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Upcoming Events

Monday, Oct. 25

Oral Interp at Brookings Invitational
Volleyball hosts Deuel (C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity)

Tuesday, Oct. 26

ASVAB Testing at GHS, 8:30 a.m. to Noon
Volleyball at Redfield (No C Match, JV at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity)

Thursday, Oct. 28

All State Chorus & Orchestra at Rapid City Civic Center

Friday, Oct. 29

All State Chorus & Orchestra at Rapid City Civic Center
Downtown Trick or Treat, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Methodist Church Trunk or Treat, 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 30

All State Chorus & Orchestra at Rapid City Civic Center
Pumpkinstakes Oral Interp at Watertown

Tuesday, Nov. 2

Brookings Novice Debate
Volleyball Region IA Tourney
NCRC Test at GHS, 8:30 a.m. to noon

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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Wound Care for Henry VIII

When we think of Henry VIII most of us envision an oversized man with multiple wives, a bitter personality, and a propensity for beheading his enemies. A lesser-known fact is that he suffered with chronic leg sores the last twenty years of his life. Living in a time before antibiotics, anesthesia, and proper wound care, this king endured excruciating ulcers with no cure available. Would history have been different if his sores could have been treated with today's advanced wound care?

As a young man, Henry was athletic and active. Unfortunately, he had multiple sports injuries, and one which occurred in January 1536 seemed to initiate chronic wounds. He was thrown off his horse at a jousting tournament and his fully armored horse landed on top of him. Reports from the time state he was unconscious for two hours and had several leg bone fractures. Initially he appeared to heal, but he later developed ulcers in his legs, and historians note at that point his personality changed.

His doctors lanced and drained his ulcers, but they never fully healed. There is much modern speculation as to what caused his sores. Likely the injury was the source, but his love of wearing garters around his calves also likely increased his risk for developing varicose veins and blood clots in his legs. His activity level dropped due to his pain and his weight increased. He was at increased risk for type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. All these things together made him susceptible to leg ulcers from blood vessels that did not work well making it difficult for his initial wounds to heal.

If I were transported back to Henry's court with the limited medical knowledge of that time, there would be little I could do to help him. However, if we were to transport Henry to modern day, we would observe his veins and arteries with ultrasounds. We'd use CT scans to see if infection had gone into the bone. We could determine his ankle-brachial index indicating how well his blood is flowing. And Henry would be given anesthesia while we probed and debrided the wounds. We could treat the root of the infection with antibiotics. And devices such as vacuum assisted closure (wound VAC) and hyperbaric oxygen chambers could help close sores that were left untreated in his time.

History may have looked very different if King Henry had not fallen from his horse launching a cascade of medical problems. Today, we can learn from his misfortune and take advantage of current wound care treatments which avoid unnecessary suffering, and possibly...change the course of our history.

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



By Jill Kruse, D.O.

GHS offers local internships Trista Keith at Lori's Pharmacy by Dorene Nelson

Groton Area High School offers a variety of business classes. One of these classes, School Internships, offers seniors the opportunity to work in various local businesses of their choice.

The purpose of this internship is to teach students responsibility by working for someone other than their family. It helps them learn how to work with the public and with customers who might not be all that agreeable at times.

Internships could also help students decide on a part-time job while they are in college or maybe even to help them choose a future occupation.

The business teacher, Becky Hubsch, has set up this experience for the seventeen students enrolled in her School Internship class.

All students must be at their chosen place of work during the first period of the school day. The student interns must contact the place they would like to work and have their own personal transportation.



Trista Keith, daughter of Bary and Tricia Keith, is interning first semester at Lori's Pharmacy. She has two older brothers.

"I participate in volleyball, soccer, track, and FCCLA," Keith listed. "Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) is a student organization for anyone interested in personal growth and leadership development," she explained.

"I work at Lori's every school day from 8:30-9:20," Keith stated. "I usually arrive here at work around 8 a.m. since customers often drop off prescriptions early in the morning."

"I will probably intern again next semester at Beauty Brew and Boutique," Keith smiled. "Madeline and I plan to just switch jobs."

"We get to select the places where we intern," she stated, "but it is up to us to contact that business and ask if they would be interested in having us work for them. It costs the businesses nothing except the time needed to explain our duties."

"I chose to intern in the pharmacy mainly because I plan to become a pharmacist after I graduate from high school," Keith explained. "I spend my time here behind the drug counter, counting pills."

"Another important job that I do here is put the flu vaccine information into the computer," she explained. "This information is

then faxed to the patient's doctor and to the SD State Department of Health."

"I think the best part of this job is the great people I get to work with," she stated. "I'm learning a lot about what is done in a pharmacy on a daily basis so starting my 'real' job won't be such a surprise!"

"I guess the hardest part of this job is making sure I don't make any mistakes," Keith admitted. "Prescriptions are very important for the patient's health so are checked twice before given to the customers."

"Following high school graduation, I plan to attend SDSU and major in pharmacy," Keith said. "I know it is a six-year program, but I feel it is an important one."



Photo Scrapbook Pages

Sisseton Football Game



Andrew Marzahn
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Ethan Gengerke
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Favian Sanchez
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Kaden Kurtz
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Jacob Lewandowski
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Pierce Kettering
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Photo Scrapbook Pages

Milbank Volleyball Match



Anna Fjeldheim
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Allyssa Locke
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Trista Keith
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Aspen Johnson
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Maddie Bjerke
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Sydney Leicht
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Elizabeth Flihs
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Madeline Flihs
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

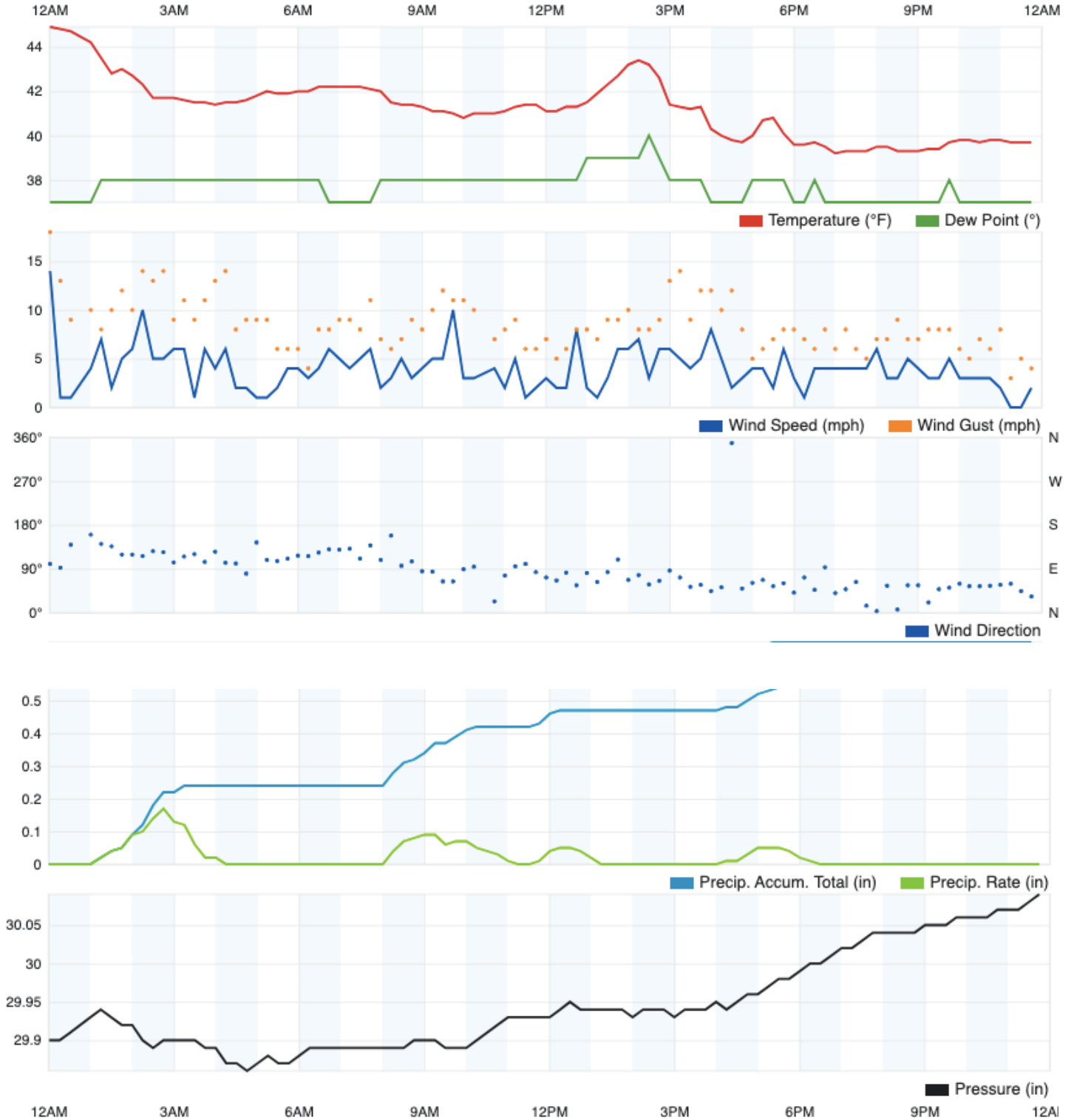


Alyssa Thaler
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Partly Sunny

High: 53 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 40 °F

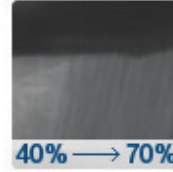
Tuesday



Mostly Cloudy
and Breezy

High: 56 °F

Tuesday
Night



Chance
Showers then
Showers
Likely

Low: 42 °F

Wednesday



Chance
Showers

High: 57 °F

NWS ABERDEEN



WEATHER.GOV/ABR

10/25/2021 5:36 AM

Dry, but Breezy Today

Gusts of 25-35 mph

Highs 45-55°F

Today will feature dry but breezy conditions with wind gusts of 25 to 35 mph expected for most areas. Gusts of 40 to 45 mph will be possible for north central South Dakota this afternoon.

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Today in Weather History

October 25, 1954: A storm dumped snow over the region with the highest snowfall amounts at Devils Tower with sixteen inches. Other snowfall totals from the area included four inches in Colony and Faith, eight inches in Custer and Lead, and eleven inches in Spearfish.

1918: The Canadian steamship Princess Sophia carrying miners from the Yukon and Alaska becomes stranded on Vanderbilt Reef. A strong northerly gale hampers rescue attempts the day before. The ship sinks on this day, killing the 268 passengers and 75 crewmen on board.

1921: A devastating category 3 hurricane struck near Tarpon Springs, Florida. The storm caused 8 fatalities and is the latest in the calendar year a category 3 hurricane or stronger made landfall in the US.

1975: GOES-1, which was launched on October 16th, produced its first image of the earth on this day.

1977: Dutch Harbor in Alaska reported a barometric pressure reading of 27.31 inches (925 millibars) to establish an all-time record for the state.

1981 - A northbound tornado caused two million dollars damage to Bountstown, FL, in less than five minutes. Fortunately no deaths occurred along its six mile path, which was 30 to 100 yards in width. Radar at Apalachicola had no indication of a tornado or severe weather. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm system moving across the Saint Lawrence Valley produced 40 to 50 mph winds east of Lake Ontario. High winds downed some trees around Watertown NY, and produced waves seven feet high between Henderson Harbor and Alexandria Bay. Mason City IA and Waterloo IA tied for honors as cold spot in the nation with record lows for the date of 19 degrees. Severe thunderstorms in Oklahoma and northern Texas produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 65 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms erupted over northeastern Texas during the late evening producing softball size hail at Newcastle and Jonesboro. Low pressure over James Bay in Canada continued to produced showers and gale force winds in the Great Lakes Region. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure over Nevada produced high winds in the southwestern U.S., and spread heavy snow into Utah. Winds gusted to 63 mph at the Mojave Airport in southern California. Snowfall totals in Utah ranged up to 12 inches at Snowbird, with 11 inches at Alta. "Indian Summer" type weather continued in the central and eastern U.S. Twenty cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 77 degrees at Alpena MI and 81 degrees at Saint Cloud MN were the warmest of record for so late in the season. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003: A fire began in the Cuyamaca Mountains spread quickly due to Santa Ana Winds. As of 2017, this fire, called Cedar Fire, remains the largest recorded wildfire in California history, burning 273,246 acres.

2008: A storm packing winds of more than 60 mph hits central Alberta. In Edmonton, the strongest October wind ever recorded reaches 64 mph, cutting power to 4,000. The winds blow free sheet metal, parts of billboards, garbage cans, and pieces of trees around the city.

2017: The high temperatures in Denver, Colorado was 84 degrees. By the morning hours on the 27th, the temperature fell to 13 degrees, a 71-degree change.

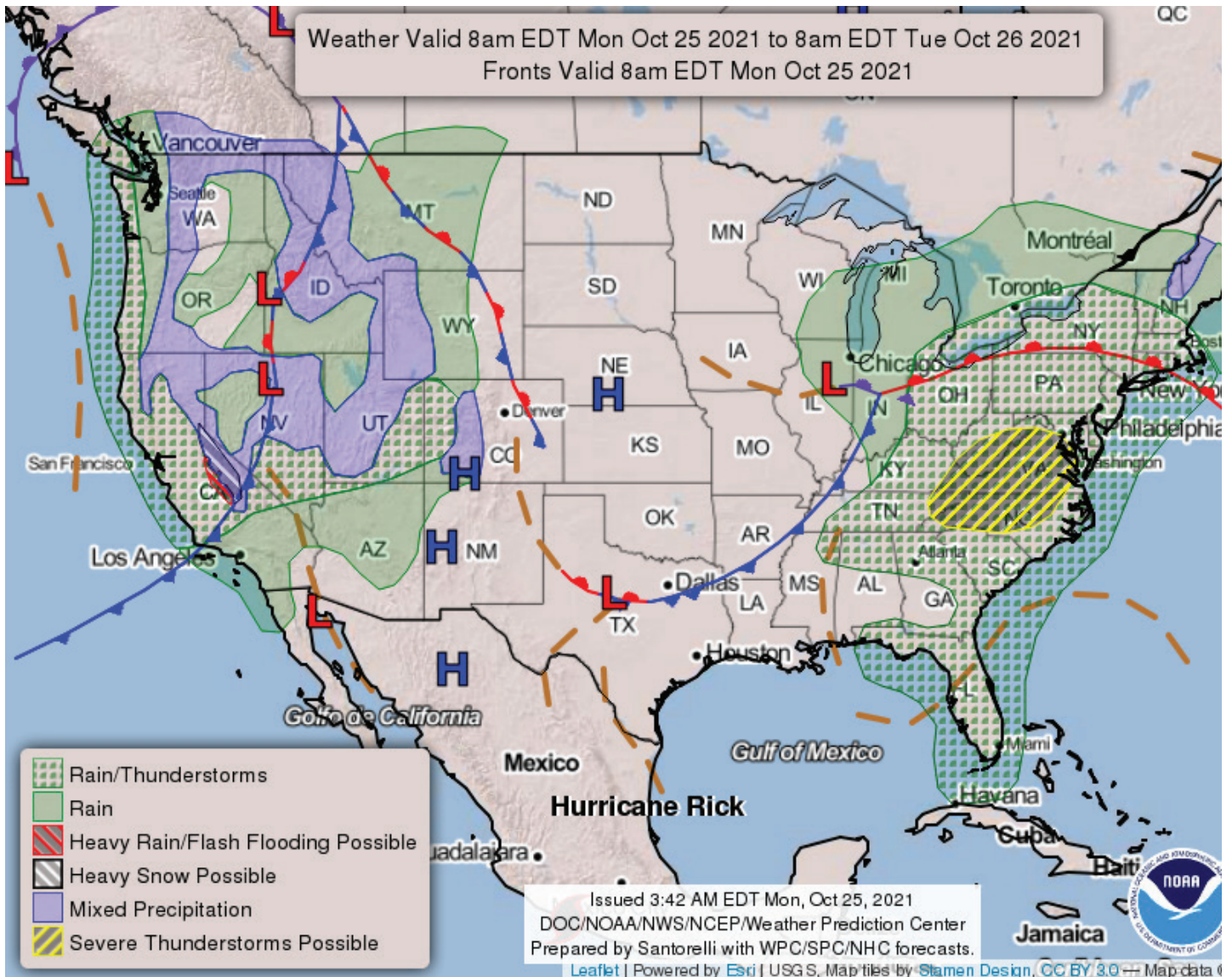
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 44.9 °F at Midnight
Low Temp: 39.2 °F at 7:00 PM
Wind: 18 mph at Midnight
Precip: 0.54

Record High: 81° in 1989
Record Low: 10° in 1942
Average High: 54°F
Average Low: 29°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.83
Precip to date in Oct.: 3.;35
Average Precip to date: 20.16
Precip Year to Date: 18.77
Sunset Tonight: 6:31:31 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:02:40 AM



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LORD OVER ALL!

The Taj Mahal of India is one of the most costly and beautiful tombs in all the world. It was built by an Indian ruler, using twenty thousand men, in memory of his favorite wife.

It is built of white marble and rests on an eight-sided platform of red sandstone. Each side is one hundred thirty feet long. A beautiful dome covers the center part of the building. It is famous for its remarkable acoustics and visitors entering the building are advised to be cautious of their voices and the sounds they make. It is to be a place of quiet respect.

Years ago, Henrietta Mears, founder of Gospel Light Publications and one of the greatest Christian educators in the history of the church, visited the Taj Mahal and asked the guide, "May I say something?" When she was granted permission, she walked on the platform and exclaimed in a moving voice, "Jesus Christ, Son of God is Lord over all!"

Like rolls of thunder echoing in a canyon between majestic mountains, her powerful voice reverberated from wall to wall and down the corridors, and those inside the tomb heard the message, "Lord over all, over all, over all, over all..."

There are times when we look at the conditions that surround us and the problems facing us when we doubt that essential fact - "Lord over all!" God had David encode that fact in Psalm 103:19b: "His kingdom rules over all." It was then; it is now and ever will be. God rules!

Prayer: May we never doubt, Lord, that You are the one who controls all things and trust in Your sovereignty! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Psalm 103:19

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2021 Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

College students design dating app that matches memes

By TANYA MANUS Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — What's scarier than the terrors of Halloween? For many people, it's trying to find love on a dating app.

Computer science students from South Dakota Mines have built a new dating app, Lafdr, that matches people based on their taste in memes. After testing a prototype, the app for IOS and Android launched last month.

Morgan Vagts and Debbie Liknes, who both graduated from Mines in May, channeled their frustration with existing dating apps by creating their own. Lafdr's algorithm, built by Liknes, connects like-minded users through the memes they enjoy on the app.

"Memes are a great conversation starter," Vagts said. "It keeps the conversation light and lets people be themselves. ... If you can laugh at a meme together, you know you have something in common."

Vagts said Lafdr is designed to help people find friendship or romantic connections, or users can simply browse the memes on Lafdr. Vagts and Liknes spent two years developing the app. It's geared toward college-age students but could potentially appeal to ages 18 to 35.

"We were just sitting in Debbie's living room, talking about the perils of online dating, and she joked about the idea of a meme-based app. And I thought, 'Yes. That's brilliant, let's do it,' and it evolved from there," Vagts said.

More than 90% of current college students have used a dating app, Vagts said, and there are more than one million memes shared on platforms like Instagram every day, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"There's a lot of dating apps out there. They're all the same idea of swiping on somebody's profile and they're based primarily on looks. You usually have to do an extra click (to get to their bio)," Vagts said. "It was interesting to find out we are the first people to try something really new, to take the idea of what a dating app is and put more of a spin on it."

