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Upcoming Events

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.

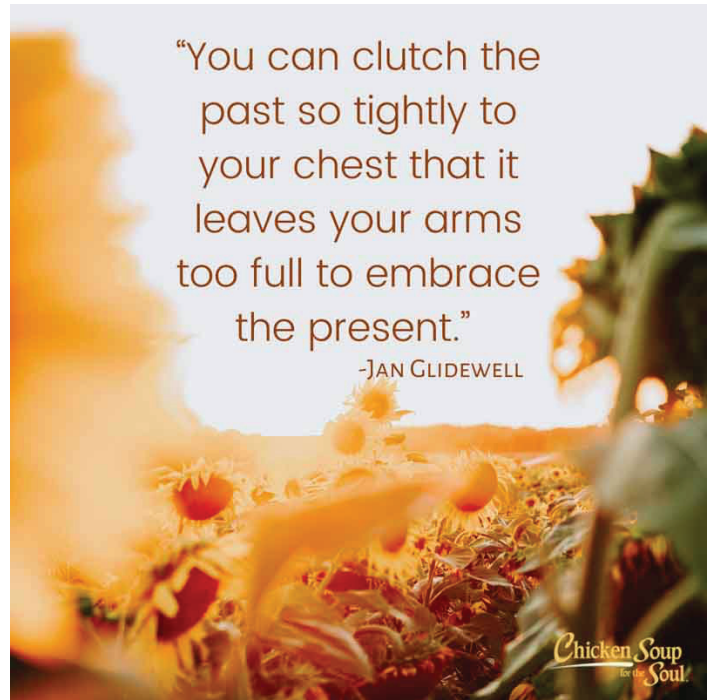
Saturday, Oct. 23

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.



The GDILIVE.COM crew of Jeslyn Kosel, Paper Paul and Mike Nehls as taken by Bruce Babcock.

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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U.S. Winter Outlook: Drier, warmer South, wetter North with return of La Nina

Drought likely to persist across the West, improve in the Northwest

Above-average temperatures are favored across the South and most of the eastern U.S. as La Nina climate conditions have emerged for the second winter in a row according to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center — a division of the National Weather Service. In NOAA's 2021 Winter Outlook — which extends from December 2021 through February 2022 — wetter-than-average conditions are anticipated across portions of the Northern U.S., primarily in the Pacific Northwest, northern Rockies, Great Lakes, Ohio Valley and western Alaska.

"Using the most up-to-date observing technologies and computer models, our dedicated forecasters at the Climate Prediction Center produce timely and accurate seasonal outlooks to help communities prepare for the months ahead," said Michael Farrar, Ph.D., director of the National Centers for Environmental Prediction.

NOAA experts also continue to monitor the widespread, ongoing drought that has persisted across much of the western half of the U.S. since late last year, keeping a close eye on the Southwest region.

"Consistent with typical La Nina conditions during winter months, we anticipate below-normal temperatures along portions of the northern tier of the U.S. while much of the South experiences above-normal temperatures," said Jon Gottschalck, chief, Operational Prediction Branch, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center. "The Southwest will certainly remain a region of concern as we anticipate below-normal precipitation where drought conditions continue in most areas."

Temperature

Warmer-than-average conditions are most likely across the Southern tier of the U.S. and much of the Eastern U.S. with the greatest likelihood of above-average temperatures in the Southeast.

Below-average temperatures are favored for southeast Alaska and the Pacific Northwest eastward to the northern Plains.

The Upper Mississippi Valley and small areas of the Great Lakes have equal chances for below-, near- or above-average temperatures.

Precipitation

The Pacific Northwest, northern Rockies, Great Lakes and parts of the Ohio Valley and western Alaska have the greatest chances for wetter-than-average conditions.

Drier-than-average conditions are favored in south-central Alaska, southern California, the Southwest, and the Southeast.

The forecast for the remainder of the U.S. shows equal chances for below-, near- or above-average precipitation during winter months.

Drought

Widespread severe to exceptional drought continues to dominate the western half of the continental U.S., Northern Plains, and the Missouri River Basin.

Drought conditions are forecast to persist and develop in the Southwest and Southern Plains.

The Pacific Northwest, northern California, the upper Midwest, and Hawaii are most likely to experience drought improvement.

About NOAA's seasonal outlooks

NOAA's seasonal outlooks provide the likelihood that temperatures and total precipitation amounts will be above-, near- or below-average, and how drought conditions are anticipated to change in the months ahead. The outlook does not project seasonal snowfall accumulations as snow forecasts are generally not predictable more than a week in advance.

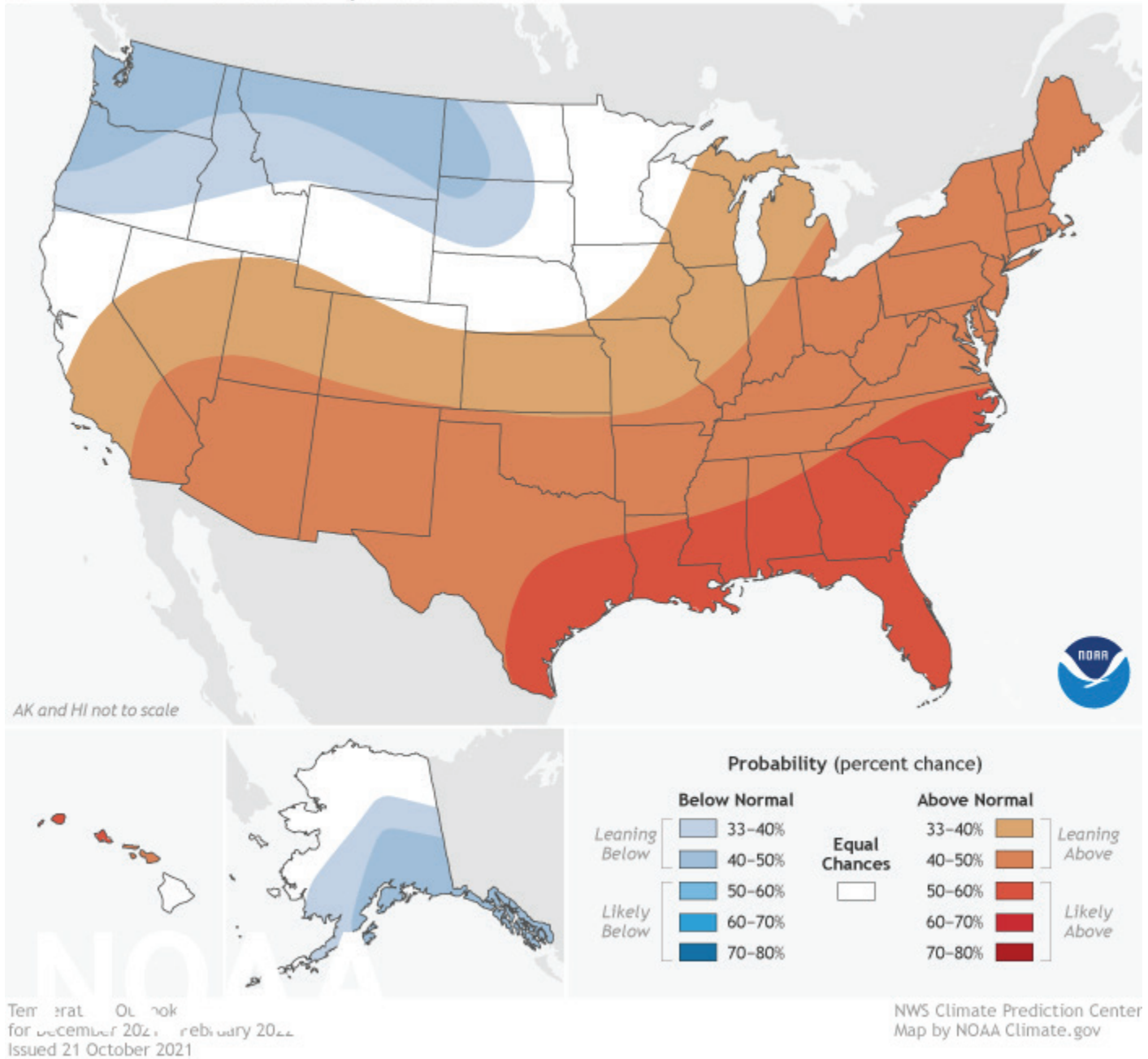
NOAA's Climate Prediction Center updates the three-month outlook each month. The next update will be available November 19.

Seasonal outlooks help communities prepare for what is likely to come in the months ahead and minimize weather's impacts on lives and livelihoods. Empowering people with actionable forecasts and winter weather tips is key to NOAA's effort to build a more Weather-Ready Nation.

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Winter 2021: U.S. Temperature Outlook

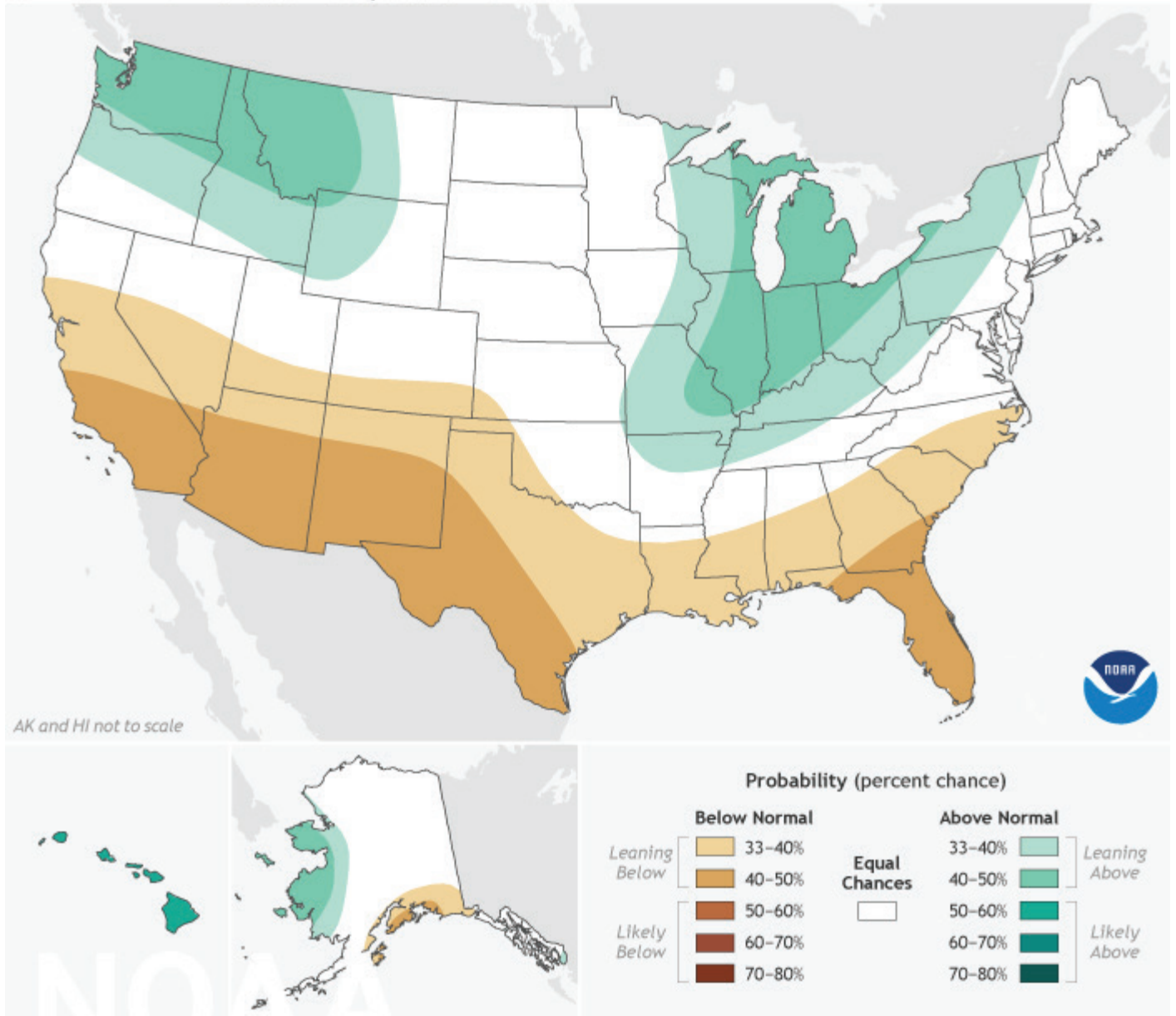


This U.S. Winter Outlook 2021-2022 map for temperature shows warmer-than-average conditions across the South and most of the eastern U.S., while below average temperatures are favored for southeast Alaska and the Pacific Northwest eastward to the Northern Plains. (NOAA Climate.gov, using NWS CPC data)

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Winter 2021: U.S. Precipitation Outlook



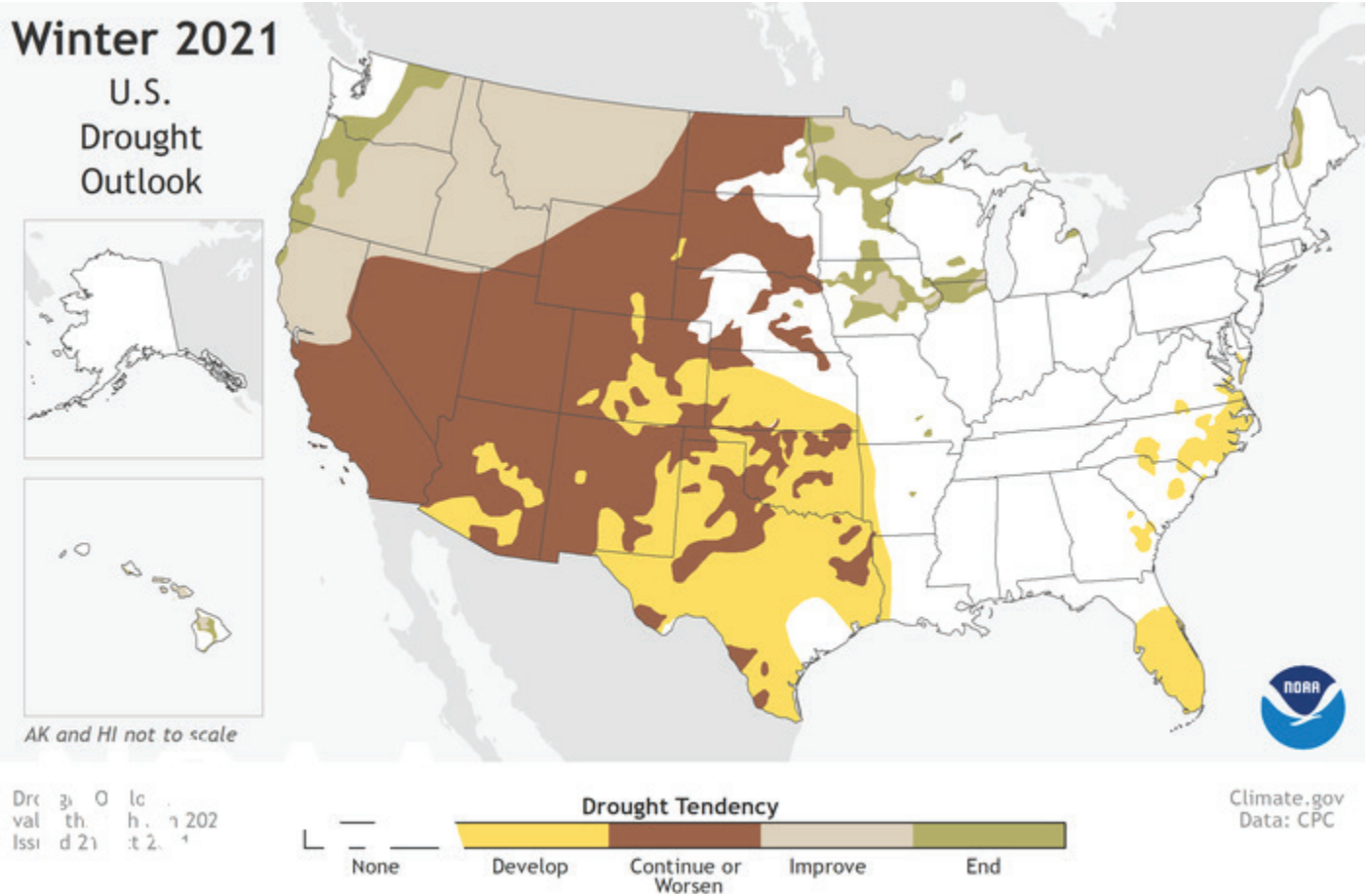
Precipitation Outlook
for December 2021 - February 2022
Issued 21 October 2021

NWS Climate Prediction Center
Map by NOAA Climate.gov

This 2021-2022 U.S. Winter Outlook map for precipitation shows wetter-than-average conditions are most likely in parts of the North, primarily in the Pacific Northwest, northern Rockies, Great Lakes, Ohio Valley and western Alaska. Drier-than-average conditions are favored in south-central Alaska, southern California, the Southwest, and the Southeast. (NOAA Climate.gov based on NWS CPC data)

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This seasonal U.S. Drought Outlook map for November 2021 through January 2022 predicts persistent drought across the West, Northern Plains, and the Missouri River Basin. Drought improvement is anticipated in the Pacific Northwest, northern California, the upper Midwest, and Hawaii. (NOAA Climate.gov based on NWS CPC data)

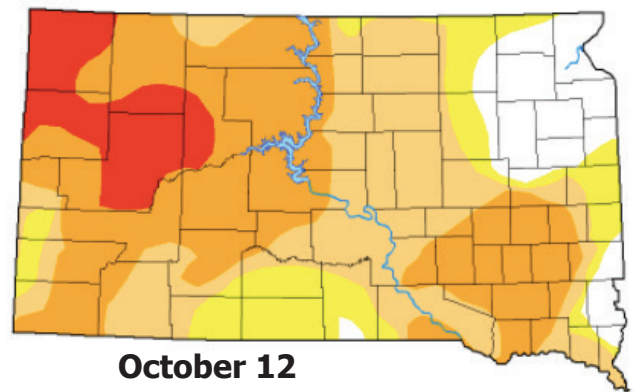
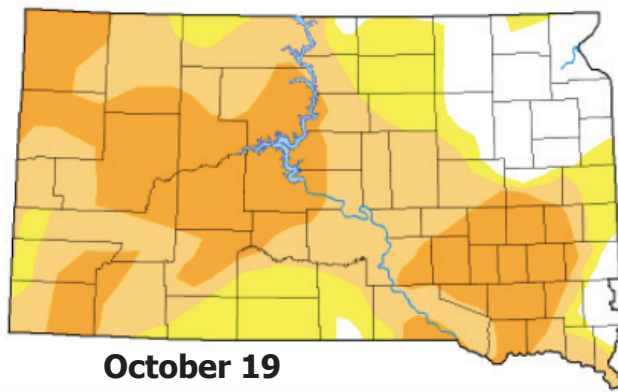
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



High Plains

Widespread precipitation (1 to 3 inches, liquid equivalent) since 12Z on Oct 12 prompted a large 1-category improvement across the Dakotas and an adjustment to only show long-term drought impacts for much of the northern Plains. Excluding the northwest corner of North Dakota, 14-day precipitation amounts have totaled 2 to 6 inches. Extreme drought (D3) remains across northwest North Dakota, based on long-term SPIs and soil moisture below the 5th percentile. Improvements were also made across parts of Nebraska and Kansas due to weekly precipitation amounts of greater than 1 inch and soil moisture recovery. Likewise, an increase in soil moisture indicators resulted in small improvements across parts of Wyoming.

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

I am updating today because the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting on booster doses was held earlier today, and I didn't want to wait until this was old news before passing it along. I'll do a quick update on the numbers, give you a couple of pieces of other news, and report on the ACIP meeting. With luck, we won't have much more news for a few days.

At midday today, the total case count in the US was up to 45,207,116 with a seven-day new-case average of 76,496. Still declining, but still some trouble spots too. States with a daily new-case average more than 50 per 100,000 residents over the last week are, from highest, Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, North Dakota, and West Virginia. The good news is that new cases are declining in all of these states, so the picture should improve from here. States still with double-digit percentage increases in new cases over the past week are, from highest, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Colorado. Hospitalizations continue to decline overall; the average is now at 57,745.

The CDC's ensemble forecast was published yesterday and projects new deaths and hospitalizations will continue to decrease over the next four weeks; this is part of a longer trend. The forecast shows as many as 769,000 deaths by November 13, a horrifying number, but reflective of a decrease in daily numbers. As of midday today, we are at 731,512 deaths with a seven-day daily average of 1532.

It's not like this is the first time, but there is some not-great news on the horizon: a new sub-variant of Delta called AY 4.2. We're seeing increasing incidence in the UK, which seems to be the country that gets these things just before we do, and some cases in the US as well where it does not appear to be increasing in frequency or involved in clusters. This one's too new to have a Pango lineage designation like the one for the original Delta: B.1.617.2. The shorthand for now has been Delta Plus. I'm not really crazy about seeing the term, Plus, in association with the Delta variant; this one's enough trouble without a plus. It was identified for the first time in July, and it now accounts for around six percent of samples tested in late September in the UK. The UK Health Ministry report says, "This sublineage is currently increasing in frequency. It includes spike mutations A222V and Y145H. In the week beginning 27 September 2021 (the last week with complete sequencing data), this sublineage accounted for approximately 6% of all sequences generated, on an increasing trajectory. This estimate may be imprecise due to known sequencing issues affecting position S:145. Further assessment is underway."

We should note that we have no evidence for a transmission advantage for either of these two mutations when they've shown up in other variants, but it's difficult to predict what they might do together in the same variant. That means we shouldn't freak out; but I'm going to be straight here when I say I do not really like any variant that can increase in competition with Delta. That's going to be the thing to watch: If it continues to increase—and do so in more places, there's a fair sign it may be more infectious yet than Delta. Computations based on frequency data say the trajectory we're seeing "would be compatible with a transmissibility advantage of ~10%," according to Professor Francois Balloux, director of University College London's Genetics Institute. And he indicates it could be worse based on the longer-term increase in cases. Even 10 percent would have fairly large effects. This is all pretty speculative yet at this point. The UK is currently experiencing a spike in case numbers and has one of the highest infection rates in the world; I don't think we understand whether or how much this subvariant may be affecting that spike. So no need to hit the panic button, but this is not a desirable situation.

Further, according to Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, we do not have any evidence at all

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that our current vaccines and therapeutics are less effective against this subvariant. We still do not want a more transmissible virus; we talked some time ago about how problematic increased transmissibility is all on its own. For the details, see my Update #357 posted February 14, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4436334386382933>. All we can do at this point is good genomic surveillance and wait to see what happens next.

Yesterday, not long after I posted our last Update, the FDA authorized booster shots for the Moderna and Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccines, following the recommendations of their Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) made in last week's meeting. They also extended the emergency use authorizations (EUAs) for all of the vaccines to cover heterologous boosting, that is, using a different vaccine as the booster to the one used in the priming dose(s), so-called mix-and-match. I want to be clear that this was not a situation where it is permissible to get a different vaccine as a booster only if yours is unavailable; they are not recommending any one vaccine or even stating a preference for staying with the same vaccine.

Next up was the ACIP, which met today to make recommendations on the boosters; they finished up just a short time ago. The group unanimously recommended booster doses for both the Moderna and the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccines. The recommendation for those who'd received the primary series with Moderna's vaccine is that people 65 and over, people 50 to 64 with health conditions that place them at risk for severe disease, and those living in long-term care facilities receive a booster at least six months after the primary series. Adults from 18 to 49 with medical conditions that place them at risk for severe disease or at high risk for occupational exposure are recommended to consider their individual risks when making a decision about a booster. All Janssen/Johnson & Johnson recipients are recommended to receive the second dose at least two months after the primary dose. Additionally, they recommended permitting heterologous boosting, or mix-and-match, where a recipient changes to a different vaccine for the booster dose. They noted that mRNA boosters appear to elicit a stronger response than an adenovirus-vectored Janssen/Johnson & Johnson booster does. They were not ready to make a recommendation of a fourth dose as a booster for the immunocompromised who have already been receiving a third dose to improve their initial response. This is pretty much in line with what the FDA authorized last week.

The group did express a concern that young, healthy people would get a booster dose when they don't really need one. Dr. Helen Talbot, infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University, said, "Those that are not at high risk should really be thoughtful about getting that dose." They did reiterate that the goal for the vaccines is not to eliminate infection entirely, but to reduce the risk for severe disease, hospitalization, and death. Now we wait for the CDC director to accept or modify these recommendations before doses will go out.

On Tuesday, the VRBPAC will meet to consider extension of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine's EUA to cover vaccination of those aged 5 to 11 with an ACIP meeting on the matter scheduled for November 2 and 3. Those doses could begin to be administered as soon as early next month, and it appears there is a plan in place to put those doses in the hands of those who will administer them very efficiently and very quickly. Sooner is better. Figure five weeks from first dose to full immunity, and we could have kids protected well before Christmas, which would be just grand. Because such a large share of infections in children are asymptomatic, we don't realize on a day-to-day basis how much difference getting children vaccinated may make in stemming this pandemic; reducing the spread we aren't even aware of would be a significant help in bringing this thing under control.

Early today, Pfizer released preliminary results of their ongoing phase 3 trial for their Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine booster shots. I will note that these data have been neither published nor peer-reviewed at this point. The trial involved 5000 participants, half of whom were randomized into a group that received the

vaccine and half of whom into a group which received a placebo. There were no new side effects or safety concerns that turned up in this trial. Between one week and 2.5 months after the third dose, just five participants given the vaccine booster developed symptomatic disease whereas 109 in the placebo group did. That computes to 95.6 percent efficacy. Better news is that, when they stratified the analysis by age, sex, race, ethnicity, and chronic medical conditions, the efficacy rate held at that same 95.6 percent. We'll need to see how this holds up as time goes on, but we're looking pretty good so far. There's a reasonable chance this third dose is what leads to much more durable immunity than two doses; most experts seem to think that, absent a new variant that escapes our immune responses, a third or possibly a fourth dose should do the trick in terms of long-term protection. I'm not seeing much in the way of opinion that we are going to need frequent boosting after a certain point—although I'm willing if that's what it takes.

And that's all I have today. Keep yourself healthy, and we'll talk again in a few days.

Wagner ends Groton Area's football season

Groton Area had four attempts in the closing minute to score within the 15 yard line, but was unable to make the play as Wagner hung on to win the first round football playoff game, 28-21. The game was played Thursday in Groton.

Both teams scored on their first possession with Groton Area taking a 7-6 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Wagner scored twice in the second quarter and Groton Area scored with no time left to make it 21-14 at halftime with Wagner holding the lead. Neither team scored in the third quarter. Wagner would score in the fourth quarter with 6:58 left. Groton Area would score with 2:03 left and then held Wagner on four plays to take over with a little over a minute left in the game. Andrew Marzahn had a big play to get the ball down to the 15 yard line. Groton Area tried to hit paydirt with the final attempt from the seven yard line with no time left on the clock.

Wagner had 222 yards passings compared to 154 for Groton Area. The Tigers had 128 yards rushing while the Red Raiders had 57 yards rushing. Both teams had 14 first downs and both teams lost a fumble and Groton Area had three interceptions while Wagner had one. Groton Area had seven penalties for 61 yards while Wagner had nine for 90 yards.

Rushing leaders were Kaen Kurtz with 97 yards and Favian Sanchez for 34 yards. Receivers with Andrew Marzahan with 49 yards on two catches, Jackson Cogley had 46 yards on four catches, Ethan Gengerke had one for 20 yards, Sanchez had tree for 18 yards, Jordan Bjerke had two for 18 yards and Pierce Kettering had two for 13 yards.

Sanchez scored on a 16 yard run, Ethan Gengerke scored on a 20 yard pass from Kaden Kurtz, and Kurtz scored on a 20 yard ru. Jackson Cogley kicked all three PATs.

Kurtz had nine tackles while Evin Nehls had eight, Gengerke seven, Logan Ringgenberg seven, Bjerke seven, Kettering seven, and Sanchez had seven tackles, one interception and one fumble recovery.

