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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

Service Notice: Robert Meister

Funeral services for Robert "Bob" Meister, 78, of Groton will be 10:30 a.m., Saturday, November 20th at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Groton. Pastor Kari Foss will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.

Visitation will be held at the church from 5-7 p.m. on Friday with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Bob passed away November 16, 2021 at Bethesda Home of Aberdeen.

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.
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Supporting local arts beats supply chain worries

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

As the holiday shopping season approaches with the speed of a runaway train, we are being warned about this year's unusual supply chain woes, as stores struggle to stock shelves. Every industry from auto production to dog grooming is prone to supply chain slowdowns, shortages and unavailabilities. But there's one way you can do your holiday shopping early, support your neighbors and find unique gift ideas—purchase your gifts from local artists and arts organizations.

It's easy to give the gift of South Dakota creativity. Choose a book by one of our state's authors or photographers, jewelry created by a local artisan, a framed print or painting by a South Dakota artist or tickets to a special performance—all gifts that will be enjoyed throughout the year.

Gifts reflecting our state's creative culture are not hard to find. Nearly every bookstore in South Dakota has an "in-state" or "regional" section, filled with our state's writers sharing their stories, telling tales of the past or breaking new ground with exciting fiction or poetry. Museum gift shops are perfect places to find South Dakota artists' work, in an incredible range of prices, sizes, colors and subject matter. Galleries, both public and private, show and sell South Dakota visual arts. You can find furniture, sculpture, prints, drawings and notecards created here in South Dakota by people you know. And don't forget albums and holiday performances by South Dakota musicians.

These gifts don't require shipping from faraway places, won't be subject to delays in seaports, don't clog the supply chain or delivery systems and are an especially creative form of "buying locally," a goal many of us have all year long.

Giving the gift of South Dakota art shows your support for the artists who are living and working in our state—and it makes this a place where artists are encouraged and can make a living. You will enhance our cultural heritage, advance the appreciation of the arts and spark new ideas for the recipient. That's quite an impactful holiday gift!

For more gift ideas—or to make a holiday gift donation to Arts South Dakota—visit artssouthdakota.org.



Small Business Saturday factor in economic recovery

By SBA South Dakota District Director Jaime Wood

Locally owned small businesses are the heartbeat of America's cities and towns – this holds especially true for South Dakota where 99 percent of businesses are considered small. For most businesses, the last quarter of the calendar year – to include the holiday season – makes or breaks revenue needed to stay operational. In the past decade, celebrating Small Business Saturday evolved into an American tradition following the Thanksgiving holiday. This year, November 27th is Small Business Saturday and with stores kicking off the holiday shopping season, there's great opportunity to show appreciation to local small businesses that continue to navigate through and recover from economic ripples brought on by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic confirmed the critical role small businesses play in our daily lives. Beyond providing needed goods and services, the in-person and relationship building experience between business owners, employees, and consumers became even more appreciated over the past few months. Being together – to shop and engage in person – after experiencing months of pandemic distress and separation – offers a nostalgic sweetness and normalcy.

To this day, brick-and-mortar businesses ornately decorate and promote their best deals of the year in hopes of luring shoppers. However, during the pandemic, online shopping skyrocketed and became habitual for many consumers. Recent surveys indicate that over 80 percent of Americans now make regular online purchases throughout the year. As COVID-19 spread across the globe, many small businesses struggled to find new ways to compete with mega online shopping sites, and large retailers that remained open during the pandemic. There is a silver lining to the pandemic – it helped to shape small business presence in the virtual space. Small businesses innovated the way they promote and sell their products and services. Many pivoted their operations and embraced the digital space by adding convenient retail websites and cellular applications to augment their onsite commerce. Some businesses also reintroduced traditional customer service practices like providing personalized one-on-one assistance, and locally produced niche items found nowhere else including online.

In addition to providing the goods and services consumers rely on, small businesses remain a stable job creator and contribute substantially to the tax base, non-profits, and charitable organizations. South Dakota's 90,000 small businesses continue to generate two of every three net new jobs and deliver essential goods and services in rural and urban areas. Over 210,000 South Dakotans are employed by small businesses.

Each year Small Business Saturday provides a huge boost to the U.S. economy when over 100 million consumers spend more than \$20 billion at small shops and local restaurants. With increased consumer confidence in the economy, and a waning pandemic, this year's Small Business Saturday promises to be even bigger and brighter. As the voice of America's entrepreneurs, the U.S. Small Business Administration celebrates this nation's 36 million small businesses that still ignite our local economies. On November 27th and throughout this holiday season, whether shopping in-person or online, making the choice to support small businesses is an investment towards securing the future of local communities.

(Jaime Wood serves as the SBA South Dakota District Director based in Sioux Falls and oversees SBA programs and services across the state)

Robotics teams make it to semifinals at Mitchell

Groton Robotics traveled down to Mitchell on Saturday, November 13th for their second tournament competing with 21 teams. Groton teams participating in this tournament were: Gear Heads 9050B (Jack Dinger, Ethan Clark, Axel Warrington), Bradyn Wienk from the Gladiators helped out Gear Heads for the day. G-Force 9050A (Travis Townsend, Jace Kroll) and Galaxy 9050E (River Pardick, Corbin Weismantel, Kiana Sander-not present Dustin Pardick) Due to other commitments Galaxy JUST started building their robot a week prior to the Mitchell tournament!

The day started with 32 qualifying matches, each team competing 6 times. At the end of the 32 qualifying matches, out of the 21 teams, G-Force ranked 7th, Gear Heads - 8th, and Galaxy - 15th.

Galaxy's day ended in the quarterfinals. G-Force and Gear Heads ended in the semi-finals.

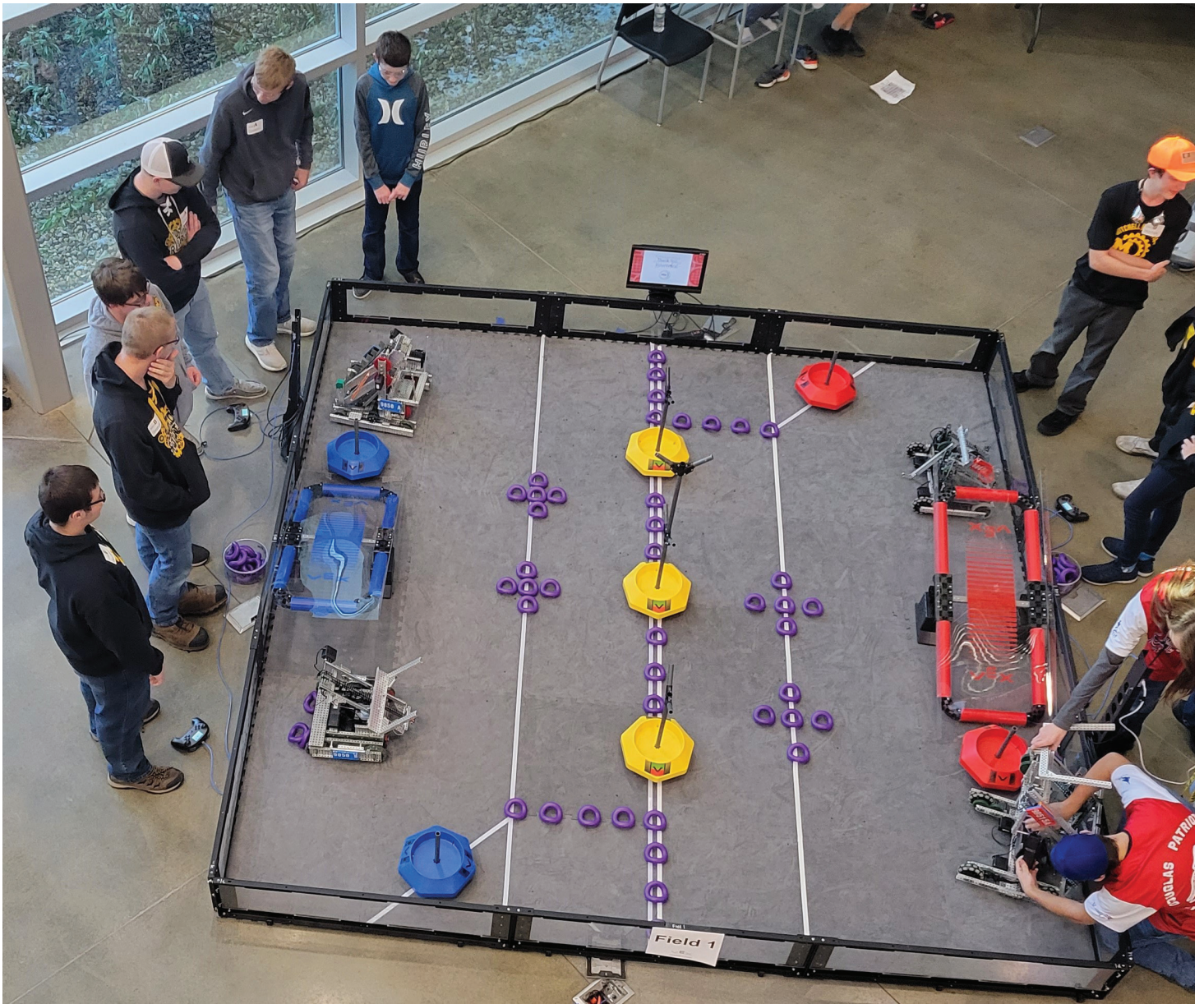
Tournament champions were from Sioux Falls and North Sioux City. Congratulations to all the robotists who participated! Groton's next tournament will be Saturday, November 20th as they travel to Rapid City. MARK YOUR CALENDAR as Groton will be hosting one tournament this year on Saturday, January 8th. For more information check out the vex VRC robotics website, download the VEX via app and follow Groton Tiger Robotics on Facebook. Thanks to all who support Groton Robotics!



(L-R) Axel Warrington, Ethan Clark, Jack Dinger and Galaxy-9050E: Kiana Sander, River Pardick. Getting ready to start a match. (Photo credit Weston Dinger)

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Gear Heads-9050B: (L-R) Axel Warrington, Ethan Clark, Jack Dinger & G-Force-9050A: Travis Townsend, Jace Kroll, helping out Bradyn Wienk from Gladiators. (Photo credit Weston Dinger)

DANR Announces December 17 Deadline for Urban and Community Forestry Grants

PIERRE, S.D. – Funding for new community forestry projects is available through the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) 2021 Urban and Community Forestry Comprehensive Challenge Grant program.

The application deadline is December 17, 2021.

The Challenge Grant program helps recipients solve specific community forestry problems or demonstrate the importance of trees and urban forests in our communities. Grant funds must be used for trees or tree management on public land or in public right of ways. Funds can also be used for professional services, tree inventories and assessments, existing tree care and maintenance, training and education, and new tree plantings.

Communities, tribes, and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply. Projects must follow the guidelines for Community Forestry Challenge Grants. These guidelines, the grant application, and a guided scoring system to assist applicants are available online at:

<https://danr.sd.gov/Conservation/Forestry/UrbanandCommunityForestry/ComprehensiveChallengeGrants/default.aspx>

Communities must provide equivalent match for all funds awarded. Match may be cash or in-kind contributions.

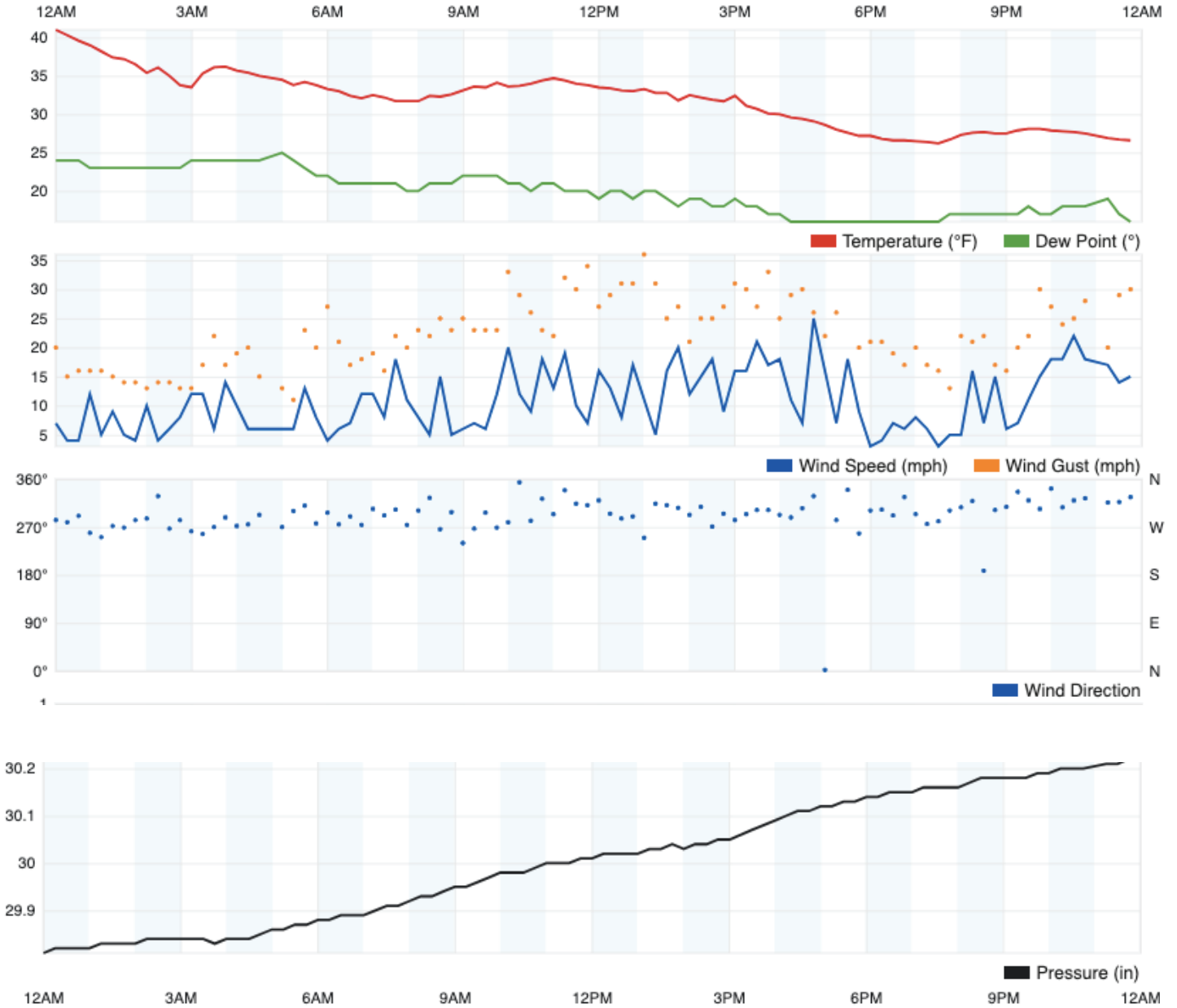
DANR's Urban and Community Forestry Comprehensive Challenge Grant is an ongoing program. During the previous grant cycle DANR awarded \$20,000 for 8 projects across the state.

For more information, please contact John Hartland at 605.362.2830 or John.Hartland@state.sd.us.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thursday



Scattered
Flurries and
Breezy then
Sunny

High: 36 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 22 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny

High: 45 °F

Friday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 26 °F

Saturday



Slight Chance
Rain/Snow
then Partly
Sunny

High: 40 °F

**Cold Today
Milder Friday**

Today... Highs in the 30s

Friday... Highs in the 40s

Weekend Outlook

Saturday: 35-48°

Sunday: 30-42°

Updated: 11/18/2021 2:22 AM Central NWS Aberdeen

The wind will gradually diminish this morning, but it will remain cold today. It should turn milder for Friday and Saturday, but then return to cold and windy for Sunday. Some light rain or snow is possible Saturday. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

November 18, 1985: Snowfall of 3-8 inches fell over western, central and northern South Dakota, with the most significant amount of 8 inches at Huron in Beadle County and White River in Mellette County. Strong winds exceeding 40 mph over the area produced near-blizzard conditions at times, with considerable blowing and drifting snow. Additional storm total snowfall amounts included; 6.0 inches in Murdo; 5.5 inches at Gettysburg, 5.0 inches near Stephan, in Eureka, and 12SSW of Harrold; and 4.0 inches in McLaughlin.

November 18, 1992: Three to eleven inches of snow fell in the northeast third of South Dakota and into west central Minnesota from the 18th into the 19th. Storm total snowfall amounts included; 11.0 inches in Browns Valley and near Bryant, 9 inches near Sisseton, Summit and Wheaton MN, 8 inches near Victor and Wilmot, 7.9 inches at Artichoke Lake MN, and 7.0 inches in Clear Lake.

1421: The notorious St. Elizabeth's flood occurred during the night of November 18, to November 19 in what is now known as the Netherlands. A strong storm on the North Sea coast caused several dikes to break allowing the lower lands to flood. Some villages around Dordrecht were lost, causing an estimated 6,000 casualties.

1929: A magnitude 7.2 earthquake off the coast of the Grand Banks, Newfoundland caused a submarine landslide that triggered a tsunami that killed people on the Burin Peninsula of Newfoundland. The under-sea landslide damaged several miles of transatlantic telegraph cables, resulting in much of the \$400,000 in damage. South Carolina and Portugal felt this tsunami.

1873 - A severe storm raged from Georgia to Nova Scotia causing great losses to fishing fleets along the coast. In Maine, the barometric pressure reached 28.49 inches at Portland. (David Ludlum)

1955 - An early season cold snap finally came to an end. Helena, MT, experienced 138 consecutive hours of subzero temperatures, including a reading of 29 below zero, which surpassed by seven degrees their previous record for the month of November. Missoula MT broke their November record by 12 degrees with a reading of 23 below zero, and Salt Lake City UT smashed their previous November record of zero with a reading of 14 below. Heavy snow in the Great Basin closed Donner Pass CA, and total crop damage from the cold wave amounted to eleven million dollars. (David Ludlum)

1957 - A tornado, 100 yards in width, travelled a nearly straight as an arrow 27-mile path from near Rosa AL to near Albertville AL, killing three persons. A home in the Susan Moore community in Blount County was picked up and dropped 500 feet away killing one person. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - The first of two successive snowstorms struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced up to 20 inches of snow in southern New Hampshire. Two days later a second storm produced up to 30 inches of snow in northern Maine. (Storm Data)

1987 - It was a windy day across parts of the nation. Gale force winds whipped the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusting to 80 mph in western New York State damaged buildings and flipped over flatbed trailers at Churchville. In Montana, high winds in the Upper Yellowstone Valley gusted to 64 mph at Livingston. Strong Santa Ana winds buffeted the mountains and valleys of southern California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front drenched Little Rock AR with 7.01 inches of rain, smashing their previous record for the date of 1.91 inches. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A second surge of arctic air brought record cold to parts of the north central U.S. Eleven cities in the Upper Midwest reported record low temperatures for the date, including Rochester MN with a reading of 4 degrees below zero. Strong winds ushering the arctic air into the north central U.S. produced squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in northern Ohio ranged up to twenty inches in Ashatabula County and Geauga County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

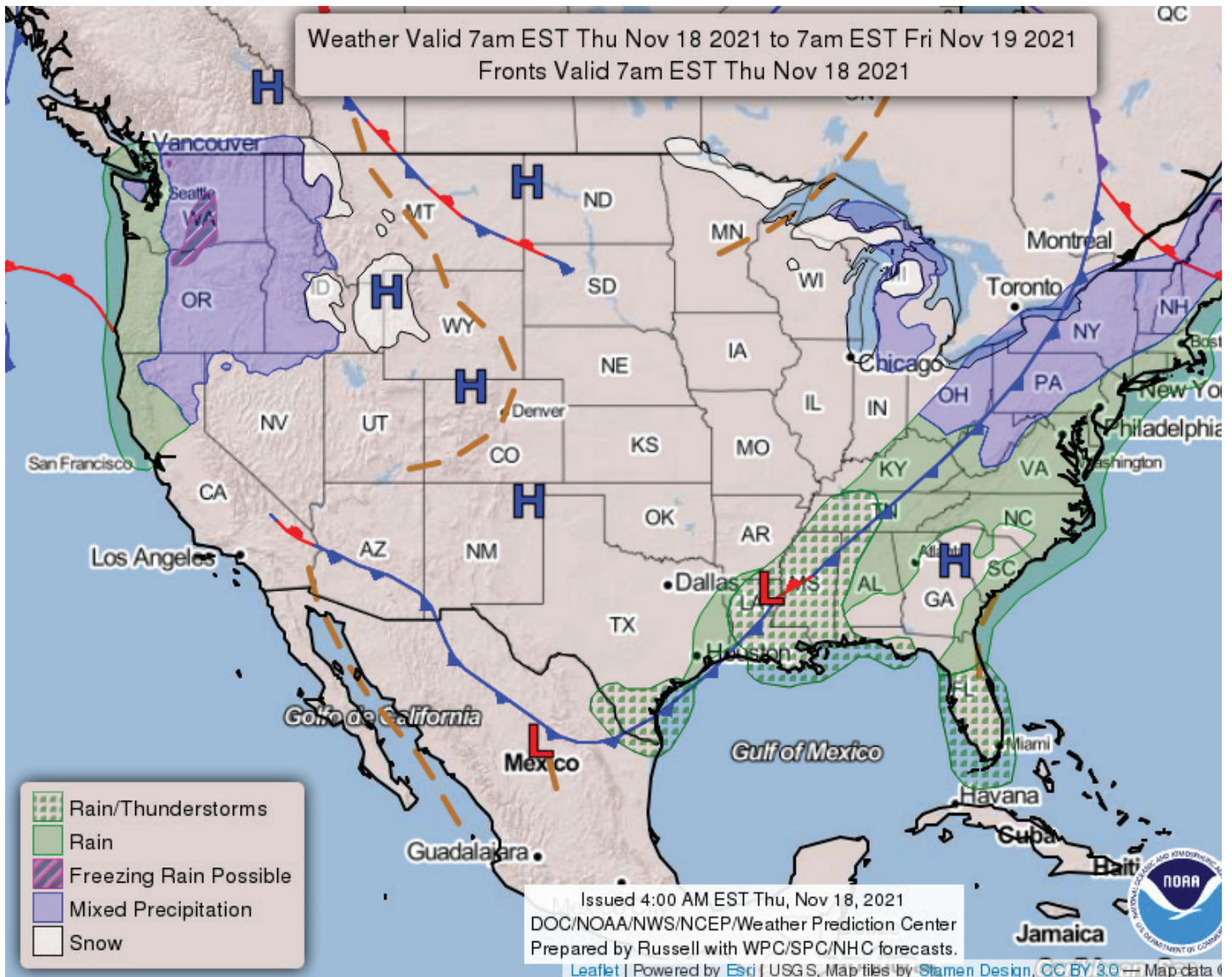
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 41.0 °F at Midnight
Low Temp: 26.2 °F at 7:30 PM
Wind: 36 mph at 1:00 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 71° in 1908
Record Low: -13° in 1896
Average High: 41°F
Average Low: 18°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.49
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16
Average Precip to date: 20.96
Precip Year to Date: 19.88
Sunset Tonight: 5:00:54 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:35:45 AM



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PROCLAIM HIS MIGHTY ACTS!

Not many people have ever heard of Mithridates the Great, King of Pontus, from northern Asia Minor, in 88 B.C. He was famous for his size, his strength, and his skill of mastering the languages of the twenty-five nations that he ruled. There's also Cardinal Mezzofanti, who was born in Bologna, Italy who spoke more than one hundred languages and dialects. Language is important. It connects us.