"While you're on Lafdr, you don't have to be thinking about all the people who didn't like you and just having dry conversations. It's a more fun and open atmosphere than most of the dating apps out there," she said.

On the first day Lafdr officially launched, Vagts said it attracted double the number of users who'd been trying the prototype. A few weeks later, the Lafdr team promoted the app via an Instagram campaign and doubled the number of users again. They're planning future campaigns to attract more users.

Liknes, who's now in Minneapolis, works on the app full-time and monitors every match the app makes.

"We like to see what it's doing. It's like a quality control measure," Vagts said. "A few weeks after we launched, we had our first relationship match. That was really exciting. ... Two days later, we had our second relationship match."

"We think there is a real market for this app," she said. "Millennials brought dating online; Gen Z has brought memes into dating."

Vagts said support Lafdr received from South Dakota Mines made the app's creation and launch possible.

"Mines helped us with building a business plan and competing in competitions and getting funding to buy an Apple computer (which was needed to build the app)," Vagts said. "The school was able to pay for a lot of things we needed for prototyping."

"Mines helped pay for a provisional patent on our technology, and they gave us prototype money to help develop our app. They also gave us the resources to do well at the Governor's Giant Vision Competition," Vagts said.

Vagts especially credits Joseph Wright, South Dakota Mines associate vice president for Economic Development, who served as the main business advisor for the Lafdr team. Vagts said she and Liknes entered the app in several competitions and lost multiple times.

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"It was very discouraging. We kept going up against the best in the best competitions with life-saving biotech crazy amazing products," Vagts said. "It was discouraging to go up against people that were saving lives. Joseph's comment was 'All of these other companies are saving lives, and you guys make life worth saving.'"

Finally in April, the Lafdr team won fourth place at the South Dakota Governor's Giant Vision student business plan competition. Vagts, Liknes, and their developers — Keegan Burnett, a 2020 Mines graduate, and Dalton Baker, who will graduate in 2022 — put in months of 12-hour days preparing Lafdr for its September launch.

Vagts now lives in Rapid City and works for B9 Creations digital manufacturing technology in addition to her role at Lafdr. She's maintained close ties with many people at South Dakota Mines who continue to offer assistance with the app.

The Lafdr team hopes to make pitches to angel investors in the next few months.

"We know that only a small percentage of venture capital investments go toward female-led businesses. We are hoping to break that trend with Lafdr," Vagts said.

"Kudos to these computer science students for using the skills they gained at Mines to build their own company. We're always proud when students use their education to change the world. This is exactly the kind of innovation and entrepreneurship we encourage at Mines," said Mines President Jim Rankin.

EXPLAINER: Will lawmakers dig into Kristi Noem, appraisers?

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers will be taking a look at a state agency that has been at the center of questions about whether Gov. Kristi Noem used her influence to aid her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

At first glance, the first item of business for the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee on Thursday appears routine: "Department of Labor and Regulation to discuss the Appraiser Certification Program."

But it could have a big impact for the Republican governor, who has generated speculation about a possible 2024 White House bid. Noem has come under scrutiny after The Associated Press reported that she held a meeting in her office last year that included her daughter, Kassidy Peters, and the director of the Appraiser Certification Program, which had moved days earlier to deny Peters' application for a license. Peters received her certification four months later.

Here's what to know about the committee's meeting:

WHO WILL BE SPEAKING?

Lawmakers have carved out a few hours in a packed schedule to hear from four people.

One is the Appraiser Certification Program's former director, Sherry Bren. She was called into the July 2020 meeting in the governor's office and was pressured to retire shortly after Peters received her license that November.

Another official slated to speak is Secretary of Labor and Regulation Marcia Hultman. She was also in the meeting and later pressured Bren to retire. Hultman has defended her actions by saying there have been positive changes at the agency since Bren left.

Lawmakers have also called the president of the state's professional appraiser association, Sandra Gresh. She has raised concerns about the new direction of the state program.

The director of the state's Office of Risk Management, Craig Ambach, also is expected to appear. His office helped negotiate a \$200,000 payment to Bren for her to retire and withdraw an age discrimination complaint. Both Bren and Hultman are bound by a clause in that settlement that bans them from disparaging each other.

WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED AT THE MEETING IN NOEM'S OFFICE?

It is not entirely clear. The governor hasn't answered detailed questions about the meeting. Bren told the AP it covered the procedures for appraiser certification and that she was presented with a letter from

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Peters' supervisor that criticized the agency's decision to deny the license.

Noem has said she didn't ask for special treatment for her daughter. She has cast the episode as yet another way she has "cut the red tape" to solve a shortage of appraisers and smooth the homebuying process.

In a YouTube video responding to the AP's report, Noem pointed out that Bren had been in her position for decades, and she charged that the system "was designed to benefit those who were already certified and to keep others out."

IS THERE A SHORTAGE OF APPRAISERS?

Yes. Industry experts have long said that's a problem, especially in rural states. In South Dakota, many experienced appraisers are nearing retirement age.

However, the governor's ability to "streamline" requirements for a license would be limited because they are mostly set at the federal level.

As governor, Noem has worked to ease licensing requirements for an array of professions. She said she had been working on appraiser regulations for years.

Asked for examples of that work prior to last year, her spokesman Ian Fury pointed out that Noem, during her eight years in Congress, twice signed onto GOP-sponsored bills that would have, among other financial reforms, adjusted federal appraiser regulations.

HOW CAN THE SHORTAGE BE SOLVED?

Since Bren's departure, Noem's administration has moved to waive certification requirements that go beyond the federal standards, such as an exam for entry-level appraisers.

But the leadership of the Professional Appraisers Association of South Dakota has raised concerns about those moves. The group says the biggest barrier to becoming an appraiser is a lack of supervisors who can train new appraisers.

Before Bren left her job, she was working to launch a first-of-its-kind program that would allow appraiser trainees to take hands-on courses and avoid the traditional apprenticeship model that has become a bottleneck. Bren helped the state win a \$120,000 annual federal grant and later testified in the Legislature in support of a bill to create the training program. Noem signed it into law this year.

WHAT WILL THE COMMITTEE DO?

It's not clear. Republican lawmakers said they will start by asking about the state agency and why there are difficulties to becoming an appraiser. But they also acknowledged that the meeting was an opportunity to question the governor's conduct. Just two Democrats sit on the 10-person committee.

If lawmakers are satisfied, they could move on from the issue.

They also could decide to delve deeper. The committee has the power to subpoena witnesses and records, but that would require approval from the Executive Board, a ranking committee of top legislators.

Kathleen Clark, a law professor who specializes in government ethics at Washington University in St. Louis, said she would not be satisfied with the governor's explanation that she was simply trying to "cut the red tape."

"It is conceivable that the agency processes needed improvement," she said. "But the presence of the daughter and the timing of the meeting suggest that this was not a meeting aimed at improving processes in general, but instead aimed at pressuring the agency to change its mind."

Drought-stricken California doused by major storm

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A powerful storm barreled toward Southern California after flooding highways, toppling trees and causing mud flows in areas burned bare by recent fires across the northern part of the state.

Drenching showers and strong winds accompanied the weekend's arrival of an atmospheric river — a long and wide plume of moisture pulled in from the Pacific Ocean. The National Weather Service's Sacramento office warned of "potentially historic rain."

Flooding was reported across the San Francisco Bay Area, closing streets in Berkeley, inundating Oakland's

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Bay Bridge toll plaza and overflowing rivers in Napa and Sonoma counties. Power poles were downed and tens of thousands of people in the North Bay were without electricity.

By Sunday morning, Mount Tamalpais just north of San Francisco had recorded a half foot (15 centimeters) of rainfall during the previous 12 hours, the weather service said.

"Some of our higher elevation locations could see 6, 7, 8 inches of rain before we're all said and done," weather service meteorologist Sean Miller said.

About 150 miles (241 kilometers) to the north, the California Highway Patrol closed a stretch of State Route 70 in Butte and Plumas counties because of multiple landslides within the massive Dixie Fire burn scar.

"We have already had several collisions this morning for vehicles hydroplaning, numerous trees falling, and several roadways that are experiencing flooding," the highway patrol's office in Oroville tweeted on Sunday. "If you can stay home and off the roads today, please do. If you are out on the roads, please use extreme caution."

The same storm system also slammed Oregon and Washington state, causing power outages affecting tens of thousands of people. Two people were killed when a tree fell on a vehicle in the greater Seattle area. Eastside Fire & Rescue responded to the scene of the fatalities near Preston, Washington, which is about 20 miles (32 kilometers) east of Seattle.

In California's Colusa and Yolo counties, state highways 16 and 20 were shut for several miles due to mudslides, the state Department of Transportation said.

Burn areas remain a concern, as land devoid of vegetation can't soak up heavy rainfall as quickly, increasing the likelihood of flash flooding.

"If you are in the vicinity of a recent burn scar and haven't already, prepare now for likely debris flows," the Sacramento weather service tweeted. "If you are told to evacuate by local officials, or you feel threatened, do not hesitate to do so. If it is too late to evacuate, get to higher ground."

South of San Francisco, evacuation orders were in effect in the Santa Cruz Mountains over concerns that several inches of rain could trigger debris flows in the CZU Lightning Complex Fire burn scar when the storm moves through early Monday. Further south, parts of western Santa Barbara County saw evacuation warnings upgraded to orders in the area burned by this month's Alisal Fire.

Strong winds were also expected, with gusts of up to 60 mph (97 kph) at the windiest spots in Northern California. Elevations above 9,000 feet (2,745 meters) in the Sierra Nevada could get 18 inches (46 centimeters) of snow or more from Sunday until Monday morning.

Recent storms have helped contain some of the nation's largest wildfires this year. But it remains to be seen if the wet weather will make a dent in the drought that's plaguing California and the western United States. California's climate is hotter and drier now and that means the rain and snow that does fall is more likely to evaporate and less likely to absorb into the soil.

California's 2021 water year, which ended Sept. 30, was the second driest on record and last year's was the fifth driest on record. Some of the state's most important reservoirs are at record low levels.

Facebook's language gaps weaken screening of hate, terrorism

By ISABEL DEBRE and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As the Gaza war raged and tensions surged across the Middle East last May, Instagram briefly banned the hashtag #AlAqsa, a reference to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City, a flash point in the conflict.

Facebook, which owns Instagram, later apologized, explaining its algorithms had mistaken the third-holiest site in Islam for the militant group Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, an armed offshoot of the secular Fatah party.

For many Arabic-speaking users, it was just the latest potent example of how the social media giant muzzles political speech in the region. Arabic is among the most common languages on Facebook's platforms, and the company issues frequent public apologies after similar botched content removals.

Now, internal company documents from the former Facebook product manager-turned-whistleblower Frances Haugen show the problems are far more systemic than just a few innocent mistakes, and that

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Facebook has understood the depth of these failings for years while doing little about it.

Such errors are not limited to Arabic. An examination of the files reveals that in some of the world's most volatile regions, terrorist content and hate speech proliferate because the company remains short on moderators who speak local languages and understand cultural contexts. And its platforms have failed to develop artificial-intelligence solutions that can catch harmful content in different languages.

In countries like Afghanistan and Myanmar, these loopholes have allowed inflammatory language to flourish on the platform, while in Syria and the Palestinian territories, Facebook suppresses ordinary speech, imposing blanket bans on common words.

"The root problem is that the platform was never built with the intention it would one day mediate the political speech of everyone in the world," said Eliza Campbell, director of the Middle East Institute's Cyber Program. "But for the amount of political importance and resources that Facebook has, moderation is a bafflingly under-resourced project."

This story, along with others published Monday, is based on Haugen's disclosures to the Securities and Exchange Commission, which were also provided to Congress in redacted form by her legal team. The redacted versions were reviewed by a consortium of news organizations, including The Associated Press.

In a statement to the AP, a Facebook spokesperson said that over the last two years the company has invested in recruiting more staff with local dialect and topic expertise to bolster its review capacity around the world.

But when it comes to Arabic content moderation, the company said, "We still have more work to do. ... We conduct research to better understand this complexity and identify how we can improve."

In Myanmar, where Facebook-based misinformation has been linked repeatedly to ethnic and religious violence, the company acknowledged in its internal reports that it had failed to stop the spread of hate speech targeting the minority Rohingya Muslim population.

The Rohingya's persecution, which the U.S. has described as ethnic cleansing, led Facebook to publicly pledge in 2018 that it would recruit 100 native Myanmar language speakers to police its platforms. But the company never disclosed how many content moderators it ultimately hired or revealed which of the nation's many dialects they covered.

Despite Facebook's public promises and many internal reports on the problems, the rights group Global Witness said the company's recommendation algorithm continued to amplify army propaganda and other content that breaches the company's Myanmar policies following a military coup in February.

In India, the documents show Facebook employees debating last March whether it could clamp down on the "fear mongering, anti-Muslim narratives" that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's far-right Hindu nationalist group, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, broadcasts on its platform.

In one document, the company notes that users linked to Modi's party had created multiple accounts to supercharge the spread of Islamophobic content. Much of this content was "never flagged or actioned," the research found, because Facebook lacked moderators and automated filters with knowledge of Hindi and Bengali.

Arabic poses particular challenges to Facebook's automated systems and human moderators, each of which struggles to understand spoken dialects unique to each country and region, their vocabularies salted with different historical influences and cultural contexts.

The Moroccan colloquial Arabic, for instance, includes French and Berber words, and is spoken with short vowels. Egyptian Arabic, on the other hand, includes some Turkish from the Ottoman conquest. Other dialects are closer to the "official" version found in the Quran. In some cases, these dialects are not mutually comprehensible, and there is no standard way of transcribing colloquial Arabic.

Facebook first developed a massive following in the Middle East during the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, and users credited the platform with providing a rare opportunity for free expression and a critical source of news in a region where autocratic governments exert tight controls over both. But in recent years, that reputation has changed.

Scores of Palestinian journalists and activists have had their accounts deleted. Archives of the Syrian

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civil war have disappeared. And a vast vocabulary of everyday words have become off-limits to speakers of Arabic, Facebook's third-most common language with millions of users worldwide.

For Hassan Slaieh, a prominent journalist in the blockaded Gaza Strip, the first message felt like a punch to the gut. "Your account has been permanently disabled for violating Facebook's Community Standards," the company's notification read. That was at the peak of the bloody 2014 Gaza war, following years of his news posts on violence between Israel and Hamas being flagged as content violations.

Within moments, he lost everything he'd collected over six years: personal memories, stories of people's lives in Gaza, photos of Israeli airstrikes pounding the enclave, not to mention 200,000 followers. The most recent Facebook takedown of his page last year came as less of a shock. It was the 17th time that he had to start from scratch.

He had tried to be clever. Like many Palestinians, he'd learned to avoid the typical Arabic words for "martyr" and "prisoner," along with references to Israel's military occupation. If he mentioned militant groups, he'd add symbols or spaces between each letter.

Other users in the region have taken an increasingly savvy approach to tricking Facebook's algorithms, employing a centuries-old Arabic script that lacks the dots and marks that help readers differentiate between otherwise identical letters. The writing style, common before Arabic learning exploded with the spread of Islam, has circumvented hate speech censors on Facebook's Instagram app, according to the internal documents.

But Slaieh's tactics didn't make the cut. He believes Facebook banned him simply for doing his job. As a reporter in Gaza, he posts photos of Palestinian protesters wounded at the Israeli border, mothers weeping over their sons' coffins, statements from the Gaza Strip's militant Hamas rulers.

Criticism, satire and even simple mentions of groups on the company's Dangerous Individuals and Organizations list — a docket modeled on the U.S. government equivalent — are grounds for a takedown.

"We were incorrectly enforcing counterterrorism content in Arabic," one document reads, noting the current system "limits users from participating in political speech, impeding their right to freedom of expression."

The Facebook blacklist includes Gaza's ruling Hamas party, as well as Hezbollah, the militant group that holds seats in Lebanon's Parliament, along with many other groups representing wide swaths of people and territory across the Middle East, the internal documents show, resulting in what Facebook employees describe in the documents as widespread perceptions of censorship.

"If you posted about militant activity without clearly condemning what's happening, we treated you like you supported it," said Mai el-Mahdy, a former Facebook employee who worked on Arabic content moderation until 2017.

In response to questions from the AP, Facebook said it consults independent experts to develop its moderation policies and goes "to great lengths to ensure they are agnostic to religion, region, political outlook or ideology."

"We know our systems are not perfect," it added.

The company's language gaps and biases have led to the widespread perception that its reviewers skew in favor of governments and against minority groups.

Former Facebook employees also say that various governments exert pressure on the company, threatening regulation and fines. Israel, a lucrative source of advertising revenue for Facebook, is the only country in the Mideast where Facebook operates a national office. Its public policy director previously advised former right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israeli security agencies and watchdogs monitor Facebook and bombard it with thousands of orders to take down Palestinian accounts and posts as they try to crack down on incitement.

"They flood our system, completely overpowering it," said Ashraf Zeitoon, Facebook's former head of policy for the Middle East and North Africa region, who left in 2017. "That forces the system to make mistakes in Israel's favor. Nowhere else in the region had such a deep understanding of how Facebook works."

Facebook said in a statement that it fields takedown requests from governments no differently from those from rights organizations or community members, although it may restrict access to content based

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on local laws.

"Any suggestion that we remove content solely under pressure from the Israeli government is completely inaccurate," it said.

Syrian journalists and activists reporting on the country's opposition also have complained of censorship, with electronic armies supporting embattled President Bashar Assad aggressively flagging dissident content for removal.

Raed, a former reporter at the Aleppo Media Center, a group of antigovernment activists and citizen journalists in Syria, said Facebook erased most of his documentation of Syrian government shelling on neighborhoods and hospitals, citing graphic content.

"Facebook always tells us we break the rules, but no one tells us what the rules are," he added, giving only his first name for fear of reprisals.

In Afghanistan, many users literally cannot understand Facebook's rules. According to an internal report in January, Facebook did not translate the site's hate speech and misinformation pages into Dari and Pashto, the two most common languages in Afghanistan, where English is not widely understood.

When Afghan users try to flag posts as hate speech, the drop-down menus appear only in English. So does the Community Standards page. The site also doesn't have a bank of hate speech terms, slurs and code words in Afghanistan used to moderate Dari and Pashto content, as is typical elsewhere. Without this local word bank, Facebook can't build the automated filters that catch the worst violations in the country.

When it came to looking into the abuse of domestic workers in the Middle East, internal Facebook documents acknowledged that engineers primarily focused on posts and messages written in English. The flagged-words list did not include Tagalog, the major language of the Philippines, where many of the region's housemaids and other domestic workers come from.

In much of the Arab world, the opposite is true — the company over-relies on artificial-intelligence filters that make mistakes, leading to "a lot of false positives and a media backlash," one document reads. Largely unskilled human moderators, in over their heads, tend to passively field takedown requests instead of screening proactively.

Sophie Zhang, a former Facebook employee-turned-whistleblower who worked at the company for nearly three years before being fired last year, said contractors in Facebook's Ireland office complained to her they had to depend on Google Translate because the company did not assign them content based on what languages they knew.

Facebook outsources most content moderation to giant companies that enlist workers far afield, from Casablanca, Morocco, to Essen, Germany. The firms don't sponsor work visas for the Arabic teams, limiting the pool to local hires in precarious conditions — mostly Moroccans who seem to have overstated their linguistic capabilities. They often get lost in the translation of Arabic's 30-odd dialects, flagging inoffensive Arabic posts as terrorist content 77% of the time, one document said.