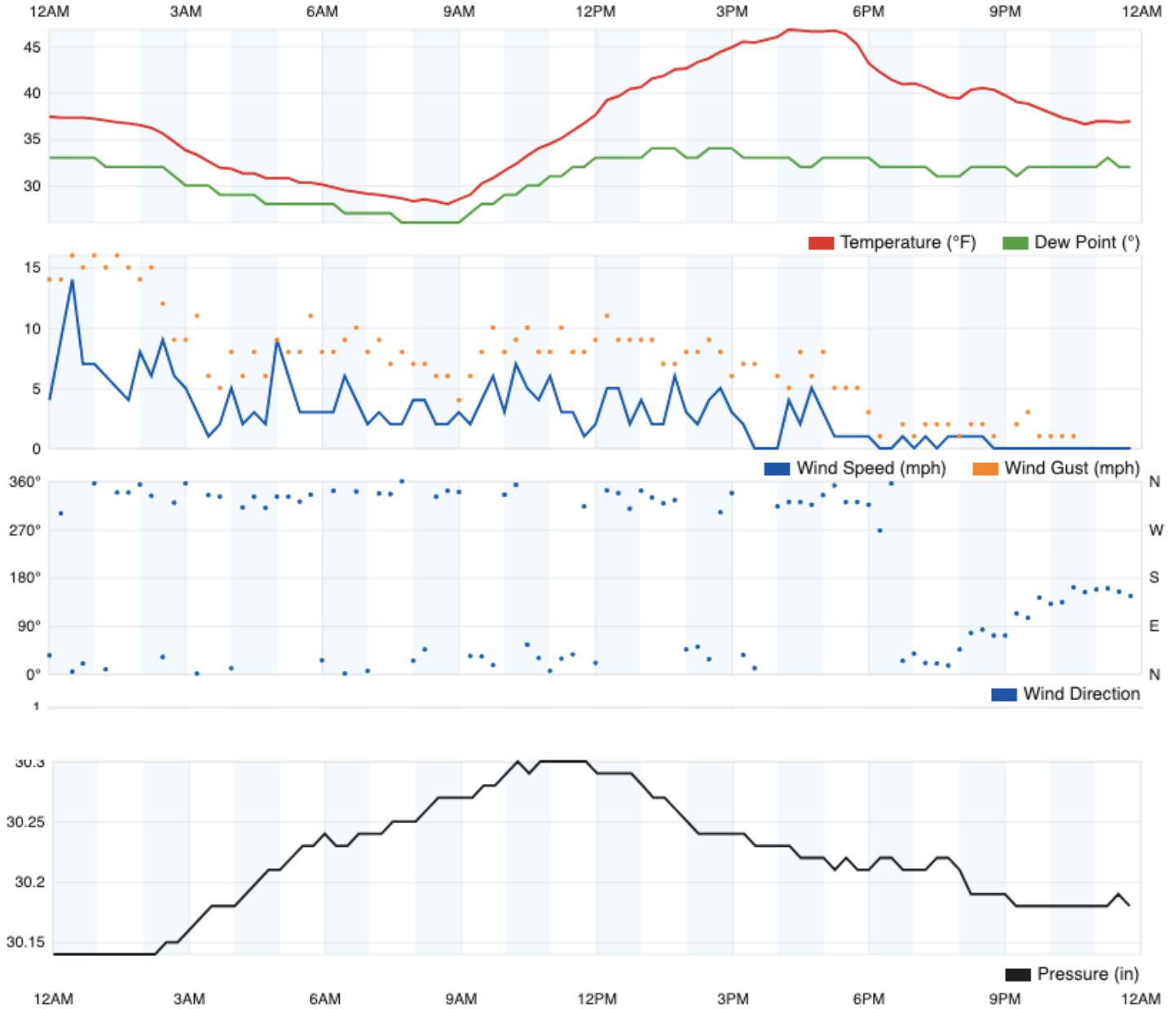
According to statistician Tom Woods, this is the third time the two teams have met in the playoffs and the first time that Wagner has won.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsoerd by Lori's Pharmacy, Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, BK Custom T's & More, Groton Legion, John Sieh Agency, PMS, Dacotah Bank, Blocker Construction , Weismantel Insurance , Thunder Seed - John Wheeling, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls, Bierman Farm Services , Milbrandt Enterprises, Locke Electric, Doug Abeln Seed, Greg Johnson Construction , TD Sponsor Bahr Spray Foam. Mike Nehls was a guest commentator with Jelsyn Kosel running the camera.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Decreasing
Clouds

High: 49 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 28 °F

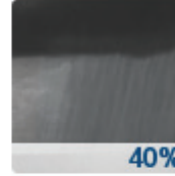
Saturday



Mostly Sunny

High: 50 °F

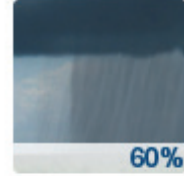
Saturday
Night



Chance
Showers

Low: 37 °F

Sunday



Showers
Likely

High: 46 °F

Cool Temperatures will Continue

Today:

Becoming Partly Sunny
Highs 45-55°F

Saturday:

Partly Cloudy
Highs 45-55°F
Breezy Southeast Winds

Sunday:

Highs 40-50°F
Showers

Cool temperatures can be expected through the weekend with highs in the 40s and 50s. Breezy southeasterly winds can be expected on Saturday. Showers move into the area on Sunday.

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Today in Weather History

October 22, 1992: Record heat occurred on this date. Temperatures rose into the upper 70s to the mid-80s across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. The record highs were 79 degrees at Mobridge and Timber Lake, 80 degrees at Sisseton, 82 degrees at Aberdeen, 83 degrees at Wheaton, and 85 degrees at Pierre. Although not a record high, Kennebec rose to 87 degrees on this date in 1992.

1884: A drought which began in August, extended through September and continued until the last week October brought hardship to Northern, Central, and Eastern Alabama. The 22nd was the first day of general showers, and gentle rains fell from the 26th to the 29th.

1965 - The temperature soared to 104 degrees at San Diego, CA. Southern California was in the midst of a late October heat wave that year. Los Angeles had ten consecutive days with afternoon highs reaching 100 degrees. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1985 - A guest on the top floor of a hotel in Seattle, WA, was seriously injured while talking on the phone when lightning struck. Several persons are killed each year when the electrical charge from a lightning bolt travels via telephone wiring. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Yakutat, AK, surpassed their previous all-time yearly precipitation total of 190 inches. Monthly records were set in June with 17 inches, in September with 70 inches, and in October with more than 40 inches. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987) Twenty-two cities in the eastern U.S., most of them in the southeast states, reported record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 30 degrees at Athens GA, 28 degrees at Birmingham AL, and 23 degrees at Pinson AL, were the coldest of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary) Showers produced heavy rain in southern California, with amounts ranging up to five inches at Blue Jay. Flash flooding resulted in two deaths, ten injuries, and more than a million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A "nor'easter" swept across the coast of New England. Winds gusted to 75 mph, and large waves and high tides caused extensive shoreline flooding. A heavy wet snow blanketed much of eastern New York State, with a foot of snow reported in Lewis County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A storm system moving out of the Gulf of Alaska brought rain to the Northern and Central Pacific Coast Region, with snow in some of the mountains of Oregon, and wind gusts to 60 mph along the Oregon coast. Six cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 34 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: Game 4 of the World Series between the Cleveland Indians and the Florida Marlins was the coldest game in World Series history. The official game-time temperature was 38 degrees at Jacobs Field in Cleveland. Wind chills as low as 18 degrees was reported during the game.

1998: Tropical Depression Thirteen formed on October 22 over the southwestern the Caribbean Sea. By the 24th, this tropical depression became Hurricane Mitch. This hurricane would rapidly intensify over the next two days, reaching Category 5 strength on the 26th. Hurricane Mitch would end up being the second deadliest hurricane in the history of the Atlantic Ocean.

1997: Game 4 of the World Series between the Cleveland Indians and the Florida Marlins was the coldest game in World Series history. The official game-time temperature was 38 degrees at Jacobs Field in Cleveland. Wind chills as low as 18 degrees was reported during the game.

1998: Tropical Depression Thirteen formed on October 22 over the southwestern the Caribbean Sea. By the 24th, this tropical depression became Hurricane Mitch. This hurricane would rapidly intensify over the next two days, reaching Category 5 strength on the 26th. Hurricane Mitch would end up being the second deadliest hurricane in the history of the Atlantic Ocean.

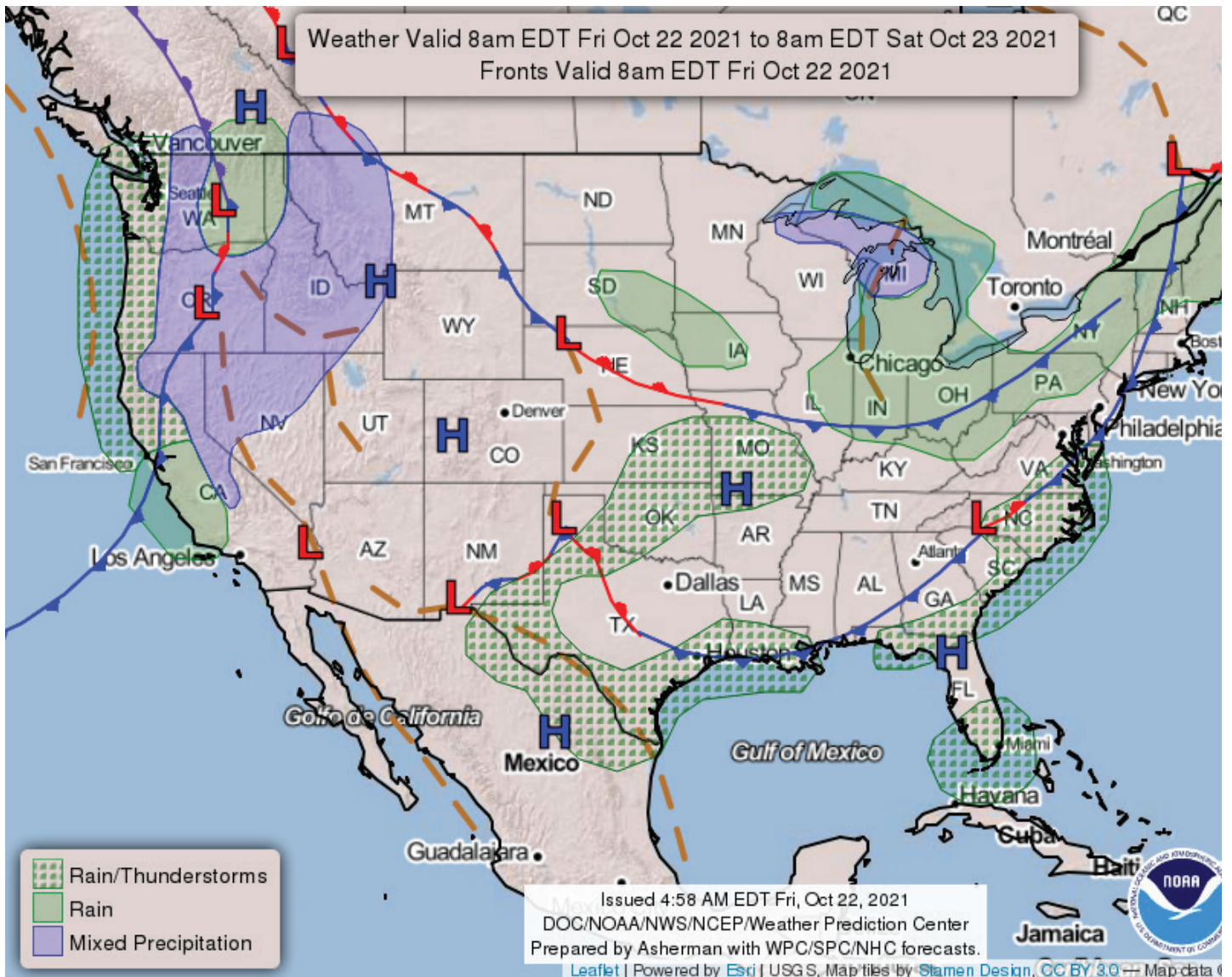
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 46.8 °F at 4:15 AM
Low Temp: 28.0 °F at 8:45 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 1:30 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 86° in 1947
Record Low: 9° in 1987
Average High: 56°F
Average Low: 31°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.58
Precip to date in Oct.: 2.81
Average Precip to date: 19.91
Precip Year to Date: 18.23
Sunset Tonight: 6:38:00 PMM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57:13 AM



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RELIEF FROM SEARCHING

Many missionaries travel to visit distant tribes in the most remote villages of the world. They all seem to have a similar experience: when the natives learn and understand that there is only one God, whose story is in the Bible, and whom they can come to know through Jesus Christ, they lose their fear of "their gods." Most of them have many different gods whom they do not know nor understand - only fear. So, they live lives filled with fear - afraid that they will displease the god they have created who may punish or kill them, their families or tribe at any time. So, they live lives that are haunted, not helped, by their beliefs.

How different is the God of the Bible whom we can come to know, love and understand? Our God has the heart of a loving Father. The Psalmist described Him in wonderful, gracious terms when he wrote, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear - stand in awe of - Him."

He has compassion on us when we are weak and need His strength to make it through difficult days and long nights. He has compassion on us when we hurt and need His hope and healing. He has compassion on us when we have failed Him and need His forgiveness.

One day two fathers were talking. "If your son was my son, I would never speak to him again for what he's done to you." "Yes," replied the father who was filled with grief, "but he's not. He's my son, and I'll always love him." How like our compassionate Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for Your compassion which we so desperately need - yet can never earn nor deserve. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. Psalm 103:13

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP FOOTBALL=

Brookings 21, Pierre 14

Canton 43, Lennox 28

Chamberlain 29, Custer 26

Dell Rapids 43, Tri-Valley 6

Harrisburg 43, Brandon Valley 14

Madison 40, Sioux Falls Christian 12

Mitchell 21, Huron 20, OT

Rapid City Stevens 49, Rapid City Central 0

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 49, Sioux Falls Jefferson 6

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 41, Aberdeen Central 14

Sioux Falls Washington 34, Sioux Falls Lincoln 24

Spearfish 28, Belle Fourche 14

Sturgis Brown 40, Douglas 13

Tea Area 27, West Central 13

Vermillion 34, Dakota Valley 6

Yankton 20, Watertown 13

Class 9A State=

First Round=

Castlewood 42, Kadoka Area 20

DeSmet 62, Britton-Hecla 12

Gregory 34, Burke 6

Herreid/Selby Area 50, Northwestern 6

Howard 40, Kimball/White Lake 6

Wall 56, North Central Co-Op 6

Warner 54, Philip 0

Wolsey-Wessington 50, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 0

Class 9AA State=

First Round=

Canistota 22, Florence/Henry 20

Garretson 28, Hamlin 7

Hanson 70, Elkton-Lake Benton 22

Ipswich 36, Lemmon/McIntosh 0

Lyman 30, Stanley County 0

Parkston 20, Bon Homme 15

Platte-Geddes 35, Chester 12

Timber Lake 14, Leola/Frederick 8

Class 9B State=

First Round=

Alcester-Hudson 34, Sully Buttes 0

Avon 64, Estelline/Hendricks 14

Dell Rapids St. Mary 40, Corsica/Stickney 0

Faulkton 52, Colome 0

Gayville-Volin 36, Langford 14

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Harding County 26, New Underwood 12
Hitchcock-Tulare 38, Faith 0
Potter County 52, Jones County 6
Class 11B State=
First Round=
Aberdeen Roncalli 14, Redfield 6
Beresford 27, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 24
Bridgewater-Emery 48, Hot Springs 6
Elk Point-Jefferson 56, St. Thomas More 28
McCook Central/Montrose 9, Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 6
Sioux Valley 54, Deuel 20
Wagner 28, Groton Area 21
Winner 60, Clark/Willow Lake 0

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

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

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined
PREP VOLLEYBALL=
Rapid City Christian def. Red Cloud, 25-18, 25-8, 25-11
Todd County def. Little Wound, 25-15, 25-17, 25-17

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

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

Medicaid expansion ballot campaigns near signature threshold

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A pair of campaigns to expand Medicaid in South Dakota are nearing enough voter petitions to be placed on the ballot next year, organizers said Thursday.

One campaign, sponsored by former Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Rick Weiland, has collected an estimated 36,000 signed petitions and is attempting to reach 45,000 by a Nov. 8 deadline. Meanwhile, a separate campaign, backed by the state's major health care systems and medical organizations, has surpassed the roughly 34,000 signature minimum and plans to turn in about 50,000 signatures, according to Zach Marcus, a spokesman for the campaign.

The secretary of state will assess whether the signatures come from South Dakota voters and usually dismisses some. If enough signatures are gathered, the measures would appear on the November 2022 ballot.

Both campaigns propose to voters an amendment to the state constitution to require Medicaid health insurance be made available to people who live below 133% of the federal poverty level, which is currently about \$17,000 for an individual or \$35,000 for a family of four. The rival initiatives propose different timelines for implementation. If both pass, the one with the higher vote count would be implemented.

The efforts have prompted a political tussle between the Legislature and groups looking to enact laws that have little chance in the Republican-dominated Statehouse.

The Legislature this year proposed a constitutional amendment that would add a 60% vote threshold to ballot measures that raise taxes or spend public funds. That constitutional amendment must be approved by voters. Lawmakers placed it on next year's primary election ballot so that it could apply to ballot initia-

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tives that appear on the November ballot.

Republican lawmakers have argued the higher vote threshold would put safeguards on government spending and is similar to supermajority requirements legislators face to raise taxes or spend money.

But Weiland described the proposal and other recent actions aimed at ballot initiatives as an attack on a form of direct democracy.

"Our state motto is, 'Under God the People Rule' — the Legislature has turned that into a joke," he said.

Weiland's group, Dakotans for Health, has teamed up with two other ballot initiative campaigns to push back on the Legislature. The campaigns, which include groups pushing for recreational marijuana legalization and an independent redistricting commission, plan to gather Sunday afternoon in Sioux Falls.

Besides pressing for more signatures, the groups are kicking off an effort to oppose the Legislature's 60% vote threshold proposal.

Strong economic growth continues in rural parts of 10 states

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Strong economic growth continues in rural parts of 10 Plains and Western states, according to a new monthly survey of bankers in the region.

The overall economic index for the region improved in October to 66.1 from September's already-strong 62.5 reading. Any score above 50 suggests a growing economy, while a score below 50 suggests a shrinking economy.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, said the region is benefitting from solid grain prices, continued low interest rates and growing agricultural exports. USDA figures show that agricultural exports are up more than 25% so far this year.

Farmland prices in the area continue growing even though the price index for cropland slipped in October to 81.5 from September's record high of 85.2.

Demand for workers remains high but businesses are having a hard time finding people to hire, Goss said. The hiring index increased in October to a very strong level of 71.4 from September's 67.9.

But bankers were less optimistic about the economy. The confidence index dropped to 51.8 in October from September's much stronger 65.4 reading.

Bankers from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming were surveyed.

South Dakota ready to inoculate state's young people

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Health officials in South Dakota say they're prepared to handle the vaccination of the state's young people as federal regulators weigh the safety and effectiveness of giving COVID-19 shots to children ages 5 to 11.

The White House detailed plans Wednesday for the Pfizer shot to be given to elementary school youngsters with federal authorization expected in a matter of weeks.

Sanford Health chief physician, Dr. Jeremy Cauwels, says the health care provider has been able to maintain a vaccine supply in all of its clinics, so when approval is given, they will be ready, KSFY-TV reported.

"I'm looking forward to the possibility of partnering with schools or other agencies around town to vaccinate more kids if that's helpful, but I think we will be able to handle a good bit of the numbers simply by making sure they know where our local clinics are and how to get to them," said Cauwels.

Roughly 28 million children nationwide will soon be able to get a COVID-19 vaccine at their pediatrician's office, local pharmacy and possibly even their school.

Sioux Falls public health director, Dr. Charles Chima, says making the vaccine available to more people is good for everyone.

"It will be a big deal because we estimate if you look at the two-county area Minnehaha and Lincoln County kids aged 5-11 probably make up about close to 10% of the population," said Chima.

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Sheriff: Baldwin fired prop gun on movie set, killing woman

By MORGAN LEE and WALTER BERRY Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Actor Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun on a movie set and killed the cinematographer, authorities said. The director of the Western being filmed was wounded, and authorities are investigating what happened.

Halyna Hutchins, cinematographer on the movie "Rust," and director Joel Souza were shot Thursday on the rustic film set in the desert on the southern outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico, according to County Sheriff's officials.

A spokesperson for Baldwin said there was an accident on the set involving the misfire of a prop gun with blanks, though a charge without a metal projectile is unlikely to kill at a moderate distance. Sheriff's spokesman Juan Rios said detectives were investigating how and what type of projectile was discharged.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported the 63-year-old Baldwin was seen Thursday outside the sheriff's office in tears, but attempts to get comment from him were unsuccessful.

Hutchins, 42, was airlifted to the University of New Mexico Hospital, where she was pronounced dead by medical personnel, the sheriff's department said. Souza, 48, was taken by ambulance to Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center, where he is undergoing treatment.

"The details are unclear at this moment, but we are working to learn more, and we support a full investigation into this tragic event," International Cinematographers Guild president John Lindley and executive director Rebecca Rhine said in a statement.

Sheriff's deputies responded about 2 p.m. to the movie set at the Bonanza Creek Ranch after 911 calls described a person being shot on set, said Rios, the sheriff's spokesman. The ranch has been used in dozens of films, including the recent Tom Hanks Western "News of the World."

"This investigation remains open and active," Rios said in a statement. "No charges have been filed in regard to this incident. Witnesses continue to be interviewed by detectives."

Hutchins, a 2015 graduate of the American Film Institute, worked as director of photography on the 2020 action film "Archenemy," starring Joe Manganiello. She was named a "rising star" by American Cinematographer in 2019.

"I'm so sad about losing Halyna. And so infuriated that this could happen on a set," said "Archenemy" director Adam Egypt Mortimer on Twitter. "She was a brilliant talent who was absolutely committed to art and to film."

Manganiello called Hutchins "an incredible talent" and "a great person" on his Instagram account. He said he was lucky to have worked with her.

Baldwin teamed up as a producer previously with Souza on the 2019 film, "Crown Vic," which starred Thomas Jane as a veteran Los Angeles police officer on a manhunt for two violent bank robbers. Souza's first credited film, 2010's "Hanna's Gold," was a treasure hunt adventure featuring Luke Perry.

Production was halted on "Rust." The movie is about a 13-year-old boy who is left to fend for himself and his younger brother following the death of their parents in 1880s' Kansas, according to the Internet Movie Database website. The teen goes on the run with his long-estranged grandfather (played by Baldwin) after the boy is sentenced to hang for the accidental killing of a local rancher.

In 1993, Brandon Lee, 28, son of the late martial-arts star Bruce Lee, died after being hit by a .44-caliber slug while filming a death scene for the movie "The Crow." The gun was supposed to have fired a blank, but an autopsy turned up a bullet lodged near his spine.

A Twitter account run by Lee's sister Shannon said: "Our hearts go out to the family of Halyna Hutchins and to Joel Souza and all involved in the incident on 'Rust.' No one should ever be killed by a gun on a film set. Period."

In 1984, actor Jon-Erik Hexum died after shooting himself in the head with a prop gun blank while pretending to play Russian roulette with a .44 Magnum on the set of the television series "Cover Up."

Berry reported from Phoenix. Associated Press film writer Jake Coyle contributed to this report.

China vows no concessions on Taiwan after Biden comments

BEIJING (AP) — China on Friday said there is “no room” for compromise or concessions over the issue of Taiwan, following a comment by U.S. President Joe Biden that the U.S. is committed to defending the island if it is attacked.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin reasserted China’s longstanding claim that the island is its territory at a daily briefing after Biden made his comment a day before at a forum hosted by CNN.

China has recently upped its threat to bring Taiwan under its control by force if necessary by flying warplanes near the island and rehearsing beach landings.

“When it comes to issues related to China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and other core interests, there is no room for China to compromise or make concessions, and no one should underestimate the strong determination, firm will and strong ability of the Chinese people to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Wang said.

“Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory. The Taiwan issue is purely an internal affair of China that allows no foreign intervention,” Wang said.

Biden’s comments on Thursday were viewed as stretching the “strategic ambiguity” Washington has maintained over how it would respond to an assault on the self-governing island republic.

The U.S. should “be cautious with its words and actions on the Taiwan issue, and not send any wrong signals to the separatist forces of Taiwan independence, so as not to seriously damage China-U.S. relations and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait,” Wang said.

In his comments, Biden said the U.S. did not want a new Cold War but expressed concern about whether China was “going to engage in activities that will put them in a position where they may make a serious mistake.”

“I just want to make China understand that we are not going to step back, we are not going to change any of our views.” Biden said. Asked whether the U.S. would come to Taiwan’s defense if it were attacked, he replied: “Yes, we have a commitment to do that.”

In Taipei, a spokesperson for independence-minded President Tsai Ing-wen said the U.S. has shown its support for Taiwan through concrete actions and the island’s 23 million citizens would not surrender to pressure or act rashly.

“Taiwan will demonstrate our firm determination to defend ourselves and continue to work with countries with similar values to make a positive contribution toward the Taiwan Strait and Indo-Pacific region’s peace and stability,” spokesperson Chang Tun-han said.

China and Taiwan split during a civil war in 1949. The U.S. cut formal diplomatic relations with Taipei in 1979 in order to recognize Beijing. The U.S. does not openly contest China’s claim to Taiwan, but is committed by law to ensure the island can defend itself and to treat all threats toward it as matters of “grave concern.”

Under President Xi Jinping, who is also Communist Party leader and head of the armed forces, China has been stepping up military, diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan. Over its National Day weekend at the beginning of the month, China sent a record 149 military aircraft southwest of Taiwan in strike group formations, prompting Taiwan to scramble aircraft and activate its air defense missile systems.

China has also recently held beach landing exercises on its side of the roughly 160-kilometer (100-mile)-wide Taiwan Strait that, like the aircraft incursions, it described as a warning to Tsai’s administration.

The U.S. has reinforced its support for Taiwan with military sales. State Department spokesman Ned Price said this month that American support for Taiwan is “rock solid.” The U.S. has “also been very clear that we are committed to deepening our ties with Taiwan,” Price said.

On Wednesday, Biden’s pick for ambassador to Beijing, Nicholas Burns, told lawmakers considering his nomination that Americans should “have confidence in our strength” when dealing with the rise of China, a nation he said the U.S. and its allies could manage.

Burns echoed the Biden administration’s stand on cooperating with China where possible but condemn-

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ing many of its actions, including its policies toward Taiwan and the semi-autonomous territory of Hong Kong, where it has virtually eliminated dissident voices through stiff legislation and arrests.

Warhol in Tehran: Iranians flock to American pop art exhibit

By NASSER KARIMI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranian hard-liners, now back at the helm of the country, may regularly rail against the poisoning of Islamic society by Western culture, but in Tehran, Iranians are flocking to the contemporary art museum to marvel at American pop artist Andy Warhol's iconic soup cans.

The circular floors of the Iranian capital's Museum of Contemporary Art display a sprawling line-up of 18 classic Warhol works, recognizable at first glance: silk-screen portraits of Communist China's founding leader Mao Zedong and Hollywood star Marilyn Monroe, paintings of Campbell Soup cans and a vintage print of former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy.

The exhibit, simply named A Review of Andy Warhol's Works, first opened in June and closes on Sunday. The still-surging coronavirus, which has killed more people in Iran than any other country in the Middle East, forced the museum to close its doors to Warhol fans for a few weeks in August.

"I love this painting," gushed 46-year-old Fatemeh Rezaee, taking in the colored ink of Marilyn Monroe's face, which Warhol produced in 1962 soon after the actress killed herself. "By looking at it, I visualized Marilyn Monroe's life story in my head. It makes the concept of death really tangible for me."

Rezaee, a retired teacher in a loose silk hijab, was so enthralled by the exhibit that she flew all the way from her home in the southern city of Shiraz to see it — twice.

She went on: "His selection of colors is outstanding and to me conveys a combination of feelings such as melancholy and mortality."

