurfaced several years ago when an auction house in Virginia received it from a family that wanted to sell it. The letter had been in the possession of a relative who died.

The auction house, which estimated the letter could sell for as much as \$35,000, determined it had been stolen and contacted the FBI.

The estate of the person who possessed the letter claimed it had been purchased legally, but the appeals court disagreed.

"As an original paper belonging to the Commonwealth and dated in 1780, the letter is owned by the Commonwealth," the decision said. "It could not lawfully have been alienated to a third party ... either before or after the letter left the custody of the Commonwealth."

Despite the appeals court's decision, the legal saga may not be over, according to an attorney for the party that had tried to sell letter.

"We are disappointed with the 1st Circuit's decision, especially its creation of a seemingly new category of public record, a 'historic public record,'" and the fact it ignored that the letter was not one of the documents the state claimed was stolen, Ernest Badway said in an email.

They may either file a motion for a rehearing with the appeals court, or appeal directly to the U.S. Supreme Court, he said.

Nets won't play Irving until he meets vaccine requirement

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Kyrie Irving can keep refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

He just won't play for the Brooklyn Nets until he does.

The Nets announced Tuesday that Irving would not play or practice with them until he could be a full participant, ending the idea that he would play in only road games.

Irving hasn't said he isn't vaccinated, asking for privacy when he spoke via Zoom during the team's media day on Sept. 27.

But he had rarely been with the team in New York, where a mandate requires professional athletes playing for a team in the city have to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to play or practice in public venues.

"Kyrie's made it clear that he has a choice in this matter and it's ultimately going to be up to him what he decides," general manager Sean Marks said. "We respect the fact that he has a choice, he can make his own and right now what's best for the organization is the path that we're taking."

Teams aren't allowed to reveal private details of players' health. But asked Tuesday if Irving was vaccinated, Marks said: "If he was vaccinated, we wouldn't be having this discussion. I think that's probably pretty clear."

Marks said he and owner Joe Tsai together made the decision, adding that it came through discussions

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with Irving and his associates.

"Kyrie loves to play basketball, wants to be out there, wants to be participating with his teammates," Marks said. "But again, this is a choice that Kyrie had and he was well aware of that."

Irving wasn't even eligible to practice with the Nets in New York until Friday, when the city told the team that its training facility was considered a private venue.

Irving then joined the team at an outdoor practice Saturday and worked out with the Nets on Sunday, but didn't play in Brooklyn's exhibition game at Philadelphia on Monday.

Coach Steve Nash had said that the Nets knew they were going to be missing Irving for some games. For now, at least, it will be all of them.

With Kevin Durant, James Harden and Irving, the Nets were considered a favorite to win the NBA title. They were eliminated by the Milwaukee Bucks in the second round of last season's playoffs after Irving sprained his ankle and missed the final three games.

Marks conceded that the Nets weren't as strong without Irving, though they may still be good enough. "At this point in time, the Nets have more than enough to win a championship," said Richard Jefferson, a former Nets star who now works for YES Network. "I think adding Kyrie makes them, in my opinion, a heavy favorite and that's just kind of is what it is. With Kyrie this team can win 55, 60 games. Without Kyrie, this team could still win 55 games."

Marks wouldn't predict how long Irving would be away from the team or get into whether the Nets would consider trying to trade him.

"The hope is that we have Kyrie back," Marks said. "We'll welcome him back in open arms under a different set of circumstances and so we need to wait and see how that transpires. But in the meantime, we need to focus on the 16 players that are going to be on this roster moving forward with us."

NBA players are not required to be vaccinated, but they face more testing and restrictions on their ability to be around their teammates. The league had said that players wouldn't be paid for games they miss because they are ineligible to play.

Marks said Irving would still be paid for road games.

Teammates had said they were supportive of Irving's decision, but Marks seemed to indicate there was concern for the fan reaction. New York was hit hard in early March 2020 by the virus and the Nets' arena became a vaccination site this spring.

"There are countless, countless workers who have lost jobs because of this, there are people who have lost loved ones and so forth and as I've mentioned before this is serious," Marks said. "And we play a game of basketball. And although it's serious and we take our job extremely seriously, these are mandates that right now we don't have any control over. All we can do is abide by them and think that science and the people governing — whether it's our city, whether it's our state, whether the country — are making the right calls for us all to get back and to move on into a healthy and safer environment."

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

Divorced UK and EU head for new Brexit fight over N Ireland

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — It was late last Christmas Eve when the European Union and Britain finally clinched a Brexit trade deal after years of wrangling, threats and missed deadlines to seal their divorce.

There was hope that now-separated Britain and the 27-nation bloc would sail their relationship toward calmer waters.

With Christmas closing in again one thing is clear — it wasn't to be.

Britain's Brexit minister on Tuesday accused the EU of wishing failure on its former member and of badmouthing the U.K. as a country that can't be trusted. David Frost said during a speech in Lisbon that the EU "doesn't always look like it wants us to succeed" or "get back to constructive working together."

He said a fundamental rewrite of the mutually agreed divorce deal was the only way to fix the exes'

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"fractious relationship." And he warned that Britain could push an emergency override button on the deal if it didn't get its way.

"We constantly face generalized accusations that we can't be trusted and that we aren't a reasonable international actor," Frost added — a response to EU claims that the U.K. is seeking to renege on the legally binding treaty that it negotiated and signed.

Post-Brexit tensions have crystalized into a worsening fight over Northern Ireland, the only part of the U.K. to share a land border with an EU country, which is Ireland. Under the most delicate and contentious part of the Brexit deal, Northern Ireland remains inside the EU's single market for trade in goods, in order to avoid a hard border with EU member Ireland.

That means customs and border checks must be conducted on some goods going to Northern Ireland from the rest of the U.K., despite the fact they are part of the same country. The regulations are intended to prevent goods from Britain entering the EU's tariff-free single market while keeping an open border on the island of Ireland — a key pillar of Northern Ireland's peace process.

