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UpComing Events

Tuesday, Nov. 15

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m. (will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM)

Oral Interp regions at Aberdeen Central

4 p.m.: JH GBB hosts Britton-Hecla (7th at 4 p.m. followed by 8th)

Thursday, Nov. 18

5 p.m.: JH GBB hosts Aberdeen Roncalli (7th at 5 p.m. followed by 8th)

6 p.m.: Football Team Awards Banquet at Olive Grove Golf Course

Friday, Nov. 19

McGovern Debate & Oral Interp at Mitchell

Saturday, Nov. 20

McGovern Debate & Oral Interp at Mitchell

1 p.m.: JH GBB at Mobridge (7th at 1 p.m., 8th grade to follow)

Sunday, Nov. 21

7 p.m.: Snow Queen Contest at GHS Gym

Wed-Fri., Nov. 24-26: No School - Thanksgiving Vacation

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
© 2021 Groton Daily Independent

Groton looking for new housing development

Affordable housing was the main focus for the group that gathered Monday afternoon at the Groton Community Center. Community leaders, along with officials from Heartland Consumers Power District, were on hand to talk about the housing situation in Groton.

The last of the lots in the Olson Development have been sold and there is a need for more housing in Groton. "Communities have to decide what is mid-range in pricing," said Casey Crabtree, Director of Economic Development for the Heartland Consumers Power District (HCPD). HCPD provides supplemental power to the city of Groton. The city gets its electricity from WAPA and anything over that allocation is purchased from HCPD.

Crabtree said that HCPD has the necessary tools to help communities with housing development. "We need to get all the doors that we can get," he said. "We're not developers, but we can tell you what is working in other communities."

One of the main concerns is the price of putting the infrastructure (water, sewer, storm sewer, electricity) in the ground. "TIF (Tax Increment Financing) helps get the infrastructure in the ground without having to charge a crazy amount for a lot," Crabtree said. He also pointed out that HCPD has programs and offers zero percent financing for infrastructure. The maximum amount is a \$1.5 million loan and a \$300,000 grant.

"We want your community to be successful," Crabtree said. "And we have the tools to get things done with the current offerings on the market."

Bruce Babcock raised a number of questions. He said that HAPI Homes is a viable option for Groton as well as Governor Homes. Crabtree said a variety of houses is a good thing. It was also mentioned that Governor Homes are now 12-14 months out with only 150 being built a year.

"When you have an idea, then we'll start working with options," Crabtree said. It is ideal that 10 to 20 lots be considered for a development.

The next step is to find parcels of land that is available for potential housing. Tom Mahan from the Groton Development Corporation, said that the corporation may be interested in developing some of their property into affordable housing. It was mentioned that if it did materialize, that a petition would be made with the railroad to have a Groton designated as a quiet zone.

According to the United States Department of Transportation, "A quiet zone is a section of a rail line at least one-half mile in length that contains one or more consecutive public highway-rail grade crossings at which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded when trains are approaching the crossings. The prohibited use of train horns at quiet zones only applies to trains when approaching and entering crossings and does not include train horn use within passenger stations or rail yards. Train horns may be sounded in emergency situations or to comply with other railroad or FRA rules even within a quiet zone. Quiet zone regulations also do not eliminate the use of locomotive bells at crossings. Therefore, a more appropriate description of a designated quiet zone would be a "reduced train horn area.""

The meeting was recorded by GDILIVE.COM and is available in the 397news.com archives. Look under City Council for the link to the video.

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Those attending going counter clockwise were John Lowary; Terry Herron, Water and Street Superintendent; Dwight Zerr, Sanitary Sewer Superintendent; Loren Locken; Councilman David Blackmun; Groton Area Superintendent Joe Schwan, Deputy Finance Officer April Abeln; Assistant Finance Officer Kellie Locke; Councilman Karyn Babcock; Bruce Babcock; Loren Flihs and Tom Mahan both from the Groton Economic Development Corp. along with Dick Kolker sitting at the cart table; Councilman Brian Bahr, Travis McGannon; Heath Giedt; Councilman Jon Cutler; City Attorney (for 43 years) Drew Johnson; Finance Officer Hope Block; Kelly Dybdahl, Customer Relations Manager for Heartland Consumers Power District; Casey Crabtree, Director of Economic Development for Hearth Consumers Power District; and Groton Mayor Scott Hanlon. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

November 16, 2021 – 7:00pm

120 N Main Street

(NOTICE ADDRESS)

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Todd Gay – Journeyman Apprenticeship Credit for Previous Work Experience
 - a. TG and PK to Heartland’s Winter Conference – November 18th in Flandreau
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Minutes
4. Bills
5. October Finance Report
6. Change Order #3 – AB Contracting
7. Pay Request #6 – AB Contracting
8. Pay Request #7 Final – AB Contracting
9. Reconsider Pay Request #11 – Maguire Iron
10. Liquor License Approvals:
 - Jungle Lanes – Retail on sale liquor, package off sale liquor
 - American Legion – Retail on sale liquor, package off sale liquor
 - Red Horse – Retail on sale liquor
 - Dollar General – Retail on-off sale wine and cider
 - Ken’s Food Fair – Package off sale liquor
 - MJs Sinclair – Package off sale liquor
 - Olde Bank N Café – Retail on-of sale wine and cider
 - Olive Grove Golf Course – Retail on sale liquor
11. GHS Intern(s) at City Hall and Wage Memorial Library – January through May 2022
12. Second Reading of Ordinance #756 – 2022 Appropriations
13. First Reading of Ordinance #757 – Updated City Ordinances as of 2022
14. Council paid time for Economic Development Meeting
15. Groton Residential Development Roundtable Meeting – November 15th at Noon – Groton Community Center with guest Casey Crabtree, Heartland Consumer Powers District’s Director of Economic Development follow up
16. Holiday Lighting Contest – December 11th - \$100, \$75 & \$50 utility bill credits to be given away
17. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
18. Hire Skating Rink Employees
19. Adjournment

GFP Shares Important December Dates with Individuals

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game Fish and Parks (GFP) today announced several major dates individuals need to be aware of as GFP transitions to a new e-commerce 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.

The first important date individuals need to be aware of is December 7. This is the last day to purchase a park entrance license that may be given as a gift for it to arrive in the mail prior to Christmas.

“Park entrance licenses are a popular gift for the holiday season,” said Parks Business Manager, Jodi Bechard. “As we transition to the new e-commerce system, we will not be able to sell park entrance licenses from December 8-15 and with mail delivery over the holiday season, licenses purchased after December 15 will likely not arrive in time for Christmas.”

GFP will also not be able to accept new camping reservations from December 8-15. Reservations made prior to this time will still be honored, but new reservations will not be able to be made during the transition period.

“To ensure everyone’s existing reservations transition properly to our new system, we will not be able to accept new reservations for one week,” said Bechard. “If you wish to stay at a state park during this time, please make your reservations prior to December 7 or contact the park directly.”

Hunters will also have an important date to remember. The last day to purchase preference points from the 2021 season will be December 14. In past seasons, this deadline had been December 15.

“The deadline for hunters to purchase their preference points will be one day earlier this year,” said Wildlife Administration Section Chief, Heather Villa. “While this is a very small change, we want to make sure all hunters are able to obtain their preference points in 2021.”

Once the new e-commerce system goes live on December 15, individuals will be able to log in and view their preference points, upcoming camping reservations and continue to purchase their licenses as they normally would.

“Our new e-commerce system is going to make it much easier for our customers to get outdoors and we’re very excited for December 15,” concluded Villa.

Individuals may purchase a park entrance license, preference points, or make a camping reservation at gfp.sd.gov.

The South Dakota Democratic Party Congratulates Marcia Bunger on Biden Administration Appointment

South Dakota Democratic Party Co-Treasurer Marcia Bunger has been appointed by the Biden Administration to lead the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Risk Management Agency (RMA). She has resigned from her role with the Party to accept this new position.

In her role as RMA Administrator, she will oversee the development and implementation of crop insurance policies and deliver educational information about risk management and crop insurance.

"I am humbled to be appointed as USDA's Risk Management Agency Administrator for the Biden Administration. I was appointed through President Biden's 'Build Back Better' model, where I submitted my desire to continue to serve the farmers and ranchers of the greatest and safest food-producing nation in the world. Throughout the Department of Agriculture, there is a greater emphasis than ever to ensure risk management programs are accessible to all and meet the needs of historically underserved communities," said Marcia Bunger.

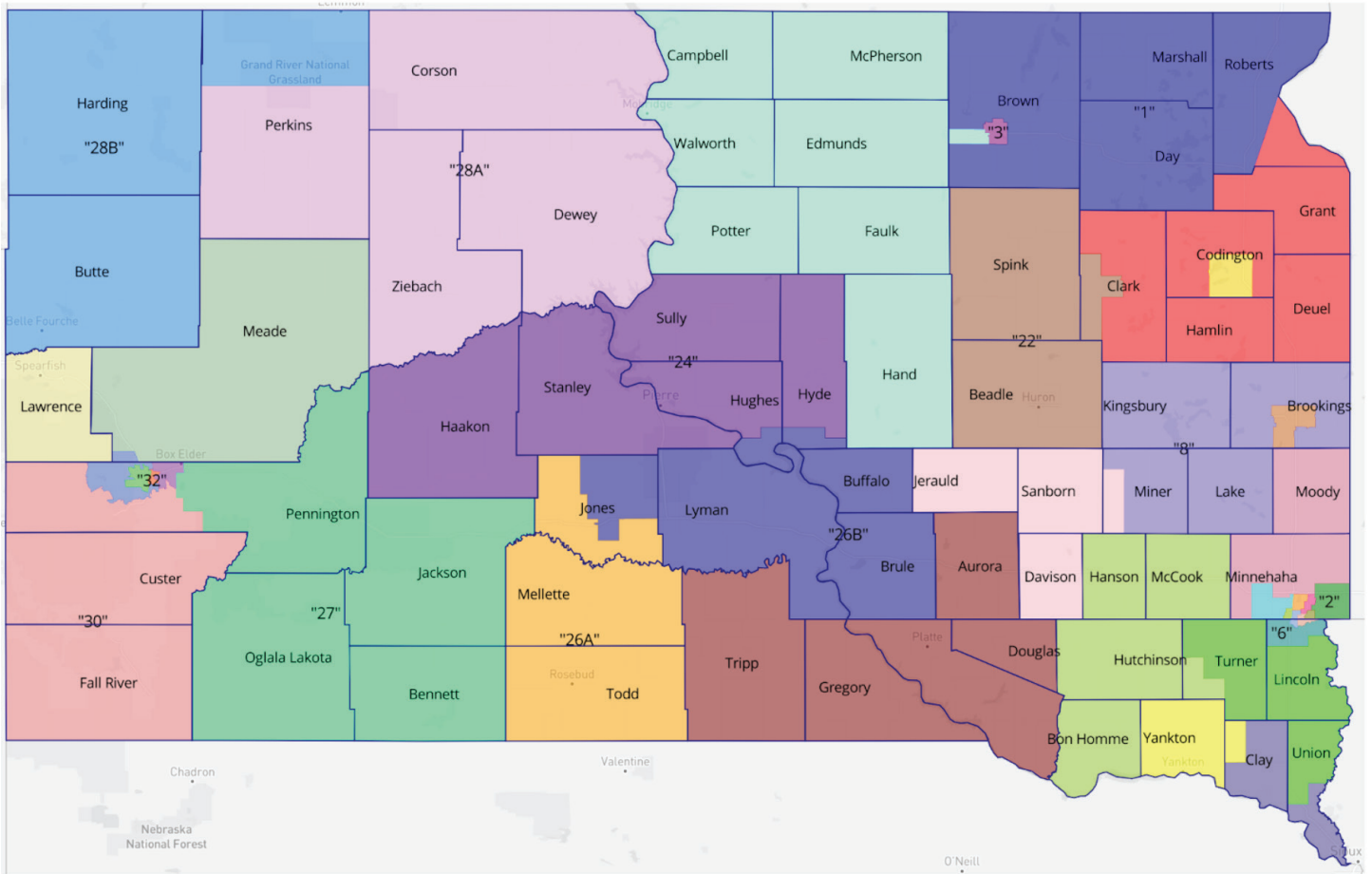
"I would like to thank Marcia for her dedicated service as Co-Treasurer of the South Dakota Democratic Party. Her hard work has set us up for financial success. I am pleased the Biden Administration has appointed a South Dakotan to such an important position. Congratulations to Marcia on her new role. I know she will do great work for the Biden Administration" said SDDP Chair Randy Seiler.

Marcia was born and raised in South Dakota on a farm as a first-generation Asian American on her maternal side and a 100-plus -year family farm on her paternal side. She graduated from Augustana with a degree in Communication and Business Administration. Marcia has been married for almost 40 years and together with her spouse has a 1,200-acre corn and soybean farm, as well as a 200 head cow-calf operation.

Marcia has worked for the USDA Farm Service Agency for over 25 years in various capacities. She has been the co-treasurer of the South Dakota Democratic Party since 2019. Previously she served as the Chair of the McCook County Democrats.

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The New SD Legislative District Map

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That's Life by Tony Bender Pre-thanksgiving quiz

Hey kids, before we break for Thanksgiving, it's time for another Official Tony Bender Super Brain Quiz, sponsored by Brunhilda's Cooking Lard, Powdermilk Biscuits, Grain Belt, and Karen & Brandon, who've "just about had it up to here" with your slanders. Well, let's see if you've been paying attention to the fake news. And yes, this will go on your permanent record.

1. According to recent state figures, student reading comprehension has fallen significantly in North Dakota because:

- a. Hacked by South Dakota to make us look bad
- b. Thanks, Biden.
- c. Rob Port uses too many big words.
- d. God's will

2. President Joe Biden created an international incident when he met with British royalty and:

- a. Cut the cheese
- b. Cut in line at buffet
- c. Launched the ol' Delaware Destroyer
- d. Tried to extradite Prince Andrew

3. What to do with the \$350 state income tax break from the ND legislature:

- a. Gas up
- b. Stock up on toilet paper
- c. More ammo
- d. Send to Joel Osteen

4. Senators John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer voted for the infrastructure bill but Rep. Kelly Armstrong didn't because:

- a. Didn't understand the question
- b. Against his religion
- c. Thought it might be a trick
- d. Infrastructure is a slippery slope

5. The state legislature just banned the teaching of Critical Race Theory in North Dakota because:

- a. It had everyone's giblets in a twist.
- b. Prefer white meat
- c. Will look good on resume
- d. Might be a gateway to jazz

6. For Thanksgiving, Gov. Doug Burgum will pardon:

- a. A turkey
- b. A pheasant
- c. Peasants
- d. Lynn Anderson

7. President Biden's approval rating is:

- a. 98.6
- b. 420
- c. Being unfairly treated by gravity
- d. Still higher than the number of teeth in the average NASCAR fan's mouth.

8. The Chahinkapa Zoo in Wahpeton has been stripped of national accreditation because:

- a. Too hard to spell
- b. Zookeepers subversively teaching Critical

Rino Theory

- c. Tigers and bears sleeping together
- d. Camels always humping

9. Liberals' favorite Thanksgiving dish:

- a. Tofu Turkey
- b. Crow
- c. Gizzards
- d. Pilgrim babies

10. Top reason for a 17-year-old to travel across state lines with an AR-15.

- a. Low on ammo for the AK-47
- b. Castle Doctrine
- c. Feared Biden would confiscate gun while he was away.
- d. To shoot a man in Reno just to watch him die

Bonus: Talk show host Joe Rogen recently revealed that he's flexible enough to:

- a. Chew his toenails
- b. Vote Dem
- c. Convince Aaron Rodgers of just about anything
- d. Not touching that with a six-inch pole

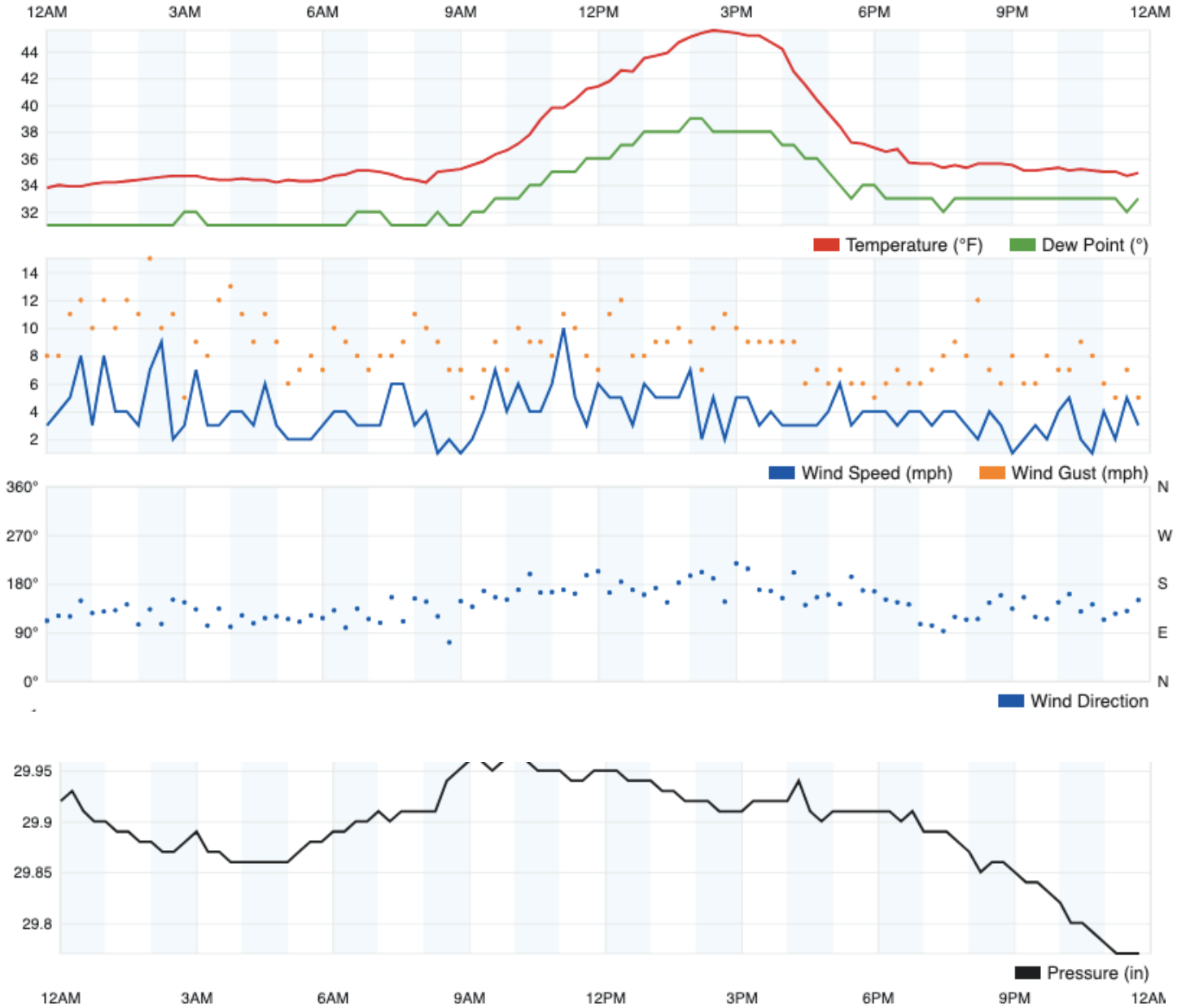
Answers: 1. B; 2. A; 3. A; 4. D; 5. D; 6. C; 7. C; 8. A; 9. D; 10. B; Bonus: A. Grades: 11-9 correct: Excellent! You get the wishbone! 6-8 correct: You've been redistricted back to third grade. 3-5 correct: A waste is a terrible thing to mind. 0-2 correct: This is why you've been on double-secret probation all along.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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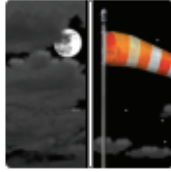
Today



Mostly Cloudy
then Mostly
Cloudy and
Breezy

High: 58 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy
then Mostly
Clear and
Breezy

Low: 26 °F

Wednesday



Partly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 37 °F

Wednesday
Night



Partly Cloudy
and Blustery

Low: 19 °F

Thursday




Sunny

High: 34 °F

Today
*Partly sunny, windy over central SD
Highs 50° east, near 70° Southern SD*


Wednesday
*Dry, colder and windy
Highs in the 30s*



FIRE DANGER

Very high/extreme grassland fire danger this afternoon Missouri valley due to gusty winds and very low relative humidity

Red Flag Warning Issued



Updated: 11/16/2021 3:19 AM Central

A storm system will bring warm temperatures to the area today, but they'll turn colder for Wednesday. Also, gusty winds are expected this afternoon, especially over central and western SD. The wind will promote very high to extreme fire danger over west river areas #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

November 16, 1996: An area of low pressure brought 6 to 9 inches of snowfall to most of central and parts of north-central South Dakota on the 16th, while widespread freezing rain associated with the warm front of the system, along with 4 to 10 inches of snow, fell in northeast South Dakota. Travel was significantly affected, and a few minor accidents occurred during the storm. Several sporting events and activities were postponed or canceled. Strong north winds late on the 16th into early the 17th resulted in near-blizzard conditions across northeast South Dakota. Some storm total snowfall amounts include, 9.0 inches 12SSW of Harrold; 8.5 inches near Highmore; 8.2 inches in Roscoe; 8.0 in Eureka; 7.9 inches near Mellette; 7.0 inches in Waubay; 6.5 inches in Murdo and Redfield; 6.0 inches in Kennebec and Miller; 5.5 inches near Victor; and 5.3 inches in Sisseton.

1958 - More than six inches of snow fell at Tucson, AZ. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1959 - The most severe November cold wave in U.S. history was in progress. A weather observing station located 14 miles northeast of Lincoln MT reported a reading of 53 degrees below zero, which established an all-time record low temperature for the nation for the month of November. Their high that day was one degree above zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - High winds and heavy snow created blizzard conditions across parts of eastern Colorado. Wind gusts reached 68 mph at Pueblo, and snowfall totals ranged up to 37 inches at Echo Lake. In Wyoming, the temperature dipped to 14 degrees below zero at Laramie. Strong thunderstorms in Louisiana drenched Alexandria with 16.65 inches of rain in thirty hours, with an unofficial total of 21.21 inches north of Olla. Flash flooding in Louisiana caused five to six million dollars damage. (15th-16th) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful low pressure system in the north central U.S. produced high winds across the Great Lakes Region, with wind gusts to 60 mph reported at Chicago IL. Heavy snow blanketed much of Minnesota, with eleven inches reported at International Falls. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Snow and gusty winds invaded the north central U.S. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced wind chill readings as cold as 25 degrees below zero, and blizzard conditions were reported in Nebraska during the late morning hours. High winds around a powerful low pressure system produced squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Whitefish Point MI, and snowfall totals in Michigan ranged up to 19 inches at Hart, north of Muskegon. (15th-16th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006: An early morning F3 tornado killed eight people, injured 20 others and left 100 people homeless in Riegelwood, North Carolina. This storm was the second deadliest tornado in the state in the past 50 years.

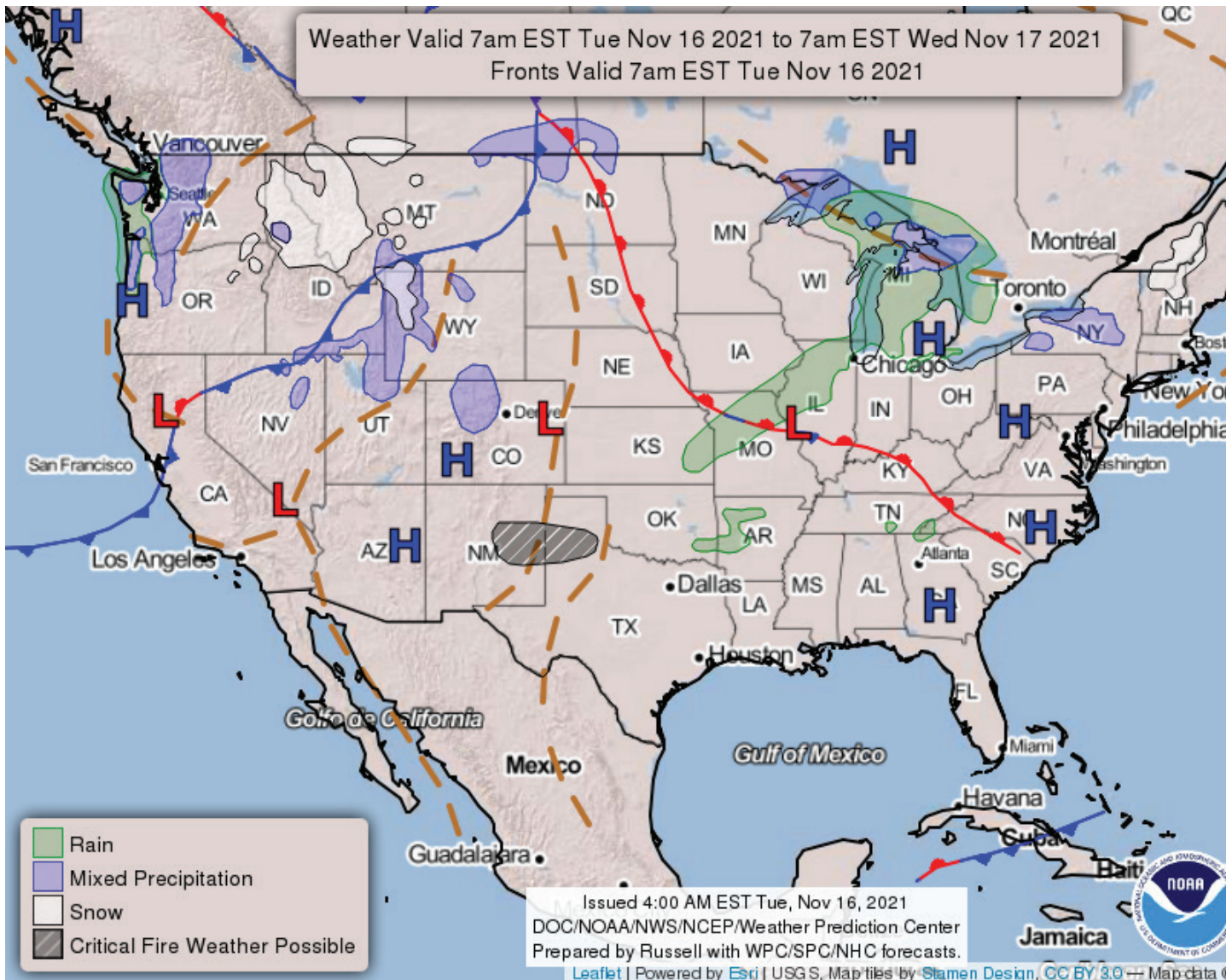
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 46 °F at 2:22 PM
Low Temp: 34 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 15 mph at 2:13 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 71° in 2001
Record Low: -12° in 1955
Average High: 42°F
Average Low: 19°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.44
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16
Average Precip to date: 20.91
Precip Year to Date: 19.88
Sunset Tonight: 5:02:47 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33:04 AM



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THE MEMORIES OF A HOLY GOD

It almost seems contradictory when we read these words of the Psalmist: "For He remembered His holy promise." It's as if God were in a grocery store, and just as He began to walk through the parking lot to His car, He stopped and said, "Oh my. I forgot the milk! I'm glad I thought of it." But, not so.