Warhol's works are among a permanent art collection worth billions of dollars kept in the Tehran museum vault. As oil boomed during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the country acquired thousands of pieces, including Monets, Picassos and Jackson Pollocks, before the 1979 Islamic Revolution ousted the pro-Western monarchy and vaulted Shiite clerics to power.

Iran's new theocracy first banned modern art and packed away the famous paintings. But in recent decades as cultural restrictions eased, some 1,500 Western art pieces from the dynastic era have gone back on display — with much fanfare. In 2015, Tehran's municipal council even plastered the city's billboards with hundreds of works by great American painters, from Rothko to Hopper, transforming the sprawling city into a giant, open-air exhibit.

Still, a visitor won't find Warhol's grittier fare, like his notorious experimental films, on display in Tehran. In 2005, when the museum showcased its entire collection of 20th-century American and European masterworks, choice pieces — including a Renoir nude — were hidden to avoid offending conservative Islamic sensibilities.

The audience in Tehran on Wednesday nonetheless appeared satisfied with Warhol's silk-screen printings that tested orthodoxies by portraying consumerist themes in the early 1960s.

"People have exceptionally welcomed Andy Warhol paintings' exhibition," said museum spokesperson Hasan Noferesti, noting the crowds amid the coronavirus pandemic required the museum cap the number of visitors per hour.

One visitor, 21-year-old microbiology student Shahin Gandomi dressed in a black shirt and wearing his hair in a ponytail, praised the Mao Zedong painting series.

"When an artist portrays a dictator in an artwork, it appears like that dictator has been taken down from his sacred position," he said.

The showcase may be coming to an end, but Noferesti said the museum plans to put more Warhols and Western artists on display soon.

Although Iran has no diplomatic relations with the United States and hostilities have simmered between the countries since 1979, bootleg copies of Hollywood blockbusters and Western music remain popular in the country, particularly among young urbanites.

Tensions with the U.S. have surged in recent months, as the election of President Ebrahim Raisi, the protégé of Iran's supreme leader, brought hard-liners to power across every branch of government.

Iran has accelerated its atomic program and talks to revive Tehran's now-tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers have stalled for months. Three years ago, then-President Donald Trump reneged on the accord and mounted an economic pressure campaign that has crippled the country's economy.

But at Tehran's sleek, white-walled exhibit this week, there was no talk of political tensions or American sanctions.

"There have been great artists in history, and it is tremendously good that we can get to see their art-works here," said 20-year-old graphics student Kourosch Aminzadeh, who had come back for a second visit.

Sheriff: Baldwin fired shot on movie set that killed woman

By MORGAN LEE and WALTER BERRY Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Authorities are investigating after confirming that a prop firearm discharged by actor Alec Baldwin, while producing and starring in a Western movie, killed the cinematographer and wounded the director.

Santa Fe County Sheriff's officials said Halyna Hutchins, cinematographer on the movie "Rust," and director Joel Souza were shot Thursday on the rustic film set in the desert on the southern outskirts of Santa Fe.

Hutchins, 42, was airlifted to the University of New Mexico Hospital, where she was pronounced dead by medical personnel, the sheriff's department said.

Souza, 48, was taken by ambulance to Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center, where he is undergoing treatment for his injuries.

Production was halted on the film.

A spokesperson for Baldwin said there was an accident on the set involving the misfire of a prop gun with blanks, though a charge without a metal projectile is unlikely to kill at a moderate distance.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported the 63-year-old Baldwin was seen Thursday outside the sheriff's office in tears, but attempts to get comment from him were unsuccessful.

The International Cinematographers Guild confirmed that the woman fatally shot was Hutchins, a cinematographer.

"The details are unclear at this moment, but we are working to learn more, and we support a full investigation into this tragic event," guild president John Lindley and executive director Rebecca Rhine said in a statement.

Hutchins, a 2015 graduate of the American Film Institute, worked as director of photography on the 2020 action film "Archenemy," starring Joe Manganiello. She was named a "rising star" by American Cinematographer in 2019.

"I'm so sad about losing Halyna. And so infuriated that this could happen on a set," said "Archenemy" director Adam Egypt Mortimer on Twitter. "She was a brilliant talent who was absolutely committed to art and to film."

Film colleague Manganiello called her "an incredible talent" and "a great person" on his Instagram account. He said he was lucky to have worked with Hutchins.

Baldwin teamed up as a producer previously with Souza on the 2019 film, "Crown Vic," which starred Thomas Jane as a veteran Los Angeles police officer on a manhunt for two violent bank robbers. His first credited film, 2010's "Hanna's Gold," was a treasure hunt adventure featuring Luke Perry.

Deputies responded about 2 p.m. to the movie set at the Bonanza Creek Ranch after 911 calls described a person being shot on set, sheriff's spokesman Juan Rios said. The ranch has been used in dozens of films, including the recent Tom Hanks Western "News of the World."

Rios said detectives were investigating how and what type of projectile was discharged.

"This investigation remains open and active," Rios said in a statement. "No charges have been filed in regard to this incident. Witnesses continue to be interviewed by detectives."

Filming for "Rust" was set to continue into early November, according to a news release from the New

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Mexico Film Office.

The movie is about a 13-year-old boy who is left to fend for himself and his younger brother following the death of their parents in 1880s' Kansas, according to the Internet Movie Database website. The teen goes on the run with his long-estranged grandfather (played by Baldwin) after the boy is sentenced to hang for the accidental killing of a local rancher.

In 1993, Brandon Lee, 28, son of the late martial-arts star Bruce Lee, died after being hit by a .44-caliber slug while filming a death scene for the movie "The Crow." The gun was supposed to have fired a blank, but an autopsy turned up a bullet lodged near his spine.

A Twitter account run by Lee's sister Shannon said: "Our hearts go out to the family of Halyna Hutchins and to Joel Souza and all involved in the incident on 'Rust.' No one should ever be killed by a gun on a film set. Period."

In 1984, actor Jon-Erik Hexum died after shooting himself in the head with a prop gun blank while pretending to play Russian roulette with a .44 Magnum on the set of the television series "Cover Up."

Berry reported from Phoenix. Associated Press film writer Jake Coyle contributed to this report.

Limbo in a blue tent: African asylum-seekers stuck on Cyprus

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — It seems a strange place to pitch a tent.

Plump in the middle of the United Nations-patrolled buffer zone that has divided Cyprus along ethnic lines since 1974, in the heart of the island's medieval capital, two Cameroonian asylum-seekers have lived in a small blue tent for nearly five months.

The breakaway Turkish Cypriot north, through which they entered hoping to reach the European Union-member, Greek Cypriot south, will deport them if they go back. And the south seems determined not to let them in — to discourage more would-be migrants from trying the same route.

To make things worse, the two can see people freely moving between north and south all the time, as their tent is beside a main authorized crossing — one of nine linking the two communities.

Enjei Grace says that she and Daniel Ejube were wrong to try to enter the internationally recognized south that way to apply for asylum.

"We are sorry," the 24 year-old says with tear-filled eyes, adding that she hopes authorities won't leave them in limbo "forever."

"We just pray that they sort things out, it's not been easy on us," she said.

Neither the Cyprus government nor authorities in the breakaway north have directly referred to the case so far. And the government has given no indication that it would let them in, for fear that could encourage other migrants from the Middle East and Africa to see the buffer zone as an easy gateway to asylum.

Cyprus says it has the highest number of first-time asylum applications among all 27 EU members, relative to its population of roughly 1.1 million. Interior Minister Nicos Nouris has told EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson that the country can't host more asylum seekers "due to the severe burden" on its reception system.

At an EU Asylum Support Office conference in Malta last week, Nouris said Cyprus is "obliged to take significant and drastic" measures along the buffer zone, adding that about 800 migrants crossed it recently within a 10-day span. Nouris added that 15,000 migrants have had their asylum applications rejected but can't be deported because there's no coherent EU policy — or agreement with their home countries — on sending them back.

The Cypriot government claims that Turkey systematically forwards asylum seekers to the Mediterranean island's Turkish Cypriot north so that they can create a new pressure point on the south. It says almost 80% of arriving migrants enter illegally across the buffer zone.

Cyprus was split in 1974 when Turkey invaded following a coup by supporters of union with Greece. Only Turkey recognizes a Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence in the north. Only the Greek Cypriot south

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enjoys full membership benefits. Decades of reunification talks have got nowhere.

The island's convoluted politics were lost on Grace and 20-year-old Ejube when they fled, separately, to an airport in the north with hopes of leaving a troubled past behind. Grace says she fled Cameroon to escape civil war and an uncle who sexually harassed her.

Ejube said his father paid for his trip to Cyprus where he would study and avoid being recruited by Cameroon's rebel forces. Both he and Grace said they didn't know about Cyprus' division.

Grace said the island appeared the "main" available EU destination when she decided to emigrate.

After realizing asylum wasn't available in the Turkish-Cypriot north, Grace and Ejube say a friend told them in May that they could easily "jump a fence" at night to reach the south.

Luck was not on their side. U.N. police officers patrolling the fenced area at a section of the capital's 16th century Venetian-built walls happened to notice them and returned them into the buffer zone. Normally, the U.N. passes asylum seekers over to authorities in the south, but this didn't happen with Ejube and Grace.

They've lived there since, with food and clothing donated by the U.N. refugee agency and individuals from both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot community.

U.N. Peacekeeping Force spokesman Aleem Siddique said the Cyprus government "has the responsibility" to accept asylum seekers and that the Force's job is to coordinate between the two sides to "prevent unauthorized access" to the buffer zone.

Emilia Strovolidou, spokeswoman for the U.N. refugee agency said Grace and Ejube should be allowed access to asylum procedures according to national, EU and international law. "Despite our interventions with the authorities, access has been denied," she said.

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

Mumbai cinemas reopen after 18 months as life swings back

MUMBAI, India (AP) — Movie theaters in India's entertainment capital Mumbai reopened on Friday after more than 18 months of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic, the last of the many virus restrictions to go amid a decline in infections.

Theaters opened to half capacity, following the guidelines released last month, but struggled to lure the public back and mostly re-released earlier hits. Many shows were running with fewer audiences, movie ticketing portal BookMyShow showed.

To minimize the danger of the virus, only those with COVID-19 vaccination certificates or with a "safe status" on the state-run health app will be allowed to enter the theaters. Masks and temperature checks are mandatory and no food or beverages will be allowed inside.

Theaters elsewhere in the country are already running shows.

Mumbai city has been one of the country's worst-affected by the pandemic but has gradually reopened following a decline in both COVID-19 cases and deaths. Cinemas there, however, are among the last public places to reopen — a hugely symbolic move in the country's financial capital also known for its Bollywood film industry.

Every year, the \$2.8 billion industry produces more than 2,000 films. Bollywood's success over the years has embedded moviegoing into India's contemporary culture and been a boon for the economy.

The restrictions imposed on movie theaters to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have hurt operators. But the industry is expected to rebound. Indian filmmakers have lined up major big-ticket releases ahead of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, when sales peak and audiences flock to theaters.

The return to cinemas in Mumbai comes a day after India celebrated its one billionth COVID-19 vaccine dose. About half of India's nearly 1.4 billion people have received at least one dose while around 20% are fully immunized, according to Our World in Data.

India witnessed a crushing coronavirus surge earlier this year but life has swung back to normal. Markets buzz with activity, foreign tourists are allowed again and the country is gearing up to celebrate Diwali.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said India's vaccine drive is an example of what it can achieve if the citizens and the government come together with a common goal. He said the milestone has silenced India's critics.

"Injecting 1 billion doses is not a mere figure but a reflection of the country's determination. India has scripted a new chapter in its history. The world will now take India more seriously after this landmark," Modi said in a speech that was televised live across the country.

Modi also exhorted people to buy Indian-made goods to boost the economy, which is expected to gain from the festival season purchases.

"There are some among us who only trust foreign brands even for everyday necessities. The success of Made in India vaccines is a paradigm shift," he said.

In South Sudan, flooding called 'worst thing in my lifetime'

By ADRIENNE SURPRENANT Associated Press

MALUALKON, South Sudan (AP) — He feels like a man who has drowned.

The worst flooding that parts of South Sudan have seen in 60 years now surrounds his home of mud and grass. His field of sorghum, which fed his family, is under water. Surrounding mud dykes have collapsed.

Other people have fled. Only Yel Aguer Deng's family and a few neighbors remain.

This is the third straight year of extreme flooding in South Sudan, further imperiling livelihoods of many of the 11 million people in the world's youngest country. A five-year civil war, hunger and corruption have all challenged the nation. Now climate change, which the United Nations has blamed on the flooding, is impossible to ignore.

As he empties a fishing net, Daniel Deng, a 50-year-old father of seven, recalls a life of being forced to flee again and again because of insecurity. "But this one event (the flood) is too much," he said. "It is the worst thing that happened in my lifetime."

The U.N. says the flooding has affected almost a half-million people across South Sudan since May. Here in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, the Lol river has burst its banks.

This state is usually spared from extreme flooding that plagues the South Sudan states of Jonglei and Unity that border the White Nile and the Sudd marshlands. But now, houses and crops have been swamped.

A new report this week coordinated by the World Meteorological Organization warned of increasing such climate shocks to come across much of Africa, the continent that contributes the least to global warming but will suffer from it most.

In these rural South Sudan communities, shelters of braided grass put up a fragile resistance in a land of seemingly endless water.

In Langic village, Ajou Bol Yel's family of seven hosted nine neighbors who had lost their homes. The elders sleep outside on beds protected by mosquito nets, while the children share the floor.

In Majak Awar, some 100 families have been displaced twice, in June when homes were flooded and again in August when their shelters were ruined, too.

"I want to leave for Sudan," whispered Nyibol Arop, a 27-year-old mother of five, as she boiled her morning tea just steps away from the stagnant water that threatens her current shelter.

It is hard to see a stable future when constantly on the move, a lesson learned during the civil war that displaced millions of people before a peace agreement in 2018.

"Floods are not constant. Some people will stay, and some will go," said Thomas Mapol, a 45-year-old father of nine, as he showed off the destroyed houses of his village near Majak Awar. "But me, I cannot move anywhere. There is no other place that I know."

Beijing offering COVID-19 boosters, 4 months before Olympics

BEIJING (AP) — China's capital Beijing has begun offering booster shots against COVID-19, four months before the city and surrounding regions are to host the Winter Olympics.

Anyone 18 or older who have received two-dose Chinese vaccines and belong to at-risk groups, includ-

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ing those participating, organizing or working on games facilities, would be eligible for the additional shot, state media reported Friday.

The booster has been rolling out in cities across the vast nation since late September, but Beijing authorities have been extra cautious in who receives the extra jab.

The games are set to begin on Feb. 4 with only residents of China allowed in the stands. Indoor events with sliding, skiing and jumping will be held in the suburb of Yanqing and the neighboring city of Zhangjiakou.

China has been largely successful in preventing local transmission through strict requirements on mask wearing, quarantining and contact tracing. Cases continue to pop up however, with 28 new ones reported Friday, including one in the Beijing suburb of Fengtai.

The pandemic is believed to have originated in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, leading to a total lockdown that affected more than 50 million people.

China has been accused of covering up the initial outbreak and stymying investigations into the coronavirus' origins, although it said earlier this week that it would cooperate with a renewed investigation by the World Health Organization while "firmly opposing any forms of political manipulation."

WHO on Wednesday released a proposed list of 25 experts to advise it on next steps in the search for the virus' origins after its earlier efforts were attacked for going easy on China.

As virus cases rise, so do pleas for Russians to get vaccine

By YAROSLAV GUNIN Associated Press

NIZHNY NOVGOROD, Russia (AP) — As she stood in the courtyard of the morgue holding the body of her grandmother who died of COVID-19, Ramilya Shigalturina had a message for anyone still resisting vaccinations.

"I'm begging all Russians: Please get vaccinated, because it's really dreadful and dangerous," said the resident of Nizhny Novgorod, the country's fifth-largest city.

Shigalturina said her 83-year-old grandmother "died right away after catching it. She wasn't vaccinated."

When Russia last year became the first country to launch a coronavirus vaccine, called Sputnik V, it was hailed as a matter of national pride and a sign of its scientific know-how. But since the free immunization program began in December 2020, only about a third of the country's 146 million people have gotten fully vaccinated.

The low vaccine acceptance is of increasing concern as Russia suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. On Thursday, the national coronavirus task force reported 1,036 deaths and more than 36,000 new infections over the past 24 hours.

"I can't understand what's going on," President Vladimir Putin said, a rare admission of bewilderment from the steely leader. "We have a reliable and efficient vaccine. The vaccine really reduces the risks of illness, grave complications and death."

At Nizhny Novgorod's Infectious Hospital No. 23, where the seriously ill patients lie in wards with little space between their beds, Dr. Natalia Soloshenko is battered by the onslaught.

"I can tell you that out of every 50 admitted, only one or two of them are vaccinated," the chief doctor told The Associated Press. "The whole ICU is full of highly critical patients; all of those patients are unvaccinated."

"To be honest, we're not even outraged anymore; we just feel sorry for these people," she said.

Nina Pugacheva is still in the hospital, but is one of the lucky ones — she is recovering.

"Tell everyone to get vaccinated," she said.

Soloshenko said widespread misinformation appears to be driving the vaccine hesitancy.

"It's a very sensitive issue, a burning issue for all health care workers. We read what's on social media and see the most negative information coming from the citizens of our country regarding vaccination," she said.

Many Russians are suspicious of vaccines as a whole because of a distrust of authorities dating to the Soviet era. With Sputnik V, there was widespread concern that it was approved for use before the comple-

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tion of full clinical trials.

Some critics also have blamed conflicting signals from authorities. While extolling Sputnik V and three other domestic vaccines, state-controlled media often criticized Western-made shots, a message that many saw as feeding doubts about vaccines in general.

The vaccination rate in the Nizhny Novgorod region, about 400 kilometers (250 miles) east of Moscow, is 44% higher than the national average, but it is seeing a high death rate. The coronavirus task force reported 40 new deaths in the past day — about twice the death rate recorded in Moscow.

As deaths spiked, regional Gov. Gleb Nikitin said new measures would be taken to curb the spread of the infections, but they haven't been announced yet.

Putin on Wednesday ordered Russians to stay away from work from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7, a period that includes a four-day national holiday.

Moscow and St. Petersburg, the two most populous Russian cities and the country's key political, business and cultural centers, have gone further, announcing new restrictions following months of inaction.

In Moscow, gyms, cinemas, entertainment venues and most stores are to be closed from Oct. 28 to Nov. 7; and restaurants will be open only for takeout or delivery.

The authorities in St. Petersburg on Monday introduced digital codes for proving vaccination that must be shown beginning Nov. 1 to enter conferences and sports events. Starting on Nov. 15, those codes will be required at movies, theaters, museums and gyms, and on Dec. 1 they will be mandatory at restaurants, cafes and some stores.

A similar code system was tried in Moscow over the summer but was abandoned after a few weeks amid complaints from restaurant owners about tanking revenue.

Associated Press writers Vladimir Isachenkov and Jim Heintz in Moscow contributed.

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

EXPLAINER: Is it time to get a COVID-19 booster? Which one?

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writers

Millions more Americans just became eligible for COVID-19 boosters but figuring out who's eligible and when can be confusing — and adding to the challenge is that this time around, people can get a different type of vaccine for that extra dose.

A number of factors, including the vaccine you started with and when your last dose was, help determine when you qualify. Just like the initial shots, boosters are free and will be available at pharmacies, doctor offices and clinics.

Here are some things to know:

Q: Why are boosters needed?

A: People who are fully vaccinated still have strong protection against hospitalization and death from COVID-19. But immunity against infection can wane over time, and the extra-contagious delta variant is spreading widely. U.S. health authorities want to shore up protection in at-risk people who were vaccinated months ago — although the priority remains getting the unvaccinated their first shots.

Q: Are boosters available for all three vaccines authorized in the U.S.?

A: Yes, Pfizer boosters began last month and this week the government cleared extra doses of the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines, too. But who's eligible — and when — differs depending on which vaccine you got first.

Q: Can I get a booster now?

A: If you got Pfizer or Moderna shots first, you're eligible if your last dose was at least six months ago and you're 65 or older, or are a younger adult who has health problems, a job or living conditions that put you at higher risk of either severe illness or exposure to the coronavirus. The main goal is to give an extra layer of protection to older and medically fragile people. But factors such as jobs are included because

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health care workers, for example, are regularly exposed to the coronavirus and can't come to work with even the mildest of infections.

Q: What if I got the J&J shot?

A: Anyone who got a J&J shot at least two months ago is eligible — regardless of age or other factors.

Q: Why are there different recommendations for the different vaccines?

A: A single shot of the J&J vaccine is less effective than two doses of Moderna or Pfizer vaccines, and health authorities decided it was important for the J&J recipients to achieve a similar level of protection. As for the timing, J&J simply had tested more people with a two-month booster than one at six months. For recipients of Moderna or Pfizer vaccinations, there's not clear data that everybody needs another dose but immunity against infection in at least some people appeared to wane around six months.

Q: What if I don't want to wait six months?

A: Experts agree that getting a booster too soon can reduce the benefit. Timing matters because the immune system gradually builds layers of defenses over months, and letting that response mature improves the chances another, later dose will provide even stronger protection.

Q: What does mixing and matching booster doses mean?

A: It means a booster that's different than your original vaccination. That gives flexibility in situations such as nursing homes where health workers on booster visits may bring only one type. It also gives people at risk of a rare side effect linked to one kind of vaccine the option of switching to a different shot.

Q: Should I seek out a different vaccine?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Food and Drug Administration didn't recommend that people switch but left open the option. Preliminary results of a government study found an extra dose of any vaccine triggered a boost of virus-fighting antibodies regardless of what shots people got to begin with. For people who originally got a J&J vaccination, the Moderna and Pfizer shots appeared to offer a stronger boost. But researchers cautioned the study was too small to say one combination was better than another, and only measured antibodies when the immune system forms additional layers of protection.

Q: Do I need a booster to still be considered fully vaccinated?

A: No, the CDC says people still are considered fully vaccinated starting two weeks after the second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines, or the single-dose J&J shot.

Q: Will this be my last booster?

A: Nobody knows. Some scientists think eventually people may get regular COVID-19 shots like we get annual flu vaccinations but researchers will need to study how long protection from the current boosters lasts.

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

Taylor hits 3 HRs, Dodgers beat Braves 11-2 to extend NLCS

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — For a guy who dislikes drama, Chris Taylor sure provided plenty of it.

Taylor hit three homers and drove in six runs, joining the likes of Reggie Jackson and Babe Ruth in October baseball lore, as the Los Angeles Dodgers broke loose at the plate to beat Atlanta 11-2 on Thursday, cutting the Braves' lead to 3-2 in the best-of-seven NL Championship Series.

"It's cool. It's definitely a surreal feeling for me," Taylor said. "I never thought I was going to hit three homers in a game, let alone a postseason game, and it just still hasn't really sunk in."

AJ Pollock had two home runs and four RBIs for the defending champion Dodgers, who have won seven straight postseason elimination games dating to last season. They also trailed 0-2 and 1-3 against Atlanta in the NLCS last year before rallying to win three straight at a neutral site in Texas.

"We needed to make a statement," the mild-mannered Taylor said. "They put it on us yesterday. We had to respond."

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Game 6 is Saturday in Atlanta, where the Braves get two more chances to clinch their first trip to the World Series since 1999.

"I guess when our backs are against the wall we play our best and fight, but that's just not an ideal spot to be in," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

After mustering only four hits during a 9-2 loss in Game 4 that pushed them to the brink of elimination, the desperate Dodgers rapped out eight hits by the third inning off Max Fried. They finished with 17, a club record for a postseason game, and also equaled a postseason franchise mark with five home runs.

The Dodgers got to Fried with four consecutive hits in the second. Pollock hit a tying homer and Taylor drove the first pitch he saw to left field, putting Los Angeles in front for good, 3-2.

Starting in place of injured Justin Turner at third base, Taylor became the second Dodgers player with a three-homer game in the playoffs. Kiké Hernández also did it in Game 5 of the 2017 NLCS against the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field as Los Angeles won its first pennant in 29 years.

Taylor had an RBI single in the third to make it 4-2. He went deep in the fifth, sending an 0-2 pitch from Chris Martin to center field and extending the lead to 6-2.

Taylor homered again in the seventh, taking Dylan Lee out to left-center before taking a curtain call in the dugout.

"I never look cool doing anything," Taylor said.

The versatile veteran had an opportunity to match the major league mark of four home runs in a game, but struck out swinging to end the eighth.

"I was trying not to think about it," Taylor said. "Usually I'm just trying to hit line drives."

Taylor also hit a game-winning homer in the bottom of the ninth inning against St. Louis in the NL wild-card game for the 106-win Dodgers.

"He's just super calm and he's so consistent for us," Pollock said. "Maybe the three home runs might have spiked his adrenaline, but probably not."

Albert Pujols wasn't just hugging, he was hitting, too.

The 41-year-old slugger got on base three times, including a walk, and scored twice on Taylor's homers. He got two singles for his third and fourth hits of the postseason in his second start. He had two hits in the NL Division Series against San Francisco.

Pujols has taken to greeting his much younger teammates with bear hugs in the dugout after home runs, and they kept him busy.

The three-time MVP is among the 11 players with a three-homer game in the postseason. Ruth accomplished the feat twice in the World Series.

"Watching Chris doing that, it was pretty special," Pujols said. "I was actually rooting for four, but he ended up striking out. But he did a heck of a job out there."

Los Angeles got a clutch performance from its bullpen, too, after opener Joe Kelly allowed a two-run homer to Freddie Freeman in the first and soon exited after 28 pitches with tightness in his right biceps that will sideline him for the rest of the postseason.

Evan Phillips, Alex Vesia, Brusdar Graterol, Blake Treinen, Corey Knebel and Kenley Jansen combined to allow just three hits the rest of the way.

Phillips struck out three in 1 1/3 innings and was credited with the win.

Atlanta's Eddie Rosario, who homered twice in his second four-hit game of the NLCS in Game 4, went 2 for 4 with a strikeout.

Pitching in his hometown, Fried gave up five runs and eight hits in 4 2/3 innings. The left-hander struck out three and walked two.

"I wasn't executing on the corners like I normally do and when you leave the balls over the middle, normally damage happens," Fried said.

In the feast-or-famine nature of the Dodgers' offense, Cody Bellinger went 3 for 4 with a strikeout and NL batting champion Trea Turner was 3 for 4 with an RBI single in a four-run eighth capped by Pollock's three-run homer. But Mookie Betts and Corey Seager were a combined 2 for 10.

"We're up 3-2 and we're going home," Freeman said. "That's a great position to be in. We're going to

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be just fine.”

RECORD BOOK

Taylor set a Dodgers postseason record with 13 total bases, most by any major leaguer in an elimination game. He became the first player to hit three homers in a postseason game for a team facing elimination.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Braves: OF Jorge Soler was activated after being out following his positive COVID-19 test. He struck out swinging as a pinch-hitter in the eighth.

Dodgers: Justin Turner was replaced on the NLCS roster by INF Andy Burns after straining his left hamstring while running to first in the seventh inning Wednesday. To make room on the 40-man roster, RHP Edwin Uceta was designated for assignment.

UP NEXT

RHP Ian Anderson goes for the Braves in Game 6. RHP Max Scherzer starts for the Dodgers.

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

Amid air quality concerns, districts embrace electric buses

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — For several years, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools had toyed with replacing some of its 1,000 diesel buses with cleaner electric vehicles. But school leaders said the change would be too costly.

Then 12-year-old student Holly Thorpe showed up at a school board meeting to tout the benefits of going electric and returned to encourage the district to apply for a state grant.

Two years on, the school board on Wednesday approved a district plan to use state money to replace up to 50 diesel buses with electric models over the next several years.

Thorpe is overjoyed the district is making the switch. “It wasn’t imaginary any more,” she said. “It just wasn’t like an idea. It was coming to life.”

The transition is part of a small but growing movement led by parents, students and lawmakers to purchase electric school buses to improve the health of students and cut planet-warming carbon dioxide emissions.

Roughly 25 million children ride school buses every year. And though only about 1% of 480,000 U.S. school buses are electric, there are signs the push to abandon diesel buses is gaining momentum:

— Late last year, the World Resources Institute announced a \$37.5 million Bezos Earth Fund grant to help electrify all school buses in the country by 2030. The nonprofit will work over the next five years on the project with school districts, communities, environmental justice groups, utilities, bus manufacturers and policymakers.