"These reps should not be fielding content from non-Maghreb region, however right now it is commonplace," another document reads, referring to the region of North Africa that includes Morocco. The file goes on to say that the Casablanca office falsely claimed in a survey it could handle "every dialect" of Arabic. But in one case, reviewers incorrectly flagged a set of Egyptian dialect content 90% of the time, a report said.

Iraq ranks highest in the region for its reported volume of hate speech on Facebook. But among reviewers, knowledge of Iraqi dialect is "close to non-existent," one document said.

"Journalists are trying to expose human rights abuses, but we just get banned," said one Baghdad-based press freedom activist, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. "We understand Facebook tries to limit the influence of militias, but it's not working."

Linguists described Facebook's system as flawed for a region with a vast diversity of colloquial dialects that Arabic speakers transcribe in different ways.

"The stereotype that Arabic is one entity is a major problem," said Enam al-Wer, professor of Arabic linguistics at the University of Essex, citing the language's "huge variations" not only between countries but class, gender, religion and ethnicity.

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Despite these problems, moderators are on the front lines of what makes Facebook a powerful arbiter of political expression in a tumultuous region.

Although the documents from Haugen predate this year's Gaza war, episodes from that 11-day conflict show how little has been done to address the problems flagged in Facebook's own internal reports.

Activists in Gaza and the West Bank lost their ability to livestream. Whole archives of the conflict vanished from newsfeeds, a primary portal of information for many users. Influencers accustomed to tens of thousands of likes on their posts saw their outreach plummet when they posted about Palestinians.

"This has restrained me and prevented me from feeling free to publish what I want for fear of losing my account," said Soliman Hijjy, a Gaza-based journalist whose aeriels of the Mediterranean Sea garnered tens of thousands more views than his images of Israeli bombs — a common phenomenon when photos are flagged for violating community standards.

During the war, Palestinian advocates submitted hundreds of complaints to Facebook, often leading the company to concede error and reinstate posts and accounts.

In the internal documents, Facebook reported it had erred in nearly half of all Arabic language takedown requests submitted for appeal.

"The repetition of false positives creates a huge drain of resources," it said.

In announcing the reversal of one such Palestinian post removal last month, Facebook's semi-independent oversight board urged an impartial investigation into the company's Arabic and Hebrew content moderation. It called for improvement in its broad terrorism blacklist to "increase understanding of the exceptions for neutral discussion, condemnation and news reporting," according to the board's policy advisory statement.

Facebook's internal documents also stressed the need to "enhance" algorithms, enlist more Arab moderators from less-represented countries and restrict them to where they have appropriate dialect expertise.

"With the size of the Arabic user base and potential severity of offline harm ... it is surely of the highest importance to put more resources to the task to improving Arabic systems," said the report.

But the company also lamented that "there is not one clear mitigation strategy."

Meanwhile, many across the Middle East worry the stakes of Facebook's failings are exceptionally high, with potential to widen long-standing inequality, chill civic activism and stoke violence in the region.

"We told Facebook: Do you want people to convey their experiences on social platforms, or do you want to shut them down?" said Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian envoy to the United Kingdom, who recently discussed Arabic content suppression with Facebook officials in London. "If you take away people's voices, the alternatives will be uglier."

Akram reported from Gaza City, Gaza Strip. Associated Press writers Sam McNeil in Beijing, Sheikh Saaliq in New Delhi and Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, California, contributed to this report.

See full coverage of the "The Facebook Papers" here: <https://apnews.com/hub/the-facebook-papers>

Leading general dissolves government in coup, PM held

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sudan's top general on Monday dissolved the government and announced that the military will run the country after his forces arrested the acting prime minister and other officials. Thousands of Sudanese protested in the streets against the coup.

The military takeover threatens to derail Sudan's long, rocky attempt to transition to democracy two years after protesters forced the ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir. The move came just before the military was supposed to hand leadership of the country's joint military-civilian administration to civilians next month.

After the early morning arrests of government officials, thousands flooded the streets of the capital, Khartoum, and its twin city of Omdurman to protest. Footage shared online appeared to show protesters blocking streets and setting fire to tires as security forces used tear gas to disperse them.

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Protesters could be heard chanting, "The people are stronger, stronger" and "Retreat is not an option!" as plumes of smoke filled the air. Videos on social media showed large crowds crossing bridges over the Nile to the center of the capital.

At least 12 protesters were wounded in demonstrations, according to the Sudanese Doctors Committee, without giving details.

In the afternoon, the head of the military, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, went on national TV and announced that he was dissolving the government and the Sovereign Council, a joint military and civilian body created to run the country since al-Bashir's ouster.

He said quarrels among political factions prompted the military to intervene.

Burhan declared a state of emergency and said the military will appoint a technocratic government to lead the country to elections, set for July 2023. But he made clear the military will remain in charge, saying, "The Armed Forces will continue completing the democratic transition until the handover of the country's leadership to a civilian, elected government."

The Information Ministry, still loyal to the dissolved government, called his speech an "announcement of a seizure of power by military coup."

The United States and the European Union expressed concern over Monday's developments.

Jeffrey Feltman, the U.S. special envoy to the Horn of Africa, said Washington was "deeply alarmed" by the reports. Feltman met with Sudanese officials over the weekend in an effort to resolve the growing dispute between civilian and military leaders. EU foreign affairs chief Joseph Borrell tweeted that he's following events with the "utmost concern."

The first reports about a possible military takeover began trickling out of Sudan before dawn Monday. By mid-morning, the Information Ministry confirmed that the prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, had been arrested and taken to an undisclosed location. Several senior government figures were also detained, the ministry said in a Facebook post. It said their whereabouts were unknown.

Hamdok's office said in a statement on Facebook that he and his wife were detained early Monday as part of what it described as a "complete coup."

Internet access was widely disrupted and the country's state news channel played patriotic traditional music. At one point, military forces stormed the offices of Sudan's state-run television in Omdurman and detained a number of workers, the Information Ministry said.

Tensions have been rising for weeks between Sudan's civilian and military leadership over Sudan's course and the pace of the transition to democracy.

A failed coup attempt in September fractured the country along old lines, pitting more conservative Islamists who want a military government against those who toppled al-Bashir in protests. In recent days, both camps have taken to the street in demonstrations.

After the September coup attempt, the generals lashed out at civilian members of the transitional power structure and called for the dissolution of Hamdok's government. The Sovereign Council is the ultimate decision maker, though the Hamdok government is tasked with running Sudan's day-to-day affairs.

Burhan, who leads the council, warned in televised comments last month that the military would hand over power only to a government elected by the Sudanese people.

His comments suggested he might not stick to the previously agreed timetable, which called for the council to be led by a military figure for 21 months, followed by a civilian for the following 18 months. Under that plan, the handover was to take place sometime in November, with the new civilian leader to be chosen by an alliance of unions and political parties that led the uprising against al-Bashir.

Since al-Bashir was forced from power, Sudan had slowly emerged from years of international pariah status. The country was removed from the United States' state supporter of terror list in 2020, opening the door for badly needed foreign loans and investment. But the country's economy has struggled with the shock of a number economic reforms called for by international lending institutions.

Sudan has suffered other coups since it gained its independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956. Al-Bashir came to power in 1989 in one such takeover, which removed the country's last elected government.

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Among those detained Monday were five senior government figures, according to two officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to share information with the media.

They include Industry Minister Ibrahim al-Sheikh, Information Minister Hamza Baloul, and Mohammed al-Fiky Suliman, a member of the Sovereign Council, as well as Faisal Mohammed Saleh, a media adviser to Hamdok. Ayman Khalid, governor of the state containing the capital, was also arrested, according to the official Facebook page of his office.

After news of the arrests spread, the country's main pro-democracy group and two political parties issued appeals to the Sudanese to take to the streets.

One of the factions, the Communist Party called on workers to go on strike in an act of mass civil disobedience after what it described as a "full military coup" orchestrated by Burhan.

The African Union has called for the release of all Sudanese political leaders including Hamdok. "Dialogue and consensus is the only relevant path to save the country and its democratic transition," said Moussa Faki, the head of the AU commission.

EXPLAINER: Just what are 'The Facebook Papers,' anyway?

By The Associated Press undefined

The Facebook Papers project represents a unique collaboration among 17 American news organizations, including The Associated Press. Journalists from a variety of newsrooms, large and small, worked together to gain access to thousands of pages of internal company documents obtained by Frances Haugen, the former Facebook product manager-turned-whistleblower.

A separate consortium of European news outlets had access to the same set of documents, and members of both groups began publishing content related to their analysis of the materials at 7 a.m. EDT on Monday, Oct. 25. That date and time was set by the partner news organizations to give everyone in the consortium an opportunity to fully analyze the documents, report out relevant details, and to give Facebook's public relations staff ample time to respond to questions and inquiries raised by that reporting.

Each member of the consortium pursued its own independent reporting on the document contents and their significance. Every member also had the opportunity to attend group briefings to gain information and context about the documents.

The launch of The Facebook Papers project follows similar reporting by The Wall Street Journal, sourced from the same documents, as well as Haugen's appearance on the CBS television show "60 Minutes" and her Oct. 5 Capitol Hill testimony before a U.S. Senate subcommittee.

The papers themselves are redacted versions of disclosures that Haugen has made over several months to the Securities and Exchange Commission, alleging Facebook was prioritizing profits over safety and hiding its own research from investors and the public.

These complaints cover a range of topics, from its efforts to continue growing its audience, to how its platforms might harm children, to its alleged role in inciting political violence. The same redacted versions of those filings are being provided to members of Congress as part of its investigation. And that process continues as Haugen's legal team goes through the process of redacting the SEC filings by removing the names of Facebook users and lower-level employees and turns them over to Congress.

The Facebook Papers consortium will continue to report on these documents as more become available in the coming days and weeks.

"AP regularly teams up with other news organizations to bring important journalism to the world," said Julie Pace, senior vice president and executive editor. "The Facebook Papers project is in keeping with that mission. In all collaborations, AP maintains its editorial independence."

See full coverage of "The Facebook Papers" here: <https://apnews.com/hub/the-facebook-papers>

Apple once threatened Facebook ban over Mideast maid abuse

By JON GAMBRELL and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

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DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Two years ago, Apple threatened to pull Facebook and Instagram from its app store over concerns about the platform being used as a tool to trade and sell maids in the Mideast.

After publicly promising to crack down, Facebook acknowledged in internal documents obtained by The Associated Press that it was “under-enforcing on confirmed abusive activity” that saw Filipina maids complaining on the social media site of being abused. Apple relented and Facebook and Instagram remained in the app store.

But Facebook’s crackdown seems to have had a limited effect. Even today, a quick search for “khadima,” or “maids” in Arabic, will bring up accounts featuring posed photographs of Africans and South Asians with ages and prices listed next to their images. That’s even as the Philippines government has a team of workers that do nothing but scour Facebook posts each day to try and protect desperate job seekers from criminal gangs and unscrupulous recruiters using the site.

While the Mideast remains a crucial source of work for women in Asia and Africa hoping to provide for their families back home, Facebook acknowledged some countries across the region have “especially egregious” human rights issues when it comes to laborers’ protection.

“In our investigation, domestic workers frequently complained to their recruitment agencies of being locked in their homes, starved, forced to extend their contracts indefinitely, unpaid, and repeatedly sold to other employers without their consent,” one Facebook document read. “In response, agencies commonly told them to be more agreeable.”

The report added: “We also found recruitment agencies dismissing more serious crimes, such as physical or sexual assault, rather than helping domestic workers.”

In a statement to the AP, Facebook said it took the problem seriously, despite the continued spread of ads exploiting foreign workers in the Mideast.

“We prohibit human exploitation in no uncertain terms,” Facebook said. “We’ve been combating human trafficking on our platform for many years and our goal remains to prevent anyone who seeks to exploit others from having a home on our platform.”

This story, along with others published Monday, is based on disclosures made to the Securities and Exchange Commission and provided to Congress in redacted form by former Facebook employee-turned-whistleblower Frances Haugen’s legal counsel. The redacted versions were obtained by a consortium of news organizations, including the AP.

Taken as a whole, the trove of documents show that Facebook’s daunting size and user base around the world — a key factor in its rapid ascent and near trillion-dollar valuation — also proves to be its greatest weakness in trying to police illicit activity, such as the sale of drugs, and suspected human rights and labor abuses on its site.

Activists say Facebook, based in Menlo Park, California, has both an obligation and likely the means to fully crack down on the abuses their services facilitate as it earns tens of billions of dollars a year in revenue.

“While Facebook is a private company, when you have billions of users, you are effectively like a state and therefore you have social responsibilities de facto, whether you like it or not,” said Mustafa Qadri, the executive director of Equidem Research, which studies migrant labor.

“These workers are being recruited and going to places to work like the Gulf, the Middle East, where there is practically no proper regulation of how they’re recruited and how they’re treated when they end up in the places where they work. So when you put those two things together, really, it’s a recipe for disaster.”

Mary Ann Abunda, who works with a nongovernmental Filipino workers’ welfare group called Sandigan in Kuwait, similarly warned of the danger the site can pose.

“Facebook really has two faces now,” Abunda said. “Yes, as it advertises, it’s connecting people, but it has also become a haven of sinister people and syndicates who wait for your weak moment to pounce on you.”

Facebook, like human rights activists and others worried about labor across the Mideast, pointed to the so-called “kafala” system prevalent across much of the region’s countries. Under this system, which allowed nations to import cheap foreign labor from Africa and South Asia as oil money swelled their economies

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beginning in the 1950s, workers find their residency bound directly to their employer, their sponsor or "kafeel."

While workers can find employment in these arrangements that allow them to send money back home, unscrupulous sponsors can exploit their laborers who often have no other legal recourse. Stories of workers having their passports seized, working nonstop without breaks, and not being properly paid long have shadowed major construction projects, whether Dubai's Expo 2020 or Qatar's upcoming FIFA 2022 World Cup.

While Gulf Arab states like the UAE and Qatar insist they've improved working conditions, others like Saudi Arabia still require employers to approve their workers leaving the country. Meanwhile, maids and domestic workers can find themselves even more at risk by living alone with families in private homes.

In the documents seen by the AP, Facebook acknowledges being aware of both the exploitive conditions of foreign workers and the use of Instagram to buy and trade maids online even before a 2019 report by the BBC's Arabic service on the practice in the Mideast. That BBC report sparked the threat by Cupertino, California-based Apple to remove the apps, citing examples of pictures of maids and their biographic details showing up online, according to the documents.

Facebook engineers found nearly three-fourths of all problematic posts, including showing maids in videos and screenshots of their conversations, occurred on Instagram. Links to maid-selling sites predominantly affected Facebook.

Over 60% of the material came from Saudi Arabia, with about a quarter coming from Egypt, according to the 2019 Facebook analysis.

In a statement to the AP, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development said the kingdom "stands firmly against all types of illegal practices in the labor market" and that all labor contracts must be approved by authorities. While keeping in contact with the Philippines and other nations on labor issues, the ministry said Facebook had never been in touch with it about the problem.

"Obviously illegal ads posted on social media platforms make it harder to track and investigate," the ministry said.

Saudi Arabia plans "a major public awareness campaign" soon as well on illegal recruitment practices, the ministry added.

Egypt did not respond to requests for comment.

While Facebook disabled over 1,000 accounts on its websites, its analysis papers acknowledged that as early as 2018 the company knew it had a problem with what it referred to as "domestic servitude." It defined the problem as a "form of trafficking of people for the purpose of working inside private homes through the use of force, fraud, coercion or deception."

The issue appeared a wide-enough problem that Facebook even used an acronym to describe it — HEx, or "human exploitation." Users at the time reported only 2% of problematic content, likely due to the desire to travel abroad for work. Facebook acknowledged it only scratched the surface of the problem and that "domestic servitude content remained on the platform."

After a week, Facebook shared what it had done and Apple apparently dropped the threat. Apple did not respond to requests for comment, but Facebook acknowledged how seriously it took the threat at the time.

"Removing our applications from Apple platforms would have had potentially severe consequences to the business, including depriving millions of users of access," the analysis said.

The problem, however, continues today across both Facebook and Instagram. Facebook appears to acknowledge that in more recent documents seen by the AP. It described engineers accessing problematic messages in maid-recruiting agencies' inboxes, including one in which a Filipina specifically is mentioned as being "sold" by her Kuwaiti employers.

"Sometimes my head and ears hurt from being hit," another batch of messages from a Filipina in Kuwait read. "When I escape from here, how will I get my passport? And how can we get out of here? The door is always locked."

Another Filipina housemaid in Kuwait, who described being "sold" to another family through an Insta-

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gram post in December 2012, told the AP that she knew of other cases of Filipinas being “traded online like merchandise.”

“I was like an animal that was being traded by one owner to another,” said the woman, who spoke from Kuwait on condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisals. “If Facebook and Instagram won’t take stronger steps against this anomaly, there will be more victims like me. I was lucky because I did not end up dead or a sexual slave.”

Authorities in Kuwait, where the Philippines temporarily banned domestic workers from going after an abused Filipina was found dead in a refrigerator in 2018 over a year after disappearing, did not respond to requests for comment.

In the Philippines, the billions of dollars annually sent home from overseas workers represent nearly 10% of the country’s gross domestic product. Those wanting to go abroad trust Facebook more than the private recruiting agencies monitored by the government in part over past scandals, said Bernard Olalia, who heads the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, which has the team monitoring Facebook postings.

Job seekers mistakenly believe the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration endorses some of the Facebook and Instagram accounts, in part as they misused the office’s logos, he said.

With the coronavirus pandemic locking down the Philippines for months, those wanting to work abroad are even more desperate than before for any opportunity. Some see “application fees” stolen by criminal gangs, he said. Others have been trafficked or sexually exploited.

“Words are not enough to describe their predicament but the situation is devastating for them,” Olalia said. “They expected to recover again, they invested just to ensure they’ll have a destination only to end up as victims of illegal recruitment. That’s devastating on their part.”

Facebook suggested a pilot program to begin in 2021 that targeted Filipinas with pop-up messages and banner ads warning them about the dangers working overseas can pose.

It remains unclear whether it ever began, though Facebook said in its statement to the AP that it delivers “targeted prevention and support ad campaigns in countries such as the Philippines where data suggests people may be at high risk of exploitation.” Facebook did not answer specific questions posed by the AP about its practices.

Olalia said his office for the last two years had a direct line to Facebook to be able to flag suspicious accounts. But even that isn’t enough as more and more pop up to replace them.

“It will affect their income so they don’t want to address this,” he said.

That leaves some of the most-desperate job seekers in the world vulnerable to promises and possible trafficking on Facebook.

“We’ve seen since the pandemic that these low-wage workers who literally raise our children, they build our buildings, they cook our food, they deliver our meals. They’re not just low-wage workers, they’re essential workers,” said Qadri, the migrant rights expert. “So we really have a duty to address these problems because our entire civilization is dependent on these people.”

Gomez reported from Manila, Philippines.

See full coverage of “The Facebook Papers” here: <https://apnews.com/hub/the-facebook-papers>

The Latest: China urges dialogue between Sudan’s factions

The Associated Press undefined

BEIJING — China is urging a dialogue between Sudanese factions as an apparent military coup roils the nation.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Monday that China wanted all parties in Sudan “to resolve their differences through dialogue so as to maintain peace and stability of the country.”

He told reporters that China would continue to closely follow the turbulence in Sudan and “take neces-

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sary measures to ensure the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel there.”

China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and major investor in Africa.

The arrests on Monday of Sudan’s interim prime minister and other officials plunged Sudan’s fragile path to democracy into uncertainty following the 2019 ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir. During al-Bashir’s harsh rule and despite allegations of his government’s human rights abuses, China was Sudan’s biggest trading partner and key international partner.

