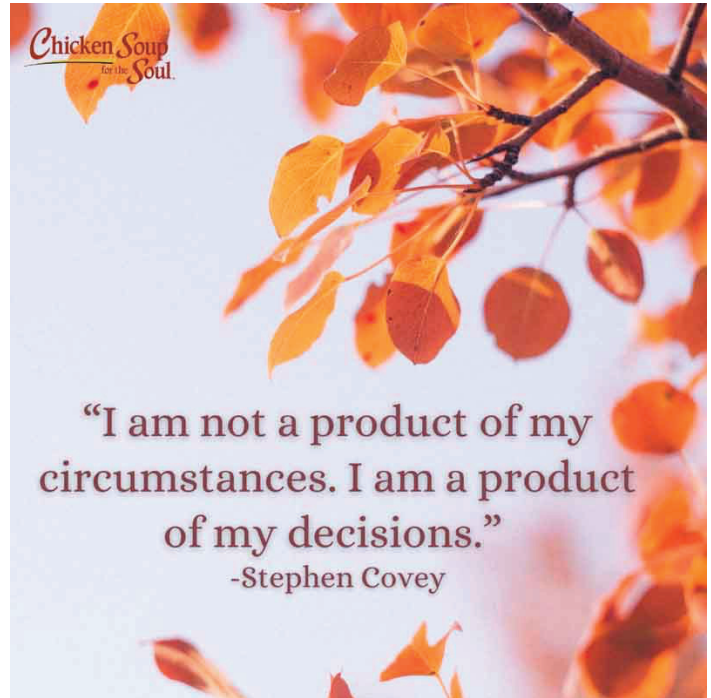


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UpComing Events

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

Council approves \$2 million budget

The council approved the second reading of the 2022 appropriations ordinance. The city approved a \$2.027 million budget. Some of the items included in the budget is a new accounting program for the finance office for \$38,000, resurfacing the swimming pool for around \$200,000, leasing a digger truck for \$100,000, bury overhead lines and replace poles for \$200,000, a \$12,000 Chamber donation, \$18,000 for striping Main Street, a \$125,000 chip seal project, \$40,000 for sewer line cleaning, \$30,000 for a new pickup for the sewer department, \$10,000 to the baseball foundation, \$5,000 for a Dolphin pool cleaner, \$6,000 for a new diving board at the pool and \$36,000 for a hydro vac rental.

Todd Gay, electric superintendent, came before the council to discuss previous work experience for Landon Johnson. Johnson had previous work experience from jobs he had worked at prior to working for the city which is 1,000 hours. The council decided to have Johnson and Gay get the hours from the previous employers and present them at the next meeting. If approved, Johnson would complete his journey lineman hours by the end of 2022. "If he has it coming, we should give it to him," said Councilman Brian Bahr.

Ken Heir from IMEG Engineering talked about change orders and pay requests from the tower and pump house projects. There are a couple of issues that need to be taken care of so the council withheld a little over \$21,000 from the pay request for AB Contracting.

There is some insulation issues with the tower that need to be taken care of as well as there was a draft inside the tower piping area. The electrical panel also needs a state inspection. "The contractors intent is good, but we need to protect ourselves as well," Heir said. The council voted to withhold \$10,000 from a pay request for Maguire Iron.

All in all, it's looking good. Heir said.

Plans are being updated for the next project which painting the reservoir and the water expansion project. It should be ready to bid right after the first of the year.

There was discussion on removing the no-parking from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. on Main Street. Street Superintendent Terry Herron was not in favor of doing that. Street striping is planned for the downtown area for next year.

The city will accept an intern(s) for City Hall and Wage Memorial Library from January through May 2022.

The council passed first reading of updated city ordinances that were reviewed by the finance office during the past four months. It is a review that needs to be done every 10 years. One thing that was mentioned was eliminating the budget billing starting January 1, 2022.

Liquor licenses were approved for all current license holders.

It was decided not to pay the council for their time at the economic development meeting and that the money would be donated to the Family Crisis Fund. Mayor Scott Hanlon reported on the meeting.

The Holiday Lighting Contest was approved with \$100 for first, \$75 for second and \$50 for third with credits on the utility bills. The transit will take people from Avantara and Rosewood Court around town to do the voting.

Kelsie Frost was hired as the skating rink manager with attendants being Shallyn Foertsch, Emma Schinkel, Carly Guthmiller, Ashley Johnson, Cadence Feist and Karsyn Jangula.

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Groton City October 2021 Financial Report

October 2021

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 2,957,262.55
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,452,303.15
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 84,912.52
SD FIT CD	\$ 102,514.21
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 4,630,169.12

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 3,075,051.76	66.41%
SD Fit	\$ 1,554,817.36	33.58%
Total	\$ 4,630,169.12	100.00%

	Beginning Cash Balance	Receipts	Expenditures	Transfers	Ending Cash Balance
General	\$ 666,100.32	\$ 85,851.36	\$ 143,524.28		\$ 608,427.40
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 113,704.76	\$ 2,948.02			\$ 116,652.78
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 9,596.96	\$ -	\$ 2,059.46		\$ 7,537.50
**Debt Service	\$ 107,739.53	\$ -	\$ 11,320.38		\$ 96,419.15
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69	\$ -			\$ 34,756.69
Water Tower	\$ 180,000.00				\$ 180,000.00
Water	\$ 339,749.42	\$ 138,568.98	\$ 116,015.37		\$ 362,303.03
Electric	\$ 2,569,198.69	\$ 124,003.72	\$ 108,178.80		\$ 2,585,023.61
Wastewater	\$ 438,512.60	\$ 17,599.30	\$ 36,734.45		\$ 419,377.45
Solid Waste	\$ 35,262.76	\$ 9,239.27	\$ 8,303.35		\$ 36,198.68
Family Crisis	\$ 8,051.14	\$ 100.00	\$ 50.00		\$ 8,101.14
Sales Tax	\$ 18,262.33	\$ 7,932.83	\$ 9,492.92		\$ 16,702.24
Employment	\$ (9,193.97)	\$ -	\$ 215.00		\$ (9,408.97)
Utility Prepayments	\$ 79,172.08	\$ 26.55	\$ 87.52		\$ 79,111.11
Utility Deposits	\$ 86,073.01	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 340.00		\$ 86,733.01
Other	\$ 524.10	\$ -			\$ 524.10
Totals	\$ 4,679,220.62	\$ 387,270.03	\$ 436,321.53	\$ -	\$ 4,630,169.12

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 2,377,849.99	by 12/1/2035
**West Sewer	\$ 52,494.27	by 10/15/2022
**RR Sewer Crossing	\$ 28,202.51	by 7/15/22
Total Debt	\$ 2,458,546.77	

\$131,884.64 ARPA GRANT (Receipted to General)
 \$95,412 Water tower loan payment
 \$11,320.38 West sewer and RR sewer loan pmts

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November Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H Club

The Friendly Fellows and Daisies 4-H Club met on November 14, 2021, in Claremont. The meeting was called to order by Vice President Blake Pauli. American Pledge was led by Parker Zoellner. The 4-H Pledge was led by Kella Tracy. Roll call topic was name your favorite Thanksgiving food. There were thank yous from 4-H members read by communications officer Hailey Pauli. The treasurer's report was read by Logan Ringgenberg and was approved by Ashlynn Warrington and 2nd by Kella Tracy. There were no additions or improvements. The Secretaries report was read by Logan Warrington and approved by Parker Zoellner and 2nd by Hailey Pauli. For old business, we talked about the recognition event. Logan Warrington made a motion to close old business and it was seconded by Walker Zoellner. For new business the club read the Newshound and talked about planning the Christmas program, donating money to the Tim Gonsoir fund, and 4-H fundraisers. Trey Smith made a motion to donate money to the Tim Gonsoir fund and it was seconded by Logan Warrington. New business was closed by Logan Ringgenberg and 2nd by Hudson Eichler. The meeting was adjourned by Ashlynn Warrington and 2nd by Hailey Pauli. Lunch was served by the Warrington family. Demonstrations were given by Ashlynn Warrington on "How to thread a needle". The club members worked on Christmas gifts for the elderly after the meeting.

Submitted by Walker Zoellner, Club Reporter

Conde National League

Nov. 15 Team Standings: Mets 29, Tigers 22, Cubs 20, Pirates 18, Braves 16, Giants 15

Men's High Games: Ryan Bethke 214; Russ Bethke 201, 187; Chad Furney 179

Men's High Series: Russ Bethke 547, Ryan Bethke 536, Dalton Locke 429

Women's High Games: Michelle Johnson 205, 169; Vickie Kramp 169; Amanda Morehouse 158

Women's High Series: Michelle Johnson 515, Vickie Kramp 453, Nancy Radke 422

Groton Prairie Mixed

Nov. 11 Team Standings: Chipmunks 6, Foxes 5, Shih Tzus 4, Coyotes 4, Cheetahs 4, Jackelopes 1

Men's High Games: Mike Siegler 202, Ron Belden 194, Brody Sombke 185

Women's High Games: Sue Stanley 169, Lori Wiley 158, Amanda Morehouse 157

Men's High Series: Mike Siegler 535, Ron Belden 491, Brad Waage 477

Women's High Series: Sue Stanley 447, Amanda Morehouse 414, Lori Wiley 404

Chronic Wasting Disease Detected in New Area

PIERRE, S.D. – Chronic wasting disease (CWD) was recently confirmed in a new area in central South Dakota. Confirmation of the disease was obtained from sick surveillance efforts coming from an adult female mule deer in Stanley County.

Stanley County is now considered in the CWD endemic area. South Dakota has now confirmed CWD in 18 counties of western and central South Dakota.

The GFP Commission recently modified carcass transportation and disposal regulations for the entire state that are effective beginning with the 2021 hunting seasons. The goal of the new CWD regulations is to help reduce the artificial spread of CWD into new areas of South Dakota.

CWD is a fatal brain disease of deer, elk, and moose caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. Most harvested animals with CWD will appear healthy and display no clinical signs. Animals in the later stages of infection with CWD may show progressive loss of weight and body condition, behavioral changes, excessive salivation, loss of muscle control and eventual death. CWD is always fatal for the afflicted animal. CWD poses serious problems for wildlife managers, and the implications of long-term management for free-ranging deer and elk is unknown.

For more information on CWD, visit gfp.sd.gov/chronic-wasting-disease or contact your local GFP office.

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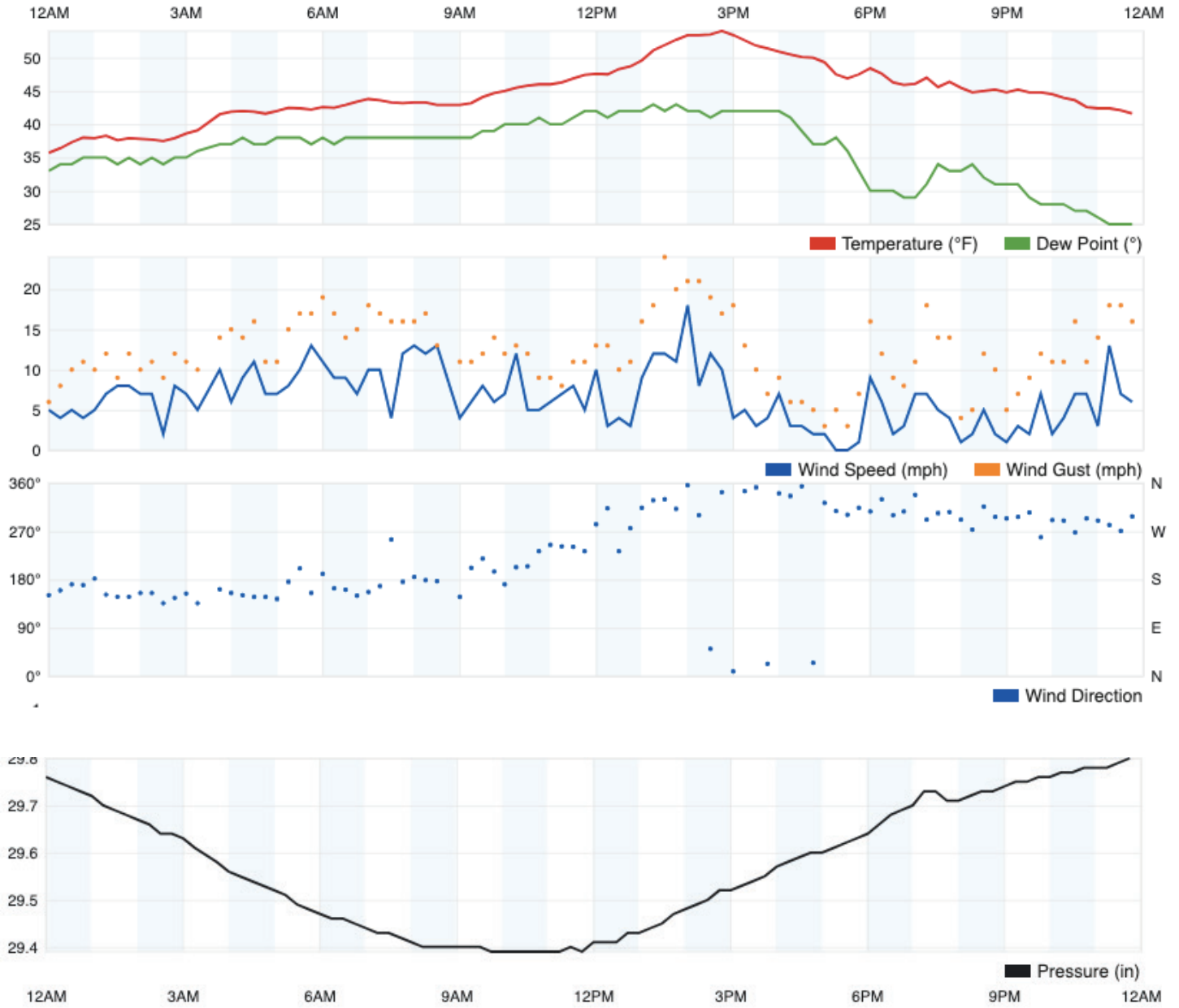


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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Increasing Clouds and Windy

High: 37 °F



Mostly Cloudy and Blustery then Mostly Cloudy

Low: 20 °F



Sunny

High: 35 °F



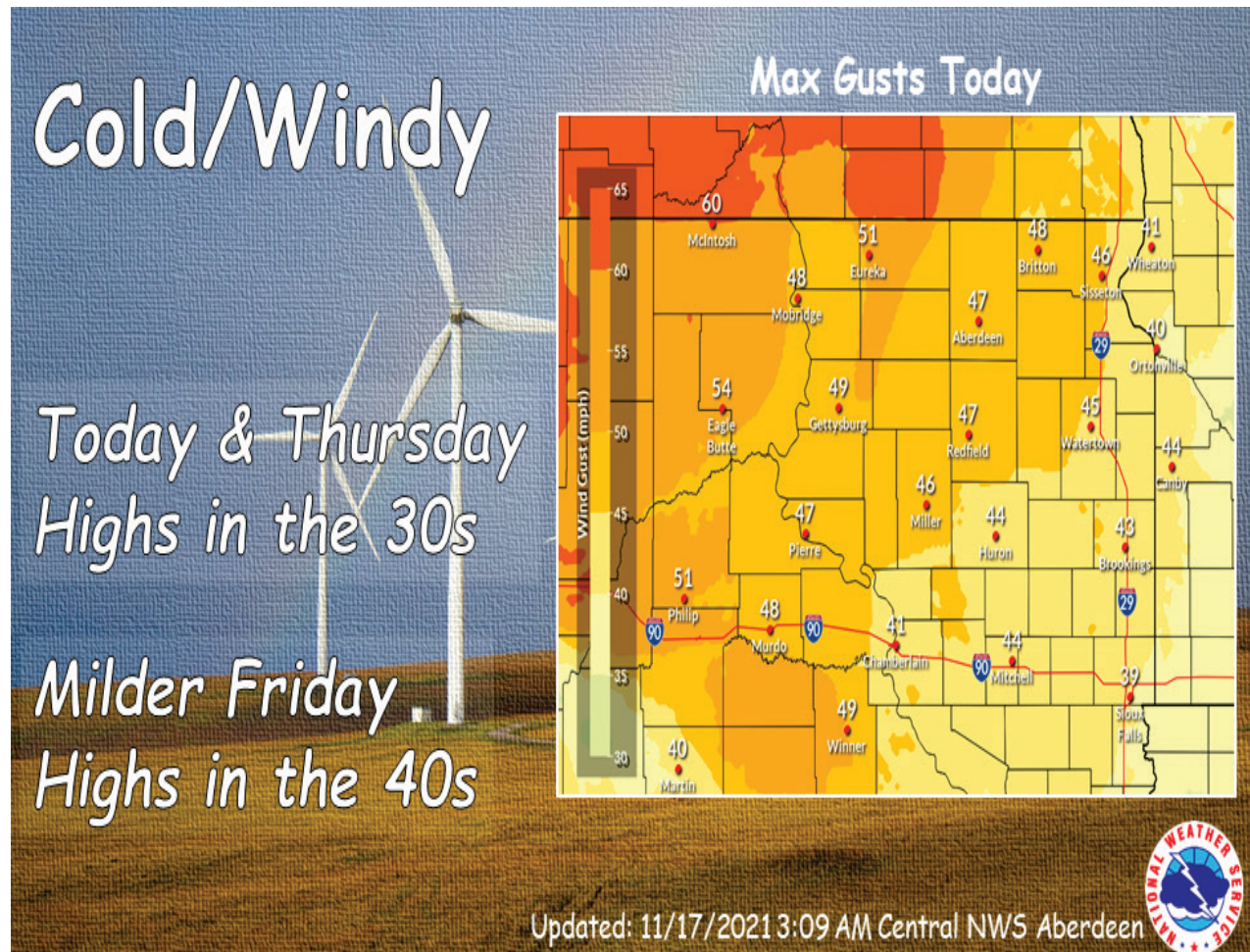
Increasing Clouds

Low: 21 °F



Partly Sunny

High: 43 °F



A gusty and cold couple of days are on tap for the region. Northwest winds could gust as high as 55-60 mph today. The wind will abate late this afternoon and evening. High temperatures will be mostly in the 30s today and Thursday. Friday will be milder. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

November 17, 1971: Snow fell off and on from the 16th through the 18th from west central Minnesota to north central Minnesota. A series of weak low-pressure waves moving northeast generally along a Sioux City to Rochester line caused heavy snow of more than 4 inches in a narrow band from Morris to Alexandria; then the snow band widened to 100 miles from Park Rapids northeast into Canada. Milbank, South Dakota received 3 inches of snow, while Wheaton, Minnesota went from no snow on the 15th to reporting eight inches on the morning of the 17th.

November 17, 1986: Three to six inches of snow fell across eastern South Dakota on the 17th and 18th with the heaviest amount reported in Sisseton. Numerous accidents occurred in the southeast part of the state. The slick roads were a factor in the vehicle death of a woman on Interstate 29, near Beresford in Lincoln County. Browns Valley reported four inches of snow, and Milbank received 7 inches.

1927: A tornado (at times to 260 yards wide) cut a seventeen-mile path through Alexandria, Virginia across the District of Columbia from the Navy yard to Benning Rd. & 19th St. NE and Northeast to East Riverdale, Maryland. This storm injured 31 people. The tornado struck the Naval Air Station where a wind gust of 93 mph was recorded.

2013: An unusually powerful storm system spun up five dozen tornadoes from the Great Lakes to the Tennessee Valley. Two EF4 twisters struck Illinois, hitting the communities of Washington and New Minden.

1869 - Southwest winds of hurricane force swept the Berkshire and Green Mountains of New England causing extensive forest and structural damage. (David Ludlum)

1927 - A tornado cut a seventeen mile path across Alexandria and southeastern Washington, DC, injuring 31 persons. The tornado struck the Naval Air Station where a wind gust of 93 mph was recorded. A waterspout was seen over the Potomac River ninety minutes later. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1953 - The temperature at Minneapolis, MN, reached 71 degrees, their warmest reading of record for so late in the autumn. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the Rockies produced 21 inches of snow at the Monarch ski resort in Colorado, with 14 inches reported at Steamboat Springs CO. Early morning thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Mary Esther FL with 4.43 inches of rain. Gale force winds over the Great Lakes Region gusted to 49 mph at Johnstown PA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Another in a series of storms brought heavy snow to the mountains of the western U.S. Totals ranged up to 17 inches at Bob Scott Summit in Nevada. Winds around Reno NV gusted to 80 mph. The Alta and Sundance ski resorts in Utah received 14 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Freezing temperatures overspread the southeastern U.S. in the wake of the severe weather outbreak of the previous two days. Eight cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Gilbert AR with a reading of 8 degrees. A fast moving storm blanketed the Great Lakes Region and Upper Ohio Valley with snow during the night. Totals ranged up to 12 inches at Pellston MI and Little Valley NY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

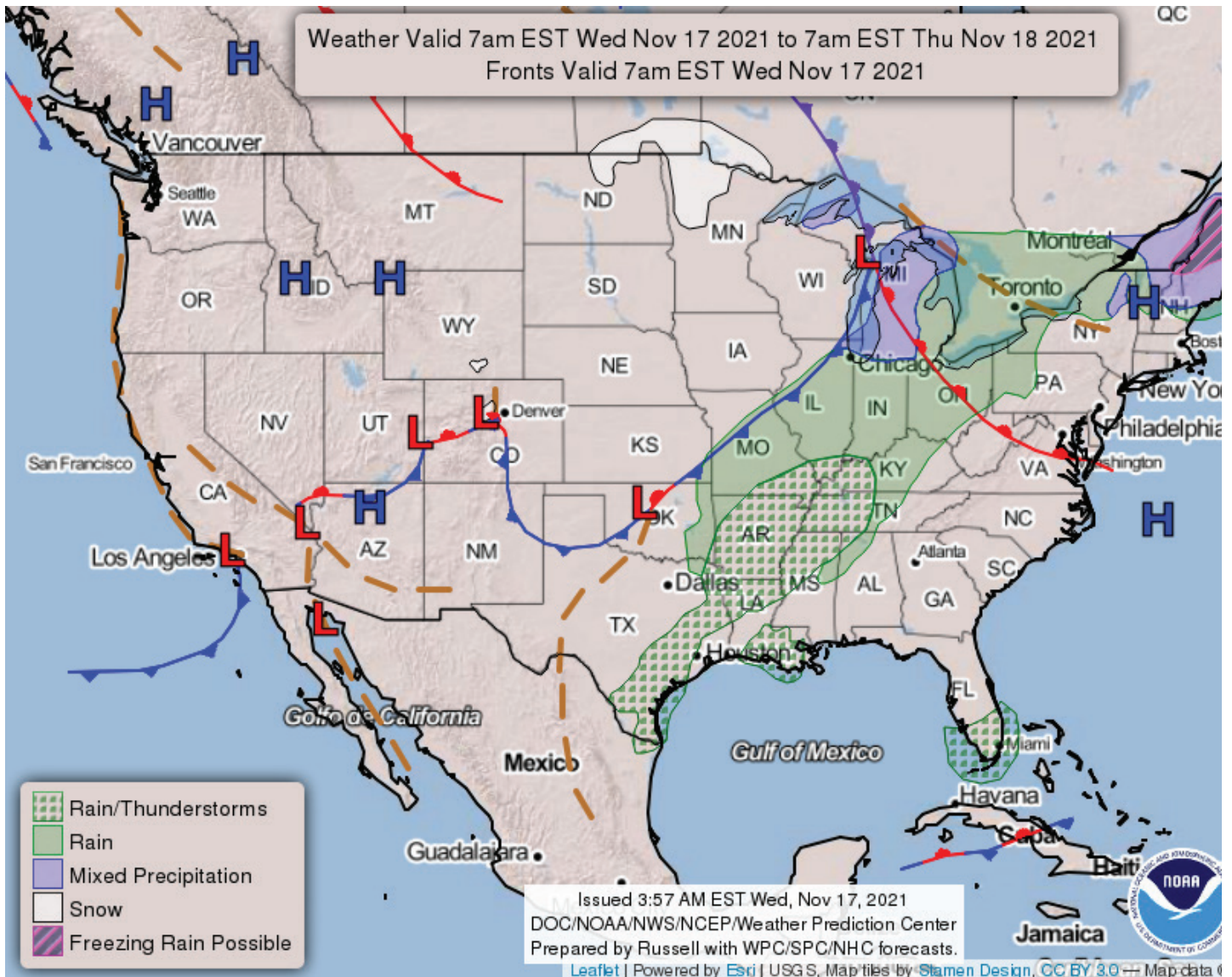
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 54.0 °F at 2:45 PM
Low Temp: 35.7 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 24 mph at 1:30 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 72° in 1953
Record Low: -8° in 1959
Average High: 42°F
Average Low: 19°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.47
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16
Average Precip to date: 20.94
Precip Year to Date: 19.88
Sunset Tonight: 5:01:49 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34:25 AM



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GIVE THANKS!

Josh felt that things were not going the way he wanted them to go in his relationship with Janie. So, he decided to take her a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a large box of candy. When Janie saw the lovely gifts, she was so excited that she threw her arms around Josh and gave him a warm hug and kiss.