The U.K. government soon complained the arrangements weren't working, saying the rules impose burdensome red tape on businesses. Never short of a belligerent metaphor, 2021 has already brought a "sausage war," with Britain asking the EU to drop a ban on processed British meat products such as sausages entering Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's British Unionist community, meanwhile, says the Brexit deal undermines the 1998 Good Friday peace accord — which sought to protect the rights of both Unionist and Irish Nationalist communities — by weakening Northern Ireland's ties with the rest of the U.K.

The bloc has agreed to look at changes to the Protocol, and is due to present proposals on Wednesday. Before that move, Britain raised the stakes again, with Frost demanding sweeping changes to the way the agreement is governed.

In his speech in the Portuguese capital, Frost said the Protocol "is not working."

"It has completely lost consent in one community in Northern Ireland," he said. "It is not doing the thing it was set up to do — protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. In fact it is doing the opposite. It has to change."

Most contentiously, he said the EU must also remove the European Court of Justice as the ultimate arbiter of disputes concerning trade in Northern Ireland and instead agree to international arbitration. He said the role of the EU court "means the EU can make laws which apply in Northern Ireland without any kind of democratic scrutiny or discussion."

The EU is highly unlikely to agree to the change. The bloc's highest court is seen as the pinnacle of the free trade single market, and Brussels has vowed not to undermine its own order.

Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, said Britain's demand was "very hard to accept."

"I don't think we could ever have a situation where we had another court deciding what the rules of the single market are," he said.

Some EU observers say Britain's demand to remove the court's oversight shows it isn't serious about making the Brexit deal work.

Frost repeated the U.K.'s threat to invoke Article 16, a clause allowing either side to suspend the agreement in exceptional circumstances. That would send already testy relations into a deep chill and could lead to a trade war between Britain and the bloc — one that would hurt the U.K. economy more than its much larger neighbor.

The economically tiny but symbolically charged subject of fish, which held up a trade deal to the final minute last year, is also stoking divisions now.

France wants its EU partners to act as one if London wouldn't grant more licenses for small French fishing boats to roam close to the U.K. crown dependencies of Jersey and Guernsey, just off France's Normandy coast.

In France's parliament last week, Prime Minister Jean Castex accused Britain of reneging on its promise over fishing.

"We see in the clearest way possible that Great Britain does not respect its own signature," he said.

In a relationship where both sides often fall back on clichés about the other, Castex was harking back to the centuries-old French insult of "Perfidious Albion," a nation that can never be trusted.

Across the English Channel, U.K. Brexit supporters often depict a conniving EU, hurt by Britain's departure, doing its utmost to make Brexit less than a success by throwing up bureaucratic impediments.

"The EU and we have got into a low equilibrium, (a) somewhat fractious relationship," Frost conceded. "(It) need not always be like that, but ... it takes two to fix it."

Jill Lawless reported from London.

Follow AP's coverage of post-Brexit developments at <https://apnews.com/hub/Brexit>

Justice Department again presses to halt Texas abortion law

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Biden administration is again urging the courts to step in and suspend a new Texas law that has banned most abortions since early September, as clinics hundreds of miles away remain busy with Texas patients making long journeys to get care.

The latest attempt Monday came three days after the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated the nation's most restrictive abortion law after a brief 48-hour window last week in which Texas abortion providers — following a blistering ruling by a lower court — had rushed to bring in patients again.

The days ahead could now be key in determining the immediate future of the law known as Senate Bill 8, including whether there is another attempt to have the U.S. Supreme Court weigh in.

The law bans abortions in Texas once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually at six weeks and before some women even know they are pregnant. Although other GOP-controlled states have had similar early bans on abortions blocked by courts, the Texas law has proved durable because the state offloads enforcement solely onto private citizens, who can collect at least \$10,000 in damages if they successfully sue abortion providers.

"If Texas's scheme is permissible, no constitutional right is safe from state-sanctioned sabotage of this kind," the Justice Department told the appeals court.

In wording that seemed to be a message to the Supreme Court, the Justice Department raised the specter that if allowed to stand, the legal structure created in enacting the law could be used to circumvent even the Supreme Court's rulings in 2008 and 2010 on gun rights and campaign financing.

It is not clear when the 5th Circuit court will decide whether to extend what is currently a temporary order allowing the Texas law to stand. The court gave the Texas attorney's general office until Thursday to respond to the Justice Department's latest arguments.

Just as some Texas abortion providers last week quickly moved to once again perform abortions for patients past six weeks, the New Orleans-based appeals court set that order aside while it reviews the case. Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in Texas, relayed to the court in a separate filing Monday night numerous stories of Texas women impacted by the law, including one patient who they said was only 12 years old.

"Oklahoma staff are working overtime to care for Texas patients denied abortions," attorneys for Planned Parenthood told the court.

The Texas law is the nation's biggest curb to abortion since the landmark Roe v. Wade decision nearly a half-century ago. A 1992 decision by the Supreme Court prevented states from banning abortion before viability, the point at which a fetus can survive outside the womb, around 24 weeks of pregnancy. But the Texas law has so far evaded being blocked by courts because of its novel enforcement scheme.

The Biden administration sued Texas over the law last month after it went into effect. Texas officials have defended the restrictions, which were signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, saying they have no ability to stop private individuals from bringing lawsuits.

Companies scraping for staff ahead of the holidays

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — All employers want for Christmas is some holiday help. But they might not get their wish.

Companies that typically hire thousands of seasonal workers are heading into the holidays during one of the tightest job markets in decades, making it unlikely they'll find all the workers they need. For shoppers, it might mean a less than jolly holiday shopping experience, with unstaffed store aisles and online orders that take longer than usual to fill.

Job openings are already plentiful, allowing job seekers to be pickier about where they work. There were 10.4 million job openings at the end of August and 11.1 million openings the month before, the highest on record since at least December 2000, when the government started recording that figure. At the same time, the Labor Department said that the number of people quitting their jobs jumped to 4.3 million in August, up from 4 million in July.

Even before the holiday hiring season, employers were so desperate to find workers that they raised pay above \$15 an hour, started offering four-figure sign-on bonuses and promised to pay their schooling. But that yielded only limited success. If they can't find the workers they need in time for the holidays, employers will likely rely on existing staff to work more overtime, which can become costly for businesses and lead to burnout for workers.