As Psalm 105 ends, the author reminds us of the faithfulness of our God. So, he wanted to remind the readers, once again, that whether or not they were faithful to Him, He was faithful to them. He made a covenant with Abraham, and through the many generations from the day that covenant was made until that very moment, He was always with them. When they felt alone, He made His presence known. When they needed protection, He was there to guard them. When they were hungry, He provided food to nourish them. When they were weak and weary, they could rely on His power.

God has been, is and will be true to what He says. And, He is faithful to keep His word to whomever He gives it. Wherever we look in history - in times of defeat and delay - it does not mean that God has forgotten what He has promised. God is always faithful to His holy promises. His promises are holy and sacred because they come from a God who is holy and sacred. Through days that seemed unbearable and nights that had no stars, God was always with them - working out His will in His way according to His plan.

God calls us to Himself to make us like Himself. He will do whatever it takes to restore His image in us. Remember: God is a "working in us God" and always faithful.

Prayer: Give us patience and perseverance, faith and willingness, hope and trust, Lord, as we become like You. Help us to remember our promises to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham. Psalm 105:42

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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)
11/11/2021 Veteran's Day Program at the GHS Arena
11/21/2021 Groton Area Snow Queen Contest
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
11/30/2021 James Valley Telecommunications Holiday Open House 10am-4pm
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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$63 million

Powerball

05-31-34-51-53, Powerball: 23, Power Play: 2

(five, thirty-one, thirty-four, fifty-one, fifty-three; Powerball: twenty-three; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$180 million

No. 14 Iowa State women beat South Dakota State 75-56

AMES, Iowa (AP) — Lexi Donarski scored 22 points, Aubrey Joens added 17 and No. 14 Iowa State beat South Dakota State 75-56 on Monday night.

Joens scored the first five points of Iowa State's 18-6 run to take a 20-point lead early in the third quarter.

Emily Ryan had 12 points, five assists and four steals for Iowa State (2-0).

Iowa State closed the first half on a 14-2 run to take a 36-26 lead at the break. The Cyclones made 9 of 10 free throws compared to SDSU's one attempt.

Madysen Vlastuin led South Dakota State (1-2) with 14 points. Tylee Irwin added 12 points and Paiton Burckhard 10. The Jackrabbits were held to 33.9% shooting, and did not make a field goal for the final 3:28 of regulation.

More AP women's college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

OSHA, South Dakota pork plant settle coronavirus complaint

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Federal workplace safety regulators announced Monday that they have reached an agreement with Smithfield Foods to settle a contested citation of the company's coronavirus safety measures during a massive outbreak last year at a South Dakota pork processing plant.

Under the agreement, Virginia-based Smithfield Foods will develop a plan to prevent infectious diseases at meatpacking plants nationwide and pay a \$13,500 fine.

Smithfield's Sioux Falls plant was one the nation's worst COVID-19 hotspots during the early days of the pandemic. By June 16, 2020, four workers were dead and nearly 1,300 had tested positive for the virus, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. After an investigation, the federal agency said Smithfield did not do enough to space workers out or provide other safety measures such as face coverings or physical barriers.

However, the company contested that assessment and defended its actions at a time when safety precautions against COVID-19 were not clear.

Smithfield's spokesman, Jim Monroe, said the company admitted no wrongdoing and called OSHA's allegations "baseless."

"Settling with OSHA and avoiding litigation allows Smithfield to continue the good relations it has with the agency, as we have the shared goal of workplace safety," he said.

The president of the local United Food and Commercial Workers union, B.J. Motley, derided the settlement and \$13,500 fine as a "slap on the wrist for Smithfield and a deeply troubling betrayal of the men and women who have already sacrificed so much in this pandemic."

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Employees at the plant have said Smithfield did not do enough last year to prevent infections in the plant, where workers labored elbow-to-elbow as they processed nearly 5% of the country's pork. The union at the plant has said that it had been attempting to negotiate for more coronavirus protections leading up to the outbreak. After cases kept accumulating, Smithfield shuttered its plant for nearly three weeks.

Smithfield has agreed to work with third-party experts to develop a new plan to prevent diseases from spreading in plants, which will include an assessment of medical safety measures from meatpacking plants' administration on down to personal protective equipment for workers on butchering lines.

Smithfield has agreed to work with third-party experts to develop a new plan to prevent diseases from spreading in plants, which will include an assessment of medical safety measures from meatpacking plants' administration on down to personal protective equipment for workers on butchering lines.

Smithfield already had a prevention plan in the works and is now focused on vaccinating its entire workforce against COVID-19, Monroe said.

OSHA's regional administrator, Jennifer Rous, warned that a comprehensive plan was necessary.

"What happened at this facility was tragic and we must ensure that all steps in the agreement are followed to prevent a mass outbreak from happening again," she said.

Midco Customers Have Spoken

SIOUX FALLS, S.D.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov 15, 2021--

Midco, the leading provider of reliable, high-speed internet, was named the best in the West region in the J.D. Power 2021 Residential Internet Service Satisfaction Study.

"Our customers share great insights. They help us understand their wants, needs and preferences," said Customer Care Manager Matt Beck. "Whether it's over the phone or on a chat, we form bonds with them, and they let us know how we can do better. They keep us accountable, and we're always striving to best serve them."

"Over my 15 years, I've installed internet in hundreds of homes. The pandemic has made reliable, high-speed internet more important than ever before," said Jim Edinger Field Technician III. "Our customers depend on us for working from home, learning online and connecting with their loved ones. I take that responsibility very seriously."

Understanding the increased need for internet as well as heightened customer expectations, Midco is committed to taking its products and services to the next level.

Fiber Forward: Midco is leaping ahead with Fiber Forward, an expansive investment that uses the company's robust fiber network and next gen fiber tech to bring 10 Gig (10G) speeds to the region. Fiber Forward will lead to improved economic development, education and quality of life in our communities.

10G: In partnership with U.S. and international cable providers, Midco will deliver a 10G platform. 10G provides fast symmetrical speeds, low latency, unmatched reliability, extra compute capabilities and rock-solid security for the broadest range of customers.

Rural Internet: Focused on helping to close the digital divide in rural America, Midco Rural Internet uses fixed wireless technology to help customers stay connected no matter where they live.

"At Midco, we're not one to idle or accept complacency. This award from J.D. Power is a testament to that," said Midco President & CEO Pat McAdaragh. "At the heart of Midco is a team of people committed to getting better – for our customers and our communities. I'm so proud of the Midco team, and I salute them for this outstanding achievement."

The J.D. Power findings include responses from more than 27,000 customers that currently have wire-line internet service. The study measures overall satisfaction with internet service providers based on five factors: performance & reliability; cost of service; communications & promotions; billing & payment; and customer service. The study was fielded from October 2020 through July 2021.

Learn more at [Midco.com/JDPower](https://www.midco.com/JDPower).

This release is available online in our Press Room.

About Midco

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Midco provides a superior network and an exceptional customer experience while being a force for good in the communities it serves. Midco is the leading provider of reliable, high-speed internet via fiber and fixed wireless technology. By 2025, Midco will deploy 10G, the next great leap for broadband – while expanding its fiber network to rural areas. The company also delivers TV services including Midco Sports (a regional sports network), phone, data center and advertising services, plus wholesale networking solutions. Midco fiber serves 460,000 homes and businesses in 400 communities in Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Visit Midco.com to learn more about Midco and how the company has been giving back to communities since 1931.

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CONTACT: Media Contact:

Paige Pearson Meyer

Director of Corporate Communications

Midco®

605.275.6300 | Paige.Pearson@Midco.com

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EXPLAINER: Which side did better in Rittenhouse closings?

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — A defense lawyer angrily accused the prosecution at Kyle Rittenhouse's murder trial of lying. The lead prosecutor struck a measured tone, even as he raised the accused's rifle at one point and sighted at a courtroom wall.

How the indignation and theatrics during Monday's closing arguments played with jurors won't be clear until 12 of them return with verdicts in a case that underscores American divisions on issues of guns, protests and policing.

Here's a look at how some five hours of closings went and which side may have made the stronger argument to jurors:

WHO DO EXPERTS SAY MADE A BETTER CLOSING ARGUMENT?

Most agreed going into the trial that prosecutors would have the tougher case to make given Rittenhouse's claim under state law that he shot three men, killing two, in self-defense. That challenge remained in closings, where prosecutors had to account for two weeks of evidence that largely showed Rittenhouse as the one being chased when he opened fire.

"Great facts make great lawyers," said Steve Greenberg, a Chicago-based lawyer who has tried dozens of murder cases nationwide. "I think the defense has better facts here."

He said evidence that the first protester Rittenhouse shot and killed, Joseph Rosenbaum, was under treatment for bipolar disorder and depression helped buttress the defense's arguments that Rosenbaum was an erratic presence who ambushed Rittenhouse and tried to take his gun.

Prosecutors fared better, he said, with their frequently repeated argument that of all the people who turned up with guns in Kenosha, only Rittenhouse shot anyone.

Another Chicago-based defense lawyer who has closely followed the trial, Joe Lopez, said he thought both sides missed an opportunity to tell compelling, memorable narratives to help jurors remember the evidence.

"The defense could have talked about Rittenhouse and his family and said, 'Look at my client. ... he came to Kenosha and was willing to die for you, to protect you,'" Lopez said. Instead, he said, both sides frequently offered comparatively dry recitations of evidence.

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WHAT ISSUE WAS AT THE CORE OF THE ARGUMENTS?

Neither Rittenhouse's alleged poor judgment in showing up in Kenosha with an AR-style rifle, nor wider issues of American gun culture, are supposed to be a focus for jurors. They're supposed to render their judgment based on whether Rittenhouse acted in self-defense by the letter of sometimes complex, counterintuitive Wisconsin law.

Boiled down, the law requires that someone's decision to react with deadly force be reasonable in the seconds and minutes that a conflict occurs.

SO HOW DID PROSECUTORS TRY TO MAKE THAT POINT IN CLOSINGS?

Prosecutor Thomas Binger attacked the self-defense argument by arguing that Rittenhouse provoked conflict by showing up with his rifle. Binger retrieved Rittenhouse's rifle — kept for much of the trial in a white box behind the defense table — and demonstrated how he said Rittenhouse wielded it recklessly and menacingly that night.

He repeatedly showed the jury drone video he said depicted Rittenhouse pointing the weapon at demonstrators, saying that was what led to a chain reaction of deadly events.

"This is a guy who came with special bullets and a gun, who came up to Kenosha with a gun to shoot someone," said Lopez, summarizing what he called the thrust of Binger's closing. "I think the prosecutor effectively made that point."

But Binger hit jurors hard with images from the violence, too.

With no warning, he displayed a close-up photo of the arm of Gaige Grosskreutz, the protester who survived a Rittenhouse bullet. Some jurors winced and turned away at the sight of a bicep in bloody tatters.

That image and photos of Rosenbaum, lying on a gurney during his autopsy, are likely to stick with jurors during deliberations.

HOW'D THE DEFENSE DO?

What may linger for jurors from the defense closing was gruff lead attorney Mark Richards, opening his argument by accusing Binger of lying to salvage a faltering case.

"Mr. Rosenbaum was shot because he was chasing my client and going to kill him, take his gun and carry out the threats he made," Richards said. He added that Rittenhouse never pointed his gun before being chased: "It didn't happen."

Greenberg said he didn't think the approach of attacking the prosecutor would play well with jurors.

"There was a lot of bashing of the prosecutor by the defense," he said. "People don't like that. You have the facts or you don't."

WHAT AUDIENCE WERE ATTORNEYS PLAYING TO?

Not the courtroom spectators, the viewers watching the closings on a livestream or journalists. Their target audience was jurors. Though they are anonymous by the judge's order, prosecutors and the defense team would have been able to identify them and delve into their personal histories — and perhaps tailor their arguments to sway a few.

Still, both Greenberg and Lopez said closings are almost never as decisive as people think.

"I don't think many cases are ever won in closings," Greenberg said. "Jurors go back to the juror room and talk it all out amongst themselves."

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

EXPLAINER: Will Xi-Biden talks repair US-China ties?

BEIJING (AP) — No breakthroughs were delivered during talks between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden, but the cordial tone of the virtual meeting is an indication that relations between the sides may be turning a corner — even if that means for now merely walking back from the heated exchanges of earlier this year.

Here is a look at what is driving tensions between the world's two biggest economies and the main takeaways from the Xi-Biden talks.

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FROM WORSE TO BAD

Relations went into sharp decline after then-President Donald Trump imposed sweeping tariffs on Chinese goods in retaliation for what he said were Beijing's unfair trading practices. The U.S. had for years been complaining of the theft or forced transfer of American technology and was campaigning to keep Chinese communications giants, most notably Huawei, out of the U.S. and other markets. The Trump administration also sharply criticized China on human rights issues.

Relations remained frosty after Biden took office. At a meeting in Alaska in March, senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi berated Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, accusing the U.S. of failing to deal with its own human rights problems and taking issue with what he said was American hypocrisy.

A trip to China by America's No. 2 diplomat Wendy Sherman in July was equally sour in tone, and a subsequent visit by U.S. climate envoy John Kerry went little better.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Relations appeared to bottom out when Sullivan and Yang met again in Switzerland last month, in a follow-up to a phone call between Xi and Biden. Sullivan made clear that the United States sought better engagement at a senior level "to ensure responsible competition," according to the White House.

The meeting laid the groundwork for the virtual meeting Tuesday between Xi and Biden, who have known each other since both were vice presidents. Xi referred to Biden as his "old friend" and they lamented they were not meeting face-to-face before launching into 3 1/2 hours of discussions.

The U.S. described the talks as respectful, straightforward and open.

CAUSES OF TENSION

The sides are at odds over everything from trade and technology to human rights, self-governing Taiwan and the South China Sea.

In some of his most pointed comments, Xi said "Taiwanese independence forces" and those in the U.S. who would use them to contain China were the key sources of tension over the island that China claims as its own territory. "We have patience and are willing to show utmost sincerity and exert the greatest efforts to obtain peaceful unification," Xi said, according to China's official Xinhua News Agency. "However, if the Taiwan independence separatist forces provoke and force our hand, we will be required to take drastic measures."

Alongside "human rights more broadly," Biden raised concerns about China's practices in Tibet, the crackdown in Hong Kong, and the Uyghur homeland of Xinjiang where more than a million have been detained in political re-education camps, according to the U.S.

Xinhua made no mention of specific human rights issues, but quoted Xi as saying that China was willing to engage in a human rights dialogue "on the basis of mutual respect, but we do not support using human rights to interfere in other countries' domestic affairs."

Trade relations have also driven strains in bilateral ties. However, the topic was not "a dominant part of the conversation," said the U.S. official. Xi said Beijing was opposed to the "politicization of trade" and Washington's invocation of national security to block market access for Chinese companies.

WHERE DO THEY GO FROM HERE?

The softened rhetoric marks a major improvement. What benefits accrue depends on whether the two countries can find areas of cooperation and come up with agreements, work-arounds or other ways of managing their disputes.

"This is an important relationship, perhaps the most consequential bilateral relationship in the world, the two largest economies, two largest militaries, two largest greenhouse gas emitters," said Paul Haenle of the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace. "So the fact that the two leaders are meeting, in my view, is

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a good thing. But we need, I think, to be realistic.”

It is “very important for the leaders of the two countries to define the relationship and steer the direction,” said Yu Wanli, a professor of international relations at Beijing Language and Cultural University. China will be looking for Biden to take action but recognizes the political constraints he faces at home, Yu said.

If nothing else, the summit may have arrested any further deterioration in ties, said Wang Huiyao, president of the Center for China and Globalization in Beijing.

The positive message sent by the two leaders will “really set a good example for all working levels of both governments to really talk to each other, find the common denominators and find all the good points that they can seek from each other,” he said.

US journalist jailed in Myanmar for months heads home

NEW YORK (AP) — American journalist Danny Fenster, who was freed after nearly six months in jail in military-ruled Myanmar, expressed relief that he on his way home ahead of his expected arrival in the United States on Tuesday.

Fenster, who was sentenced last week to 11 years of hard labor, was handed over Monday to former U.S. diplomat Bill Richardson, who helped negotiate the release. He is one of more than 100 journalists, media officials or publishers who have been detained since the military ousted the elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in February.

“I’m feeling all right physically,” a bearded Fenster, in baggy drawstring pants and a knit hat, told journalists after landing in Doha, Qatar, which he passed through on his way home. “It’s just the same privations and things that come with any form of incarceration. ... The longer it drags on, the more worried you are that it’s just never going to end.”

He said he was not starved or beaten while in custody and was “happy to be on my way home.” While jailed, Fenster told his lawyer that he believed he had COVID-19, though prison authorities denied that.

Fenster, the managing editor of online magazine Frontier Myanmar, was convicted Friday of spreading false or inflammatory information, contacting illegal organizations and violating visa regulations. Days before his conviction, he learned he had been charged with additional violations that put him at risk of a life sentence.

“We are so grateful that Danny will finally be able to reconnect with his loved ones, who have been advocating for him all this time, against immense odds,” Richardson, a former governor of New Mexico and past ambassador to the United Nations, said in a statement.

Fenster has been in detention since he was arrested at Yangon International Airport on May 24. He was expected to arrive in New York on Tuesday morning.

“We are overjoyed that Danny has been released and is on his way home — we cannot wait to hold him in our arms,” his family said in a statement.

The exact allegations against Fenster were never clear, but much of the prosecution’s case appeared to hinge on proving that he was employed by another online news site that was ordered closed this year during the crackdown on the media that followed the de facto coup. Fenster used to work for the site but left that job last year.

A native of the Detroit area, Fenster has a master’s degree in creative writing from Wayne State University and worked for a newspaper in Louisiana before moving to Southeast Asia, according to Deadline Detroit, a news website to which he occasionally contributed.

His brother, Bryan Fenster, has said he was particularly interested in the plight of people from the Muslim Rohingya minority, hundreds of thousands of whom fled Myanmar during a brutal counterinsurgency campaign by the army in 2017.

The generals in Myanmar “were convinced that it wasn’t worth it to hang on to Danny,” U.S. Rep. Andy Levin of Michigan, who represents the Fenster family in Congress, told Detroit radio station WWJ. “If they kept him and anything really happened to him, we would never forget it. We would never forgive them.”

Polish forces use water cannons on migrants who threw stones

By VANESSA GERA and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Polish border forces on Wednesday said they were attacked with stones by migrants at the border with Belarus and responded by using water cannons against them.

The Border Guard agency posted video on Twitter showing a water cannon being directed across the border at a group of migrants in a makeshift camp in freezing temperatures.

Polish police said one officer was seriously injured. He was taken by ambulance to a hospital and it is likely his skull was fractured after being hit by an object.

The situation marks an escalation in a tense migration and political border crisis where the lives of thousands of migrants are at stake.

Poland's Defense Ministry said its soldiers and other border forces were attacked with stones and other objects.

The ministry also said that Belarusian forces tried to destroy fencing along the countries' common border, while the Interior Ministry posted video apparently showing migrants trying to tear down a fence.

There was no way to independently verify what was happening because a state of emergency in Poland is keeping reporters and human rights workers out of the border area. In Belarus journalists face severe restrictions on their ability to report as well, with only a few present at the border.

At one point Tuesday a Polish independent broadcaster, TVN24, was forced to rely on CNN in order to show a picture of the border not filtered through government authorities.

Poland's parliament is expected Tuesday to take up a legislative proposal that would regulate the ability of citizens to move in the area of the border with Belarus after the state of emergency ends at this end of this month.

The state of emergency was imposed at the beginning of September as a large number of migrants from the Middle East sought to cross into Poland from Belarus.

The border is also part of the European Union's eastern border, and the EU accuses the authoritarian regime of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko of fomenting a migration crisis in order to pressure the bloc.

The EU has been putting pressure on airlines to stop transporting Syrians, Iraqis and others to Belarus. Meanwhile, the Iraqi government is urging its citizens trapped at the border to return home.

Some 200 Iraqi nationals who arrived in Belarus with the intention of crossing into the EU reached out to the Iraqi embassy in Russia and expressed a desire to return to their homeland, an embassy spokesman told the Interfax agency on Tuesday.

The spokesman added that an evacuation flight will take place on Thursday and all those wishing to return to Iraq are already in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, awaiting the flight. There were no issues with transporting the migrants from the border to Minsk, the diplomat told Interfax, and Belarusian authorities have provided all the necessary assistance.

Litvinova reported from Moscow.

2 explosions rock Uganda's capital, Kampala, killing 3

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Two explosions rocked Uganda's capital, Kampala, early Tuesday, killing at least three civilians in what police described as a coordinated attack by extremists.

Three suicide bombers also died in the blasts, police said. The explosions caused chaos in Kampala as terrified residents fled the city's center.

"The bomb threats are still active, especially from suicide attackers," police spokesman Fred Enanga said, blaming the blasts on the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamic extremist group.

The twin explosions occurred within three minutes of each other. Both were carried out by attackers carrying explosives. A possible attack on a third scene was foiled by police who pursued and disarmed a

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suspected suicide bomber, Enanga said.

One blast was near a police station and the other on a street near the parliamentary building, according to police and witnesses. The explosion near parliament appeared to hit closer to a building housing an insurance company and the subsequent fire engulfed cars parked outside. Body parts were seen scattered in the street, and later some lawmakers were seen evacuating the parliamentary building nearby.

At least 33 people are being treated at the city's main public referral hospital, Enanga told reporters. Five are critically injured, he said.

People scammed to leave the city in the aftermath of the attacks, many on passenger motorcycles, as police cordoned wide areas near the blast scenes, footage posted on social media showed.

Ugandan officials have been urging vigilance in the wake of a string of bomb explosions in recent weeks.

One person was killed and at least seven others wounded in an explosion at a restaurant in a suburb of Kampala on Oct. 23.

Another explosion two days later on a passenger bus killed only the suicide bomber, according to police.

Even before those attacks, the U.K. government had updated its Uganda travel advisory to say extremists "are very likely to try to carry out attacks" in this East African country.

The Allied Democratic Forces, an affiliate of the Islamic State group in central Africa, claimed responsibility for the attack on the eatery. Enanga, the police spokesman, said Tuesday's attacks bore "the hallmarks" of the work of this group, although there was no immediate claim of responsibility.

At least 150 planned attacks have recently been defused, he said, describing a "domestic terror group" eager to carry out more attacks.

The Allied Democratic Forces has long been opposed to the rule of longtime President Yoweri Museveni, a U.S. security ally who was the first African leader to deploy peacekeepers in Somalia to protect the federal government from the extremist group al-Shabab. In retaliation over Uganda's deployment of troops to Somalia, the group carried out attacks in 2010 that killed at least 70 people who had assembled in public places in Kampala to watch a World Cup soccer game.

But the Allied Democratic Forces, with its local roots, has become a more pressing challenge to Museveni, who has ruled Uganda for 35 years.

The group was established in the early 1990s by Ugandan Muslims who said they had been sidelined by Museveni's policies. At the time, the rebel group staged deadly terrorist attacks in Ugandan villages as well as in the capital, including a 1998 attack in which 80 students were massacred in a frontier town near the Congo border.

A Ugandan military assault later forced the rebels into eastern Congo, where many rebel groups are able to roam free because the central government has limited control there.

Reports of an alliance between the Allied Democratic Forces and the Islamic State group first emerged in 2019, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which tracks the online activities of extremist organizations.

Blinken to Africa to boost US response to regional crises

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration's competition with China for influence didn't get off to a great start in Africa.

In August, the top U.S. diplomat planned a visit, only to postpone it because of the turmoil in Afghanistan that preoccupied Washington. Now, three months later and as two significant African crises worsen, Secretary of State Antony Blinken will try again this week to signal the administration's "America is back" message to the continent.

Despite its importance in the U.S.-China rivalry, Africa has often been overshadowed amid more pressing issues in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and even Latin America. Thus, Blinken's trip is aimed in part at raising Washington's profile as a player in regional and international initiatives to restore peace and promote democracy as it competes with China.

That's been a hard sell despite massive U.S. contributions of money and vaccines to fight the coronavirus

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pandemic and other infectious diseases. All the while, China is pumping billions into African energy, infrastructure and other projects that Washington sees as rip-offs designed to take advantage of developing nations.

More immediately, Blinken is looking to boost thus-far unsuccessful U.S. diplomatic efforts to resolve deepening conflicts in Ethiopia and in Sudan and counter growing insurgencies elsewhere. His three-nation tour — to Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal — follows months of administration attempts to ease both situations that have yet to bear fruit despite frequent lower-level interventions.

"Our intensive diplomacy there is ongoing, and through the trip, we would like to demonstrate that our commitment to African partnerships and African solutions to African challenges is enduring and will continue while we continue our intensive efforts with our African partners and likemindeds to address the difficult challenges in Ethiopia and certainly Sudan," said Ervin Massinga, a top U.S. diplomat for Africa.

Blinken begins his tour in Kenya, a key player in both neighboring Ethiopia and Sudan and currently a member of the U.N. Security Council. Kenya also has deep interests in Somalia, which it borders and which has been wracked by violence and instability for decades.

Yet months of engagement by the administration, including an August visit to Ethiopia by U.S. Agency for International Development administrator Samantha Power, several trips to Addis Ababa and Nairobi by Biden's special envoy for the Horn of Africa, Jeff Feltman, and a current visit to Sudan by the top diplomat for Africa, have produced little progress.

Instead, conflict in Ethiopia has escalated between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government and the leaders in the northern Tigray region, who once dominated the government, with rebels now advancing on the capital amid increasingly dire warnings from the U.S. and others for foreigners to leave.

Those tensions, which some fear could escalate into mass inter-ethnic killings in Africa's second-most populated country, exploded into war last year, with thousands killed, many thousands more detained and millions displaced. Blinken will underscore those concerns when he meets Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta on Wednesday, according to State Department spokesman Ned Price.

