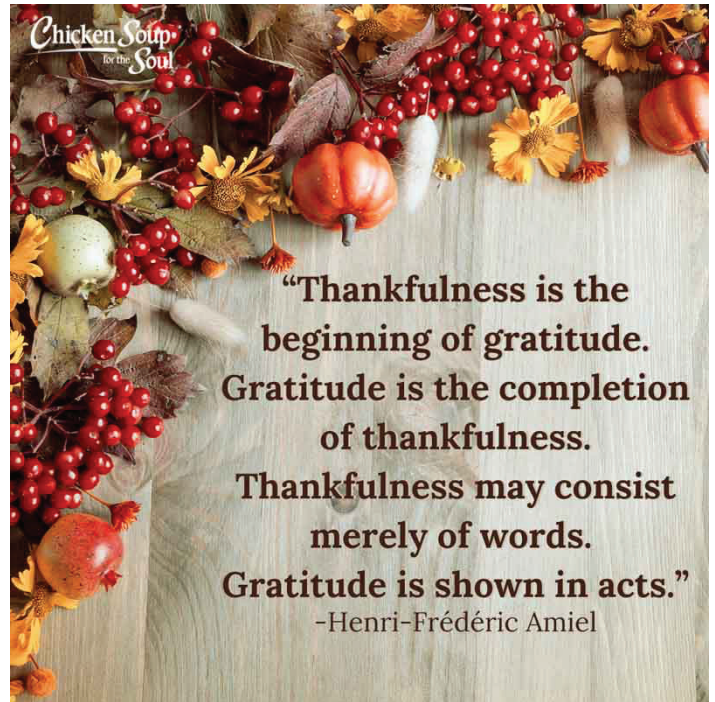


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UpComing Events

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

Thursday, Nov. 25

Community Thanksgiving Dinner, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

Tuesday, Nov. 30

Groton Novice Debate
JH GBB hosting Clark/Willow Lake (7th at 6 p.m. with 8th to follow)

Wednesday, Dec. 1

8:30 a.m. to Noon: ACT Practice Test

Thursday, Dec. 2

LifeTouch Pictures Retake at Elementary, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

8:30 a.m. to Noon: ACT Practice Test

JH GBB at Northwestern (7th at 6:30 p.m. followed by 8th)

Friday, Dec. 3

State Oral Interp at Huron

8:30 a.m. to Noon: ACT Practice Test

Saturday, Dec. 4

State Oral Interp at Huron

10 a.m.: JH GBB Jamboree in Groton

10 a.m.: Wrestling Invite at Clark-Willow Lake

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

Monday, Dec. 6

4 p.m.: School Board planning/work session
JH GBB hosts Langford. 7th at 6 p.m. with 8th to follow

Tuesday, Dec. 7

GBB at Flandreau Indian. JV at 5 p.m. with varsity to follow
JHGBB at Tiospa Zina (7th at 4 p.m. with 8th to follow)

Thursday, Dec. 9

7 p.m.: MS/HS Christmas Concert

Friday, Dec. 10

GBB hosts Britton-Hecla. JV at 6 p.m. with Varsity to follow

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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Trees and more at Wage Memorial Library

City Hall is decked out with trees set up and decorated by Groton businesses and organizations. One of them is the Groton OST tree in the top left photo. Kim Weber is putting the finishing touches on "The Grench" tree. On the right is April Abeln putting up a Dr. Seuss wall cling.

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Food Drive Held

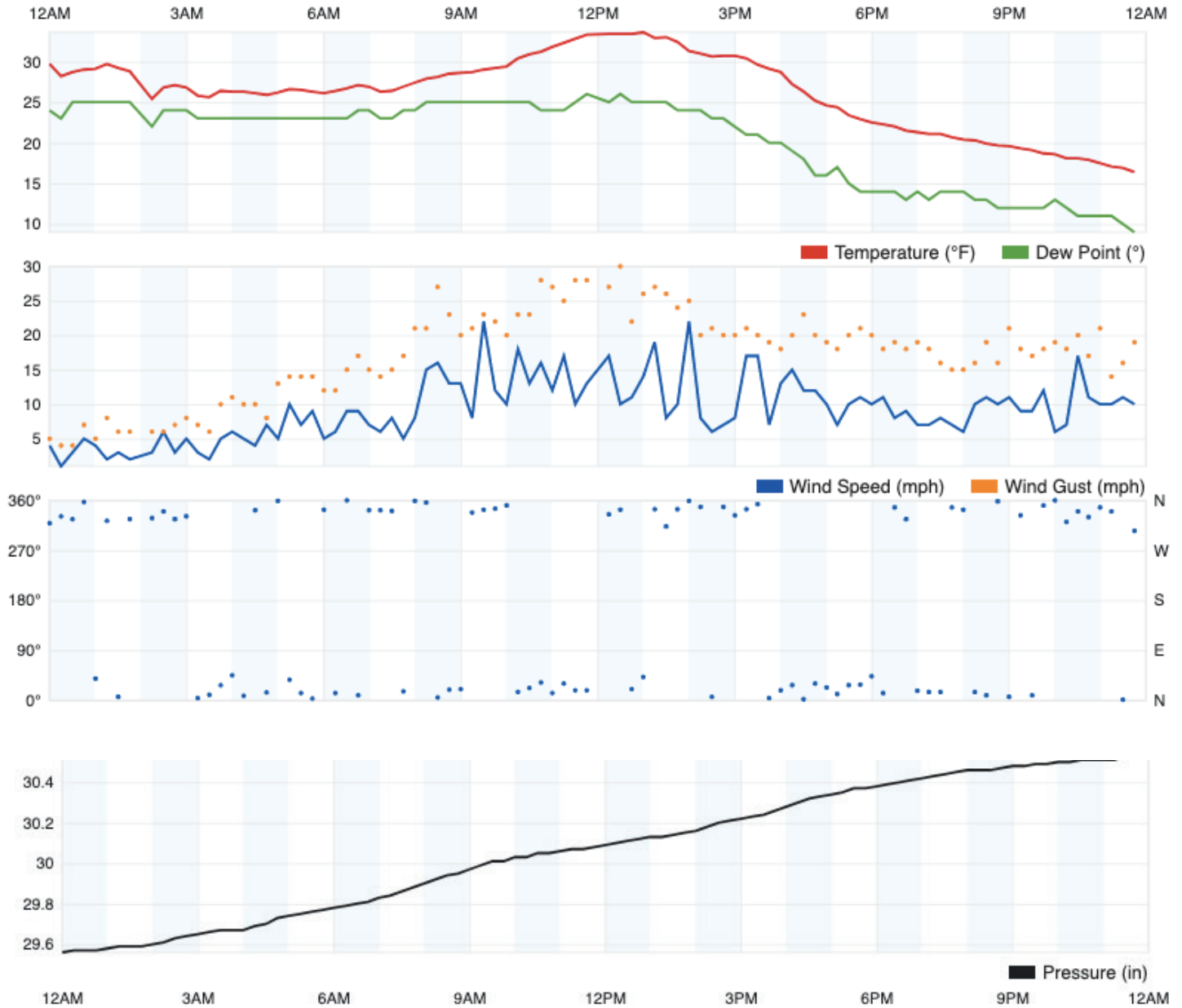
The Groton FCCLA members organized a community food drive. FCCLA members helping are pictured above: Karsyn Jangula Carly Guthmiller, Shea Jandel, Abby Jensen, Emily Overacker, Emma Bahr, Advisor, Lindsey Tietz. In back helping to load the bags are Dwight Zerr and Justin Cleveland. (Courtesy photos)



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thanksgiving
Day



Mostly Sunny

High: 28 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 21 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny

High: 50 °F

Friday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 30 °F

Saturday



Partly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 44 °F

HAPPY
THANKSGIVING!

TODAY FRI SAT SUN

Increasing afternoon clouds Decreasing clouds

25 to 43° 44 to 62° 40s 40 to 56°

Temperatures warmest over central SD, and coldest over west central MN

NWS Aberdeen, SD

Today will be the last day of below normal temperatures for at least the next week! Look for increasing clouds behind high pressure moving into Minnesota. A warm front will slide across the region tonight into Friday, with high temperatures rebounding into the 40s or warmer for the rest of the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

November 25, 1896: A major blizzard occurred throughout South Dakota, beginning on the 25th and continuing until the 27th. The storm began in most locations as rain and sleet, which turned to snow, accompanied by strong northerly winds. The 26th was the peak of the storm, and the heaviest snow and strongest wind occurred throughout the north, northeast, west and southwest portions of the state. In eastern and southeastern South Dakota, sleet was extraordinarily heavy on the 26th. There were many reports received of large quantities of trees stripped of smaller branches and limbs due to the weight of the sleet. Across the state, telegraph lines were flattened in all directions, and the poles were broken off in many places. Although there was very little loss of livestock in areas with available shelter, there were heavy individual losses on the ranges of South Dakota. Several people also perished on the ranges west of the Missouri River when they became lost in the storm without livestock. Reports of snowfall totals from the storm are very limited but included 17 inches at Aberdeen and 12 inches at Mellette. This blizzard was the most prominent individual feature in a November that was overall frigid, with a state mean temperature of 16.5 degrees, which was 17.2 degrees below normal at the time. The month still stands as the coldest November on record in Aberdeen, with an average temperature nearly 7 degrees Fahrenheit colder than the next coldest November (1985). The lowest reported temperature during the month was -29 F at Webster. Aberdeen recorded a low of -25 F on the 29th with a high temperature of -8 F that same day. The month currently stands as the snowiest November on record and second snowiest overall month on record for Aberdeen, with 32.8 inches, behind 38.5 inches recorded in February 1915.

November 25, 1703: The greatest windstorm ever recorded in the southern part of Great Britain reaches its peak intensity which it maintains through November 27. Winds gust up to 120 mph, and 9,000 people perish in the mighty gale, most of them sailors of the British fleet. The storm continued through December 2nd. It was reported that 4,000 oaks died in the New Forest and an attempt to count the toll of trees in Kent gave up at 17,000. At sea, the Eddystone Lighthouse was washed away, killing six people. Daniel Defoe wrote a journal called *The Storm* (1704) about this event. The storm has been called the first substantial work of modern journalism.

1950: Called the "storm of the century" this storm impacted the eastern part of the US, killing hundreds and causing millions of dollars in damages. New York City recorded a 94 mph wind gust and Bear Mountain, just north of the city recorded a 140 mph gust. Record low temperatures were reported on the southern end of this storm in Tennessee and North Carolina. This storm was unique as Pittsburgh saw 30 inches of snow, while Buffalo saw 50 degrees with 50 mph wind gusts.

1970 - The temperature at Tallahassee, FL, dipped to 13 degrees, following a high of 40 degrees the previous day. The mercury then reached 67 degrees on the 26th, and highs were in the 70s the rest of the month. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - The Great Thanksgiving Weekend Blizzard hit Denver, CO. The storm produced 21.5 inches of snow in 37 hours, closing Stapleton Airport for 24 hours. The snow and wind closed interstate highways around Denver. Visibility at Limon CO was down to zero for 24 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An early morning thunderstorm in southeastern Texas produced high winds which rolled a mobile home east of Bay City killing two of the four occupants. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in central and eastern Texas, with nine inches reported at Huntsville, and 8.5 inches at Wimberly. Snow fell across northern and central Lower Michigan, with totals ranging up to nine inches at Cadillac. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma and northwest Texas during the day and into the night. Thunderstorms in Texas produced softball size hail at Alba, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Krum. Hail and high winds caused nearly five million dollars damage at Kaufman TX, and strong downburst winds derailed twenty-eight freight cars at Fruitvale TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

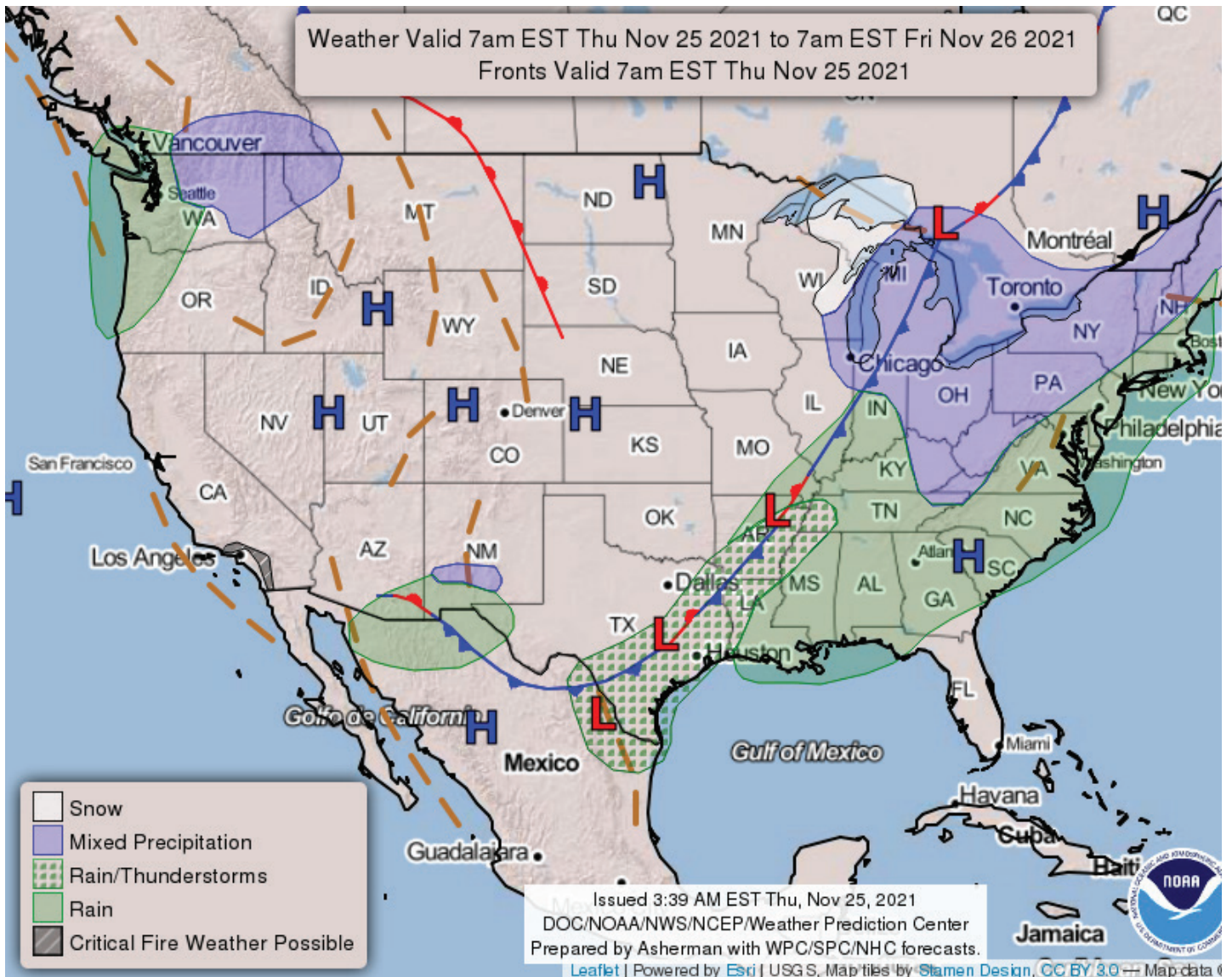
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 34 °F at 1:05 PM
Low Temp: 16 °F at 11:57 PM
Wind: 30 mph at 11:52 AM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 64° in 1960
Record Low: -22° in 1996
Average High: 38°F
Average Low: 15°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.64
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.16
Average Precip to date: 21.11
Precip Year to Date: 19.88
Sunset Tonight: 4:55:31 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:44:45 AM



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THE DANGER OF ANGER

Sin is not a behavior to belittle. When it no longer frightens us, we have lost contact with God. A small sin can lead to a large tragedy. All sin has consequences.

One day, while the children of Israel were on the path to the Promised Land, they came to a place that had no water. Rather than trusting their God who had always provided for their every need, they became frightened. And when fear takes over in anyone's life, faultfinding follows.

Our Psalmist gives us a vivid report of the consequences of their behavior: it "angered" Moses. So, the Lord told him to take his rod, gather the people together, speak to the rock in their presence, and it would give them all the water they needed.

But Moses did not speak to the rock. He struck it twice with his rod. Then, in anger, he spoke harshly to the people. Instead of doing what God asked him to do, he did what he wanted to do and then reacted in anger.

Notice that the word anger is only one letter short of danger - it lacks a "d." The result of his disobedience is seen in his anger. And there is always a great danger when we are disobedient to God. His disobedience led to anger - which led to sin. As a result, he lost the great honor and privilege of leading his people into the Promised Land.

How sad. How tragic. Moses did many great and glorious things. He had worked hard and done well. He was so close to reaching the goal God had given him. But he disobeyed God, lost control of his emotions, and had to pay the consequences. A moment of anger can destroy anyone.

Prayer: Lord, only You can give us victory over things that will so easily destroy us. Protect us from the danger of our anger and give us the personal strength to obey. May we follow Your advice. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them. Psalm 106:32

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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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

07-08-11-26-28

(seven, eight, eleven, twenty-six, twenty-eight)

Estimated jackpot: \$242,000

Lotto America

04-10-34-49-52, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 3

(four, ten, thirty-four, forty-nine, fifty-two; Star Ball: seven; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$4.43 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$94 million

Powerball

10-16-32-63-65, Powerball: 17, Power Play: 2

(ten, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-three, sixty-five; Powerball: seventeen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$224 million

Freidel lifts S. Dakota St. past George Mason 80-76

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Noah Freidel had 25 points and Baylor Scheierman scored 21 and South Dakota State beat George Mason 80-76 on Wednesday night.

Douglas Wilson had 14 points for South Dakota State (6-2) and Luke Appel 11.

D'Shawn Schwartz scored a career-high 29 points for the Patriots (4-4), whose losing streak stretched to four games. Josh Oduro added 20 points and seven rebounds and Devon Cooper had 15 points and six assists.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

This was generated by Automated Insights, <http://www.automatedinsights.com/ap>, using data from STATS LLC, <https://www.stats.com>

Nevada beats Washington with 4 in double figures, 81-62

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Grant Sherfield scored 23 points and Desmond Cambridge Jr. added 21 to lead Nevada to an 81-62 victory over Washington on Wednesday night in the Crossover Classic.

Nevada (3-4) and Washington (4-3) each finished 2-1 in the round-robin tournament.

Sherfield was 8 of 16 from the floor and Cambridge 7 of 12, and they combined for five of the Wolf Pack's eight 3-pointers. Warren Washington added 15 points and Will Baker had 10.

The Wolf Pack used a 19-4 run that included a pair of 3's from Sherfield and one from Daniel Foster to take a 61-49 lead with 8:21 remaining. PJ Fuller answered with a 3-pointer and Terrell Brown Jr. a layup to pull the Huskies to 61-54, but they didn't get closer.

Brown, who scored a career-high 32 points against South Dakota State on Tuesday, had 19 points to lead Washington.

Nevada outrebounded the Huskies 44-25 with Baker and Washington grabbing nine boards apiece.

The Wolf Pack lost to South Dakota State but beat George Mason to win their final two games of the

tournament. The Huskies won their first two.

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-basketball-poll> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Noem names new leadership at Department of Corrections

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Wednesday appointed a new interim cabinet secretary overseeing the state's prison system, as well as named a warden for the State Penitentiary.

The Republican governor said that the previous interim Secretary of Corrections Tim Reisch would step down next month. She named Reisch to the role in July amid an investigation into working conditions at the prison in Sioux Falls. At the time, she also appointed Doug Clark as acting warden of the Sioux Falls prison.

"We are tremendously grateful to General Reisch for stepping in during a time of great need for DOC," Noem said in a statement.

On Wednesday, Noem announced she was promoting Clark to be interim Secretary of Corrections and naming Daniel Sullivan, who most recently worked as an associate warden in the federal prison system, to the job of warden at the State Penitentiary.

"Our top priority continues to be the safety of the men and women who work at our DOC facilities and those who are confined there," Noem said. "Daniel Sullivan will bring fresh eyes and a wealth of experience to our State Penitentiary, and we are glad to have him on the team."

Ex-official set to speak in Noem, appraiser agency probe

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers will meet next month to hear from a former state employee at the center of questions over whether Gov. Kristi Noem interfered in a state agency that was evaluating her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

The Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee has scheduled a meeting for Dec. 14 after issuing a subpoena to 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.

Last year, Bren's agency had moved to deny Noem's daughter, Cassidy Peters, an upgrade to her appraiser certification. But days later, Noem held a meeting that included Peters, Bren and other decision-makers in Peters' application for the license. The state agency granted Peters another opportunity to apply for her license in an agreement signed the next week.

Noem's administration has adamantly denied wrongdoing and described Peters' application process as keeping with the normal course of business. But government ethics experts say Noem may have abused the powers of her office.

The chair of the legislative committee, Sen. Kyle Schoenfish, confirmed that Bren was expected to speak at the next meeting.

South Dakota Supreme Court rules against pot legalization

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld a lower court's ruling that nullified a voter-passed amendment to the state constitution that would have legalized recreational marijuana use.

Gov. Kristi Noem instigated the legal fight to strike down the amendment passed by voters in November. Though the Republican governor opposed marijuana legalization as a social ill, her administration's arguments in court centered on technical violations to the state constitution.

The high court sided with those arguments in a 4-1 decision, ruling that the measure — Amendment A — would have violated the state's requirement that constitutional amendments deal with just one subject.

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"It is clear that Amendment A contains provisions embracing at least three separate subjects, each with distinct objects or purposes," Chief Justice Steven Jensen wrote in the majority opinion, which found recreational marijuana, medical marijuana and hemp each to be separate issues.

About 54% of voters approved the constitutional amendment last year. But Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. Rick Miller sued on Noem's behalf. Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom also joined the lawsuit. The high court ruled that the law enforcement officers did not have standing to sue, but because Noem ordered Miller's suit, they treated it as if Noem brought the lawsuit herself.

Noem praised the decision, and noted that it would not change how she implements a separate, voter-passed law that legalizes medical marijuana. That law has already taken effect.

"South Dakota is a place where the rule of law and our Constitution matter, and that's what today's decision is about," she said in a statement. "We do things right — and how we do things — matters just as much as what we are doing."

The state Supreme Court's decision upheld a circuit judge's ruling in February. Advocates for pot legalization appealed, arguing that the Supreme Court should dismiss the legal challenge because it overturned the will of voters and dampened their future ability to enact laws through the ballot box.

Matthew Schweich, the campaign director for South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws, called the ruling "extremely flawed" and reliant on "a disrespectful assumption that South Dakota voters were intellectually incapable of understanding the initiative."

In the high court's majority opinion, Jensen argued that the multiple subjects of the constitutional amendment — recreational marijuana, medical marijuana and hemp — risked forcing a choice on voters who supported legalizing one, but not the others. He found the ballot measure risked political "logrolling" — a practice in which several topics are included in one proposed law to gain broad support.

Thom, who is the sheriff in the state's second-most populated county, pointed out that the ruling actually upheld a previous constitutional amendment, passed by voters in 2018, that requires constitutional amendments contain a single subject.

"It is critically important to defend our state constitution, and I appreciate the High Court clarifying these issues," he said in a statement. "I am pleased the Court sided with me in upholding the will of the voters."

The one dissenting voice, Justice Scott Myren, wrote that the ballot measure proposed a "comprehensive plan" for marijuana legalization and found no evidence voters were confused about what they were supporting. He urged the court to err on the side of upholding such voter-passed laws, which have been a longstanding feature — and source of conflict — in South Dakota.

"This bold experiment in citizen-led direct democracy began before statehood," Myren wrote.

Pot legalization is not going away in South Dakota. Marijuana advocates are trying to bring recreational marijuana back to voters next year through a ballot measure that would instruct the Legislature to legalize it. Lawmakers are also considering legalizing pot for adults in the upcoming legislative session.

"This is a setback," Schweich said of Wednesday's ruling. "But the important thing is that we have the will of the people on our side. Eventually, the will of the people will be upheld."

Marijuana has become broadly accepted around the United States, with a Gallup Poll last year showing 68% of Americans favored legalization. South Dakota was among four states that month to approve recreational marijuana, along with New Jersey, Arizona and Montana. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have done so.

Opponents of marijuana legalization used a similar legal strategy to stave off a marijuana legalization proposal in Nebraska last year. Only in that instance, the ruling stopped the ballot measure from ever going to a vote.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. November 22, 2021.

Editorial: Electric Vehicles And Yankton Tourism

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Tourism is a vital component of the Yankton area economy, and it's about more than simply having the lake area and all those camping pads at its disposal. It can also refer to countless associated things that can bolster the experience for visitors.

With that in mind, let's discuss an item that will loom as a need for the community in the future: an electric vehicle (EV) charging station, a publicly accessible place where people with electric vehicles can charge their batteries for travel.