Suddenly, he turned and began running down the steps of her porch. "Where are you going, Josh? Have I embarrassed you? Have I offended you?"

"Oh no," came the reply. "I'm going for some more flowers and candy!"

God gives us one good gift after another. They come whether we expect them or not - even though we do not always deserve them!

Psalm 106 begins with a shout: PRAISE THE LORD! And following the shout, the Psalmist gives us a reason for us to shout: "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever!"

His everlasting love and goodness are like rivers that flow through our lives, bringing us His blessings that we do not deserve nor could ever earn. His river never dries up in the summer or turns into ice in the winter. It flows freely bringing us God's best every day of our lives!

Surely, it is good to give God thanks. But it is even better to show Him our thanks for doing His work in His world. Now that Jesus has gone to be with His Father in Heaven, we are left here to do what He started. We are obligated to reach out to the lost and hurting with His love, mercy, and grace.

Prayer: Sometimes we become so complacent in our faith. Trouble our hearts, Heavenly Father, and give us no rest until we willingly do the things Your Son did. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Psalm 106:1

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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 Tuesday:

Mega Millions

06-22-44-53-65, Mega Ball: 3, Megaplier: 3

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

Estimated jackpot: \$63 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$190 million

Noem's daughter says she's quitting real estate business

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's daughter on Tuesday said she would quit the real estate appraiser business following scrutiny over whether her mother used her influence to aid her application for an appraiser license.

Noem's daughter, Kassidy Peters, slammed a legislative inquiry and news reporting on the episode in a letter to Secretary of Labor Marcia Hultman. She also released a document that a legislative committee was seeking to subpoena. Lawmakers were zeroing in on the timeline of a meeting Noem called last year that included Peters and key decision-makers in a government agency that had moved days earlier to deny her application for an upgrade to her appraiser certification.

"I am writing you today to express my disappointment and anger that my good name and professional reputation continue to be damaged by questions and misinformation concerning the Appraiser Certification Program," Peters wrote to Hultman in the letter, which was obtained by The Associated Press. KSFY first reported the contents of the letter.

She told Hultman she would turn in her appraiser license by the end of the year, adding "I'm angry and I can acknowledge that this has successfully destroyed my business."

The Republican-dominated Government Operations and Audit Committee had requested the document to confirm what Hultman had told them last month — that state regulators had already decided to give Peters another chance to win her appraiser certification prior to the meeting in the governor's mansion. Noem echoed that defense in a later news conference.

"The details of that agreement were discussed and in place prior to that meeting," Hultman told lawmakers at the October meeting.

But the signed agreement with Peters is dated the week after the July 27, 2020 meeting.

The governor's office referred a request for comment to the Department of Labor and Regulation. The department in turn released a letter from Hultman to lawmakers that blamed the AP for giving "the impression I testified at the hearing that there was an agreement in place with Ms. Peters before the hearing."

Hultman wrote that an AP reporter created an "inaccurate and a false narrative" and that she "never remotely gave the impression" during her testimony that the agreement had been signed before the meeting.

The AP has not reported that Hultman said the agreement was signed before the meeting. She told lawmakers in October that state regulators had worked out an agreement to allow Peters to seek further education and resubmit work samples to be reviewed for compliance with federal standards.

Hultman also told lawmakers she assumed that the former director of the Appraiser Certification Program, Sherry Bren, was part of the discussion to give Peters another opportunity to win her license.

However, the agreement with Peters was signed by another state employee, Amber Mulder, who was Bren's supervisor. Mulder was also in the meeting with the governor last year.

The committee was set to request final approval for a pair of subpoenas from a ranking legislative com-

mittee on Wednesday. Hultman asked for the subpoena for Peters' agreement be dismissed.

Besides pressing for the document that Peters released, the committee also wants to subpoena Bren.

The former director of the program was called into the July 2020 meeting and was later pressured to retire shortly after Peters received her license that November. Bren filed an age discrimination complaint and received a \$200,000 payment from the state to withdraw the complaint and leave her job this year. Noem has said the settlement had nothing to do with her daughter.

Judge blocks tax cut rule in American Rescue Plan

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A federal judge has blocked the U.S. Treasury from enforcing a provision of the American Rescue Plan Act that prohibited states from using the pandemic relief funds to offset new tax cuts.

U.S. District Judge L. Scott Coogler ruled Monday in Alabama that Congress exceeded its power in putting the so-called tax mandate on states. He entered a final judgement in favor of 13 states that had filed a lawsuit and instructed the Treasury Department not to enforce the provision. The judge left the rest of the law in place.

The American Rescue Plan steered \$195 billion in flexible relief funds to states but specified that states could not use it as a means to cut taxes by using the federal relief dollars to offset the revenue reduction.

The judge described the tax-cut restrictions as "a federal invasion of State sovereignty" that was "unconstitutionally ambiguous" — leaving states guessing as to whether their tax cuts would trigger a repayment of federal funds.

"The Tax Mandate's restriction on direct or indirect state tax cuts pressures States into adopting a particular — and federally preferred — tax policy," Coogler wrote. That "may disincentive" states "from considering any tax reductions for fear of forfeiting ARPA funds."

The lawsuit was filed by Alabama, Arkansas, Alaska, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah and West Virginia.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall called that tax-cut restrictions "an unprecedented and unconstitutional assault on state sovereignty by the federal government."

Officials from other states on Tuesday also praised the ruling.

West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey said the decision "ensures our citizens aren't stuck with an unforeseen bill from the feds years from now."

Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt said it "clears the way" for the state to pursue a sales tax cut on groceries "without fear of federal reprisal."

Justice Department lawyers representing the Treasury Department argued the money should be used for its intended purpose — pandemic recovery.

"Congress did not provide Rescue Plan funds for States to replace purposeful decreases in net tax revenue; it provided the money to help States economically recover from the pandemic in ways they otherwise could not," federal lawyers wrote in an August court filing.

Federal government lawyers added, "states are free to cut all the taxes they want, as long as they do not use the federal aid to 'offset' any decreased revenue."

Associated Press writer David A. Lieb contributed from Jefferson City, Missouri.

2nd group of states challenges health worker vaccine mandate

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A second set of states has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers.

The latest suit, dated Monday, was filed in Louisiana on behalf of 12 states and comes less than a week after another lawsuit challenging the rule was filed in Missouri by a coalition of 10 states.

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"The federal government will not impose medical tyranny on Louisiana's people without my best fight," Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry said in a news release announcing the lawsuit.

Both lawsuits say the vaccine mandate threatens to drive away health care workers who refuse to get vaccinated at a time when such workers are badly needed. They also contend the rule issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services violates federal law and unconstitutionally encroaches on powers reserved to the states.

The Louisiana lawsuit quotes from Friday's order by the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals blocking a broader Biden administration vaccine mandate that businesses with more than 100 workers require employees to be vaccinated by Jan. 4 or wear masks and be tested weekly for COVID-19.

Borrowing language from the 5th Circuit, the Louisiana lawsuit calls the health care worker vaccine requirement a "one-size-fits-all" sledgehammer. In addition to Louisiana, the suit covers Montana, Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah and West Virginia.

The Missouri suit includes Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming.

The Biden administration has not yet filed responses in either of the suits.

The Louisiana-based lawsuit was assigned to U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty, an appointee of President Donald Trump. Any appeals of a Doughty decision would go to the 5th Circuit.

Former Sanford CEO paid more than \$49 million last year

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Internal Revenue Service filings show former Sanford Health CEO Kelby Krabbenhoft was paid more than \$49 million in salary, severance and other payouts last year.

Krabbenhoft left Sanford last year after nearly a quarter century, receiving a combination of salary, incentive-based pay, severance and two lump sum payouts from supplemental executive retirement plans.

About \$15 million was paid as severance and another \$29 million was given through the retirement plan, which was started in 1983 specifically for Sanford's executives. The Sanford Health Board of Trustees ended the executive plan in November 2020, according to the 990 form.

High profile resignations in 2021 included Executive Vice President Micah Aberson, Chief Marketing Officer Kimber Severson and Chief Philanthropy Officer Bobbie Tibbetts.

The amount paid to Krabbenhoft upon his departure is shown on the regional health system's IRS form 990, which is filed annually.

In an email to Sanford employees sent Monday and obtained by the Argus Leader, CEO and President Bill Gassen said that the information released in the 990 confirms his plan to run a smaller executive team and reduce administrative overhead.

Gassen was paid more than \$1.6 million in compensation, according to the 2020 filing, after taking the helm for part of the year.

"We are making meaningful changes to improve transparency, strengthen culture and better support every member of the Sanford Family," Gassen said in the email.

Sanford is based in Sioux Falls and has major medical centers in Fargo and Bismarck, North Dakota, and Bemidji, Minnesota.

Former House Speaker to challenge Gov. Noem in GOP primary

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmaker and former House Speaker Steve Haugaard will challenge Gov. Kristi Noem for the Republican nomination for governor next year.

Haugaard, who was first elected in 2014, confirmed on Tuesday that he had filed paperwork to run for governor and will announce his candidacy on Wednesday. KSFY first reported Haugaard's candidacy.

The Sioux Falls lawyer will be facing a formidable opponent in Noem, who is a national star in the Republican party. She formally announced her reelection campaign last week, touting a \$10 million fundraising haul since she was elected three years ago. She has more than \$6.5 million in cash on hand, her campaign said.

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Haugaard declined to discuss his campaign, but the lawmaker is known for being one of the House's most ardent conservatives on both fiscal and social issues. He clashed with the governor on several occasions while he was House Speaker in 2019 and 2020.

South Dakota's primary election is in June.

Journalism in middle America got communities through the pandemic

William Thomas Mari Louisiana State University

(The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.)

William Thomas Mari, Louisiana State University

(THE CONVERSATION) News of the pandemic's devastating effect on journalism was conveyed by headlines across the nation telling of newsroom closures, layoffs and furloughs.

Journalism was in trouble in 2020. In fact, it had been in trouble for a while.

But how did so many local news organizations – especially newspapers – manage to survive the pandemic? Weeklies beefed up their daily online news coverage, business models were blown up and existing rationales for why journalism matters became more than theoretical to rural journalists.

Their determination to survive and serve as a public health lifeline for their communities fueled an oral history project that my colleague Teri Finneman and I conducted, interviewing 28 journalists across seven states in the middle of the country. We learned how locally owned and family-owned newspapers made it through COVID-19.

"There've been times that we've had to reach out to mayors and different cities and communities across the state ... to make sure that ... knew that [journalists] were deemed essential workers," said Ashley Wimberley, executive director of the Arkansas Press Association. That label exempted news workers from stay-at-home orders and designated them as critically needed by their communities.

There were no easy answers. Not in Louisiana, where I teach journalism at Louisiana State University. Not anywhere.

Telling the history

Oral history grabs the first impressions of history for those living now, looking back at what just happened. It helps people understand the present and how to move forward, out of a crisis. But it also records events for scholars and citizens in the future.

"Always remember that when you're putting those stories in your newspaper, that you are printing your community's history," Amy Johnson, the publisher of the Springview Herald in Nebraska, told us.

Benny Polacca of the Osage News in Oklahoma told us something similar: He encouraged journalists covering some future pandemic to "do your due diligence in order to come to some type of understanding, some type of argument, some type of focus, if you were going to be reporting or researching the time of COVID-19."

Often, it's journalism on the coasts that gets the attention of researchers. The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times – these big news organizations are written about constantly.

By talking to journalists in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, our project pushed back against this tendency to ignore the middle of the nation and its important journalism. As a kind of new essential worker, journalists found themselves in charge of explaining complicated guidance from state and local officials about COVID-19, how schools would work and where to get help.

"I hope that, through this, that our role as journalism, they [the public] realize how important it is that the information we put out, you know, how it affects them every day," Johnson said.

Kansas Press Association Executive Director Emily Bradbury had a message for these journalists who were working for news organizations increasingly threatened with being shut down: "I want them to know that in the midst of an emergency, in the midst of what can seem like a hopeless situation, when they look

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at their financials, that what they're doing is important. And what they're doing matters, and that no one else can do what they do, and they look out for their communities like no one else."

Loans, side hustles and deals

Reporters and editors found new ways of paying the bills. That meant accepting government subsidies in the form of Paycheck Protection Program loans. It meant, for some, going door to door and asking readers to subscribe, or keep subscribing. It meant consolidating newspapers, putting out more online editions, or taking pay cuts.

"People just don't understand. It costs a lot of money and time to do this, and I just wish we – there was more value or people appreciate it or understood the value and the cost of really providing this service," said Bonita Gooch, the publisher of The Community Voice, a Black newspaper based in Wichita, Kansas.

Some publishers took on side hustles to bring in revenue, creating ad copy for local business or doing marketing work.

At The Kingfisher Times & Free Press in Oklahoma, for example, Christine Reid, the paper's editor, created ads for a local vocational-technical school. "I've also tried to use that as an avenue to ... generate more ads for the newspaper," Reid said.

Some papers worked out advertising deals with local businesses as consumers shopped more locally.

Local publishers did whatever it took to stay afloat. As some of our initial findings have shown, that showed both opportunity and hesitancy about change.

"We're gonna have to rely less on advertising revenue and more on subscription revenue, and so we've got to make sure we're offering a unique product that they want to pay for," said Letti Lister, the president and publisher of the Black Hills Pioneer in Spearfish, South Dakota.

We saw tentative signs of hope, as journalists got financial and moral support from their readers during a fraught election. "If anything, it's rallied the troops, if you will, in our community because they trust us, they know that we're going to report the news in a timely manner and keep the public up to date," said Amy Wobbema, publisher of the New Rockford Transcript in North Dakota. Arguably most coverage was calm and steady.

But there was still hesitancy over what newspapers had to do to adapt. Some journalists are uncomfortable with receiving government funding and would rather rely on community support.

As South Dakota Newspaper Association Executive Director Dave Bordewyk put it: "Sort of, 'Look, contribute to our newspaper ... because if you value that importance of local news and journalism, then we need your support beyond just subscribing to the newspaper or advertising, which has gone away.'"

Ultimately, the pandemic showed that more research needs to be done on journalism in rural areas – we managed to talk to only a fraction of the total number of small-town journalists and publishers. Other scholars have already learned that local journalism helps reduce violent partisanship and reinforces institutions. To be clear, scholars have defined violent partisanship as the willingness to resort to physical altercations to resolve disputes – good local journalism channels that energy toward peaceful, democratic ends. Other scholars have found that institutions like local courts and governments get increased legitimacy as a result of local news. More sustained scholarly attention will likely turn up other benefits that the public isn't yet aware of.

"That's what we hope. What I hope comes out of this is that readers can understand that, and can ... have a renewed value on what that [local] publication has done for their community during this pandemic," Bradbury told us.

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Contempt charges dropped for 3 Marshals Service supervisors

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Contempt charges have been dismissed for three supervisors in the U.S. Mar-

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shals Service for a series of events that began with a deputy marshal refusing to disclose her vaccination status while serving in federal court in Aberdeen.

A mid-December trial in Sioux Falls has been canceled.

Federal Judge Charles Kornmann filed the charges against John Kilgallon, chief of staff, Daniel Mosteller, U.S. marshal in South Dakota and Stephen Houghtaling, chief deputy U.S. marshal.

Kornmann had issued a directive earlier this year that anybody in his courtroom needed to be vaccinated for COVID-19. The Marshals Service argued that no deputy marshals should be required to disclose their vaccination status.

When a deputy marshal refused to disclose her status during a proceeding last May, she was directed to leave the courtroom in Aberdeen. Upon the direction of her supervisors, she took the defendants who were awaiting hearings before Kornmann out of the courthouse and the proceedings were held virtually.

Civil contempt charges were initially pursued, but later converted to criminal contempt charges after a hearing before Kornmann, the Argus Leader reported.

After those charges were filed, however, the U.S. Attorney's Office in South Dakota and the U.S. Department of Justice both recused themselves from criminally prosecuting the case and a special prosecutor was assigned.

Kornmann also recused himself, leading to the appointment of a federal judge in Nebraska who dismissed the charges last week.

Shocked tennis star Osaka posts: Where is Peng Shuai?

BEIJING (AP) — Tennis star Naomi Osaka says she's been shocked to hear about a fellow player who has gone quiet since making a sexual assault allegation against a former top government official in China.

The Japanese former No. 1-ranked, four-time major winner posted on social media on Wednesday to join those asking: where is Peng Shuai?

In a Twitter post — under the hashtag WhereIsPengShuai — Osaka wrote: "Not sure if you've been following the news but I was recently informed of a fellow tennis player that has gone missing shortly after revealing that she has been sexually abused. Censorship is never ok at any cost."

The 24-year-old Osaka, who hasn't played at tour-level since her U.S. Open title defense ended in a third-round loss in September, said she hoped Peng and her family "are safe and ok."

"I'm in shock of the current situation," she wrote, "and I'm sending love and light her way."

Other leading players including men's No. 1 Novak Djokovic expressed shock at the situation, and the organizers of the women's and men's professional tennis tours have called for a full investigation into the allegations made by the two-time Grand Slam doubles champion.

Peng wrote in a lengthy social media post earlier this month that a former vice premier had forced her to have sex despite repeated refusals. The post was removed from her verified account on Weibo, a leading Chinese social media platform, and China's entirely state-controlled media has suppressed all reporting on the case.

Reports of the allegations circulated overseas for more than a week before WTA Chairman and CEO Steve Simon issued a statement saying "Peng Shuai, and all women, deserve to be heard, not censored."

"Her accusation about the conduct of a former Chinese leader involving a sexual assault must be treated with the utmost seriousness."

The men's tour followed Monday, with ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi saying tennis authorities were "deeply concerned by the uncertainty surrounding the immediate safety and whereabouts of WTA player Peng Shuai."

"We are encouraged by the recent assurances received by WTA that she is safe and accounted for and will continue to monitor the situation closely," Gaudenzi said. "Separately, we stand in full support of WTA's call for a full, fair and transparent investigation into allegations of sexual assault against Peng Shuai."

Peng, 35, wrote that Zhang Gaoli, a former vice premier and member of the ruling Communist Party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee, had forced her to have sex despite repeated refusals following

a round of tennis three years ago. She said Zhang's wife guarded the door during the incident.

Her post also said they had sex once seven years ago and she had feelings for him after that.

As is usual for retired Chinese officials, the 75-year-old Zhang dropped from public sight after his retirement in 2018 and is not known to have any intimate professional or political connections to current leaders.

Peng won 23 tour-level doubles titles, including at Wimbledon in 2013 and the French Open in 2014. She was a semifinalist in singles at the U.S Open in 2014. Peng hasn't played at the top tier since the Qatar Open in February of last year, before restrictions imposed for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Peng also played in three Olympics — 2008, 2012, and 2016 — but the International Olympic Committee has remained silent about her allegations. The IOC and China are organizing the Beijing Winter Olympics starting Feb. 4.

Her accusation was the first against a prominent government official since the #MeToo movement took hold in China in 2018 before being largely tamped down by authorities the same year.

When asked during a daily briefing on Monday about Peng's allegation, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said: "I have not heard of the matter, and it is not a diplomatic question."

In response to another question at Wednesday's daily briefing, Zhao said he had no knowledge of Peng's situation.

"Do you think the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry is omnipotent?" Zhao asked a reporter. "I suggest you ask the relevant authorities about the relevant question."

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

Biden pushes electric vehicle chargers as energy costs spike

By AAMER MADHANI and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is highlighting billions of dollars in his giant bipartisan infrastructure deal to pay for the installation of electric vehicle chargers across the country, an investment he says will go a long way to curbing planet-warming carbon emissions while creating good-paying jobs.

Biden on Wednesday will visit a General Motors plant in Detroit that manufactures electric vehicles. He'll use the occasion to make the case that the \$7.5 billion in the new infrastructure law for electric vehicle chargers will help America get "off the sidelines" on green-energy manufacturing. Currently, the U.S. market share of plug-in electric vehicle sales is one-third the size of the Chinese EV market.

"It's a big deal," Biden declared as he signed the bill into law at a White House ceremony earlier this week.

Republicans — even some of those who voted in favor of the infrastructure package — are criticizing Biden for being preoccupied with electric vehicle technology at a time when Americans are contending with a spike in gasoline and natural gas prices.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell took the Senate floor Tuesday to make the case that "the Biden administration doesn't have any strategic plan to snap its fingers and turn our massive country into some green utopia overnight."

"They just want to throw boatloads of government money at things like solar panels and electric vehicles and hope it all works out," said McConnell, one of 19 GOP senators who voted in favor of the infrastructure bill. He added, "American families are staring down the barrel of skyrocketing heating bills, and the Democrats' response is to go to war against affordable American energy."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki has stressed that the administration is looking at "every tool in our arsenal" to combat high gasoline prices, saying that Biden and his economic team are "quite focused" on the issue.

Psaki said the administration has asked the Federal Trade Commission "to crack down on illegal pricing" and is engaging with countries and entities abroad like OPEC on increasing supply.

The GM plant that Biden will visit was slated to be closed in 2018 as the automaker tried to shed excess factory capacity to build sedans as buyers shifted toward SUVs and trucks. But the plant, which built cars with internal combustion engines since it opened in 1985, was rescued a year later and designated Factory

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Zero to build zero-emissions electric vehicles.

Currently, the 4.1 million-square-foot plant, which straddles the border between Detroit and the enclave of Hamtramck, is making pre-production versions of the electric GMC Hummer pickup truck.

Next year it will start making a Hummer electric SUV. The plant will start cranking out the Origin, an electric vehicle for GM's Cruise autonomous vehicle subsidiary, in 2023, and an electric Chevrolet Silverado pickup at an unspecified date.

The plant won't see much direct impact from the infrastructure spending, but it will benefit from \$7.5 billion designated to help build an electric vehicle charging network.

Biden wanted \$15 billion to build 500,000 chargers and hasn't given a number for how many could be constructed for half that amount.

It's likely \$7.5 billion won't be enough. The International Council on Clean Transportation says the U.S. will need 2.4 million charging stations by 2030 if 36% of new vehicle sales are electric. Currently there are about 45,500 charging stations nationwide with about 112,000 plugs.

Biden is hoping to do even more to promote electric vehicles, including a provision for a \$7,500 tax credit for consumers who buy electric vehicles through 2026 that's been floated as part of his proposed \$1.85 trillion social services and climate bill.

The following year, only purchases of electric vehicles made in the U.S. would qualify for the credit. The base credit would go up by \$4,500 if the vehicle is made at a U.S. plant that operates under a union-negotiated collective bargaining agreement. Only auto plants owned by GM, Ford Motor Co. and Stellantis NV qualify.

The tax break favoring American-made vehicles could be a point of tension when Biden hosts Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador at the White House on Thursday for the first North American Leaders Summit since 2016.

Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said she raised concerns with Secretary of State Antony Blinken when the two met in Washington last week that the proposed tax credit would have an adverse impact on North America's integrated auto industry and put thousands of jobs in Canada at risk.

China, US to ease restrictions on each other's journalists

BEIJING (AP) — China and the U.S. have agreed to ease restrictions on each other's journalists amid a slight relaxation of tensions between the two sides.

The official China Daily newspaper on Wednesday said the agreement was reached ahead of Tuesday's virtual summit between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden.

The agreement represents a degree of progress on an issue that has long aggravated relations, but details remain to be ironed out. COVID-19 travel restrictions and long-standing obstacles faced by foreign media within China are also factors standing in the way of a major breakthrough in media relations.

Under the agreement, the U.S. will issue one-year multiple-entry visas to Chinese journalists and will immediately initiate a process to address "duration of status" issues, China Daily said. China will reciprocate by granting equal treatment to U.S. journalists once the U.S. policies take effect, and both sides will issue media visas for new applicants "based on relevant laws and regulations," the report said.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian gave no information on a timeline for implementation, but called the agreement a "hard-won achievement that is in the interest of both sides and should be cherished."

"We hope that the U.S. will keep its promise to put the relevant measures and policies in place as soon as possible and work with China to create favorable conditions for both (nations') media to continue to work and live in each other's countries," Zhao said at a daily briefing.

In a statement to The Associated Press late Tuesday, the State Department said China had committed to issuing visas for a group of U.S. reporters "provided they are eligible under all applicable laws and regulations."

"We will also continue issuing visas to (Chinese) journalists who are otherwise eligible for the visa under U.S. law," the statement said.

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China also committed to increase the length for which U.S. journalist visas are valid from the current 90 days to one year.

"On a reciprocal basis, we are committing to increase validity of U.S. visas issued to PRC journalists to one year as well," the State Department statement said, referring to the People's Republic of China.

Not mentioned in either statement were press conditions in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory of Hong Kong, where both local and international media have come under increasing pressure. The Economist said last week that Hong Kong refused a visa renewal for its correspondent Sue-Lin Wong. Authorities have not explained the rejection.

Limits on journalists have fueled tensions between the two countries for more than a year after the U.S. cut 20 visas issued to Chinese state media journalists and required those remaining to register as foreign agents, among other changes.

China responded by expelling journalists working for U.S. outlets and severely restricting conditions for those continuing to work in the country.