"I've never seen a market like this," said Matt Lavery, UPS's global director of sourcing and recruiting, who has worked on the hiring side of the package delivery company for 24 years. "Normally when you're talking about people coming off unemployment benefits, you see surges in candidates. We're not seeing those."

Enhanced unemployment benefits, which included a \$300-a-week federal supplement as well as programs that covered gig workers and people who were jobless for six months or more, ended in early September. That cut off aid to roughly 7 million people. So far, though, the termination of those programs appears to have had little effect on the number of people looking for work.

To snap up available workers as fast as it can, UPS is trying a new tactic: Hire in 30 minutes or less. Taking too long to hire can mean an applicant may go elsewhere. So the company has nearly done away with interviews, and does the whole hiring process online.

Not having enough workers can be costly for companies. FedEx said it spent \$450 million between June and August due to higher wages, paying overtime and other costs related to the tight job market.

At one of its hubs in Portland, Oregon, FedEx has about 65% of the staff it needs. The company has been diverting about a quarter of the packages that would normally flow to other hubs farther away that can handle it. More than 600,000 packages a day are being rerouted, leading to worsening service, said FedEx Chief Operating Officer Rajesh Subramaniam President, during a call with investors last month.

FedEx said it needs 90,000 holiday workers this year, 20,000 more than last year. Others are hiring around the same levels as last year: Amazon, UPS and Walmart, each of which is currently trying to hire 100,000 people or more.

There are many reasons why workers are in short supply, but they mostly revolve around the pandemic. The delta variant has made people fearful of working in tight spaces with others, and most major employers that hire hourly workers haven't mandated vaccines for them yet. Child care issues leave people needing to stay home, and many have been saving money during the pandemic, giving them enough cash to avoid taking jobs they don't want.

Another potential wrinkle: President Joe Biden's announcement in September that employers with more than 100 workers will have to mandate vaccines or offer weekly testing. It's unclear when those rules will start or how that would affect hiring. Companies that have already mandated vaccines have reported high rates of vaccinations. And a fully vaccinated workforce could make that employer more attractive to workers fearful of catching the virus. But some employers fret that the mandate could complicate hiring further.

Some wonder whether employers that need holiday help will be able to find workers in time.

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"It doesn't look good," said Andrew Challenger, senior vice president at hiring firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, which predicts retailers will add 700,000 workers during the holidays this year, 36,000 fewer than last year.

At job site Indeed, searches by people looking for seasonal work were down 13% the week ending Oct. 10, compared to the same period a year ago. And those searches were down 27% from 2019, before the pandemic began.

"The job seeker interest is sluggish," said AnnElizabeth Konkel, an economist at Indeed. "It's just not taking off."

Those already working in stores, warehouses and package delivery companies may work longer hours. Target said it will hire 100,000 holiday workers this year, about 30,000 less than last year, but will give 5 million additional hours to its existing workforce, potentially pumping \$75 million more into workers' paychecks. Target employees are already working nearly 15% more than last year, but the retailer said they are asking for more hours. Target, which already pays workers at least \$15 an hour, is planning to give store workers an extra \$2 an hour if they work weekends and other busy days closer to Christmas.

Craig Rowley, who works at the retail and consumer goods team at management consulting firm Korn Ferry, said if employers can't find the workers they need, online orders could take longer because there won't be enough people to pack orders or deliver them, especially as it gets closer to Christmas and more shoppers head online. And stores are likely to do away with late night or overnight hours since retailers will want their existing staff to work when stores are busiest.

"You're not going to see the wild extended hours because they just can't staff it," Rowley said.

AP Retail Writer Anne D'Innocenzio in New York also contributed to this story.

Americans quit their jobs at a record pace in August

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — One reason America's employers are having trouble filling jobs was starkly illustrated in a report Tuesday: Americans are quitting in droves.

The Labor Department said that quits jumped to 4.3 million in August, the highest on records dating back to December 2000, and up from 4 million in July. That's equivalent to nearly 3% of the workforce. Hiring also slowed in August, the report showed, and the number of jobs available fell to 10.4 million, from a record high of 11.1 million the previous month.

The data helps fill in a puzzle that is looming over the job market: Hiring slowed sharply in August and September, even as the number of posted jobs was near record levels. In the past year, open jobs have increased 62%. Yet overall hiring, as measured by Tuesday's report, has actually declined slightly during that time.

The jump in quits strongly suggests that fear of the delta variant is partly responsible for the shortfall in workers. In addition to driving quits, fear of the disease probably caused plenty of those out of work to not look for, or take, jobs.

As COVID-19 cases surged in August, quits soared in restaurants and hotels from the previous month and rose in other public-facing jobs, such as retail and education. Nearly 900,000 people left jobs at restaurants, bars, and hotels in August, up 21% from July. Quits by retail workers rose 6%.

Yet in industries such as manufacturing, construction, and transportation and warehousing, quits barely increased. In professional and business services, which includes fields such as law, engineering, and architecture, where most employees can work from home, quitting was largely flat.

Other factors also likely contributed to the jump in quits. With many employers desperate for workers and wages rising at a healthy pace, workers have a much greater ability to demand higher pay, or go elsewhere to find it.

The data from August is probably too early to reflect the impact of vaccine mandates. President Joe Biden's mandate was not announced until Sept. 9. United Airlines announced its mandate in early August,

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but it was one of the first companies to do so. And layoffs were unchanged in August, the report found.

The government said Friday that job gains were weak for a second straight month in September, with only 194,000 jobs added, though the unemployment rate fell to 4.8% from 5.2%. Friday's hiring figure is a net total, after quits, retirements, and layoffs are taken into account. Tuesday's report, known as the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS, includes raw figures, and showed that total hiring in August fell sharply, to 6.3 million from 6.8 million in July.

The data is "highlighting the immense problems businesses are dealing with," said Jennifer Lee, an economist at BMO Capital Markets, in an email. "Not enough people. Not enough equipment and/or parts. Meantime, customers are waiting for their orders, or waiting to place their orders. What a strange world this is."

Quits also rose the most in the South and Midwest, the government said, the two regions with the worst COVID outbreaks in August.

When workers quit, it is typically seen as a good sign for the job market, because people usually leave jobs when they already have other positions or are confident they can find one. The large increase in August probably does reflect some of that confidence among workers.