— This year, a suburban Maryland district became the country’s largest to commit to going completely electric. It plans to replace 1,442 diesel buses by 2035. The first 326 electric ones will be leased from Massachusetts-based Highland Electric Transportation.

— California, the country’s electric school bus leader, has funded the purchase of 1,167 and budgeted for another 1,000 over the next three fiscal years.

“This is an opportunity to make sure that we are doing all we can to protect kids health,” said California Energy Commission member Patty Monahan. “Some of these kids in parts of Los Angeles are on the bus for an hour, two hours a day. So we want to make sure that they are breathing clean air.”

At Twin Rivers Unified School District in Northern California, where diesel buses have been replaced by 40 electric buses and 34 that run on compressed natural gas, officials say clouds of dirty air have disappeared.

“One of the drivers said ‘I can’t believe the change I’m seeing in my lifetime,’” said Tim Shannon, the district’s director of transportation services. “He said ‘I used to have to hold a handkerchief over my face to walk through the yard because of the thick diesel soot.’”

The electric buses are 60% cheaper to operate and will pay for themselves over time, Shannon said.

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Some districts are planning to sell excess energy from batteries back to the grid, a move welcomed by utilities who themselves have launched programs to buy electric school buses. This summer, a school bus in a Massachusetts district delivered power back to the grid.

Efforts to replace diesel school buses are driven by the fact that children are more susceptible to health impacts of air pollution. Exposure to diesel exhaust, according to the EPA, can lead to asthma and respiratory illnesses and worsen heart and lung ailments, especially in children and the elderly.

A study of school buses in Washington state found using cleaner fuels or upgrading older diesel reduced children's exposure to airborne particles by as much as 50% and improved their health. Their findings suggest a nationwide switch to cleaner school buses could result in around 14 million fewer absences each year. The researchers at the universities of Washington and Michigan did not examine electric buses, which produce less local pollution than those using fossil fuels.

Lead author Sara Adar, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, said older diesel buses resulted in children in the Seattle area "getting higher levels of air pollution during their commute."

"The pollutants those kids were experiencing also did seem to be linked to worse health," she said. "We saw kids' lungs weren't quite as healthy."

Diesel school bus engines are much cleaner, since the EPA implemented standards that required them to produce 90% less particulate matter. The EPA also has awarded \$55 million to replace more than 2,700 old diesel school buses since 2012 and announced in October that \$17 million more would be available.

With the improved standards, the diesel industry argues that switching to electric won't significantly reduce emissions or address concerns about global warming — especially since electricity for buses still often comes from fossil fuels. They note that more than 54% of school buses are newer models with far fewer emissions.

"School districts should be able to choose the bus type and technology that works for them," said Allen Schaeffer, executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum. "Some may find electric buses a good fit while others will stick with diesel and utilize low-carbon renewable fuels to cut their carbon footprint and other emissions."

Advocates point out that nearly half of diesel buses are older ones that produce dangerous pollutants and are much more expensive to maintain. But they acknowledge the challenge is getting districts with older buses funds to transition to electric ones, which often cost three times more.

Many districts are eyeing funding from several bills in Congress.

The nearly \$1 trillion infrastructure bill includes \$5 billion for electric and hybrid school buses. Democratic U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a former preschool teacher who chairs the Senate Committee on Health, Education Labor & Pensions, and other advocates want \$5 billion more for electric school buses in President Joe Biden's \$3.5 trillion rebuilding plan.

Several congressional bills would provide billions more for electric school buses.

Some states, including Florida and Virginia, are buying electric buses with billions of dollars from the Volkswagen settlement of its diesel emissions cheating scandal.

Miami-Dade Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said the district will use \$11.6 million from the settlement to start buying electric buses, but said a full transition would be impossible without federal help.

"If we as a nation prioritize environmental protection, the reduction of greenhouse gases, the maximization of new technologies that reduce our dependency on carbon fuels, then the federal investment must incentivize these transitions with actual funding," he said. "And that's exactly what our country needs. That's exactly what Miami needs."

Follow Michael Casey on Twitter: @mcasey1

From exile, female former Afghan leader keeps fighting

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

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NEW YORK (AP) — Two months after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, one of the country's once-prominent female leaders — a former parliament member, candidate for president and a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize — is visiting the United Nations, not as a representative of her government but as a woman in exile.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Fawzia Koofi called for humanitarian aid sent to Afghanistan to be contingent on the participation of women in its distribution, as well as free and safe travel for Afghans into and out of the country.

Aid "should not be politicized. ... Women should be involved in every stage of it and they should be listened to. Women should not be only the recipients," said Koofi, part of a delegation of Afghan women visiting the U.N. to urge member states not to compromise on inclusion and equal rights in Afghanistan.

Since fleeing Kabul in August, Koofi has been living in hotel rooms in Europe. She described the pain of separation from her country, of two decades of hopes dashed and of searching for permanent residence for herself and her two daughters.

"This is not an Afghanistan I fought for," she told the AP. "The Afghanistan that I was hoping for was (that) women should not suffer as much as I suffered during my childhood, during the time that I was a teenager, when (the) Taliban took over."

"I wanted other girls to enjoy at least the freedom of choosing which school they should go. But now, their choice is limited to which room in their houses they should spend during the day. This is heartbreaking."

Koofi, a former deputy speaker of parliament, was one of only four women in talks to reach a power-sharing deal with the Taliban, which ultimately failed. She described watching the Taliban's commitment to negotiations change after they signed a peace agreement with the United States in February 2020.

"After they signed the agreement, they were more extreme and they were more into buying time, preferring a military strategy," she said.

Taliban fighters pursued that strategy in the summer, seizing province after province until they reached Kabul in August. When then-President Ashraf Ghani fled, the Taliban entered the capital, sparking panic among many who had opposed their rule and feared for their lives and futures.

That was the fatal blow to reaching a political settlement many had hoped would cement the gains women had achieved in access to education, work and the legal system, Koofi said.

She also blamed "world leaders," seeming to point a finger at U.S. President Joe Biden. "As a superpower, the United States has a major responsibility and should be held accountable," she said.

When he announced withdrawal plans, Biden said he was bound by the timetable set by the Trump administration and that the U.S. could not continue to extend the military presence in Afghanistan and expect a different result.

Still, Koofi said she thinks the breakdown of peace talks and the Taliban takeover could have been avoided. Pausing as tears ran down her face, she said: "I mean, every day we are actually dealing with this trauma."

Her former female colleagues in parliament, female judges who used to sentence people affiliated with the Taliban and some journalists who spoke out against the group are now fearful, she said.

The Taliban must also be held accountable, she added, for their pledges that women would be able to go to school and work "within the principles of Islam."

Each day, Koofi said she gets hundreds of text and voice messages largely from women still in Afghanistan, hoping she can help them.

"They're very angry ... that I am not with them at these difficult times," she said. "The women, especially, they keep sending me messages expressing their anger that, you know, 'We need you to be here with us in the streets of Kabul,' and they are right."

Women she used to work with and who were the breadwinners in their families send her photos of themselves as reminders.

"Psychologically to process this and to be able to adjust and accept, it's not been easy," she said. "Not only for me, for every woman and man that I have met in the last two months after I left Kabul."

For now, Koofi is focused on resolving residency status for herself and her daughters, ages 22 and 23. For security reasons, she declined to say where.

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Some 100,000 Afghans have fled the country since the Taliban took power, though many were unable to leave in the final chaotic airlifts. The 38 million Afghans who remain are facing “universal poverty” within a year, the U.N. development agency said in September.

Koofi also warned of the threat from the Islamic State group in Afghanistan — known by its Arabic acronym Daesh — and called for renewed political negotiations because, she said, stability does not just come from the cessation of violence, but strong and inclusive institutions.

“If we think that one military extremist group, which is Taliban, is going to defeat Daesh — it’s not going to work that way,” she said.

“You need to continue to empower the nation, empower the people, educate them, support the political process.”

House votes to hold Trump ally Steve Bannon in contempt

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House has voted to hold Steve Bannon, a longtime ally and aide to former President Donald Trump, in contempt of Congress for defying a subpoena from the committee investigating the violent Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

In a rare show of bipartisanship on the House floor, the committee’s Democratic chairman, Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, led the floor debate along with Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, one of two Republicans on the panel. Still, the vote Thursday was 229-202 with all but nine GOP lawmakers who voted saying “no.”

The House vote sends the matter to the U.S. attorney’s office in Washington, where it will now be up to prosecutors in that office to decide whether to present the case to a grand jury for possible criminal charges. It’s still uncertain whether they will pursue the case — Attorney General Merrick Garland would only say at a House hearing on Thursday that they plan to “make a decision consistent with the principles of prosecution.”

The partisan split over Bannon’s subpoena — and over the committee’s investigation in general — is emblematic of the raw tensions that still grip Congress nine months after the Capitol attack.

Democrats have vowed to comprehensively probe the assault in which hundreds of Trump’s supporters battered their way past police, injured dozens of officers and interrupted the electoral count certifying President Joe Biden’s November victory. Lawmakers on the panel say they will move swiftly and forcefully to punish anyone who won’t cooperate with the probe.

“We will not allow anyone to derail our work, because our work is too important,” Thompson said ahead of the vote.

Republicans call it a “witch hunt,” say it is a waste of time and argue that Congress should be focusing on more important matters.

Indiana Rep. Jim Banks, leading the GOP opposition on the floor, called the probe an “illicit criminal investigation into American citizens” and said Bannon is a “Democrat party boogeyman.”

Cheney and Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger are the only two Republicans on the Jan. 6 panel, and both have openly criticized Trump and his role in fomenting the insurrection while the majority of House Republicans have remained silent in the face of Trump’s falsehoods about massive fraud in the election. Trump’s claims were rejected by election officials, courts across the country and by his own attorney general.

The Jan. 6 committee voted 9-0 Tuesday to recommend the contempt charges after Bannon missed a scheduled interview with the panel last week, citing a letter from Trump’s lawyer that directed him not to answer questions. The committee noted that Bannon did not work at the White House at the time of the attack, and that he not only spoke with Trump before it but also promoted the protests on his podcast and predicted there would be unrest. On Jan. 5, Bannon said that “all hell is going to break loose.”

Lawmakers on the panel said Bannon was alone in completely defying its subpoena, while more than a dozen other subpoenaed witnesses were at least negotiating with them.

“Mr. Bannon’s own public statements make clear he knew what was going to happen before it did, and

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thus he must have been aware of -- and may well have been involved in -- the planning of everything that played out on that day," Cheney said ahead of the vote. "The American people deserve to know what he knew and what he did."

Joining Cheney and Kinzinger in voting to hold Bannon in contempt were Republican Reps. Peter Meijer and Fred Upton of Michigan, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, Anthony Gonzalez of Ohio, John Katko of New York, Nancy Mace of South Carolina and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington.

Mace, who represents a political swing district, told reporters after the vote that she wants to maintain the power of subpoenas for future Republican majorities.

"I want the power to subpoena, when we start investigating some of the crises that are facing the Biden administration right now," she said, mentioning immigration and the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Biden himself invoked the insurrection and linked it to the nation's turbulent history as he marked the 10th anniversary of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the National Mall.

"We're confronting the stains of what remains a deep stain in the soul of the nation: hate and white supremacy," Biden said, describing what he said is a line in American history from slavery to the present day.

"In a violent, deadly insurrection on the Capitol nine months ago — it was about white supremacy in my view," he said.

Biden, who had previously said the Justice Department should prosecute those who ignore congressional subpoenas, apologized Thursday for appearing to interfere with the agency's decisions in comments last week.

"I should have chosen my words more wisely," Biden said during a CNN town hall. "I did not, have not and will not pick up the phone and call the attorney general and tell him what he should or should not do."

Even if the Justice Department does decide to prosecute, the case could take years to play out — potentially pushing past the 2022 election when Republicans could win control of the House and end the investigation.

There's still considerable uncertainty about whether the department will pursue the charges, despite Democratic demands for action. It's a decision that will determine not only the effectiveness of the House investigation but also the strength of Congress' power to call witnesses and demand information.

While the department has historically been reluctant to use its prosecution power against witnesses found in contempt of Congress, the circumstances are exceptional as lawmakers investigate the worst attack on the U.S. Capitol in two centuries.

Democrats are pressuring Justice to take the case, arguing that nothing less than democracy is on the line.

"The stakes are enormous," Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin said. "What we're talking about is this massive, violent assault on American democracy."

If the Justice Department doesn't prosecute, the House has other options, including a civil lawsuit. That could also take years but would force Bannon and any other witnesses to defend themselves in court.

The lingering acrimony over the insurrection, and the Bannon subpoena, flared Wednesday at a House Rules Committee hearing held to set the parameters of Thursday's debate. Under intense questioning from Raskin, Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Republican who defended Trump and opposed the Bannon contempt effort, said he accepted that Biden is the president but would not say that Biden won the election.

Raskin said, "I know that might work on Steve Bannon's podcast, but that's not going to work in the Rules Committee of the United States House of Representatives, Mr. Gaetz. I'm sorry."

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Michael Balsamo, Eric Tucker, Alan G and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

What is the 'delta plus' variant of the coronavirus?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

What is the "delta plus" variant?

It's a relative of the delta variant, identified by British scientists last month.

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Because it isn't a variant of interest or concern, it has not yet been officially named after a letter of the Greek alphabet, like the other worrisome variants.

Scientists are monitoring the delta-related variant — known as AY.4.2. — to see if it might spread more easily or be more deadly than previous versions of the coronavirus. In a recent report, U.K. officials said this variant makes up 6% of all analyzed COVID-19 cases in the country and is "on an increasing trajectory."

The variant has two mutations in the spike protein, which helps the coronavirus invade the body's cells. These changes have also been seen in other versions of the virus since the pandemic started, but haven't gone very far, Francois Balloux, director of the Genetics Institute at University College London.

The delta variant remains "by far the most dominant variant in terms of global circulation" said Maria Van Kerkhove, the World Health Organization's technical lead on COVID-19, at a public session this week.

"Delta is dominant, but delta is evolving," she said, adding that the more the virus circulates, the greater chances it has to mutate.

The U.N. health agency is currently tracking 20 variations of the delta variant. The AY.4.2 is "one to watch because we have to continuously keep an eye on how this virus is changing," said Van Kerkhove.

In the U.S., the delta variant accounts for nearly all COVID-19 cases. The newer "delta plus" variant has been spotted "on occasion," but it's not yet a concern, health officials said.

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

Can new variants of the coronavirus keep emerging?

Can I get the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time?

Is the delta variant of the coronavirus worse for kids?

Gang boss in Haiti threatens to kill abducted missionaries

By EVENS SANON, MATÍAS DELACROIX and PIERRE-RICHARD LUXAMA Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — The boss of a notorious Haitian gang accused of kidnapping 17 members of a U.S.-based missionary group last weekend is warning that the hostages will be killed if his demands aren't met.

"I swear by thunder that if I don't get what I'm asking for, I will put a bullet in the heads of these Americans," gang leader Wilson Joseph said in a video posted on social media Thursday.

Officials said early in the week that the 400 Mawozo gang was demanding \$1 million for each of those kidnapped, although it wasn't clear if that included the five children in the group, among them an 8-month-old. Sixteen Americans and one Canadian were abducted, along with their Haitian driver.

Joseph also threatened Prime Minister Ariel Henry and Haiti's national police chief as he spoke in front of the open coffins that apparently held several members of his gang who were recently killed.

"You guys make me cry. I cry water. But I'm going to make you guys cry blood," he said.

Later in the day, Henry's office announced that Léon Charles had resigned as head of Haiti's National Police and was replaced by Frantz Elbé. The newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* said Elbé was director of the police departments of the South East and Nippes and previously served as general security coordinator at the National Palace when Jocelerme Privert was provisional president.

"We would like for public peace to be restored, that we return to normal life and that we regain our way to democracy," Henry said.

There was no immediate comment from Charles or Elbé.

The missionaries who were abducted Saturday during a visit to an orphanage are with Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries, which held a news conference before Joseph's video was posted.

Weston Showalter, spokesman for the religious group, said the families of those kidnapped are from Amish, Mennonite and other conservative Anabaptist communities in Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Ontario, Canada. He read a letter from the families, who weren't identified by name, in which they said, "God has given our loved ones the unique opportunity to live out our Lord's

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command to love your enemies.”

The group invited people to join them in prayer for the kidnappers as well as those kidnapped and expressed gratitude for help from “people that are knowledgeable and experienced in dealing with” such situations.

“Pray for these families,” Showalter said. “They are in a difficult spot.”

The organization later issued a statement saying it would not comment on the video.

The gang leader’s death threat added to the already intense concern in and around Holmes County, Ohio, where Christian Aid Ministries is based and which has one of the nation’s largest concentrations of Amish, conservative Mennonite and related groups. Many members of those groups have supported the organization through donations or by volunteering at its warehouse.

“Many people in the community feel helpless, but they also realize the power of prayer and the power of our historic theology,” including the Anabaptist belief in nonresistance to violence, said Marcus Yoder, executive director of the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center in Millersburg.

The same day that the missionaries were kidnapped, a gang also abducted a Haiti university professor, according to Haiti’s ombudsman-like Office of Citizen Protection. It also noted a Haitian pastor abducted earlier this month had not been released despite a ransom being paid.

Criminals “operate with complete impunity, attacking all members of society,” the office said.

UNICEF said Thursday that 71 women and 30 children have been kidnapped so far this year — surpassing the 59 women and 37 children abducted in all of last year. “They represent one third of the 455 kidnappings reported this year,” the agency said.

“Nowhere is safe for children in Haiti anymore,” Jean Gough, UNICEF regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean, said in a statement. “Whether on their way to school, at home or even at church, girls and boys are at risk of being kidnapped anywhere, at any time of the day or night.”

Meanwhile, hundreds of demonstrators blocked roads and burned tires in Haiti’s capital to protest a severe fuel shortage and a spike in insecurity and to demand that the prime minister step down.

In addition to kidnappings, the gangs are accused of blocking gas distribution terminals and hijacking supply trucks, which officials say has led to a shortage of fuel. Many gas stations remain closed for days at a time, and the lack of fuel is so dire that the CEO of Digicel Haiti announced this week that 150 of its 1,500 branches countrywide are out of diesel.

Alexandre Simon, an English and French teacher, said he and others were protesting because of the dire conditions facing Haitians.

“There are a lot of people who cannot eat,” he said. “There is no work ... There are a lot of things we don’t have.”

Associated Press writers Dánica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Kantele Franko in Columbus, Ohio, and Peter Smith in Pittsburgh contributed to this report.

AP FACT CHECK: Biden overstates his record on COVID vaccine

By AMANDA SEITZ and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden botched the numbers behind the COVID-19 vaccine rollout Thursday as he stretched to take all the credit for the surge of shots once he was in office.

A look at his remarks during a CNN town hall event:

COVID

BIDEN: “When I first was elected, there were only 2 million people who had COVID shots in the United States of America — and the vaccine. Now we got 190 million, because I went out and bought everything I could do and buy in sight and it worked.”

THE FACTS: No, that’s not how the vaccine rollout in the U.S. happened. Biden is overstating his part.

First, it’s not true that 2 million people had shots when he was elected in November. The COVID-19 vaccines were still awaiting emergency authorization then. The first shots were administered to the public

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in mid-December.

Nearly 16 million doses had been administered by Jan. 20, the day Biden took office. And Biden didn't buy up all the doses — the Trump administration had purchased 300 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna in December, weeks before Biden was inaugurated.

The Trump administration's vaccine plan fell short of its goals and suffered from disarray out of the gate. On Inauguration Day, less than half of the 36 million doses distributed to the states by the federal government had been administered.

Even so, the plan set the stage for an acceleration of vaccinations that did not happen solely because Biden "went out and bought everything I could do."

BORDER:

BIDEN, asked why he hasn't visited the U.S.-Mexico border as president: "I've been there before and I haven't, I mean I know it well. I guess I should go down but the whole point of it is I haven't had a whole hell of a lot of time to get down. I've been spending time going around looking at the \$900 billion worth of damage done by hurricanes and floods and weather and traveling around the world. but I plan on — now, my wife Jill has been down. She's been on both sides of the river."

THE FACTS: Yes, Jill Biden has been to the border but not, as he implies, as the eyes and ears of a president consumed with crises.

She wasn't first lady and he wasn't president when she went to Brownsville, Texas, in December 2019 and walked across to Matamoros, Mexico, to hand out Christmas meals and toys to the families of asylum seekers and witness their living conditions.

Seitz reported from Columbus, Ohio. David Klepper in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

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

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Qantas moves up flights as Australia expects tourists soon

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Qantas Airways on Friday brought forward its plans to restart international travel from Sydney as Prime Minister Scott Morrison predicted tourists would be welcomed back to Australia this year.

Vaccinated Australian permanent residents and citizens will be free to travel through Sydney from Nov. 1 without the need for hotel quarantine on their return.

Two weeks ago, Morrison said Australians, skilled migrants and students would be given priority over foreign travelers in coming to Sydney. He predicted tourists would return in 2022 or later.

But while tourists would retain their low priority, Morrison now expects they will return this year.

"That is very possible and very achievable before the end of the year," Morrison said.

Sydney-based Qantas announced services to Thailand, Singapore, South Africa and Fiji had been brought forward by weeks or months. A new service to New Delhi would begin in December, the first to India in almost a decade.

The New South Wales state government's decision to dispense with quarantine requirements for vaccinated travelers in Sydney had significantly increased travel demand, a Qantas statement said.

The 22,000 staff employed by Qantas and its budget subsidiary Jetstar would return to work in December, six months earlier than planned.

The changes are being driven by New South Wales' rapid uptake of vaccines. By Friday, 83% of the population aged 16 and older was fully vaccinated and almost 93% had at least one dose of a vaccine.

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Only the national capital Canberra has a higher proportion of the population vaccinated.

Australia had one the lowest vaccination rates of any wealthy country due to supply problems and public distrust of locally manufactured AstraZeneca. It now has one of the highest due in part to supply deals done with Britain, Poland and Singapore.

Melbourne, Australia's most populous city after Sydney, came out of 77 days of lockdown on Friday after Victoria state reached a benchmark of 70% of the target population fully vaccinated.

Pandemic restrictions were eased despite Victoria recording its deadliest day of the delta variant outbreak with 16 COVID-19 deaths. There were also 2,189 new infections detected in the latest 24 hours.

"Victorians, it's fair to say, have done a quite amazing thing. So many people going and getting vaccinated so quickly," Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said.

"We've always said that lockdowns were a function of not having the vaccine that we needed but if we got vaccinated, we'd have so many more options," he added.

Sydney, where the delta outbreak began in June, came out of lockdown last week after reaching the same 70% vaccination benchmark.

New South Wales reported five COVID-19 deaths on Friday and 345 new infections.

White House, Dems hurriedly reworking \$2 trillion Biden plan

By LISA MASCARO, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House and Democrats are hurriedly reworking key aspects of President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion domestic policy plan, trimming the social services and climate change programs and rethinking new taxes on corporations and the wealthy to pay for a scaled-back package.

The changes come as Biden more forcefully appeals to the American public, including in a televised town hall Thursday, for what he says are the middle-class values at the heart of his proposal.

Biden mentioned during the evening event the challenge he faces in wrangling the sharply divergent factions in the Democratic party to agree to the final contours of the bill. With an evenly divided Senate, he can't afford to lose a single vote, and he is navigating the competing demands of progressives, who want major investments in social services, and centrists, who want to see the price tag on the package come down.

"When you're president of the United States, you have 50 Democrats — every one is a president. Every single one. So you gotta work things out," he said during a CNN town hall.

Still, he expressed optimism about the process, saying "I think so" when asked if Democrats were close to a deal.

"It's all about compromise. Compromise has become a dirty word, but bipartisanship and compromise still has to be possible," he said.

Biden later said the discussions are "down to four or five issues."

On one issue — the taxes to pay for the package — the White House idea seemed to be making headway with a new strategy of abandoning plans for reversing Trump-era tax cuts in favor of an approach that would involve taxing the investment incomes of billionaires to help finance the deal.

Biden has faced resistance from key holdouts, in particular Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., who has not been on board with her party's plan to undo President Donald Trump's tax breaks for big corporations or individuals earning more than \$400,000 a year.

The president was unusually forthcoming Thursday night about the sticking points in the negotiations with Sinema and another key Democrat, conservative Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia.

While the president said Sinema "will not raise a single penny in taxes" on the wealthy or corporations, a White House official later clarified that the president was referring to raising the top tax rates, not the range of tax proposals "which Senator Sinema supports."

Biden said Manchin doesn't want to "rush" the transition to clean energy so quickly it will result in major job losses in his coal-producing state.

Even as he seemed encouraged by progress, Biden acknowledged major reductions to his original vision.

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He signaled the final plan would no longer provide free community college, but said he hoped to increase Pell Grants to compensate for the loss of the policy.

"It's not going to get us the whole thing, but it is a start," he said.

He also said that what had been envisioned as a federally paid, months-long family leave program would be just four weeks.

As long-sought programs are adjusted or eliminated, Democratic leaders are working to swiftly wrap up talks, possibly in the days ahead.

Talks between the White House and Democratic lawmakers are focused on reducing what had been a \$3.5 trillion package to about \$2 trillion, in what would be an unprecedented federal effort to expand social services for millions and address the rising threat of climate change.

"We have a goal. We have a timetable. We have milestones, and we've met them all," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., who predicted Thursday, "It will pass soon."

An abrupt change of course came late Wednesday when the White House floated new ways to pay for parts of the proposal.

Biden himself signaled flexibility on the tax provisions of the bill, as long as it's paid for and it doesn't increase taxes on those earning \$400,000 or less.

"I'm willing to make sure that we pay for everything," he said when pressed on what tax proposal he'd support.

The newly proposed tax provisions, though, are likely to sour progressives and even some moderate Democrats who have long campaigned on scrapping the Republican-backed 2017 tax cuts that many believe unduly reward the wealthy and cost the government untold sums in lost revenue at a time of gaping income inequality. Many are furious that perhaps a lone senator could stymie that goal.

The chairman of the tax-writing Ways & Means Committee, Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., said he spoke for more than 30 minutes with the centrist Arizona senator, whose closely held views are a mystery to her colleagues.

"I said, Kyrsten, you and I both know this has got to pass. She said: 'I couldn't agree more,'" Neal told reporters at the Capitol.

Sinema's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Under existing law passed in 2017, the corporate tax rate is 21%. Democrats had proposed raising it to 26.5% for companies earning more than \$5 million a year. The top individual income tax rate would go from 37% to 39.6% for those earning more than \$400,000, or \$450,000 for married couples.

Under the changes being floated the corporate rate would not change. But the revisions would not be all positive for big companies and the wealthy.

The White House is reviving the idea of a minimum corporate tax rate, similar to the 15% rate Biden had proposed this year. That's even for companies that say they had no taxable income — a frequent target of Biden, who complains they pay "zero" in taxes.

The new tax on the wealthiest individuals would be modeled on legislation from Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. He has proposed taxing stock gains of people with more than \$1 billion in assets — fewer than 1,000 Americans.

Other tax options are also being considered, and Democrats are almost certain to include a provision to beef up the Internal Revenue Service to go after tax dodgers.

Biden and his party are trying to shore up middle-class households, tackle climate change and stem the trend toward rising income inequality.

In the mix are at least \$500 billion to battle climate change, \$350 billion for child care subsidies and free prekindergarten, a one-year extension of the \$300 monthly child tax credit put in place during the COVID-19 crisis, and money for health care provided through the Affordable Care Act and Medicare.

The president especially wants to advance the legislation by the time he departs next week for a global climate summit in Scotland.

Manchin has made clear he opposes the president's initial energy plan, which was to have the government impose penalties on electric utilities that fail to meet clean energy benchmarks and provide financial

rewards to those that do.

Instead, Biden is focused on providing at least \$500 billion in tax credits, grants and loans for energy producers that reach emission-reduction goals.

Democrats also want to add funding to provide dental, vision and hearing aid benefits to people on Medicare proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.