The new agreement "was the result of more than a year of difficult negotiations over the treatment of media outlets in both countries," China Daily said.

"It is hoped that more good news is ahead for the two countries' media outlets through further China-U.S. cooperation," the newspaper added.

The State Department said it has "remained in close consultation with the affected outlets, as well as other outlets facing personnel shortages due to PRC government policy decisions, and we are gratified their correspondents will be able to return to the PRC to continue their important work. We welcome this progress but see it simply as initial steps."

The State Department also said it would continue to work toward expanded access and better conditions for U.S. and foreign media in China, where they face considerable obstacles ranging from questioning by police, harassment preventing them from doing their work, personal threats and lawsuits brought by people they interview.

"We will continue to advocate for media freedom as a reflection of our democratic values," the State Department told the AP.

Asked about Wong's case, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said the issuing of visas is at the "autonomy and the discretion of any government." Lam added that the authorities do not comment on individual cases but will continue to facilitate the operation of overseas media based in Hong Kong "in a legitimate manner" according to the city's mini-constitution, known as the Basic Law.

The city's Foreign Correspondents' Club said it was "deeply concerned" over the denial of Wong's employment visa.

"We again call on the government to provide concrete assurances that applications for employment visas and visa extensions will be handled in a timely manner with clearly-stated requirements and procedures, and that the visa process for journalists will not be politicized or weaponized," the club said in a statement last week.

Wong is the latest in a string of journalists in Hong Kong to be denied visas.

In 2018, Hong Kong authorities refused to renew the work visa of Financial Times senior editor Victor Mallet after he chaired a lunchtime talk at the Foreign Correspondents' Club with the leader of a now-banned pro-Hong Kong independence party. Authorities did not say why Mallet's application was rejected.

In 2020, Hong Kong did not renew a work visa for Chris Buckley, a New York Times reporter who had been working in Hong Kong after being expelled from China, as well as for Irish journalist Aaron Mc Nicholas, who was then an incoming editor for the independent media outlet Hong Kong Free Press.

Associated Press reporter Zen Soo in Hong Kong contributed to this report.

Schools close as smog-laden India capital considers lockdown

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By SHEIKH SAALIQ and SHONAL GANGULY Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Schools were closed indefinitely and some coal-based power plants shut down as the smog-shrouded Indian capital and neighboring states invoked harsh measures Wednesday amid considerations of a lockdown in New Delhi to combat worsening air pollution.

India's top court is deliberating on the lockdown — a first of its kind in the country to stem pollution and not to control coronavirus infections.

It's not clear how far it would go, but the New Delhi government has already shown its willingness to impose an emergency weekend lockdown, similar to the one implemented during the pandemic. It's now waiting for the Supreme Court's decision, which could come as early as Nov. 24.

The government is discussing whether it would keep the industries open, and some experts say a lockdown would achieve very little in controlling pollution but rather would cause disruptions in the economy and impact the livelihoods of millions of people.

"This is not the solution that we are looking for, because this is hugely disruptive. And we also have to keep in mind that the economy is already under pressure, poor people are at risk," said Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director at the Center for Science and Environment, a research and advocacy organization in New Delhi.

Even then, soaring pollution levels in the capital prompted a federal environment ministry panel to issue strict guidelines on Tuesday night to stem the pollution and to show residents that the government was taking action to control an environmental crisis that has been plaguing the capital for years.

Besides the closure of schools, the Commission for Air Quality Management ordered a stop to construction activities until Nov. 21 and banned trucks carrying non-essential goods. The panel also directed the states to "encourage" work from home for half of the employees in all private offices.

Despite some improvement in New Delhi air over the past two days, readings of dangerous particles Wednesday were still as high as seven times the safe level, climbing above 300 micrograms per cubic meter in some parts of the city.

The World Health Organization designates the safe level for the tiny, poisonous particles at 25.

Forecasters warned air quality would worsen before the arrival of cold winds next week that will blow away the smog.

Earlier this month, air quality levels fell to the "severe" category in the capital and residents faced bouts of severe, multiday pollution. It prompted a stern warning last week from India's Supreme Court, which ordered state and federal governments to take "imminent and emergency" measures to tackle what it called a crisis.

Among the many Indian cities gasping for breath, New Delhi tops the list every year. The crisis deepens particularly in the winter when the burning of crop residues in neighboring states coincides with cooler temperatures that trap deadly smoke. That smoke travels to New Delhi, leading to a surge in pollution in the city of more than 20 million people.

Emissions from industries with no pollution control technology, pollutants from firecrackers linked to festivals, and construction dust also sharply increase in winter months.

Several studies have estimated that more than a million Indians die every year because of air pollution-related diseases.

The capital has often experimented with limiting the number of cars on the road to lower vehicular emissions, using large anti-smog guns and halting construction activity. But the steps have had little effect.

Residents say the government isn't doing enough.

Suresh Chand Jain, a New Delhi shop owner, said authorities should introduce stricter regulations aimed at limiting car use and controlling the burning of crop residues in neighboring states, emissions of which contribute hugely to the capital's bad air quality.

"Shutting down the city will not end the pollution," said Jain.

Experts say such emergency measures are not helpful in the long run.

"These are done only to ensure that you don't worsen the situation, that you shave off the peak. But it is not a silver bullet that is going to just clean the air immediately," said Roychowdhury.

Sudanese migrants in Israel fear deportation after coup

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — For nearly 10 years, Monim Haroon has only known one home: Israel. Like thousands of Sudanese migrants, he lives and works without legal status, fearing that a return to his native land would be a death sentence.

Israel's normalization of ties with Sudan, announced last year, had raised fears among the migrants that they would lose their migrant status and be forced to return. Now, weeks after a military coup derailed Sudan's transition to democracy, they dread being forcibly returned to a country under the full control of generals blamed for past atrocities.

"I am not against normalization," said Haroon. "But the normalization should be through the civilian Sudanese government, not the military powers that now control Sudan."

The asylum-seekers' plight points to one of the less savory aspects of the so-called Abraham Accords, a series of deals reached between Israel and four Arab countries last year. The U.S.-brokered agreements with Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco — widely hailed as a breakthrough in Mideast diplomacy — were struck with unelected Arab leaders with little tolerance for dissent who were richly rewarded by the Trump administration.

Sudan's military leaders, the driving force behind the agreement, secured the country's removal from the U.S. list of terrorism sponsors, unlocking vital international aid and commerce.

But then last month, Sudan's top military leader, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, disbanded the transitional government and ordered the arrest of civilian leaders, quashing hopes of a democratic transition after the 2019 overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

The coup, which has been condemned by the United States and other Western nations, has left Israel in a potentially awkward situation.

Israel has been silent on the coup and its aftermath, indicating it intends to maintain normalized ties. A report on the Israeli news site Walla that an Israeli delegation had secretly visited Sudan to meet with the coup leaders deepened migrant fears that they could soon be deported. The Israeli Foreign Ministry and Sudanese officials did not respond to requests for comment.

Sudanese and Eritrean migrants began arriving in Israel in 2005, with many of the Sudanese fleeing persecution in the western Darfur region and the country's south. Seeking safety and opportunity in Israel, they made often dangerous journeys across Egypt's rugged Sinai Peninsula.

Israel initially did little to stop the influx, but as more migrants arrived, the authorities began detaining thousands in remote desert prisons. And in 2013, Israel completed construction of a fenced barrier along its border with Egypt that mostly halted the migration.

The migrants' presence has sparked a backlash among many Israelis who associate them with the crime and poverty in south Tel Aviv, where most of them settled. Right-wing governments in recent years have made various attempts to expel them.

Ayelet Shaked, a prominent right-wing politician, has described Sudanese migrants as "infiltrators" and said they should be sent back since ties have been normalized. She is now the interior minister in Israel's new government, a position that oversees immigration policies.

"We are worried because she has always been against asylum-seekers," Haroon said.

The Interior Ministry said the status of Sudanese migrants has not changed following the coup but declined to answer further questions.

Israel has resolved only a small fraction of the thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum claims, deeming the vast majority to be economic migrants. Under international law, Israel cannot deport migrants back to countries where their life or basic freedoms are seriously threatened.

Sudan's incarcerated former president al-Bashir was charged with genocide by the International Criminal Court for mass killings that took place in Darfur during the 2000s. The region remains unstable, with deadly tribal clashes still common. Since the October coup, at least 23 Sudanese protesters have been killed in

confrontations between pro-democracy demonstrators and military forces.

"Although Israel does not send migrants back, consecutive decrees have purposefully made life unbearable for African refugees," said Sigal Rozen, public policy director at the Israeli Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, an advocacy group that assists the Africans.

Most of the estimated 28,000 Sudanese and Eritrean migrants work in menial jobs and struggle to make ends meet. Their numbers have dwindled by half since the 2000s, with most traveling onward to third countries, considering it unsafe to return home.

In 2012, Israel ordered the deportation of over 1,000 migrants back to South Sudan after it gained independence, arguing that it was safe for them to go home. Those who voluntarily returned were given a cash incentive of about \$1,000. The move was criticized by rights groups following South Sudan's descent into civil war in 2013.

Stuck in Israeli legislative limbo, most African migrants are barred from basic social rights such as sick pay and driving licenses and are also subject to financial penalties. Among the most controversial of these was the "Deposit Law," which limited asylum seekers to accessing only 80% of their salaries while they remained in Israel. The law, which returned the remainder of their salaries only if they left the country, was later reversed in 2020.

In April, Israel's Supreme Court ordered the Interior Ministry to resolve thousands of the unanswered Sudanese asylum claims by the end of the year or grant them temporary residency.

Sudan was noticeably absent from anniversary commemorations of the Abraham Accords earlier this fall. As Israel and the other three nations trumpeted high-level visits and opened embassies, there has been little on the Sudan front beyond a surprise meeting between Israeli and Sudanese officials in the UAE weeks before the coup. Sudan also said in September that it would seize the assets of companies linked to Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that rules Gaza.

Haim Koren, former Israeli ambassador to Egypt and South Sudan, attributed the delays to concerns by Sudanese officials over whether Israel's new government and the Biden administration would follow through on the promises of the normalization agreement. Both have expressed strong support for deepening and expanding the Abraham Accords.

"There remain areas that still require negotiation, but I expect full relations to be established," said Koren. "Maybe not today, but it will happen."

Blinken, in Kenya, seeks to cool regional crises

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

NAIROBI (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken opened his first official visit to Africa in Kenya with an appeal Wednesday for the preservation of democracy and inclusion in politically and ethnically fractured societies. His message was delivered amid worsening crises in neighboring Ethiopia and Sudan.

With insecurity wracking both of those countries, Blinken began his Africa tour in a nation with its own turbulent history of democracy. Kenya will face another test of stability in presidential elections next year, yet has emerged as a player in attempting to ease the Ethiopia conflict.

Before meeting President Uhuru Kenyatta and other senior Kenyan officials, Blinken spoke with civic leaders about the importance of combatting what he termed "democratic recession" around the world, including challenges in the United States that show "just how fragile our democracy can be."

"This is an important time," he told a small group of human rights, labor and anti-corruption advocates at a Nairobi hotel. "Around the world we've seen we've seen over the last decade or so what some have called 'democratic recession'."

"Even vibrant democracies like Kenya are experiencing these pressures, especially around election time," Blinken said, alluding to the presidential election set for August 2022. Combatting misinformation, political violence, voter intimidation and corruption is critical to halting the backsliding, he said.

Blinken is looking to boost thus-far unsuccessful U.S. diplomatic efforts to resolve the deepening conflicts in Ethiopia and in Sudan and to counter growing insurgencies elsewhere, like Somalia. His visit to Kenya,

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Nigeria and Senegal follows months of Biden administration attempts to ease both situations that have yet to bear fruit despite frequent lower-level interventions.

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

Instead, conflict in Ethiopia has escalated between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government and leaders in the northern Tigray region who once dominated the government.

The 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.

The situation "could easily slip over into genocide," said Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, a confidante of President Joe Biden who traveled to Ethiopia earlier this year to meet with Abiy. In an online event Tuesday, Coons urged progress in talks "before this becomes another Yugoslavia."

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis told the same event that Abiy has "obviously weaponized food and water," referring to Tigray, where more than a month has now passed since any humanitarian aid has entered.

Rebel Tigray forces are advancing on Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, amid increasingly dire warnings from the U.S. and others for foreigners to leave.

"Leave now," a senior State Department official warned Americans still in Ethiopia on Tuesday, adding there should be no expectation that the U.S. will be able to organize an evacuation.

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 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 Prize laureate, are possible.

Ethiopia has condemned the sanctions and in Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the African Union, and elsewhere, there is skepticism and hostility to U.S. pressure despite America being the country's largest aid donor.

As Feltman has shuttled between capitals, 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.

Coup leader Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan tightened his grip on power last week, reappointing himself as the chairman of a new Sovereign Council. The U.S. and other Western governments criticized the move because it did away with a joint military-civilian council already in place. The Sudanese generals responded by saying they would appoint a civilian government in the coming days.

Burhan moved against civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok just hours after Feltman had left Sudan's capital, Khartoum, on a mission intended to resolve escalating tensions between them. The U.S. has retaliated for the coup by suspending \$700 million in direct financial assistance. Further moves, including a slowdown or reversal of a multiyear rapprochement with the government, could also be in the works.

The top U.S. diplomat for Africa, Molly Phee, met Tuesday with Hamdok and Burhan. Burhan said the leaders of Sudan were willing to engage in dialogue with all political forces without conditions, according to a statement from the newly appointed Sovereign Council.

In addition to trying to cool tensions in the region, Blinken's trip is also aimed at raising Washington's profile as a player in regional and international initiatives to restore peace and promote democracy and human rights as it competes with China for influence in developing countries.

That push didn't get off to a great start in Africa. The coronavirus pandemic canceled a planned early summer visit by Blinken to the continent. The trip was rescheduled for August, only to be postponed again due to the turmoil in Afghanistan that preoccupied Washington.

Now, three months later, Blinken hopes to deliver the administration's "America is back" message to Africa. Despite its importance in the U.S.-China rivalry, Africa has often been overshadowed by more press-

ing issues in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and even Latin America despite massive U.S. contributions of money and vaccines to fight the pandemic and other infectious diseases.

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

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

Hundreds go missing in Burkina Faso amid extremist violence

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

FADA N'GOURMA, Burkina Faso (AP) — The last time Polenli Combarry spoke to her son on the phone she prayed for God to bless him. Shortly after, she called back but the line was dead.

Her 34-year-old son was returning a truck used to move the family's belongings from their village in eastern Burkina Faso after jihadis forced everyone to leave. He disappeared in March.

"We will keep searching ... I'm just praying to God to have him back," said Combarry, 53, sitting despondently in the eastern city of Fada N'Gourma where she now lives.

Islamic extremist violence is ravaging Burkina Faso, killing thousands and displacing more than 1 million people.

And people are going missing. Reports of missing relatives quadrupled from 104 to 407 between 2019 and 2020, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which defines a missing person as someone whose whereabouts cannot be accounted for and requires state intervention.

"With the conflict, you have more sudden movements of people, you have more incidents which can lead to separation and disappearance," said Marina Fakhouri, head of protection with the ICRC in Burkina Faso. "Certainly we are concerned also by the number of families who are coming to us directly to signal that they have a missing relative and need support."

People have previously gone missing in the West African nation due to migration, floods or shocks from climate change, but the magnitude has increased because of the violence, she said.

Tracing people during a conflict and in a context of mass displacement is challenging, can cause tensions within families and communities and psychological and physical distress. One month after her son disappeared, Combarry's husband died of a heart attack due to the shock, she said.

While some families blame the jihadis for the disappearances of their loved ones, many others point to the security forces as the main perpetrators. During a trip to Fada N'Gourma in October and speaking to people in the Sahel province by phone, three families, including Combarry's, told The Associated Press they suspect the army is responsible for their missing relatives.

The military has been accused by rights groups of extrajudicial killings and targeting people deemed to be associated with the jihadis. About 70% of families reporting people missing allege it is linked to the security forces, said Daouda Diallo, executive secretary for the Collective Against Impunity and Stigmatization of Communities, a civil society group.

There's been a reduction of reported cases affiliated with the military since the end of last year, which Diallo attributes to a report by Human Rights Watch that accused the army of being involved in mass killings, said Diallo. But now the abuses are being committed by volunteer fighters, civilians armed by the state, he said.

"It is sad to see that the violence has been subcontracted to armed civilians or militia in the field," Diallo said.

The ministry of defense did not respond to requests for comment.

Burkina Faso's increasing violence fuels impunity among the security forces and the abductions and killings highlight the absence of the rule of law, conflict analysts say.

"A significant proportion of the violence is attributed either to jihadist groups or 'unidentified armed men' making it easy to absolve certain parties of responsibility. It's easy to kill people or make them disappear, but much more difficult to protect them," said Heni Nsaibia, senior researcher at the Armed Conflict Loca-

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tion and Event Data Project.

Families searching for relatives they believe were taken by state agents say they don't know where to turn. Hamadou Diallo's nephew was allegedly arrested by the army outside Dori town in the Sahel province in 2019, he said. Unaware of any organization that could help other than the military, Diallo stopped searching.

"Nobody had the courage to approach (the army)," he said. "After one or two weeks, if you don't see a family member, that means (they're dead)."

Rights groups say the government is obligated to investigate all cases of disappearance, hold people responsible and use the judiciary and the national human rights commission, said Corinne Dufka, West Africa director for Human Rights Watch.

"Both institutions need to redouble their efforts on behalf of families whose loved ones went missing at the hands of state security forces or armed Islamists. They have a right to the truth and to justice," she said.

But while families with missing relatives search for answers, they live in limbo.

Fidele Ouali hasn't seen his 33-year-old brother since he disappeared a year and a half ago, he said. A farmer and father of five, Ouali said he was close to his brother, but as time passes, he's finding it harder to remember him.

"All my memories are wiped out," said Ouali. Clutching his brother's birth certificate which he carries everywhere, Ouali said he is torn between giving up completely and hanging onto the hope that one day he might see his brother again.

EXPLAINER: Europe lacks natural gas. Is it Russia's fault?

By DAVID McHUGH and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Europe is short of natural gas — dangerously short. A cold winter could mean a severe crunch, and utility bills are headed higher, burdening ordinary people and weighing on the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has promised to help fill European gas storages as energy prices soar — but supply shortages and political tensions have continued to rattle energy markets, keeping prices high. That's pinched businesses and forced them to pass along costs to customers already facing higher bills at home.

Moscow has been accused of using the volatile situation to push for a quick launch of a newly built Russian pipeline under the Baltic Sea: Nord Stream 2, which is awaiting German regulators' approval and has been criticized by Ukraine, the U.S. and others.

With Europe dependent on imported gas and Russia supplying 40% or more of those imports, Putin has leverage. He's said the new pipeline already is filled with gas and could help increase supplies "the day after" it's approved.

Here are important factors behind the gas crisis:

HOW DID EUROPE GET INTO THIS MESS?

Multiple reasons. One was a cold winter that drained gas reserves, which are used to generate electrical power and typically replenished in summer. That didn't happen this year.

Hot weather drained more gas than usual through demand for air conditioning. Less wind meant less renewable electricity, leading generators to reach for gas fuel. Limited supplies of liquid natural gas, an expensive option that can be delivered by ship instead of pipeline, were snapped up by customers in Asia.

On top of that, Europe for years has pushed for day-to-day spot pricing, instead of long-term contracts. Russian-controlled gas giant Gazprom has fulfilled those long-term contracts but hasn't pumped additional gas beyond that. Putin says customers who have those contracts pay much less for gas than other buyers.

Prices were seven times higher in October than they were at the beginning of the year and have eased to about four times higher lately.

HOW DOES THE NORD STREAM 2 PIPELINE PLAY INTO THIS?

Gazprom invested billions into building the 1,234-kilometer (765-mile) pipeline to Germany. It would al-

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low Russia to sell gas directly to a major customer and circumvent a pipeline through Ukraine, which has faced relentless pressure from Russia following Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea peninsula and its support for separatist rebels in Ukraine.

Even before the 2014 hostilities, Moscow had launched efforts to diversify gas supply routes to the European Union, saying the Ukrainian system is dilapidated and accusing the country of siphoning gas.

Ukraine stands to lose \$2 billion in annual transit fees. It and Poland, which sits on another bypassed pipeline, are fiercely opposed to Nord Stream 2. The United States and some other countries also have been strongly critical, warning the project would increase Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Monday that he hoped "other European countries may recognize that a choice is shortly coming, between mainlining ever more Russian hydrocarbons in giant new pipelines and sticking up for Ukraine and championing the cause of peace and stability."

Several analysts said they don't expect Nord Stream to come on line this winter — though there has been speculation Europe might allow gas to start flowing while regulators review it, perhaps in exchange for sending more gas through Ukraine.

HAS RUSSIA WITHHELD EXTRA GAS SUPPLIES?

Gazprom says no. The head of its export branch, Elena Burmistrova, said this month that "we aren't interested in either record low or record high gas prices," adding that "we want to see a well-balanced and predictable market."

At least some analysts agree.

Thomas O'Donnell, an energy and geopolitical analyst at the Hertie School graduate university in Berlin, said Russia had to fill its own gas reserves — just like the EU — after a cold winter.

While Putin relishes his role as the "gas godfather" and has exploited the shortage to press for approval of Nord Stream 2, "the more mundane reality is ... there simply has been no spare Russian gas to export until Russia finishes filling its own domestic storage for winter," wrote O'Donnell, who blogs at globalbarrel.com. "The godfather was bluffing."

O'Donnell said the only way for Russia to help make up the gas shortage this winter would be to pump more gas through Ukraine — assuming Gazprom is willing to do that.

Putin ordered Gazprom to send gas into European storage after Russia finished filling its reserves last week, but "it's limited," O'Donnell said. "He could be making a show of doing much more."

U.S. officials agree.

"Russia can and should provide additional supplies through Ukraine, which has sufficient pipeline capacity, and they don't need Nord Stream 2 for that," Karen Donfried, the top U.S. diplomat for Europe, said last week.

"And, if Russia fails to do that, obviously it's going to hurt European energy security and bring into question what Russia's motives are for withholding those supplies," she said.

By underlining Europe's dependence on Russian gas, Putin and Gazprom may hope for more lenient EU market regulation of Nord Stream 2, O'Donnell said.

The pipeline hit a delay Tuesday when German regulators suspended the approval process because of an issue with the pipeline operator's status under German law.

WHAT IMPACT COULD EUROPE'S GAS SHORTAGE HAVE?

Natural gas prices will sooner or later be reflected in home and business charges for electricity and gas.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, cited spiraling energy costs as a drag on the pandemic recovery because higher bills will take money away from consumer spending and business investment.

Europe's tight market is echoing in the U.S., helping raise prices there, though the U.S. market has not seen anywhere near Europe's price spike.

WHAT COULD IT MEAN FOR THE WINTER?

Analysts say it's hard to predict. Everyone hopes there isn't a big late-winter storm that would threaten dwindled supplies.

Analysts have speculated that electricity could be rationed — perhaps for some industrial customers at

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first — if things get really bad.

An energy apocalypse — a total loss of electricity or heat if gas reserves are drawn to zero and can't be substituted — would likely cause deaths among poor and vulnerable populations, like what happened in Texas this year when a winter storm knocked out power, leading to more than 200 deaths.

WHAT ABOUT BELARUS' THREAT TO CUT OFF GAS SUPPLIES?

Poland and other EU nations accused authoritarian Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko of using migrants trying to get to the EU through Belarus' border with Poland as pawns to avenge sanctions over his government's crackdown on protests.

With the EU threatening more crippling sanctions, Lukashenko threatened to cut off Russian gas supplies to Europe that pass through a pipeline in Belarus.

Although his statement further rattled the markets, it's unlikely Lukashenko would be able to fulfill his threat, given his political dependence on Russia and Moscow's desire to maintain the reputation of a reliable supplier.

Valery Karbalevich, an independent Belarusian political analyst, dismissed Lukashenko's threat as bluster. "The decisions are made in Moscow, not Minsk," he said. "Lukashenko wants to scare the EU and drag Putin into the confrontation, trying to provoke the Kremlin to take a more radical action."

Isachenkov reported from Moscow. Associated Press journalist Yuras Karmanau in Kyiv, Ukraine, contributed to this report.

US Northwest, Canada devastated by flood, 1 death reported

By LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — As many parts of western Washington began drying out Tuesday after a storm that dumped rain for days, waters in some areas continued rising, more people were urged to evacuate and crews worked to restore power and reopen roads.

Officials in the small city of Sumas, Washington, near the Canada border called the flood damage there devastating. Officials said on Facebook Tuesday that hundreds of people had been evacuated and estimated that 75% of homes had water damage.

The soaking reminded people of western Washington's record, severe flooding in November 1990 when two people died and there were more than 2,000 evacuations, officials said.

"These families and businesses need our prayers and support as we start the process of cleanup and rebuilding over the next few days," the Facebook post said.

Across the border, the body of a woman was recovered from a landslide northeast of Vancouver, British Columbia, near Lillooet that was triggered by record rainfall. Royal Canadian Mounted Police said at least two other people were reported missing.

