"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition
Today, turning out mostly sunny, chilly, high 59. **Tonight,** clear, frost in some suburbs, low 47. **Tomorrow,** sunny, seasonable, a light breeze, high 63. Weather map, Page A28.

VOL. CLXX .... No. 58,849 NEW YORK, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2020 $3.00

ADAM DEAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Shields, Water Cannons and an Arcane Law
The Thai police wielded stinging liquid and an obscure rule shielding the queen to go after antigovernment demonstrators. Page A13.

White House Unleashes Blitz of Policy Changes As Election Day Nears

Cutting Corners on Getting Public Input for Regulations Affecting Millions

By ERIC LIPTON

WASHINGTON — Facing the prospect that President Trump could lose his re-election bid, his cabinet is scrambling to enact regulatory changes affecting millions of Americans in a blitz so rushed it may leave some changes vulnerable to court challenges.

The effort is evident in a broad range of federal agencies and encompasses proposals like easing limits on how many hours some truckers can spend behind the wheel, giving the government more freedom to collect biometric data and setting federal standards for when workers can be classified as independent contractors rather than employees.

In the bid to lock in new rules before Jan. 20, Mr. Trump's team is limiting or sidestepping requirements for public comment on some of the changes and swatting aside critics who say the administration has failed to carry out sufficiently rigorous analysis.

Some cases, like a new rule to allow railroads to move highly flammable liquefied natural gas on freight trains, have led to warnings of public safety threats.

Every administration pushes to complete as much of its agenda as possible when a president's term is coming to an end, seeking not just to secure its own legacy but also to tie the hands of any successor who tries to undo its work.

But as Mr. Trump completes four years marked by an extensive deregulatory push, the administration's accelerated effort to put a further stamp on federal rules is drawing questions even from some former top officials who served under Republican presidents.

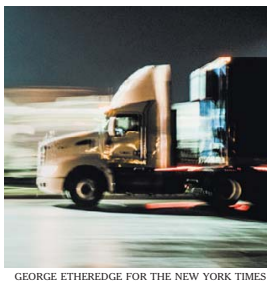
"Two main hallmarks of a good regulation is sound analysis to support the alternatives chosen and extensive public comment to get broader opinion," said Susan E. Dudley, who served as the top White House regulatory official during the George W. Bush administration. "It is a concern if you are bypassing both of those."

Administration officials said they were simply completing work on issues they have targeted since Mr. Trump took office in 2017 promising to curtail the reach of federal regulation.

"President Trump has worked quickly from the beginning of his term to grow the economy by removing the mountain of Obama-Biden job-killing regulations," Russell Vought, the director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, which oversees regulatory policy, said in a statement.

If Democrats take control of Congress, they will have the power to reconsider some of these last-minute regulations, through a law last used at the start of Mr. Trump's tenure by Republicans to repeal certain rules enacted at the end of the Obama administration.

Continued on Page A22



GEORGE ETHEREDGE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The administration wants to ease limits on the hours some truckers can spend driving.

Mexico Shaken By Drug Arrest Of Top General

By AZAM AHMED and ALAN FEUER

MEXICO CITY — American law enforcement agents were listening in as Mexican cartel members chattered on a wiretap, talking about a powerful, shadowy figure known as El Padrino, or The Godfather.

Agents had been closing in on him for months, suspecting that this central figure in the drug trade was a high-ranking official in the Mexican military.

All of a sudden, one of the people under surveillance told his fellow cartel members that El Padrino happened to be on television at that very moment. The agents quickly checked to see who it was — and found it was the Mexican secretary of defense, Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos, according to four American officials involved in the investigation.

In that moment, the authorities say, they finally confirmed that the mystery patron of one of the nation's most violent drug cartels was actually the leader in charge of waging Mexico's war against organized crime.

It was a stunning display of how deep the tendrils of organized crime run in Mexico, and on Thursday night General Cienfuegos was taken into custody by the American authorities at the Los Angeles airport while traveling with his family.

Even for Mexico, a country often inured to the unrelenting violence and corruption that have gripped it for years, the arrest was nothing less than extraordinary, piercing the veil of invincibility that the nation's armed forces have long enjoyed.

General Cienfuegos, Mexico's

Continued on Page A13

In the Suburbs, Women Turn Away From Trump

The Past Four Years Have Soured Voters He Needs to Keep

By LISA LERER

WESTERVILLE, Ohio — Kate Rabinovitch doesn't call herself an activist.