MORE ON SUDAN:

In apparent Sudan coup, PM, officials detained

HERE’S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

CAIRO - The Saudi-based Organization of Islamic Cooperation has expressed concern over the apparent coup in Sudan amid a fragile transition to democracy.

In a statement carried by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, the organization said Monday that it urged Sudanese leaders to “abide by the constitutional document and what has been agreed upon during the transition period.”

The statement comes as other nations express alarm at the arrest of Sudan’s interim prime minister and other senior officials. Their whereabouts were not immediately known.

Thousands of Sudanese protesters have flooded the streets as fears of a military coup grip the country two years after mass protests ousted autocrat Omar al-Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades.

The 57-nation OIC is based in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia.

BERLIN — Germany has demanded an immediate halt to the apparent military coup underway in Sudan.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass condemned the attempted takeover in the vast east African country and called the news “dismaying.”

“This attempted coup must end immediately,” he said, urging “all those who bear responsibility for security and state order in Sudan to continue the peaceful political transition process in Sudan toward democracy.”

The statement Monday was one of several from other nations expressing concern about the arrest of Sudan’s interim prime minister and other senior officials. Their whereabouts were not immediately known.

Thousands of Sudanese protesters have flooded the streets as fears of a military coup grip the country two years after mass protests ousted autocrat Omar al-Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades. Since 2019, Sudan has been navigating a fragile transition to democracy.

CAIRO — The United Nations Mission to Sudan has issued an emphatic rebuke of what it called an ongoing coup and attempts to undermine the northeast African nation’s fragile democratic transition.

The first reports about a possible military takeover began trickling out of Sudan before dawn Monday. By mid-morning, the information ministry confirmed that the prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, had been arrested and taken to an undisclosed location. Several senior government figures were also detained, the ministry said in a Facebook post. It said their whereabouts were unknown.

“The reported detentions of the prime minister, government officials and politicians are unacceptable,” said the recently formed U.N. political mission, which has a mandate to assist the country’s political transition and protect human rights.

The mission called on Sudan’s security forces “to immediately release those who have been unlawfully detained or placed under house arrest” and urged all parties to “exercise utmost restraint.”

Diplomats have joined in a chorus of concern over the events that rocked Sudan on Monday, as Sudanese security forces detained senior government officials in undisclosed locations and thousands flooded the street in protest, two years after mass demonstrations helped topple former autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

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CAIRO — The Arab League has released a statement of “deep concern” about the apparent military coup in Sudan.

The Secretary-General of the 22-member bloc, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, urged all parties on Monday to “fully abide” by the constitutional declaration signed in August 2019, which had aimed to pave the way for a transition to civilian rule and democratic elections following the ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

“There are no problems that cannot be resolved without dialogue,” Aboul Gheit said after Sudan’s military detained the country’s interim prime minister along with other top Cabinet officials and protesters poured into streets of the capital, Khartoum.

“It is important to respect all decisions and agreements that were decided upon ... refraining from any measures that would disrupt the transitional period and shake stability in Sudan,” the statement added.

CAIRO — The European Union has joined the United States in expressing grave concern about a possible military takeover underway in Sudan.

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell tweeted on Monday that he’s following events in the northeast African nation with the “utmost concern,” after reports emerged that Sudanese military forces had detained several senior government officials, including the interim prime minister.

“The EU calls on all stakeholders and regional partners to put back on track the transition process,” Borrell wrote, referring to Sudan’s fragile transition from autocracy to democracy after the ouster of longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir in 2019.

Earlier, U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman said Washington was “deeply alarmed” and indicated that a military coup would threaten American aid to the impoverished country.

“As we have said repeatedly, any changes to the transitional government by force puts at risk U.S. assistance,” the U.S. Bureau of African Affairs wrote on Twitter.

Russia marks another record number of daily COVID-19 cases

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia reported another daily record of confirmed coronavirus cases Monday as a surge in infections has prompted the Kremlin to tell most people to stay away from work starting later this week.

The Russian government’s coronavirus task force tallied 37,930 new confirmed cases in 24 hours, the highest number since the start of the pandemic. The task force also reported 1,069 more COVID-19 deaths in the same period, slightly fewer than a record of 1,075 reached over the weekend.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered Russians not to go to work between Oct. 30 and Nov. 7, when the country will observe an extended holiday. During that time, most state organizations and private businesses, except for those operating key infrastructure and a few others, are to halt work.

In some of Russia’s 85 regions where the situation is particularly grave, Putin said the nonworking period could begin earlier and be extended beyond Nov. 7. Six of them — Kursk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novgorod, Perm, Samara and Voronezh — started the off-work period Monday.

Officials in Moscow ordered it to begin Thursday, with gyms, most entertainment venues and most stores closed for 11 days 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 after Nov. 7.

Putin has also told local officials to order unvaccinated people older than 60 to stay home and close nightclubs and other entertainment venues.

Russian authorities hope the idle time will help limit the spread of the virus by keeping people out of offices and off public transportation, where mask mandates have been loosely enforced.

Overall, Russia has registered over 8.2 million confirmed virus cases and 231,669 deaths, by far the highest death toll in Europe and the fifth-highest in the world after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico.

The government has blamed the latest spike in infections and deaths on low vaccination rates and lax

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public attitudes toward taking precautions. Only about 45 million Russians — roughly a third of the country's 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 uptake has been slow, blamed in part on conflicting signals from authorities.

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

Whistleblower Haugen to testify as UK scrutinizes Facebook

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Former Facebook data scientist turned whistleblower Frances Haugen plans to answer questions Monday from lawmakers in the United Kingdom who are working on legislation to rein in the power of social media companies.

Haugen is set to appear before a parliamentary committee scrutinizing the British government's draft legislation to crack down on harmful online content, and her comments could help lawmakers beef up the new rules. She's testifying the same day that Facebook is set to release its latest earnings and that The Associated Press and other news organizations started publishing stories based on thousands of pages of internal company documents she obtained.

It will be her second appearance before lawmakers after she testified in the U.S. Senate earlier this month about the danger she says the company poses, from harming children to inciting political violence and fueling misinformation. Haugen cited internal research documents she secretly copied before leaving her job in Facebook's civic integrity unit.

The documents, which Haugen provided to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, allege Facebook prioritized profits over safety and hid its own research from investors and the public. Some stories based on the files have already been published, exposing internal turmoil after Facebook was blindsided by the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol riot and how it dithered over curbing divisive content in India, and more is to come.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has disputed Haugen's portrayal of the company as one that puts profit over the well-being of its users or that pushes divisive content, saying a false picture is being painted. But he does agree on the need for updated internet regulations, saying lawmakers are best able to assess the tradeoffs.

Haugen told U.S. lawmakers that she thinks a federal regulator is needed to oversee digital giants like Facebook, something that officials in Britain and the European Union are already working on.

The U.K. government's online safety bill calls for setting up a regulator that would hold companies to account when it comes to removing harmful or illegal content from their platforms, such as terrorist material or child sex abuse images.

"This is quite a big moment," Damian Collins, the lawmaker who chairs the committee, said ahead of the hearing. "This is a moment, sort of like Cambridge Analytica, but possibly bigger in that I think it provides a real window into the soul of these companies."

Collins was referring to the 2018 debacle involving data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica, which gathered details on as many as 87 million Facebook users without their permission.

Representatives from Facebook and other social media companies plan to speak to the committee Thursday.

Ahead of the hearing, Haugen met the father of Molly Russell, a 14-year-old girl who killed herself in 2017 after viewing disturbing content on Facebook-owned Instagram. In a chat filmed by the BBC, Ian Russell told Haugen that after Molly's death, her family found notes she wrote about being addicted to Instagram.

Haugen also is scheduled to meet next month with European Union officials in Brussels, where the bloc's executive commission is updating its digital rulebook to better protect internet users by holding online companies more responsible for illegal or dangerous content.

Under the U.K. rules, expected to take effect next year, Silicon Valley giants face an ultimate penalty of

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up to 10% of their global revenue for any violations. The EU is proposing a similar penalty.

The U.K. committee will be hoping to hear more from Haugen about the data that tech companies have gathered. Collins said the internal files that Haugen has turned over to U.S. authorities are important because it shows the kind of information that Facebook holds — and what regulators should be asking when they investigate these companies.

The committee has already heard from another Facebook whistleblower, Sophie Zhang, who raised the alarm after finding evidence of online political manipulation in countries such as Honduras and Azerbaijan before she was fired.

See full coverage of the “Facebook Papers” here: <https://apnews.com/hub/the-facebook-papers>

Follow Kelvin Chan at twitter.com/chanman

Youngkin’s school warnings intensify GOP’s suburban push

By STEVE PEOPLES, SARAH RANKIN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

ASHLAND, Va. (AP) — Glenn Youngkin wants voters in Virginia to hear an urgent message: Your children are in danger.

In a speech in Northern Virginia’s suburbs last week, the Republican candidate for governor highlighted the murky case of a student who allegedly committed sex crimes in two area schools. He said the incidents, which have sparked community outrage, are the result of failed Democratic leadership.

“What other tragedy awaits Virginia’s children?” an atypically grim-faced Youngkin asked from the podium, flanked by a collection of parents and schoolchildren.

On the eve of the Nov. 2 election, Youngkin’s dark message represents a new front in his monthslong push to repair the Republican Party’s standing in the suburbs, where college-educated moms and dads forcefully turned against Donald Trump’s GOP.

Shying away from Trump and his divisive rhetoric for much of the year, Youngkin has adopted a suburban strategy that instead emphasizes an approachable image and “kitchen table” issues like taxes, public safety and education. He’s also tried to link his education platform to the frustrations of Virginia activist groups — many of them run by officials with former ties to the Trump administration, the Republican Party or both — already upset by school pandemic restrictions and transgender policies, as well as classroom curricula they see as too liberal and un-American.

Youngkin’s final-days focus on sexual predators in schools, hardly a widespread issue, will test the limits of his suburban outreach and provide lessons for Republicans aiming to retake control of Congress next year.

In competitive suburban districts from California to Connecticut, Republicans are heading into the midterms searching for a post-Trump playbook to rebalance the political landscape. If Youngkin wins, many GOP candidates will likely embrace his rhetoric. A loss, however, could signal that the hard-line approach has limited appeal beyond the Republican base.

Less than two weeks before Election Day in Virginia, there are signs that Youngkin’s strategy is working.

Democrat Terry McAuliffe’s campaign privately concedes the race is a toss-up, despite built-in advantages in a state President Joe Biden carried by 10 percentage points last fall. New polling from Monmouth University, which has the race tied, suggested that Youngkin may be gaining some support among those deciding between the two candidates in the final months of the campaign, including in the Northern Virginia suburbs.

Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute, also cited a shift in voters’ top issues away from the pandemic, which tends to favor Democrats, and toward the economy and education, where the politics are murkier.

McAuliffe’s fight to maintain his party’s advantage with suburban voters has centered on linking Youngkin to Trump, who was twice rejected by Virginia voters. McAuliffe released an ad this week in which his opponent and Trump use nearly identical language. While Trump has endorsed Youngkin and the two share

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positions on several policies, the Virginia Republican has spent millions of dollars from his personal fortune on television ads defining himself as a moderate Republican businessman.

Youngkin chief strategist Jeff Roe says the campaign has targeted a universe of roughly 15% of the electorate that he calls "Peloton dads and soccer moms," a group of persuadable independents that tend to be college-educated, white and suburban. To reach them, Youngkin has rolled out a consistent advertising strategy and campaign events focused on local issues.

McAuliffe "is running a campaign on issues nobody's talking about and running against somebody who's not on the ballot. No wonder he's not doing well," Roe said. "We're talking to people about issues they care about and we're running against Terry McAuliffe."

Some Democrats are concerned.

In the Richmond suburbs, Alsuin Preis, a member of the Henrico County Democrats executive committee, said she's skeptical Youngkin will sway many Democratic women, but she worries he might appeal to anti-Trump Republicans. She has noticed a surge of Youngkin yard signs in her neighborhood, a swing district that shifted blue after Trump's election.

"Glenn Youngkin has given them permission to not be ashamed anymore," she said of her Republican neighbors.

Two decades ago, George W. Bush focused on education to portray himself as a "compassionate conservative." Youngkin is trying to do the same by talking up his own plans to raise teacher pay and boost education spending. Both are also McAuliffe priorities.

But a pair of recent cases of alleged high school sexual assault have allowed Youngkin to connect his education platform to the prospect of violence in schools.

The first occurred in a restroom at Stone Bridge High School in Ashburn, in Northern Virginia's Loudoun County, on May 28. The father of the victim was arrested during a school board meeting the following month, as officials were discussing transgender school bathroom policies, after an altercation with another parent. On Oct. 6, a separate incident occurred at Broad Run High School, about 3 miles from Stone Bridge.

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that a 14-year-old male was arrested in connection with the May 28 assault and charged with two counts of forcible sodomy. Police have since announced that the same suspect has been charged with sexual battery and abduction of a fellow student in the Oct. 6 incident.

In response to outrage from parents that the same student allegedly was allowed to commit two assaults in different schools, Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent Scott Ziegler apologized last week and said school officials will review disciplinary procedures.

Youngkin's decision to address the incidents during the closing days of his campaign does carry risk. On Friday, the state police confirmed it was investigating multiple threats against a county prosecutor, who criticized Youngkin in a TV interview for "inflaming" the community.

Still, the cases have supplemented what Youngkin's campaign already saw as an issue of strength during the race's home stretch: standing up for parents.

"It's less about ideology. Now we're talking about a parent's role as it influences the safety of their child," said Alleigh Marré, a Virginia mother and former Trump administration staffer who leads an organization called Free to Learn Coalition. "I think most parents, when they look at what occurred in Loudoun, they see a father who was sticking up for his daughter who was a survivor of sexual assault and yet the repercussions came back to the dad."

Earlier this year, her group spent heavily on ads criticizing school districts in Virginia, New York and Arizona for politicizing classrooms. This week, it announced a \$1 million-plus buy on digital and television advertising statewide in Virginia aiming to expose school "policies that would silence parents," while highlighting McAuliffe's debate comment that parents shouldn't tell schools what books to teach.

On the ground in Northern Virginia, Briana Howard, a 32-year-old mom of a second grader in Fairfax County schools, said her family struggled during last year's classroom closures. She supported them initially, but felt they went on for far too long.

Howard said she typically votes for Democrats and voted for Biden last year but is supporting Youngkin

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because of his stance on education and her frustration with Democrats, who she feels have catered to teachers unions instead of families.

She attended one of Youngkin's recent rallies and described being "very moved" to hear that he was taking the alleged sexual assaults seriously and demanding an investigation.

"He was very passionate about what he said and just really made me feel like he's going to listen to parents and he's going to listen to our voices. And he's going to not just listen to us but change what is happening," she said.

Crew member: Baldwin careful with guns before fatal shooting

By RYAN PEARSON and GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A camera operator told authorities that Alec Baldwin had been careful with weapons on the set of the film "Rust" before the actor shot and killed a cinematographer with a gun he'd been told was safe to use, court records released Sunday show.

Cameraman Reid Russell told a detective that Baldwin was rehearsing a scene Thursday in which he was set to draw his gun while sitting in a church pew and point it at the camera. Russell said he was unsure whether the weapon was checked before it was handed to Baldwin.

The camera wasn't rolling when the gun went off, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, Russell told a detective according to a search warrant affidavit.

Authorities said Friday that the assistant director, Dave Halls, had handed the weapon to Baldwin and announced "cold gun," indicating it was safe to use. When asked about how Baldwin treated firearms on the set, Russell said the actor was very careful, citing an instance when Baldwin made sure a child actor was not near him when a gun was being discharged.

The affidavit released Sunday also includes statements by director Joel Souza, who was standing behind Hutchins and was wounded.

It detailed the moments before the shooting and shows that there was turmoil on the set the day of the shooting. Several members of the camera crew walked off the production in a dispute over payment and lodging, Russell said, and he was left with a lot of work to do. Only one camera was available to shoot, and it had to be moved because the light had shifted and there was a shadow.

Souza said that he was focused on how the scene would appear on camera. He said he recalled hearing the phrase "cold gun" being used before the shooting.

He said the scene they were shooting did not call for the use of live rounds.

Souza described the gunshot as sounding like a whip and a loud pop.

On Sunday, a crew member who worked with Halls on another project said she had raised safety concerns about him in 2019.

Maggie Goll, a prop maker and licensed pyrotechnician, said in a statement that she filed an internal complaint with the executive producers of Hulu's "Into the Dark" series in 2019 over concerns about Halls' behavior on set. Goll said in a phone interview Sunday that Halls disregarded safety protocols for weapons and pyrotechnics and tried to continue filming after the supervising pyrotechnician lost consciousness on set.

Halls has not returned phone calls and email messages seeking comment.

The fatal shooting and previous experiences point to larger safety issues that need to be addressed, Goll said, adding that crew member safety and wellbeing were top issues in recent contract negotiations between a union that represents film and TV workers and a major producers' group.

"This situation is not about Dave Halls. ... It's in no way one person's fault," she said. "It's a bigger conversation about safety on set and what we are trying to achieve with that culture."

The film's chief electrician Serge Svetnoy blamed producers for Hutchins' death in an emotional Facebook post on Sunday. Svetnoy said he had worked with Hutchins on multiple films and faulted "negligence and unprofessionalism" among those handling weapons on the set. He said producers hired an inexperienced armorer.

Hollywood professionals say they're baffled by the circumstances and production crews have quickly

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stepped up safety measures.

Jeffrey Wright, who has worked on projects including the James Bond franchise and the upcoming movie "The Batman," was acting with a weapon on the set of "Westworld" when news broke of the shooting Thursday at a New Mexico ranch. "We were all pretty shocked. And it informed what we did from that moment on," he said in an interview Sunday at the Newport Beach Film Festival.

"I don't recall ever being handed a weapon that was not cleared in front of me — meaning chamber open, barrel shown to me, light flashed inside the barrel to make sure that it's cleared," Wright said. "Clearly, that was a mismanaged set."

Actor Ray Liotta agreed with Wright that the checks on firearms are usually extensive.

"They always — that I know of — they check it so you can see," Liotta said. "They give it to the person you're pointing the gun at, they do it to the producer, they show whoever is there that it doesn't work."

A vigil for Hutchins was held Sunday in Southern California, where attendees exchanged tearful hugs and speakers echoed calls for heightened safety standards.

Baldwin, who is known for his roles in "30 Rock" and "The Hunt for Red October" and his impression of former President Donald Trump on "Saturday Night Live," has described the killing as a "tragic accident."

Flaccus reported from Portland, Oregon. Michelle Eaton in Newport Beach, California, contributed to this report.

Stripping military bases of Confederate names stirs passions

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

BLACKSTONE, Va. (AP) — Civil War history casts a long shadow in Virginia, the birthplace of Confederate generals, scene of their surrender and now a crossroad of controversy over renaming military bases that honor rebel leaders.

In and around Blackstone, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southwest of Richmond, that shadow can stir passions when talk turns to nearby Fort Pickett. Some are troubled by Congress requiring the Pickett name be dropped as part of a wider scrubbing of military base names that commemorate the Confederacy or honor officers who fought for it. In all, the names of at least nine Army bases in six states will be changed.

Others here say it's high time to drop the names.

"Change them!" says Nathaniel Miller, a Black member of the town council who was stationed at Pickett after he returned from Vietnam in 1973. "It should have happened a long time ago," he says, because the names are a reminder of slavery and a period in American history when Black people had no voice.