But the fact that the increase in quits was heavily concentrated in sectors that involve close contact with the public is a sign that fear of COVID also played a large role. Many people may have quit even without other jobs to take.

The sharp increase in job openings also has an international dimension: Job vacancies have reached a record level in the United Kingdom, though that is partly because many European workers left the U.K. after Brexit.

EXPLAINER: Why Social Security COLA will jump next year

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rising inflation is expected to lead to a sizeable increase in Social Security's annual cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, for 2022. Exactly how much will be revealed Wednesday morning after a Labor Department report on inflation during September, a data point used in the final calculation.

Over the last 10 years, the Social Security COLA has averaged about 1.7% annually as inflation remained low. But the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic has triggered rising prices for a wide range of goods and services, and that's expected to translate to bigger checks for retirees.

WHY ARE SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS ADJUSTED?

Policymakers say the COLA works to preserve the purchasing power of Social Security benefits, and shouldn't be seen as a pay hike for retirees.

At one time Congress had to approve inflation increases, but starting in the mid-1970s lawmakers turned that function over to nonpartisan experts within the government bureaucracy. The annual review is now tied to changes in an official measure of inflation and proceeds automatically and with no political brinksmanship.

HOW BIG AN INCREASE FOR 2022?

Stay tuned.

The Great Recession saw a COLA increase of 5.8% for 2009, and the number for next year may rival that.

This summer, government economic experts predicted a COLA in the range of 6%. If that's the case, it would be the biggest Social Security hike the vast majority of baby boomer retirees have seen. Up to now, they've collected meager to modest annual adjustments, not counting three years for which there was no COLA because inflation barely showed a pulse.

A 6% COLA would increase the average Social Security payment for a retired worker by close to \$93 a month, to \$1,636 next year. Compare that to this year's COLA, worth only about \$20 a month.

WHAT'S CHANGED OVER THE PAST YEAR?

As the economy recovers from the shock of coronavirus shutdowns, prices are rising at a pretty good clip.

Gas serves as an ever-present reminder, above \$3 a gallon in most states, \$4 a gallon in California and Hawaii. But food had already been going up and so are labor costs as employers compete to hire choosy

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workers seeking higher pay and better benefits. Add to the mix supply chain problems that have slowed deliveries of everything from refrigerators to running shoes.

All that gets sifted into the prices that consumers pay for their everyday needs.

WHO'S AFFECTED?

The COLA is big enough to have an impact on the overall economy.

It affects the household budgets of about 1 in 5 Americans, including Social Security recipients, disabled veterans and federal retirees, about 70 million people.

About half of seniors live in households where Social Security benefits account for at least 50% of their income, and one-quarter rely on their monthly payment for all or nearly all their earnings. For this latter group, the COLA can literally make a difference in what they're able to put on the table.

DO PRIVATE PENSIONS ALSO PROVIDE A COLA?

Inflation protection is central to Social Security's benefit design, but it's not so common among traditional private pensions. Benefits paid by most employer plans gradually lose some of their purchasing power over the years.

Social Security not only increases retiree checks to compensate for inflation, but it then adds that amount to a person's underlying benefit so it grows with compounding as future COLAs are factored in.

CAN SOCIAL SECURITY AFFORD TO KEEP PAYING COLAS?

Proposals have been floated both to increase or trim back COLAs in the context of a broader Social Security overhaul. Many advocates for older people argue that the inflation index currently used does not adequately reflect the higher health care costs faced by the aging.

On the other side, groups pressing to reduce federal deficits urge switching to an alternate inflation measure that factors in consumers' habit of substituting cheaper goods when prices rise. That would yield slightly lower estimates of cost-of-living changes.

Social Security trustees said in their report this year that the program's long-term fiscal imbalance is casting a longer shadow.

For the first time in 39 years, the cost of delivering benefits will exceed Social Security's total income from payroll tax collections and interest. From here on in, Social Security will have to tap its savings to pay full benefits.

The report also moved up the exhaustion date for Social Security's massive trust fund by one year, to 2034. At that point, the program will be able to pay only 78% of scheduled benefits, the report said.

Such a reduction would represent a major hardship for most people who depend on Social Security, even middle-class retirees.

But hardly anyone with political power in Washington is talking about fixes.

"Social Security is an issue that really needs to be addressed together by both parties," said David Certner, legislative policy director at AARP. "It is very difficult to do bipartisan work on something as big and important as Social Security in what is a very partisan atmosphere."

Next on FDA's agenda: Booster shots of Moderna, J&J vaccines

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With many Americans who got Pfizer vaccinations already rolling up their sleeves for a booster shot, millions of others who received the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine wait anxiously to learn when it's their turn.

Federal regulators begin tackling that question this week.

On Thursday and Friday, the Food and Drug Administration convenes its independent advisers for the first stage in the process of deciding whether extra doses of the two vaccines should be dispensed and, if so, who should get them and when. The final go-ahead is not expected for at least another week.

After the FDA advisers give their recommendation, the agency itself will make a decision on whether to authorize boosters. Then next week, a panel convened by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will offer more specifics on who should get them. Its decision is subject to approval by the CDC director.

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The process is meant to bolster public confidence in the vaccines. But it has already led to conflicts among experts and agencies — and documents the FDA released Tuesday suggest this week's decisions will be equally difficult.

In one earlier vaccine dispute, the CDC's advisory panel last month backed Pfizer boosters at the six-month point for older Americans, nursing home residents and people with underlying health problems. But CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky overruled her advisers and decided boosters should also be offered to those with high-risk jobs such as teachers and health care workers, adding tens of millions more Americans to the list.

Some health experts fear the back-and-forth deliberations are muddling the public effort to persuade the unvaccinated to get their first shots. They worry that the talk of boosters will lead people to wrongly doubt the effectiveness of the vaccines in the first place.

When the FDA's panel meets to review the Moderna and J&J vaccines, experts will discuss whether a third Moderna shot should contain just half the original dose and what's the best timing for a second shot of the single-dose J&J vaccine.

The panel will also look into the safety and effectiveness of mixing-and-matching different brands of vaccine, something regulators have not endorsed so far.