A few weeks ago, the 29-year-old real estate agent wrote personalized messages to voters in her home state of Ohio on behalf of Joseph R. Biden Jr. She texts with undecided friends during the debates, arguing for the Democratic nominee. And she is helping to organize voter drives in her suburban Cleveland neighborhood.

But a political activist? No way.

"It's just not something that I ever would have described myself as, if you talked to me a year ago," said Ms. Rabinovitch. "I'm just a mom with the feels, like hard feels."

Four years ago, Ms. Rabinovitch agonized over which candidate to support. In the final minutes of voting, she walked into the booth still uncertain. She left having cast her ballot for Donald J. Trump.

"I thought, 'Oh, what's the worst that could happen?'" she recalled recently. "I do feel guilty."

For much of the country, polarized views about the president and his chaotic upending of American politics haven't budged since 2016, when he squeezed out a narrow Electoral College victory while losing the popular vote. Yet, there is a demographic group that has changed its mind: white women in the suburbs.

In 2016, the suburbs powered Mr. Trump's victory, with exit polls showing that he won those areas by four points. Now, polling in swing states shows the president losing those voters by historic margins, fueled by a record-breaking gender gap. Mr. Biden leads by 23 points among suburban women in battleground states, according to recent polling by The New York Times and Siena

Continued on Page A19

MARIA MAGDALENA ARRELLAGA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

From Wetland to Inferno
Fires worsened by climate change have destroyed a chunk of Brazil's Pantanal wetland. Page A10.

In Rural West, Jails Are Hubs For Infections

*This article is by **Lucy Tompkins**, **Maura Turcotte** and **Libby Seline**.*

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — For months, the jail in central Montana's Cascade County was free of the coronavirus, which seemed as distant a threat as it did in much of the nation's rural Mountain West.

Then a few people who had the virus were arrested. By the time Paul Krogue, the jail's medical director, realized there was a problem, nearly 50 inmates were infected in the jail, where some had been sleeping on mats on an overcrowded floor. After several weeks, Mr. Krogue got a call that infections were spreading to a side of the jail that had been virus-free.

He hung up the phone and put his head in his hands.

"I just kind of lost it, like, 'My God, I don't know how much longer I can do this,'" Mr. Krogue, a nurse practitioner, recalled. "I was just scared that I'm not going to be able to see it through, that I'm going to get sick — you just feel so exhausted and it's just a lot."

The Mountain West, which for months avoided the worst of the pandemic, has rapidly devolved into one of the most alarming hot spots in a country that recorded its eight millionth confirmed case on Thursday, a day when more than 65,000 cases were announced nationwide, the most in a single day since July.

Continued on Page A6

Trump Shrugs Over His Debts, But Test Awaits

By RUSS BUETTNER and SUSANNE CRAIG

President Trump painted a rosy picture of his financial condition during a televised town hall on Thursday night, calling his hundreds of millions of dollars in debt coming due "a peanut" and saying he had borrowed it as a favor to lenders eager to take advantage of his financial strength.

In fact, the loans, and the unusual requirement he had to accept to receive them, illustrate the financial challenges he faces and the longstanding reluctance of banks to deal with him.

Mr. Trump had to personally guarantee $421 million in debt, a rare step that lenders only require of businesses that may not be able to repay. The commitment puts his assets on the line and could place his lenders, should he be re-elected, in the position of deciding whether to foreclose on a sitting president.

The personal guarantee also speaks to why, despite Mr. Trump's assertion that banks are eager to lend him money, nearly all the money he borrowed in the last decade came from only two institutions.

"When a bank asks for a personal guarantee, it is because the bank isn't satisfied with the creditworthiness of the borrower," said Richard Scott Carnell, who served as assistant secretary for finan-

Continued on Page A16

When a Vigilante's Call to Action Is Only a Facebook Post Away

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

Tapping on his cellphone with a sense of purpose, Kevin Mathewson, a former wedding photographer and onetime city alderman in Kenosha, Wis., did not slow down to fix his typos as he dashed off an online appeal to his neighbors. It was time, he wrote on Facebook in late August, to "take up arms to defend out City tonight from the evil thugs."