While holding out hope that a window of opportunity for a resolution still exists, the Biden administration has moved toward sanctions, announcing the expulsion of Ethiopia from a U.S.-Africa trade pact and hitting, at least at first, leaders and the military of neighboring Eritrea with penalties for intervening in the conflict on Ethiopia's behalf. Sanctions against Ethiopian officials, including Abiy, a Nobel Peace laureate, are possible.

Ethiopia has condemned the sanctions and stepped up its criticism of "meddling" in its internal affairs. And in Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the African Union, and elsewhere, there is skepticism and hostility to U.S. pressure for an immediate cease-fire and talks despite America being the country's largest aid donor.

As Feltman has shuttled between Nairobi and Addis Ababa with an eye toward easing tensions in Ethiopia, he and the administration have also been confounded by developments in Sudan, where a military coup last month toppled a civilian-led government that was making significant strides in restoring long-strained ties with the U.S.

Just last week, coup leader Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan tightened his grip on power, reappointing himself as the chairman of a new sovereign council. The move was criticized by the U.S. and other Western governments despite saying it would appoint a civilian government in the coming days.

Burhan notably moved against civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok just hours after Feltman had left Khartoum on a mission intended to resolve escalating tensions between them. The U.S. has retaliated against the coup by suspending \$700 million in direct financial assistance to Sudan. Further moves, including a slowdown or reversal of a multiyear rapprochement with the government, could also be in the works without changes.

The top U.S. diplomat for Africa, Molly Phee, is currently in Khartoum and will be joining Blinken in Nairobi to discuss her efforts in Sudan.

Mediation efforts, however, have stumbled, with Burhan and his supporters insisting on forming a technocratic government and pro-democracy advocates calling for a return to pre-coup power-sharing

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arrangements, freeing Hamdok and other officials from house arrest and negotiations on broad reform. From Kenya, Blinken will travel to Nigeria to meet Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari to discuss West African security arrangements amid a surge in Islamist extremist violence. Also on tap for Blinken are talks on climate change, clean energy, sustainable development and the pandemic, and a speech on the Biden administration's Africa strategy.

Blinken will wrap up the trip in Dakar, where he'll discuss similar issues with Senegalese President Macky Sall, who will soon take over the chairmanship of the African Union.

Associated Press writers Cara Anna in Nairobi and Samy Magdy in Cairo contributed to this report.

China hails Xi and Biden talks, after year of growing strain

By KEN MORITSUGU and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Tuesday hailed a virtual meeting between President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden, saying they had a candid and constructive exchange that sent a strong signal to the world.

The positive description of the meeting came in sharp contrast to heated exchanges between the two nations earlier this year. The talks appeared to mark what both sides hoped would be a turnaround in relations, though major differences remain.

"If China-U.S. relations cannot return to the past, they should face the future," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

The video conference between the two leaders and their senior aides lasted more than three hours and was their first formal meeting since Biden took office in January.

Facing domestic pressures at home, both Biden and Xi seemed determined to lower the temperature in what for both sides is their most significant — and frequently turbulent — relationship on the global stage.

"As I've said before, it seems to me our responsibility as leaders of China and the United States is to ensure that the competition between our countries does not veer into conflict, whether intended or unintended," Biden told Xi at the start of their virtual meeting Monday. "Just simple, straightforward competition."

The White House set low expectations for the meeting, and no major announcements or even a joint statement were delivered. Still, White House officials said the two leaders had a substantive exchange.

Xi greeted the U.S. president as his "old friend" and echoed Biden's cordial tone in his own opening remarks, saying, "China and the United States need to increase communication and cooperation."

However, Xi held a tough line on Taiwan, which Chinese officials had signaled would be a top issue for them at the talks. Tensions have heightened as the Chinese military has dispatched an increasing number of fighter jets near the self-ruled island, which Beijing considers part of its territory.

Xi blamed the tensions on Taiwan seeking to attain independence through reliance on the U.S. and some on the American side using Taiwan as a way to interfere in China, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

"This is extremely dangerous, it's playing with fire, and they that play with fire will burn themselves," Xi was quoted as saying by the agency.

Chinese military forces held exercises last week near Taiwan in response to a visit by a U.S. congressional delegation to the island.

The White House said Biden reiterated the U.S. will abide by the longstanding U.S. "One China" policy, which recognizes Beijing but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei. But Biden also made clear the U.S. "strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," the White House said.

The relationship has had no shortage of tension since Biden strode into the White House in January and quickly criticized Beijing for human rights abuses against Uyghurs in northwest China, suppression of democratic protests in Hong Kong, military aggression against the self-ruled island of Taiwan and more. Xi's deputies, meanwhile, have lashed out against the Biden White House for interfering in what they see as internal Chinese matters.

The White House in a statement said that Biden again raised concerns about China's human rights prac-

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As U.S.-China tensions have mounted, both leaders also have found themselves under the weight of increased challenges in their own backyards.

Biden, who has watched his poll numbers diminish amid concerns about the lingering coronavirus pandemic, inflation and supply chain problems, was looking to find a measure of equilibrium on the most consequential foreign policy matter he faces.

Xi, meanwhile, is facing a COVID-19 resurgence, rampant energy shortages, and a looming housing crisis that Biden officials worry could cause tremors in the global market.

“Right now, both China and the United States are at critical stages of development, and humanity lives in a global village, and we face multiple challenges together,” Xi said.

The U.S. president was joined in the Roosevelt Room for the video call by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and a handful of aides. Xi, for his part, was accompanied in the East Hall of the Great Hall of the People by communist party director Ding Xuexiang and a number of advisers.

The high-level diplomacy had a touch of pandemic Zoom meeting informality as the two leaders waved to each other once they saw one another on the screen, with Xi telling Biden, “It’s the first time for us to meet virtually, although it’s not as good as a face-to-face meeting.”

Biden would have preferred to meet Xi in person, but the Chinese leader has not left his country since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The White House floated the idea of a virtual meeting as the next best thing to allow for the two leaders to have a candid conversation about a wide range of strains in the relationship.

With Beijing set to host the Winter Olympics in February and Xi expected to be approved by Communist Party leaders to serve as party leader next year and then a third term as president in 2023 — unprecedented in recent Chinese history — the Chinese leader may be looking to stabilize the relationship in the near term.

Both leaders gave nods to their history with the other. Biden noted that the two have spent an “awful ... lot of time” speaking to each other over the years, and have never walked away “wondering what the other man is thinking.”

But the public warmth — Xi referred to Biden as his “old friend” when the then-vice president visited China in 2013, while Biden spoke of their “friendship” — has cooled now that both men are heads of state. Biden bristled in June when asked by a reporter if he would press his old friend to cooperate with a World Health Organization investigation into the coronavirus origins.

Xi, however, seemed interested in publicly reviving the warmth of the earlier days of their relationship, saying, “I am very happy to see my old friend.”

Despite the tensions, there have been moments of progress in the U.S.-China relationship over the past months.

Last week, the two countries pledged at U.N. climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, to increase their cooperation and speed up action to rein in climate-damaging emissions.

The White House has said it views cooperation on climate change as something in China’s interest, something the two nations should cooperate on despite differences on other aspects of the relationship.

“None of this is a favor to either of our countries — what we do for one another — but it’s just responsible world leadership,” Biden told Xi. “You’re a major world leader, and so is the United States.”

Madhani reported from Washington, D.C. Associated Press writer Colleen Long in Washington, D.C., contributed.

Netanyahu appears in court as ex-aide prepares to take stand

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

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JERUSALEM (AP) — Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared in court for the first time in over half a year on Tuesday as a one-time confidant prepared to take the stand against him in a high-profile corruption case.

But the long-awaited testimony was delayed until next week after a legal challenge from Netanyahu's lawyers.

Nir Hefetz, a former Netanyahu aide, is a star prosecution witness in the case against Netanyahu, with his close proximity to the Netanyahu during several years in office a key part of the evidence. Hefetz left a long career in journalism in 2009 to work as a spokesman for Netanyahu's government, then in 2014 became the Netanyahu family's spokesman and adviser.

Netanyahu entered the courtroom Tuesday accompanied by a lawyer, his younger son, Avner, and a pair of supporters from his Likud party. The security presence around the building was much smaller than past sessions, when Netanyahu was the prime minister.

His lawyers immediately asked that Tuesday's session be delayed following reports that another witness had come forward with new evidence alleging that Netanyahu's wife, Sara, had accepted an expensive bracelet as a gift from two billionaire friends, Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer.

Netanyahu's lawyers argued that the former prime minister and his wife were caught off-guard by the allegations and had the right to study the evidence before Hefetz took the stand.

After a short recess, the court accepted the request and postponed Hefetz's testimony until next Monday. Several dozen supporters waited for Netanyahu outside the building, with one man shouting at journalists "we'll throw you in the trash."

Netanyahu has been accused of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases.

The first involves Netanyahu allegedly receiving gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from wealthy friends, including Milchan and Packer. In the second case, Netanyahu is accused of orchestrating positive coverage in a major Israeli paper in exchange for promoting legislation that would have harmed the paper's chief rival. The third one, nicknamed Case 4000, entails Netanyahu allegedly passing legislation worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the owner of Israeli telecom giant Bezeq in exchange for positive coverage on its Walla news site.

In 2018, after he was arrested by police in connection with Case 4000, Hefetz signed a state's witness deal and provided investigators with recordings of conversations with Netanyahu and his family. But because of his close connection with the former prime minister, Hefetz's testimony is likely to be relevant to all three cases.

The former prime minister has denied any wrongdoing. As prime minister, Netanyahu long rejected calls to step down while under indictment, using his position to lash out at law enforcement, the media and the courts.

But Netanyahu failed to win re-election in four consecutive elections, with voters deadlocked over his leadership and trial. Early this year, he was ousted from office after a constellation of rivals managed to cobble together a ruling coalition without his long-dominant Likud party.

He is now opposition leader in the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

Netanyahu's criminal trial began in 2020, while the country was embroiled in a protracted political crisis and dealing with the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Witnesses started taking the stand in April, and proceedings are expected to last several years.

'We don't deserve this': Inflation hits Turkish people hard

By MEHMET GUZEL and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Market-stand owner Kadriye Dogru makes do with stale, sesame-covered bagels, known as simit, for lunch these days. The widowed mother of two says she goes without lunch so she can put food on the table for her family later in the day.

The money that the 59-year-old earns by selling sweatpants and other garments at Istanbul's Ortakcilar

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market no longer lasts, and she is struggling to buy food, let alone anything else.

"I had never experienced such a deplorable life. I go to sleep, I wake up and the prices have gone up. I bought a 5-litre can of (cooking) oil, it was 40 lira. I went back, it was 80 lira," she said. "We don't deserve this as a nation."

Many people in Turkey are facing increased hardship as prices of food and other goods have soared. While rising consumer prices are affecting countries worldwide as they bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic, economists say Turkey's eye-popping inflation has been exacerbated by economic mismanagement, concerns over the country's financial reserves and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's push to cut interest rates.

He claims lower borrowing costs will boost growth, though economists say just the opposite is the way to tame soaring prices. The Turkish lira has been tumbling to record lows against the U.S. dollar as the country's central bank has slashed interest rates, fueling concerns about its independence.

Caught in the middle are everyday Turks trying to make ends meet.

"Everything is so expensive, I cannot buy anything," Suheyla Poyraz said as she browsed food stalls at the Ortakcilar market in Istanbul's Eyupsultan district.

The 57-year-old homemaker has voted for Erdogan's party and called on the government to act to end inflation.

"If you are the government and if we are voting for you to put things right, why aren't you intervening? Why aren't you stopping the rising prices?" Poyraz said.

High inflation has been hurting the popularity ratings of Erdogan, whose early years in power were marked by a strong economy. Opinion surveys indicate that an alliance of opposition parties that have formed a bloc against Erdogan's ruling party and its nationalist allies are fast narrowing the gap.

The Turkish government says inflation rose nearly 20% in October compared with a year earlier, but the independent Inflation Research Group, made up of academics and former government officials, put it close to a stunning 50%. In comparison, U.S. prices rose about 6% from a year ago — the most since 1990 — and inflation in the 19 European Union countries that use the euro exceeded 4%, the highest in 13 years.

Turkey's currency, as a result, hit an all-time low of 10 against the U.S. dollar last week and has lost some 25% of its value since the start of the year. That is driving prices higher, making imports, fuel and everyday goods more expensive. While some argue that a weaker lira makes Turkish exporters more competitive in the global economy, much of Turkey's industry relies on imported raw materials.

Erdogan has raised concerns about his influence over monetary policy, appointing four central bank governors since 2019 and firing bankers who are said to have resisted lowering interest rates. The bank has increased rates by 3 percentage points since September and will release its latest decision Thursday.

In contrast, central banks in other pandemic-hit countries have been raising rates or considering doing so in the months ahead as backups at ports and factories, labor shortages and soaring energy costs have pushed up prices.

Foreign investors have been dumping Turkish assets, and Turks have been converting their savings to foreign currencies and gold.

"There has been a massive selloff in financial markets just due to this intervention to the central bank's independence," said Ozlem Deric Sengul, an economist and founding partner of the Istanbul-based Spinn Consulting. "There are several factors that move both inflation and financial market prices ... (but) the dominant factor is the central bank's policy."

She estimates more than half of the population "is struggling in terms of income."

Erdogan, meanwhile, insists that the economy is strong and that the country is emerging from the pandemic in better shape than others.

"Shelves in Europe are empty, they are empty in the United States. Praise to God, we are continuing with plentitude and abundance," he has said.

His government has blamed exorbitant food prices on supermarket chains and ordered an investigation that has resulted in fines. He also has ordered agricultural cooperatives to open a thousand new shops

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across the country in a bid to keep food prices low.

Earlier, he accused a group of students who slept outdoors in parks to protest high housing and dormitory prices of "terrorism." Meanwhile, rents have skyrocketed and prices for home sales, mostly pegged on the dollar, are increasing.

In a bid to alleviate suffering, Labor and Social Security Minister Vedat Bilgin said this month that the government was working to adjust the minimum wage to protect workers against rising prices.

"We are working to remove the issue of minimum wage from the agenda — I can already say that it will provide a relief," he said.

Economists say it's not enough.

"The inflation and low income and uneven income distribution will have more side effects in 2022 and 2023 if the government continues to insist on low interest rates, loose monetary policy and election preparations," Sengul said.

Musa Timur, who owns a grocery store in Istanbul, said rising prices make it hard for him to replace products.

"Any product that we sell — we cannot get them in at the same prices," he said.

He said his customers are no longer able to afford a variety of food and mostly buy bread, pasta and eggs.

Fraser reported from Ankara, Turkey. Associated Press journalists Zeynep Bilginsoy and Ayse Wieting in Istanbul contributed.

Afghan evacuees enjoy Albania but have eyes set on Canada

By LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

GOLEM, Albania (AP) — One Afghan teacher calls Albania a "paradise" while a former Afghan government official cannot get enough of "the freedom" that exists in the tiny Western Balkan country where they were evacuated to after the Taliban took over their homeland.

Others are more pensive. An Afghan woman who mentored orphan girls deplors the end of her project and the fate of her former students and women under their new Taliban rulers, while a businessman misses his company back home.

All of them are in limbo, waiting for a visa to the United States at the Kolaveri tourist resort on Golem Beach, 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of the Albanian capital, Tirana. And all share a common dream: to go from the U.S. to Canada, where they hope to build a better future.

The resort shelters 571 Afghan evacuees plucked from their "fearsome and chaotic" country, as Fareidoun Hakimi, who has become the community's leader, described Afghanistan.

A group of 125 Afghans, including judges, cyclists, journalists, TV presenters, human rights activists, family members of Afghan diplomats, artists, law enforcement officers and scientists landed in Albania on Oct. 13, assisted by IsrAID, an Israeli aid organization.

Albania has sheltered up to 2,000 Afghan evacuees, all housed in hotels and resorts. They are supposed to stay there for a year or so until U.S. authorities finish processing their special immigration visas.

"The Albania country in the world / Its soil is like paradise," was part of a poem that 61-year-old poet and teacher Sadiq Zarei wrote and recited to visiting Associated Press journalists. "They saved shama'il and all of us," it ends, referring to a collection of sacred tales about the life of the Islamic prophet Muhammad compiled by a 9th-century scholar.

Hakimi said everyone at the resort could now pray in peace there or go to a nearby mosque, especially on Fridays. Albania's 2.8 million people are predominantly Muslim, living in harmony with Orthodox and Catholic communities.

Hakimi, a 36-year-old former public administration adviser at a province near Kabul, spoke for hours about the saga of how they fled Afghanistan.

"People never expected this to happen suddenly," he said of the U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Along with his wife, his 2- and 5-year-old sons and his mother, Hakimi reached Kunduz in northern

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Afghanistan, where they tried to cross into Tajikistan. There were about 125 people like him whom the Taliban tried to stop. After many days, they went to the Mazar-i-Sharif airport, flew to Tajikistan and had to wait for three days inside the terminal until Albania offered them visas and IsrAID chartered a plane.

At the resort, Hakimi and 17 other section leaders are working nonstop to supply food, entertainment, psychological support and other basic needs for the relocated community. He and others enjoy the freedom they have been given and praised the warmth of the Albanian staff.

"We would hardly pass this difficult moment without their open-hearted welcome," said Hakimi.

At the fenced and guarded beach resort, children play while elders stay at the coffee bar, walk around or stroll on the beach. A young Afghan woman studies on a laptop. Many get together in groups to spend the day in Tirana or the nearby city of Durres.

When Mohammad Javed Khan, who worked as a clerk at the Afghan parliament, was asked what they found in Albania, his immediate answer was "Freedom."

"The freedom which every human needs; relaxation, sleep," he said. "We can sleep without fear."

Security and fears about family members were top concerns for Afghans seeking to flee. Khan, who arrived with his wife and 3-month-old daughter, said he has finally relaxed.

"No one will take our daughter," the 27-year-old said. "No one will carry out suicide bomb attacks. ... We ran away because there was no security."

Leqa Fahimi arrived with her husband, 9-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son, who misses home and wants to return. In Afghanistan, she worked with an international non-governmental organization taking care of orphan girls.

"I taught them about kindness, about friendship, self-confidence, how to share their own story to the world," Fahimi said, adding in a desperate voice: "We had lot of activity for the girls. And now ... I don't know where they are."

The evacuees try to keep themselves busy, helping the resort staff and each other, organizing sports activities or entertainment for the children.

Hakimi is expecting the confirmation of a special application visa by the U.S. government.

"We have all the good things here that we had lost back at home," he said. "But I want to go to Canada, where my brother and sister are."

The same with Fahimi, the poet-teacher, and the clerk, Khan.

"We would love to go to Canada because Canada has the best immigration policies and part of my family lives in Canada," said Khan.

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Despite mistrust, Afghan Shiites seek Taliban protection

By LEE KEATH Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Outside a Shiite shrine in Kabul, four armed Taliban fighters stood guard on a recent Friday as worshippers filed in for weekly prayers. Alongside them was a guard from Afghanistan's mainly Shiite Hazara minority, an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder.

It was a sign of the strange, new relationship brought by the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. The Taliban, Sunni hard-liners who for decades targeted the Hazaras as heretics, are now their only protection against a more brutal enemy: the Islamic State group.

Sohrab, the Hazara guard standing watch over the Abul Fazl al-Abbas Shrine, told The Associated Press that he gets along fine with the Taliban guards. "They even pray in the mosque sometimes," he said, giving only his first name for security reasons.

Not everyone feels so comfortable.

Syed Aqil, a young Hazara visiting the ornate shrine along with his wife and 8-month-old daughter, was

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disturbed that many of the Taliban still wear their traditional garb — the look of a jihadi insurgent — rather than a police uniform.

“We can’t even tell if they are Taliban or Daesh,” he said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group.

Since seizing power three months ago, the Taliban have presented themselves as more moderate, compared with their first rule in the late 1990s when they violently repressed the Hazaras and other ethnic groups. Courting international recognition, they vow to protect the Hazaras as a show of their acceptance of the country’s minorities.

But many Hazaras still deeply distrust the insurgents-turned-rulers, who are overwhelmingly ethnic Pashtu, and are convinced they will never accept them as equals in Afghanistan. Hazara community leaders say they have met repeatedly with Taliban leadership, asking to take part in the government, only to be shunned. Hazaras complain individual fighters still discriminate against them and fear it’s only a matter of time before the Taliban revert to repression.

“In comparison to their previous rule, the Taliban are a little better,” said Mohammed Jawad Gawhari, a Hazara cleric who runs an organization helping the poor.

“The problem is that there is not a single law. Every individual Talib is their own law right now,” he said. “So people live in fear of them.”

Some changes from the previous era of Taliban rule are clear. After their August takeover, the Taliban allowed Shiites to perform their religious ceremonies, such as the annual Ashura procession.

The Taliban initially confiscated weapons that Hazaras had used, with permission from the previous government to guard some of their own mosques in Kabul. But after devastating IS bombings of Shiite mosques in Kandahar and Kunduz provinces in October, the Taliban returned the weapons in most cases, Gawhari and other community leaders said. The Taliban also provide their own fighters as guards for some mosques during Friday prayers.

“We are providing a safe and secure environment for everyone, especially the Hazaras,” Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. “They should be in Afghanistan. Leaving the country is not good for anyone.”

The Hazaras’ turning to Taliban protection shows how terrified the community is of the Islamic State group, which they say aims to exterminate them. In past years, IS has attacked the Hazaras more ruthlessly than the Taliban ever did, unleashing bombings against Hazara schools, hospitals and mosques, killing hundreds.

IS is also a shared enemy. Though they are Sunni hard-liners like the Taliban, IS militants are waging an insurgency, with frequent attacks on Taliban fighters.

Some Hazara leaders see a potential for cooperation. Ahmed Ali al-Rashed, a senior Hazara cleric, praised the Taliban commanders who now run the main police station in Dashti Barchi, the sprawling district of west Kabul dominated by Hazaras.

“If all Taliban were like them, Afghanistan would be like a garden of flowers,” he said.

Others in Dashti Barchi were skeptical the Taliban will ever change.

Marzieh Mohammadi, whose husband was killed five years ago in fighting with the Taliban, said she’s afraid every time she sees them patrolling Dashti Barchi.

“How can they protect us? We can’t trust them. We feel like they are Daesh,” she said.

The differences are partly religious. But also Hazaras, who make up an estimated 10% of Afghanistan’s population of nearly 40 million, are ethnically distinct and speak a variant of Farsi rather than Pashtu. They have a long history of being oppressed by the ethnic Pashtu majority, some of whom stereotype them as intruders.

Aqil said that when he tried to go to a police station for a document, the Taliban guard at the gate only spoke Pashtu and impatiently slammed the door in his face. He had to come back later with a Pashtu-speaking colleague.

“This sort of situation makes me lose hope in the future,” he said. “They don’t know us. They are not

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broadminded to accept other communities. They act as if they are the owners of this country.”

A young Hazara woman, Massoumeh, said four people were killed last month in her part of Dashti Barchi, raising residents’ fears that people with roles in the previous government were targets.

She went with a community delegation led by a local elder to the area’s Taliban police station to discuss security. The only woman in the delegation, she had to wait in the yard while the others met with the district commander, who she said tried to blame the security failings on the local elder. As the delegation left, a guard told them not to bring a woman with them again, she said.

“How can you keep security in Afghanistan if you can’t keep security in our village?” she said.

The 21-year-old Massoumeh was a nurse at Dashti Barchi’s main hospital in 2020 when IS gunmen stormed the maternity ward, killing at least 24 people, mostly mothers who were pregnant or had just given birth — one of the militants’ most horrific attacks.

Since then, she has been too afraid to return to work because of death threats after she spoke about the attack on Afghan TV. Soon after the attack, two militants approached her on a bus late at night, picking her out using a photo on their phone, and pulled a gun on her, warning her not to go back to work, she said. She and her father still get threatening phone calls, she said.

Police under the previous government gave her some protection, she said. But she doesn’t even bother to ask the Taliban police for help.

“Of course not. We are afraid of them,” she said. “No one will come and help us.”

Other events in the Hazaras’ central Afghanistan heartland have raised the community’s concerns. In Daikundi province, Taliban fighters killed 11 Hazara soldiers and two civilians, including a teenage girl, in August, according to Amnesty International. Taliban officials also expelled Hazara families from several Daikundi villages after accusing them of living on land that didn’t belong to them.

After an uproar from Hazaras, further expulsions were halted, Gawhari and other community leaders said.

But so far, the Taliban have rejected repeated requests from the Hazaras for a say in government. Gawhari, the cleric, said a Hazara delegation approached the Taliban and proposed 50 Hazara experts and academics to be brought into the administration. “They were not interested,” he said.

The international community is pressing the Taliban to form a government that reflects Afghanistan’s ethnic, religious and political spectrum, including women. The Taliban’s Cabinet is comprised entirely of men from their own ranks.

Last week, Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi expressed impatience with international demands for inclusivity. “Our current Cabinet fulfils that requirement, we have representatives from all ethnicities,” he told reporters.

The highest level Hazara in the administration is a deputy health minister. Several other Hazaras hold some provincial posts, but they are Hazaras who long ago joined the Taliban insurgency and adopted its hard-line ideology. Few in the Hazara community recognize them.

Ali Akbar Jamshidi, a former parliament member representing Daikundi province, said Hazaras won’t be satisfied with a few local positions and want to be brought into the Cabinet and the intelligence and security services.

The Taliban, he said, are running a government “that acts like a warlord who has seized everything.”

“Physical security is not enough. We need psychological security as well, feeling like we are part of this government and it is part of us,” he said. “The Taliban can benefit from us. They have the opportunity to form a government for the future, but they are not taking this opportunity.”

Abdul Qahhar Afghan contributed.

Biden, Xi try to tamp down tension in long virtual meeting

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and China’s Xi Jinping’s more than three-hour virtual talk concluded with the leaders of the superpowers agreeing they need to tread carefully as their nations find

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themselves in an increasingly fraught competition.

Facing domestic pressures at home, both Biden and Xi seemed determined to lower the temperature in what for both sides is their most significant — and frequently turbulent — relationship on the global stage.

“As I’ve said before, it seems to me our responsibility as leaders of China and the United States is to ensure that the competition between our countries does not veer into conflict, whether intended or unintended,” Biden told Xi at the start of their virtual meeting Monday. “Just simple, straightforward competition.”

The White House set low expectations for the meeting, and no major announcements or even a joint statement were delivered. Still, White House officials said the two leaders had a substantive exchange.

Xi greeted the U.S. president as his “old friend” and echoed Biden’s cordial tone in his own opening remarks, saying, “China and the United States need to increase communication and cooperation.”

The relationship has had no shortage of tension since Biden strode into the White House in January and quickly criticized Beijing for human rights abuses against Uyghurs in northwest China, suppression of democratic protests in Hong Kong, military aggression against the self-ruled island of Taiwan and more. Xi’s deputies, meanwhile, have lashed out against the Biden White House for interfering in what they see as internal Chinese matters.