Fort Pickett's namesake is Maj. Gen. George E. Pickett, best remembered for a failed Confederate assault at Gettysburg that became known as Pickett's Charge. He was a Virginia native and a West Point graduate who resigned his U.S. Army officer commission shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

The push to rename Fort Pickett and other bases is part of a national reckoning with centuries of racial injustice, triggered most recently by the May 2020 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. For years, the military defended the naming of bases after Confederate officers; as recently as 2015 the Army argued that the names did not honor the rebel cause but were a gesture of reconciliation with the South.

Congress easily agreed last year to compel the name changes to remove what are seen by many as emblems of human bondage and Black oppression.

Reflecting a shift in the military's thinking, Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has spoken forcefully about a legacy of Black pain reflected in Confederate names at Army bases where today at least 20% of soldiers are Black. He said those names can be reminders to Black soldiers that the rebel officers fought for an institution that may have enslaved their ancestors.

Milley told a House committee in June 2020 the Confederacy doesn't deserve to be commemorated in this way.

"It was an act of rebellion, it was an act of treason at the time, against the Union, against the Stars and Stripes, against the U.S. Constitution," he said. "And those officers turned their back on their oath. Now,

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some have a different view of that. Some think it's heritage. Others think it's hate."

No one around Blackstone seems to know why the government picked the Pickett name in the first place. The 1942 dedication ceremony for what originally was called Camp Pickett, attended by the general's descendants, was held on July 3 to coincide with the 79th anniversary of his Gettysburg charge. An Associated Press account of the ceremony quoted Virginia Gov. Colgate Darden saying the story of Pickett's Charge "will live forever as an epic of superb courage" that made him a Virginia "immortal."

Some folks, like Greg Eanes, an Air Force veteran who grew up in the nearby town of Crewe, see removing the Pickett name as disrespecting the rebels and their descendants.

"In my opinion, it is nothing less than cultural genocide, albeit with a velvet glove," Eanes says, standing beside a still-visible Confederate trench on a battlefield in an adjacent county. "The South has a unique history. Many of its people have ancestors and family members who were in the Confederate armies. It would be wrong, in my opinion, to dismiss — just arbitrarily dismiss — their concerns."

Still, stripping Fort Pickett of its Confederate connection is hardly a hot topic around here.

"There was probably a time in my life when this would have gotten me riled up," says Billy Coleburn, 52, a Blackstone native who publishes the local newspaper and is mayor of the town of about 3,500 residents.

"The times change," he adds.

Local innkeepers Jim and Christine Hasbrouck applaud the removal of Confederate generals' names.

"We need to stop putting them on a pedestal," says Jim.

Fort Pickett is used mainly by the Virginia National Guard. Situated in what is known as Southside Virginia, it is roughly halfway between Richmond, former capital of the Confederacy, and Appomattox, where Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his Confederate forces in 1865.

This is a heavily Republican area that voted for Donald Trump over Joe Biden by 57% to 42% last November and also favored Trump over Hillary Clinton four years earlier by a 55% to 42% margin. Reminders of the Civil War are not hard to find here; up the road among groves of pine, elm, maple and oak is Sailor's Creek Battlefield State Park, scene of a series of battles on April 6, 1865, in which Confederate forces — including a unit commanded by Pickett — were defeated. Three days later, Lee surrendered at Appomattox.

Congress last year created a federal commission to recommend new names for at least nine Army bases named for Confederate officers, including three in Virginia. The others are in North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas. The law was passed over the objection of Trump, who argued that renaming disrespects those who trained at the bases.

Two active Navy ships also will be renamed. The USNS Maury, an oceanographic survey ship, was named for Matthew Fontaine Maury, a naval officer and scientist who resigned to join the Confederates. The cruiser USS Chancellorsville was named for the 1863 Confederate victory at Chancellorsville, Virginia.

Tom Wilkinson, a Blackstone resident and retired Army colonel who commanded Fort Pickett from 2008 to 2012, says he accepts the renaming decision but considers it a mistake.

"If we could look back in hindsight, I would say leave it alone," Wilkinson says. "Because what's next? Are you going to change the names of streets throughout the United States?"

In fact the post-George Floyd debate over racial injustice does extend beyond military base names. Pickett, for example, is a name that stirs controversy as far away as Washington state. In 2019 the Bellingham city council voted to remove the Pickett name from a bridge that troops under his command built during his establishment of a frontier post called Fort Bellingham in the 1850s.

A hotter topic here in Nottoway County is a November referendum on whether to relocate a Confederate war monument that has stood in front of the county courthouse since 1893.

Fort Pickett is among the last bases to be visited by members of the federal Naming Commission created by Congress. In their other visits, the commissioners were generally well received by communities, although some people "took the opportunity to vent a little," according to Michelle Howard, a retired Navy admiral who heads the commission, which will visit Pickett soon.

Aside from his decision to take up arms against the federal government, Pickett's military record is the subject of conflicting interpretation by historians. But it's generally agreed that his performance was spotty

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at best.

After the decimation of his division at Gettysburg in 1863, Pickett commanded Confederate forces in North Carolina and Virginia. His defeat at Five Forks, about 20 miles east of Blackstone, in 1865 was especially humiliating because he had slipped away earlier to a fish bake, not expecting a Union attack. Days later he fled the battlefield at Sailor's Creek after his men were overwhelmed and forced to surrender.

Whatever the details of his legacy, people who grew up near Fort Pickett say the name change won't really matter.

"It will always be Pickett to me," says Leigh Hart, who was born and raised in Blackstone. "It will be Pickett forever."

AP source: Manchin agreeable to wealth tax for Biden plan

By LISA MASCARO and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pivotal Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin appears to be on board with White House proposals for new taxes on billionaires and certain corporations to help pay for President Joe Biden's scaled-back social services and climate change package.

Biden huddled with the conservative West Virginia Democrat and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer at the president's Delaware home on Sunday as they work on resolving the disputes between centrists and progressives that have stalled the Democrats' wide-ranging bill. A person who insisted on anonymity to discuss Manchin's position told The Associated Press the senator is agreeable to the White House's new approach on the tax proposals.

What had been a sweeping \$3.5 trillion plan is now being eyed as \$1.75 trillion package. That's within a range that could still climb considerably higher, according to a second person who insisted on anonymity to discuss the private talks.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said that even at "half" the original \$3.5 trillion proposed, Biden's signature domestic initiative would be larger than any other legislative package with big investments in health care, child care and strategies to tackle climate change.

"It is less than what was projected to begin with, but it's still bigger than anything we have ever done in terms of addressing the needs of America's working families," Pelosi said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union."

Democrats are working intensely to try again to wrap up talks on the measure so the president can spotlight his administration's achievements to world leaders at two overseas summits on the economy and climate change that get underway this week.

Biden met with Manchin and Schumer, D-N.Y., at the president's home in Wilmington after Democrats missed last week's deadline to resolve disputes. Biden has said he'd like to see a \$2 trillion package and they are trying again this upcoming week to reach agreement.

It's unclear what level of the new taxes Manchin would support, but he generally backs the White House proposals, according to the person who insisted on anonymity to discuss Manchin's position. Neither person insisting on anonymity was authorized to discuss the negotiations by name.

The White House said the breakfast meeting was a "productive discussion" about the president's agenda. The talks appeared to last for hours, but no decisions were announced. The Democrats "continued to make progress," the White House said in its post-meeting statement.

Resolving the revenue side is key as the Democrats insist the new spending will be fully paid for by the various taxes.

Manchin and another Democrat, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have almost on their own halted Biden's proposal from advancing. With Republican opposition and an evenly split 50-50 Senate, Biden has no votes to spare, and the two Democratic senators have insisted on reducing the size of the enormous package and pressed for other changes.

One key debate has been over the revenues to pay for the package, after Sinema rejected an earlier plan to reverse the Republican-led 2017 tax cuts and raise rates on corporations earning more than \$5

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million a year and wealthy Americans earning more than \$400,000, or \$450,000 for couples.

Instead, the White House is considering a tax on the investment incomes of billionaires — fewer than 1,000 of the wealthiest Americans with at least \$1 billion in assets. It also has floated a 15% corporate minimum tax that is designed to ensure all companies pay what Biden calls their “fair share” — ending the practice of some big-name firms paying no taxes.

Democrats initially planned that Biden’s package would contain \$3.5 trillion worth of spending and tax initiatives over 10 years. But demands by moderates led by Manchin and Sinema to contain costs mean its final price tag could well be less than \$2 trillion.

Disputes remain over far-reaching investments, including plans to expand Medicare coverage with dental, vision and hearing aid benefits for seniors; child care assistance; and free pre-kindergarten.

Pelosi, D-Calif., said on CNN that Democrats were still working to keep in provisions for four weeks of paid family leave but acknowledged that other proposals such as expanding Medicare to include dental coverage could prove harder to save because of cost.

Pelosi reiterated that about 90% is wrapped up and said she expected an agreement by week’s end, paving the way for a House vote on a separate \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill before next Sunday, Oct. 31, when a series of transportation programs will lapse. The Senate approved over the summer the package of road, broadband and other public works projects, but the measure stalled in the House during deliberations on the broader Biden bill.

Manchin, whose state has a major coal industry, has opposed Biden’s initial climate change proposals, which involved a plan to penalize utilities that do not switch quickly to clean energy. Democrats are now also compiling other climate change strategies to meet Biden’s goal of reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030.

Democrats were hoping Biden could cite major accomplishments when he attends a global conference in Scotland on climate change in early November after attending a summit of world leaders in Rome.

Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent who caucuses with Democrats, said the expected cuts to the clean energy provisions in the spending bill were especially disappointing.

“If we’re going to get the rest of the world to take serious steps to remedy this problem, we’ve got to do it ourselves,” King said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Pelosi insisted that Democrats had pieced together other policies in the spending bill that could reduce emissions. “We will have something that will meet the president’s goals,” she said.

Democrats also want to make progress that could help Democrat Terry McAuliffe win a neck-and-neck Nov. 2 gubernatorial election in Virginia.

Rep. Ro Khanna, a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, maintained that his caucus will not budge on supporting the infrastructure bill before Oct. 31 if there is no agreement on the broader package, which would be passed under so-called budget reconciliation rules.

“The president needs the reconciliation agreement to go to Glasgow,” Khanna, D-Calif., said on “Fox News Sunday.” He added: “That’s what is going to deal with climate change, that’s what’s going to hit his goals of 50% reduction by 2030. I’m confident we will have an agreement.”

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

China to start vaccinating children to age 3 as cases spread

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Children as young as 3 will start receiving COVID-19 vaccines in China, where 76% of the population has been fully vaccinated and authorities are maintaining a zero-tolerance policy toward outbreaks.

Local city and provincial level governments in at least five provinces issued notices in recent days announcing that children ages 3-11 will be required to get their vaccinations.

The expansion of the vaccination campaign comes as parts of China take new clampdown measures to

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try to stamp out small outbreaks. Gansu, a northwestern province heavily dependent on tourism, closed all tourist sites Monday after finding new COVID-19 cases. Residents in parts of Inner Mongolia have been ordered to stay indoors due to an outbreak there.

The National Health Commission reported 35 new cases of local transmission had been detected over the past 24 hours, four of them in Gansu. Another 19 cases were found in the Inner Mongolia region, with others scattered around the country.

China has employed lockdowns, quarantines and compulsory testing for the virus throughout the pandemic and has largely stamped out cases of local infection while fully vaccinating 1.07 billion people in its population of 1.4 billion.

In particular, the government is concerned about the spread of the more contagious delta variant by travelers and about having a largely vaccinated public ahead of the Beijing Olympics in February. Overseas spectators already have been banned from the Games, and participants will have to stay in a bubble separating them from people outside.

China's most widely used vaccines, from Sinopharm and Sinovac, have shown efficacy in preventing severe disease and transmission of the virus, based on public data. But the protection they offer against the delta variant has not been answered definitively, although officials say they remain protective.

Hubei, Fujian and Hainan provinces all issued provincial level notices alerting new vaccination requirements, while individual cities in Zhejiang province and Hunan province have also issued similar announcements.

China in June had approved two vaccines — Sinopharm's from the Beijing Institute of Biological Products and Sinovac — for children age 3-17, but it has only been vaccinating those 12 and older. In August, regulators approved another, Sinopharm's from the Wuhan Institute of Biological Products.

After the vaccines received domestic approval for children in China, foreign governments began giving the shots to children in their own countries. Cambodia uses both Sinovac and Sinopharm's shots in children 6-11. Regulators in Chile approved Sinovac for children as young as 6. In Argentina, regulators approved the Sinopharm vaccine for children as young as age 3.

Many developing countries left out of the race to get shots from Western pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Moderna bought Chinese vaccines. China has shipped more than 1.2 billion doses as of September, according to its Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Even with widespread domestic and global use, not every parent is reassured about the vaccine, citing less publicly available data on the shots.

Wang Lu, who lives in the southern city of Fuzhou in Fujian province, said she isn't particularly rushing to get her 3-year-old son vaccinated. "I'm just not very clear on the vaccine's safety profile, so I don't really want to get him vaccinated, at the very least, I don't want to be the first," Wang said.

Sinovac started an efficacy trial with 14,000 child participants across multiple countries in September. Its approval in China was based on smaller phase 1 and phase 2 trials. Sinopharm's Beijing shot was also approved based on smaller phase 1 and phase 2 trials. These were published later in peer-reviewed journals.

Other parents said they weren't concerned, given that many other people had already gotten the shot.

Wu Cong, a mom of a 7-year old, said her daughter's school in Shanghai hadn't yet notified them of any vaccinations.

"I think this isn't too different from the flu vaccine, there's already been so many people vaccinated, so I don't have too many worries," said Wu.

Associated Press researcher Chen Si in Shanghai contributed to this report.

In France, Trump-like TV pundit rocks presidential campaign

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A survivor of the terrible journey to Auschwitz remembered how the youngest wailed. There were 99 children squeezed among 751 adults gasping for air, crazed by thirst and hunger, aboard convoy No. 63 that departed Paris at 10 minutes past midday on Dec. 17, 1943.

The 828 murdered at the death camp from that trainload alone included 3-year-old Francine Baur, her

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sister Myriam, 9, their brothers Antoine and Pierre, 6 and 10, and their parents Odette and André.

All born in France, their French citizenship proved worthless under France's wartime Vichy regime that teamed up with the country's Nazi occupiers and their extermination of Jews.

So when André Baur's great-nephew, a Paris mayor, was catching up on his Twitter feed recently and saw a claim reported in French media that Adolf Hitler's Vichy collaborators safeguarded France's Jews from the Holocaust, he was revolted. Worst still in the eyes of Ariel Weil, mayor of the French capital's city center, was that the debunked assertion came from a pretender for the French presidency who is himself Jewish.

That person is Eric Zemmour, a rabble-rousing television pundit and author with repeated convictions for hate speech who is finding fervent audiences for his anti-Islam, anti-immigration invective in the early stages of France's presidential race. He is packing auditoriums with paying crowds and filling supporters' heads with visions of a Trump-like leap from small screen to the presidential Elysee Palace when France votes in April.

Although not yet officially declared as a candidate, Zemmour has so far dictated the course and tenor of the campaign. With climbing poll numbers, now consistently in double digits, and a Trump-like knack for generating buzz — recent video of him pointing a sniper rifle at journalists is racking up millions of views — Zemmour is sucking airtime from declared contenders.

He has also destabilized them by hammering on about immigration and the mortal danger he says it poses to France, making it harder for mainstream rivals to steer campaign conversation back to themes — combating climate change, post-pandemic rebuilding and suchlike — they want to focus on.

Zemmour is acting as a presidential contender in all but name. Supporters are soliciting funds and the backing from elected officials that candidates need to run. Shown the rifle at a security show by an exhibitor who said, "When you are president, Mr. Zemmour," he interjected, "Yes."

That is a horrifying scenario for French Jews who are appalled by Zemmour's sugarcoating of the Vichy regime that was led by World War I hero Marshal Philippe Petain. He was tried and sentenced to death at World War II's end, subsequently commuted to life imprisonment.

That Zemmour is himself a descendant of Berber Jews from Algeria, a family history he talks about proudly, deepened the hurt for Jews who lost relatives to the Holocaust.

"Just because he is Jewish, he is doing something that nobody else can do, and that is just disgusting," Weil told The Associated Press in an interview. "History is complicated but this is very simple: Petain did not protect the French Jews."

The frightened men, women and children herded aboard convoy No. 63 swelled what, by World War II's end, became a shameful count of 74,182 Jews deported from France. Most were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz, in Nazi Germany-occupied Poland, where more than 1.1 million people perished.

A Paris court in February acquitted Zemmour on a charge of contesting crimes against humanity — illegal in France — for arguing in a 2019 television debate that Petain saved France's Jews from the Holocaust.

In its verdict, the court said the deportation of foreign and French Jews "was implemented with the active participation of the Vichy government, its officials, and its police." Zemmour's comments negated Petain's role in the extermination, the court added.

But in acquitting Zemmour, it said he'd spoken in the heat of the moment. It also noted that during the trial, Zemmour made a distinction between saying that "some French Jews" were saved (using the word "des" in French), which he maintained was true, and saying "the French Jews" were saved (using the French word "les"), a generality which he said he disavowed.

Yet last month, Zemmour employed "les" when expounding again on Vichy in another broadcast interview, saying: "I say that Vichy protected the French Jews and that it handed over the foreign Jews."

"It's abominable, because these poor people died," he added.

Lawyers who contest his court acquittal plan to cite that interview as evidence when their appeal is heard in January.

Politically, most threatened by Zemmour is French far-right leader Marine Le Pen. Since losing the 2017 presidential runoff to winner Emmanuel Macron, she has watered down some of her policy proposals in hopes of broadening her appeal. But Zemmour is chipping away at her base, seemingly poaching Le Pen

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voters who suspect she's gone soft. Some polls suggest they are neck and neck. But both consistently trail Macron, who is expected to stand again.

While both portray immigration as a threat to French identity, Zemmour uses language that Le Pen balks at and which his critics say positions him at the extremes of the far right. In a country that officially regards itself as colorblind and where public discussion of race is sometimes frowned upon, Zemmour is rare among political figures in openly distinguishing between skin colors. At a recent rally in Versailles, he described woke culture as a plot to make "white, heterosexual, Catholic" men feel "so full of guilt" that they willingly abandon their "culture and civilization."

On Vichy, Zemmour has sought of late to draw a line under that topic. "I am no longer discussing historical points that are discussed by historians," he said in Versailles.

But for French Jews, the damage is already done. Some fear he has muddied decades of work by Holocaust researchers to indelibly document the horrors.

"He is denying something that was evident, that cannot be denied," said Eugenie Cayet, 84, whose father was deported from Paris to Auschwitz and killed.

"What's his goal? To rally all of Le Pen's votes behind him."

Proposed mine tests UK climate efforts ahead of UN meeting

By JO KEARNEY and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

WHITEHAVEN, England (AP) — In the patchwork of hills, lakes and sea that makes up England's north-west corner, most people see beauty. Dave Cradduck sees broken dreams.

The coal mine where Cradduck once worked has long closed. The chemical factory that employed thousands is gone. The nuclear power plant is being decommissioned.

For the 74-year-old Cradduck, a plan for a new coal mine that could bring hundreds of jobs is cause for hope.

But environmentalists view it with horror. They say it sends a disastrous message as the United Kingdom welcomes world leaders, advocates, diplomats and scientists to Glasgow, Scotland, for a United Nations climate conference that starts Oct. 31. The two-week COP26 meeting is considered a last chance to nail down carbon-cutting promises that can keep global warming within manageable limits.