One day earlier, hundreds of residents had poured onto the streets of Kenosha to protest the police shooting of 29-year-old Jacob Blake. Disturbed by the sight of buildings in flames when he drove downtown, Mr. Mathewson decided it was time for people to arm themselves to protect their houses and businesses.

To his surprise, some 4,000 people responded on Facebook. Within minutes, the Kenosha

Heating Up Right-Wing Fears in Kenosha

Guard had sprung to life.

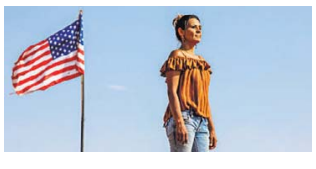
His call to arms — along with similar calls from others inside and outside the state — propelled civilians bearing military-style rifles onto the streets, where late that night a gunman scuffling with protesters shot three of them, two fatally. The Kenosha Guard then evaporated just as quickly as it arose.

Long a divisive figure in Kenosha, Mr. Mathewson, 36, who sprinkles his sentences with "Jeez!" and describes himself as "chunky," does not fit the typical profile of a rifle-toting watchdog, although he said he supported

Continued on Page A23

DISTORTIONS

On Friday, President Trump tweeted a satirical article about Twitter shutting down to shield Joe Biden. It isn't clear if Mr. Trump knew it was a joke. How the article's right-wing source capitalizes on confusion. PAGE A19



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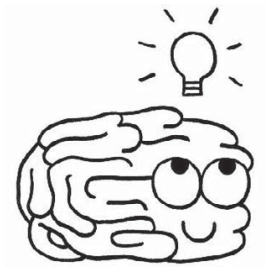
Inside The Times

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY



JORDAN AWAN

The News Quiz

Did you follow the headlines this week? Take our quiz to find out.

1. Which drugmaker paused its coronavirus vaccine trial on Monday because of a participant's "unexplained illness"?
a. Eli Lilly
b. Johnson & Johnson
c. Novavax
d. Zydus Cadila

2. What did the California Republican Party admit to placing across the state?
a. Billboards calling Kamala Harris a "monster"
b. Erroneous voting instructions
c. Deceptively labeled ballot boxes
d. Malfunctioning voting machines

3. Which two countries are in a battle over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh?
a. Armenia and Azerbaijan
b. Armenia and Turkey
c. Azerbaijan and Georgia
d. Turkey and Georgia

4. Jaime Harrison raised a record $57 million from July through September, the highest quarterly fund-raising total for any Senate candidate in U.S. history. Who is he challenging in November?
a. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina
b. Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado
c. Senator Martha McSally of Arizona
d. Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky

5. Carlo Acutis, a young Italian, may become the first millennial what?
a. Bishop
b. Cardinal
c. King
d. Saint

6. Which university has agreed to pay nearly $1.2 million to female professors to address inequity?
a. Purdue University
b. Princeton University
c. Stanford University
d. Texas A&M University

7. The K-pop band BTS made comments during a recent Korean War tribute that started a social media storm in which country?
a. China
b. Russia
c. South Korea
d. United States

8. The mother of which former U.S. presidential candidate died on Monday at 108?
a. Hillary Clinton
b. John Kerry
c. John McCain
d. Mitt Romney

9. Which UNESCO world heritage site opened for one tourist who, because of a pandemic lockdown, waited seven months to visit it?
a. Machu Picchu
b. The Statue of Liberty
c. Taj Mahal
d. Vatican City

10. Which soccer star has tested positive for the coronavirus?
a. Sam Kerr
b. Lionel Messi
c. Megan Rapinoe
d. Cristiano Ronaldo

11. The iPhone 12 has arrived. Which of its improvements has Apple emphasized?
a. Its 5G capability
b. Its larger size
c. Its improved speakers
d. Its watertightness

Solutions: 1. B; 2. C; 3. A; 4. A; 5. D; 6. B; 7. A; 8. C; 9. A; 10. D; 11. A. This quiz is by Will Dudding, Anna Schaverien and Jessica Anderson. The News Quiz is published online on Fridays. Find previous quizzes at nytimes.com/newsquiz.

