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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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Student photo, essay contests announced for Soil Health Conference

PIERRE, SD – The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition has announced student soil health photo and essay contests in conjunction with its annual conference. The contests are open to all students from middle school through post-secondary. The winners of the contests will be announced during the Soil Health Conference, Jan. 18-19, 2022, at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel in Aberdeen, SD.

“One of our goals is to help make soil health a priority for the next generation of farmers and ranchers,” SDSHC Coordinator Cindy Zenk said. “These contests are designed to help students engage with soil health concepts and hopefully spark a desire to learn more.”

In the post-secondary category, the first-place winner will receive \$400 and a hoodie, and the second-place winner will receive \$200 and a hoodie. In the high school and middle school categories, the first-place winners will each receive \$200 and a hoodie, and the second-place winners will each receive \$100 and a hoodie.

Contest entries must be submitted by December 31, 2021. Full details of the conference are available at www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/soil-health-conference/students/.

GFP Commission Holds November Meeting

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their November meeting at Pierre's Red Rossa.

The Commission proposed to remove no boating zones and allow for non-motorized watercraft within the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge and the Waubay State Game Bird Refuge.

GFP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been in collaboration to discuss ways to increase hunting and fishing opportunities, while still meeting the objectives of the USFWS Refuge System. These respective changes to administrative rules will align state and federal regulations, resulting in more recreational opportunities within the refuge boundaries.

The Commission also proposed a change to allow for cancellation of campsites and lodging facilities without fee for a period of time after a reservation is made. After that period has elapsed, a fee of one-half of the first night's camping or lodging fees will be assessed for both types of overnight use.

Finally, the Commission proposed to modify two administrative rules to align new business practices and requirements for license agents in preparation of launching a new online licensing system. The new e-commerce system is called Go Outdoors South Dakota and will go live December 15, 2021. This system combines the purchases of hunting and fishing licenses with our state parks camping reservations and other purchases.

Once the system is live, license agents will be required to operate under new business practices, including electronic ACH transfers and adjusted timeframes when electronic money sweeps will occur. License agents serve an important role for selling licenses on behalf of GFP as well as providing hunters with the ability to purchase hunting and fishing licenses in person outside normal business hours that GFP offices are open.

To see any of these proposals, or more in-depth information on the November meeting, visit: gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/

If you would like to comment on any of these proposals, visit gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions. Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave Pierre, SD

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on December 5.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held December 9-10 in Brookings.

GFP Seeking Comments on Greater Sage-Grouse Plan

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is seeking comments on the draft greater sage-grouse action plan.

All individuals interested in the management of greater sage-grouse in South Dakota have from now through December 15, 2021, to provide suggestions and comments on the draft action plan. A final draft of the action plan is scheduled to be presented to the GFP Commission in January for their consideration and adoption.

A draft of the action plan can be found online at <https://gfp.sd.gov/management-plans/> under "Plans Up for Revision". Written comments on the plan can be sent to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, S.D. 57501, or emailed to sagegrouseplan@state.sd.us.

Comments must be received by December 15, 2021 and include your full name and city of residence.

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SAY THANKS TO VETERANS BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

By Steve Nelson

This November will be the 39th anniversary of the Wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Where did those 39 years go? Is Vietnam getting to be only a memory?

I hope not.

Some 39-plus years ago a young architect name Maya Lin submitted a proposal. Critics then called her black-granite design "too abstract." Nevertheless, Lin's design was approved. Today, the Wall draws 4.5 to 5 million visitors each year.

Of the 58,000 names listed on the Wall, only eight of them are women, from about 10,000 who served as nurses in Vietnam.

The idea for the memorial came to veteran Jan Scruggs in 1979 while he was watching "The Deer Hunter, a movie that brought him many flashbacks.

Then there is the moving Wall. This moving Wall has been in Pierre twice, the latest was at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial dedication. It contains 58,000 names of those who didn't return. They were mainly a bunch of 18, 19 and 20 years olds. They went off to war expecting to come home to family and friends. Some returned home in body bags.

South Dakota wasn't spared. If you go to the Memorial in Pierre next to Capitol Lake, the names of 208 young men who died are etched there from the 28,000 South Dakotans who served with honor.

But most South Dakotans did return. Some unscathed, some shot up, hurt and only now beginning to tell their stories. Like the war veterans before them, enough time has passed so the pain of speaking out has numbed.

I've talked to a lot of them, wrote down their comments, and often thought how fortunate I was during my years in the service.

I saw the results of that war though when I had duty of burial detail at Bayamon National cemetery in Puerto Rico. I watched mothers cry, looked at the friends and families, heads bowed, crying and trying to figure it all out. I watched Father Calimano, the old priest in his simple white robe, put his arm around them and say "buena gente" (good people), as they walked away from the burial site.

One morning over breakfast the week before the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial dedication in Pierre, I had time to listen to Ken Korkow. Ken is one of the most decorated Vietnam vets in South Dakota. What he did was heroic and I often ask myself what is a hero. I can tell you now. I had breakfast with one: Pastor Ken Korkow.

I worked in the state office of economic development with Charlie Turbiville and Wayne Mundt, both men decorated with medals for their service. And there is Pat Hoing and Dennis Foell; both men were awarded bronze stars.

Tom Magedanz walked the mountains and valleys of Vietnam as a Marine corporal. He told me about roaming around in the jungle in the rain that never stopped. It reminded me of a scene from the movie "Forest Gump," when he and Bubba are back to back in a foxhole full of water.

Tom was a longtime Legislative Research Council aide to the state House and Senate Agricultural and Natural Resource Committees. He sat patiently through those committee meetings for years, a far cry from the jungles of Vietnam.

Fort Pierre's Mike McClelland is still carrying around shrapnel in the roof of his mouth. Those I've mentioned here are just a few of many.

South Dakota had three Medal of Honor recipients: General Patrick Brady, Sp/4 Michael Fitzmaurice, and Colonel Leo Thorsness.

Since Vietnam, we've been in Iraq and Afghanistan fighting two completely different kind of wars. The common denominator, death, is still there. Young men and women die. That's war.

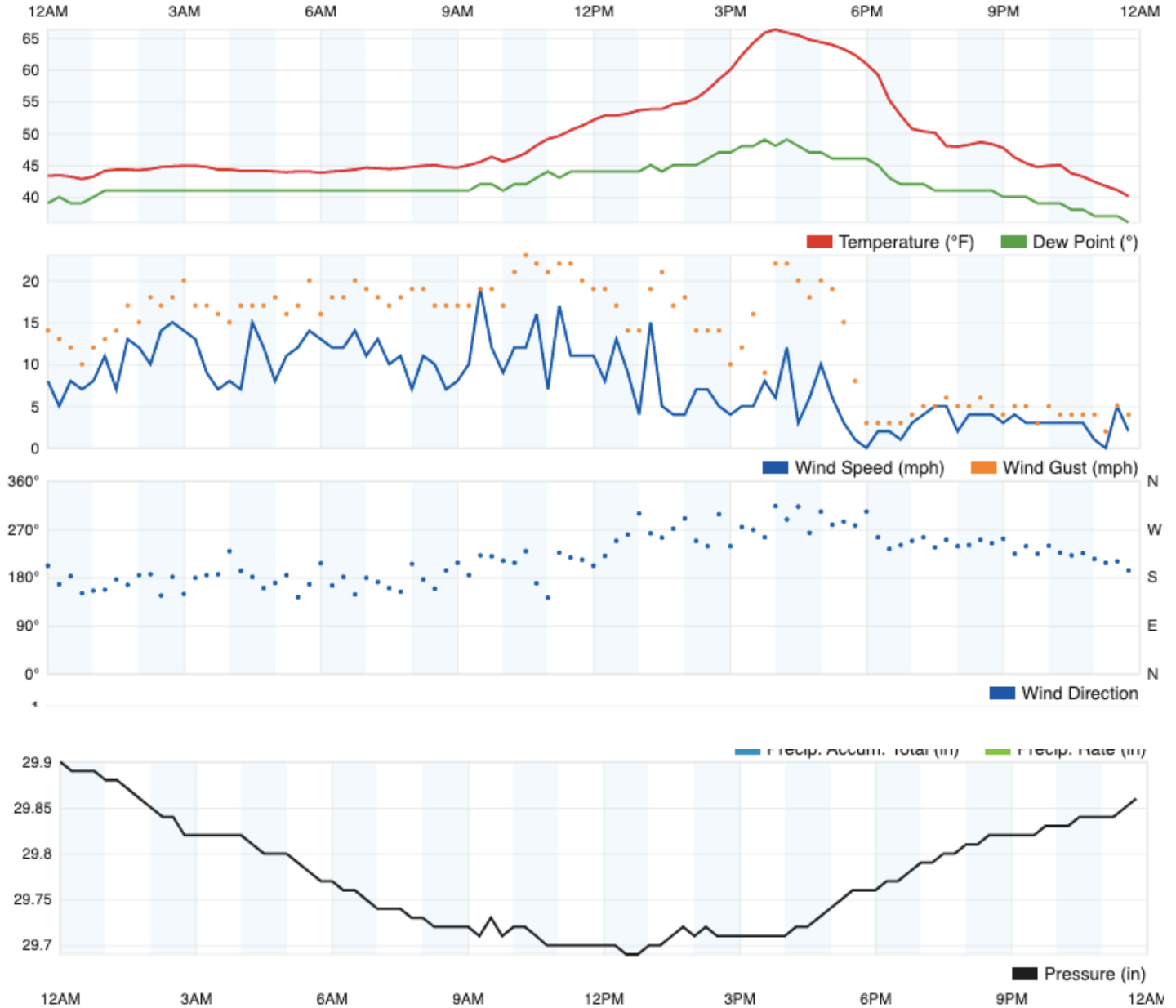
For those Vietnam veterans in South Dakota and the families and friends of those who were killed or missing - they are not forgotten. We need to be constantly reminded of their sacrifices and contributions. We also need to be reminded that the Vietnam era vets are getting older. Time is running out to tell them "thanks for your service." Enough said.

Steve Nelson, a Pierre resident, is a longtime outdoor writer and photographer.

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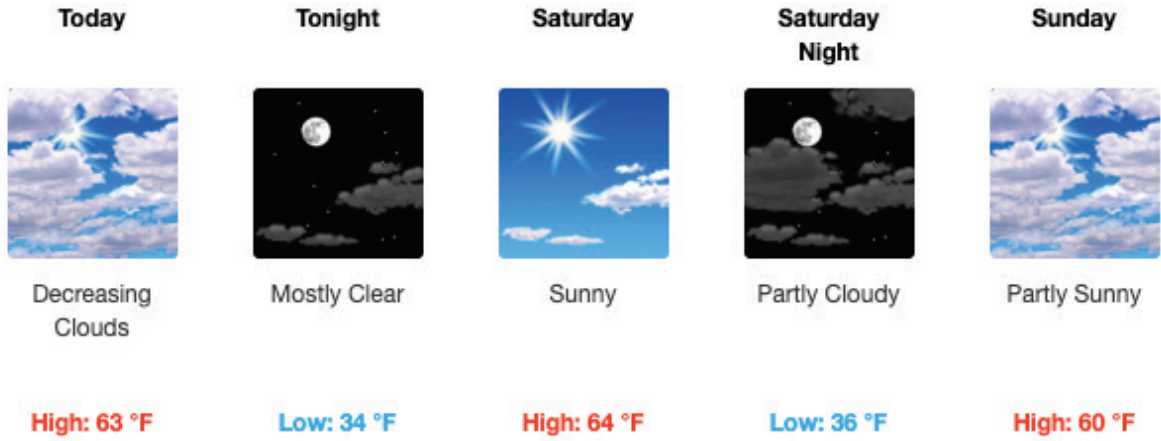
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

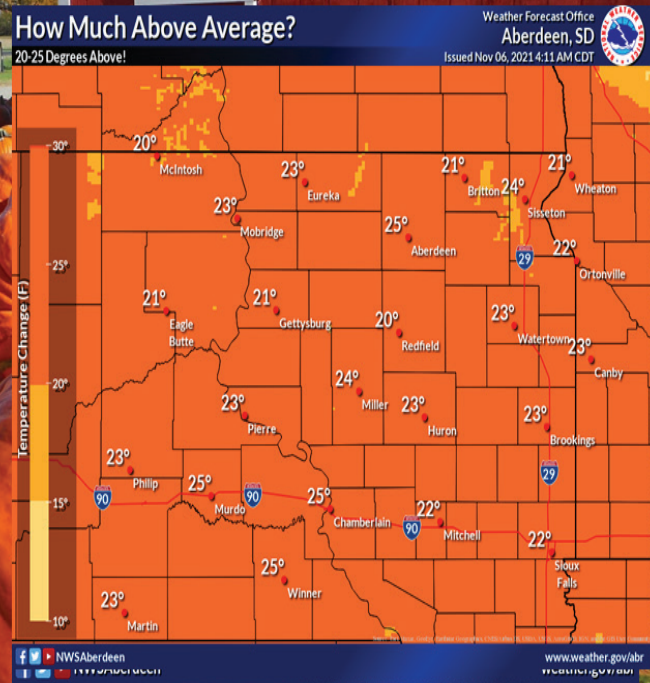
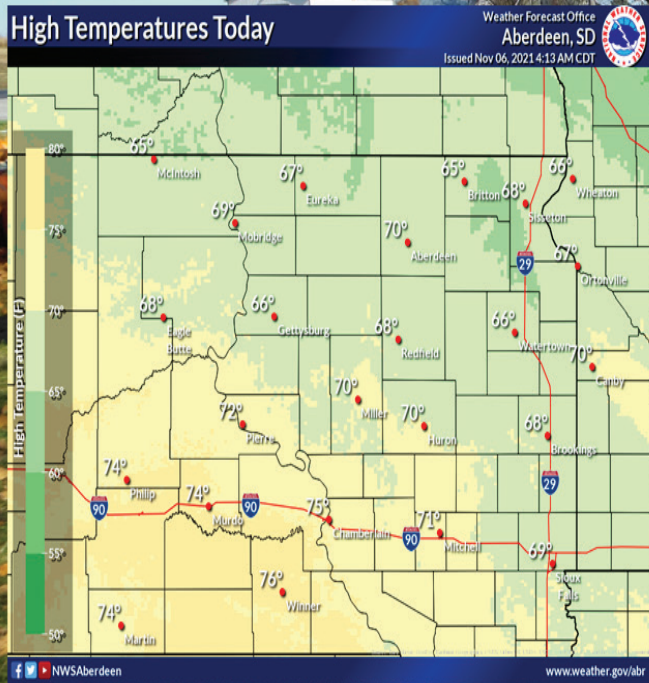


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Much Above Average Temperatures Continue Today



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 11/6/2021 5:26 AM Central

Another very mild day is in store, with high temperatures in the mid-60s, to the low 70s. These readings are 20 to 25 degrees above average for this time of year.

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Today in Weather History

November 6th, 1959: A strong cold front that brought near blizzard conditions and freezing temperatures on the 5th continued to bring record or near-record lows during the morning hours on this day. Some low temperatures include; -13 in Murdo; -12 in Eureka; -11 in Britton; -10 in Castlewood; -9 near McIntosh and Redfield; -8 in Andover; -7 in Clear Lake and Kennebec; -6 degrees in Aberdeen; -5 in Watertown; and -4 in Pierre.

November 6th, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across South Dakota and into Minnesota brought widespread rain, freezing rain, and snow to central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota. Much of the freezing fell across central and north-central South Dakota west of the Missouri River. As the freezing rain changed over to snow and the winds increased, the ice and snow buildup on the power lines and poles caused hundreds of power poles to break across Jones, Stanley, Dewey, and Corson counties. East of the Missouri River, the colder air and stronger winds moved in, changing the rain over to snow. High winds of 30 to 45 mph with gusts near 60 mph brought widespread blizzard conditions to all areas.

Ice buildup ranged from a tenth to an inch for counties west of the Missouri River. Snowfall amounts across the entire area ranged from 2 to 8 inches, with a 15-inch amount recorded in southwest Corson County. Other snowfall amounts include 3 inches in Eagle Butte, Blunt, Kennebec, Mission Ridge, and Onida; 4 inches in Pollock, Gettysburg, and Bowdle; 5 inches south of Harrold, Iona, and near McIntosh; 6 inches in Mobridge; 7 inches in Murdo; 8 inches in McLaughlin, and 15 inches southwest of Keldron.

All 4,600 customers of the Moreau-Grand Electric Company lost power due to the storm. The last time this occurred was during the winter of 1967-68. The monetary loss to this cooperative and other electric cooperatives for Jones, Stanley, Corson, and Dewey counties was hundreds of thousands of dollars. Over 100 line workers worked countless hours with crews coming as far away as Nebraska and Iowa to assist in the power recovery. Over 1,000 customers were without power for an extended period.

The blizzard resulted in numerous school, business, and road closures along with flight cancellations. Interstate 90 was shut down from Mitchell, South Dakota, to the Wyoming border from Thursday the 6th until Friday evening of the 7th. In the early afternoon hours of Friday, the 7th, slippery roads, high winds, and low visibilities contributed to the rollover of a passenger van carrying seven students. The passenger van rolled several times, causing severe injuries to three of the students. The Governor declared a state of emergency on the 7th, and President Bush declared South Dakota a disaster area.

1961: Santa Ana winds in southern California downed trees, utility lines and blew 10 to 50 percent of the avocado crop from trees. Dust from the winds lowered the visibility, which led to a 16 car pileup, injuring 23 people. In addition, the winds brought the lowest relative humidity of record to Burbank, 3 percent, and contributed to disastrous fires in the hills of the Los Angeles area.

1977: Several possible causes lead to the collapse of the Kelly Barnes Dam in Georgia to give way. The failure allowed a 40-acre lake to flood the Toccoa Falls College, killing 39 people and injuring 60 more.

2005: The deadliest tornado to strike Indiana since April 3rd, 1974, occurred around 2 am. A single F3 tornado inflicted 24 fatalities, 238 injuries, and nearly 90 million dollars in damage with a path length of 41 miles. This storm moved in a northeasterly direction from just north of Smith Mills, Kentucky, to Genyville, Indiana, and crossed the Ohio River three times. Most of the damage occurred as the tornado passed southeast of the city of Evansville, Indiana.

2016: An EF2 tornado hit Cesano, Rome, Italy, along its 25-mile path. Two people were killed.

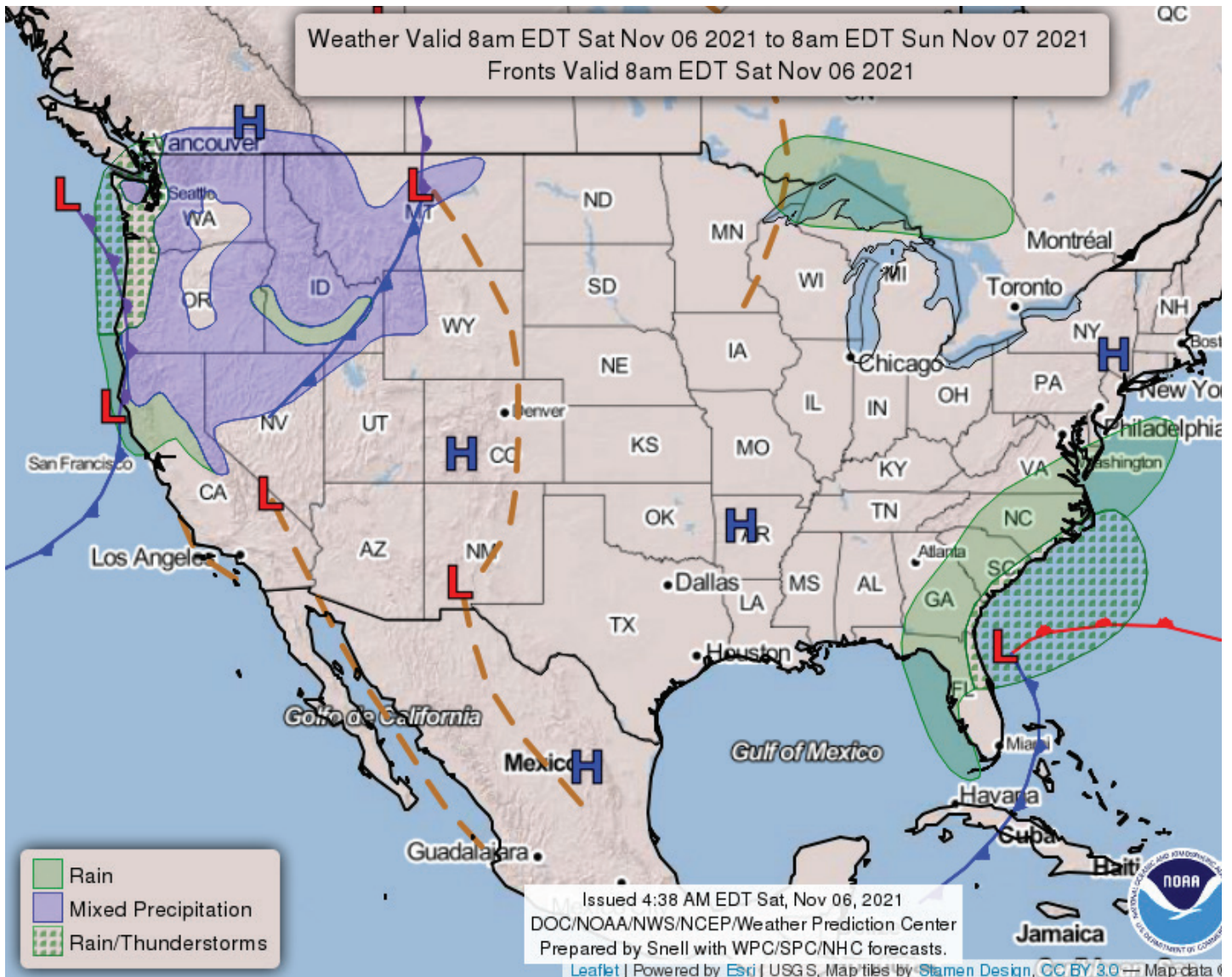
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 66.3 °F
Low Temp: 40.1 °F
Wind: 23 mph
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 79° in 2004
Record Low: -8° in 1991
Average High: 47°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.20
Precip to date in Nov.: 4.30
Average Precip to date: 20.67
Precip Year to Date: 19.72
Sunset Tonight: 6:14:10 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:19:18 AM



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SING TO THE LORD!

When Herbert Hoover was president, he asked Rudy Vallee to sing at the White House. He was very impressed by the famous "megaphone crooner" and entertainer and at the end of his performance said, "You are great, Mr. Vallee. If you can sing a song that would make people feel good, forget their problems, and relieve their depression, I will give you a medal." However, Vallee did not have a song that he could sing that would bring about those results.

But there is One who can do that. David said, "I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to Him as I rejoice in the Lord."