Today, philologists claim that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 different languages that people use to communicate with one another. The majority of the languages in our world flow from one person to another. Some languages exist that have never been reduced to writing. Every one of them evolves and changes over time. When people connect with other people in other places, languages become richer and more inclusive. Some languages add new words while other words are deleted when they no longer make sense. Some words lose their meaning and are soon forgotten.

Yet, no matter how many words there may be or how many languages are spoken, the Psalmist put things into the proper context when he asked, "Who can proclaim the mighty acts of God, or fully declare His praise?"

We will never be able to praise God as much as He deserves, but we can praise Him with a heart that is sincere. If we ever begin to realize the magnitude of God's love and mercy that saved us, and now sustains us, our hearts will be filled with such joy that our voices will never cease to express our gratitude and thanks!

Prayer: Father, we lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving to You for Your love for us and the gift of Your Son, our Savior. May our humble offering be acceptable to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise? Psalm 106:2

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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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

Scheierman leads S. Dakota St. past Montana St. 91-74

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Baylor Scheierman scored 18 points on 7-for-8 shooting, grabbed seven rebounds, distributed three assists and had three steals and South Dakota State beat Montana State 91-74 on Wednesday night.

Noah Friedel scored 18 points off the bench for the Jackrabbits (3-1), Douglas Wilson added 15, Charlie Easley 13, Alex Arians 12 and Luke Appel 11.

Jubrielo Belo scored 13 for Montana State (1-2) and Abdul Mohamed and Great Osobor 10 apiece.

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and <https://twitter.com/AP>—

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

02-14-28-33-35

(two, fourteen, twenty-eight, thirty-three, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$222,000

Lotto America

06-30-31-40-50, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 2

(six, thirty, thirty-one, forty, fifty; Star Ball: five; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$4.17 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$74 million

Powerball

03-16-48-52-60, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 3

(three, sixteen, forty-eight, fifty-two, sixty; Powerball: one; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$190 million

Search warrants unsealed in probe of billionaire Sanford

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota investigators probed an email account belonging to billionaire banker-turned philanthropist T. Denny Sanford, as well as his cellular and internet service providers, for possible possession of child pornography, according to search warrants unsealed Wednesday.

The investigation into Sanford was reported last year by ProPublica and the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. Both news outlets went to court for access to the search warrants. The state Supreme Court ruled last month, in a case that only publicly named an “implicated individual,” to unseal the warrants and the corresponding lists of what investigators found.

The unsealing of the legal documents Wednesday was the first time investigative documents have been released that name Sanford. However, the affidavits from an agent with South Dakota’s Division of Criminal Investigation agent will remain sealed until the investigation is concluded or criminal charges are filed, as allowed under state law. The affidavits, which are sworn statements from law enforcement officers, could detail what investigators found and why the billionaire was under investigation.

Sanford came to the attention of investigators in late 2019, according to the search warrants. A Division of Criminal Investigation agent requested a search warrant seeking information relating to an email account associated with him that December. The agent followed up with a request for four more search

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warrants on his cellular and internet service providers in March 2020.

Sanford has not been charged with a crime and it remains unclear if he will face any charges.

"The ultimate fact remains that the investigating authorities have not found information to support criminal charges," said Sanford's attorney Marty Jackley.

The legal form that lists what investigators turned up in their search warrants — known as a "verified inventory" — did not detail what investigators found, but indicated that reports and documents from Sanford's cellular and internet providers had been attached to an investigative report.

Jackley also pointed out that Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg's office called statements on the investigation from anonymous sources inaccurate.

Ravnsborg had determined there was sufficient evidence to move toward prosecuting Sanford last year, two people briefed on the matter by law enforcement previously told the Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it.

However, the attorney general passed the case to the U.S. Department of Justice because it spanned to Arizona, California and Nebraska, according to both people. Federal prosecutors have given no indication that they are bringing charges against Sanford.

The DOJ did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In an email from Ravnsborg released Wednesday, the attorney general told a South Dakota judge last year that "multiple states and jurisdictions" were involved and that he would need to consult with the DOJ about the request to access the search warrants.

The 85-year-old is the state's richest man, worth an estimated \$3.4 billion. He made a fortune as the founder of First Premier Bank in South Dakota, which is known for issuing high-interest credit cards to those with poor credit.

In recent years, he has focused on philanthropy as part of a mission to "die broke." His name adorns dozens of buildings and institutions in South Dakota and beyond.

Sanford's philanthropic largesse has increased in recent months. This year alone, he has announced donations of \$650 million to Sanford Health, which changed its name in 2007 to reflect its largest benefactor. He also gave \$100 million to South Dakota's government for a college scholarship endowment.

Tribes welcome infusion of money in infrastructure bill

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Tribes welcomed an infusion of money in the massive infrastructure bill to expand broadband coverage, fix roads and address water and sanitation needs, but they say real change will come only with sustained investment.

President Joe Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion deal earlier this week that includes about \$11 billion in benefits for Indian Country, according to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. About one-third of that, \$3.5 billion, will go to the Indian Health Service, the federal agency tasked with providing healthcare for more than 2 million Native American and Alaska Natives.

The funding is enough to address more than 1,560 projects on the agency's list of water and sanitation deficiencies in 12 regions, estimated to cost nearly \$2.6 billion. Projects in Alaska and the Southwest region that covers the Navajo Nation — where many tribal members live without running water and indoor plumbing — collectively have the largest price tags.

"In these and several other tribal communities, sanitation and clean water systems would never be built because the annual appropriations were insufficient to cover all the deficiencies," the National Indian Health Board said Wednesday.

Indian Health Service spokeswoman Jennifer Buschick said the agency will consult with tribes soon to determine how to allocate the funding.

Another \$2.5 billion will go to fulfill tribal water rights settlements that already have been approved. The Interior Department hasn't specified which agreements that quantify tribes' rights to water are included. But the leaders of the Navajo Nation, which extends into parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, and the

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White Mountain Apache Tribe in eastern Arizona said they expect to benefit from the funding.

Heather Tanana, who is Navajo and an assistant law professor at the University of Utah, is part of a group that released a roadmap Tuesday on how the federal government can move forward with the funding effectively. It includes coordination among federal agencies, working with tribes and through an existing tribal task force.

Officials with the Biden administration repeatedly referred to a "whole of government" approach this week during the White House Tribal Nations Summit in announcing agreements among federal agencies on tribal treaty rights and sacred sites.

Tanana, the research lead for the Tribal Clean Water initiative, said goals and accountability also must be part of the equation, along with building capacity for tribes to operate water and sanitation systems on their own. The group of tribal members, water experts and nonprofits pushes for access to clean water for tribes in the Colorado River basin and beyond.

"Whole of government shouldn't just be a catchy phrase," Tanana said. "It's critical to getting the money that Congress just appropriated on to the ground and into actual projects."

Building and improving upon water and sanitation systems will have a cascading effect in tribal communities and urban areas where most Native Americans live, improve health disparities and foster economic development, the National Indian Health Board said. The group also said the momentum should continue with Congress fully funding health care facilities serving Indigenous people as part of the federal government's obligation to federally recognized tribes.

Colorado U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, who had co-sponsored a separate bill to improve water and wastewater systems in Indian Country, said: "This is the first step of many to reduce this shameful disparity and help ensure that tribal communities have access to safe, clean water."

U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said the infrastructure funding is not inconsequential but is long overdue.

"It's been decades that we've been talking about eliminating the honey bucket and getting clean drinking water into communities, and sanitation systems," she said, referring to lined buckets used to collect human waste in many isolated Alaska Native villages that lack indoor plumbing.

"A flush toilet is not too much to ask in this day and age," Murkowski said.

Tribal leaders told the Biden administration during the virtual summit that they appreciated the money in the infrastructure bill but pointed out some potential hurdles, including for tribes that don't have the resources to compete for grants or match the funding.

"Why can't tribes just receive the funding?" said Janet Davis, chairwoman of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe in Nevada. "Why do we have to write grants to be able to use it, so we can use it for our communities to be safe?"

Navajo President Jonathan Nez suggested federal policies and regulations be eased or updated so projects won't be stalled. He cited needing environmental clearances from two different federal agencies when a U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs road or bridge is constructed on the reservation.

"A failure to clear out some of the burdens that prevent infrastructure investment will mean all our efforts to help pass the infrastructure bill may not lead to the progress we want for our people," Nez said. "What's the point of giving us money if regulations make it almost impossible to spend it?"

White Mountain Apache Chairwoman Gwendena Lee-Gatewood said lasting differences will come only with sustained investments to make up for decades of underfunding and neglect.

"We hope this administration will continue to focus on the critical needs and keep its foot on the gas in future budget years," she said during the two-day summit that wrapped up Tuesday.

Biden administration officials said they would work to address the tribes' concerns.

Associated Press writer Becky Bohrer in Juneau, Alaska, contributed to this story. Fonseca is a member of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/FonsecaAP>.

Ex-official subpoenaed in probe of Noem daughter meeting

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers issued a subpoena Wednesday to the former head of the state agency at the center of questions over whether Gov. Kristi Noem influenced her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

The Executive Board, which presides over other legislative committees, voted 14-1 to compel testimony from Sherry Bren, the former director of the Appraiser Certification Program. Bren had suggested the committee subpoena her because she is barred from disparaging state officials as part of a settlement agreement with the state.

The Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee has been looking into a meeting Noem held last year that included her daughter, Kassidy Peters, and Bren, following an Associated Press report about it. Bren's agency had moved to deny Peters' application to upgrade her real estate appraiser license, but she was granted another opportunity to pursue her license through an agreement signed more than a week after the meeting.

Noem's labor secretary told the committee last month that regulators had already decided to give Peters another opportunity to win her license prior to the meeting.

Lawmakers were cautioned by some on the executive board to tread lightly as they probe an issue that has drawn ire from Noem, who has positioned herself for a potential White House bid. One top Republican said he wanted the committee to limit its questions to the operations of the state agency.

"We feel strongly that this has a limited scope," Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck said. "It's about the functionality of the appraisal program of which there's much discussion probably in all of our districts because of the critical role appraisers play in getting financing and dealing with all housing issues."

Although government ethics experts had said the meeting in the governor's mansion last year may have been an abuse of the governor's power, Noem has denied wrongdoing and said she was looking to solve a shortage of appraisers in South Dakota.

The legislative committee had also prepared to subpoena the Department of Labor and Regulation for the agreement. But Peters released the document, labeled a "stipulation agreement," Tuesday as she announced she would leave her appraisal business.

Republican Sen. Kyle Schoenfish, who is the chair of the Government Operations and Audit Committee, said that a subpoena for the document, which called for the department to produce "an agreed disposition," was no longer necessary.

The committee had requested Bren's presence last month but she declined. However, Bren told the AP that she would work with lawmakers to "correct any factual inaccuracies" in the testimony Noem's labor secretary, Marcia Hultman, gave to the committee.

Hultman pressured Bren to retire shortly after Peters received her license in November last year. The longtime agency head 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.

One lawmaker on the committee, Republican Rep. Chris Karr, suggested he wanted to find out why Bren faced pressure to retire.

"It's important that we make sure we're protecting the employees of our state," he said. "We're trying to sort out all the facts."

Bren's testimony has not been scheduled.

Primary challenger says Noem hasn't sided with conservatives

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Republican primary challenger to South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said Wednesday that the governor is bound to corporate interests and has repeatedly sided against conservatives.

State Rep. Steve Haugaard, a Sioux Falls lawyer, told a crowded room of supporters during his formal campaign announcement that Noem has been on the wrong side of issues like sports participation by

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transgender athletes and COVID-19 vaccine mandates.

Noem earlier this year blocked legislation that would have prohibited transgender women from competing in high school sports designated for females. She said it would make South Dakota vulnerable to civil rights litigation and could prompt college tournaments to be pulled out of the state. Noem has also refused to block private employers from requiring their workers be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Noem, who has traveled the country meeting with political organizations and other supporters, formally announced her reelection campaign last week. She has raised \$10 million since she was elected three years ago and has more than \$6.5 million in cash on hand, her campaign said.

Haugaard, 65, said Noem has been hobnobbing with the wrong people, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

"We need a full-time governor who puts South Dakotans first. Period," Haugaard said. "Kristi Noem has been beholden to special interests, from the NCAA, to big business, to corporate lobbyists."

Noem's office did not immediately respond to an email request for comment.

Haugaard 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.

He has also raised eyebrows with some of his actions in the legislature. Haugaard once suggested that creating a Spanish-language driver's test would "dilute our population with a second culture and encourage that second culture." Another time he tried to implement a dress code in the House that drew objections from women in the legislature.

South Dakota's primary election is in June.

Dentist accused of domestic abuse give up dental practice

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls dentist accused of choking his wife in a domestic abuse case has given up his dental practice.

Cale Slack made his first court appearance Tuesday on a felony aggravated assault charge and four misdemeanor assault charges.

A conviction on the felony charge carries up to 15 years in prison.

Slack has been a dentist in Sioux Falls since 1997. However, Slack has agreed with the South Dakota Board of Dentistry to stop practicing in light of domestic abuse charges filed against him, KELO-TV reports.

According to prosecutors, the alleged abuse took place in September.

Sioux Falls police spokesman Sam Clemens says the defendant is accused of hitting, punching and choking the victim Sept. 25 and two days later breaking her car window as she waited to pick up children outside a middle school.

Slack's attorney did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. November 15, 2021.

Editorial: Redistricting: A New Map, A New Approach

South Dakota lawmakers wrapped up the grueling, once-in-a-decade redistricting process last week, coming up with a plan that addresses some of the tough realities in this rural state — while also demonstrating one of the big flaws in the process.

The final compromise manages to ensure Native American representation in the Rapid City area and will create some districts around Sioux Falls that aren't directly part of that city. Locally, District 18, which has long been just Yankton County, will now take on the northwest corner of Clay County. Meanwhile, District 17 will include Clay County as well as southern Union County, while the rest of Union County and Turner County will be tied into a district that runs up to Sioux Falls. Also, Bon Homme County will be back in one piece.

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Redistricting may be tough for some people to get excited about — as Rep. Nancy York (R-Watertown) told KELO, “A lot of people don’t even know what we’re doing out here. The voters don’t care” — it can have a serious impact on legislation, especially when it comes to issues in which rural perspectives and urban opinions are at odds. It stands to reason that, with more representation shifting toward Sioux Falls, Rapid City and larger communities, the more pull those lawmakers (and, by extension, constituents) will have in shaping what comes out of Pierre each winter.

As we’ve noted before, this is not a problem unique to South Dakota. As urban centers gain more population in sprawling rural states, representation at the state capital will gradually reflect that trend, which does mean rural areas are gradually losing their volume at the Legislature. It will never go away, but their voices will increasingly become a smaller chorus in the decades ahead.

Meanwhile, some plans tossed around in Pierre throughout this process plainly showed their political designs, as some proposals carved up areas to dilute their power. It was not a coincidence, for instance, that one early proposal partitioned the city of Vermillion, one of the more Democratic communities in the state, into three different districts. It took an impressive amount of boundary gymnastics to formulate that proposal based along the population formula. Although eventually scuttled, the idea illustrates what the dubious art of gerrymandering is all about.

District 18 Rep. Ryan Cwach (D-Yankton) criticized the closed-door negotiating that went into drawing these lines.

“The whole fact that politicians are involved in this process of redistricting brings transparency questions,” he told The Associated Press. “My only conclusion from this whole thing, besides I’m thankful we got to a pretty competitive map, is that this should be the last time politicians draw the lines.”

This is something we’ve advocated in the past. The last thing we should want is lawmakers, whose power is based on how much control their party has, in charge of drawing the boundary lines of the election process which determines that power. As we’ve seen too many times at various levels, the ability to gerrymander districts has led to some ridiculously drawn districts that are twisted and contorted to great lengths in order to undercut parties, minorities and others. As some have accurately described it, this could be seen as an effort by politicians to pick their voters.

Redistricting should be a nonpartisan process in which gaining or diluting political advantage isn’t a tempting priority. While not all lawmakers take this approach when they head into the redistricting process, history tells us the idea is too tantalizing for some to resist.

It’s an issue that, ideally, should be addressed before this matter arises again in 10 years. Mind you, it probably won’t ... but it really should.

END

US warns pilots of weapon fire as war nears Ethiopia capital

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The United States is warning pilots that planes operating at one of Africa’s busiest airports could be “directly or indirectly exposed to ground weapons fire and/or surface-to-air fire” as Ethiopia’s war nears the capital, Addis Ababa.

The Federal Aviation Administration advisory issued Wednesday cites the “ongoing clashes” between Ethiopian forces and fighters from the northern Tigray region, which have killed thousands of people in a year of war. The U.S. this week urged its citizens in Ethiopia to “leave now,” saying there should be no expectation of an Afghanistan-style evacuation.

The Addis Ababa international airport is the hub for the state-owned Ethiopian Airlines, a symbol of Ethiopia’s former status as one of the world’s most rapidly growing economies before the war. The airline in recent years became Africa’s largest and best-managed carrier, turning Addis Ababa into the gateway to the continent. Addis Ababa is also the continent’s diplomatic capital as home of the African Union.

The FAA advisory notes no reports of disruptions at Bole International Airport and “no indication of an intent to threaten civil aviation,” but it says the risk to approaching and departing planes could increase if

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the Tigray fighters encircle the capital.

The Tigray fighters "likely possess a variety of anti-aircraft capable weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank weapons, low-caliber anti-aircraft artillery, and man-portable air-defense systems," or MANPADS, which could reach up to 25,000 feet above ground level, the FAA advisory says.

In an acknowledgment of Bole airport's importance for onward travel for the African continent and beyond, the U.K. Minister for Africa Vicky Ford last week told reporters that Britain now advises against all travel to Ethiopia apart from the airport for departures and transfers.

The Tigray forces who had long dominated the national government before current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018 have approached Addis Ababa in recent weeks and joined up with another armed group, the Oromo Liberation Army, with the aim of pressing Abiy to step aside.

The Tigray forces also say they are pressuring Ethiopia's government to lift a months-long blockade on the Tigray region, which includes an Ethiopian government restriction on flights over Tigray. No food, medicine or other humanitarian aid has entered Tigray, a region of some 6 million people, for more than a month since Ethiopia's military resumed airstrikes there for the first time since June.

Efforts by an AU envoy, former Nigerian president Olesegun Obasanjo, and U.S. envoy Jeffrey Feltman continue to nudge the warring sides to agree to a cease-fire and talks.

Ethiopia's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Dina Mufti, told reporters Thursday that both Obasanjo and Feltman are in Ethiopia, but he didn't give details.

Ethiopian Airlines seized the world's attention in 2019 when the crash of a Boeing 737 Max shortly after takeoff from Addis Ababa killed 157 people. That and the earlier crash of another brand-new 737 Max off the coast of Indonesia had far-reaching consequences for the aeronautics industry as it brought about the grounding of Boeing 737 Max jets until late last year.

White House offering more aid for winter heat, utility bills

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

The Biden administration is taking steps to help distribute several billion dollars in aid for winter heating and utility bills, an unprecedented sum that comes largely from its \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package.

The package provided an additional \$4.5 billion for the government's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which typically has funding of \$3 billion to \$4 billion annually. Aid for renters can also cover utility costs, while the money provided to state, local and tribal governments can help families that face high heating bills and are ineligible for other programs.

"It's another example of where the American Rescue Plan included extra precautions to ensure we would be prepared," said Gene Sperling, who is overseeing coronavirus relief for the White House. "These new programs and funding were designed to ensure that if the weather was colder or the prices were higher, we would have the highest resources ever to help as many hard-pressed families as possible."

The White House sent out invites for a call Thursday afternoon with representatives from governors' offices to discuss ways to distribute the funds and coordinate across programs. Speakers on the call will include Sperling, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and the governors of Connecticut, Maine and Michigan.

The aid helps to create a cushion that limits the shock of higher energy costs ahead of winter. Republican lawmakers have said the relief package, which became law in March, caused higher levels of inflation, with prices in October 6.2% higher than a year ago.

"The Democrats' inflation is functioning like an ultra-punitive tax on the American families who can least afford it, exactly the opposite of a 'high-class problem,'" Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said in a Wednesday floor speech.

But in this instance, the spending from the aid package is already helping to insulate millions of households from higher utility bills. Estimates by the Urban Institute based off a Census Bureau survey indicate that a third of families used the monthly payments from the expanded child tax credit to pay their utility bills between July and October 2021.

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Electricity and natural gas prices are roughly 11% higher than a year ago, according to the Labor Department's consumer price index. Heating oil prices have more than doubled over the past year, according to the Energy Information Administration.

The administration is also calling on utilities and energy companies to use the available government resources to protect their most vulnerable customers. DTE Energy, Eversource, National Grid and North-Western Energy have already agreed to identify and notify eligible recipients and guarantee no shutoffs for customers seeking assistance.

SKorea sees record virus jump as thousands take college exam

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea reported its biggest daily jump in coronavirus infections since the start of the pandemic as hundreds of thousands of masked students flocked to schools on Thursday for the country's highly competitive college entrance exam amid growing concerns about the delta-driven spread.

About 509,000 students were taking the one-day exam at 1,395 sites across the nation, including hospitals and shelters.

The annual exam, called "Suneung," or the College Scholastic Ability Test, is crucial in the education-obsessed country, where careers, social standings and even marriage prospects greatly depend on which university a person attends.

Students were required to have their temperatures taken before entering classrooms, and those with fevers were sent to separate testing areas. The Education Ministry said that 68 infected students and 105 others in self-quarantine took the hours-long test in isolation.

The 3,292 new cases reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Thursday marked the second straight day of over 3,000 cases. The agency said 29 patients died in the past 24 hours, bringing the death toll to 3,187, while 506 others were in serious or critical condition.

To reduce noise, transportation authorities were planning to temporarily stop landings and departures of planes at airports during the English-listening part of the test. Government offices and private companies had their employees come in late, and the country's stock market delayed its opening by an hour to clear roads for test-takers.

"(Students) weren't given proper classes (because of COVID-19) and I often saw my child worrying much and struggling," said Seo Kwang-sun, a mother of a test-taker in Seoul.

While schools have been alternating between on-and-offline classes, the Education Ministry had planned a full return to classrooms starting next week to help reduce education gaps and align with the government's virus strategies.

Officials eased social distancing rules starting this month in what they described as the first step toward restoring some pre-pandemic normalcy. In allowing larger social gatherings and longer indoor dining hours at restaurants, officials cited concerns about the pandemic's impact on the economy and expressed hope that improving vaccination rates would keep hospitalizations and deaths down even if the virus continues to spread.

But there has been a rise in serious cases and fatalities among older people who rejected vaccines or whose immunities waned after being injected early in the mass immunization campaign that started in late February, prompting questions about whether the decision to loosen virus restrictions was premature.

So far, officials have issued no plans to re-impose stricter social distancing measures or postpone a full reopening of schools.

China coast guard uses water cannon against Philippine boats

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Chinese coast guard ships blocked and sprayed a powerful stream of water at two Philippine boats carrying supplies to troops at a disputed South China Sea shoal, prompting Manila

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to order Beijing's ships to back off and warn that its supply vessels are covered by a mutual defense treaty with the United States, Manila's top diplomat said Thursday.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said no one was hurt in the incident on Tuesday, but the two supply ships had to abort their mission to provide food to Filipino forces occupying Second Thomas Shoal, which lies off western Palawan province in the Philippines' internationally recognized exclusive economic zone.

Locsin said in a tweet that the three Chinese coast guard ships' actions were illegal and urged them "to take heed and back off."

It was the latest flare-up in the long-simmering territorial disputes in the strategic waterway, where China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have overlapping claims. China claims virtually the entire South China Sea and has transformed seven shoals into missile-protected island bases to cement its assertions, ratcheting up tensions and alarming rival claimants and Western governments led by the U.S.