On This Day in History

A MEMORABLE HEADLINE FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

BLACK MEN FILL CAPITAL'S MALL IN DISPLAY OF UNITY AND PRIDE

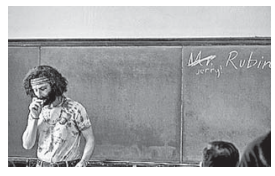
October 17, 1995. Black men from across the nation gathered at the National Mall in Washington to "vow stronger leadership in protecting their communities from violence and social despair," The Times reported. "There's a new Black man in America today," said Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam and organizer of the "Million Man March," which drew an estimated 400,000 to the Mall. The event included speeches by many prominent Black figures, including the poet Maya Angelou and the Rev. Jesse Jackson. The crowd easily exceeded the attendance (estimated at 250,000) of the 1963 civil rights march led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Subscribers can browse the complete Times archives through 2002 at timesmachine.nytimes.com.

The Newspaper And Beyond

VIDEO

In a new "Anatomy of a Scene," the writer and director Aaron Sorkin narrates a sequence from his new docudrama "The Trial of the Chicago 7," featuring Sacha Baron Cohen as the activist Abbie Hoffman. *nytimes.com/video*



AUDIO

This week on "The Argument," the podcast's second anniversary, the opinion columnists Michelle Goldberg and Ross Douthat dig into voice mails and emails to answer listener questions, and debate court packing amid Judge Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation hearing. *nytimes.com/theargument*

ADVICE

In our Tripped Up column, the seasoned travel writer Sarah Firshein aims to help travelers resolve their thorniest problems, pandemic-related or otherwise. Write to her at *travel@nytimes.com.*

READERS

If you're a K-12 teacher, how are you handling remote learning? The Times wants to know how you've adapted your classroom practices and to learn about your biggest challenges. Share your experiences and video lessons at *nytimes.com/readers.*

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Of Interest

NOTEWORTHY FACTS FROM TODAY'S PAPER

A study from the Commonwealth Fund suggests that as many as 14.6 million people had lost employer-based health insurance coverage as of June because of the pandemic-induced recession.

Reducing the Pain of a New Insurance Year B5

•

In Thailand, criticizing the royal family is against the law and can mean prison sentences of up to 15 years.

Thai Police Use Water Cannons and Arcane Law To Quell Demonstrations A13

•

A 75-year-old dispute involving heirs of a Hungarian banker over the ownership of art seized by Nazis has included 11 court decisions, five appeals and 15 claims by roughly 30 lawyers in seven countries.

Art Is Long. This Case Is Longer. C1

AURÉLIA DURAND

Lebanon has more Christians per capita than any other Arab state.

In Lebanon, Recreating a Legacy Of Stained-Glass Marvels A9

A majority of American voters cast their ballots to give Democrats the White House in all but one presidential election dating to 1992.

Expand Court to Counter Vote Suppression, Liberals Say A21

•

Valerie Vlahakis, the owner of Lee Sims Chocolates in Jersey City, N.J., and eight employees melt, mold, box and peddle 150,000 pounds of chocolate each year.

'It's Fall! Here We Are!' A Morsel of a Shop Survives B1

•

Randy Arozarena, a postseason star for the Tampa Bay Rays, said that in his first professional season in Cuba, he made $38 a month.

From $38 a Month in Cuba to Playoff Stardom For the Rays B7

The Conversation

THREE OF THE MOST READ, SHARED AND DISCUSSED POSTS FROM ACROSS NYTIMES.COM

A Combative Trump and a Deliberate Biden Spar From Afar at Town Halls

With less than three weeks until Election Day, the candidates took part in dueling forums on competing television networks, during which President Trump declined to disavow QAnon and Joe Biden promised a clear stance on expanding the Supreme Court. This was Friday's most read report.

In Rare Move, Trump Administration Rejects California's Request for Wildfire Relief

In September, the state asked for federal aid to help recover from six major fires that scorched more than 1.8 million acres, destroyed thousands of structures and caused at least three deaths. The rejection escalated a long-running feud between the administration and California on climate change and forest management.

MAX WHITTAKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

He Married a Sociopath: Me

This installment of the weekly "Modern Love" column is an essay by Patric Gagne, a wife and mother whose husband's white lies — made obvious by her own sociopathy — provided a rare lesson in empathy.

Spotlight

ADDITIONAL REPORTAGE AND REPARTEE FROM OUR JOURNALISTS

On the "Sway" podcast this week, Kara Swisher talked about Big Tech and misinformation with Alex Stamos, former chief information security officer at Facebook and the current director of the Stanford Internet Observatory, a research program that studies abuse of the web. In the edited excerpt below, Mr. Stamos talked about why it can be difficult to lead security and address misinformation at tech companies.