An estimated 103 million Americans are fully vaccinated with Pfizer's formula, 69 million with Moderna's and 15 million with J&J's, according to the CDC. Regulators took up the question of Pfizer boosters first because the company submitted its data ahead of the other vaccine makers.

Tim Anderson, a U.S. history teacher at a high school outside Louisville, Kentucky, already had his two Moderna shots months before he came down with COVID-19 in August. While his symptoms hit him "like a sledgehammer," he is convinced that the inoculation saved him and his girlfriend from the more severe effects of the disease.

The two are now awaiting clearance of a Moderna booster shot.

"Until we can build up enough immunity within our own self and, you know, as a group of humans, I'm willing to do what I need to do," Anderson, 58, said.

The FDA meetings come as U.S. vaccinations have climbed back above 1 million per day on average, an increase of more than 50% over the past two weeks. The rise has been driven mainly by Pfizer boosters and employer vaccine mandates.

While the FDA and CDC so far have endorsed Pfizer boosters for specific groups only, Biden administration officials, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, have suggested that extra shots will eventually be recommended for most Americans.

In a new review of Moderna's data, the FDA did not indicate Tuesday if it was leaning toward clearing the company's booster. It said vaccines used in the U.S. still provide protection, and it raised questions about some of Moderna's data.

The two initial Moderna shots contain 100 micrograms of vaccine each. But the drugmaker says 50 micrograms ought to be enough for a booster for healthy people.

A company study of 344 people gave them a 50-microgram shot six months after their second dose, and levels of virus-fighting antibodies jumped. Moderna said the booster even triggered a 42-fold rise in antibodies able to target the extra-contagious delta variant.

Side effects were similar to the fevers and aches that Moderna recipients commonly experience after their second regular shot, the company said.

As for people who got the J&J vaccine, the company submitted data to the FDA for different options: a booster shot at two months or at six months. The company said in its FDA submission that a six-month booster is recommended but that a second dose could be given at two months in some situations.

J&J released data in September showing that a booster given at two months provided 94% protection against moderate-to-severe COVID-19 infection. The company has not disclosed patient data on a six-month booster, but early measures of virus-fighting antibodies suggest it provides even higher protection.

Even without a booster, J&J says, its vaccine remains about 80% effective at preventing COVID-19

hospitalizations in the U.S.

Scientists emphasize that all three vaccines used in the U.S. still offer strong protection against severe disease and death from COVID-19. The issue is how quickly, and how much, protection against milder infection may wane.

In one recent study, researchers compared about 14,000 people who had gotten their first Moderna dose a year ago with 11,000 vaccinated eight months ago. As the delta variant surged in July and August, the more recently vaccinated group had a 36% lower rate of "breakthrough" infections compared with those vaccinated longer ago.

AP Writer Bobby Caina Calvan contributed to this story from New York.

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Spain's national day salutes Columbus with little opposition

By BARRY HATTON and ALICIA LEÓN Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Pomp, pageantry and a grand military parade marked Spain's national day ceremonies in Madrid on Tuesday, overshadowing protests against what some see as a misguided celebration of Spanish colonial history.

Cavalry members escorted King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia to a platform where the royal couple watched more than 2,600 troops march along the flag-lined Paseo de la Castellana. The parade featured dozens of aircraft flying overhead and a 21-gun salute.

A parachutist with a giant red-and-yellow Spanish flag attached to his ankle landed on the avenue, drawing cheers from the thousands of spectators.

The Día de la Fiesta Nacional, also known as Dia de la Hispanidad, is a public holiday in Spain. The 1987 law which made Oct. 12 the national holiday said it commemorates "the linguistic and cultural projection of Spain outside of its European limits."

The date marks explorer Christopher Columbus' Oct. 12, 1492 sighting of land while traveling under Spanish royal sponsorship in search of what came to be known as the Americas. That event heralded centuries of colonization of the Americas by European nations while bringing violence, disease and death to indigenous people.

In Spain, the suffering of native populations during that period has not received the same attention or prompted the kind of historical reevaluation as it has, for example, in the United States, where in many places Columbus Day has been paired or replaced with Indigenous Peoples Day to switch the focus of the annual holiday.

Near to where Tuesday's official national day celebrations were held in Madrid is a statue of Columbus atop a pedestal. It is 17 meters (56 feet) high.

In the U.S. city of Chicago, by contrast, three statues of Columbus remain in storage by order of the local government after protesters targeted them last summer.

The debate over Columbus' historical legacy has raged for many years. But it came into sharper focus in the United States after a campaign to remove monuments dedicated to Confederate generals flared into deadly violence in 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Protests staged to coincide with Spain's national day mostly were driven by other grievances.

The king, for instance, received jeers and whistles from people who want to abolish the Spanish monarchy. Regional officials fighting for the independence of Spain's Catalonia region went to work as normal as a way of thumbing their noses at the country's central authorities.

Even the anti-establishment, left-wing Unidas Podemos (United We Can) party supported the formal ceremonies in Madrid even though fighting inequality is one of its banner issues. The left-wing party, which is part of Spain's coalition government, sent its three government ministers to attend the parade.

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Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez sought to focus the celebrations on a more modern appreciation of Oct. 12.

He said the holiday was meant to celebrate "what bonds us together, what makes us bigger as a society, what makes Spain a friendly, open, diverse country."

Groups protesting against the tribute to Columbus and his legacy organized scattered demonstrations, including in Madrid, though turnout was light.

Joan Felguera, a 17-year-old student attending a protest in Barcelona against crimes committed by Spanish colonizers, said people had to choose how to react to what was known about the period.

"History is history," he said. "But culture is changing and ways of thinking have evolved."

But at a separate far-right rally in the northeastern Spanish city, participants argued that the Spanish conquests were benign. "But now things are being twisted around," said Ester Lopez, a 40-year-old office worker.

Paula Guerra, a Chilean anti-racism activist, said the celebrations ought to be replaced by "an acknowledgment of the damage caused by the horrors" committed by Spain in the Americas.

"It was a regime of terror. It was a regime of barbarism," she said.

Dora Turín, 35, who works in Spain's audiovisual sector, said in advance of the parade that people should reflect positively on Spain's colonial rule.