The Philippine government conveyed to China "our outrage, condemnation and protest of the incident," Locsin said, adding that "this failure to exercise self-restraint threatens the special relationship between the Philippines and China" that President Rodrigo Duterte and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, worked to nurture.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China's coast guard had upheld China's sovereignty after the Philippine ships entered Chinese waters at night without permission.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon told reporters in Manila that two Chinese coast guard ships blocked the two wooden-hulled supply vessels. A third coast guard ship "water cannoned the two for one hour," he said, adding that the outrigger of one of the Philippine ships was displaced by the impact.

A water cannon is a device on firetrucks that shoots high-velocity water for firefighting and crowd control but has also been installed on Chinese coast guard ships to drive away what China considers intruders in the waters it claims.

The Philippines plans to deploy coast guard and Bureau of Fisheries vessels instead of navy ships to back up its forces and enforce its fishing laws at Second Thomas Shoal, which Filipinos call Ayungin and China refers to as the Ren'ai reef, Esperon said.

The number of Chinese surveillance ships has increased in recent weeks in the far-flung shoal and also around Thitu, a larger Philippine-occupied island in the Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea's most hotly contested area, he said.

Philippine forces won't be deterred from traveling again to the shoal following the incident, he said.

"We will continue the resupply and we do not have to ask the permission of anybody because that is within our territory," Esperon said.

The Philippine military deliberately ran aground a World War II-era warship, the BRP Sierra Madre, at the submerged shoal in 1999 to fortify its claim and provide a shelter to a small contingent of Filipino marines.

The Sierra Madre is now effectively a rusty shipwreck but the Philippine military has not decommissioned it. That makes the ship an extension of the government and means any attack on the ship is tantamount to an assault against the Philippines.

In 2014, the Philippine military invited more than a dozen journalists, including from The Associated Press, on a resupply mission to the shoal in a bid to draw global attention to what Philippine officials have called China's bullying tactics.

Two Chinese coast guard ships then tried to block the slow-moving, military-chartered vessel carrying the journalists, with one cutting dangerously through the Philippine ship's path twice. The Chinese coast guard warned the Philippine vessel by radio to turn back, saying it was illegally venturing into Chinese territory.

The Chinese ships blew their horns intimidatingly, but the boat managed to maneuver toward the Sierra Madre through shallow waters dotted with rocky coral outcrops, preventing the Chinese ship from pursuing.

Washington has no claims in the busy waterway but has patrolled the region with its Navy ships and aircraft to assure its allies, including the Philippines, and protect freedom of navigation and overflight. China has repeatedly warned the U.S. to stay away from the disputed waters and not meddle in what it

says is a regional issue.

President Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump, have repeatedly assured the Philippines that the U.S. will honor its obligation under the nations' Mutual Defense Treaty if Philippine forces, ships or aircraft come under attack in the region.

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

Hong Kong declares wild boars fair game after animal attacks

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong authorities have had enough of wild boars.

An increasing number of attacks by the animals, including one that bit a police officer last week, triggered an operation Wednesday night in a district less than half an hour's drive from Hong Kong's financial center. Experts used dart guns to capture seven wild boars, which were later put down via medicine injections, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department said in a statement.

Wild boars are a common sight in Hong Kong along hiking trails. They are often fed by people despite appeals by authorities not to do so as they could transmit diseases and may gather in large numbers. Previous attempts to relocate and sterilize the boars "could not effectively control the wild pig nuisance," the department said.

"A large group of wild pigs continued to wander and gather at the site, posing threats to members of the public and road users," the statement read.

Last week, a wild boar knocked down an auxiliary police officer and bit his leg before plunging to its death from a residential car park. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has since warned of stiffer penalties for those caught feeding the boars.

"I understand that a lot of Hong Kong people love the wetlands and nature. However, we also need to protect public safety," Lam said earlier this week at a regular news conference.

"There were about 30 cases of wild boars attacking humans, we can't simply sit on our hands while things deteriorate," she said.

Philanthropic group ADM Capital Foundation, the Hong Kong Veterinary Association and other animal rights organizations have since sent an open letter to the government criticizing its shift in policy to cull the boars.

"Whilst it is recognized that the majority of the public do not feed wild pigs, the consequences of the relatively few that do are significant, and thus sufficient resources must be allocated to stopping the practice," the letter read.

A petition by groups including Hong Kong Animal Post and Hong Kong Wild Boar Concern Group said that the measures announced by the agriculture department to regularly capture and put down wild boars "ignores their right to live and considers their existence in urban areas as a capital offense. This approach is extremely unreasonable and contradicts previous animal management policy principles."

The AP Interview: Ex-Interpol wife takes on China government

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

LYON, France (AP) — In China, she enjoyed the privileges that flowed from being married to a senior member of the governing elite. Her husband was a top police official in the security apparatus that keeps the Communist Party in power, so trusted that China sent him to France to take up a prestigious role at Interpol.

But Meng Hongwei, the former Interpol president, has now vanished into China's sprawling penal system, purged in a stunning fall from grace. And his wife is alone with their twin boys in France, a political refugee under round-the-clock French police protection following what she suspects was an attempt by Chinese agents to kidnap and deliver them to an uncertain fate.

From being an insider, Grace Meng has become an outsider looking in — and says she is horrified by

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what she sees.

So much so that she is now shedding her anonymity, potentially putting herself and her family at additional risk, to speak out against China's authoritarian government that her husband — a vice minister of public security — served before disappearing in 2018. He was later tried and imprisoned.

"The monster" is how Meng now speaks of the government he worked for. "Because they eat their children."

In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Meng chose for the first time to show her face, agreeing to be filmed and photographed without the dark lighting and from-the-back camera angles that she previously insisted on, so she could speak openly and in unprecedented detail about her husband, herself and the cataclysm that tore them apart.

"I have the responsibility to show my face, to tell the world what happened," she told The AP. "During the past three years, I learned — just like we know how to live with the COVID — I know how to live with the monster, the authority."

Among the global critics of China — many of them now mobilizing against the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing — Meng brings the unique perspective of a former insider who has walked through the looking glass and emerged with her views transformed. So profound is the change that she has largely stopped using her Chinese name, Gao Ge. She says she now feels more herself as Grace, her chosen name, with her husband's surname, Meng.

"I have died and been reborn," she says.

About Meng, his whereabouts and health as an imprisoned soon-to-be 68-year-old, she is entirely in the dark. Their last communication was two text messages he sent on Sept. 25, 2018, on a work trip to Beijing. The first said, "wait for my call." That was followed four minutes later by an emoji of a kitchen knife, apparently signaling danger. She thinks he likely sent them from his office at the Ministry of Public Security.

Since then, she says she has had no contact with him and that multiple letters sent by her lawyers to Chinese authorities have gone unanswered. She is not even sure he is alive.

"This has already saddened me beyond the point where I can be saddened further," she said. "Of course, it's equally cruel to my children."

"I don't want the children to have no father," she added, starting to cry. "Whenever the children hear someone knocking on the door, they always go to look. I know that they're hoping that the person coming inside will be their father. But each time, when they realize that it isn't, they silently lower their heads. They are extremely brave."

Official word about Meng's fate came out in dribs and drabs. A statement in October 2018, just moments after Grace Meng had first met reporters in Lyon, France, to sound the alarm about his disappearance, announced that he was being investigated for unspecified legal violations. That signaled that he was the latest high-ranking Chinese official to fall victim to a party purge.

Interpol announced that Meng had resigned as president, effective immediately. That still infuriates his wife, who says the Lyon-based police body "was of no help at all." She argues that by not taking a firmer stand, the global organization that works on shared law enforcement issues has only encouraged authoritarian behavior from Beijing.

"Can someone who has been forcibly disappeared write a resignation letter of their own free will?" she asked. "Can a police organization turn a blind eye to a typical criminal offense like this?"

In 2019, China announced that Meng had been stripped of his Communist Party membership. It said he abused his power to satisfy his family's "extravagant lifestyle" and allowed his wife to use his authority for personal benefit. In January 2020, a court announced he'd been sentenced to 13 years and six months in prison on charges of accepting more than \$2 million in bribes. The court said he confessed guilt and expressed regret.

His wife has long maintained that the accusations were trumped up and that her husband was purged because he'd been using his high-profile position to push for change.

"It's a fake case. It's an example of a political disagreement being turned into a criminal affair," she said.

"The extent of corruption in China today is extremely serious. It's everywhere. But there are two different opinions about how to solve corruption. One is the method used now. The other is to move toward constitutional democracy, to solve the problem at its roots."

Grace Meng also has political connections through her own family. Her mother served on an advisory body to the Chinese legislature. And the family has previous experience of political trauma. After the Communist takeover in 1949, Grace Meng's grandfather was stripped of his business assets and later imprisoned in a labor camp, she said.

History, she says, is repeating itself.

"Of course, this is a great tragedy in our family, a source of great suffering," she told the AP. "But I also know that very many families in China today are facing a similar fate to mine."

Exonerations for 2 men convicted in Malcolm X's 1965 death

NEW YORK (AP) — Two men who for decades steadfastly maintained their innocence in the 1965 assassination of civil rights icon Malcolm X are set to be exonerated Thursday, after a nearly two-year-long re-investigation.

Muhammad Aziz, now 83, and the late Khalil Islam were convicted in 1966, after a trial in which authorities withheld evidence favorable to the defense, said their attorneys, the Innocence Project and civil rights lawyer David Shanies.

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.'s office is expected to join the men's attorneys Thursday in asking a judge to toss out the convictions.

Malcolm X was killed on Feb. 21, 1965, at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, as he was beginning a speech. Aziz, Islam and a third man, Mujahid Abdul Halim — also known as Talmadge Hayer and Thomas Hagan — were convicted of murder in March 1966 and sentenced to life in prison.

Hagan said he was one of three gunmen who shot Malcolm X, but he testified that neither Aziz nor Islam was involved. The two always said they were innocent and offered alibis. No physical evidence linked them to the crime.

Malcolm X gained national prominence as the voice of the Nation of Islam, speaking about the importance of Black people claiming their civil rights "by any means necessary" in his highly visible role with the Black Muslim organization.

But he later split with the group and, after a trip to Mecca, started speaking about the potential for racial unity. It earned him the ire of some in the Nation of Islam, who saw him as a traitor.

Aziz was released in 1985. Islam was released two years later and died in 2009. Both continued to press to clear their names.

Arbery's shooter back on stand as Black pastors plan rally

By RUSS BYNUM and JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — The man who fatally shot Ahmaud Arbery faces cross-examination by prosecutors Thursday, while a large group of Black ministers planned to rally outside the courthouse in support of Arbery's family.

Travis McMichael returns to the witness stand a day after testifying that Arbery forced him to make a split-second "life-or-death" decision by attacking him and grabbing his shotgun. McMichael's testimony marked the first time any of the three white men charged with murder in Arbery's death has spoken publicly out about the killing.

Now he faces aggressive questioning by prosecutors, who contend there was no justification for McMichael and his father to arm themselves and chase Arbery when he ran past their Georgia home on Feb. 23, 2020.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Al Sharpton planned to return Thursday for a rally with a large group of Black ministers, after a defense attorney intensified frustrations in the coastal Georgia community of Brunswick when

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he said he didn't want "any more Black pastors" sitting in the Glynn County courtroom with Arbery's family.

Attorney Kevin Gough asked the judge last week to remove Sharpton from the court, saying the civil rights activist was trying to influence the jury, which is disproportionately white. The judge refused, and later called Gough's remarks "reprehensible."

The Feb. 23, 2020, shooting of Arbery after he was spotted running in the defendants' neighborhood deepened a national outcry over racial injustice after cellphone video of his death leaked online two months later.

McMichael and his father, Greg McMichael, armed themselves and jumped in a pickup truck to pursue Arbery after he ran past their home from a nearby house under construction. A neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, joined the chase in his own truck and recorded the cellphone video.

Prosecutors say the men chased Arbery for five minutes and used their trucks to prevent Arbery from fleeing their neighborhood before Travis McMichael shot him. They say there's no evidence Arbery committed any crimes.

Arbery had enrolled at a technical college and was preparing to study to become an electrician like his uncles when he was killed. The McMichaels told police they suspected Arbery was a burglar because security cameras had recorded him several times in the unfinished house on their street.

Jury to hear closing arguments in 'Unite the Right' trial

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA. (AP) — Jurors in the Unite the Right civil trial are set to hear closing arguments Thursday in a civil lawsuit that seeks to hold white nationalists accountable for the violence that erupted in Charlottesville in 2017.

Lawyers for nine people who were physically injured or left emotionally scarred during two days of chaos allege that the defendants conspired to commit racially motivated violence. Attorneys for the white nationalists say there was no conspiracy and their use of racial epithets and blustery talk in chat rooms before the rally is protected by the First Amendment.

Hundreds of white nationalists descended on Charlottesville on Aug. 11 and Aug. 12, 2017, ostensibly to protest the city's plans to remove a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

During a march on the University of Virginia campus, white nationalists surrounded counterprotesters and threw burning tiki torches at them. The following day, an avowed admirer of Adolf Hitler rammed his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killing one woman and injuring dozens more.

The driver of the car, James Alex Fields Jr. of Maumee, Ohio, is serving life in prison for murder and hate crimes and lost an appeal of his conviction this week. Fields is one of 24 individuals and organizations named as defendants in the lawsuit.

The trial has featured emotional testimony from people who were struck by Fields' car or witnessed the attack, as well as plaintiffs who were subjected to racist taunts or beaten.

During their testimony, some of the defendants used racial epithets and proudly espoused their views of white supremacy. They also blamed each other and anti-fascist protesters known as antifa for the violence.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified monetary damages and a judgment that the defendants violated the plaintiffs' constitutional rights. It is being funded by Integrity First for America, a nonprofit civil rights organization.

Hate speech in Myanmar continues to thrive on Facebook

By SAM McNEIL and VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Years after coming under scrutiny for contributing to ethnic and religious violence in Myanmar, Facebook still has problems detecting and moderating hate speech and misinformation on its platform in the Southeast Asian nation, internal documents viewed by The Associated Press show.

Three years ago, the company commissioned a report that found Facebook was used to "foment division and incite offline violence" in the country. It pledged to do better and developed several tools and

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policies to deal with hate speech.

But the breaches have persisted -- and even been exploited by hostile actors -- since the Feb. 1 military takeover this year that resulted in gruesome human rights abuses across the country.

Scrolling through Facebook today, it's not hard to find posts threatening murder and rape in Myanmar.

One 2 1/2 minute video posted on Oct. 24 of a supporter of the military calling for violence against opposition groups has garnered over 56,000 views.

"So starting from now, we are the god of death for all (of them)," the man says in Burmese while looking into the camera. "Come tomorrow and let's see if you are real men or gays."

One account posts the home address of a military defector and a photo of his wife. Another post from Oct. 29 includes a photo of soldiers leading bound and blindfolded men down a dirt path. The Burmese caption reads, "Don't catch them alive."

Despite the ongoing issues, Facebook saw its operations in Myanmar as both a model to export around the world and an evolving and caustic case. Documents reviewed by AP show Myanmar became a testing ground for new content moderation technology, with the social media giant trialing ways to automate the detection of hate speech and misinformation with varying levels of success.

Facebook's internal discussions on Myanmar were revealed in disclosures made to the Securities and Exchange Commission and provided to Congress in redacted form by former Facebook employee-turned-whistleblower Frances Haugen's legal counsel. The redacted versions received by Congress were obtained by a consortium of news organizations, including The Associated Press.

Facebook has had a shorter but more volatile history in Myanmar than in most countries. After decades of censorship under military rule, Myanmar was connected to the internet in 2000. Shortly afterward, Facebook paired with telecom providers in the country, allowing customers to use the platform without needing to pay for the data, which was still expensive at the time. Use of the platform exploded. For many in Myanmar, Facebook became the internet itself.

Htaike Htaike Aung, a Myanmar internet policy advocate, said it also became "a hotbed for extremism" around 2013, coinciding with religious riots across Myanmar between Buddhists and Muslims. It's unclear how much, if any, content moderation was happening at the time by people or automation.

Htaike Htaike Aung said she met with Facebook that year and laid out issues, including how local organizations were seeing exponential amounts of hate speech on the platform and how its preventive mechanisms, such as reporting posts, didn't work in the Myanmar context.

One example she cited was a photo of a pile of bamboo sticks that was posted with a caption reading, "Let us be prepared because there's going to be a riot that is going to happen within the Muslim community."

Htaike Htaike Aung said the photo was reported to Facebook, but the company didn't take it down because it didn't violate any of the company's community standards.

"Which is ridiculous because it was actually calling for violence. But Facebook didn't see it that way," she said.

Years later, the lack of moderation caught the attention of the international community. In March 2018, United Nations human rights experts investigating attacks against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya minority said Facebook had played a role in spreading hate speech.

When asked about Myanmar a month later during a U.S. Senate hearing, CEO Mark Zuckerberg replied that Facebook planned to hire "dozens" of Burmese speakers to moderate content, would work with civil society groups to identify hate figures and develop new technologies to combat hate speech.

"Hate speech is very language specific. It's hard to do it without people who speak the local language and we need to ramp up our effort there dramatically," Zuckerberg said.

Information in internal Facebook documents show that while the company did step up efforts to combat hate speech in the country, the tools and strategies to do so never came to full fruition, and individuals within the company repeatedly sounded the alarm. In one document from May 2020, an employee said a hate speech text classifier that was available wasn't being used or maintained. Another document from a month later said there were "significant gaps" in misinformation detection in Myanmar.

"Facebook took symbolic actions I think were designed to mollify policymakers that something was being

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done and didn't need to look much deeper," said Ronan Lee, a visiting scholar at Queen Mary University of London's International State Crime Initiative.

In an emailed statement to the AP, Rafael Frankel's, Facebook's director of policy for APAC Emerging Countries, said the platform "has built a dedicated team of over 100 Burmese speakers." He declined to state exactly how many were employed. Online marketing company NapoleonCat estimates there are about 28.7 million Facebook users in Myanmar.

During her testimony to the European Union Parliament on Nov. 8, Haugen, the whistleblower, criticized Facebook for a lack of investment in third-party fact-checking, and relying instead on automatic systems to detect harmful content.

"If you focus on these automatic systems, they will not work for the most ethnically diverse places in the world, with linguistically diverse places in the world, which are often the most fragile," she said while referring to Myanmar.

After Zuckerberg's 2018 congressional testimony, Facebook developed digital tools to combat hate speech and misinformation and also created a new internal framework to manage crises like Myanmar around the world.

Facebook crafted a list of "at-risk countries" with ranked tiers for a "critical countries team" to focus its energy on, and also rated languages needing more content moderation. Myanmar was listed as a "Tier 1" at-risk country, with Burmese deemed a "priority language" alongside Ethiopian languages, Bengali, Arabic and Urdu.

Facebook engineers taught Burmese slang words for "Muslims" and "Rohingya" to its automated systems. They also trained systems to detect "coordinated inauthentic behavior" such as a single person posting from multiple accounts, or coordination between different accounts to post the same content.

The company also tried "repeat offender demotion" which lessened the impact of posts of users who frequently violated guidelines. In a test in two of the world's most volatile countries, demotion worked well in Ethiopia, but poorly in Myanmar -- a difference that flummoxed engineers, according to a 2020 report included in the documents.

"We aren't sure why ... but this information provides a starting point for further analysis and user research," the report said. Facebook declined to comment on the record if the problem has been fixed a year after its detection, or about the success of the two tools in Myanmar.

The company also deployed a new tool to reduce the virality of content called "reshare depth promotion" that boosts content shared by direct contacts, according to an internal 2020 report. This method is "content-agnostic" and cut viral inflammatory prevalence by 25% and photo misinformation by 48.5%, it said.

Slur detection and demotion were judged effective enough that staffers shared the experience in Myanmar as part of a "playbook" for acting in other at-risk countries such as Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, India, Russia, the Philippines and Egypt.

While these new methods forged in Myanmar's civil crises were deployed around the world, documents show that by June 2020 Facebook knew that flaws persisted in its Myanmar safety work.

"We found significant gaps in our coverage (especially in Myanmar and Ethiopia), showcasing that our current signals may be inadequate," said an internal audit of the company's "integrity coverage." Myanmar was color-coded red with less than 55% coverage: worse than Syria but better than Ethiopia.

Haugen criticized the company's internal policy of acting "only once a crisis has begun."

Facebook "slows the platform down instead of watching as the temperature gets hotter, and making the platform safer as that happens," she said during testimony to Britain's Parliament on Oct. 25.

Frankel, the Facebook spokesperson, said the company has been proactive.

"Facebook's approach in Myanmar today is fundamentally different from what it was in 2017, and allegations that we have not invested in safety and security in the country are wrong," Frankel said.

Yet, a September 2021 report by the Myanmar Social Media Insights Project found that posts on Facebook include coordinated targeting of activists, ethnic minorities and journalists -- a tactic that has roots

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in the military's history. The report also said the military is laundering its propaganda through public pages that claim to be media outlets.

Opposition and pro-military groups have used the encrypted messaging app Telegram to organize two types of propaganda campaigns on Facebook and Twitter, according to an October report shared with the AP by Myanmar Witness, a U.K.-based organization that archives social media posts related to the conflict.

Myanmar is a "highly contested information environment," where users working in concert overload Facebook's reporting system to take down others' posts, and also spread coordinated misinformation and hate speech, the report said.

In one example, the coordinated networks took video shot in Mexico in 2018 by the Sinaloa cartel of butchered bodies and falsely labeled it as evidence of the opposition killing Myanmar soldiers on June 28, 2021, said Benjamin Strick, director of investigations for Myanmar Witness.

"There's a difficulty in catching it for some of these platforms that are so big and perhaps the teams to look for it are so small that it's very hard to catch water when it's coming out of a fire hydrant," he said.

The organization also traced the digital footprint of one soldier at the incineration of 160 homes in the village of Thantlang in late October. He posed in body armor on a ledge overlooking burning homes, with a post blaming opposition forces for the destruction in a litany of violent speech.

Facebook "conducted human rights due diligence to understand and address the risks in Myanmar," and banned the military and used technology to reduce the amount of violating content, spokesperson Frankel said.

Yet Myanmar digital rights activists and scholars say Facebook could still take steps to improve, including greater openness about its policies for content moderation, demotion and removal, and acknowledging its responsibilities toward the Myanmar people.

"We need to start examining damage that has been done to our communities by platforms like Facebook. They portray that they are a virtual platform, and thus can have lower regulation," said Lee, the visiting scholar. "The fact is that there are real-world consequences."

Differences endure as Biden brings back North America summit

By AAMER MADHANI, ROB GILLIES, and MARIA VERZA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — North America's leaders are reviving three-way summity after a Trump-era break.

As President Joe Biden, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador resume the tradition of the North America Leaders Summit on Thursday, the three allies face deep differences on migration, climate and trade.

There's "not that much in common between them, at least in their vision for what they want for their countries," said Kenneth Frankel, president of the Canadian Council for the Americas. "Not just what they want for their countries, but what they can deliver for their countries."

Thursday's meetings at the White House will be the first trilateral get-together for North American leaders since a June 2016 gathering of Trudeau, Barack Obama and Enrique Peña Nieto in Ottawa. The gatherings took a hiatus under President Donald Trump, who feuded with Trudeau and Nieto during his tenure.

Biden has made some progress in repairing relations with U.S. neighbors after the turbulent Trump years. But many significant strains remain — and some new ones have emerged.