The White House in a statement said that Biden again raised concerns about China’s human rights practices, and made clear that he sought to “protect American workers and industries from the PRC’s unfair trade and economic practices.” The two also spoke about key regional challenges, including North Korea, Afghanistan and Iran.

As the U.S.-China tensions have mounted, both leaders also have found themselves under the weight of increased challenges in their own backyards.

Biden, who has watched his poll numbers diminish amid concerns about the lingering coronavirus pandemic, inflation and supply chain problems, was looking to find a measure of equilibrium on the most consequential foreign policy matter he faces.

Xi, meanwhile, is facing a COVID-19 resurgence, rampant energy shortages, and a looming housing crisis that Biden officials worry could cause tremors in the global market.

“Right now, both China and the United States are at critical stages of development, and humanity lives in a global village, and we face multiple challenges together,” Xi said.

The U.S. president was joined in the Roosevelt Room for the video call by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and a handful of aides. Xi, for his part, was accompanied in the East Hall of the Great Hall of the People by communist party director Ding Xuexiang and a number of advisers.

The high-level diplomacy had a touch of pandemic Zoom meeting informality as the two leaders waved to each other once they saw one another on the screen, with Xi telling Biden, “It’s the first time for us to meet virtually, although it’s not as good as a face-to-face meeting.”

Biden would have preferred to meet Xi in person, but the Chinese leader has not left his country since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The White House floated the idea of a virtual meeting as the next best thing to allow for the two leaders to have a candid conversation about a wide range of strains in the relationship.

Xi told Biden that while it was nice to see him that a virtual meeting wasn’t “as good as a face-to-face meeting.”

Chinese officials said in advance that Taiwan would be their top issue for the talks. Tensions have heightened as the Chinese military has dispatched an increasing number of fighter jets near the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which Beijing considers part of its territory. Chinese military forces held exercises last week near Taiwan in response to a visit by a U.S. congressional delegation to the island.

“The Taiwan issue concerns China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as China’s core interest,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Monday. “It is the most important and sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations.”

The White House said Biden reiterated the U.S. will abide by the longstanding U.S. “One China” policy, which recognizes Beijing but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei. But Biden also made clear the U.S. “strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and sta-

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bility across the Taiwan Strait," the White House said.

With Beijing set to host the Winter Olympics in February and Xi expected to be approved by Communist Party leaders to serve as party leader next year and then a third term as president in 2023 — unprecedented in recent Chinese history — the Chinese leader may be looking to stabilize the relationship in the near term.

"China and the United States should respect each other, coexist in peace, and pursue win-win cooperation," Xi said.

Despite his domestic problems, White House officials made the case that Biden was coming into the meeting from a position of strength.

Earlier Monday, Biden signed into law a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, legislation to upgrade the nation's crumbling infrastructure that the Democrat argued is crucial for the U.S. as it seeks to retain a competitive edge over China.

"Because of this law, next year will be the first year in 20 years American infrastructure investment will grow faster than China's," Biden declared at his signing ceremony. "We will will once again have the best roads, bridges, ports and airports over the next decade."

Both leaders gave nods to their history with the other. Biden noted that the two have spent an "awful ... lot of time" speaking to each other over the years, and have never walked away "wondering what the other man is thinking." During their talk, both leaders recalled things that the others had said in past conversations as they sought to counter and drive home arguments, according to a senior Biden administration official who briefed reporters after the meeting on the condition of anonymity.

But the public warmth — Xi referred to Biden as his "old friend" when the then-vice president visited China in 2013, while Biden spoke of their "friendship" — has cooled now that both men are heads of state. Biden bristled in June when asked by a reporter if he would press his old friend to cooperate with a World Health Organization investigation into the coronavirus origins.

Xi, however, seemed interested in publicly reviving the warmth of the earlier days of their relationship, saying, "I am very happy to see my old friend."

During the early going of the Biden administration, the two sides have frequently traded recriminations and the presidents' top advisers have engaged in unproductive exchanges. But there have been moments of progress.

Last week, the U.S. and China pledged at U.N. climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, to increase their cooperation and speed up action to rein in climate-damaging emissions.

Republicans have accused the Biden administration of failing to hold Beijing accountable on human rights for the sake of pursuing its climate agenda.

"As he turns a blind eye to human rights atrocities to pursue his political agenda, Biden has allowed China to threaten American security and our allies' sovereignty, while undermining the advancement of freedom across the globe," the Republican National Committee said in a statement shortly before the start of the leaders' meeting.

The White House has said it views cooperation on climate change as something in China's interest, something the two nations should cooperate on despite differences on other aspects of the relationship.

"None of this is a favor to either of our countries — what we do for one another — but it's just responsible world leadership," Biden told Xi. "You're a major world leader, and so is the United States."

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

Jury to begin deliberations at Kyle Rittenhouse murder trial

By MICHAEL TARM, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Jurors will begin deliberations Tuesday at Kyle Rittenhouse's murder trial after two weeks of testimony in which prosecutors and defense attorneys painted starkly different pictures of his actions the night he shot three men on the streets of Kenosha.

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Prosecutors claimed in closing arguments Monday that Rittenhouse was a “wannabe soldier” who provoked bloodshed by bringing a semi-automatic rifle to a protest and menacing others, then walking off like a “hero in a Western” after killing two men and wounding a third.

But Rittenhouse’s lawyer countered that Rittenhouse acted in self-defense after being ambushed by a “crazy person” who he feared would wrest away his gun and use it to kill him.

Jurors listened to a full day of arguments before being told to return Tuesday morning for the start of deliberations in the case that has stirred fierce debate in the U.S. over guns, vigilantism and law and order.

Eighteen jurors have been hearing the case; the 12 who will decide Rittenhouse’s fate and the six who will be designated alternates will be determined by a drawing from a raffle drum.

Rittenhouse, then 17, shot two men to death and wounded a third during a tumultuous night of protests against racial injustice in the summer of 2020.

Rittenhouse said he went to Kenosha from his home in Antioch, Illinois, to protect property from rioters in the days after a Black man, Jacob Blake, was shot by a white Kenosha police officer. Rittenhouse, a former police youth cadet, is white, as were those he shot.

In closing arguments, prosecutor Thomas Binger called Rittenhouse a “wannabe soldier” who was “looking for trouble that night” — repeatedly showing the jury drone video that he said depicted Rittenhouse pointing the AR-style weapon at demonstrators.

“This is the provocation. This is what starts this incident,” the prosecutor declared. “You lose the right to self-defense when you’re the one who brought the gun, when you are the one creating the danger, when you’re the one provoking other people.”

Rittenhouse, now 18, faces a mandatory sentence of life in prison if convicted of the most serious charge against him, first-degree intentional homicide, which is Wisconsin’s top murder charge.

Binger zeroed in on the killing of 36-year-old Joseph Rosenbaum, the first man gunned down that night and whose shooting set in motion those that followed. The prosecutor repeatedly called it murder, saying it was unjustified and reminded jurors that Rittenhouse testified he knew Rosenbaum was unarmed.

Binger also said there is no video to support the defense claim that Rosenbaum threatened to kill Rittenhouse, and said Rittenhouse could have run away instead of shooting.

Binger also disputed the contention that Rosenbaum was trying to grab Rittenhouse’s rifle, which he said was not within arm’s reach when the first shot occurred. And Binger argued that once Rosenbaum was wounded, he was incapable of taking away the gun, which was strapped to Rittenhouse’s body, since he was falling to the ground with a fractured pelvis. Rittenhouse kept firing, delivering what the prosecutor called the “kill shot” to Rosenbaum’s back.

“I think we can also agree that we shouldn’t have 17-year-olds running around our streets with AR-15s, because this is exactly what happens,” Binger said.

In his own closing argument, defense attorney Mark Richards called Rosenbaum a “crazy person” who was “hell-bent on causing trouble that night” and went after Rittenhouse unprovoked.

“Mr. Rosenbaum was shot because he was chasing my client and going to kill him, take his gun and carry out the threats he made,” Richards said, adding that Rittenhouse never pointed his gun before being chased: “It didn’t happen.”

Richards said an enlarged image that prosecutors said shows Rittenhouse pointing his gun at protesters is “hocus pocus” that doesn’t prove anything.

After killing Rosenbaum, Rittenhouse shot and killed Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 28, while trying to make his way through the crowd. Rittenhouse testified that Huber hit him with a skateboard and that Grosskreutz came at him with a gun of his own — an account largely corroborated by video and Grosskreutz himself.

The prosecutor said Huber, Grosskreutz and others in the crowd were trying to stop what they believed was an active shooter.

When it was all over, Rittenhouse walked away like a “hero in a Western — without a care in the world for anything he’s just done,” Binger said.

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The defense, though, said Rittenhouse was set upon by a "mob." Richards accused prosecutors of using the term "active shooter" for Rittenhouse because of "the loaded connotations of that word."

Supporters have hailed Rittenhouse as a hero who took a stand against lawlessness; foes have branded him a vigilante.

Earlier Monday, Judge Bruce Schroeder dismissed a count of possession of a dangerous weapon by a person under 18, a misdemeanor that had appeared to be among the likeliest of the charges to net a conviction. It carries up to nine months in jail.

The defense argued that Wisconsin law has an exception related to the length of a weapon's barrel. After prosecutors conceded Rittenhouse's rifle was not short-barreled, the judge threw out the charge.

Perhaps in recognition of weaknesses in their case, prosecutors asked the judge to let the jury consider several lesser charges if they acquit him on the original counts. Schroeder agreed to do so as he delivered some 36 pages of legal instructions to the jury.

In his instructions, the judge said that to accept Rittenhouse's claim of self-defense, the jury must find that he believed there was an unlawful threat to him and that the amount of force he used was reasonable and necessary.

With a verdict near, Gov. Tony Evers said that 500 National Guard members would be prepared for duty in Kenosha if local law enforcement requested them.

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

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

Inmate who was key to juvenile life debate is up for parole

REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — In recent years, hundreds of people once destined to spend the rest of their lives in prison after being convicted of crimes as juveniles have gone free after Supreme Court decisions ruling that young people are capable of change and should be given a second chance.

But so far the man whose case has been central to this change — 75-year-old Henry Montgomery — is still behind bars nearly six decades after his 1963 arrest. That may change Wednesday when a Louisiana parole board votes for the third time whether to grant Montgomery parole.

"The state has gotten about fifty-eight years of Henry Montgomery's life. He doesn't have much left. What's the value in making him spend a couple more years there? I, for one, cannot see it," said Andrew Hundley who runs the Louisiana Parole Project that will provide a home and support for Montgomery should he be released.

Montgomery was arrested after fatally shooting Charles Hurt, an East Baton Rouge sheriff's deputy, who caught him skipping school. Montgomery was 17 at the time. He was initially sentenced to death but the state's Supreme Court threw out his conviction in 1966, saying he didn't get a fair trial. The case was retried, Montgomery convicted again but this time sentenced to life in prison.

When Montgomery went to prison, and for decades afterward, the "lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key" attitude dominated law enforcement and society — especially in Louisiana where the incarceration rate has consistently been the highest in the country. Juvenile offenders, often portrayed as irredeemable "super-predators," were no exception.

But recent Supreme Court rulings have begun to chip away at these lifetime juvenile sentences as the country has begun to rethink "tough-on-crime" approaches.

In 2012, in *Miller v. Alabama*, the court ruled that mandatory sentencing of life without parole for juvenile offenders was "cruel and unusual" punishment. The court's decision was based on the idea that children's minds and impulse controls are still developing, and they often act recklessly. The court found that juveniles are capable of growth and change and, except in the most severe cases, should be given

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the opportunity to get out of prison.

In 2016, the Supreme Court took up Montgomery's case and made their earlier decision retroactive, giving hundreds of juvenile lifers a shot at freedom.

Since the court's Montgomery decision, about 800 people who had been sentenced to life without parole as juveniles have been released, according to the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. About 656 people are serving life without parole for crimes they committed as children — down from 2,800 about five years ago — the organization said.

Advocates also point to the sweeping changes that have happened in the near-decade since Miller was decided. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia have completely banned the use of life without parole for juveniles offenders — compared to five states in 2012. In another six states, the sentence still exists but no juveniles are serving life without parole.

In Louisiana, about 96 out of roughly 300 former juvenile lifers incarcerated at the time of the Montgomery decision have been freed, according to data compiled by the Parole Project and the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights, which represents kids going through the justice system. But Louisiana has not done away with the life without parole sentence for juveniles, and advocates at the LCCR say just as many children are being sentenced to life without parole in the years after the Supreme Court's pivotal 2012 ruling as after it — usually children of color.

When Montgomery started serving his time at Angola it was a violent place, where attacks on inmates and guards were commonplace. There was little in the way of rehabilitative programs, especially not for prisoners who were never expected to experience freedom again.

Some of the programs like the boxing club were ones that Montgomery himself helped start, say supporters. He's worked for years at the prison's silk screen shop where one of his lawyers during the last parole board hearing said he'd been named employee of the month more times that she could count.

During the last year the coronavirus has limited Montgomery's contact with the outside world, his lawyer Keith Nordyke said. The elderly Montgomery is extremely hard of hearing, making Zoom calls difficult, Nordyke said. In previous parole hearings Montgomery has struggled to understand what is being said.

Hurt, the sheriff's deputy who Montgomery killed, was married and had three children. Two of his daughters have met with Montgomery in prison and forgiven him, but family members have opposed his release. Hurt's grandson J.P. deGravelles, who is also in law enforcement, said the family is not acting out of vindictiveness and if Montgomery is granted parole, deGravelles wishes him well. But his grandfather will never get such an opportunity at life again.

"This is not a witch hunt for us. We just we think he was given a sentence, and he was given a just sentence and he should carry it out," deGravelles said. "The killing of a police officer is a direct assault on the very fabric of society."

Should Montgomery be granted parole, he'll become a client of the Louisiana Parole Project. The organization — started in 2016 by Hundley who is a former juvenile lifer himself — helps offenders who've served long sentences reenter society. They'd provide Montgomery with a place to stay and help him with important steps to reentering society such as getting an ID card, signing up for health insurance, learning how to use a cellphone or computer and making sure he has his medications.

Hundley worries if Montgomery doesn't get paroled this time, he could die in prison. In 2019, the three member board voted 2-1 in favor of letting him out, but the decision had to be unanimous. This time, a simple majority would suffice. Hundley has asked Montgomery what he would like to do if he is released.

"He wants to be able to look at sunrise without looking at it through razor wire. That is what he is looking forward to. That's what he thinks about," Hundley said.

49ers win 1st home game in more than a year, 31-10 over Rams

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) — After a nearly two-month stretch that featured one win and far too many disappointments, the San Francisco 49ers were running out of time to establish an identity this season.

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An opening 18-play touchdown drive against the rival Los Angeles Rams was a pretty good start.

Jimmy Garoppolo capped that long drive with the first of his two touchdown passes, Jimmie Ward returned one of his two first-quarter interceptions for another score and the 49ers beat the Rams 31-10 on Monday night for their first home win in more than a year.

"It got us into a rhythm for sure," Garoppolo said. "That's the way we want to do it. Just running the ball, converting on third down and then score at the end. I don't want to say it took their soul away but it definitely did something."

The Niners (4-5) had lost four of five games and were in danger of falling out of the playoff race before putting together a complete performance in their fifth straight win against the Rams (7-3).

Garoppolo threw TD passes to George Kittle and Deebo Samuel, Samuel also ran for a score and Ward delivered the big plays defensively to give San Francisco its second home win in the past two seasons. The other also came against the Rams on Oct. 18, 2020.

It all started on the ground, where coach Kyle Shanahan had set an audacious goal of 40 carries that the Niners exceeded with 44 runs for 156 yards.

"I almost regretted it because it's tough to do," Shanahan said. "I'm glad I set it. We came through with it. It's a huge team goal."

San Francisco had its most rushes in a regular-season game in nine years. The Niners used a similar formula two years ago when they made it to the Super Bowl.

Last week, San Francisco had 11 carries for 39 yards in a 31-17 loss to Arizona.

"If you want to establish any type of dominance, especially in the trenches, I think that is necessary," left tackle Trent Williams said. "You got to run the ball and got to make your opponents respect it."

The Niners sealed the game when Garoppolo connected on a 40-yard TD to Samuel on fourth-and-6 early in the fourth quarter that made it 31-7.

Garoppolo finished 15 for 19 for 182 yards and the two TDs.

The Rams lost for the second straight week with Matthew Stafford once again throwing two interceptions, including one returned for a touchdown.

Los Angeles struggled to get into any rhythm offensively in the first game after receiver Robert Woods went down with a season-ending knee injury last week in practice.

"This was a humbling night for us as a team, and a great opportunity for us to be able to take a deep breath, step away, look at the things that we need to correct, particularly offensively over the last couple of weeks," coach Sean McVay said.

Odell Beckham Jr. made his Los Angeles debut after signing last week but had only two catches for 18 yards.

Recently acquired edge rusher Von Miller also played for the first time with the Rams and had three tackles but didn't put pressure on Garoppolo.

Stafford went 26 for 41 for 243 yards with one TD, two interceptions and nearly a third that K'Waun Williams trapped on his backside only to have it wiped off by a penalty.

TAKE IT AWAY

Ward intercepted Stafford on Los Angeles' first two drives of the game after coming into the night with two INTs in 85 games and none since 2016.

The first came on a deep heave by Stafford to Beckham that went right to Ward. The next came on a quick throw that tight end Tyler Higbee bobbled right into Ward's hands, leading to a 27-yard TD return.

Ward became the seventh player since 2000 with two interceptions, including a pick-6, in the first quarter.

KEEP IT AWAY

The Niners did a good job keeping the ball away from Stafford in the first half. They had an 18-play, 93-yard drive that took 11:03 off the clock after Ward's first interception. It was capped by an 8-yard TD pass from Garoppolo to Kittle.

That was the second opening drive of at least 18 plays in the past eight seasons, with Houston doing it earlier this year against New England.

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San Francisco then had an 11-play, 91-yard drive on its second possession capped by Samuel's 8-yard run to take a 21-7 lead.

FAKE IT

McVay made a curious decision when he called for a fake field goal on fourth-and-8 from the 17 with 18 seconds left in the first half.

Holder Johnny Hekker completed a 2-yard pass to Kendall Blanton that was well short of the first down.

INJURED

Rams: RB Darrell Henderson left in first quarter to be evaluated for a concussion but returned late in the first half.

49ers: RT Jaylon Moore (knee) left the game in the first half.

UP NEXT

Rams: Los Angeles has a bye next week before visiting Green Bay on Nov. 28

49ers: Visit Jacksonville on Sunday.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and <https://apnews.com/hub/pro-32> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Biden to push infrastructure deal at 'red list' bridge in NH

By COLLEEN LONG and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last time Joe Biden was in New Hampshire, he was a no-show at his own, sad party.

Trounced in the state's 2020 Democratic presidential primary, Biden hopped a flight to next-up South Carolina before the polls had even closed on his fifth-place finish. On Tuesday, he returns to New Hampshire as president, eager to talk up his new \$1 trillion infrastructure deal and what all that money can do for Americans.

Biden is down in the polls and hopes to use the successful deal to shift the political winds in his direction with new momentum for his broader \$1.85 trillion social spending package before Congress.

The president signed the infrastructure bill into law on Monday at a splashy bipartisan ceremony for hundreds on the White House South Lawn, where lawmakers and union workers cheered and clapped.

"America is moving again and your life is going to change for the better," Biden promised Americans.

The president and members of his Cabinet are moving, too — spreading out around the country to showcase the package. Biden himself has stops Tuesday in Woodstock, New Hampshire, and Wednesday in Detroit to promote the new law as a source of jobs and repairs for aging roads, bridges, pipes and ports while also helping to ease inflation and supply chain woes.

"As he goes around the country, he's really going to dig into how these issues will impact people's everyday lives, what they talk about at their kitchen tables," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

The president, whose poll numbers continued to drop even after passage of the bill, is pleading for patience from Americans exhausted by the pandemic and frightened by rising inflation.

Biden defeated Donald Trump by 7 percentage points in New Hampshire in the 2020 election, but his popularity has sagged in the state. In a University of New Hampshire Survey Center Granite State Poll last month, his overall favorable rating was 34%, with 53% having an unfavorable view.

On Tuesday, the president will visit a bridge that carries state Route 175 over the Pemigewasset River. Built in 1939, the bridge has been on the state's "red list" since 2014 because of its poor condition. Another bridge over the river was added in 2018.

"The president is going there because there is a broken-down bridge that needs to be repaired," Psaki said.

The infrastructure bill contains \$110 billion to repair aging highways, bridges and roads. According to the White House, 173,000 total miles or nearly 280,000 kilometers of U.S. highways and major roads and 45,000 bridges are in poor condition. The law has almost \$40 billion for bridges, the single largest dedicated bridge investment since the construction of the national highway system, according to the Biden administration.

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Many of the particulars of how the money is spent will be up to state governments. Biden has named former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu as the liaison between the White House and the states to help ensure things run smoothly and to prevent waste and fraud.

Ramer reported from Concord, N.H.

Trump ally Bannon talks tough after court appearance

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Longtime Trump ally Steve Bannon appeared before a judge to face criminal contempt charges for defying a subpoena from Congress' Jan. 6 committee, then declared combatively outside court that he was "taking on the Biden regime" in fighting the charges.

Bannon did not enter a plea Monday and is due back in court on Thursday for the next phase of what could be the first high-level trial in connection with January's insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Combative outside court, he said he was "going on the offense" against the attorney general, the speaker of the House and President Biden. He declared, "This is going to be a misdemeanor from hell for Merrick Garland, Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden."

The 67-year-old Bannon surrendered earlier in the day to FBI agents. He was indicted on Friday on two federal counts of criminal contempt — one for refusing to appear for a congressional deposition and the other for refusing to provide documents in response to the committee's subpoena.

Federal Magistrate Judge Robin Meriweather released him without bail but required him to check in weekly with court officials and ordered him to surrender his passport. If convicted, Bannon faces a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of one year behind bars on each count, prosecutors said.

Outside the courthouse, a large inflatable rat made to look like Republican former President Donald Trump was on the sidewalk as a crowd waited for Bannon to leave. Some in the crowd shouted expletives at him and called him a traitor, and one man paraded around with a sign that read: "Clowns are not above the law."

The indictment came as a second expected witness, former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, defied a separate subpoena from the committee on Friday and as Trump has escalated his legal battles to withhold documents and testimony about the insurrection. Bannon and Meadows are key witnesses for the committee because they both were in close touch with Trump around the time of the Jan. 6 Capitol attack.

If the House votes to hold Meadows in contempt, that recommendation would also be sent to the Justice Department for a possible indictment.

Meadows was Trump's top aide at the end of his presidency and was one of several people who pressured state officials to try and overturn the results of the 2020 election won by Democrat Biden. Bannon promoted the Jan. 6 protests on his podcast after predicting the day before that "all hell is going to break loose."

The committee said that Bannon urged Trump to focus on the congressional certification and was present at an event at the Willard Hotel on Jan. 5 in which Trump allies tried to persuade members of Congress to vote against the results.

Bannon's lawyer, David Schoen, said his client didn't appear before Congress because he was told by another lawyer not to come after Trump claimed executive privilege would apply.

"Mr. Bannon is a lay person. When the privilege has been invoked by the purported holder of privilege, he has no choice but to withhold the documents. You can't put the genie back in the bottle," he said. "Mr. Bannon acted as his lawyer counseled him to do by not appearing and by not turning over documents in this case. He didn't refuse to comply."

Schoen also decried the Justice Department's decision to prosecute Bannon, claiming it runs counter to Attorney General Garland's statement of commitment to equal justice under the law.

Officials in both Democratic and Republican administrations have been held in contempt by Congress, but criminal indictments for contempt are exceedingly rare.

The indictment against Bannon comes after a slew of Trump administration officials — including Bannon

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— defied requests and demands from Congress over the past five years with little consequence, including during an impeachment inquiry. President Barack Obama’s administration also declined to charge two of its officials who defied congressional demands.

The indictment says Bannon didn’t communicate with the committee in any way from the time he received the subpoena on Sept. 24 until Oct. 7 when his lawyer sent a letter, seven hours after the documents were due.

Bannon, who worked at the White House at the beginning of the Trump administration and currently serves as host of the conspiracy-minded “War Room” podcast, is a private citizen who “refused to appear to give testimony as required by a subpoena,” the indictment says.

Houston officials pick internal review of Astroworld tragedy

HOUSTON (AP) — Calls for an independent investigation into what led to 10 deaths at the Astroworld music festival went unheeded Monday, as Houston-area officials instead chose to direct a county administrator to conduct a review with other governmental entities.

County Judge Lina Hidalgo — the top elected official in Harris County, which includes Houston — had proposed a third-party probe of the planning and execution of the festival founded and headlined by rap superstar Travis Scott.

The Harris County administrator instead will work with other city and county entities to review security, fire and other safety plans at the county-owned NRG Park, where the festival was held.

“I hope that it comes back with actionable lessons,” Hidalgo said. “I hope it doesn’t result in something vague or forgotten.”

Other members of Harris County’s governing body, known as a commissioner’s court, were concerned Hidalgo’s investigation could lead to legal liabilities for the county.

Dozens of lawsuits have already been filed over injuries and deaths at the Nov. 5 concert.

Houston police are conducting a separate criminal investigation into what happened at the festival. No one has been charged.

The police department, along with the city fire department, played key roles in crowd control and other safety measures at the show. Experts in crowd safety say an investigation by neutral outsiders into the tragedy could help avoid potential conflicts of interest and promote transparency.

Police have said they are reviewing surveillance video provided by concert promoter Live Nation, as well as dozens of clips of the show shared on social media. Investigators also planned to speak with Live Nation representatives, Scott and concertgoers.

Over 300 people were treated on site for injuries at the show, and at least 25 were hospitalized.

Many unanswered questions center on the actions of event organizers.

A 56-page event operations plan for the Astroworld music festival included protocols for dangerous scenarios including an active shooter, bomb or terrorist threats, and severe weather. But it did not include information on what to do in the event of a crowd surge.

The 10 people who died included a 9-year-old boy. The oldest was 27. Reports on individual causes of death are pending.

For more AP stories on Astroworld: <https://apnews.com/hub/astroworld-festival-deaths>

Atmospheric river whips Northwest; 1 missing, roads closed

By LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — Flooding and landslides prompted the complete closure of the West Coast’s main north-south highway overnight Monday near Bellingham, Washington, as the culmination of days of storms and high winds wreaked havoc in the Pacific Northwest.

The extreme weather was caused by an atmospheric river — a huge plume of moisture extending over

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the Pacific and into Washington and Oregon. More than 158,000 customers were without power in Western Washington at one point Monday afternoon.