The Hebrew word for meditate includes two words from the English language: one is "think," and the other suggests "speech" or "audible thinking," or "thinking out loud." If we put them together, they can bring about significant results!

Imagine how our lives would be different if, when we thought about God's Word, we would begin to "talk" to Him. For example, if 1 John 1:9 came to mind during a time of meditation, we might say something like, "Oh, thank You Lord for Your forgiveness. How grateful I am that if I come to You, confess my sin, ask You for Your forgiveness and repent, You will forgive me. Thank You for the assurance of Your grace and mercy. How much I need it. And please, Lord, fill my life with Your Spirit so that when I am tempted to sin, I can ask You to give me the strength to overcome the temptation!"

Prayer: Father, as I read and focus on You, please fill my mind with Your Word. Let it speak to my heart and then may my heart speak to You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to Him as I rejoice in the Lord. Psalm 104:33-34

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Rapid City Central, 25-18, 25-15, 25-17

Sioux Falls Washington def. Rapid City Stevens, 25-16, 25-14, 25-19

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

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

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP FOOTBALL=

Class 9A State=

Semifinal=

Herreid/Selby Area 16, DeSmet 14

Howard 21, Wall 17

Class 9AA State=

Semifinal=

Canistota 24, Parkston 20

Platte-Geddes 23, Timber Lake 20

Class 9B State=

Semifinal=

Dell Rapids St. Mary 32, Avon 30

Potter County 22, Faulkton 12

Class 11A State=

Semifinal=

Madison 38, Dell Rapids 28

Milbank 24, Vermillion 0

Class 11AA State=

Semifinal=

Pierre 28, Aberdeen Central 21

Tea Area 35, Yankton 28

Class 11AAA State=

Semifinal=

Brandon Valley 28, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 20

Harrisburg 17, Sioux Falls Lincoln 10

Class 11B State=

Semifinal=

Bridgewater-Emery 28, Beresford 21

Winner 52, Elk Point-Jefferson 14

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

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

Well-traveled airport leader looks to expand Minot offerings

By JILL SCHRAMM Minot Daily News

MINOT, N.D. (AP) — Minot's new airport director said she wants to use her diverse experiences in aviation management to enhance the activity at Minot International Airport.

Jennifer Eckman stepped into her new position Oct. 4.

She previously had served since January 2019 as project manager of the Northern Plains Unmanned Aviation Systems Test Site in Grand Forks. Working in the drone industry in Grand Forks exposed her to a different world of aviation.

"The concepts and the technologies that enable flying a drone were all pretty new to me. There's a whole new list of acronyms I had to learn, which in the world of aviation, that's amazing that there were more acronyms," she laughed. "I'm hoping with my connections with the Northern Plains that we can bring some of those technologies that I was working on here to this airport."

She said there are areas on airport property suitable for growing a UAS business, the Minot Daily News reported.

"Actually, we have some of the infrastructure already, where certain types of drones we could already handle," she said.

Eckman sees potential for more robust industrial or commercial operations at the airfield. She would like to be involved in diversifying the businesses and opportunities at the airport as well as in developing the airline services and increasing passenger traffic as COVID-19 concerns ease.

"Obviously, the passenger ridership has been down, but we're starting to see us come back to the 2019 numbers — slowly, but we're hoping to get there. With the borders opening soon, I'm hoping and anticipating that we might be getting close to what we were in 2019 by the end of the year," Eckman said.

She added that airlines have been maintaining their flights and plan to add a few additional flights over the holidays.

Eckman said she's optimistic about the aviation industry, having witnessed its resiliency in the rebound from the 9-11 terrorist attacks and the Y2K transition to a new century in the year 2000.

A Bismarck native, Eckman said she grew up wanting to be an astronaut. Her career goal adjusted after enrolling in the University of North Dakota's aviation program.

"I really enjoyed my airport management classes, and I switched degrees to airport management," she said.

She did get a private pilot's license, although she hasn't done much flying.

"My passion is more in the airport management side," she said.

It was that passion that drew her to Minot.

"I loved my job at the Northern Plains, but I really missed airports. I've been working in airports for almost 20 years," Eckman said. "I have a diverse knowledge of different airports and how they run because I've worked at quite a few of them, from interning at something as large as Minneapolis/St. Paul to a smaller airport like Jamestown, North Dakota."

She previously had been airport manager in Jamestown, the deputy airport director for finance and administration in Rapid City, South Dakota, and the airport administrative assistant and airport real estate specialist at Paine Field/Snohomish County Airport in Everett, Washington.

Eckman earned a bachelor's degree in business administration, with a major in airport management, from UND in May 1999 and a master's of fine arts from California State University-Long Beach in May 2004. She is working toward a master's in business administration. She also has completed the Accredited Airport Executive program.

Her husband, a contractor with Boeing, and children will be moving from Grand Forks to Minot later this year when an opportune time in the school year presents itself. The family enjoys biking and hiking and looks forward to getting outdoors in Minot.

Eckman also expects to be busy on airport projects that require attention, whether it is preparing for winter snow removal or next year's wetland mitigation projects.

Her initial weeks on the job have been spent getting to know the airport's personnel and tenants. Eck-

man said the chance to work in a beautiful terminal with a great staff has made for a good start. "The team is really great at what they do, and I'm hoping to enhance it to the next level," she said. "There's some processes that I've seen implemented at other airports that I'm trying to implement here to get us to the next level, to be the best airport we can be."

A longtime addict, Yankton mother graduates from drug court

By RANDY DOCKENDORF Yankton Press and Dakotan

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — As a drug addict for nine years, Keri Curtis chose to keep away from her children rather than have them see how far she had fallen.

She lived on the streets, moving from place to place. She became trapped in abusive relationships and toxic people, describing herself as being toxic, as well.

And she chose drugs over her children.

"I stayed away from my kids during my addiction. I didn't want them to see me on drugs," she told the Press & Dakotan. "I knew they were disappointed in me, but I didn't want them to see me and become even more disappointed."

But last month, Curtis stood before her children and others during her graduation from Yankton County Drug Court. She didn't wear a cap and gown, and there was no playing "Pomp and Circumstance."

But she felt a joy that had been missing in her life, including the ability to face her children and hug them deeply. She also received support from others at the courtroom ceremony, including a judge, police officer, her counselor and the Drug Court Team that worked with her long journey, the Yankton Press and Dakotan reported.

"I never thought I could be happy," she said while shedding tears. "But today, I feel more than happy. I don't know what the word for it is. This day is definitely important. After being an addict for nine years, I've been sober for 534 days. It's a huge accomplishment."

Curtis has shown tremendous perseverance already, according to Commander Todd Brandt with the Yankton Police Department and a member of the Yankton County Drug Court Team.

"She has marked 500-plus days of sobriety for something where others may not go a couple of hours," he told the Press & Dakotan. "I have seen the transformation, from seeing her at the worst time when I was a young officer and then seeing where she has come today, as a productive member of society and a fantastic mother. It's why I come up every Wednesday for Drug Court and see what it does for these people."

But the graduation was also a time for Curtis to share her painful story.

"In 2018, I was at my worst. I had done meth for two years, and I had done K2 during the two years before that," she said. "I was so lost. I was homeless and away from my kids. A lot of times, I didn't want to be alive anymore."

She was arrested in 2018, sentenced to 30 days in jail. "I had never gone longer than 30 days without using (drugs)," she said.

The court ordered her into drug treatment at Lewis and Clark Behavioral Health Services (LCBHS) in Yankton. There, she met mental health and substance abuse counselor Abbey Peltier, herself a recovering addict.

Curtis was admitted to the Drug Court program and worked with Drug Court Defense Attorney Luci Youngberg. "I wanted my kids to be proud of me again. This was my last chance to get it right," Curtis said.

Yankton County Drug Court Judge Kasey Sorensen, who presided at graduation, commended Curtis for her achievement.

"You're an inspiration to everyone in this room," the judge said. "These graduations bring me to tears."

Drug Court typically represents the last option before prison, Sorensen told the Press & Dakotan. State statute excludes sex offenders and others deemed not eligible for the program.

"It's a minimum 17 months long, and this is hard work. They have to put in the effort to completely change their lives," the judge said. "This is not a 'get out of jail free' card. Some offenders say, 'Just send

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me to prison. I would rather just serve my time and get out rather than go through the program.”

As a police officer, Brandt said he has also seen offenders who would take prison over Drug Court.

Curtis acknowledged the long, painful process. She had been using drugs and alcohol to cover long, deep pain that she had never faced. One of the biggest steps was opening up with Peltier during counseling and then telling her story to a group.

Drug Court provides both accountability and support with new friends and sponsors, Peltier told the Press & Dakotan. In addition, they develop good relationships with judges, the courts, attorneys and law enforcement.

Curtis acknowledged the entire Yankton County Drug Court Team.

“To the Drug Court Team, thank you for believing in me before I could believe in myself,” Curtis said. “You have seen my worst, and now I’m so glad you’re here now and see me at my best.”

Susan Jacobs, a former associate warden at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield, has worked with cases in the Yankton, Vermillion and Wagner areas. She teaches Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) for drug courts through South Dakota Lutheran Social Services.

MRT is a treatment system, often used in substance abuse programs, designed to lead to enhanced moral reasoning, better decision making and more appropriate behavior.

“Yankton’s Drug Court is one of the best programs I have ever witnessed,” Jacobs said. “The Drug Court Team and their program have helped many adult offenders not only kick their addiction and become productive law abiding citizens, it literally has saved lives, plus has kept many from going to prison.”

Sorensen said she sees the transformation in the participants’ appearance and emotions. She supports the program’s focus on rehabilitation.

“They are off the substance, and they are engaged with their family and the community in so many positive ways,” the judge said. “The community as a whole is better off, not to mention the individuals themselves.”

The commencement also recognized Chris Pokorney’s phasing promotion in the program. He has completed the Drug Court program and is working with it at an additional level.

Brandt admitted he wasn’t sold on the Drug Court at first when Yankton County became one of the first in South Dakota to adopt it.

“To begin with, I had a lot of apprehension that drug courts would actually work. I went into the idea kicking and screaming,” he said. “But as I began to understand addiction, and I still don’t fully understand it, I realized the struggle and the pain that these people were going through. Now, I’m very impressed with the outcome, and taxpayer dollars are well spent.”

The Drug Court Team meets weekly, going over the participants’ achievements and failures to help them stay on track, Brandt said. He sees the YPD’s role as helping those struggling with addiction and not merely arresting offenders.

Peltier shared her own journey and praised Curtis for her achievements. Peltier encouraged others to take the first step and seek help.

“Don’t let what you did in your past dictate your future,” she said. “We’re here for you, but you have to open up and let us in.”

Curtis wants her message to serve as hope for both addicts and their loved ones.

“There is a chance at life. They can get through this,” she said. “They can find true happiness on the other side.”

The Yankton County Drug Court Team includes Sorensen; John Billings with the Yankton County State’s Attorney’s Office; Youngberg; Amy Drotzmann as the Drug Court services officer; Nicole Peterson as the Drug Court coordinator; Sharon Kraft as the Drug Court program specialist; Peltier and Ashley Olivier with LCBHS; Brandt and Dean Larson with the Yankton Police Department; and Jacobs.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

10-15-20-66-68, Mega Ball: 18, Megaplier: 2

(ten, fifteen, twenty, sixty-six, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: eighteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$36 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$146 million

Oil tanker explodes in Sierra Leone, killing at least 92

By CLARENCE ROY-MACAULAY Associated Press

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — An oil tanker exploded near Sierra Leone's capital, killing at least 92 people and severely injuring dozens of others after large crowds gathered to collect leaking fuel, officials and witnesses said Saturday.

The explosion took place late Friday after a bus struck the tanker in Wellington, a suburb just to the east of Freetown.

The mortuary at Connaught Hospital reported 92 bodies had been brought in by Saturday morning. About 30 severely burned victims were not expected to survive, according to Foday Musa, a staff member in the intensive care unit.

Injured people whose clothes had burned off in the fire that followed the explosion lay naked on stretchers as nurses attended to them Saturday. Hundreds of people milled outside the main gates of the mortuary and near the hospital's main entrance, waiting for word of their loved ones.

It was not immediately known how many people were undergoing treatment for burns because patients were taken to hospitals and clinics across the metropolitan area.

Video obtained by The Associated Press of the explosion's aftermath showed a giant fireball burning in the night sky as some survivors with severe burns cried out in pain. Charred remains of the victims lay strewn at the scene awaiting transport to mortuaries.

President Julius Maada Bio, who was in Scotland attending the United Nations climate talks Saturday, deplored the "horrendous loss of life."

"My profound sympathies with families who have lost loved ones and those who have been maimed as a result," he tweeted.

Vice President Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh visited two hospitals overnight and said Sierra Leone's National Disaster Management Agency and others would "work tirelessly" in the wake of the emergency.

"We are all deeply saddened by this national tragedy, and it is indeed a difficult time for our country," he said on his Facebook page.

8 dead, numerous injured at Astroworld Festival in Houston

HOUSTON (AP) — At least eight people died and numerous others were injured in what officials described as a surge of the crowd at the Astroworld music festival in Houston while rapper Travis Scott was performing.

Officials declared a "mass casualty incident" just after 9 p.m. Friday during the festival where an estimated 50,000 people were in attendance, Houston Fire Chief Samuel Peña told reporters at a news conference.

"The crowd began to compress towards the front of the stage, and that caused some panic, and it started causing some injuries," the fire chief said. "People began to fall out, become unconscious, and it created additional panic."

The show was called off shortly thereafter. The fire chief said "scores of individuals" were injured.

Officials transported 17 people to hospitals, including 11 who were in cardiac arrest, Peña said. It wasn't clear whether all eight who died were among the 17 that had been transported to hospitals. Many people were also treated at the scene at NRG Park, where a field hospital had been set up. About 300 people

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were examined at that site throughout the day, he said.

Astroworld is a two-day music festival that was scheduled to take place Friday and Saturday in Houston. The event was sold out, according to the Astroworld website. Saturday's performances have been canceled.

The deaths called to mind a 1979 concert for The Who where 11 people died and about two dozen were injured as thousands of fans tried to get into Cincinnati's riverfront coliseum.

Scott, one of music's biggest young stars, released two new songs earlier Friday, "Mafia" and "Escape Plan." The 29-year-old Houston native has been nominated for eight Grammy Awards. He has a 3-year-old daughter, Stormi, with Kylie Jenner, who announced in September that she's pregnant with their second child.

Drake joined Scott on-stage at the concert — which was livestreamed by Apple Music — and posted photos to Instagram after the performance.

Event promoters had arranged for medical units to be on scene at the festival, however once the crowd surge began, those units were "quickly overwhelmed," Peña said.

In a video posted to social media, Scott could be seen stopping the concert at one point and asking for aid for someone in the audience: "Security, somebody help real quick."

Houston Police Executive Assistant Chief Larry Satterwhite was near the front of the crowd and said it seemed the surge "happened all at once."

"Suddenly we had several people down on the ground, experiencing some type of cardiac arrest or some type of medical episode," Satterwhite said. "And so we immediately started doing CPR, and moving people right then, and that's when I went and met with the promoters, and Live Nation, and they agreed to end early in the interest of public safety."

Peña said officials did not immediately know the causes of death for the eight people who died. A medical examiner would investigate. The deceased had not been identified as of early Saturday.

Officials set up a reunification center at a hotel for family members who had not been able to reach relatives who had been in attendance at the event. Authorities were looking to connect families with festivalgoers who were transported to the hospital, "some as young as 10" years old, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo said.

Houston Police Chief Troy Finner called for calm and urged people not to jump to conclusions as to what caused the surge.

"I think it's very important that none of us speculate. Nobody has all the answers tonight," Finner said. He added that there have been several rumors surrounding the event that authorities would look into.

"We're going to do an investigation and find out because it's not fair to the producers, to anybody else involved, until we determine what happened, what caused the surge," he said. "We don't know, but we will find out."

The Associated Press reached out to a representative for Scott but did not immediately hear back.

Finner told reporters that Scott and the event promoters cooperated with police.

Scott founded Astroworld Festival in 2018 and it has taken place at the former site of Six Flags AstroWorld each year since, except for in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Other music events where there have been multiple fatalities in recent years include the Las Vegas massacre in 2017 when 58 people were killed at the Route 91 Harvest Festival, the so-called Ghost Ship fire in 2016 that killed 36 people in California and the 2003 Station nightclub fire that killed 100 people in Rhode Island.

UN investigator: Crimes against humanity under Myanmar junta

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The head of the U.N. body investigating the most serious crimes in Myanmar said Friday that preliminary evidence collected since the military seized power on Feb. 1 shows a wide-spread and systematic attack on civilians "amounting to crimes against humanity."

Nicholas Koumjian told U.N. reporters that the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, which

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he heads, has received over 200,000 communications since the army takeover and has collected over 1.5 million items of evidence that are being analyzed "so that one day those most responsible for the serious international crimes in Myanmar will be brought to account."

In determining that the crimes against civilians appear to be widespread and systematic, he said investigators saw patterns of violence -- a measured response by security forces to demonstrations in the first six weeks or so after the military takeover followed by "an uptick in violence and much more violent methods used to suppress the demonstrators."

"This was happening in different places at the same time, indicating to us it would be logical to conclude this was from a central policy," Koumjian said. "And, also, we saw that particular groups were targeted, especially for arrests and detentions that appear to be without due process of law. And this includes, of course, journalists, medical workers and political opponents."

Myanmar for five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to leadership in 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investment into the country.

The Feb. 1 military takeover followed November elections which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won overwhelmingly and the military rejects as fraudulent. Since the takeover, Myanmar has been wracked by unrest, with peaceful demonstrations against the ruling generals morphing first into a low-level insurgency in many urban areas after security forces used deadly force and then into more serious combat in rural areas, especially in border regions where ethnic minority militias have been engaging in heavy clashes with government troops.

Christine Schraner Burgener told The Associated Press shortly before her 3 ½ year term as the U.N. special envoy for Myanmar ended on Oct. 31 that "civil war" has spread throughout the country.

The U.N. investigative body was established by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council in September 2018 with a mandate to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law committed in Myanmar.

Koumjian, an American lawyer who served as an international prosecutor of serious crimes committed in Cambodia, East Timor and Bosnia, was appointed by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as its head in 2019 with instructions to prepare files that can facilitate criminal prosecutions in national, regional or international tribunals to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Koumjian said his team has been collecting evidence from a wide variety of sources including individuals, organizations, businesses and governments, and the evidence includes photographs, videos, testimonies and social media posts "that could be relevant to show that crimes happened and who is responsible for those crimes."

The investigative body has received information from social media companies, which he wouldn't name except for Facebook because it had made its cooperation public.

"We began engaging with Facebook as soon as we were created in 2019, and they have been meeting with us regularly," Koumjian said. "We have received some, but certainly not all, that we have requested. We continue to negotiate with them and actually I am hopeful that we are going to receive more information."

He said the Human Rights Council specifically instructed the investigators to cooperate with the International Criminal Court's probe into crimes committed against Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim minority and the case at the International Court of Justice brought by Gambia on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation accusing Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingya.

"So we are sharing documents with those proceedings," Koumjian said.

The court actions stem from the Myanmar military's harsh counterinsurgency campaign against the Rohingya in August 2017 in response to an insurgent attack. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh to escape what has been called an ethnic cleansing campaign involving mass rapes, killings and the torching of homes.

Koujjan said: "All we're doing is collecting evidence of the very worst violence, hopefully sending a mes-

sage to perpetrators: "If you commit this, you run the risk that you will be held to account."

Ice on the edge of survival: Warming is changing the Arctic

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

While conducting research in Greenland, ice scientist Twila Moon was struck this summer by what climate change has doomed Earth to lose and what could still be saved.

The Arctic is warming three times faster than the rest of the planet and is on such a knife's edge of survival that the U.N. climate negotiations underway in Scotland this week could make the difference between ice and water at the top of the world in the same way that a couple of tenths of a degree matter around the freezing mark, scientists say.

Arctic ice sheets and glaciers are shrinking, with some glaciers already gone. Permafrost, the icy soil that traps the potent greenhouse gas methane, is thawing. Wildfires have broken out in the Arctic. Siberia even hit 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). Even a region called the Last Ice Area showed unexpected melting this year.

In the next couple of decades, the Arctic is likely to see summers with no sea ice.

As she returns regularly to Greenland, Moon, a researcher with the U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center, said she finds herself "mourning and grieving for the things we have lost already" because of past carbon dioxide emissions that trap heat.

But the decisions we make now about how much more carbon pollution Earth emits will mean "an incredibly large difference between how much ice we keep and how much we lose and how quickly," she said.

The fate of the Arctic looms large during the climate talks in Glasgow — the farthest north the negotiations have taken place — because what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic. Scientists believe the warming there is already contributing to weather calamities elsewhere around the world.

"If we end up in a seasonally sea ice-free Arctic in the summertime, that's something human civilization has never known," said former NASA chief scientist Waleed Abdalati, who runs the University of Colorado's environment program. "That's like taking a sledgehammer to the climate system."

What's happening in the Arctic is a runaway effect.

"Once you start melting, that kind of enhances more melt," said University of Manitoba ice scientist Julienne Stroeve.

When covered with snow and ice, the Arctic reflects sunlight and heat. But that blanket is dwindling. And as more sea ice melts in the summer, "you're revealing really dark ocean surfaces, just like a black T-shirt," Moon said. Like dark clothing, the open patches of sea soak up heat from the sun more readily.

Between 1971 and 2019, the surface of the Arctic warmed three times faster than the rest of the world, according to the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program.

The result?

"The Arctic isn't just changing in temperature," Abdalati said. "It's changing in state. It's becoming a different place."

The 2015 Paris climate agreement set a goal of limiting the warming of the Earth to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial temperatures, or, failing that, keeping it under 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). The world has already gotten 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer since the late 1800s.

The difference between what happens at 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees can hit the Arctic harder than the rest of the world, University of Alaska Fairbanks climate scientist John Walsh, a member of the Arctic monitoring team. "We can save the Arctic, or at least preserve it in many ways, but we're going to lose that if we go above 1.5."

The Arctic itself has blown past 2 degrees Celsius of warming, Stroeve said. It's approaching 9 degrees Celsius (16 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming in November, she said.

For John Waghiyi Jr., the Arctic is not a number or an abstraction. It's been home for 67 years, and he and other native Bering Sea elders have watched the Arctic change because of warming. The sea ice,

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which allows humans and polar bears to hunt, is shrinking in the summer.

"The ice is very dangerous nowadays. It's very unpredictable," said Waghiyi of Savoonga, Alaska. "The ice pack affects us all, spiritually, culturally and physically, as we need to have it in order to keep harvesting."

The ice is "at the core of our identity," said Dalee Sambo Dorough, international chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, representing 165,000 people in several nations.

This isn't just a problem for people living in the Arctic. It spells trouble for regions much farther south.