Trudeau arrived in Washington with concerns about buy-American provisions in the president's proposed \$1.85 trillion social services plan. Mexico's priorities heading into the summit were to obtain concrete advances on immigration and more equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

The tradition of three-way meetings started when George W. Bush played host to Mexico's Vicente Fox and Canada's Paul Martin in 2005 for talks at his ranch in Waco, Texas.

Biden has already held separate virtual meetings with Trudeau in February and López Obrador in March.

Biden will meet separately with Trudeau and López Obrador again on Thursday before the leaders hold a trilateral session in the midst of what is a big week for the U.S. president. Biden signed a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill into law Monday, held a virtual summit with China's Xi Jinping that night, and traveled

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over the next two days to promote provisions in the big spending deal. He's also trying to push through his social services and climate spending plan.

There are growing concerns in Canada about a provision in the spending plan that would offer U.S. consumers a \$7,500 tax credit if they buy electric vehicles through 2026. 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 was made at a U.S. plant that operates under a union-negotiated collective bargaining agreement.

Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland called the incentive a clear violation of the new NAFTA agreement. Trudeau, Freeland and other Canadian ministers met with U.S. officials on Capitol Hill on Wednesday. And Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said she raised concerns about the electric vehicle provision with Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week.

Freeland said that for Canada, "Job one here in the U.S. this week is to really make our American counterparts aware of the extent to which their current approach to this issue is a problem for Canada and to really explain to them that the way they have formulated this incentive really, really has the potential to become the dominant issue in our bilateral relationship."

White House spokesman Chris Meagher said the electric vehicle tax incentives are an essential part of Biden's push to link efforts to curb climate emissions with job creation in the U.S.

The U.S. and Canada, meanwhile, have expressed frustration that López Obrador has failed to get on board with global efforts to curb climate emissions. The Mexican president skipped this month's U.N. climate summit in Glasgow.

López Obrador's government, for its part, wants promised U.S. development funds for the Northern Triangle countries of Central America to be firmed up. The Mexican leader continues to press the U.S. to fund an expansion of his tree planting program to Central America.

Mexico has worked with the United States — under both Trump and Biden — to control migrant flows and assist in returning migrants to Central America. The two countries are still negotiating the court-ordered re-implementation of a Trump-era policy known as Remain in Mexico, which forced asylum seekers to wait out their U.S. asylum process in Mexico.

López Obrador has also mentioned on multiple occasions his interest in the U.S. government expanding its temporary work visa program so more Mexicans and Central Americans can fill the demand for labor in the U.S. The temporary workers in turn could have access to the higher pay they seek in the U.S. without becoming part of the illegal immigration flow.

Arriving in Washington on Wednesday, Mexico Foreign Affairs Secretary Marcelo Ebrard said his government would focus on three issues: the pandemic, economic integration and immigration. On immigration, Ebrard said Mexico would try to rally support for two of López Obrador's signature social programs — tree planting and youth job opportunities — to reduce the push factors of migration.

Ken Salazar, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, recently expressed "serious concerns" about the Mexican government's attempts to limit competition in the electrical power sector.

Trudeau and Biden are also expected to discuss the future of an oil pipeline that crosses part of the Great Lakes and is the subject of rising tension over whether it should be shut down. Biden is caught in a battle over Enbridge's Line 5, a key segment of a pipeline network that carries Canadian oil across the U.S. Midwest.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat and Biden ally, has demanded closure of the 68-year-old line because of the potential for a catastrophic rupture along a 4-mile section (6.4 kilometers) in the Straits of Mackinac, which connects Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. The Biden administration has not taken a position but is under increasing pressure to do so.

Canada last month invoked a 1977 treaty that guarantees the unimpeded transit of oil between the two nations.

Associated Press writer Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Rittenhouse jury to resume after fresh mistrial request

By MICHAEL TARM, SCOTT BAUER and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — The jury in Kyle Rittenhouse's trial was to move into a third day of deliberations Thursday, even as its request to re-watch video in the case sparked a fresh bid from his attorneys for a mistrial.

Judge Bruce Schroeder did not immediately rule on the request, which stemmed from the defense team's assertion that it received an inferior copy of a potentially critical video from prosecutors. It was the second mistrial motion from the defense in a week.

At issue Wednesday was a piece of drone video that prosecutors showed the jury during closing arguments in an attempt to undermine Rittenhouse's self-defense claim and portray him as the instigator of the bloodshed in Kenosha in the summer of 2020. Prosecutors said the footage showed him pointing his rifle at protesters before the shooting erupted.

Rittenhouse attorney Corey Chirafisi said the defense initially received a smaller compressed version of the video and didn't get the higher-quality larger one used by the prosecution until the evidence portion of the case was over.

He said that the defense would have approached things differently if it had received the better footage earlier and that it is now asking for "a level, fair playing field."

Chirafisi said the mistrial request would be made "without prejudice," meaning prosecutors could still retry Rittenhouse.

Last week, the defense asked for a mistrial with prejudice, meaning Rittenhouse could not be put on trial again. That request was prompted by what the defense said were improper questions asked by prosecutor Thomas Binger during his cross-examination of Rittenhouse.

Rittenhouse, 18, is on trial on homicide and attempted homicide charges for killing two men and wounding a third with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle during a tumultuous night of protests over the police shooting of Jacob Blake, Black man, by a white police officer. Rittenhouse, a then-17-year-old former police youth cadet, said he went to Kenosha to protect property from rioters.

He shot and killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, now 28. Rittenhouse is white, as were those he shot. The case has become a flashpoint in the debate over guns, racial injustice, vigilantism and self-defense in the U.S.

Rittenhouse could get life in prison if convicted of the most serious charge against him.

The dispute over the video erupted after the jurors asked to re-watch footage on the second day of their deliberations.

Defense attorneys said they would object to the jury viewing the drone video. The same footage prompted a heated dispute earlier in the trial over technical questions of whether a still image taken from the video was distorted when it was enlarged.

The prosecution contends the video proves Rittenhouse lied on the stand when he said he didn't point his rifle at protesters. But the key moment in the video is hard to decipher because of how far away the drone was and how small a figure Rittenhouse is in the frame.

A smaller file size or lower-resolution video file is fuzzier and grainier, particularly if played on a larger screen, said Dennis Keeling, an adjunct professor in the cinema and television arts department at Columbia College Chicago. That's why people working with video footage are careful to check the file size, length and other details after making a copy to ensure the new version is what they wanted, he added.

Prosecutors told the judge Wednesday that the jury saw the highest-quality version during the trial and that it was not the state's fault that the file size got smaller when received by the defense.

"We're focusing too heavily on a technological glitch," prosecutor James Kraus said.

The judge said he had "qualms" about admitting the video during the trial, but because it had already been shown in court, he would allow the jury to re-watch it during deliberations.

But if it turns out the video should not have been admitted into evidence, "it's going to be ugly," Schroeder warned.

He said the mistrial request will have to be addressed if there is a guilty verdict.

If Rittenhouse is acquitted, the issue will be moot. But if he is found guilty, a mistrial ruling would essentially void the verdict.

Julius Kim, a Milwaukee-based defense attorney who has been watching the case, said a mistrial could be declared even if the judge finds it was an honest mistake or a technical problem.

But to win a mistrial, the defense will have to meet a high bar and explain to the judge why what happened actually hurt Rittenhouse, said Ion Meyn, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School.

"You can't just say, 'The state gave me a lower-quality video and therefore I get a mistrial,'" Meyn said. "That's a losing argument for sure."

Earlier in the day, the judge criticized news coverage of the case and second-guessing from legal experts in the media, saying he would "think long and hard" about allowing televised trials in the future.

He took exception to news stories about his decisions not to allow the men Rittenhouse shot to be called "victims" and to let Rittenhouse draw the lots that determined which jurors were alternates. The judge also complained about criticism that he had yet to rule on the earlier mistrial request.

Schroeder said he hadn't had a chance to read the motion because he had just received it and wanted to give the state a chance to weigh in.

"It's just a shame that irresponsible statements are being made," the judge said of comments in a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel story from law school professors.

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

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

Rittenhouse trial arguments worry mental health advocates

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

The first man Kyle Rittenhouse fatally shot on the streets of Kenosha, Wisconsin, was "irrational and crazy," Rittenhouse's attorney told jurors at his murder trial.

Joseph Rosenbaum had been on medication for bipolar disorder and depression, and he was trying to take Rittenhouse's rifle, attorney Mark Richards said, suggesting there could have been more bloodshed if Rittenhouse hadn't acted.

"I'm glad he shot him because if Joseph Rosenbaum got that gun I don't for a minute believe he wouldn't have used it against somebody else," Richards said during closing arguments in the 18-year-old Illinois man's trial for killing Rosenbaum and another man and wounding a third during a chaotic night of protests in August 2020.

To some legal experts and other observers, Richards' remarks were a smart courtroom strategy and an accurate depiction of the threat faced by Rittenhouse, who says he shot the men in self-defense. But mental health advocates heard something different: a dangerous assumption that people living with mental illness are homicidal and need to be killed, and terminology such as "crazy" that they say is pejorative and adds to the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

Studies have shown that people with bipolar disorder and depression are more likely to hurt themselves than hurt others, said Sue Abderholden, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Minnesota. That's why NAMI's work includes training police officers to use de-escalation strategies when dealing with people who have a mental illness.

"You just don't have someone shot down, particularly someone who is unarmed," she said.

Jason Lackowski, a former Marine who said he went armed to the Kenosha protests to protect property, testified during the trial that Rosenbaum acted "belligerently" that night and seemed to want "to entice someone to do something," but did not appear to pose a serious threat to anyone. Lackowski said he

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turned his back on Rosenbaum and ignored him.

Rittenhouse didn't know Rosenbaum or his background when they crossed paths at the protest that followed the shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man, by a white police officer. And the jury wasn't supposed to know much about him either.

During pretrial hearings, defense attorneys said they wanted to present evidence of Rosenbaum's past, including an Arizona conviction for having sex with a minor in 2002. They planned to argue that Rosenbaum, 36, was trying to take the then-17-year-old Rittenhouse's weapon during their encounter because Rosenbaum wasn't legally allowed to have a gun due to his criminal past. Prosecutors argued that the defense was trying to signal to the jury that Rosenbaum was a bad guy who deserved to die.

Judge Bruce Schroeder blocked defense lawyers from revealing the sex crime conviction at the trial. Jurors also were not supposed to hear about Rosenbaum's mental health history, which Schroeder said wasn't relevant because Rittenhouse didn't know it when he shot him.

But the information came out in court after prosecutors asked Rosenbaum's fiancée, Kariann Swart, whether Rosenbaum — whom she said had just been released from a hospital — had taken medication earlier on the day he was shot. Schroeder later ruled that by asking that question, prosecutors opened the door for the defense to ask Swart what the medication was for. Under cross-examination, she told jurors it was for bipolar disorder and depression.

Swart also testified that Rosenbaum had returned from a Milwaukee hospital on the day of the shooting. The jury did not hear that Rosenbaum had been in a mental health ward following a suicide attempt.

Phil Turner, a former federal prosecutor who is now in private practice and who isn't involved in the Rittenhouse case, believes the testimony about Rosenbaum's mental illness was "very important to the self-defense argument" and therefore fair game.

People, including the jury, might agree that mental illness on its own does not cause someone to be violent, Turner said. But that information along with Rosenbaum's actions that night — from getting in the face of men armed with rifles to at one point chasing after Rittenhouse — likely was a "nodding their head kind of moment" for jurors.

"It fortifies the defense argument that this is the truth, this is the reality," Turner said.

Kim Motley, an attorney representing Rosenbaum's estate, said she understands Richards' efforts to "vigorously defend" his client. But she called his comments about being glad Rittenhouse shot Rosenbaum — among the final words jurors heard before they started deliberating Tuesday following a roughly two-week trial — "disgusting" and offensive to people who struggle with mental illness.

"This trial isn't about the type of person Joseph Rosenbaum was," Motley said "This trial is about his client, Kyle Rittenhouse."

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

High-profile execution looms for Julius Jones in Oklahoma

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Students at high schools across Oklahoma City walked out of their classes. Prayer vigils were held at the state Capitol, and barricades were erected outside the governor's mansion. Even Baker Mayfield, quarterback for the NFL's Cleveland Browns, weighed in on Oklahoma's highest-profile execution in decades.

Julius Jones, 41, who has maintained his innocence for more than two decades, is scheduled to receive a lethal injection Thursday at the State Penitentiary in McAlester for the 1999 slaying of a Paul Howell, a businessman in the affluent Oklahoma City suburb of Edmond.

Mayfield, a Heisman Trophy winner from the University of Oklahoma, is among several high-profile athletes and entertainers who have weighed in on Jones' case, urging Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt to commute his sentence and spare his life.

"Yeah, it's pretty rough, to be honest with you," Mayfield said Wednesday, pausing and his eyes filling

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with tears. "That's not something that's easy to talk about. Been trying to get the facts stated and the truth to be told for a while.

"It's a shame that it's gotten this far, 24 hours away."

Stitt has been tight-lipped about the case, but has met with Jones' attorneys and Howell's family.

Jones' mother, Madeline-Davis-Jones, who tried unsuccessfully to meet with Stitt on Monday, spoke to a group of about 300 people, many of them students from nearby high schools, who gathered at the Capitol on Wednesday outside of Stitt's office, chanted and sang hymns.

"I don't want to go to a lynching tomorrow," Davis-Jones said, her voice rising with emotion. "Why would I want to see someone hang? We should be through with that. Do you want your baby, your child to be hanged?"

Jones maintains he was framed by the actual killer, a high school friend and co-defendant who testified against him and was released from prison after 15 years.

State and county prosecutors have said the evidence against Jones is overwhelming. Trial transcripts show witnesses identified Jones as the shooter and placed him with Howell's stolen vehicle. Investigators also found the murder weapon wrapped in a bandana with Jones' DNA in an attic space above his bedroom. Jones claims the murder weapon was placed there by the actual killer, who visited Jones' house after Howell was shot.

The state's Pardon and Parole Board twice voted 3-1 to recommend Stitt grant clemency to Jones and commute his sentence to life in prison.

Stitt spokesman Charlie Hannema said "the governor takes his role in this process seriously and is carefully considering the Pardon and Parole Board's recommendation as he does in all cases."

Paul Howell's sister, Megan Tobey, testified before the board that she distinctly remembers seeing Jones shoot her brother in front of his two young daughters.

"He is the same person today as he was 22 years ago. He's still getting into trouble. He's still in a gang. He's still lying. And he still feels no shame, guilt or remorse for his action," Tobey said. "We need Julius Jones to be held responsible."

In a separate vote on Wednesday, the same board voted 3-2 to grant clemency to another death row inmate, Bigler Stouffer, citing concerns with the state's lethal injection protocols. Stouffer is scheduled to die on Dec. 9.

Jones' case was profiled in "The Last Defense," a three-episode documentary produced by actress Viola Davis that aired on ABC in 2018. Since then, Kim Kardashian West and athletes with Oklahoma ties, including Mayfield and NBA stars Russell Westbrook, Blake Griffin and Trae Young, have urged Stitt to commute Jones' death sentence.

Oklahoma ended a six-year moratorium on executions — brought on by concerns over its lethal injection methods — last month. John Marion Grant, 60, convulsed and vomited as he was being put to death Oct. 28.

Grant was the first person in Oklahoma to be executed since a series of flawed lethal injections in 2014 and 2015 led to a de facto moratorium. Richard Glossip was just hours away from being executed in September 2015 when prison officials realized they had received the wrong lethal drug. It was later learned the same wrong drug had been used to execute an inmate in January 2015.

The drug mix-ups followed a botched execution in April 2014 in which inmate Clayton Lockett struggled on a gurney before dying 43 minutes into his lethal injection — and after the state's prisons chief ordered executioners to stop.

Migrant camps grow in Mexico amid uncertainty on US policy

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — As darkness fell, about 250 police officers and city workers swept into a squalid camp for migrants hoping to apply for asylum in the United States. Migrants had to register for credentials or leave. Within hours, those who stayed were surrounded by enough chain-link fence to extend twice

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the height of the Statue of Liberty.

The Oct. 28 operation may have been the beginning of the end for a camp that once held about 2,000 people and blocks a major border crossing to the United States. There may be more camps to come.

First lady Jill Biden sharply criticized a similar camp in Matamoros, bordering Brownsville, Texas, on a 2019 visit, saying, "It's not who we are as Americans." The Biden administration touted its work closing that camp in March, but others sprang up around the same time in nearby Reynosa and in Tijuana.

The camps, full of young children, are a product of policies that force migrants to wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court or prohibit them from seeking asylum under pandemic-related public health powers. Uncertainty about U.S. asylum policies has also contributed to growing migrant populations in Mexican border cities, creating conditions for more camps.

Migrants are often out of public view in border cities, but the Tijuana camp is highly visible and disruptive. Tents covered with blue tarps and black plastic bags block entry to a border crossing where an average of about 12,000 people entered the U.S. daily before the pandemic. It is one of three pedestrian crossings to San Diego.

The U.S. fully reopened land borders with Mexico and Canada to vaccinated travelers Nov. 8.

Montserrat Caballero, Tijuana's first female mayor, said officials did "almost nothing" to control the camp before she took office Oct. 1. When she asked Mexico's state and federal governments to join her in erecting a fence and introducing a registry, they declined.

"The authorities at every level were scared — scared of making a mistake, scared of doing something wrong and affecting their political careers," she said in an interview. "No one wants to deal with these issues."

Caballero said she acted to protect migrants. She knows of no homicides or kidnappings at the camp, but The Associated Press found that assaults, drug use and threats have been common.

"I could not close my eyes to the flashing red light I saw," she said. "Closing your eyes only allows it grow."

The only entry-exit is guarded around the clock by Tijuana police. Migrants with credentials are free to come and go.

"There is no asylum process (in the United States) until further notice," Enrique Lucero, the city's director of migrant services, told people who asked about U.S. policy on a morning walk-through last week.

Since March 2020, the U.S. has used Title 42, named for a public health law, to expel adults and families without an opportunity for asylum; unaccompanied children are exempt. But the Biden administration has exercised that authority on only about one of every four who come in families, largely due to resource constraints and Mexico's reluctance to take back Central American families.

It's unclear why the U.S. releases many families to seek asylum and returns others to Mexico, prompting those who are turned back to stick around until they succeed.

Mayra Funes, a 28-year-old Honduran, said she didn't get a chance to make her case to agents when she was expelled crossing the border illegally near McAllen, Texas, in March with her 7-year-old daughter. She doesn't know if she will try again after six months in the Tijuana camp.

"There is no hope of knowing how they are going to open the process," she said.

Lucero, a soft-spoken graduate of George Washington University who worked at the Mexican consulate in Chicago, says his job is persuading migrants to move to a shelter, including large facilities recently opened by Mexico's federal and state governments. Many are turned off by curfews and other shelter rules and worry being farther from the border will cut them off from news on U.S. policy changes.

Natalina Nazario, 37, needed no convincing, stopping Lucero and jumping at the city's offer to pay bus fare to Acapulco, about 1,900 miles (3,040 kilometers) away, for her and her 17- and 11-year-old sons. She fears violence in the Mexican beach city but, after a month at the camp, doesn't want her children missing more school.

Few others noticed Lucero's presence. Olga Galicia, a 23-year-old from Guatemala, sat on a curb scrubbing clothes in a plastic bin of soapy water. She had been at the camp about six months and said she will stay with her 3- and 1-year-old sons until she gets more information on how to seek asylum in the United States.

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Tijuana won't forcibly remove any migrants, said Caballero, who expects holdouts to leave during seasonal rains. Thousands of migrants who came in a 2018 caravan were soaked sleeping outside in frigid November downpours.

The city estimates the camp held 1,700 people two weeks before the Oct. 28 operation, which Caballero publicly warned was coming but didn't say when.

The first count, on Oct. 29, showed 769 migrants, more than 40% children. Half were Mexican — many from strife-torn states of Guerrero and Michoacan — and one-third were Honduran, with El Salvadorans and Guatemalans accounting for nearly all the rest.

The steep decline just before registration likely reflects that many living there were Tijuana's homeless, not migrants, Caballero said.

The camp occupies a large, once-barren plaza. A warren of walkways includes rows that are wide enough in some parts for two people to stroll in opposite directions. People lounge inside tents or outside in folding chairs.

There are 12 portable bathrooms, 10 showers and a shared water tap for washing clothes. Charities donate food to migrants who prepare hot chocolate, fried eggs, hot dogs and spaghetti for everyone. The federal utility recently stopped the camp from stealing electricity, leaving it dark at night and forcing the makeshift kitchen to rely on canned food.

The future is less certain for a migrant camp in Reynosa, across the border from McAllen, Texas. It has about 2,000 people in a plaza near the city's main border crossing, said Felicia Rangel-Samponaro, director of The Sidewalk School, which educates children there.

The Biden administration, under a court order, plans to soon reinstate a Trump-era policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for hearings in the U.S. It hinges on approval from Mexican officials, who have told U.S. authorities they need more shelter beds and worry about violence in the state of Tamaulipas, which includes Reynosa.

The "Remain in Mexico" policy is expected to resume in "the coming weeks" after U.S. and Mexican authorities resolve "one set of outstanding issues," Blas Nuñez-Nieto, acting assistant U.S. Homeland Security secretary for border and immigration policy, said in a court filing Monday. He did not elaborate.

Caballero said U.S. authorities haven't pressured Mexico to reopen the busy pedestrian crossing between Tijuana and San Diego. U.S. Customs and Border Protection said in a statement it is working closely with Mexico "to determine how to resume normal travel safely and sustainably."

The mayor plans to ask Mexico's National Guard to help prevent camps from popping up again in Tijuana. "The reality is that camps are going to be established if we are unprepared," she said.

Mississippi executes man who killed wife, terrorized family

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

PARCHMAN, Miss. (AP) — A man who pleaded guilty to killing his estranged wife and sexually assaulting her young daughter as her mother lay dying was put to death Wednesday evening, becoming the first inmate executed in Mississippi in nine years.

David Neal Cox, 50, abandoned all appeals and filed court papers calling himself "worthy of death" before the state Supreme Court set his execution date. He appeared calm as he received a lethal injection. A coroner pronounced him dead at 6:12 p.m. CST at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

Cox pleaded guilty in 2012 to capital murder for the May 2010 shooting death of his estranged wife, Kim Kirk Cox. He also pleaded guilty to multiple other charges, including sexual assault. A jury handed down the death sentence.

Cox wore a red prison jumpsuit and was covered by a white sheet during the execution. Wide leather straps held him down on a gurney.

"I want my children to know that I love them very much and that I was a good man at one time," Cox said just before the injection started. "Don't ever read anything but the King James Bible."

Cox thanked the state corrections commissioner, Burl Cain, for "being very kind to me. And that's all I

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got to say.”

Cox appeared to take several deep breaths after the lethal chemicals started flowing through a clear plastic tube into his body, and his mouth moved some. He was pronounced dead within a few minutes.

Among those who witnessed the execution was Cox’s now 23-year-old stepdaughter. She was 12 when he sexually assaulted her three times in front of her wounded mother as he held them and one of her younger brothers hostage on the night of May 14 and May 15, 2010, in the small town of Sherman.

Mississippi carried out six executions in 2012. The state does not have any others scheduled among the more than 30 people currently on its death row.

States have had difficulty finding lethal injection drugs because pharmaceutical companies began blocking the use of their products to carry out death sentences.

The Mississippi Department of Corrections revealed in court papers earlier this year that it had acquired three drugs for the lethal injection protocol: midazolam, which is a sedative; vecuronium bromide, which paralyzes the muscles; and potassium chloride, which stops the heart.

Cain told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the drugs listed in the court records were the ones being used for the execution. He would not say where the department obtained them.