Fast-rising water levels from a Sumas River in Washington state overwhelmed rescuers in Abbotsford, British Columbia, on Tuesday, where 1,100 homes were evacuated. Those residents joined thousands of others in the province who were forced from their homes by floods or landslides starting Sunday night.

Abbotsford Mayor Henry Braun said Tuesday that impassable highways were creating havoc as authorities tried to get people to evacuation sites.

"It breaks my heart to see what's going on in our city," he said.

Southwest of Sumas, Washington, a 59-year-old man from Everson identified by police Tuesday as Jose Garcia remained missing after his truck was swept into a flooded field and he had been clinging to a tree.

Crews partially reopened the West Coast's main north-south highway, Interstate 5, near Bellingham, Washington, following its complete closure overnight because of mudslide debris. The northbound lanes remained closed Tuesday evening as crews continued working.

Additionally, six railroad cars that had been sitting on tracks in a BNSF rail yard in Sumas derailed in the flooding Tuesday, said Lena Kent, BNSF general director of public affairs. Trains in that location and others in western Washington won't be running until water recedes and tracks are inspected and repaired if

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necessary, she said.

Canada's two largest railways expect it will take several days to clear track outages in southern British Columbia that are hindering the movement of goods to the port in Vancouver.

In the northern Washington city of Ferndale, officials on Tuesday urged people in homes and businesses to evacuate in an area near the rising Nooksack River. Bystanders near the town's main street rescued a man Tuesday who mistakenly drove into floodwaters. The half-dozen people waded into waters up to their chests and pushed the floating car to drier ground.

The rains were caused by an atmospheric river — a huge plume of moisture extending over the Pacific and into Washington and Oregon.

It was the second major widespread flood event in the northwest part of Washington state in less than two years, and climate change is fueling more powerful and frequent severe weather, Whatcom County officials told the Bellingham Herald.

About 5.57 inches of rain fell at Bellingham International Airport from Saturday through Monday, Nov. 15. The normal monthly rain total is 5.2 inches for November, according to National Weather Service data.

At the height of the storm, more than 158,000 electrical customers in western Washington on Monday had no power as wind speeds reached 60 mph (96 kph), including one gust of 58 mph (93 kph) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Schools in and around the city of Bellingham were closed Tuesday for the second day in a row.

West of Seattle on the Olympic Peninsula, the U.S. Coast Guard helped local authorities evacuate about 10 people Monday near the town of Forks.

More than 31,000 Washington state electrical customers remained without power on Tuesday.

The National Weather Service had issued flood warnings for several rivers around western Washington. There was good news in that south of Bellingham, the Skagit River at Mount Vernon crested at a level below that of a flood wall constructed in 2016 to hold back rushing waters, The Seattle Times reported.

Up the Skagit River from Mount Vernon in the town of Hamilton, floodwaters that surrounded homes were slowly receding Tuesday evening, Q13-TV reported. Dozens of people, including Bert Kerns, escaped to higher grounds at the Hamilton First Baptist Church on Sunday. He was among those who hadn't been able to get to his house yet.

"Rough. Kind of like a nightmare," said Kerns, who has lived in Hamilton since 1980.

Gov. Jay Inslee on Monday declared a severe weather state of emergency in 14 counties.

Coming off climate talks, US to hold huge crude sale in Gulf

By MATTHEW BROWN and JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The U.S. Interior Department on Wednesday will auction vast oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Mexico estimated to hold up to 1.1 billion barrels of crude, the first such sale under President Joe Biden and a harbinger of the challenges he faces to reach climate goals that depend on deep cuts in fossil fuel emissions.

The livestreamed sale invited energy companies to bid on drilling leases across some 136,000 square miles (352,000 square kilometers) — about twice the area of Florida.

It will take years to develop the leases before companies start pumping crude. That means they could keep producing long past 2030, when scientists say the world needs to be well on the way to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to avoid catastrophic climate change.

The auction comes after a federal judge in a lawsuit brought by Republican states rejected a suspension of fossil fuel sales that Biden imposed when he took office.

The Democrat campaigned on promises to curb fossil fuels from public lands and waters, which including coal account for about a quarter of U.S. carbon emissions, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Yet even as he's tried to cajole other world leaders into strengthening international efforts against global warming, Wednesday's sale illustrates Biden's difficulties gaining ground on climate issues at home.

The administration last week proposed another round of oil and gas lease sales in 2022, in Montana,

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Wyoming, Colorado and other western states. Interior Department officials proceeded despite concluding that burning the fuels could lead to billions of dollars in potential future climate damages.

"We had Trump's unconstrained approach to oil and gas on federal lands and Biden's early attempt to pause drilling. Now it looks like the Biden administration is trying to find a new policy," said researcher Robert Johnston with Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

"They're being very cautious about undermining their fragile momentum" on climate issues, he added.

The energy bureau said in pre-sale documents released Tuesday that it received bids on 307 tracts totaling nearly 2,700 square miles (6,950 square kilometers). That's the largest total for a single sale since Gulf-wide bidding resumed in 2017. The seven prior sales generated almost \$1 billion in total revenue.

Environmental reviews of the latest sale — conducted under former President Donald Trump and affirmed under Biden — reached an unlikely conclusion: Extracting and burning the fuel would result in fewer greenhouse gases than leaving it.

Similar claims in two other cases, in Alaska, were rejected by federal courts after challenges from environmentalists. Climate scientist Peter Erickson's work was cited by judges in one of the cases, and he said the Interior Department's analysis had a glaring omission: It excluded greenhouse gas increases in foreign countries that result from having more Gulf oil enter the market.

"The math is extremely simple on this kind of stuff," said Erickson, a senior scientist with the Stockholm Environment Institute, a nonprofit research group. "If new leases expand the global oil supply, that has a proportional effect on emissions from burning oil. Therefore, giving out these leases in the Gulf of Mexico would be increasing global emissions."

The Interior Department's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management recently changed its emissions modeling methods, citing Erickson's work. Officials said it was too late to use that approach for Wednesday's auction.

For upcoming sales, spokesperson Melissa Schwartz said Interior is conducting a more comprehensive emission review than any prior administration. It's also appealing the court order that forced their resumption.

Erik Milito, president of the National Ocean Industries Association said he was uncertain that using the new approach would have changed the government's conclusions, since drilling for oil in other parts of the world is less efficient and hauling imports also adds to carbon costs.

The continued use of the old analysis rankles drilling opponents who say Biden isn't following through on his climate pledges.

"We're talking about transitioning away from a fossil fuel economy and they are selling a giant carbon bomb of a lease sale," said attorney Drew Caputo with Earthjustice, which has a pending federal lawsuit against the Gulf sale.

Some Democrats also objected to the sale. House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raúl Grijalva of Arizona said Biden "needs to do better" after promising to lead on climate issues but continuing a fossil fuel program with a long history of mismanagement.

The Gulf of Mexico accounts for about 15% of total U.S. crude production and 5% of its natural gas.

Industry analysts had predicted some heightened interest in Wednesday's sale since oil prices rose sharply over the past year. It's also a chance for companies to secure drilling rights before the administration or Congress can increase drilling fees and royalty rates, said analyst Justin Rostant with industry consulting firm Wood Mackenzie.

"Different companies have different approaches and different strategies," Rostant said. "Some could think this might be the year to go big."

Brown reported from Billings, Montana.

Follow Matthew Brown on Twitter: @MatthewBrownAP

After record low, monarch butterflies return to California

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By HAVEN DALEY and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press
PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (AP) — There is a ray of hope for the vanishing orange-and-black Western monarch butterflies.

The number wintering along California's central coast is bouncing back after the population, whose presence is often a good indicator of ecosystem health, reached an all-time low last year. Experts pin their decline on climate change, habitat destruction and lack of food due to drought.

An annual winter count last year by the Xerces Society recorded fewer than 2,000 butterflies, a massive decline from the tens of thousands tallied in recent years and the millions that clustered in trees from Northern California's Mendocino County to Baja California, Mexico in the south in the 1980s. Now, their roosting sites are concentrated mostly on California's central coast.

This year's official count started Saturday and will last three weeks but already an unofficial count by researchers and volunteers shows there are over 50,000 monarchs at overwintering sites, said Sarina Jepsen, Director of Endangered Species at Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

"This is certainly not a recovery but we're really optimistic and just really glad that there are monarchs here and that gives us a bit of time to work toward recovery of the Western monarch migration," Jepsen said.

Western monarch butterflies head south from the Pacific Northwest to California each winter, returning to the same places and even the same trees, where they cluster to keep warm. The monarchs generally arrive in California at the beginning of November and spread across the country once warmer weather arrives in March.

Monarchs from across the West migrate annually to about 100 wintering sites dotting central California's Pacific coast. One of the best-known wintering places is the Monarch Grove Sanctuary, a city-owned site in the coastal city of Pacific Grove, where last year no monarch butterflies showed up.

The city 70 miles (112 kilometers) south of San Francisco has worked for years to help the declining population of monarch. Known as "Butterfly Town, USA," the city celebrates the orange and black butterfly with a parade every October. Messing with a monarch is a crime that carries a \$1,000 fine.

"I don't recall having such a bad year before and I thought they were done. They were gone. They're not going to ever come back and sure enough, this year, boom, they landed," said Moe Ammar, president of Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce.

This year a preliminary count showed more than 13,000 monarchs have arrived at the site in Monterey County, clustering together on pine, cypress and eucalyptus trees and sparking hope among the grove's volunteers and visitors that the struggling insects can bounce back.

Scientists don't know why the population increased this year but Jepsen said it is likely a combination of factors, including better conditions on their breeding grounds.

"Climatic factors could have influenced the population. We could have gotten an influx of monarchs from the eastern U.S., which occasionally can happen, but it's not known for sure why the population is what it is this year," she said.

Eastern monarch butterflies travel from southern Canada and the northeastern United States across thousands of miles to spend the winter in central Mexico. Scientists estimate the monarch population in the eastern U.S. has fallen about 80% since the mid-1990s, but the drop-off in the Western U.S. has been even steeper.

The Western monarch butterfly population has declined by more than 99% from the millions that overwintered in California in the 1980s because of the destruction of their milkweed habitat along their migratory route as housing expands into their territory and use of pesticides and herbicides increases.

Researchers also have noted the effect of climate change. Along with farming, climate change is one of the main drivers of the monarch's threatened extinction, disrupting an annual 3,000-mile (4,828-kilometer) migration synched to springtime and the blossoming of wildflowers.

"California has been in a drought for several years now, and they need nectar sources in order to be able to fill their bellies and be active and survive," said Stephanie Turcotte Edenholm, a Pacific Grove Natural

History Museum docent who offers guided tours of the sanctuary. "If we don't have nectar sources and we don't have the water that's providing that, then that is an issue."

Monarch butterflies lack state and federal legal protection to keep their habitat from being destroyed or degraded. Last year, they were denied federal protection but the insects are now among the candidates for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Rodriguez reported from San Francisco.

Q&A: Binance CEO on bubbles, meme coins and crypto's swings

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The CEO of Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, doesn't try to explain why some cryptocurrencies that started purely as a joke have surged so much in price.

He also doesn't want to say if the exuberance for meme coins like Dogecoin is an indication of a dangerous bubble. But Changpeng Zhao, who goes by "CZ," does say that it shows the power of decentralization, which has underpinned the huge growth for crypto.

Led by Bitcoin, cryptocurrencies have swelled in value to more than \$2.6 trillion, putting them on par with the world's most valuable stock, Microsoft. Such fast growth is drawing in more investors, as well as gaining the attention of regulators around the world.

Zhao spoke with The Associated Press after his company issued a call for more regulation of crypto markets around the world. Besides bubbles and meme coins, he talked about which cryptocurrencies he owns and his promise to donate most of his wealth. This conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What's your takeaway when cryptos that started as a joke are soaring in value?

Zhao: To be honest, I don't get Dogecoin. But this shows the power of decentralization. What I think may or may not matter. If a large enough number of people in the community values it because it's cute, because they like the meme, then it has value.

And Dogecoin has lasted so many years. It's gone up and down, up and down, but it's lasted. And now we have Shiba, which is also a meme coin. We have a lot more meme coins. But guess what? For something to be valuable, you only need one other person to want to buy it.

For something to have liquidity, you need a large number of people to want to buy it or sell it. Once you have liquidity, a thing has value, according to the neutral market. So it's not up to me to judge it.

As a platform, we want to provide a marketplace for all the relatively valuable cryptocurrencies in the world.

Q: When people buy things only because the next person will buy it, isn't that a sign of a bubble?

Zhao: To some extent, yes. But it's not a black and white thing.

There's no clear definition of what a bubble is. If an asset's price drops more than 80%? Bitcoin dropped more than that and then recovered. Amazon dropped (more than 90% from the start of 2000 into September 2001), and now they are one of the most valuable companies in the world. Did it go through a bubble? According to most laymen's definition, it probably did. For Jeff Bezos, he would probably disagree.

What's important is there are high fluctuations. As long as people understand what they're holding, what the risks are, then that's OK.

Q: Why are crypto prices so volatile, shooting up and down so fast?

Zhao: For the mass consumers, the first thing I would want them to understand is that everything is volatile.

You have to park your value somewhere. It could be a house, it could be stock, it could be U.S. dollars. But all of those things fluctuate against something else.

Crypto has high volatility because it's a relatively smaller market. It's much, much smaller than traditional assets. The larger the market value one's asset is, the smaller the volatility. That's just math.

Let's say you look at a small coin with a total market value of \$10 million. If somebody tried to use \$1 million to buy the coin, the price is going to go up much more than 10% because not everybody is selling

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that coin. If you look at a \$100 trillion asset market, putting in \$1 million is not going to move the price at all

If you have to pay rent in U.S. dollars next month, then you need to hold some U.S. dollars. You can't just put that at risk in highly volatile assets. But the money that you can set aside for two years, five years, you can move that money into highly volatile assets.

Q: Is that volatility the biggest barrier keeping people out of cryptos today?

Zhao: Today, in the crypto space, there are a lot of active traders. There's a large number of people who are in this industry for investment gains or speculative trading, and those guys actually prefer volatility.

I actually think the biggest factor blocking or hindering the growth of crypto is ease of use. Today it's quite difficult to hold your cryptocurrency in a secure way, meaning that if your computer breaks or if your computer gets a virus, your crypto is still safe. If you lose your computer, or if you lose your crypto wallet device, you can still get it back. And that means you have to have backups and the backup needs to be secured. They cannot be stolen. And the last part that many people don't think about is: What happens if you go away? People die. If you suddenly become unavailable, can your kids get it? How do they get it? Are there ways to guarantee they will get it and that they'll get it only after you die?

There aren't very good tools to handle all of those aspects. Centralized exchanges offer one solution: We hold custody of people's coins. (But) how to securely hold your tokens is a fundamental limitation factor. We have not provided easy-enough-to-use tools that are also secure enough today. But I think as the industry evolves, things will get better.

Q: How do you personally invest your money?

Zhao: I actually don't do much investment. I'm one of those really bad examples to follow for most other people.

I bought some Bitcoins in 2014. I spent a little bit of it over time, but I held onto most of it. I did not sell.

The other asset I hold, which is the majority of my net worth, is BNB (Binance coin). Personally, I don't hold any other coins. I am a decent sized shareholder in Binance, if we ever want to realize the equity value someday.

I personally do not own equity in any other project, crypto or not crypto. I do this very deliberately because I don't want any potential conflicts of interest. So I'm very, very not diversified, which I actually do not recommend to most people.

But for me, I can take the risk. As long as I don't do anything unethical — even if something happens to Binance, and we don't make it, and if I say I'm going to do another project, I believe my credibility is there for other people to invest a lot of money.

Personally, I'm financially free. I don't need a lot of money, and I can maintain my lifestyle in this way. I do intend to give away most of my wealth, like many wealthy entrepreneurs or founders did from Rockefeller until today. I do intend to give away 90, 95 or 99% of my wealth.

Q: Crypto seems so divisive, where people are either fervent believers or think it's worthless. Will it always be this all-or-nothing thing?

Zhao: For the last few years, it's this bipolar thing. There's a small group of guys who are diehard crypto fans, and then there's a majority of people who don't even know what crypto is. But as more and more people get into crypto, we see that middle ground.

I talk to a lot of athletes who are now looking at NFTs (or non-fungible tokens, which use the technology underpinning crypto to create unique digital collectibles). They now realize the value of this. They may not be a diehard crypto fan, but they also are not super skeptical about crypto anymore.

Even governors of central banks, when I talked to them a year ago, they were very skeptical. But now when I talk to them, they say, "We need this to grow our economy." But they still have concerns about certain aspects of crypto.

Amid crypto's Wild West, Binance says a sheriff is needed

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The cryptocurrency market gets likened to the Wild West by critics, and now a key

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player is asking for sheriffs to come to town.

Binance, the world's largest exchange for trading Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, says it's time for global regulators to establish rules for crypto markets. It released a list of "10 fundamental rights for crypto users" this week that it wants to guide discussions with regulators, policymakers and other exchanges.

The company acknowledges that crypto platforms have an obligation to protect users and to implement processes to prevent financial crimes, along with the responsibility to work with regulators and policymakers to set standards to keep users safe.

The call for regulation might seem strange for an industry whose popularity exploded in some part precisely because it sought to operate outside the heavy hand of governments and other authorities. But Binance CEO Changpeng Zhao, who goes by "CZ," says more regulation for the industry is inevitable, and this allows his company to play a role in the discussions. It may also help draw in people who are still hesitant to get into crypto.

"This year, most of the regulators around the world are looking at crypto intently, and many of them are communicating with us," Zhao said. "So we feel this is the right time" to issue a call for a global framework.

"We feel that it is important for industry players to have a seat at the table," he said. "And we also feel that some regulations, if they're made in a vacuum, may not have practical considerations in how they are applied, and they don't get applied very well."

Regulatory scrutiny of cryptocurrencies has intensified as they've grown more mainstream. Big businesses, professional investors and even the government of El Salvador are all buying in, even if critics struggle to see the value of digital currencies created by non-governments. They're broadening crypto's base beyond its initial core of fanatics and sent Bitcoin last week to a record high of nearly \$68,991, more than doubling in 2021.

Binance's call for regulation reminds some on Wall Street of the playbook that companies have followed in other disruptive industries after becoming big winners.

"They're doing what Uber and Lyft did," said Gil Luria, technology strategist at D.A. Davidson. "Build a business ahead of regulations. When it gets to a certain scale, acknowledge that regulation will be helpful and then help shape it."

Zhao said that Binance welcomes regulations "for many reasons. One of those minor reasons is a selfish reason: that in a regulated industry, the few larger players will remain. The smaller players do get cut off, which is unfortunate for those guys."

The move could also prove to be wise if Binance's U.S. business ultimately tries to sell stock on a U.S. exchange, something Zhao hopes will happen in the next few years. A competitor, Coinbase, has already fetched a nearly \$74 billion market value on Wall Street following its initial public offering this spring.

Such opportunities for wealth have drawn more new investors into crypto, as well as the eyes of regulators.

"Right now, we just don't have enough investor protection in crypto," Gary Gensler, chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, said in a speech this summer while calling it the "Wild West."

"This asset class is rife with fraud, scams, and abuse in certain applications," he said. "There's a great deal of hype and spin about how crypto assets work. In many cases, investors aren't able to get rigorous, balanced, and complete information."

Analysts said they expect Binance to agree to report transactions to U.S. regulators looking for movements involved in the financing of terrorism, among other things. One of Binance's "fundamental rights" also calls for strict regulations on marketplaces that offer "derivatives and leveraged instruments," which can be lucrative but also very risky trades for investors.

Most regulators around the world are focusing on "know your customer" rules, where financial companies try to verify the identity of who's using their services, Zhao said. They're also keyed in on protections for consumers.

But even there, "different countries do have different interpretations and different meanings for these very simple words," Zhao said. In the U.S., for example, the emphasis for anti-money laundering is on blocking financing for terrorism, while Chinese regulators are looking more for people moving money out

of the country.

Campbell Harvey, a finance professor at Duke University who recently wrote a book titled "DeFi and the Future of Finance," said regulators are playing catch-up with complicated and fast-moving technologies, while trying to find a balance between protecting investors and not squashing innovation or driving it to other countries.

The stakes are rising to get it right. The uncertainty now around what regulation will eventually look like is keeping some big institutional investors like pension funds out of crypto. And that's where the opportunity for even bigger money for the industry lies.

Given all the complexities, Harvey said the best solution may be for the U.S. government to create a new agency to oversee cryptocurrencies and the ecosystem around them, rather than relying on a combination of regulatory bodies.

"It's complex, and it just doesn't fit many of the usual regulatory models," he said.

Zhao, who said the only cryptocurrencies he owns are Bitcoin and Binance coin, said some parts of the cryptocurrency world look more like securities, while others look more like commodities or currencies. And the ecosystem is growing by the day as people can create new tokens with just a few clicks of a mouse and keyboard.

He likened it to the early days of the internet, when people were trying to figure out what kind of media it was. Is it radio? TV? Something else?

"People may have a tendency to view crypto as a single asset, which I think is a little bit misleading," he said. "Crypto is a fundamental technology that can improve on many of the traditional asset types."

Inmate stabbed in eyeball in latest federal prison violence

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An inmate at the largest federal prison in the U.S. was stabbed in the eyeball by a fellow prisoner this month, the latest gruesome example of violence in a prison system plagued by chronic unrest, understaffing, corruption and abuse.

The 27-year-old inmate was attacked from behind at FCI Fort Dix, a low-security prison in Burlington County, New Jersey, that is run by the same warden who was in charge of a Manhattan federal jail when financier Jeffrey Epstein killed himself, three people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The inmate, whom the AP is not identifying, has remained hospitalized since the Nov. 5 attack, they said. He is expected to survive. The people familiar with the matter were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and insisted on anonymity.

The stabbing is just the latest example of serious violence within the beleaguered federal Bureau of Prisons. The agency has struggled through a multitude of crises in recent years, including widespread staffing shortages, serious employee misconduct, a series of escapes and deaths.

On Tuesday, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin, D-Ill., called for Bureau of Prisons Director Michael Carvajal to be fired after an AP investigation found rampant criminal activity among employees as agency officials overlooked wrongdoing.

The warden at Fort Dix, Lamine N'Diaye, was previously the warden at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, the now-closed federal lockup in Manhattan. He was removed from that position after Epstein killed himself at the jail in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

Prosecutors say the guards who were supposed to be monitoring Epstein were instead sleeping and browsing the internet. The Bureau of Prisons closed the jail in October for much-needed repairs after years of decay, though it may never reopen.

The Bureau of Prisons named N'Diaye as warden at Fort Dix in February despite an ongoing federal investigation into lapses that led to Epstein's death and in direct contradiction of a public pronouncement that the agency would delay any move until the inquiry was finished.

The bureau attempted to place N'Diaye in the Fort Dix job a year earlier, but the move was stopped by then-Attorney General William Barr after the AP reported the transfer.

The Justice Department's inspector general has yet to complete the investigation.

FCI Fort Dix, located on the grounds of the joint military base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, is the largest single federal prison by population, with just under 3,000 inmates. An adjacent prison camp has 231 minimum-security inmates.

The facility was hit hard by COVID-19, with two inmates dying of the disease and more than 1,600 inmates and 100 staff members testing positive and recovering.

The prison made headlines in 2019 when an inmate, a former inmate and two other people were arrested for using a drone to smuggle in contraband including cellphones, tobacco, weight-loss supplements and eyeglasses.

The same year, in a separate case, a Fort Dix correctional officer pleaded guilty to pocketing bribes to smuggle in contraband.

On Twitter, follow Michael Balsamo at twitter.com/mikebalsamo1 and Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mike-sisak and send confidential tips by visiting <https://www.ap.org/tips>

At least 1 dead from mudslides in Canada after heavy rains

By JIM MORRIS and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — The body of a woman was recovered from one of the mudslides caused by extremely heavy rainfall in the Pacific coast Canadian province of British Columbia, authorities said Tuesday.

Police said search and rescue personnel were continuing to look for other possible victims from Monday's slides.

David MacKenzie, the Pemberton District Search and Rescue manager, said his team came across seven vehicles at the slide site on Highway 99 near the town of Lillooet and police were trying to determine if there were any other bodies.

"It is a significant amount of debris. It makes it very difficult for our search crews. The mud is up to their waist. I can't recall our team being involved in anything like this in the past," he said.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Staff Sgt. Janelle Shoihet said the total number of people and vehicles unaccounted for had not yet been confirmed. She said investigators had received reports of two other people who were missing but added that other motorists might have been buried in the slide.

Jonathan Gormick, spokesman for the Vancouver Heavy Urban Search and Rescue Team, said that while the roadway had been cleared of potentially trapped vehicles or people, they would now be searching the slide's debris field.

About 300 people spent Sunday night in their vehicles and were helicoptered to safety Monday.

Elsewhere in the province, Abbotsford Mayor Henry Braun said impassable highways were creating havoc in his city as police and firefighters tried to get people to evacuation centers.

"It breaks my heart to see what's going on in our city," Braun said.