"It was a contribution of cultures, in addition to ours," she said. "It meant adding more knowledge and being able to mix inter-culturally and reach what we are now."

Barry Hatton reported from Lisbon, Portugal. Germán Martínez and Hernán Muñoz contributed from Barcelona, Spain.

IMF board confident about leader despite data-rigging claims

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER and ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The International Monetary Fund expressed "full confidence" in its managing director Tuesday in response to allegations that while she was a World Bank official, she and others pressured staffers to change business rankings in an effort to placate China.

The IMF's 24-member executive board said in a statement that its review "did not conclusively demonstrate that the managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, played an improper role."

But it said a probe into possible misconduct by World Bank staff was continuing. The United States, the IMF's largest shareholder, said it planned to closely monitor the further investigation into the issue. The World Bank and IMF are both global lenders in the United Nations system.

Georgieva has denied any wrongdoing in response to an investigative report by the WilmerHale law firm. The report found she played a role in pressuring World Bank staff to amend data affecting 2018 rankings that were meant to show how welcoming China and other nations were to businesses.

Countries used the annual Doing Business report, which evaluated tax burdens, bureaucratic obstacles and regulatory systems, to attract foreign investment.

The rankings have been discontinued due to the controversy, which also prompted criticism that China, the world's second-largest economy, has too much influence over international finance organizations.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen spoke with Georgieva by phone and said the report "raised legitimate issues and concerns," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

However, the Treasury agreed that "absent further direct evidence with regard to the role of the managing director there is not a basis for a change in IMF leadership."

Yellen said it was crucial to defend the integrity of the IMF and the World Bank.

The "U.S. believes proactive steps must be taken to reinforce data integrity and credibility at the IMF, and that the institution and its leadership must renew their commitment to upholding transparency and whistleblower protections surrounding policies, research, and analysis to provide accountability and public oversight over key decisions," the Treasury statement said.

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Addressing the controversy Wednesday, Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist, said that the IMF took very seriously the need to protect the integrity of its economic reports. She noted that the investigation focused on a World Bank report, not a report produced by the IMF.

"We are constantly working to ensure the highest standards for our data and for our research," she told reporters at a briefing on the IMF's updated World Economic Outlook. "As part of that we have ongoing reviews all the time and will continue to do so."

The IMF had said late Friday it was seeking more "clarifying details" in its investigation and the board met again with Georgieva on Sunday.

Georgieva appeared before a panel for more than five hours last week after a presentation by WilmerHale that alleged she and other World Bank officials had pressured staff to alter the data.

The 190-nation IMF and World Bank annual meetings are being held this week in Washington and the controversy surrounding the Doing Business report was threatening to overshadow the agenda of those meetings.

Georgieva, a 68-year-old Bulgarian economist, has served as managing director of the IMF since 2019. She was the fund's first leader to come from an emerging market economy rather than one of the traditional European economic powers, like Germany or France.

In taking over the leadership of the IMF, she succeeded Christine Lagarde, who stepped down to take over as head of the European Central Bank.

Chuckie chucked: Gruden's words antithetical to modern NFL

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writer

Jon Gruden had to go.

At a time when messages such as "It Takes All of Us" and "End Racism" are stenciled into every end zone in the league, when women have joined the ranks of front offices, coaching staffs and officiating crews and a player on his own team came out as gay, Gruden's emails revealing racist, homophobic and misogynistic comments were antithetical to the modern NFL.

Gruden resigned as coach of the Las Vegas Raiders on Monday night, releasing a statement that said, "I love the Raiders and do not want to be a distraction. Thank you to all the players, coaches, staff, and fans of Raider Nation. I'm sorry, I never meant to hurt anyone."

His departure was the only acceptable resolution to this quagmire of his own creation because the NFL has made too much progress of late for Gruden to keep his job and roll back that evolution, suggested ESPN football analyst Booger McFarland.

"This is something that had to happen," McFarland said. "This is something he couldn't deny. This is in emails where you're going against what the NFL is trying to do. The players have stickers on their helmets and they have phrases in the end zone: 'End Racism. Stop Hate. It Takes All of Us. Inspire Change.' So, we're trying to get rid of the very things that Jon Gruden is promoting through his personal emails."

Gruden's rapid downfall began Friday when The Wall Street Journal reported that Gruden used a racist term to describe NFL union chief DeMaurice Smith, who's Black, in a 2011 email to former Washington executive Bruce Allen.

If it had ended there, Gruden might have survived.

Following the Raiders' 20-9 loss to Chicago on Sunday, Raiders quarterback Derek Carr said he was among many players who were shocked to hear about Gruden's racist remark but made clear his coach had his support.

Carr said Gruden addressed the issue and gave his side of the story in a team meeting the morning before that story broke: "He was honest. He was up-front with it, and us as a team were like, 'Yeah, coach, it was 10 years ago. We love you, man. We've got your back.'"

Gruden insisted Sunday that he wasn't racist, revealed he was sickened by the controversy he'd created and again apologized to Smith.

"But I feel good about who I am and what I've done my entire life," Gruden stressed, adding he hadn't

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been contacted by the NFL about his racist remark but "we'll see what happens here in the next few days."

What happened was another bombshell: The New York Times reported late Monday that Gruden's transgressions weren't limited to a single racist comment but that he frequently used misogynistic and homophobic language directed at Commissioner Roger Goodell and others in the league.

A league source confirmed the accuracy of the emails and said they were sent to the Raiders last week. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the league hasn't made the emails public.

The report, which came out during the "Monday Night Football" telecast where Gruden burnished his chops as an NFL icon between coaching stints, showed Gruden denouncing the drafting of a gay player and the tolerance of players protesting racial injustice and police misconduct during the playing of the national anthem.

The emails also reveal him using a gay slur to insult Goodell and saying the commissioner shouldn't have pressured the Rams to draft "queers," a reference to Michael Sam, who was the first openly gay player drafted by an NFL team.

Raiders defensive end Carl Nassib came out as gay in June and is the first openly gay player to appear in an NFL game.