Cain, the onetime head of the Louisiana state penitentiary in Angola, witnessed several executions in that neighboring state before he took up his new role in Mississippi. He stood by Cox during the execution.

“You couldn’t make it more picture perfect than we had tonight,” Cain told reporters afterward.

A group that opposes executions, Death Penalty Action, said earlier that killing an inmate who surrendered all appeals would amount to “state-sponsored suicide.” The group had petitioned Republican Gov. Tate Reeves to block the execution of Cox, but Reeves’ spokeswoman said the governor declined to intervene because Cox admitted to “horrific crimes.”

Attorneys from the Mississippi Office of Capital Post-Conviction Counsel represented Cox in recent years. After the state Supreme Court set his execution date, Cox sent a handwritten statement strongly objecting to their continued involvement. The office director, Krissy C. Nobile, said Tuesday that after “considerable and difficult deliberation, and out of respect for David Cox’s autonomy and stated desire,” the office did not plan any more appeals for him.

Kim Cox’s father, retired law enforcement officer Benny Kirk, said David Cox called during the night of the attack and said he had shot Kim. Benny Kirk spoke on the phone with his daughter and she told him: “Daddy, I’m dying.”

Police surrounded the house and tried to get David Cox to release his wife and the two children. Kim Cox was dead by the time the ordeal ended after more than eight hours.

The Associated Press does not usually identify victims of sexual assault but Cox’s stepdaughter, Lindsey Kirk, agreed to be interviewed and talk about what happened to her. She told The Associated Press last week that David Cox had sexually assaulted her for a few years when her mother was out of the house, and that he threatened to kill them if she told anyone.

While staying with her grandparents in the summer of 2009, Kirk texted her mother and told her of the assaults by her stepfather. Soon after that, David Cox was arrested and charged with statutory rape, sexual battery, child abuse and possession of methamphetamine. He was released in April 2010 without standing trial. Kim Cox obtained a restraining order against him, and she moved to her sister’s home.

Kim Cox’s family did not issue a statement after the execution.

Questions remained about whether David Cox was responsible for the 2007 disappearance of his brother’s wife, Felicia Cox, who was last seen in a neighboring county. Her daughter, Amber Miskelly, recently told WTVA-TV that David Cox was the last person to see her mother alive. After the execution, Cain said David Cox had not spoken about his sister-in-law’s disappearance.

Emily Wagster Pettus was a witness to the execution of David Neal Cox.

Toronto lefty Ray wins AL Cy Young, Brewers’ Burnes takes NL

By BEN WALKER AP Baseball Writer

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In this Year of the Pitcher, both Robbie Ray and Corbin Burnes completed their own kind of comebacks. Ray rebounded from a dismal season that saw him take a rare pay cut to win the AL Cy Young Award with Toronto while Burnes returned from an early bout of COVID-19 with Milwaukee to win the NL's top pitching prize Wednesday.

"Everyone has their story," Burnes said during a conference call.

Burnes led the majors with a 2.43 ERA and edged out Philadelphia's Zack Wheeler. They both got 12 first-place votes from members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America, but Burnes drew 14 seconds to Wheeler's nine.

Burnes pitched 167 innings, the fewest for a Cy Young-winning starter in a non-shortened season, and the right-hander struck out 234. Wheeler fanned 247 — one shy of Ray's big league-leading total — and topped the majors with 213 1/3 innings.

"Everyone's case," Burnes said, "was different."

Ray was best in the AL with a 2.84 ERA and 193 1/3 innings. That came after a pandemic-shortened 2020 when the lefty went a combined 2-5 with a 6.62 ERA for Arizona and Blue Jays and issued the most walks in the majors.

"I knew ... I was going to have to put in some hard work," Ray said, adding, "I knew I wanted to make changes."

And in a sign of just how much voters have moved past simply win-loss records while crunching new-era stats, Dodgers lefty Julio Urías posted the most victories in going 20-3, but finished a distant eighth and didn't get a single top-four nod.

Max Scherzer, who pitched for Los Angeles and Washington, finished third in the NL and Dodgers ace Walker Buehler was fourth.

Burnes became the first Brewers pitcher to earn the NL honor — Pete Vuckovich in 1982 and Rollie Fingers in 1981 won the award when Milwaukee was still in the American League.

Ray got 29 first-place votes and became the first Toronto pitcher to win since the late Roy Halladay in 2003. Yankees ace Gerrit Cole drew the other top vote and finished second and Chicago White Sox righty Lance Lynn was third.

Ray went 13-7 in 32 starts and helped keep Toronto in playoff contention until the final weekend.

Having turned 30 last month, the award sets him up well -- a free agent, he turned down an \$18.4 million qualifying offer from Toronto earlier Wednesday.

"I'm enjoying free agency," he said. "The process is a lot of fun."

Ray said Toronto is "still in the conversation."

"Obviously, I love Toronto, but we'll see where things go," he said.

Burnes was 11-5 and an All-Star for the NL Central champion Brewers. His innings count was lower than his competitors, owing to him missing two weeks in early May after testing positive for the coronavirus.

In his first season as a full-time starter, Burnes struck out a record 58 before issuing his first walk. He tied the major league mark by fanning 10 in a row against the Cubs in August.

Burnes combined with closer Josh Hader on a no-hitter against Cleveland in September. Burnes struck out 14 over eight innings in that game — it was the record ninth no-hitter in the majors this season, topping the eight set in 1884 when pitchers began throwing overhand.

Burnes had an 8.82 ERA in 28 relief appearances and four starts in 2019, then was 4-1 with a 2.11 ERA during the virus-shortened season when he was hampered by an oblique strain. He came back to lead the majors with 12.6 strikeouts per nine innings this year.

"You always have to evolve," he said.

Voting for the awards was completed before the playoffs began. Burnes threw six shutout innings against Atlanta in the NL Division Series and turned 27 later in October.

Ray's power arm always drew attention. He ranks No. 1 in major league history with 11.2 strikeouts per nine innings (minimum: 1,000 innings), and he was an All-Star with Arizona in 2017.

But controlling his heat and sharp breaking pitches often was a problem, and Ray bottomed out last year.

The dip caused his base salary to drop from \$9.43 million to \$8 million this year. He earned some of that

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back with a \$125,000 for winning the Cy Young, and figures to cash in even more soon.

Drafted and signed by Washington in 2010, Ray made his big league debut in 2014 with Detroit -- that staff also included future Cy Young winners Max Scherzer, Justin Verlander, Rick Porcello and David Price.

Ray was traded with cash to Toronto on Aug. 31, 2020, for reliever Travis Bergen. Ray was 49-51 with a 4.26 ERA over seven seasons in the majors before this big year.

Ray became the fifth Blue Jays pitcher to win the Cy Young, along Halladay, Roger Clemens in 1997-98 and Pat Hentgen in 1996.

UP NEXT

The MVPs will be announced Thursday, ending the BBWAA awards season.

Los Angeles Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani is considered the AL favorite, with Toronto slugger Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Blue Jays infielder Marcus Semien as the other finalists. Ohtani, who went 9-2 with a 3.18 ERA and 156 strikeouts in 130 1-3 innings, didn't get a Cy Young vote; he hit 46 homers with 100 RBIs and stole 26 bases.

Phillies star Bryce Harper, Washington outfielder Juan Soto and San Diego dynamo Fernando Tatis Jr. are the NL finalists.

No matter who wins, it will mark the first time since 1987 (the Cubs' Andre Dawson and Toronto's George Bell) that neither MVP reached the playoffs in the year they were elected.

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

EXPLAINER: What's behind Rittenhouse mistrial requests?

By AMY FORLITI and SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Attorneys for Kyle Rittenhouse have requested a mistrial based on several issues, including claims that prosecutors acted in bad faith and that the state gave them an inferior copy of video that may be a key piece of evidence in the case.

The defense says some of the issues should result in a mistrial with no chance for a retrial, while one could give prosecutors the option to try Rittenhouse again.

Here's a look at the mistrial requests and what they mean:

MISTRIAL WITH PREJUDICE

The defense made its first request for a mistrial last week and followed up on Monday with a written motion, seeking a mistrial with prejudice based on three issues.

Among them, Rittenhouse's attorneys argued that prosecutors brought up a prior incident the judge had previously ruled could not be raised at trial. It involved a video that showed Rittenhouse witnessing possible shoplifting and saying if he had a gun he would shoot the people.

Judge Bruce Schroeder admonished prosecutor Thomas Binger when he tried to raise it in front of the jury.

The judge also chided Binger, during cross-examination of Rittenhouse, for a line of questioning that the judge said was a commentary on Rittenhouse's constitutional right to invoke silence after his arrest. Binger said he was trying to establish that the testimony Rittenhouse heard during the trial influenced what he said on the stand when telling his story for the first time publicly.

"This is a grave constitutional violation for you to talk about the defendant's silence," Schroeder told the prosecutor. "You're right on the borderline. And you may be over. But it better stop."

The third issue Rittenhouse raised was about drone video that prosecutors say shows Rittenhouse pointing his rifle at protesters before the shooting started. Prosecutors used the video in a bid to undermine Rittenhouse's self-defense claim and portray him as the instigator of the bloodshed in Kenosha in the summer of 2020.

Rittenhouse's attorneys said prosecutors gave the defense a copy of the video in a lower quality, smaller file that made it less clear than what the state had. They argued the video was the "linchpin" to the prosecutors' case and it was inconceivable that they wouldn't provide the defense with the same quality version.

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"The failure to provide the same quality footage in this particular case is intentional and clearly prejudices the defendant," they wrote in the motion for a mistrial.

A mistrial with prejudice would mean that prosecutors could not try the case again.

MISTRIAL WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Prosecutors said Wednesday that they didn't intentionally provide an inferior video, but that the issue was a technical one. After some back and forth in court, defense attorney Corey Chirafisi made an oral request for a mistrial without prejudice, saying the defense didn't get the same quality of video until after the evidentiary portion of the case was closed. He told the judge that if the defense needs a "level, fair playing field, we have to ask for it, and I'm asking for it."

Chirafisi said the defense would have done things differently if they had the higher-quality video earlier.

"We're talking about a potential life sentence here," Chirafisi said, referencing the sentence Rittenhouse could get if convicted of the most serious charge against him. He said a mistrial on this issue would be without prejudice, meaning the case could be tried again.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

"From the defense point of view, to get a mistrial is generally considered a favorable thing," said Ion Meyn, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School. "If you're the defense, you're definitely going to be doing this."

The state would face enormous pressure when deciding whether to pursue a second trial of this magnitude, Meyn said. The state could also decide to bring reduced charges or seek a plea deal, all of which benefit the defense, he said.

The defense seeking the mistrial without prejudice, after initially seeking it with prejudice, is a change in tone, said Milwaukee defense attorney Julius Kim.

"They are essentially saying, 'We just kind of want a new trial at this point, no matter what,'" Julius said.

Still, they must explain to the judge why what happened hurt Rittenhouse, Meyn said.

"You can't just say the state gave me a lower-quality video and therefore I get a mistrial," Meyn said. "That's a losing argument for sure."

The defense has a higher bar to meet in convincing the judge that a mistrial with prejudice is warranted, Meyn said.

"It's a pretty big lift," Meyn said.

WHAT NOW?

It's not clear when Schroeder will rule, though he said Wednesday he would address the issue if there is a guilty verdict. If Rittenhouse is acquitted, the issue will be moot. But if he is found guilty, a mistrial ruling would essentially void the verdict.

The jury has deliberated for two full days without a verdict.

Kim said it's a little unusual for a judge to wait for a verdict before ruling on a mistrial request. "I think he just kind of wanted to see where the cards fall, because depending on what the verdict is, that may let him off the hook on some of these decisions he has to make. ... If he's acquitted of everything, that makes these decisions a lot easier."

IF THERE'S A NEW TRIAL, WHO WOULD PRESIDE?

If Schroeder declares a mistrial without prejudice, prosecutors may file new charges. If there is no plea, Rittenhouse would wind up right back before the same judge, according to Michael Cicchini, a Kenosha defense attorney not involved in the case.

Schroeder's handling of the nearly three-week trial drew scrutiny several times, including when he called for applause for military veterans shortly before a defense witness who had served in the Army — the only veteran in the room — took the stand to testify.

He also had Rittenhouse himself draw juror numbers to determine which 12 jurors would deliberate — something he called a longstanding practice in his courtroom. On Wednesday, Schroeder criticized some media coverage of the case and said he would "think long and hard" about allowing televised trials in the future.

Forliti reported from Minneapolis. Todd Richmond also contributed from Madison, Wisconsin.

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

Rapper Young Dolph fatally shot at Tennessee cookie shop

By ADRIAN SAINZ and RYAN PEARSON Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Rapper Young Dolph, widely admired in the hip-hop community for his authenticity and fierce independence, was shot and killed Wednesday inside a beloved local cookie shop in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, authorities said.

Police tweeted they had no information to release about a possible suspect in the shooting, which took place at Makeda's Cookies near Memphis International Airport.

"The tragic shooting death of rap artist Young Dolph serves as another reminder of the pain that violent crime brings with it," Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland said in a statement.

The Daily Memphian newspaper reported that Young Dolph's cousin, Mareno Myers, said the 36-year-old rapper had been in town since Monday visiting an aunt who has cancer and was also giving out Thanksgiving turkeys.

"He was inside (Makeda's), and somebody just rolled up on him and took his life," Myers said.

Just last week, the cookie shop posted a video on Instagram of the rapper promoting the store's cookies, saying he returns to the store whenever he is in Memphis.

A large crowd gathered near the shop after the shooting. At a news conference Wednesday evening, Memphis Police Director Cerelyn "CJ" Davis asked the public to remain calm and recommended that residents stay home tonight. She did not say if police think other shootings under investigation Wednesday were related to the rapper's killing.

A city council member called for a curfew. Davis did not rule out issuing one at some point.

Like the Los Angeles rapper Nipsey Hussle, who was killed in 2019, Young Dolph pursued an independent approach to the music business. His Paper Route Empire label retained control over his music. "I just got another vision for it — strictly 100 percent ownership," he said in 2018 mini-documentary co-produced by his label, titled "Turned Dirt Into Diamonds." "A lot of people, they can't see what I see."

"God bless Dolph," tweeted Chance the Rapper. "Real independent Memphis rapper born in Chicago. loved by millions of ppl."

Born in Chicago as Adolph Thornton Jr., he moved to Memphis when he was 2, according to The Commercial Appeal. He said in the documentary that he'd been raised by his grandmother and tried to help his parents "clean their life up" once he found success.

He released numerous mixtapes, starting with 2008's "Paper Route Campaign," and multiple studio albums, including his 2016 debut "King of Memphis." He also collaborated on other mixtapes and albums with fellow rappers Key Glock, Megan Thee Stallion, T.I., Gucci Mane, 2 Chainz and others.

Young Dolph had three albums reach the top 10 on the Billboard 200, with 2020's "Rich Slave" peaking at No. 4.

In his music, Young Dolph rapped about being a drug dealer and life on the streets in Memphis. He recently performed at a concert at the University of Memphis and has performed during the halftime of a Memphis Grizzlies game. He was admired in Memphis as a torchbearer of the city's rap legends, Three 6 Mafia.

Young Dolph considered himself a workaholic and in recent years was focused on growing his business. "I'm a CEO first, then an artist," he told the writer Gary Suarez in a 2020 interview for Forbes, saying he'd strategically held off on signing with a major label. "As long as I keep going up and keep working, my value is going to increase."

"I know what the streets want to hear, I know what the street's going through, the lingo, the fashion, everything. It ain't nothing; it's my real life," he told Suarez.

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Young Dolph had survived previous shootings. He was shot multiple times in September 2017 after a fight outside a Los Angeles hotel. In February of that year, his SUV was shot at in Charlotte, North Carolina, more than 100 times. The incident was the inspiration for the song "100 Shots." He said he survived because he had bulletproof panels in his vehicle, The Commercial Appeal reported.

Memphis officials, athletes and numerous members of the music industry posted their condolences on social media.

"R.I.P. to my friend Dolph this broke my heart," Gucci Mane posted on Twitter.

The rapper's talent agency, APA, said it was shocked and saddened by his death.

"The world has lost an icon, a great man and beloved artist who has been taken too soon," the agency said in a statement. "His dedication, drive, hard work and loyalty to all those around him always came first and he will be deeply missed."

In a post on his Twitter account on Oct. 20, Young Dolph said a doctor told him he needed some time to himself.

"I never knew what anxiety meant until My doctor just explained to me that I have it this morning," another tweet posted that day said.

In an August tweet, he said: "Still can't believe i got to where im at in life. still feel unreal."

It is the fourth high-profile shooting in the Memphis area in the past two months. Others include a school shooting in which a 13-year-old student wounded a classmate, the fatal shooting of two postal employees by a third postal worker who then killed himself, and a mass shooting at a Kroger grocery store in the Collierville suburb that left two people dead, including the shooter, and more than a dozen wounded.

Pearson reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press writers Joshua Housing in Munster, Indiana; Kristin M. Hall in Nashville, Tennessee contributed to this report.

State media release attributed to Peng raises WTA concerns

BEIJING (AP) — The head of the women's professional tennis tour questioned the legitimacy of what Chinese state media said was a retraction by a Grand Slam doubles champion who has accused a former top government official of sexual assault.

WTA Chairman and CEO Steve Simon said Wednesday that a statement attributed to Peng Shuai and tweeted out by CGTN, the international arm of Chinese state broadcaster CCTV — which said it contained the contents of an email she wrote to Simon — "only raises my concerns as to her safety and whereabouts."

Peng is a 35-year-old from China and a former No. 1-ranked player in women's doubles who won titles at Wimbledon in 2013 and the French Open in 2014.

She wrote in a lengthy social media post earlier this month that a former vice premier and member of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee 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 the country's state-controlled media has suppressed all reporting on the case.

Simon called Sunday for a full investigation and demanded that Peng not be censored. Those expressing concern about the case and Peng's safety also have included ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi and four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka.

A statement attributed to Peng by CGTN on Wednesday included a reference to her allegation being "not true."

As the overseas arm of state broadcaster CCTV, CGTN is among the numerous propaganda tools wielded by the ruling Communist Party in an attempt to sway foreign opinion. It has been sanctioned on numerous occasions by British TV regulator Ofcom for airing forced confessions by a British businessman, a Hong Kong bookseller and an employee of the UK consulate in Hong Kong.

"I have a hard time believing that Peng Shuai actually wrote the email we received or believes what is being attributed to her," Simon said. "Peng Shuai displayed incredible courage in describing an allegation

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of sexual assault against a former top official in the Chinese government. The WTA and the rest of the world need independent and verifiable proof that she is safe. I have repeatedly tried to reach her via numerous forms of communications, to no avail."

Simon's statement, released by the WTA, continued: "Peng Shuai must be allowed to speak freely, without coercion or intimidation from any source. Her allegation of sexual assault must be respected, investigated with full transparency and without censorship. The voices of women need to be heard and respected, not censored nor dictated to."

Peng wrote that Zhang Gaoli 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 and was a singles semifinalist at the 2014 U.S Open. She hasn't competed on tour since the Qatar Open in February 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic forced tennis to take a hiatus.

Peng also participated in three Olympics. The International Olympic Committee and China are organizing the Beijing Winter Games starting Feb. 4; the IOC said Wednesday that it has seen news reports about Peng and is in touch with the International Tennis Federation.

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.

In response to a question at Wednesday's daily briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said he had no knowledge of Peng's situation.

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

House censures Rep. Gosar for violent video in rare rebuke

By KEVIN FREKING and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted Wednesday to censure Republican Rep. Paul Gosar of Arizona for posting an animated video that depicted him killing Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez with a sword, an extraordinary rebuke that highlighted the political strains testing Washington and the country.

Calling the video a clear threat to a lawmaker's life, Democrats argued Gosar's conduct would not be tolerated in any other workplace — and shouldn't be in Congress.

The vote to censure Gosar and also remove him from his House committee assignments was approved by a vote of 223-207, almost entirely along party lines, with Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois the only Republicans voting in favor.

Gosar had deleted the tweet days ago amid the criticism, but he retweeted the video late Wednesday shortly after the vote.

He showed no emotion as he stood in the well of the House after the vote, flanked by roughly a dozen Republicans as Speaker Nancy Pelosi read the censure resolution and announced his penalty. He shook hands, hugged and patted other members of the GOP conference on the back before leaving the chamber.

Republican Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy called the censure an "abuse of power" by Democrats to distract from national problems. He said of the censure, a "new standard will continue to be applied in the future," a signal of potential ramifications for Democratic members should Republicans retake a majority.

But Democrats said there was nothing political about it.

"These actions demand a response. We cannot have members joking about murdering each other," said Pelosi. "This is both an endangerment of our elected officials and an insult to the institution."

Ocasio-Cortez herself said in an impassioned speech, "When we incite violence with depictions against our colleagues, that trickles down to violence in this country. And that is where we must draw the line."

Unrepentant during tense floor debate, Gosar rejected what he called the "mischaracterization" that the

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cartoon was "dangerous or threatening. It was not."

"I do not espouse violence toward anyone. I never have. It was not my purpose to make anyone upset," Gosar said.

He compared himself to Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first Treasury secretary, celebrated in recent years in a Broadway musical, whose censure vote in Congress was defeated: "If I must join Alexander Hamilton, the first person attempted to be censured by this House, so be it, it is done."

The decision to censure Gosar, one of the strongest punishments the House can dole out, was just the fourth in nearly 40 years — and just the latest example of the raw tensions that have roiled Congress since the 2020 election and the violent Capitol insurrection that followed.

Democrats spoke not only of the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection, but also the violent attacks that have escalated on both parties, including the 2017 shooting of Republican lawmakers practicing for a congressional baseball game and the 2011 shooting of former Arizona Rep. Gabby Giffords as she met with constituents at an event outside a Tucson grocery store.

Republicans largely dismissed Gosar's video as nothing more than a cartoon, a routine form of political expression and hardly the most important issue facing Congress.

Yet threats against lawmakers are higher than ever, the chief of the U.S. Capitol Police told the Associated Press in an interview earlier this year.

The censure of Gosar was born out of Democratic frustration. Over the past week, as outrage over the video grew, House GOP leaders declined to publicly rebuke Gosar, who has a lengthy history of incendiary remarks. Instead, they largely ignored his actions and urged their members to vote against the resolution censuring him.

Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida said, "I would just suggest we have better things to do on the floor of the House of Representatives than be the hall monitors for Twitter."

The resolution will remove Gosar from two committees: Natural Resources and the Oversight and Reform panel, on which Ocasio-Cortez also serves, limiting his ability to shape legislation and deliver for constituents. It states that depictions of violence can foment actual violence and jeopardize the safety of elected officials, citing the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol as an example.

Gosar is the 24th House member to be censured. Though it carries no practical effect, except to provide a historic footnote that marks a lawmaker's career, it is the strongest punishment the House can issue short of expulsion, which requires a two-thirds vote.

Democratic Rep. Charles Rangel, the former chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, was the last to receive the rebuke in 2010 for financial misconduct.

It would also be second time this year the House has initiated the removal of a GOP lawmaker from an assigned committee, the first being Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia.

Gosar, a six-term congressman, 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 and Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., were shown fighting other animated characters. Gosar's character is seen striking another one made to look like Ocasio-Cortez in the neck with a sword. The video also shows him attacking President Joe Biden.

Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., whose receipt of repeated death threats has required her to spend thousands on security, said Gosar has not apologized to her. She singled out McCarthy for not condemning Gosar.

"What is so hard about saying this is wrong?" Ocasio-Cortez said. "This is not about me. This is not about Representative Gosar. But this is about what we are willing to accept."