The concept of electric vehicles has always been a seemingly distant vision, especially in rural places like South Dakota where there are greater distances between communities and, in years past, electric vehicles may have seemed as impractical.

But it's clear now that electric vehicles are part of a future that's growing closer each day.

Last week, President Joe Biden announced a push to have half of the vehicles sold in the U.S. by 2030 to be electric. However, some companies are already on that path. On Friday, Ford announced it plans to boost its production of electric vehicles to 600,000 by 2023, aiming to have between 40% to 50% of its sales be electric by the end of this decade. Others are following suit. According to NBC News, the transition to electric vehicles "is accelerating rapidly. Whereas the 2021 model year ended with just over a dozen long-range battery-electric vehicles available for U.S. motorists, industry analysts expect that to grow to more than 50 by the end of next year."

The same acceleration is happening with global markets, too. That means U.S. automakers will need to address that international need as well as the domestic market.

Granted, a lot of money remains to be spent and a lot of work done before EV's become the dominant vehicles on our highways. And while that's happening, technology will continue to evolve. So, there is still some time to address the EV demand locally.

But the transition is happening now, and it wouldn't be the worst idea for Yankton — either on a public level or a private level — to begin thinking along these lines.

South Dakota currently has several EV charging stations, with many of them clustered around Sioux Falls and Rapid City, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. This makes sense, given their urban settings and their places on the state's highways. There is also a handful scattered along Interstate 90 crossing east to west through the state, which also makes sense. The closest one to Yankton is located in Vermillion.

Thus, given the million-plus visitors the Lewis & Clark Lake area draws annually — it's the most visited destination in South Dakota outside of the Black Hills — this will eventually become, if not a need, certainly an attractive feature for those traveling in EV's.

This is a very broad overview of a more complicated topic. There are currently four types of connectors, and Tesla vehicles need their own special stations. Meanwhile, local people can purchase their own vehicle chargers for home use. And that's just for starters — and it's all likely to evolve in the coming years.

Yankton should start planning for this eventuality. Perhaps a private party will get into this. (The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources is currently seeking applications for the second round of the Volkswagen Electric Vehicle Charging Station Program, which aims to establish more light-duty electric charging stations around the state.) However, if private parties do not step forward, this might be something the city could consider setting up, perhaps selling it to private interests at some point.

Again, this is not a pressing need for the very immediate future, but it is a recognition of a future that is headed our way, literally, which means it will become an important component for those visiting Yankton.

END

Who's a hero? Some states, cities still debating hazard pay

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — When the U.S. government allowed so-called hero pay for frontline workers as a possible use of pandemic relief money, it suggested occupations that could be eligible from farm workers and childcare staff to janitors and truck drivers.

State and local governments have struggled to determine who among the many workers who braved

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the raging coronavirus pandemic before vaccines became available should qualify: Only government workers, or private employees, too? Should it go to a small pool of essential workers like nurses or be spread around to others, including grocery store workers?

"It's a bad position for us to be in because you have your local government trying to pick winners and losers, if you would, or recipients and nonrecipients. And hence by default, you're saying importance versus not important," said Jason Levesque, the Republican mayor of Auburn, Maine, where officials have not yet decided who will receive hazard pay from the city's American Rescue Plan funds.

A year and a half into the pandemic, such decisions have taken on political implications for some leaders as unions lobby for expanded eligibility, with workers who end up being left out feeling embittered.

"It sounds like it's about the money, but this is a token of appreciation," said Ginny Ligi, a correctional officer who contracted COVID-19 last year in Connecticut, where the bonus checks have yet to cut amid negotiations with unions. "It's so hard to put into words the actual feeling of what it was like to walk into that place every day, day in, day out. It scarred us. It really did."

Interim federal rules published six months ago allow state and local COVID-19 recovery funds to be spent on premium pay for essential workers of up to \$13 per hour, in addition to their regular wages. The amount cannot exceed \$25,000 per employee.

The rules also allow grants to be provided to third-party employers with eligible workers, who are defined as someone who has had "regular in-person interactions or regular physical handling of items that were also handled by others" or a heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19.

The rules encourage state and local governments to "prioritize providing retrospective premium pay where possible, recognizing that many essential workers have not yet received additional compensation for work conducted over the course of many months," while also prioritizing lower income eligible workers.

As of July, about a third of U.S. states had used federal COVID-19 relief aid to reward workers considered essential with bonuses, although who qualified and how much they received varied widely, according to an Associated Press review.

A list of hazard and premium pay state allocations as of Nov. 18, provided by the National Conference of State Legislatures, shows funds have typically been set aside for government workers, such as state troopers and correctional officers.

In Minnesota, lawmakers still have \$250 million in aid set aside for hero pay, but they've been struggling with how to distribute it. A special committee was unable to come up with a compromise plan, instead sending two competing recommendations to the full legislature for consideration.

"I think every time we take another week, we're just delaying the whole process and I think the fastest way is to get them over to the Legislature," said Republican state Sen. Mary Kiffmeyer, a member of the committee, during a meeting last month.

Minnesota Senate Republicans want to offer a tax-free bonus of \$1,200 to about 200,000 workers who they say took on the greatest risk, such as nurses, long-term care workers, prison staff and first responders.

But House Democrats want to spread the money more widely, providing roughly \$375 to about 670,000 essential workers, including low-wage food service and grocery store employees, security guards, janitors and others.

Earlier this week, after it appeared that a political impasse was easing over another issue, Democratic House Speaker Melissa Hortman told Minnesota Public Radio that she believed an agreement can be reached on front-line worker pay, noting there's a "pretty natural middle ground" between the dueling proposals.

Connecticut has yet to pay out any of the \$20 million in federal pandemic money set aside by state lawmakers in June for essential state employees and members of the Connecticut National Guard.

As negotiations continue with union leaders, the Connecticut AFL-CIO labor organization has stepped up pressure on Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont, who is up for reelection in 2022, to provide \$1 an hour in hazard pay to all public and private sector essential workers who worked during the pandemic before vaccinations became available.

"The governor needs to reevaluate his priorities and show that these workers who put themselves and

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their lives at risk are a top priority. I think it's really the least he can do for these workers," said Ed Hawthorne, president of the Connecticut AFL-CIO. "These workers showed up for Connecticut. It's time to governor to show up for them."

Max Reiss, Lamont's spokesperson, said the figures cited by organized labor are "just not feasible."

In the meantime, he said, the administration is in negotiations with state employee unions, classifying the work state employees did during the pandemic and determining whether they may have shifted to other responsibilities that were more or less risky, which could also affect whether they receive more or less money.

"We want to recognize the workers who kept going into work every day because they had to and there was not a choice. And those range from people working in state-run health care facilities to people who needed to plow our roads during severe weather and work in-person jobs," he said. "The next piece is that you have to come up with the determination as to who all those people were. And there's a verification process to that."

In some states like California, cities are in the process of determining how to fairly distribute some of their federal funds to help essential private sector workers who may not have received extra pay from their employers.

Rachel Torres, deputy of the political and civil rights department at United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 770, said her union is urging cities to follow the lead of Oxnard and Calabasas, which voted this year to provide grocery and drug store workers with payments of as much as \$1,000.

"It really should not be a competition among essential workforces. There should be moneys available for many workers," Torres said.

David Dobbs and his fellow firefighters in Bridgeport, Connecticut, are upset their city has yet to provide them with a share of the \$110 million it received in federal pandemic funds. Mayor Joe Gamin, a Democrat, said in a statement that he supports the concept of premium pay but that the matter is still being reviewed to make sure any payments comply with federal rules.

"We've demonstrated a commitment to this partnership. And I think we feel a little betrayed by the city right now, when when they're not dealing with us, when they came into this windfall," said Dobbs, president of the Bridgeport Firefighters Association, which gave up pay raises in the past when the city's budget was tight. "Imagine loaning your friends a decent amount of money and then hitting the Powerball and not making things right."

Associated Press writer Steve Karnowski in Minneapolis contributed to this report.

Who's a hero? Some states, cities still debating hazard pay

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — When the U.S. government allowed so-called hero pay for frontline workers as a possible use of pandemic relief money, it suggested occupations that could be eligible from farm workers and childcare staff to janitors and truck drivers.

State and local governments have struggled to determine who among the many workers who braved the raging coronavirus pandemic before vaccines became available should qualify: Only government workers, or private employees, too? Should it go to a small pool of essential workers like nurses or be spread around to others, including grocery store workers?

"It's a bad position for us to be in because you have your local government trying to pick winners and losers, if you would, or recipients and nonrecipients. And hence by default, you're saying importance versus not important," said Jason Levesque, the Republican mayor of Auburn, Maine, where officials have not yet decided who will receive hazard pay from the city's American Rescue Plan funds.

A year and a half into the pandemic, such decisions have taken on political implications for some leaders as unions lobby for expanded eligibility, with workers who end up being left out feeling embittered.

"It sounds like it's about the money, but this is a token of appreciation," said Ginny Ligi, a correctional

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officer who contracted COVID-19 last year in Connecticut, where the bonus checks have yet to cut amid negotiations with unions. "It's so hard to put into words the actual feeling of what it was like to walk into that place every day, day in, day out. It scarred us. It really did."

Interim federal rules published six months ago allow state and local COVID-19 recovery funds to be spent on premium pay for essential workers of up to \$13 per hour, in addition to their regular wages. The amount cannot exceed \$25,000 per employee.

The rules also allow grants to be provided to third-party employers with eligible workers, who are defined as someone who has had "regular in-person interactions or regular physical handling of items that were also handled by others" or a heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19.

The rules encourage state and local governments to "prioritize providing retrospective premium pay where possible, recognizing that many essential workers have not yet received additional compensation for work conducted over the course of many months," while also prioritizing lower income eligible workers.

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"The governor needs to reevaluate his priorities and show that these workers who put themselves and their lives at risk are a top priority. I think it's really the least he can do for these workers," said Ed Hawthorne, president of the Connecticut AFL-CIO. "These workers showed up for Connecticut. It's time to governor to show up for them."

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Associated Press writer Steve Karnowski in Minneapolis contributed to this report.

France calls for European aid after 27 migrant deaths at sea

By OLEG CETINIC and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

CALAIS, France (AP) — President Emmanuel Macron appealed Thursday to neighboring European countries to do more to stop illegal migration into France after at least 27 people died trying to cross the English Channel.

Macron said that when migrants arrive on French shores with hopes of heading to Britain "it is already too late."

Speaking a day after the deadliest migration tragedy to date on the dangerous sea lane that separates France and Britain, Macron said France is deploying army drones as part of stepped-up efforts to patrol the northern French coastline and help rescue migrants at sea.

But he also said that France is a "transit country" for migrants aiming for Britain and that a greater collective effort is needed.

"We need to strengthen cooperation with Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, but also the British and the (European) Commission," he said on a visit to Croatia. "We need stronger European cooperation."

The French leader described the dead in Wednesday's sinking as "victims of the worst system, that of smugglers and human traffickers."

France has never had so many officers mobilized against illegal migration and its commitment is "total," he said. But he also made clear that it wants more help.

"When these women and men arrive on the shores of the English Channel it is already too late," he said.

The French prosecutors' office tasked with investigating the sinking said the dead included 17 men, seven women and two boys and one girl thought to be teenagers. Magistrates were investigating potential charges of homicide, unintentional wounding, assisting illegal migration and criminal conspiracy, the prosecutors' office said.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said children and pregnant women were among the dead.

He announced the arrest of a fifth suspected smuggler thought to have been involved. He said authorities are working to determine the victims' nationalities. Two survivors were treated for hypothermia. One

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is Iraqi, the other Somali, Darmanin said.

In their immediate response to the sinking, French authorities initially gave slightly differing figures on the numbers of dead, from at least 27 to 31. The figure that Darmanin used Thursday morning on RTL radio was 27.

Darmanin on Wednesday had already announced the arrest of four suspected smugglers on suspicion of being linked to the sunken boat. He told RTL that a fifth suspected smuggler was picked up overnight.

The fifth suspect was driving a vehicle registered in Germany, Darmanin said. He said criminal groups in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Britain are behind people-smuggling networks.

He also called on those countries to cooperate better in the battle against smugglers, saying they don't always respond fully to French judicial requests for information.

"Britain and France must work together. We must no longer be, in effect, the only ones able to fight the smugglers," the minister said.

"The smugglers buy boats, Zodiacs, in Germany with cash," he added. "The smuggler arrested overnight has German plates; he bought his Zodiacs in Germany."

The minister also took a swipe at British government migration policies, saying France expels more people living in the country without legal permission than the U.K. Illegal migration from France's northern shores to Britain has long been a source of tension between the two countries, with both sides blaming each other even as their police forces work together to try to stop unseaworthy boats from crossing the English Channel. The issue is often used by politicians on both sides pushing an anti-migration agenda.

"Clearly, immigration is badly managed in Britain," Darmanin said.

He also suggested that by hiring people living in the country illegally, British employers are encouraging illegal migration to English shores.

"English employers use this labor to make the things that the English manufacture and consume," he said. "We say reform your labor market. Tell English employers that we need them to be as patriotic as the conservative government."

Ever-increasing numbers of people fleeing conflict or poverty in Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, Eritrea or elsewhere are risking the perilous journey in small, unseaworthy craft from France, hoping to win asylum or find better opportunities in Britain. The crossings have tripled this year compared to 2020.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Macron spoke after Wednesday's tragedy and agreed "that it is vital to keep all options on the table to stop these lethal crossings and break the business model of the criminal gangs behind them," Johnson's office said.

Macron advocated an immediate funding boost for the European Union's border agency, Frontex, and an emergency meeting of European government ministers, according to his office.

"France will not allow the Channel to become a cemetery," Macron said.

John Leicester reported from Le Pecq.

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

EU regulator authorizes Pfizer's COVID vaccine for kids 5-11

By MIKE CORDER and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The European Union's drug regulator on Thursday authorized Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine for use on children from 5 to 11 years old, clearing the way for shots to be administered to millions of elementary school pupils amid a new wave of infections sweeping across the continent.

It is the first time the European Medicines Agency has cleared a COVID-19 vaccine for use in young children.

The agency said it "recommended granting an extension of indication for the COVID-19 vaccine Comirnaty to include use in children aged 5 to 11."

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After evaluating a study of the vaccine in more than 2,000 children, the EMA estimated that the vaccine was about 90% effective in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 in young children and said the most common side effects were pain at the injection site, headaches, muscle pain and chills. The agency said the two-dose regimen should be given to children three weeks apart.

At least one country facing spiking infections didn't wait for the EMA approval. Authorities in the Austrian capital, Vienna, already have begun vaccinating the 5 to 11 age group. Europe is currently at the epicenter of the pandemic and the World Health Organization has warned the continent could see deaths top 2 million by the spring unless urgent measures are taken.

The EMA green light for the vaccine developed by Pfizer and German company BioNTech has to be rubber-stamped by the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, before health authorities in member states can begin administering shots.

Earlier this week, Germany's health minister Jens Spahn said shipping of vaccines for younger children in the EU would begin on Dec. 20.

The United States signed off on Pfizer's kids-sized shots earlier this month, followed by other countries including Canada.

Pfizer tested a dose that is a third of the amount given to adults for elementary school-age children. Even with the smaller shot, children who are 5 to 11 years old developed coronavirus-fighting antibody levels just as strong as teenagers and young adults getting the regular-strength shots, Dr. Bill Gruber, a Pfizer senior vice president, told The Associated Press in September.

But the studies done on Pfizer's vaccine in children haven't been big enough to detect any rare side effects from the second dose, like the chest and heart inflammation that has been seen in mostly male older teens and young adults.

American officials noted that COVID-19 has caused more deaths in children in the 5 to 11 age group than some other diseases, such as chickenpox, did before children were routinely vaccinated.

Earlier this month, the EMA said it began evaluating the use of Moderna Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 6 to 11; it estimated that a decision would be made within two months.

Although children mostly only get mild symptoms of COVID-19, some public health experts believe immunizing them should be a priority to reduce the virus' continued spread, which could theoretically lead to the emergence of a dangerous new variant.

Researchers disagree on how much kids have influenced the course of the pandemic. Early research suggested they didn't contribute much to viral spread. But some experts say children played a significant role this year spreading contagious variants such as alpha and delta.

In a statement this week, WHO said that because children and teens tend to have milder COVID-19 disease than adults, "it is less urgent to vaccinate them than older people, those with chronic health conditions and health workers."

It has appealed to rich countries to stop immunizing children and asked them to donate their doses immediately to poor countries who have yet to give a first vaccine dose to their health workers and vulnerable populations.

Still, WHO acknowledged that there are benefits to vaccinating children and adolescents that go beyond the immediate health benefits.

"Vaccination that decreases COVID transmission in this age group may reduce transmission from children and adolescents to older adults, and may help reduce the need for mitigation measures in schools," WHO said.

Maria Cheng reported from London.

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

Australia sending troops to Solomon Islands as unrest grows

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By DAVID RISING and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia announced Thursday it is sending police, troops and diplomats to the Solomon Islands to help after anti-government demonstrators defied lockdown orders and took to the streets for a second day in violent protests.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the deployment includes a detachment of 23 federal police officers and up to 50 more to provide security at critical infrastructure sites, as well as 43 defense force personnel, a patrol boat and at least five diplomats.

The first personnel left Australia on Thursday with more going on Friday, and the deployment was expected to last for a few weeks, Morrison said.

“Our purpose here is to provide stability and security,” he said.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare declared a lockdown Wednesday after about 1,000 people gathered in protest in the capital, Honiara, demanding his resignation over a host of domestic issues.

It was not immediately clear what triggered the outburst of protests, but tensions between the government and the leadership of the most populous island of Malaita have been simmering for some time.

The premier of Malaita has been outspokenly critical of Sogavare’s 2019 decision to cut the country’s diplomatic ties with Taiwan, switching its diplomatic allegiance to China instead, accusing him of getting too close to Beijing.

The province has also complained it has been unfairly deprived of government investment.

The protesters on Wednesday breached the National Parliament building and burned the thatched roof of a nearby building, the government said. They also set fire to a police station and other buildings.

“They were intent on destroying our nation and ... the trust that was slowly building among our people,” the government said in a statement.

Morrison said Sogavare requested assistance from Australia amid the violence under a bilateral security treaty.

“It is not the Australian government’s intention in any way to intervene in the internal affairs of the Solomon Islands. That is for them to resolve,” he said.

“Our presence there does not indicate any position on the internal issues of the Solomon Islands,” Morrison added.

The Solomon Islands, about 1,500 kilometers (1,000 miles) northeast of Australia, were the scene of bloody fighting during World War II.

After it was captured by the Japanese, U.S. Marines landed on the island of Guadalcanal in August 1942 to open a campaign to wrest back control. They were successful, though fighting in and around the Solomon Islands continued through the end of the war.

Australia led an international police and military force called the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands that restored peace in the country after bloody ethnic violence from 2003 until 2017.

After the outbreak of the current protests, Sogavare ordered the capital locked down from 7 p.m. Wednesday through 7 p.m. Friday after saying he had “witnessed another sad and unfortunate event aimed at bringing a democratically elected government down.”

“I had honestly thought that we had gone past the darkest days in the history of our country,” he said. “However, today’s events are a painful reminder that we have a long way to go.”

Despite an announcement from the Solomon Islands police force that they would be conducting increased patrols through Honiara amid the lockdown, protesters again took to the streets Thursday.

Local journalist Gina Kekea posted photos on Twitter of a bank, shops and a school in flames.

Morrison said he decided to send help after it became clear that police in the Solomon Islands were “stretched.”

Local media reported that many of the protesters were from Malaita, whose premier, Daniel Suidani, has been at odds with Sogavare since his decision to cut ties with Taiwan.

China expressed serious concern about attacks on some Chinese citizens and institutions, without providing details.

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"We believe that under the leadership of Prime Minister Sogavare, the Solomon Islands government can restore social order and stability as soon as possible," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at a daily briefing in Beijing.

He said that economic and other cooperation since the establishment of diplomatic relations has benefited both sides. "Any attempts to undermine the normal development of China-Solomon relations are futile," he said.

Suidani said he was not responsible for the violence in Honiara, but told the Solomon Star News that he agreed with the calls for Sogavare to resign.

"Over the last 20 years Mannaseh Sogavare has been in power, the plight of Solomon Islanders has worsened whilst at the same time foreigners have reaped the best of the country's resources," Suidani was quoted as saying. "People are not blind to this and do not want to be cheated anymore."

Honiara journalist Elizabeth Osifelo said the cause of chaos was a "mixture of a lot of frustration."

"The switch to China from Taiwan, that was also, I could, say part of it," Osefelo told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "It's not probably what has triggered the situation, but that has also pretty much contributed to some of the tension we've been experiencing."

___ Rising reported from Bangkok.

Macy's Thanksgiving parade returns, with all the trimmings

NEW YORK (AP) — Crimped by the coronavirus pandemic last year, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is returning Thursday in full albeit with precautions.

Balloons, floats, marching bands, clowns and performers — and, of course, Santa Claus — will once again wend though 2 1/2 miles (4 kilometers) of Manhattan streets, instead of being confined to one block or sometimes pre-taped last year.

Spectators, shut out in 2020, can line the route again. High school and college marching bands from around the country have been invited back to the lineup; most of last year's performers were locally based to cut down on travel. The giant balloons, tethered to vehicles last year, are getting their costumed handlers back.

"Last year was obviously symbolic. It wasn't everything we would have liked to see in a parade, but they kept it going," Mayor Bill de Blasio said at a news briefing Wednesday. "This year, the parade's back at full strength."

"It's going to be a great sign of our rebirth," he added.

The Thanksgiving parade is the latest U.S. holiday event to make a comeback as vaccines, familiarity and sheer frustration made officials and some of the public more comfortable with big gatherings amid the ongoing pandemic.

Still, safety measures continue. Parade staffers and volunteers must be vaccinated against COVID-19 and wear masks, though some singers and performers can shed them. There's no inoculation requirement for spectators, but Macy's is encouraging them to cover their faces. A popular pre-parade spectacle — the inflation of the giant balloons — was limited to vaccinated viewers.

The Thanksgiving event also comes days after an SUV driver plowed through a Christmas parade in suburban Milwaukee, killing six people and injuring over 60. Authorities said the driver, who has been charged with intentional homicide, was speeding away from police after a domestic dispute.

De Blasio said Wednesday there was no credible, specific threat to the Thanksgiving parade, but the New York Police Department's security measures would be extensive, as usual.

"I'm very confident in what the NYPD has prepared to keep everyone safe tomorrow," he said.

Thousands of police officers are assigned to the parade route, from streets to rooftops. Cars are blocked from the parade route with sand-filled garbage trucks, other heavy vehicles and approximately 360,000 pounds (163,000 kilograms) of concrete barriers.

Bomb-detecting dogs, bomb squad officers, heavy-weapons teams, radiation and chemical sensors and over 300 extra cameras also are being dispatched to the parade route, NYPD Chief of Counterterrorism

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Martine Materasso said.

Inside the barricades, the parade features about 8,000 participants, four dozen balloons of varying sizes and two dozen floats.

New balloon giants joining the lineup include the title character from the Netflix series "Ada Twist, Scientist"; the Pokémon characters Pikachu and Eevee on a sled (Pikachu has appeared before, in different form), and Groggu, aka "Baby Yoda," from the television show "The Mandalorian." New floats are coming from entities ranging from condiment maker Heinz to NBCUniversal's Peacock streaming service to the Louisiana Office of Tourism.

Entertainers and celebrities include Carrie Underwood, Jon Batiste, Nelly, Kelly Rowland, Miss America Camille Schrier, the band Foreigner, and many others. Several Broadway musical casts and the Radio City Rockettes also are due to perform.

Europe's Christmas markets warily open as COVID cases rise

By DAVID McHUGH, EMILY SCHULTHEIS and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The holiday tree is towering over the main square in this central German city, the chestnuts and sugared almonds are roasted, and kids are clambering aboard the merry-go-round just like they did before the pandemic. But a surge in coronavirus infections has left an uneasy feeling hanging over Frankfurt's Christmas market.

To savor a mug of mulled wine — an uncomplicated rite of winter in pre-pandemic times — masked customers must pass through a one-way entrance to a fenced-off wine hut, stopping at the hand sanitizer station. Elsewhere, security officers check vaccination certificates before letting customers head for the steaming sausages and kebabs.

Despite the pandemic inconveniences, stall owners selling ornaments, roasted chestnuts and other holiday-themed items in Frankfurt and other European cities are relieved to be open at all for their first Christmas market in two years, especially with new restrictions taking effect in Germany, Austria and other countries as COVID-19 infections hit record highs. Merchants who have opened are hoping for at least a fraction of the pre-pandemic holiday sales that can make or break their businesses.

Others aren't so lucky. Many of the famous holiday events have been canceled in Germany and Austria. With the market closures goes the money that tourists would spend in restaurants, hotels and other businesses.