An increasingly large number of studies link Arctic changes to alterations of the jet stream — the river of air that moves weather from west to east — and other weather systems. And those changes, scientists say, can contribute to more extreme weather events, such as floods, drought, the February Texas freeze, or more severe wildfires.

Also, the melting of ice sheets and glaciers can add considerably to rising sea levels.

"The fate of places like Miami are tied very closely to the fate of the Greenland," said David Balton, director of the U.S. Arctic Executive Steering Committee, which coordinates U.S. domestic regulations involving the Arctic and deals with other northern nations. "If you live in Topeka, Kansas, or if you live in California. If you live in Nigeria, your life is going to be affected. ... The Arctic matters on all sorts of levels."

Read stories on climate issues by The Associated Press at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate>.

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears.

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

Dems end deadlock, House hands Biden infrastructure win

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House approved a \$1 trillion package of road and other infrastructure projects after Democrats resolved a months-long standoff between progressives and moderates, notching a victory that President Joe Biden and his party had become increasingly anxious to claim.

The House passed the measure 228-206 late Friday, prompting prolonged cheers from the relieved Democratic side of the chamber. Thirteen Republicans, mostly moderates, supported the legislation while six of Democrats' farthest left members — including Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri — opposed it.

Approval of the bill, which would create legions of jobs and improve broadband, water supplies and other public works, whisked it to the desk of a president whose approval ratings have dropped and whose nervous party got a cold shoulder from voters in this week's off-year elections.

Democratic gubernatorial candidates were defeated in Virginia and squeaked through in New Jersey, two blue-leaning states. Those setbacks made party leaders — and moderates and progressives alike — impatient to produce impactful legislation and demonstrate they know how to govern. Democrats can ill afford to seem in disarray a year before midterm elections that could result in Republicans regaining congressional control.

Simply freeing up the infrastructure measure for final congressional approval was a like a burst of adrenaline for Democrats. Yet despite the win, Democrats endured a setback when they postponed a vote on a second, even larger bill until later this month.

That 10-year, \$1.85 trillion measure bolstering health, family and climate change programs was sidetracked after moderates demanded a cost estimate on the sprawling measure from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. The postponement dashed hopes that the day would produce a double-barreled win for Biden with passage of both bills.

But in an evening breakthrough brokered by Biden and House leaders, five moderates later agreed to

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back that bill if CBO's estimates are consistent with preliminary numbers that White House and congressional tax analysts have provided. The agreement, in which lawmakers promised to vote on the social and environment bill by the week of Nov. 15, stood as a significant step toward a House vote that could ultimately ship it to the Senate.

"Generations from now, people will look back and know this is when America won the economic competition for the 21st Century," Biden said in a written statement early Saturday.

The president and first lady Jill Biden delayed plans to travel Friday evening to their house in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. Instead, Biden spoke to House leaders, moderates and progressives, said a White House official who described the conversations on condition of anonymity.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said Biden even called her mother in India, though it was unclear why.

"This was not to bribe me, this is when it was all done," Jayapal told reporters. The lawmaker said her mother told her she "just kept screaming like a little girl."

In a two-sentence statement, the five moderates said that if the fiscal estimates on the social and environment bill raise problems, "we remain committed to working to resolve any discrepancies" to pass it. The five included Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., leader of a group of centrists who this summer repeatedly pressured House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to schedule earlier votes on the infrastructure bill.

In exchange, progressives agreed to back the infrastructure measure, which they'd spent months holding hostage in an effort to pressure moderates to back the larger bill.

The day marked a rare detente between Democrats' moderate and progressive wings that party leaders hope will continue this fall. The rival factions have spent recent weeks accusing each other of jeopardizing Biden's and the party's success by overplaying their hands and expressed a deep distrust of each other.

But Friday night, Jayapal suggested they would work together moving forward.

"Let me tell you, we're going to trust each other because the Democratic Party is together on this. We are united that it is important for us to get both bills done," she said.

The agreement came together after the White House issued a statement from Biden explicitly urging Democrats to support both bills. "I am confident that during the week of November 15, the House will pass the Build Back Better Act," he said.

When party leaders announced early in the day that the social and environment measure would be delayed, the scrambled plans cast a fresh pall over the party.

Democrats have struggled for months to take advantage of their control of the White House and Congress by advancing their top priorities. That's been hard, in part because of Democrats' slender majorities, with bitter internal divisions forcing House leaders to miss several self-imposed deadlines for votes.

"Welcome to my world," Pelosi told reporters, adding, "We are not a lockstep party."

Progressives had long demanded that the two massive bills be voted on together to pressure moderates to support the larger, more expansive social measure.

Democrats' day turned tumultuous early after a half-dozen moderates demanded the CBO cost estimate of the sprawling package of health, education, family and climate change initiatives before they would vote for it.

Party leaders said that would take days or more. But with Friday's delayed vote and lawmakers leaving town for a week's break, those budget estimates should be ready by the time a vote is held.

The infrastructure measure cleared the Senate in August with bipartisan support. The package would provide huge sums for highway, mass transit, broadband, airport, drinking and waste water, power grids and other projects.

But it became a pawn in the long struggle for power between progressives and moderates. Early Friday, Jayapal said the White House and Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation had provided all the fiscal information lawmakers needed for the broad bill. She suggested that progressives would oppose the infrastructure bill unless the two measures were voted on together.

But that changed after the two Democratic factions reached their agreement.

House passage of the social and environment package would send it to the Senate, where it faces cer-

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tain changes and more Democratic drama. That's chiefly because of demands by Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona to contain the measure's costs and curb or drop some of its initiatives.

Moderates have forced leaders to slash the roughly 2,100-page measure to around half its original \$3.5 trillion size. Republicans oppose it as too expensive and damaging to the economy.

The package would provide large numbers of Americans with assistance to pay for health care, raising children and caring for elderly people at home. The package would provide \$555 billion in tax breaks encouraging cleaner energy and electric vehicles. Democrats added provisions in recent days restoring a new paid family leave program and work permits for millions of immigrants.

Much of the package's cost would be covered with higher taxes on wealthier Americans and large corporations.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro, Farnoush Amiri, Kevin Freking, Aamer Madhani, Alexandra Jaffe, Mary Clare Jalonick and Brian Slodysko contributed to this report.

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Brazilian singer and Latin Grammy winner dies in plane crash

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Marília Mendonça, one of Brazil's most popular singers and a Latin Grammy winner, died Friday in an airplane crash on her way to a concert. She was 26.

Mendonça's press office confirmed her death in a statement, and said four other passengers on the flight also perished. Their plane crashed between Mendonça's hometown Goiania and Caratinga, a small city in Minas Gerais state located north of Rio de Janeiro.

Minas Gerais state's civil police also confirmed Mendonça's death, without providing details about the cause of the accident, which occurred shortly before arrival. Photographs and videos show the plane laying just beneath a waterfall; Mendonça had posted a video this afternoon showing her walking toward the plane, guitar case in hand.

The rising star performed country music, in Brazil called sertanejo. She was known for tackling feminist issues in her songs, such as denouncing men who control their partners, and calling for female empowerment.

On Friday evening, the news triggered an outpouring of sadness on social media from all corners of Brazil, including fans, politicians, musicians and soccer players. Her Instagram account has 38 million followers.

"I refuse to believe, I just refuse," Brazil soccer star Neymar, who is a friend of Mendonça's, said on Twitter after the news broke. Brazil's government also offered its condolences.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro also used social media to mourn the passing "of one of the greatest artists of her generation."

"The entire country receives the news in shock," he said.

Her album "Em Todos os Cantos" won her the 2019 Latin Grammy for best sertanejo album. She was nominated for the same award this year for "Patroas."

Mendonça was also famous for her romantic songs, often expressing the loss of loved ones.

"You always make me cry, you're unique and eternal," said fan Michelle Wisla on Twitter.

Mendonça leaves behind a son, who will turn 2 years old next month.

Local Democrats warn party: Growing Republican wave is real

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW HOPE, Pa. (AP) — The Democrats of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, felt the red wave building over the summer when frustrated parents filled school board meetings to complain about masking requirements and an academic theory on systemic racism that wasn't even taught in local schools.

They realized the wave was growing when such concerns, fueled by misleading reports on conservative media, began showing up in unrelated elections for judges, sheriff and even the county recorder of deeds. And so they were not surprised — but devastated all the same — when Democrats all across this key county northeast of Philadelphia were wiped out in Tuesday's municipal elections.

"This is a bell we need to pay attention to. This is something going on across the country," said attorney Patrice Tisdale, a Democrat who lost her bid to become a magisterial district judge against a Republican candidate with no formal legal training. "The Democrats can't keep doing politics as usual."

She's among the down-ballot Democrats sending an urgent message to the national party: It's worse than you think.

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This suburban region northeast of Philadelphia is a critical political battleground in one of the nation's premier swing states. It's the type of place where moderate and college-educated voters, repelled by former President Donald Trump's divisive behavior, helped Democrats retake control of Congress in 2018 and win back the White House in 2020. That's what makes the setbacks here so alarming to many Democrats.

Some in the party privately suspected they were in trouble in Virginia's high-profile governor's race, which they ultimately lost. But Democrats also suffered embarrassing outcomes in Democratic-leaning suburban New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, where they nearly lost the governor's office and the state Senate president was unseated by a furniture company truck driver who spent \$2,300 on his entire campaign.

The focus now shifts to the even more consequential midterm election season next year, when control of Congress and dozens more governorships will be decided. Already, high-profile Senate races are taking shape in states like Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina and here in Pennsylvania, where there is reason to believe the political dynamics could be different in November 2022.

Namely, Trump, who Republicans intentionally avoided in this week's elections, will almost certainly be a much more significant presence next year. The early slate of Republican candidates, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, have embraced Trump, his tone and his divisive policies much more than the Republicans on this week's ballots. At the same time, Democratic strategists believe their party on Capitol Hill will eventually pass popular infrastructure and health care packages that voters will appreciate.

"There's just not a correlation there in terms of what the issues are going to be a year from now and the kind of personalities and the kind of candidates that are running here in Pennsylvania," said Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, a leading Democratic candidate in the state's high-profile election to replace Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, whose retirement gives Democrats one of their best pickup opportunities in the nation.

The head of the Senate Democrats' campaign arm, Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan, predicted the party would have a strong record to sell voters next year as the pandemic ends and the economy recovers.

"It will be a major contrast with Republicans who are focused on fighting with each other in nasty primaries, wooing Donald Trump for his endorsement and pushing the agenda of the ultra-wealthy," Peters said.

Indeed, while Virginia's Republican Gov.-elect Glenn Youngkin successfully avoided Trump throughout his race, the former president has already endorsed Pennsylvania Republican Senate candidate Sean Parnell, who's in the midst of a messy public divorce that includes allegations of domestic abuse. Parnell, a former Army Ranger and a regular on Fox News, is scheduled to testify next week in divorce court.

Trump is also taking an active interest in Georgia, where his endorsed Senate candidate, former NFL star Herschel Walker, is facing allegations of domestic violence of his own. And in Arizona, the candidates are embracing his election fraud conspiracy theories. One of the leading Republican candidates, state Attorney General Mark Brnovich, recently bowed to pressure from Trump in announcing a new investigation into the 2020 election.

Still, historical headwinds against the party that occupies the White House — backed by a new Republican focus on education that seemed to unite Trump's base and anti-Trump Republicans this week — could make the 2022 midterms the worst election for Democrats since 2010. That year, they lost 63 seats in the House and another six in the Senate.

Bucks County offers a sobering tale for Democrats everywhere.

President Joe Biden won this overwhelmingly white county of nearly 630,000 people northeast of Philadelphia by more than 4 points just last fall, a significant jump from Hillary Clinton's victory of less than 1% four years earlier. The county serves as a microcosm of Pennsylvania, and perhaps the country, with a blend of working-class neighborhoods, rural areas and affluent suburbs.

Trump's name was largely absent from this week's municipal elections, but a new Republican focus on education helped unify the Republican electorate, which was badly fractured during the Trump presidency.

"For us, it was really last summer when it all kind of hit," said Liz Sheehan, the Democratic president of the New Hope-Solebury School Board.

People began to raise concerns at local school board meetings about an alleged sexual assault involving a student in northern Virginia. Others seized on controversial books and critical race theory, an academic

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framework that centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions and that they function to maintain the dominance of white people. The approach isn't taught in public schools, but has become a catch-all political buzzword in recent months for any teaching about race and American history.

While the alleged sexual assault and debates over critical race theory were hot topics in national conservative media, they had little to do with Bucks County.

"We sort of naively thought that, 'Alright, I guess we're a little bit more rational in our area.' And all of the sudden, we had meetings where people were showing up in Trump hats," Sheehan said.

"A lot of it now is about this notion of parent control in public school, and that is the mask debate and the critical race theory debate coming together under one heading," the school board president continued. "And that, I think is what has really motivated people locally, and why we saw a lot of school board members lose seats, a lot of far-right people gain seats."

Sheehan won her race, but many other Democrats were not so lucky.

Robin Robinson, the Bucks County recorder of deeds, says she earned more votes in her bid for a second term than any other Democratic candidate for that office in history. She lost anyway.

She's scared about what that means for the 2022 midterms.

"I was the largest vote getter for a Democrat in the history of this county and I couldn't win a crumbly little reporter of deeds?" Robinson said. "The problem is bigger than Bucks County."

Several Democratic Senate candidates were active in Bucks County in the days and weeks leading up to the election to try to energize voters behind their lower-profile candidates. Overall turnout ultimately exceeded 40% of registered voters in the county, a staggering figure for an off-year election.

Bucks County Republican Party Chair Pat Poprik is optimistic about her party's future, especially after watching a surge of first-time volunteers in recent months. The GOP's success had little to do with Trump, she said.

"Some people listen to him, absolutely, but it's diminishing constantly," Poprik said. "If he comes back in 2024, we'll see, I don't know, some people say he will, some people say he won't. I gotta tell you, that was the last thing on my mind."

Biden's bet that economy would boost Democrats falls flat

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy was supposed to help President Joe Biden and Democrats, but as of late it's been hurting them with voters.

Biden on Friday praised the U.S. economy for performing better than the rest of the world, saying it's largely because of his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package and plans for additional spending of roughly \$2.75 trillion on infrastructure, families, schools, health care and climate change.

Yet Americans have turned pessimistic about the economy as inflation has persisted. On Tuesday, voters in Virginia rewarded Republican Glenn Youngkin with a win in the governor's election in part based on a belief that he would be better for economic growth. The president could not ignore these realities, yet he said Friday at the White House that the latest numbers show a ruggedly energetic economy.

"We still have to tackle the costs that American families are facing, but this recovery is faster, stronger and fairer and wider than almost anyone could have predicted," Biden said. "That's what the numbers say."

The president also acknowledged that voters can't just rely on the numbers—they need to "feel it in their lives and their bank accounts and their hopes and expectations."

This question as to whether Americans are feeling what the economic numbers show is at the heart of Biden's challenge in the months leading up to the 2022 elections, when control of the House and Senate could possibly slip from the Democrats. It's not enough for the president to highlight Friday's employment report of 531,000 job gains and a 4.6% unemployment report in October, so long as the pandemic rages and shortages of basic goods ranging from auto to furniture keep pushing up prices.

Beneath this challenge rests a deeper set of questions about how politics and the economy mingle after the pandemic. Do Americans care more about job growth or inflation? Are they skeptical that government

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spending can permanently improve the economy for the better? Can Democrats expect to be rewarded for their results or are voters indifferent to policy achievements?

These questions also posed an obstacle as House Democrats on Friday finally approved Biden's bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure deal, which had already cleared the Senate. The House was preparing later Friday to move forward with a \$1.75 trillion mix of social spending and matching increases.

After attending the U.N. climate summit, Biden suggested at a Tuesday news conference in Glasgow, Scotland, that the failure to pass his agenda earlier would have no impact on how the Democrats fared in the 2021 election.

"I've not seen any evidence that whether or not I am doing well or poorly, whether or not I've got my agenda passed or not is going to have any real impact on winning or losing," the president said. "Even if we had passed my agenda, I wouldn't claim, 'We won because Biden's agenda passed.'"

Economists across the ideological spectrum noted that the country faces an unusual situation after the coronavirus. The delta variant appears to have hobbled growth late this summer and the rush of money from the government caused consumer and business demand to surge in ways not seen in recent recoveries.

As a result, some reliable indicators of the economy have become less reliable. Yes, there has been a solid recovery in hiring yet so many people have stopped working or seeking jobs that the adjusted unemployment rate is closer to 7.3%, instead of 4.6%, said Heidi Shierholz, president of the liberal Economic Policy Institute and a former chief economist at the Labor Department.

"We are still in a huge hole," Shierholz said. "Coming out of the COVID recession has created some unique circumstances that people never experienced before."

This created a Dickensian-like framework in which it could be the best of times and the worst of times. The economy is poised for the fastest growth since 1984 and the stock market's Dow Jones industrial average hit a record high this week. Yet inflation is running high at an annualized rate of 5.4% and eating into paychecks. Employers are struggling to find workers despite raising wages. Container ships are stuck waiting to dock at ports, creating empty shelves and long delays for consumers ahead of the holiday shopping season.

"Inflation is outpacing wage gains and that's a big problem," said Michael Strain, director of economic policy studies at the center-right American Enterprise Institute. "It feels like the economy has gotten worse."

Average gasoline prices have jumped more than 60% from a year ago to \$3.42 a gallon, according to the American Automobile Association. The jump has been so swift that Biden last week called on OPEC nations to pump more oil even as he simultaneously called for moving away from fossil fuels to have a zero-emissions economy by 2050.

Voters so far seem to believe that the economy would fare better under Republicans.

In Tuesday's election in Virginia, more than a third of voters said the economy was their top priority, according to AP VoteCast. Of that key group, 63% broke for Youngkin on the belief that a Republican could do more for growth.

More importantly, 54% of Virginia voters said they disapproved of how Biden was handling the economy. That nearly matches a recent AP-NORC survey in which 58% nationwide disliked the president's economic stewardship, a sharp reversal from March when 60% backed Biden on the economy.

Republican lawmakers have been effective at hammering Biden and Democrats on the inflation issue. The Biden administration initially tried to minimize inflation as a problem by calling it transitory, but the consensus by many economists is that it will keep running above the Federal Reserve's 2% target until the second half of next year.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell interpreted the results of Tuesday's elections as a rejection of Biden's economic policies.

"Washington Democrats have super-charged inflation, re-created welfare without work requirements, and made America significantly less energy independent," the Kentucky senator said in a Wednesday floor speech. "The American people will not stand for this. That's what voters told Democrats last night."

There is also the possibility that Biden misread what voters were saying in last year's elections. Much of

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the president's ability to create a broader coalition came from opposition to Donald Trump, rather than a full embrace of his ideas. Paul Winfree, director of economic policy studies at the conservative Heritage Foundation, interprets the disapproval of Biden as a sign that voters see his expansion of government spending as going too far to the left.

"The 2020 election was a referendum on Trump as an individual more than anything else," Winfree said. "Now we see voters saying that the Democrats have misidentified their mandate."

Stuart Stevens, co-founder of the Lincoln Project, a conservative group that staunchly opposes Trump, said that Biden has struggled to communicate its successes with the economy. He noted that many Americans believe the country is on the wrong track even though vaccinations are up, the stock market is climbing and the unemployment rate is falling.

Stevens concluded Friday on Twitter: "The Democratic Party has a huge messaging problem."

Virginia Dems concede defeat, say Republicans control House

By DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Democratic leaders in Virginia conceded Friday that Republicans have won control of the House of Delegates.

The Associated Press has not called all of Virginia's House races yet. But the concession means Republicans would complete an elections sweep in which they also reclaimed the offices of governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general.

House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn issued a statement acknowledging the GOP majority shortly after Democratic Del. Martha Mugler conceded defeat in a tight race against Republican challenger A.C. Cordoza in the 91st House district, located in Virginia's Hampton Roads region. With Mugler's concession, Republicans now expect to hold at least 51 seats in the 100-member chamber.

"While the results of the election were not in our favor, our work for the people of Virginia goes on," said Filler-Corn.

Garren Shipley, a spokesman for House Republican Leader Todd Gilbert, said Filler-Corn called Gilbert on Friday. "The House Republican caucus appreciates her pledge to a smooth transition to the incoming majority," Shipley said.

The GOP victories are being seen as a backlash against a Democratic majority that has pushed through a series of progressive reforms over the past two years, including the repeal of the death penalty, a loosening of abortion restrictions and the legalization of marijuana.

Democrats hold a slim 21-19 majority in the Senate. Senators are not up for reelection until 2023.

Tuesday's marquee race in Virginia was the governor's contest, in which Republican businessman Glenn Youngkin defeated former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe. The GOP also captured the lieutenant governor's office after Republican Winsome Sears beat Democrat Hala Ayala, and the attorney general's office with Republican Jason Miyares' victory over Democratic two-term incumbent Mark Herring. Sears will become the state's first female lieutenant governor and the first woman of color to win statewide office in Virginia.

Youngkin's victory and the near-defeat of New Jersey's Democratic governor have sparked fears that Democrats are on course to lose control of Congress in next year's midterm elections.

Democrats held a 55-45 majority heading into the election Tuesday.

Republicans had controlled the House since 2000, but Democrats won back 15 GOP-held seats in 2017, helped by voter hostility toward then-President Donald Trump. In 2019, Democrats took full control of the legislature by wiping out slim Republican majorities in the House and Senate.

Among the surprise wins this year was that by Republican Kim Taylor over three-term incumbent Democratic Del. Lashrecse Aird in the 63rd District, which gave Republicans their 50th seat on Wednesday. Aird claimed victory late Tuesday, but a late surge by Taylor gave her a 741-vote win.

Democrat Wendy Gooditis won reelection to her third term in District 10, defeating Republican challenger Nick Clemente, a political newcomer. Gooditis' northern Virginia district includes parts of fast-growing Loudoun County and rural areas in Clarke and Frederick counties.

Associated Press writer Sarah Rankin in Richmond, Virginia, contributed to this report.

No toilet for returning SpaceX crew, stuck using diapers

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The astronauts who will depart the International Space Station on Sunday will be stuck using diapers on the way home because of their capsule's broken toilet.

NASA astronaut Megan McArthur described the situation Friday as "suboptimal" but manageable. She and her three crewmates will spend 20 hours in their SpaceX capsule, from the time the hatches are closed until Monday morning's planned splashdown.

"Spaceflight is full of lots of little challenges," she said during a news conference from orbit. "This is just one more that we'll encounter and take care of in our mission. So we're not too worried about it."

After a series of meetings Friday, mission managers decided to bring McArthur and the rest of her crew home before launching their replacements. That SpaceX launch already had been delayed more than a week by bad weather and an undisclosed medical issue involving one of the crew.

SpaceX is now targeting liftoff for Wednesday night at the earliest.