This is not the first brush with controversy for Gosar, who was first elected in 2010's tea party wave. He has been repeatedly criticized by his own siblings, six of whom appeared in campaign ads supporting his Democratic opponent in 2018.

Earlier this year Gosar looked to form an America First Caucus with other hardline Republican House

members that aimed to promote "Anglo-Saxon political traditions" while warning that mass immigration was putting the "unique identity" of the U.S. at risk. He's made appearances at fringe right-wing events, including a gathering in Florida last February hosted by Nick Fuentes, an internet personality who has promoted white supremacist beliefs.

He has also portrayed a woman shot by Capitol police during the attack on the Capitol as a martyr, claiming she was "executed." And he falsely suggested that a 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was instigated by "the left" and backed by billionaire George Soros, a major funder of liberal causes who has become the focus of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Under pressure, Apple allows self-repairs to iPhones, Macs

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Apple is letting some iPhone users fix their own phones, a sharp turnaround for a company that has long prohibited anyone but company-approved technicians from fiddling with its proprietary parts and software.

The company said Wednesday that it will enable users of two of the newest iPhone models and eventually some Mac computers to get access to genuine Apple parts and tools for consumer repairs.

The shift reflects a strengthening "right to repair" movement embraced by President Joe Biden and affecting everything from smartphones to cars and tractors. It's a reaction to the infusion of software into more everyday products and the practices of manufacturers who have increasingly made those products difficult and expensive to repair.

Apple is launching an online store for self-service repairs early next year that it says will have more than 200 individual parts and tools for making the most common repairs on the iPhone 12 or iPhone 13. It will initially be focused on do-it-yourself fixes to screens, batteries and displays, which Apple previously resisted and cited concerns about security and safety, such as faulty battery replacements that can damage a device.

Apple's action is welcome news for consumers and a sign that similar standards should apply to other electronics, said Maureen Mahoney, a senior policy analyst at Consumer Reports.

"If you buy a product, you should be able to fix it," she said. Otherwise "consumers have to either rely on the manufacturers' authorized repairer or they have to buy a new one."

The Federal Trade Commission, the Biden administration and state legislatures have been eyeing regulatory changes that would make it easier for Americans to repair their broken devices.

Regulators have expressed concerns about restrictions that steer consumers into manufacturers' and sellers' repair networks, adding costs to consumers and shutting out independent repair shops from business opportunities. They've also said those repair restrictions often fall heavily on minority and low-income consumers. An FTC report to Congress in May noted that many Black-owned small businesses make equipment repairs, and repair shops often are owned by entrepreneurs from poor communities.

Apple has long been a target for right-to-repair advocates because of its practice of locking down its software so that parts are encoded to a specific device. Some attempted repairs — such as replacing a broken original screen with one made by a third party — have left phones unusable.

There are limits to the changes that Apple is making but it's still "a big milestone," said Nathan Proctor, senior director for the Right to Repair campaign at U.S. PIRG, a consumer advocacy group.

"One of the most visible right-to-repair opponents is reversing course in a meaningful way," he said.

Proctor said that's thanks to growing pressure, including from some of Apple's own investors. A shareholder proposal from an environmentally minded investment group calls for the company to cease its anti-repair practices, arguing that they are contributing to electronic waste.

Portland among US cities adding funds to police departments

By SARA CLINE Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Night after night, hundreds of people marched the streets of Oregon's largest

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city, demanding racial justice after the murder of George Floyd by a white officer.

Among the rallying cries were “defund the police” — a call for elected officials to reallocate some law enforcement funding elsewhere. In June 2020, the Portland City Council and the mayor answered by cutting millions from the police budget.

Now, a year and a half later, officials partially restored the cut funds. On Wednesday, the Portland City Council unanimously passed a fall budget bump that included increasing the current \$230 million police budget by an additional \$5.2 million. The added police spending is occurring amid a year of a record number of homicides, the city’s greatest police staffing shortage in decades and reform recommendations made by the U.S. Department of Justice.

“Many Portlanders no longer feel safe,” Mayor Ted Wheeler said. “And it is our duty, as leaders of this city, to take action and deliver better results within our crisis response system.”

Portland isn’t the only liberal city doing an about-face on police spending. From New York City to Los Angeles — in cities that had some of the largest Black Lives Matter protests, and some with an extensive history of police brutality — police departments are seeing their finances partially restored in response to rising homicides, an officer exodus and political pressures.

In recent mayoral elections, some winning candidates have pledged to bolster public safety budgets. In Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed, voters rejected a proposal to replace the police department with a new Department of Public Safety.

Although the three-word call to action was the jumping-off point for communities to talk about how they want to be policed, experts say the goals of “defund the police” are debatable. To some it means abolishing police departments, for others it is about cutting law enforcement budgets and to others it is about reform and accountability.

“The defund-the-police movement spearheaded an opportunity for historically disenfranchised and historically under-resourced communities to express their continued discontent with policing,” said Howard Henderson, the Center for Justice Research director at Texas Southern University.

For months, beginning in late May 2020, Portland — one of the whitest cities in America — was roiled by near-nightly Black Lives Matter protests. At the time, officials including Wheeler were criticized for what many described as an overly aggressive police force.

During the height of protests, officers reported more than 6,000 uses of force. The U.S. Department of Justice rebuked the bureau for its “abnormally high” reliance on violent tactics.

Portland police have a history of being combative. In 2014, the city and Department of Justice reached a settlement agreement following a federal investigation that found Portland officers used excessive force against people with mental illness. Some of the police spending that passed on Wednesday — including \$2.7 million for body-worn cameras and hiring staff to assess the police department’s crowd control tactics — were created in order to meet the Justice Department’s reform requirements.

During last year’s protests, Portlanders called for \$50 million to be cut from the department budget, with the money going to community-driven initiatives.

The City Council responded by cutting \$15 million. An additional \$12 million was cut due to pandemic-caused economic shortfalls. As a result, school resource officers, transit police and a gun violence reduction team — which was found to disproportionately target Black Portland residents during traffic stops, according to an audit in March 2018 — were disbanded.

Similar action was taken elsewhere.

In the wake of protests, the Los Angeles City Council cut \$150 million from the police budget, promising to put that money into other social services. Likewise, in New York City lawmakers approved a shift of \$1 billion from policing to education and social services. At the time the NYPD budget was around \$6 billion, with several billion dollars more in shared city expenses such as pensions. However, since the cut, concerns about crime led to about \$200 million in restored funding.

Henderson says some of the loudest voices of the “defund” movement weren’t people in neighborhoods most riddled by crime.

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"The folks who live in these high-crime communities ... they don't want to get rid of police altogether," Henderson said. "What they want to do is get rid of bad policing,"

In Portland, gun violence has disproportionately impacted communities of color. Family members of homicide victims and advocates who work with young gang members have questioned the cuts and asked for greater police presence, along with accountability and increased social services.

In the November elections, questions about when and where police are needed were at the forefront.

In Seattle, mayoral candidates who wanted to defund police stumbled. In New York City former police captain Eric Adams, who has not embraced calls to defund the police, was elected mayor.

In Minneapolis, Police Chief Medaria Arradondo has proposed a \$192 million budget for 2022, which would restore funding to what it was before Floyd's death. The proposed budget, which will be voted on in December, includes funds to replace around 300 who have quit since last year.

Similarly in Portland, the police department is 128 officers short of authorized strength. The added police spending includes signing bonuses for new officers, funding a retire-rehire program and bolstering recruitment with the goal to hire 200 additional sworn officers and 100 unarmed community safety officers by 2024 — which some advocates see as a meaningful reform win and a compromise to defunding police.

Nationally, homicides increased by nearly 30% from 2019 to 2020, based on FBI data. However, in Portland, deadly violence has increased at a faster rate than nearly all major cities, with an 83% increase in homicides in 2020.

Aaron Chalfin, a University of Pennsylvania criminologist who has studied four decades of police budgets in major cities, says 54% of the times that cities hired more officers, homicide numbers decreased. Many factors are at play in the fluctuation of crime rates, including the number of officers and police department budgets. Other factors include financial and mental health struggles caused by the pandemic, the economy, programs for young people and even the amount of street lighting.

There are "a million things that drive crime up and down," Chalfin said.

Across the country, officials have used the "defund the police" movement to discuss policing alternatives.

In Portland, it paved the way for City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty — the first Black woman elected to City Council and key architect of police reform plans — to create Portland Street Response. The unarmed policing alternative — comprised of a paramedic, a mental health crisis responder and peer support specialists — respond to non-emergency calls for people experiencing a crisis.

Henderson said that because of "defund the police," a valuable national conversation was started.

"At the end of the day was it the best phrase? Maybe it was? Maybe it wasn't?" Henderson said. "But at least we're talking about it."

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

Henry Montgomery, at center of juvenile life debate, is free

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — The Louisiana inmate whose Supreme Court case was instrumental in extending the possibility of freedom to hundreds of people sentenced to life in prison without the opportunity for parole when they were juveniles was freed on parole Wednesday after spending nearly six decades behind bars.

Henry Montgomery, 75, was released from prison just hours after the parole board's decision and went to the offices of the Louisiana Parole Project, a nonprofit which is supporting him after his release. There he was embraced by tearful staff and former juvenile lifers who were freed as a result of the court case that bears Montgomery's name.

"It feels so wonderful," said Montgomery during an interview with The Associated Press. When asked what he plans to do now that he is out of prison, Montgomery said he wanted to pay his respects to his

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mother and grandmother and other family members who died when he was behind bars.

Montgomery had been convicted in the 1963 killing of East Baton Rouge sheriff's deputy Charles Hurt, who caught him skipping school. Montgomery was 17 at the time. He was initially sentenced to death but the state's Supreme Court threw out his conviction in 1966, saying he didn't get a fair trial. The case was retried, Montgomery convicted again but this time sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. He served decades at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

A three-member board voted unanimously in favor of parole. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting was held on Zoom with Montgomery appearing on camera at Angola.

"He's been in prison for 57 years. He has an excellent ... disciplinary record. He is a low risk by our assessment. He's got good comments from the warden," said board member Tony Marabella as he voted to approve Montgomery's release with certain conditions including a curfew and that he have no contact with the victim's family.

Montgomery's release owes back to two specific Supreme Court cases. In 2012, the Supreme Court ruled in *Miller v. Alabama* that mandatory sentencing of life without parole for juvenile offenders was "cruel and unusual" punishment. But it didn't settle the question of whether that decision applied retroactively or only to cases going forward.

In 2016, the Supreme Court settled the matter when it took up Montgomery's case and extended their decision on such sentences to people already in prison.

The decision ushered in a wave of new sentences and releases. Since the court's Montgomery decision, about 800 people who had been sentenced to life without parole as juveniles have been released, according to the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. But, until Wednesday, Montgomery remained in prison.

After the Supreme Court decision, he was resentenced in 2017 to life with parole and the state judge who resentenced Montgomery called him a "model prisoner" who appears to be rehabilitated. But then the parole board rejected his application two times, the most recent rejection coming in 2019.

Andrew Hundley is a former juvenile lifer who was released due to the Montgomery decision and went on to found the Parole Project in 2016 to assist people who have served long prison sentences reenter society. He said many former juvenile lifers who were released and were able to go on with their lives felt a collective sense of guilt that Montgomery — whose case made their releases possible — was still behind bars. For juvenile lifers still incarcerated, his release carries a different message, Hundley said.

"For individuals who continue to be in prison, Henry gives them hope that they may be judged by who they are today and not the worst mistake they ever made," Hundley said.

The Parole Project will help Montgomery with housing, signing up for health care or medications, getting an ID card and learning how to navigate society. The reentry started with a cheeseburger, fries and an orange soda — his first meal out of prison — and his first cellphone which staff members said they would help him set up.

Montgomery also noted the huge changes that had taken place in Baton Rouge since he was incarcerated — freeways that didn't exist decades ago, for example — and said he didn't even recognize some places.

Shon Williams was on hand Wednesday to welcome Montgomery. He was a former juvenile lifer who served time in Angola with Montgomery. He recalled Montgomery taking a sign language class in prison that Williams taught despite his arthritis and Montgomery giving him advice in prison to "never give up." Williams said he was holding back tears watching Montgomery on Wednesday.

"If it wasn't for him I'd still be in Angola," Williams said.

During the hearing, Hundley and others spoke of what Montgomery had accomplished in prison including his years of work at the prison's silk screen shop and the length of his stay. He was also instrumental in establishing a boxing team.

His release was not without opposition. Hurt, the sheriff's deputy who Montgomery killed, was married and had three children. Two of his daughters have met with Montgomery in prison and forgiven him, but family members have opposed his release. A prosecutor from the area where Montgomery's crime occurred spoke against his parole as did one of the deputy's daughters, Linda Hurt Woods.

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"I do not believe that he should be released at this time," said Woods, saying that the decision shows deep disrespect to law enforcement officers. "He made a decision at 17 years old. You know right from wrong at 17. I did."

Montgomery himself said little during the roughly half-hour hearing. He is extremely hard of hearing, and his lawyer often had to repeat questions from the board members. At times Montgomery said he was struggling to find words to express himself.

"I'm really sorry that I, that this happened," Montgomery said. "I am going to have to live with this all my life, the rest of my life." Speaking later to the AP he said: "I destroyed my life, they life and the people that I hurt," referring to his own family and that of the slain deputy's.

Follow Santana on Twitter @ruskygal.

2 men set to be cleared in the 1965 killing of Malcolm X

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two of the three men convicted in the assassination of Malcolm X are set to be cleared Thursday after insisting on their innocence since the 1965 killing of one of the United States' most formidable fighters for civil rights, their lawyers and Manhattan's top prosecutor said Wednesday.

A nearly two-year-long re-investigation found that authorities withheld evidence favorable to the defense in the trial of Muhammad Aziz, now 83, and the late Khalil Islam, said their attorneys, the Innocence Project and civil rights lawyer David Shanies.

Aziz called his conviction "the result of a process that was corrupt to its core — one that is all too familiar" even today.

"I do not need a court, prosecutors or a piece of paper to tell me I am innocent," he said in a statement. But he said he was glad his family, friends and lawyers would get to see "the truth we have all known, officially recognized."

He urged the criminal justice system to "take responsibility for the immeasurable harm it caused me."

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. tweeted that his office would join the men's attorneys in asking a judge Thursday to toss out the convictions.

"These men did not get the justice that they deserved," Vance told The New York Times, which first reported on the developments. Innocence Project co-founder Barry Scheck called the case "one of the most blatant miscarriages of justice that I have ever seen."

One of the civil rights era's most controversial and compelling figures, Malcolm X rose to fame as the Nation of Islam's chief spokesperson, proclaiming the Black Muslim organization's message at the time: racial separatism as a road to self-actualization. He famously urged Black people to claim civil rights "by any means necessary" and referred to white people as "blue-eyed devils," and he later denounced racism.

About a year before his death, he split from the Nation of Islam and later made a pilgrimage to Mecca, returning with a new view of the potential for racial unity. Some in the Nation of Islam saw him as a traitor.

At age 39, he was gunned down as he began a speech in Harlem's Audubon Ballroom on Feb. 21, 1965.

Aziz, Islam and a third man, Mujahid Abdul Halim — also known as Talmadge Hayer and Thomas Hagan — were convicted of murder in March 1966 and sentenced to life in prison.

Hagan said he was one of three gunmen who shot Malcolm X, but he testified that neither Aziz nor Islam was involved. The two, then known as Norman 3X Butler and Thomas 15X Johnson, maintained throughout that they were innocent and offered alibis at their 1966 trial. No physical evidence linked them to the crime.

"Thomas 15 Johnson and Norman 3X Butler had nothing to do with this crime whatsoever," Hagan said in a sworn statement in 1977.

Hagan was paroled in 2010. A message was left Wednesday at a phone number he had when paroled.

He identified two other men as gunmen, but no one else was ever arrested.

According to The New York Times, the re-investigation found the FBI had documents that pointed to other suspects, and a still-living witness supported Aziz's alibi — that he was at home with a leg injury at

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the time of the shooting.

The witness, whom authorities had never interviewed before and was identified only by the initials "J.M.," said he spoke to Aziz on the latter's home phone the day of the killing, the newspaper said.

Also, the review found that prosecutors knew about but didn't disclose that undercover officers were in the ballroom when the gunfire erupted, and police knew that someone had called the Daily News of New York earlier that day saying that Malcolm X would be killed.

The New York Police Department and the FBI said Wednesday that they had cooperated fully with the re-investigation, and they declined to comment further.

Aziz was released in 1985. Islam was released two years later and died in 2009. Both continued to press to clear their names.

"I did not kill Malcolm X," Aziz said at a news conference in 1998, after the Nation of Islam tapped him to run the mosque where the slain leader had preached.

A decade later, Islam told a gathering at a Harlem bookstore: "I need to be exonerated. I had to walk 22 years in prison."

And after their release, he and Aziz lived under the cloud of being Malcolm X's supposed assassins.

"Exonerating these men is a righteous and well-deserved affirmation of their true character," Shanies said in a statement. Deborah Francois, a counsel in his office, called the convictions "the product of gross official misconduct and a criminal justice system weighed against people of color."

The Manhattan district attorney's office publicly acknowledged it was considering reopening the case after Netflix aired the documentary series "Who Killed Malcolm X?" last year. The series explored a theory by scholars that the two men were innocent and that some of the real killers had escaped.

Associated Press writers Michael R. Sisak and Karen Matthews contributed to this report.

Biden pushes electric vehicle chargers as energy costs spike

By AAMER MADHANI and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — President Joe Biden punched the accelerator on a battery-powered Hummer on Wednesday, causing the wheels to squeal and the truck to jet forward as he tried in his own way to drive the country toward an electric vehicle future.

The engine was quiet as the president pulled up to a waiting delegation of reporters and officials.

"Anyone wanna jump in the back?" Biden asked.

The president had just toured a General Motors plant in Detroit to showcase how his newly signed \$1 trillion infrastructure law could transform the auto industry.

He 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. It's also an attempt to leapfrog China in the plug-in EV market. Currently, the U.S. market share of plug-in electric vehicle sales is one-third the size of the Chinese EV market.

The president noted that the U.S. was not yet leading with electric vehicles, something he believes his infrastructure package can change with plans to build 500,000 charging stations. The Hummer he drove has a starting price of \$108,700, as the electric market seems designed so far to serve luxury buyers instead of a mass audience.

"Up until now, China has been leading in this race — that's about to change," he said. "We're going to make sure that the jobs of the future end up here in Michigan, not halfway around the world."

Two top White House advisers, writing in the Detroit Free Press, said the legislation will help America regain its global competitiveness, which has waned, they contend, "after decades of delay and decay."

"Nobody knows this better than Detroit, which has been at the heart of American industrial strategy in the past and now can again, which is why President Biden is coming today," wrote Brian Deese, director of the National Economic Council, and national security adviser Jake Sullivan in an opinion column published Wednesday.

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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.

Biden has asked the Federal Trade Commission to monitor gasoline prices and address any illegal conduct being observed and is engaging with countries and entities abroad like OPEC on increasing supply.

Biden went a step further Wednesday, sending a letter asking the FTC chair to consider investigating "whether illegal conduct is costing families at the pump." The letter noted an "unexplained" gap in the price of unfinished gasoline and prices for consumers at the pump.

The GM plant Biden visited 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 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.

AP writer Alexandra Jaffe contributed reporting.

How a right-wing provocateur is using race to reach Gen Z

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

MANKATO, Minnesota (AP) — Charlie Kirk stood 80 miles from where George Floyd was murdered, faced an overwhelmingly white audience, and declared he was going to say things "no one dares say out loud."

What followed was an avalanche of aspersions and debunked claims about Floyd, the Black man whose

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death at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer set off a global reckoning over racial injustice and broad calls for change. But the white conservative agitator had a counter view: Floyd was a "scumbag," he said, unworthy of the attention.

The insult lodged at Floyd — a 46-year-old father suspected of passing off a counterfeit \$20 bill — was intended to be shocking. But anyone familiar with Kirk shouldn't be surprised. For years, the conservative provocateur and his group, Turning Point USA, have built a following inflaming racial divides and stoking outrage. Kirk thrived during President Donald Trump's tenure — landing speaking spots at the Republican National Convention in 2016 and 2020 and occasionally counseling Trump on campaign messaging and tactics.

Now the 28-year-old is expanding his reach, trying to rally a next generation of aggrieved white conservatives. On a tour of college towns, he blasts schools and local governments for teaching about racism, with a confrontational style some call dangerous. Yet Kirk is drawing large crowds of millennials and Gen Zers, millions of online followers and donor cash, often with little media attention.

Kirk is stoking fear among a group that is coming of age in a time of social restlessness, said Nekima Levy Armstrong, a Minneapolis civil rights lawyer and activist.

"He's taking the discontent that some people may be experiencing and combining it with racial animus, which is a dangerous recipe in a country that is still in the midst of racial turmoil," she said.

Like many leading Republicans, including Virginia Gov.-elect Glenn Youngkin and Trump, Kirk seizes on opposition to critical race theory. The once obscure academic framework has been transformed by conservatives into a catchall term for education about inclusion, diversity and systemic racism in the U.S.

Kirk's answer is a free K-12 alternative curriculum described as the key to a "reliable, honest and quality America-first education," and is aimed primarily at homeschooling parents.

It's just one offering in Kirk's buzzing conservative content portal designed to meet young people where they live online. There's also an array of podcasts hosted by Kirk and other conservative figures, and a "Professor Watchlist" to label instructors "who discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda."

"Turning Point Live" is a three-hour streaming talk show aimed at Gen Z and featuring 20-something host John Root. Recent guests include Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee and Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, both Republicans.

And there's plenty of swag: "Buy merch. Save America," the site suggests.

Turning Point USA's online audience is large and growing. It averaged 83,000 monthly unique visitors over the past three years, but it grew to a monthly average of 111,000 in the past year, according to the digital intelligence firm Similarweb. That's more than three times the traffic for conservative radio host Laura Ingraham's website over the past year.

That traffic is driven in part by at least a dozen social media accounts across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that, combined, have more than 10 million followers online.

Money into Kirk's nonprofit network has followed the traffic.

Turning Point USA is a 501c3 nonprofit, meaning contributions are tax-deductible and its donors are not disclosed. But in 2019, the most recent year for which tax records are public, Turning Point USA raised more than \$28 million, according to Internal Revenue Service filings. That's almost twice what it raised in 2014, its first-year as a tax-exempt charity.

Though Turning Point USA doesn't have to disclose its donors, some are foundations established by wealthy conservatives, which report their donations to the IRS in annual tax filings. A partial list reads like a roster of conservative megadonors, including foundations affiliated with the late megadonor Foster Friess and the Uihlein and Bradley families, who also help finance leading conservative policy groups such as American Legislative Exchange Council, the Cato Institute and the Federalist Society.

Kirk also leads a fundraising group aimed specifically at political advocacy. That group, Turning Point Action, has endorsed several congressional candidates for 2022. The list includes Washington's Joe Kent, Illinois' Catalina Lauf, Florida's Anna Paulina Luna and Ohio's Max Miller, all candidates who ran to oppose

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GOP House members who voted for Trump's second impeachment.

Kirk has shown a knack for anticipating the outrage of the moment.

He was quick to assail shutdown orders at the dawn of the pandemic, and then claimed falsely that Trump won the 2020 election. He has attacked Olympic gymnast Simone Biles, blamed spiking violent crime on efforts to defund police departments and months before Youngkin was seizing on parental outrage in Virginia, Kirk had turned to critical race theory.

"He works within the framework of the Trump movement. He is a good barometer of what the Republican right wing feels it can get away with," said Michael Hayden, a spokesman for the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit group that tracks far right figures and organizations.