Interstate 5 was closed near Bellingham, just south of the Canadian border, because of the ongoing threat from debris and floodwaters.

Schools were also closed Monday. Evacuations were ordered in multiple areas as floodwaters swamped business districts and partially submerged cars in communities north of Seattle.

Forecasters said conditions should be much drier Tuesday. But the National Weather Service issued flood warnings for several rivers around Western Washington. Strong winds also hit the region Monday. Gusts pushed 60 mph (96 kph) in multiple places, including a gust of 58 mph (93 kph) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Late Monday, Gov. Jay Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency in 14 Western Washington counties and said the state Emergency Management Division, with support from the Washington National Guard, would coordinate the response.

A state of emergency for the town of Hamilton was declared Sunday. People there, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) northeast of Seattle, were urged to evacuate.

Cars and trailers were packed into the parking lot outside the Red Cross evacuation site at Hamilton Baptist Church, where dozens of residents are waiting out the storm, the Skagit Valley Herald reported.

Skagit County officials were comparing this flood to severe flooding in 2009, when the Skagit and Samish rivers overflowed and caused damage to homes, farms and infrastructure,

As the water made its way down the Skagit River, people were warned to expect flooding in Sedro-Woolley, Burlington and Mount Vernon and Mount Vernon officials had recommended some evacuations late Monday.

Just south of the Canadian border in Sumas, Washington, officials said city hall was flooded and that the flooding event was looking like one not seen since 1990.

"At this point in time there is no reasonably safe way to drive to Bellingham without putting yourself or others at risk," the city's police department said via Twitter.

Nicole Postma, who owns a coffee stand in Sumas and is president of the Sumas Chamber of Commerce, told The Bellingham Herald Monday that people are nervous.

"We knew that the flood was imminent, but had no idea it would be like this," she said.

Southwest of Sumas, deputies using a Whatcom County Sheriff's Office rescue vehicle evacuated stranded residents in the Everson area, officials said on Twitter. One person was missing after being swept away by floodwaters and had been last seen holding on to a tree, Everson police said via Facebook.

Bellingham experienced record rainfall Sunday with a one-day total of 2.78 inches (7 centimeters), crushing the prior daily record from 1998 at 0.88 inches (2.2 centimeters), according to the National Weather Service. A daily rainfall record was also set Monday in Bellingham with 1.89 inches (4.8 centimeters).

All schools in the Bellingham, Washington, district were also closed Tuesday because of flooding, road closures and dangerous conditions, district officials said. Authorities said a person driving southbound on I-5 in Bellingham early Monday morning was seriously hurt when a tree fell on their vehicle.

Caylon Coomes of Bellingham drove his truck and paddle board from his home near Lake Whatcom earlier on Monday to flooded city streets near the interstate.

"It looked pretty good out there (by the lake), but the street looks a little bit better," he said. He met another man in a parking lot and donning wetsuits they waded into the water and paddled away past vehicles stuck in the floodwaters.

On the Olympic Peninsula, several highways were closed in places, and the U.S. Coast Guard helped local authorities evacuate about 10 people west of Forks, Washington. Daily record rainfall also fell Monday west of Forks in Quillayute with 4.01 inches (10 centimeters), the weather service said.

A semitrailer truck tipped in heavy winds on the Deception Pass bridge and was leaning on the railing Monday, state troopers said. The driver was able to get out, according to the state patrol.

Emergency officials warned that people should expect to see water in low-lying roadways and should

turn around rather than drive through water on the road.

Holiday TV brings new movies, specials — and Charlie Brown

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Supply-chain woes are this year's Grinch, threatening to steal gifts and good cheer. But TV is overstocked with holiday specials and rom-coms — including the Food Network's first movie and the rebranded GAC Family channel's Christmas debut.

Old favorites such as 1965's "A Charlie Brown Christmas" may require a measure of strategy to watch. The classic Peanuts special will air on PBS and, for a three-day window, be available free on Apple TV+.

The twist for the Food Network's film is its debut on corporate sibling discovery+ which, as with other streaming services, offers a free-trial option. Like Santa Claus scoring courtesy cookies, enjoy the gift while it lasts.

Here's a sampling of what to watch while sipping nog and nibbling on roasted chestnuts — if available on store shelves. All air times are Eastern.

MOVIETIME

"A Rich Christmas," streaming now on BET+. A self-absorbed socialite gets a new perspective on life when she's forced to work at a family homeless shelter. Bill Bellamy and Tyler Abron star.

"Candy Coated Christmas," discovery+, Friday, Nov. 19. Molly McCook plays an executive whose life takes a detour when she visits the town of Peppermint Hollow. Ree Drummond (Food Network's "The Pioneer Woman") plays the local baker.

"A Kindhearted Christmas," GAC Family (formerly Great American Country), Saturday, Nov. 20. A woman wants to emulate her late husband's generosity, bringing joy to others and maybe to herself. Jennie Garth stars.

"A Kiss Before Christmas," Hallmark Channel, Sunday, Nov. 21. James Denton, Teri Hatcher and Marilu Henner star in the tale of a man who gets the alternate life he wished for, and tries to give it back.

"Who Is Christmas Eve?" Bounce, 8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 21. A young woman (Paige Audrey-Marie Hurd) abandoned as an infant delves into her past with help from her boyfriend (Romeo Miller) and an investigative genealogist.

"Romance in the Wilds," Fox Nation, Thursday, Nov. 25. A forest ranger and geologist (Kaitlyn Leeb, Victor Zinck Jr.) join ranks to flee a wildfire. Does love ignite? The actors also star in Fox Nation's "Christmas in the Wilds," out the same day.

"Reba McEntire's Christmas in Tune," Lifetime, 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 26. Georgia (McEntire) and Joe (John Schneider) broke up as a couple and a singing duo years ago, but their daughter wants a reunion for charity.

"Christmas Again," Disney Channel, Friday, Dec. 3. Teenager Rowena is caught living the holiday over and over again after wishing that she could reclaim her life before her parents' divorce. Scarlett Estevez stars.

"It's a Wonderful Life," NBC, 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 4, and Friday, Dec. 24. Jimmy Stewart stars as a despairing man who finds value in his life with the help of an aspiring angel, Clarence.

"Our Christmas Journey," Hallmark Movies & Mysteries, 10:01 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 4. Holly Robinson Peete stars as a single mom who faces an independent new chapter for her teenage son with autism and herself. Peete and her husband, former NFL quarterback Rodney Peete, are parents of a son with autism. The actor said on Twitter that "I have wanted to make a movie about an #autism family making transitions at #Christmas for a while."

"The Christmas Thief," ION Television, 8 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 5. A novice private eye, home for the holidays and trying to solve burglaries blamed on Santa Claus, clashes with a local detective. Michelle Borth and Vivica A. Fox co-star.

FA LA LA LA LA

"iHeartRadio Holiday Special," the iHeartRadio app, YouTube and Facebook pages. 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 24. Mario Lopez hosts a virtual concert including Train, Kelly Clarkson, Michael Bublé, and Pentatonix.

"CMA Country Christmas," ABC, 9 p.m. Monday, Nov. 30. Performers and songs include Kelsea Ballerini

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("Santa Baby"), Gabby Barrett ("The First Noel"), Lady A ("Wonderful Christmastime") and Little Big Town ("Christmas Time Is Here").

"Kelly Clarkson Presents When Christmas Comes Around," NBC, 10 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 1. Clarkson hosts a special that offers music, celebrates tradition, and gives to those in need.

"Christmas Under the Stars," BYUtv, 7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 5, and on the BYUtv app. The a cappella group Pentatonix mixes favorite tunes and carols with songs from its new holiday album, "Evergreen."

"Michael Bubl 's Christmas in the City," NBC, 10 p.m. Monday, Dec. 6, and Wednesday, Dec. 22. The pop singer marks the 10th anniversary of his album "Christmas" with music and comedy.

"20 Years of Christmas with the Tabernacle Choir," PBS, Monday, Dec. 13, and Friday, Dec. 24 (check local listing for times). Brian Stokes Mitchell narrates a retrospective of performances by Kristin Chenoweth, Audra McDonald and dozens more artists.

STOCKING STUFFERS

"A Charlie Brown Christmas," now on Apple TV+ (free from Dec. 11-13) and on PBS, Sunday, Dec. 19 (check local listings for time). Is Christmas all about the goods or good-heartedness? The question unsettles Charlie Brown.

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," CBS, 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 22. A reindeer finds that being different is worthwhile in this 1964 special that's based on the Johnny Marks song and narrated by Burl Ives.

"Mary McCartney Serves It Up," discovery+, Tuesday, Nov. 23. In four new holiday episodes, the British cookbook author enjoys meatless meals with guests including her famous dad, Paul McCartney, and Oprah Winfrey.

"How the Grinch Stole Christmas," NBC, 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 26 and Saturday, Dec. 25. Horror movie king Boris Karloff provided the voice for Dr. Seuss' infamous Grinch for the enduring 1966 cartoon.

"Twas the Fight Before Christmas," Apple TV+, Friday, Nov. 26. A documentary about an Idaho neighborhood that became a battleground for a man with a large-scale holiday obsession and his foes, aka other homeowners.

"A Home for the Holidays," CBS, 9 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 5. In the special's 23rd annual broadcast, inspiring stories of youngsters adopted from foster care are joined with performances by pop artists.

9 takeaways from Kyle Rittenhouse trial closings

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Attorneys in Kyle Rittenhouse's murder trial sparred for the last time Monday during closing arguments, with prosecutors painting Rittenhouse as an inexperienced instigator and defense lawyers insisting the Illinois man fired in self-defense.

Rittenhouse shot and killed Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz during street unrest in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in August 2020. He has claimed self-defense, while prosecutors have argued he was an inexperienced and overmatched teen who provoked violence by showing up with a rifle.

Here are some takeaways from Assistant District Attorney Thomas Binger and defense attorney Mark Richards' closings:

"QUACK DOCTOR"

Binger painted Rittenhouse as a fraud. He said Rittenhouse told people at the protest that he was an emergency medical technician when he was really just a lifeguard.

"This is an emergency situation," Binger said. "Everybody's anticipating violence. Everybody's prepared for people to be hurt, harmed, injured. And yet the defendant's going to go there and walk around claiming to be a medic. He's like a quack doctor practicing without a license that puts lives at risk . . . He wrapped up an ankle and I think maybe helped somebody who got a cut on their hand. Yeah. On the other hand, he killed two people, blew off Gaige Grosskreutz's arm."

ACTIVE SHOOTER

Binger also portrayed Rittenhouse as an active shooter and said people in the crowd had a right to

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stop him. He said Rittenhouse denied shooting Rosenbaum when Grosskreutz and another man, Jason Lackowski, asked him what happened immediately after the shots were fired.

"The crowd sees the defendant running with a gun. He's lying to them. He still has the gun," Binger said. "It is entirely reasonable for that crowd to believe at that moment that he is a threat to kill again. I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that in this situation, the crowd has the right to try and stop an active shooter. They have a right to protect themselves. The defendant is not the only one in the world who has the right to self-defense."

Richards said calling Rittenhouse an active shooter is "BS" and if he didn't know better he would think Binger was a "whiny defense lawyer."

"Every person who was shot was attacking Kyle: One with a skateboard, one with his hands, one with his feet, one with a gun," Richards said. "My client does not have to take a beating from the hands of this mob, or from the hands of Mr. Rosenbaum."

OUTSIDER

Binger tried to get jurors to see Rittenhouse, who lived in nearby Antioch, Illinois, as one of a horde of outsiders who came to Kenosha to play soldier during the protest, ignoring roadblocks, curfew orders and closed interstate exits.

"These guys with the AR-15s are just wannabe soldiers acting tough, trying to manufacture some personal connection to this event, furthering their own personal agenda, just a small part of the deluge of chaos tourists we saw here in Kenosha trying to feed off of what we were going through, despite everything we did to try and tell them, go away, stay out."

Richards countered that Rittenhouse came to the city to help, noting that he helped clean graffiti off a high school before the shootings.

"Kyle feels for this community," he said.

NAPOLEON COMPLEX

Binger focused largely on Rosenbaum's actions, trying to counter Rittenhouse's assertions that Rosenbaum was causing trouble all night, swinging a chain, demanding people shoot him, spewing racial slurs and setting fires. Binger described Rosenbaum as a small man — he stood at 5 feet 4 — with a "Napoleon complex" but he was harmless.

"Oh, let me tell you all the awful things Joseph Rosenbaum did," the prosecutor said. "He tipped over a Port-a-Potty that had no one in it. He swung a chain. He lit a . . . Dumpster on fire . . . Oh, and he said some bad words. He said the N-word. If he were alive today . . . I'd probably try and prosecute him for arson. But I can't because the defendant killed him. But that's the way we deal with people that do these things. When you commit arson, we prosecute you. We don't execute you in the street."

Richards called Rosenbaum "irrational and crazy" and said he chased Rittenhouse down until he had him cornered. If Rosenbaum had taken Rittenhouse's gun from him he would have shot others, Richards said.

"Mr. Rosenbaum made a fatal mistake that day, chasing Kyle Rittenhouse into the corner," Richards said. "He ran as far as he could, and he shot, four times in three-quarters of a second . . . I'm glad (Rittenhouse) shot him because if Joseph Rosenbaum got that gun I don't for a minute believe he wouldn't have used it against somebody else . . . Mr. Rosenbaum was hell-bent on causing trouble that night."

WOULD YOU HAVE DONE THIS?

Binger wrapped up his arguments by asking jurors to ask themselves if they would have reacted like Rittenhouse in the same situation.

"Would a reasonable person have done the same thing?" Binger said. "Would you have engaged in the reckless conduct that led to this course of events? Would you have gone out after curfew with an AR-15 looking for trouble? Would you have aimed at other people? Would you have tried to use the gun to protect an empty car lot? No reasonable person would have done these things. "

10 MILLION REASONS TO LIE

Richards focused on Grosskreutz's testimony that he didn't know his own pistol had a round in the chamber when he ran up to Rittenhouse. Grosskreutz has filed a lawsuit against the city of Kenosha alleging

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police conspired with armed militia the night he was shot; he's seeking \$10 million.

"Grosskreutz won't say anything that puts him in a bad light," Richards said. "Grosskreutz's the person who has 10 million reasons to lie."

WITNESSES

Richards argued that the state's witnesses actually helped Rittenhouse's case, pointing out that a police detective seemed to agree that Rosenbaum came out of hiding to chase Rittenhouse; a forensic pathologist testified that Rittenhouse shot Rosenbaum at close range, within 4 feet, bolstering the defense argument that Rosenbaum reached for Rittenhouse's rifle; and others in Rittenhouse's group testified they had permission to guard the car dealership.

One member of Rittenhouse's group, JoAnn Fiedler, testified that she never saw Rittenhouse act inappropriately toward anybody, Richards recounted for jurors.

HOCUS POCUS OUT OF FOCUS

Richards lambasted the prosecution's use of an enlarged photo taken from drone video that a state crime lab analyst testified he took 20 hours to produce. Prosecutors said the enlarged image shows Rittenhouse pointing his gun at protesters, an act they say provoked the series of events that resulted in Rittenhouse killing two people and wounding a third.

"What he did for those 20 hours is hocus pocus," Richards said in urging jurors to reject consideration of the image. "And he makes an exhibit that is out of focus."

Prosecutors said it took the analyst 20 hours to work on the entire video, not just the image that was enlarged.

POLITICAL FIRESTORM

Richards said Binger's office never reassessed their case after video evidence showed Rittenhouse acted in self-defense. He said prosecutors want to hold someone responsible for bringing "terror" to Kenosha's streets.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is a political case . . . but the district attorney's office is marching forward with this case because they need somebody to be responsible. They need somebody to . . . say, he did it, he's the person who brought terror to Kenosha. Kyle Rittenhouse is not that individual."

Associated Press writers Amy Forliti in Minneapolis and Scott Bauer in Madison contributed to this report.

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

'Atmospheric river' causes floods, evacuations in Northwest

By LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — Days of heavy rainfall and high winds Monday coming from an atmospheric river — a huge plume of moisture extending over the Pacific and into the Northwest — in Washington state caused extensive flooding and mudslides that forced evacuations and closed schools and part of Interstate 5.

The National Weather Service issued flood warnings for several rivers around Western Washington, which has seen nearly ceaseless rain for about a week. Strong winds also hit the region Monday. Gusts pushed 60 mph (96 kph) in multiple places, including a gust of 58 mph (93 kph) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

More than 158,000 customers were without power in Western Washington at one point Monday afternoon.

Later Monday, Gov. Jay Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency in 14 Western Washington counties and said the state Emergency Management Division, with support from the Washington National Guard, would coordinate all incident-related assistance.

A state of emergency for the town of Hamilton was declared Sunday. People there, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) northeast of Seattle, were urged to evacuate.

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Cars and trailers were packed into the parking lot outside the Red Cross evacuation site at Hamilton Baptist Church, where dozens of residents are waiting out the storm, the Skagit Valley Herald reported.

Skagit County officials were comparing this flood to severe flooding in 2009, when the Skagit and Samish rivers overflowed and caused damage to homes, farms and infrastructure,

As the water made its way down the Skagit River, people were warned to expect flooding in Sedro-Woolley, Burlington and Mount Vernon. City officials in Mount Vernon on Monday afternoon recommended people living west of the Division Street Bridge evacuate because of the threat of potential significant flooding overnight.

Just south of the Canadian border in Sumas, Washington, officials said city hall was flooded and that the flooding event was looking like one not seen since 1990.

"At this point in time there is no reasonably safe way to drive to Bellingham without putting yourself or others at risk. Please do not drive through standing or rushing water," the city's police department said via Twitter.

Nicole Postma, who owns a coffee stand in Sumas and is president of the Sumas Chamber of Commerce, told The Bellingham Herald Monday that people are nervous.

"We knew that the flood was imminent, but had no idea it would be like this," she said.

Southwest of Sumas, deputies using a Whatcom County Sheriff's Office rescue vehicle were evacuating stranded residents in the Everson area, officials said on Twitter.

Bellingham experienced record rainfall Sunday with a one-day total of 2.78 inches (7 centimeters), crushing the prior daily record from 1998 at 0.88 inches (2.2 centimeters), according to the National Weather Service.

All schools in the Bellingham, Washington, district and nearby districts were closed Monday because of dangerous travel conditions. Mudslides closed part of Interstate 5 just south of Bellingham Monday afternoon with three cars stuck in the debris.

No one was seriously injured and the interstate was later shut in both directions overnight because of flooding and active slides, state Trooper Rocky Oliphant said on Twitter.

Caylon Coomes of Bellingham drove his truck and paddle board from his home near Lake Whatcom earlier on Monday to some flooded city streets near the interstate.

"It looked pretty good out there (by the lake) but the street looks a little bit better," he said. He met another man in a parking lot and donning wetsuits they waded into the water and paddled away past vehicles stuck in the floodwaters.

On the Olympic Peninsula, several highways were closed in places and the U.S. Coast Guard helped local authorities evacuate people west of Forks, Washington. The agency said on Twitter there were about 10 people in danger and that no injuries had been reported.

A semitrailer truck tipped in heavy winds on the Deception Pass bridge and was leaning on the railing Monday, state troopers said. The driver was able to get out, according to the state patrol.

Emergency officials warned that people should expect to see water in low-lying roadways and should turn around rather than drive through water on the road. That water can be moving swiftly and be deeper than it seems, posing serious risk to people in vehicles.

Forecasters say conditions should improve by Tuesday after parts of the region have seen more than 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain in the past several days.

6 teens injured in drive-by shooting near Denver area school

By PATTY NIEBERG AP / Report for America

AURORA, Colo. (AP) — Six teenagers were wounded Monday in a drive-by shooting in a park near a suburban Denver high school, but all were expected to survive, police said.

The victims, who range in age from 14 to 18, are all students at Aurora Central High School in Aurora, a diverse city east of Denver, said police chief Vanessa Wilson. She said she needed everyone to be "out-raged" by what happened and come forward with any information they might have to help police find

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those responsible.

Wilson asked neighbors and other bystanders to share any videos or photos from phones or house surveillance systems that might help detectives identify the suspects, who haven't been apprehended.

Multiple rounds fired from different guns were found at the scene, and it is possible some rounds were fired by someone on foot, she said.

Police officers assigned to the school were the first to respond to the shooting and saved the life of one victim by applying a tourniquet, Wilson said. That student later underwent emergency surgery, she said.

Wilson said she's relieved the students are expected to survive but said gun violence is a public health crisis.

"There is a violence crisis across the nation right now, and so I think we all need to pay attention," she said.

Three patients from the shooting were taken to Children's Hospital Colorado. They were in stable condition and have all been reunited with their families, spokesperson Caitlin Jenney said.

Several students hugged one another outside the school as staff and police ushered students away from the direction of the crime scene. Others shouted "Stay safe" as they parted ways.

Student Aariah McClain, 15, said she heard gunfire as she was walking near the school's football field during lunch. She heard four shots at first, so she started walking toward the school. Then she said she heard "a whole lot more," she said.

"I was shocked," she said of the shooting, as she waited outside the school with her father, Harold McClain, for her 14-year-old sister to be dismissed.

"I work and we pay taxes for these police to be here. I don't see how this is even happening," Harold McClain said. "They need more security."

The school was put on a "secure perimeter" because of the shooting, police said. That typically means no one is allowed in or out of a school but students and staff are able to move freely within the building.

Evette Mitchell, 47, rushed to the school to get her son, Trevell, 15. He was in gym class when he heard the gunshots, and the teacher escorted them to the smaller gym.

"I did 90 (mph) on the highway," she said, "because I didn't know if it was my kid or not."

Mitchell said she is frustrated because another shooting involving three teens happened near the school on a recent weekend. Mitchell added parents get blamed for youth violence, but there are no affordable activities offered for students in the area.

"Everything costs. We're all low-income families so it's hard for us to find something for these kids to do," said Mitchell, who said her son was going to be in online classes for the rest of the week because of the shooting.

According to U.S. News and World Report's high school rankings, 67% of the school's approximately 2,000 students are considered economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Michelle Marin, who lives across the street from the school, said she walks her dog at the park almost every morning and sees students hanging out there all the time, "but you never think something like that's going to happen."

"We have seen some lockdowns but nothing with the caution tape or anything like that," Marin said.

The shooting comes after an 18-year-old died after being shot about 5 miles (8 kilometers) away on Sunday night.

A shooting was also reported Friday in the parking lot of an Aurora mall, but police only found several shell casings when they arrived.

Nieberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Associated Press writer Colleen Slevin in Denver contributed to this report.

Prosecutor: Rittenhouse provoked the bloodshed in Kenosha

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By SCOTT BAUER, MICHAEL TARM and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Kyle Rittenhouse provoked bloodshed on the streets of Kenosha by bringing a semi-automatic rifle to a protest and menacing others, and when the shooting stopped, he walked off like a “hero in a Western,” a prosecutor said in closing arguments Monday at Rittenhouse’s murder trial.

But Rittenhouse’s lawyer countered that the shooting started after the young man was ambushed by a “crazy person” that night and feared his gun was going to be wrested away and used to kill him. Defense attorney Mark Richards said Rittenhouse acted in self-defense.

After a full day of arguments, the jurors were told to return Tuesday morning for the start of deliberations in the case that has stirred fierce debate in the U.S. over guns, vigilantism and law and order.

Eighteen jurors have been hearing the case; the 12 who will decide Rittenhouse’s fate and the six who will be designated alternates will be determined by drawing numbers from a lottery drum.

Rittenhouse, then 17, shot two men to death and wounded a third during a tumultuous night of protests against racial injustice in the summer of 2020.

Rittenhouse said he went to Kenosha from his home in Antioch, Illinois, to protect property from rioters in the days after a Black man, Jacob Blake, was shot by a white Kenosha police officer. Rittenhouse, a former police youth cadet, is white, as were those he shot.

In closing arguments, prosecutor Thomas Binger said Rittenhouse was a “wannabe soldier” and was “looking for trouble that night.” Binger repeatedly showed the jury drone video that he said depicted Rittenhouse pointing the AR-style weapon at demonstrators.

“This is the provocation. This is what starts this incident,” the prosecutor declared.

He told the jury: “You lose the right to self-defense when you’re the one who brought the gun, when you are the one creating the danger, when you’re the one provoking other people.”

Rittenhouse, now 18, faces a mandatory sentence of life in prison if convicted of the most serious charge against him, first-degree intentional homicide, which is Wisconsin’s top murder count.

Binger zeroed in on the killing of 36-year-old Joseph Rosenbaum, who was the first man gunned down that night and whose shooting set in motion the ones that followed. The prosecutor repeatedly called it murder, saying it was unjustified.

The prosecutor reminded jurors that Rittenhouse testified he knew Rosenbaum was unarmed. Binger also said there is no video to support the defense claim that Rosenbaum threatened to kill Rittenhouse.

Binger disputed the contention that Rosenbaum was trying to grab Rittenhouse’s rifle. “Mr. Rosenbaum is not even within arm’s reach when the first shot occurs,” Binger said. He rejected the claim that Rittenhouse had no choice but to shoot, saying he could have run away.

And Binger argued that once Rosenbaum was wounded, he was not even capable of taking away the gun, which was strapped to Rittenhouse’s body, since he was falling to the ground with a fractured pelvis. Rittenhouse kept firing, delivering what the prosecutor called the “kill shot” to Rosenbaum’s back.

“I think we can also agree that we shouldn’t have 17-year-olds running around our streets with AR-15s, because this is exactly what happens,” Binger said.

In his own closing argument, Richards, the defense attorney, called Rosenbaum a “crazy person” who was “hell-bent on causing trouble that night” and went after Rittenhouse unprovoked.

“Mr. Rosenbaum was shot because he was chasing my client and going to kill him, take his gun and carry out the threats he made,” Richards said, adding that Rittenhouse never pointed his gun before being chased: “It didn’t happen.”

Richards said an enlarged image that prosecutors said shows Rittenhouse pointing his gun at protesters is “hocus pocus” that doesn’t prove anything.

Rittenhouse himself looked largely impassive during the arguments, occasionally jotting notes. His mother, Wendy Rittenhouse, listened intently behind him.

With a verdict near, Gov. Tony Evers said that 500 National Guard members would be prepared for duty in Kenosha if requested by local law enforcement.

After killing Rosenbaum, Rittenhouse shot and killed Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 28, while trying to make his way through the crowd. Rittenhouse testified that Huber hit him with a skate-

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board and that Grosskreutz came at him with a gun of his own — an account largely corroborated by video and Grosskreutz himself.

But the prosecutor said Rittenhouse provoked that bloodshed, too. He said Huber, Grosskreutz and others in the crowd were trying to stop what they believed was an active shooter.