"The U.K. sets itself out as a leader, but it's building a coal mine, which is the most polluting thing that you can do," said Rebecca Willis, professor of energy and climate governance at Lancaster University. "It sends a signal to the rest of the world that the U.K. isn't actually serious."

But Cradduck sees the mine as a sign that "at least someone's interested in the area." He says it "will provide jobs for people who have got mining in their blood."

The proposed new mine symbolizes the dilemma facing the British government: It aims to generate all of the U.K.'s electricity from clean energy sources by 2035, and to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. But Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has also pledged to boost prosperity in England's neglected north with new factories, roads, railways and other infrastructure that environmentalists say is at odds with the government's green agenda.

West Cumbria Mining, the company hoping to build Britain's first deep coal mine in three decades, wants to extract coking coal — a type used to make steel rather than for fuel — from under the Irish Sea. It plans to process the coal on the site of a shuttered chemical plant in Whitehaven, 340 miles (550 kilometers) northwest of London.

The company says this is a new kind of mine, far removed from the dirty, dangerous behemoths whose brick and steel skeletons dot the region's landscape. Designs show curved modern buildings that blend in with the surrounding hills, and the company says it will be the world's first net-zero coal mine, with all of its carbon emissions reduced or offset by credits to the Gold Standard Foundation, an environmental organization.

Alexander Greaves, a lawyer for the mining company, said while opening a new coal mine might look bad at first glance, this project aims to be different.

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"Showing these mines can be made by law ... to capture greenhouse gas emissions and required to offset any residual impact ... is true environmental leadership," he said.

Environmentalists scoff at that idea.

"It's blindingly obvious that the quickest way to stop these carbon emissions and to make radical changes — which we have to do in the next 10 years — is to stop opening any new coal mines," said Maggie Mason, a local opponent of the mine. "The same is true for oil wells and gas wells."

Nature and industry have long vied for supremacy in this part of England. Whitehaven sits on the edge of the Lake District National Park, an area whose beauty inspired William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter. But the area once was home to industries that offered hard, dirty jobs in factories and mines. Now, though, wind turbines spin beside the sea — a sign of Britain's transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, which last year produced almost half of the country's electricity.

That share shrank this year — partly due to a lack of wind — and with the cost of imported natural gas soaring and plans for new nuclear plants moving at a crawl, the U.K. government is still considering new fossil-fuel projects.

Elsewhere, there's the Cambo oilfield in the North Atlantic, west of the Shetland islands, where Shell and Siccar Point Energy plan to extract 170 million barrels of oil. Environmental groups are trying to force the British government to stop the drilling, but Johnson's administration is reluctant to intervene, saying "sources like Cambo are still required" to meet Britain's energy needs as it shifts to a low-carbon economy.

"We need to transition our existing oil and gas sector to a decarbonized platform," Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said last month in the House of Commons, accusing Cambo opponents of wanting "a complete eclipse" of the oil and gas industries "with 250,000 jobs vanishing overnight."

In West Cumbria, the local authority approved the mine a year ago. The area's Conservative mayor, Mike Starkie, says it will be "transformational."

The British government, under pressure from opponents and its own environmental commitments, intervened in March and ordered an inquiry by a planning inspector. He says he will make a recommendation around the end of the year. Then the U.K. government will make a final decision — well after COP26 has ended.

Local supporters of the mine believe they are the silent majority, at risk of being drowned out by environmental activists. Some rallied at the site this month, holding signs that read "Part of the answer, not part of the problem" and "Cumbria coke is the real thing."

"It's been very simplified in the press that it's jobs against the climate," said John Greasley, who helps run a Facebook page in support of the mine. "And, of course, the climate is going to win every time. But it's deeper than that."

Lawless reported from London.

Follow AP's climate coverage at <http://apnews.com/hub/climate>

South Korea's leader vows final push for talks with North

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's president said Monday he'll keep striving to promote peace with North Korea through dialogue until the end of his term next May, after Pyongyang raised animosities with a resumption of provocative weapons tests.

While launching a spate of newly developed weapons in recent weeks, North Korea has also slammed Washington and Seoul over what it calls hostility toward the North. Its actions indicate North Korea wants its rivals to ease economic sanctions against it and accept it as a legitimate nuclear state, experts say.

In his final policy speech at parliament, President Moon Jae-in said he'll "make efforts to the end to help a new order for peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula be established through dialogue and diplomacy."

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Moon, a champion of greater reconciliation with North Korea, once shuttled between Pyongyang and Washington to help facilitate now-stalled nuclear diplomacy between the two countries. Pyongyang turned a cold shoulder on Moon after its diplomacy with Washington broke down in early 2019 amid bickering over the sanctions.

Moon praised himself for paving the way for a peace process on the Korean Peninsula by holding three summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and helping arrange the first-ever North Korea-U.S. summit between Kim and then-President Donald Trump in 2018.

But Moon acknowledged his push for peace through dialogue remains "incomplete."

Moon's single five-year term ends next May, and he's barred by law from seeking reelection. The presidential candidate of Moon's ruling liberal party has unveiled a similar North Korea policy as Moon's. Surveys indicate a neck-and-neck race with a potential conservative candidate, who will likely take a harder line on the North.

Moon's appeasement policy on North Korea has been divisive, with his supporters call him a peace-making mediator while his opponents accused him of helping North Korea find ways to weaken international pressure and perfect its weapons systems.

The North Korean weapons systems tested recently are mostly short- and medium-range weapons that place South Korea and Japan within their striking ranges. Last Tuesday, North Korea fired a ballistic missile from a submarine in its most significant weapons test since President Joe Biden took office in January.

Some experts say North Korea may test a longer-range missile that could pose a direct threat to the American homeland to increase its pressure on Washington in coming weeks.

In part of his efforts to ease tensions, Moon has recently been pushing for a symbolic declaration to end the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty. When Moon meets Pope Francis at the Vatican this week during his European tour, they'll discuss a possible North Korea trip by Francis as the pope has repeatedly expressed hopes to visit the North, according to Moon's office.

South Korea's Unification Ministry said Monday the government will make efforts to help realize Francis' trip to North Korea if related talks have progress. Spokeswoman Lee Jong-joo said a North Korea visit by the pope would make a big contribution to peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Sluggish pace of confirmations vexes Biden White House

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate's willingness to confirm a president's nominees took a downward turn during Donald Trump's first year in office. And it has only gotten worse for President Joe Biden.

About 36% of Biden's nominees have been confirmed so far in the evenly divided Senate, a deterioration from the paltry 38% success rate that Trump saw at the same stage of his presidency. Their predecessors, Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, both saw about two-thirds of their nominees confirmed through Oct. 21, according to tracking by the Partnership for Public Service.

The trend is alarming to good government advocates, who say Washington's ability to meet mounting challenges is being undermined by gaps in leadership. But the slow-walking shows no signs of letting up as senators place holds on a wide swath of nominees to gain leverage and attract public attention.

Among the most notable examples:

—Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, has placed holds on several State and Treasury nominees over a pipeline that will carry natural gas from Russia to Germany. He wants the Biden administration to implement sanctions to stop it.

—Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., had placed holds on all Department of Homeland Security nominees until Vice President Kamala Harris visited the U.S.-Mexico border.

—Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said he will not consent to the nomination of any Defense or State Department nominees until the secretaries of those departments resign for the troubled withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The holds don't prevent nominees from being confirmed, but they force extra steps in a Senate that already moves at a leisurely pace. The backup burns through time on the Senate calendar and forces

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Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to make tough choices about what will see a vote.

While gridlock isn't new, the struggle to staff administrations is getting worse. During the first nine months of the Bush and Obama administrations, the Senate required fewer than 10% of their nominees to advance through time-hogging cloture votes aimed at limiting debate. But Democrats increased that to 40% under Trump. Republicans have responded in kind, ramping it up to more than 50% under Biden, according to White House data.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said there have been "unprecedented delays, obstruction, holds on qualified individuals from Republicans in the Senate." And that, she said, is thwarting the confirmation of ambassadors and economic and national security officials.

"The blame is clear," Psaki said. "It is frustrating."

Holds tell only part of the story, though. The number of positions requiring Senate confirmation keeps growing — from fewer than 800 when Dwight Eisenhower was president to more than 1,200 now. That means more competition for the Senate's time and attention.

"Our system is broken," said Max Stier, the CEO of the Partnership for Public Service. "We have a Senate that was designed for a different era, the equivalent of the country road and the world around it has become a major urban center and it can't manage the traffic that is now trying to go down it."

Stier's organization provides information and training aimed at making government employees more effective. He said delays in filling key government posts make it harder to respond to problems such as the pandemic, the economic fallout that came from it, climate change and foreign threats such as those from China, Russia and North Korea.

"We face an extraordinary set of challenges and our government is our one tool as a society to deal with these big problems," Stier said.

His organization recommends that Congress reduce the number of positions requiring Senate confirmation and give nominees a quicker vote.

"There are legitimate reasons why the Senate would reject a nominee," Stier said. "But the key point here is they ought to be giving them the up-and-down vote fast — not what is happening now."

Senators seem unlikely to relent. Holding up a nominee is a rare chance to gain the administration's attention and perhaps change its course of action. At other times, it gives them an opportunity to make a statement that resonates with their party's voters.

Cruz has been a longtime opponent of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which he says will increase Europe's reliance on Russia for its energy. The Biden administration imposed sanctions on Russian companies and ships for their work on the project, but opted not to punish the German company overseeing it.

Cruz's office said the senator is committed to using whatever leverage he has to force "mandatory sanctions."

"He believes that those sanctions can still prevent Nord Stream 2 from coming online and that the Biden administration can be convinced to implement them," Cruz's office said.

Hawley, meanwhile, has demanded that Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin resign because of the "botched Afghanistan withdrawal."

"Until there is accountability, the least we can do is actually vote for nominees to leadership positions at the State Department and Department of Defense," Hawley said in a statement.

Without the holds, the nominees could be confirmed through a voice vote, a process taking only minutes that can be used so long as no senators object. That's how more than 90% of nominees were confirmed at similar stages of the Bush and Obama presidencies.

There is one bright spot for Biden. He is eclipsing other presidents when it comes to confirming judicial nominees. The Senate has confirmed 16 district and circuit court judges as of Oct. 13, matching the combined total for Bush, Obama and Trump by that date.

Kathryn Dunn Tenpas of the Brookings Institution noted that Obama was criticized for not moving quickly enough on judges. "It's clear to me the Biden people have learned from that mistake," she said.

"I mean, would you rather have life-tenured people get through or would you have people who are go-

ing to probably stay on average for 18 to 24 months in these jobs?" Tenpas said.

During the Trump presidency, it was Republicans who voiced frustration with Democratic tactics to slow the confirmation process. Republican leader Mitch McConnell, then the majority leader, led a change in the chamber's rules that shrank how long the chamber could debate a nominee.

In recent weeks, McConnell has repeatedly criticized Democrats for dedicating so much of the Senate's time to what he described as "mid-level nominations." Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, D-Ill., scoffed at the criticism.

"The reason we have to go through every step, dot every I, cross every T and listen to interminable speeches unrelated to the nominee is his caucus's decision to slow this process down," Durbin said.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said the confirmation process has been a problem for both parties serving in the majority "when everything is so polarized around here."

"I'm hoping this is just an ugly phase," he said.

Associated Press writer Alexandra Jaffe contributed to this report.

Crew member who gave Baldwin gun subject of prior complaint

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — A crew member says she has raised safety concerns in the past about the assistant director who authorities say unwittingly handed actor Alec Baldwin the prop gun that killed a cinematographer on a film set.

Maggie Goll, a prop maker and licensed pyrotechnician, said in a statement that she filed an internal complaint with the executive producers of Hulu's "Into the Dark" series in 2019 over concerns about assistant director Dave Halls' behavior on set. Goll said in a phone interview Sunday that Halls disregarded safety protocols for weapons and pyrotechnics and tried to continue filming after the supervising pyrotechnician lost consciousness on set.

Halls has not returned phone calls and email messages seeking comment.

This week's fatal shooting and some of her previous experiences point to larger safety issues that need to be addressed, Goll said, adding that crew member safety and wellbeing are top issues in ongoing contract negotiations between a union that represents film and TV workers and a major producers' group.

"This situation is not about Dave Halls. ... It's in no way one person's fault," she said. "It's a bigger conversation about safety on set and what we are trying to achieve with that culture."

Baldwin fired a prop gun on the New Mexico set of the film "Rust" Thursday, killing 42-year-old Halyna Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza, who was standing behind her.

The gun Baldwin used was one of three that a firearms specialist, or "armorer," had set on a cart outside the building where a scene was being rehearsed, according to court records. Halls grabbed a gun off a cart and handed it to Baldwin, indicating that the weapon was safe by yelling "cold gun," court papers say. But it was loaded with live rounds, according to the records.

Baldwin, 63, who is known for his roles in "30 Rock" and "The Hunt for Red October" and his impression of former President Donald Trump on "Saturday Night Live," has described the killing as a "tragic accident."

Goll said it should not have happened because there are "so many steps that you have to go through ... that the possibility of it even getting there should be impossible."

Actor Ray Liotta agreed that the checks on firearms are usually extensive.

"They always — that I know of — they check it so you can see," Liotta said in an interview Sunday at the Newport Beach Film Festival. "They give it to the person you're pointing the gun at, they do it to the producer, they show whoever is there that it doesn't work."

Rust Movie Productions has not answered repeated emails seeking comment.

Baldwin, who is a producer on "Rust," met with Hutchins' husband and 9-year-old son Saturday at a hotel in Santa Fe where the actor had been staying during filming. Baldwin and Hutchins' husband can be seen embracing in a photo published by the New York Post.

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A vigil for Hutchins was held Sunday in Southern California, where attendees exchanged tearful hugs and speakers called for heightened safety standards on film sets.

Goll said in her email that during work on "Into the Dark," Halls didn't hold safety meetings and consistently failed to announce the presence of a firearm on set to the crew, as is protocol. The assistant prop master admonished Halls several times for dismissing the actors before they had returned weapons to the props table, she said.

She became most concerned, however, when the supervising pyrotechnician, who is diabetic, was found unconscious in a chair, she said. Halls wanted to resume filming after the man was removed from the set even though Goll, the remaining pyrotechnician on site, didn't have the qualifications to supervise the complicated series of pyrotechnic effects that were planned.

"One of the things that stuck out to me most about that day is the fact that he called out on radio over channel one, 'Hey, Maggie says we can keep going!' and I basically held the button down so he couldn't transmit to anyone else on that channel while I yelled out, 'No, Dave, that's not what I said. We're not doing that,'" she recalled in a phone interview.

She filed an internal complaint with the executive producers of Blumhouse Productions about that day, she said.

"To my knowledge nothing was done after my complaints," she said in an email.

"I am gutted at not pushing harder for greater accountability and safety," she wrote. "Many of us have messaged each other wondering the same thing: is there something we could have done then that would have prevented the tragedy?"

Flaccus reported from Portland, Oregon. Associated Press writers Jake Coyle and Jocelyn Noveck in New York; Ryan Pearson in Los Angeles; Walter Berry in Phoenix; and Michelle Eaton in Newport Beach, California, contributed to this report.

Biden, Schumer, Manchin huddle, but still no budget deal

By LISA MASCARO and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pivotal Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin appears to be on board with White House proposals for new taxes on billionaires and certain corporations to help pay for President Joe Biden's scaled-back social services and climate change package.

Biden huddled with the conservative West Virginia Democrat and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer at the president's Delaware home Sunday as they work on resolving the disputes between centrists and progressives that have stalled the Democrats' wide-ranging bill. A person who requested anonymity to discuss Manchin's position told The Associated Press the senator is agreeable to the White House's new approach on the tax proposals.

What had been a sweeping \$3.5 trillion plan is now being eyed as \$1.75 trillion package. That's within a range that could still climb considerably higher, according to a second person who requested anonymity to discuss the private talks.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said that even at "half" the original \$3.5 trillion proposed, Biden's signature domestic initiative would be larger than any other legislative package with big investments in health care, child care and strategies to tackle climate change.

"It is less than what was projected to begin with, but it's still bigger than anything we have ever done in terms of addressing the needs of America's working families," Pelosi said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union."

Democrats are working intensely to try again to wrap up talks on the measure so the president can spotlight his administration's achievements to world leaders at two overseas summits on the economy and climate change that get underway this week.

Biden met with Manchin and Schumer, D-N.Y., at the president's home in Wilmington after Democrats missed last week's deadline to resolve disputes. Biden has said he'd like to see a \$2 trillion package and

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they are trying again this upcoming week to reach agreement.

It's unclear what level of the new taxes Manchin would support, but he generally backs the White House proposals, according to the person who requested anonymity to discuss Manchin's position. Neither person requesting anonymity was authorized to discuss the negotiations by name.

The White House said the breakfast meeting was a "productive discussion" about the president's agenda. The talks appeared to last for hours, but no decisions were announced. The Democrats "continued to make progress," the White House said in its post-meeting statement.

Resolving the revenue side is key as the Democrats insist the new spending will be fully paid for by the various taxes.

Manchin and another Democrat, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have almost on their own halted Biden's proposal from advancing. With Republican opposition and an evenly split 50-50 Senate, Biden has no votes to spare and the two Democratic senators have insisted on reducing the size of the enormous package and pressed for other changes.

One key debate has been over the revenues to pay for the package, after Sinema rejected an earlier plan to reverse the Republican-led 2017 tax cuts and raise rates on corporations earning more than \$5 million a year and wealthy Americans earning more than \$400,000, or \$450,000 for couples.

Instead, the White House is considering a tax on the investment incomes of billionaires — fewer than 1,000 of the wealthiest Americans with at least \$1 billion in assets. It also has floated a 15% corporate minimum tax that is designed to ensure all companies pay what Biden calls their "fair share" — ending the practice of some big-name firms paying no taxes.

Democrats initially planned that Biden's package would contain \$3.5 trillion worth of spending and tax initiatives over 10 years. But demands by moderates led by Manchin and Sinema to contain costs mean its final price tag could well be less than \$2 trillion.

Disputes remain over far-reaching investments, including plans to expand Medicare coverage with dental, vision and hearing aid benefits for seniors; child care assistance; and free pre-kindergarten.

Pelosi, D-Calif., said on CNN that Democrats were still working to keep in provisions for four weeks of paid family leave but acknowledged that other proposals such as expanding Medicare to include dental coverage could prove harder to save because of cost.

Pelosi reiterated that about 90% is wrapped up and said she expected an agreement by week's end, paving the way for a House vote on a separate \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill before next Sunday, Oct. 31, when a series of transportation programs will lapse. The Senate approved over the summer the package of road, broadband and other public works projects, but the measure stalled in the House during deliberations on the broader Biden bill.

Manchin, whose state has a major coal industry, has opposed Biden's initial climate change proposals, which involved a plan to penalize utilities that do not switch quickly to clean energy. Democrats are now also compiling other climate change strategies to meet Biden's goal of reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030.

Democrats were hoping Biden could cite major accomplishments when he attends a global conference in Scotland on climate change in early November after attending a summit of world leaders in Rome.

Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent who caucuses with Democrats, said the expected cuts to the clean energy provisions in the spending bill were especially disappointing.

"If we're going to get the rest of the world to take serious steps to remedy this problem, we've got to do it ourselves," King said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Pelosi insisted that Democrats had pieced together other policies in the spending bill that could reduce emissions. "We will have something that will meet the president's goals," she said.

Democrats also want to make progress that could help Democrat Terry McAuliffe win a neck-and-neck Nov. 2 gubernatorial election in Virginia.