Alex Stamos Running a security team in a tech company does have different challenges because what you have is often executives who are themselves technologists. And the other thing about Silicon Valley that I think is both a great power and a great weakness is people really do believe in the mission of the companies. In tech, we still have this thing where people go to work for these companies because they believe we're changing the world.

Kara Swisher Oh, come on, Alex, they like the money.

Stamos Oh, it's absolutely about the money, too, but people really believe that they're doing something right. And as a result, that actually makes them more resistant to change in some ways.

In tech, when you're really trying to sell people on the idea that, oh, the things you've been doing so far were actually not that great, your core belief in your goodness and the things you've been doing are not that correct, sometimes that makes it a lot harder than it would be to do security in a company where I.T. is just a tool.

To listen to the full episode, go to nytimes.com/sway.

Sketchbook

THERE'S ALWAYS THE YACHT

In the spring, people in lockdown struggled to find toilet paper. Now, seven months into the pandemic, there's this: Because of high demand, big spenders are encountering difficulty buying or renting islands to isolate themselves. Good to know in case that lottery ticket hits.

JENNIFER XIAO

Quote of the Day

INFERNO THREATENS WORLD'S LARGEST TROPICAL WETLAND A10

"I no longer hear the song of the Chaco chachalaca bird. Even the jaguar that once scared me is suffering."

SANDRA GUATÓ SILVA, *a community leader in the Pantanal wetland of Brazil, lamenting the destruction caused by wildfires.*

Here to Help

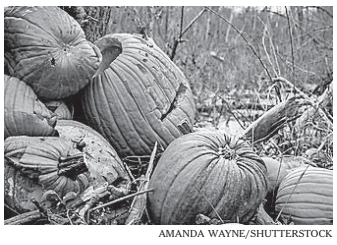
CLEAN UP YOUR HALLOWEEN

Halloween is going to look a bit different this year because of the pandemic, but there could be a *green* lining: an opportunity to develop a more sustainable outlook on a typically high-waste holiday.

Need an example? Consider pumpkins. American farmers produced more than a billion pounds of them in 2018, according to the Department of Agriculture. Much of that total ends up decomposing in landfills and emitting methane, a potent greenhouse gas. "The biggest issue with a lot of these holidays is that they're extraordinarily wasteful," said Amanda Cattermole, who runs a consulting firm that advocates for better chemical and sustainability management in supply chains.

Candy is another culprit. Last year, an estimated $2.6 billion worth of Halloween candy was sold in the United States. Some of those sweet treats, like the ones that contain palm oil, are particularly detrimental to the earth because of their link to deforestation. Then, there's the problem of packaging. Many recycling centers don't accept foil or plastic wrappers with food waste, so they tend to end up in landfills.

Costumes and decorations are also an area of environmental concern. Since most people wear costumes only once or twice, the ones purchased from stores are typically designed with cheap materials. According to Ms. Cattermole, those materials are often among the worst for the planet, often going through hefty chemical processes during production.



AMANDA WAYNE/SHUTTERSTOCK

The good news is, there are some easy shifts you can make to clean up your Halloween, according to Katherine White, a professor at the University of British Columbia who studies sustainability. The first is to set reasonable limits on how much stuff you acquire and, when possible, use household items you already have. For example, skip the plastic trick-or-treating bucket and use a pillowcase.

Costume swaps are a growing part of the circular clothing economy worth exploring, Dr. White added. Costume rentals are also available in some cities. And, coming back to those pumpkins: Consider shopping local, and when the Halloween party is over, try composting.

MIRANDA GREEN

This advice appeared in the Climate Fwd: newsletter. Sign up at nytimes.com/newsletters.

N

Tracking an Outbreak

The New York Times

Coronavirus Update

Pfizer Says No Vaccine by Election Day

Draft Study Casts Doubt on Remdesivir

Outbreaks Straining Small Communities

By JAMES BARRON

The pandemic grinds on at its own speed. It will not be rushed by dates on the calendar. That became clear on Friday with an announcement from a drug company that ruled out President Trump's claim that a coronavirus vaccine could be ready before Election Day.