Sunny skies followed two days of torrential storms that dumped the typical amount of rain that the city gets in all of November, but the mayor said the water was still rising and Highway 1 would be cut shut down for some time.

Braun said he was worried about getting enough information from officials in Washington state about water levels that have risen dramatically from the overflowing Nooksack River and over the Sumas dike.

"When are we going to crest? When is it going to level off here? It's like a full cup of coffee. Once it's full, it keeps flowing over the sides," he said.

Abbotsford Police Chief Mike Serr said officers removed some people from the roofs of cars awash in flood waters Monday night but left some motorists in semi-trucks because they were higher above the water.

"I was out there last night. You could not see where the side of the road was. We had one member put on a life-jacket and swim out towards a car that was overturned to bring someone back. And that was on a regular basis for about two hours," Serr said.

About 1,100 homes had been evacuated in Abbotsford, adding to others in various parts of British Columbia, including in Merritt, where the entire town of 7,000 people was forced to leave after the sanitation

system failed.

Multiple roadways have been closed because of flooding or landslides, including sections of Highway 1A, Highway 3, Highway 5, Highway 11, Highway 12 and Highway 91.

British Columbia Public Safety Minister Mike Farnworth said provincial Cabinet ministers would meet Wednesday to consider declaring a provincewide state of emergency. He said supplies like food, cots and blankets were being delivered to the town of Hope, which is supporting nearly 1,100 people forced from their homes.

"I'm extremely concerned about the situation in British Columbia right now and what hundreds of families are going through, thousands are people are affected across the province by these extreme weather events," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

Associated Press writer Jim Morris reported this story in Vancouver and AP writer Rob Gillies contributed from Toronto.

Rittenhouse jurors to return for Day 2 of deliberations

By MICHAEL TARM, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Jurors weighing charges against Kyle Rittenhouse were to return Wednesday for a second day of deliberations in his murder trial, after they failed to reach a swift verdict on whether he was the instigator in a night of bloodshed in Kenosha or a concerned citizen who came under attack while trying to protect property.

The jury of 12 deliberated for a full day Tuesday without reaching a decision. Several appeared tired as they walked into the courtroom Tuesday evening and indicated with a show of hands that they were ready to go home.

The case went to the anonymous jury after Judge Bruce Schroeder, in an unusual move, allowed Rittenhouse himself to play a minor role in selecting the final panel of 12 who would decide his fate. Rittenhouse reached into a raffle drum and drew numbered slips that determined which of the 18 jurors who sat through the case would deliberate and which ones would be dismissed as alternates.

That task is usually performed by a court clerk, not the defendant. Schroeder said he has been having defendants do it for "I'm going to say 20 years, at least."

Rittenhouse, 18, faces life in prison if convicted as charged for using an AR-style semi-automatic rifle to kill two men and wound a third during a night of protests against racial injustice in Kenosha in the summer of 2020. The former police youth cadet is white, as were those he shot.

Rittenhouse testified he acted in self-defense, while prosecutors argued he provoked the violence. The case has become a flashpoint in the U.S. debate over guns, racial-justice protests, vigilantism and law and order.

The jury appeared to be overwhelmingly white. Prospective jurors were not asked to identify their race during the selection process, and the court did not provide a racial breakdown.

As the jury deliberated, dozens of protesters — some for Rittenhouse, some against — stood outside the courthouse. Some talked quietly with those on the other side, while others shouted insults. One woman could be heard repeatedly calling some Rittenhouse supporters "white supremacists."

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, who faced criticism over his response to the Kenosha protests in 2020, urged calm as the jury deliberated. He announced last week that 500 members of the National Guard would stand ready for duty in Kenosha if needed.

"Regardless of the outcome in this case, I urge peace in Kenosha and across our state," Evers tweeted. He added: "I ask all those who choose to assemble and exercise their First Amendment rights in every community to do so safely and peacefully."

The large protests that some had anticipated did not materialize during the trial's testimony phase. On most days, only a few demonstrators gathered on the courthouse steps, and the high fence that protected the building during last year's unrest is gone.

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Rittenhouse was 17 when he went to Kenosha from his home in Antioch, Illinois, in what he said was an effort to protect property from rioters in the days after a Black man, Jacob Blake, was shot by a white Kenosha police officer.

In a fast-moving series of clashes in the streets, Rittenhouse shot and killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, now 28.

During closing arguments Monday, prosecutor Thomas Binger said that Rittenhouse was a “wannabe soldier” who set the deadly chain of events in motion by bringing a rifle to a protest and pointing it at protesters just before he was chased.

But Rittenhouse lawyer Mark Richards countered that Rittenhouse was ambushed by a “crazy person” — Rosenbaum.

Rittenhouse testified that Rosenbaum chased him down and made a grab for his rifle, causing him to fear the weapon was going to be used against him. His account of Rosenbaum’s behavior was largely corroborated by video and some of the prosecution’s own witnesses.

As for Huber, he was gunned down after he was seen on video hitting Rittenhouse with a skateboard. And Grosskreutz admitted he had his own gun pointed at Rittenhouse when he was shot.

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

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>

Filipino journalist reflects on Nobel Prize win at Harvard

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — One month since she was named the first Filipino to win the Nobel Peace Prize, journalist Maria Ressa says much still remains uncertain about her life.

Will her battle against a libel suit in the Philippines lead to jail time? Will she be able to travel to Norway to accept her prestigious award next month? When is the next time she’ll be able to see her family?

“You know the painting *The Scream*?” Ressa said Tuesday evening, holding her hands to her face and mock-bellowing into the existential void like the famed Edvard Munch work. “I wake up every day like that.”

“I don’t know where it will lead,” she continued during an interview at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, shortly before delivering the university’s annual Salant Lecture on Freedom of the Press. “But I know that if we keep doing our task, staying on mission, holding the line, that there’s a better chance that our democracy not only survives, but that I also stay out of jail. Because I’ve done nothing wrong except be a journalist, and that is the price we have to pay. I wish it wasn’t me, but it is.”

The 58-year-old co-founder of Rappler, a Manila-based news website, said it wasn’t lost on her that her Harvard speech came just hours after American journalist Danny Fenster’s emotional reunion with family in New York following his negotiated release from military-ruled Myanmar, where he’d spent six months in jail for his work.

“It shows how it crumbles fast. The ground we’re on is quicksand,” she said. “Power can do what it wants.”

Ressa worries about what next year’s elections in the Philippines, U.S. and elsewhere will bring.

She assailed American social media companies for failing to act as gatekeepers as misinformation continues to proliferate virtually unchecked across their platforms, allowing repressive regimes like those in Myanmar and elsewhere to thrive and threaten democratic institutions.

“If you don’t have facts, you can’t have truth. You can’t have trust. You don’t have a shared reality,” she said. “So how do we solve these existential problems — the rise of fascism, coronavirus, climate change — if we don’t agree on the facts? This is fundamental.”

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Ressa, who along with co-winner and Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov became the first working journalists in more than 80 years to win the Nobel Peace Prize, is wrapping up a monthlong stint as a visiting fellow at Harvard.

She says she's looking forward to visiting her parents in Florida for Thanksgiving next week before heading back to the Philippines. It marks the first time since she's been out of the country since being convicted last summer of libel and sentenced to jail in a decision seen as a major blow to press freedom globally.

Ressa has remained free on bail while that case is on appeal, but faces up to six years in prison, not to mention a series of other active legal cases against her.

Before this month's trip, she had a number of other travel requests denied by Philippine courts, including one she says was to visit her ailing mother. Ressa will also have to get court approval to attend the Nobel Prize award ceremony in Oslo, Norway, on Dec. 10.

"It's like death by a thousand cuts," said Ressa, who was born in Manila but raised mostly in the U.S., before moving back to the Philippines and launching a journalism career. "You don't know how free you are until you begin to lose your freedom, or you have to ask people for your freedoms."

At Harvard, Ressa has been meeting with faculty and students, giving talks and doing research on a forthcoming book.

She co-founded Rappler in 2012, and the website quickly gained notoriety for its reporting on President Rodrigo Duterte's bloody, yearslong crackdown on illegal drugs. The news organization has also documented how social media is being used to spread fake news, harass opponents and manipulate public discourse.

During Tuesday's lecture, which Ressa gave remotely from her hotel room due to a potential COVID-19 exposure related to the campus event, she also reflected on the toll on her personal life.

In the Philippines, she'd taken to wearing a bulletproof vest at times in public, and pleaded with Facebook to delete violent posts against her as death threats mounted.

For female journalists in particular, Ressa said, attacks on social media quickly become menacing. Among roughly half a million online attacks she's received, some 60% were against her credibility while 40% were more personal and "meant to tear down my spirit," she said.

"There are moments when you go, 'Why?' Why does it demand this much?" Ressa said. "But the cost of not doing the right thing is far greater than the consequences for one person."

Cash wins 2nd straight Manager of the Year; Kapler NL winner

By NOAH TRISTER AP Baseball Writer

For Kevin Cash, being mentioned in the same sentence with Bobby Cox is an honor.

"That's wrong. I shouldn't be," Cash said. "But saying that, it's incredibly humbling. When you think about greats in our game, Bobby Cox is right there."

Cash has now accomplished something only Cox achieved previously — back-to-back Manager of the Year awards. Cash won the American League honor Tuesday night. The Tampa Bay skipper was joined by San Francisco's Gabe Kapler, who won the National League award.

Cox took the NL honor two years in a row with Atlanta in 2004-05 during his Hall of Fame career.

That's the feat Cash has now matched. He led the low-payroll Rays to a second consecutive AL East crown this season. Tampa Bay (100-62) finished with the AL's best record before losing to Boston in the Division Series.

The Rays made it to the World Series in 2020, but Cash came under criticism for removing starting pitcher Blake Snell in the final game. But if anything, quick hooks like that were a fairly normal strategy in this year's postseason — perhaps another example of Cash and Tampa Bay being ahead of the curve on new ways to approach the game.

The Rays are now 2 for 2 on major awards. Outfielder Randy Arozarena was named Rookie of the Year on Monday. It wasn't always the smoothest of seasons for Tampa Bay — right-hander Tyler Glasnow and reliever Nick Anderson were limited by injuries — but the Rays still held off threats from the Red Sox and Yankees in their division, as well as an improving Toronto team.

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"We had the youth, we had the athleticism, and ultimately the talent to perform really really well," Cash said.

Seattle's Scott Servais finished second behind Cash in the voting by members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Houston's Dusty Baker was third.

Charlie Montoyo of the Blue Jays was fourth, followed by Alex Cora of the Red Sox, Tony La Russa of the White Sox and A.J. Hinch of the Tigers.

Cash received 19 of the 30 first-place votes.

Kapler won the NL award after guiding San Francisco to a franchise-best 107 victories in his second season with the Giants. He beat out Craig Counsell of the Milwaukee Brewers and Mike Shildt of the St. Louis Cardinals.

Kapler managed two seasons in Philadelphia before being fired. The Giants hired him after Bruce Bochy's retirement. Kapler had both big shoes to fill — Bochy won three championships with San Francisco — and a struggling team to take over. When the Giants went 29-31 in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, it was their fourth straight losing record.

Then, in a year when the star-laden Dodgers and Padres were supposed to compete for NL West supremacy, San Francisco surged to the best record in baseball. The Giants beat out the Dodgers by a game for the division crown, although they lost to Los Angeles in a tightly contested Division Series.

Kapler said he's learned to become a good listener.

"I think I've really started to respect, understand and appreciate the feedback that I'm getting from players on a regular basis," he said. "I really trust our players."

As it turned out, Bochy was the person who announced Kapler's award on the MLB Network show.

"I continue to feel like it's impossible to fill Bruce Bochy's shoes," Kapler said.

Perhaps it is, but now Kapler has done something Bochy never did with the Giants — win Manager of the Year. Bochy did receive the award in 1996 when he was with the Padres.

Kapler is the first Giants manager to win since 2000, when Baker received the honor for the third time in an eight-year span.

Counsell finished second behind Kapler after leading the Brewers to the NL Central title. Shildt was third — a month after he was fired over what Cardinals president John Mozeliak described as philosophical differences.

Brian Snitker of the World Series champion Braves and Dave Roberts of the Dodgers were the other managers to receive votes.

Kapler received 28 of the 30 first-place votes, which were cast before the playoffs began.

UP NEXT

The Cy Young Awards are announced Wednesday night. Tampa Bay won't be winning that: The AL finalists are Gerrit Cole of the Yankees, Lance Lynn of the White Sox and Robbie Ray of the Blue Jays.

The NL finalists are Max Scherzer, who pitched for the Nationals and Dodgers this year, along with Corbin Burnes of the Brewers and Zack Wheeler of the Phillies.

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Rittenhouse verdict comes amid a fraught gun landscape

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

The upcoming verdict in Kyle Rittenhouse's murder trial for shooting three men during street unrest in Wisconsin comes against a backdrop of deep political divisions and expanded access to guns in the United States — factors that some fear could lead to more dangerous encounters.

The 18-year-old testified he fired in self-defense, killing two men and wounding a third, after coming under attack during a night of protests against racial injustice in Kenosha in the summer of 2020. But

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prosecutors argue that Rittenhouse set the deadly chain of events in motion by traveling from his home in nearby Illinois armed with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle.

While legal experts have said the details give Rittenhouse a strong argument for self-defense, some worry about the broader signal an acquittal could send. The jury that heard the case deliberated a full day Tuesday without reaching a decision; they return Wednesday.

"It's easy to see how an acquittal could send the message that there are no consequences for showing up armed wherever you want, and then when situations escalate, you pull the trigger and get away with it," said Nick Suplina, senior vice president for law and policy at Everytown for Gun Safety.

The case comes at a time when many other states are expanding self-defense laws and loosening permitting requirements for carrying guns in public. The U.S. Supreme Court, meanwhile, seems poised to strike down a stricter New York gun-permitting law. Both gun sales and gun violence have separately been on the rise.

Those on the other side of the gun debate argue armed confrontations will remain rare and point to political divisions rather than the weapons themselves. "We've been seeing people expressing things publicly at events that are, quite frankly, off the charts these days," said Alan Gottlieb, founder of the Second Amendment Foundation.

Still, powerful weapons have become more widely available across much of the U.S. in recent years, a situation very different from the world where the American legal concept of self-defense originated hundreds of years ago, said Sam Buell, a professor of law at Duke University. The basic idea is that people can use deadly force when their lives are threatened, but not if they are the aggressor. The question of who started a fight may have been simpler to work out in an earlier era, but no longer.

"That's kind of the very issue that the sides seem to be fighting about in this trial," Buell said. "Clearly, the law doesn't have the answer."

The major change to U.S. self-defense law in recent years, he said, has been the advent of "stand your ground" laws, which remove a requirement to retreat from confrontations before using deadly force.

Though they came under scrutiny after high-profile shooting deaths like that of unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012, they're now in force in more than half of U.S. states. Wisconsin doesn't have one, but three more states enacted them this year — Ohio, Arkansas and North Dakota, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

Also this year, six more states loosened requirements to carry guns in public by removing the requirement to get a permit, the largest number of any single year, said Allison Anderman, the group's senior counsel.

"In certain states, it seems as though legislators are using the events of 2020 to expand the ability for people to threaten others in public with a gun and to kill them and escape justice," she said.

Others, like Gottlieb, make the argument that guns can be needed for self-protection at places like protests where emotions run high and violence is possible.

Whatever the verdict in the Rittenhouse case, Buell cautions against reading too much into it from a legal perspective.

"I think it's a big mistake for people to look for a jury verdict in a single criminal case as somehow the way to resolve these questions in a society," he said. "It can't bear that weight. No case can bear that weight."

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

No verdict after daylong deliberations by Rittenhouse jury

By MICHAEL TARM, AMY FORLITI and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — The jury at Kyle Rittenhouse's murder trial deliberated a full day on Tuesday without reaching a verdict over whether he was the instigator in a night of bloodshed in Kenosha or a concerned citizen who came under attack while trying to protect property.

The case went to the anonymous jury after the judge, in an unusual move, allowed Rittenhouse himself to play a minor role in the selection of the final panel of 12 people whose job was to decide his fate.

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Rittenhouse reached into a raffle drum and drew numbered slips that determined which of the 18 jurors who sat through the case would deliberate and which ones would be dismissed as alternates.

That task is usually performed by a court clerk, not the defendant. Judge Bruce Schroeder said later in the day that he has been having defendants do it for "I'm going to say 20 years, at least."

The jury will return Wednesday morning to continue its work.

Rittenhouse, 18, faces life in prison if convicted as charged for using an AR-style semi-automatic rifle to kill two men and wound a third during a night of protests against racial injustice in Kenosha in the summer of 2020. The former police youth cadet is white, as were those he shot.

Rittenhouse testified he acted in self-defense, while prosecutors argued he provoked the violence. The case has become a flashpoint in the U.S. debate over guns, racial-justice protests, vigilantism and law and order.

The jury appeared to be overwhelmingly white. Prospective jurors were not asked to identify their race during the selection process, and the court did not provide a racial breakdown.

As the jury deliberated, dozens of protesters — some for Rittenhouse, some against — stood outside the courthouse. Some talked quietly with those on the other side, while others shouted insults. One woman could be heard repeatedly calling some Rittenhouse supporters "white supremacists."

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, who faced criticism over his response to the Kenosha protests in 2020, urged calm as the jury deliberated. He announced last week that 500 members of the National Guard would stand ready for duty in Kenosha if needed.

"Regardless of the outcome in this case, I urge peace in Kenosha and across our state," Evers tweeted. He added: "I ask all those who choose to assemble and exercise their First Amendment rights in every community to do so safely and peacefully."

The large protests that some had anticipated did not materialize during the trial's testimony phase. On most days, only a few demonstrators gathered on the courthouse steps, and the high fence that protected the building during last year's unrest is gone.

Rittenhouse was 17 when he went Kenosha from his home in Antioch, Illinois, in what he said was an effort to protect property from rioters in the days after a Black man, Jacob Blake, was shot by a white Kenosha police officer.

In a fast-moving series of clashes in the streets, Rittenhouse shot and killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, now 28.

During closing arguments Monday, prosecutor Thomas Binger said that Rittenhouse was a "wannabe soldier" who set the deadly chain of events in motion by bringing a rifle to a protest and pointing it at protesters just before he was chased.

But Rittenhouse lawyer Mark Richards countered that Rittenhouse was ambushed by a "crazy person" — Rosenbaum.

Rittenhouse testified that Rosenbaum chased him down and made a grab for his rifle, causing him to fear the weapon was going to be used against him. His account of Rosenbaum's behavior was largely corroborated by video and some of the prosecution's own witnesses.

Huber was shot after he hit Rittenhouse with a skateboard. And Grosskreutz admitted he had his own gun pointed at Rittenhouse when he was shot.

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

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>

Coming off climate talks, US to hold huge crude sale in Gulf

By MATTHEW BROWN and JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The U.S. Interior Department on Wednesday will auction vast oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Mexico estimated to hold up to 1.1 billion barrels of crude, the first such sale under President Joe Biden and a harbinger of the challenges he faces to reach climate goals that depend on deep cuts in fossil fuel emissions.

The livestreamed sale invited energy companies to bid on drilling leases across some 136,000 square miles (352,000 square kilometers) — about twice the area of Florida.

It will take years to develop the leases before companies start pumping crude. That means they could keep producing long past 2030, when scientists say the world needs to be well on the way to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to avoid catastrophic climate change.

The auction comes after a federal judge in a lawsuit brought by Republican states rejected a suspension of fossil fuel sales that Biden imposed when he first took office.

The Democrat campaigned on promises to curb fossil fuels from public lands and waters, which including coal account for about a quarter of U.S. carbon emissions, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Yet even as he's tried to cajole other world leaders into strengthening international efforts against global warming, Wednesday's sale illustrates Biden's difficulties gaining ground on climate issues at home.

The administration last week proposed another round of oil and gas lease sales in 2022, in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and other western states. Interior Department officials proceeded despite concluding that burning the fuels could lead to billions of dollars in potential future climate damages.

"We had Trump's unconstrained approach to oil and gas on federal lands and Biden's early attempt to pause drilling. Now it looks like the Biden administration is trying to find a new policy," said researcher Robert Johnston with Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

"They're being very cautious about undermining their fragile momentum" on climate issues, he added.

The energy bureau said in pre-sale documents released Tuesday that it received bids on 307 tracts totaling nearly 2,700 square miles (6,950 square kilometers). That's the largest total for a single sale since Gulf-wide bidding resumed in 2017. Those seven sales have generated almost \$1 billion in total revenue.

Environmental reviews of the Gulf of Mexico sale conducted under former President Donald Trump and affirmed under Biden reached an unlikely conclusion: Extracting and burning the fuel would result in fewer greenhouse gases than leaving it in the ground.

Similar claims in two other cases, in Alaska, were rejected by federal courts after challenges from environmentalists. Climate scientist Peter Erickson — whose work was cited by judges in one of the cases — said the Interior Department's analysis had a glaring omission: They left out greenhouse gas increases in foreign countries that would result from having more Gulf oil on the market.

"The math is extremely simple on this kind of stuff," said Erickson, a senior scientist with the Stockholm Environment Institute, a nonprofit research group. "If new leases expand the global oil supply, that has a proportional effect on emissions from burning oil. Therefore, giving out these leases in the Gulf of Mexico would be increasing global emissions."

The Interior Department's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in recent months changed its emissions modeling methods, citing Erickson's work. But officials said it was too late to use the new approach for Wednesday's lease sale, which they said had been through "a rigorous process with specific timelines."

"The environmental analysis for Lease Sale 257 was already complete and as such does not contain the newer approach to considering the impacts of foreign consumption of oil and gas," the agency said in a statement provided to The Associated Press.

Administration officials declined AP's interview requests. For upcoming sales, spokesperson Melissa Schwartz said Interior is conducting a more comprehensive emission review than any prior administration, as it appeals the court order that forced their resumption.

Erik Milito, president of the National Ocean Industries Association said he was uncertain that using the new approach would have changed the government's conclusions, since drilling for oil in other parts of

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the world is less efficient and hauling imports also adds to carbon costs. He described the Gulf as the "backbone of U.S. oil production" and said companies consider it a strong investment.

The continued use of the old analysis rankles drilling opponents who say Biden isn't following through on his climate pledges.

"We're talking about transitioning away from a fossil fuel economy and they are selling a giant carbon bomb of a lease sale," said attorney Drew Caputo with Earthjustice, which has a lawsuit challenging the Gulf lease sale pending in federal court. "That creates a property right to develop those leases. It's a lot harder to keep the carbon in the ground if you sell the lease."

Some Democrats also objected to the sale. The chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Arizona Rep. Raúl Grijalva, said Biden promised to lead on climate issues but continues running a fossil fuel program with a long history of mismanagement.

"The administration needs to do better," Grijalva said in a statement Tuesday.

The Gulf of Mexico accounts for about 15% of total U.S. crude production and 5% of its natural gas.

Industry analysts had predicted some heightened interest in Wednesday's sale since oil prices rose sharply over the past year. It's also a chance for companies to secure drilling rights before the administration or Congress can increase drilling fees and royalty rates or adopt new restrictions on environmental permits, said analyst Justin Rostant with industry consulting firm Wood Mackenzie.

An outright ban on new leases and drilling seems unlikely after the federal court shot down Biden's temporary suspension, he added.

"Different companies have different approaches and different strategies," Rostant said. "Some could think this might be the year to go big."

Brown reported from Billings, Montana.

Follow Matthew Brown on Twitter: @MatthewBrownAP

Pfizer asks US officials to OK promising COVID-19 pill

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer asked U.S. regulators Tuesday to authorize its experimental pill for COVID-19, setting the stage for a likely launch this winter of a promising treatment that can be taken at home.

The company's filing comes as new infections are rising once again in the United States, driven mainly by hot spots in states where colder weather is driving more Americans indoors.

Pfizer's pill has been shown to significantly cut the rate of hospitalizations and deaths among people with coronavirus infections. The Food and Drug Administration is already reviewing a competing pill from Merck and several smaller drugmakers are also expected to seek authorization for their own antiviral pills in the coming months.

"We are moving as quickly as possible in our effort to get this potential treatment into the hands of patients, and we look forward to working with the U.S. FDA on its review of our application," said Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, in a statement.

Specifically, Pfizer wants the drug available for adults who have mild-to-moderate COVID-19 infections and are at risk of becoming seriously ill. That's similar to how other drugs are currently used to treat the disease. But all FDA-authorized COVID-19 treatments require an IV or injection given by a health professional at a hospital or clinic.

The FDA is holding a public meeting on the Merck pill later this month to get the opinion of outside experts before making its decision. The agency isn't required to convene such meetings and it's not yet known whether Pfizer's drug will undergo a similar public review.

Some experts predict COVID-19 treatments eventually will be combined to better protect against the worst effects of the virus.

Pfizer reported earlier this month that its pill cut hospitalizations and deaths by 89% among high-risk

adults who had early symptoms of COVID-19. The company studied its pill in people who were unvaccinated and faced the worst risks from the virus due to age or health problems, such as obesity. If authorized, the FDA will have to weigh making the pill available for vaccinated people dealing with breakthrough infections, since they weren't part of the initial tests.