Rep. Ro Khanna, a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, maintained that his caucus will not budge on supporting the infrastructure bill before Oct. 31 if there is no agreement on the broader

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package, which would be passed under so-called budget reconciliation rules.

"The president needs the reconciliation agreement to go to Glasgow," Khanna, D-Calif., said on "Fox News Sunday." He added: "That's what is going to deal with climate change, that's what's going to hit his goals of 50% reduction by 2030. I'm confident we will have an agreement."

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Race-blind redistricting? Democrats incredulous at GOP maps

By BRYAN ANDERSON and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A decade ago, North Carolina Republicans redrew their legislative districts to help their party in a way that a federal court ruled illegally deprived Black voters of their right to political representation. A state court later struck down Republican-drawn maps as based on pure partisanship.

So, as the GOP-controlled legislature embarks this year on its latest round of redistricting, it has pledged not to use race or partisan data to draw the political lines. Still, the maps Republicans are proposing would tilt heavily toward their party. Several publicly released congressional maps dilute Democratic votes by splitting the state's biggest city, Charlotte — also its largest African American population center — into three or four U.S. House districts and giving the GOP at least a 10-4 advantage in a state that Donald Trump narrowly won last year.

As the once-a-decade redistricting process kicks into high gear, North Carolina is one of at least three states where Republicans say they are drawing maps without looking at racial and party data. But those maps still happen to strongly favor the GOP.

Democrats and civil rights groups are incredulous, noting that veteran lawmakers don't need a spreadsheet to know where voters of various races and different parties live in their state. Plus, under certain scenarios, the Voting Rights Act requires the drawing of districts where the majority of voters are racial or ethnic minorities.

"This is the first redistricting round I've ever heard of this," said Thomas Saenz, president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which is suing Texas Republicans over maps that the GOP said it drew without looking at racial data. "I suspect they're trying to set up a defense for litigation. Because they know the race data — they know where the Black community lives. They know where the Latino community lives."

Jason Torchinsky, general counsel to the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said ignoring racial data is proper in certain circumstances, as in the cases of North Carolina and Texas.

"It depends on where you are," Torchinsky said.

The drawing of legislative lines is often a raw partisan fight because whichever party controls the process can craft districts to maximize its voters' clout — and scatter opposing voters so widely they cannot win majorities.

In 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that federal courts cannot overturn unfair maps on the basis of partisanship. But state courts still can void maps for being too partisan and race remains a legal tripwire in redistricting.

If mapmakers explicitly try to weaken voters' power based on race, they may violate the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal protection under the law. But the Voting Rights Act requires them to consider race if the state has "racially polarized" voting, in which white people consistently vote against candidates backed by a minority racial or ethnic group. The mapmakers must then create a district in which that minority comprises a plurality or majority of voters so they can elect their preferred candidates.

Republicans complain they cannot win.

"It's truly a conundrum and has been for the last decade for the GOP, because when we look at race, we were told we shouldn't have, and those maps were struck down," said North Carolina state Sen. Paul Newton, who co-chairs that state's redistricting committee. "Now that we're not looking at race, the Democrat Party is telling us, 'Oh, you should be looking at race.'"

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North Carolina's redistricting legal fight is part of why the new race-blind approach caught on.

The Republican-controlled legislature has complete control of redistricting; its maps cannot be vetoed by its Democratic governor. A federal court in 2016 found North Carolina Republicans improperly crammed Black voters into two congressional districts to dilute African American votes elsewhere. It ordered the map redrawn, and in a separate case another panel of judges found that dozens of state legislative districts were illegal racial gerrymanders as well. The updated congressional map was the basis of the 2019 Supreme Court case.

But, barely two months later, a North Carolina state court found the GOP advantage in some of the redrawn state legislative maps still violated the state constitution. Based on this and other rulings, Republicans redrew the maps once again in late 2019, this time saying they weren't looking at racial or partisan data, and they passed legal muster.

Then, in August, the legislature formally adopted a rule that it wouldn't consider race or partisanship in its latest line-drawing that would begin after the U.S. Census Bureau released data on population changes over the past decade. Lawmakers noted that, during the epic litigation of the prior decade, a federal court had found the state didn't have racially polarized voting and didn't require special attention to racial data.

Democrats and civil rights groups strenuously objected. The Southern Coalition for Social Justice wrote Republicans a letter warning they would be disenfranchising Black and Latino voters. "They're not listening," said Allison Riggs, head of the group's voting rights program.

Other GOP-controlled states have followed North Carolina's example. For the past five decades, Texas has been found to have violated federal law or the U.S. Constitution in redistricting, including by shortchanging Black and Latino voters. This time, Republicans who control the state Legislature said they wouldn't consider racial data and their lawyers said that was OK.

"I've stated it, and I'll state it again — we drew these maps race blind," Texas state Sen. Joan Huffman, a Republican who drew that state's maps, said in one Senate hearing.

Although almost all of Texas' population growth has come from Latinos, African Americans and Asian Americans, the maps do not create any new majority Black or Latino districts. That latter omission is at the heart of suits by Latino civil rights groups last week as Texas approved its maps.

"The only time that communities of color can get justice is going to the courthouse," said Democratic state Rep. Rafael Anchia, chair of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus.

Ohio Republicans are also enmeshed in litigation over their state legislative plan, which they said was drawn with no racial or partisan data. "It's illegal to use race in drawing districts. That's a violation of federal law," Republican state Senate President Matt Huffman told reporters last month.

Ohio Republicans said that even though they didn't use partisan data, they were targeted in a suit by several community and anti-gerrymandering groups for drawing a partisan map anyway.

"The way the map performs is to really skew partisan outcomes in Ohio," said Freda Levenson, legal director of the ACLU of Ohio, one of the plaintiffs. "It's very likely they did use partisan data."

Riccardi reported from Denver. Associated Press writers Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas, and Julie Carr Smyth in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

Anderson is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

ASEAN leaders hold summit with Myanmar's general shut out

By EILEEN NG and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Southeast Asian leaders are meeting this week for their annual summit where Myanmar's top general, whose forces seized power in February and shattered one of Asia's most phenomenal democratic transitions, has been shut out for refusing to take steps to end the deadly violence.

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Myanmar defiantly protested the exclusion of Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who currently heads its government and ruling military council, from the summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Brunei, which currently leads the 10-nation bloc, will host the three-day meetings starting Tuesday by video due to coronavirus concerns. The talks will be joined by President Joe Biden and the leaders of China and Russia, and are expected to spotlight Myanmar's worsening crisis and the pandemic as well as security and economic issues.

ASEAN's unprecedented sanctioning of Myanmar strayed from its bedrock principles of non-interference in each other's domestic affairs and deciding by consensus, meaning just one member can effectively shoot down a group decision. Myanmar cited the violation of those principles enshrined in the group's charter in rejecting the decision to bar its military leader from the summit.

But the regional group has few other options as the general's intransigence further risked tainting its image as a diplomatic refuge for some of the most intractable tyrants in Asia.

A senior ASEAN diplomat, who joined an Oct. 15 emergency meeting where the foreign ministers decided to rebuff Myanmar, said those two principles bind but "will not paralyze" the bloc. The diplomat called ASEAN's more forceful response "a paradigm shift" but added its conservative principles would likely stay.

"In serious cases like this, when the integrity and credibility of ASEAN is at stake, ASEAN member states or even the leaders and the ministers have that latitude to act," said the diplomat, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the issues publicly.

Instead of Myanmar's top general, the country's highest-ranking veteran diplomat, Chan Aye, was invited to the summit as the country's "non-political" representative, the diplomat said. It remains unclear if Chan Aye will attend.

Myanmar's military-appointed foreign minister joined the online emergency meeting two weeks ago. It was held in a calm manner, although some ministers bluntly expressed their opposition to the Feb. 1 military takeover that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, which overwhelmingly won last November's vote. Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan declared that his government still recognizes Suu Kyi and ousted President Win Myint, both of whom have been detained, as Myanmar's legitimate leaders, according to the diplomat.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, a staunch critic of the military's seizure of power, told his ASEAN counterparts that the principle of non-interference cannot be used "as a shield to avoid issues being addressed" given that the Myanmar crisis has alarmed the region. In a separate online forum last week, he suggested officials and others "do some soul-searching" for ASEAN "on the possibility of moving away from the principle of non-interference toward 'constructive engagement' or 'non-indifference.'"

ASEAN has been under intense international pressure to take steps to help end the violence that has left an estimated 1,100 civilians dead since the army took power and locked up Suu Kyi and others, igniting widespread peaceful protests and armed resistance. U.N. special envoy Christine Schraner Burgener warned last week that Myanmar "will go in the direction of a failed state" if violent conflicts between the military, civilians and ethnic minorities spiral out of control and the democratic setback was not resolved peacefully.

Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide victory in 2015 after more than five decades of military rule. But the military remained powerful and contested her National League for Democracy party's win in last November elections as fraudulent.

ASEAN has not recognized the military leadership although Myanmar remains a member.

The group "must take a bolder step to speak up against non-democratic overthrow of democratically elected government and crimes against humanity against the Myanmar people," said Alexander Arifianto, an Indonesian expert on regional politics at Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. "ASEAN needs to reform its decision-making process."

ASEAN leaders agreed on a five-point contingency plan in an emergency meeting in April in Indonesia that was attended by Min Aung Hlaing. They called for an immediate end to the violence and the start of a dialogue to be mediated by a special ASEAN envoy, who should be allowed to meet all parties. But the

military later repeatedly refused to allow the envoy to meet Suu Kyi and other political detainees in an impasse that is testing the regional bloc.

ASEAN admitted Myanmar in 1997 despite intense opposition from the U.S. and European countries, which then cited its military junta's record of suppressing democracy and human rights. The other members of the bloc are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Gomez reported from Manila, Philippines. Associated Press writers Grant Peck in Bangkok and Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia, contributed to this report.

Florida's top doctor refuses mask, is told to leave meeting

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Florida's top health official was asked to leave a meeting after refusing to wear a mask at the office of a state senator who told him she had a serious medical condition, officials have confirmed.

Florida Senate leader Wilton Simpson, a Republican, sent a memo to senators Saturday regarding the incident at the office of Democratic state Sen. Tina Polsky, asking visitors at the building to be respectful with social interactions. Polsky, who represents parts of Broward and Palm Beach counties, had not yet made public her breast cancer diagnosis.

Polsky told The Associated Press about the tense exchange with state Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo that was first reported by the news site Florida Politics. She said Ladapo and two aides were offered masks and asked to wear them when they arrived for the Wednesday meeting. She did not tell him she had breast cancer, but said she had a serious condition.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says cancer patients are at a higher risk to get severely ill from COVID-19 and may not build the same immunity to vaccines.

Ladapo had asked to meet her in Tallahassee as he seeks confirmation in the Senate after being named to the post by Gov. Ron DeSantis last month.

"It was so shocking to me that he treated me in this manner," Polsky said. "If he is a surgeon general for the next several years, I am really concerned about a future public health emergency and not being able to rely on him for necessary guidance and proper scientific leadership."

Ladapo offered to go outside, but the senator said she did not want to sit on the metal picnic tables on a warm day when her office was nice and spacious. She said she asked whether there was a reason why he couldn't wear a mask, but he wouldn't answer.

Democrats have opposed the appointment of Ladapo, criticizing him for comments and actions related to the pandemic.

A day into his job, Ladapo signed new rules allowing parents to decide whether their children should quarantine or stay in school after being exposed to people who tested positive for COVID-19.

On Thursday at a press conference with DeSantis to oppose vaccine mandates, Ladapo said people were not comfortable with the vaccines because the federal government has not been open about the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines, saying there was a "concerted effort" to hide stories of people with adverse reactions.

Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine has received the full approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, meeting high standards required for the vaccine to be considered safe. It has been administered to millions and proven to be effective against hospitalization and death. However, immunity against infection can wane over time.

Authorities in Sweden, Denmark and Norway earlier this month suspended or discouraged the use of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in young people because of an increased risk of heart inflammation, a very rare side effect associated with the shot.

Ladapo also wrote an opinion column in the Wall Street Journal saying masks have "little or no effect on respiratory virus transmission."

The CDC still recommends people with weakened immune systems, and those in high-transmission areas

to wear masks. Studies have supported their use, with some finding that cloth masks are less effective. In the memo sent by Simpson, the president of the Florida senate, he said that while there's no mask mandate in the Senate, senators can request social distancing and masking within their offices.

"It shouldn't take a cancer diagnosis for people to respect each other's level of comfort with social interactions during a pandemic," he said. "What occurred in Senator Polsky's office was unprofessional and will not be tolerated in the Senate."

The Florida Department of Health's spokeswoman Weesam Khoury said the agency was not aware of any specific Senate protocol, but said it would ask members ahead of time and make necessary accommodations such as meeting through Zoom or outdoors.

The Department of Health "will be addressing this directly with members of the Senate, rather than letting this play out publicly," Khoury said in an email.

Fire on cargo ship off British Columbia coast reported out

By JIM MORRIS Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Canadian Coast Guard officials said Sunday a fire that was burning in several containers aboard a cargo ship off the coast of British Columbia appeared to be out.

The Coast Guard said it received word late Saturday morning that a fire had broken out in 10 damaged containers aboard the MV Zim Kingston, which is now anchored about five miles off the provincial capital of Victoria, and that two of the burning containers held hazardous material identified as potassium amlyxanthate.

"The majority of the fire is actually out," JJ Brickett, federal incident commander with the Canadian Coast Guard, said during a teleconference Sunday. "We still see it smoldering."

The Coast Guard said the hazardous material inside the containers prevented the ship's crew from spraying cold water directly on the fire. An emergency zone had been doubled to two nautical miles around the Zim Kingston.

Brickett said it was "a really good sign" that there was no indication of scorching or charring on adjacent containers.

"Presumably everything that was inside those containers has been consumed by the fire," he said. "The fire is smoldering and we're continuing to cool on either side."

The Joint Rescue and Coordination Centre in Victoria said 16 crewmembers were safely taken off the ship, while five others, including the captain, remained on board at their own behest.

The coast guard said a hazardous materials crew from Vancouver was mobilizing and the owner of the Zim Kingston had contracted the U.S.-based Resolve Marine Group for salvage operations, including fire-fighting and recovery of the containers.

Danaos Shipping Co. which manages the container ship, said in an emailed statement earlier: "No injuries were reported. The fire appears to have been contained."

Brickett said the U.S. Coast Guard had dispatched a tracking buoy to monitor 40 containers that fell overboard from the Zim Kingston in choppy waters Friday. The containers were about 27 nautical miles off the west coast of Vancouver Island on Sunday.

Two of those containers held "materials we would be concerned about," Brickett said, but added that "none of our trajectories right now have any of those containers grounding."

Efforts to retrieve the containers would not be able to start until after a break in a storm that was forecast to worsen until Monday, authorities said.

Brickett said the ship's owners had "been very responsible" and acted properly in hiring the proper resources. It was too early to say what caused the fire or if it was related to the containers falling overboard, he said.

"Our first priority is to stabilize the scene, put the flames out," he said.

Beleaguered Haiti capital brought to brink by fuel shortages

By MATÍAS DELACROIX Associated Press

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's capital has been brought to the brink of exhaustion by fuel shortages, after staggering along despite an earthquake, the assassination of the president, gang violence and mass kidnappings.

More than two weeks of fuel deliveries interrupted by gang blockades and abductions of fuel truck drivers have driven residents of Port-au-Prince to a desperate search for gasoline and diesel. The fuels are widely used to run generators needed to compensate for the country's unreliable electrical system.

The city's main fuel terminals are located in or near gang-dominated neighborhoods like Martissant, La Saline and Cite Soliel, and some gangs have reportedly been demanding extortion payments to allow fuel trucks through.

The gangs have become a powerful force in Haiti. One of the gangs recently kidnapped 17 members of a U.S.-based missionary group and reportedly demanded a ransom of \$1 million each for their release, warning that the hostages will be killed if their demands aren't met. There is no word yet on their fate.

The gangs have also kidnapped hundreds of Haitians, and the government appears unable, or unwilling, to take them on.

Protests broke out Saturday in the Delmas neighborhood, where gas stations have run out of fuel. Police arrived and dispersed the crowds with warning shots of what appeared to be live rounds.

Some of the country's cellphone networks suffered service declines as fuel to run cell tower equipment ran short.

Officials at the Saint Damien hospital, the capital's foremost pediatrics center, said it had only three days of fuel left to run generators that power ventilators and medical equipment. The hospital can run partly on solar power, but that doesn't provide enough electricity for all its needs.

Denso Gay, the hospital's project manager, said Saint Damien is treating two patients with COVID-19 and also handles urgent surgeries, like C-sections.

"I am very worried," Gay said. "The situation is very critical."

"The oxygen is running on electricity. If we don't have electricity to run the oxygen and the (medical) apparatus, we will need to close" to new patients, he said.

Gay estimates the approximately 1,500 gallons of fuel left in the hospital's reserve tanks would last only for about three more days.

The hospital normally gets deliveries of about 3,000 gallons of fuel twice a month.

"We contacted the company, and they said they cannot deliver, they cannot come across town because of the danger to the drivers," Gay said.

The United Nations Children's Fund warned Sunday that "hundreds of women and children who seek emergency care in health facilities are at risk of dying if solutions are not found to the fuel shortage prevailing in Haiti for weeks due to insecurity."

It said several hospitals across the country have sent pleas for help directly to UNICEF and its partners.

"With the insecurity prevailing in Port-au-Prince, the lives of many child-bearing women and newborn babies are in danger because hospitals that should give them life-saving care cannot operate normally due lack of fuel. They risk dying if health services cannot give them adequate care," said Raoul de Torcy, UNICEF Deputy Representative.

UNICEF said it had secured a contract with a local provider to supply hospitals in and around Port-au-Prince with 10,000 gallons of fuel. "But due to insecurity, the provider eventually declared he could transport fuel neither in the Haitian capital, nor in other provinces ... because many truck drivers no longer accept to ply the roads crossing gang-controlled areas for fear of being kidnapped and their truck hijacked."

Meanwhile, capital residents were on a desperate chase to get 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 last week that 150 of its 1,500 branches countrywide were out of diesel.

On Thursday, hundreds of demonstrators blocked roads and burned tires in Port-au-Prince to protest the severe fuel shortage and a spike in insecurity.

Alexandre Simon, an English and French teacher, said he and others were protesting because of the

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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."

Let computers do it: Film set tragedy spurs call to ban guns

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — With computer-generated imagery, it seems the sky's the limit in the magic Hollywood can produce: elaborate dystopian universes. Trips to outer space, for those neither astronauts nor billionaires. Immersive journeys to the future, or back to bygone eras.

But as a shocked and saddened industry was reminded this week, many productions still use guns — real guns — when filming. And despite rules and regulations, people can get killed, as happened last week when Alec Baldwin fatally shot cinematographer Halyna Hutchins after he was handed a weapon and told it was safe.

The tragedy has led some in Hollywood, along with incredulous observers, to ask: Why are real guns ever used on set, when computers can create gunshots in post-production? Isn't even the smallest risk unacceptable?

For Alexi Hawley, it is. "Any risk is too much risk," the executive producer of ABC's police drama "The Rookie" announced in a staff memo Friday, saying the events in New Mexico had "shaken us all."

There "will be no more 'live' weapons on the show," he wrote in a note, first reported by The Hollywood Reporter and confirmed by The Associated Press.

Instead, he said, the policy would be to use replica guns, which use pellets and not bullets, with muzzle flashes added in post-production.

The director of the popular Kate Winslet drama "Mare of Easttown," Craig Zobel, called for the entire industry to follow suit and said gunshots on that show were added after filming, even though on previous productions he has used live rounds.