Turning Point USA was listed among the 11 groups involved in the "March to Save America" rally that preceded the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. Days before the rally, Kirk boasted on Twitter about sending buses "full of patriots to DC to fight for this president." He later deleted the tweet.

Online contributions to Turning Point's website spiked immediately after the riot, according to Similarweb, which can track frequency of online payments but not amounts.

Kirk is not among the more than a dozen rally organizers subpoenaed by the House select committee investigating the Capitol siege. A committee spokesperson would not comment on whether Kirk has been interviewed or approached by the committee.

Lately Kirk, who did not respond to interview requests, has stayed out of the headlines. However, an event in Idaho drew attention last month when a man shouted from a crowd: "How many elections are they going to steal before we kill these people?"

Kirk answered by denouncing the comment, but blamed the left: "They are trying to make you do something that will be violent, that will justify a takeover of your freedoms and liberties."

Raised in the upper-income Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights, Kirk became politically involved young, volunteering in middle school and high school on political campaigns. His quick rise began shortly after high school when he quit attending Harper College, a Chicago-area community college, to pursue political activism and co-founded Turning Point USA with Chicago-area tea party activist and mentor Bill Montgomery.

Kirk's "Exposing Critical Racism Theory" tour has promoted recent stops in Alabama, Idaho, Michigan, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas and Vermont. Last month, he packed a convention center ballroom in Mankato, Minnesota, with roughly 600 people — mostly teenagers and college students — on a Tuesday evening.

Once a prairie farming hub south of Minneapolis, Mankato has swelled into a diversifying mini-metro. Minnesota State University, food production plants and the Mayo Clinic's satellite campus all have drawn African and Latin American immigrants, while the Black population has grown steadily.)

For 90 minutes, Kirk spoke directly to the virtually all-white crowd and told them radical leftists want them to feel ashamed.

"Just because you're a white person does not mean you have to begin apologizing simply for how God made you," he said.

He repeated widely debunked claims about Floyd's criminal record and suggested that the cause of Floyd's death was a drug overdose, rather than homicide, as the medical examiner found.

Rep. Jim Hagedorn, the local Republican congressman, was in the audience and later said in a Facebook post that he "enjoyed attending" and hearing Kirk "discuss the need to stand up and defend America and our founding principles."

Riley Carlson, the campus coordinator for Turning Point USA at Minnesota State, said she didn't know much about critical race theory before the event.

"We're just excited Charlie is here to explain it," said the senior from St. Michael, a Minneapolis suburb. "There's so many different ways you can look at it. And I'm looking for where I stand on it."

Kirk's message is a hard sell to most young people. Roughly 60% of voters younger than 30 said they think racism is a very serious problem in the United States, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 110,000 voters in the 2020 election. It's the largest percentage of any age group surveyed.

Meanwhile, Trump lost younger voters by 30 percentage points last year, VoteCast shows.

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"It's a wedge issue to fire up a shrinking base," said John Della Volpe, director of polling at the Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics and an expert in young voters.

But it demonstrates Kirk's finger is on the pulse of conservative anger, said Peter Montgomery, a senior fellow with the liberal People for the American Way.

"Fearmongering about critical race theory has really seemed to rise to the top of the messaging of the groups I watch," he said. "There's been a pivot toward that and Kirk has been wise to the fundraising power it promises."

Hannah Fingerhut, Mary Clare Jalonick and Amanda Seitz contributed from Washington. Michelle Smith contributed from Providence, Rhode Island.

This story has been corrected to remove a reference in the 16th paragraph to foundations affiliated with the Charles and David Koch network. Turning Point USA does not receive funding from them.

White House: 10% of kids have been vaccinated in 1st 2 weeks

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House says about 10% of eligible kids aged 5 to 11 have received a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine since its approval for their age group two weeks ago.

At least 2.6 million kids have received a shot, White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Wednesday, with 1.7 million doses administered in the last week alone, roughly double the pace of the first week after approval. It's more than three times faster than the rate adults were vaccinated at the start of the nation's vaccination campaign 11 months ago.

Zients said there are now 30,000 locations across for kids to get a shot, up from 20,000 last week, and that the administration expects the pace of pediatric shots to pick up in the coming days.

Kids who get their first vaccine dose by the end of this week will be fully vaccinated by Christmas, assuming they get their second shot three weeks after the first one.

State-by-state breakdowns of doses given to the age group haven't been released by the White House or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but figures shared by states show the pace varies. About 11-12% of children in that age group have received their first doses in Colorado, Utah and Illinois, but the pace is much slower in places like Idaho (5%), Tennessee (5%) and Wyoming (4%), three states that have some of the lowest rates of vaccination for older groups.

The White House was stepping up its efforts to promote kid vaccination, with first lady Jill Biden and the singer Ciara taping a video Wednesday encouraging shots for kids.

The first lady also visited a Washington pediatric care facility along with Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, the Washington Mystics' Alysha Clark and the Washington Wizards' Thomas Bryant.

"You're the real heroes," Biden told newly vaccinated kids. "You have your superpower and now you're protected against COVID."

Biden also warned parents against misinformation around the vaccines and emphasized their safety.

"I want you to remember and share with other parents: The vaccine protects your children against COVID-19," she said. "It's been thoroughly reviewed and rigorously tested. It's safe. It's free, and it's available for every single child in this country 5 and up."

AP writer Brady McCombs in Salt Lake City contributed.

Contrary to popular belief, no great migration in pandemic

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Contrary to popular belief, there has been no great migration in the U.S. during the pandemic.

New figures released Wednesday by the U.S. Census Bureau show that the proportion of people who

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moved over the past year fell to its lowest level in the 73 years that it has been tracked, in contradiction to popular anecdotes that people left cities en masse to escape COVID-19 restrictions or in search of more bucolic lifestyles.

"Millennials living in New York City do not make up the world," joked Thomas Cooke, a demographic consultant in Connecticut. "My millennial daughter's friends living in Williamsburg, dozens of them came home. It felt like the world had suddenly moved, but in reality, this is not surprising at all."

In 2021, more than 27 million people, or 8.4% of U.S. residents, reported having moved in the past year, according to the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

By comparison, 9.3% of U.S. residents moved from 2019 to 2020. Three decades ago, that figure was 17%.

Besides giving rise to shelter-in-place restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic may have forced people to postpone life-cycle events such as marriages or having babies that often lead to moves. But the decline is part of a decadeslong migration decline in the U.S., said William Frey, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution.

"These numbers show a lot of people didn't move or moved at a slower rate," Frey said. "But it's a longer-term trend."

That's not to say that nobody moved. The one uptick in mobility patterns last year took place in longer-distance moves, from state to state, compared to moves within a state or county. Those 4.3 million residents who moved to another state may have done so because of the pandemic, Frey said.

Demographic expert Andrew Beveridge used change-of-address data to show that while people moved out of New York, particularly in well-heeled neighborhoods, at the height of the pandemic, those neighborhoods recouped their numbers just months later. Regarding the nation as a whole, Beveridge said he's not surprised migration declined.

"The same thing happened during the financial crisis. Nobody moved. Nobody got married. Nobody had kids," said Beveridge, a sociology professor at Queens College and the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. "All demographic change sort of just screeches to a halt."

Other factors contributing to Americans staying put have been an aging population, since older people are less likely to move than younger ones; the ability to telecommute for work, which allowed some workers to change jobs without having to move; and rising home prices and rents that kept some would-be movers in place, demographers said.

"I think the boom in remote work because of COVID coupled with the economic shock is the big reason," said Mary Craigle, bureau chief for Montana's Research and Information Services.

Mobility in the U.S. has been on a downward slide since 1985 when 20% of U.S. residents moved. That was an era when Baby Boomers were young adults, beginning careers, getting married and starting families. In comparison, millennials, who today are in the same age range as their Baby Boomer cohorts were in the mid-1980s, are stuck in place due to high housing costs and underemployment, according to an analysis Frey did last year.

Advancements in telecommunications and transportation have contributed to the decadeslong decline in U.S. mobility. Nowadays, people can get an education, work and visit family and friends remotely. In the last half of the last century, the highway system allowed people to work 50 miles (80 kilometers) from their homes without having to move closer for work, said Cooke, a professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut.

Rising economic insecurity over the decades also has made U.S. residents less mobile since "when there's insecurity, people value what they already have," he said.

The slowdown in American mobility is part of a recent stagnation in population dynamics in the U.S. The 2020 census shows that the U.S. grew by only 7.4% over the previous decade, the slowest rate since between 1930 and 1940. Earlier this week, the Census Bureau revealed that the population center of the U.S. moved only 11.8 miles (19 kilometers), the smallest shift in 100 years.

US offers investment to boost global COVID vaccine capacity

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressed to address gaping inequality in global COVID-19 vaccines, the Biden administration took steps Wednesday to make billions of dollars available to drugmakers to scale up domestic production to share with the world and prepare for the next pandemic.

Under the new initiative, the government's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority is soliciting pharmaceutical companies with proven ability to make the more-effective mRNA vaccines to bid for U.S. investment in scaling up their manufacturing. Pfizer and Moderna produce the two U.S.-approved mRNA shots.

The White House hopes the move will build capacity to produce an additional 1 billion shots per year.

The initiative comes as the Biden White House has faced growing pressure at home and abroad over inequity in the global vaccine supply — as the U.S. moves toward approving booster shots for all adults while vulnerable people in poorer nations wait for their first dose of protection.

According to an analysis by the ONE Campaign, an international aid and advocacy organization, only 4.7% of people living in low-income countries have received a first dose. Wealthy nations administered more than 173 million booster shots, while lower-income countries have administered about 32 million first shots.

The Biden administration believes increasing capacity of COVID-19 shots will help ease a global shortage of doses, particularly in lower- and middle-income nations, stopping preventable death and limiting the development of potentially new, more dangerous variants of the virus.

"The goal of this program is to expand existing capacity by an additional billion doses per year, with production starting by the second half of 2022," White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said.

On Wednesday, Zients announced that the U.S. has now donated 250 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines globally — the most of any nation — with a goal of sharing more than 1.1 billion shots by the end of 2022.

There are no firm agreements yet with Moderna or Pfizer to take up the U.S. on the investment, but the Biden administration hopes that the enhanced manufacturing capacity, through support for the company's facilities, equipment, staff or training, will by mid-2022 allow more COVID-19 doses to be shared overseas as well as help prepare for the next public health emergency.

The administration is prioritizing the mRNA vaccines, which have proven to be more effective against preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19 than the Johnson & Johnson viral vector vaccine, which uses a harmless virus that carries genetic material to stimulate the immune system. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are made with a piece of genetic code called messenger RNA that tells the body to make harmless copies of the spike protein so it's trained to recognize the virus.

Robbie Silverman, senior advocacy manager at Oxfam America, welcomed Biden's plan to invest into vaccine manufacturing capacity but said it was nowhere near sufficient.

"What the world really needs is distributed regional manufacturing capacity of vaccines, and it sounds like this investment is focused on building U.S. capacity," he said. "We desperately need the companies who have a monopoly over the COVID vaccines to transfer their technology, and we need the U.S. government to use its leverage."

Silverman estimated that without companies transferring their knowledge of how to make COVID-19 vaccines, it would take manufacturers elsewhere double the time needed to start making doses, noting that billions of vaccines against other diseases are routinely made in developing countries.

Silverman said that while the U.S. should have negotiated more provisions about vaccine equity when it was securing its own supply, it was not too late to act. He said the U.S. should support the proposed waiver that was drafted by India and South Africa at the World Trade Organization, calling for patents on COVID-19 vaccines and treatments to be suspended. And he said the U.S. could invoke the Defense Production Act to target critical ingredients for COVID-19 shots.

"The U.S. government has lots of tools at its disposal to push pharmaceutical companies," he said, noting that it had invested billions of dollars into creating Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine. "The U.S. needs to make sure these companies, which they funded, are prioritizing public health rather than profits."

Ava Alkon, a senior policy and research officer at Doctors Without Borders, said that the billion doses

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that might be produced with the U.S. investment were still far from the figure needed to immunize the world. The World Health Organization has estimated that 11 billion doses are needed.

Alkon said that since any manufacturers newly drafted into making COVID-19 doses would not be able to produce any supplies for several months, a more immediate solution is needed. "We believe that the U.S. can distribute many more doses than it already has on an ongoing basis," she said, calling for the U.S. to be more transparent about how many extra doses it has. She said some estimates suggest the U.S. could have at least 500 million surplus vaccines by the end of the year.

In a statement, Moderna said it hadn't yet reviewed the Biden administration's proposal, but that it looked forward to discussing it with the administration "and understanding whether there is a role that we could play in supporting the government's efforts to address pandemic preparedness." Pfizer declined comment.

The New York Times first reported on the new initiative.

AP writers Maria Cheng in London and Lauran Neergaard in Washington contributed.

Belarus brings some migrants in from cold at Polish border

By MONIKA SCISLOWSKA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Hundreds of migrants who were camped in the cold on the Poland-Belarus border have been moved to a nearby warehouse in Belarusian territory, reports said Wednesday, with some still harboring hopes of entering the European Union.

The move came a day after a melee broke out in the border crisis, with migrants throwing stones at Polish forces massed on their side of the razor-wire fence, injuring 12, and they responded with water cannons and tear gas. Warsaw accused Belarusian forces of instigating the conflict, while the government in Minsk denounced Poland's "violent actions."

The migrants, mostly from the Middle East, have been stuck at the border since Nov. 8. Most are fleeing conflict or despair at home and want to reach Germany or other western European countries.

The West has accused Belarus 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, which has seen migrants entering the country since summer and then trying to cross into Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

On Wednesday, Poland's Border Guard tweeted a video showing migrants with bags and backpacks being directed by Belarus forces away from the camp near the Kuznica border crossing, and Polish Deputy Interior Minister Maciej Wasik said he had received information they were leaving on buses.

The Belarus state news agency Belta reported they were moved to a heated, warehouse-like building about 500 meters (yards) from the border near Bruzgi, giving them the chance to rest indoors after many days in tents.

One of them, an Iraqi Kurd named Miran Ali, took video in the warehouse and said Belarusian authorities told them they wouldn't be forced to return home. In response, the migrants chanted "Belarus! Belarus! Belarus!" in gratitude.

"This is the joy and happiness of Kurdish people after they were told that they will not be sent back to Kurdistan by force, and that they can wait here until Germany or one of the cities in Germany take them there," Ali said as he recorded the video. "These people are expressing happiness and optimism in this cold and ugly camp."

They sat on blankets, most still wrapped in heavy jackets and raincoats.

Belta reported about 1,000 migrants agreed Tuesday to move into the building to "wait for the situation to resolve," and it quoted some of them as saying that they are not planning to return to their home countries. Most of the building's space was allocated for the migrants, who were offered food, water, medical aid, mattresses and pillows, the news agency said.

Some migrants opted to stay camped near the border. Poland's Defense Ministry posted video showing people and tents there, with some smoke rising from campfires.

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The next steps in the crisis are unclear. Although arrangements have been made for flights from Minsk to Iraq to repatriate those who want to return, it is uncertain how many will go. Iraq has appealed for its citizens to fly home, telling them the way into the EU is closed. The first flight from Minsk for the voluntary repatriation to Iraq is expected Thursday.

Belarus also released video from its State Border Committee, alleging it showed Lithuanian border guards with dogs pushing migrants away from the Belarus-Lithuania frontier Tuesday night.

Lithuania denied the claim, releasing its own video of the incident. It blamed Belarusian officials for pushing the group of 13 migrants toward the Lithuanian side and preventing them from returning to Belarus after being stopped by the Lithuanian guards.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke with Lukashenko for the second time this week, stressing that migrants should be given the chance to return to their home countries with the help of the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration.

Steve Alter, a spokesman for the German Interior Ministry, denied Berlin was planning to bring the migrants to Germany. The "road to Belarus is a dead end for most people who want to go to Germany. There are no plans to approve taking people in," he said.

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said U.N. aid was starting to reach the migrants and it was important to ensure humanitarian agencies gain permanent access, even if it meant talking to Lukashenko, whose legitimacy is questioned by the West following a disputed 2020 reelection.

"It makes sense to also talk to those who have the opportunity to change this situation in Minsk, even when it comes to a ruler whose legitimacy, like all other European member states, Germany does not recognize," he said, adding that Merkel has coordinated with other EU partners and remains committed to the bloc's stance of tightening sanctions on Minsk.

Meanwhile, Polish President Andrzej Duda said there is "no military threat" at the border from the primarily civilian police and border guards that are there to prevent illegal migration. The presence of the Polish military there is chiefly as a backup, he said on a visit to Montenegro.

Duda stressed that Poland won't accept any international decisions on the border standoff that are made without Warsaw's participation, referring to the talks involving Merkel and Lukashenko.

Information on both sides of the border is hard to verify due to government restrictions. A state of emergency in Poland is keeping journalists, human rights workers and others away from the border along a zone that is 3 kilometers (2 miles) deep, and Belarus limits the presence of independent journalists.

Estonia, which also is affected by migrant movements but to a lesser degree, said it would build a temporary razor wire barrier of up to 40 kilometers (25 miles) on its eastern border with Russia as an interim security solution.

This northernmost of the three Baltic nations with a population of 1.3 million, Estonia shares a 294-kilometer (183-mile) land border with Russia and a 340-kilometer border with Latvia. It does not neighbor Belarus.

Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets told broadcaster ERR on Tuesday that the crisis stems from Lukashenko's bid to be recognized by the West as president and have EU sanctions lifted, stressing they must stay in place.

"In our view, it is important that the European Union remains united and exerts its influence on Belarus through action," Liimets said, adding new sanctions should be imposed as soon as possible.

Salar Salim in Baghdad, Daria Litvinova in Moscow, Frank Jordans in Berlin, Jari Tanner in Tallinn, Estonia, and Vanessa Gera in Warsaw contributed.

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

Call to remove Black pastors adds to agony in Arbery's town

By JEFFREY COLLINS and JAY REEVES Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Race was always going to be at the forefront of the trial of three white men

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charged with chasing and killing Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man, in a coastal Georgia neighborhood.

But a defense attorney's quickly rejected call to kick out Black pastors, including Jesse Jackson, from the Glynn County courtroom intensified frustrations and added fresh agony to a lingering wound that many in the community had hoped the trial could start healing.

About a mile from the courthouse in the majority Black city of Brunswick, Tony Bryant has been following the proceedings.

Sitting outside the front door of his apartment with peeling teal paint and a view of cranes at the state of Georgia's port along the East River, he said the way race has seeped into the trial has been discouraging but not surprising — from seating an almost all-white jury when 27% of Glynn County's 85,000 people are Black to trying to kick out Jackson and other pastors.

"Three white men killed a Black guy. Come on, man. Who did they think was going to be there to support his family?" Bryant said.

The request was especially offensive because pastors play an important role in comforting people who are hurting and demanding justice, said John Perry, a pastor and the former leader of Brunswick's chapter of the NAACP.

"I believe we're seeing overwhelming evidence that points us toward guilt, and so there's been an attempt to take the focus off of the evidence," Perry said.

After Jackson, the Rev. Al Sharpton and others sat with Arbery's family in court, defense attorney Kevin Gough asked the judge to kick out the pastors, saying civil rights icons could influence the jury.

"We don't want any more Black pastors coming in here ... sitting with the victim's family, trying to influence the jurors in this case," Gough said last week. The attorneys for the other two men on trial did not join Gough.

Sharpton said he started gathering dozens of Black pastors to pray outside the courthouse Thursday with lawyers representing Arbery's family.

"They tried to ban one. We're coming back with a hundred," Sharpton said.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley called the request against the Black pastors "reprehensible" because in America trials and courtrooms are open for all outside of pandemic concerns, and the pastors had followed those rules.

That opinion was echoed throughout Brunswick, from groups of white and Black pastors gathering outside the courthouse each day to shop owners a few blocks away, where a glance to the left sees dozens of expensive boats docked.

Melissa Bagby winced when a reporter asked her about the attorney's request Tuesday.

"That was disgusting," she said behind the counter of The Market, a store full of knickknacks, whimsical signs and a cat named Sasha who leads customers to her food bowl.

Arbery "wasn't armed and wasn't doing anything wrong," Bagby said. "I think they're trying to do whatever they can."

The city of 15,000, which is the gateway to idyllic spots along the coast and surrounded by a county where a significant majority of people are white, has talked and prayed its way through the anger after the men weren't charged for more than two months — after a video of them chasing Arbery in pickup trucks was released and state investigators took over.

In Brunswick, white and Black people make a point "to sit at the dinner table and drink tea and lemonade and eat chicken and biscuits" while sharing their thoughts and experiences, said the Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed, a Black pastor who has lived in Brunswick all her 60 years.

But each new point of racial division from the trial hurts her goal of bringing Black and white people together to solve other, more persistent problems.

"It sets us back because it takes us away from conversations that were already going on," said Lattany-Reed, who pastors Harper's Chapel United Methodist Church. "It's taken our attention away from education and economic justice and stimulating the economy for the common good."

With the trial winding down, Brunswick is preparing for a possible verdict.

"If it comes back not guilty, I would leave town for at least three days. Not guilty would open the flood gates," said Perry, the local civil rights leader.

None of the businesses near the courthouse, accustomed to taping up or boarding windows when hurricanes threaten, have taken precautions.

Danielle Brazell and other business owners worried last year when a protest outside the office of a local prosecutor who initially chose not to charge the men attracted national attention.

"I felt better after that," said Brazell, who owns the Rose & Vine gift shop. "I think they will be found guilty. They deserve it for what they did. But if they aren't, I think people will understand it isn't the community's fault."

Before testimony in the trial started, outgoing Brunswick Mayor Cornell Harvey, who is Black, and Glynn County Commission Chairman Wayne Neal, who is white, spoke in a video with a number of other people in the community urging unity and togetherness.

"I'm praying that this doesn't become a racial divide," Harvey said Tuesday. "We have a chance to show the world that we know how to keep the peace in a peaceful town."

Reeves reported from Birmingham, Alabama. AP writer Russ Bynum in Brunswick contributed to this report.

New research offers glimpse into early human development

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Scientists have been able to get a rare glimpse into a crucial, early stage of human development by analyzing an embryo in its third week after fertilization — a moment in time that has been difficult to study because of both practical and ethical considerations.

European researchers looked at a single embryo that was 16 to 19 days old, donated by a woman who ended her pregnancy. Until now, experts said, researchers have lacked a full understanding of this stage of development because human embryos at this stage are difficult to obtain. Most women don't yet know they're pregnant by this point and decades-old global guidelines have until recently prohibited growing human embryos in a lab beyond 14 days.

The study, published online Wednesday in the journal *Nature*, looked at "gastrulation," which begins about 14 days after fertilization, when the embryo is still about the size of a poppy seed, and lasts a little more than a week.

It's "a process by which you have this kind of explosion of cell diversity," said lead investigator Shankar Srinivas, an expert in developmental biology at the University of Oxford, who worked with colleagues in the United Kingdom and Germany on the research. "It's during gastrulation that the different cells emerge, but they also start to be positioned in different places in forming the body so that they can carry out their functions and form the correct organs."

For decades, the so-called "14-day rule" on growing embryos in the lab has guided researchers, with some places, including the United Kingdom, writing it into law. Others, including the United States, have accepted it as a standard guiding scientists and regulators.

Earlier this year, the International Society for Stem Cell Research recommended relaxing the rule and allowing researchers to grow embryos past two weeks under limited circumstances and after a tough review process. But the rule remains law in the UK.

This research was not subject to the law because the embryo wasn't grown in a lab. But it is an example of the types of things scientists expect to learn more about if rules are relaxed. Researchers found various types of cells, including red blood cells and "primordial germ cells" that give rise to egg or sperm cells. But they didn't see neurons, Srinivas said, meaning embryos aren't equipped at this stage to sense their environment.