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet, who will return with McArthur, told reporters that the past six months have been intense up there. The astronauts conducted a series of spacewalks to upgrade the station's power grid, endured inadvertent thruster firings by docked Russian vehicles that sent the station into brief spins, and hosted a private Russian film crew — a space station first.

They also had to deal with the toilet leak, pulling up panels in their SpaceX capsule and discovering pools of urine. The problem was first noted during SpaceX's private flight in September, when a tube came unglued and spilled urine beneath the floorboards. SpaceX fixed the toilet on the capsule awaiting liftoff, but deemed the one in orbit unusable.

Engineers determined that the capsule had not been structurally compromised by the urine and was safe for the ride back. The astronauts will have to rely on what NASA describes as absorbent "undergarments."

On the culinary side, the astronauts grew the first chile peppers in space — "a nice moral boost," according to McArthur. They got to sample their harvest in the past week, adding pieces of the green and red peppers to tacos.

"They have a nice spiciness to them, a little bit of a lingering burn," she said. "Some found that more troublesome than others."

Also returning with McArthur and Pesquet: NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide. SpaceX launched them to the space station on April 23. Their capsule is certified for a maximum 210 days in space, and with Friday marking their 196th day aloft, NASA is eager to get them back as soon as possible.

One American and two Russians will remain on the space station following their departure. While it would be better if their replacements arrived first — in order to share tips on living in space — Kimbrough said the remaining NASA astronaut will fill in the newcomers.

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US employers shrugged off virus and stepped up hiring

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's employers accelerated their hiring last month, adding a solid 531,000 jobs, the most since July and a sign that the recovery from the pandemic recession is overcoming a virus-induced slowdown.

Friday's report from the Labor Department also showed that the unemployment rate fell to 4.6% last month from 4.8% in September. That is a comparatively low level though still well above the pre-pandemic

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jobless rate of 3.5%. And the job gains in August and September weren't as weak as initially reported: The government increased its estimate of hiring for those two months by a hefty combined 235,000 jobs.

All told, the figures point to an economy that is steadily recovering from the pandemic recession, with healthy consumer spending prompting companies in nearly every industry to add workers. Though the effects of COVID-19 are still causing severe supply shortages, heightening inflation and keeping many people out of the workforce, employers are finding gradually more success in filling near record-high job postings.

"This is the kind of recovery we can get when we are not sidelined by a surge in COVID cases," said Nick Bunker, director of economic research at the employment website Indeed. "The speed of employment gains has faltered at times this year, but the underlying momentum of the U.S. labor market is quite clear."

The better-than-expected jobs report was welcomed on Wall Street, where investors sent stocks further into record territory. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose more than 200 points, or roughly 0.6%, in Friday trading. Short-term Treasury yields rose as some investors moved up their expectations for when the Federal Reserve will begin raising interest rates. But longer-term yields dipped amid muted expectations for inflation over the long term.

By most barometers, the economic recovery appears solidly on track. Services companies in such areas as retail, banking and warehousing have reported a sharp jump in sales. Sales of new and existing homes surged last month. And consumer confidence rose in October after three straight declines.

At the same time, though, the nation remains 4.2 million jobs short of the number it had before the pandemic flattened the economy in March 2020. The effects of the virus are still discouraging some people from traveling, shopping, eating out and attending entertainment venues.

In October, the pickup in hiring was spread across nearly every major industry, with only government employers reporting a job loss, mostly in education. Shipping and warehousing companies added 54,000 jobs. The battered leisure and hospitality sector, which includes, restaurants, bars, hotels and entertainment venues, gained 164,000. Manufacturers, despite their struggles with supply shortages, added 60,000, the most since June 2020.

And employers, who have been competing to fill jobs from a diminished pool of applicants, raised wages at a solid clip: Average hourly pay jumped 4.9% in October compared with a year earlier, up from 4.6% the previous month. Even a gain that strong, though, is barely keeping pace with recent surges in consumer inflation.

Those price increases pose a headwind for the economy. Higher costs for food, heating oil, rents and furniture have burdened millions of families. Prices rose 4.4% in September compared with 12 months earlier, the sharpest such jump in three decades.

Among people who are receiving pay raises, some of the biggest beneficiaries are the record-high number of people who have been quitting jobs to take new ones. One of them is Christian Frink, who has begun work as a business analyst at a digital consulting firm. In his new job, Frink, 27, of Ferndale, Michigan, helps business clients determine the technologies they need.

Earlier this year, Frink held a marketing job but left it because, like many people during COVID, he felt burnt out. He then worked for Door Dash during the spring and summer to earn money and searched for new work. Although employers were complaining about a labor shortage, several told him they wouldn't hire anyone without a college degree. (Frink attended college but didn't graduate.)

This past summer, Frink took coding classes at Tech Elevator, a boot camp, and then landed his new position. Now, he's earning 35% more than in his previous job and says he's "blown away" that he already has health care coverage and doesn't have to wait months to become eligible.

Yet it isn't only job-switchers who are receiving pay raises. Chad Leibundguth, a regional director in Tampa for the Robert Half staffing agency, said the job market is the strongest for workers he has seen in his 22-year career. Before the pandemic, he said, you could fill a customer service job in Florida for \$14 an hour. "Nowadays," he said, "you've got to be closer to \$20 an hour, because people have options."

Job prospects are brightening even for people who have been out of work for prolonged periods. The number of long-term unemployed — people who have been jobless for six months or more — has fallen

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sharply in recent months, to 2.3 million in October from 4.2 million in April. That's still double the pre-recession total. But it's an encouraging sign because employers are typically wary of hiring people who haven't held jobs for an extended time.

At the same time, disparities in the job market have persisted. The Black unemployment rate was unchanged in October at 7.9%, for example, while for white workers, it fell to 4% from 4.2%. The Latino jobless rate dropped to 5.9% from 6.3%.

And though white-collar jobs in professional services like information technology, engineering and architecture are nearly back to their pre-pandemic employment levels, leisure and hospitality still has 1.4 million fewer jobs.

Hari Ravichandran, CEO of digital security provider Aura in Boston, says his 800-person company has 140 positions open, mostly in software development.

Ravichandran is willing to hire remote workers; 170 of his staffers have never regularly worked in any of the company's buildings. Still, hiring remains as tough as he's ever experienced.

One disappointing note in Friday's report is that the workforce — the number of people either working or looking for a job — was unchanged in October. That suggested that the reopening of schools in September, the waning of the virus, and the expiration of a \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement have yet to coax many people off the sidelines of the job market in large numbers.

Drawing many people back into the workforce after recessions is typically a prolonged process. There are now 7.4 million people officially out of work — just 1.7 million more than in February 2020, before the pandemic struck the economy. Yet millions more who lost jobs during the recession have given up their job hunts, and employers might have to raise pay and benefits to draw them back in, said Aaron Sojourner, a labor economist at the University of Minnesota.

Even so, some companies still can't find enough workers. Many parents, particularly mothers, haven't returned to the workforce after having left jobs during the pandemic to care for children or other relatives. Yet there was evidence of a small rebound last month: The proportion of women who were either working or looking for work rose after two months of declines.

Kourtnei Graves of Detroit has been in and out of work during the pandemic because of her parenting duties. She quit an administrative assistant job a year ago because her day care had shut down, and she had to look after her 5-year old twin girls.

Graves, 27, looked for work-from-home jobs, but many employers didn't want to provide the flexibility she needed.

"They don't want you to have to pick up your kids from school," particularly during a training, she said. "For me as their mom, I can't do that." She said the father of her children, who works in the auto industry, helps financially.

But with the girls now in kindergarten, Graves broadened her job search and this week accepted a job at a clothing store. She feels overqualified, given her seven years working in administrative jobs. But she is happy to be working.

"They're paying pretty decent for retail," she said. "It's definitely been a struggle and a journey."

This story has been corrected to remove an erroneous reference to a 25% pay increase at Aura in the past nine months.

Voting lawsuit keeps Texas, Biden administration at odds

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — More and more, Texas and the Biden administration are dragging each other to court.

First it was over immigration enforcement on the U.S.-Mexico border. Then a Texas ban on most abortions. Then this week, just days after the Justice Department urged the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the nation's most restrictive abortion law, Attorney General Merrick Garland brought another lawsuit against

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America's biggest red state, this time over restrictive new voting rules.

With President's Joe Biden's own domestic priorities remaining stuck despite his party controlling Congress, his administration is simultaneously trying to knock down pillars of a hard-right agenda the Texas GOP muscled through over the last year. Doing so could provide a boost to Democrats, who are searching for a win as they confront an already stormy outlook heading into the 2022 midterm elections.

But putting up the fight is still short of sweeping federal legislation sought by Democrats, and a conservative majority on the Supreme Court could ultimately stand in the way.

Although the justices signaled on Monday they would allow Texas abortion providers to pursue a court challenge to a controversial law that has banned most abortions in the state since September, it was not clear whether they would let the restrictions remain in place for now.

"It seems like every harmful law in the state of Texas ends up in federal court," Democratic state Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer said. "Republicans control every lever of government in the state of Texas. If they wanted to celebrate Christmas in the month of April, they have the votes to do it. But just because they have the votes, that doesn't necessarily make it so."

Texas Republicans have defended their laws as legal, and Gov. Greg Abbott reacted to the latest lawsuit by tweeting: "Bring it."

Depending on the party in the White House, big states have become eager centers of resistance. California proudly sued the Trump administration more than 120 times. During the Obama administration, Abbott's biggest applause line was that his former job as attorney general was to go into the office, sue the federal government and go home.

Not even a week after Biden was sworn in, Texas eagerly resumed the role of chief antagonist to a Democratic president, suing over a 100-day moratorium on deportations. Texas has not let up since and rushed to challenge the Biden administration at just about every turn, including a lawsuit filed Friday over COVID-19 vaccine mandates for private businesses.

"The Biden Administration's new vaccine mandate on private businesses is a breathtaking abuse of federal power," said Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton, calling the requirement "flatly unconstitutional."

The Biden administration's latest suit against Texas, filed Thursday, targets provisions of a sweeping GOP-backed elections overhaul that outlasted months of protests from Democrats, including a 38-day walkout that had ground the state Capitol to a halt over the summer.

Texas is one of at least 18 states that have enacted new voting restrictions since the 2020 election, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. The laws were part of a GOP campaign in the name of election security, partly driven by former President Donald Trump's claims the election was stolen.

The Biden administration also sued Georgia over its new election laws. But the bigger goal for Democrats continues to remain out of reach: new federal elections laws they say are needed to counteract the wave of GOP voting measures. Those efforts, however, have been unable to overcome opposition by Senate Republicans, who have called it a power grab.

On Monday, the Supreme Court justices sounded less convinced that the Justice Department lawsuit against Texas over its abortion law should go forward. Justice Elena Kagan suggested that a ruling instead in favor of the providers would allow the court to avoid difficult issues of federal power.

More than 100 prosecutors and former judges signed in opposition to the law in a brief filed by the group Fair and Just Prosecution, which argued that letting the Texas law stand would allow states to create an end run around federal law.

"The fact that it's Texas means more women have been impacted," said Miriam Krinsky, the group's executive director. "But if any state had chosen to bring this type of illegal construct, I think we would have found a lot of troubled people around the country willing to come together to speak up."

Witness: Kenosha victim was belligerent but no threat

By SCOTT BAUER, MICHAEL TARM and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — The first man shot and killed by Kyle Rittenhouse on the streets of Kenosha was

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acting "belligerently" that night but did not appear to pose a serious threat to anyone, a witness testified Friday at Rittenhouse's murder trial.

Jason Lackowski, a former Marine who said he took an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle to Kenosha last year to help protect property during violent protests against racial injustice, said that Joseph Rosenbaum "asked very bluntly to shoot him" and took a few "false steppings ... to entice someone to do something."

Lackowski got up from the witness stand and demonstrated what he meant by "false stepping." He took a small step and slight lurch forward, then stopped.

But Lackowski, who was called as a witness by the prosecution, said he considered Rosenbaum a "babbling idiot" and turned his back and ignored him. He admitted he didn't see everything that went on between Rittenhouse and Rosenbaum, including their final clash.

In other testimony, the prosecution suffered a potential blow when Rosenbaum's fiancée, Kariann Swart, disclosed that he was on medication for bipolar disorder and depression but didn't fill his prescriptions because the local pharmacy was boarded up as a result of the unrest — information Rittenhouse's lawyers could use in their bid to portray Rosenbaum as the aggressor that night.

The judge allowed the defense to elicit testimony about Rosenbaum's mental illness because prosecutors brought up mention of medication. Had prosecutors not touched on the topic, it is unlikely the judge would have let the defense bring it up.

On the day he was killed, Rosenbaum had been released from a Milwaukee hospital. The jury was told that much, but not why he had been admitted — after a suicide attempt.

Rittenhouse, 18, is charged with shooting three men, two fatally, in the summer of 2020. The one-time police youth cadet was 17 when he went to Kenosha with an AR-style rifle and a medical kit in what he said was an effort to safeguard property from the demonstrations that broke out over the shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man, by a white Kenosha police officer.

Rittenhouse is white, as were those he shot.

Prosecutors have portrayed Rittenhouse as the instigator of the bloodshed, while his lawyer has argued that he acted in self-defense, suggesting among other things that Rittenhouse feared his weapon would be taken away and used against him.

On Thursday, witnesses testified that a "hyperaggressive" Rosenbaum angrily threatened to kill Rittenhouse that night and that Rosenbaum was gunned down after he chased Rittenhouse and lunged for the young man's rifle.

A state crime lab DNA analyst testified Friday that she tested swabs from the barrel guard from Rittenhouse's rifle and did not find DNA from Rosenbaum or the other man killed that night, Anthony Huber. But Amber Rasmussen said she received no swabs from the actual barrel and would have no way of knowing if Rosenbaum touched it.

Under cross-examination by Rittenhouse attorney Corey Chirafasi, Rasmussen was shown still images of Huber and Rittenhouse and agreed they appeared to depict Huber touching the rifle. She also acknowledged that the absence of Huber's DNA on the gun doesn't mean he didn't touch it.

In other testimony Friday, a Kenosha officer said that because of the chaos after the shooting and other gunfire that night, police didn't realize Rittenhouse was the gunman as he approached a police vehicle.

Video of police allowing Rittenhouse to pass, even as people were shouting that he had just shot people, was widely circulated and cited by those who say he got preferential treatment because he is white.

However, Officer Pep Moretti said he drew his weapon and used pepper spray on Rittenhouse, regarding him initially as a threat because he was disobeying commands and advancing with a gun.

Rittenhouse was not arrested at the time. He returned to his home in Antioch, Illinois, and turned himself in the next day.

Moretti described the area at the time as a "war zone," adding: "The city was burning and on fire and we're just outnumbered and completely surrounded."

In their testimony, Lackowski and another veteran, former Army infantryman Ryan Balch, both used military terminology that reflected their backgrounds as they spoke about patrolling the streets of Kenosha against protest violence.

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Lackowski referred to "areas of occupation," talked about taking up his "post" in a parking lot, and said he was trained in "shout, shove, show, shoot."

"You shout, you shove, you show your firearm and you shoot," Lackowski explained.

Balch used the term "plate carrier," which he explained means body armor. He gave a detailed explanation of the differences between full metal jacket bullets and hollow points and talked about ensuring the armed citizens in Kenosha that night worked in pairs to protect each other.

According to testimony, Rosenbaum, 36, was unarmed and did not hurt anyone that night. During the clash with Rittenhouse, he threw a clear plastic hospital bag that he had been given to hold his toiletries.

Rosenbaum's fiancée testified that hours before he was killed, she told him not to go downtown because of the unrest.

"When he left, he said that he would see me in the morning and he was all excited and 'I love you.' It was a pleasant visit," Swart said.

After getting a call from the medical examiner that Rosenbaum was dead, Swart said, she fell to her knees and cried and then found a video online showing him dying: "I broke down and I can't get that image out of my head."

In the morning, Swart said, she went to the spot at a car dealership where Rosenbaum lay on the ground after being shot. "And I put my hand in it and my hand was wet with his blood," she said. "And that's again when I collapsed on the ground."

Rosenbaum's killing has emerged as one of the most crucial moments that night because it set in motion the bloodshed that followed moments later.

Rittenhouse shot and killed Huber, a 26-year-old protester seen on bystander video hitting Rittenhouse with a skateboard. Rittenhouse then wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 27, who had a gun in his hand as he stepped toward the young man.

Rittenhouse could get life in prison if convicted in the case that has stirred furious debate over self-defense, vigilantism, the right to bear arms and the racial unrest that erupted around the U.S. after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other cases like it.

Bauer reported from Madison, Wisconsin; Forliti from Minneapolis. Associated Press writer Tammy Webber contributed from Fenton, Michigan.

Find AP's full coverage on the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse at: <https://apnews.com/hub/kyle-rittenhouse>

University changes course; professors may testify in lawsuit

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Reversing its previous position, the University of Florida said Friday that it will allow three professors to testify as experts in a lawsuit challenging a new state election law that critics say restricts voting rights.

Last month, the university prohibited Dan Smith, Michael McDonald and Sharon Austin from testifying in the lawsuit brought by civic groups, saying that such testimony would put the school in conflict with the administration of Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, which pushed the election law. More than half of the university's trustees are appointed by the governor.

In a letter to the campus, university president Kent Fuchs said he is asking the office responsible for approving professors' outside work to greenlight their request to serve as expert witnesses in the litigation. Fuchs said the outside work would have to be on the professors' own time and not use university resources.

Attorneys representing the professors said they were still planning to move forward with a lawsuit against the university.

"Despite reversing the immediate decision prohibiting the Professors from testifying, the University has made no commitment to abandon its policy preventing academics from serving as expert witnesses when the University thinks that their speech may be adverse to the State and whatever political agenda politi-

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cians want to promote," David O'Neil and Paul Donnelly said in a statement. "It is time for this matter to be rightfully adjudicated, not by press release, but in a court of law."

The university's announcement came after the union for faculty members urged donors to withhold contributions and scholars and artists to turn down invitations to campus until university administrators affirmed the free speech rights of school employees.

Not allowing them to testify would be "an attack on all of us," said Paul Ortiz, a history professor who is president of the union chapter at the university.

Hours later, after hearing about the reversal, Ortiz called the announcement, "a really positive step forward," and said the union chapter's executive committee will meet to decide how to proceed.

"I'm delighted to see this," Ortiz said. "We want some kind of guarantee that this isn't going to be on a case-by-case basis — if another faculty member says, 'I want to engage in this type of activity,' that we aren't going to end up back in the same place."

The union also had asked the university to issue an apology, affirm its support for voting rights and declare that the school's mission is for the public good.

Fuchs and Provost Joe Glover said in a letter to the campus community earlier this week that the school will immediately appoint a task force "to review the university's conflict of interest policy and examine it for consistency and fidelity." On Friday, Fuchs said a preliminary recommendation will be ready by the end of the month.

Also this week, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges told news outlets the organization planned to investigate the university's previous decision to prohibit the professors from testifying.

The University of Florida's president answers to its board of trustees, which has six members appointed by the governor and five appointed by the state university system's board of governors. The board of governors, in turn, has 17 members, 14 of whom are appointed by the Florida governor and confirmed by the state Senate. These offices have been in Republican hands for many years.

In a statement this week, DeSantis' office denied being behind the decision to block the faculty members' testimony, and on Friday his press secretary, Christina Pushaw, tweeted that any such suggestion was "absurd."

Florida Democratic elected officials, many of whom attended the University of Florida, were critical of the university's initial rejection of the professors' requests, tying it to other controversial recent decisions by the school, such as the quick hiring of DeSantis' pick to be Florida's surgeon general. Dr. Joseph Ladapo recently came under fire for refusing to don a mask at a meeting with a lawmaker who was being treated for cancer.

"The rapid reversal of this ill-advised policy will restore the pride and integrity of the Gator Nation of which I am so incredibly proud," Democratic U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz said in a statement. "Go Gators!"

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

Official: A dozen drug gangs fighting for Mexico's Caribbean

By DAN CHRISTIAN ROJAS Associated Press

PUERTO MORELOS, Mexico (AP) — The shooting of two suspected drug dealers at a resort on Mexico's Caribbean coast is part of a fight among about a dozen gangs to carve up the lucrative market of selling drugs to tourists and locals, an official said Friday.

The chief prosecutor of the coastal state of Quintana Roo said that two main gangs are fighting for control of Puerto Morelos, just south of Cancun. Thursday's shooting occurred on a beach just yards from luxury hotels.

But about 10 gangs are fighting over street-level drug sales in Tulum, a beach town further south. A California woman and a German tourist were killed in the crossfire of a gang shootout two weeks ago, and three other tourists were wounded.

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"In Tulum we have about 10 groups of drug dealers and here in Puerto Morelos there are two groups fighting each other," prosecutor Oscar Montes de Oca, told the Imagen Radio station.

Montes de Oca said the commando of about 15 masked drug gang gunmen arrived in vehicles and stormed the beach in Puerto Morelos by entering through a hotel parking lot — not coming by boat, as Gov. Carlos Joaquin had said the evening before.

Montes de Oca said Friday that they fled in a boat they commandeered after the attack.

The dramatic shooting attack sent tourists scrambling for cover at the beach in front of the Azul Beach Resort and the Hyatt Ziva Riviera Cancun.

Montes de Oca said the presence of over 20 million tourists every year in the coastal state provided a strong draw for retail drug sales. "We are facing an issue of supply and demand for drugs," he said.

Cartels fighting for the area's lucrative retail drug trade include the Jalisco cartel and the a gang allied with the Gulf cartel.

Montes de Oca said one of the men targeted in the attack fled into one of the hotels before dying. The other was killed on the beach. One person suffered non-life-threatening injuries in the attack, but authorities could not immediately determine whether that person was a hotel employee or a guest.

Joaquin called the attack "a serious blow to the development and security of the state ... putting the image of the state at grave risk."

Antonio Chaves, the leader of Maya Riviera Hotel Association, told The Associated Press the shootings would impact the state's tourism industry, which is recovering the the coronavirus pandemic.

"Clearly, we are going to suffer setbacks in the very short term," Chaves said, adding that, even though it causes suffering, it's unlikely to deter drug gangs.

"They are criminal groups that don't care about the place, the time, the surroundings, and that affects the tourism zone," he said.

The shootings were the latest chapter in drug gang violence that has sullied the reputation of Mexico's Caribbean coast as a once-tranquil oasis.

Guests at both resorts posted social media images of tourists hiding or nervously milling in the lobbies.

Keith Jackson, a tourist from London, England, left the beach just before the shooting. But he said Friday, "We're not sure we would come back. We're not sure we would come back after this."

"The two women that were killed in Tulum, you know, in the crossfire, you know, this is what happened," Jackson said. "So we all kind of worried that something will happen while we're there and we'll get caught in the in the action."