For best results, patients need to start taking the pills within three days of symptoms, underscoring the need for speedy testing and diagnosis. That could be a challenge if another COVID-19 surge leads to testing delays and shortages seen last winter.

Pfizer's drug is part of a decades-old family of antiviral drugs known as protease inhibitors, which revolutionized the treatment of HIV and hepatitis C. The drugs block a key enzyme which viruses need to multiply in the human body. That's different than the Merck pill, which causes tiny mutations in the coronavirus until the point that it can't reproduce itself.

On Tuesday, Pfizer signed a deal with a U.N.-backed group to allow generic drugmakers to produce low-cost versions of the pill for certain countries. Merck has a similar deal for its pill, which was authorized in Britain earlier this month.

The U.S. has approved one other antiviral drug for COVID-19, remdesivir, and authorized three antibody therapies that help the immune system fight the virus. But they usually have to be given via time-consuming infusions by health professionals, and limited supplies were strained by the last surge of the delta variant.

The U.S. government has already committed to purchasing Merck's pill. Federal authorities were in negotiations with Pfizer to buy millions of doses of its pill, according to an official familiar with the matter.

AP reporter Zeke Miller in Washington contributed.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP_FDWriter

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House to vote on censuring Gosar over video

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House will vote Wednesday on a resolution to censure Republican Rep. Paul Gosar of Arizona for tweeting an animated video that depicted him striking Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., with a sword.

Democratic lawmakers said Gosar's actions amounted to threatening another member's life, calling the video "so beyond the pale." Republicans warned Democrats to be careful about dictating the punishment of those who serve in the minority because of the precedent it will set. Earlier this year, the House stripped Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., of her committee assignments for spreading hateful and violent conspiracy theories.

"This is a dark and dangerous road the majority is going down," said Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, the ranking Republican on the House Rules Committee. "I urge you for the future of the chamber to rethink this course."

Gosar posted the video over a week ago with a note saying, "Any anime fans out there?" The roughly 90-second video was an altered version of a Japanese anime clip, interspersed with shots of Border Patrol officers and migrants at the southern U.S. border.

During one roughly 10-second section, animated characters whose faces had been replaced with Gosar. Greene of Georgia and Lauren Boebert of Colorado were shown fighting other animated characters. In one scene, Gosar's character is seen striking the one made to look like Ocasio-Cortez in the neck with a sword. The video also shows him attacking President Joe Biden.

"I don't know if it was to create harm, if it was to incite violence, if it was to fuel hate, but it probably accomplished all of those things," said Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-Texas. "We have an obligation to live up

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to the highest standards possible, but also to hold each other up to those standards. If we don't do it, then what we are doing is allowing for a new norm to be created."

Last week, Gosar issued a statement saying the video wasn't meant to depict harm or violence, calling it instead "a symbolic portrayal of a fight over immigration policy."

He told his House Republican colleagues during a private meeting Tuesday that he would never espouse violence or harm to anyone. Gosar noted that he took the video down from his account, according to a person in the room who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

Ocasio-Cortez said Tuesday he has not apologized to her.

"It's been well over a week. He not only has not apologized," she said. "He not only has not made any sort of contact or outreach, neither he nor the Republican leader (Kevin) McCarthy, but he has also doubled down by saying that I am somehow, you know, representative of undocumented people."

"In a perfect world, he'd be expelled," she told reporters. "We are not in a perfect world, so censure and removal from committee I believe is appropriate."

The resolution coming up for a vote states that depictions of violence can foment actual violence and jeopardize the safety of elected officials. It also cites the insurrection of the Capitol on Jan. 6 as an example. The resolution goes on to say that violence against women in politics is a global phenomenon meant to silence and discourage them from seeking positions of authority and participating in public life, with women of color disproportionately impacted.

A censure resolution, if approved by a majority of the House, requires the censured lawmaker to stand in the well of the House as the resolution of censure is read aloud by the House speaker.

The House has censured its members on 23 occasions. The last censure resolution was approved in 2010 involving Democratic Rep. Charles Rangel, the former chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, for financial misconduct. The censure carries no practical effect, except to provide a historic footnote that marks a lawmaker's career.

The censure resolution also calls for Gosar's removal from the two committees he serves on: the Committee on Natural Resources and Committee on Oversight and Reform, which includes Ocasio-Cortez.

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., was one of the few Republicans saying he would vote to censure Gosar.

"We have to hold Members accountable who incite or glorify violence, who spread and perpetuate dangerous conspiracies. The failure to do so will take us one step closer to this fantasized violence becoming real," Kinzinger tweeted.

Associated Press staff writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: How the Rittenhouse jury was narrowed

By SCOTT BAUER, TODD RICHMOND and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Kyle Rittenhouse played a direct role Tuesday in choosing, albeit randomly, the final 12 jurors who are deciding his innocence or guilt in the murder trial over his killing two protesters and wounding a third last summer.

At the direction of Circuit Judge Bruce Schroder, Rittenhouse's attorney placed slips of paper into a raffle drum with the numbers of each of the 18 jurors on it who sat through the two-week trial. The drum had been sitting on a window ledge throughout the trial but was placed in front of Rittenhouse at the defense table Tuesday.

With the jury watching, Rittenhouse then selected six pieces of paper from the drum, each bearing a number that corresponded to a juror. A court official then read aloud the numbers of the jurors being dismissed: 11, 58, 14, 45, 9 and 52. The names of the jurors have not been made public.

The dismissed jurors won't be among the final 12 deliberating the case. But they were required to remain in the courthouse, at the request of the defense, until the jury returned with a verdict.

Hours later, in response to questions about the drawing, Schroeder said he's been having defendants pull the numbers of alternate jurors from the drum for roughly 20 years.

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Portage County Assistant District Attorney Robert Jambois was a prosecutor in Kenosha in 2008 when he tried Mark Jensen for homicide in front of Schroeder. Jensen was accused of poisoning and smothering his wife in one of the highest-profile cases to land in Schroeder's courtroom before Rittenhouse.

Jambois said alternates were designated by picking numbers from a tumbler but that the clerk of courts pulled the numbers from it, not Jensen.

"I've never heard of a defendant pulling the names," Jambois said. "That's done by a member of the court."

Julius Kim, a former Milwaukee County assistant district attorney, said he's never seen a judge allow a defendant to draw the numbers to determine who the final members of a jury will be.

"It's not unusual to select alternates by lot," Kim said. "(But) I've never seen a judge allow a defendant to draw those names. That might be a little unconventional but there's nothing wrong with it that I could really see."

Milwaukee-based defense attorney Tom Grieve also said he's never seen a defendant do that, "but it's a shoulder shrug for me."

"I don't really care," Grieve said. "The point is they have some system to arrive at 12 jurors. It's certainly unusual but I don't see anything wrong with it."

There's no prohibition on having the defendant draw the numbers of alternate jurors, but the general practice is to have the clerk of courts do it, said Ion Meyn, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School.

"This is not really a well-litigated area," Meyn said.

If it is common practice for that judge, prosecutors may decide it's not worth objecting to, Meyn said.

"Too risky," Meyn said of objecting. "Too many downsides to that."

The Rittenhouse jury pool had started at 20, but one juror was dismissed for health reasons and another was let go after he told a joke related to the case to a bailiff.

The jury began deliberations on Tuesday, minutes after Rittenhouse drew the numbers. The judge asked both sides to remain within 10 minutes of the courthouse in case there were questions.

Rittenhouse faced multiple charges after he killed two protesters and injured a third on the streets of Kenosha last summer. The protests were spurred by the police shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man.

Rittenhouse, who was 17 at the time, argues he acted in self-defense. The most serious charge before jurors could put Rittenhouse in prison for the rest of his life.

Schroeder, the judge in Rittenhouse's trial, is the longest-serving circuit court judge in Wisconsin. The 75-year-old's methods have drawn attention throughout the trial, including reading trivia questions to jurors at the outset, professing his lack of knowledge about modern technology, asking for applause for veterans on Veterans Day as a defense witness who served in the military was about to testify and sometimes speaking angrily at prosecutors when they pursued lines of questioning he had barred.

Bauer and Richmond reported from Madison, Wisconsin.

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

Richardson adds to diplomatic wins with journalist's release

By WILL WEISSERT and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bill Richardson's success in helping secure journalist Danny Fenster's release from a Myanmar prison is the latest demonstration of the former New Mexico governor's knack for flying into some of the most closed societies on earth and persuading those in charge to do Washington a favor.

From Iraq to Sudan to North Korea, Richardson has repeatedly proven willing to talk with dictators, military juntas and reclusive strongmen — forging relationships with notorious regimes outside formal diplomatic channels.

"I think there was a certain amount of trust between myself and the commanding general," Richardson told reporters in New York on Tuesday, referring to Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's ruler. "I treated

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him with respect, he treated me with respect.”

Richardson’s missions have often come with the blessing of Democratic presidents, though their open public endorsement is rarer until after the fact. Striking that balance allows foreign officials to believe they are talking to someone who can be an informal conduit to top U.S. authorities even as the administration says publicly it won’t negotiate with rogue states.

White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates said Tuesday, “We appreciate efforts by all partners, including Gov. Richardson, who helped secure Danny’s release.”

Before Richardson intervened, Fenster, the managing editor of Frontier Myanmar, spent nearly six months in jail and was sentenced last week to 11 years of hard labor.

The former governor was initially criticized by some human rights activists for visiting Myanmar earlier this month, making him the highest-profile American to visit the country since its ruling military junta overthrew Aung San Suu Kyi’s civilian government in February.

Richardson countered Tuesday by suggesting that though he was attacked for bestowing legitimacy with a photo-op, what he was really doing was laying the groundwork for Fenster’s release.

“I plead guilty to photo-ops and getting human beings rescued and improving the lives of human beings,” said Richardson, who spent his 74th birthday on Monday flying with Fenster from Myanmar to Doha, Qatar, before traveling on to New York.

Richardson was the Democratic governor of New Mexico from 2003 to 2011. The bilingual son of an American father and Mexican mother, he grew up in Mexico City and pitched for Tufts University’s baseball team.

He’s also a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, energy secretary and congressman who served on the House Intelligence Committee. Some of his most prominent global work began in December 1994, when he was visiting North Korean nuclear sites and word came that an American helicopter pilot had been downed and his co-pilot killed.

The Clinton White House enlisted Richardson’s help and, after days of tough negotiations, the then-congressman accompanied the remains of Chief Warrant Officer David Hilemon while paving the way for Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Hall to return home.

The following year, and after a personal appeal from Richardson, Saddam Hussein freed two Americans who had been imprisoned for four months, charged with illegally crossing into Iraq from Kuwait. In 2006, he helped secure the release of Paul Salopek, a then-Chicago Tribune correspondent who was jailed in Sudan.

Richardson has been involved in other high-profile prisoner releases more recently, including the 2014 freeing of U.S. Marine reservist Sgt. Andrew Tahmoressi, who had been imprisoned for crossing into Mexico with loaded guns.

“I have chosen to reach out to him on every single case I have worked on,” said Jonathan Franks, a consultant who has collaborated with Richardson multiple times on efforts to free wrongful detainees. “Part of that is he is willing to do stuff that the government either can’t or won’t.”

Franks described Richardson as invaluable in representing the interests of Navy veteran Michael White, who was ultimately released by Iran last year in a deal trumpeted by the Trump administration — including by regularly checking in with White’s mother and by passing along messages and requests about his welfare.

In Fenster’s case, Richardson said he’d been in “constant constant constant constant” contact with the State Department, which initially urged him not to bring up the jailed journalist because “efforts were being made on other fronts.” Richardson said he respected that at first, but later raised Fenster’s release as a way to help make progress on separate humanitarian matters.

“I made the pitch on behalf of their people — humanitarian issues, vaccines,” Richardson said. “I said, ‘Let’s find ways to help the people and maybe I can help with the U.N. agencies, with member countries, donor countries.’”

Richardson ran briefly for president in 2008, becoming the first Hispanic candidate with a legitimate shot at the White House. He produced political ads recalling his 1995 visit to Baghdad and work to help free the two Americans, one of whom was from Iowa, whose caucus kicks off presidential primary voting.

In a contest dominated by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, however, Richardson's presidential campaign didn't resonate with voters.

Richardson's informal diplomatic efforts haven't always panned out either.

In 1995, he left Burma frustrated after its military junta refused to allow him to visit detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In 2011, Richardson traveled to Cuba to try to see a jailed American contractor. He was denied access to Alan Gross, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison for bringing unauthorized communications equipment onto the island, and left saying he felt the Cuban government wasn't serious about trying to improve relations with the U.S.

Gross was released three years later on humanitarian grounds.

Still, that Richardson can focus exclusively on the release of a captive American, rather than broader geopolitical considerations, is a particular benefit, Franks noted, especially in places where the U.S. has frayed or nonexistent diplomatic ties.

"If the goal is to bring the American home no matter what, and to do so sort of unencumbered by politics or bureaucracy or any of the other things that kind of fall along with the government," he said, "sometimes it's just easier, I guess, for some of these folks to chat with him than it is to chat with US government."

Associated Press writers Vanessa Alvarez in New York and Amer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

This story has been updated to CORRECT that Richardson previously visited Myanmar earlier this month, not in February.

Yellen extends to Dec. 15 date for potential debt default

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Congress Tuesday that she believed she would run out of maneuvering room to avoid the nation's first-ever default soon after Dec. 15.

In a letter to congressional leaders, Yellen said that she believed Treasury could be left with insufficient resources to keep financing the government beyond Dec. 15.

Yellen's new date is 12 days later than the Dec. 3 date she provided in a letter to Congress on Oct. 18. That letter was based on the fact that Congress had just passed a \$480 billion increase in the debt limit as a stop-gap measure.

As she has done in the past, Yellen urged Congress to deal with the debt limit quickly to remove the possibility of a potential default on the nation's obligations.

"To ensure the full faith and credit of the United States, it is critical that Congress raise or suspend the debt limit as soon as possible," Yellen wrote to congressional leaders.

Yellen has repeatedly warned that failure to deal with the debt limit and allowing the government to default would be catastrophic and likely push the country into a recession.

In her letter, Yellen said that the extra time reflected more up-to-date estimates of government revenues and spending and also was impacted by the infrastructure bill that President Joe Biden signed into law on Monday. That legislation requires the transfer by Treasury of \$118 billion by Dec. 15 into the Highway Trust Fund.

Yellen said after that while she had a "high degree of confidence she will be able to finance the U.S. government through Dec. 15" and complete the highway trust fund transfer, there are scenarios where the government will be left with insufficient resources to finance operations beyond the Dec. 15 date, she said.

The need to raise or suspend the debt limit is just one of the budget issues facing Congress. Lawmakers must also approve a budget by Dec. 3 when the current stop-gap funding measures runs out. Failure to do that would trigger a government shutdown.

And Democrats are aiming to approve a \$1.75 trillion measure to expand the social safety net and deal with climate change threats. Speaker Nancy Pelosi has said she hopes the House can pass this measure,

which Republicans oppose, this week. It must also pass the Senate.

Biden touts infrastructure bill at snowy, rusty bridge in NH

By COLLEEN LONG, HOLLY RAMER and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WOODSTOCK, N.H. (AP) — Fighting sagging poll ratings, President Joe Biden set out Tuesday on a national tour to persuade everyday Americans of the benefits of his big, just-signed infrastructure plan. First stop: a snowy, rusty bridge in New Hampshire, a state that gave him no love in last year's presidential primaries.

Biden left the state in February of 2020 before polls had even closed on his fifth-place primary finish. But he returned as president, eager to talk up the billions in investments in upgrading America's roads, bridges and transit systems that he signed into law Monday.

Walking across the rural New Hampshire bridge that's been tagged a priority for repairs since 2014, Biden framed the infrastructure law in direct and human terms. He said it would have a meaningful impact here, from efficient everyday transportation to keeping emergency routes open.

"This isn't esoteric, this isn't some gigantic bill — it is, but it's about what happens to ordinary people," he said. "Conversations around those kitchen tables that are both profound as they are ordinary: How do I cross the bridge in a snowstorm?"

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

The president held a splashy bipartisan bill-signing ceremony Monday 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.

Also this week, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan will take a tour through the South, hitting Louisiana and Texas, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland will visit Massachusetts, California and the state she represented in Congress, New Mexico, and Vice President Kamala Harris will visit Ohio, among top administration officials on the road.

The president, whose poll numbers have continued to drop even after passage of the bill, is pleading for patience from Americans exhausted by the pandemic and concerned about rising inflation. The White House says the infrastructure funding could begin going out within months, and they say it will have a measurable impact on Americans' lives by helping create new, good-paying jobs.

During his New Hampshire stop Tuesday, Biden said there were 215 bridges deemed "structurally unsafe" and 700 miles of highway in the state listed in poor condition, which he said costs residents heavily each year in gas and repairs.

In addition to speeding repairs to roads and bridges, Biden touted the law's investments in upgrading public transit and trains, replacing lead pipes and expanding access to broadband internet. The law, he said, is estimated to create an extra 2 million jobs a year, and he insisted it also would improve supply chain bottlenecks that have contributed to rising prices for consumers by providing funding for America's ports, airports and freight rail.

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 visited 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.

"This may not seem like a big bridge, but it saves lives and solves problems," Biden said.

New Hampshire's Republican Gov. Chris Sununu, who planned to greet Biden at the airport, sent a letter to the president Tuesday asking him to work with Congress to earmark even more infrastructure funding for the state. He also urged Biden to address supply chain issues, workforce shortages and the rising cost of construction materials.

"Ensuring that roads get built, bridges get repaired, and drinking water gets improved will be even more challenging given the economic challenges Washington seems oblivious to," Sununu said.

Under the funding formula in the bill, New Hampshire will receive \$1.1 billion for federal-aid highways and \$225 million for bridges, the White House said.

The infrastructure bill overall 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.

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.

Boosters for all adults in US closer with panel meeting set

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — An influential U.S. advisory panel will discuss expanding eligibility for COVID-19 vaccine booster shots to all adults Friday, a move that could make the shots available nationwide as early as this weekend.

Some cities and states already allow all adults to get boosters of Pfizer's vaccine, but it is not yet official U.S. policy. In the last week, California, New Mexico, Arkansas, West Virginia and Colorado expanded the shots to all adults. New York City made a similar move.

Pfizer asked U.S. regulators last week to allow boosters of its COVID-19 vaccine for anyone 18 or older. The Food and Drug Administration is expected to sign off on Pfizer's application before the advisory panel meets Friday. The final step — CDC's official recommendation — could come soon after the meeting.

The move would greatly expand who is eligible. Boosters are now recommended for people who initially received their second Pfizer or Moderna shots at least six months ago if they're 65 or older or are at high risk of COVID-19 because of health problems or their job or living conditions. Boosters are also recommended for people who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine at least two months ago.

Nearly 31 million Americans have already received a dose beyond their original vaccination, including those with weakened immune systems, such as cancer patients and organ transplant recipients who need an extra dose to be fully vaccinated.

While all three vaccines used in the U.S. continue to offer strong protection against severe COVID-19 illness and death, the shots' effectiveness against milder infection can wane over time.

Pfizer has submitted early results of a booster study in 10,000 people to make its case that it's time to further expand the booster campaign. The study found that a booster could restore protection against symptomatic infection to about 95%, even as the extra-contagious delta variant was surging. Side effects were similar to those seen with the company's first two shots.

Members of the panel, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, have debated in prior meetings whether there is sufficient evidence that boosters are currently needed for all adults.

Associated Press writer Matthew Perrone contributed to this story from Washington.

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Wind-stoked wildfire causes death in Wyoming, evacuations

CODY, Wyo. (AP) — Wildfires pushed by strong winds forced the evacuation of homes in Montana, Wyoming and Colorado and led to a death in Wyoming, officials said Tuesday.

Downed power lines caused a fire near the northern Wyoming community of Clark on Monday night that burned at least two homes and seven outbuildings, said Jerry Parker, the Park County Fire District administrator. Wind gusts topped 100 mph (161 kph) in the area Monday night.

Kristie Hoffert, medical chief for the Clark Fire District, said the person who died was a family member of a firefighter.

"It hits incredibly close to home for our department," she told The Cody Enterprise on Tuesday. "We are struggling."

Officials did not release any information on how the death occurred.

Clark resident James Hayes told the newspaper that he was forced to flee his home at about 1 a.m. Tuesday, shortly before the fire encircled it. He returned later Tuesday to find his property mostly unscathed, he said.

The fire burned about half a square mile (1.4 square kilometers) of land, Parker said.

In south-central Montana, a fire reported at about 11:30 p.m. Monday led the Stillwater County Sheriff's Office to order evacuations southwest of the town of Absarokee, including an area between the communities of Ingersoll and Roscoe.

Thirty-five evacuation notices were issued and deputies also went door-to-door, but it's not clear how many people left their residences, the sheriff's office said. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

"Right now, we've got firefighters, engines and dozers working to get ahead of the fire," Absarokee Volunteer Fire Rescue Department Chief Amanda Ferster told The Billings Gazette. There have been no reports of injuries or major structures destroyed, she said.

The fire had burned an estimated 6 square miles (16 square kilometers) in timber and rough terrain by Tuesday afternoon. Rain fell on the area Tuesday morning, but the wind increased the fire activity in the afternoon, said Tammie Mullikin, a spokesperson for the Stillwater County Sheriff's Office.

In north-central Colorado, a fire southeast of Estes Park forced evacuations in a forested region of Larimer County while sending plumes of smoke toward the eastern plains.

The fire was first reported about 7 a.m. in rugged terrain and triggered evacuations in the Hermit Park and Little Valley areas near Estes Park and, later, southward to the Boulder County line and east of U.S. Highway 36 between Estes Park and Lyons. The blaze grew to 115 acres (47 hectares), the Larimer County Sheriff's Office said.

The cause of the fire was unknown.

Winds gusting to 45 mph (73 kph) fanned the fire slowly eastward. Steep terrain of pine and scrub brush made it difficult for local fire crews to gain access. Officials reported 11% containment Tuesday afternoon.

County officials had no immediate reports of structures being damaged. It wasn't immediately known how many people received evacuation notices, said sheriff's Deputy Chris Smith.

The National Weather Service in Boulder said an approaching cold front could bring higher wind gusts to the area late Tuesday but lower temperatures just above freezing on Wednesday.

A historic drought and recent heat waves tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists say climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

GOP-majority court chosen to consider Biden vaccine mandate

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By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Challenges to President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for private employers will be consolidated in the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, a panel dominated by judges appointed by Republicans.

The Cincinnati-based court was selected Tuesday in a random drawing using ping-pong balls, a process employed when challenges to certain federal agency actions are filed in multiple courts.

The selection could be good news for those challenging the administration's vaccine requirement, which includes officials in 27 Republican-led states, employers and several conservative and business organizations. They argue the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration does not have the authority to impose the mandate.

The challenges, along with some from unions that said the vaccine mandate didn't go far enough, were made this month in 12 circuit courts. Under an arcane system, it was up to the clerk of the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict litigation to select a ping-pong ball from a bin to choose where the cases would be heard.

It was a favorable outcome for Republicans. Eleven of the 16 full-time judges in the 6th Circuit were appointed by Republican presidents. Accounting for one of the Republican-appointed judges, Helene White, who often sides with judges appointed by Democrats and adding senior judges who are semi-retired but still hear cases, the split is 19-9 in favor of Republicans. Six of the full-time judges were appointed by former President Donald Trump.

Another court where a majority of judges were nominated by Republicans, the New Orleans-based 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, issued a ruling that put the mandate on hold.

It's not clear whether the court that will hear the case will act as the 5th Circuit did and side quickly with the Republican challengers. But legal experts have become increasingly concerned in recent years about the politicization of both federal and state courts, raising questions about whether justice is fairly administered or dispensed through a partisan lens.

Allison Orr Larsen, a professor at William & Mary Law School, coauthored a study published this year that found growing partisanship in federal judicial decisions. For decades, the study found that rulings on cases in which all judges in a circuit weighed in generally were not decided along party lines based on the presidents who appointed the judges.

"We did see a concerning spike starting in 2018 that led us to wring our hands," Larsen said in an interview.

The increasing partisanship in a branch of government that is supposed to be blind to partisan politics was seen in judges appointed by presidents of both parties, but Larsen said it's not clear why that was or whether it will last.

Some of the federal courts moved to the right when Donald Trump was president and Republicans controlled the U.S. Senate, which confirms judicial nominees. Trump appointed 54 judges to the circuit courts, which are one step below the U.S. Supreme Court, including filling one seat twice. That represents nearly 30% of the seats on the circuit courts, where cases are most often considered by three-judge panels.

Trump's appointees flipped the 11th Circuit in the South to Republican control and expanded the GOP-appointed majorities in the 5th, 6th and 8th Circuits in the Midwest and South. Biden's three appointees switched the New York-based 2nd Circuit to Democratic control.

Republican state attorneys general and conservative groups mostly filed their challenges in circuit courts dominated by conservative judges, while the unions went to circuits with more judges nominated by Democratic presidents.

In all, 34 objections have been filed in all 11 regional circuits plus the one for the District of Columbia. That's where the ping-pong balls came in to play.