Associated Press writers Alex Jaffe, Kevin Freking and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

Nissan ex-chair Ghosn set on restoring reputation

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Carlos Ghosn, the former auto industry superstar whose career screeched to a halt with his arrest three years ago, isn't about to settle into quiet retirement.

The former head of the Nissan-Renault alliance fled to Lebanon in late 2019, while out on bail facing financial misconduct charges in Japan. In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Ghosn was confident, energized and determined to fight to restore his reputation.

"I'm going to be there. I'm going to defend my rights as long as I have the energy to do it," Ghosn, 67, said via Zoom from his home in Beirut. His story is "far from finished," he said.

Ghosn fled from Japan while hiding in a big cargo box on a private jet. The French, Brazilian-born Ghosn took refuge in Lebanon, his ancestral homeland, which has no extradition treaty with Japan.

Ghosn said he is trying to get Interpol to drop its red flag, which requests police worldwide to seek out and arrest persons wanted for prosecution or to serve a sentence. He's eager to be able to travel outside of Lebanon, but the process is likely to be bureaucratic and long.

Japanese prosecutors say they are still intent on pursuing him on allegations of under-reporting his compensation and of breach of trust in misusing Nissan money for personal gain — charges he denies.

Japan has extradition treaties with the U.S. and South Korea and prosecutors said they would seek help from other countries, including Brazil and France, if Ghosn travels there.

Apart from the main case in Japan, Ghosn is under investigation in France and is being sued by Nissan Motor Co. in Japan for alleged financial damages. Tokyo prosecutors have refused to send his files to Lebanon for the criminal case to be tried there.

Nissan's French alliance partner Renault sent Ghosn to Japan in 1999 to steer a turnaround when the Japanese automaker was on the verge of collapse. Under Ghosn, Nissan became more profitable than Renault. The partnership expanded to include smaller rival Mitsubishi Motors Corp. and other automakers. Nissan owns 15% of Renault, which owns a much bigger 43% of Nissan. The government of France owns 15% of Renault.

Analysts estimate the damage suffered by the Nissan-Renault alliance over the Ghosn scandal at billions of dollars in capital value, sales and brand image. Nissan expects to eke out a profit this fiscal year after losing money for the last two years.

Aaron Ho, analyst at New York-based CFRA Research, believes Nissan has fallen behind in an intensely competitive industry because of the Ghosn scandal.

"Before Nissan resolves its internal issues over corporate power and puts its resources back into making tangible progress — which takes a lot of time, and a lot of time has been wasted — to create values for its end demand, we are not optimistic," he said.

Ghosn asserts the case against him was concocted in a power struggle within Nissan's boardroom. He said he wants to show "a conspiracy" by Nissan officials who, worried about a takeover-like merger by Renault, got Japanese authorities to pursue a criminal case against him.

"The only way I can qualify them are: Thugs, inside Nissan," he said.

Nissan, which has denounced Ghosn, does not comment on the Ghosn case.

Testimony at the trial of Greg Kelly, a former top executive at Nissan Motor Co. who was arrested at the same time as Ghosn, has shown that Nissan officials did seek out prosecutors.

The case against Ghosn and Kelly centers on elaborate calculations to compensate Ghosn after retire-

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ment for a pay cut he took beginning in 2009, when disclosure of big executive pay became a legal requirement in Japan.

Prosecutors allege Ghosn broke the law by failing to report that compensation, which was never paid or even formally agreed upon. Kelly says he is innocent, and was trying to find legal ways to pay Ghosn to retain him.

Ironically, Ghosn says the money he allegedly failed to report was based on him retiring in 2018, the year he was arrested.

Ghosn looks anything but retired. He's working on movies, teaching classes on management, consulting for businesses and helping out with university research on "character assassination."

"Look. Books, books, books," he said, when asked what else he's been working on.

"Broken Alliances," an English version of the 2020 French book "Le temps de la verite," was released in September. He is writing a book with his wife Carole, who also is wanted in Japan, about their ordeal.

Human rights advocates and other critics say Japan's system amounts to "hostage justice," allowing suspects to be questioned for days without a lawyer present while they are kept in solitary confinement in a small, spartan cell. The conviction rate of over 99% has raised questions over forced confessions.

"One of the things I could do for Japan is fighting with all those people who are opposed in Japan to the hostage justice system," said Ghosn.

His ride is still a Nissan, the Patrol sport-utility vehicle, a model he worked on that's popular in the Middle East. And he insists there was no way he could have foreseen the trouble that was headed his way.

"If somebody was telling you before it happened that I was going to be arrested," he said, "you would laugh. You would say, 'Come on. It is a joke.'"

Yuri Kageyama is on Twitter <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

House votes to hold Trump ally Steve Bannon in contempt

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted Thursday to hold Steve Bannon, a longtime ally and aide to former President Donald Trump, in contempt of Congress for defying a subpoena from the committee investigating the violent Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

In a rare show of bipartisanship on the House floor, the committee's Democratic chairman, Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, led the floor debate along with Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, one of two Republicans on the panel. Still, the vote was 229-202 with all but nine GOP lawmakers who voted saying "no."

The House vote sends the matter to the U.S. attorney's office in Washington, where it will now be up to prosecutors in that office to decide whether to present the case to a grand jury for possible criminal charges. It's still uncertain whether they will pursue the case — Attorney General Merrick Garland would only say at a House hearing on Thursday that they plan to "make a decision consistent with the principles of prosecution."

The partisan split over Bannon's subpoena — and over the committee's investigation in general — is emblematic of the raw tensions that still grip Congress nine months after the Capitol attack.

Democrats have vowed to comprehensively probe the assault in which hundreds of Trump's supporters battered their way past police, injured dozens of officers and interrupted the electoral count certifying President Joe Biden's November victory. Lawmakers on the panel say they will move swiftly and forcefully to punish anyone who won't cooperate with the probe.

"We will not allow anyone to derail our work, because our work is too important," Thompson said ahead of the vote.

Republicans call it a "witch hunt," say it is a waste of time and argue that Congress should be focusing on more important matters.

Indiana Rep. Jim Banks, leading the GOP opposition on the floor, called the probe an "illicit criminal

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investigation into American citizens" and said Bannon is a "Democrat party boogeyman."

Cheney and Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger are the only two Republicans on the Jan. 6 panel, and both have openly criticized Trump and his role in fomenting the insurrection while the majority of House Republicans have remained silent in the face of Trump's falsehoods about massive fraud in the election. Trump's claims were rejected by election officials, courts across the country and by his own attorney general.

The Jan. 6 committee voted 9-0 Tuesday to recommend the contempt charges after Bannon missed a scheduled interview with the panel last week, citing a letter from Trump's lawyer that directed him not to answer questions. The committee noted that Bannon did not work at the White House at the time of the attack, and that he not only spoke with Trump before it but also promoted the protests on his podcast and predicted there would be unrest. On Jan. 5, Bannon said that "all hell is going to break loose."

Lawmakers on the panel said Bannon was alone in completely defying its subpoena, while more than a dozen other subpoenaed witnesses were at least negotiating with them.

"Mr. Bannon's own public statements make clear he knew what was going to happen before it did, and thus he must have been aware of -- and may well have been involved in -- the planning of everything that played out on that day," Cheney said ahead of the vote. "The American people deserve to know what he knew and what he did."

Joining Cheney and Kinzinger in voting to hold Bannon in contempt were Republican Reps. Peter Meijer and Fred Upton of Michigan, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, Anthony Gonzalez of Ohio, John Katko of New York, Nancy Mace of South Carolina and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington.

Mace, who represents a political swing district, told reporters after the vote that she wants to maintain the power of subpoenas for future Republican majorities.

"I want the power to subpoena, when we start investigating some of the crises that are facing the Biden administration right now," she said, mentioning immigration and the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Biden himself invoked the insurrection and linked it to the nation's turbulent history as he marked the 10th anniversary of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the National Mall.

"We're confronting the stains of what remains a deep stain in the soul of the nation: hate and white supremacy," Biden said, describing what he said is a line in American history from slavery to the present day.

"In a violent, deadly insurrection on the Capitol nine months ago — it was about white supremacy in my view," he said.

Biden, who had previously said the Justice Department should prosecute those who ignore congressional subpoenas, apologized Thursday for appearing to interfere with the agency's decisions in comments last week.

"I should have chosen my words more wisely," Biden said during a CNN town hall. "I did not, have not and will not pick up the phone and call the attorney general and tell him what he should or should not do."

Even if the Justice Department does decide to prosecute, the case could take years to play out — potentially pushing past the 2022 election when Republicans could win control of the House and end the investigation.

There's still considerable uncertainty about whether the department will pursue the charges, despite Democratic demands for action. It's a decision that will determine not only the effectiveness of the House investigation but also the strength of Congress' power to call witnesses and demand information.

While the department has historically been reluctant to use its prosecution power against witnesses found in contempt of Congress, the circumstances are exceptional as lawmakers investigate the worst attack on the U.S. Capitol in two centuries.

Democrats are pressuring Justice to take the case, arguing that nothing less than democracy is on the line.

"The stakes are enormous," Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin said. "What we're talking about is this massive, violent assault on American democracy."

If the Justice Department doesn't prosecute, the House has other options, including a civil lawsuit. That could also take years but would force Bannon and any other witnesses to defend themselves in court.

The lingering acrimony over the insurrection, and the Bannon subpoena, flared Wednesday at a House

Rules Committee hearing held to set the parameters of Thursday's debate. Under intense questioning from Raskin, Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Republican who defended Trump and opposed the Bannon contempt effort, said he accepted that Biden is the president but would not say that Biden won the election.

Raskin said, "I know that might work on Steve Bannon's podcast, but that's not going to work in the Rules Committee of the United States House of Representatives, Mr. Gaetz. I'm sorry."

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Michael Balsamo, Eric Tucker, Alan G and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

COVID vaccine: CDC expands booster rollout, OKs mixing shots

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Millions more Americans can get a COVID-19 booster and choose a different company's vaccine for that next shot, federal health officials said Thursday.

Certain people who received Pfizer vaccinations months ago already are eligible for a booster and now the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says specific Moderna and Johnson & Johnson recipients qualify, too. And in a bigger change, the agency is allowing the flexibility of "mixing and matching" that extra dose regardless of which type people received first.

The Food and Drug Administration had already authorized such an expansion of the nation's booster campaign on Wednesday, and it was also endorsed Thursday by a CDC advisory panel. CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky had the final word on who gets the extra doses.

"These past 20 months have taught us many things, but mostly to have humility," she told the panel. "We are constantly learning about this virus, growing the evidence base and accumulating more data."

There still are restrictions on who qualifies and when for a booster. Starting six months past their last Pfizer or Moderna vaccination, people are urged to get a booster if they're 65 or older, nursing home residents, or at least 50 and at increased risk of severe disease because of health problems. Boosters also were allowed, but not urged, for adults of any age at increased risk of infection because of health problems or their jobs or living conditions. That includes health care workers, teachers and people in jails or homeless shelters.

Moderna's booster will come at half the dose of the original two shots.

As for recipients of the single-shot J&J vaccine, a COVID-19 booster is recommended for everyone at least two months after their vaccination. That's because the J&J vaccine hasn't proved as protective as the two-dose Moderna or Pfizer options.

The CDC panel didn't explicitly recommend anyone get a different brand than they started with but left open the option — saying only that a booster of some sort was recommended. And some of the advisers said they would prefer that J&J recipients receive a competitor's booster, citing preliminary data from an ongoing government study that suggested a bigger boost in virus-fighting antibodies from that combination.

"We're at a different place in the pandemic than we were earlier" when supply constraints meant people had to take whatever shot they were offered, noted CDC adviser Dr. Helen Keipp Talbot of Vanderbilt University.

She called it "priceless" to be able to choose a different kind for the booster if, for example, someone might be at risk for a rare side effect from a specific vaccine.

About two-thirds of Americans eligible for COVID-19 shots are fully vaccinated, and the government says getting first shots to the unvaccinated remain the priority. While health authorities hope boosters will shore up waning immunity against milder coronavirus infections, all the vaccines still offer strong protection against hospitalizations and death, even as the extra-contagious delta variant burned through the country.

And CDC's advisers wrestled with whether people who didn't really need boosters might be getting them, especially young, otherwise healthy adults whose only qualification was their job.

Dr. Sarah Long of Drexel University voiced concerns about opening those people to rare but serious side effects from another dose if they already were adequately protected.

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"I have my own concerns that we appear to be recommending vaccines for people who I don't think need it," added Dr. Beth Bell of the University of Washington.

But she stressed that the vaccines work and that moving forward with the recommendations makes sense for the sake of being clear and allowing flexibility when it comes to boosters.

Despite the concerns by some members, the panels' votes ended up being unanimous.

The vast majority of the nearly 190 million Americans who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 have received the Pfizer or Moderna options, while J&J recipients account for only about 15 million.

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

Official: Narrative of riders filming train rape is false

By CLAUDIA LAUER undefined

MEDIA, Pa. (AP) — The narrative that passengers watched a man rape a woman on a train in suburban Philadelphia last week and "filmed it for their own gratification instead of calling the police" is false, the prosecutor handling the case said Thursday as he asked witnesses to come forward.

Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer said during a news conference that the other passengers on the train were not present for the entire 40-minute interaction on Oct. 13 and may not have understood what they were seeing.

"People get off and on at every single stop," Stollsteimer said. "That doesn't mean when they get on and they see people interacting that they know a rape is occurring."

Stollsteimer's recount of surveillance video and plea to witnesses came after days of authorities saying multiple passengers were present for the assault, with some appearing to hold their phones in the direction of the attack as police allege 35-year-old Fiston Ngoy raped the woman in a train seat.

Police and Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority officials initially expressed dismay that passengers did not call 911 or report the attack, even if they didn't understand the seriousness of what was happening.

Upper Darby Police Superintendent Timothy Bernhardt told reporters over the weekend there were passengers present who "should have done something," in his opinion.

Nevertheless, Stollsteimer said Thursday "the narrative that there is a group of people callously filming and didn't act, is simply not true." He added that witnesses of the attack could share information without fear of being charged.

He said Wednesday that Pennsylvania law does not allow for the prosecution of someone for simply witnessing a crime.

Surveillance video shows two passengers holding phones up toward the assault, Stollsteimer said. One of those people provided video to authorities as part of the investigation, he said.

Requests by The Associated Press for surveillance video from the attack on the Market-Frankford line have been denied by SEPTA, citing the ongoing criminal investigation.

In an arrest affidavit for Ngoy, police said he boarded the train shortly after the woman, quickly sitting next to her, and repeatedly tried to touch and grope her over the next almost 40 minutes. Investigators say surveillance video also shows the woman pushing Ngoy away several times.

Ngoy, who told police he had seen the woman before and that the sexual encounter was consensual, is charged with rape and several related offenses and is being held on \$180,000 bail. The woman, who was taken to the hospital, said she had never met Ngoy and did not give him permission to touch her.

A public defender assigned to represent Ngoy declined to comment, saying it was still very early in the case. A hearing is scheduled for Monday.

SEPTA Police Chief Thomas J. Nestel III's best estimate was there were about 10 passengers in the close vicinity of Ngoy and the woman during the rape, which started about 9:52 p.m. and ended when SEPTA police pulled Ngoy off of the woman about 10 p.m., authority spokesman Andrew Busch said Wednesday.

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An off-duty SEPTA employee was one of those 10 people. That employee alerted SEPTA police because he believed something wasn't right with the interaction, Busch said. He praised the employee's actions, saying he likely prevented Ngoy from being able to walk off the train and escape arrest.

Three minutes after the employee reported the assault, SEPTA officers stationed at the 69th Street terminal responded to the train car and stopped it.

An arrest for a separate sexual assault at the 69th Street terminal was also announced at the news conference Thursday. Bernhardt said a woman had missed her stop and asked the suspect how to get to the platform to go in the opposite direction. As he showed her, Bernhardt said he groped the woman and pushed her into a seclude area.

A passenger on the platform heard her screams for help and intervened. SEPTA police ultimately stopped the attack and took the man into custody.

Desperate Haitians suffocate under growing power of gangs

By DÁNICA COTO and ALBERTO ARCE Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — The video shows more than 30 men lined up in front of a crumbling structure in silence. Their heads are bowed as a man walks between them and swigs from a small bottle. Someone exclaims, "There will be trouble in Port-au-Prince!"

Nearby, assault weapons are lined up against a wall, and two dozen handguns are scattered on the ground. Two large buckets are filled with bullets.

The men appear to be fresh recruits for one of Haiti's most notorious street gangs, and the footage records their induction into the criminal underworld that increasingly rules the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. The video is emblazoned with the name "400 Mawozo" and "400 good for nothings," both references to the gang police say is responsible for multiple killings and kidnappings, including the recent abduction of 17 people from a U.S.-based religious group.

The footage posted earlier this year is a gritty online brag that demonstrates the startling power of Haitian gangs as they seize control of more land and commit more crimes than ever before — all without a care. Their tightening grip on society threatens the country's social fabric and its fragile, anemic economy.

"The situation is out of control," said James Boyard, professor of political science at Haiti State University, who, like other experts, accused some politicians and business owners of funding gangs. "They made them too powerful. Now they are terrorized. They didn't know things would go out of control the way they did."

This story is part of a series, Haiti: Business, politics and gangs, produced with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

Gangs control up to 40% of Port-au-Prince, a city of more than 2.8 million people where gangs fight over territory daily. The street that belonged to one group yesterday may belong to a rival group the next day. Two leaders who previously shot at each other may form a brief alliance against a third before becoming enemies again.

There are dozens of gang names — Krache Difé, Torcel, Baz Pilot and 5 Secondes among them — but experts say only about 30 gangs are firmly established in the capital and surrounding areas. The largest and most powerful is thought to be "G9 Family and Allies" federation of nine gangs, which is run Jimmy Cherizier, a former police officer.

Gang violence waxes and wanes depending on the state of Haiti's economy, its political situation and, at one point, the presence of United Nations peacekeepers. Currently, the country is still spinning from the July 7 killing of President Jovenel Moïse and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that killed more than 2,200 people in August.

Those two events temporarily halted some gang activity, but kidnappings have surged in recent weeks. At least 328 kidnappings were reported to Haiti's National Police in the first eight months of 2021, compared with a total of 234 for all of 2020, according to a report issued last month by the U.N. Integrated

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Office in Haiti.

The gangs' growing power is most visible in the community of Martissant, which connects Port-au-Prince with the southern part of the country and is ground zero for at least three warring groups. The violence there has reached such extreme levels that many Haitians take hourlong detours to avoid the area, according to the local *Le Nouvelliste* newspaper.

Martissant's abandoned police station is pockmarked with bullet holes, and bare-chested men with covered faces keep watch behind torched cars to ensure no one approaches.

In July, a gang opened fire on an ambulance and killed a nurse. The following month, gang violence forced Doctors Without Borders to close its Martissant clinic. On a recent Saturday, a group of armored police vehicles tried to cross the area and were shot at. The body of a dead civilian lay on the ground for the rest of the day.

Until recent years, turf wars were usually between gangs, with civilians sometimes caught in the crossfire. Then in November 2018, more than 70 people were killed in La Saline, a seaside slum in Port-au-Prince currently controlled by the G9 federation, whose leader was implicated in the massacre.

"Retaliation started escalating ... so they started going after civilians," said a top international official who was not authorized to speak to the media. "Now gang confrontations make no distinction between gangs and civilians."

The same applies to kidnappings, which have targeted a hotdog vendor, priests, schoolchildren and wealthy business owners for ransom.

Experts believe much of this activity is driven by extreme poverty in a country where 60% of the population makes less than \$2 a day and millions of people go hungry.

"Gangs are a way out, maybe the only way out of that situation," Boyard said.

The country's GDP dropped to -3.3% last year, the biggest decrease since the -5.7 drop that followed a devastating 2010 earthquake. In addition, the Haitian gourde depreciated more than 50% in the past year, and inflation remains above 10%, which has reduced purchasing power, said Haitian economist Enmy Germain.

This situation is comparable to the period that followed the 1991 coup that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Germain said.

Experts blame Aristide for creating the current gang phenomena. After returning to power in 1994, they say, he disbanded the army and began arming people in slums, many of whom he had influenced during his time as a Catholic priest.

Some gang recruits start as young as 6 or 7 and by their late teens occupy high-ranking positions. Few survive to 30. Members often refer to themselves as "soldiers." An armed man who identified himself only as James said he is a mechanic and joined the Baz Pilat gang "to protect the ghetto from rivals that enter to steal, kill and rape."

Gangs also choke Haiti's economy by blocking gas distribution terminals and major transportation routes — moves that prevent goods from flowing through the country. Many gas stations now remain closed for days at a time.

"I'm living in a chaotic country," said Delmy Belmon, a 44-year-old manager at a hardware store. He said his children, ages 9 and 12, can't go outside to play and are old enough to understand what is going on.

"Whenever they are in the car, they are looking right and left, and when motorcycles approach the car, I can feel they are scared," he said.

Violence is expected to worsen as Haiti prepares for presidential and legislative elections scheduled for next year. Political groups have long been known for paying gangs, according to the top international official.

"Any gang is open for negotiation and purchase," the official said.

Haiti has roughly 9,000 police officers on the streets, a fraction of the number that would normally patrol a country of more than 11 million people.

Gangs outnumber police and carry more weapons. Earlier this year, they killed at least four officers and wounded several others following a botched anti-gang raid in the Village de Dieu slum.

Days later, police marched through the streets to demand the return of their colleagues' bodies. The officers belong to a disgruntled sector called Fantom 509, which has been accused of killing people, setting buildings ablaze and even storming a jail to free imprisoned comrades.

Some officers with Haiti's National Police also have ties to gangs, Boyard said. "They support them, tell them how to move, when to go out and when to go in," he said.

A spokeswoman for Haiti's National Police did not return a message seeking comment.

Meanwhile, André Apaid, a Haitian businessman who owns a large textile company, declined to say whether he pays gangs but noted: "Business coexists with criminal and violent structures in order to survive."

Gang activity is "a poison for an economy," Germain said. "We cannot talk about economic recovery if we don't have security, if people are kidnapped every day, if freight trucks are hijacked by gangs every day, if enterprises cannot freely carry out their activities."

Associated Press photojournalist Alberto Arce reported this story in Port-au-Prince and AP writer Danica Coto reported from San Juan, Puerto Rico. AP journalists Evens Sanon in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and Chery Dieu-Nalio in New York contributed to this report.

California proposes new oil drilling ban near neighborhoods

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's oil and gas regulator on Thursday proposed that the state ban new oil and gas drilling within 3,200 feet of schools, homes and hospitals to protect public health in what would be the nation's largest buffer zone between oil wells and communities.

It's the latest effort by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration to wind down oil production in California, aligning him with environmental advocates pushing to curb the effects of climate change and against the powerful oil industry in the nation's seventh-largest oil producing state.

Studies show living near a drilling site can elevate risks of birth defects, cancer, respiratory problems and other health issues. More than 2 million Californians live within 3,200 feet (975 meters) of oil drilling sites, primarily low-income residents and people of color in Los Angeles County and the Central Valley. The proposal would not ban wells already operating in those zones but would add new pollution controls.

"This is about public health, public safety, clean air, clean water — this is about our kids and our grandkids and our future," Newsom said in Wilmington, a Los Angeles neighborhood with the city's highest concentration of wells. "A greener, cleaner, brighter, more resilient future is in our grasp and this is a commitment to advance that cause."

The rules are a draft that signal what the administration is seeking, but they could change and won't take effect until at least 2023.

This would be the first time California has set statewide rules on how close drilling can be to homes, schools and other sites. Other oil and gas producing states such as Colorado, Pennsylvania and even Texas have rules about how close oil wells can be to certain properties. Colorado's 2,000-foot setback on new drilling, adopted last year, is the nation's strictest rule right now.

California's plan, if adopted, would also go further than the 2,500 foot (762 meter) buffer environmental groups sought. A coalition of environmental justice groups that advocate for Black, brown and Indigenous communities in heavily polluted areas commended the ruling but pushed Newsom to more aggressively phase out existing neighborhood drilling.

"Oil and gas companies have been treating our communities as sacrifice zones for over a century," Juan Flores, community organizer with the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, said in a statement. "Frontline community members have spoken in a clear voice, demanding an end to neighborhood drilling."

The Western States Petroleum Association, an oil and gas interest group, blasted the proposed rules as an "activist assault on California's way of life, economy and people" in a statement from President Catherine Reheis-Boyd.

Reheis-Boyd said the industry doesn't oppose local setbacks but does not approve of a statewide rule.

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She said the rules would lead to less reliable energy and higher prices in an industry that employs about 150,000 people.

Robbie Hunter of the influential State Building and Construction Trades Council, a labor union, said the rule would increase California's dependence on foreign oil, and said the state was "fast becoming a beached whale with no ability to meet its own needs."

Newsom, who just survived a recall election, cast the proposal as the latest step in his efforts to ensure oil is not part of California's future. He has directed state air regulators to make a plan to end oil and gas production by 2045 and curb demand by banning the sale of new gas-powered cars by 2035.

He was joined in Wilmington by state lawmakers who have long pushed for setbacks and doctors who spoke about the dangers of oil pollution for people who live nearby, particularly expectant mothers and children.

"I am tired of my district being called 'asthma alley,'" said state Sen. Lena Gonzalez, a Democrat who represents southeast Los Angeles County.

The rules were proposed by the California Geologic Energy Management Division, known as CalGEM, which regulates the state's oil industry and issues drilling permits. Newsom directed it to focus on health and safety when he took office in 2019, specifically telling the division to consider setbacks around oil drilling to protect community health. The state received more than 40,000 public comments on the draft rules and convened a 15-member panel of public health experts to research the effects of neighborhood oil drilling on health and safety.

CalGEM has long faced criticism that it's too cozy with the industry it regulates. Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the state natural resources agency, acknowledged the regulator needs to better enforce oil companies' compliance with state law.

Wells within 3,200 feet of community sites account for about a third of the state's oil extraction, Crowfoot said. There are about 32,400 wells in that zone, said Erin Mellon, a Newsom spokeswoman. Community sites include homes and apartments, preschools and K-12 schools, day cares, businesses, and health care facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes.

Existing wells would not be shut down but would be required to meet many new pollution control measures, including comprehensive leak detection and response plans, vapor recovery, water sampling and a reduction of nighttime lighting and dust. They are designed to limit health effects such as asthma and pregnancy complications, and cut nuisances like noise pollution.

Administration officials said they hope the new rules will be burdensome enough to prompt some drillers to close the wells. Operators would be financially responsible for meeting the requirements and have one to two years to do so.

Jared Blumenfeld, California's environmental protection secretary, said the rules signal to existing drillers that "they're going to have to invest a significant amount of time, money and attention in order to get into compliance."

US regulators endorse efforts to address climate risks

By JOSH BOAK and MARTIN CRUTSINGER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. financial regulators on Thursday approved a series of steps toward addressing the dangers that climate change poses to the nation's financial system.

The Financial Stability Oversight Council, which is headed by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and includes Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, acknowledged in a report that climate change is a serious economic threat.

"Climate-related impacts in the form of warming temperatures rising sea levels, droughts, wildfires, intensifying storms and other climate related events are already imposing significant costs upon the public and the economy," the council's 133-page report says. "It is the responsibility of the council and its members to ensure the financial system's resiliency to climate related risks."

The report includes more than 30 proposals aimed at improving efforts to the assess risks. It put for-

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ward recommendations to upgrade the collection of risk data and also ways of making sure the public has access to the data.

The report was released 10 days before a United Nations conference on climate change in Glasgow, Scotland. It signals the Biden administration's intention to tell the broader international community that it is putting together the policy architecture to address climate change and improve the resilience of financial markets.

With the United States lagging behind the European Union and the United Kingdom in responding to climate change's economic threats, the administration hopes to use the report to assert more leadership on the issue.

As recommended by the report, a special advisory committee would be established of scientists, Wall Street executives, business and labor leaders, environmentalists and others to help develop standards for monitoring the economic impacts of climate change.

The report also advises identifying and filling gaps in data for assessing how climate change could threaten the economy, including the sharing of data across the federal government and with international counterparts.

The council approved creation of two climate advisory panels that will report to the group on a regular basis to keep officials informed of progress being made.

Companies and government agencies would also have new standards for public disclosures about the climate, a move designed to make it easier for the markets to appropriately weigh the impacts of climate change and the potential savings from reducing those impacts through measures like the use of renewable energy.