Just before they left, Jackson and Marie Hitches, also of London, said they saw about five masked men walking down the beach before the shooting, asking questions even of a lifeguard and security staff, apparently looking for the rival drug dealers, who had masqueraded as trinket vendors.

"They climbed up into the lifeguards' tower and they threatened and they were asking for information and they threatened him with a gun, asking him, you know, if I'd seen the the two new guys walking up and down the beach," Jackson said.

"And he (the lifeguard) radioed in, and that's when the security came out at that point," Jackson added, saying that while the security people spoke to the suspected cartel members, "nothing happened. It was about two hours later when the shooting happened."

Rival cartels often kill other gangs' street-level dealers in Mexico to eliminate competition and ensure their drugs are sold first. It is not the first time that tourists have been caught in such battles.

The Puerto Morelos shooting comes two weeks after California travel blogger Anjali Ryot of San Jose, California, and German citizen Jennifer Henzold were killed by crossfire during what prosecutors said appeared to be a clash over street-level drug sales in Tulum.

Three other foreign tourists were wounded in the Oct. 20 shooting at a street-side eatery right off Tulum's main strip. They included two German men and a Dutch woman.

Montes de Oca said eight suspects in the Tulum attack had been detained in possession of firearms.

The German Foreign Office issued a travel advisory about the violence, advising its citizens, "If you are currently in the Tulum or Playa del Carmen area, do not leave your secured hotel facilities."

There have been signs that the situation in Quintana Roo state, where all the resorts are located, was out of control months ago. In June, two men were shot to death on the beach in Tulum and a third was wounded.

And in nearby Playa del Carmen, police staged a massive raid in October on the town's restaurant-lined Quinta Avenida, detaining 26 suspects — most apparently for drug sales — after a city policewoman was shot to death and locked in the trunk of a car. Prosecutors said Friday they have arrested a suspect in that killing.

The administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has pinned tourism hopes on the so-called Maya Riviera, where it has announced plans to build an international airport and a stop for the Maya train, which will run in a loop around the Yucatan Peninsula.

AP Reporter Fabiola Sánchez contributed to this report

Former Justice Dept. lawyer cuts Jan. 6 deposition short

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former assistant attorney general who aligned himself with former President Donald Trump after he lost the 2020 election has declined to be fully interviewed by a House committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, ending a deposition after around 90 minutes Friday.

Jeffrey Clark, who championed Trump's efforts to overturn the election, presented the committee with a letter saying he would not answer questions based on Trump's assertions of executive privilege, including in an ongoing court case, according to a person familiar with the closed-door meeting who was granted anonymity to discuss it. Clark left the interview with his lawyer, who told reporters that they were heading "home."

Clark, who was subpoenaed by the committee to appear, would not answer any questions from reporters as he departed.

In a statement Friday evening, Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's chairman, confirmed that Clark refused to answer questions and said it was unacceptable. He said he had rejected the claims of privilege and said Clark "has a very short time" to reconsider and cooperate.

"It's astounding that someone who so recently held a position of public trust to uphold the Constitution would now hide behind vague claims of privilege by a former President, refuse to answer questions about an attack on our democracy, and continue an assault on the rule of law," Thompson said.

Clark's refusal is just the latest fallout from Trump's attempt to assert executive privilege in a lawsuit he filed against the committee and the National Archives. The suit aims to block the government from releasing a tranche of internal White House documents, including call logs, drafts of remarks, speeches and handwritten staff notes from before and during the insurrection. President Joe Biden has so far waived executive privilege on nearly all the documents that the committee has asked for, citing the panel's need to investigate the violent attack.

Amid the legal wrangling, the House panel has struggled to gain cooperation from some of Trump's other top allies — including his longtime associate Steve Bannon and former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows — as it conducts a sweeping investigation outside of public view. The committee has so far interviewed more than 150 witnesses so far, according to two people familiar with the interviews who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss them.

The interviews have included a broad swath of former and current executive branch officials, Trump campaign aides, law enforcement officials and others. The panel has also talked to several people who helped organize a rally the morning of Jan. 6 where Trump told his supporters to "fight like hell."

The committee has also interviewed Justice Department officials who were in office after the election. Thompson said Clark's "refusal to answer questions about the former President's attempt to use the Department of Justice to overturn the election is in direct contrast to his supervisors at the Department, who have come in and answered the committee's questions on these important topics."

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Clark is one of almost 20 people the committee has subpoenaed so far. A report issued by Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee last month detailed how he championed Trump's efforts to undo the election results and clashed as a result with Justice Department superiors who resisted the pressure, culminating in a dramatic White House meeting at which Trump ruminated about elevating Clark to attorney general. He did not do so after several aides threatened to resign.

Thompson wrote in Clark's subpoena that the committee's probe "has revealed credible evidence that you attempted to involve the Department of Justice in efforts to interrupt the peaceful transfer of power" and his efforts "risked involving the Department of Justice in actions that lacked evidentiary foundation and threatened to subvert the rule of law."

It is unclear whether the panel will move to hold Clark in contempt of Congress, as they did with Bannon. Thompson said the committee needs the information Clark is withholding and is willing "to take strong measures" to hold him accountable.

The House voted last month to recommend the charges against Bannon, and it is now up to the Justice Department to decide whether to prosecute.

As they voted to hold Bannon in contempt, lawmakers on the panel — including two Republicans — made clear they would fight any assertions of executive privilege, which was developed over the years to protect a president's private conversations and communications. Thompson said then that the panel "won't be deterred" by any such claims.

A federal judge hearing the case also appeared to question Trump's assertions this week, expressing skepticism when Trump's lawyers argued the House panel did not have a legislative purpose for obtaining the documents.

"The Jan. 6 riot happened in the Capitol," said U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan. "That is literally Congress' house."

The House committee could pursue similar contempt charges against Meadows and former Trump administration aides Dan Scavino and Kashyap Patel, who have all been in extended discussions with the committee about testifying after they were subpoenaed.

Despite Trump's false claims about a stolen election — the primary motivation for the violent mob that broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Biden's victory — the results were confirmed by state officials and upheld by the courts. Trump's own attorney general, William Barr, had said the Justice Department found no evidence of widespread fraud that could have changed the results.

Associated Press journalists Rick Gentilo and Nomaan Merchant contributed to this report.

UN Security Council calls for end to Ethiopia hostilities

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. Security Council called for an end to the intensifying and expanding conflict in Ethiopia on Friday, and for unhindered access for humanitarian aid to tackle the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade in the war-torn Tigray region.

The U.N.'s most powerful body expressed serious concern about the impact of the conflict on "the stability of the country and the wider region," and called on all parties to refrain "from inflammatory hate speech and incitement to violence and divisiveness."

The press statement was approved by the 15 council members the day after the first anniversary of the war in the northern Tigray region that has killed thousands of people and displaced millions. It was only the council's second statement on the conflict, and the first to address the worsening conflict.

"Today the Security Council breaks six months of silence and speaks again with one united voice on the deeply concerning situation in Ethiopia," said Ireland's U.N. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason. "For the first time, the Council clearly calls for a cessation of hostilities. We believe this should happen immediately, and that all civilians must be protected."

The statement was drafted by Ireland, Kenya, Niger, Tunisia and St. Vincent and The Grenadines. Those

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countries and the United States had called for an open Security Council meeting on Ethiopia on Friday afternoon, but it was postponed until early next week, probably Monday. Diplomats said African Union representatives weren't available to participate so the meeting was delayed.

The council called on the parties "to put an end to hostilities and to negotiate a lasting cease-fire, and for the creation of conditions for the start of an inclusive Ethiopian national dialogue to resolve the crisis and create the foundation for peace and stability throughout the country."

Council members said the language in the statement was watered down after objections from Russia to the original statement which "called on all parties to immediately end hostilities without preconditions."

But the statement, read by Mexico's U.N. Ambassador Juan Ramon De La Fuente Ramirez, the current council president, did call for an end to hostilities -- though without the word immediately. It did single out "the expansion and intensification of military clashes in northern Ethiopia."

In recent weeks, the conflict has expanded, with Tigray forces seizing key cities on a major highway leading to Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, and linking up with another armed group, the Oromo Liberation Army, with which it struck an alliance in August.

Months of political tensions between Ethiopian President Abiy Ahmed's government and the Tigray leaders who once dominated Ethiopia's government exploded into war last November. Following some of the fiercest fighting of the conflict, Ethiopia soldiers fled the Tigray capital, Mekele, in June. Facing the current Tigray offensive, president Abiy declared a national state of emergency with sweeping detention powers on Tuesday.

The Tigray forces say they are pressuring Ethiopia's government to lift a deadly months-long blockade on their region of around 6 million people, where basic services have been cut off and humanitarian food and medical aid are denied.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last month that at least 5.2 million people in the region need humanitarian assistance including at least 400,000 "living in famine-like conditions." Child malnutrition levels are now at the same level as they were at the start of the 2011 famine in Somalia, he warned.

The press statement reiterated the Security Council's support for the African Union's role in resolving the conflict and gave strong support to the "strategy and efforts to achieve a cease-fire and a prompt and peaceful resolution of the conflict" being undertaken by the AU's high representative for the Horn of Africa region, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo.

The Security Council statement did not mention the announcement earlier Friday that the Tigray forces, which in August linked up with the Oromo Liberation Army, have joined with seven other armed and opposition groups in an alliance against prime minister Abiy Ahmed to seek a political transition. The alliance left open the possibility of his ouster by force.

Amid fears that the violence could lead to a division of Ethiopia similar to the break-up of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, council members "reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of Ethiopia."

Attorneys present jurors with dueling portraits of Arbery

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Prosecutors and defense attorneys on Friday presented dueling portraits of Ahmaud Arbery, who was either an innocent Black runner fatally shot by three white strangers or "a scary mystery" who had been seen prowling around a Georgia neighborhood.

In her opening statement, prosecutor Linda Dunikoski said the short cellphone video that stirred national outrage over Arbery's slaying offered only a glimpse of the attack on the 25-year-old, who gave his pursuers no reason to suspect him of any wrongdoing.

"They assumed that he must have committed some crime that day," Dunikoski said. "He tried to run around their truck and get way from these strangers, total strangers, who had already told him that they would kill him. And then they killed him."

An attorney for Travis McMichael, the man who shot Arbery three times, put the shooting in a much

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different light. Attorney Robert Rubin described Arbery to the overwhelmingly white jury as “an intruder” who had four times been recorded on video “plundering around” a neighboring house under construction.

McMichael and his father, Greg McMichael, gave chase, hoping to detain Arbery until police arrived, Rubin said, but Arbery refused to stop and lunged toward McMichael and his gun.

“It is a horrible, horrible video, and it’s tragic that Ahmaud Arbery lost his life,” Rubin said. “But at that point, Travis McMichael is acting in self-defense. He did not want to encounter Ahmaud Arbery physically. He was only trying to stop him for the police.”

Arbery’s killing on Feb. 23, 2020, was largely ignored until the video leaked and deepened a national reckoning over racial injustice.

On that Sunday afternoon, the McMichaels armed themselves and pursued Arbery in a pickup truck as he ran through their neighborhood just outside the port city of Brunswick. A neighbor, William “Roddie” Bryan, joined the chase and recorded graphic video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery with a shotgun.

The chase started when a neighbor who’s not charged in the case called a nonemergency police number after seeing Arbery wandering inside a home under construction, where security cameras had recorded him before.

Dunikoski said Greg McMichael later told police that at one point during the chase he shouted at Arbery, “Stop or I’ll blow your f—ing head off!”

When a police officer who responded to the shooting asked Greg McMichael if Arbery had broken into a house, he told the officer: “That’s just it. I don’t know ... I don’t know. He might have gone in somebody’s house,” according to Dunikoski.

“All three of these defendants did everything they did based on assumptions — not on facts, not on evidence,” Dunikoski said. “And they made decisions in their driveways based on those assumptions that took a young man’s life.”

As Dunikoski played the video of Arbery’s death for the jury, his mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, cried out in the courtroom and sobbed as her attorney tried to console her.

Rubin described Arbery as a “scary mystery” to residents of a neighborhood already on edge from thefts and property crimes. Travis McMichael saw him outside the home construction site at night 11 days before the shooting. When Arbery reached for his pocket, Rubin said, Travis Michael feared he was reaching for gun.

That’s why the McMichaels grabbed guns before chasing Arbery, Rubin said, insisting they had probable cause to legally detain him on suspicion of stealing under a Georgia law allowing citizen’s arrests. The law was later repealed in response to Arbery’s death.

As Arbery ran toward the McMichaels’ truck, Travis McMichael raised the shotgun in hopes that “he’s going to deescalate the situation,” Rubin said. Instead of running past him, Rubin said, Arbery turned toward Travis McMichael “swinging aggressively” with his fists.

Travis McMichael, Rubin said, recalled his firearms training from when he served in the Coast Guard: “Never lose your weapon. And that’s why he shoots.”

“He has no choice because if this guy gets his gun, he’s dead or his dad’s dead,” Rubin said.

Greg McMichael was in his driveway reupholstering boat cushions when he saw Arbery run past “hauling ass,” said Franklin Hogue, Greg McMichael’s defense attorney.

“Greg McMichael was absolutely sure this was the guy, the same guy he had seen on surveillance video inside a house where Greg had sound reasons to believe theft had occurred, burglary,” Hogue said.

Hogue said most facts in the trial are not in dispute.

“The why it happened is what this case is about,” Hogue said. “This case is about intent, beliefs, knowledge — reasons for beliefs whether they were true or not.”

Bryan’s attorney, Kevin Gough, deferred making an opening statement until after prosecutors rest their case, which Georgia courts allow.

All three defendants are standing trial together, charged with murder and other felonies.

Arbery had been dead for more than two months when Bryan’s video of the killing leaked online in May

2020. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case from local police. GBI agents arrested the McMichaels the next day, and charged Bryan two weeks later.

Dunikoski described Arbery as an "avid runner" and told the jury it was not surprising for him to go running in the Satilla Shores subdivision, which was less than 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from his own home.

When he was killed, Arbery had no weapon and was carrying no wallet or keys, Dunikoski said.

Arbery "couldn't even have called for help if he wanted to because he had no cellphone on him," she added.

Officer William Duggan of Glynn County police was the first witness to testify. Duggan was the second officer to arrive after the shooting. Video from his body camera showed Arbery, his white T-shirt soaked with blood, facedown in the road. Duggan rolled him over and pressed a hand to his wounded chest.

He told other first responders he heard Arbery gurgling at first, but said he died after about two minutes.

"I had pressure on, but there was nothing I could do," Duggan said on the video.

Prosecutor in Andrew Cuomo's groping case seeks more time

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A prosecutor investigating accusations that former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo groped a woman asked a judge for more time to evaluate the evidence, saying the criminal complaint filed last week by the local sheriff was "potentially defective," according to a letter released Friday.

The request from Albany County District Attorney David Soares throws the high-profile case into further turmoil a week after Cuomo was charged with committing a misdemeanor sex crime. The one-page complaint filed in Albany City Court by a sheriff's office investigator accuses Cuomo of forcible touching by putting his hand under a woman's shirt on Dec. 7.

Soares, who has said he was caught off guard by the filing, said in a letter to Judge Holly Trexler on Thursday that his office had been investigating the matter for several months.

"We were in the middle of that investigation when the Sheriff unilaterally and inexplicably filed a complaint in this court," Soares wrote in the letter. "Unfortunately, the filings in this matter are potentially defective in that the police-officer-complainant failed to include a sworn statement by the victim such that the People could proceed with a prosecution on these papers."

The district attorney said the sheriff's complaint, as filed, only included part of the woman's testimony, but left other parts out, including sections that could possibly be "exculpatory," meaning potentially helpful to Cuomo's defense.

Soares said that his office still had hundreds of hours of videotaped testimony to review and that it anticipates receiving more material with deadlines for a speedy trial approaching.

Cuomo had been summoned to appear for an arraignment Nov. 17. Soares asked for that to be put off for 60 days. Cuomo's attorneys joined in the request.

"The purpose of this adjournment is to give my office time to continue with our independent and unbiased review of the facts of this case," Soares wrote.

The court granted a delay until Jan. 7, 2022, a spokesperson for Soares said in an email.

A call was made to Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple seeking comment. The sheriff acknowledged last week that the court paperwork had been processed more quickly than he intended, before he'd gotten a chance to consult with the district attorney. But he said he was confident in the strength of the case.

There was no immediate comment from Cuomo's spokesperson.

The complaint did not name the woman, but she has identified herself as Brittany Commisso, who worked as one of Cuomo's executive assistants before he resigned amid sexual harassment allegations in August.

Forcible touching is a misdemeanor in New York, punishable by up to a year in jail, though many cases for first-time offenders are resolved with probation or a shorter jail sentence.

Cuomo has repeatedly denied touching anyone inappropriately.

He resigned from office in August after an investigative report, overseen by New York Attorney General Letitia James, concluded that Cuomo has sexually harassed 11 women.

Both Cuomo and Commisso gave lengthy interviews to James' investigators. Soares has said that much of that material was turned over to his office but that it was voluminous and would take time to evaluate.

Rodgers sought treatments instead of COVID-19 vaccine

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers said Friday he sought alternative treatments instead of the NFL-endorsed COVID-19 vaccinations because he is allergic to an ingredient in two of the FDA-approved shots.

Speaking on SiriusXM's "Pat McAfee Show," Rodgers said: "I'm not an anti-vax, flat-earther. I have an allergy to an ingredient that's in the mRNA vaccines. I found a long-term immunization protocol to protect myself and I'm very proud of the research that went into that."

Rodgers, who turns 38 on Dec. 2, did not say what ingredient he was allergic to, or how he knows he is allergic.

Rodgers, who has been tested daily as part of NFL protocols for the unvaccinated, found out he contracted COVID-19 on Wednesday. The reigning NFL MVP said he didn't feel well on Thursday but was much better on Friday.

Rodgers can't rejoin the Packers for 10 days, missing Sunday's game at Kansas City. He must have a negative test to return to the team on Nov. 13.

During the interview with McAfee, Rodgers misquoted the CDC website and offered his explanation for why hasn't taken the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Rodgers said the CDC's website says "should you have an allergy to any of the ingredients, you should not get one of the mRNA vaccines. So those two (Moderna and Pfizer) were out already."

Instead the CDC site says, "If you have had a severe allergic reaction or an immediate allergic reaction — even if it was not severe — to any ingredient in an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, you should not get either of the currently available mRNA COVID-19 vaccines."

Rodgers did not say he had an allergic reaction.

He said with some of the public issues involving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine — clotting issues and his "hearing of multiple people who had had adverse events around getting the J&J ... the J&J shot was not even an option at that point."

The COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the U.S. were tested in tens of thousands of people and proven to be both safe and effective at dramatically reducing the risk of serious disease and death. The vaccines now have been given to more than 200 million Americans and that real-world use plus extra government safety tracking have made clear that serious side effects are extremely rare — and that any risk is far lower than the risks posed by COVID-19.

Rodgers' research led him to a treatment he did not detail, and he said the NFL was aware of the treatment protocol he was using, which took "multiple months."

"The league was fully aware of it upon my return to the Packers (in August)," Rodgers said. "It was at that point that I petitioned them to accept my immunization under their vaccination protocol."

A member of the Packers' medical staff inquired to the NFL Players Association's medical director on behalf of an anonymous player who asked if an alternative homeopathic treatment could render him as "fully vaccinated" under the protocols. That player was Rodgers.

The NFLPA's medical director, Dr. Thom Mayer, shared an email from the team and related materials from Rodgers with Dr. Allen Sills, the league's medical chief, and with an independent infectious disease expert, who were asked for an opinion.

The expert, hired jointly by the league and union, said he could not find in his research that the treatment offers reliable and robust COVID-19 protection — that the treatment was not the equivalent of receiving one of the three endorsed vaccines. There was a lack of scientific data demonstrating whether and how well the treatments Rodgers wanted approved would work.

The union and the doctors were never contacted again by Rodgers after his petition and a subsequent

appeal were denied.

"And I also said, how come there's no exemption for medical exemptions, religious exemptions, pre-existing conditions?" Rodgers added. "And they basically said those are all basically exempted but you would be put in the non-vaccinated category."

Rodgers also told McAfee he has concerns about potential fertility issues had he taken one of the vaccinations.

Many scientists, including three doctors who specialize in reproductive health, have vouched for the safety of vaccinations for couples who want to have a baby and urged people to seek out their doctors or nurse practitioners with any questions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and obstetrician groups also recommend COVID-19 vaccines for pregnant individuals.

Dr. Stephanie Broadwell of Sanford Health Fargo, Dr. Stephanie Foughty of Altru Health Devils Lake and Dr. Ana Tobiaz of Sanford Health Bismarck said at a virtual North Dakota town hall in July to get the vaccine.

"I can understand that people are scared, people are nervous," Broadwell said. "I think sometimes there can be information that can be helpful and some that can be somewhat misleading. I think it's just really hard to digest all the information that is out there and stories that are filtering through that maybe even come from trusted sources."

Rodgers strongly questioned the NFL's protocols, along with any organization forcing health requirements on individuals.

"I believe strongly in bodily autonomy and the ability to make choices for your body, not to have to acquiesce to some woke culture or crazed group of individuals who say you have to do something," he said. "Health is not a one size fits all for everybody, and for me it involved a lot of study in the offseason."

More AP NFL coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Pfizer says COVID-19 pill cut hospital, death risk by 90%

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer Inc. said Friday that its experimental antiviral pill for COVID-19 cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults, as the drugmaker joined the race for an easy-to-use medication to treat the coronavirus.

Currently most COVID-19 treatments require an IV or injection. Competitor Merck's COVID-19 pill is already under review at the Food and Drug Administration after showing strong initial results, and on Thursday the United Kingdom became the first country to OK it.

Pfizer said it will ask the FDA and international regulators to authorize its pill as soon as possible, after independent experts recommended halting the company's study based on the strength of its results. Once Pfizer applies, the FDA could make a decision within weeks or months.

Since the beginning of the pandemic last year, researchers worldwide have been racing to find a pill to treat COVID-19 that can be taken at home to ease symptoms, speed recovery and keep people out of the hospital.

Having pills to treat early COVID-19 "would be a very important advance," said Dr. John Mellors, chief of infectious diseases at the University of Pittsburgh, who was not involved in the Pfizer study.

"If someone developed symptoms and tested positive we could call in a prescription to the local pharmacy as we do for many, many infectious diseases," he said.

On Friday, Pfizer released preliminary results of its study of 775 adults. Patients who received the company's drug along with another antiviral shortly after showing COVID-19 symptoms had an 89% reduction in their combined rate of hospitalization or death after a month, compared to patients taking a dummy pill. Fewer than 1% of patients taking the drug needed to be hospitalized and no one died. In the comparison group, 7% were hospitalized and there were seven deaths.