Jens Knauer, who crafts intricate, lighted Christmas-themed silhouettes that people can hang in windows, said his hope was simply that the Frankfurt market "stays open as long as possible."

While Christmas is 40% of annual revenue for many retailers and restaurateurs, "with me, it's 100%," Knauer said. "If I can stay open for three weeks, I can make it through the year."

Purveyors are on edge after other Christmas markets were abruptly shut down in Germany's Bavaria region, which includes Nuremberg, home of one of the biggest and best-known markets. Stunned exhibitors in Dresden had to pack up their goods when authorities in the eastern Saxony region suddenly imposed new restrictions amid soaring infections. Austria's markets closed as a 10-day lockdown began Monday, with many stall owners hoping they can reopen if it's not extended.

Markets usually attract elbow-to-elbow crowds to row upon row of ornament and food sellers, foot traffic that spills over into revenue for surrounding hotels and restaurants. This year, the crowds at Frankfurt's market were vastly thinned out, with the stalls spread out over a larger area.

Heiner Roie, who runs a mulled wine hut in the shape of a wine barrel, said he's assuming he will see half the business he had in 2019. A shutdown would cause "immense financial damage — it could lead to complete ruin since we haven't made any income in two years, and at some point, the financial reserves are used up."

But if people have a little discipline and observe the health measures, "I think we'll manage it," he said.

Next door, Bettina Roie's guests are greeted with a sign asking them to show their vaccination certificates at her stand serving Swiss raclette, a popular melted cheese dish.

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The market “has a good concept because what we need is space, room, to keep some distance from each other,” she said. “In contrast to a bricks-and-mortar restaurant, they have their building and their walls, but we can adjust ourselves to the circumstances.”

The extended Roie family is a fifth-generation exhibitor business that also operates the merry-go-round on Frankfurt’s central Roemerberg square, where the market opened Monday.

Roie said it was important to reopen “so that we can bring the people even during the pandemic a little joy — that’s what we do, we bring back joy.”

The latest spike in COVID-19 cases has unsettled prospects for Europe’s economic recovery, leading some economists to hedge their expectations for growth in the final months of the year.

Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank in London, has cut his forecast for the last three months of the year in the 19 countries that use the euro from 0.7% to 0.5%. But he noted that the wave of infections is having less impact across the broad economy because vaccinations have reduced serious illnesses and many companies have learned to adjust.

That is cold comfort to Germany’s DEHOGA restaurant and hotel association, which warned of a “hail of cancellations” and said members were reporting every second Christmas party or other special event was being called off.

Other European countries where the pandemic isn’t hitting as hard are returning to old ways. The traditional Christmas market in Madrid’s Plaza Mayor, in the heart of the Spanish capital, is slated to open Friday at the size it was before the pandemic.

It will have 104 stalls of nativity figures, decorations and traditional sweets in a country where 89% of those 12 or older are fully vaccinated. Last year, it had half the number of stalls and restricted the number of people allowed in the square. Masks and social distancing will remain mandatory, organizers said.

In Hungary’s capital of Budapest, Christmas markets have been fenced off and visitors must show proof of vaccination to enter.

Gyorgy Nagy, a producer and seller of handmade glazed crockery, said the restrictions initially stirred worries of fewer shoppers. But business has been good so far.

“I don’t think the fence is bad,” he said. “At the beginning, we were scared of it, really scared, but I think it’s fine. ... I don’t think it will be a disadvantage.”

Markets opening reflects a broader spectrum of loose restrictions in Hungary, even as new COVID-19 cases have exceeded peaks seen during a devastating surge last spring. More infections were confirmed last week than in other week since the pandemic started.

A representative for the Advent Bazilika Christmas market said a number of its measures go beyond government requirements, including that all vendors wear masks and those selling food and drinks be vaccinated.

Bea Lakatos, a seller of fragrant soaps and oils at the Budapest market, said that while sales have been a bit weaker than before the pandemic, “I wasn’t expecting so many foreign visitors given the restrictions.”

“I think things aren’t that bad so far,” she said this week. “The weekend started particularly strong.”

In Vienna, markets were packed last weekend as people sought some Christmas cheer before Austria’s lockdown. Merchants say closures last year and the new restrictions have had disastrous consequences.

“The main sales for the whole year are made at the Christmas markets — this pause is a huge financial loss,” said Laura Brechmann who sold illuminated stars at the Spittelberg market before the lockdown began. “We hope things will reopen, but I personally don’t really expect it.”

In Austria’s Salzkammergut region, home to ski resorts and the picturesque town of Hallstatt, the tourism industry hopes the national lockdown won’t be extended past Dec. 13 and it can recover some much-needed revenue.

Last winter’s extended lockdowns cost the tourism board alone 1 million euros (\$1.12 million) just in nightly tourist tax fees during that period — not to mention the huge financial losses sustained by hotels, restaurants and ski resorts.

“Overall, I do think that if things open up again before Christmas, we can save the winter season,” said Christian Schirlbauer, head of tourism for the Dachstein-Salzkammergut region. “But it will depend on

whether or not the case numbers go down.”

Emily Schultheis reported from Vienna, and Justin Spike from Budapest, Hungary. Aritz Parra contributed to this report from Madrid.

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Holiday season moves into high gear but challenges remain

By ANNE D’INNOCENZIO The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Buoyed by solid hiring, healthy pay gains and substantial savings, shoppers are returning to stores and splurging on all types of items.

But the big question is: How much will supply shortages, higher prices and staffing issues dampen their mood this holiday season?

Americans, already fatigued with pandemic-induced social distancing policies, may get grumpy if they can’t check off items on their holiday wish lists, or they may feel disappointed by the skimpy holiday discounts. Exacerbating their foul moods is the fact that many frustrated workers called it quits ahead of the holidays, leaving businesses short-handed during their busiest time of the year.

Shoppers are expected to pay on average of between 5% to 17% more for toys, clothing, appliances, TVs and others purchases on Black Friday this year compared with last year, according to Aurelien Duthoit, senior sector advisor at Allianz Research. TVs will see the highest price spikes on average, up 17% from a year ago, according to the research firm. That’s because whatever discounts available will be applied to goods that are already expensive.

Such frustrations could mute sales for the holiday season that are supposed to break records.

The National Retail Federation, the nation’s largest retail trade group, predicts holiday sales will increase between 8.5% and 10.5% compared with the 2020 holiday period when shoppers, locked down during the early part of the pandemic, spent their money on pajamas and home goods — mostly online. Holiday sales increased 8.2% in 2020.

“I think it is going to be a messy holiday season,” said Neil Saunders, managing director at GlobalData Retail. “It will be a bit frustrating for retailers, consumers and the workers. We are going to see long lines. We are going to see messier stores. We are going to see delays as you collect online orders.”

Jill Renslow, executive vice president of business development and marketing for Mall of America, the nation’s largest mall, expects customer counts on Black Friday to be close to the 2019 levels and said its store tenants are seeing “power shopping” earlier in the season. But she acknowledged the mall’s tenants have struggled with staffing and, as a result, the center will open two hours later and close one hour earlier on Black Friday.

“They (retailers) are doing everything they can to deliver a good guest experience,” Renslow said. “But consumers are going to need to be patient and know that the lines may be little bit longer.”

Still, don’t discount the resilience of shoppers who have shown signs they want to celebrate the holidays after muted celebrations last year.

Kathleen Webber, a 58-year-old college professor who lives in Yardley, Pennsylvania, said she’s going back to having big family gatherings for the holidays and will be buying more gifts after spending the holidays last year with only her husband and three children.

“Everybody is so happy to be together, and so we want to celebrate,” said Webber, a big online shopper. But the fear of shortages is pushing her to finish holiday shopping by the end of next week; usually, she would wait until Dec. 21 to finish her online buying.

Retailers have also proven to be resilient.

When the pandemic forced non-essential stores to shut down for several months during the spring of 2020, pundits feared the death of department stores and apparel chains. A number of iconic retailers that were already struggling reorganized in bankruptcy, including Neiman Marcus, J.C. Penney and Brooks Brothers.

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Meanwhile, big box retailers like Walmart and Target that were allowed to remain open only got stronger.

But many retailers have rebounded to a healthier financial state since then. The percentage of U.S. retailers that defaulted on their debt soared 20% last year, compared to 6% for all corporate issuers, according to S&P Global Ratings. This year, it's less than 2%.

Store closings have also leveled off, a reversal of the bleak picture in 2020. Coresight Research, a global research firm, says retailers in the U.S. have announced 5,057 store closures for the year, but the number of store openings is 5,103 as of November 19. Coresight Research predicted in June 2020 there would be as many as 25,000 store closures last year but in reality, the number was just over 8,000.

The companies that were able to survive the pandemic were also the ones that were able to quickly pivot. Many switched their offerings from dressy clothing to casual wear and department stores like Macy's that never provided such services as curbside pickup suddenly launched them. Others got rid of their money-losing locations.

Some of the changes that were introduced in 2020 out of necessity appear to be here to stay, including offering big holiday discounts earlier in October to smooth out peaks in online ordering, and doing away with Thanksgiving Day store shopping and moving customers online instead for deals.

And while the pandemic-induced clogs in the supply network have reduced inventory needed to satisfy shopper demands, such shortfalls have also proven to be a silver lining. Leaner inventories have brought back some pricing power to retailers who've been locked in a vicious cycle of discounting for years. Such non-stop promotions have eaten away profits.

"Even with the increased labor costs and increased supply chain costs, retail earnings have been quite good," said Ken Perkins, president of Retail Metrics LLC, noting that when the pandemic hit, it looked like the "sky was falling and retailers would never see a profit again."

Follow Anne D'Innocenzio: <http://twitter.com/ADInnocenzio>

Coal mine fire in Russia's Siberia kills 11, dozens trapped

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A fire at a coal mine in Russia's Siberia killed 11 people and injured more than 40 others on Thursday, with dozens of others still trapped, authorities said.

Efforts to rescue those trapped in the mine were halted on Thursday afternoon because of an explosion threat, and rescuers were rushed out of the mine, administrators of the mine told the Interfax news agency.

The blaze took place in the Kemerovo region in southwestern Siberia. Russia's state Tass news agency reported, citing an unnamed emergency official, that coal dust caught fire, and that smoke quickly filled the Litsvyazhnaya mine through the ventilation system.

A total of 285 people were in the mine at the time of the incident — 239 of them have been evacuated and 46 other miners are still trapped underground, Kemerovo Governor Sergei Tsivilyov said on his page on the messaging app Telegram.

Tsivilyov said in another Telegram post that a total of 49 people with injuries have sought medical assistance. He had earlier reported a toll of 60 injured people and hasn't offered any explanation for the revision.

Earlier Thursday, Russia's acting minister for emergency situations, Alexander Chupriyan, said 44 miners have been hospitalized with injuries. The difference in injury tolls reported by different officials couldn't be immediately reconciled.

Russia's Investigative Committee has launched a criminal probe into the fire on charges of violating safety regulations that led to deaths.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday extended his condolences to the families of the killed miners and ordered the government to offer all the necessary assistance to those who were injured, Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

In 2016, 36 miners were killed in a series of methane explosions in a coal mine in Russia's far north. In the wake of the incident, the authorities analyzed the safety of the country's 58 coal mines and declared

20 of them, or 34%, potentially unsafe.

The Listvyazhnaya mine in the Kemerovo region wasn't among them at the time, according to media reports.

The latest inspection of the mine took place on Nov. 19, Interfax reported, citing officials from Rostekhnadzor, Russia's state technology and ecology watchdog. The report didn't offer any details on the results of the inspection.

According to Tass, the regional branch of Rostekhnadzor also inspected the mine in April and registered 139 different violations, including breaching fire safety regulations.

Al-Shabab blast by school in Somali capital kills at least 8

By HASSAN BARISE Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — A large explosion outside a school in Somalia's capital on Thursday killed at least eight people, including students, witnesses said. The extremist group al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack.

The al-Qaida-linked group controls large parts of rural Somalia and continues to frustrate efforts at rebuilding the Horn of Africa nation after three decades of conflict.

The blast sent a plume of smoke above a busy part of Mogadishu during the morning rush hour. The blast shredded part of the school, with emergency workers looking through the collapsed roof beams and wooden benches.

"We were extremely terrified by the blast," said teacher Mohamed Osman, who said he was explaining a lesson to students when the explosion occurred. "We were disorientated and we were covered with dust and smoke."

Police spokesman Abdifatah Adam Hassan said eight people were killed and 17 others wounded.

"This is a tragedy," said Abdulkadir Adan of the Amin ambulance service, which rushed people to a hospital.

The casualties were fewer than might have occurred since Thursday is part of the weekend in Somalia, an overwhelmingly Muslim nation.

Al-Shabab in a statement carried by its Andalus radio said it targeted Western officials being escorted by the African Union peacekeeping convoy. But a witness, Hassan Ali, told the AP that a private security company was escorting the officials and said he saw four of the security personnel wounded.

The attack occurred as Somalia faces major questions about its political and security future. The AU peacekeeping force was meant to withdraw from the country, but its mission could be extended amid concerns that Somali forces are not ready to assume responsibility for security. The U.S. early this year said its troop withdrawal from Somalia was complete.

A long-delayed presidential vote was meant to take place in February but now looks set to be held next year.

Germany latest country to pass 100,000 deaths from COVID-19

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Official figures released Thursday show Germany has become the latest country to surpass 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic began.

Germany's disease control agency said it recorded 351 additional deaths in connection with the coronavirus over the past 24 hours, taking the total toll to 100,119.

In Europe, Germany is the fifth country to pass that mark, after Russia, the United Kingdom, Italy and France.

The Robert Koch Institute, a federal agency that collects data from some 400 regional health offices, said Germany also set a record for daily confirmed cases — 75,961 in a 24-hour period. Since the start of the outbreak, Germany has had more than 5.57 million confirmed cases of COVID-19.

The surge in cases prompted Germany's government-in-waiting on Wednesday to announce the creation of a new permanent expert group to advise officials on how to tackle the pandemic.

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While the number of daily infections is higher than that seen during the last winter surge, there are currently fewer daily deaths per confirmed case. Experts argue this is because of vaccinations, which they say reduces the likelihood of serious illness.

Still, hospitals have warned that intensive care beds are running out, with almost 4,000 already occupied by COVID-19 patients. Some hospitals in the country's south and east have begun transferring patients to other regions.

The general manager of the Bavarian hospitals association, Roland Engehausen, said the number of new cases needs to come down sharply.

"Otherwise we're going to have a dramatic situation between Christmas and New Year's the likes of which we haven't seen yet," he told German news agency dpa.

Saxony, to the northeast, became the first German state to record a weekly number of confirmed cases above 1,000 per 100,000 inhabitants Thursday. It has the lowest vaccination rate — at 57.9% — among Germany's 16 states.

The government has urged people who were vaccinated more than six months ago to get boosters, and those who haven't been inoculated at all yet to get their first shot. Officials say 68.1% of Germany's 83 million inhabitants are fully vaccinated, far below the minimum level of 75% the government has aimed for.

Center-left leader Olaf Scholz, who is poised to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor next month, called Wednesday for mandatory vaccinations in nursing homes that care for particularly vulnerable people — and left open the possibility of extending the measure to others.

"Vaccinations are the way out of this pandemic," Scholz said.

His Social Democratic Party's health expert Karl Lauterbach, a trained epidemiologist, cited the case of Bayern Munich soccer star Joshua Kimmich as a cautionary tale for those who believe they can avoid both the virus and the vaccine. Kimmich, who had hesitated to get the shot, tested positive this week. Bayern said Wednesday that Kimmich was "doing well."

"The case shows how difficult it is for unvaccinated people to avoid COVID these days," Lauterbach said on Twitter.

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Lifting obstacles: France helps women report abuse to police

By MASHA MACPHERSON and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France is launching a new process for women to formally report abuse, circumventing police stations where many victims feel uncomfortable filing such complaints.

Junior Interior Minister Marlene Schiappa said alternative locations can include a friend's home or some other place where abused women feel safe.

"There are women who tell us that they don't dare to come to a police station because they are afraid of not being welcomed, because it's hard to talk about things that are taboo (with) an unknown person in uniform in a foreign environment," she said in an interview with The Associated Press. "That's why we are lifting one after the other, the obstacles they are facing."

An annual survey led by national statistics institute INSEE found that only 10% of victims of sexual abuse in France file a formal complaint.

And police this week reported a 10% increase in reports of domestic violence last year. It is estimated that more than 200,000 women each year are physically or sexually abused by their partner or ex-partner, according to INSEE.

The latest government initiative will try sending police officers where women have found shelter so that they can file formal complaints. This will allow victims to stay "in an environment where you feel safe, at a friend's house, at your lawyer's house, at the hospital, at your doctor's house," Schiappa said.

This comes in addition to other efforts made in recent years, including training more police officers, creating a list of questions asked to assess danger, and the possibility to alert police by text message or

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an internet platform, she added.

The junior minister is in charge of supervising relations between police and female victims of violence. On Tuesday, she visited a renovated police station in Paris' 13th arrondissement, now including an office providing privacy for those filing complaints, and a room dedicated to children, with toys and books.

The visit was part of other events this week aimed at marking Thursday's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The 13th arrondissement has been selected, along with other areas in the country, to implement the new process of filing complaints.

The measure comes after a viral online campaign on French social media denounced the shocking response of police officers victim-blaming women or mishandling their complaint as they reported sexual abuse. The hashtag #DoublePeine (#DoubleSentencing) rapidly counted at least 30,000 accounts of alleged mistreatment by police, according to activists.

"I want to value and support the action of the police forces ... and to remind everyone once again that in the vast majority of cases, complaints are handled with a lot of empathy, a lot of support," Schiappa said. "But for the minority of cases in which it goes badly, it is obviously inadmissible."

The Interior Ministry in recent months sent instructions to police about the legal obligation to accept all complaints, following accounts by women saying they had been discouraged by officers from reporting abuse — sometimes with the argument of insufficient evidence.

"Refusing to receive a complaint is illegal," Schiappa said. "We want the complaints to be forwarded to the public prosecutor's office so that the justice system can take it over."

Axelle Garnier de Saint Sauveur, a psychologist working with Paris police to help take care of victims and train officers, said there are a series of obstacles to women reporting abuse.

When their partner has a hold on them, it "blocks everything. It prevents (them) from going towards protection, file a complaint," she said. "You also have the fact that traumatic situations completely hinder the victim's ability to think."

Another reason is that "there is surely a part of fear, of ignorance about what to do when you are abused. How are you going to be treated" when filing a complaint.

"That is scary (for the victim) to think: 'I'm not going to be heard, I'm not going to be welcome'. And then there is the obstacle to overcome: enter a police station."

On Saturday, tens of thousands of people marched through Paris and other cities to demand more government action on the issue. "We recalled that violence is everywhere. That it is not unavoidable," women's right group NousToutes tweeted.

Activists want the government to dedicate 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) each year to fight violence against women, instead of the 360 million (\$406 million) spent now — in part to create more shelters.

Women step up, fill the gaps in Burkina Faso's virus fight

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

KAYA, Burkina Faso (AP) — Mariama Sawadogo sits in a small studio, translating notes from French to the local language of Moore and scribbling talking points in the margins. Transmission, prevention, vaccination — Sawadogo hits these topics in her bimonthly radio show on Zama FM, interviewing doctors and nurses about COVID-19 and testing callers on their knowledge.

Many guests and listeners in Burkina Faso call her "aunty" as she gently guides them to the right answers and awards prizes such as soap and washing buckets.

Sawadogo's voice has become a familiar sound for nearly a million people in her town of Kaya and beyond, northeast of the capital in this West African country, where many feel the government has let them down during the pandemic. Hungry for any information about the virus, mothers huddle together outside to tune in to Sawadogo's show, sharing rare mobile phones in slivers of shade while their children play nearby.

Tests, vaccines and public messaging often miss many of the country's 20 million residents, despite a \$200 million budget for virus response efforts. In a region where women are responsible for family work

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and community relationships, they've stepped up to provide a collective authoritative voice, make and deliver supplies, and find ways to support their families through the economic crisis.

This story is part of a yearlong series on how the pandemic is impacting women in Africa, most acutely in the least developed countries. AP's series is funded by the European Journalism Centre's European Development Journalism Grants program, which is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. AP is responsible for all content.

"They didn't help us," Mamounata Ouedraogo said of the government. "If we expected to get our information from them, we would never have any."

Like Sawadogo, she lives in Kaya, one of the last safe havens in the conflict-plagued country, where tens of thousands of displaced people have sought shelter as violence that spilled over from neighboring Mali in 2015 escalates and jihadi attacks encroach on major towns. Ouedraogo listens to all of Sawadogo's shows and said she'd know little about the virus without them.

Norbert Ramde, head of Burkina Faso's doctors' association, said diseases like malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis are higher priorities for the government and medical community — and beyond disease, jihadis are the biggest threat.

"Do you want us to take all the resources to combat COVID-19 and forget about this?" he said. "We have to invest in that, too."

But Burkina Faso was hard hit when the pandemic struck last March, recording some of Africa's highest infection numbers and death rates. Officials implemented curfews, sealed the landlocked country's borders, and closed mosques, churches, schools and markets. Many residents protested and, after just a few weeks, most restrictions were lifted.

"The priority for the government is to convince the population, not to take some measures which will be very aggressive," said Dr. Brice Bicaba, the government epidemiologist who leads Burkina Faso's coronavirus response.

He said officials have opted to work through community leaders and local associations to get residents to understand the dangers of the virus and police their own behavior, rather than reimpose restrictions and risk protests and conflict — a concern for Burkina Faso's young government since an uprising ousted the longtime president in 2014.

Part of the millions for virus response went toward flyers, radio and TV messaging, and other community engagement measures, in addition to the creation of labs and the purchasing of medical supplies and tests, according to Bicaba and budget documents.

But many health professionals and citizens said those messaging efforts aren't reaching all the people they need to. In Kaya, officials held one public meeting in December to provide general information, but locals said they would have preferred door-to-door visits to better explain preventative measures and give specifics on how the virus is contracted.

Messages also weren't always translated into local languages, a significant problem since most people don't speak the country's official language, French, regularly.

Even in the capital, Ouagadougou, which is 60 miles (85 kilometers) from Kaya, messaging hasn't been widespread, with billboards and signs about masks, handwashing and vaccination scarce.

In Ouagadougou, Zenabou Coulibaly Zongo spends her own money making soap and buying hand sanitizer for mosques, markets and health centers. At the start of the pandemic, Zongo, now 63, was hospitalized with bronchial pneumonia. She paid out of pocket for two weeks' worth of oxygen treatments at a private clinic, where she watched others die from respiratory problems.

"It was a wake-up call, because I envisioned coronavirus spreading like it did in Europe," she said.

Now, despite her asthma putting her more at risk, Zongo delivers her soaps and uses her visits to instruct people about COVID-19 and vaccines. During a recent visit to a mosque, some people told Zongo, who is highly regarded in her community as the founder of the Council of Burkinabe Women, that they

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didn't know vaccine shots were free until she provided the information.

Health experts say governments must take the lead, but that community engagement serves as the bedrock of emergency responses.

"Community organizations are key to filling these remaining gaps, as central government support may not suffice," said Donald Brooks, CEO of Initiative: Eau, a U.S. aid group assisting in Burkina Faso's pandemic response.

Many both inside and outside Burkina Faso don't trust the virus data provided by the government — 15,514 cases and 265 deaths — noting a lack of testing and a health system the U.N. has called among the world's weakest.

Many people don't come to hospitals and instead die at home, so likely aren't included in official counts. And the government already was struggling before the pandemic with the humanitarian crisis fueled by jihadi violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, preventing people from accessing health clinics and virus testing.

Amid the chaotic atmosphere — with the military struggling to stem the violence and an ultimatum from the opposition to the president — misinformation has flourished. Sawadogo's radio presence serves as a leading voice to fight it. She hears from cynical listeners who say the pandemic was created to mislead Black people and that the vaccine will sterilize them. Some outright accuse her of lying.

But the mother of three boys is accustomed to naysayers and skeptics. In 2007, she left her first husband despite a strong cultural aversion to divorce, in part because he wouldn't let her work as an Islamic woman. She wanted to be financially independent so she went to night school and became an accountant.

Her internship was at Radio Zama, where her bosses sensed a strong radio presence after she recorded some ads. So in 2016, she started hosting shows. When the station got funding from the European Union for the virus show, she was a natural choice.

"You're on Zama FM. How are you doing?" Sawadogo greets callers. "What's your name, and where are you calling from?" She speaks to guests and listeners like family.

"Sometimes after the show, people will call me personally and say 'Our family didn't believe in the disease, but since they have been listening, they now believe,'" Sawadogo said. "When you realize that thousands of people listen to your voice, you realize that they consider what you say, you're just proud."

That keeps her going through long days as she also takes care of her boys, prepares meals and endures long waits to see her husband. He sells grain in the country's Sahel region; they see each other just once every two weeks.