In a 2017 email, the Times said Gruden responded to a sexist meme of a female official by saying: "Nice job roger." The paper also said Gruden criticized Goodell and the NFL for trying to reduce concussions, said that Eric Reid, a player who had demonstrated during the playing of the national anthem, should be fired, and mocked an article in 2017 about players calling on Goodell to support their efforts promoting racial equality and criminal justice reform.

It's long been part of the job description for NFL head coaches to manage the fallout when a player says or does something stupid. Inevitably, a boneheaded decision off the field will create waves, headlines and maybe even the dreaded distraction for a team.

That makes crisis management as much a part of the head coach's duties as creating game plans for the upcoming opponent.

Thanks to Gruden and Urban Meyer, those roles have been reversed in 2021.

The winless Jacksonville Jaguars had to come to Meyer's defense after their gaffe-prone rookie head coach skipped their flight home from Cincinnati earlier this month and was captured on camera partying like a college kid with embarrassing video clips quickly spreading on social media.

That led Meyer to apologize on three consecutive days for his "inexcusable" behavior at an Ohio bar two weekends ago. He said several veteran players expressed their support as he tries to make amends: "I had at least eight to 10 phone calls where they called me and they were over-the-top supportive and said, 'We got you, man. Move forward.' A common thing was, 'Coach, we all did stupid things.'"

Meyer's mess pales in comparison to Gruden's imbroglio, which erupted into a split with the Raiders 24 hours after his players vouched for their head coach.

While Meyer, an NFL newcomer, hasn't received much in the way of public support from former pro players and coaches, several people lined up in support of Gruden with endorsements that came well before the the scope of his misdeeds was revealed.

NBC analyst Tony Dungy said he'd never heard of an NFL head coach skipping out on the flight home with his team like Meyer did. For Gruden, he offered harsh words but also grace.

"What Jon Gruden did in that email: definitely insensitive, definitely inappropriate, definitely immature. I thought he attacked the character of a man," Dungy said during the Bills-Chiefs rain delay Sunday night. "But he apologized for it. He said it wasn't racially motivated. I have to believe him. This was an incident that was 10 years ago. He apologized and I think we have to accept that apology and move on."

Instead, the league is moving on without Gruden.

With contributions from AP Sports Writer Greg Beacham and Pro Football Writers Barry Wilner, Rob Maaddi and Mark Long.

More AP NFL coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Report says UK's slow virus lockdown cost 1000s of lives

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's failure to impose a lockdown in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic cost thousands of unnecessary deaths and ranks among the country's worst public health blunders, lawmakers concluded Tuesday in the nation's first comprehensive report on the pandemic.

The deadly delay derived from the failure of British government ministers to question the recommendations of scientific advisers, resulting in a dangerous level of "groupthink" that caused them to dismiss the more aggressive strategies adopted in East and Southeast Asia to limit infections, the report said.

It was only when Britain's National Health Service risked being overwhelmed by rapidly rising infections that Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government finally ordered a lockdown, in late March 2020.

"Decisions on lockdowns and social distancing during the early weeks of the pandemic - and the advice that led to them - rank as one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced," states the joint report from the House of Commons' science and health committees. "Painful though it is, the U.K. must learn what lessons it can of why this happened if we are to ensure it is not repeated."

Lawmakers said their inquiry was designed to uncover why the U.K. performed "significantly worse" than many other countries during the initial period of the pandemic. The U.K. has recorded more than 137,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe after Russia.

But government officials said they did what they could with the information they had in a time of crisis.

"It was an unprecedented pandemic," Cabinet minister Stephen Barclay told Sky News. "We were learning about it as we went through, and of course with hindsight, there's things we know about it now that we didn't know at the time."

Bereaved families reacted to the parliamentary report with outrage, furious that the people who died of COVID-19 received scant mention in the 150-page document. They said the joint committee only was interested in "speaking to their colleagues and friends."

"The report it's produced is laughable and more interested in political arguments about whether you can bring laptops to...meetings than it is in the experiences of those who tragically lost parents, partners or children to COVID-19," said Hannah Brady, spokesperson for COVID-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. "This is an attempt to ignore and gaslight bereaved families, who will see it as a slap in the face."

Lawmakers released their findings amid frustration with the timetable for a formal public inquiry into the government's response to COVID-19. Johnson says the inquiry will start next spring.

The report was based on testimony from 50 witnesses, including former Health Secretary Matt Hancock and former government insider Dominic Cummings. It was unanimously approved by 22 lawmakers from the three largest parties in Parliament: the governing Conservatives and the opposition Labour Party and the Scottish National Party.

The committees praised the government's early focus on vaccines as the ultimate way out of the pandemic and its decision to invest in vaccine development. These decisions led to Britain's successful inoculation program, which has seen almost 80% of people 12 and over now fully vaccinated.

"Millions of lives will ultimately be saved as a result of the global vaccine effort in which the U.K. has played a leading part," the committees said.

But they also criticized the government's test-and-trace program, saying its slow, uncertain and often chaotic performance hampered Britain's response to the pandemic.

The government's strategy during the first three months of the crisis reflected official scientific advice that widespread infection was inevitable given that testing capacity was limited; that there was no immediate prospect for a vaccine; and the belief that the public wouldn't accept a lengthy lockdown, the report said. As a result, the government sought merely to manage the spread of the virus, instead of trying to stop it altogether.

The report described this as a "serious early error" that the U.K. shared with many countries in Europe

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and North America.

"There was a groupthink that the way you tackle a pandemic should be similar to a flu pandemic," Jeremy Hunt, a former British health minister who now heads Parliament's health committee, said. "I was part of that groupthink, too, when I was health secretary."

Hunt said that before the coronavirus hit, "an American university said we were the second-best prepared country in the world" for a pandemic.

"We know that clearly wasn't the case," he said.

Trish Greenhalgh, a professor of primary care health services at the University of Oxford, said the report "hints at a less-than-healthy" relationship between government and scientific bodies. With COVID-19 still killing hundreds of people every week in Britain, advisory committees continue to debate exactly what evidence is "sufficiently definitive" to be considered certain, she said.

"Uncertainty is a defining feature of crises," Greenhalgh said. "Dare we replace 'following the science' with 'deliberating on what best to do when the problem is urgent but certainty eludes us'? This report suggests that unless we wish to continue to repeat the mistakes of the recent past, we must."