"We were hoping that we had something extraordinary, but it's rare that you see great drugs come through with almost 90% efficacy and 100% protection for death," said Dr. Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer's chief

scientific officer, in an interview.

Study participants were unvaccinated, with mild-to-moderate COVID-19, and were considered high risk for hospitalization due to health problems like obesity, diabetes or heart disease. Treatment began within three to five days of initial symptoms, and lasted for five days. Patients who received the drug earlier showed slightly better results, underscoring the need for speedy testing and treatment.

Pfizer reported few details on side effects but said rates of problems were similar between the groups at about 20%.

An independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early, standard procedure when interim results show such a clear benefit. The data have not yet been published for outside review, the normal process for vetting new medical research.

Top U.S. health officials continue to stress that vaccination will remain the best way to protect against infection. But with tens of millions of adults still unvaccinated — and many more globally — effective, easy-to-use treatments will be critical to curbing future waves of infections.

The FDA has set a public meeting later this month to review Merck's pill, known as molnupiravir. The company reported in September that its drug cut rates of hospitalization and death by 50%. Experts warned against comparing preliminary results because of differences in the studies, including where they were conducted and what types of variants were circulating.

"It's too early to say who won the hundred meter dash," Mellors said. "There's a big difference between 50% and 90% but we need to make sure the populations were comparable."

Although Merck's pill is further along in the U.S. regulatory process, Pfizer's drug could benefit from a safety profile that is more familiar to regulators with fewer red flags. While pregnant women were excluded from the Merck trial due to a potential risk of birth defects, Pfizer's drug did not have any similar restrictions. The Merck drug works by interfering with the coronavirus' genetic code, a novel approach to disrupting the virus.

Pfizer's drug is part of a decades-old family of antiviral drugs known as protease inhibitors, which revolutionized the treatment of HIV and hepatitis C. The drugs block a key enzyme which viruses need to multiply in the human body.

The drug was first identified during the SARS outbreak originating in Asia during 2003. Last year, company researchers decided to revive the medication and study it for COVID-19, given the similarities between the two coronaviruses.

The U.S. has approved one other antiviral drug for COVID-19, remdesivir, and authorized three antibody therapies that help the immune system fight the virus. But they have to be given by IV or injection at hospitals or clinics, and limited supplies were strained by the last surge of the delta variant.

Shares in New York-based Pfizer Inc. gained 11% to close at \$48.61 on Friday.

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

EXPLAINER: How the Arbery trial got a nearly all-white jury

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

The long-standing practice of allowing attorneys to dismiss prospective jurors without giving a reason has come under intense criticism after a nearly all-white jury was picked to decide whether three white men are guilty of murder for shooting and killing Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man who was jogging though a neighborhood in Georgia.

The selection of 11 white jurors and one Black man to decide the fate of the three defendants has drawn complaints from prosecutors and the victim's family that jury selection process was blatantly unfair.

Even the judge in the case agreed with prosecutors that the exclusion of Black potential jurors looked like intentional discrimination. Still, the judge said he had limited authority to intervene after defense attorneys gave reasons that were not about race for cutting jurors.

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The trial has brought new attention to a debate and growing movement around the U.S. to do away “peremptory challenges,” which allow lawyers to summarily dismiss jurors. Critics say the practice is fraught with biases and creates racially imbalanced juries that make it harder to bring equal justice.

HOW DO STRIKES WORK?

During jury selection, the defense and prosecution each get a certain number of peremptory challenges, or strikes, that lets them dismiss potential jurors without explanation.

Lawyers can also ask to remove a prospective juror for cause if they believe that person is biased or lacks the ability to serve, though they must explain the potential bias.

Still, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that peremptory strikes cannot be used to dismiss jurors based solely on their race. If a judge allows a challenge to a peremptory strike, the attorney who wants to remove a juror must offer a “race-neutral” reason for doing so.

But critics say lawyers can get away with abusing peremptory challenges as long as they provide a reason that is not about race. They also say a 1986 U.S. Supreme Court decision governing the practice has failed to end discrimination in trials.

CHANGE IS COMING

Around the country, courts are beginning to change the rules to prevent the unfair exclusion of prospective jurors based on race or ethnicity.

The Washington Supreme Court did so in 2018, saying judges don’t have to find purposeful discrimination to deny a peremptory challenge, and that challenges based on “implicit, institutional, and unconscious biases” can be rejected.

The court also said certain justifications for removing prospective jurors — distrust in the legal system and knowing someone who has been convicted of a crime — are invalid.

In 2020, California adopted a similar set of invalid justifications for peremptory strikes. The rule changes will begin to apply at criminal trials next year and in 2026 for civil trials.

Two months ago, the Arizona Supreme Court announced it was eliminating peremptory strikes beginning Jan. 1.

The two state Court of Appeals judge who proposed the change said it was “a clear opportunity to end definitively one of the most obvious sources of racial injustice in the courts.”

In Arizona, Pima County Public Defender Joel Feinman said he hasn’t seen prosecutors in his jurisdiction use peremptory challenges in a racist way but recognizes that the practice has led to racially lopsided juries in other communities.

While the elimination of peremptory challenges will help prevent racial disparities in trials, Feinman said the move also carries a drawback: It will make it harder to keep people who are hiding their biases — such as a strong support for law enforcement — off a jury.

“It’s a double-edged sword,” Feinman said.

Hundreds of thousands fans celebrate Braves title in parade

By CHARLES ODUM AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — The Atlanta Braves were cheered by hundreds of thousands of fans in a two-stage parade on Friday celebrating the team’s first World Series championship since 1995.

Some area schools closed, and students seized the opportunity to attend the event.

“That’s what the fun part of this is,” Braves chairman Terry McGuirk said. “Every block it was just kids and it was all kids. Never, never did I expect to see that many little guys.”

The parade started in downtown Atlanta, near the Braves’ former home at Turner Field. The route took the busses, floats and pickup trucks past a memorial to late Hall of Famer Hank Aaron at the site of old Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. The procession then headed to Peachtree Street, where fans packed sidewalks several rows deep.

Atlanta police estimated 300,000 to 400,000 fans attended the downtown portion of the parade.

The fan turnout was similarly strong for the final mile of the parade, which ended at the Braves’ current

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Truist Park in suburban Cobb County. The stadium was filled. Thousands more fans packed the mixed-entertainment complex outside the stadium.

The Braves were lured to Cobb County by tax incentives and the ability to build a complex of dining, shopping, apartments and entertainment adjacent to the new stadium, which opened in 2017.

McGuirk said he thought "there were well more than a million people" overall.

"This city has lost its mind and it's so wonderful to be a part of it," McGuirk said.

The Braves clinched the World Series by beating the Houston Astros 7-0 in Game 6 on Tuesday night.

Braves shortstop Dansby Swanson, a native of Marietta in suburban Atlanta, had a hometown perspective on the fans' 26-year wait to celebrate another championship.

"This city has been wanting a championship for a long time," Swanson said. "It's just so cool they let schools out. To see kids be able to enjoy this moment and be inspired by this moment, it's second to none."

Despite temperatures in the mid-40s at the start of the parade, Braves outfielder Joc Pederson wore shorts. Most of his teammates and fans in the street bundled up.

Pederson stayed warm by remaining active. Wearing a pearl necklace and puffing on a cigar, Pederson tossed more pearl necklaces to the fans as if he were in a Mardi Gras parade on Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

Pederson also won the World Series last season with the Los Angeles Dodgers, but he said this was his first parade.

"This is incredible," Pederson said. "The turnout is unreal. I didn't expect anything less. The A-T-L is the best. ... I'll remember it forever. It's a special moment."

Braves manager Brian Snitker rode in the back of a pickup truck with his wife, Ronnie. Snitker described the fan turnout as "insane." He said riding in the parade was "phenomenal. ... I'm so proud of our city and Braves country. What a day."

Aaron's wife, Billye, said at the Truist Park celebration that Hank, who died on Jan. 22, "is here with us. He loved the Atlanta Braves and I am so very, very happy to see these young men who have picked up the mantle and carried it on."

Braves general manager Alex Anthopoulos, unable to attend Game 6 because he tested positive for COVID-19, spoke at the ceremony from a luxury suite and said "Flags fly forever, 2021 will fly forever!"

Fans at the stadium were encouraged by broadcaster Joe Simpson to participate in the controversial tomahawk chop chant.

The celebration at the stadium included a free concert featuring Atlanta rappers Ludacris and Big Boi.

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

After Virginia, GOP amplifies debate over race and education

By THOMAS BEAUMONT, AARON MORRISON and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans plan to forcefully oppose race and diversity curricula — tapping into a surge of parental frustration about public schools — as a core piece of their strategy in the 2022 midterm elections, a coordinated effort to supercharge a message that mobilized right-leaning voters in Virginia this week and which Democrats dismiss as race-baiting.

Coming out of Tuesday's elections, in which Republican Glenn Youngkin won the governor's office after aligning with conservative parent groups, the GOP signaled that it saw the fight over teaching about racism as a political winner. Indiana Rep. Jim Banks, chairman of the conservative House Study Committee, issued a memo suggesting "Republicans can and must become the party of parents." House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy announced support for a "Parents' Bill of Rights" opposing the teaching of "critical race theory," an academic framework about systemic racism that has become a catch-all phrase for teaching about race in U.S. history.

"Parents are angry at what they view as inappropriate social engineering in schools and an unresponsive bureaucracy," said Phil Cox, a former executive director of the Republican Governors Association.

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Democrats were wrestling with how to counter that message. Some dismissed it, saying it won't have much appeal beyond the GOP's most conservative base. Others argued the party ignores the power of cultural and racially divisive debates at its peril.

They pointed to Republicans' use of the "defund the police" slogan to hammer Democrats and try to alarm white, suburban voters after the demonstrations against police brutality and racism that began in Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd. Some Democrats blame the phrase, an idea few in the party actually supported, for contributing to losses in House races last year.

If the party can't find an effective response, it could lose its narrow majorities in both congressional chambers next November.

The debate comes as the racial justice movement that surged in 2020 was reckoning with losses — a defeated ballot question on remaking policing in Minneapolis, and a series of local elections where voters turned away from candidates who were most vocal about battling institutional racism.

"This happened because of a backlash against what happened last year," said Bernice King, the daughter of the late civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who runs Atlanta's King Center.

King warned attempts to roll back social justice advances are "not something that we should sleep on."

"We have to be constantly vigilant, constantly aware," she said, "and collectively apply the necessary pressure where it needs to be applied to ensure that this nation continues to progress."

Banks' memo included a series of recommendations on how Republicans aim to mobilize parents next year, and many touch openly on race. He proposed banning federal funding supporting critical race theory and emphasizing legislation ensuring schools are spending money on gifted and talented and advanced placement programs "instead of exploding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion administrators."

The coming fight in Congress over the issue was previewed last month, when Attorney General Merrick Garland appeared before two committees to defend a Justice Department directive aimed at protecting school officials who faced threats amid the heated debate over teaching about race. Republicans accused Garland of targeting conservative parents.

Democrats plan to combat such efforts by noting that many top Republicans' underlying goal is removing government funding from public schools and giving it to private and religious alternatives. They also see the school culture war squabbles as likely to alienate most voters since the vast majority of the nation's children attend public schools.

"I think Republicans can, will continue to try to divide us and don't have an answer for real questions about education," said Marshall Cohen, the Democratic Governors Association's political director. "Like their plan to cut public school funding and give it to private schools."

White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre accused Republicans of "cynically trying to use our kids as a political football." But Jean-Pierre also took on conservatives' critique that critical race theory teaches white children to be ashamed of their country.

"Great countries are honest, right? They have to be honest with themselves about the history, which is good and the bad," she told reporters. "And our kids should be proud to be Americans after learning that history."

Most schools don't teach critical race theory, which centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions and that they function to maintain the dominance of white people.

But parents organizing across the country say they see plenty of examples of how schools are overhauling the way they teach history and gender issues — which some equate with deeper social changes they do not support.

And concerns over what students are being taught — especially after remote learning amid the coronavirus pandemic exposed a larger swath of parents to curricula — led to other objections about actions taken by schools and school boards. Those including COVID safety protocols and policies regarding transgender students.

"I'm sure that most people have no problem with teaching history in a balanced way," said Georgia Democratic Rep. Hank Johnson. "But when you say critical race theory, and you say that it is attacking us and causing our children to feel bad about themselves, that is an appeal that is attractive. And, unfortu-

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nately for Democrats, it's hard to defend when someone accuses you of that."

Democrats were wiped out Tuesday in lower-profile races in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where critical race theory was a dominant issue at contentious school board meetings for much of the summer and fall.

Patrice Tisdale, a Jamaican-born candidate for magisterial district judge, said she felt the political climate was racially charged. She heard "dog whistles" from voters, who called her "antifa" and accused her of wanting to defund the police, she said. While canvassing a neighborhood in the election's closing weeks, one voter asked Tisdale whether she believed in critical race theory.

"I said, 'What does that have to do with my election?'" recalled Tisdale, an attorney, who lost her race. "I'm there all by myself running to be a judge and that was her question."

The issue had weight in Virginia, too. A majority of voters there — 7 in 10 — said racism is a serious problem in U.S. society, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of Tuesday's electorate. But 44% of voters said public schools focus "too much" on racism in the U.S., while 30% said they focus on racism "too little."

The divide along party lines was stark: 78% of Youngkin voters considered the focus on racism in schools to be too much, while 55% of voters for his opponent, Democrat Terry McAuliffe, said it was too little.

Youngkin strategist Jeff Roe described the campaign's message on education as a broad, umbrella issue that allowed the candidate to speak to different groups of voters — some worried about critical race theory, others about eliminating accelerated math classes, school safety and school choice.

"It was about parental knowledge," he said.

McAuliffe went on the attack last week, portraying Republicans as wanting to ban books. He accused Youngkin of trying to "silence" Black authors during a flareup over whether the themes in Nobel laureate Toni Morrison's 1987 novel "Beloved" were too explicit. McAuliffe still lost a governor's race in a state President Joe Biden carried easily just last year.

Republican Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer bristled at equating a movement to defend school "parental rights" and race.

"The way this was handled in Virginia was frankly about parents, mothers and fathers, saying we want a say in our child's education," said Emmer, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

That didn't rattle some Democrats, who see the GOP argument as manufactured and fleeting.

"Republicans are very good at creating issues," deadpanned Democratic Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

"We'll have to address it, and then they'll make up something else."

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa; Morrison from New York. Associated Press writers Steve Peoples in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Jill Colvin in New York and Kevin Freking, Mary Clare Jalonick and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

Inside and outside climate talks, youths urge faster action

By SETH BORENSTEIN and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — Young people both inside and outside of the United Nations climate talks are telling world leaders to hurry up and get it done, that concrete measures to avoid catastrophic warming can't wait.

Ashley Lashley, a 22-year-old from Barbados who is on her country's climate negotiation team in Glasgow, thought about how to communicate the need for urgency during a session on carbon trading. As she listened to other delegates debate the intricate and intractable topic that has baffled negotiators for more than six years, a phrase popped into her head: "blah-blah-blah."

That's the expression prominent teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg has started repeating to express her thoughts on the pace of government actions to curb global warming. The Thunberg-inspired Fridays for Future movement held a demonstration outside the conference venue to pressure the negotiators inside, drawing tens of thousands of participants.

And inside, the session Lashley attended droned on. She worries her fellow negotiators too easily become bogged down in minutiae and lose sight of the big picture: keeping emissions from exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), which could wipe out some island nations and other vulnerable spots.

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"Can't you guys just wrap it up," Lashley, one of the few young people sitting in on negotiations, recalled thinking on Friday.

Umuhaza Grace Ineza, 25, a negotiator for Rwanda, said she watches some sessions crawling along and hears other negotiators say "Ooh, let's try this way, that way, and then we can come up with a decision next session." Ineza says she wants to ask them if they understand how urgent limiting climate change is for the next generation.

"In my mind, it's like do these people have children?" she said.

University of Michigan graduate student observers AJ Convertino and Evan Gonzalez said watching the sessions on the inside made them both more impatient but also more optimistic because they see the right things being said and done, if still way too slowly.

Friday was the day the U.N. conference said it was dedicating to youth. But the schedule didn't reflect that, at times: a news conference where officials talked about youth had a panel with no members under 30, and the lunchtime events featured former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, 73, and 77-year-old John Kerry, the U.S. climate envoy.

"When I arrived at COP26, I could only see white middle-aged men in suits," Magali Cho Lin Wing, 17, a member of the UNICEF U.K. Youth Advisory Board, said at a press event. "And I thought, 'Hold on is this a climate conference or some corporate event? Is this what you came for? To swap business cards?'"

And except on rare occasions, young people say they are not being listened to.

"It's our future. Our future is being negotiated, and we don't have a seat at the table," said 20-year-old Boston College student Julia Horchos, who is inside the conference, but hasn't gotten into negotiating sessions.

Still, they know it's important to be at least near the room where it all happens.

"It's my life," Horchos said. "It's definitely my responsibility to step up."

Greenpeace International Executive Director Jennifer Morgan gave the conference participants and activists under 30 credit.

"Youth have brought critical urgency to the talks," Greenpeace International Executive Director Jennifer Morgan said. "They have emphasized what is at stake for young people if the gap to 1.5 C is not closed."

Outside the negotiations, the worry about the future was the same, but the way it was expressed was different. During the Fridays for Future demonstration in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Park, mostly young activists carried banners with slogans such as "I have to clear up my mess, why don't you clear up yours?" and "Stop climate crimes."

Speaking at the Fridays rally outside the conference venue, Greta Thunberg branded the U.N. climate talks in Glasgow so far "a failure," accusing leaders of actively creating loopholes in the rules and giving misleading pictures of their countries' emissions.

"World leaders are obviously scared of the truth, yet no matter how hard they try, they cannot escape it," the 18-year-old Swedish activist said. "They cannot ignore the scientific consensus, and above all they cannot ignore us - the people, including their own children."

The Fridays For Future protest was part of a series of demonstrations being staged around the world Friday and Saturday, to coincide with the talks.

Some at the rally accused negotiators of "greenwashing" their country's failure to curb greenhouse gas emissions by trumpeting policies that sound good but won't do enough to prevent dangerous temperature rises in the coming decades.

Brianna Fruean, a 23-year-old activist who grew up in Samoa, a low-lying Pacific island nation that is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels and cyclones, said: "My biggest fear is losing my country."

"I've seen the floods go into our homes, and I've scooped out the mud," she said.

Fruean was given the stage at the beginning of the conference, known as COP26, where she told leaders about the effects of climate change already being felt in her country.

"I feel like I'm being seen," she said. "I will know if I've been heard by the end of COP."

Natalia Gomez, 24, of Costa Rica, has been in on negotiating sessions and cheered on the outside pro-

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test from afar. Outside, youths are making important points, getting attention and putting pressure on leaders, she said. Inside, youths are helping try to get things done. She keeps asking herself which one is more important.

"I don't know," Gomez said.

This story has been updated to correct the last name of one of the activists to Ruas, not Ruiz.

Follow AP's climate coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate>. Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter: @borenbears.

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

House Dems delay huge social bill, plan infrastructure vote

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Democrats abruptly postponed an expected House vote Friday on a 10-year, \$1.85 trillion social and environment measure, as leaders' long struggle to balance demands from progressives and moderates once again dogged the pillar of President Joe Biden's domestic agenda.

In a bid to hand him a needed victory, leaders prepared to try pushing an accompanying \$1 trillion package of road and other infrastructure projects through the chamber and to his desk.

With lawmakers set to leave town for a week's break, the scrambled legislative plans cast a fresh pall over a party that has tried futilely for weeks to find middle ground on its massive package of health, education, family and climate change initiatives. That's been hard, in part because the Democrats' slender majorities mean they need the support of every Senate Democrat and can have no more than three defectors in the House.

The party's congressional leaders had hoped for House approval of both that measure and the infrastructure bill on Friday. That would have produced twin triumphs for a president and party eager to rebound from this week's deflating off-year elections and show they can govern.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

WASHINGTON (AP) — With nearly no votes to spare, Democratic leaders tried resolving lingering concerns of moderate lawmakers Friday in hopes of finally pushing President Joe Biden's multitrillion-dollar domestic agenda through the House.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and other leaders met privately with a handful of centrists who say they want an official cost estimate from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office before voting on a 10-year, \$1.85 trillion social and environment bill. Democrats can lose no more than three votes in the narrowly divided House to pass the legislation.

Biden, meeting reporters to tout a strong monthly jobs report, said he was returning to the Oval Office "to make some calls" to lawmakers. He said he would ask them to "vote yes on both these bills right now."

Leaders want to pass that legislation, and a separate five-year, \$1 trillion package of road and other infrastructure projects, to quickly notch accomplishments just days after a gubernatorial election defeat in Virginia and disappointing contests elsewhere. They also want the votes to occur before Congress leaves by the weekend for a week-long recess.

Leaders have said complete CBO figures won't be available for days or more. "We're working on it," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said of the talks. By late morning, a House procedural vote was underway that started over three hours earlier as behind-the-scenes discussions continued.

House passage of Biden's larger measure would send it to the Senate, where it would face certain changes and more Democratic drama. That's chiefly because of demands by Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona to contain the measure's costs and curb or drop some of its initiatives.

But House approval of the smaller, bipartisan infrastructure measure would send it directly to the White

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House, where Biden would be certain to take a victory lap. That bill, projected to create mountains of jobs, had been blocked by House progressives to pressure moderates to back the larger family and climate change legislation.

Pelosi met late Thursday with Hispanic lawmakers wanting the larger measure to go as far as possible in helping immigrants remain in the U.S. Their prospects for bold action are limited by strict Senate rules, though. Rep. Adriano Espaillat, D-N.Y., said Friday that they'd discussed moving on the issue in other bills and considered Pelosi an ally.

After months of negotiations, House passage of the big bill would be a crucial step, sending to the Senate Biden's effort to expand health care, child care and other social services and deliver a huge investment to fight climate change.

Alongside the slimmer roads-bridges-and-broadband package, it adds up to Biden's answer to his campaign promise to rebuild the country from the COVID-19 crisis and confront a changing economy.

Pelosi's strategy seemed focused on passing the most robust bill possible in her chamber and then leaving the Senate to adjust or strip out the portions its members won't agree to. In late tweaks to the bill to nail down votes, the House Rules Committee approved revisions to a state-and-local tax deduction and other issues.

Half the size of Biden's initial \$3.5 trillion package, the bill exceeds 2,100 pages and has support progressive lawmakers, even though it is smaller than they wanted. But the chamber's more centrist and fiscally conservative Democrats continued to mount objections.

Republicans opposed the measure as too expensive and damaging to the economy.

Overall the package remains more far-reaching than any other in decades. It would provide large numbers of Americans with assistance to pay for health care, raising children and caring for elderly people at home.

There would be lower prescription drug costs, limiting the price of insulin to \$35 a dose. Medicare for the first time would be able to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower prices for some other drugs, a long-sought Democratic priority.