Under federal law, cases challenging federal agency actions get consolidated upon the agency's request if they are filed in multiple circuit courts. Each circuit where a challenge is filed within the first 10 days of the agency taking action has an equal chance of being selected.

It was up to the judicial panel's clerk, John W. Nichols, to select a ping-pong ball from a bin, according to a Tuesday court filing by the panel. The office denied a request by The Associated Press to allow media access to the drawing.

Previously this year, the lottery had been used to assign just two cases. One involved fallout from a Na-

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tional Labor Relations Board ruling on an anti-union Twitter message by Tesla founder Elon Musk where objectors filed in two circuits. The other was over orders from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in which objectors filed in three.

The employer vaccine mandate is higher profile and further reaching. It calls for businesses with more than 100 workers to require employees to be vaccinated by Jan. 4 or wear masks and be tested weekly for COVID-19. Exemptions are provided for religious reasons and for those who work at home or only outdoors.

Because it's an unusual rule from the workplace safety agency, there is no consensus among lawyers on how the challenges will go. OSHA has issued just 10 emergency rules in the half century since it was formed. Of the six challenged in court, only one survived intact.

The Biden administration has insisted it's on strong legal footing. It also has the backing of the American Medical Association, which filed papers in support of the mandate.

"The AMA's extensive review of the medical literature demonstrates that COVID-19 vaccines authorized or approved by FDA are safe and effective, and the widespread use of those vaccines is the best way to keep COVID-19 from spreading within workplaces," the group said in its filing.

Among those challenging the rule is a consortium of construction contractors. They say they want their workers vaccinated, but that a requirement only on larger companies is just pushing vaccine-hesitant workers to take jobs with companies that have fewer than 100 employees.

"Crafting an unworkable rule that will do little to get construction workers vaccinated is an approach that is not only wrong, but likely counterproductive," said Scott Casabona, president of Signatory Wall and Ceiling Contractors Alliance.

Officials with the workplace safety agency say they're considering extending the mandate to smaller employers.

A three-judge panel of the 5th Circuit extended the stay of the OSHA rule in an opinion released last Friday, expressing skepticism that the agency had authority to implement the vaccine requirement. The 6th Circuit could modify, revoke or extend the stay.

It had not yet been determined which judges from the 6th Circuit will be on a three-judge panel to hear the case or whether it will be considered by all the judges.

The U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment on the selection of the court.

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Associated Press writer Mark Sherman in Washington, D.C., contributed to this article.

Prosecution rests in trial of men who chased Ahmaud Arbery

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Prosecutors rested their case Tuesday in the trial of three white men charged with chasing and killing Ahmaud Arbery after the jury saw graphic photos of the shotgun wounds that punched a gaping hole in his chest and unleashed bleeding that stained his white T-shirt entirely red.

Prosecutors called 23 witnesses during eight days of testimony. They concluded with Dr. Edmund Donoghue, the state medical examiner who performed the autopsy on Arbery's body, followed by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's lead investigator in the case.

Donoghue testified that Arbery was hit by two of the three shotgun rounds fired at him. He said both gunshots caused such severe bleeding that either blast alone would have killed the 25-year-old Black man.

The first shot at close range tore through an artery in Arbery's right wrist and punched a big hole in the center of his chest, breaking several ribs and causing heavy internal bleeding, Donoghue said. The second shot missed entirely. The third shot fired at point-blank range ripped through a major artery and vein near his left armpit and fractured bones in his shoulder and upper arm.

"Is there anything law enforcement or EMS could have done to save his life at the scene?" prosecutor Linda Dunikoski asked.

"I don't think so. No," Donoghue replied.

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Donoghue performed an autopsy on Feb. 24, 2020, the day after Arbery was slain. The jury saw close-up photos of his injuries, which included several large abrasions to Arbery's face from when he fell facedown in the street following the third gunshot. Photos of his clothing showed his T-shirt turned red with blood. Cellphone video of the shooting shows it had been white.

Asked by the prosecutor how Arbery was able to fight back after sustaining such a severe chest wound from the first gunshot, the medical examiner called it a "fight or flight reaction" that raised his heart rate and blood pressure while sending adrenaline coursing through his body.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley said defense attorneys would begin their cases Wednesday.

Father and son Greg and Travis McMichael armed themselves and pursued Arbery in a pickup truck after spotting him running in their neighborhood. Their neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan joined the chase and took cellphone video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery. All three men are charged with murder and other crimes.

The McMichaels told police they chased Arbery suspecting he was a burglar after security cameras recorded him several times inside a home under construction, five houses away. Defense attorneys say the younger McMichael fired his gun in self-defense after Arbery tried to take it from him.

Prosecutors say they chased Arbery for five minutes to keep him from leaving 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.

Robert Rubin, one of Travis McMichael's attorneys, noted that the medical examiner wrote in his report that Arbery died from wounds "sustained during a struggle for a shotgun."

"Were you aware that Mr. Arbery had his hand on the gun?" Rubin asked Donoghue, who answered that he was.

Despite the gunshot to his right wrist, Rubin said, "nothing prevented Mr. Arbery from holding the gun with one hand and swinging and punching with the other hand."

GBI agent Richard Dial, who led the investigation into Arbery's death, showed the jury maps of the neighborhood where the shooting occurred and a drone video tracing what authorities believe was the path of the chase that ended in the killing. Dial also briefly reviewed the cellphone video of the shooting itself.

Bryan's attorney, Kevin Gough, asked the investigator whether he agreed that Bryan's video of the shooting was "consistent with someone who was a witness" to the chase rather than participant.

"He wasn't a witness," Dial replied. "It would be consistent that he was still pursuing Mr. Arbery, trying to box him in between two different vehicles."

US population center moves 11.8 miles; still in Missouri

By SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

HARTVILLE, Mo. (AP) — Some people might describe Hartville, Missouri, as being in the middle of nowhere, but the U.S. Census Bureau on Tuesday announced that it's the closest town to the middle of the nation.

The hamlet of about 600 people in the Missouri Ozarks is located about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the center of the U.S. population distribution, according to the Census Bureau.

The town is the type of place where families have been farming for generations, everybody knows each other and people stay for the "small-town living," said Sabrina Gilliland, 38, a paralegal for the local prosecutor, who lives on a family farm with her four children, cattle, pigs and chickens.

Gilliland joked that her mother is "related to half the people in the town." The four-block center of Hartville has a diner, barbershop, gas station and hair salon.

Pastor Melvin Moon, a Hartville City Council member, is hopeful the new designation brings tourists to the area known for Civil War history, antique shops and rivers popular for fishing, canoeing and kayaking. The Census Bureau will present a plaque to the town next spring.

"We are truly the heart of America," Moon said. "This small town represents what's great about America still: People are neighbors, people take time for each other and they help each other."

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Bypassed by interstate highways and railroads, the town doesn't have a big tax base or large industry. The local school, a nursing home, the gas station and the Dollar General store are the largest employers. There used to be a lot of farmers in the area, but it's hard to make a living that way now, Moon said.

"So you have to want to live here," he said.

The nation's population center is calculated every 10 years after the once-a-decade census shows where people are living. The heart of America has been located in Missouri since 1980. Previously located in Plato, Missouri, in the neighboring county, it moved only 11.8 miles (19 kilometers) southwest from 2010 to 2020. It is the smallest distance shift in 100 years and the second-smallest in U.S. history.

It also was the southernmost shift in history, said Deirdre Bishop, the Census Bureau's chief of geography.

"That pull came from the growth in the southeast, in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas," Bishop said.

The center is actually still closer to Plato than Hartville, but the Census Bureau likely wanted to keep it moving "since it is so tied up in our national psyche with expansion and progress," said Alex Zakrewsky, who is principal planner for Middlesex County, New Jersey, and has predicted the location after past censuses.

"Hartville also has the additional symbolic value of its name," Zakrewsky said.

To calculate the center of the U.S., the Census Bureau figures out which spot would be "the balance point" if the 50 states were located on an imaginary, flat surface with weights of identical size — each representing the location of one person — placed on it.

Zakrewsky said he wonders if the center of the U.S. is going to move a lot farther west by 2030 since California, the nation's most populous state, is losing residents.

"I sometimes speculate that Hartville may be the centroid's terminus," he said.

The fifth paragraph has been edited to correct the word to "distance."

Associated Press writer Mike Schneider in Orlando, Florida, contributed to this report.

Twitter rolls out redesigned misinformation warning labels

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Twitter users will soon see new warning labels on false and misleading tweets, redesigned to make them more effective and less confusing.

The labels, which the company has been testing since July, are an update from those Twitter used for election misinformation before and after the 2020 presidential contest. Those labels drew criticism for not doing enough to keep people from spreading obvious falsehoods.

The redesign launching worldwide on Tuesday is an attempt to make them more useful and easier to notice, among other things.

Experts say such labels, used by Facebook as well, can be helpful to users. But they can also allow social media platforms to sidestep the more difficult work of content moderation — that is, deciding whether or not to remove posts, photos and videos that spread conspiracies and falsehoods.

Twitter only labels three types of misinformation: "manipulated media," such as videos and audio that have been deceptively altered in ways that could cause real-world harm; election and voting-related misinformation and false or misleading tweets related to COVID-19.

The new designs added orange and red to the labels so they stand out more than the old version, which was blue and blended in with Twitter's color scheme. While this can help, Twitter said its tests showed that if a label is too eye-catching, it leads to more people to retweet and reply to the original tweet.

Twitter said Tuesday the redesigned labels showed a 17% increase in "click-through-rate," which means that more people clicked on the redesigned labels to read the information debunking false or misleading tweets.

Misleading tweets that got the redesigned label — with an orange icon and the words "stay informed" were also less likely to be retweeted or liked than those with the original labels.

Tweets with more serious misinformation — for instance, a tweet claiming that vaccines cause autism — will get a stronger label, with the word "misleading" and a red exclamation point. It won't be possible

to reply to, like or retweet these messages.

Judge vets potential jurors for Ghislaine Maxwell trial

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prospective jurors got their first glimpse of Ghislaine Maxwell, the British socialite charged with helping Jeffrey Epstein sexually abuse girls and women, when a judge began questioning them individually Tuesday.

Wearing a black suit, Maxwell hugged her lawyers when she entered the courtroom and briefly sketched a courtroom artist who was drawing her.

Judge Alison J. Nathan's questions in Manhattan federal court were aimed at seeing if potential jurors can stay impartial in the sordid case against Maxwell.

The 12 jurors and six alternates who will hear the case will not be chosen until Nov. 29, when opening statements will begin. The trial is expected to stretch to mid-January.

Maxwell, 59, has pleaded not guilty to charges she groomed underage victims to have unwanted sex with Epstein. She has vehemently denied wrongdoing.

Each prospective juror sat alone in a jury box for 10 to 15 minutes while Nathan posed questions from about 10 feet (3 meters) away.

"I'm Judge Nathan. Nice to see you in person," Nathan greeted one potential juror, alluding to two videos that about 600 prospective jurors had watched of the judge describing the case and the jury selection process.

Hundreds were dismissed after filling out a written questionnaire. Nathan expects to question about 230 potential jurors, identified only by number, over several days as Maxwell observes along with her lawyers from a row behind prosecutors. Most of the two dozen spectators spaced apart to guard against the coronavirus were journalists.

Wearing a black mask that matched her robe, Nathan reminded prospective jurors that Maxwell must be considered innocent until a verdict at her trial.

Some prospective jurors said they had heard of Epstein but not Maxwell while others said they had heard of both.

The judge was particularly interested in learning whether any members of the jury pool — drawn from a wide area in and around New York City — could remain impartial after suffering sexual harassment or having bad experiences with law enforcement.

One 68-year-old Manhattan resident said she believed she had experienced sexual harassment "as we know it today." But she added that it probably wasn't thought of in the same way at the time and she didn't believe she'd ever been the victim of serious harassment or abuse.

A 72-year-old Manhattan man seemed amused, if not slightly baffled, when the judge asked him if working around wealthy individuals when he worked as director of training and service for a high-end catering company might affect his ability to be fair and impartial. Maxwell has estimated her assets to be worth \$22.5 million.

"They provided my livelihood," he said with a chuckle.

Epstein was arrested in 2019, but the case against him took a shocking turn when the financier and convicted sex offender killed himself while awaiting trial.

After Epstein's death, prosecutors turned their sights on Maxwell, his ex-girlfriend.

The wealthy, Oxford-educated socialite is 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.

Ghislaine Maxwell holds U.S., British and French citizenships and was repeatedly denied bail in the run-up to her trial.

Russia rejects accusations of endangering ISS astronauts

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By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian officials on Tuesday rejected accusations that they endangered astronauts aboard the International Space Station by conducting a weapons test that created more than 1,500 pieces of space junk but a White House official said the move by Russia would threaten activities in space “for years to come.”

U.S. officials on Monday accused Russia of destroying an old satellite with a missile in what they called a reckless and irresponsible strike. They said the debris could damage the space station, an assessment backed by NATO’s chief.

Astronauts now face four times greater risk than normal from space junk, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told The Associated Press. The defunct Russian satellite Cosmos 1408 was orbiting about 40 miles (65 kilometers) higher than the space station.

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,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said Tuesday that Russia’s action demonstrated its “complete disregard for the security, safety, stability and long-term sustainability of the space domain for all nations. This debris will continue to pose a direct threat to activities in outer space for years to come and puts at risk satellites all nations rely on for national security, economic prosperity and scientific discovery.” He said the United States would work with its allies “as we seek to respond to this irresponsible act.”

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 to the space station.

Russia’s Defense Ministry on Tuesday confirmed carrying out a test and destroying a defunct satellite that has been in orbit since 1982, but insisted that “the U.S. knows for certain that the resulting fragments, in terms of test time and orbital parameters, did not and will not pose a threat to orbital stations, spacecraft and space activities.” It called remarks by U.S. officials “hypocritical.”

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the strike was carried out “with surgical precision” and posed no threat to the space station. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also charged that it is “hypocrisy” to say that Russia creates risks for peaceful activities in space.

The Russian space agency Roscosmos wouldn’t confirm or deny that the strike took place, saying only that the “unconditional safety of the crew has been and remains our main priority.”

Once the situation became clear early Monday morning, those on board the International Space Station — four Americans, one German and two Russians — 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 individual labs on every orbit, or 1 1/2 hours, as they passed near or through the space debris.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg agreed that Russia’s actions endangered the space station.

“This was a reckless act by Russia to actually shoot down and destroy a satellite as part of a test of an anti-satellite weapons system,” which created a lot of space debris, Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels.

He said it was of additional concern “because it demonstrates that Russia is now developing new weapons systems that can shoot down the satellites, can destroy important space capabilities for basic infrastructure on Earth, like communications, like navigation, or like early warning of missile launches.”

The German Foreign Ministry also said it was “very concerned” by the test, which it said resulted in “additional risks” for the astronauts on the ISS.

“This irresponsible behavior carries a high risk of miscalculations and escalation,” the ministry said, adding that the test underlines the urgency of an international agreement on rules for the peaceful use of space.

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

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

NASA had the space 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, which orbits about 260 miles (420 kilometers) high.

Marcia Dunn in Cape Canaveral, Florida, Lorne Cook in Brussels, Geir Moulson in Berlin and Darlene Superville in Washington D.C. contributed to this report.

Michelle Wu sworn in as Boston's first woman elected mayor

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Michelle Wu was sworn in Tuesday as Boston's first woman and first person of color elected mayor in the city's long history.

The swearing-in of the city's first Asian American mayor came two weeks after Wu won the city's mayoral election. Before Wu, Boston had elected only white men as mayor.

"City government is special. We are the level closest to the people, so we must do the big and the small. Every streetlight, every pothole, every park and classroom, lays the foundation for greater change," Wu said after taking the oath of office.

"After all, Boston was founded on a revolutionary promise: that things don't have to be as they always have been. That we can chart a new path for families now, and for generations to come, grounded in justice and opportunity," she said.

Wu, 36, takes over for a fellow Democrat — former acting Mayor Kim Janey — who was Boston's first woman and first Black resident to serve in, but who was not elected to, the top post.

Wu said when she first set foot inside the cavernous Boston City Hall, she felt swallowed up by the maze of concrete hallways, checkpoints and looming counters -- all reminders of why her immigrant family tried to steer clear of such spaces.

But she said her family's struggles eventually brought her to an internship with former Mayor Thomas Menino and ultimately a seat on the Boston City Council where, she said, she learned the ropes of city government and politics.

"Today I know City Hall's passageways and stairwells like my own home," she said.

The swearing-in means Wu will now face the daunting task of trying to make good on a slew of ambitious policy proposals that were the backbone of her campaign.

To push back against soaring housing costs that have forced some former residents out of the city, Wu has promised to pursue rent stabilization or rent control. The biggest hurdle to that proposal is the fact that Massachusetts voters narrowly approved a 1994 ballot question banning rent control statewide.

Another of Wu's top campaign promises is to create a "fare-free" public transit system. Wu has said the proposal would strengthen the city's economy, address climate change and help those who take the bus or subway to school or work.

Like the rent control pledge, Wu can't unilaterally do away with fares on the public transit system. Wu has said she would try to work with partners in state government to make each proposal a reality.

In her comments Tuesday, Wu said it's critical to tackle the big challenges she has promised while not losing sight of the nitty-gritty of city government.

"Not only is it possible for Boston to deliver basic city services and generational change — it is absolutely necessary in this moment," she said. "We'll tackle our biggest challenges by getting the small things right."

Wu, whose parents immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan, grew up in Chicago and moved to Boston to attend Harvard University and Harvard Law School. She has two small children.

Janey made brief comments before Wu was sworn in, thanking the city for the chance to serve as mayor, even for a brief period.

"I know that Boston is in good hands and I am so proud to call you Madam mayor," Janey said to Wu.

Janey had been president of the Boston City Council before taking over as mayor, the second of the city's three mayors this year.

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She rose to the top post on an acting basis when the city's previous elected mayor, Democrat Marty Walsh, stepped down this year to become U.S. Secretary of Labor under President Joe Biden. Janey was sworn in March 24.

Janey attempted to use the status of the office in her run to replace Walsh, but she failed to garner enough votes to make it past the preliminary mayoral election that whittled the field down to two candidates — City Councilors Wu and Annissa Essaibi George.

Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, Democratic U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey and U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley attended the swearing-in.

US journalist jailed for months in Myanmar lands in New York

By TED SHAFFREY and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — American journalist Danny Fenster, who was freed after nearly six months in jail in military-ruled Myanmar, arrived Tuesday in the United States for an emotional reunion with his family.

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.

It's been a "long time coming, a moment I had been imagining so intensely for so long," a bearded and shaggy-haired Fenster said after landing in New York. "Surpasses everything I had imagined."

Fenster's family awaited his arrival in the lobby of an airport hotel — and rushed outside to greet him as the SUV carrying him approached. His mother, Rose, embraced him in a long tight hug the moment he stepped out of the vehicle.

"It's over. There's nothing to be anxious about anymore," Fenster said later in an interview. "Any bitter, ill will, regret, anger spilled out on the tarmac when I got on that plane."

His wife, Julianna, who is still in Myanmar, is set to reunite with him in Detroit.

Late Monday, as Fenster, 37, transited through Qatar, he told reporters that he was physically OK and had not been starved or beaten while in custody. While jailed, he had told his lawyer that he believed he had COVID-19, although 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.

It "feels great to get Danny back home. It's worth the effort, worth everything we did," said Richardson, a former governor of New Mexico and past ambassador to the United Nations who helped negotiate the release through his foundation.

Fenster's mother described the ordeal as a "nightmare" and the family expressed relief that it was over.

It "feels great, he's safe, that's all we want," his father, Buddy, said.

Fenster — in a knit hat that he said was a gift from another prisoner — joked that the first thing he would do is get a shave and a haircut.

He also said he hoped his plight would help focus world attention on the suffering of the people of Myanmar, where the army has responded brutally to peaceful protests that opposed the generals' seizure of power. Security forces have killed more than 1,200 civilians and arrested about 10,000 others, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. The takeover and the ensuing crackdown have drawn condemnation and sanctions from the United States and others.

Richardson is known for negotiating the freedom of Americans detained in countries with which Washington has poor relations and when he visited Myanmar earlier this month, it raised hopes that he might win Fenster's release. But after that trip, he said his focus was on helping the Southeast Asian country manage the COVID-19 pandemic and speeding up the delivery of vaccines there — and no mention of Fenster was made in his foundation's summary of the visit.

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In an interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday, Richardson said U.S. officials told him not to bring up Fenster's case during his first meeting with military leaders. But he did so when he sensed there was an opportunity to negotiate the release during a private conversation with the commander-in-chief of the junta.

"Well, I raised it. I said, 'You should release him,'" Richardson explained, at which point talks deepened and he was told to return Monday for "a final negotiation."

Later that day, according to Richardson's timeline, Fenster was free.

Richardson said he made no promises in exchange for Fenster's freedom. "And they didn't ask me for anything," he said.

"I saw we had progress on the humanitarian issue, and I zeroed in on Danny and Aye Moe," Richardson said, referring to a former worker at his foundation who was also detained then released.

The White House thanked Richardson for securing Fenster's release. "The United States welcomes the release of Danny Fenster from detention in Burma," White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates said.

Fenster had been in detention since his arrest at Yangon International Airport on May 24.

The exact allegations against him 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 military takeover. 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 older brother, Bryan, 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."

Associated Press writer Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Poland uses water cannons against migrants at Belarus border

By VANESSA GERA and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Polish forces at the border with Belarus used water cannons and tear gas Tuesday against stone-throwing migrants, as Warsaw accused Belarusian authorities of giving smoke grenades and other weapons to those trying to cross the frontier.

The events marked an escalation in the tense crisis on the European Union's eastern border, where the West has accused President Alexander Lukashenko of using the migrants as pawns to destabilize the 27-nation bloc in retaliation for its sanctions on his authoritarian regime. Belarus denies orchestrating the crisis.

The Poland Border Guard agency posted video on Twitter showing water being sprayed across the border at a group of migrants who threw debris, and the Defense Ministry also said tear gas was used against the attackers. Polish authorities said nine of its forces were injured — seven policemen, one soldier and a female border guard.

Some 2,000 migrants were at the frontier in makeshift camps in the freezing weather, but only about 100 were believed involved in attacking the Polish forces at the crossing near Kuźnica, said Border Guard spokeswoman Anna Michalska. The crossing has been closed since last week.

Police spokesman Mariusz Ciarka later said the migrants there had been "pacified." He added that the attackers had been given smoke grenades by the Belarusians and threw stones at the Polish police, with the events monitored by the Belarusian services using a drone. The Polish Defense Ministry also said Belarus gave some migrants flash-bang grenades.

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Belarus' State Border Guard Committee and the Foreign Ministry said they would investigate Poland's actions.

"These are considered violent actions against individuals who are on the territory of another country," committee spokesman Anton Bychkovsky was quoted as saying by Belarus' state news agency Belta.

Lukashenko on Tuesday again rejected accusations of engineering the crisis and said his government has deported about 5,000 illegal migrants from Belarus this fall.

"We're not collecting refugees all over the world and bringing them to Belarus, as Poland has informed the European Union. Those who come to Belarus legally, we accept here, the same way any other country would. Those who violate the law, even in the slightest, (we put) on a plane and send back (home)," he told a government meeting dedicated to the situation at the border.

In May, however, he had railed against the EU sanctions imposed on his country for its harsh crackdown on internal dissent, saying: "We were stopping migrants and drugs — now you will catch them and eat them yourself."

On Tuesday, Lukashenko said he and German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed Monday by phone that neither Belarus, nor the EU would benefit from an escalation of the crisis. He said he proposed a resolution but did not elaborate, adding that Merkel is discussing it with other EU leaders.

Some of the migrants have children with them at the border in their desperate bid to reach the EU. Most are fleeing conflict, poverty and instability in the Middle East and elsewhere. At least 11 deaths have been reported in recent weeks as the weather has turned colder and they are trapped in the dank forest between the forces of the two countries.

While some have managed to get into the EU before Poland, Lithuania and Latvia bolstered their borders, passage appears to be much harder now.

Poland's Defense Ministry said Belarusian forces tried to destroy border fences, and its Interior Ministry posted video apparently showing migrants trying to tear one down. It said the migrants are using the smoke grenades and similar weapons given to them by Belarusian troops who no longer seem to be trying to conceal their involvement.

Poland has taken a tough stand against the migrants' illegal entry, reinforcing the border with riot police and troops, rolling out razor wire, and making plans to build a tall steel barrier. The Polish approach has largely met with approval from other EU nations, who want to stop another wave of migration.

But Poland also has been criticized by human rights groups and others for pushing migrants back into Belarus and not allowing them to apply for asylum.

"It's very clear that if you see what's been happening to this group of people — that their own specific concerns, their particular dignity and their rights — have not been treated with the respect that they should have," said U.N. spokesman Farhan Haq. "And that is why we want them to be able to speak for themselves and to be heard. We don't want these people to be instrumentalized and used as pawns in the disputes involving the countries."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called Poland's actions "violate all conceivable norms of international humanitarian law and other agreements of the international community."