Yellen called the changes approved by FSOC an "important first step" but said they were by no means the end of the group's effort to better incorporate the assessment of climate threats into the regulatory process.

She said the severe weather events of this summer from the wildfires in the West to Hurricane Ida along the Gulf Coast demonstrated the need for action.

Powell, calling climate change a "significant challenge for the global economy and the financial system," said the Fed was committed to doing its part in such areas as using more sophisticated analyses to better assess climate risks.

Yellen has made addressing climate change a top priority since joining the Biden administration.

Environmental groups, however, said they were disappointed that the FSOC did not make more ambitious recommendations.

"Financial regulators can and must act to rein in Wall Street's contributions to the climate crisis," said Ben Cushing, the manager of the Sierra Club's fossil-free finance campaign. "This report is a step in the right direction, but bolder action from regulators is necessary in order to protect our economy from the climate crisis."

FSOC is an umbrella panel made up of the heads of the government's top financial regulatory agencies. It was created by Congress in 2010 to address serious problems in coordination between agencies that had been revealed by the 2008 financial crisis.

The report and its recommendations were approved by all members of the panel with the exception of Jelena McWilliams, the head of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., who abstained on the grounds she felt more information was needed before reaching a conclusion. McWilliams was appointed to the FDIC by then-President Donald Trump.

Virginia gives Democrats a test of Black turnout before 2022

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — As Democrat Terry McAuliffe worked the crowd at Norfolk State University's homecoming football game, many fans at the historically Black school were ready with answers before he could even ask for their vote.

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"Everybody I talked to said: 'Don't worry, I've already voted. I've already voted,'" McAuliffe said of his campaign stop last weekend.

But McAuliffe can't afford not to worry. Polls have consistently shown him with the overwhelming support of Black Virginians, but his victory may hinge on whether this core part of his base shows up in strong numbers to vote.

National activists worry that President Joe Biden's falling approval ratings, and a lack of action by the Democrat-controlled Congress on voting rights and issues important to African Americans, could spell trouble in a race with Republican former businessman Glenn Youngkin that already looked exceedingly tight.

"Black voters, by and large, are feeling like they're being taken for granted," said Wes Bellamy, co-chair of Our Black Party, which advocates for political positions that benefit African Americans.

And any hint of waning enthusiasm among Democratic base voters could prove even more disastrous for the national party in next year's midterm elections — when the party's narrow control of both congressional chambers is at stake.

Black voters made up 11% of the national electorate in 2020 and 9 in 10 of them supported Biden last year, playing critical roles in delivering close states like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, according to AP VoteCast, a nationwide survey of the 2020 electorate. But that means any softening of support could have the opposite effect in statewide races next year.

Democrats have been mobilizing their brightest national stars in hopes of staving off complacency in party ranks. Vice President Kamala Harris recorded a video praising McAuliffe that will be seen at 300-plus churches statewide and campaigned for McAuliffe on Thursday. Former President Barack Obama will be in Richmond this weekend and Biden is coming next week.

"This race is tight," Harris told hundreds of cheering supporters in the Washington suburb of Dumfries on Thursday night. "And we got to make it clear, Virginia, that we're paying attention. We got to make it clear that we're not taking anything for granted."

They're following Georgia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams and Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, who each visited Black churches last weekend. Abrams will be back in the state for a Charlottesville rally Sunday.

McAuliffe, who served as governor from 2014 to 2018, has visited 60-plus Black churches, his campaign says, and last Sunday held the first of several planned "Souls to the Polls" efforts to bring African American worshippers to early voting stations.

It's difficult to gauge the success of those campaigns, since Virginia has only recently begun allowing no-excuse early voting. Still, McAuliffe advisers say they're encouraged by the total number of early ballots cast so far. Nearly 310,000 people have cast in-person ballots, with another almost 180,000 voting by mail.

That pales in comparison to the more than 1 million Virginians who voted by mail during last year's presidential race, though. Those totals could also be offset by a strong showing on Election Day, when more Republicans than Democrats have tended to vote.

At nearly every campaign stop, McAuliffe, who is white, mentions how he was recruited by leading members of the statehouse Black caucus to run again, and that helped him top three Black candidates in the Democratic gubernatorial primary, two of them woman.

This week he released an ad focusing on the violent 2017 clash between white supremacists and counter-protesters in the college town of Charlottesville, part of an ongoing effort to keep former President Donald Trump front of mind for Virginia voters. The ad contrasted Trump saying there were "very fine people on both sides" against McAuliffe's own reaction as governor, when he implored the "white supremacists and the Nazis that came into Charlottesville today: Go home. You are not wanted."

Youngkin's message to Black voters promotes his economic plans.

"Terry McAuliffe failed to deliver for the Black community as governor — losing their support — and now he is desperately trying to regain their trust," said Youngkin spokesperson Macaulay Porter.

Bellamy, of Our Black Party, spent recent weeks driving around Virginia and was surprised at the number of Youngkin yard signs he saw. He said McAuliffe has a "very strong record" that will help him with the

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Black community, but national Democrats present potential hurdles.

"When you look at national politics, when you look at some of the things that the Biden campaign promised but not quite delivered on yet, I think there will be some trickle-down effect," he said.

Bellamy singled out Congress' failure to pass federal voting rights legislation and policing reform. He said many Black voters have been troubled that some top Democrats haven't endorsed changing Senate rules to get such legislation passed over unified Republican opposition — but have said they might be willing to change chamber rules to move major spending bills.

Indeed, the Senate took up a voting rights package Wednesday only to have it blocked by Republican opposition — the kind of maneuver changing chamber rules might prevent.

McAuliffe counters that Black voters know his record from his first tenure as governor, when he restored voting rights for many former Virginia felons and others who had been removed from the state's voting rolls, and pushed state lawmakers to expand Medicare coverage under the Obama administration's signature health law.

He's also released a campaign plan to "Lift Up Black Virginians," which includes pledges to accelerate the pathway to a \$15 per hour minimum wage while working to ensure state government better supports Black-owned banks and promotes diversity in financial fields.

Jenkins Zardee, 62, a retired Navy sailor who attended a recent McAuliffe rally with Abrams in Norfolk, said he believes "there's enough enthusiasm."

"It's all about turnout," said Zardee. "But people know, if you didn't like the last four years we just came out of, you have to come and vote for Terry McAuliffe."

That message hasn't reached everyone, though. Regina Scheithauer, a singer and part-time school volunteer, attended the same rally and said of Abrams, "That's how you get the people to pay attention."

But Scheithauer said she knew little about McAuliffe — despite the fact that he's already been governor — and said she hadn't yet decided whether to vote for him.

Another potential wildcard is Princess Blanding, the sister of a Black man who was killed by Richmond police in 2018. She is running for governor as a third-party candidate. At McAuliffe's rally with Abrams, some attendees hoisted Blanding campaign signs, and though their ranks were small, they outnumbered the few protesters present waving Youngkin signs.

The Democratic National Committee has announced a campaign featuring ads on Spanish-language and Black radio, and in print outlets targeting the Asian American community. That's in addition to spending \$5 million in Virginia boosting campaign staff and organizing and training capacity.

But Cliff Albright, co-founder of Black Voters Matter, said Democratic outreach efforts in Virginia have generally been late and underfunded and have relied too heavily on things like ads instead of on-the-ground outreach. Bringing in Democratic standouts likely wouldn't be enough to correct that, he predicted.

"Pulling in new, infrequent voters, it's going to take more than a couple of visits. It's really going to take creating some type of excitement at the grassroots level, and ideally some excitement that's around policy that people feel passionate about and feel like is really on the line," Albright said. "I just don't know if McAuliffe has really specified to folks about what the urgency is in order to get some of the new voters that they need."

FBI: Remains found in Florida park ID'd as Brian Laundrie

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — The FBI on Thursday identified human remains found in a Florida nature preserve as those of Brian Laundrie, a person of interest in the death of girlfriend Gabby Petito while the couple was on a cross-country road trip.

The remains, a backpack and notebook believed to belong to Laundrie were discovered Wednesday in a Florida wilderness park, according to the FBI. The area where they were found had been under water during earlier searches.

The FBI's Denver office said in a news release a comparison of dental records confirmed that the remains

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were Laundrie. A lawyer for his parents, Steve Bertolino, also confirmed in a statement they were told the remains were those of their son.

"We have no further comment at this time and we ask that you respect the Laundrie's privacy at this time," the statement said.

The FBI statement did not list a cause of death. It wasn't clear how long the remains may have been submerged in water.

The discovery of the remains concluded a massive search involving federal, state and local law enforcement that began shortly after Laundrie disappeared Sept. 14, two weeks after the 23-year-old returned alone to his parents' home in North Port, Florida.

The investigation into Petito's slaying, however, is not yet concluded. But only Laundrie has ever been identified by law enforcement officials as a person of interest in the case.

Petito's family reported her missing Sept. 11, launching a search that garnered worldwide media attention and, in Laundrie's case, focused largely on the Carlton Reserve wilderness park near the Laundrie home. It is a densely wooded, swampy area that's home to alligators, coyotes, bobcats, snakes and numerous other creatures.

The couple first met as teenagers on Long Island, New York, and more recently moved to Florida's Gulf Coast to live with his parents.

They first gained an online following while on their trip in a converted Ford Transit van in videos filled with happy scenes that may have concealed deeper problems. After Petito disappeared, the case became a true-crime obsession on social media.

The intense focus on 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. Petito, 22, was white.

Her body was found Sept. 19 on the edge of Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park, which the couple had visited. The coroner there concluded she died of strangulation and her body had been where it was found for three or four weeks.

The couple was stopped Aug. 12 by police in Moab, Utah, after they had a physical altercation, but no domestic violence charges were filed. The police department there is conducting an internal review to determine if policy was followed.

Laundrie returned home alone Sept. 1 in the van the couple took on their trip, which was later impounded by authorities. He was reported missing after telling his parents that he was going for a hike in the Carlton Reserve.

Dozens of unconfirmed tips poured into authorities about spotting Laundrie from Wyoming to the Appalachian Trail, but none panned out.

The remains were found Wednesday as searches concentrated on the nearby Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park, where a Ford Mustang that Laundrie drove to the wilderness was found. That park is directly adjacent to the Carlton Reserve, both of which are about 35 miles (56 kilometers) south of Sarasota, Florida.

Laundrie was charged in a federal Wyoming indictment with unauthorized use of a debit card, which alleged Laundrie used a Capital One Bank card and someone's personal identification number to make unauthorized withdrawals or charges worth more than \$1,000. It does not say to whom the card belonged or what type of charges were made.

Had Laundrie lived, that indictment would have permitted authorities to arrest him.

UK palace says queen, 95, spent night in hospital for checks

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's Queen Elizabeth II spent a night in a hospital for checks this week after canceling an official trip to Northern Ireland on medical advice, Buckingham Palace said Thursday.

The palace said the 95-year-old British monarch went to the private King Edward VII's Hospital in London on Wednesday for "preliminary investigations." It said she returned to her Windsor Castle home at lunchtime on Thursday, "and remains in good spirits."

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On Wednesday, the queen canceled a scheduled trip to mark 100 years since the creation of Northern Ireland, and the palace said she had “reluctantly” accepted medical advice to rest for a few days. It did not elaborate, but the decision was understood not to be related to COVID-19. The queen has been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The palace confirmed the queen’s hospital stay after The Sun newspaper reported the news.

The queen is now back at Windsor Castle, west of London, where she has spent much of her time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

The decision came just days after Elizabeth was seen using a walking stick at a major public event when attending a Westminster Abbey service marking the centenary of the Royal British Legion, an armed forces charity.

She had previously been photographed using a cane in 2003, but that was after she underwent knee surgery.

Britain’s longest-lived and longest-reigning monarch, Elizabeth is due to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee — 70 years on the throne — next year.

Elizabeth has ruled since 1952 and was widowed this year when Prince Philip died at age 99 in April. She has cut back on her workload in recent years but still keeps a busy schedule of royal duties. On Tuesday, she held audiences with diplomats and hosted a reception at Windsor Castle for global business leaders, and on Saturday the equine aficionado attended horse racing at Ascot Racecourse.

In less than two weeks she is due to host world leaders at the United Nations climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland.

She has generally enjoyed good health throughout her long life. She was last hospitalized in 2013, when she was 86, after experiencing symptoms of gastroenteritis.

She recently declined the honor of being named “Oldie of the Year” by The Oldie magazine. Her office said that “Her Majesty believes you are as old as you feel, as such The Queen does not believe she meets the relevant criteria to be able to accept.”

Why no tusks? Poaching tips scales of elephant evolution

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A hefty set of tusks is usually an advantage for elephants, allowing them to dig for water, strip bark for food and joust with other elephants. But during episodes of intense ivory poaching, those big incisors become a liability.

Now researchers have pinpointed how years of civil war and poaching in Mozambique have led to a greater proportion of elephants that will never develop tusks.

During the conflict from 1977 to 1992, fighters on both sides slaughtered elephants for ivory to finance war efforts. In the region that’s now Gorongosa National Park, around 90% of the elephants were killed.

The survivors were likely to share a key characteristic: half the females were naturally tuskless — they simply never developed tusks — while before the war, less than a fifth lacked tusks.

Like eye color in humans, genes are responsible for whether elephants inherit tusks from their parents. Although tusklessness was once rare in African savannah elephants, it’s become more common — like a rare eye color becoming widespread.

After the war, those tuskless surviving females passed on their genes with expected, as well as surprising, results. About half their daughters were tuskless. More perplexing, two-thirds of their offspring were female.

The years of unrest “changed the trajectory of evolution in that population,” said evolutionary biologist Shane Campbell-Staton, based at Princeton University.

With colleagues, he set out to understand how the pressure of the ivory trade had tipped the scale of natural selection. Their findings were published Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Researchers in Mozambique, including biologists Dominique Goncalves and Joyce Poole, observed the national park’s roughly 800 elephants over several years to create a catalogue of mothers and offspring.

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"Female calves stay by their mothers, and so do males up to a certain age," said Poole, who is scientific director and co-founder of the nonprofit ElephantVoices.

Poole had previously seen other cases of elephant populations with a disproportionately large number of tuskless females after intense poaching, including in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. "I've been puzzling over why it's the females who are tuskless for a very long time," said Poole, who is a co-author of the study.

In Gorongosa, the team collected blood samples from seven tusked and 11 tuskless female elephants, then analyzed their DNA for differences.

The elephant survey data gave them an idea where to look: Because the tuskless elephants were female, they focused on the X chromosome. (Females have two X chromosomes; males have one X and one Y chromosome.)

They also suspected that the relevant gene was dominant – meaning that a female needs only one altered gene to become tuskless — and that when passed to male embryos, it may short-circuit their development.

"When mothers pass it on, we think the sons likely die early in development, a miscarriage," said Brian Arnold, a co-author and evolutionary biologist at Princeton.

Their genetic analysis revealed two key parts of the elephants' DNA that they think play a role in passing on the trait of tusklessness. The same genes are associated with the development of teeth in other mammals.

"They've produced the smoking-gun evidence for genetic changes," said Chris Darimont, a conservation scientist at the University of Victoria in Canada, who was not involved in the research. The work "helps scientists and the public understand how our society can have a major influence on the evolution of other life forms."

Most people think of evolution as something that proceeds slowly, but humans can hit the accelerator.

"When we think about natural selection, we think about it happening over hundreds, or thousands, of years," said Samuel Wasser, a conservation biologist at the University of Washington, who was not involved in the research. "The fact that this dramatic selection for tusklessness happened over 15 years is one of the most astonishing findings."

Now the scientists are studying what more tuskless elephants means for the species and its savannah environment. Their preliminary analysis of fecal samples suggests the Gorongosa elephants are shifting their diet, without long incisors to peel bark from trees.

"The tuskless females ate mostly grass, whereas the tusked animals ate more legumes and tough woody plants," said Robert Pringle, a co-author and biologist at Princeton University. "These changes will last for at least multiple elephant generations."

Follow Christina Larson on Twitter: @larsonchristina

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Trump plan for new media venture gets investors' thumbs up

By JILL COLVIN and ALEX VEIGA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Some investors aren't waiting to see if former President Donald Trump's plans for a media company to challenge the likes of Facebook, Twitter and even Disney can actually become reality — they're all in.

Trump said Wednesday that he's launching Trump Media & Technology Group and a "Truth Social" app as a rival to the Big Tech companies that have shut him out and denied him the megaphone that was paramount to his national rise. The announcement came nine months after Trump was expelled from social media for his role in inciting the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

Experts were split on how strong a competitor Trump Media & Technology Group can be, but the stock market reacted with exuberance.

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TMTG's plan is to become a publicly listed company through a merger with Digital World Acquisition Corp., a type of company whose sole purpose is to acquire a private company and take it public. Shares of Digital World Acquisition quadrupled Thursday in what some might see as validation for Trump, even though there's a ways to go before the merger is completed.

"I'm personally not a Trump supporter, but this could lead to giant media presence," said investor Ryan Joshua Keenan, who put \$2,000 into the stock early Thursday morning and had already tripled the money by the early afternoon. "It's been going up ridiculously."

Trump has spoken about launching his own social media site ever since he was barred from Twitter and Facebook. An earlier effort to launch a blog on his existing website was abandoned after the page drew dismal views.

"We live in a world where the Taliban has a huge presence on Twitter, yet your favorite American President has been silenced," he said in a statement Wednesday. "This is unacceptable."

Conservative voices actually do well on traditional social media. On Wednesday, half of Facebook's 10 top performing link posts were from conservative media, commentators or politicians, according to a daily list compiled by a New York Times technology columnist and an internet studies professor using Facebook's own data.

TMTG has not set its sights low. In addition to the Truth Social app, which is expected to soft-launch next month with a nationwide rollout early next year, the company says it is planning a video-on-demand service dubbed TMTG+ that will feature entertainment programming, news and podcasts.

One slide in a TMTG presentation on its website includes a graphic of its potential competitors, which range from Facebook and Twitter to Netflix and Disney+ to CNN. The same slide suggests that over the long term TMTG will also become a power in cloud computing and payments and suggests it will go head-to-head with Amazon, Microsoft, Google and Stripe.

A Trump-branded social media portal would join a crowded space dominated by Big Tech-run portals like Facebook and Twitter. Still, everyday social media users tend to be on multiple platforms at once, so TMTG's offering doesn't have to necessarily peel users from other portals to thrive.

"This network will most likely be most successful in targeting far-right users, the same that left Facebook for 'alternative' social networks like Gab or Parler," said Alexandra Cirone, assistant professor in government at Cornell University.

Trump's new media outlet could also compete for viewers on conservative networks such as OANN, Newsmax and Fox News, she said.

Ali Mogharabi, senior equity analyst at Morningstar, who covers Twitter, Facebook and other social media companies, said Trump's brand could initially give TMTG a leg up relative to other new social media sites going up against Facebook and other big players.

"Whether that's going to be sustainable in the long run, that's very uncertain."

Mogharabi said next year's mid-term elections could be pivotal in whether the social media platform succeeds.

"A lot of Trump supporters would probably go on there. Even more so in 2024, if Trump actually decides to run for president. Those types of future events could actually attract more users."

For now, the deal is attracting stock traders. Shares of Digital World Acquisition soared \$35.34, or 357%, to \$45.50, and changed hands more than 475 million times. That compares with average trading volume of about 11 million shares for Twitter, which trade at around \$65.

Digital World Acquisition, based in Miami, is a special-purpose acquisition company, or SPAC. Such publicly traded companies are designed to list the shares of a private company more quickly than a traditional initial public offering. In practice, that means the SPAC acquires a private firm and then changes its name and other details to those of the acquired firm.

"It's been many, many months since there's been a SPAC merger greeted with this amount of enthusiasm," said Jay Ritter, a professor at the University of Florida who specializes in initial public offerings.

A SPAC pays for an acquisition with cash from its own initial public offering. DWA completed its initial public offering on Sept. 8. DWA said it has raised roughly \$293 million in cash, which it will use to grow

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TMTG's ventures.

The enthusiasm from investors came even though the SPAC deal was unusual in several ways. Announcements of such deals typically are accompanied by the actual merger agreement and a presentation to investors full of numbers and data.

In this one, the merger agreement was not there. And the "Company Overview" of TMTG on its website is light on details about its structure and finances.

"I don't know enough to say it's unprecedented, but it's weird. Given a lot of things that happen with Trump are not great with details and formalities, it's perhaps not surprising, but it's not the norm in SPACs," said Michael Ohlrogge, an assistant professor of law at New York University who researches SPACs.

Until the deal is completed, TMTG would not have access to the cash raised by the SPAC. And without additional details from the companies, it's unclear what Trump's role will be and how much he'll be compensated.

The deal has an initial enterprise value, which measures total debts and assets, of \$875 million, according to Wednesday's announcement. Experts say it could take up to six months for the deal to close.

Digital World Acquisition is currently run by CEO Patrick Orlando, a Miami-based founder of the Benessere Investment Group. He owns 18% of Digital World's stock, according to a recent regulatory filing.

Orlando has experience taking at least three SPACs public. One company, Yunhong International, had planned to buy a marketer of "carbon neutral" fuel cells and batteries, but a press release issued last month said the deal had been canceled without giving a reason.

Orlando declined to comment about Trump's potential role in the new company to The Associated Press on Thursday, pointing to the public statements, which provide no detail.

The last time Trump ran a publicly traded company, it didn't end up well for investors. His casino company, Trump Entertainment Resorts, lost hundreds of millions of dollars over more than a dozen years and filed for bankruptcy several times, socking shareholders with big losses. Trump fared better. He took in \$82 million in fees, salary and bonuses over the same period, according to Fortune magazine.

Veiga reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press reporters Bernard Condon and Stan Choe, and technology editor David Hamilton, contributed to this report.

Biden bill would put US back on path of reducing uninsured

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democrats' social spending and climate change bill would put the United States back on a path to reducing its persistent pool of uninsured people, with estimates ranging from 4 million to 7 million Americans gaining health coverage.

Those getting covered would include about one-third of uninsured Black Americans, according to an analysis by the Urban Institute and the Commonwealth Fund, nonpartisan research groups that support the goal of expanding health insurance. Other estimates from the Congressional Budget Office and the center-right American Action Forum project a similar overall trend.

With the legislation, the number of uninsured people under age 65 would drop from about 28 million to less than 24 million in a decade, according to the budget office, which provides nonpartisan analysis for Congress. That 28 million starting point is roughly in line with the current count of uninsured people, so the nation would see a holding pattern if lawmakers do nothing.

Even with former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, or ACA, nearly 9% of Americans remain uninsured. But now, by building on that health law, President Joe Biden is trying to drive the numbers lower, a few percentage points at a time.

Left-leaning Democrats who favor guaranteed government health insurance for all are promoting the piecemeal progress under Biden nonetheless.

"The best approach to getting universal coverage is through a single-payer system, but we should not overlook how powerfully important the provisions in the Build Back Better agenda are," said Massachusetts

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Sen. Elizabeth Warren, referring to Biden's signature legislation proposal. "We have a historic opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives ... and we should do that."

Final specifications of Biden's package are being worked out but numerous Democrats say the health insurance provisions have broad backing within their party. The changes include an extension of temporary financial subsidies for "Obamacare" plans in Biden's coronavirus relief bill, coverage for low-income people in a dozen mainly Southern states where Republicans blocked Medicaid expansion, and a formula tweak for what's deemed affordable workplace coverage.

"These policies would definitely reduce the number of uninsured in ways you could see clearly," said economist Jessica Banthin, lead author of the Urban-Commonwealth analysis.

Republicans are trying to brand the Democrats' plan as wasteful. Citing a budget office cost estimate of \$553 billion over 10 years, House Republicans say that would work out to \$14,200 per person covered, or about twice the annual premium for employee-only coverage at work.

"There's nothing affordable about Democrats' plan," Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the top Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, said in a statement.

But such criticism overlooks the fact that Republicans don't agree among themselves on a strategy to continue expanding health insurance coverage. Most believe it's not the role of government to guarantee coverage for all, particularly for people who are able to work.

Under President Donald Trump, Republicans tried and failed to repeal the Obama health law, and that would have made more than 20 million Americans uninsured. Trump never delivered on his own promise of "insurance for everybody."

What's more, a good deal of the cost in the Democrats' latest bill involves their Medicaid workaround, which would not be happening if GOP-led states such as Texas, Florida and Georgia had joined the 38 others that expanded the program under the Obama law.

In the states still refusing, Biden and congressional Democrats would provide a federal fallback for uninsured low-income people. That includes about 2 million people currently ineligible for government-sponsored health insurance and at least as many who are legally entitled to purchase an ACA plan but probably cannot afford it, even with subsidies.

Adding a racial justice dimension to the push, many who would be helped are Black Americans.

"This is an equity issue," said Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock. Georgia's first Black senator, Warnock has made Medicaid his signature issue as he prepares for a reelection campaign next year.

"We have the opportunity to uphold the promise we made 11 years ago when we passed the Affordable Care Act," Warnock said. "Every day that we delay is another day that the least among us continue to suffer."

On a side note, the estimates from the Urban Institute and the Commonwealth Fund, as well as the one from the American Action Forum, project the Democratic bill would reduce the number of uninsured by about 7 million people. It's the budget office that produced the smaller estimate of 4 million.

That doesn't reflect a disagreement about the bill's impact, but more of a technicality. The CBO said it's due to different assumptions that the researchers made in calculating their estimates. For example, CBO assumed that some of the Medicaid holdout states would expand their programs if federal law stays the same. The other two groups of experts did not.

Fed imposes sweeping new limits on policymakers' investments

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve is imposing a broad new set of restrictions on the investments its officials can own, a response to questionable recent trades that forced two top Fed officials to resign.

The Fed announced Thursday that its policymakers and senior staff would be barred from investing in individual stocks and bonds. They would also have to provide 45 days' advance notice of any trade and receive prior approval from ethics officials. And they would have to hold the investments for at least a year.

These senior officials will also have to sell any individual stocks or bonds they now own, as well as any category of securities, such as municipal bonds, that the Fed is buying as part of its economic support

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programs.

The new rules would also require Fed officials to publicly disclose all financial transactions within 30 days, and would bar trading during periods of "heightened financial market stress." The central bank said it hasn't yet decided how to define such periods. In a statement, the Fed said it would incorporate the restrictions into its written policies "in the coming months." Fed officials suggested that they might have to expand their legal staff to implement them.

"These tough new rules raise the bar high in order to assure the public we serve that all of our senior officials maintain a single-minded focus on the public mission of the Federal Reserve," Chair Jerome Powell said in a statement.

Powell, who is under consideration by the Biden administration for a second four-year term as Fed chair, has come under fire after it was revealed that two regional Federal Reserve Bank presidents traded stocks and other investments last spring. Although the trades complied with Fed financial ethics rules, they occurred while the Fed was taking expansive steps to boost the economy and calm financial markets. As a result, they raised the possibility of conflicts of interest, because the two officials could have profited from the Fed's actions.

One of the officials, Robert Kaplan, who was president of the Dallas Fed, made trades of \$1 million or more in 22 stocks last year, including Apple, Facebook and Chevron.

The other official, Eric Rosengren, who was head of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, invested in funds that held mortgage-backed securities of the same type that the Fed was buying as part of its efforts to hold down longer-term interest rates.

Kaplan and Rosengren announced their resignations soon after the questionable trades came to light.

Ethics experts said the trades underscored how lax the Fed's rules were given its outsize influence over financial markets. The regional Fed bank presidents take part in private discussions about potential interest rate changes that stand to affect the financial markets. They can also move markets in their frequent public speeches, which typically reflect their inside knowledge of the Fed's policy discussions.

Under the rules announced Thursday, Fed officials — including the regional presidents — will be limited to owning diversified investments such as mutual funds.

Powell's term expires in February, but most observers expect the White House to announce a decision this fall. Many progressive groups, though, have urged the administration to nominate Lael Brainard, a member of the Fed's governing board, or some other candidate, rather than Powell. Some have argued that the Fed's rules around investing were too lax.

Not all critics are likely to be satisfied by the stricter rules unveiled Thursday.

"The changes announced today by the Federal Reserve are long overdue and a good start but don't go far enough," said Dennis Kelleher, president of Better Markets, an advocacy group.