Medicare would have a new hearing aid benefit for older Americans, and those with Medicare Part D would see their out-of-pocket prescription drug costs capped at \$2,000.

The package would provide some \$555 billion in tax breaks encouraging cleaner energy and electric vehicles, the nation's largest commitment to tackling climate change.

With a flurry of late adjustments, the Democrats added key provisions in recent days — adding back a new paid family leave program and work permits for immigrants. Late changes Thursday would raise a \$10,000 cap on state-and-local tax deductions to \$80,000.

Much of the package's cost would be covered with higher taxes on wealthier Americans, those earning more than \$400,000 a year, and a 5% surtax would be added on those making over \$10 million annually. Large corporations would face a new 15% minimum tax in an effort to stop big businesses from claiming so many deductions that they end up paying zero in taxes.

Democrats have been working to resolve their differences, particularly with senators Manchin and Sinema, who forced cutbacks to Biden's bill but championed the slimmer infrastructure package that had stalled amid deliberations.

Manchin has panned the new family and medical leave program, which is expected to provide four weeks of paid time off after childbirth, for recovery from major illness or for caring for family members, less than the 12-week program once envisioned.

Senators are also likely to strip out a just-added immigration provision that would create a new program for some 7 million immigrants who are in the country without legal standing, allowing them to apply for permits to work and travel in the U.S. for five years. It's not clear that addition would pass muster with the Senate parliamentarian under special budget rules being used to process the package.

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri, Kevin Freking, Aamer Madhani and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Colin Powell remembered as a model for future generations

By ROBERT BURNS and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Colin L. Powell, the trailblazing soldier-diplomat who rose from humble beginnings to become the first Black secretary of state, was remembered by family and friends Friday as a principled man of humility and grace whose decorated record of leadership can serve as a model for generations to come.

"The example of Colin Powell does not call on us to emulate his resume, which is too formidable for mere mortals," his son, Michael, said in a touching tribute at his father's funeral service at Washington National Cathedral. "It is to emulate his character and his example as a human being. We can strive to do that."

The funeral on a sunny and chilly day drew dignitaries and friends from across the political and military spectrum. They included President Joe Biden and former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, former secretaries of state James Baker, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Army Gen. Mark Milley.

Two recent presidents did not attend — Bill Clinton, who is recovering from a severe infection, and Donald Trump, who publicly disparaged Powell after his death for having been critical of the former president.

Powell died Oct. 18 of complications from COVID-19 at age 84. He had been vaccinated against the coronavirus, but his family said his immune system had been compromised by multiple myeloma, a blood cancer for which he had been undergoing treatment.

Funeral attendees Friday were required to wear masks. Not all did.

As guests gathered in the cavernous cathedral that has hosted the funerals of several past presidents, including Dwight D. Eisenhower, the U.S. Army Brass Quintet played a range of tunes, including "Dancing Queen" by Abba, a favorite of Powell's.

Richard Armitage, who served as the State Department's No.-2-ranking official while Powell was secretary of state during the Bush administration, recalled the day Sweden's foreign minister, Ann Linde, came to call and — knowing of Powell's affection for Abba — presented him with a full CD set of group's music.

"Colin immediately went down on one knee and sang the entire 'Mamma Mia' to a very amused foreign minister of Sweden and to a gob-smacked U.S. delegation. They'd never seen anything like it," said Armitage, who described a 40-year friendship with Powell that began while both served in the Pentagon.

Madeleine Albright, who was Powell's immediate predecessor as secretary of state, called him "a figure who almost transcended time," and "one of the gentlest and most decent people any of us will ever meet."

"He relished the opportunity to connect with other generations," she said.

"This morning my heart aches," she added, "because we've lost a friend and our nation one of its finest and most loyal soldiers. Yet even as we contemplate the magnitude of our loss, we can almost hear a familiar voice asking us — no, commanding us — to stop feeling sad, to turn our gaze once again from the past to the future and to get on with the nation's business while making the most of our own days on Earth, one step at a time."

During her tenure as ambassador to the United Nations during the Clinton administration, Albright sometimes clashed with Powell, although they became good friends. Both have recalled the time, during his final months as Joint Chiefs chairman, when she argued for a U.S. military intervention in the Balkans, asking why the United States had built a superb military if it couldn't be used in such circumstances. Powell recalled being so irritated by her statement, "I thought I would have an aneurysm."

Powell's view was that the United States should commit its military only when it had a clear and achievable political objective, a key element of what became known as the Powell Doctrine, which embodied lessons learned from the U.S. failure in Vietnam.

The story of Powell's rise to prominence in American life is a classic.

In his autobiography, "My American Journey," Powell recalled a 1940s childhood in the Hunts Point section of New York City's South Bronx, where he was a mediocre student — happy-go-lucky but aimless.

He caught the military bug during his first year at the City College of New York in 1954. Powell was inspired by seeing fellow students in uniform, and he enrolled in the school's Reserve Officer Training Corps.

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"I felt distinctive" in uniform, he wrote.

Although he was only 4 when the United States entered World War II, he had vivid memories of the war years. "I deployed legions of lead soldiers and directed battles on the living room rug," he wrote — a fantasy forerunner of his Army years.

Powell would serve 35 years in uniform. Commissioned in 1958, he served around the world, including two tours in Vietnam in the 1960s.

He distinguished himself at the Pentagon even before he attained flag officer rank. In the late 1970s he worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and in 1983 as a brigadier general he became the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. He later served in the White House as President Ronald Reagan's national security adviser, and in 1989 he was promoted to four-star general. Later that year, President George H.W. Bush selected him to be the first Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

It was a trailblazing American dream journey that won him international acclaim and trust.

He put that credibility on the line in February 2003 when, appearing before the United Nations as secretary of state, he made the case for war against Iraq. When it turned out that the intelligence he cited was faulty and the Iraq War became a bloody, chaotic nightmare, Powell's stellar reputation was damaged.

Still, it wasn't destroyed. After leaving government, he became an elder statesman on the global stage and the founder of an organization aimed at helping young disadvantaged Americans. Republicans wanted him to run for president. After becoming disillusioned with his party, he ended up endorsing the last three Democratic presidential candidates, who welcomed his support.

More vaccines, fewer mask rules as US keeps fighting COVID

By JEFFREY COLLINS and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The United States is steadily chipping away at vaccine hesitancy and driving down COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations to the point that schools, governments and corporations are lifting mask restrictions yet again.

Nearly 200 million Americans are fully vaccinated and the nation's over-65 population, which bore the brunt of the pandemic when it started nearly two years ago, is enthusiastically embracing vaccines.

Nearly 98% of the over-65 population has received at least one COVID-19 shot and more than 25% of them have gotten boosters, just weeks after they were authorized. The improving metrics could get a boost from President Joe Biden's workplace mandate unveiled Thursday and the launch of COVID-19 shots in elementary-age students.

Seniors also are playing a role in getting other family members vaccinated. Erin Lipsker plans to get her 8-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son vaccinated as soon as possible so they can see her parents and her 98-year-old grandmother. An added motivation is that Lipsker was treated for cancer two years ago, and her 8-year-old daughter, Kennedy, has asthma.

"The more children and adults are vaccinated, the quicker we will be able to resume a new normal. I want that for my kids. I want that for our planet," said Lipsker, of Spokane, Washington. "I think I will feel much safer around our family. I have a 98-year-old grandmother that my kids adore. I will feel safer having my kids around her, and my parents."

But the pandemic has proven hard to control. In the U.S., winter is coming and diseases like COVID-19 often spread easier with people indoors and closer together. The worst surge in the nation happened last winter, before the vaccines were widely available.

While cases around the world are declining, the World Health Organization said this week new cases jumped by 6% in Europe, compared with an 18% increase the previous week. The U.S. plans to open its borders to international travelers Monday.

The trends in the U.S. have health officials feeling better for the first time in months and hoping the progress will continue as long as a new variant doesn't pop up or the rate of newly vaccinated people declines. But they have also been down this road before and have come to the conclusion that COVID-19 is going to be an issue for years to come.

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"It is going to be endemic. It is going to exist in our population for a long period of time," said Deborah Fuller, a professor of microbiology at the University of Washington. "You saw what looked like an inflection point coming and, boom, here came the delta variant."

There are still plenty of encouraging signs in the U.S. Pfizer announced Friday its experimental pill for COVID-19 cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% among patients with mild-to-moderate infections and it will soon ask the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to authorize its pill.

The number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 is averaging around 42,000, the lowest number since the beginning of August, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The hospitalization dip matches a dip in overall cases.

But deaths, which lag behind increasing case counts because it can take weeks for the disease to kill, continue to mount. The U.S. is averaging 1,100 coronavirus deaths per day, down from more than 1,600 two weeks ago.

More than 750,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the U.S. in less than two years, about the population of Denver. The latest 50,000 deaths happened in the past month.

With hospital beds emptying, case counts declining and an increase in vaccinated people, however, it has been a slow return to a new normal. Louisiana's Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards last week ended a face covering requirement almost everywhere but schools, saying he was "optimistic, relieved that the worst of the fourth surge is very clearly behind us now."

Memphis also ended its mask requirement, and so did a number of schools around Atlanta as the spread of the virus decreased. Amazon ended a mask mandate for most vaccinated workers in places where local or state rules don't require them. Hawaii's governor ended pandemic capacity limits on businesses like restaurants, bars and gyms, but owners must continue to enforce social distancing rules.

Color-coded virus maps that were a sea of red in September have started to turn yellow and blue in recent weeks, indicating a much slower spread of disease. The CDC says about 350 counties are now experiencing moderate or low transmission, many of them in the Deep South.

In the U.S., nearly 60% of the population — more than 193 million people — are fully vaccinated. More than 21 million have received a booster dose, and those numbers are soaring each day. The average number of Americans getting booster shots has reached nearly 800,000 per day. That compares with about 265,000 people per day getting their first shot.

It's still too early to know how many children under 12 have gotten shots in the three days they have been available.

Lagging behind are Southern and more rural states and that rural divide even extends to states with higher vaccination rates like Maine, where more than 70% of the population is vaccinated. Many of the rural states are starting to experience cold weather that is driving people indoors and creating ripe conditions for more virus spread.

In Maine, the five counties with the lowest vaccination rates are rural ones along the border with Canada, where rates hover just over 60%.

"One theory is that residents of those counties feel less at risk of infection because they interact less often with others. Vaccine hesitancy among residents of those counties also seems to dovetail with political identity factors," said Robert Long, a spokesperson for the Maine Center for Disease Control.

—
Associated Press Writer Mike Stobbe contributed.

Aaron Feuerstein, famously generous mill owner, dies at 95

BROOKLINE, Mass. (AP) — Aaron Feuerstein, who owned a textile mill in Massachusetts and famously continued to pay his workers even after a devastating fire, has died. He was 95.

Feuerstein, the former owner of Malden Mills in Lawrence, died Thursday night of complications from a fall days before at his home in Brookline, his son Daniel Feuerstein told The Boston Globe for a story Friday.

"My father lived a full life," Feuerstein told the newspaper. "I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring

of condolences from the entire Malden Mills community. The love went both ways."

Malden Mills had been a major textile factory known for its Polartec synthetic fleece fabric.

The sprawling brick mill complex burned in December 1995, but Feuerstein continued to pay his 1,400 employees for months after the blaze shuttered operations.

He also committed to rebuilding the factory, which his grandfather had opened in 1906 and his family had operated for three generations.

"I'm not throwing 3,000 people out of work two weeks before Christmas," Feuerstein told the Globe at the time.

Lawrence City Council President Marc Laplante told the Globe that Feuerstein "exemplified good corporate citizenship" and left a positive legacy in the largely immigrant mill city near the New Hampshire state line.

During an interview with 60 Minutes in 2002, Feuerstein was asked what he hoped his tombstone would read.

"Hopefully it'll be, 'He done his damndest,'" he said. "You know, that I didn't give up and I try to do the right thing."

Malden Mills reopened in 1997, but the company, later rebranded as Polartec, struggled in the ensuing years.

It filed for bankruptcy in 2007 and was eventually sold to a private equity firm, which closed the mill and moved its diminished operations to Tennessee. Milliken, a South Carolina-based industrial manufacturer, acquired the Polartec brand in 2019.

Funeral arrangements have not been made public. Feuerstein's survivors include two sons and a daughter, WFXT-TV reports. His wife, Louise, died in 2013.

Official Myanmar records mistaken about detained US reporter

BANGKOK (AP) — Testimony by prosecution witnesses on Friday in the case of Danny Fenster, a U.S. journalist who has been detained in Myanmar for more than five months, established that official records did not accurately reflect where he was employed, his lawyer said.

The point may be crucial because it appears that Fenster is being prosecuted for alleged offenses by a news outlet at least seven months after he stopped working for the outlet. Authorities have not clearly described what Fenster is accused of doing and his trial is closed to the media and the public.

Fenster was detained at Yangon International Airport May 24 as he was about to board a flight to go to the Detroit area in the United States to see his family. He is the managing editor of Frontier Myanmar, an online news magazine based in Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city.

He has been charged with incitement for allegedly spreading false or inflammatory information, an offense punishable by up to three years in prison.

Fenster was also accused of violating the Unlawful Associations Act for contacting opposition groups that were declared illegal by Myanmar's military-installed government. The offense carries a penalty of two to three years' imprisonment.

An additional charge of violating visa conditions that is punishable by six months to five years' imprisonment was added this week.

Fenster's lawyer, Than Zaw Aung, said prosecution witnesses, including police officers, testified under cross-examination on Friday that a letter from the Information Ministry declared that the publishing license of Myanmar Now, another online news site, contained Fenster's name in its list of editors. The license was originally valid for a period lasting from 2015 to 2025.

Both Myanmar Now and Frontier Myanmar have issued statements saying that Fenster worked as a reporter and copy editor for Myanmar Now until July 2020 and that he joined Frontier Myanmar the following month.

"The witnesses said that Danny is in charge of Myanmar Now according to a letter from the Information Ministry. They testified in this way as Danny's name is included in a letter sent by the Information Ministry. I don't know why his name is on the list," Than Zaw Aung told The Associated Press.

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Last month, the judge said Fenster had been sought in connection with activities by Myanmar Now together with its chief editor, Ko Swe Win, according to Fenster's lawyer.

The judge also told Fenster that after Myanmar Now's license was revoked in March of this year, the news outlet defied authorities by continuing to post stories about organizations opposed to the military takeover, Fenster's lawyer said.

Fenster is among about 100 journalists who have been detained since February, when the military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. About 30 remain in jail.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price urged Myanmar's government on Thursday to immediately release Fenster.

"His detention, the detention of so many others, it's a sad reminder of the continuing human rights and humanitarian crisis facing the country of Burma, facing the Burmese, but also facing foreign nationals, including Americans, who happen to be in Burma." Price said, referring to Myanmar by its old name.

This version corrects that the visa violation charge was added this week, not last month.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Despite false claims, LA mayor who tested positive for COVID had not received booster shot

CLAIM: Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has received three COVID-19 vaccine doses but still tested positive for the virus.

THE FACTS: The day after Garcetti tested positive for COVID-19 while attending a U.N. climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, social media users began falsely claiming he had not only received two COVID-19 vaccine doses, but also a third booster dose. Social media posts on Thursday used the false claim as a premise for skepticism about vaccine effectiveness. "BREAKING - Triple vaxxed Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti tests positive for COVID," read one post circulating widely on Instagram. "Remember, trust the science." Another post on Facebook read: "LA Mayor Eric Garcetti tested positive for COVID and he's (asterisk)TRIPLE VAXXED.(asterisk)" However, Garcetti has not gotten a booster shot for COVID-19, Alex Comisar, his communications director, said Thursday. Garcetti "received two doses of the Moderna vaccine earlier this year and will be getting his booster as soon as it's recommended he do so," Comisar said. If you got Pfizer or Moderna shots first, U.S. health authorities say you're eligible for a booster if your last dose was at least six months ago and you're 65 or older. Younger adults with health problems, or with jobs or living conditions that put them at higher risk of COVID-19, are also eligible. Anyone who got the Johnson & Johnson shot first is eligible for a booster, as long as they got the vaccine at least two months ago. People who are fully vaccinated are still strongly protected against hospitalization and death from COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the agency says public health officials have observed waning protection over time against mild and moderate disease, especially in certain populations. Booster shots can increase protection for people who were vaccinated months ago.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

No, COVID-19 vaccines don't cause HIV, AIDS or cancer

CLAIM: Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine shot makes you more likely to get AIDS or cancer.

THE FACTS: The claim is false. On October 25, Facebook and Instagram removed a live video published by Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro. In the video Bolsonaro falsely claimed that people in the U.K. who had received two coronavirus vaccine doses were developing AIDS faster than expected. Days later, social media posts repeated the false information. One popular Facebook post falsely claimed, "Y'all The shot is giving ppl cancer & HIV." But immunologists, infectious disease specialists and cancer researchers

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contacted by The Associated Press said COVID-19 vaccines don't cause cancer or make individuals more likely to contract HIV, which is the virus that causes AIDS. Dr. Michael Imperiale, professor in the department of microbiology and immunology at the University of Michigan, said "there is no evidence linking the vaccines to cancer," and that none of the ingredients in the vaccines are cancer-causing. Dr. Mark Shlomchik, chair of the department of immunology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, said the idea that any vaccine can cause cancer is inaccurate. "There is no practical way that a vaccine could cause cancer," Shlomchik said. "No vaccine that we have ever studied or used to prevent infection has ever been associated with cancer." The claim that COVID-19 vaccines cause HIV or AIDS is "absolutely and categorically a false statement," said Dr. Monica Gandhi, associate chief of the division of HIV, infectious diseases and global medicine at the University of California San Francisco Medical School. "There is nothing in the COVID vaccines that contain either HIV or increase a body's susceptibility to contracting HIV." Individuals also can't contract HIV while receiving the shot. "It is not possible to transmit HIV between people during immunization," said Dr. Paul Bollyky, associate professor of medicine in the division of infectious diseases at Stanford University department of medicine. "The COVID-19 vaccines are not made using any human blood products and a single-use needle is used in each different person who received the vaccine." AIDS is the most severe phase of HIV infection, associated with a high viral load and a badly damaged immune system. But in clinical trials testing the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines, no evidence emerged suggesting people living with HIV were more likely to develop AIDS after receiving the shot. "Many hundreds of thousands of people have participated in worldwide trials for the vaccines," said Shlomchik. "Adverse events' were studied in both vaccinated participants and non-vaccinated people who were part of the study. There was never any difference between the two groups in getting AIDS." Real world data also doesn't show vaccinated people getting AIDS more often than unvaccinated people. "7 billion doses of COVID vaccines have been given out," said Gandhi. "And there has been no evidence that vaccines make it more likely for individuals to get AIDS."

— Associated Press writer Terrence Fraser in New York contributed this report.

Posts use old photo to criticize jets flown to climate conference

CLAIM: Photo shows "the 400 jets used by #COP26Glasgow attendees to get to a conference on reducing emissions and fossil fuels."

THE FACTS: The image of parked jets was taken in New Orleans during the 2013 Super Bowl, not at the U.N. climate summit in Scotland known as COP26. Some who are critical of the fact that some attendees flew to the climate conference in private jets erroneously used the old photo from 2013 to make their point. "These are the 400 jets used by #COP26Glasgow attendees to get to a conference on reducing emissions and fossil fuels," conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza wrote in a tweet that garnered some 9,000 retweets and 23,000 likes. "Clearly there will be fierce competition here for the Hypocrisy Awards." Reverse image searches show the photo used in the tweet has been online for several years. The image appeared in a 2013 story by Aviation International News, which identified the image as showing hundreds of business jets at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport for the Super Bowl that year. David Spielman, the New Orleans-based photographer credited with the image, confirmed in a phone interview that he took the photo for that outlet. D'Souza later corrected himself on Facebook, where he had also shared the claim. "Correction: the photo posted below was the wrong photo," he said. "The photo below was taken in 2013." D'Souza did not immediately respond to a request for comment. COP26 bills itself as being a "carbon-neutral conference" and says that "unavoidable carbon emissions from COP26" will be offset — such as by investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Associated Press asked the communications team for the conference how many private jets had transported attendees and whether they were accounted for in the carbon offsets plan, but did not receive a response before publication. Other efforts to verify the number of private jets used were also unsuccessful.

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

Ads raising awareness about strokes in kids are not related to vaccines

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CLAIM: A bus advertisement on knowing the warning signs of strokes in children is related to COVID-19 vaccines.

THE FACTS: In the days after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration cleared a smaller dose of the Pfizer vaccine to be used by children ages 5 to 11, social media users shared a photo of a bus advertisement from Canada to spread false information about COVID-19 vaccines and children. Posts that circulated online included a photo of the advertisement, which read, "Kids have strokes too, know the signs," along with a caption that falsely suggested that the government was somehow forecasting a wave of strokes among children once they become vaccinated against COVID-19. However, the advertisement, which was featured on nine buses in Ontario, has no link to the vaccines. A Canadian charitable foundation, Achieving Beyond Brain Injury, placed the ads to educate the public about strokes among children during Pediatric Stroke Awareness month in May. The foundation's co-founders, Nadine Vermeulen and Rebecca DiManno, started the organization after their sons suffered strokes at 10 and 14 years old. Vermeulen said the bus ads had nothing to do with the COVID-19 vaccines. "It was heartbreaking that what we are trying to do and spread awareness has been turned into something that we feel we have to defend ourselves against," she said about the claims on social media. Vermeulen said her organization had not said that strokes are common, they only wanted to make parents aware. "Neither of us knew that kids could have strokes until our kids did," Vermeulen told The Associated Press. "There are different signs you can look for that can help save a child's life." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not list stroke as a side effect of the COVID-19 vaccines. Millions of children ages 12 to 17 have received the Pfizer vaccine and there have been no significant reports of strokes. "None of the mRNA vaccines that are under investigation for children are associated with that," Dr. Kevin J. Downes, assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine, said of strokes. This week, American children aged 5 to 11 began receiving Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for kids. Prior to that, the FDA reviewed data from 3,100 children in that age group who had received the vaccine during trials and found that some experienced mild to moderate side effects, including sore arms, fatigue and fever. In rare cases, some teens and young adults who have received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines have reported a side effect of heart inflammation also known as myocarditis.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this report.

Soccer match video edited to add anti-Biden chant

CLAIM: Video shows crowd chanting "F--- Joe Biden" during soccer game.

THE FACTS: A video clip of a 2016 soccer game that circulated on TikTok was altered to add audio from a country music concert where the audience chanted a profanity in reference to President Joe Biden. On TikTok, users can take the sound from one clip and play it over the visuals from another. Audio from an Aaron Lewis concert replaced the original sound of the soccer match. In the concert clip, the country singer, the former frontman of the metal band Staind, led his audience in the anti-Biden chant. A YouTube video shows Lewis leading a chant that sounds the same at a Sept. 25 concert in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The footage in the soccer clip shows MetLife stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, packed with fans watching Chile and Argentina compete in the Copa America final on June 26, 2016. At the time, Barack Obama was president.