Even senior officials like Cummings and Hancock told the committees they were reluctant to push back against scientific consensus.

Hancock said as early as Jan. 28, 2020, he found it difficult to push for widespread testing of people who didn't show symptoms of COVID-19 because scientific advisers said it wouldn't be useful.

"I was in a situation of not having hard evidence that a global scientific consensus of decades was wrong but having an instinct that it was," he testified. "I bitterly regret that I did not overrule that scientific advice."

Follow all AP stories on the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Pay up: UN climate summit leader says funding key to success

PARIS (AP) — The British official who will preside over an upcoming U.N. climate summit said Tuesday that he's losing sleep over how to get long-promised funding for poorer nations to switch to cleaner energy and cope with the worst impacts of climate change.

Alok Sharma, president of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, used a speech in Paris to jolt richer nations into action in the last weeks before the Oct. 31-Nov. 12 event in Glasgow, Scotland.

Sharma said that securing the previously promised annual package of climate change funding for poorer nations "is vital to the success of the summit."

"Without finance, tackling climate change is well-nigh impossible. So developed countries must deliver on the \$100 billion a year promised to developing nations. This is a totemic figure. A matter of trust. And trust is a hard-won and fragile commodity in climate negotiations," he said.

"Thinking about this does keep me awake at night," he added.

Sharma, who was the U.K.'s secretary of state for business before he stepped down to oversee the COP26 conference, also put pressure on the Group of 20 nations that together account for the bulk of global wealth and trade and around 80% of polluting emissions that contribute to global warming.

In July, G-20 nations all agreed that before the COP26 meeting, they would each lay out "ambitious" targets to reduce emissions by 2030, Sharma said. But some haven't yet done so and "must deliver," he said.

"I say to those G-20 leaders: They simply must step up ahead of COP26," he said.

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

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Oct. 13, the 286th day of 2021. There are 79 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

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On Oct. 13, 1792, the cornerstone of the executive mansion, later known as the White House, was laid by President George Washington during a ceremony in the District of Columbia.

On this date:

In 1775, the United States Navy had its origins as the Continental Congress ordered the construction of a naval fleet.

In 1845, Texas voters ratified a state constitution.

In 1943, Italy declared war on Germany, its one-time Axis partner.

In 1944, during World War II, American troops entered Aachen (AH'-kehrn), Germany.

In 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon held the third televised debate of their presidential campaign (Nixon was in Los Angeles, Kennedy in New York).

In 1972, a Uruguayan chartered flight carrying 45 people crashed in the Andes; survivors resorted to feeding off the remains of some of the dead in order to stay alive until they were rescued more than two months later.

In 1974, longtime television host Ed Sullivan died in New York City at age 73.

In 1999, the Senate rejected the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, with 48 senators voting in favor and 51 against, far short of the 67 needed for ratification.

In 2000, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung was named winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Longtime American communist Gus Hall died in New York at age 90.

In 2003, the U.N. Security Council approved a resolution expanding the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Afghanistan.

In 2006, The United Nations General Assembly appointed South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon the next U.N. secretary-general. Banker Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh won the Nobel Peace Prize for using microcredit to lift people out of poverty.

In 2010, rescuers in Chile using a missile-like escape capsule pulled 33 men one by one to fresh air and freedom 69 days after they were trapped in a collapsed mine a half-mile underground.

Ten years ago: Raj Rajaratnam (rahj rah-juh-RUHT'-nuhm), the hedge fund billionaire at the center of one of the biggest insider-trading cases in U.S. history, was sentenced by a federal judge in New York to 11 years behind bars.

Five years ago: Donald Trump heatedly rejected the growing list of sexual assault allegations against him as "pure fiction," hammering his female accusers as "horrible, horrible liars." Bob Dylan was named winner of the Nobel prize in literature. Death claimed Thailand's longtime monarch, King Bhumibol, at age 88 and Nobel Prize-winning Italian playwright Dario Fo at age 90.

One year ago: In the first of two days of questioning by the Senate Judiciary Committee, Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett deflected Democrats' questions on abortion, health care and a possible disputed-election fight; she declined to say whether she would recuse herself from any election-related cases involving President Donald Trump. Early voting began with long lines in Texas, one of the few places in the U.S. not allowing widespread mail balloting during the pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Gospel singer Shirley Caesar is 84. Actor Melinda Dillon is 82. Singer-musician Paul Simon is 80. Musician Robert Lamm (Chicago) is 77. Country singer Lacy J. Dalton is 75. Actor Demond Wilson is 75. Singer-musician Sammy Hagar is 74. Pop singer John Ford Coley is 73. Actor John Lone is 69. Model Beverly Johnson is 69. Producer-writer Chris Carter is 65. Actor and former NBA star Reggie Theus (THEE'-us) is 64. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., is 63. R&B singer Cherrelle is 62. Singer/TV personality Marie Osmond is 62. Rock singer Joey Belladonna is 61. Former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer is 61. NBA coach Doc Rivers is 60. Actor T'Keyah Crystal Keymah (tuh-KEE'-ah KRYS'-tal kee-MAH') is 59. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Jerry Rice is 59. Actor Christopher Judge is 57. Actor Matt Walsh is 57. Actor Reginald Ballard is 56. Actor Kate Walsh is 54. R&B musician Jeff Allen (Mint Condition) is 53. Actor Tisha Campbell-Martin is 53. Classical singer Carlos Marin (Il Divo) is 53. Olympic silver medal figure skater Nancy Kerrigan is 52. Country singer Rhett Akins is 52. Classical crossover singer Paul Potts is 51. TV personality Billy Bush is 50. Actor Sacha Baron Cohen is 50. R&B singers Brandon and Brian Casey

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(Jagged Edge) are 46. Actor Kiele Sanchez is 45. Former NBA All-Star Paul Pierce is 44. DJ Vice is 43. Singer Ashanti (ah-SHAHN'-tee) is 41. R&B singer Lumidee is 41. Christian rock singer Jon Micah Sumrall (Kutless) is 41. Olympic gold medal swimmer Ian Thorpe is 39. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., is 32. Actor Caleb McLaughlin (TV: "Stranger Things") is 20.