Women in the community say Sawadogo, 44, is doing more than just teaching people about COVID-19 — she's a role model for them and their daughters in a society dominated and controlled by men.

Sawadogo urges her whole community to tune in, but focuses on women in particular — they're the healers and caretakers when people fall ill with coronavirus, just as they were during West Africa's Ebola crisis from 2014 to 2016. Her listeners say if the host was a man, he wouldn't take the time and care she does to encourage them.

"As a woman, she raises the name of women," said Zenabou Sawadogo, 31, a mother of six, including two girls who listen to the show with her.

Families in Burkina Faso are grappling not just with COVID-19, but also with the country's escalating violence and collapsing economy. Zenabou Sawadogo's husband has been unable to work mining gold because jihadi fighting has cut access to sites, meaning he can't earn a living and they can't afford to send their 11-year-old daughter to school.

Some families have had to cut back on feeding their children — from three meals a day to two or even one. Women who used to sell clothes and food in neighboring Ivory Coast can't because borders are closed. And during the pandemic, more women have been asking for aid from private banks that help impoverished people.

Burkina Faso's latest coronavirus struggle involves vaccination. Despite being part of COVAX, the U.N.-backed program to provide shots to developing nations, the nation was one of the last countries in the world to receive shots.

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The government delayed the work needed get the vaccines: paperwork, waivers and distribution plans. It finally gave the first vaccines in June. By the end of October, about 284,000 people — less than 1.5% of Burkina Faso's population — were fully vaccinated, according to World Health Organization figures.

Vaccine hesitancy runs so deep in Burkina Faso that even radio host Sawadogo has yet to receive a jab, though she interviews doctors who advise all citizens to be immunized against COVID-19 and urges her listeners to do so.

She worries about links between the shots and rare blood clots in women, widely publicized during a fumbled rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe. She said even though a nurse reassured her, she's not yet convinced it's safe.

"If your blood clots, the result is death," she said. "I want to be vaccinated, but the issue of blood clots frightens me."

Zongo, the soap-maker in the capital, also isn't vaccinated, insisting she first wants to finish medication she's taking from a recent accident. Both women are part of a widening gender gap that experts fear means African women are the world's least vaccinated population.

But Zongo and Sawadogo say they'll eventually be vaccinated and they'll continue to spread their messages about the pandemic and advocate for women.

"A woman — whether she's European, or American, or South American, whoever she is — I see her as a phoenix," Zongo said. "No matter how hard you're hit, you must be able to get back on your feet, always able to get back on your feet, like the phoenix that rises again from the ashes."

This story is part of a yearlong series on how the pandemic is impacting women in Africa, most acutely in the least developed countries. AP's series is funded by the European Journalism Centre's European Development Journalism Grants program, which is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. AP is responsible for all content.

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See the full series on how the pandemic is affecting women in Africa: <https://apnews.com/hub/women-the-eyes-of-africa>

Durant moves into NBA's top 25, Nets beat Celtics 123-104

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Kevin Durant grew up in the Washington, D.C., area looking up to Allen Iverson as he led Georgetown to back-to-back trips to the NCAA Sweet 16.

Now the Nets forward is looking down at the Hall of Famer from the top 25 of the NBA's all-time scoring list.

"Iverson, he was in the Pantheon for me. One of those guys I emulated every time I went outside," Durant said on Wednesday night after surpassing Iverson's career total and leading Brooklyn to a 123-104 victory over the Boston Celtics.

"To pass him on the list, to end up there with some of the greats on that list is incredible," said Durant, who entered the night with 24,367 points, one behind Iverson, and passed him on a jumper in the first two minutes. "I've just got to keep going."

Patty Mills scored 23, and James Harden had 20 points and 11 assists for Brooklyn. LaMarcus Aldridge scored 17 points with nine rebounds for the Nets, who have won four in a row, seven out of eight and 12 of their last 14 games.

Marcus Smart had 20 points and eight assists for Boston, which had won three in a row. Jayson Tatum had 15 points and eight rebounds for the Celtics, who cut a 29-point, third-quarter lead to 12 early in the fourth, but could get no closer.

It was Brooklyn's first visit to Boston since completing a Game 4 victory in the first round of last season's

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playoffs.

"It's a quality road win against a team that's been playing great basketball," Nets coach Steve Nash said.

The Nets opened an 11-point lead midway through the first quarter and led by as many as 17 in the second before taking a 62-49 lead into the half. They scored 18 of the first 21 points in the third and led 97-68 before Boston scored the last eight points of the quarter.

Boston scored the first eight points in the fourth to cut it to 97-85. But Mills assisted on James Johnson's jumper, then hit a 3-pointer to extend the lead.

KEEP IT DOWN

Nash had just finished explaining how these Nets were the quietest team he's ever had when a ruckus erupted from the coaches' locker room next door.

"Keep it down in there," guard James Harden said with a laugh, banging on the wall as he followed Nash in the postgame news conference. "I'm doing media."

Nash said he is starting to feel his team become more vocal.

"They're one of the quietest teams I've ever been around," he said. "We're not a loud group, but the spirit is growing. The guys are starting to come together and find the joy in playing together."

OLD FRIENDS

The last time Brooklyn visited Boston, ex-Celtic Kyrie Irving was hit with a water bottle as the team left the court. Irving has not played this season due to his refusal to comply with COVID-19 vaccination mandates.

New Celtics coach Ime Udoka was a Nets assistant last season. Harden stopped by the Boston bench before the game for a handshake, but Durant preferred to exchange trash talk with the coach who was also an assistant on the U.S. Olympic team.

"Coming into Boston's a tough place to play," Durant said. "Now that Ime's here makes it even sweeter."

MORE MILESTONES

Tatum went 1 for 9 from 3-point range, but his make gave him 650 in his career and moved him ahead of Larry Bird and into fifth on the Celtics' all-time list. Smart, who made three on Wednesday, is fourth with 702.

TIP-INS

Next up on the scoring list for Durant is Ray Allen, who has 24,505 points. ... Hall of Famer Bill Russell was at the game, sitting courtside under the basket at the Nets end of the court. ... Udoka picked up a technical foul leaving the court at halftime. Durant shot the free throw before the start of the third quarter, and missed it. ... Harden stopped by the Boston bench before the game to say hello to Udoka, who was a Nets assistant last season.

UP NEXT

Nets: Host Phoenix on Saturday.

Celtics: Play at San Antonio on Friday night.

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

From serious to scurrilous, some Jimmy Hoffa theories

By ROGER SCHNEIDER Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The FBI's confirmation last week that it was looking at a spot near a New Jersey landfill as the possible burial site of former Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa is the latest development in a search that began when he disappeared in 1975.

A number of theories have emerged about Hoffa since he was reported missing, though many of them have been tied to book releases. From serious to scurrilous, here are some of the best:

Theory: Hoffa was killed on the orders of alleged New Jersey mob figure Anthony "Tony Pro" Provenzano. His body was "ground up in little pieces, shipped to Florida and thrown into a swamp."

Who put it forth: Self-described mafia murderer Charles Allen, who served prison time with Hoffa and

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participated in the federal witness-protection program, told the story to a U.S. Senate committee in 1982.

Outcome: The FBI never found enough evidence to support the claim and questions were raised about Allen trying to sell the story to make money.

Theory: Probably the most infamous had Hoffa buried under Section 107 of Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Who put it forth: Self-described hit man Donald "Tony the Greek" Frankos in a 1989 Playboy magazine interview.

Outcome: The FBI found nothing to support the claim and didn't bother to show up when the stadium was demolished in 2010.

"When that information came to our attention we batted it around, but we were all convinced in the end that this guy was not reliable," FBI agent Jim Kossler said then. "We were able to prove to our mind that what he was telling us couldn't have happened because he either couldn't have been there or he was in jail at the time."

Theory: Hoffa was abducted by "either federal marshals or federal agents," driven to a nearby airport and dropped out of a plane, possibly into one of the Great Lakes that surround Michigan.

Who put it forth: Former Hoffa aide and strong-arm Joseph Franco in the 1987 book "Hoffa's Man."

Outcome: Other than Franco's word, there was nothing to support his claim.

A Chicago Tribune review of the book put it this way: "Former New York Times reporter Richard Hammer, who helped Franco with the book, candidly writes in the introduction that the stories have the 'ring of truth.' Maybe, but they also reek of something else."

Theory: Hoffa was killed by one-time ally Frank Sheeran at a Detroit house. Key parts of the narrative became the basis for the 2019 movie "The Irishman."

Who put it forth: Sheeran.

Outcome: Bloomfield Township police ripped up floorboards at the house in 2004, but the FBI crime lab concluded that blood found on them was not Hoffa's.

Theory: New Jersey mob hit man Richard "The Iceman" Kuklinski killed Hoffa in Michigan, drove the body to a New Jersey junkyard, sealed it in a 50-gallon drum and set it on fire. He later dug up the body and put it in the trunk of a car that was sold as scrap metal.

Who put it forth: Kuklinski, who contended in his 2006 book, "The Ice Man: Confessions of a Mafia Contract Killer," that he received \$40,000 for the slaying.

Outcome: The former chief of organized crime investigations for the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice told The Record of Bergen County, New Jersey, that he doubted the claim.

"They took a body from Detroit, where they have one of the biggest lakes in the world, and drove it all the way back to New Jersey? Come on," Bob Buccino said.

Theory: Hoffa was killed and his body was buried beneath a swimming pool in Oakland County's Hampton Township.

Who put it forth: Richard C. Powell, who used to live on the property and who was serving life in prison without the possibility of parole for a 1982 homicide in Saginaw County.

Outcome: Police used a backhoe to demolish the pool and dig beneath it in 2003, although no trace of Hoffa was found. At one point, police brought Powell to the scene handcuffed and shackled. Then-Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran told the Bay City (Michigan) Times that Powell "didn't have any connection to Hoffa at all" and that the convict just wanted a few moments of fame.

Theory: Hoffa's killers buried him beneath the 73-story Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit.

Who put it forth: Marvin Elkind, a self-described "chauffeur and goon for mob bosses," in the 2011 book

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"The Weasel: A Double Life in the Mob."

Outcome: The building, home to General Motors' headquarters, stands and the claim has never been taken seriously.

Theory: Hoffa was buried in a makeshift grave beneath a concrete slab of a barn in Oakland Township about 25 miles north of Detroit.

Who put it forth: Reputed Mafia captain Tony Zerilli in the online "Hoffa Found." Zerilli was in prison for organized crime when Hoffa disappeared, but he claimed he was informed about Hoffa's whereabouts after his release.

Outcome: The FBI and police in 2013 spent two days digging at the site that no longer had the barn, but found nothing.

Theory: Hoffa's body was delivered to a Jersey City landfill in 1975, placed in a steel drum and buried about 100 yards away on state property that sits below an elevated highway.

Who put it forth: Journalist Dan Moldea, who has written extensively about the Hoffa saga, as a result of interviews with Frank Cappola. Cappola, who died in 2020, says his father owned the landfill and buried the body.

Outcome: To be determined. The FBI obtained a search warrant to do a site survey, which it completed last month and is analyzing the data. The agency hasn't said whether it removed anything from the site.

Libya: Gadhafi son disqualified from running for president

By RAMI MUSA Associated Press

BENGHAZI, Libya (AP) — Libya's top electoral body on Wednesday disqualified the son and onetime heir apparent of the late dictator Moammar Gadhafi from running for president in elections to be held next month, citing his previous convictions.

The name of Seif al-Islam Gadhafi appeared on a list of ineligible candidates issued by the country's High National Elections Committee. He can appeal the decision in court in the coming days.

Seif al-Islam had been sentenced to death by a Tripoli court in 2015 for using violence against protesters in a 2011 uprising against his father, but that ruling has since been called into question by Libya's rival authorities. He is also wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity related to the uprising.

Libya is set to hold the first round of presidential elections on Dec. 24, after years of U.N.-led attempts to usher in a more democratic future and end the country's civil war. Adding to the concerns surrounding the election, the U.N.'s top envoy for Libya submitted his resignation last week, though he said Wednesday he is prepared to stay on through the vote if needed.

Following the 2011 overthrow and killing of Moammar Gadhafi, oil-rich Libya spent most of the last decade split between rival governments — one based in the capital, Tripoli, and the other in the eastern part of the country. Each side in the civil war has also had the support of mercenaries and foreign forces from Turkey, Russia and Syria and other regional powers.

The son of Libya's former dictator submitted his candidacy papers in the southern town of Sabha on Nov. 14. It was the first time in years that the 49-year-old, who earned a PhD at the London School of Economics, appeared in public.

He had been captured by fighters in the town of Zintan late in 2011, as the uprising ended his father's rule after 40 years. Seif al-Islam was released in June 2017.

The announcement of his possible candidacy stirred controversy across the divided country, where a number of other high-profile candidates have also emerged in recent weeks. Among them are powerful military commander Khalifa Hifter and the country's interim prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah.

The long-awaited vote still faces challenges, including unresolved issues over laws governing the elections, and occasional infighting among armed groups. Other obstacles include the deep rift that remains between the country's east and west and the presence of thousands of foreign fighters and troops.

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Meanwhile, U.N. envoy Jan Kubis submitted his resignation last week, though it didn't become public until Tuesday.

The Geneva-based diplomat serves as both special envoy for Libya and head of the U.N. political mission in the country. He told the Security Council on Wednesday that he is leaving to facilitate a change he considers vital: moving the mission chief's job to Tripoli to be on the ground at a high-stakes moment for Libya.

The idea divided the council during discussions in September. Western countries embraced it; Russia rejected it.

Kubis added that he was ready to continue as special envoy through the election, though he said the U.N. had accepted his resignation with a Dec. 10 effective date.

Asked about the discrepancy, U.N. spokesperson Farhan Haq said the organization would "continue to work with him while we're seeking a successor."

The job was open for nearly a year before being filled by Kubis, a former Slovak foreign minister and U.N. official in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Security Council emphasized the importance of the upcoming election Wednesday, urging an "inclusive and consultative electoral process," warning against violence and disinformation and calling for Libyans to accept the results of the vote.

Libyan Ambassador Taher El Sonni said his country appreciates "all international initiatives with genuine intentions," but he said the council's members need "to heed us, too" and let Libyans lead their own way out of crisis.

"You have a moral responsibility towards the developments in my country over the past 10 years," he told the group. "Don't belittle us."

Associated Press writer Jennifer Peltz contributed from New York.

On the road again: Travelers emerge in time for Thanksgiving

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Determined to reclaim Thanksgiving traditions that were put on pause last year by the pandemic, millions of Americans will be loading up their cars or piling onto planes to gather again with friends and family.

The number of air travelers this week is expected to approach or even exceed pre-pandemic levels, and auto club AAA predicts that 48.3 million people will travel at least 50 miles from home over the holiday period, an increase of nearly 4 million over last year despite sharply higher gasoline prices.

Many feel emboldened by the fact that nearly 200 million Americans are now fully vaccinated. But it also means brushing aside concerns about a resurgent virus at a time when the U.S. is now averaging nearly 100,000 new infections a day and hospitals in Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado and Arizona are seeing alarming increases in patients.

The seven-day daily average of new reported cases up nearly 30% in the last two weeks through Tuesday, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says unvaccinated people should not travel, although it is unclear whether that recommendation is having any effect.

More than 2.2 million travelers streamed through airport checkpoints last Friday, the busiest day since the pandemic devastated travel early last year. From Friday through Tuesday, the number of people flying in the U.S. was more than double the same days last year and less than 9% lower than the same days in 2019.

At Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey, Christian Titus was heading to Canada to visit extended family. Titus says he's spent much of the pandemic inside but is willing to risk flying on a crowded airplane because he misses being around his family. He got a booster shot to increase his protection.

"My mental health does better by being around my family during these times," he said. "Yeah, it's dan-

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gerous. But you love these people, so you do what you can to stay safe around them.”

Meka Starling and her husband were excited for many members of their extended family to meet their 2-year-old son, Kaiden, for the first time at a big Thanksgiving gathering in Linden, New Jersey.

“We’ve put pictures on Facebook so a lot of them have seen pictures of him, but to get to actually touch him and talk to him, I’m excited about it,” said Starling, 44, of West Point, Mississippi.

For their part, airlines are hoping to avoid a repeat of the massive flight cancellations — more than 2,300 apiece — that dogged Southwest and American Airlines at different times last month.

The breakdowns started with bad weather in one part of the country and spun out of control. In the past, airlines had enough pilots, flight attendants and other workers to recover from many disruptions within a day or two. They are finding it harder to bounce back now, however, because they are stretched thin after pushing thousands of employees to quit when travel collapsed last year.

American, Southwest, Delta and United have all been hiring lately, which gives the airlines and industry observers hope that flights will stay on track this week.

“The airlines are prepared for the holidays,” said Helene Becker, an airlines analyst for financial-services firm Cowen. “They cut back the number of flights, the industry has enough pilots, they are putting more flight attendants through their (training) academies, and they are paying flight attendants a premium — what I’m going to call hazardous-duty pay — to encourage people not to blow off work.”

The airlines have little margin for error right now. American expected to fill more than 90% of its seats with paying customers on Tuesday. That’s a throwback to holiday travel before the pandemic.

“There is not a lot of room to put people on another flight if something goes wrong,” said Dennis Tajer, a pilot for the airline and a spokesman for the American pilots’ union.

By late afternoon Wednesday on the East Coast, airlines in the U.S. had canceled fewer than 100 flights, an unusually low number, according to FlightAware. The Federal Aviation Administration reported very few airports affected by significant delays.

“The airport was easy. It took us five minutes to get through security,” said Ashley Gregory, who returned home to Dallas with her husband and daughter after a few days in Jacksonville, Florida.

“But our bags are late,” she added, glancing at the empty baggage carousel at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Several travelers interviewed at DFW said their flights were full but people behaved well. The Justice Department said Wednesday it will prioritize prosecution of passengers who violate federal law on flights — the latest in a series of crackdowns against violence on planes. In the worst incidents — some captured on video and posted to social media — flight attendants have been injured.

Casey Murray, president of the pilots’ union at Southwest, said he had not received any reports of major incidents involving passengers for several days.

“I don’t think anything is going to make video, which is good,” Murray said. “That’s just another layer of stress, complexity and fatigue on top of everything else that is going on.”

At Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix, hundreds of travelers waited in security lines snaking around in a half-dozen loops. The terminals were packed with people, and with seats all taken, travelers sat in floors as they waited for their flights. There were also long lines for food at a time when some Phoenix airport workers are on strike in a dispute over wages and benefits.

At the Denver airport, Rasheeda Golden arrived from Houston with her boyfriend and his sister on their way to a snowmobiling excursion over Thanksgiving.

“It’s exciting to be traveling now, especially with things opening back up, some sense of normalcy going on. I welcome it,” she said.

Golden added that she’s not worried about flying, but she remains cautious when she is in “a cluster of too many people.”

“As long as we have our masks on, I’ve done my part,” she said. “The rest is to enjoy my vacation.”

For holiday travelers going by car, the biggest pain is likely to be higher prices at the pump. The nationwide average for gasoline on Tuesday was \$3.40 a gallon, according to AAA, up more than 60% from last

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Thanksgiving.

Those prices could be one of several factors that will discourage some holiday travelers. In a survey conducted by Gasbuddy, which tracks pump prices, about half of the app users who responded said high prices will affect their travel plans this week. About two in five said they aren't making as many trips for a variety of reasons.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday ordered 50 million barrels of oil released from America's strategic reserve to help bring down energy costs, in coordination with other major energy consuming nations. The U.S. action is aimed at global energy markets, but also at helping Americans coping with higher inflation and rising prices ahead of Thanksgiving and winter holiday travel.

The price at the pump was a bit of a shock to Tye Reedy, who flew into California from Tennessee and borrowed his friend's truck for some sightseeing. Gas was running \$5 a gallon at the Chevron in Alameda, and it cost \$100 to fill up the truck.

"We did not travel last year because of COVID restrictions and all," Reedy said. "We're confident enough ... with the vaccine and where things are now with the virus that, you know, we felt comfortable traveling."

AP staff writers Ted Shaffrey and Seth Wenig in Newark, New Jersey, Terry Chea in Alameda, Calif., Brian Skoloff in Phoenix and Thomas Peipert in Denver contributed to this report.

David Koenig can be reached at twitter.com/airlinewriter

2 trials, 1 theme: White men taking law into their own hands

By NOREEN NASIR, SUDHIN THANAWALA and ADAM GELLER Associated Press

The trials of Kyle Rittenhouse and three men accused of killing Ahmaud Arbery had vastly different outcomes. But coming just days apart, they laid bare a dangerous and long-running current in the fight for racial equality: The move by some white Americans to grab guns and take their own stand against perceptions of lawlessness, particularly by Black people.

The two cases, which ended with an acquittal for Rittenhouse last week and guilty verdicts for Arbery's killers on Wednesday, highlighted polarizing issues about gun and self-defense laws, and racial injustice.

They also forced the questions: Who or what is being protected? And from whom? Should peace of mind for white Americans come at the expense of the protection and safety of Black Americans?

"So much of this issue about protection and safety is about the safety and the protection of whites or white property," said Carol Anderson, historian and professor of African American studies at Emory University. "There is a hubris of whiteness. The sense that it is on me to put Black lives back into their proper place."

Arbery, a Black man, was chased and shot to death by white men suspicious of an outsider in their predominantly white Georgia neighborhood. In Wisconsin, while both Rittenhouse and the three men he shot were white, the encounter was triggered by the 17-year-old's decision to travel from his Illinois home to Kenosha and arm himself with an AR-15 rifle, bent on protecting local businesses from Black Lives Matter protesters.

The unmistakable connection: The idea that white men who perceive a problem "should grab a gun and wade into trouble and then claim self-defense," said Michael Waldman, president of the Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law.

"This is a product of a gun culture. It's also a product of laws ... that give white men with guns the ability to create chaos and sometimes get away with it," said Waldman, author of "The Second Amendment: A Biography."

The two coinciding trials highlighted deep racial rifts within American society, particularly following last year's broad movement for racial justice that swept the country in the wake of George Floyd's murder.

Both also came at the end of a year that began with an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, in which an overwhelmingly white crowd of supporters of former President Donald Trump, enraged with the idea that the 2020 election was "stolen" from them, stormed the building in an effort to take ownership of the

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government.

The impetus for raiding the Capitol, Anderson said, was the unfounded claim that there was massive amounts of voter fraud in cities where there were sizable Black populations, "the notion that Black folks voting is what stole the election."

"That's the thing about vigilantism, it's that something precious to me, for me, for my community, is being stolen and it's being stolen by the unworthy, by the undeserving," Anderson said.

White vigilantism signifies "the need to keep the Black population, particularly the Black male population, under surveillance and under control," said writer Darryl Pinckney. It has evolved over time, but there is a long history in the U.S. of people taking the law into their own hands — and of white Americans using that as a pretext to violently enforce racial boundaries.

Pinckney pointed to vagrancy laws and Black Codes, passed after the Civil War, that aimed to control freed slaves. "Laws that say, 'if you can't say where you live, you can be locked up and made to work on the chain gang for some time.'" During segregation, Black people were told they were in the wrong place. In the days of integration, it was a questioning of why Black people were in a particular place — a demand for proof that they belonged in order to put white people "at ease."

Arbery's death recalls the 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin, a Black teen, by a white Hispanic man patrolling his Florida subdivision against supposed criminals. For many Black Americans, that case served as a cautionary tale that just being Black could make them targets, said Angela Onwuachi-Willig, dean of Boston University's law school.

To Willig, there was a direct line between the killing of Martin and the notorious 1955 lynching of Emmett Till, a Black teen visiting Mississippi from Chicago who was brutally slain by a pair of white vigilantes convinced the 14-year-old had whistled at a white woman. And the Arbery case is yet another reminder of the lingering malice that may await Black Americans who dare to cross into areas regarded as white strongholds, she said.

Organized violence against Black people by ordinary white American citizens has a long history in the U.S. and was often perpetrated with either explicit or tacit approval from authorities, said Ashley Howard, an assistant professor of African American history at the University of Iowa. She pointed to slave patrols that set out to capture suspected fugitive slaves and lynching cases, where jailers would often step aside or provide keys to give mobs access to Black suspects.

Arbery's killers "were operating under that kind of slave patrol code, which basically deputized all whites to have the power to question anybody Black about why are you here? What are you doing here?" Anderson said.

During the civil rights movement, police would often turn a blind eye to white vigilantes coming to Black communities to put down protests, Howard said. The violence was fueled by a false perception that Black people were aggressing against whites.

"It's this feeling that the world that they know is being attacked," Howard said of white vigilantes. "It is being threatened and they need to literally pick up arms and defend it against the roving mobs or however they are being framed and understood."

While Rittenhouse's victims were three white men, race stood at the heart of his case, too, given that he decided to take up arms in defense of property during a Black Lives Matter protest, and his victims were white men who were standing up for the equal treatment of Black Americans. "Attacking the white allies of Black liberation has always been a part of the story," Pinckney said.