When it was all over, Rittenhouse walked away like a “hero in a Western — without a care in the world for anything he’s just done,” Binger said.

The defense, though, said Rittenhouse was set upon by a “mob.” Richards accused prosecutors of using the term “active shooter” for Rittenhouse because of “the loaded connotations of that word.”

And in an apparent reference to the police shooting of a Black man that touched off the protests, Richards said: “Other people in this community have shot people seven times, and it’s been found to be OK.” (No charges were brought against the white officer.)

When the prosecutor displayed a photo of Rosenbaum’s bloodied body on a gurney during his autopsy and another of his mangled hand, some jurors appeared to avert their eyes. Later, when Binger displayed a close-up of Grosskreutz’s bicep largely obliterated by a bullet, several jurors winced and turned away.

The sound of a small group of protesters chanting outside the building could be heard at one point, but it wasn’t clear from inside the courtroom what they were saying or whether the jury heard them.

Supporters have hailed Rittenhouse as a hero who took a stand against lawlessness; foes have branded him a vigilante.

Binger began his closing arguments by questioning whether Rittenhouse was genuinely trying to help.

The prosecutor noted that Rittenhouse had ammunition capable of traveling the length of five football fields and passing through cars, and asked the jury: “Why do you need 30 rounds of full metal jacket (ammo) to protect a building?”

But Richards said Rittenhouse, who worked as a lifeguard in Kenosha and helped clean up graffiti before the shootings, “feels for this community” and “came down here trying to help, to see the damage.”

The defense attorney branded the trial a “political case” brought by prosecutors who he said need someone to blame for the violence.

Earlier Monday, Judge Bruce Schroeder dismissed a count of possession of a dangerous weapon by a person under 18, a misdemeanor that had appeared to be among the likeliest of the charges to net a conviction. It carries by up to nine months in jail.

The defense argued that Wisconsin law has an exception related to the length of a weapon’s barrel. After prosecutors conceded Rittenhouse’s rifle was not short-barreled, the judge threw out the charge.

Perhaps in recognition of weaknesses in their case, prosecutors asked the judge to let the jury consider several lesser charges if they acquit him on the original counts. Schroeder agreed to do so as he delivered some 36 pages of legal instructions to the jury.

In his instructions, the judge said that to accept Rittenhouse’s claim of self-defense, the jury must find that he believed there was an unlawful threat to him and that the amount of force he used was reasonable and necessary.

This story has been updated to correct Gaige Grosskreutz’s age to 28.

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

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

Russian test blamed for space junk threatening space station

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A Russian weapons test created more than 1,500 pieces of space junk now threatening the seven astronauts aboard the International Space Station, according to U.S. officials

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who called the strike reckless and irresponsible.

The State Department confirmed Monday that the debris was from an old Russian satellite destroyed by the missile.

"Needless to say, I'm outraged. This is unconscionable," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told The Associated Press. "It's unbelievable that the Russian government would do this test and threaten not only international astronauts, but their own cosmonauts that are on board the station" as well as the three people on China's space station.

Nelson said the astronauts now face four times greater risk than normal. And that's based on debris big enough to track, with hundreds of thousands of smaller pieces going undetected — "any one of which can do enormous damage if it hits in the right place."

In condemning Russia, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said satellites were also now in jeopardy.

The test clearly demonstrates that Russia "despite its claims of opposing the weaponization of outer space, is willing to ... imperil the exploration and use of outer space by all nations through its reckless and irresponsible behavior," Blinken said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment late Monday from Russia about the missile strike.

Once the threat became clear early Monday morning, the four Americans, one German and two Russians on board were ordered to immediately seek shelter in their docked capsules. They spent two hours in the two capsules, finally emerging only to have to close and reopen hatches to the station's individuals labs on every orbit, or 1 1/2 hours, as they passed near or through the debris.

By the end of the day, only the hatches to the central core of the station remained open, as the crew slept, according to Nelson.

Even a fleck of paint can do major damage when orbiting at 17,500 mph (28,000 kph). Something big, upon impact, could be catastrophic.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. has repeatedly raised concerns with Russia about doing a satellite test.

"We are going to continue to make very clear that we won't tolerate this kind of activity," he told reporters.

NASA Mission Control said the heightened threat could continue to interrupt the astronauts' science research and other work. Four of the seven crew members arrived at the orbiting outpost Thursday night.

NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei, who's midway through a yearlong mission, called it "a crazy but well-coordinated day" as he bid Mission Control good night.

"It was certainly a great way to bond as a crew, starting off with our very first work day in space," he said.

A similar weapons test by China in 2007 also resulted in countless debris. One of those pieces threatened to come dangerously close to the space station last week. While it later was dismissed as a risk, NASA had the station move anyway.

Anti-satellite missile tests by the U.S. in 2008 and India in 2019 were conducted at much lower altitudes, well below the space station at about 260 miles (420 kilometers.)

The defunct Russian satellite Cosmos 1408 was orbiting about 40 miles (65 kilometers) higher.

Until Monday, the U.S. Space Command already was tracking some 20,000 pieces of space junk, including old and broken satellites from around the world.

Jonathan McDowell of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics said it will take days if not weeks and months to catalogue the latest wreckage and confirm their orbits. The fragments will begin to spread out over time, due to atmospheric drag and other forces, he said in an email.

The space station is at especially high risk because the test occurred near its orbit, McDowell said. But all objects in low-Earth orbit — including China's space station and even the Hubble Space Telescope — will be at "somewhat enhanced risk" over the next few years, he noted.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Space Agency said via Twitter that the astronauts were ordered into their docked capsules, in case they had to make a quick getaway. The agency said the crew was back doing routine operations, and the space station's commander, Russian Anton Shkaplerov, tweeted: "Friends, everything is regular with us!"

But the cloud of debris posed a threat on each passing orbit — or every 1 1/2 hours — and all robotic

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activity on the U.S. side was put on hold. German astronaut Matthias Maurer also had to find a safer place to sleep than the European lab.

NASA's Nelson noted that the Russians and Americans have had a space partnership for a half-century — going back to the joint Apollo-Soyuz mission in 1975.

"I don't want it to be threatened," he told the AP, noting both countries are needed for the space station. "You've got to operate it together."

AP reporters Matthew Lee and Robert Burns in Washington contributed.

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Vermont Democratic Sen. Leahy, 81, is retiring after 8 terms

By ALAN FRAM, WILSON RING and LISA RATHKE Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont said Monday he won't seek reelection next year to the seat he's held since 1975, signaling an end to a career that's included major roles on issues such as civil liberties and financing the government and that began before four of his current colleagues were born.

"It's time to come home," said Leahy, 81. He made the announcement in the Vermont State House, blocks from where he grew up.

The decision by Leahy, among the Senate's more liberal members, marks the end of a political era. He's the last of the so-called Watergate babies, the surge of congressional Democrats elected in 1974 after President Richard Nixon resigned to avoid impeachment.

He's also among a dwindling group from a more collegial era when senators had more harmonious relationships despite ideological differences. Among those is Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., now one of Congress' sharpest partisans, who's served alongside Leahy for over three decades and praised him warmly as "an all-time Senate institution."

Leahy became the first Democrat facing reelection next year in the 50-50 Senate to say he'll retire. His state has shifted from solidly Republican to deep blue while he's been senator, and his seat seems securely in Democratic hands.

He chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee, which injects him into this fall's budget fight. He was chair or top Democrat on the Judiciary committee for two decades and was atop the Agriculture panel for 10 years. But inside the Capitol, he's equally known as a photography buff who wanders the corridors with a camera slung around his neck and for shepherding around celebrities including members of his beloved Grateful Dead.

In keeping with his hobby, Leahy took pictures at the White House on Monday as President Joe Biden signed the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill. He told reporters that Biden, a Senate colleague for decades, "was kind enough to call me at home" over the weekend, but he declined to provide details.

Leahy is the longest-serving sitting senator, and by the time his term expires in January 2023, he'll have served for 48 years, the third-longest tenure ever. He's the fifth-oldest current senator, among six 80-somethings in the chamber who include his Vermont colleague Bernie Sanders, 80.

Sens. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., Josh Hawley, R-Mo., Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., were born after Leahy entered the Senate.

Atop the Senate Appropriations Committee, Leahy has followed that panel's tradition and worked closely with senior Republican Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama as it distributes hundreds of billions of dollars among federal agencies and to lawmakers' states. But the process has devolved into an annual struggle to prevent federal shutdowns as the two parties fight over federal borrowing and other issues.

"We're different. We've got different political philosophies," Shelby, 87 and also retiring, said in an interview. Shelby said his and Leahy's goal is to fund the government "and we have to do that working together."

Leahy will leave the chamber after eight terms with a record of promoting human rights, working to ban

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land mines and championing the environment.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, he helped write the 2001 Patriot Act, which strengthened government surveillance capabilities and criminal penalties against convicted terrorists, even as he helped limit its intrusions into civil liberties. More recently, he worked on legislation aimed at curbing the government's ability to get Americans' private telephone data.

He's one of the few senators who have voted on the nomination of every current Supreme Court justice, supporting all three Democratic nominees and opposing every GOP pick except for Chief Justice John Roberts. He's helped write bills on gun control, patents and land mines, which led to his friendship with rock musician Bono, a fellow land mine opponent whom he's shown around the Capitol.

An ardent Batman fan, Leahy has appeared briefly in five Batman movies, telling the Joker in "The Dark Knight" in 2008, "We're not intimidated by thugs."

And he's given Capitol tours to members of the Grateful Dead, the classic rock group he followed for decades and whose concerts he sometimes attended on stage. He's said that while onstage once, he took a call from an official who unwittingly asked him to lower his radio so he could talk to President Bill Clinton.

"Would I call myself a Deadhead? With pride," Leahy once said.

As the longest-serving member of the Senate's majority party, Leahy is that chamber's president pro tempore. That largely ceremonial post makes him third in line to the presidency, after Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

It was in that role that Leahy presided last February over the second impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump. Leahy was hospitalized briefly the evening before the trial after not feeling well, was sent home and gaveled the proceedings to order the next morning.

Leahy is the only Democrat to have ever served as a Vermont senator, though his colleague Sanders, an independent, caucuses with the Democrats. Yet Democrats' hold on Leahy's seat next year became even stronger Monday after GOP Gov. Phil Scott, viewed as his party's strongest potential challenger, seemed to take himself out of the running.

"Governor Scott has been clear that he is not running for the U.S. Senate next year. That has not changed," Scott's press secretary Jason Maulucci said by email. Scott, who frequently clashed with Trump, in a statement called Leahy an "incredible champion for Vermonters."

Many in Vermont think Democratic Rep. Peter Welch, the tiny state's only House member, will want to replace Leahy. Welch issued a statement praising him but saying nothing about running.

Democrats control the 50-50 Senate because of Harris' tiebreaking vote, making every seat crucial in next year's election.

But the GOP is defending 20 seats to Democrats' 14. Of the five announced GOP retirees, three are in states that seem competitive — North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania. One Republican senator who's not yet announced whether he'll seek reelection is Ron Johnson from Wisconsin, a swing state.

Fram reported from Washington. Ring reported from Stowe, Vt. Associated Press writer Colleen Long contributed to this report from Washington.

Alex Jones liable for defamation in Sandy Hook 'hoax' case

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

A Connecticut judge found Infowars host Alex Jones liable by default Monday in a defamation lawsuit brought by parents of children killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting over the conspiracy theorist's claims that the massacre was a hoax.

The ruling by the judge, who cited Jones' refusal to abide by court rulings or turn over evidence, means a jury will determine how much in damages Jones should pay to the families.

Shortly after the judge's decision, Jones went on his show and said he'd been deprived of a fair trial.

"These individuals, again, are not allowing me to have a jury trial because they know the things they said I supposedly did didn't happen," he said. "They know they don't have a case for damages. And so

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the judge is saying you are guilty of damages, now a jury decides how guilty you are. It's not guilty until proven guilty."

Judge Barbara Bellis took the rare step of issuing a default judgment in the case because she said Jones and his companies, Infowars and Free Speech Systems, had failed to turn over documents including records that might have showed how, and if, they had profited from spreading misinformation about the school shooting and other mass killings.

Norman Pattis, a lawyer for Jones, said an appeal of Bellis' default ruling is planned.

"The ruling is founded neither in law or fact," Pattis said in an email. "We remain confident that, in the end, the Sandy Hook families cannot prove either liability or damages. We think their lawyers know this; hence, the desperate effort to obtain a default."

His lawyers have asked that Bellis be removed from the case, alleging she has not been impartial.

The ruling has the same outcome as a jury determining the case in favor of the families. A jury will now determine the damages.

Twenty first-graders and six educators were killed in the December 2012 shooting. The gunman, 20-year-old Adam Lanza, killed his mother at their Newtown home before the shooting, and killed himself at the school as police arrived, officials said.

The shooting was portrayed on Jones' Infowars show as a hoax involving actors aimed at increasing gun control. Jones has since acknowledged the school shooting did occur.

Families of the victims said they have been subjected to harassment and death threats from Jones' followers because of the hoax conspiracy pushed on Infowars. They sued Jones and his companies for defamation and infliction of emotional distress. The hearing on damages before a jury is expected to be held next year.

"What's clear from Judge Bellis' ruling is that Alex Jones and the Jones defendants have engaged in a long, continuous course of misconduct in this case designed to prevent the plaintiffs from getting evidence about Mr. Jones' business and about his motives for publishing lies about them and their families," said Christopher Mattei, a lawyer for relatives of eight of the victims who sued Jones in Connecticut.

Messages were left for parents of some of the children killed in the shooting.

A Texas judge recently issued similar rulings against Jones in three defamation lawsuits brought by Sandy Hook families in that state, finding Jones liable for damages after defaulting him and his companies for not turning over documents. Hearings on damages also were ordered.

In one of the lawsuits, a Texas judge in 2019 ordered Jones to pay \$100,000 in legal fees and refused to dismiss the suit. And a jury in Wisconsin awarded \$450,000 to one of the parents in his lawsuit against conspiracy theorist writers, not including Jones, who claimed the massacre never happened.

In the three Connecticut lawsuits, Jones previously was sanctioned for violating numerous orders to turn over documents and for an angry outburst on his web show against Mattei. A judge barred Jones from filing a motion to dismiss the case — a ruling that was upheld after being appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to hear Jones' appeal in April.

Trump ally Bannon talks tough after court appearance

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Longtime Trump ally Steve Bannon appeared before a judge on Monday to face criminal contempt charges for defying a subpoena from Congress' Jan. 6 committee, then declared combatively outside court that he was "taking on the Biden regime" in fighting the charges.

Bannon did not enter a plea and is due back in court on Thursday for the next phase of what could be the first high-level trial in connection with January's insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Combative outside court, he said he was "going on the offense" against the attorney general, the speaker of the House and President Biden. He declared, "This is going to be a misdemeanor from hell for Merrick Garland, Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden."

The 67-year-old Bannon surrendered earlier in the day to FBI agents. He was indicted on Friday on two

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federal counts of criminal contempt -- one for refusing to appear for a congressional deposition and the other for refusing to provide documents in response to the committee's subpoena.

Federal Magistrate Judge Robin Meriweather released him without bail but required him to check in weekly with court officials and ordered him to surrender his passport. If convicted, Bannon faces a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of one year behind bars on each count, prosecutors said.

Outside the courthouse, a large inflatable rat made to look like Republican former President Donald Trump was on the sidewalk as a crowd waited for Bannon to leave. Some in the crowd shouted expletives at him and called him a traitor, and one man paraded around with a sign that read: "Clowns are not above the law."

The indictment came as a second expected witness, former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, defied a separate subpoena from the committee on Friday and as Trump has escalated his legal battles to withhold documents and testimony about the insurrection. Bannon and Meadows are key witnesses for the committee because they both were in close touch with Trump around the time of the Jan. 6 Capitol attack.

If the House votes to hold Meadows in contempt, that recommendation would also be sent to the Justice Department for a possible indictment.

Meadows was Trump's top aide at the end of his presidency and was one of several people who pressured state officials to try and overturn the results of the 2020 election won by Democrat Biden. Bannon promoted the Jan. 6 protests on his podcast after predicting the day before that "all hell is going to break loose."

The committee said that Bannon urged Trump to focus on the congressional certification and was present at an event at the Willard Hotel on Jan. 5 in which Trump allies tried to persuade members of Congress to vote against the results.

Bannon's lawyer, David Schoen said his client didn't appear before Congress because he was told by another lawyer not to come after Trump claimed executive privilege would apply.

"Mr. Bannon is a lay person. When the privilege has been invoked by the purported holder of privilege, he has no choice but to withhold the documents. You can't put the genie back in the bottle," he said. "Mr. Bannon acted as his lawyer counseled him to do by not appearing and by not turning over documents in this case. He didn't refuse to comply."

Schoen also decried the Justice Department's decision to prosecute Bannon, claiming it runs counter to Attorney General Garland's statement of commitment to equal justice under the law.

Officials in both Democratic and Republican administrations have been held in contempt by Congress, but criminal indictments for contempt are exceedingly rare.

The indictment against Bannon comes after a slew of Trump administration officials -- including Bannon -- defied requests and demands from Congress over the past five years with little consequence, including during an impeachment inquiry. President Barack Obama's administration also declined to charge two of its officials who defied congressional demands.

The indictment says Bannon didn't communicate with the committee in any way from the time he received the subpoena on Sept. 24 until Oct. 7 when his lawyer sent a letter, seven hours after the documents were due.

Bannon, who worked at the White House at the beginning of the Trump administration and currently serves as host of the conspiracy-minded "War Room" podcast, is a private citizen who "refused to appear to give testimony as required by a subpoena," the indictment says.

US urged to help more people escape Taliban-led Afghanistan

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A coalition of organizations working to evacuate people who could be targeted by the Taliban rulers in Afghanistan appealed Monday for more assistance from the U.S. government and other nations as conditions deteriorate in the country.

Members of the AfghanEvac Coalition met in a video call with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to press

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the case for additional resources to help tens of thousands of people get out of Afghanistan, now faced with a deepening economic and humanitarian crisis in addition to a precarious security situation following the U.S. withdrawal.

Participants said afterward they were grateful for what the State Department has done so far, including helping to arrange a series of evacuation flights for U.S. citizens and residents since the withdrawal, but more will be needed in the months ahead.

"The State Department doing enough isn't enough; we need whole of government solutions; we need the international community to step up and we need it quickly," said Peter Lucier, a former Marine who served in Afghanistan who works with coalition-member Team America. "Winter is coming. There is a famine already."

Private groups, particularly with ties to the veteran community, have played an important role in the evacuation and resettlement of tens of thousands of Afghans since the U.S. ended its longest war and the government fell to the Taliban. Members of the coalition, which includes about 100 organizations, have been working to help people get on the scarce flights out of the country and helping them get settled in communities once they reach the United States.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the call included discussion of what he called "our collective efforts" to aid visa holders and applicants and to "facilitate the departure of these individuals who are at a stage where it is appropriate to do so."

About 82,000 people have come to the U.S. so far under what the Biden administration calls Operation Allies Welcome. The Department of Homeland Security said 10% were American citizens or permanent residents.

The rest were a combination of people who had obtained special immigrant visas, for those who had worked for the U.S. government as interpreters or in some other capacity; people applying for one of the visas but who hadn't yet received it; or other Afghans who might be vulnerable under the Taliban, such as journalists or government officials, and qualified to come as refugees. Nearly half were children.

As of Monday, DHS said about 46,000 are still being housed at domestic U.S. military bases until they can be resettled by private refugee organizations around the country. Another 2,600 remain at overseas transit points, dubbed "lily pads," as they undergo security vetting and health screening before coming to the U.S.

The State Department said separately Monday that some people coming to the U.S. from countries other than Afghanistan under the broader refugee program would be temporarily delayed so refugee agencies can focus on resettling Afghans. The pause would run through Jan. 11 and won't apply to certain categories, including urgent cases, family reunifications and those who have already made travel arrangements.

The AfghanEvac Coalition has urged the U.S. government to establish more of the "lily pads," and work with other nations to create more pathways for people to reach safety. It's unclear how many people need to be evacuated but organizations have estimated the number conservatively in the tens of thousands. Aid agencies said about 300,000 have fled Afghanistan into Iran, including many members of Shiite communities seeking refuge from both the Taliban and attacks by the Islamic State affiliate in the country.

Lucier and Shawn VanDiver, a founder of the coalition, said without providing specifics that they raised "specific stumbling blocks" and "choke points," that are preventing people from reaching safety in the U.S. or elsewhere. Both said it will require more time and input from other parts of the government to solve those problems.

"The answers are complex," Lucier said. "There are no simple technical fixes to a lot of this."

The meeting takes place against a backdrop of intense criticism by some Republicans in Congress, attacking a frantic evacuation, which was set in motion by President Donald Trump's decision to sign a peace deal with the Taliban and set a withdrawal date, and for what they have alleged is insufficient vetting of refugees. They have also accused the administration of understating the number of American citizens left behind.

Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee wrote Blinken on Monday seeking interviews with more than 30 State Department officials to address what they called the "many unanswered questions

about the planning – or lack thereof – that preceded the drawdown and evacuation.” Those include the number of American citizens and residents still in Afghanistan and mechanisms for continued evacuations.

As of Monday, the U.S. has assisted the departure of 435 American citizens and 325 permanent residents since Aug. 31, including with some recent flights, Price said.

Blinken said Friday that the U.S. has offered the opportunity to leave Afghanistan to all American citizens and permanent residents it has identified as remaining in the country who wish to depart and have appropriate travel documents. Several hundred Americans are reported to still be in Afghanistan, though not all have indicated they want to leave, Biden administration officials have said.

The Gulf nation of Qatar has agreed to represent the United States in Taliban-run Afghanistan following the closure of the American Embassy in Kabul and will handle consular services for American citizens in Afghanistan and will deal with routine official communications between Washington and the Taliban government.

Associated Press writer Matthew Lee contributed to this report.

US journalist jailed in Myanmar for nearly 6 months is freed

By GRANT PECK and DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — American journalist Danny Fenster, who spent nearly six months in jail in military-ruled Myanmar and was sentenced last week to 11 years of hard labor, was freed Monday and began his journey home.

Fenster was handed over to former U.S. diplomat Bill Richardson, who helped negotiate the release, and the two landed in Doha, Qatar.

“I’m feeling all right physically,” a bearded Fenster, in baggy drawstring pants and a knit hat, told journalists on the tarmac. “It’s just the same privations and things that come with any form of incarceration. You just go a little stir-crazy. The longer it drags on, the more worried you are that it’s just never going to end. So that was the biggest concern, just staying sane through that.”

While still jailed, Fenster told his lawyer that he believed he had COVID-19, though prison authorities denied that.

Fenster, the managing editor of online magazine Frontier Myanmar, was convicted Friday of spreading false or inflammatory information, contacting illegal organizations and violating visa regulations. Days before his conviction, he learned he had been charged with additional violations of terrorism and treason statutes that put him at risk of an even longer sentence of life in prison.

He is one of more than 100 journalists, media officials or publishers who have been detained since the military ousted the elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in February, and his was the harshest sentence yet.

“This is the day that you hope will come when you do this work,” Richardson, a former governor of New Mexico and past ambassador to the United Nations, said in a statement emailed by his office. “We are so grateful that Danny will finally be able to reconnect with his loved ones, who have been advocating for him all this time, against immense odds.”

Fenster has been in detention since he was arrested at Yangon International Airport on May 24 as he was headed to the Detroit area to see his family.

“We are overjoyed that Danny has been released and is on his way home — we cannot wait to hold him in our arms,” his family said in a statement. “We are tremendously grateful to all the people who have helped secure his release, especially Ambassador Richardson, as well as our friends and the public who have expressed their support and stood by our sides as we endured these long and difficult months.”

The exact allegations against Fenster were never clear, but much of the prosecution’s case appeared to hinge on proving that he was employed by another online news site that was ordered closed this year during a crackdown on the media following the military’s seizure of power. Fenster used to work for the site but left that job last year.

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Fenster, a native of the Detroit area, has a master's degree in creative writing from Wayne State University, and had worked for a newspaper in Louisiana before moving to Southeast Asia, according to Deadline Detroit, a news website to which he was an occasional contributor.

His brother, Bryan Fenster, has said he had "passion for writing about folks who struggle and fight for social justice" and was particularly interested in the plight of people from the Muslim Rohingya minority, hundreds of thousands of whom fled Myanmar during a brutal counterinsurgency campaign by the army in 2017.

Frontier Myanmar Editor-in-Chief Thomas Kean said Fenster was "one of many journalists in Myanmar who have been unjustly arrested simply for doing their job since the February coup."

According to the U.N., at least 126 journalists, media officials or publishers have been detained by the military since the takeover and 47 remain in custody, though not all of them have been charged.

In a statement broadcast on state TV, the military said that Fenster had been released at the request of Richardson and the chairman of the Japan-Myanmar Friendship Association. Japan, unlike the United States and the European Union, does not take a publicly confrontational stance with the military-installed government, and would like to see improved relations between Myanmar and the West.

The generals in Myanmar "were convinced that it wasn't worth it to hang on to Danny," U.S. Rep. Andy Levin of Michigan, who represents the Fenster family in Congress, told Detroit radio station WWJ. "He was innocent, and he was just an annoyance for them. If they kept him and anything really happened to him, we would never forget it. We would never forgive them."

Richardson said he discussed Fenster's release during a recent visit to Myanmar when he held face-to-face negotiations with Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the country's ruler.

Richardson is known for traveling to nations with which Washington has poor, if any, relations — such as North Korea — to obtain the freedom of detained Americans.

He also has a long history of involvement with Myanmar, starting in 1994, when as a member of Congress he met Suu Kyi at her home, where she had been under house arrest ordered by a previous military government.

Shawn Crispin, Southeast Asia representative for the Committee to Protect Journalists, said Fenster "never should have been jailed or sentenced on bogus charges in the first place."

"Myanmar's military regime must stop using journalists as pawns in their cynical games and release all the other reporters still languishing behind bars on spurious charges," Crispin added.

This story has been corrected to reflect that the mass amnesty did not take place on Oct. 21. It was carried out on Oct. 19-20.

Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

Biden signs \$1T infrastructure deal with bipartisan crowd

By JOSH BOAK and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden signed his hard-fought \$1 trillion infrastructure deal into law Monday before a bipartisan, celebratory crowd on the White House lawn, declaring that the new infusion of cash for roads, bridges, ports and more is going to make life "change for the better" for the American people.

But prospects are tougher for further bipartisanship ahead of the 2022 midterm elections as Biden pivots back to more difficult negotiations over his broader \$1.85 trillion social spending package.

The president hopes to use the infrastructure law to build back his popularity, which has taken a hit amid rising inflation and the inability to fully shake the public health and economic risks from COVID-19.