"There's no reason to have guns loaded with blanks or anything on set anymore," Zobel wrote on Twitter. "Should just be fully outlawed. There's computers now. The gunshots on 'Mare of Easttown' are all digital. You can probably tell, but who cares? It's an unnecessary risk."

Bill Dill — a cinematographer who taught Hutchins, a rising star in her field, at the American Film Institute — expressed disgust in an interview over the "archaic practice of using real guns with blanks in them, when we have readily available and inexpensive computer graphics."

Dill, whose credits include "The Five Heartbeats" and "Dancing in September," said there was added danger from real guns because "people are working long hours" on films and "are exhausted."

"There's no excuse for using live weapons," he said.

A petition was launched over the weekend on change.org for real guns to be banned from production sets.

"There is no excuse for something like this to happen in the 21st century," it said of the tragedy. "This isn't the early 90's, when Brandon Lee was killed in the same manner. Change needs to happen before additional talented lives are lost." Lee, the actor son of martial arts legend Bruce Lee, was killed in 1993 by a makeshift bullet left in a prop gun after a previous scene.

The petition appealed to Baldwin directly "to use his power and influence" in the industry and promote "Halyna's Law," which would ban the use of real firearms on set. As it stands, the U.S. federal workplace safety agency is silent on the issue and most of the preferred states for productions take a largely hands-off approach.

Hutchins, 42, died and director Joel Souza was wounded Thursday on the set of the Western "Rust" when Baldwin fired a prop gun that a crew member unwittingly told him was "cold" or not loaded with live rounds, according to court documents made public Friday.

Souza was later released from the hospital.

The tragedy came after some workers had walked off the job to protest safety conditions and other

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production issues on the film, of which Baldwin is the star and a producer.

In an interview, British cinematographer Steven Hall noted that he worked on a production this year in Madrid that involved "lots of firearms."

"We were encouraged not to use blanks, but to rely on visual effects in post (production) to create whatever effect we wanted from a particular firearm, with the actor miming the recoil from the gun, and it works very well," he said.

He noted, though, that special effects add costs to a production's budget. "So it's easier and perhaps more economic to actually discharge your weapon on set using a blank," said Hall, a veteran cinematographer who has worked on films like "Fury" and "Thor: The Dark World." But, he said, "the problem with blanks is, of course ... something is emitted from the gun."

Besides financial concerns, why else would real guns be seen as preferable? "There are advantages to using blanks on set that some people want to get," said Sam Dormer, a British "armorer," or firearms specialist. "For instance, you get a (better) reaction from the actor."

Still, Dormer said, the movie industry is likely moving away from real guns, albeit slowly.

The term "prop gun" can apply to anything from a rubber toy to a real firearm that can fire a projectile. If it's used for firing, even blanks, it's considered a real gun. A blank is a cartridge that contains gunpowder but no bullet. Still, it can hurt or even kill someone who is close by, according to the Actors' Equity Association.

That's why many are calling to ban blanks as well, and use disabled or replica guns.

"Really there is no good reason in this day to have blanks on set," director Liz Garbus wrote on Twitter. "CGI can make the gun seem 'real,' and if you don't have the budget for the CGI, then don't shoot the scene."

Broadway actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein wrote that the tragedy certainly made him wonder why Hollywood wasn't leaning more on special effects.

"Why, with all of the Hollywood magic available, are they still firing off gun powder? They know that they are going to goose-up the gunshots in post production," he wrote on Facebook. "Why chance an accident in the first place?"

But he also said the death raised even broader questions.

"With all of that Hollywood talent and imagination are we still writing stories about shooting one another?" he asked. "Do we really have nothing better to spend millions of dollars on than the glamorization of gun battles?"

Associated Press writers Lindsey Bahr, Lynn Elber in Los Angeles, Hillel Italie in New York, and Lizzie Knight in London contributed to this report.

Despite hybrid release, 'Dune' draws well on the big screen

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Denis Villeneuve's "Dune" debuted with \$40.1 million in ticket sales in its opening weekend in North America, drawing a large number of moviegoers to see the thundering sci-fi epic on the big screen despite it also being available to stream in homes.

Warner Bros. launched the Legendary Entertainment production simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max. When the studio first charted that course for all its 2021 releases due to the pandemic, how the strategy would affect "Dune" — one of the year's most anticipated spectacles — was always one of the biggest question marks. Villeneuve vehemently protested the decision.

"I strongly believe the future of cinema will be on the big screen, no matter what any Wall Street diletante says," Villeneuve wrote in a lengthy statement to Variety last December.

Warner Bros. has continued to maintain it will return to exclusive theatrical releases next year. For now, the \$165 million-budgeted "Dune" marks the best domestic opening for any of the studio's hybrid releases, surpassing the \$31.7 debut of "Godzilla vs. Kong" in March. Expectations had hovered closer to \$30-35

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million for "Dune."

"This was a tremendous result as we're ramping out of the pandemic," said Jeff Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "Once we get out of the pandemic, if we have a movie like this, clearly you'd want to go into theaters first. There's no question of that."

Goldstein estimated the film would have debuted with approximately 20% more in box office had it not also been streaming simultaneously. (The studio didn't release streaming figures.) Coming into the weekend, "Dune," which first premiered at the Venice Film Festival in early September, had already grossed \$130 million internationally. This weekend, it debuted with \$21.6 million in China, where Legendary and Wanda handled distribution. Altogether, "Dune" added \$47.4 million internationally for a global cumulative gross of \$220.7 million.

"Dune" is the second big-screen attempt to adapt Frank Herbert's 1965 epic, following David Lynch's much derided 1984 version. Villeneuve's "Dune," which adapts only the first half of the book, stars Timothée Chalamet, Oscar Isaac, Rebecca Ferguson, Zendaya and Javier Bardem. Legendary and Warner Bros. have yet to confirm a sequel to "Dune," which chronicles a violent power shift on the desert planet Arrakis, where a valuable mineral called "spice" is harvested.

Moviegoers gave "Dune" an A- CinemaScore and critics (83% on Rotten Tomatoes) have praised the operatic sweep and visual craft of Villeneuve's film. It fared particularly well on large-format screens, with IMAX accounting for about \$9 million in ticket sales.

"What I think Warner's strategy has proven is that movie fans, by and large, will choose the movie theater experience when given the choice — particularly for movies like this," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for data firm Comscore. "This should be a very encouraging sign for theater owners. The allure of the movie theater remains whether a piece of content is available at home or not."

Last week's top film, Universal Pictures' horror sequel "Halloween Kills," also launched well while streaming at home, on Peacock. After debuting with \$50.4 million, "Halloween Kills" slid steeply in its second week with \$14.5 million, good for second place. In two weeks, it has grossed \$73.1 million domestically.

"No Time to Die," Cary Fukunaga's James Bond film starring Daniel Craig, came in third with \$11.9 million in its third week. Worldwide, the film has brought in more than \$525 million. MGM, United Artists and Universal Pictures charted a theater-only release for "No Time to Die."

The weekend's biggest disappointment, albeit not unexpectedly, was "Ron's Gone Wrong." The lightly marketed Disney animated release, produced by 20th Century Fox before Disney acquired the studio, opened with a modest \$7.3 million domestically and about the same internationally. But with good reviews and an "A" CinemaScore from audiences, the film could hold well in the coming weeks, with little family competition. "Ron's Gone Wrong" is about a middle-schooler and his walking, talking digital device Ron (voiced by Zach Galifiniakis).

Another Chalamet film, "The French Dispatch," also debuted strongly. The Wes Anderson film, released by Disney's Searchlight Pictures, launched with \$1.3 million in 52 theaters. That gave "The French Dispatch" the best per-theater average of the pandemic. Anderson's ode to the New Yorker, which had been delayed by a year because of the pandemic, opens nationwide on Friday. While "The French Dispatch" — a \$25 million film with a starry cast including Frances McDormand, Bill Murray, Benicio del Toro, Tilda Swinton and others — isn't a small indie, the film's first-week performance gave arthouses a lift.

Said Searchlight Pictures' distribution chief Frank Rodriguez in a statement: "These figures show that after a year and a half, arthouse and independent theaters have a superhero of their own in Wes Anderson."

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

1. "Dune," \$40.1 million.
2. "Halloween Kills," \$14.5 million.
3. "No Time to Die," \$11.9 million.
4. "Venom: Let There Be Carnage," \$9.1 million.
5. "Ron's Gone Wrong," \$7.3 million.

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6. "The Addams Family 2," \$4.3 million.

7. "The Last Duel," \$2.1 million.

8. "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," \$2 million.

9. "The French Dispatch," \$1.3 million.

10. "Free Guy," \$258,000.

___ Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Ed Sheeran has COVID, will do performances from home

By The Associated Press undefined

British pop star Ed Sheeran said Sunday he has tested positive for COVID-19 and will do interviews and performances from his house while he self-isolates.

Sheeran, 30, broke the news on social media days before his new studio album is due out.

"Quick note to tell you that I've sadly tested positive for Covid, so I'm now self-isolating and following government guidelines," Sheeran wrote on Instagram. "It means that I'm now unable to plough ahead with any in person commitments for now, so I'll be doing as many of my planned interviews/performances I can from my house. Apologies to anyone I've let down."

Sheeran had just been announced as the musical guest on NBC's "Saturday Night Live" on Nov. 6.

Representatives did not immediately say which performances he is canceling and which he will carry out from home.

Sheeran's official website lists no performances before April. The four-time Grammy winner's new studio album is called "=", which is pronounced "Equals."

Pope: Don't send migrants back to Libya and 'inhumane' camps

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday made an impassioned plea to end the practice of returning migrants rescued at sea to Libya and other unsafe countries where they suffer "inhumane violence."

Francis also waded into a highly contentious political debate in Europe, calling on the international community to find concrete ways to manage the "migratory flows" in the Mediterranean.

"I express my closeness to the thousands of migrants, refugees and others in need of protection in Libya," Francis said. "I never forget you, I hear your cries and I pray for you."

Even as the pontiff appealed for changes of migrant policy and of heart in his remarks to the public in St. Peter's Square, hundreds of migrants were either at sea in the central Mediterranean awaiting a port after rescue or recently coming ashore in Sicily or the Italian mainland after setting sail from Libya or Turkey, according to authorities.

"So many of these men, women and children are subject to inhumane violence," he added. "Yet again I ask the international community to keep the promises to search for common, concrete and lasting solutions to manage the migratory flows in Libya and in all the Mediterranean."

"How they suffer, those who are sent back" after rescue at sea, the pope said. Detention facilities in Libya, he said "are true concentration camps."

"We need to stop sending back (migrants) to unsafe countries and to give priority to the saving of human lives at sea with protocols of rescue and predictable disembarking, to guarantee them dignified conditions of life, alternatives to detention, regular paths of migration and access to asylum procedures," Francis said.

U.N. refugee agency officials and human rights organizations have long denounced the conditions of detention centers for migrants in Libya, citing practices of beatings, rape and other forms of torture and insufficient food. Migrants endure weeks and months of those conditions, awaiting passage in unseaworthy rubber dinghies or rickety fishing boats arranged by human traffickers.

Hours after the pope's appeal, the humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders said that its rescue ship, Geo Barents, reached a rubber boat that was taking on water, with the sea buffeted by strong winds and waves up to three meters (10 feet) high. It tweeted that "we managed to rescue all the 71

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people on board.”

The group thanked the charity group Alarm Phone for signaling that the boat crowded with migrants was in distress.

Earlier, Geo Barents, then with 296 migrants aboard its rescue ship, was awaiting permission in waters off Malta to disembark. Six migrants tested positive for COVID-19, but because of the crowded conditions aboard, it was difficult to keep them sufficiently distant from the others, Doctors Without Borders said.

In Sicily, a ship operated by the German charity Sea-Watch, with 406 rescued migrants aboard, was granted permission to enter port. But Sea-Watch said that a rescue vessel operated by a Spanish charity, with 105 migrants aboard, has been awaiting a port assignment to disembark them for four days.

While hundreds of thousands of migrants have departed in traffickers’ boats for European shores in recent years and set foot on Sicily or nearby Italian islands, many reach the Italian mainland.

Red Cross officials in Roccella Ionica, a town on the coast of the “toe” of the Italian peninsula said on Sunday that about 700 migrants, some of them from Afghanistan, reached the Calabrian coast in recent days on boats that apparently departed from Turkey.

Authorities said so far this year, about 3,400 migrants had reached Roccella Ionica, a town of 6,000 people, compared to 480 in all of 2019. The migrants who arrived in the last several days were being housed in tent shelters, RAI state television said.

Italy and Malta have come under criticism by human rights advocates for leaving migrants aboard crowded rescue boats before assigning them a safe port.

The Libyan coast guard, which has been trained and equipped by Italy, has also been criticized for rescuing migrants in Libyan waters and then returning them to land where the detention centers awaited them.

On Friday, Doctors Without Borders tweeted that crew aboard the Geo Barents had “witnessed an interception” by the Libyan coast guard and that the migrants “will be forcibly taken to dangerous detention facilities and exposed to violence and exploitation.”

With rising popularity of right-wing, anti-migrant parties in Italy in recent years, the Italian government has been under increasing domestic political pressure to crack down on illegal immigration.

Italy and Malta have lobbied their European Union partner countries, mainly in vain, to take in some of those rescued at sea.

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

Texas drag race driver slams into spectators, killing 2 kids

KERRVILLE, Texas (AP) — A driver lost control during a Texas drag racing event on an airport runway and slammed into a crowd of spectators, killing two children and injuring eight other people, authorities said.

A 6-year-old boy and an 8-year-old boy were killed in the crash Saturday afternoon at an event called “Airport Race Wars 2” at the Kerrville-Kerr County Airport, police said in a news release. The organized event was attended by thousands and involved drivers speeding down a runway as they competed for cash.

The driver “lost control and left the runway, crashing into parked vehicles and striking spectators who were observing the races,” Kerrville police said.

The injured victims were taken to various hospitals, including a 46-year-old woman who was listed in critical condition. The majority of the other injuries were not believed to be life-threatening, although the condition of a 26-year-old man was unknown, authorities said. A 4-year-old boy and a 3-month-old girl were taken to a hospital for precautionary evaluations.

Authorities have not released the identities of the two children who were killed at the event about 60 miles (97 kilometers) northwest of San Antonio.

The Kerrville Convention and Visitors Bureau’s website promoted the event as an “action packed, family-friendly day” in which fans could watch the “fastest drag cars compete for over \$8000 in total prizes.”

Upward of 3,500 people were in attendance, according to Louis Amestoy, a freelance journalist who was at the event.

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The race was an eighth of a mile (0.2 kilometers) long, and water-filled plastic barriers lined the course. But Amestoy said they didn't extend past the finish line, leaving no protection between spectators and cars as they were slowing down at the end of the race.

Spectators could get within about 15 feet (4.6 meters) of the track, and many watched the race from lawn chairs in the absence of stands. Organizers reminded people to stay in the grass and off the asphalt, Amestoy told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

The driver was nearing the end of the strip when the car veered off course, Amestoy said.

Associated Press writer Bryan Gallion contributed to this report from Roseland, New Jersey.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Oct. 25, the 298th day of 2021. There are 67 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 25, 1983, a U.S.-led force invaded Grenada (greh-NAY'-duh) at the order of President Ronald Reagan, who said the action was needed to protect U.S. citizens there.

On this date:

In 1760, Britain's King George III succeeded his late grandfather, George II.

In 1854, the "Charge of the Light Brigade" took place during the Crimean War as an English brigade of more than 600 men charged the Russian army, suffering heavy losses.

In 1859, radical abolitionist John Brown went on trial in Charles Town, Va., for his failed raid at Harpers Ferry. (Brown was convicted and hanged.)

In 1881, artist Pablo Picasso was born in Malaga, Spain.

In 1910, "America the Beautiful," with words by Katharine Lee Bates and music by Samuel A. Ward, was first published.

In 1962, during a meeting of the U.N. Security Council, U.S. Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson II demanded that Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin confirm or deny the existence of Soviet-built missile bases in Cuba; Stevenson then presented photographic evidence of the bases to the Council.

In 1971, the U.N. General Assembly voted to admit mainland China and expel Taiwan.

In 1982, the situation comedy "Newhart," starring Bob Newhart as a Vermont innkeeper, premiered on CBS.

In 1994, Susan Smith of Union, South Carolina, claimed that a Black carjacker had driven off with her two young sons (Smith later confessed to drowning the children in John D. Long Lake, and was convicted of murder). Three defendants were convicted in South Africa of murdering American exchange student Amy Biehl. (In 1998, all three were granted amnesty by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.)

In 1999, golfer Payne Stewart and five others were killed when their Learjet flew uncontrolled for four hours before crashing in South Dakota; Stewart was 42.

In 2002, U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., was killed in a plane crash in northern Minnesota along with his wife, daughter and five others, a week and a-half before the election.

In 2014, the World Health Organization said more than 10,000 people had been infected with Ebola and that nearly half of them had died as the outbreak continued to spread. Jack Bruce, 71, the bassist and lead vocalist of the 1960s power trio Cream, died in London.

Ten years ago: Deposed Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, his son Muatassim and former Defense Minister Abu Bakr Yunis were buried at dawn in a secret location, five days after Gadhafi was slain by revolutionary fighters.

Five years ago: A federal judge in San Francisco approved a nearly \$15 billion settlement, giving nearly a half-million Volkswagen owners and leaseholders the choice between selling their diesel engine cars back or having them repaired so they didn't cheat on emissions tests and spew excess pollution. The Cleveland

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Indians beat the Chicago Cubs 6-0 in the World Series opener.

One year ago: White House chief of staff Mark Meadows told CNN that "we're not going to control the pandemic," because it's a "contagious virus just like the flu." Hundreds of thousands of Californians lost power as utilities sought to reduce the chance of their equipment sparking wildfires and the fire-weary state braced for a new bout of dry, windy weather.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Marion Ross is 93. Basketball Hall of Famer Bob Knight is 81. Author Anne Tyler is 80. Rock singer Jon Anderson (Yes) is 77. Political strategist James Carville is 77. Singer Taffy Nivert (Starland Vocal Band) is 77. Rock musician Glenn Tipton (Judas Priest) is 74. Actor Brian Kerwin is 72. Actor Mark L. Taylor is 71. Movie director Julian Schnabel is 70. Rock musician Matthias Jabs is 65. Actress Nancy Cartwright (TV: "The Simpsons") is 64. Country singer Mark Miller (Sawyer Brown) is 63. Rock musician Chad Smith (Red Hot Chili Peppers; Chickenfoot) is 60. Actor Tracy Nelson is 58. Actor Michael Boatman is 57. Actor Kevin Michael Richardson is 57. Actor Mathieu Amalric is 56. Singer Speech is 53. Actor-comedian-TV host Samantha Bee is 52. Actor Adam Goldberg is 51. Actor-singer Adam Pascal is 51. Rock musician Ed Robertson (Barenaked Ladies) is 51. Actor Persia White is 51. Country singer Chely (SHEL'-ee) Wright is 51. Actor Leslie Grossman is 50. Violinist Midori is 50. Actor Craig Robinson is 50. Actor Michael Weston is 48. Actor Zachary Knighton is 43. Actor Mariana Klaveno is 42. Actor Mehcad (muh-KAD') Brooks is 41. Actor Ben Gould is 41. Actor Josh Henderson is 40. Pop singer Katy Perry is 37. Rock singer Austin Winkler is 37. Singer Ciara is 36. Actor Krista Marie Yu (TV: "Dr. Ken") is 33. Actor Rachel Matthews is 28. Actor Conchita Campbell is 26. Washington Nationals outfielder Juan Soto is 23.