Elijah Lovejoy, a white abolitionist and newspaper editor, was fatally shot by a pro-slavery mob in Alton, Illinois, in 1837. His killers were found "not guilty."

James Peck, a white activist during the civil rights movement, was deemed a race traitor by the KKK, brutally beaten to a "bloody pulp" during the Freedom Rides, as civil rights activist John Lewis described it.

Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights activist who participated in the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965, was shot and killed by Ku Klux Klan members.

In today's context, following persistent pleas that "Black lives matter" and many white people heeding

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the call to join the movement, discomfort and fear around a loss of white identity or power are being stoked once again, and some feel increasingly emboldened to address it.

"White identity has never been challenged to this degree or abandoned to this extent by other white people," Pinckney said. "There is a real sense of betrayal, and that's part of the fear — this loss of status or the devaluation of personal whiteness."

Nasir is a member of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/noreensnasir>

College Football Picks: Big stakes from ACC to Mountain West

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

There is still so much to be decided heading into this week's Thanksgiving college football feast.

Let's sort it out, conference by conference.

Atlantic Coast Conference: No. 20 Pitt is locked into the conference championship game and will face No. 21 Wake Forest, No. 24 North Carolina State or Clemson. Wake is in with a win. N.C. State takes the Atlantic Division with a win and a Wake loss. If both lose, Clemson gets to the ACC championship for a seventh straight season.

American Athletic Conference: No. 4 Cincinnati will play No. 19 Houston. Where the game will be played will be determined by whether the Bearcats win Friday at East Carolina.

Big Ten: The winner of Michigan-Ohio State takes the East. Wisconsin takes the West with a victory and Iowa takes it if the Badgers lose and the Hawkeyes win. If both lose, that opens the door for Minnesota and also makes Purdue's result relevant, though the Boilermakers can't win the division.

Big 12: Oklahoma State is in. If Oklahoma beats Oklahoma State, the conference title game is a rematch next week. If Oklahoma State wins and Baylor wins, it's Cowboys-Bears.

Conference USA: No. 15 UTSA has clinched a division and will play the winner of the Western Kentucky-Marshall game.

Mid-American Conference: Northern Illinois will play the winner of Saturday's Miami, Ohio, at Kent State game.

Mountain West: Lots of possibilities but the biggest game is Boise State at San Diego State, kicking off at 9 a.m. PST on Black Friday. The Aztecs host the conference title game with a victory. Even with a victory, Boise State needs help to clinch its division because Air Force holds a tiebreaker.

Pac-12: Utah has the South clinched. Oregon wins the North by beating Oregon State, but a loss sends either the Beavers or Washington State to the conference title game for the first time.

Southeastern Conference: Georgia vs. Alabama is set, but both need to take care of some rivalry business first.

Sun Belt: Same as above for Appalachian State and No. 23 Louisiana-Lafayette.

The picks, with lines from FanDuel Sportsbook.

THURSDAY

No. 8 Mississippi (plus 1 1/2) at Mississippi State

Last time the Egg Bowl was on Thanksgiving night both coaches ended up getting fired within a month and a half ... OLE MISS 31-28.

FRIDAY

No. 4 Cincinnati (minus 14 1/2) at East Carolina

CFP is truly in the Bearcats' grasp ... EAST CAROLINA 27-24, UPSET SPECIAL.

Colorado (plus 23 1/2) at No. 16 Utah

Utes have won the last four meetings by an average of 23 points ... UTAH 42-14.

No. 17 Iowa (minus 1 1/2) at Nebraska

Hawkeyes have beaten the Huskers in six straight, but the last three have been by a combined 12 points ... NEBRASKA 23-22.

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Boise State (minus 2 1/2) at No. 22 San Diego State

Broncos have won four straight to surge back into the conference race ... SAN DIEGO STATE 20-17.

North Carolina (plus 6 1/2) at No. 24 North Carolina State

Tar Heels trying to play spoiler and salvage an otherwise disappointing season ... NORTH CAROLINA 34-28.

Missouri (plus 14 1/2) at No. 25 Arkansas

Is this a rivalry? Tigers have won last five and six of seven meetings since they joined the SEC ... ARKANSAS 35-24.

SATURDAY

No. 1 Georgia (minus 35 1/2) at Georgia Tech

Since the Yellowjackets beat the Bulldogs in Kirby Smart's first season as coach, Georgia has won three straight by an average of 33 points ... GEORGIA 45-7.

No. 2 Ohio State (minus 9 1/2) at No. 6 Michigan

Jim Harbaugh is 0-5 as Michigan coach against the Buckeyes. Is this the year he breaks through? ... OHIO STATE 38-31.

No. 3 Alabama (minus 19 1/2) at Auburn

Tide has lost three of its last four trips to Jordan-Hare Stadium, but the Tigers come in on a three-game losing streak that's taken a lot of the juice out of the Iron Bowl ... ALABAMA 31-14.

No. 5 Notre Dame (minus 19 1/2) at Stanford

Cardinal (3-8) trying to avoid worst season since 2006 ... NOTRE DAME 35-13.

No. 10 Oklahoma (plus 4 1/2) at No. 7 Oklahoma State

Sooners have dominated Bedlam, going 14-2 since Mike Gundy has been coaching the Cowboys ... OKLAHOMA 28-27.

Texas Tech (plus 14 1/2) at No. 9 Baylor

Are the Bears going to be back in the market for a head coach? Dave Aranda is drawing interest from all over ... BAYLOR 35-17.

Oregon State (plus 7 1/2) at No. 11 Oregon

Ducks are 2-2 against the Beavers under Mario Cristobal ... OREGON 31-24.

Penn State (minus 1 1/2) at No. 12 Michigan State

Nittany Lions can't run the ball but might not have to against the Spartans' leaky secondary ... PENN STATE 27-24.

No. 13 BYU (minus 6 1/2) at Southern California

Trojans don't appear to have much fight left for this lost season ... BYU 42-31.

No. 14 Texas A&M (minus 6 1/2) at LSU

Could be Ed Orgeron's last game as Tigers coach, unless they go to a bowl ... TEXAS A&M 27-17.

No. 15 UTSA (minus 10 1/2) at North Texas

Roadrunners trying to stay unbeaten ... UTSA 28-14.

No. 18 Wisconsin (minus 6 1/2) at Minnesota

The most played rivalry in major college football with 130 meetings ... WISCONSIN 23-17.

No. 19 Houston (minus 32 1/2) at UConn

Former AAC rivals, which sounds weird ... HOUSTON 42-14.

No. 20 Pittsburgh (minus 13 1/2) at Syracuse

Orange have lost two straight and are still one victory short of bowl eligibility ... PITTSBURGH 28-20.

No. 21 Wake Forest (minus 4 1/2) at Boston College

With QB Phil Jurkovec back for BC, Eagles have a chance to play spoiler ... BOSTON COLLEGE 35-31.

Louisiana-Monroe (plus 21 1/2) at No. 23 Louisiana-Lafayette

Ragin' Cajuns won the rivalry game by 50 last season ... LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE 42-17.

TWITTER REQUESTS

Clemson (minus 11 1/2) at South Carolina — @treys842

Tigers have won six straight in the Palmetto Bowl, the last four by blowouts ... CLEMSON 28-14.

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Western Kentucky (plus 1 1/2) at Marshall— @philip_runyon
With just an average game, Hilltoppers QB Bailey Zappe could reach 5,000 yards passing and 50 TD passes ... WESTERN KENTUCKY 35-31.

Rutgers (plus 1 1/2) at Maryland — @EppingerKevin
Winner becomes bowl eligible ... RUTGERS 27-23.

Florida State (plus 2 1/2) at Florida — @SteveWildzN
Another game where the winner becomes bowl eligible; that's a long way from the Bowden vs. Spurrier days ... FLORIDA STATE 24-21.

Washington State (minus 1 1/2) at Washington — @bwolf4
If the Cougars can break a seven-game Apple Cup losing streak, it might land interim coach Jake Dickert the gig long-term ... WASHINGTON STATE 20-17.

UMass (plus 6 1/2) at New Mexico State — @dacon1508
Two victories between the Minutemen and Aggies ... NEW MEXICO STATE 24-20.

Last week: 21-4 straight; 13-12 against the spread.
Season: 176-77 straight; 138-115 against the spread.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at <https://twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP> and listen at <http://www.appodcasts.com>

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-football> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25. Sign up for the AP's college football newsletter: <https://apnews.com/cfbtop25>

3 men charged in Ahmaud Arbery's death convicted of murder

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Three men were convicted of murder Wednesday in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, the Black man who was running empty-handed through a Georgia subdivision when the white strangers chased him, trapped him on a quiet street and blasted him with a shotgun.

The February 2020 slaying drew limited attention at first. But when video of the shooting leaked online, Arbery's death quickly became another example in the nation's reckoning of racial injustice in the way Black people are treated in their everyday lives.

Now the men all face a mandatory sentence of life in prison. The judge will decide whether their sentences are served with or without the possibility of parole.

As the first of 23 guilty verdicts were read, Arbery's father had to leave the courtroom after leaping up and shouting. At the reading of the last criminal count, Arbery's mother dropped her head and quietly pumped her fists.

"He didn't do nothing but run and dream," Marcus Arbery Sr. said of his son. Outside the courthouse, dozens of Black supporters hugged and cried.

The jury deliberated for about 10 hours before convicting Greg McMichael, son Travis McMichael and neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan.

The McMichaels grabbed guns and jumped in a pickup truck to pursue the 25-year-old Arbery after seeing him running outside the Georgia port city of Brunswick. Bryan joined the pursuit in his own pickup and recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael fatally shooting Arbery.

The father and son told police they suspected Arbery was a fleeing burglar. But the prosecution argued that the men provoked the fatal confrontation and that there was no evidence Arbery committed any crimes in the neighborhood.

"We commend the courage and bravery of this jury to say that what happened on Feb. 23, 2020, to Ahmaud Arbery — the hunting and killing of Ahmaud Arbery — it was not only morally wrong but legally wrong, and we are thankful for that," said Latonia Hines, Cobb County executive assistant district attorney.

Prosecutor Linda Dunikoski added: "The jury system works in this country. And when you present the

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truth to people and they see it, they will do the right thing.”

Travis McMichael, 35, stood for the verdict, his lawyer’s arm around his shoulder. At one point, he lowered his head to his chest. After the verdicts were read, as he stood to leave, he mouthed “love you” to his mother in the courtroom gallery.

Greg McMichael, 65, hung his head when the judge read his first guilty verdict. Bryan, 52, bit his lip. Speaking outside the courthouse, Ben Crump, attorney for Arbery’s father, repeatedly said that “the spirit of Ahmaud defeated the lynch mob.”

Arbery’s mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, thanked the crowd gathered for the verdict and said she did not think she would see this day.

“It’s been a long fight. It’s been a hard fight. But God is good,” she said, adding that her son would now rest in peace.

Travis McMichaels’ attorneys said both he and his father feel that they did the right thing, and that they believed the video would help their case. But they also said the McMichaels regret that Arbery got killed.

“I can tell you honestly, these men are sorry for what happened to Ahmaud Arbery,” attorney Jason Sheffield said. “They are sorry he’s dead. They are sorry for the tragedy that happened because of the choices they made to go out there and try to stop him.”

They planned to appeal.

Bryan’s attorney, Kevin Gough, said his team was “disappointed with the verdict, but we respect it.” He planned to file new legal motions after Thanksgiving.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley did not immediately schedule a sentencing date, saying that he wanted to give both sides time to prepare.

In a statement, President Joe Biden said Arbery’s killing was a “devastating reminder” of how much more work the country has to do in the fight for racial justice.

“While the guilty verdicts reflect our justice system doing its job, that alone is not enough. Instead, we must recommit ourselves to building a future of unity and shared strength, where no one fears violence because of the color of their skin,” Biden said.

Though prosecutors did not argue that racism motivated the killing, federal authorities have charged them with hate crimes, alleging that they chased and killed Arbery because he was Black. That case is scheduled to go to trial in February.

The disproportionately white jury received the case around midday Tuesday.

Soon after returning to court Wednesday morning, the jury sent a note to the judge asking to view two versions of the shooting video — the original and one that investigators enhanced to reduce shadows — three times apiece.

Jurors returned to the courtroom to see the videos and listen again the 911 call one of the defendants made from the bed of a pickup truck about 30 seconds before the shooting.

On the 911 call the jury reviewed, Greg McMichael tells an operator: “I’m out here in Satilla Shores. There’s a Black male running down the street.”

He then starts shouting, apparently as Arbery is running toward the McMichael’s idling truck with Bryan’s truck coming up behind him: “Stop right there! Damn it, stop! Travis!” Gunshots can be heard a few seconds later.

The graphic video emerged two months later, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case, quickly arresting the three men.

Defense attorneys contend the McMichaels were attempting a legal citizen’s arrest when they set off after Arbery, seeking to detain and question him after he was seen running from a nearby home under construction.

Travis McMichael testified that he shot Arbery in self-defense. He said Arbery turned and attacked with his fists while running past the truck where McMichael stood with his shotgun.

At the time of his death, Arbery had enrolled at a technical college and was preparing to study to become an electrician like his uncles.

Shaun Seals, a 32-year-old lifelong Brunswick resident, rushed to the courthouse to join the crowd cheering the verdict.

"We just came out to witness history," said Seals, pushing his 10-month-old daughter in a stroller.

Seals, who is Black, called the convictions a victory not just for his community but for the nation.

"It's not going to heal most of the wounds" from a long history of inequality, he said. "But it's a start and shows people are trying."

Collecting \$26M award vs. white nationalists may be tough

By DENISE LAVOIE and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Nine people who sued white nationalist leaders and organizations over the violence at a deadly rally in Charlottesville in 2017 won a \$26 million judgment for the injuries and trauma they endured. But whether they will be able to collect a significant chunk of that money remains to be seen.

Many of the defendants are in prison, in hiding or have dropped out of the white nationalist movement. At least three of the far-right extremist groups named as defendants have dissolved. And most of the defendants claim they will never have the money needed to pay off the judgments against them.

"I have no assets. I have no property. You can't get blood from a stone," said Matthew Heimbach, who co-founded the far-right Traditionalist Worker Party with fellow defendant Matthew Parrott. Their neo-Nazi group fell apart after Heimbach was arrested in 2018 on charges that he assaulted Parrott, his wife's stepfather. The men had argued over Heimbach's alleged affair with Parrott's wife, according to court documents.

Heimbach said he is a single father to two young sons, works at a factory and lives paycheck to paycheck. He said the plaintiffs' lawyers who sued him "just wasted \$20 million to try and play Whac-A-Mole with public figureheads."

Months before the trial, Richard Spencer, one of the most well-known white nationalists in the country, told a judge his notoriety has made it difficult for him to raise money for his defense against the "financially crippling" lawsuit. He said the case has been "extremely expensive" and a "huge burden" for him.

Spencer popularized the term "alt-right" to describe a loosely connected fringe movement of white supremacists, neo-Nazis and other far-right extremists. After the verdict was announced on Tuesday, Spencer said he now views the alt-right as a "totally dysfunctional institution with dysfunctional people" and claims he has grown disgusted "with a lot of it."

The whereabouts of two defendants, Andrew Anglin and Robert "Azzmador" Ray, are unknown.

Anglin, founder of a neo-Nazi website called The Daily Stormer, has not paid any portion of a August 2019 judgment for orchestrating an anti-Semitic harassment campaign against a Montana real estate agent's Jewish family. A federal judge entered a default judgment against Anglin after he failed to appear for a deposition. Other plaintiffs' lawyers, including those in the Charlottesville civil case, also have secured default judgments against Anglin.

In September 2020, U.S. District Judge Norman Moon issued an arrest warrant for Ray, a neo-Nazi podcaster who has written for Anglin's website. Moon agreed to hold Ray in civil contempt of court for his "total disregard" of court orders in the lawsuit.

Even with the many obstacles to collecting the full \$26 million judgment, there are ways to secure at least some of it. Typically, plaintiffs' lawyers will seek court orders to seize assets, garnish wages and place liens on property owned by defendants.

Several of the defendants' lawyers said they will try to reduce the award.

Attorney James Kolenich, who represented three defendants, including James Kessler, the lead organizer of the rally, said although some of the white nationalist organizations have some assets, "I don't think any of them could afford to pay out of pocket these damages."

"We are going to do what we can to cut this down to size," he said.

Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, said the plaintiffs' lawyers may be able to recover some of the damages because of the sheer

number of defendants named in the lawsuit. The jury issued the \$26 million judgement against 17 defendants; the judge issued default judgments against another seven defendants before the trial.

"The thing that's different about this case is you have a wide array of defendants. Some of them are currently locked up or destitute, but they might have assets, (insurance) policies or real estate that could be recoverable," Levin said.

Amy Spitalnick, executive director of Integrity First for America, a civil rights nonprofit that funded the lawsuit, said the group is "committed to ensuring our plaintiffs can collect on these judgments and see the full accountability they deserve."

Many of the racists who embraced the alt-right brand for their white supremacist ideology have largely faded from public forums since the bloodshed in Charlottesville. The movement began to crumble amid a flurry of litigation and in-fighting among leaders.

Two of the defendants are in prison.

James Alex Fields Jr. was sentenced to life on murder and hate crimes after he was convicted of intentionally ramming his car into a crowd of counterprotesters on the second day of the Charlottesville demonstrations, killing a woman.

Christopher Cantwell, who hosts a live-streamed talk show called "Radical Agenda," was convicted of extortion in September 2020 and sentenced to nearly 3 1/2 years in federal prison for threatening to rape the wife of a man whom he believed was harassing him.

Many of the defendants were booted off mainstream social media platforms. Some have chosen to keep low profiles since Charlottesville. Rally organizer Elliott Kline, also known as Eli Mosley, disappeared from the alt-right scene after the New York Times uncovered evidence that he lied about his military service.

Oren Segal, vice president of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism, said the jury's verdict sends a message that there will be consequences for promoting hate and violence. The ADL financially supported Integrity First for America's work on the case.

"Accountability can't be underestimated in a case like this," Segal said.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland.

Migrant boat capsizes in English Channel; at least 31 dead

By MICHEL SPINGLER and SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

CALAIS, France (AP) — At least 31 migrants bound for Britain died Wednesday when their boat sank in the English Channel, in what France's interior minister called the biggest migration tragedy on the dangerous crossing to date.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said 34 people were believed to have been on the boat. Authorities found 31 bodies — including those of five women and a young girl — and two survivors, he said. One person appeared to still be missing. The nationalities of the travelers was not immediately known.

The regional maritime authority, which oversees rescue operations, later said 27 bodies were found, two people survived and four others were missing and presumed drowned. The discrepancy in the numbers was not immediately explained.

Ever-increasing numbers of people fleeing conflict or poverty in Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, Eritrea or elsewhere are risking the perilous journey in small, unseaworthy craft from France, hoping to win asylum or find better opportunities in Britain. The crossings have tripled this year compared to 2020, and another 106 migrants were rescued in French waters on Wednesday alone.

A joint French-British search operation for survivors of the sinking was called off late Wednesday. Both countries cooperate to stem migration across the Channel but also accuse each other of not doing enough — and the issue is often used by politicians on both sides pushing an anti-migration agenda.

Four suspected traffickers were arrested Wednesday on suspicion of being linked to the sunken boat, Darmanin told reporters in the French port city of Calais. He said two of the suspects later appeared in court.

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The regional prosecutor opened an investigation into aggravated manslaughter, organized illegal migration and other charges after the sinking. Lille Prosecutor Carole Etienne told The Associated Press that officials were still working to identify the victims and determine their ages and nationalities, and that the investigation may involve multiple countries.

"It's a day of great mourning for France, for Europe, for humanity to see these people die at sea," Darmanin said. He lashed out at "criminal traffickers" driving thousands to risk the crossing.

Activists demonstrated outside the port of Calais on Wednesday night, accusing governments of not doing enough to respond to migrants' needs. Hundreds of people live in precarious conditions along the French coast, despite regular police patrols and evacuation operations.

The bodies were brought to the Calais port, Jean-Marc Puissesseau, head of the ports of Calais and Boulogne, told The AP. "We were waiting for something like this to happen," he said, given the growing numbers of people risking the passage.

Aid groups blamed European governments for increasingly hard-line migration policies. "The U.K. is not a choice, it is an escape, an escape for people fleeing the lack of welcome in Europe," said Nikolai Posner of French charity Utopia 56.

Darmanin called for coordination with the U.K., saying "the response must also come from Great Britain."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron spoke after Wednesday's tragedy and agreed "that it is vital to keep all options on the table to stop these lethal crossings and break the business model of the criminal gangs behind them," Johnson's office said.

Downing Street said the two leaders "underlined the importance of close working with neighbors in Belgium and the Netherlands as well as partners across the continent if we are to tackle the problem effectively before people reach the French coast."

Macron stressed "the shared responsibility" of France and the U.K. and told Johnson he expects full cooperation from the British and that they do not use the tragic situation "for political purposes," the Elysee said.

France's government is holding an emergency meeting Thursday morning to discuss next steps. Macron advocated an immediate funding boost for the European Union's border agency, Frontex, and an emergency meeting of European government ministers, according to his office. "France will not allow the Channel to become a cemetery," Macron said.

Johnson convened a meeting of the government's crisis committee, and said he was "shocked, appalled and deeply saddened."

He urged France to step up efforts to stem the flow of migrants, and said Wednesday's incident highlighted how efforts by French authorities to patrol their beaches "haven't been enough."

"We've had difficulties persuading some of our partners, particularly the French, to do things in a way that we think the situation deserves," he told reporters.

Darmanin insisted that France has worked hard to prevent crossings, rescuing 7,800 people since January and stopping 671 who were trying to cross on Wednesday alone.

A French naval boat spotted several bodies in the water around 2 p.m. and rescue boats retrieved several dead and injured from the surrounding waters, a maritime authority spokesperson said. French patrol boats, a French helicopter and a British helicopter searched the area.

More than 25,700 people undertook such dangerous boat journeys so far this year — three times the total for the whole of 2020. With changeable weather, cold seas and heavy maritime traffic, the crossing is dangerous for the inflatables and other small boats that men, women and children squeeze into.

Migrants from around the world have long used northern France as a launching point to reach Britain by stowing away in trucks or using dinghies and other small boats organized by smugglers. Many want to reach the U.K. in search of economic opportunity or because of family and community ties, or because their efforts to win asylum in the EU failed. French authorities say another big draw is lax British rules toward migrants without residency papers.

The overall number of people applying for asylum in Britain is down slightly on last year, and Britain receives much fewer asylum seekers than comparable European countries like Germany or France.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, says an estimated 1,600 people have died or disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea this year while trying to reach Europe from North Africa or Turkey. Hundreds more have perished in the Atlantic Ocean off West Africa on a migrant route to Spain's Canary Islands.

"How many more times must we see people lose their life trying to reach safety in the UK because of the woeful lack of safe means to do so?" said Tom Davies, Amnesty International U.K.'s refugee and migrant rights campaign manager.

"We desperately need a new approach to asylum, including genuine Anglo-French efforts to devise safe asylum routes to avoid such tragedies happening again," he added.

Hui reported from London. Angela Charlton in Paris, Sylvie Corbet in Strasbourg, France, Jill Lawless and Pan Pylas in London contributed to this report.

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Justice Dept. to prioritize prosecuting violence on flights

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Merrick Garland directed U.S. attorneys across the country to swiftly prioritize prosecution of federal crimes that happen on commercial flights as federal officials face a historic number of investigations into passenger behavior.

Garland's memo, issued Wednesday, emphasizes that the Justice Department is committed to aggressively prosecuting violent passengers who assault crew members or endanger the safety of other passengers. Federal law prohibits interfering with a flight crew, including assaulting, intimidating or threatening crew members.

In a statement, Garland said such passengers do more than harm employees. "They prevent the performance of critical duties that help ensure safe air travel. Similarly, when passengers commit violent acts against other passengers in the close confines of a commercial aircraft, the conduct endangers everyone aboard," he said.

The memo also notes that dozens of incidents have been reported to the FBI by the Federal Aviation Administration — it investigates some flight disturbances and can issue civil fines to disruptive passengers — as part of an "information-sharing protocol" between the two agencies.

The FAA said earlier this month that it had launched 950 investigations into passenger behavior on flights this year. That is the highest total since the agency started keeping track in 1995. In the five years from 2016 through 2020, the agency averaged 136 investigations a year.

The agency also said that it had referred 37 cases involving unruly airline passengers to the FBI for possible criminal prosecution since the number of disruptions on flights began to spike in January.

"The unacceptable disruptive behavior that we're seeing is a serious safety threat to flights, and we're committed to our partnership with the DOJ to combat it," FAA Administrator Steve Dickson said.

Airlines and their unions have pressed the federal government to push more aggressively for criminal prosecution. Airlines have reported more than 5,000 incidents involving unruly passengers this year, with more than 3,600 of those involving people who refused to wear face masks as required by federal regulation.