The Fed should apply them more broadly, Kelleher said, to any Fed employees with access to nonpublic information — not just senior officials. Senior leaders, Kelleher said, should have to put their holdings in a blind trust.

The Fed considered blind trusts, officials said, but did not choose that route because officials would be unable to guarantee that they were not invested in individual stocks or bonds.

Some ethics experts applauded the Fed's move. Norman Eisen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said the new rules "compare favorably" to other government agencies.

"The Fed has treated this as what we in the ethics profession refer to as a teachable moment to broadcast a message of integrity," Eisen said. "They are to be congratulated."

Powell's own investments have also raised concerns. A former partner at the Carlyle Group, an investment firm, Powell owns municipal bonds, a type of security that the Fed bought last year for the first time as part of its efforts to ensure that financial markets could operate smoothly.

At a news conference Sept. 22, Powell said he thought that Fed officials generally shouldn't own financial assets of the kind that the Fed itself is purchasing. He said he had owned muni bonds for years. Powell will have to sell the muni bonds under the new rules, Fed officials confirmed.

At the same news conference, Powell acknowledged that the existing rules were inadequate and said

the Fed would make changes.

And earlier this month, the Fed said an internal watchdog would investigate whether the trades by Kaplan and Rosengren violated any laws.

US: More threats, more desperate refugees as climate warms

By JULIE WATSON, ELLEN KNICKMEYER and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Earth's warming and resulting natural disasters are creating a more dangerous world of desperate leaders and peoples, the Biden administration said Thursday in the federal government's starkest assessments yet of security and migration challenges facing the United States as the climate worsens.

The Defense Department for years has called climate change a threat to U.S. national security. But Thursday's reports by the departments of Defense and Homeland Security, National Security Council and Director of National Intelligence provide one of the government's deepest looks yet at the vast rippling effects on the world's stability and resulting heightened threats to U.S. security, as well as its impact on migration.

They include the first assessment by intelligence agencies on the impact of climate change, identifying 11 countries of greatest concern from Haiti to Afghanistan.

Another report, the first by the government focusing at length on climate and migration, recommends a number of steps, including monitoring the flows of people forced to leave their homes because of natural disasters, and working with Congress on a groundbreaking plan that would add droughts, floods and wildfires and other climate-related reasons to be considered in granting refugee status.

The climate migration assessments urge the creation of a task force to coordinate U.S. management of climate change and migration across government, from climate scientists to aid and security officials.

Each year, storms, the failure of seasonal rains and other sudden natural disasters force an average of 21.5 million people from their homes around the world, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees says. Worsening climate from the burning of coal and gas already is intensifying a range of disasters, from wildfires overrunning towns in California, rising seas overtaking island nations and drought-aggravated conflict in some parts of the world.

"Policy and programming efforts made today and in coming years will impact estimates of people moving due to climate-related factors," said the report, one of dozens of climate change assessments President Joe Biden ordered from federal agencies. "Tens of millions of people, however, are likely to be displaced over the next two to three decades due in large measure to climate change impacts."

The Biden administration is eager to show itself confronting the impacts of climate change ahead of a crucial U.N. climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, that starts late this month. That's especially so as Biden struggles to get lawmakers to agree to multibillion-dollar measures to slow climate change, a key part of his domestic agenda.

As part of its push Thursday, the administration released the first-ever national intelligence estimate on climate change, a document intended to signal the importance placed on the issue. National intelligence estimates are benchmark documents created by U.S. intelligence agencies that are intended to inform decision-making and analysis across the government.

Notably, U.S. intelligence agencies concluded it was probably already too late to keep the warming of the planet at or below the level laid out in the 2015 U.N. Paris climate accord. While that level remains the official goal for the United States and United Nations, many scientists have concluded the Earth's temperature will rise at least several more tenths of a degree, a level of warming that brings even more damage and threatens some nations' existence.

"Given current government policies and trends in technology development, we judge that collectively countries are unlikely to meet the Paris goals because high-emitting countries would have to make rapid progress toward decarbonizing their energy systems by transitioning away from fossil fuels within the next decade, whereas developing countries would need to rely on low-carbon energy sources for their

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economic development," the intelligence report said.

No nation offers asylum or other legal protections to people displaced specifically because of climate change. The United States has the opportunity to change that, which could prompt others to follow suit, refugee advocates said.

The administration said it is not seeking to change international agreements on refugees but rather create U.S. laws that would allow climate change effects to be part of a valid claim for refugee status.

It noted that activists persecuted for speaking out against government inaction on climate change may also have plausible claims to refugee status.

Ama Francis, who has been helping the International Refugee Assistance Project find ways to protect climate refugees, applauded the administration's recognition that global warming should be taken into account.

"That's a huge signal from the U.S. government that our refugee and asylum system can protect people right now, which is important because there are thousands of climate displaced people already on the move, including those showing up at the U.S. border," Francis said.

It's imperative the report turn into legislation that allows climate refugees the ability to resettle in the United States, and not just result in another task force, others said.

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of nine U.S. agencies working to resettle refugees, said action is needed because the current U.S. humanitarian protection system "wasn't engineered for cascading natural disasters, mass aridification or large swath of lands consumed by rising seas."

According to the separate intelligence assessment, a warming planet could increase geopolitical tensions particularly as poorer countries grapple with droughts, rising seas and other effects, while they wait for richer, higher-polluting countries to change their behavior. Climate change will "increasingly exacerbate risks to U.S. national security interests," according to the estimate.

The estimate identifies 11 countries of particular concern: Afghanistan, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Iraq, Myanmar, Nicaragua, North Korea and Pakistan. It also lists two regions of concern: Central Africa and small island states in the Pacific Ocean.

Strains on land and water could push countries further toward conflict. In South Asia, much of Pakistan relies on surface water from rivers originating in India. The two countries are nuclear-armed rivals that have fought several wars since their founding in 1947. On India's other side, about 10% of Bangladesh's 160 million people already live in coastal areas vulnerable to rising seas and saltwater intrusion.

Intelligence officials who spoke on condition of anonymity under agency rules said climate change could indirectly affect counterterrorism by pushing people seeking food and shelter to violent groups.

The intelligence community needs more scientific expertise and to integrate climate change into its analysis of other countries, the officials said.

Rising temperatures could force almost 3% of the populations of Latin America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa — more than 143 million people — to move within their countries in the next 30 years, according to one forecast cited in the report.

Watson reported from San Diego. AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein contributed.

After Kanter's Tibet comments, Celtics blacked out in China

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Chinese broadcaster and NBA partner Tencent is not showing current or archived Boston Celtics games on its platforms, in apparent response to comments that Celtics center Enes Kanter made to advocate Tibetan independence.

Kanter, as part of a series of social media posts, also called Chinese President Xi Jinping a "dictator." Kanter did not play in Boston's season-opening 138-134 loss to New York on Wednesday night. The game that was not shown on the streaming services that typically broadcast most NBA games to millions in China.

The NBA had no immediate comment and the Celtics were not practicing Thursday. It was also not im-

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mediately clear how long Tencent's plans to not air the Celtics would last.

Kanter was wearing shoes emblazoned with the words "Free Tibet" during Wednesday night's game. "More than 150 Tibetan people have burned themselves alive!! — hoping that such an act would raise more awareness about Tibet. I stand with my Tibetan brothers and sisters, and I support their calls for Freedom," he wrote on Twitter.

The league and China have had a damaged relationship since October 2019, when then-Houston general manager Daryl Morey tweeted in support of government protesters in Hong Kong and sparked what essentially became a blackout for the league in the world's most populous nation.

NBA games were eventually returned to Tencent's lineup but not state television provider CCTV, except for two games during the 2020 NBA Finals. Tencent did not offer Philadelphia's games last season, Morey's first with the 76ers.

"The player you mentioned was clout-chasing, trying to get attention with Tibet-related issues," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Thursday when asked about Kanter's posts. "His wrong remarks are not worth refuting."

China's Communist leaders are extremely sensitive to anything they view as outside interference in domestic political affairs. After Morey's tweet, the fallout was immense and sponsors — following CCTV's lead — pulled their backing of the NBA China Games days later between the Los Angeles Lakers and Brooklyn Nets. The NBA estimated that the strained relationship with the Chinese and lost broadcast rights meant the league missed out on about \$400 million in revenue during the 2019-20 season alone.

"It's unclear whether we'll be back on CCTV television in China this year," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said earlier this week.

For now, the fallout from Kanter's comments does not appear to be as severe as the immediate response to Morey's tweet, which was quickly deleted. Other NBA games played Wednesday were offered on Tencent, and the three games on Thursday's schedule appeared on the provider's listings.

Kanter is from Turkey and has long been an outspoken critic of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Turkish government. Kanter has said his passport was revoked by the Turkish government in 2017.

It's not just the NBA that is finding itself dealing with difficult issues when it comes to relationships with China. A number of groups have called for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, and others, to boycott this winter's Beijing Games in support of human-rights issues.

The USOPC plans to send full teams to China for the February Olympics.

"We expect that China is going to be a unique situation to really allow sport to speak for unity and for global peace and for the rights of people around the world," said Susanne Lyons, who chairs the USOPC board of directors. "That really is the place where sport can make its stand."

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

Moscow closing schools, many businesses as virus deaths soar

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Restaurants, movie theaters and many retail stores in Moscow will be closed for 11 days starting Oct. 28, along with other new restrictions, officials said Thursday, as Russia recorded the highest numbers of coronavirus infections and deaths since the pandemic began.

The government coronavirus task force reported 36,339 new infections and 1,036 deaths in the past 24 hours. That brought Russia's death toll to 227,389, by far the highest in Europe.

President Vladimir Putin has voiced consternation about Russians' hesitancy to get vaccinated and urged them to get the shots, but firmly ruled out making them mandatory.

He responded to the rising infections and deaths by ordering Russians to stay off work from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7, when the country already is observing a four-day national holiday, and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin followed up by introducing new restrictions in the capital, starting even earlier.

Gyms, cinemas and other entertainment venues, as well as most stores will close in Moscow from Oct.

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28 to Nov. 7, along with kindergartens and schools. Restaurants and cafes will only be open for takeout or delivery orders during that period. Food stores and pharmacies can stay open.

Access to museums, theaters, concert halls and other venues will be limited to those holding digital codes on their smartphones to prove vaccination or past illness, a practice that will remain in place even after Nov. 7.

Most state organizations and private businesses, except for those operating key infrastructure and a few others, will halt work in the 11-day period, Sobyenin added.

Earlier this week, he said unvaccinated people over 60 will be required to stay home except for brief walks and open-air exercise. He also told businesses to keep at least a third of their employees working remotely for three months starting Oct. 25.

"The situation in Moscow is developing according to the worst-case scenario," Sobyenin wrote on his blog, adding that the number of infections in the capital is nearing all-time highs.

Russia's daily infections have been surging for weeks and mortality numbers topped 1,000 for the first time last weekend amid low vaccination rates, lax public attitudes toward taking precautions and the government's reluctance to tighten restrictions. Only about 45 million Russians — roughly a third of its nearly 146 million people — are fully vaccinated.

Russia was the first country in the world to authorize a coronavirus vaccine, launching Sputnik V in August 2020, and has plentiful supplies. But citizens have been reluctant to get it.

Putin, who was vaccinated with Sputnik V earlier this year, said Wednesday he was bewildered by that hesitancy, even among his close friends, who told him they would get the shot after he did, but then kept delaying it.

Speaking Thursday at a panel with foreign policy experts, Putin said that "there are just two options for everyone — to get sick, or receive a vaccine. And there is no way to walk between the raindrops."

Asked if Russia could make vaccines mandatory, Putin said he believes they should remain voluntary.

"I believe we mustn't force it but persuade people and prove to them that vaccination is better than illness," he said. "We must try to increase people's trust in the government's actions. We need to be more convincing and prove it by example. I hope we will succeed."

Some critics have blamed the slow pace of vaccination on conflicting signals from authorities. While extolling Sputnik V and three other domestic vaccines, state-controlled media often criticized Western-made shots, a message that many saw as feeding doubts about vaccines in general.

Russia is still waiting for the World Health Organization to approve Sputnik V.

On Thursday, WHO formally restarted the process to approve the vaccine for emergency use — a process that had been put on hold for months because of legal procedures to secure the agreement of the Russian Direct Investment Fund that bankrolls the vaccine to WHO rules and procedures.

Dr. Mariangela Simao, a WHO assistant director-general for medical products, didn't specify when a possible approval would come for an emergency use listing for Sputnik V. She said WHO expects to receive in the next two weeks additional data on the vaccine, such as technical and clinical data, manufacturing practices and quality management systems.

Russian authorities believe the order to keep people off work should help limit the spread of the virus by keeping them out of offices and off public transportation, where mask mandates have been widely ignored. The government also urged local authorities to tighten their own restrictions during the period.

In some regions where the situation is even more threatening, Putin said the nonworking period could start as early as Saturday and be extended past Nov. 7.

After imposing a nationwide lockdown early in the pandemic, the government has balked at them since then, for fear of hurting the economy and sapping Putin's popularity. Authorities have instead allowed regional authorities to decide on local restrictions.

Many of Russia's 85 regions already have restricted attendance at large public events and introduced the digital codes for access to restaurants, theaters and other venues. Some have made vaccinations compulsory for certain public servants and people over 60.

But Moscow had avoided such restrictions until now, and crowds have flocked to its restaurants, movie

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theaters, nightclubs and karaoke bars. Authorities have avoided restrictive measures until now, partly because the capital's health care system has more resources than other regions.

But Sobyenin said tougher measures are now inevitable.

"The experience shows that nonworking days are the most effective way to reduce contagion and deaths," he said.

Associated Press writer Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

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

Billions in environmental justice funds hang in the balance

By DREW COSTLEY AP Science Writer

Tens of billions of dollars for U.S. environmental justice initiatives originally proposed in a \$3.5 trillion domestic spending package now hang in the balance as Democrats decide how to trim the bill down to \$2 trillion.

Investments in a wide range of these projects were proposed in the Build Back Better plan, but Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona demanded that the bill be reduced, with Manchin asking for it to be cut by as much as half.

Now, Democratic leaders are trying to bridge divergent views of progressive and moderate lawmakers over the size and scope of the bill. With Republicans in lockstep against President Joe Biden's proposal, Democrats must hold together slim House and Senate majorities to pass it. Leaders have set an Oct. 31 voting deadline, but that may slip as they struggle for consensus.

Several congressional aides who spoke on background to discuss ongoing negotiations said no one can venture an estimate of how much environmental justice spending will be cut from the reconciliation bill, but the overall amount for such initiatives certainly will be less than the roughly \$80 billion originally proposed.

The biggest spending proposals were \$20 billion for replacing America's lead water pipes, nearly \$15.5 billion for a greenhouse gas reduction fund and \$10 billion for expanding access to public transit near affordable housing. Among the other initiatives were \$5 billion in block grants to environmental and climate justice projects, \$2.5 billion for providing access to solar in low-income communities and \$2.5 billion for abandoned mine cleanup.

The high-stakes wrangling is taking place about two months after the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change called the warming planet a "code red for humanity" and just weeks before world leaders, including Biden, convene to determine global climate and environment policy at the U.N. climate change summit known as COP26.

As domestic spending talks take place in Washington, environmental justice advocates around the country are watching closely and lobbying lawmakers to preserve as many initiatives and as much money for them as possible.

"When we hear that the \$3.5 trillion will be watered down ... it's honestly unacceptable," said Ellen Sciales, communications director for Sunrise Movement, a national, youth-led environmental group. "The urgency of now really cannot be (overstated)."

Local and regional environmental activists have held protests across the nation for several weeks, calling on Senate Democrats to pass the entire \$3.5 trillion package. With a reduction in the package looming, activists worry environmental justice projects that could improve the health of their communities will be sacrificed.

"If Congress does not pass a full deal, ... it would be devastating," said Juan Jhong-Chung, policy associate with the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition. "It would represent another broken promise by our elected officials."

Environmental advocates have been banking on Biden's promise just days before the presidential election to pass "the most ambitious environmental justice agenda ever." He was speaking at a news conference

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in Flint, Michigan, where residents have been dealing with a lead contamination crisis in its water systems since 2014.

"Our people are already struggling," Jhong-Chung said. "And now with the climate crisis, things are getting worse here in Michigan. We just experienced this summer of record-breaking flooding."

Water sanitation and scarcity issues top of the list of pressing needs for many in disadvantaged communities as rural areas countrywide lack modern sewage and sanitation systems, and the West deals with a megadrought.

Catherine Flowers, who serves on Biden's White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council and long has advocated for clean water and sanitation systems in rural areas, is concerned for places like predominately Black Lowndes County, Alabama, where many residents have to release their wastewater directly into the environment.

"When people talk about environmental justice, they never talk about sanitation," she said. "The assumption was that rural communities have always had it, and that's not true."

In Arizona, with its drought, some of Sen. Sinema's constituents have aggressively pushed her to pass the Build Back Better plan in its entirety, going so far as to confront her on the campus of Arizona State University, where she's a professor.

Hannah Hurley, a spokesperson for Sinema, said she would not reveal the nature of negotiations on Capitol Hill to news media. The other key senator in negotiations on the plan, Manchin, has publicly opposed incentivizing clean energy over fossil fuels, such as coal produced in his state. His office did not respond to requests for comment on this story.

Some western senators publicly support environmental justice spending proposed in the plan.

"Environmental justice is not an issue adjacent to climate action, it is at the heart of climate action," said Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Calif.). "We can no longer ignore the inequities that leave communities of color behind and bearing the brunt of the climate crisis."

This story corrects the spelling of Kyrsten Sinema's first name.

Associated Press reporter Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report from Washington, D.C.

Follow Drew Costley on Twitter: @drewcostley

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Minneapolis cop gets nearly 5 years in killing of 911 caller

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A Minneapolis police officer who fatally shot an unarmed woman after she called 911 to report a possible rape happening behind her home was sentenced Thursday to nearly five years in prison — the most the judge could impose but less than half the 12½ years he was sentenced to for his murder conviction that was overturned last month.

Mohamed Noor was initially convicted of third-degree murder and manslaughter in the 2017 fatal shooting of Justine Ruszczyk Damond, a 40-year-old dual U.S.-Australian citizen and yoga teacher who was engaged to be married. But the Minnesota Supreme Court tossed out Noor's murder conviction and sentence last month, saying the third-degree murder statute didn't fit the case because it can only apply when a defendant shows a "generalized indifference to human life," not when the conduct is directed at a particular person, as it was with Damond.

Judge Kathryn Quaintance, who also presided at Noor's trial, granted prosecutors' request to impose the maximum sentence in state guidelines on Noor's manslaughter conviction, 57 months. In doing so, she brushed aside the defense's request for 41 months, which is the low end of the range. With good

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behavior, Noor could be freed on supervised release by next summer. The state prison website listed his anticipated release date as June 27.

"Mr. Noor, I am not surprised that you have been a model prisoner," Quaintance said. "However, I do not know any authority that would make that grounds for reducing your sentence." She cited Noor "shooting across the nose of your partner" and endangering others the night of the shooting to hand down the stiffest sentence she could.

Quaintance also remarked that because neither side had sought a departure from the sentencing guidelines, she was unable to deviate from them.

Noor, who was fired after he was charged, has already served more than 29 months. In Minnesota, inmates who behave well typically serve two-thirds of their prison sentences and the remainder on supervised release.

Noor testified at his 2019 trial that he and his partner were driving slowly in an alley when a loud bang on their police SUV made him fear for their lives. He said he saw a woman appear at the partner's driver's side window and raise her right arm before he fired a shot from the passenger seat to stop what he thought was a threat.

He was sentenced to 12 1/2 years on the murder count and had been serving most of his time at an out-of-state facility.

Noor's appeal of his murder conviction was watched closely for implications in the case of Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer convicted of the same charge in George Floyd's death. After the state Supreme Court overturned Noor's third-degree murder conviction, experts said they expected the same eventual result for Chauvin but that it would likely have little impact because Chauvin was also convicted of a more serious second-degree murder charge in Floyd's death. Chauvin was sentenced to 22 1/2 years.

Noor's attorneys, Tom Plunkett and Peter Wold, sought 41 months at the resentencing, citing Noor's good behavior behind bars and harsh conditions he faced during many months in solitary, away from the general prison population.

Plunkett said Thursday that much attention has been given to the victim as a kind and giving person — "all true," he said. But Plunkett said there is "similar goodness" in Noor. He said Noor had always sought to help people around him, and recapped Noor's good behavior while in prison.

Assistant Hennepin County Attorney Amy Sweasy, meanwhile, asked Quaintance to give Noor the longest possible sentence. She said the case "is worse than typical" because of who Noor is. "The most serious sentence this court can impose is required," she said.

Damond's parents, John Ruszczyk and Maryan Heffernan, also asked the judge to impose the longest sentence. In a statement read by prosecutors, they called Damond's death "utterly gratuitous" and said that the Minnesota Supreme Court's overturning of a "poorly written law" didn't change the jury's belief that Noor committed murder.

"Our sorrow is forever, our lives will always endure an emptiness," they said.

The victim's fiancé, Don Damond, gave his statement via Zoom. He started by praising prosecutors for their "sound application of the law" and criticizing the state Supreme Court for its reversal, which he said "does not diminish the truth that was uncovered during the trial."

"The truth is Justine should be alive. No amount of justification, embellishment, cover-up, dishonesty or politics will ever change that truth," he said.

But Don Damond also spoke directly to Noor, saying he forgave him and had no doubt Justine also would have forgiven him "for your inability in managing your emotions that night."

Noor, wearing a suit and tie and donning a face mask, appeared impassive as the victim's loved ones' statements were read. He later addressed the court briefly, saying, "I'm deeply grateful for Mr. Damond's forgiveness. I am deeply sorry for the pain that I've caused that family. And I will take his advice and be a unifier. Thank you."

Damond's death angered citizens in the U.S. and Australia, and led to the resignation of Minneapolis' police chief. It also led the department to change its policy on body cameras; Noor and his partner didn't have theirs activated when they were investigating Damond's 911 call.

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Noor, who is Somali American, was believed to be the first Minnesota officer convicted of murder for an on-duty shooting. Activists who had long called for officers to be held accountable for the deadly use of force applauded the murder conviction but lamented that it came in a case in which the officer is Black and his victim was white. Some questioned whether the case was treated the same as police shootings involving Black victims.

Noor's father, Mohamed Abass, denounced Quaintance on his way out of the courthouse as "the worst judge in Minnesota" and "very hateful." Speaking to reporters, he said, "This judge hates (the) Somali community" and said he believed racism was a factor in her decision to impose the toughest sentence she could.

Days after Noor's conviction, Minneapolis agreed to pay \$20 million to Damond's family, believed at the time to be the largest settlement stemming from police violence in Minnesota. It was surpassed earlier this year when Minneapolis agreed to a \$27 million settlement in Floyd's death just as Chauvin was going on trial.

Fire that threatened Lake Tahoe region is now 100% contained

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. (AP) — The 2-month-old California wildfire that threatened the Lake Tahoe resort region over the summer has been declared 100% contained, officials said.

The fire, which scorched more than 346 square miles (896 square kilometers) of the Sierra Nevada and burned hundreds of homes, reached the milestone late Wednesday, according to a report from firefighting officials.

Storms this week covered the western side of the fire in snow, rain fell on the eastern side and stronger storms are expected throughout this week. The fire is expected to continue smoldering long into the winter, authorities said.

The fire was reported Aug. 14 and destroyed 1,000 structures including more than 770 homes as it marched toward the tourist destination community of South Lake Tahoe, which was spared. Many of the homes that were destroyed were in the small rustic forest community of Grizzly Flat.

Elsewhere in California, in the northern Sierra Nevada and southern Cascades mountain ranges, the gigantic Dixie Fire was 97% contained as of late Wednesday.

That wildfire became the second-largest in the California's recorded history as it raged across 1,505 square miles (3,898 square kilometers), destroying more than 1,300 structures including nearly 700 homes. It was formed by fires that broke out July 13 and July 22 and merged into one.

Drought in the West tied to climate change is making wildfires harder to fight. Scientists say climate change has made the West much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

UK police charge 25-year-old man with lawmaker's murder

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British police charged a 25-year-old man Thursday with the murder of a Conservative lawmaker, alleging that the killing was an act of terrorism by a supporter of the Islamic State group.

Prosecutors said Ali Harbi Ali, a man from London with Somali heritage, had "religious and ideological motivations" when he attacked David Amess last week in the town of Leigh-on-Sea. Prosecutors allege Ali targeted Amess because the lawmaker had voted for air strikes on Syria.

The slaying took place as Amess, who was 69, attended a routine meeting with his constituents. The slaying shook a nation accustomed to having face-to-face contact with its leaders, heightened concerns about extremism and rattled British politicians, who say they face increasing levels of vitriol and abuse as they perform their jobs.

At a briefing hearing at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court on Thursday, prosecutor James Cable said Ali began planning to kill a lawmaker two years ago, and initially focused on two other politicians

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before choosing Amess.

Ali was not asked to enter a plea at the preliminary hearing, which lasted less than 15 minutes. He smiled at his legal team as he entered the court and spoke only to confirm his name, age, and address. He was ordered detained until the next hearing.

Nick Price of the Crown Prosecution Service said the murder "has a terrorist connection, namely that it had both religious and ideological motivations."

Matt Jukes, the Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations, said "no other arrests have been made and at this time we are not seeking anybody else in relation to this incident."

Jukes said detectives had analyzed computers, searched several London addresses and reviewed CCTV footage as part of the investigation.

The death of Amess, who had served in Parliament for almost 40 years and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2015, escalated concerns about security among Britain's politicians, who pride themselves on being accessible to their constituents.

The slaying came five years after Labour Party lawmaker Jo Cox was shot and stabbed to death by a far-right extremist. Cox was the first British lawmaker to be killed since a peace accord ended large-scale Northern Ireland violence almost 30 years earlier.

British politicians are protected by armed police when they are in Parliament but generally are not given such protection in their home districts.

Home Secretary Priti Patel told the House of Commons on Wednesday that intelligence officers had upgraded the threat level for politicians from "moderate" to "substantial," though she said there was no "specific or imminent threat."

A special session of the House of Commons on Monday resounded with appeals to force social media giants to do more to prevent the spread of online hate that has poisoned political discourse.

Amess was a social conservative who opposed abortion, campaigned for animal rights and strongly supported Britain's exit from the European Union. He was well liked even by his political opponents for his civility, good humor and commitment to his constituents in the seaside constituency of Southend West, 40 miles (60 kilometers) east of London.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he hoped Amess' loved ones would "get the justice they deserve as fast as possible."

"What we must not do is be intimidated by this appalling murder into changing the way we conduct our parliamentary business or the way we work in our constituencies," he said. "Which I think is the last thing that David Amess would've wanted."

Texas urges Supreme Court to leave abortion law in place

WASHINGTON (AP) — Texas on Thursday urged the Supreme Court to leave in place its law banning most abortions and told the justices there's no reason to rush into the case.

The state filed its response Thursday to the Biden administration's call on the high court to block the law, the most restrictive abortion curb in the nation, and rule conclusively this term on the measure's constitutionality.

The court's intervention at this early stage, before a federal appeals court has ruled on the law, would be highly unusual but not unprecedented.

In its court filing, Texas defended an order by a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that allowed the abortion law to go back into effect after a lower-court judge put it on hold.

"In sum, far from being demonstrably wrong, the Fifth Circuit's conclusion that Texas is likely to prevail was entirely right," the state wrote.

The Biden administration argues the law is "clearly unconstitutional" because it bans abortions at roughly six weeks, long before a fetus can survive outside the womb. The Supreme Court's major abortion rulings make clear that states can regulate but not prohibit abortions before the point of fetal viability.

But the Texas law was written to evade early federal court review and, apart from a 48-hour period in

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early October, the effort has succeeded. Clinics have said abortions are down by about 80% since the law took effect last month, and women in Texas have flocked to clinics in other states to obtain abortions.

Texas also is opposing the Biden administration's call for the court to take up the abortion law and rule on its constitutionality, even though the 5th Circuit has yet to do so.

But the state said that if the court agrees to the Biden administration's request, it also should consider whether to overrule high-court rulings that reach back nearly 50 years guaranteeing a right to an abortion.