Oxford University officials said this stage of development has never been fully mapped out in humans before.

The authors said they hope their work not only sheds light on this stage of development but also helps scientists learn from nature about how to make stem cells into particular types of cells that can be used

to help heal damage or disease.

Robin Lovell-Badge, a stem cell expert at London's Francis Crick Institute who chaired the group behind the guidelines, said being able to culture human embryos beyond 14 days "would be incredibly important to understand not just how we develop normally but how things go wrong."

It's very common for embryos to fail during gastrulation or shortly afterwards, he said. "If things go even slightly wrong, you end up with congenital abnormalities, or the embryo miscarries."

Dr. Daniel Sulmasy, director of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University, said "those of us who are morally conservative" always thought the 14-day rule was somewhat arbitrary, "but at least it was some recognition of the humanness of the embryo."

With the new recommendation, there will be more research on older embryos, he said. "Part of what science does is to always try to go forward and learn things that are new. And that continues to be a pressure. But the mere fact that we can do something is not sufficient to say that we ought to do it."

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Callers to global helplines voiced similar pandemic worries

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

Fears of infection. Loneliness. Worries about physical health.

As the coronavirus spread across borders early in the pandemic, calls to global helplines showed a striking similarity in the toll on mental health — from China to Lebanon, Finland to Slovenia.

An analysis of 8 million calls to helplines in 19 countries, published Wednesday in *Nature*, reveals a collective response to unprecedented, uncertain times.

Callers' worries centered on fears of infection, loneliness and physical health. Calls about relationship issues, economic problems and suicide-related issues were generally less prevalent than before the pandemic.

The Swiss and German researchers looked at helplines in 14 European countries, the United States, China, Hong Kong, Israel and Lebanon. They included suicide-prevention hot lines and ones providing crisis counseling.

"We were struck by how similar the broad evolution of helpline call patterns looked across nations," said Marius Brulhart, a University of Lausanne economics professor and the study's lead author.

Pooling country-specific data during the pandemic's first 12 weeks in 2020, the researchers found that call volumes peaked at six weeks, rising 35% above calls during the same period in 2019.

The researchers also analyzed data through spring 2021 from two of the largest helplines, in France and Germany. Call patterns in those two countries followed upswings and downswings in infections and government restrictions, and the concerns raised were similar to those early in the pandemic.

Strict lockdown and social distancing measures were linked with more calls due to fear, loneliness and suicidal thinking or behavior. Governmental financial support for workers who lost jobs and businesses that lost patrons had the opposite effect, "alleviating distress and mental health concerns," the researchers said.

Karestan Koenen, a Harvard mental health researcher, said patterns linking a decline in calls with government assistance is an important takeaway for policymakers.

Analyzing helpline data is "an incredibly creative way to assess mental health in the pandemic" in an array of countries, she said. In the U.S., crisis helplines have been heavily promoted throughout the pandemic and that may have broadened their use, Koenen noted.

Concerns raised in the calls echo results from surveys showing the pandemic's toll on mental health, said Judith Bass, of Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"The idea that fear was part of the early manifestations both makes research sense but also logical sense," Bass said. The virus "was an unknown that nobody had experienced before."

Bass noted that the study didn't include developing countries, such as those in Africa that have experienced Ebola and other disease outbreaks. People in those countries might have reacted differently to the

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early days of the COVID-19 pandemic than the countries included in the analysis, she said.

Still, the study showed how prevalent helplines are around the world, Bass said, and they are available in many more countries than were included in the study.

Brulhart said those used in the study manage data in a way that made them accessible for academic research.

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Christmas stretch: UK inflation highest in nearly a decade

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Consumer prices in the United Kingdom surged at the fastest rate in nearly a decade in October amid soaring energy costs, official figures showed Wednesday, a development that has cemented market expectations that the Bank of England will raise interest rates next month.

The Office for National Statistics said inflation accelerated to 4.2% in the 12 months through October, from 3.1% the previous month. The bigger-than-expected increase pushed inflation to its highest level since November 2011 and means most people will be enduring a drop in living standards in the run-up to Christmas as household incomes get stretched.

Because inflation is running at more than double the Bank of England's target rate of 2%, the central bank is under pressure to raise interest rates to try to curb the price surges by cooling the economy. It had been widely expected to become the first central bank among the leading industrial nations to raise interest rates earlier this month but held off because of some unease about the outlook for unemployment.

With figures on Tuesday showing the U.K.'s labor market remaining resilient, many analysts said the latest inflation numbers gives the rate-setters on the bank's Monetary Policy Committee, or MPC, further ammunition to modestly lift the benchmark rate from the record low of 0.1% to 0.2%.

"With CPI inflation moving further away from the Bank of England's 2% target, there is now even more pressure on the MPC to act to rein in price growth at its upcoming December meeting," said economist Ellie Henderson at Investec.

Not everyone thinks a rate hike is a good idea, especially at a time when the British economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic appears to be losing some steam. Skeptics think a rate hike won't do much because a large chunk of the increase in inflation is a result of temporary factors related to the shock of the pandemic, such as supply shortages, and as a result, inflation will drift lower toward the bank's target next year.

In its release Wednesday, the statistics agency noted that the inflation data was influenced by the effects of the coronavirus-related lockdowns that triggered "dramatic declines" in some prices last year. These unusually low prices are now the starting point for calculating 12-month price increases, causing short-term "distortions" in the figures.

These are factors that are affecting inflation levels around the world. Last week, the U.S. recorded an annual inflation rate of 6.2%, its highest level in nearly 31 years. European countries are recording similar spikes, too, but so far neither the U.S. Federal Reserve nor the European Central Bank appear to be as close as the Bank of England in considering a rise in borrowing costs.

For British homeowners and those looking to borrow, a pre-Christmas rate hike is the last thing they will want given that everything else appears to be heading higher.

"With prices rising faster than pay, many families will struggle to keep up with basic living costs, let alone Christmas celebrations," said Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the umbrella Trades Union Congress.

Associated Press reporter Danica Kirka contributed to this report.

Review: Too many old ghosts mar 'Ghostbusters: Afterlife'

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By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

"Ghostbusters: Afterlife" — the direct cinematic follow-up to the 1984 classic — is haunted, of course. But not in a good way.

Director and co-writer Jason Reitman's sequel leans so hard into his dad's original that it sometimes seems like a checklist of the megahit's touchstones, from the Ecto-1 tricked-out Cadillac, to Stay-Puft marshmallows, appearances from the surviving Ghostbusters and even the same Ray Parker Jr. theme song.

It has taken Ivan Reitman's original — which had the feel of an anarchic "Saturday Night Live" skit taken as far as it could go — too seriously. It fetishizes the ghost-trapping equipment and limps along until the original actors arrive — one cynically resurrected — to wring some sort of emotion it hasn't earned.

The film is set several decades after the events in "Ghostbusters," trading in the urban for the rural and ignoring any other sequels. It focuses on a struggling single mother Callie (Carrie Coon, treading water) and her two kids, the very, very teenage son Trevor (Finn Wolfhard) and her precocious science whiz daughter Phoebe (Mckenna Grace, also on the soundtrack with the appropriately titled "Haunted House").

After Callie's estranged father dies, the family pack up for his dilapidated farm in Summerville, Oklahoma, where the kids realize their grandfather was famed Ghostbuster Egon Spengler (the late Harold Ramis), who abandoned their mom for reasons unknown and hasn't been forgiven. "Take a little advice," mom tells the kids, "Don't go chasing ghosts."

Eerie things happen for the first hour and it's appropriate that Wolfhard of "Stranger Things" fame is here, mixing that show's vibe with an early Steven Spielberg suburban-stressed-out-parents-and-their-quirky-kids movie feel. (The family's motto: "Don't be yourself!") Chess pieces move on their own, flashlights get used a lot and proton packs get played with.

The amount of acting talent wasted in this film is astounding, from a Slimer-esque critter named Muncher "voiced" by Josh Gad (bravo, eating noises!) and Logan Kim playing an intensely weird podcaster, to acting greats J.K. Simmons and Tracey Letts (Coon's real-life playwright-acting husband). A mom love interest is offered by Paul Rudd as a studly teacher, but 2021's Sexiest Man Alive is unable to create comedic sparks due to so much slime.

"Ghostbusters: Afterlife" meanders along like an after-school special — kids, did you know science can be cool? — until the inevitable: Original stars Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Ernie Hudson arrive in the final 10 minutes to save the day (curiously also appearing, but sidelined, are OGs Annie Potts and Sigourney Weaver). And then comes the breaking point: Ramis heroically reappears thanks to supernatural computer work, a moment that can seem either incredibly crass or honorifically crass.

"What the hell is going on?" asks one character and she's right. Poorly edited, the film's musical queues must often signal to the viewer what they should be feeling. Poorly explained, the plot relies on the audience already knowing about the first film and especially the same villains — Gozer, the Gatekeeper and the Keymaster. Come on, at least update the baddies.

Once viewers realize this is merely a greatest hits compilation, they can settle in and anticipate the reappearance of lines like "Are you a god?" and "Who you gonna call?" After all, this is not a movie that can stand alone. It is more like half a movie, standing in the shadow of its parent. It is a film made to sell us more lunchboxes.

"Ghostbusters: Afterlife," a Sony Pictures release that hits theaters exclusively Friday is rated PG-13 for "supernatural action and some suggestive references." Running time: 124 minutes. One star out of four.

MPAA Definition of PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Online: <https://www.sonypictures.com/movies/ghostbustersafterlife>

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Nov. 18, the 322nd day of 2021. There are 43 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 18, 1991, Shiite (SHEE'-eyet) Muslim kidnappers in Lebanon freed Anglican Church envoy Terry Waite and Thomas Sutherland, the American dean of agriculture at the American University of Beirut.

On this date:

In 1883, the United States and Canada adopted a system of Standard Time zones.

In 1963, the Bell System introduced the first commercial touch-tone telephone system in Carnegie and Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

In 1966, U.S. Roman Catholic bishops did away with the rule against eating meat on Fridays outside of Lent.

In 1976, Spain's parliament approved a bill to establish a democracy after 37 years of dictatorship.

In 1978, U.S. Rep. Leo J. Ryan, D-Calif., and four others were killed in Jonestown, Guyana, by members of the Peoples Temple; the killings were followed by a night of mass murder and suicide by more than 900 cult members.

In 1987, the congressional Iran-Contra committees issued their final report, saying President Ronald Reagan bore "ultimate responsibility" for wrongdoing by his aides. A fire at London King's Cross railway station claimed 31 lives.

In 1999, 12 people were killed when a bonfire under construction at Texas A-and-M University collapsed. A jury in Jasper, Texas, convicted Shawn Allen Berry of murder for his role in the dragging death of James Byrd Jr., but spared him the death penalty.

In 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled 4-to-3 that the state constitution guaranteed gay couples the right to marry.

In 2004, Former President Bill Clinton's library opened in Little Rock, Arkansas; in attendance were President George W. Bush, former President George H.W. Bush and former President Jimmy Carter. Former Ku Klux Klansman Bobby Frank Cherry, convicted of killing four black girls in the racially motivated bombing of a Birmingham, Alabama, church in 1963, died in prison at age 74.

In 2005, eight months after Robert Blake was acquitted at a criminal trial of murdering his wife, a civil jury decided the actor was behind the slaying and ordered him to pay Bonny Lee Bakley's children \$30 million.

In 2009, two days before turning 92, Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., set a record for longest-serving lawmaker in congressional history at 56 years, 320 days. (That record was broken in 2013 by U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich.)

In 2013, Toronto's city council voted to strip scandal-plagued Mayor Rob Ford of many of his powers following a heated debate in which he knocked over a city councilor.

Ten years ago: In an incident that prompted national outrage, campus police at the University of California, Davis used pepper spray on nonviolent Occupy protesters. (The school later agreed to pay \$1 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the demonstrators.) Self-help author James Arthur Ray was sentenced to two years in prison for leading an Arizona sweat lodge ceremony that was supposed to offer spiritual enlightenment but instead resulted in three deaths.

Five years ago: President-elect Donald Trump signaled a sharp policy shift to the right by picking Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions as attorney general, Kansas Rep. Mike Pompeo to head the CIA and Michael Flynn as his national security adviser.

One year ago: President Donald Trump filed for a recount of Wisconsin's two largest Democratic counties, paying the required \$3 million cost and alleging that they were the sites of the "worst irregularities" although no evidence of illegal activity had been presented. (The recounts resulted in a slightly larger lead for Democrat Joe Biden.) House Democrats nominated Nancy Pelosi to be the speaker who would guide them in the new Congress with Joe Biden in the White House. Pfizer said new test results showed its

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coronavirus vaccine was safe and 95% effective, and that it protected older people most at risk of dying. The Federal Aviation Administration cleared Boeing's 737 Max for flight; regulators around the world had grounded the Max in March 2019 after a pair of deadly crashes. The Minnesota Timberwolves selected Georgia freshman guard Anthony Edwards with the No. 1 pick in the delayed NBA draft.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brenda Vaccaro is 82. Author-poet Margaret Atwood is 82. Actor Linda Evans is 79. Actor Susan Sullivan is 79. Country singer Jacky Ward is 75. Actor Jameson Parker is 74. Actor-singer Andrea Marcovicci is 73. Rock musician Herman Rarebell is 72. Singer Graham Parker is 71. Actor Delroy Lindo is 69. Comedian Kevin Nealon is 68. Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback Warren Moon is 65. Actor Oscar Nunez is 63. Actor Elizabeth Perkins is 61. Singer Kim Wilde is 61. Actor Tim Guinee is 59. Rock musician Kirk Hammett (Metallica) is 59. Rock singer Tim DeLaughter (dee-LAW'-ter) is 56. Actor Romany Malco is 53. Actor Owen Wilson is 53. Actor Dan Bakkedahl is 53. Singer Duncan Sheik is 52. Actor Mike Epps is 51. Actor Peta Wilson is 51. Actor Chloe Sevigny (SEH'-ven-ee) is 47. Country singer Jessi Alexander is 45. Actor Steven Pasquale is 45. Rock musician Alberto Bof (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 44. Rapper Fabolous is 44. Actor-director Nate Parker is 42. Rapper Mike Jones is 41. Actor Mekia Cox is 40. Actor-comedian Nasim Pedrad (nah-SEEM' peh-DRAHD') is 40. Actor Allison Tolman is 40. Actor Christina Vidal is 40. Actor Damon Wayans Jr. is 39. Country singer TJ Osborne (Brothers Osborne) is 37. U.S. Olympic track star Allyson Felix is 36. Fashion designer Christian Siriano is 36. Actor Nathan Kress is 29.

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

At midday today, we are at a seven-day new-case average of 85,861; this number has been rising for some time, a worry going into the holidays with all the travel that is scheduled and the family gatherings that are planned. And we broke the 47 million-case mark on Saturday, bringing us to a total today of 47,275,212. Here's the history (and yes, I'm as tired of posting it as you are of seeing it):

April 28, 2020 – 1 million – 98 days
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days
January 5 – 21 million – 5 days
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days

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January 18 – 24 million – 5 days
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days
March 24 – 30 million – 17 days
April 8 – 31 million – 15 days
April 24 – 32 million – 16 days
May 18 – 33 million – 23 days
July 16 – 34 million – 59 days
July 31 – 35 million – 15 days
August 11 – 36 million – 11 days
August 17 – 37 million – 6 days
August 23 – 38 million – 6 days
August 30 – 39 million – 7 days
September 5 – 40 million – 6 days
September 12 – 41 million – 7 days
September 18 – 42 million – 6 days
September 27 – 43 million – 9 days
October 6 – 44 million – 9 days
October 18 – 45 million – 12 days
November 1 – 46 million – 14 days
November 13 – 47 million – 12 days

Hospitalizations have leveled off and are at 47,077 today. Deaths, too, have leveled off: The seven-day average today is 1092. It's good news that these are not tracking higher with the new cases; I suspect this is a reflection of a couple of factors: The breakthrough cases, younger cases, and reinfections are all going to trend toward milder. Then there is our increasing arsenal of tools for the management and treatment of Covid-19. This is a good thing; but the problem is that, at the current rate, we're still going to lose 30,000 people a month, which seems like too many to me. Also our health care system is absolutely strained to breaking in regions with high case numbers.

Things are rough: The country as a whole is reporting an 18 percent increase in cases over the past two weeks and has breached the threshold for unchecked transmission as have 29 states and territories. Thirty-five states are showing increases in average daily cases over the period, 30 of these increasing by double-digit percentages. Much of the surge is in northern states where the weather is growing colder: New Hampshire, Minnesota, Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Indiana all have more than a 50 percent increase in new case reports over the past couple of weeks. There are also some troubling indications of upward ticks in numbers in some states in the South, which only recently turned around their last surge: Missouri's up 40 percent in two weeks, Kansas 35 percent, Arkansas and Oklahoma 21 percent. We have millions of unvaccinated people, a very high daily case rate, and a general slackening—or complete ignoring—of any public health measures intended to stem transmission. States are passing laws intended to prevent mitigation measures. Alarm bells are going off.

In speaking with CNN, Michael Osterholm, director of the center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, said, "I don't know what's going to happen over the next few weeks. But I have a feeling it's not going to be pretty," adding, "Where do I see us going? I think we will continue to see surges. They may not be nearly as high as the ones we've just had, but they will occur." You know

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what that means. More disabled people. More long Covid. More deaths. More children left without a parent, spouses without a partner, friends and coworkers and neighbors bereft.

And according to Ali Mokdad, University of Washington epidemiologist, speaking with CNN, "Cases are going up. It was coming down. This is at a time when the United States has all the tools we need to prevent a surge, all the tools we need to save lives. We have the best vaccines, and we have plenty of them, and people are not willing to get them." He referred to low-vaccination states as bonfires waiting to be ignited, especially considering the places with low vaccination are, for the most part, also the places resistant to mask use or any other mitigation.

In a news conference a few days ago, director of infection prevention and epidemiology at Beaumont Health in southeast Michigan, Dr. Nick Gilpin, said in a news conference, "I have a feeling we'll be in this world for the next couple of months because I don't see much that can change this unless people start radically changing behavior. This could be a four or five month affair."

What do we need to do? Mostly vaccinate more people. Osterholm has a podcast, and this week he said we're in real danger of ending up back in a mess, mentioning our 60 million unvaccinated people who are available to fuel new waves of infection. "Overall, there's still a lot of human wood left for this coronavirus forest fire to burn." He reminded us that when transmission is high even the vaccinated are at risk. I'm worried about the next couple of months.

We have a third and a fourth state which have approved giving booster doses of vaccine to any adult who seeks them at least six months after the second dose of an mRNA vaccine. In New Mexico this is, as in Colorado, by executive order of the governor and in response to a serious upswing in case numbers and a situation where hospitals are, according to Dr. David R. Scrase, acting secretary for the Department of Health, "well beyond capacity." The governor also issued a new indoor masking order. In Arkansas, the health department issued new recommendations to health care providers that they can give boosters to all adults at least six months past their initial vaccination series. Additionally, in New York City, health providers have been informed they may give boosters to all adults who request one. And in the rest of New York and in Virginia, all adults are being encouraged to get boosters, even though there has been no formal policy change. In West Virginia, the governor said adults should "absolutely get" a booster, but also stopped short of changing the official policy. New Jersey's governor has also told residents, "If you're in doubt and you meet the waiting period, just get a booster. Choose the side of greater protection." So while there has been no official policy change there either, here's another state telling residents to go ahead and have a booster.

It's looking like the FDA plans to authorize booster doses of Pfizer/BioNTech's vaccine for everyone 18 and over who is six months past the initial vaccination series. There is no plan to consult with their Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC), but rather they plan to make the decision directly, possibly as soon as tomorrow. The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has a meeting scheduled on Friday to look at the data on the booster. Following that, the director of the CDC can act to put their recommendations into practice. This would make every adult eligible for a Pfizer/BioNTech booster irrespective of which vaccine they initially received. Moderna expects to submit its request for an extension of its emergency use authorization (EUA) to cover all adults. The fact is that lots of people have sought out and received boosters whether or not they are officially qualified. We'll see how this week goes, but I think these are going to be authorized. If so, I'll drop an update as soon as I see the news.

Pfizer made its application to the FDA for EUA for its antiviral medication, Paxlovid, on Tuesday. We've

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talked about this drug; it reduces the rate of hospitalization and death by 89 percent for high-risk people with symptoms. The application covers people at increased risk for hospitalization due to age or underlying medical conditions. While the clinical trial did not include vaccinated people, I would not be surprised to see them included in the folks for whom the drug is recommended. The application follows closely on Merck's application for molnupiravir, a drug that reduces incidence of hospitalization and death by about half. Given the remarkable results from both in clinical trials, I wouldn't be surprised to see these receive EUA relatively quickly. Pfizer is also testing Paxlovid in people at low risk of severe disease and for prophylactic use in those who have been exposed, but are not yet showing symptoms. The US government has already purchased 10 million courses of Paxlovid treatment and 3.5 million course of molnupiravir.

A research team at the University of Rochester Medical Center and New York University has confirmed for the first time the presence of Covid-19 antibodies in breast milk of mothers who had prior infection and those who have been vaccinated. The antibodies acquired from natural infection were of the class IgA, which is typically found on skin and mucous membrane as well as circulating in small numbers in the blood; and they were seen up to three months after the mother's infection. Those resulting from vaccination were largely IgG, a type primarily seen circulating in the blood with only a small amount along mucous membranes and such; these declined somewhat as time passed after the vaccination, but were still active and well above the levels seen before the vaccination. These were neutralizing antibodies, which means they are capable of disabling the virus when they encounter it. What we don't know yet is whether these passively-acquired antibodies are protective for the infants. We should also note that, given the mother's antibodies would not be recognizable as self once the infant's immune system is up and running, these antibodies are not going to last forever; the infant's immune system will attack and destroy them with time. This means that, at some point, those kids are still going to need vaccination; but they have short-term protection early in life.

We have another update from the zoos. Somehow, probably because I was away from home, I missed the story last month when a rare snow leopard died from Covid-19 at the Great Plains Zoo in South Dakota. She began to show symptoms and then deteriorated rapidly, experiencing a decline in her respiratory function. She was dead within a week. Now three more have died at the Lincoln Children's Zoo in Nebraska. This species is listed as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List, so the losses have a broader impact than just these animals and these zoos. The Children's Zoo also had two Sumatran tigers which tested positive around the same time, but these appear to be recovered.

We've talked about long Covid more than once or twice over the past several months; if I recall correctly, the last thing we had was that around one in three patients suffered some lingering symptoms. There's a new review of 57 studies involving 250,000 survivors on long-term effects published in JAMA Network Open by a team from the US and Australia showing at least 50 percent of patients have lingering health issues six months or longer after the initial infection. They're calling the condition postacute sequelae of Covid-19 (PASC).

They found chest imaging abnormality in 62 percent, difficulty concentrating in 24 percent, generalized anxiety disorder in 30 percent, general functional impairments in 44 percent, and fatigue or muscle weakness in 38 percent. Obviously, there is some overlap among these various categories, and there were some other less frequent symptoms reported as well, including "cardiac, dermatologic, digestive, and ear, nose, and throat disorders." The conclusion I think we're going to have to deal with is this one: "These long-term PASC effects occur on a scale that could overwhelm existing health care capacity." Consider here we've had upwards of 47 million cases; half of that is a whole lot of folks needing care for chronic conditions. That's an ongoing burden we should be planning for. Research on this condition continues.

That's it for today. I'll let you know when the CDC approves new booster guidelines. In the meantime, stay well, and we'll talk again soon.