"My message to the American people is this: America is moving again and your life is going to change for the better," he said.

With the bipartisan deal, the president had to choose between his promise of fostering national unity

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and a commitment to transformative change. The final measure whittled down much of his initial vision for infrastructure. Yet the administration hopes to sell the new law as a success that bridged partisan divides and will elevate the country with clean drinking water, high-speed internet and a shift away from fossil fuels.

"Folks, too often in Washington, the reason we didn't get things done is because we insisted on getting everything we want. Everything," Biden said. "With this law, we focused on getting things done. I ran for president because the only way to move our country forward in my view was through compromise and consensus."

Biden will get outside Washington to sell the plan more broadly in coming days.

He intends go to New Hampshire on Tuesday to visit a bridge on the state's "red list" for repair, and he will go to Detroit on Wednesday for a stop at General Motors' electric vehicle assembly plant, while other officials also fan out across the country. The president went to the Port of Baltimore last week to highlight how the supply chain investments from the law could limit inflation and strengthen supply chains, a key concern of voters who are dealing with higher prices.

"We see this as is an opportunity because we know that the president's agenda is quite popular," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday before the signing. The outreach to voters can move "beyond the legislative process to talk about how this is going to help them. And we're hoping that's going to have an impact."

Biden held off on signing the hard-fought infrastructure deal after it passed on Nov. 5 until legislators would be back from a congressional recess and could join in a splashy bipartisan event. On Sunday night before the signing, the White House announced Mitch Landrieu, the former New Orleans mayor, would help manage and coordinate the implementation of the infrastructure spending.

The gathering Monday on the White House lawn was uniquely upbeat with a brass band and peppy speeches, a contrast to the drama and tensions when the fate of the package was in doubt for several months. The speakers lauded the measure for creating jobs, combating inflation and responding to the needs of voters.

Ohio Sen. Rob Portman, a Republican who helped negotiate the package, celebrated Biden's willingness to jettison much of his initial proposal to help bring GOP lawmakers on board. Portman even credited former President Donald Trump for raising awareness about infrastructure, even though the loser of the 2020 election voiced intense opposition to the ultimate agreement.

"This bipartisan support for this bill comes because it makes sense for our constituents, but the approach from the center out should be the norm, not the exception," Portman said.

The signing included governors and mayors of both parties and labor and business leaders. In addition to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the guest list included Republicans such as Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, Maine Sen. Susan Collins, New York Rep. Tom Reed, Alaska Rep. Don Young and Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan.

In order to achieve a bipartisan deal, the president had to cut back his initial ambition to spend \$2.3 trillion on infrastructure by more than half. The bill that becomes law on Monday in reality includes about \$550 billion in new spending over 10 years, since some of the expenditures in the package were already planned.

The agreement ultimately got support from 19 Senate Republicans, including Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell. Thirteen House Republicans also voted for the infrastructure bill. An angry Trump issued a statement attacking "Old Crow" McConnell and other Republicans for cooperating on "a terrible Democrat Socialist Infrastructure Plan."

McConnell said the country "desperately needs" the new infrastructure money, but he skipped Monday's signing ceremony, telling WHAS radio in Louisville, Kentucky, that he had "other things" to do.

Historians, economists and engineers interviewed by The Associated Press welcomed Biden's efforts. But they stressed that \$1 trillion was not nearly enough to overcome the government's failure for decades to maintain and upgrade the country's infrastructure. The politics essentially forced a trade-off in terms of potential impact not just on the climate but on the ability to outpace the rest of the world this century

and remain the dominant economic power.

"We've got to be sober here about what our infrastructure gap is in terms of a level of investment and go into this eyes wide open, that this is not going to solve our infrastructure problems across the nation," said David Van Slyke, dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

Biden also tried unsuccessfully to tie the infrastructure package to passage of a broader package of \$1.85 trillion in proposed spending on families, health care and a shift to renewable energy that could help address climate change. That measure has yet to gain sufficient support from the narrow Democratic majorities in the Senate and House.

Biden continues to work to appease Democratic skeptics of the broader package such as Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, while also holding on to the most liberal branches of his party. Pelosi said in remarks at the Monday bill signing that the separate package will pass "hopefully this week."

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz expressed concern during a Fox News interview Sunday that Republican support for the infrastructure law could ultimately lead Democrats to rally and back the second package

"They gave Joe Biden a political win," Cruz said of his fellow Republicans. "He will now go across the country touting, look at this big bipartisan win. And that additional momentum, unfortunately, makes it more likely that they whip their Democrats into shape and pass some multitrillion-dollar spending bill on top of this."

The haggling over infrastructure has shown that Biden can still bring together Democrats and Republicans, even as tensions continue to mount over the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump who falsely believe that Biden was not legitimately elected president. Yet the result is a product that might not meet the existential threat of climate change or the transformative legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whose portrait hangs in Biden's Oval Office.

"Yes, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a big deal," said Peter Norton, a history professor in the University of Virginia's engineering department. "But the bill is not transformational, because most of it is more of the same."

Norton compared the limited action on climate change to the start of World War II, when Roosevelt and Congress reoriented the entire U.S. economy after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Within two months, there was a ban on auto production. Dealerships had no new cars to sell for four years as factories focused on weapons and war materiel. To conserve fuel consumption, a national speed limit of 35 mph was introduced.

"The emergency we face today warrants a comparable emergency response," Norton said.

Italy stumbles into playoffs again in World Cup qualifying

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

Italy is facing another detour to get to a World Cup final.

The playoffs beckon for the Azzurri — just like four years ago — after stumbling to 0-0 at Northern Ireland on Monday, plunging the recently crowned European champion to a second-place finish behind Switzerland in their qualifying group.

Switzerland leapfrogged Italy with a 4-0 win over Bulgaria.

Italy's soccer-mad fans might be starting to fear the worst. After all, their country also failed to secure automatic qualification for the 2018 World Cup and wound up losing to Sweden in a two-leg playoff, one of the darkest moments in Italy's soccer history.

This time, the Italians will need to get through two one-leg matchups to advance in a newly devised playoff system. The draw takes place on Nov. 26 and Italy will be at home for its first match because it will be a seeded team.

England, like Switzerland, is heading straight to Qatar.

On the next-to-last night of group play in Europe, England romped to its biggest competitive win — 10-0 over the part-timers of San Marino — to finish top of its group with more goals (39) than any other team in qualifying.

Harry Kane enjoyed himself, in particular, with four goals — all in the first half — to move to 48 for England, five off Wayne Rooney's national record.

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Scotland will be seeded, like Italy, in the playoffs after a 2-0 victory over Group F winner Denmark, whose perfect record in qualifying came to an end.

Poland finished second in England's group and closed with a 2-1 loss at home to Hungary, and will likely be away in its first match in the playoffs.

AZZURRI AGONY

Italy and Switzerland went into their final qualifiers on 15 points each in Group C but with the Azzurri having a superior goal difference, the first tiebreaker if they ended tied on points.

That didn't come into play because while Switzerland swept to an easy win over already-eliminated Bulgaria thanks to goals by Noah Okafor, Ruben Vargas, Cedric Itten and Remo Freuler, Italy became the latest big team to struggle in an intense atmosphere at Windsor Park.

Without injured striker Ciro Immobile and other regular starters, the Italians struggled to carve out opportunities despite dominating possession.

As Switzerland piled up the goals in Lucerne, Italy's task became even harder and Roberto Mancini's team nearly lost when Conor Washington's late effort was cleared off the line.

Mancini has sparked a revival for the Azzurri, culminating in winning Euro 2020 in July, but they could miss out again on soccer's premier tournament for the second straight time.

"We need to rediscover what has set us apart until now," Mancini said, "and remain completely calm until March."

ENGLAND CRUISE

Not since 1964 and a 10-0 win over the United States have the English reached double figures in goals in a match. They'd never done so in a competitive match before Monday.

Harry Maguire, Emile Smith Rowe, Tyrone Mings, Tammy Abraham and Bukayo Saka joined Kane in scoring for England, while there was also an own-goal by San Marino, the world's lowest-ranked team — a lineup filled with non-professionals who were using annual leave from their day jobs to play in the qualifier.

Getting near England's record win, 13-0 over Ireland in 1882, looked on when Saka made it 10-0 in the 79th, by which time the beleaguered hosts were down to 10 men. But there were no more goals.

England finished on 26 points, six clear of Poland.

SCOTLAND SEEDED

Scotland is one of four teams sure of being seeded — and therefore playing at home — in the playoff semifinals, along with Portugal, Italy and Russia.

Sweden also looks good for a home match, while Wales will get one, too, with a win over already-qualified Belgium on Tuesday when the group stage of European qualifying is wrapped up.

Denmark dropped points for the first time in qualifying after goals by John Souttar and Che Adams secured a sixth straight competitive victory for Scotland for the first time since 1930.

Also in Group F, Israel finished third after beating the Faeroe Islands 3-2 and Austria beat Moldova 4-1.

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

Steve Douglas is at <https://twitter.com/sdouglas80>

Report: 'Whole of society' effort must fight misinformation

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

Misinformation is jeopardizing efforts to solve some of humanity's greatest challenges, be it climate change, COVID-19 or political polarization, according to a new report from the Aspen Institute that's backed by prominent voices in media and cybersecurity.

Recommendations in the 80-page analysis, published Monday, call for new regulations on social media platforms; stronger, more consistent rules for misinformation "superspreaders" who amplify harmful falsehoods and new investments in authoritative journalism and organizations that teach critical thinking and media literacy.

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The report is the product of the Aspen Institute's Commission on Information Disorder, a 16-person panel that includes experts on the internet and misinformation, as well as prominent names such as Prince Harry, the duke of Sussex.

"Hundreds of millions of people pay the price, every single day, for a world disordered by lies," reads the report's introduction, written by the commission's three co-chairs: journalist Katie Couric, former White House cybersecurity official Christopher Krebs and Rashad Robinson, president of the organization Color of Change.

Specifically, the report calls for a national strategy for confronting misinformation, and urges lawmakers to consider laws that would make social media platforms more transparent and accountable — to officials, researchers and consumers.

Another recommendation would strip some of the platforms' legal immunity when it comes to content promoted by ads, or for lawsuits regarding the implementation of their platform's designs and features.

The authors of the report blame the proliferation of misinformation on factors including the rapid growth of social media, a decline in traditional local journalism and a loss of trust in institutions.

Falsehoods can prove deadly, as shown by the conspiracy theories and bogus claims about COVID-19 and vaccines that have set back attempts to stop the coronavirus. The report's authors said misinformation is proving just as damaging when it comes to faith in elections or efforts to fight climate change.

During a briefing on the report's findings Monday, Couric, Krebs and Robinson stressed that every American has a role to play in fighting misinformation, by reviewing where they get their information, by ensuring that they don't spread harmful falsehoods, and by fighting the polarization that fuels misinformation.

"The path to making real change is going to require all of us," Robinson said.

The Aspen Institute has shared its findings with several social media platforms including Facebook. A message seeking a response from that company was not immediately returned on Monday.

The Aspen Institute is a nonpartisan nonprofit based in Washington, D.C. The report was funded by Craig Newmark Philanthropies, a charity founded by the creator of Craigslist.

Klepper reported from Providence, R.I.

Tensions flare in Arbery death trial as Jesse Jackson visits

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — A judge denied mistrial requests Monday at the trial of three white men charged with murdering Ahmaud Arbery after defense attorneys claimed jurors were tainted by weeping from the gallery where the slain Black man's parents sat with the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

The morning's testimony was largely disrupted by arguments outside the jury's presence over Jackson's appearance. The judge said he found one defense lawyer's complaints last week about Black pastors to be "reprehensible" and no group would be excluded from his courtroom.

Father and son Greg and Travis McMichael armed themselves and pursued the 25-year-old in a pickup truck after spotting him running in their neighborhood on Feb. 23, 2020. Their neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan joined the chase and took cellphone video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery three times with a shotgun.

Tensions flared in the courtroom Monday morning soon after Jackson sat in the back row of the courtroom between Arbery's parents. Defense attorney Kevin Gough asked the judge to make the civil rights leader leave to avoid unfairly influencing the jury.

Gough, an attorney for Bryan, also complained last week when the Rev. Al Sharpton joined Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, and father, Marcus Arbery Sr., inside the Glynn County courtroom. Gough told the judge Thursday "we don't want any more Black pastors coming in here."

"There is no reason for these prominent icons in the civil rights movement to be here," Gough said Monday. "With all due respect, I would suggest, whether intended or not, that inevitably a juror is going to be influenced by their presence in the courtroom."

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley declined the request. Courtrooms are generally open to the

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public, although the judge has limited seating in the public gallery because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The court is not going to single out any particular individual or group of individuals as not being allowed into his courtroom as a member of the public," Walmsley said. "If there is a disruption, you're welcome to call that to my attention."

Jackson told reporters outside the courthouse that he came to coastal Brunswick to support justice for Arbery's family, not in response to the attorney's previous remarks about Black pastors.

"As the judge said, it was my constitutional right to be there," Jackson said. "It's my moral obligation to be there."

Jackson acknowledged that Arbery's mother wept "very quietly" in the courtroom after prosecutors showed a photo of her son to a witness.

Gough's mistrial request was joined by the two other defense teams. Franklin Hogue, an attorney for Greg McMichael, said he fears the defendants aren't receiving a fair trial in the community.

Jason Sheffield, one of Travis McMichaels' attorneys, said the weeping caused some jurors to look and see Jackson, an icon "whose autographed picture hung in my mother's law office for decades."

"Several jurors did look over. Their faces changed, (showing) the emotion and sympathy they felt," Sheffield told the judge.

Walmsley warned the attorneys their own statements may have lured some high-profile figures to the courthouse.

"I will say that is directly in response, Mr. Gough, to statements you made, which I find reprehensible," the judge said.

Walmsley singled out a comment Gough made to back up his "Black pastors" remark last week: "If a bunch of folks came in here dressed like Colonel Sanders with white masks sitting in the back ... " before the judge cut him off.

Outside the courthouse last week, Sharpton denounced the disproportionately white makeup of the jury. Walmsley allowed the jury to be sworn in over objections by prosecutors who said several potential jurors were excluded because they are Black, leaving only one Black juror on the panel of 12. Glynn County, where the trial is being held, is nearly 27% Black.

Sharpton said he'll return to the courthouse, and activists said 100 Black pastors will join him.

Bryan and the McMichaels are charged with murder and other crimes. Prosecutors say they chased Arbery for five minutes to keep him from exiting the Satilla Shores subdivision outside the port city of Brunswick. The chase ended when Arbery, trailed by Bryan's truck, tried to run around the McMichaels' truck as it idled in the road ahead. The video shows Travis McMichael confronting Arbery and then shooting him as he throws punches and grapples for the gun.

The McMichaels told police they suspected Arbery was a burglar after security cameras recorded him several times inside a home under construction, five houses away. Defense attorneys say Travis McMichael opened fire in self-defense.

On the witness stand Monday afternoon, a Georgia Bureau of Investigation firearms examiner testified that Arbery's T-shirt had large holes with singed edges suggesting the shotgun barrel was either pressed against him or almost touching when it was fired into his chest and armpit.

Robert Rubin, an attorney for Travis McMichael, asked firearms examiner Brian Leppard whether that meant the gun was within arm's length of Arbery.

"I think it's reasonable to say that, if the end of the shotgun can touch your shirt, if you were the victim then you could grab the shotgun," Leppard replied.

This story has been corrected to show Sheffield said Jackson's photo hung in his mother's law office, not her loft.

Contributors include Associated Press Writer Kate Brumback in Atlanta.

Macron, Putin discuss deescalating Belarus border tensions

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian leader Vladimir Putin talked on the phone Monday about the need for de-escalating the tensions around the growing migrant pressure on the European Union's borders with Belarus, Macron's office said.

In the almost two-hour talk, they also agreed upon the "need for a humanitarian effort for the migrants" but did not announce any concrete steps, according to the Elysee statement.

The EU says Moscow has a role in building the migration pressure and could actively help in easing it.

The Kremlin's account of the conversation said Putin informed Macron about his contacts with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and "emphasized the necessity of discussing the problems that had arisen directly between the leaderships of the EU countries and Belarus."

Putin also noted "the extremely harsh treatment of refugees by Polish border guards," according to the Kremlin. Polish forces are blocking people from entering Poland and are pushing back to Belarus those migrants who cross the border.

Also Monday, Lukashenko spoke on the phone with Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel for 50 minutes about "the situation with refugees on the Belarusian-Polish, Belarusian-Lithuanian and Belarusian-Latvian borders," according to Belarusian state news agency Belta.

They discussed "ways and prospects of resolving" the crisis and preventing its escalation, as well as humanitarian aid to the migrants, Belta said.

The calls took place as the EU ratcheted up pressure on Belarus by agreeing to slap sanctions on airlines accused of helping Lukashenko wage a "hybrid attack" against the entire bloc using migrants.

The EU is also calling for humanitarian aid as up to 4,000 migrants are stuck in makeshift camps in freezing weather in Belarus while Poland has reinforced its border with 15,000 soldiers, in addition to border guards and police. The EU has expressed solidarity with Poland's guarding the bloc's external border. At least 11 migrants have died in recent weeks.

Polish authorities said Monday that Belarusian services had led a large group of migrants to a border crossing with Poland and made them believe they would be transported by bus to Germany. Polish police broadcast messages across the border telling the migrants that "they have been deceived."

"The Belarusian side is deliberately escalating the situation," said Marcin Przydacz, a deputy foreign minister. "The situation is unprecedented and unpredictable."

Belarus' borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia are also the eastern borders of both the EU and NATO. The EU says Lukashenko's authoritarian regime has for months invited migrants to the Belarusian capital of Minsk, many of them Iraqis, Afghanis and Syrians, with the promise of helping them across the border.

Meanwhile, Lithuanian officials said they were seeing a rising number of attempts by migrants to cross its border from Belarus.

The 27-country EU has already imposed four sets of sanctions on Belarus authorities and senior officials over the disputed election last year that returned Lukashenko to office and his government's brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters. Opposition leaders and Western nations have described the vote as a sham.

The EU is preparing a fifth lot of sanctions on Belarus. On Monday the bloc's foreign ministers extended the scope of those measures to add airlines, travel agents and others accused of helping to bring migrants to Minsk.

"Today's decision reflects the determination by the European Union to stand up to the instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes. We are pushing back on this inhuman and illegal practice," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

EU headquarters said the bloc will now be able to target individuals and entities organizing or contributing to activities by the Lukashenko regime that "facilitate illegal crossing" of the EU's external borders.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said the administration of President Joe Biden was also "preparing follow-up sanctions in close coordination with the EU and other partners and allies that will continue to hold the Lukashenko regime accountable for its ongoing attacks on democracy, on human rights on international norms."

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The EU believes Lukashenko began luring migrants to Belarus as a retaliatory measure to destabilize the bloc, which has been deeply divided over how to manage migration since well over 1 million people entered the bloc in 2015.

Germany allowed in hundreds of thousands of people that year, but doesn't want to encourage more now. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was asked in Brussels if he would support Germany taking in people now on the Belarusian side of the border if the flow of migrants to Belarus is stopped.

He replied: "No. I would argue for the people who are there, who were brought there under false pretenses by the Lukashenko regime, being taken back to their countries of origin, and for the countries of origin to take their share of the responsibility."

German federal police said Monday that they registered 1,708 unauthorized entries to the country "with a connection to Belarus" in the first 14 days of November, bringing the total this year so far to 9,549.

Also Monday, the United Arab Emirates banned travelers from several Middle Eastern countries from boarding flights to Belarus, cutting off one of the last major air routes for would-be migrants. Most airlines with flights to Minsk now say that won't allow Iraqis, Syrians or Afghans to travel there.

Lukashenko, meanwhile, brushed aside the threat of fresh sanctions.

"We will defend ourselves. That's it, there's nowhere to retreat further," he was quoted as saying by the state news agency Belta.

Lukashenko once again denied that his government organized the migrant influx, saying that "it isn't worth the effort," and he insisted the migrants are resisting Belarusian efforts to encourage them to return home.

Belarus flag carrier Belavia is among the airlines likely to be hit, and Maas warned other companies to follow the example of Turkish Airlines by restricting flights to the Belarus capital.

He warned of a possibility of denial of overflight rights and landing permission in Europe.

Associated Press writers Monika Scislowaska and Vanessa Gera in Warsaw; Liudas Dapkus in Vilnius, Lithuania; Daria Litvinova in Moscow; Yuras Karmanau in Kyiv, Ukraine; Sylvie Corbet in Paris; and Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this report.

UK says Liverpool taxi blast was a bomb, raises threat level

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British authorities raised the country's threat level to its second-highest rung on Monday, after police said a blast in a taxi outside a Liverpool hospital was caused by a homemade bomb.

Investigators said they were treating Sunday's explosion — which killed the suspected bombmaker and injured the cab driver — as a terrorist incident, but that the motive was unclear.

Counterterrorism police named the dead man as 32-year-old Emad Al Swealmeen. They did not give further details, though Britain's Press Association news agency and other media reported that he had not been on the radar of the security services.

The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre raised the U.K. threat level from substantial — meaning an attack is likely — to severe, meaning it is highly likely, following the U.K.'s second fatal incident in a month. Conservative lawmaker David Amess was stabbed to death in October in what police said was an act of terrorism.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the "sickening attack" at Liverpool Women's Hospital and told reporters that the British people "will never be cowed by terrorism."

"We will never give in to those who seek to divide us with senseless acts of violence," he said.

The male passenger in a taxi was killed and the driver injured when a blast ripped through the vehicle as it pulled up outside the hospital on Sunday morning. Russ Jackson, the head of Counterterrorism Policing in northwest England, said the explosion was caused by "the ignition of an explosive device" that was brought into the vehicle by the passenger.

Three men in their 20s were arrested elsewhere in the city Sunday under the Terrorism Act and a fourth was detained on Monday. All are believed to be "associates" of the dead passenger, police said.

Suspicious about a motive for the explosion have been aroused by the timing — just before 11 a.m. on

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Remembrance Sunday, the moment when people across Britain hold services in memory of those killed in wars.

Jackson said investigators had not found a link to remembrance events "but it is a line of inquiry we are pursuing."

"Although the motivation for this incident is yet to be understood, given all the circumstances, it has been declared a terrorist incident," he said at a press briefing.

He said the passenger had been picked up by the cab a 10-minute drive away and asked to be taken to the hospital, where the explosion occurred. The driver, named by local media as David Perry, managed to escape from the car. He was treated in the hospital and released.

Police said officers had searched two addresses in the city linked to the passenger — one where he had lived and a second he had recently rented — and found "significant items" at the latter. Officers performed a controlled explosion "as a precaution" as part of the investigation.

Liverpool Mayor Joanne Anderson said the taxi driver had locked the doors of his cab so the passenger couldn't leave. Police did not confirm that account.

"The taxi driver, in his heroic efforts, has managed to divert what could have been an absolutely awful disaster at the hospital," Anderson told the BBC.

The prime minister also said the driver appeared to have behaved "with incredible presence of mind and bravery."

Nick Aldworth, a former senior terrorism investigator in Britain, said the taxi appeared to have sustained "a lot of fire damage with very little blast damage."

He said "whatever was in that vehicle was either a low yield, or didn't work properly, or possibly an incendiary. So I think it's very much open to debate at the moment about what has happened."

Britain's official terrorism threat level was lowered from "severe" to "substantial" in February. It has been at severe most of the time since 2014, briefly rising to "critical" amid a spate of violent attacks in 2017. The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre sets the threat level based on intelligence about international terrorism at home and overseas.

Britain has experienced attacks by both Islamic and far-right extremists over the years, including a May 2017 suicide bombing at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester that killed 22 people.

Amess was stabbed to death Oct. 15 while meeting with constituents, in what police said was an act of terrorism by a supporter of the Islamic State group. His slaying came five years after Labour Party lawmaker Jo Cox was shot and stabbed to death by a far-right extremist.

Racial disparities in kids' vaccinations are hard to track

By ANNIE MA and MIKE MELIA Associated Press

The rollout of COVID-19 shots for elementary-age children has exposed another blind spot in the nation's efforts to address pandemic inequalities: Health systems have released little data on the racial breakdown of youth vaccinations, and community leaders fear that Black and Latino kids are falling behind.

Only a handful of states have made public data on COVID-19 vaccinations by race and age, and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not compile racial breakdowns either.

Despite the lack of hard data, public health officials and medical professionals are mindful of disparities and have been reaching out to communities of color to overcome vaccine hesitancy. That includes going into schools, messaging in other languages, deploying mobile vaccine units and emphasizing to skeptical parents that the shots are safe and powerfully effective.

Public health leaders believe racial gaps are driven by work and transportation barriers, as well as lingering reluctance and information gaps. Parents who do not have transportation will have a harder time getting their children to and from appointments. Those who do not have flexible work schedules or paid family leave may delay vaccinating their kids because they will not be able to stay home if the children have to miss school with minor side effects.

In the few places that do report child COVID-19 vaccines by race, the breakdowns vary.

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In Michigan, Connecticut and Washington, D.C., white children got vaccinated at much higher rates than their Black counterparts. But in New York City, white children between 13 and 17 are vaccinated at lower rates than Black, Latino and Asian kids.

In Connecticut, vaccination rates for 12- to 17-year-olds in many wealthy, predominantly white towns exceed 80%.

In Hartford, 39% of children between 12 and 17 are fully vaccinated. Across the city line in the suburb of West Hartford, 88% of children the same age are fully vaccinated, according to state data updated in November.

Hartford's school system is 80% Black and Latino. West Hartford's schools are 73% white.

On Monday morning, parents who dropped off their children at a diverse Hartford elementary school provided a glimpse into the various opinions around child COVID-19 vaccinations. The school's enrollment is more than 75% Latino, Black and Asian.

Some expressed mistrust of the vaccines and had no plans to get their children vaccinated. Others were completely on board. One father was skeptical at first, but said communications from the school persuaded him of the benefits of vaccinations for students, including an end to the disruptions to in-person learning.

Ed Brown said his 9-year-old son will be vaccinated because the boy's mother feels strongly about it, even though he still has some reservations. One result of the shot becoming available for his son, Brown said, is that he will get vaccinated himself.

"I will not give my son something I don't know is safe," said Brown, who is Black.

Another parent, Zachary Colon, said she was determined not to have her children vaccinated.

"I'm not vaccinating my son," she said. "I read it got FDA approval really quickly. I'm afraid they don't know enough about it."

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, the superintendent of Hartford schools, said the low vaccination rate among her students means more of them end up missing school.

If vaccinated students are exposed to infected people, they can come to school as long as they are not showing symptoms. Unvaccinated students have to test negative in order to return immediately.