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

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EU, UK divide widens on new NIreland, French fishing deal

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The United Kingdom on Friday rejected European Union proposals to streamline the trade of goods in Northern Ireland as insufficient, further aggravating a standoff between both sides and

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bringing the prospect of a post-Brexit trade war closer.

The U.K. government said after unsuccessful talks between its negotiator David Frost and his counterpart Maros Sefcovic that the EU offers to revamp the Northern Ireland deal, which the 27-nation bloc saw as far-reaching and unprecedented, "did not currently deal effectively with the fundamental difficulties."

Beyond rejecting his proposals, Sefcovic retorted that "we have seen no move at all from the U.K. side. I find this disappointing."

On top of the dispute over how to smooth the trade in goods in the U.K.'s Northern Ireland, where the complicated Brexit deal has left the region also in the EU's single trading zone, both sides also made no progress in negotiations over symbolically important U.K. fishing licenses off France.

Talks will now continue in London next week.

Frost also continued to wield the threat of suspending the Northern Ireland deal under the so-called Article 16 procedure. He said it was "very much on the table and has been since July."

Article 16 is a clause in the EU-U.K. protocol on Northern Ireland allowing either side to suspend that part of the deal in exceptional circumstances.

Sefcovic said the impact of such a move would be grave. "Let there be no doubt that triggering Article 16 ... would have serious consequences — serious for Northern Ireland. This is what leads to instability and unpredictability."

Northern Ireland, part of the U.K., shares a land border with EU member Ireland. The Brexit agreement gives it a special trade status that ensures there is an open border on the island of Ireland. It is a key pillar of Northern Ireland's peace process since the 1998 Good Friday accord that ended years of violence.

Analysts say it would only be a small step from a suspension of Article 16 to a trade war.

The current deal that Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed has been controversial from the start since it means a new customs border in the Irish Sea for goods entering Northern Ireland from the rest of the U.K., even though they are part of the same country.

That has brought red tape for businesses, and caused problems with some goods reaching Northern Ireland. EU rules on chilled meats led to a brief sausage shortage, and now Britain claims that Christmas crackers — festive noisemakers that are a holiday party staple — are being prevented from reaching Northern Ireland.

The EU said it has already offered major concessions in cutting red tape for trade between Britain and Northern Ireland, but London also wants to get rid of the legal oversight of the EU's top court, something Brussels has set as a red line.

Issues over fish licenses have further complicated relations. Although fishing is a tiny industry economically for both Britain and France, the issue of boats' access to waters that divide the two maritime powers has flared into a major irritant on top of the Northern Ireland issue.

France says Britain is breaking a commitment of the EU-U.K. trade agreement reached last year by not giving sufficient licenses to its Normandy fishermen seeking access to Crown dependencies Jersey and Guernsey. Britain says it still has insufficient proof some of the fishermen have historical rights to go there.

Follow AP's coverage of post-Brexit developments at <https://apnews.com/hub/Brexit>

Lone French fisherman left adrift in UK-France fishing spat

By NICO GARRIGA and THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

GRANVILLE, France (AP) — Soon-to-be father Hermann Outrequin felt optimistic in 2019 when he gave up his fishing company job of 16 years to go independent. The Normandy fisherman wanted a fresh start to have time for his newborn son.

But now a political spat over fishing rights between Paris and London has thrown cold water over his plans.

Staring out across the cold English Channel from the Granville coastline into the pre-dawn darkness, Outrequin says he regrets that decision and worries for his future.

The 43-year-old has just been denied yet another permit to fish in U.K. waters — which account for one

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third of his regular fishing grounds and include some of the richest.

"So, I don't have a license. I don't have the right anymore. The English have turned their backs on us," he said.

The all-important U.K. licenses are at the center of the dispute following Britain's split with the European Union earlier this year. Before Brexit, French fishermen could fish deep inside British waters. Now they need to be granted a special license from the British government or the self-governing British Crown dependencies of Jersey and Guernsey to fish in certain areas.

Fishing is a tiny industry economically, but one that looms large symbolically for both Britain and France, which have long and cherished maritime traditions.

Paris says many vessels have been denied permits for waters where they have long sailed. Britain contends that it has granted 98% of applications from EU vessels — and now the dispute concerns just a few dozen French boats with insufficient paperwork.

France has threatened to bar British boats from some of its ports and tighten checks on vessels and trucks carrying British goods if more French vessels aren't licensed to fish in U.K. waters soon. Paris has also suggested it might restrict energy supplies to the Channel Islands, which are heavily dependent on French electricity.

While the dispute has threatened cross-Channel relations, it also has real consequences for France's ordinary unsung fishermen.

"I'm not asking for the moon," Outrequin said, zipped up in a thermal jacket as he prepared to go out to trawl for scallops.

Outrequin's was a regular story of a father-to-be. The secure fishing job he had held since 2003 at Abeilles International, a unit of the Groupe Bourbon company, required him to be away for long lengths of time. He and his wife Marielis decided that he would need to be back in the evenings to help with his newborn son Paul. So he gave up the protection of the job with the industry giant in 2019 to buy his own boat called the Santa Clara and go it alone.

But new paperwork needed for the post-Brexit seascape put a spanner in the works. He now regrets making that decision.

Outrequin said that the Channel Islands authorities which grant licenses in his fishing area now require fishermen to show they have fished for a minimum of 11 days each year in their waters between 2017-2020.

But since Outrequin's company did not exist for half of that period, he cannot possibly qualify.

Jersey, which is only 14 miles off the coast of France, issued earlier this week 49 temporary licenses to French boats. But that represents just a fraction of those still unlicensed.

Jabbing at a chart of the Channel with his finger, Outrequin vents his frustration. "Before we could go and fish here, but now it's over. All this part here, over."

Many fishermen in northern France say their livelihoods depend on access to British waters, where they chase mackerel, whiting, squid and other species. Outrequin is despondent about the future, and lays hope in French President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron is expected to seek re-election in April's presidential vote in France, and will likely be wanting to project an image of strength and steadfastness ahead of that.

"The problem is," Outrequin said, "will Macron actually do something about it? He has to do something."

Adamson reported from Paris

In Peru, rumors feed vaccine reluctance among Indigenous

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press

Maribel Vilca didn't even bother to go to the community meeting giving information to her Indigenous community about COVID-19 vaccines.

"What happens if I die with the vaccine? I have small children," she said, expressing mistrust of the government health services after bad experiences during two pregnancies.

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The fears expressed by 38-year-old woman who lives near the shore of Lake Titicaca, are common among Peru's Indigenous people, who make up about a quarter of the country's 33 million people — and they have complicated the national vaccination drive.

While more than 55% of Peruvians have gotten at least one shot of COVID-19 vaccines, only about 25% of people in Indigenous areas have been vaccinated.

Authorities say that's partly due to the difficulty of getting vaccines to remote Andean and Amazon regions where many Indigenous people live and distributing them. Some clinics are so poorly funded they lack gasoline for their vehicles.

And some Indigenous representatives complain that, as in other countries around the region, the government has been slow to coordinate with Indigenous leaders on how best to reach those communities.

But it's also true that engrained distrust of government authorities has made people open to baseless rumors and conspiracy fantasies — spread by social media or word of mouth — about vaccines that could save many thousands of lives.

Despite overwhelming evidence, based on more than 7 billion vaccine doses delivered worldwide, that serious side effects are very rare, Vilca said she fears a shot might kill or harm her.

Rumors about vaccines, sometimes spread on local Quechua-language community radio, often mimic Q-Anon type misinformation spread across social media the U.S. and Europe about tracking microchips or terrible side effects.

And for Peru's Indigenous people, both ancient and recent history gives reason for mistrust.

Many recall a government project carried out by doctors and nurses that sterilized about 273,000 Indigenous women during the presidency of Alberto Fujimori from 1990 to 2000.

Perhaps no nation has been hit harder by the virus than Peru: It has reported more than 200,000 deaths, with a per capita fatality toll worse than any sizable nation according to data from Johns Hopkins University. On a per capita basis, Peru has lost more than twice as many people to COVID-19 as have the United States or Brazil.

Yet infections and deaths among the nation's Indigenous people have been far lower, with fewer than 700 Indigenous deaths from COVID-19 reported by the Ministry of Health — perhaps one reason why many feel less urgency to get vaccinated.

Julio Mendigure, director of Indigenous affairs for the ministry, said the most common rumors he hears are that the vaccines contain tiny chips, that they could be used to sterilize women or lower men's sexual vigor or cause early death.

Rural nurse Marina Checalla said others believe vaccines could cause a magnetic field that attracts metal or improves telephone signals.

In a small-scale effort to help overcome mistrust, the government turned to the Red Cross, which has a good reputation in rural areas. Starting in August, it sent nurses and volunteers into 64 communities to answer questions about the vaccines in local languages.

Red Cross health coordinator Paul Acosta said that of 1,777 people they had spoken with, 70% went on to be vaccinated.

The government also has allocated \$6 million for a campaign to promote vaccines in Amazon communities, hiring local residents to help promote the shots.

But such efforts often come after people already skeptical of official intentions have spent months trading odd conspiracy theories.

In the highland village of Santa Cruz de Mijani in Peru's Puno region, 54-year-old Josefa Espinoza told Red Cross vaccine promoters that "I'd rather die without getting vaccinated" because she had heard that along with "good vaccines" were others that "cause death."

Espinoza, who listens to local radio stations while tending to her cattle, said she believes the virus was created in a laboratory "by rich countries" and that a new, more potent variant would be spread by fleas, bees and snakes "produced by rich countries ... the rich guys will manipulate us and that's what worries me," she said.

In San Antonio de Putina, Alicia Chura said she had heard over a local Quechua-language radio station

that the vaccines were being given to older people to kill them because the country "is filling up with many people."

On the floating islands of the Uros in Lake Titicaca, boatman Joel Huilca said he'd been wary of vaccines since a measles shot as a child left him with pain for several months.

As for the COVID-19 vaccine, "They say it leaves you like a zombie; they are going to put in a chip and they are going to know where you go and what you do."

The persistence of such ideas frustrates nurse Marina Checalla, who was trying to promote life-saving shots at the meeting that Vilca skipped in Jochi San Francisco,

"There are myths that are causing damage and don't let us reach the populations," she said.

More than 70 people turned up, but only 30 got shots.

One of those who did was 82-year-old Celso Quispe, despite the fact his wife and three adult children had not.

"There are comments, but I don't believe them," he said. "What do the people know?"

Hamas 'guardian' law keeps Gaza woman from studying abroad

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Afaf al-Najar had found a way out of Gaza.

The 19-year-old won a scholarship to study communications in Turkey, secured all the necessary travel documents and even paid \$500 to skip the long lines at the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

But when she arrived at the border on Sept. 21 she was turned back — not by Israel or Egypt, which have imposed a 14-year blockade on the Gaza Strip — but because of a male guardianship law enacted by the Islamic militant group Hamas, which rules the territory.

"I honestly broke down," she said, describing the moment border officials removed her luggage from the bus. "My eyes started pouring, I could not even stand up. They had to bring a chair for me... I felt my dream is being robbed."

Travel in and out of Gaza, a coastal territory that is home to more than 2 million Palestinians, has been severely restricted since 2007, when Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces. Israel, which has fought four wars with Hamas, most recently in May, says the blockade is needed to keep the militants from rearming. Critics view it as a form of collective punishment.

Hamas has repeatedly demanded the lifting of the blockade. But in February, an Islamic court run by Hamas issued a notice saying that unaccompanied women must get permission from a male "guardian" — a husband, relative, or even a son — to travel outside the territory.

After a backlash led by human rights groups, Hamas authorities amended the ruling to drop the requirement. Instead, it said that a male relative can petition a court to prevent a woman from traveling if it would result in "absolute harm." Women cannot prevent men from traveling.

Hamas has only taken sporadic steps over the years to impose Sharia, or Islamic law, on already conservative Gaza, and even then has usually backed down in the face of criticism. It does not share the extreme ideology of more radical factions such as the Islamic State group.

But the amended law has remained in effect.

Al-Najar's father filed a petition, and the court prevented her from traveling so that it could consider it. She lives with her mother, who is separated from her father, and says he cut off all contact with her in May. He could not be reached for comment.

Hamas officials did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group that is deeply critical of the blockade, called on Hamas to lift its restrictions.

"Hamas's authorities should lift the travel ban on Afaf al-Najar and the Supreme Judicial Council should withdraw its notice, so that women in Gaza can travel without discriminatory restrictions," it said.

After being turned back at the border, al-Najar appealed to a number of local human rights groups, but said they appeared reluctant to assist her, fearing reprisal from Hamas. Eventually, she filed a petition

against the ban.

Her father failed to show up at the first hearing, causing it to be postponed. Before it adjourned, the judge asked her why she was going abroad and suggested she could just as easily study in one of Gaza's universities.

Al-Najar, who speaks fluent English and teaches the language, aspires to be a journalist. She says a multi-cultural country like Turkey provides opportunities that don't exist in Gaza, which is largely cut off from the outside world.

The hearing was postponed a second time because her father's attorney was sick. It was postponed a third time on Wednesday because his new lawyer said he needed time to study the case.

The scholarship's validity was extended until the end of the year, but if al-Najar does not make it to Turkey by then, she will lose it.

But she's not giving up.

"I realized no one is going to help me but myself, and I realized that I have to be strong now to fight for my rights," she said. "Instead of crying in my room and letting myself down, I decided to fight. I chose to fight for the first time in my life."

A rebel, a bureaucrat: The women who stayed in Afghanistan

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Two women from different walks of life — one a rebel, the other a bureaucrat — face an unknown future in Afghanistan. One decided to work with the Taliban, the other is determined to fight them. Both vow they will never leave their homeland.

Karima Mayar Amiri, 54, heads a department in the Taliban-run Health Ministry. She is among the few women able to retain a leadership position in the new government's bureaucracy and believes Afghans must be served no matter who is at the helm.

Many years her junior, Rishmin Juyunda, 26, could not disagree more. Afghan women will never be served with the Taliban in power, she says. The rights activist is part of an underground network determined to fight harsh Taliban policies that restrict women's freedom.

They represent a broad spectrum of women who have remained in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after many fled, fearing a return to the brutal repression that marked the group's previous rule in the late 1990s. The international community has linked recognition of a Taliban government to factors such as guarantees for women's rights.

It is not clear what rights women will be able to retain. Under the Taliban, women in most government ministries are now unable to work, teen-age girls are prohibited from going to school, the interim cabinet is comprised entirely of men. This deepens mistrust toward the Taliban.

But there are exceptions.

Amiri, a mother of six, retained her senior position as the director of the ministry's Quality and Safety Department after the collapse of the previous U.S.-backed government. Her case is rare; most senior female bureaucrats have been barred from work across government portfolios except for health.

She is at the office by 9 a.m. to manage a team of five. Nearly every day she meets with her Taliban-appointed superiors to review action plans to combat the spread of diseases from the coronavirus to dengue fever.

"It was not a difficult decision for me to stay. I have my own department. If they request a plan, I will provide it. The Taliban leadership wants me to work for them, and I am ready," she said. "As long as I am healthy, I will work for them, for my people, my country."

Juyunda is entering her last semester majoring in economics at Zahra University in Tehran. She chose to stay in the capital of Kabul and study remotely after the Taliban's August takeover. Textbooks crowd her worktable, but her focus is interrupted by a buzzing phone. In a string of WhatsApp messages, rights activists proposed slogans for the next demonstration.

Like many young women who grew up after the U.S. invasion in 2001, Juyunda's dreams were dashed

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overnight after the Taliban seized Kabul and consolidated control of the country. Many of her friends have left, unwilling to wait and see how the dust will settle following the dramatic U.S. exit.

She stayed. "I will never leave Afghanistan. I have to stay and make a change," she said, her lively hazel eyes framed by a scarlet headscarf.

The decision to remain came amid large-scale evacuations.

Between the Aug. 15 fall of Kabul and the final U.S. exit two weeks later, thousands of Afghans, including many women, rushed to the city's airport in a desperate attempt to get out.

Amiri chose a different path.

Three days after the Taliban overran the capital, she was back in the office to help meet the growing need in the crumbling health sector. International aid that once funded hospitals and health worker wages had stopped abruptly. Hospitals across the country were being hit hard by an economic crisis brought on by international sanctions against the Taliban.

She requested that her Taliban superiors merge her department with another to improve quality control. They approved it.

When a Taliban guard attempted to inspect her bag at the ministry gate one morning, she refused and asked that a separate room be erected for female checks. They complied.

A graduate of Kabul Medical University 31 years ago, she has worked for the Health Ministry since 2004. Five health ministers have come and gone during her tenure. "Why should the Taliban be any different?" she asked.

The only change they introduced was for women to don Islamic dress. Amiri, a devout Muslim, was already in the habit of wearing a headscarf.

"Health is not political," Amiri insists. The guidelines her office formulates are sent to thousands of public hospitals, clinics and facilities across the country. "Life goes on," she says.

But for Juyunda, life will never be the same.

It took her weeks to recover from the shock of the takeover. Her family of 11 had greatly benefited after the U.S. invasion. She and her four sisters were able to attend school in Ghor province. Her parents held well-paid government jobs. She was on her way to becoming an economist brimming with ideas to improve her country.

From social media she came to know of a women's protest organized outside the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul in September. Shortly after she arrived, a Taliban unit showed up and the group had to disperse. She stood there holding a sign "Education is a right" and repeated to herself, "I am strong, they are weak."

She witnessed protesters being beaten with rifles and cables. This is war, she thought.

Numbers were exchanged, and soon a network of dozens of like-minded activists was formed.

The Taliban have said they have no issue with the right to protest, but that the activists must seek their permission to demonstrate. Subsequent sit-ins have not been able to draw large numbers. But Juyunda said to seek permission from the Taliban would be an implicit acceptance of their rule.

"We will never do that," she said.

The lives of both women were shaped by Afghanistan's turbulent history.

Amiri was a gynecologist in the conservative Wardak province, a Taliban stronghold as far back as the 1990s when the group was first in power.

To survive, she said, she made her world a little smaller.

"During that time, I went to the hospital, I treated patients, delivered babies and did surgeries, and then I went straight home. That was my life," she said.

In 2021, she reverted to the same tactic. After 3:30 p.m., she leaves the office and goes straight to her Kabul home to spend the evening with her children and grandchildren.

Juyunda's childhood was marked by the violence of the Taliban insurgency in the years after the U.S. invasion. She saw entire buildings go up in flames after rocket strikes and bombings.

At night she would sleep with a glass full of water. "I thought, if a bomb ever hit our home, I could use it to put out the flames," she recalled, smiling at the thought of her childhood naivete.

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The bombs have stopped, but Juyunda's war for the rights of women continues. Amiri, meanwhile, is hopeful. "Let's see what happens," she said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Nov. 6, the 3190th day of 2021. There are 55 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 6, 1860, former Illinois congressman Abraham Lincoln of the Republican Party was elected President of the United States as he defeated John Breckinridge, John Bell and Stephen Douglas.

On this date:

In 1632, King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden was killed in battle.

In 1893, composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky died in St. Petersburg, Russia, at age 53.

In 1906, Republican Charles Evans Hughes was elected governor of New York, defeating newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst.

In 1928, in a first, the results of Republican Herbert Hoover's presidential election victory over Democrat Alfred E. Smith were flashed onto an electric wraparound sign on the New York Times building.

In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower won re-election, defeating Democrat Adlai E. Stevenson.

In 1977, 39 people were killed when the Kelly Barnes Dam in Georgia burst, sending a wall of water through Toccoa Falls College.

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan won re-election by a landslide over former Vice President Walter Mondale, the Democratic challenger.

In 1990, about one-fifth of the Universal Studios backlot in southern California was destroyed in an arson fire.

In 2012, President Barack Obama was elected to a second term of office, defeating Republican challenger Mitt Romney.

In 2014, the march toward same-sex marriage across the U.S. hit a roadblock when a federal appeals court upheld laws against the practice in four states: Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky and Tennessee. (A divided U.S. Supreme Court overturned the laws in June 2015.)

In 2015, President Barack Obama rejected the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, declaring it would undercut U.S. efforts to clinch a global climate change deal at the center of his environmental legacy. (President Donald Trump would reverse the Obama decision, but President Joe Biden canceled the permit for the pipeline on the day he took office.)

In 2017, former Democratic congressman Anthony Weiner reported to prison in Massachusetts to begin a 21-month sentence for sexting with a 15-year-old girl.

Ten years ago: Greece's embattled prime minister, George Papandreou, and its main opposition leader, Antonis Samaras, agreed to form an interim government to ensure the country's new European debt deal.

Five years ago: FBI Director James Comey abruptly announced that Democrat Hillary Clinton should not face criminal charges related to newly discovered emails from her tenure at the State Department.

One year ago: Democrat Joe Biden overtook President Donald Trump in Georgia as the counting of votes continued in the battleground state; Biden also expanded his lead over Trump in Pennsylvania and Nevada. The federal agency that oversees U.S. election security pushed back at unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud in a statement, saying that local election offices had detection measures that "make it highly difficult to commit fraud through counterfeit ballots." Sen. Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, said Trump was "damaging the cause of freedom" and inflaming "destructive and dangerous passions" by claiming, without foundation, that the election was rigged and stolen from him. As the nation set daily records for confirmed cases of the coronavirus, two senior administration officials confirmed that Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, had tested positive.

Today's Birthdays: Actor June Squibb is 92. Country singer Stonewall Jackson is 89. Singer P.J. Proby is

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83. Actor Sally Field is 75. Singer Rory Block is 72. Jazz musician Arturo Sandoval is 72. TV host Catherine Crier is 67. News correspondent and former California first lady Maria Shriver is 66. Actor Lori Singer is 64. Actor Lance Kerwin is 61. Former Education Secretary Arne Duncan is 57. Rock singer Corey Glover is 57. Actor Brad Grunberg is 57. Actor Peter DeLuise is 55. Actor Kelly Rutherford is 53. Actor Ethan Hawke is 51. Chef/TV judge Marcus Samuelsson is 51. Actor Thandiwe (tan-DEE'-way) Newton (formerly Thandie (TAN'-dee)) is 49. Model-actor Rebecca Romijn (roh-MAYN') is 49. Actor Zoe McLellan is 47. Actor Nicole Dubuc is 43. Actor Taryn Manning is 43. Retired NBA star Lamar Odom is 42. Actor Patina Miller is 37. Actor Katie Leclerc (LEH'-klehr) is 35. Singer-songwriter Ben Rector is 35. Singer-songwriter Robert Ellis is 33. Actor Emma Stone is 33. Actor Mercedes Kastner is 32.