Warsaw says Moscow bears some responsibility for the border crisis, given its strong support for Belarus. The Russian government has denied responsibility.

Events at the border have been difficult to verify independently. Poland has imposed a state of emergency, which bars reporters and human rights workers from the area. In Belarus, journalists face severe restrictions on their ability to report.

Poland's parliament is expected to consider a bill to regulate citizens' ability to move in the border area after the state of emergency expires in December.

The EU has been pressuring airlines to stop carrying Syrians, Iraqis and others to Belarus, and the efforts were bringing changes. A Beirut travel agency said flights from the Lebanese capital to Minsk had been stopped for now. A Tuesday evening flight by Belarusian carrier Belavia was shown as canceled on the airport's website.

Iraq urged its citizens at the border to return home. About 200 Iraqis in Belarus to travel to the EU have contacted the Iraqi Embassy in Russia about returning home, an embassy spokesman told the Interfax agency. The spokesman said an evacuation flight will leave Thursday from Minsk, and Belarusian authorities have helped bring migrants back from the border.

Social media platforms used by Syrians and Iraqis to navigate the Belarus-Europe track posted photos showing crowds along the border overnight. Some appeared undeterred, posting that they got warm clothes and boots. Messages celebrated those who made it across, and a few urged migrants to head for the Belarus-Lithuania border.

Some described harsh treatment, including beatings, by Belarusian border guards, but most postings appeared to recognize that the Belarus route might no longer work.

"There is no more path to escape. By God, Minsk's route has ended. What are the new roads?" one person posted on a social media platform.

Litvinova reported from Moscow. Sarah El Deeb in Beirut, Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations and Yuras Karmanau Kyiv, Ukraine, contributed.

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

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

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

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 extremist group that is affiliated to the Islamic State group.

The IS group claimed responsibility for the blasts, according to SITE, which tracks the online activities of extremist organizations.

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

Police released security video footage of the precise moments the bombers detonated their devices in the streets, sending clouds of white smoke billowing in the air. Police officers were among the casualties.

"We give thanks to God. He has protected us," said eyewitness Jane Among near one of the blast scenes. "We first heard a blast, and then when we stayed a little we heard another blast and saw dust all over."

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 scampered 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.

In a series of Twitter posts, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said the attacks were carried out by "manipulated and confused" youths who were being hunted down by the security forces in the months since a failed assassination bid on a top government official.

"The terrorists invited us and we are coming for them," he said.

The U.S. Embassy condemned the bomb attacks "in the strongest terms," extending condolences to the victims' families.

"United States' support for the Ugandan people is unwavering as we work toward our shared goal of a

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secure, democratic, and prosperous Uganda," it said in a statement posted on Twitter.

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 restaurant. 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 long rule of 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, 77, who has ruled Uganda for 35 years and was reelected to a five-year term in January.

The group was established in the early 1990s by some 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 IS group first emerged in 2019, according to SITE.

Uganda is predominantly Christian and Muslims make up about 14% of the country's 44 million people.

Infrastructure bill unleashes funding to address risky dams

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — States will soon be flooded with federal money to address a pent-up need to repair, improve or remove thousands of aging dams across the U.S., including some that could inundate towns or neighborhoods if they fail.

The roughly \$3 billion for dam-related projects pales in comparison to the tens of billions of dollars going to roads, rails and high-speed internet in the \$1 trillion infrastructure plan signed Monday by President Joe Biden. But it's a lot more than dam projects had been getting.

The money could give "a good kick-start to some of these upgrades that need to be done to make the dams as safe as possible," said David Griffin, manager of Georgia's Safe Dams Program and president-elect of the Association of State Dam Safety Officials.

The U.S. has more than 90,000 dams, averaging over a half-century old. An Associated Press analysis in 2019 identified nearly 1,700 dams in 44 states and Puerto Rico that were in poor or unsatisfactory condition and categorized as high-hazard — meaning their failure likely would result in a deadly flood. The actual number almost certainly is higher, because some states declined to provide complete data for their dams.

Though many large dams are maintained by federal or state agencies, most of the nation's dams are privately owned. That makes fixing them more challenging, because regulators have little leverage over dam owners who don't have the money to make repairs or simply neglect the needed fixes.

Over the past decade, the Federal Emergency Management Agency provided more than \$400 million for projects involving dams, mostly to repair damage from natural disasters. But until just a few years ago,

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there was no national program focused solely on improving the thousands of dams overseen by state and local entities.

FEMA's Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams Grant Program has divvied up \$31.6 million among 36 participating states from 2019-2021. That amount, appropriated by Congress, was barely one-fifth of what had been authorized under a 2016 federal law.

The infrastructure bill provides more than 18 times that amount, pumping \$585 million into the program for hazardous dams, including \$75 million set aside for their removal. Because of administrative requirements, FEMA said the new money likely won't start flowing to states before the 2023 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, 2022. Previous grants often have been enough only to cover engineering or planning expenses.

"This funding will allow for significant increases in the number and amount of actual dam rehabilitation and removal projects which the current funding levels have not allowed," said David Maurstad, FEMA's deputy associate administrator for insurance and mitigation.

Repairing and modernizing all 14,343 high-hazard dams that aren't owned by the federal government could cost more than \$20 billion, according to an estimate by the dam safety association.

"The program is not really intended to fix all of them, but this will definitely help to fix some of the worst of those," said Mark Ogden, a former Ohio dam safety official who is now a technical specialist at the association. "It will definitely improve public safety."

The infrastructure legislation also includes \$148 million for FEMA to distribute to state dam safety offices — a significant increase over the \$6 million to \$7 million annually that has been divided among states. The new money could help states hire more staff or consultants to assess the safety of dams and develop emergency action plans. Every state except Alabama has a dam safety program, but many are underfunded and understaffed, creating a backlog of work.

After dam failures resulted in flooding that forced the evacuation of about 10,000 people last year in Michigan, a review by the dam safety association found the state's dam safety office was "extremely understaffed" and that it hadn't invested in dam safety "for many decades."

Michigan responded by beefing up its budget. A state spending plan that took effect last month includes \$13 million for grants to repair and remove dams and \$6 million for an emergency fund that could be tapped when dam owners are unwilling or unable to make repairs. It also includes money to hire more staff for the dam safety program.

Additional dam funding is sprinkled throughout the federal infrastructure legislation.

The Bureau of Reclamation will get \$500 million over five years for its dam safety program, a 50% increase over its current annual appropriation. The money is likely to go toward major renovation projects at B.F. Sisk Dam on San Luis Reservoir in California and El Vado Dam in New Mexico, said reclamation dam safety officer Bob Pike. That will free up other funds to hasten repairs at about 20 other high-hazard dams in the bureau's footprint of 17 western states, he said.

Reclamation will get an additional \$100 million for repairs at certain old dams. An additional \$118 million will fund repairs at dams through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. And \$75 million will flow through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a loan program to make dam repairs.

The bill includes up to \$800 million through several federal agencies that could be used to remove dams, allowing fish to pass through.

The large influx of federal funds shows that "removing dams in many places is good and appropriate and healthy for river resilience," said Tom Kiernan, president of the nonprofit group American Rivers.

The infrastructure bill also includes about \$750 million that could fund improvements at hydroelectric dams or retrofit existing dams to start producing energy. That includes a new grant program capped at \$5 million a year per facility. The hydropower industry is pushing for separate legislation that also would create a tax credit for improvements to hydroelectric dams.

The funding in the infrastructure bill "is just a down payment," said LeRoy Coleman, spokesman for the National Hydropower Association. "We need transformational change for more clean energy and for healthier rivers."

English cricket racism exposed by victim Rafiq at parliament

By ROB HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LONDON (AP) — English cricket was forced to confront its racist culture on Tuesday when former player Azeem Rafiq testified through tears at a parliamentary hearing but with a determination to expose the Islamophobia and bullying he suffered for more than a decade.

“Do I believe I lost my career to racism? Yes, I do,” said Rafiq, who played for Yorkshire — England’s most successful cricket club.

“I hope in five years’ time we are going to see a big change, that I did something far bigger than any runs or any wickets I got.”

Racism complaints that led to Yorkshire launching an investigation in September 2020 reached the British Parliament after the report that dismissed some abuse as “friendly banter” led to no immediate departures from the club’s hierarchy and was not publicly released.

Rafiq told legislators that Yorkshire teammates used an offensive term referencing his Pakistani heritage and that the leadership at the 33-time winners of the English county championship failed to act on the racism.

“Pretty early on, (for) me and other people from an Asian background,” Rafiq told a House of Commons select committee overseeing sport, “there were comments such as, ‘You lot sit there near the toilets,’ ‘Elephant washers.’ The word P(asterisk)(asterisk)(asterisk) was used constantly. And there just seemed to be an acceptance in the institution from the leaders and no one stamped it out.”

Asked if he thought cricket was institutionally racist in the country, Rafiq responded: “Yes, I do.”

Two former players at Essex have recently also said they were racially abused at that club, whose chairman resigned last week over the use of racist language at a board meeting four years ago.

Rafiq, a former England Under-19 captain, said he felt “isolated, humiliated at times” by his treatment at Yorkshire during two spells playing for the club from 2008 to 2018.

During testimony, Rafiq also made fresh claims of racial discrimination against former England internationals Matthew Hoggard, Tim Bresnan, Alex Hales and Gary Ballance who are accused of using the offensive abbreviation of Pakistani toward him.

“For any part I played in contributing to Azeem Rafiq’s experience of feeling bullied at Yorkshire, I apologize unreservedly,” Bresnan said.

Rafiq said Ballance’s use of “Kevin” as a blanket derogatory term for all people of color was “an open secret in the England dressing room” and Hales called his dog Kevin because it was black.

“It’s disgusting how much of a joke it was,” Rafiq said.

As a graduate of the Yorkshire academy, Rafiq recalled Hoggard told Asian players “you lot sit over there” and referred to them as “elephant washers.”

Rafiq has also said former England captain Michael Vaughan said “there’s too many of you lot” at a 2009 game for Yorkshire. Vaughan denies saying it.

Yorkshire said last month that it would not take any disciplinary action against any of its employees, players or executives despite a report upholding seven of the 43 allegations that Rafiq was the victim of racial harassment and bullying. Only recently have the chairman and chief executive resigned.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has suspended Yorkshire from hosting international matches over its “wholly unacceptable” response to the racism faced by Rafiq, while sponsors are ending deals, including kit supplier Nike.

“I agree that the handling of the report indicates issues around institutional racism,” ECB chief executive Tom Harrison told legislators.

Rafiq said he was being talked about as a captain of Yorkshire before reporting his concerns in 2017. Then Rafiq said board minutes said he was “a problem, a troublemaker and an issue that needs to be resolved.”

That followed a 2017 preseason tour when Rafiq said he suffered abuse from a teammate in front of others.

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"Gary Ballance walks over and goes, 'Why are you talking to him? You know he's a P(asterisk)(asterisk) (asterisk).' Or, 'He's not a sheikh, he's got no oil,'" Rafiq testified.

Two weeks ago, Ballance, a former England cricketer, admitted to using a racial slur against Rafiq when they were teammates at Yorkshire, but said that was in the context of friends saying offensive things to each other.

In a written submission to the hearing, Rafiq claimed that Yorkshire "protected" Ballance by allowing him to miss drug hair sample tests to avoid sanctions.

"When he failed a recreational drug test and was forced to miss some games," Rafiq said, "the club informed the public he was missing games because he was struggling with anxiety and mental health issues."

At one point the committee had to break for several minutes after Rafiq grappled with the emotions of recounting painful experiences.

The Pakistan-born Rafiq, who is Muslim, described his distressing first experience of alcohol at the age of 15 after being asked about his drinking.

"I got pinned down at my local cricket club and had red wine poured down my throat, literally down my throat," the 30-year-old Rafiq said. "I (then) didn't touch alcohol until about 2012 and around that time I felt I had to do that to fit in. I wasn't perfect. There are things I did which I felt I had to do to achieve my dreams.

"I deeply regret that but it has nothing to do with racism. When I spoke I should have been listened to. The game as a whole has a problem, with listening to the victim. There is no 'yeah, but' with racism; there is no 'two sides' to racism."

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Defying inflation, Americans ramped up spending last month

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Many Americans have taken a darker view of the economy as inflation has worsened. Yet so far, they appear no less willing to spend freely at retailers — an encouraging sign for the crucial holiday shopping season.

Buoyed by solid hiring, healthy pay gains and substantial savings stemming in part from government stimulus checks and other relief, Americans ramped up their spending at retail stores and online shops last month. Some of the increase reflected the impact of higher prices, and there were signs that Americans have started to seek out cheaper options.

Yet the October gain the government reported Tuesday was solid enough for most economists to anticipate holiday shopping jumping by a record amount this year.

The data also illustrates a key factor behind the supply chain backups that have left dozens of ships waiting to unload at U.S. ports: Americans are buying a tremendous amount of goods, from appliances to electronics to furniture. Retail and food service sales have surged 16.3% compared with a year ago. That is a record high excluding several months during the spring when federal stimulus checks caused sharp spikes in spending.

From September to October, retail sales jumped 1.7%, the U.S. Commerce Department said Tuesday. That was the biggest month-to-month gain since March and was up from a 0.8% increase from August to September.

The increase occurred just as retailers face a host of challenges. Many have had to sharply raise pay to find and keep workers, thereby increasing their labor costs. And some are scrambling amid overwhelmed supply chains to keep their shelves stocked.

"Even with all these problems, we're still on track here for a banner year," said Tim Quinlan, an economist at Wells Fargo.

After adjusting for inflation, Quinlan estimates that retail sales in November and December will be 10% higher than a year earlier, which would be the biggest such gain in seven years.

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Last month, sales soared 3.8% at electronics and appliance stores and 4% among online retailers. Those increases suggested that many Americans are already doing their holiday shopping, possibly to avoid higher prices and supply shortages closer to the holidays.

Tuesday's retail sales figures aren't adjusted for inflation, which rose 0.9% in October, the government said. In some categories, such as gas station sales, a jump in gas prices accounted for nearly all the gain. Gas sales rose 3.9% in October, while gas prices, before seasonal adjustment, rose 3.7% that month, according to the government's inflation report.

Still, two major retailers reported robust sales increases Tuesday, another sign that high prices aren't deterring many consumers from spending. Walmart and Home Depot reported rising sales and solid profits, although costs rose for both companies because of supply chain disruptions. Walmart said its consolidated gross profit rate took a hit primarily because of increased supply chain costs.

Analysts will be monitoring earnings results from other major retailers like Target and Macy's later this week for further clues about how inflation is affecting shopping habits.

There are signs, though, that rising inflation is starting to affect some consumers' shopping patterns. Walmart executives said that grocery sales rose sharply in the fall, partly a reflection of purchases by some shoppers who had been stung by rising prices elsewhere. Customer traffic rose 5.7%.

In October, the government said sales at restaurants and bars were flat, even though restaurant prices surged last month by the most since 1981. Data from the OpenTable online reservation service indicates that consumers are slowly returning to restaurants. Both trends combined suggests that Americans are eating out at cheaper places, Quinlan said.

Behind the healthy retail spending are solid hiring, strong pay raises and healthy savings for many people. Most households with children have been receiving monthly payments from the Biden administration's child tax credit. Wages and salaries jumped in the July-September quarter, compared with a year earlier, by the most in 20 years.

Still, inflation has eroded those gains for most Americans. Prices jumped 6.2% in October from a year earlier, the government said Wednesday, the most in 31 years.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail, said he thinks many Americans are determined to spend what it takes to enjoy themselves as they make up for lost celebrations from a year ago.

"This suggests that the retail sector will be able to weather the impact of higher prices ... at least in the near term," Saunders noted. If inflation stays high, he said, it could undermine growth next year.

D'Innocenzo reported from New York.

Times Square is back open on New Year's Eve — with vax proof

NEW YORK (AP) — Crowds will once again fill New York's Times Square this New Year's Eve, with proof of COVID-19 vaccination required for revelers who want to watch the ball drop in person, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Tuesday.

"Yes, we are proud to announce that Times Square, wonderful celebration in Times Square, the ball drop, everything, coming back full strength the way we love it," de Blasio said at a virtual news briefing. "Hundreds of thousands of people there to celebrate. We can finally get back together again. It's going to be amazing."

Tom Harris, the president of the Times Square Alliance, said all spectators aged 5 and over will be asked to show proof of full vaccination. People who can't be vaccinated because of a disability will have to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test, he said.

The New Year's Eve celebration, perhaps the city's most iconic public gathering, was a socially distant affair during the height of the pandemic last year.

There were no packed crowds of giddy revelers, jammed together cheek-by-jowl. Instead there were mostly empty streets as officials told people to stay home and watch the ball drop on television. Entertainers including Jennifer Lopez performed behind police barricades to small groups made up of essential

workers.

With the advent of vaccines, the city's public celebrations have been on the upswing in 2021. The Macy's Fourth of July fireworks once again welcomed crowds to gather and watch as fireworks lit up the sky, and some parades have returned to city streets.

The Macy's Thanksgiving Parade will also be returning to pre-COVID form, with giant balloons guided by volunteer handlers making their way through the event's Manhattan parade route, instead of the one-block stretch they were kept to last year.

Durbin calls for Garland to remove federal prisons director

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee demanded Tuesday that Attorney General Merrick Garland immediately fire the director of the beleaguered federal Bureau of Prisons after an Associated Press investigation detailing serious misconduct involving correctional officers.

Sen. Dick Durbin's demand came two days after the AP revealed that more than 100 Bureau of Prisons workers have been arrested, convicted or sentenced for crimes since the start of 2019. The AP investigation also found the agency has turned a blind eye to employees accused of misconduct and has failed to suspend officers who themselves had been arrested for crimes.

Durbin took particular aim at Director Michael Carvajal, who has been at the center of the agency's myriad crises. Under Carvajal's leadership, the agency has experienced a multitude of crises from the rampant spread of coronavirus inside prisons and a failed response to the pandemic to dozens of escapes, deaths and critically low staffing levels that have hampered responses to emergencies.

Carvajal was appointed by then-Attorney General William Barr but Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said recently that she still had confidence in him despite the many serious issues during his tenure. The AP reported in June that senior officials in the Biden administration had been weighing whether to oust him. He is one of the few remaining holdovers from the Trump administration.

"Director Carvajal was handpicked by former Attorney General Bill Barr and has overseen a series of mounting crises, including failing to protect BOP staff and inmates from the COVID-19 pandemic, failing to address chronic understaffing, failing to implement the landmark First Step Act, and more," Durbin said in a statement. "It is past time for Attorney General Garland to replace Director Carvajal with a reform-minded Director who is not a product of the BOP bureaucracy."

Two-thirds of the criminal cases against Justice Department personnel in recent years have involved federal prison workers, who account for less than one-third of the department's workforce. Of the 41 arrests this year, 28 were of BOP employees or contractors. The FBI had just five. The Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives each had two.

The AP investigation also detailed how the Bureau of Prisons allowed an official at a federal prison in Mississippi, whose job it was to investigate misconduct of other staff members, to remain in his position after he was arrested on charges of stalking and harassing fellow employees. That official was also allowed to continue investigating a staff member who had accused him of a crime.

And in the last week, two inmates have escaped from the custody of the Bureau of Prisons, marking at least 36 escapes within the last 22 months.

"We have a new Administration and a new opportunity to reform our criminal justice system," Durbin said. "It's clear that there is much going wrong in our federal prisons, and we urgently need to fix it. That effort must start with new leadership."

Separately on Tuesday, the Justice Department's inspector general found that the Bureau of Prisons had stalled the development of more than 30 agency policies because agency officials have been refusing to meet with the union representing prison workers for in-person policy negotiations, as required under a contract.

About half of the policies that have stalled for the last 20 months were created or revised in response to the First Step Act, a bipartisan criminal justice overhaul signed during the Trump administration and

aimed at encouraging inmates to participate in programs aimed at reducing recidivism — which could let them out of prison earlier — easing mandatory minimum sentences and giving judges more discretion in sentencing.

The inspector general found that the Bureau of Prisons has not given credit to any of the about 60,000 federal inmates who have completed those programs because the agency hasn't finalized its procedures or completed the policy negotiations with the union. The watchdog also found that the failure to negotiate has delayed the implementation of 27 recommendations from the inspector general's office.

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 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.

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 about 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 have bottomed 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 morning Beijing time 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, and Chinese spokesperson Zhao Lijian called them "candid, constructive, substantive and fruitful."

SOURCES 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

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crackdown in Hong Kong, and the Uyghur homeland of Xinjiang where an estimated million people or more have been detained in re-education camps, according to experts.

Xinhua made no mention of specific human rights issues. It 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. 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 International Peace. "So the fact that the two leaders are meeting, in my view, is 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.

Paul Haenle's affiliation has been corrected to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, not World Peace.

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

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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.

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>

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Nov. 17, the 321st day of 2021. There are 44 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 17, 1997, 62 people, most of them foreign tourists, were killed when militants opened fire at the Temple of Hatshepsut (haht-shehp-SOOT') in Luxor, Egypt; the attackers, who also hacked their victims, were killed by police.

On this date:

In 1558, Elizabeth I acceded to the English throne upon the death of her half-sister, Queen Mary, beginning a 44-year reign.

In 1800, Congress held its first session in the partially completed U.S. Capitol building.

In 1869, the Suez Canal opened in Egypt.

In 1889, the Union Pacific Railroad Co. began direct, daily railroad service between Chicago and Portland, Oregon, as well as Chicago and San Francisco.

In 1969, the first round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the United States and the Soviet Union opened in Helsinki, Finland.

In 1970, the Soviet Union landed an unmanned, remote-controlled vehicle on the moon, the Lunokhod 1.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon told Associated Press managing editors in Orlando, Florida: "People have got to know whether or not their president is a crook. Well, I'm not a crook."

In 1979, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini (ah-yah-TOH'-lah hoh-MAY'-nee) ordered the release of 13 Black and/or female American hostages being held at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

In 1989, the Walt Disney animated feature "The Little Mermaid" opened in wide release.

In 2002, Abba Eban (AH'-bah EE'-ban), the statesman who helped persuade the world to approve creation of Israel and dominated Israeli diplomacy for decades, died near Tel Aviv; he was 87.

In 2003, Arnold Schwarzenegger was sworn in as the 38th governor of California.

In 2018, Argentina's navy announced that searchers had found a submarine that disappeared a year earlier with 44 crewmen aboard; the government said it would be unable to recover the vessel.

Ten years ago: Occupy Wall Street protesters clogged streets and tied up traffic around the U.S. to mark two months since the movement's birth and signal they weren't ready to quit, despite the breakup of many of their encampments by police. Clayton Kershaw of the Los Angeles Dodgers won the NL Cy Young Award. Demi Moore said she was ending her 6-year marriage to Ashton Kutcher.

Five years ago: President-elect Donald Trump, at Trump Tower in New York, held his first meeting with a world leader, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (SHIN'-zoh AH'-bay), and received advice from former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

One year ago: President Donald Trump fired the nation's top election security official, Christopher Krebs, who had refuted Trump's unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud and vouched for the integrity of the vote. Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said the U.S. would reduce troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan to about 2,500 in each country by mid-January, accelerating troop withdrawals during Trump's final days in office. Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California easily won reelection as House Republican leader. The White House coronavirus task force warned of an "aggressive" and "unrelenting" spread of the coronavirus as the nation headed into the Thanksgiving holiday. U.S. regulators allowed emergency use of the first rapid coronavirus test that could be performed entirely at home and delivered results in 30 minutes.

Today's Birthdays: Sen. James Inhofe (IHN'-hahf), R-Okla., is 87. Singer Gordon Lightfoot is 83. Singer-songwriter Bob Gaudio (GOW'-dee-oh) is 80. Movie director Martin Scorsese (skor-SEH'-see) is 79. Actor Lauren Hutton is 78. Actor-director Danny DeVito is 77. "Saturday Night Live" producer Lorne Michaels is 77. Movie director Roland Joffe is 76. Former Democratic National Chairman Howard Dean is 73. Former House Speaker John Boehner (BAY'-nur) is 72. Actor Stephen Root is 70. Rock musician Jim Babjak (The Smithereens) is 64. Actor Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio is 63. Actor William Moses is 62. Entertainer RuPaul

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is 61. Actor Dylan Walsh is 58. Former National Security Adviser Susan Rice is 57. Actor Sophie Marceau (mahr-SOH') is 55. Actor-model Daisy Fuentes is 55. Blues singer/musician Tab Benoit (behn-WAH') is 54. R&B singer Ronnie DeVoe (New Edition; Bell Biv DeVoe) is 54. Rock musician Ben Wilson (Blues Traveler) is 54. Actor David Ramsey is 50. Actor Leonard Roberts is 49. Actor Leslie Bibb is 48. Actor Brandon Call is 45. Country singer Aaron Lines is 44. Actor Rachel McAdams is 43. Rock musician Isaac Hanson (Hanson) is 41. Former MLB outfielder Ryan Braun is 38. Actor Justin Cooper is 33. Musician Reid Perry (The Band Perry) is 33. Actor Raquel Castro is 27.