"The Department of Justice is committed to using its resources to do its part to prevent violence, intimidation, threats of violence and other criminal behavior that endangers the safety of passengers, flight crews and flight attendants on commercial aircraft," Garland said in the statement.

The international president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO, Sara Nelson, also applauded Garland's announcement.

"Consequences need to be swift and clear to keep travel safe and protect the people on the frontlines who have worked through all the stresses of this pandemic," Nelson said in a statement. "We want to take people to New Orleans, Seattle, Fort Lauderdale, or to see Grandma. We do not want to take them to jail. But, the DOJ can now make it clear that's where you're going if you refuse to cooperate and act out violently on a plane."

Americans are spending but inflation casts pall over economy

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans are doing the main thing that drives the U.S. economy — spending — but accelerating inflation is casting a pall.

A raft of economic data issued Wednesday showed the economy on solid footing, with Americans' incomes rising and jobless claims falling to a level not seen since the Beatles were still together.

The spike in prices for everything from gas to rent, however, will likely be the chief economic indicator Americans discuss over Thanksgiving Day dinner.

The Commerce Department reported that U.S. consumer spending rebounded by 1.3% in October. That was despite inflation that over the past year has accelerated faster than it has at any point in more than three decades.

The jump in consumer spending last month was double the 0.6% gain in September.

At the same time, consumer prices rose 5% compared with the same period last year, the fastest 12-month gain since the same stretch ending in November 1990.

"Although consumer confidence has declined in the fall because of high inflation, households continue to spend," said Gus Faucher chief economist at PNC Financial.

Personal incomes, which provide the fuel for future spending increases, rose 0.5% in October after having fallen 1% in September, which reflected a drop in government support payments.

Pay for Americans has been on the rise with companies desperate for workers, and government stimulus checks earlier this year further padded their bank accounts. That bodes well for a strong holiday season and major U.S. retailers say they're ready after some companies, like Walmart and Target, went to extreme lengths to make sure that their shelves are full despite widespread shortages.

Analysts said the solid increase in spending in October, the first month in the new quarter, was encouraging evidence that overall economic growth, which slowed to a modest annual rate of 2.1% in the July-September quarter, will post a sizable rebound in the current quarter. That is expected as long as the recent rise in COVID cases and concerns about inflation don't dampen holiday shopping.

"After experiencing one of the most severe economic shocks of the past century in 2020, the U.S. economy has displayed one of the most rapid recoveries in modern history in 2021," Gregory Daco, chief U.S. economist for Oxford Economics, wrote in a note to clients. Daco predicts GDP in the current October-December period would rebound to a growth rate of 5.6%.

The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits, meanwhile, dropped last week by 71,000 to 199,000, the lowest since mid-November 1969. But seasonal adjustments around the Thanksgiving holiday contributed significantly to the bigger-than-expected drop. Unadjusted, claims actually ticked up by more than 18,000 to nearly 259,000.

In a cautionary note Wednesday the University of Michigan reported that its consumer sentiment index fell 4.3 percentage points to a reading of 67.4 this month, its lowest level since November 2011, weighed down by inflation concerns.

And there are regions in the U.S. experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases that could get worse as families travel the country for the Thanksgiving holiday.

President Joe Biden acted Tuesday to counter spiking gasoline prices by ordering a release from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve, but economists expect that move to have only a minimal effect on the surge in gas prices.

The Fed seeks to conduct its interest-rate policies to achieve annual gains in its preferred price index of around 2%. However, over the past two decades, inflation has perennially failed to reach the Fed's 2% inflation target.

Fed officials at their November meeting announced the start of a reduction in its \$120 billion per month in bond purchases which the central bank had been making to put downward pressure on long-term interest rates in order to spur the economy.

Minutes from that meeting showed Fed officials increasingly concerned that the unwanted price pressures could last for a longer time. Officials indicated that the Fed should be prepared to move to reduce its bond purchases more quickly — or even start raising the Fed's benchmark interest rate sooner — to make sure inflation does not get out of hand.

The reduction in bond purchases marked the Fed's first maneuver to pull back on the massive support it has been providing to the economy. Economists expect that will be followed in the second half of 2022 by an increase to the Fed's benchmark interest rate, which influences millions of consumer and business loans. That rate has been at a record low of 0% to 0.25% since the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020.

Legal experts see case for intent in Waukesha parade crash

By TAMMY WEBBER, TODD RICHMOND and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

The man accused of plowing his SUV into a parade of Christmas marchers could have turned down a side street but didn't. Once he passed it, he never touched the brakes — barreling through and leaving bodies in his wake, according to a criminal complaint.

No motive has been given for Darrell Brooks Jr., the suspect in the suburban Milwaukee crash Sunday that killed six people and injured more than 60 others, but it may not matter if he goes to trial. Legal experts say the evidence strongly supports intentional homicide charges that would mean life in prison.

Former Waukesha County District Attorney Paul Bucher said it might be difficult to prove intent with the first person Brooks struck, "but when he kept going and knowing what he had done to the first person and didn't stop, then it was all intentional."

Brooks, 39, is charged with five counts of first-degree intentional homicide and is expected to face a sixth count after an 8-year-old boy died Tuesday. Waukesha County District Attorney Susan Opper has also said additional charges are likely.

Brooks' attorneys, Jeremy Perri and Anna Kees, cautioned people not to judge the case before all facts are known.

"It's essential that we not rush to judgment, and instead treat these proceedings and all those involved with dignity and respect," they said in a statement.

"That includes Mr. Brooks, who is entitled to a vigorous defense and careful protection of his Constitutional rights. No matter how serious and emotional the charges, until the government proves its allegations beyond a reasonable doubt, our client is presumed innocent."

Opper said Wednesday her office would not comment on a pending case.

Brooks is accused of refusing to stop even as an officer banged on the hood of his SUV. Another officer fired three shots into the vehicle, but it did not stop.

Five people ranging in age from 52 to 81 were pronounced dead within hours. One of many injured children, Jackson Sparks, 8, died on Tuesday. Representatives for area hospitals said Wednesday that at least 16 people are being treated for injuries.

Brooks hasn't spoken publicly and it's not known what, if anything, he told investigators.

But even if Brooks was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time — and police have not said he was — that could not be used as a defense in Wisconsin, experts said.

Tom Grieve, a Brookfield defense attorney and former Waukesha County prosecutor, said one possible defense would be that Brooks was suffering from a mental disease or defect. A jury would have to decide if he was guilty of the charges and then whether he was mentally ill. Such a finding would likely land him in a mental institution rather than prison.

Opper could have charged Brooks with first-degree reckless homicide, which would have been a "slam dunk" conviction that, given Brooks' age, would have been an effective life sentence, Bucher said. But extensive video and other evidence also support the more serious charge, he and other experts said.

"The fact he didn't step on the brakes: That was intentional. The fact that his foot was on the gas: That was intentional. He could have stopped ... He's the only person who could put his foot on the brake pedal and he didn't," Grieve said.

A criminal complaint detailing the charges includes statements from police officers and witnesses who said the vehicle “appeared to be intentionally moving side to side,” with no attempt to slow down or stop as it struck multiple people and sent bodies and objects flying.

One officer who tried to stop the vehicle said Brooks was looking directly at him, and it appeared he had no emotion on his face, the complaint said.

Prosecutors would not be allowed to put police or bystanders on the stand to speculate on what Brooks intended to do or his state of mind, experts said.

Bucher said prosecutors also would not be able to introduce social media posts made by Brooks, an aspiring rapper, or lyrics from his songs suggesting an interest in violence — which became the subject of widespread speculation on social media that Brooks’ actions were intentional.

Brooks included links on social media to his songs, several of which seemingly celebrate violence and call police “pigs.” In a biography on his SoundCloud account, he refers to growing up in the “dangerous west side neighborhood of Washington Park” in Milwaukee, his “multiple legal battles” and his desire to turn the “life he lived on the streets” into music.

Brooks, who has been charged with crimes more than a dozen times since 1999, had two outstanding cases against him at the time of the parade disaster, including one earlier in November in which he’s accused of intentionally striking a woman with his car in Milwaukee County. He had been free on \$1,000 bail for that case, which prosecutors now say was inappropriately low.

And on Sunday, Brooks was leaving the scene of a domestic dispute that had taken place just minutes before he drove into the parade route, Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said.

Several experts predicted a plea deal.

“If I were in this case, what I’d be trying to do was to see how I can put out this fire as quickly as possible,” said Phil Turner, a former federal prosecutor who now works in private practice in Chicago. “If you let it linger, it’s only going to get worse.”

Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan; Richmond from Madison, Wisconsin; and Condon from New York.

Houston highway project sparks debate over racial equity

By JUAN A. LOZANO and HOPE YEN Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A \$9 billion highway widening project being proposed in the Houston area could become an important test of the Biden administration’s commitment to addressing what it has said is a history of racial inequity with infrastructure projects in the U.S.

The project’s critics, including community groups and some residents, say it won’t improve the area’s traffic woes and would subject mostly Black and Latino residents to increased pollution, displacement and flooding while not improving public transportation options.

Its supporters counter the proposed 10-year construction project that would remake 24 miles along Interstate 45 and several other roadways would enhance driver safety, help reduce traffic congestion and address flood mitigation and disaster evacuation needs.

The project, which has been in the works for nearly two decades, has remained on hold since March as the Federal Highway Administration reviews civil rights and environmental justice concerns raised about the proposal. Harris County, where Houston is located, has also filed a federal lawsuit alleging state officials ignored the project’s impacts on neighborhoods.

The dispute over the project comes as Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has pledged to make racial equity a top priority at his department.

The impacts of “misguided transportation policy” is something that has “disproportionately happened in Black and brown communities and neighborhoods,” Buttigieg said last December in response to a question from Rodney Ellis, a commissioner in Harris County.

The I-45 project is expected to displace more than 1,000 homes and apartments along with 344 businesses, two schools and five places of worship in mostly Black and Latino neighborhoods.

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"It's very racially unjust," Molly Cook with Stop TxDOT I-45, one of the community groups opposing the project, said as she stood in a cul-de-sac in north Houston where 10 homes were expected to be torn down because of the widening. "We're going to spend all this money to make the traffic worse and hurt a lot of people."

Fabian Ramirez, 40, whose family has lived since the 1960s in a neighborhood near downtown Houston, said if the project goes through, he could be forced to sell property he owns.

"It's taken my family generations for me to get to this position where I can say, 'This property right next to downtown is mine.' And to have (the) government come and take the property away as soon as I obtain it, it's nerve-wracking," Ramirez said.

The Texas Department of Transportation, commonly known as TxDOT, and the five members of the Texas Transportation Commission that govern it, have pushed back on claims the project promotes racial inequity. Agency spokesman Bob Kaufman said Tuesday that TxDOT "has worked extensively" with local governments and communities to "develop tangible solutions" to concerns.

"This project cannot be everything that everybody wants or that everybody believes in. However, it can be transformational for the region and the state," commission member Laura Ryan said during an August meeting.

The commission has said if the federal government does not complete its investigation by the end of this month, it might review at its Dec. 9 meeting whether to pull the project's state funding.

In a statement Tuesday, the Federal Highway Administration said its review was continuing.

Robert Bullard, a professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University in Houston, believes the I-45 proposal continues a long history of infrastructure projects — including the creation of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s — that have depreciated wealth in minority neighborhoods through the loss of homes and businesses and exacerbated inequality.

Ines Sigel, interim executive director of LINK Houston, a nonprofit focused on transportation issues that opposes the I-45 expansion, said what the federal government decides in Houston could lead to meaningful changes that improve communities across the country.

Similar debates about highway and infrastructure projects are also taking place in other U.S. cities, including Charleston, South Carolina, Mobile, Alabama, and Los Angeles.

"Unless local and state governments start saying we want to change our entire approach, and that highway expansion could be bad for the environment and we want fewer cars, then the Biden administration's goals will be really difficult to achieve," said Yonah Freemark, a senior research associate with the Urban Institute, a Washington-based think tank.

Last week, Harris County officials paused their lawsuit against TxDOT in the hope of resolving concerns about the project. The move took some community groups fighting the project by surprise.

But Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the county's top elected official, said last week that the pause is not an end to the lawsuit and she's committed to ensuring the project is "forward thinking and ... respects the health of the community."

Bob Harvey, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership, a leading Houston area business group that backs the project, said his organization is optimistic that concerns will be resolved, "ensuring this important project for the Houston region will move forward."

Roger Panetta, a retired history professor at Fordham University in New York, said those opposing the I-45 project will have an uphill battle, as issues of racism and inequity have been so persistent in highway expansions that it "gets very difficult to dislodge."

Yen reported from Washington.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter at www.twitter.com/juanlozano70

EXPLAINER: Trio guilty of killing Ahmaud Arbery. What now?

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By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The killing was captured on video and shared around the world: Ahmaud Arbery running toward and then around an idling pickup truck before its driver blasted him at close range with a shotgun.

Soon after Travis McMichael fatally shot Arbery on Feb. 23, 2020, his father, Greg McMichael, told police how the pair had armed themselves, chased the young Black man and trapped him “like a rat.” Neighbor William “Roddie” Bryan told officers he joined the pursuit and helped cut off Arbery’s escape.

After a 13-day trial at the Glynn County courthouse in coastal Georgia, a disproportionately white jury found the three white men guilty of murder. Each man was also convicted on lesser charges.

ON WHAT CHARGES WAS EACH MAN CONVICTED?

A nine-count indictment charged all three men with one count of malice murder, four counts of felony murder, two counts of aggravated assault, one count of false imprisonment and one count of criminal attempt to commit a felony, in this case false imprisonment.

Travis McMichael was convicted of all nine charges. Greg McMichael was convicted of all charges except malice murder. Bryan was convicted of two counts of felony murder, one count of aggravated assault, one count of false imprisonment and one count of criminal attempt to commit a felony.

HOW MUCH PRISON TIME ARE THEY FACING?

Malice and felony murder convictions both carry a minimum penalty of life in prison. The judge decides whether that comes with or without the possibility of parole. Even if the possibility of parole is granted, a person convicted of murder must serve 30 years before becoming eligible. Multiple murder convictions are merged for the purposes of sentencing.

Murder can also be punishable by death in Georgia if the killing meets certain criteria and the prosecutor chooses to seek the death penalty. Prosecutors in this case did not.

Each count of aggravated assault carries a prison term of at least one year but not more than 20 years. False imprisonment is punishable by a sentence of one to 10 years in prison.

WHEN WILL THEY BE SENTENCED?

That’s not clear yet. Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley will set a sentencing date.

WILL THERE BE APPEALS?

Appeals are almost certain in this case, said University of Georgia law professor emeritus Ron Carlson.

One likely basis for appeal could be the exclusion of certain evidence from the trial, he said. Defense attorneys had sought to introduce evidence of Arbery’s criminal record, records on his mental health and the fact that he was on probation. They also wanted to have a use-of-force expert testify. But the judge ruled against admitting any of that evidence.

“They’ll argue that relevant evidence helpful to the defense was excluded by the trial judge and that was an error,” Carlson said.

It’s also possible that appellate attorneys could find other grounds for appeal after scouring transcripts and jury instructions, and speaking with jurors.

Robert Rubin and Jason Sheffield, attorneys for Travis McMichael, said after the verdict that they plan to appeal. Sheffield said they had no second thoughts about trying the case in the community where Arbery was killed rather than seeking to move it elsewhere. But he said, “It could certainly become a part of the appeal.”

AREN’T THERE STILL FEDERAL CHARGES PENDING?

Yes. The McMichaels and Bryan still face federal charges.

Months before the three stood trial on state murder charges, a federal grand jury in April indicted them on hate crimes charges. It’s an entirely separate case that’s not affected by the state trial’s outcome.

U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood has scheduled jury selection in the federal trial to start Feb. 7. All three men are charged with one count of interference with civil rights and attempted kidnapping. The McMichaels were also charged with using, carrying and brandishing a firearm during a crime of violence.

The federal indictment says the men targeted Arbery because he was Black.

Associated Press writer Russ Bynum in Brunswick, Georgia, contributed to this report. Find all of the AP’s

coverage of the case: <https://apnews.com/hub/ahmaud-arbery>

Q&A: T-Pain talks new book, embracing his musical legacy

By GARY GERARD HAMILTON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — There may be a plethora of adjectives to describe music superstar T-Pain, but boring is never included. So when the idea of writing a book was presented, he knew what he would not be writing: an autobiography.

"I want to bring joy to other people. I don't want to kill the mood. I want people to feel good when they read what I do," said the "Bartender" singer. "So, I felt like why not do something that people can actually get something from?"

The "Buy U a Drank" singer is transitioning from consumer to instructor with his new book, "Can I Mix You a Drink?" Co-written with professional cocktail expert and beverage executive Maxwell Britten, the book, which features gorgeous photos of cocktails on sleek black pages, is filled with 50 alcoholic drink recipes inspired by Pain's music and career travels. He also offers brief, personal anecdotes before each recipe, many named after some of his biggest hits.

"When I go to these different places, all these different things that I probably didn't think I would like, I ended up liking when it was done correctly in the region and from the culture that I was getting it from," explained the "Blame It" harmonizer. "It helped to make this book pretty broad."

In an interview with the Associated Press, T-Pain talked about creating the book, his passion for music, and if he's finally ready to embrace his position in history as a musical trailblazer. Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: How hands-on were you with "Can I Mix You a Drink?"

T-Pain: I wanted to make sure that it wasn't just a book of like screwdrivers, so I definitely was hand-on with a lot of it. I put in my weird requests... the I'm So Hood drink, I requested that be served in a paper bag. The 5 O'Clock, I made sure that I had ice cream inside of it, like it was a beer float, basically. I had a song called "Red Cup" — one of the recipes is called Red Cup. It had to be served in a red cup — it's the exact portions, and you actually pour into the lines on a red cup.

AP: What's your favorite drink?

T-Pain: It was the I'm Sprung because I was drinking wine at the time. But now, it's I'm So Hood, just because of the sheer ridiculousness of it being served in a brown paper bag... Seeing that paper bag just brings light to my day." (laughs)

AP: Can you tell us about your new music? "I Like Dat" has already hit 22 million views on YouTube, and you just dropped "I'm Cool With That."

T-Pain: It's fun to not have to chase anything. I'm actually having fun making music again, and it's not a job. It's actually still my passion. It's not something that I have to do to survive. It's just something that I'm doing with my hobby in my spare time, and if it comes out dope, then why not let the world hear it?

AP: You're independent, so were you surprised at the success of "I Like Dat?"

T-Pain: Absolutely. Like I said, I'm not chasing the No. 1 spot, I'm not chasing money, so, you know, seeing the exposure and seeing the acceptance that it's getting, yeah, that's amazing... The fact that people are still vibing with T-Pain in 2021 — yeah, I love it. That's a dream come true. People would kill and die to last in the game this long.

AP: Eventually, you'll have an album called "Precious Stones." What can we expect?

T-Pain: The reason it's called "Precious Stones" is because I feel like the world has been flooded with just the same white diamonds — like, white diamonds, meaning a metaphor as just the same kind of music all over the place. Everybody's making the same music, everybody's doing the same video... I look at jewelry like that and I'm like, "Why are diamonds so expensive if there's so many of them?" Everything got diamonds in it, everything — but what you can't find a lot of is those precious stones.

AP: You've received a lot of criticism in the past for popularizing Auto-Tune, but have you begun to realize how much you're actually appreciated by your fans and music lovers?

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T-Pain: I see it sometimes, man. And it does break through the negativity a lot... As an artist and as a public figure, we always see the negative first. That's just what happens first. When we sit down and actually relax and chill out and stop trying to impress everybody, we do get to see the appreciation. And that's where I am in my life. I'm actually chillin', relaxing and sitting back and enjoying it. ____

Follow Associated Press entertainment journalist Gary Gerard Hamilton on social media with his handle @GaryGHamilton

Brazilians find stock exchange bull unbearable, remove it

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Many Brazilians felt bearish about the new Wall Street-inspired bull sculpture outside the stock exchange, and didn't have to wait long for it to crash: The statue has been removed a week after it was installed.

Sao Paulo's stock exchange had hoped to bestow the rundown city center with a flashy landmark. But its golden sheen was offset by nearby tents for the homeless and the daily line outside a major trade union of people searching for jobs -- any job.

By Tuesday night, it was gone.

Critics said the metal and fiberglass sculpture at the gates of the stock exchange in no way reflects Brazil's current economic crossroads nor near-term prospects, with poverty and unemployment high and inflation running in the double digits. Local media have shown poor Brazilians in several cities so desperate for food that they rummage through rejected meat scraps.

"It represents the strength and the resilience of the Brazilian people," Gilson Finkelsztain, the exchange's CEO, said at its Nov. 16 unveiling. It was sponsored by the stock exchange and investor Paulo Spyer.

Spyer, who owns a consultancy firm named Vai Tourinho ("Go Little Bull" in Portuguese), said he was honored to give "a gift to all Brazilians." Some locals were keen to snap pictures with the sculpture, which resembles the Charging Bull in Manhattan's financial district.

But celebration was swiftly met with protests. The next day, a dozen students posted stickers that read "HUNGER" on the bull's body. After their removal, the nonprofit group SP Invisible, which aids the poor, organized a barbecue beside the bull to feed homeless people. Both demonstrations reverberated widely on social media.

"This bull is suggesting we are experiencing some progress, but it is the exact opposite," Vinícius Lima, one of the nonprofit's organizers, told journalists. "Beef prices have skyrocketed. It costs double what it used to. Fewer and fewer Brazilians can afford it. That's why we came here."

Over the weekend, the bull's sponsors attempted to co-opt demonstrations by asking visitors to bring food for donation. Still, the bull continued getting roasted.

City Hall's urban planning body summoned the sculpture's sponsors and the artist who crafted it for a meeting. Its main objection with the golden beast was that sponsors didn't seek approval beforehand and it apparently violated a law limiting what can be displayed outdoors. Sao Paulo limits outdoor advertising.

"There is a law and it must be followed. Everyone has to be aware of the law before doing something," Viviane Rubio, an adviser to the urban planning body, said during Tuesday's afternoon meeting. "You needed to let us know before you placed it there," she said.

The bull's creator, artist and architect Rafael Brancatelli, expressed contrition.

"I wasn't trying to be disrespectful or go over anyone's head. The lesson has been learned," he said. "In another initiative, we will certainly look for you first."

Under orders from Sao Paulo's stock exchange, a crane took away the bull Tuesday night, its head and horns wrapped in plastic.

Maria Gomes, who has worked in the region 30 years, said Wednesday she was pleased by the removal of the sculpture, which she initially thought was an ad for a barbecue restaurant and had deemed "hideous." Still, she felt the bull may have been unfairly blamed.

"It was a 'scapebull,'" said Gomes, 67. "Now that it is gone, it feels better. But it is actually the same

degraded city center of years ago.”

Biden picks women of color to lead White House budget office

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

NANTUCKET, Mass. (AP) — Two women of color are President Joe Biden’s picks to lead the White House budget office, a milestone for the powerful agency after his first choice withdrew following criticism over her previous attacks on lawmakers from both parties.

If confirmed by the Senate, Shalanda Young would become the first Black woman in charge of the Office of Management and Budget, while Nani Coloretti, a Filipino American, would serve as Young’s deputy, making Coloretti one of the highest-ranking Asian Americans in government.

“Today it’s my honor to nominate two extraordinary, history-making women to lead the Office of Management and Budget,” Biden said in a video announcement released Wednesday while he spends the Thanksgiving holiday on Nantucket island in Massachusetts.

“She has continued to impress me, and congressional leaders as well,” Biden said of Young, who has been acting director for most of the year. Biden turned to Young after his first nominee for budget director, Neera Tanden, came under bipartisan criticism.

Sen. Joe Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat who has become a pivotal vote for Biden’s agenda in a chamber split 50-50, was the first Democrat to oppose Tanden’s nomination and, lacking the necessary votes, she ultimately withdrew from consideration.

Biden later gave Tanden a job in the White House, where she is staff secretary and a senior presidential adviser.

Young faces a Senate confirmation vote, though it was not immediately clear how soon it would be scheduled. But she was confirmed as deputy director in March on a 63-37 vote, with backing from more than a dozen Republicans.

Young, who previously was staff director for the House Appropriations Committee, also has support from top Democratic leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Pelosi, in a statement issued Wednesday, said Young’s nomination is “well-deserved.” Other Democratic lawmakers expressed support for Young on Twitter.

“Good call,” wrote Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., a member of the Budget Committee, which will vote first on the nominations, tweeted that Young’s “leadership is just what we need to implement a federal budget that prioritizes the American people.”

In Congress, Young oversaw \$1.3 trillion in annual appropriations bills, disaster aid and COVID-19-related spending. The head of the Office of Management and Budget is tasked with putting together the president’s annual budget for Congress and overseeing a wide range of logistical and regulatory issues across the federal government.