The court already has the issue on its agenda in a case from Mississippi that will be argued on Dec. 1.

Tool for police reform rarely used by local prosecutors

By MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Isaiah Obet was behaving erratically and in mental distress in 2017 when Auburn police officer Jeff Nelson ordered his police dog to attack and then shot Obet in the torso. Obet fell to the ground and Nelson fired again, fatally shooting Obet in the head. Police said the officer's life was in danger because Obet was high on drugs and had a knife. The city later reached a settlement of \$1.25 million with Obet's family.

The next year, Joseph Allen was crossing in front of Nelson's patrol car when the officer swerved and pinned him against a fence, breaking both his ankles. His justification: Allen was a dangerous criminal.

In 2019, Nelson scuffled with Jesse Sarey after attempting to arrest him for disorderly conduct. He punched Sarey seven times and then shot him in the torso. After Sarey fell to the ground, Nelson killed him with a second shot to the forehead. He claimed Sarey was on his hands and knees "ready to spring forward," which later was disproved by both video and witnesses.

Nelson's actions in all three cases were outlined in a criminal complaint, eyewitness accounts, and police dashcam video obtained by The Associated Press. In the past decade, Nelson has been investigated in more than 60 use-of-force cases that involved choking suspects until they passed out, severe dog bites, and physical force that required medical care. But he was not on the King County Prosecuting Attorney's list that flags officers whose credibility is in question due to misconduct — a designation that must be shared with defense attorneys.

Nelson was only added to its "potential impeachment disclosure" list, or Brady List, after he was charged with killing Sarey. A trial is set for February 2022. Mohammad Hamoudi, a federal public defender, said given Officer Nelson's history, all of his cases should be reviewed. And he hopes his story will encourage prosecutors to track excessive force cases involving other police officers.

"It has to do with respect for the rules, the laws, and others," he said. "If an officer lacks impulse control or the ability to exercise informed judgment, you can call into question how he investigates cases."

The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer has sparked a national conversation on police reform, ranging from defunding departments to enhancing training. But reform activists and civil rights advocates say prosecutors already have powerful tools at their disposal to curb bad behavior by police: They can use Brady Lists to shine a light on troubled officers, and they can then refuse to put forward cases from those officers with tarnished histories.

The AP found that prosecutors sometimes don't even compile the lists and that wide disparities in what offenses land officers on them are prevalent across the country, with excessive force often failing to merit inclusion.

The AP also found that many prosecutors and police unions have gone to great lengths to keep Brady List information from becoming public.

Now, defense attorneys, public defenders, civil rights groups and even some prosecutors are calling for an increased use of Brady Lists and a broadening of the offenses that will land a police officer on them, while police unions are resisting those efforts.

Amy Parker of the King County Department of Public Defense called it imperative for officers' violent histories to be exposed.

"As a career public defender, I have listened to prosecutors routinely make the argument that defendants

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with prior unlawful uses of force/crimes of violence are more prone to violence and lack credibility," she said in an email. "If prosecutors are going to apply that standard to defendants, then the same standard should apply to police officers when judging their conduct."

King County prosecutor Dan Satterberg argues excessive force doesn't make an officer less credible. "An officer who was accused of using too much force in an unrelated arrest has nothing to do with the impeachment of their veracity," he said.

Brady Lists stem from a ruling in the 1963 Supreme Court case, *Brady v. Maryland*, mandating prosecutors turn over exculpatory evidence to defense attorneys, including information that could be used to question the officers' credibility. But the ruling did not define the steps prosecutors and police departments must take to ensure defendants are informed or whether lists of troubled officers must be kept at all.

The result, critics say, is a mishmash of policies that vary state to state -- and even jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Prosecutors in Atlanta, Chicago, Tulsa, and Pittsburgh told the AP that they don't track officers with disciplinary problems, and Milwaukee prosecutors only listed officers who have been convicted of crimes.

The Dallas County district attorney's list contained 192 names, with infractions ranging from making false statements to convictions for theft, assault, and driving under the influence. The Suffolk County, Massachusetts, prosecutor's list included Boston officers who lied on their timesheets or embezzled funds. Louisiana's Orleans Parish district attorney tracked officers who committed crimes, lied, or drove dangerously, but not violent arrests.

Dishonesty lands an officer on the list in Detroit, Denver, and Seattle, but using excessive force does not.

The Phoenix district attorney, along with prosecutors in Orange County, Florida, and Los Angeles, were among the few the AP found who include excessive use of force cases on their lists.

"It's like there's a huge continuum and the result is you don't have the same procedures being followed not only across the country but within individual states," said Will Aitchison, an attorney with Portland, Oregon-based Labor Relations Information Systems, which represents officers after they've appealed discipline orders.

Some states have attempted to pass legislation that would address the lack of consistency, including the Washington State Legislature, which approved a bill this year requiring county prosecutors to develop written protocols for collecting potential impeachment information by July 2022.

The California Legislature approved a bill last year that required prosecutors to maintain a list of officers who have had "sustained findings for conduct of moral turpitude or group bias," but Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed the measure due to the cost of such "a significant state mandate."

When Larry Krasner was elected Philadelphia district attorney in 2017, his staff discovered a "do not call" list of police officers that had been compiled by a previous prosecutor.

The officers had a history of lying, bias, and excessive force and were barred from testifying "absent explicit permission from the highest levels of the district attorney's office."

Krasner shared the list with defense attorneys, who used the information to challenge the convictions of people imprisoned by testimony from those officers and has continued to provide timely Brady material to public defenders.

"When my client goes for a preliminary arraignment first appearance in court where they set bail, the prosecutor might disclose 20 to 30 or 40 pages of materials that they've generated on a particular police officer," Philadelphia public defender Bradley Bridge said.

Using Brady List information, Bridge has filed motions to dismiss about 6,000 convictions based on officer misconduct, with more than 2,000 convictions thrown out so far.

Bridge acknowledges some of those released might be guilty.

"The problem is, there's no way to know," he said. "I have no idea how to evaluate whether they're guilty or not guilty because the officer's behavior in the cases is too tainted."

Bridge has filed more than 500 petitions to reopen convictions tied to a sole officer who admitted fal-

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sifying records -- Christopher Hulmes of the Philadelphia Police Department's Narcotics Strike Force, who was charged in 2015 with perjury and tampering with public records. So far, 357 of those convictions have been dismissed, many involving drugs and guns, Bridge said.

Krasner said he feels prosecutors have both a legal and moral obligation to use Brady Lists, but that local police have pushed back.

Last month, he asked for the Philadelphia Police Department to be held in contempt for not cooperating with his request for officer disciplinary material.

Kym Worthy, the prosecutor for Wayne County, Michigan, which includes Detroit, also is disclosing Brady List material to defense attorneys and the public "because in an era of criminal justice reform," she said, "it just makes sense."

Worthy has compiled a list of officers who have committed offenses involving theft, dishonesty, fraud, bias or bribery, saying officers who commit these crimes have lost their credibility and won't be called to testify.

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner also has said she won't take criminal cases filed by untrustworthy officers and has an "exclusion list" with more than 50 names.

"The union's predictable over-the-top 'sky is falling' reaction to any attempt to distinguish the vast majority of honest and hardworking officers from the few bad actors is one big reason why community relations with the people they serve are so frayed," Gardner said.

Last year, police misconduct records were at issue in the hotly contested Los Angeles district attorney race between Jackie Lacey and former San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon, who had been the San Francisco police chief when now Vice-President Kamala Harris was the city's district attorney and became the DA when she ascended to the state attorney general job.

Gascon had partnered with Harris and the police union to establish a "do not call" list that became the model for the state. After he won the Los Angeles election, he sent letters to local law enforcement agencies seeking the names of officers involved in 11 categories of misconduct, including bribery, theft, evidence tampering, dishonesty, and unreasonable force.

"If the officer's history is such that we just don't believe the officer, period, we will not use him," Gascon said.

Settlement agreements -- and many police union contracts -- often prohibit the release of the names of officers named in disciplinary records, but Brady Lists can blow open those closed doors.

The contract between Seattle and its police department, for instance, prohibits releasing disciplined officers' names. But the Brady Lists sent to the AP by the King County prosecuting attorney included 51 Seattle officers.

Seventeen of those officers had criminal charges filed against them, 26 had sustained findings of dishonesty, six had shown racial bias and one violated the department's ethics policy.

An investigation by the Office of Police Accountability found that a Seattle officer violated policies against biased policing by posting offensive comments on social media in 2019. The office was prohibited from naming the officer and so referred to him in its report as Named Employee #1, but the Brady List identified him as Ron Smith.

One of Smith's social media comments "stated that the Islamic religion was not one of peace, suggesting that the Islamic religion and all of its approximately 1.57 billion adherents were supportive of violence," the OPA report said.

Another post targeted Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, saying: "you weak wristed lefties don't want border security ... you want votes to keep your anti-American party in power," the report said.

Smith resigned, but the OPA investigation did find that he engaged in "bias-based policing."

Another Seattle officer on the Brady List was Salvatore Ditusa, who was working a side job flagging traffic when he approached three workers and "engaged in a diatribe that included multiple racial slurs towards African Americans," the OPA said. Ditusa also resigned. The OPA found that he had also engaged in biased policing.

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In Los Angeles, the battle over disclosing officer misconduct information traveled all the way to the state's highest court.

When Jim McDonnell took over the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, he wanted to share the list of officers accused of misconduct with the prosecutor's office, but both sides were concerned that a state law -- the peace officer's bill of rights -- would prohibit the move.

After the police union filed an injunction to block any sharing, the case went to the state Supreme Court, which ruled in 2019 that prosecutors could be given the list.

One of the people named was homicide detective Daniel Morris.

In 2003, a car theft suspect had said Morris and other officers kicked, punched, and stomped on him -- an accusation Morris denied to three different supervisors. But he eventually admitted to the beating, receiving a 30-day suspension.

That information was not shared with the district attorney's office until 2019.

Ten years before that, Morris had investigated the murder of a gang member in Paramount, California, obtaining a search warrant for the home of Filipe Angel Acosta.

Morris testified that Acosta, who had no criminal history, was associated with a gang and he was charged with drug possession, with a gang enhancement.

Acosta refused a deal that would have involved admitting to gang involvement, but changed his mind and entered a plea of no contest after getting sick in jail and being hospitalized.

At no point did the district attorney reveal that Morris had been disciplined for dishonesty.

When Morris' misconduct finally was disclosed, Acosta filed a motion to overturn his conviction because of the prosecutor's Brady violation. The charges were dismissed.

As a 2013 report on the sheriff's department by a civilian oversight group called the Office of Independent Review put it: "Instances of deputies lying in reports or during investigations do not simply affect the immediate case at hand. Instead, they may influence the outcome of every other case in which the deputy's testimony is considered."

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Dems' domestic plans popular, but reward by voters unassured

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Divided Democrats struggling to enact President Joe Biden's domestic agenda are confronting one of Congress' cruelest conundrums: Your goals may be popular, but that doesn't ensure they'll become law or that voters will reward you.

Polls show the public likes health care, education and other initiatives proposed for the enormous package. But Democrats haven't successfully clinched the sale to voters, who've been distracted by the party's internal fight over the plan's multitrillion-dollar price tag, remain confused about what's actually in the measure and are skeptical it would help them personally.

History shows that widely supported ideas can fail in Congress anyway. Even enacting a well-liked measure doesn't mean that voters, come the next election, will reward the party behind that achievement. Also, Democrats are crafting their bill against a backdrop of a country hardened along partisan lines and as large majorities disapprove of how Washington is handling its job.

"Cynicism and the lack of trust in institutions," said Democratic pollster Molly Murphy. People "don't think a whole lot gets done. And then that becomes a little self-fulfilling, they don't pay attention" to what's happening in Washington.

To Whit Ayres, a Republican pollster, "the popularity of particular policies has been overwhelmed by the power of partisanship and polarization."

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Progressive and centrist Democrats have fought for months over the package, which includes components that earn high marks in polls. Initially advanced as a 10-year, \$3.5 trillion plan, moderates are forcing down its price tag.

Biden this week told lawmakers he thinks he can negotiate a compromise with centrists for a package closer to \$2 trillion. To do so, Democrats are considering slicing the cost and duration of priorities such as the child tax credit, paid family leave and expanded federal health care benefits.

Those talks continue and success isn't guaranteed. But the party would have so much to lose from the collapse of Biden's top-tier domestic goal — plus an accompanying, bipartisan \$1 trillion package of infrastructure projects — that pressure for cutting a deal is immense.

Republicans unanimously oppose the larger social and environmental measure.

Polling shows the public likes the overall plan and that many of its individual items draw extremely strong support, seemingly giving Democrats an edge. In a May poll by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation, nearly 9 in 10 backed letting the government force lower prescription costs by negotiating prices for the drugs it buys.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey in July found that about two-thirds or more supported bolstering affordable housing, caregiving for the elderly, free preschool and raising taxes on the rich and corporations to pay for much of the cost. Other polls have shown strong backing for creating paid family leave and curbing climate change.

Yet surveys have shown that frustrated party leaders have failed to clearly broadcast the plan's contents and benefits to constituents during the monthslong legislative slog.

Two surveys this month had ominous signs for Democrats.

A CNN poll showed that only 1 in 4 people said their families would be better off if the legislation was enacted — including only about half of Democrats. A Gallup poll found that 43% want a stronger government push to solve problems, down from 54% who said so a year ago.

The spotlight on lawmakers battling over their proposal's cost and policies has led many to say the communicating needs a better focus.

"Message the content rather than the process," said Democratic pollster Celinda Lake. "As we say in our business, sell the brownie, not the mix."

While Democrats have a solid chance of eventually coalescing around a compromise, there's precedent for popular ideas failing to pass Congress anyway.

A 2013 push to expand background checks for gun sales months after the mass killing of elementary school children in Newtown, Connecticut, fell short. So did a 2018 effort to help young "Dreamer" immigrants become citizens.

Both received strong Democratic backing in the Senate and some GOP support. But each fell victim to Republican-led tactics called filibusters that require 60 Senate votes to overcome. Democrats are using a special process that would let them approve this year's domestic measure by a simple majority vote, but they will need unanimous party support in the Senate and near-solid House backing to succeed.

The current domestic bill underscores how wide acceptance of an issue might mask intense dislike by one side's voters, making it easier for lawmakers of that party to oppose it.

In the AP-NORC survey, 76% of Democrats but just 27% of Republicans backed free community college. Extending more generous tax credits for children is favored by 73% of Democrats and 34% of Republicans. Housing aid and free preschool also won significantly more support from Democrats than Republicans.

Democrats also know that even passage of major legislation embodying Biden's goals might not prevent major setbacks in next year's midterm elections. That's especially true in the House, where significant losses in such contests are historically routine.

Democrats lost 54 seats and House control in the 1994 elections despite approving significant budget and gun control measures under President Bill Clinton. They lost 64 seats and their House majority in 2010, months after enacting President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

The party that holds the White House has gained House seats in just three of the 40 midterm elections

since the Civil War. In the Senate, that party has gained seats in only 13 of those elections.

As of now, Republicans are on track to capture the House if they can pick up just five seats in next year's voting. They would win Senate control if they gain one seat.

Associated Press writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

India celebrates 1B vaccine doses, hopes to speed 2nd shots

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India celebrated giving its billionth COVID-19 vaccine dose on Thursday, a hopeful milestone for the South Asian country where the delta variant fueled a crushing surge earlier this year and missteps initially held back its inoculation campaign.

About half of India's nearly 1.4 billion people have received at least one dose while around 20% are fully immunized, according to Our World in Data. Many of those shots have come in just the past couple of months, after the rollout languished in the first half of the year amid vaccine shortages and problems with the system for rolling them out.

The success of the campaign has been credited with driving down coronavirus cases since the devastating months at the start of the year when India was recording hundreds of thousands infections a day, hospitals buckled under the pressure, and crematoriums and graveyards became overwhelmed. But experts warn that India must speed up the delivery of second shots in order to ensure the outbreak doesn't flare again.

The country widened the gap between shots from 12 to 16 weeks in order to administer more first doses at a time when supply was limited and infections were surging — a tactic countries like the United Kingdom have used in times of crisis. But it created a lag in getting people fully immunized.

India is using vaccines that require two doses. Ramping up the second dose is "an important priority," V.K. Paul, the head of the country's COVID-19 taskforce, said last week.

"We would like to see this number go up. Complete coverage is absolutely critical," Paul said.

For now, the country appears to have enough vaccines to do that — but its supplies will be watched closely since it is a major supplier of the shots globally. When it halted exports in April as cases surged at home, it had a devastating impact on poorer countries that particularly rely on doses from India. Exports resumed earlier this month.

The government is now optimistic that the country's rising vaccine supply will be enough to cover its international and domestic commitments. Both of the two main suppliers have ramped up production, with the Serum Institute of India now producing around 220 million doses a month and Bharat Biotech about 30 million, Paul said.

Still, experts say the vaccine situation will need constant review. "There can be no written-in-stone rule — if infections rise drastically, they can again stop exports until there's enough doses," said K. Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Health Foundation of India.

On Thursday, India confirmed more than 18,400 new cases and 160 deaths — dramatically below the worst days in May when daily fatalities exceeded 4,000. Overall, the country has recorded around 34 million infections and over 450,000 deaths, according to the Health Ministry, though those figures, as elsewhere, are likely undercounts.

Even states where infections were swelling a few weeks ago, such as Kerala along the tropical Malabar coast, have seen a sustained decline.

"There is a sense of comfort that India has suffered the worst of the delta variant, but this must be accompanied with a feeling of caution," said Reddy. "Even if cases go up, we are unlikely to see the scale of the surge earlier — if that does happen, it would be fairly unexpected."

India earlier said it aimed to vaccinate all eligible adults by the end of the year, but experts say the current pace of immunizations will need to increase to meet this goal, even though it has already ramped up significantly. Though the campaign began in January, by mid-June, only about 3.5% of the population had been fully vaccinated.

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India celebrated the achievement of 1 billion shots with fanfare Thursday — though it's not that surprising since it's the world's second-most populous country. The first country to reach that milestone, China, is the most populous.

Billboards announcing the feat with a photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi were posted across New Delhi. Outside a local politician's house in the capital city, residents gathered as sweets were distributed. A song and film to commemorate the moment have been released, and the Indian flag was unfurled at the historic Red Fort in New Delhi.

In recent months, life in India has swung back to normal. Markets buzz with activity, foreign tourists are allowed again after a 19-month hiatus and the country is gearing up to celebrate Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.

But there are fears this could be a lull before a storm. Even though India may have borne the brunt of the delta variant already, things could escalate quickly if a new variant emerges — either from within the country or outside.

"If the virus becomes different or mutates, it changes the dynamics. This could change everything," Paul said.

Rapper Young Thug sues over swiped bag that had cash, songs

ATLANTA (AP) — Atlanta rapper Young Thug said an apartment concierge let an unknown person take his Louis Vuitton bag holding about 200 unreleased songs and more than \$100,000 worth of jewelry and cash.

The performer's allegations are in a lawsuit against the company that manages the apartment complex where he lived and its concierge company, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

The newspaper said neither JLB Peachtree nor concierge company Pegasus Residential has answered requests for comment about the lawsuit filed last week in Gwinnett County Superior Court on behalf of Jeffery Williams, 30, whose stage name is Young Thug.

According to the lawsuit, a concierge at Trace Apartments put the bag in a secure location after the rapper accidentally left it next to his vehicle on Nov. 1, 2020, but another employee released it to someone else.

The missing bag contained a hard drive with about 200 unreleased songs that are worth at least \$1 million, the lawsuit said.

The bag also held \$40,000 in cash, a diamond-encrusted watch worth \$57,000 and a \$37,000 chain with inset diamonds, according to the lawsuit.

Ukraine hits all-time death record amid vaccine hesitancy

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Coronavirus infections and deaths in Ukraine surged to all-time highs Thursday amid a laggard pace of vaccination, with overall inoculations among the lowest in Europe.

Ukrainian authorities reported 22,415 new confirmed infections and 546 deaths in the past 24 hours, the highest numbers since the start of the pandemic.

Authorities have blamed a spike in infections on a slow pace of vaccination in the nation of 41 million. Ukrainians can choose between Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Sinovac vaccines, but only about 15% of the population is fully vaccinated, Europe's lowest level after Armenia.

Overall, the country has registered over 2.7 million infections and 62,389 deaths.

Ukraine has faced a steady rise in contagion in the past few weeks, which forced the government to introduce restrictions on access to public places and the use of public transport. Starting Thursday, proof of vaccination or a negative test is required to board planes, trains and long-distance buses.

The restrictive measures have made a black market for counterfeit vaccination certificates blossom, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy chaired a meeting earlier this week on ways to combat the practice. Police said they suspect workers at 15 hospitals across the country of involvement in issuing false vaccination certificates.

Despite the rising contagion, the government has been reluctant to introduce another lockdown. It's

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keen to avoid further damage to an economy weakened by the conflict with neighboring Russia — which annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in the country's eastern industrial heartland.

"There are just two ways — vaccination or lockdown," Zelenskyy said. "I'm against the lockdown for the sake of (the) economy."

To encourage vaccination, the authorities have started offering shots in shopping malls. As infections soared, skeptical attitudes began to change and a record number of more than 251,000 people received vaccines over the past 24 hours.

"I'm frightened by a spike in infections, my friend is at a hospital in grave condition," 38-year-old businessman Denys Onuchko said after receiving the first vaccine dose at a Kyiv shopping mall.

Onuchko noted that many Ukrainians have been disinformed by conspiracy theories about vaccines, but now take a more rational approach as the situation exacerbates. "People have been scared by stories ... but the real threat must make them sober up," he said.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said city hospitals are facing an influx of patients, an increasing share of them in grave condition.

Yulia Furman, 47, who also received the first vaccine shot, said many people in her entourage believed in conspiracy theories about vaccines.

"Many of my friends believed those stories about a global plot and now they are gravely ill, it's now time to protect oneself," she said.

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

US unemployment claims fall to new pandemic low of 290,000

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week to a new low point since the pandemic erupted, evidence that layoffs are declining as companies hold onto workers.

Unemployment claims dropped 6,000 to 290,000 last week, the third straight drop, the Labor Department said Thursday. That's the fewest people to apply for benefits since March 14, 2020, when the pandemic intensified. Applications for jobless aid, which generally track the pace of layoffs, have fallen steadily from about 900,000 in January.

Unemployment claims are increasingly returning to normal, but many other aspects of the job market haven't yet done so. Hiring has slowed in the past two months, even as companies and other employers have posted a near-record number of open jobs. Officials such as Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell had hoped more people would find work in September as schools reopened, easing child care constraints, and enhanced unemployment aid ended nationwide.

Yet so far, that hasn't happened. Instead, some observers are starting to consider whether some of those who had jobs before the pandemic, and lost them, may have permanently stopped looking for work.

On Tuesday, Christopher Waller, a member of the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors, said that two million of the 22 million jobs lost to the pandemic may not return anytime soon because retirements have accelerated so quickly since COVID-19 hit.

The Labor Department's report Thursday also showed that the number of people receiving jobless aid continues to fall steadily. In the week of Oct. 2, the latest data available, 3.3 million people received unemployment benefits, down from 3.6 million in the previous week.

A year ago, nearly 24 million people were getting unemployment aid.

About 7 million people lost jobless benefits in September after two emergency programs, set up in March 2020, expired. One of the programs provided aid to gig workers and the self-employed, who traditionally are not eligible to receive unemployment insurance, and the second covered workers who have been unemployed for longer than six months. And an extra \$300 a week in federal unemployment benefits

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expired nationwide Sept. 6.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Oct. 22, the 295th day of 2021. There are 70 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 22, 2014, a gunman shot and killed a soldier standing guard at a war memorial in Ottawa, then stormed the Canadian Parliament before he was shot and killed by the usually ceremonial sergeant-at-arms.

On this date:

In 1811, composer and piano virtuoso Franz Liszt was born in the Hungarian town of Raiding (RY'-ding) in present-day Austria.

In 1836, Sam Houston was inaugurated as the first constitutionally elected president of the Republic of Texas.

In 1906, French post-impressionist painter Paul Cezanne died in Aix-en-Provence at age 67.

In 1926, Ernest Hemingway's first novel, "The Sun Also Rises," was published by Scribner's of New York.

In 1934, bank robber Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd was shot to death by federal agents and local police at a farm near East Liverpool, Ohio.

In 1962, in a nationally broadcast address, President John F. Kennedy revealed the presence of Soviet-built missile bases under construction in Cuba and announced a quarantine of all offensive military equipment being shipped to the Communist island nation.

In 1968, Apollo 7 returned safely from Earth orbit, splashing down in the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1979, the U.S. government allowed the deposed Shah of Iran to travel to New York for medical treatment — a decision that precipitated the Iran hostage crisis.

In 1986, President Reagan signed into law sweeping tax-overhaul legislation.

In 1995, the largest gathering of world leaders in history marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

In 2001, a second Washington, D.C., postal worker, Joseph P. Curseen, died of inhalation anthrax.

In 2015, former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton battled Republican questions in a marathon hearing that revealed little new information about the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya.

Ten years ago: The Obama administration pulled U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford from Syria amid what were termed "credible threats against his personal safety." The heir to the Saudi throne, Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz Al Saud, died in New York. (He was succeeded as crown prince by his half-brother, Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz, who died in June 2012; Defense Minister Prince Salman bin Abdul-Aziz was then named the new heir to the throne.) Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal easily coasted to a second term in a landslide election.

Five years ago: Republican Donald Trump vowed to sue every woman who accused him of sexual assault or other inappropriate behavior, calling them "liars" whose allegations he blamed Democrats for orchestrating. The Chicago Cubs won their first pennant since 1945, beating the Los Angeles Dodgers 5-0 in Game 6 of the NL Championship Series.

One year ago: In the closing debate of the presidential campaign, President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden clashed over how to tame the raging coronavirus; Trump declared that the virus would "go away," while Biden countered that the nation was heading toward a "dark winter." U.S. regulators approved the first drug to treat COVID-19; remdesivir (rehm-DEH'-siv-veer), an antiviral medicine given to hospitalized patients through an IV, had been authorized for use on an emergency basis since spring. Senate Judiciary Committee Republicans advanced Amy Coney Barrett's Supreme Court nomination to the full Senate; Democratic senators boycotted the vote in protest of the GOP's rush to install Trump's nominee to replace the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Macy's said Santa Claus wouldn't be greeting kids at its flagship New York store due to the coronavirus, interrupting a holiday tradition started nearly

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160 years ago.

Today's Birthdays: Black Panthers co-founder Bobby Seale is 85. Actor Christopher Lloyd is 83. Actor Derek Jacobi is 83. Actor Tony Roberts is 82. Movie director Jan (yahn) de Bont is 78. Actor Catherine Deneuve is 78. Rock singer/musician Eddie Brigati is 76. Former Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour is 74. Actor Jeff Goldblum is 69. Rock musician Greg Hawkes is 69. Movie director Bill Condon is 66. Actor Luis Guzman is 65. Actor-writer-producer Todd Graff is 62. Rock musician Cris Kirkwood is 61. Actor-comedian Bob Odenkirk is 59. Olympic gold medal figure skater Brian Boitano is 58. Christian singer TobyMac is 57. Singer-songwriter John Wesley Harding (Wesley Stace) is 56. Actor Valeria Golino is 55. Comedian Carlos Mencia is 54. Country singer Shelby Lynne is 53. Reggae rapper Shaggy is 53. Movie director Spike Jonze is 52. Rapper Tracey Lee is 51. Actor Saffron Burrows is 49. Actor Carmen Ejogo is 48. Former MLB player Ichiro Suzuki (EE'-cheer-oh soo-ZOO'-kee) is 48. Actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson is 46. Christian rock singer-musician Jon Foreman (Switchfoot) is 45. Actor Michael Fishman is 40. Talk show host Michael Essany is 39. New York Mets infielder Robinson Canó is 39. Rock musician Rickard (correct) Goransson (Carolina Liar) is 38. Rock musician Zac Hanson (Hanson) is 36. Actor Corey Hawkins is 33. Actor Jonathan Lipnicki is 31. Actor Sofia Vassilieva (vas-ihl-lee-A'-vuh) is 29. Actor Elias Harger is 14.