"That can become another barrier for some of our families. Some of our families, for a variety of reasons, they don't get the test, and so they have to wait out the seven to 10 days. And so absolutely, it has kept students home," she said.

In Washington, lingering reluctance in the Black community has been mirrored in low vaccination rates among Black adolescents. The most recent numbers provided by the District of Columbia Department of Health show that the rate of full vaccination among Black children between 12 and 15 is just over half that of their white counterparts: 29 percent compared with 54 percent.

During a recent event to promote the start of vaccinations for children as young as age 5, Health Department Director Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt acknowledged that reluctance has been difficult to overcome despite months of public campaigning in the nation's capital.

"People have to want to be vaccinated," she said. "It's not always an access issue. It's a choice issue."

In Seattle, the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic began hosting mobile clinics, offering in-home vaccinations and providing information in an array of languages to reach families who might otherwise not have gotten a shot for their kids. About 40% of the clinic's patients are Black and 30% speak a language other than English, while 70% are on Medicaid.

Chicago's public health department planned to expand its in-home vaccination program to ages 5 and up starting this week. Comer Children's Hospital at the University of Chicago and the Loyola Medicine center west of Chicago both planned to send mobile pediatric vaccination units into underserved communities in the coming days.

The White House has made health equity a top priority, and its coronavirus task force said last week that the country has closed the racial gap among the overall population of 194 million people who are fully vaccinated. The Biden administration also said it is spending nearly \$800 million to support organizations that seek to broaden vaccine confidence among communities of color and low-income Americans.

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But federal, state and local systems for tracking public health data are still limited and underfunded, including tracking data for racial disparities in child vaccines, said Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association.

"We've not invested in the data system that we absolutely need to have for public health," Benjamin said. "That is the fundamental failure of this system."

Without widespread numbers on who is getting the shot, it's difficult to know what disparities may exist, said Samantha Artiga, director of the racial equity and health policy program at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

"Data are key for getting a complete picture and understanding where disparities are present," Artiga said. "They can be used to focus efforts and resources and then measure progress to addressing them over time."

Associated Press data journalist Angel Kastanis and writer Ashraf Khalil contributed to this report.

Ma covers education and equity for AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/anniema15>

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Key reason for supply shortages: Americans keep spending

By TOM KRISHER and PAUL WISEMAN AP Business Writers

DETROIT (AP) — Take a step back from the picked-over store shelves, the stalled container ships and the empty auto showrooms, and you'll find a root cause of the shortages of just about everything.

Even as the pandemic has dragged on, U.S. households flush with cash from stimulus checks, booming stock markets and enlarged home equity have felt like spending freely again — a lot. And since consumer demand drives much of the U.S. and global economies, high demand has brought goods shortages to the U.S. and much of the world.

Add the fact that companies are ordering — and hoarding — more goods and parts than they need so they don't run out, and you end up with an almost unquenchable demand that is magnifying the supply shortages.

That's where a big problem comes in: Suppliers were caught so flat-footed by how fast pent-up spending surged out of the recession that they won't likely be able to catch up as long as demand remains so robust. That's especially so because Americans, still hunkered down at home more than they did before the pandemic, continue to spend more on goods — electronics, furniture, appliances, sporting goods — than on services like hotels, meals out and movie tickets. All that demand for goods, in turn, is helping to accelerate U.S. inflation.

Unless spending snaps sharply back to services — or something else leads people to stop buying so much — it could take deep into 2022 or even 2023 before global supply chains regain some semblance of normalcy.

"Demand is completely skewed," said Bindiya Vakil, CEO of Resilinc, a consulting firm that helps companies manage supply chains. "This has now become more and more painful by the day."

One reason people may eventually stop spending so much is that everything simply costs more now. Consumer prices in the U.S. skyrocketed 6.2% over the past year as food, gasoline, autos and housing catapulted inflation to its highest pace since 1990. The laws of gravity suggest that the cumulative effect of so much inflation will eventually exert a brake on spending.

For now, though, manufacturers foresee no end to heavy demand — and no end to beleaguered supply chains or spiking inflation pressures. A chronic lack of computer chips has forced Ford Motor Co., for instance, to revamp its system of ordering parts that require long periods from order to delivery to try to address shortages.

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"It's highlighted that the "just-in-time" operating model that's been prevalent in autos may not be the right operating model," Hau Thai-Tang, Ford's chief operations and product officer, told analysts.

Smaller companies, too, have felt compelled to build up as many supplies as they can so they can still make products. Moriarty's Gem Art near Chicago, a family business for 40 years, has been stocking up on gold, silver and platinum to make necklaces and rings, desperate not to run out of supplies as holiday orders pick up.

"We're ordering a lot more than what we actually have orders for — just in case," said Jeff Moriarty, the marketing manager.

Even a normal post-holiday shopping lull, though it might help, isn't expected to be enough to unclog ports, speed shipping traffic or allow factories to replenish inventories.

"The baseline expectation for improvement is around the middle of 2022," said Oren Klachkin, lead U.S. economist for Oxford Economics. "But I think the risks of that happening later are fairly high."

Though Americans have increasingly ventured out in recent months, the balance between spending on goods and services remains skewed. The pent-up demand that followed the economic recovery is still tilted toward goods like furniture and cars and less toward haircuts, concerts and restaurant meals. Though services spending has grown in recent months, it isn't nearly enough to close the gap.

Since April 2020, consumer spending on goods has jumped 32%. It's now 15% above where it was in February 2020, just before the pandemic paralyzed the economy. Goods account for roughly 40% of consumer spending now, up from 36% before the pandemic.

U.S. factories have tried mightily to keep up with demand. Production rose nearly 5% over the past year, according to the Federal Reserve, despite periodic ups and downs, including disruptions to auto production caused by chip shortages.

Imports have narrowed the gap between what America's consumers want and what its factories can produce. From January through September this year, the U.S. imported 23% more than in the same period in 2020. In September, thanks to surging imports, the U.S. posted a record deficit in goods trade: Imports topped exports by \$98.2 billion.

Voracious demand for goods has accelerated as more people have become vaccinated in wealthier countries. Yet in poorer countries, especially in Southeast Asia, the spread of the delta variant forced new factory shutdowns in recent months and crimped supply chains again. Only recently did it start to recover.

At the same time, many U.S. workers have decided to quit jobs that had required frequent public contact. This created shortages of workers to unload ships, transport goods or staff retail shops.

Ports clogged up. Last month, 65 ships waited off the California coast to be unloaded at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach — two weeks' worth of work. The average wait: 12 days. That has since worsened to 78 ships, with an average wait of nearly 17 days, despite around-the-clock port operations beginning in October.

Before the pandemic, ships had set arrival times and went straight to a berth for unloading, said Gene Seroka, the L.A. port's executive director. Now, with Asian factory output at record highs, the port is moving record levels of goods. Yet it's not enough to meet the demand.

Seroka doesn't foresee the shipments easing even next year. Retailers have told him they plan to use the slower months of January and February — if they actually are slower — to replenish inventory.

As with ports, rail lines are moving more goods. Through early November, freight shipped by America's railroads was up 7.5% from a year ago. Truck shipments were up 1.7% in September. Yet there aren't enough drivers or trucks to move all the freight.

In China, too, manufacturers are struggling with shipping delays, container shortages and cost increases. Shantou Limei International Ltd., which makes children's toys in the city of Shantou, expects sales to fall 30% this year because of delays and costlier shipping.

"The most serious problem for us is being unable to deliver goods on time because of the difficulties in securing freight containers," said Frank Xie, the company's general manager. "A lot of things have gone beyond our controls and expectation."

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Philip Richardson, an American who manufactures loudspeakers in Panyu, near Hong Kong, said orders have increased 400%. A key reason is increased demand from Americans and Europeans, who have gone on a home electronics buying spree. The price to ship goods to U.S. customers on a 40-foot cargo container, meantime, more than tripled in July.

"The customer has to bear it or cut back on orders," Richardson said.

Song Wenjie, owner of Hand-in-Hand Electric Appliance Technology Co., a manufacturer of home appliances in Jiaxing, south of Shanghai, said that soaring cargo prices make it unprofitable to ship some goods.

"The combination of power outages and shipping delays might lead to a 20% fall in production this year, Song said.

Among European companies grappling with snarled supply lines is Shoe Zone, a British retailer that sources most of its footwear from China. Shipping container prices have jumped at least five-fold in 12 months, said Anthony Smith, the chief executive.

"This will continue to impact us for at least a further six months until the issues being experienced in the whole supply chain return to more sensible levels," he said.

Wiseman reported from Washington. Joe McDonald and Yu Bing in Beijing, Kelvin Chan in London and Mae Anderson in New York contributed to this report.

Austria locks down the unvaccinated amid a surge of COVID-19

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Austria took what its leader called the "dramatic" step Monday of implementing a nationwide lockdown for unvaccinated people who haven't recently had COVID-19, perhaps the most drastic of a string of measures being taken by European governments to get a massive regional resurgence of the virus under control.

The move, which took effect at midnight, prohibits people 12 and older who haven't been vaccinated or recently recovered from leaving their homes except for basic activities such as working, grocery shopping, going to school or university or for a walk — or getting vaccinated.

The lockdown is initially being imposed until Nov. 24 in the Alpine country of 8.9 million. It doesn't apply to children under 12 because they cannot yet officially get vaccinated — though the capital, Vienna, on Monday opened up vaccinations for under-12s as part of a pilot project and reported high demand.

Officials say police patrols and checks will be stepped up and unvaccinated people can be fined up to 1,450 euros (\$1,660) if they violate the lockdown.

"We really didn't take this step lightly and I don't think it should be talked down," Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg told Oe1 radio. "This a dramatic step — about 2 million people in this country are affected. ... What we are trying is precisely to reduce contact between the unvaccinated and vaccinated to a minimum, and also contact between the unvaccinated."

"My aim is very clearly to get the unvaccinated to get themselves vaccinated and not to lock down the vaccinated," Schallenberg added. "In the long term, the way out of this vicious circle we are in — and it is a vicious circle, we are stumbling from wave to lockdown and that can't carry on ad infinitum — is only vaccination."

About 65% of Austria's population is fully vaccinated, a rate Schallenberg described as "shamefully low." All students at schools, whether vaccinated or not, are now required to take three COVID-19 tests per week, at least one of them a PCR test.

The leader of the far-right opposition Freedom Party vowed to combat the new restrictions by "all parliamentary and legal means we have available." Herbert Kickl said that "two million people are being practically imprisoned without having done anything wrong."

On Monday, Kickl announced on Facebook that he had tested positive for COVID-19 and must self-isolate for 14 days, so he won't be able to attend a protest in Vienna planned for Saturday.

Authorities are concerned about rising infections and increasing pressure on hospitals. Austria on Mon-

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day recorded 894.3 new cases per 100,000 residents over the previous seven days. That is far worse than neighboring Germany, which has set its own pandemic records of late, and has 303 new cases per 100,000 residents over seven days.

Berlin on Monday became the latest of several German states to limit access to restaurants, cinemas, museums and concerts to people who have been vaccinated or recently recovered — shutting out other unvaccinated people, even those who have tested negative. Under-18s are exempt.

On Thursday, the German parliament is due to vote on a new legal framework for coronavirus restrictions drawn up by the parties that are expected to form the country's next coalition government. Those plans are reportedly being beefed up to allow tougher contact restrictions than originally planned.

Separately, one of the three German parties hoping to take office next month said they will consider introducing a vaccine mandate in some areas, a step that officials so far have balked at.

"We will need compulsory vaccination ... in nursing homes, in day care centers and so on," said the Greens' parliamentary group leader, Katrin Goering-Eckardt.

Germany has struggled to bring new momentum to its vaccination campaign, with just over two-thirds of the population fully vaccinated, and is trying to ramp up booster shots.

Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel issued a new appeal Saturday for holdouts to get vaccinated. "Think about it again," she said. The country's disease control center called last week for people to cancel or avoid large events.

To Germany's west, the Netherlands on Saturday night implemented a partial lockdown that is to run for at least three weeks, forcing bars and restaurants to close at 8 p.m. In the northern Dutch city of Leeuwarden, hundreds of young people gathered in a central square to protest the restrictions, setting off fireworks and holding flares, before riot police moved in to push the protesters out.

The Austrian government's next move may well be to tighten the screws.

Health Minister Wolfgang Mueckstein told ORF television that he wants to discuss further coronavirus restrictions on Wednesday, and said one proposal is limits on going out at night that would also apply to the vaccinated.

But Schallenberg sounded more cautious.

"Of course I don't rule out sharpening" the measures, he said, but he indicated that he doesn't expect restrictions on bars and nightclubs at present.

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

'Sesame Street' debuts Ji-Young, first Asian American muppet

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

What's in a name? Well, for Ji-Young, the newest muppet resident of "Sesame Street," her name is a sign she was meant to live there.

"So, in Korean traditionally the two syllables they each mean something different and Ji means, like, smart or wise. And Young means, like, brave or courageous and strong," Ji-Young explained during a recent interview. "But we were looking it up and guess what? Ji also means sesame."

At only 7 years old, Ji-Young is making history as the first Asian American muppet in the "Sesame Street" canon. She is Korean American and has two passions: rocking out on her electric guitar and skateboarding. The children's TV program, which first aired 52 years ago this month, gave The Associated Press a first look at its adorable new occupant.

Ji-Young will formally be introduced in "See Us Coming Together: A Sesame Street Special." Simu Liu, Padma Lakshmi and Naomi Osaka are among the celebrities appearing in the special, which will drop Thanksgiving Day on HBO Max, "Sesame Street" social media platforms and on local PBS stations.

Some of Ji-Young's personality comes from her puppeteer. Kathleen Kim, 41 and Korean American, got into puppetry in her 30s. In 2014, she was accepted into a "Sesame Street" workshop. That evolved into a mentorship and becoming part of the team the following year. Being a puppeteer on a show Kim watched

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growing up was a dream come true. But helping shape an original muppet is a whole other feat.

"I feel like I have a lot of weight that maybe I'm putting on myself to teach these lessons and to be this representative that I did not have as a kid," Kim said. But fellow puppeteer Leslie Carrara-Rudolph — who performs Abby Cadabby — reminded her, "It's not about us ... It's about this message."

Ji-Young's existence is the culmination of a lot of discussions after the events of 2020 — George Floyd's death and anti-Asian hate incidents. Like a lot of companies, "Sesame Street" reflected on how it could "meet the moment," said Kay Wilson Stallings, executive vice-president of Creative and Production for Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind "Sesame Street."

Sesame Workshop established two task forces — one to look at its content and another to look at its own diversity. What developed was Coming Together, a multi-year initiative addressing how to talk to children about race, ethnicity and culture.

One result was 8-year-old Tamir. While not the show's first Black muppet, he was one of the first used to talk about subjects like racism.

"When we knew we were going to be doing this work that was going to focus on the Asian and Pacific Islanders experience, we of course knew we needed to create an Asian muppet as well," Stallings said.

These newer muppets — their personalities and their looks — were remarkably constructed in a matter of a months. The process normally takes at least a couple of years. There are outside experts and a cross-section of employees known as the "culture trust" who weigh in on every aspect of a new muppet, Stallings said.

For Kim, it was crucial that Ji-Young not be "generically pan-Asian."

"Because that's something that all Asian Americans have experienced. They kind of want to lump us into this monolithic 'Asian,'" Kim said. "So it was very important that she was specifically Korean American, not just like, generically Korean, but she was born here."

One thing Ji-Young will help teach children is how to be a good "upstander." "Sesame Street" first used the term on its "The Power of We" TV special last year, which featured Tamir.

"Being an upstander means you point out things that are wrong or something that someone does or says that is based on their negative attitude towards the person because of the color of their skin or the language they speak or where they're from," Stallings said. "We want our audience to understand they can be upstanders."

In "See Us Coming Together," Sesame Street is preparing for Neighbor Day where everyone shares food, music or dance from their culture. Ji-Young becomes upset after a kid, off screen, tells her "to go back home," an insult commonly flung at Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. But she feels empowered after Sesame Street's other Asian American residents, guest stars and friends like Elmo assure her that she belongs as much as anyone else.

The fact that Ji-Young was created to counter anti-Asian sentiment makes her more special to Kim in some ways.

"I remember like the Atlanta shootings and how terrifying that was for me," Kim said. "My one hope, obviously, is to actually help teach what racism is, help teach kids to be able to recognize it and then speak out against it. But then my other hope for Ji-Young is that she just normalizes seeing different kinds of looking kids on TV."

Vanessa Leung, co-executive director of Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, is excited about Ji-Young. The organization was not involved in Ji-Young's creation but previously consulted on anti-racism content for Sesame Workshop. It matters when Asian American families, especially with many of them being immigrant families, can see themselves reflected in an institution like "Sesame Street," Leung said.

"It sparks curiosity and early understanding of the diversity of our community, the beauty in the diversity of our community," Leung said.

Ji-Young will be heavily present throughout the show's 53rd season next year, Stallings reassured. She also won't just be utilized for content related to racial justice. She will pop up in various digital programs, live-action and animated.

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As the new kid on the street, Ji-Young is looking forward to showing her friends and neighbors aspects of Korean culture such as the food. She loves cooking dishes like tteokbokki (chewy rice cakes) with her halmoni (grandmother). And she already has one "Sesame Street" friend who wants a sample.

"I would love to try it," said Ernie, who joined Ji-Young's interview. "You know, I've tried bulgogi. I really like bulgogi. I'm gonna guess that maybe old buddy Bert has not tried Korean food."

Having already made several famous friends on "Sesame Street," is there anyone Ji-Young still really wants to meet?

"The Linda Lindas because they're so cool," Ji-Young said, referring to the teenage punk rock band. "And they rock out and they're cool girls and most of them are Asian. They're my heroes. If we can get the Linda Lindas on 'Sesame Street,' I would show them around."

Terry Tang is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ttangAP>

Jeffrey Epstein faces trial by proxy: Ghislaine Maxwell

By TOM HAYS and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein died by suicide behind bars, a judge invited his accusers to court to vent their anger at a man they called a coward for taking his own life to escape accountability for sexually abusing them.

The coming weeks will still see, in a way, Epstein prosecuted by proxy: his former girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell, will stand trial in Manhattan federal court. Some of his accusers, identified in court by pseudonyms or first names, will get a chance to play a key role as government witnesses.

Maxwell, 59, has pleaded not guilty to charges she groomed underage victims to have unwanted sex with Epstein. She has vehemently denied wrongdoing.

"I have not committed any crime," the jailed Maxwell blurted out at a recent pretrial conference. She was made to wear shackles coming and going from the courtroom, accentuating the severity of the allegations — although the restraints were gone at a hearing last week.

The questioning of jurors by Judge Alison J. Nathan begins Tuesday as a pool of over 600 potential jurors is whittled down to 12 — and six alternates — just before opening statements start Nov. 29 in Maxwell's highly anticipated trial.

Epstein, who died at 66, was arrested on multiple sex trafficking charges in New York in 2019. His lawyers contended the charges violated a 2008 non-prosecution deal with federal prosecutors in Miami that secretly ended a federal sex abuse probe involving at least 40 teenage girls. After pleading guilty to state charges in Florida instead, he spent 13 months in jail and paid settlements to victims.

The New York case took a shocking turn when Epstein killed himself while awaiting trial two years ago. After his death, prosecutors turned their sights on Maxwell. The wealthy, Oxford-educated British socialite was the daughter of British publishing magnate Robert Maxwell, who died in 1991 after falling off his yacht — named the Lady Ghislaine — near the Canary Islands while facing allegations he'd illegally looted his businesses' pension funds.

Behind the scenes of a lavish lifestyle, prosecutors say, Maxwell seized the role of satisfying Epstein's proclivity for luring young victims into "sexualized massages." They plan to show jurors a picture of Maxwell and Epstein swimming nude together to illustrate their close relationship.

The trial's drama will revolve around testimony from four women who say they and others were victimized as teens from 1994 to 2004 at Epstein's estate in Palm Beach, Florida, his posh Manhattan townhouse and at other residences in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and London.

Prosecutors say there's evidence Maxwell knew that the victims, including a 14-year-old, were below the age of consent and arranged travel for some between Epstein's homes. Defense lawyers are still trying to reduce or eliminate the testimony of one of the four because she was 17 at the time in a jurisdiction where that wasn't legally underage.

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And prosecutors this past weekend asked the judge to let them reveal to the jury statements Epstein made to an employee about Maxwell's involvement with procuring underage girls.

The indictment said Maxwell "would try to normalize sexual abuse for a minor victim by, among other things, discussing sexual topics, undressing in front of the victim, being present when a minor victim was undressed, and/or being present for sex acts involving the minor victim and Epstein."

The Epstein and Maxwell cases have fueled a cottage industry of podcasts and documentaries, like Netflix's "Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich," as well as conspiracy theories and conjecture.

Reports that investigators seized Maxwell's address books have sparked speculation that the trial could explore Epstein's connections to Prince Andrew, former President Bill Clinton and former O.J. Simpson lawyer Alan Dershowitz. But the judge has made clear there will be no name-dropping at trial, saying only certain pages of an address book — showing a section naming the alleged victims under the heading "massage" — will come into evidence.

And she blocked prosecutors' attempt to introduce emails they said would show Maxwell tried select women for other men, saying she was using her access to women "as a form of social currency with other influential men with whom she sought to ingratiate herself."

Epstein's name, however, is expected to come up frequently, and Maxwell's lawyers have complained that Maxwell has already suffered from the negative publicity surrounding him. A questionnaire used to screen potential jurors inquired whether they had ever posted anything or an opinion about Maxwell or Epstein on social media.

The defense has signaled it wants to portray Maxwell as a victim of sorts.

"Jeffrey Epstein was a brilliant man who was flawed by enduring personality traits familiar to psychiatrists," her lawyers said in a recent court filing. "Like many people who achieve great power and wealth, Jeffrey Epstein exploited the 'Halo effect' to surround himself with people who would serve his needs."

Nathan has four times rejected Maxwell's bail requests, noting the ease with which the holder of U.S., French and British citizenships could use wealth and global connections to flee.

The judge also questioned Maxwell's integrity, saying that she told authorities after her July 2020 arrest that she possessed around \$3.5 million in assets, when she later admitted controlling \$22.5 million with her husband.

In a letter to Nathan last week, defense lawyer Bobbi Sternheim said her client "is eager for her day in court."

Maxwell "looks forward to her trial and to walking out of the courthouse uncuffed and unshackled following her acquittal," wrote the lawyer who has repeatedly complained about Maxwell's jail conditions, contending Maxwell's been punished for Epstein's suicide by guards who shine a light into her cell every 15 minutes and treat her harshly.

At a hearing last year where Maxwell was denied bail, some Epstein accusers made clear they believe she was equally culpable.

One called Maxwell "a sexual predator who groomed and abused me and countless other children and young women." In a statement read aloud by a prosecutor, another said, "Without Ghislaine, Jeffrey could not have done what he did."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Nov. 16, the 320th day of 2021. There are 45 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 16, 1914, the newly created Federal Reserve Banks opened in 12 cities.

On this date:

In 1907, Oklahoma became the 46th state of the union.

In 1933, the United States and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations.

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In 1945, "The Friendly Ghost," an animated short featuring the debut of Casper, was released by Paramount's cartoon division.

In 1961, House Speaker Samuel T. Rayburn died in Bonham, Texas, having served as speaker since 1940 except for two terms.

In 1981, the Senate confirmed Dr. C. Everett Koop to be surgeon general. Oscar-winning actor William Holden, 63, was found dead in his Santa Monica, California, apartment.

In 1982, an agreement was announced in the 57th day of a strike by National Football League players.

In 1989, six Jesuit priests, a housekeeper and her daughter were slain by army troops at the University of Central America Jose Simeon Canas in El Salvador.

In 1991, former Louisiana governor Edwin Edwards won a landslide victory in his bid to return to office, defeating State Rep. David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader.

In 2001, investigators found a letter addressed to Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., containing anthrax; it was the second letter bearing the deadly germ known to have been sent to Capitol Hill.

In 2004, President George W. Bush picked National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice to be his new secretary of state, succeeding Colin Powell.

In 2006, Democrats embraced Nancy Pelosi as the first female House speaker in history, but then selected Steny Hoyer as majority leader against her wishes.

In 2018, a U.S. official said intelligence officials had concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (jah-MAHL' khahr-SHOHK'-jee).

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama, visiting Canberra, said he would send military aircraft and up to 2,500 Marines to northern Australia for a training hub to help allies and protect American interests across Asia.

Five years ago: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, addressing a U.N. conference in Morocco, made a stirring appeal to all countries — including his own — to press ahead with the fight against climate change, saying a failure to do so would be a "betrayal of devastating consequences." Former congressman and defense secretary Melvin Laird, 94, died in Fort Myers, Florida.

One year ago: President-elect Joe Biden warned of dire consequences if President Donald Trump and his administration continued to refuse to coordinate with his transition team on the coronavirus pandemic and kept blocking briefings on national security policy issues and vaccine plans; Biden told reporters, "More people may die if we don't coordinate." As officials in Nevada's most populous counties certified results of the election, Trump took to Twitter with a new attack on the vote count that gave Biden a 33,596-vote statewide victory. A second experimental COVID-19 vaccine — this one from Moderna Inc. — yielded extraordinarily strong early results; Moderna said the vaccine appeared to be 94.5% effective.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Clu Gulager is 93. Journalist Elizabeth Drew is 86. Blues musician W.C. Clark is 82. Actor Joanna Pettet is 79. Actor Steve Railsback is 76. Actor David Leisure is 71. Actor Miguel Sandoval is 70. Actor Marg Helgenberger is 63. Rock musician Mani is 59. Former pro tennis player Zina Garrison is 58. Former MLB All-Star pitcher Dwight Gooden is 57. Jazz singer Diana Krall is 57. Actor Harry Lennix is 57. Rock musician Dave Kushner (Velvet Revolver) is 55. Actor Lisa Bonet (boh-NAY') is 54. Actor Tammy Lauren is 53. R&B singer Bryan Abrams (Color Me Badd) is 52. Actor Martha Plimpton is 51. Actor Michael Irby is 49. Actor Missi Pyle is 49. Rock musician Corey McCormick (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 45. Olympic gold medal figure skater Oksana Baiul (ahk-SAH'-nah by-OOL') is 44. Actor Maggie Gyllenhaal (JIHL'-ehn-hahl) is 44. Pop singer Trevor Penick is 42. Former NBA player Amare Stoudemire (ah-MAR'-ay STOW'-duh-my-ur) is 39. Actor Kimberly J. Brown is 37. Rock singer Siva Kaneswaran (The Wanted) is 33. Actor-comedian Pete Davidson (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 28. Actor Casey Moss is 28. Actor Noah Gray-Cabey is 26.