Coloretti would rejoin the federal government from her current post at the Urban Institute think tank, where she is senior vice president overseeing financial and business strategy.

Her prior federal government service includes deputy secretary at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, assistant secretary for management at the Treasury Department and acting chief operating officer at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Biden said Young and Coloretti are “two of the most experienced, qualified people to lead” the budget office and called on the Senate to vote quickly to confirm them.

Jaffe reported from Washington.

Acquitted and in demand, Rittenhouse ponders what’s next

By MICHAEL TARM and AMY FORLITI Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — When he was acquitted of murder in shootings during unrest in Wisconsin, Kyle

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Rittenhouse went from staring at possible life behind bars to red-hot star of the right: an exclusive interview with Tucker Carlson and a visit with Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago capped by a photo of both men smiling and snapping a thumbs-up.

For Rittenhouse, a year of legal uncertainty over whether his claim of self-defense would stand up has given way to uncertainty over what's next. He told Carlson, in an appearance that spiked the host's ratings by some 40%, that he hoped to become a nurse or maybe even a lawyer. He planned to "lay low" but would for sure leave the Midwest.

Even as Rittenhouse figures out his next moves, fundraising continues on his behalf, ostensibly to retire legal bills from his trial but perhaps in recognition that he may face civil lawsuits over the shootings. Rittenhouse has hinted he may bring defamation claims of his own, and could seek possession of \$2 million in bail money raised by his supporters.

And some marketing experts say Rittenhouse — at least for a short while — may be able to leverage his story into lucrative paid appearances and even a book.

"I wouldn't go near it on a number of levels," Ric Bachrach, CEO of branding and marketing company Celebrity Focus, said. "But somebody out there is going to want to tell his story."

"He could easily secure a seven-figure book contract," said Andrew M. Stroth, a former talent agent and an attorney in Chicago with no ties to Rittenhouse. Rittenhouse, he said, "could monetize his brand and potentially make in the millions."

Rittenhouse could get the \$2 million that was raised for his bail, though there is a legal battle for it. In Kenosha County, where he was tried, if a defendant is acquitted, the entire bail amount is typically refunded to whomever posted it, upon a judge's order. The poster of the bail is not necessarily the defendant, said Rebecca Matoska-Mentink, the clerk of courts for Kenosha County.

Rittenhouse's bail was posted by his former attorney, John Pierce, who said he has relinquished claim to the money. Mark Richards, Rittenhouse's current attorney, said in a Friday filing it should go to his client. Fightback Foundation, the organization that raised the funds and transferred them to Pierce so bail could be paid, argues that the money should be refunded to the organization.

Other fundraising opportunities have opened up.

After his acquittal, GoFundMe lifted a ban on Rittenhouse fundraisers that had been in place as part of a policy blocking fundraising for the legal defense of someone accused of a violent crime. There didn't appear to be any new fundraising efforts for Rittenhouse on the GoFundMe website.

But there are at least three efforts to raise money for Rittenhouse or his family on GiveSendGo, one of which has raised more than \$625,000 — including thousands since his acquittal. It's not clear how much an additional website, freekyleusa.org, has raised.

One email Tuesday from "Free Kyle USA," sent under the name of Rittenhouse's mother, Wendy, called his acquittal "a victory for the truth, for justice, and for every American's God-given and unalienable right of self-defense." It said funds would go toward case-related debts, legal bills and then toward a scholarship fund for Rittenhouse so he can graduate from college without debt.

He may not have to wait around for donations. Stroth estimated Rittenhouse could command a speaker's fee on the lecture circuit of anywhere between \$2,500 and \$25,000 a speech.

Both Stroth and Bachrach said they would never seek to represent Rittenhouse, and that many speakers' agents and publishers would consider him too toxic. But some who cater to conservatives could jump at the chance to sign him.

Former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who was released from prison last year after then-President Donald Trump commuted his sentence, told reporters in August that money he earns sending personalized greetings via the Cameo app is "surprisingly lucrative." A personal video greeting from Blagojevich costs \$100 and messages for business use are \$500.

Blagojevich also started a podcast, another possible option for Rittenhouse.

There's also merchandise. "Free Kyle" T-shirts and other items that were sold online after the shootings were eventually dropped by the vendor after prosecutors criticized the sales. Acquittal might re-open that market.

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In his interview with Fox News, Rittenhouse hinted that he was looking into possible libel lawsuits. "I feel like my life has been extremely defamed," he said, adding: "I have really good lawyers who are taking care of that right now."

It's not at all clear whether Rittenhouse has a strong libel case. The threshold for proving libel is far higher for figures in the public eye and those charged with crimes, even if they were later acquitted.

And Rittenhouse could be open to some civil liability of his own.

The man who was shot and wounded by Rittenhouse and the family of one of the two men killed are suing Kenosha officials. Neither lawsuit names Rittenhouse as a defendant, and it wasn't immediately clear if claims would be filed against him. The standard of proof is lower in civil trials than in criminal ones.

As Rittenhouse weighs his next moves, many conservatives are rushing to tie themselves to him as a symbol of the vindicated right to self-defense.

Besides Carlson's exclusive interview, the host has a documentary on Rittenhouse upcoming in December, with footage from an embedded camera crew. Trump talked up Rittenhouse's visit to Mar-a-Lago on Sean Hannity's show, complete with photo.

Some of the most conservative members of Congress — Reps. Madison Cawthorn, Paul Gosar and Matt Gaetz — took to social media to dangle internship offers for Rittenhouse, though it's not clear whether they were serious or if Rittenhouse even has an interest in such work. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene introduced a bill to award him the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Rittenhouse himself may need to move fast for the most gain from his story, Bachrach said.

Of Rittenhouse's fame, he said: "I think it has a shelf life, but I don't think it will ever go away."

Forliti reported from Minneapolis.

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

Ethiopian leader called war 'epitome of hell.' Now he's back

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is already a veteran at surprising the world in just three years in power. He's done it again this week by announcing that, after a year of waging war, he will lead it from the battlefield.

Abiy's rule has been short in the vast sweep of Ethiopian history, but he has spent almost all his life preparing for it. Told as a child by his mother that she believed he would lead Ethiopia, he now speaks of martyrdom, if needed, to hold the nation together.

Abiy rocketed to office out of seemingly nowhere in 2018 with vows of dramatic reforms to a long-repressive national government. He also announced he would make peace with neighboring Eritrea after years of bitter conflict. For that, the youthful prime minister was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Then, less than a year later, Abiy announced his military was at war with the leaders of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, who had dominated the previous national government but quickly found friction with the prime minister. Political differences turned to gunfire in November 2020.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since then, and close to half a million people inside Tigray now face the world's worst famine crisis in a decade, one that the United States has called "entirely man-made."

The 45-year-old Abiy has now plunged into the fight, arriving at the battlefield on Tuesday, a government spokesman said.

The prime minister is no stranger to war. As a teenager, he joined fighters who eventually overthrew the country's Marxist Derg regime, then signed up for the new government's military. He took part in Ethiopia's war against Eritrea as a radio operator, serving at the border in Tigray, and later became a lieutenant colonel.

Now roles are dramatically reversed. The Tigray fighters Abiy once called friends are now the enemy,

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and the Eritrean soldiers he once fought have been allowed to join the war as Ethiopia's allies.

Years after his career turned from the military to politics, Abiy faces a battlefield challenge he has never faced before: Commanding an army.

But the prime minister is known as a man with a sense of destiny.

He "clearly has a personal sense of his right to be ruler of Ethiopia and take on the responsibility it entails," said Christopher Clapham, a retired professor associated with the University of Cambridge.

Overseeing the fracture of Ethiopia, a nation with a 3,000-year history, would be a "massive blow" to Abiy, Clapham said, and by heading to the battlefield he is following the tradition of emperors.

But emperors can fall, and governments, too. The rival Tigray forces, whose advance on Ethiopia's capital in recent weeks prompted a national state of emergency, want to see Abiy gone, by force if needed.

The deeply religious prime minister came to office preaching national unity, and representing it as well. The son of a Christian and Muslim and of mixed ethnic heritage, he shocked Africa's second-most populous country by apologizing for the past government's abuses. Tigrayans have recalled cheering him on, at first.

"War is the epitome of hell for all involved," Abiy said in his Nobel address in those earlier days.

Now the hardened positions by the warring sides, each believing they can be victorious, have tested the efforts of mediators from the United States and African Union. Abiy believes the Tigray forces will be pushed back into their region, U.S. envoy Jeffrey Feltman said this week. But he added, "I question that confidence."

The war front, Feltman said, is edging closer to Ethiopia's capital, with the Tigray fighters newly on the move toward Debre Sina, less than a day's drive from Addis Ababa. The fighters are also trying to cut off a crucial supply line from neighboring Djibouti, a further threat to Africa's diplomatic capital.

Accordingly, a growing number of countries have told their citizens to leave immediately. And the U.S. has told Americans again and again that no Afghanistan-style evacuation is coming for them.

The war, Abiy said in announcing his move to the battlefield, "is a struggle that determines whether we exist or not. But we will definitely win. It is unthinkable for Ethiopia to be defeated. We are in a time when it requires to lead the country by paying the sacrifice."

He called on fellow Ethiopians to meet him there.

Scholz seals deal to crown career as German chancellor

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Olaf Scholz is set to become post-World War II Germany's ninth chancellor, crowning a career that has seen him serve in a string of top government posts, after leading his party to an election comeback that appeared hugely unlikely just a few months ago.

The 63-year-old on Wednesday sealed a deal for his center-left Social Democrats to lead Germany's next government in a coalition with the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats. The agreement followed relatively quick talks that were disciplined and discreet, qualities that reflect Scholz's own image.

Scholz has a terse, no-nonsense approach typical of his home city of Hamburg, where he once worked as a lawyer — an even more sober style than that of outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel. He joined the Social Democratic Party at 17 and was first elected to parliament in 1998.

He is unflappable and unshakably self-confident, but no master of rhetoric. During a turbulent stint as the Social Democrats' general secretary in the early 2000s, he earned the nickname "Scholzomat" for what critics said was a habit of constantly repeating the same phrases in support of then-Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's welfare-state trims and economic reforms, which faced dissent within the party.

Scholz's experience, attention to detail and sometimes technocratic image became an asset during this year's election campaign, in which he led the long-struggling Social Democrats from third place in polls to a narrow win in the Sept. 26 election.

He was helped by a series of gaffes and slips by his two opponents — Armin Laschet, the leader of Merkel's center-right Christian Democrats, and Annalena Baerbock, who was making the Greens' first run

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for the chancellery.

The Social Democrats' stock rose as Scholz, the finance minister and vice chancellor in Merkel's government, calmly ran through a largely accident-free campaign and turned in unspectacular but solid performances in three televised pre-election debates.

He also appeared to portray himself as Merkel's natural successor, although he belongs to a different party. At one point, he posed with the outgoing chancellor's trademark "Merkel diamond" folded-hands gesture in an "interview without words" for the daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*.

Scholz first served in the national government from 2007-9 as Merkel's labor minister, during the global financial crisis. Germany kept down unemployment, notably by using a government-backed salary support program to keep people on companies' payrolls. The same device served it well during the coronavirus pandemic, in which Scholz has helped guide Germany's economic response as finance minister.

Scholz became the mayor of Hamburg, Germany's second-biggest city, in 2011. He won back the traditional Social Democratic stronghold after years of center-left disarray in Hamburg, saying his party knew that "if you order leadership from me, you get it."

A low point was Hamburg's hosting of the 2017 Group of 20 summit, remembered largely for widespread rioting by hard-left protesters. Scholz had previously dismissed worries about the event.

The following year, he was elevated to the No. 2 job in Merkel's government after his party reluctantly ditched a pledge to go into opposition. As finance minister, Scholz was a driving force behind moves to place a global minimum tax of at least 15% on large companies and led efforts to cushion the pandemic's financial impact. But he also drew criticism over the collapse last year of payment processing company Wirecard.

The pragmatic Scholz ran for the Social Democrats' leadership in 2019 but was spurned by members in favor of a left-leaning duo, Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans. However, the party put that contest behind it and had no hesitation in turning to him last year as its candidate to succeed Merkel.

Political opponent-turned-ally Christian Lindner, the leader of the pro-business Free Democrats and Scholz's designated successor as finance minister, said Wednesday that negotiators "experienced him as a strong leadership personality who has the experience and professionalism to lead this country."

"Olaf Scholz will be a strong chancellor for Germany," he said.

Follow AP's coverage of Germany's transition to a new government at <https://apnews.com/hub/germany-election>.

German parties reach deal for government to end Merkel era

By GEIR MOULSON and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's would-be governing parties vowed Wednesday to modernize Europe's biggest economy and step up efforts against climate change as they announced an agreement that leaves center-left leader Olaf Scholz poised to replace longtime Chancellor Angela Merkel within weeks.

The coalition will shift Germany's leadership a bit to the left after 16 years under the center-right Merkel, who gained plaudits for her handling of a series of crises over the years. Scholz signaled that the country's foreign policy would not change much.

Scholz's Social Democrats, the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats are set to take the reins just as Germany faces its biggest surge of coronavirus infections in the pandemic so far, a reality that somewhat overshadowed the launch. Scholz opened the event by promising that "the new government will do everything necessary to bring us through this time well."

The three-party alliance is a first for a German government and creates strange bedfellows, with two left-leaning parties and one, the Free Democrats, that in recent decades allied with the center-right. But Scholz presented it as a big opportunity.

The new government will not seek "the lowest common denominator, but the politics of big impacts," he promised.

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Scholz, 63, said he expects that members of the three parties will give their blessing to the deal in the next 10 days. The biggest challenge is a vote by the Greens' roughly 125,000-strong membership. The other two parties plan to sign off on it at conventions during the first weekend in December, paving the way for parliament to elect Scholz as chancellor during the week starting Dec. 6.

Scholz has been Merkel's finance minister and vice chancellor since 2018 in the outgoing "grand coalition" of Germany's traditional big parties, in which his party was the junior partner. Merkel didn't run for a fifth term, and her Christian Democrats will head into opposition after a disastrous campaign that ended with defeat in Germany's Sept. 26 election.

"We will take over the government in a time of crisis," Green co-leader Robert Habeck acknowledged, describing the coalition deal as a sign of "courage and confidence" that fits those times. "The guiding principle of this government is a society that acts, a state that invests and a Germany that simply works."

Key pledges by the prospective partners include an increase in the minimum wage to 12 euros (\$13.50) per hour from the current 9.60 euros — a move that Scholz said "means a wage increase for 10 million citizens." And they also aim to get 400,000 new apartments per year built in an effort to curb rising rental prices.

Habeck also said measures planned by the government would put Germany on a path to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris climate accord. It also intends to bring forward Germany's exit from coal-fueled power from 2038, "ideally" completing it in 2030.

Habeck added that, instead of formally setting new goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it will focus on concrete measures including ensuring that the price per ton of carbon dioxide won't fall below 60 euros — a measure that will speed up the coal phaseout.

At the Free Democrats' insistence, the prospective partners said they won't raise taxes or loosen curbs on running up debt.

The pro-business party's leader, Christian Lindner, said that "together we have a mission to modernize this country." He proclaimed that "we are going to digitize this state." That's a challenge in a country that has notoriously patchy internet and cellphone coverage and where government services are often offline.

Lindner, who is set to become finance minister, also said the coalition would implement more liberal social policies. Those include legalizing the sale of cannabis for recreational purposes in licensed shops.

The new government plans to place a greater emphasis on the welfare and participation of children and young people. The coalition deal says it will aim to lower the voting age in European elections from 18 to 16, and aim to change Germany's constitution so 16-year-olds can vote in federal elections too.

Looking beyond Germany, Scholz stressed the importance of a strong Europe, friendship with France and partnership with the United States as key cornerstones of the new government's foreign policy — continuing a long post-war tradition.

It's typical in Germany for coalitions to draw up detailed agreements for their four-year terms; this one runs to 177 pages.

The Social Democrats will get seven Cabinet ministers, including the defense and health portfolios, as well as the chancellery. The Greens will get five, including the foreign minister and a minister for "economy and climate protection," a new combination. Neither party announced who would get those jobs.

The Free Democrats will get four ministries, including the key finance portfolio that goes to Lindner.

He acknowledged that the unexpectedly leak-free talks were "extraordinarily discreet." But he added: "I can assure you that the talks were just as argumentative as they were discreet — we argued over some individual sentences for hours."

Merkel's Christian Democrats are currently preoccupied with a contest over who will become their next leader and revive the party's fortunes after it suffered its worst-ever election result.

Follow AP's coverage of Germany's transition to a new government at <https://apnews.com/hub/germany-election>.

Sweden's first female prime minister quits hours later

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Hours after being tapped as Sweden's first female prime minister, Magdalena Andersson resigned Wednesday after suffering a budget defeat in parliament and her coalition partner the Greens left the two-party minority government.

The government's own budget proposal was rejected in favor of one presented by the opposition that includes the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats. Sweden's third-largest party is rooted in a neo-Nazi movement. The vote was 154-143 in favor of the opposition's budget proposal.

Andersson, leader of the Social Democratic party, decided it was best to step down from the post more than seven hours after she made history by becoming the first woman to lead the country.

"For me, it is about respect, but I also do not want to lead a government where there may be grounds to question its legitimacy," Andersson told a news conference.

Andersson, who was finance minister before briefly becoming prime minister, informed parliamentary Speaker Andreas Norlen that she is still interested in leading a Social Democratic one-party government.

Norlen, the speaker of Sweden's 349-seat parliament, said he will contact Sweden's eight party leaders "to discuss the situation." On Thursday, he will announce the road ahead.

Andersson said that "a coalition government should resign if a party chooses to leave the government. Despite the fact that the parliamentary situation is unchanged, it needs to be tried again."

Even though the Green Party pulled its support for her government, it said it is prepared to stand behind Andersson in a new vote to tap a prime minister.

But the Greens said it was in the best interests of the party to pull support for her after the budget defeat in parliament.

"We have a united party behind us saying we can not sit in government that implements a policy (the Sweden Democrats) negotiated. We must look our voters in the eye and feel pride," said Marta Stenevi, Green Party spokesperson as the party chose to resign from the government.

The other Green Party spokesperson Per Bolund said "that is something we deeply regret."

Earlier in the day, Andersson said she could "govern the country with the opposition's budget."

The approved budget was based on the government's own proposal but of the 74 billion kronor (\$8.2 billion) that the government wanted to spend on reforms, just over 20 billion kronor (\$2.2 billion) will be redistributed next year, Swedish broadcaster SVT said. The approved budget aims at reducing taxes, increased salaries for police officers and more money to different sectors of Sweden's judiciary system.

Andersson's appointment as prime minister had marked a milestone for Sweden, viewed for decades as one of Europe's most progressive countries when it comes to gender relations, but which had yet to have a woman in the top political post.

Andersson had been tapped to replace Stefan Lofven as party leader and prime minister, roles he relinquished earlier this year.

Earlier in the day, 117 lawmakers voted yes to Andersson, 174 rejected her appointment while 57 abstained and one lawmaker was absent.

Under the Swedish Constitution, prime ministers can be named and govern as long as a parliamentary majority — a minimum of 175 lawmakers — is not against them.

Sweden's next general election is scheduled for Sept. 11.

Germany faces grim COVID milestone with leadership in flux

By DANIEL NIEMANN and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

ESCHWEILER, Germany (AP) — As Germany inches toward the mark of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, the country's leader-in-waiting announced plans Wednesday to create an expert team at the heart of the next government to provide daily scientific advice on tackling the coronavirus pandemic.

Olaf Scholz of the center-left Social Democrats announced the measure, along with the creation of a standing emergency committee, at the start of a news conference laying out the deal his party and two

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others have agreed to form a new government.

"Sadly, the coronavirus still hasn't been beaten," Scholz said. "Every day we see new records as far as the number of infections are concerned."

German officials — from outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel to state governors and the three parties now poised for power — have been criticized for failing to take decisive steps to flatten the curve of infections during the transition period since September's nation election.

Doctors and virologists have been warning for months that Germany faces a surge in new cases that could overwhelm its health care system, even as senior politicians dangled the prospect of further lifting pandemic restrictions.

"Nobody had the guts to take the lead and announce unpopular measures," said Uwe Janssens, who heads the intensive care department at the St. Antonius hospital in Eschweiler, west of Cologne.

"This lack of leadership is the reason we are here now," he said.

Doctors like Janssens are bracing for an influx of coronavirus patients as confirmed cases hit fresh daily highs that experts say is also being fueled by vaccine skeptics.

Resistance to getting the shot — including the one developed by German company BioNTech together with U.S. partner Pfizer — remains strong among a sizeable minority of the country. Vaccination rates have stalled at 68% of the population, far short of the 75% or higher that the government had aimed for.

"We've increasingly got younger people in intensive care," said Janssens. "The amount of time they're treated is significantly longer and it blocks intensive care beds for a longer period."

Older people who got vaccinated early in 2021 are also seeing their immunity wear off, making them vulnerable to serious illness again, he said. Echoing problems seen during the initial vaccine rollout, authorities have struggled to meet demand for boosters even as they tried to encourage holdouts to get their first shot.

Some German politicians are suggesting it's time to consider a vaccine mandate, either for specific professions or for the population as a whole. Austria took that step last week, announcing COVID-19 shots will become compulsory for all starting in February after seeing a similar reluctance to get vaccinated fuel fresh outbreaks and hospitalizations.

Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel said in June that she didn't favor such a measure.

Scholz, who is currently finance minister under Merkel, had initially refused to be drawn on whether he would back compulsory COVID-19 shots.

But speaking alongside the leaders of the environmentalist Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, Scholz said Wednesday that the new government will require staff in care homes to get vaccinated. He said an expansion of the measure could be considered, without elaborating.

A fund of 1 billion euros (\$1.12 billion) will also be established to provide bonus payments to carers in hospitals and nursing homes, he said.

The three parties recently used their parliamentary majority to pass a law that replaces the existing legal foundations for pandemic restrictions with narrower measures, starting Wednesday. These include a requirement for workers to provide their employers with proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative test. The change was criticized by Merkel's center-right Union bloc as making it harder for Germany's 16 governors to impose hard lockdowns.

Merkel's spokesman acknowledged Wednesday that "there are many experts who doubt that what's been decided so far, as sensible and important as it is, will be enough to slow the wave (of infections)."

Germany's disease control agency on reported a record 66,884 newly confirmed cases Wednesday, and 335 deaths. The total death toll from COVID-19 stood at 99,768 since the start of the pandemic, the Robert Koch Institute said. German weekly Die Zeit, which conducts its own count based on local health authority figures, said the 100,000 threshold had already been passed.

Meanwhile, health authorities in five eastern states and Bavaria have activated an emergency system to coordinate the distribution of 80 seriously ill patients to other parts of the country. Earlier this month, two patients were taken from southern Germany to Italy for treatment, a significant change from last year,

when Italian patients were being sent to German hospitals.

Germany boasted almost four times as many intensive care beds per capita as Italy had then, a factor that experts say was key to the low German death toll at the time.

Since January, Germany has had to cut its ICU capacity by 4,000 beds due to lack of staff, many of whom have quit because of the pressure they endured earlier in the pandemic.

"It's hard for people to cope with this, physically and psychologically," Janssens said of the situation doctors and nurses face in the coming months.

"We'll survive, somehow," he added.

The World Health Organization's European office warned this week that availability of hospital beds will again decide how well the region copes with the expected rise in cases over the coming months — along with vaccination rates.

Based on current trends, Europe could see another 700,000 deaths reported across the 53-nation region by next spring, with 49 countries expected to see "high or extreme stress in intensive care units," the agency said Tuesday.

Frank Jordans reported from Berlin.

Ethiopia says PM, a Nobel Peace laureate, is at battlefield

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's Nobel Peace Prize-winning prime minister has gone to the battlefield, his government announced Wednesday, after the leader said martyrdom might be necessary in the year-long war with rival fighters approaching the capital.

State media showed no images of Abiy Ahmed, a 45-year-old former soldier, and his spokeswoman Bilen Seyoum dismissed a request for details on his location as "incredible." He arrived at the front Tuesday, according to a government spokesman.

Tens of thousands of people have died in the war between Ethiopian federal and allied troops and fighters from the country's Tigray region. The prospect of the ancient nation breaking apart has alarmed both Ethiopians and observers who fear what would happen to the often turbulent Horn of Africa at large. Countries including France, Germany and Turkey have told their citizens to leave immediately.

Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize just two years ago for sweeping political reforms and for making peace with neighboring Eritrea. His trajectory from winning the Nobel to now potentially heading into battle has shocked many.

But a move to the front would follow the tradition of Ethiopian leaders including Emperor Haile Selassie and Emperor Yohannes IV, who was killed in battle in 1889, said Christopher Clapham, a retired professor associated with the University of Cambridge.

"It strikes me as a very traditional Ethiopian exertion of leadership," Clapham said. "It might be necessary to rescue what looks like a very faltering Ethiopian military response."

The Tigray forces, who had long dominated the national government before Abiy came to power, appear to have the momentum. They've approached the capital of Addis Ababa in recent weeks with the aim of strengthening their negotiating position or simply forcing the prime minister to step down.

While unusual, a leader's move to the front has occurred elsewhere in Africa, but at times with deadly results: Chad's longtime president, Idriss Deby Itno, was killed while battling rebels in April, according to the military.

"The situation is extremely dangerous," said Adem Abebe, researcher with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. "If (Abiy) gets hurt or killed, it's not just the federal government that will collapse, the army will as well."

The prime minister announced earlier this week that he would go to the battlefield, saying that "this is a time when leading a country with martyrdom is needed." The deputy prime minister is handling the government's day-to-day operations in the meantime, spokesman Legesse Tulu said Wednesday.

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Abiy also invited Ethiopians to join him — the latest call for every able citizen in the country of more than 110 million people to fight. There have been reports of hurried military trainings and allegations of forced conscription in recent months, while analysts have warned that, with the military apparently weakened, ethnic-based militias are stepping up.

“He may be seriously considering becoming a martyr,” said the man who nominated Abiy for the Nobel, Awol Allo, a senior lecturer in law at Keele University in Britain.

Allo said the move fits with the prime minister’s view of himself and his sense that he was destined to lead. But he also didn’t rule out the possibility that Abiy may have simply left the capital for a safer location — not the front — and was directing the war from there.

U.S. envoy Jeffrey Feltman told reporters on Tuesday that he fears that “nascent” progress in mediation efforts with the warring sides could be outpaced by the “alarming” military developments.

The war began in November 2020, when a growing political rift between the Tigray leaders and Abiy’s government broke into open conflict. Abiy quietly allowed soldiers from Eritrea to enter Tigray and attack ethnic Tigrayans, resulting in some of the worst atrocities of the war. He denied the Eritreans’ presence for months.

The Tigray forces have said they want Abiy out, among other demands. Abiy’s government wants the Tigray forces, which it has designated as a terrorist group, to withdraw to their region as part of their conditions.

“Unless there is some kind of divine intervention, I don’t see any chance for a peaceful resolution through dialogue because the positions are highly polarized,” said Kassahun Berhanu, professor of political science at Addis Ababa University, who added he believed Abiy’s announcement about going to the front is “aimed at boosting popular morale.”

Millions of civilians are trapped and going hungry amid the fighting. Ethiopia’s government has blockaded the Tigray region for several months, saying it fears that humanitarian aid will end up in the hands of fighters, while hundreds of thousands of people in the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions are beyond the reach of significant aid as Tigray forces advance through those areas.

One target of the Tigray forces appears to be the supply line from neighboring Djibouti to Ethiopia’s capital, and the U.S. envoy warned the fighters against cutting off that road or entering Addis Ababa.

That could be “catastrophic” for the country, Feltman said to reporters on Tuesday.

African Union envoy Olesegun Obasanjo also has been mediating but has not spoken publicly about his work in recent days.

US jobless claims hit 52-year low after seasonal adjustments

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits plummeted last week to the lowest level in more than half a century, another sign that the U.S. job market is rebounding rapidly from last year’s coronavirus recession.

Jobless claims dropped by 71,000 to 199,000, the lowest since mid-November 1969. But seasonal adjustments around the Thanksgiving holiday contributed significantly to the bigger-than-expected drop. Unadjusted, claims actually ticked up by more than 18,000 to nearly 259,000.

The four-week average of claims, which smooths out weekly ups and downs, also dropped — by 21,000 to just over 252,000, the lowest since mid-March 2020 when the pandemic slammed the economy.

Since topping 900,000 in early January, the applications have fallen steadily toward and now fallen below their prepandemic level of around 220,000 a week. Claims for jobless aid are a proxy for layoffs.

Overall, 2 million Americans were collecting traditional unemployment checks the week that ended Nov. 13, down slightly from the week before.

“Overall, expect continued volatility in the headline figures, but the trend remains very slowly lower,” Contingent Macro Advisors wrote in a research note.

Until Sept. 6, the federal government had supplemented state unemployment insurance programs by

paying an extra payment of \$300 a week and extending benefits to gig workers and to those who were out of work for six months or more. Including the federal programs, the number of Americans receiving some form of jobless aid peaked at more than 33 million in June 2020.

The job market has staged a remarkable comeback since the spring of 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic forced businesses to close or cut hours and kept many Americans at home as a health precaution. In March and April last year, employers slashed more than 22 million jobs.

But government relief checks, super-low interest rates and the rollout of vaccines combined to give consumers the confidence and financial wherewithal to start spending again. Employers, scrambling to meet an unexpected surge in demand, have made 18 million new hires since April 2020 and are expected to add another 575,000 this month. Still, the United States remains 4 million short of the jobs it had in February 2020.

Companies now complain that they can't find workers to fill job openings, a near-record 10.4 million in September. Workers, finding themselves with bargaining clout for the first time in decades, are becoming choosier about jobs; a record 4.4 million quit in September, a sign they have confidence in their ability to find something better.

'They become our family:' US farming couple rescues Afghans

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

FERGUS FALLS, Minnesota (AP) — The U.S. soldiers called them "Caroline's guys." They transformed farms in a war zone - risking their lives for the program she built, sharing her belief that something as simple as apple trees could change the world.

The university-educated Afghans helped turn land in an overgrazed, drought-stricken and impoverished region in eastern Afghanistan into verdant gardens and orchards that still feed local families today.

In the process, the 12 agricultural specialists, all traditional Afghan men, formed a deep, unexpected bond with their boss, an American woman who worked as a U.S. Department of Agriculture adviser in the region for two years.

Now Caroline Clarin is trying to save them one by one, doing it all from the 1910 Minnesota farmhouse she shares with her wife, drawing from retirement funds to help a group of men who share her love of farming.

Clarin has helped get five of her former employees and their families into the U.S. since 2017, while her wife has helped them rebuild their lives in America.

Since the Taliban seized power in August, texts from those remaining have grown more urgent and Clarin says she can "feel the panic increasing" as winter approaches and food shortages grow. She has stepped up her efforts, working endless hours, diligently tracking their visa applications. She calls senators to apply pressure so they don't languish like the thousands of other visa applications in the backlogged system for Afghans who supported the U.S. government during the long war.

She's driven by fear her team will be killed by the Taliban, though the new government has promised not to retaliate against Afghans who helped the U.S.. She also wants to give them a future.

Since U.S. forces withdrew, more than 70,000 Afghans have come to the United States and thousands are languishing at U.S. military bases as resettlement agencies struggle to keep up.

Clarin knows she cannot save everyone, but she's determined to help those she can.

After she left Afghanistan in 2011, she was consumed by anger over her program being gutted as the U.S. government changed its priorities.

"When I got on the plane, it was like leaving my family on the helipad," she said. "I felt like I deserted them."

The most recent of her friends to escape was Ihsanullah Patan, a horticulturist who waited seven years for a special immigrant visa. After he texted her that two of his close friends had just been killed, Clarin withdrew \$6,000 from a retirement fund to get him and his family on a commercial flight to Minnesota before the Taliban took control of the country this summer.

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When Clarin picked them up at the airport in Minneapolis at midnight for the three-hour drive back to Fergus Falls, she was consumed with joy.

"It was like my son came home," she said.

Patan arrived in Minnesota with saffron, Afghan almonds, and 5 kilos (11 pounds) of Afghan green tea to share. He also gave Clarin and her wife, Sheril Raymond, seeds of Afghanistan's tender leeks for their garden.

He was the first member to join Clarin's team after she was sent to Paktika province. A confident, young university graduate, Patan spelled out what was needed in the region. It would become the basis of her program: Seeds, trees and the skills to plant gardens and orchards.

Patan considers Clarin and her wife family. His three sons and daughter call them their "aunties."

In fact, he's decided to live in nearby Fergus Falls, a town of 14,000, instead of moving to a larger city with an Afghan transplant community.

Surrounded by farmland stretching to the North Dakota border, the town's skyline is dominated by grain elevators and the spires of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, a reflection of the region's Scandinavian roots.

The only other Afghan family in town is his cousin's. Sami Massoodi, who has a degree in livestock management, also worked for Clarin's team in Afghanistan and arrived in 2017. He and his family lived on their farm before they got established in Fergus Falls.

"In Fergus Falls, they have really good people, really friendly people," Patan said as he drives his minivan down the tree-lined streets to pick up his 5-year-old daughter at a Head Start program.

It is a place where neighbors pay unannounced visits to say "hi" and people greet the postmaster by name. It is also staunchly Republican. Fergus Falls is the county seat of Otter Tail County, which voted twice for former President Donald Trump.

But people in town say friendships and family take precedence over political views, and there is broad empathy for the struggle of immigrants since many people's parents, grandparents or great grandparents came from Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

Only months after they arrived, the Patan family already feels at home in large part because of Raymond.

She helped enroll their kids in school, find a dentist for 9-year-old Sala's infected tooth, and sign Patan up for car insurance, something that was new for the 35-year-old.

She lined up English classes and state and federal services for new immigrants. She drove Patan an hour to the nearest testing site for a driver's license. After he failed twice because his English was not proficient enough, he asked if there was a test in his native Pashto language, like in Virginia and California. There wasn't. So Raymond found a site, another hour away, that would allow him to review his errors. On his third try, he passed.

Clarin has tracked down a sheep on craigslist for Eid, while Raymond watched YouTube videos on how to slaughter livestock according to halal principles, since the closest halal butcher is an hour away in Fargo, North Dakota.

For Patan, they have been a comfort in a strange place.

"When we are going to their house, we feel like we went to Afghanistan and we are going to meet our close relatives," he said.

He longs for his homeland, the family festivities. Patan's wife makes their traditional dishes still, like Bolani Afghani, a fried, vegetable-filled flatbread that Clarin enjoyed with him in Afghanistan.

Over there, Patan and her team were the ones helping her feel at home.

It was the longest she and Raymond had been apart since they started dating in 1988.

Raymond, who cares for the chickens, pigs and other animals on their farm, would do video calls often, staying online even after Clarin had fallen asleep.

Two years after Clarin returned, they married in August 2013 when same-sex marriage became legal in Minnesota.

Homosexuality is still widely seen as taboo and indecent in Afghanistan, where same-sex relations are

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illegal.

Yet, none of the Afghan families have asked about their marriage or expressed judgment, the couple said. Patan calls them his "sisters."

"We have a lot of respect for them," he said.

Both Clarin and Patan speak passionately about farming, describing in detail how to get a good apple crop and ward off disease.

Clarin arranged for the U.S. military to take her team in convoys to remote areas to train farmers, empowering Afghans to teach each other skills. They lined canals to ensure clean water. They worked with farmers to plant trees and build stone barriers to control flooding. They distributed seeds to 1,200 families, who have since shared seeds with more people.

The program trained about 5,000 farmers in Paktika from 2009 to 2011. They provided growers hoop-houses, apple trees, pruning equipment and small grants. They taught farmers tangible solutions, including using buckets with drip lines to irrigate gardens and conserve water.

The Taliban tried to sabotage the trust they built with farmers, Clarin said. Once, an explosive blew up in a red bucket like the ones they used for irrigation.

Patan has stayed in contact with some of the farmers in Paktika and proudly shows photos on his iPhone of the tiny stems he distributed that are now trees several feet tall. One farmer texted him to say his harvest is feeding his family as millions of others in the country face severe hunger.

That offers some solace after seeing his homeland fall to the Taliban. It feels good he said to know his work left something lasting and that "the people can still benefit from it. We educated one generation and those fathers will tell it to their sons."

Patan misses his career back in Afghanistan. Most U.S. employers do not recognize degrees from Afghan universities so he plans to return to school to earn a U.S. degree. For now, he is training to be a commercial truck driver, a field flush with opportunities: There were 21 job openings in the area when he started his classes this month.

He wants a local truck route to stay close to home, but it will still be challenging for his family. His wife, Sediqa, does not speak English, nor does she know how to read or write, and does not feel comfortable going out by herself.

She also does not drive.

When she started learning English online, she was at "ground zero," said her teacher, Sara Sundberg at Minnesota State Community and Technical College.

"When she came, she didn't know what to do with a pencil. We had to show her. She held it kind of like a Henna tube," said Sundberg, holding together her thumb and index finger tightly at the tip as if squeezing something.

Five months later, her handwriting is "meticulous," and her pronunciation is excellent, Sundberg said. She's even learning to say Minnesota with the long "ooooo."

"I'm teaching her how to communicate with the community and I want people to understand her," Sundberg said. "Everything is brand new for her."

Sediqa is slowly gaining confidence in speaking with her teacher, but with others she is silent, smiling and staying back with her children.

Everything is new for their children, too. Patan's sons befriended a neighbor boy and jumped for the first time on a trampoline.

His oldest son, Maiwan, decorated his first pumpkin, while his two younger sons wore their traditional Afghan clothes because their teachers told them that on the Friday before Halloween the kids could "dress up," something that was lost in translation but went unnoticed as the other kids excitedly showed them their costumes.

They look forward to the weekends with their "aunties" at the farm.

On a warm October Saturday, Clarin jogged next to 12-year-old Maiwan driving a small tractor as Ali and

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his 9-year-old brother, Sala, dug in the dirt for worms with their cousins, giggling and chatting incessantly in Pashto.

"They are kinda free," Patan says of his kids now, recalling how bomb blasts in Kabul caused them to miss school more than once.

They still carry the trauma. When fireworks were shot off for Fourth of July this summer, Patan called his cousin in a panic and asked if Fergus Falls was being bombed.

Clarín has vowed to get all her guys out.

Since the Taliban took control of the country in August, she has been starting most days around 3 a.m. when she quietly makes her way to her basement office, hours before she heads to her job in Fergus Falls as a U.S. Department of Agriculture wetlands restoration engineer.

Stacks of passport photos, recommendation letters, visa applications and other paperwork cover the tables, her desk and the top of a freezer. Across the hall, Raymond has prepared a guest room for the next Afghan family they get out.

Besides the guys from her program still in Afghanistan, she is aiding other Afghans, including several women. "Why US government did this to us? Why did they leave us behind?" one texts. Desperate pleas for help from more Afghans keep popping up in her phone as word spreads of her efforts.

"My sister said, 'You got your own little Underground Railroad in the basement,'" Clarín said.

So far, the couple has spent just under \$10,000 since May. That includes the airfare for the Patan family, a contribution toward the family's used minivan, and fees for five applications for humanitarian parole for families still in Afghanistan.

Raymond keeps the tally in a notebook.

"It does make me a little nervous because we've lived on the edge for so long," said 57-year-old Raymond, who sews her dresses, knits hats, and bakes bread.

"So I work another year before retiring," Clarín, 55, answers with a shrug.

Two other Afghan families Clarín helped chose to settle in Austin, Texas, and San Diego, partly because in both places there are mosques, halal butcher shops and established Afghan communities. None of that exists in Fergus Falls. They also wanted to avoid Minnesota's winters where wind chill temperatures a few years ago dropped to as low as 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, (-45 degrees Celsius), something Patan was shocked to learn.

But Patan knows there are drawbacks to cities. Another former member of Clarín's team who moved to California recently returned to Minnesota after complaining about the crime in Sacramento. They now live about an hour away but close to Fargo, where there is a mosque.

Patan, who speaks Dari and Pashto, translates documents for Clarín for the visa applications. He worries about his former colleagues, who remain his close friends.

"I hope that one day they can also come here and we will make a big Afghan kind-of-family over here," he said. "All of them want to come here to Fergus."

Raymond worries more than Clarín about money, and she finds the government fee of \$575 per application for humanitarian parole outrageous.

But she also acknowledges they cannot step back now.

"When we bring in a family, they become our family," she said.

Public nuisance laws in opioid cases give hope to both sides

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — A jury's finding this week that three major pharmacy chains are responsible for contributing to the scourge of opioid addiction in two Ohio counties may be just the beginning of a protracted legal battle that ultimately could leave the communities no better off.

The reason is the central argument — that pharmacies created a "public nuisance" by dispensing an overwhelming quantity of prescription painkillers into each county.

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Thousands of state and local governments have sued drugmakers, distributors and pharmacies over a crisis that has contributed to more than 500,000 overdose deaths in the U.S. over the past two decades. The lawsuits generally center on claims the companies created public nuisances by interfering with the rights of the public through the way they marketed, shipped and sold the drugs — feeding the addictions of some patients and providing pills later diverted to the black market.

Similar arguments were used in two other cases — in California and Oklahoma — that went in favor of the industry in the weeks before the Ohio jury's decision. Given those decisions, there is no guarantee that Tuesday's verdict in the case brought by Lake and Trumbull counties against CVS, Walgreens and Walmart will hold up on appeal or lead to similar decisions elsewhere.

"There's been a variety of different decisions lately that should give us reason to be cautious about what this really means in the grand scheme," said Kevin Roy, chief public policy officer at Shatterproof, which advocates for solutions to the nation's addiction and overdose crisis.

The industry argues it did nothing illegal and that public nuisance laws simply don't apply to prescribing and distributing prescription painkillers.

"As we have said throughout this process, we never manufactured or marketed opioids nor did we distribute them to the 'pill mills' and internet pharmacies that fueled this crisis," Walgreens spokesperson Fraser Engerman said in a statement. "The plaintiffs' attempt to resolve the opioid crisis with an unprecedented expansion of public nuisance law is misguided and unsustainable."

Public nuisance claims are typically used to address local concerns like blighted homes, illegal drug-dealing or dangerous animals. Such claims were used in lawsuits states brought against tobacco companies in the 1990s, but those led to settlements rather than trials.

Lawyers representing the counties and other local governments involved in the broader universe of opioid lawsuits said the companies have been complicit in creating local public health emergencies by opening more locations, flooding communities with pills and facilitating the flow of opioids into a secondary market.

In Trumbull County alone, roughly 80 million prescription painkillers were dispensed between 2012 and 2016 — equivalent to 400 for every resident. In Lake County, it was some 61 million pills.

Rev. Barbara Holzhauser has seen the flood of opioids tear the seams of her community. She has been on the receiving end of too many calls telling her of another overdose death and has officiated at many of those funerals.

"In almost every situation the person, just like my nephew, has tried to get well and has fallen back into it," said Holzhauser, whose nephew died from an overdose eight years ago.

An assistant minister at Mentor United Methodist Church, she said the crisis has been devastating across Lake County, a mix of blue collar and affluent suburban neighborhoods just east of Cleveland. Holzhauser said she was glad the county was doing something to hold the drug industry accountable.

"I can't think of anyone that I know that hasn't been affected by it somehow," she said.

The attorneys representing local governments in the national opioid litigation cited impacts like those on Lake County in defending the use of public nuisance statutes, asserting companies were negligent or careless. Attorney Mark Lanier said the pharmacies should have exercised greater responsibility in dispensing opioids.

"These are drugs that are highly addictive," Lanier said. "And through this trial, the jury was able to assess those national measures that have been put in place by these pharmaceutical chains and shout out from the rooftops: 'Inadequate.'"

Yet the pharmacy chains have vowed to keep fighting and see reason for optimism.

An Oklahoma judge ruled in 2019 that drugmaker Johnson & Johnson created a nuisance and ordered the company to pay the state \$465 million. This month, the state Supreme Court rejected the verdict, saying Oklahoma's public nuisance law didn't apply to the opioid maker.

Also this month, a California judge ruled in favor of a group of drugmakers being sued under a public nuisance statute by county and city governments.

Tuesday's ruling bucked that trend. The Ohio case also is unique because it was the first of the U.S. opioid trials to be decided by a jury rather than a court, and the first on claims against pharmacies.

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Elizabeth Burch, a University of Georgia law professor, said pursuing the cases on public nuisance grounds makes sense because the pharmacies were uniquely positioned to watch the addiction crisis develop.

"These are the folks that are on the front lines," she said. "They're seeing the same people coming in and they're seeing the same doctors writing prescriptions."

But she also noted that public nuisance statutes and case law vary by state and that factors such as a compelling lawyer can be enough to swing a verdict. That makes it uncertain whether a consensus will develop around the legal theory.

More tests of the public nuisance laws are on the horizon.

A federal judge in West Virginia heard a case against drug distributors earlier this year but has not yet ruled. Trials are ongoing against distributors in Washington state and manufacturers in New York.

Unlike companies in other segments of the drug industry, no pharmacy has entered into a nationwide settlement deal over the crisis. Joe Rice, one of the lead attorneys representing local governments in the cases, said he hopes the ruling prompts pharmacy chains to start reaching those settlements.

If they don't, it could cost them even more. The two Ohio counties, for instance, are each seeking more than \$1 billion in damages in a second phase of the trial that is expected to be held next April or May.

"We're going to try a lot of cases and we're going to lose some," Rice said. "But we're going to win this war."

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Nov. 25, the 329th day of 2021. There are 36 days left in the year. Today is Thanksgiving.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 25, 1986, the Iran-Contra affair erupted as President Ronald Reagan and Attorney General Edwin Meese revealed that profits from secret arms sales to Iran had been diverted to Nicaraguan rebels.

On this date:

In 1783, the British evacuated New York during the Revolutionary War.

In 1835, American industrialist Andrew Carnegie was born in Dunfermline, Scotland.

In 1947, movie studio executives meeting in New York agreed to blacklist the "Hollywood Ten" who'd been cited for contempt of Congress the day before.

In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a slight stroke.

In 1961, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Enterprise, was commissioned.

In 1963, the body of President John F. Kennedy was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery; his widow, Jacqueline, lighted an "eternal flame" at the gravesite.

In 1987, Harold Washington, the first black mayor of Chicago, died in office at age 65.

In 1999, Elian Gonzalez, a 5-year-old Cuban boy, was rescued by a pair of sport fishermen off the coast of Florida, setting off an international custody battle.

In 2001, as the war in Afghanistan entered its eighth week, CIA officer Johnny "Mike" Spann was killed during a prison uprising in Mazar-e-Sharif, becoming America's first combat casualty of the conflict.

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security, and appointed Tom Ridge to be its head.

In 2009, Toyota said it would replace the gas pedals on 4 million vehicles in the United States because the pedals could get stuck in the floor mats and cause sudden acceleration.

In 2014, President Barack Obama sharply rebuked protesters for racially charged violence in Ferguson, Missouri, saying there was no excuse for burning buildings, torching cars and destroying other property in response to the police shooting death of Michael Brown.

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Ten years ago: The U.S. increased pressure on Egypt's military rulers to hand over power to civilian leaders, and the generals turned to Kamal el-Ganzouri, a Mubarak-era politician to head a new government in a move that failed to satisfy more than 100,000 protesters jamming Tahrir Square.

Five years ago: Fidel Castro, who led his rebels to victorious revolution in 1959, embraced Soviet-style communism and defied the power of 10 U.S. presidents during his half-century of rule in Cuba, died at age 90.

One year ago: Phoning in to an event held by Pennsylvania Republicans to investigate unproven allegations of voter fraud, President Donald Trump again made baseless claims that he had won the election against Joe Biden; Trump said, "This election has to be turned around." Trump pardoned former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who had twice pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his Russia contacts. Millions of Americans took to the skies and the highways ahead of Thanksgiving, disregarding increasingly dire warnings to stay home and limit holiday gatherings to members of their own household. Former Argentine soccer star Diego Maradona died of a heart attack at the age of 60, two weeks after being released from an Argentine hospital following brain surgery.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Kathryn Crosby is 88. Actor Christopher Riordan is 84. Pro Football Hall of Fame coach Joe Gibbs is 81. Singer Bob Lind is 79. Author, actor and economist Ben Stein is 77. Actor John Larroquette is 74. Actor Tracey Walter is 74. Movie director Jonathan Kaplan is 74. Author Charlaine Harris is 70. Retired MLB All-Star Bucky Dent is 70. Dance judge Bruno Tonioli (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 66. Singer Amy Grant is 61. Former NFL quarterback Bernie Kosar is 58. Rock musician Eric Grossman (K's Choice) is 57. Rock musician Scott Mercado is 57. Rock singer Mark Lanegan is 57. Rock singer-musician Tim Armstrong is 56. Actor Steve Harris is 56. Actor Billy Burke is 55. Singer Stacy Lattisaw is 55. Rock musician Rodney Sheppard (Sugar Ray) is 55. Rapper-producer Erick Sermon is 53. Actor Jill Hennessy is 52. Actor Christina Applegate is 50. Actor Eddie Steeples is 48. Actor Kristian Nairn is 46. Former NFL quarterback Donovan McNabb is 45. Actor Jill Flint is 44. Actor Jerry Ferrara is 42. Actor Joel Kinnaman is 42. Actor Valerie Azlynn is 41. Former first daughter Barbara Pierce Bush is 40. Former first daughter Jenna Bush Hager is 40. Actor Katie Cassidy is 35. Actor Stephanie Hsu is 31. Contemporary Christian singer Jamie Grace is 30.