The announcement, from the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, confirmed what many epidemiologists had already inferred — that the company would not be ready to seek authorization for its coronavirus vaccine before at least the second half of next month. The announcement signaled a shift for the company and for Dr. Albert Bourla, its chief executive. He had repeatedly promised rapid results as the race for a vaccine headed into late-stage trials. "Our model — our best case — predicts that we will have an answer by the end of October," he told a television interviewer last month. Dr. Bourla's statements drew an attaboy from a president who clearly craved vaccine approval before Election Day: Mr. Trump called him a "great guy." (Dr. Bourla later tweeted that "Pfizer has never discussed" the Food and Drug Administration's vaccine requirements with the White House. And, in an open letter on Oct. 1, he said that "we are moving at the speed of science" — echoing a joint pledge by nine vaccine companies that they would not deliver vaccines until and unless they had been fully vetted.)

Friday also brought debate about the antiviral drug remdesivir, one of the drugs the president was given during his stay in the hospital with the coronavirus. A study of more than 11,000 people sponsored by the World Health Organization found that remdesivir had failed to prevent deaths among coronavirus patients. But the findings have not been peer-reviewed or published in a scientific journal. Gilead, which makes remdesivir, took issue with the W.H.O.'s findings, calling them "inconsistent" with other trials and asserting that the organization's data had not undergone rigorous review.

Remdesivir was granted emergency authorization for Covid-19 in May after a smaller National Institutes of Health trial indicated that it had sped the recovery of severely ill patients. But Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's leading infectious disease expert and the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was quoted after that study was released as saying it was not a "knockout drug that will change the trajectory of the coronavirus pandemic."

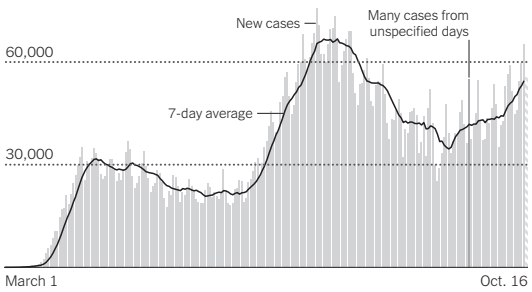
Politics and the pandemic have become entangled as Election Day approaches, however, and an open letter condemned the Trump administration's politicization of another critical agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The letter has been signed by more than 1,000 current and former C.D.C. intelligence officers — experts who spent their careers researching outbreaks and tracking diseases. They said the C.D.C. should be returned to its "indispensable role" in fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

The letter, first posted on Medium in May, recently passed the 1,000-signature mark and was republished on Friday by The Epidemiology Monitor, a trade publication that devoted its entire October edition to calling for a restoration of the C.D.C.'s reputation.

New Coronavirus Cases Announced Daily in U.S.

As of Friday evening, more than **8,075,700** people across every state, plus Washington, D.C., and four U.S. territories, have tested positive for the virus, according to a New York Times database.



Note: Friday's total is incomplete because some states report cases after press time. Data is as of Oct. 16, 2020, at 5 p.m. Eastern.
Sources: State and local health agencies; hospitals; C.D.C.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Rampage in Rural America

The coronavirus hit the Northeast in the spring. Now it is ravaging rural America, wreaking havoc in small towns that lack critical resources like physicians who live nearby. In Great Falls, Mont., the hospital's 27-bed Covid-19 unit is full. The county health department is racing to hire new contact tracers. And Paul Krogue, a nurse practitioner who also teaches at Montana State University's Great Falls campus, has seen attendance in his classes dwindle as students become sick or go into quarantines.

In July, Gov. Steve Bullock of Montana ordered masks worn inside businesses and indoor public spaces. Mr. Krogue said some people in Great Falls were nonchalant at first, as almost no one in Cascade County knew anyone who had been infected. "We benefited from that early on," he said. "But in some ways, I think it did us a disservice, too, because it also created a certain level of complacency."

Elsewhere in rural America, the numbers are small, but the impact is big. North Dakota has had 4,270 new cases in the last seven days, less than a fifth of the number reported in Wisconsin. But North Dakota's smaller population means that it had 560 cases for every 100,000 residents, the most in the nation. South Dakota has posted 4,571 new cases in the last week, or one for every 517 residents. The comparable figure for Wisconsin was 376.

Gov. Doug Burgum of North Dakota warned this week of "additional adversity and perhaps deadlier outcomes."

In Scotland, Marrying Without a Mask

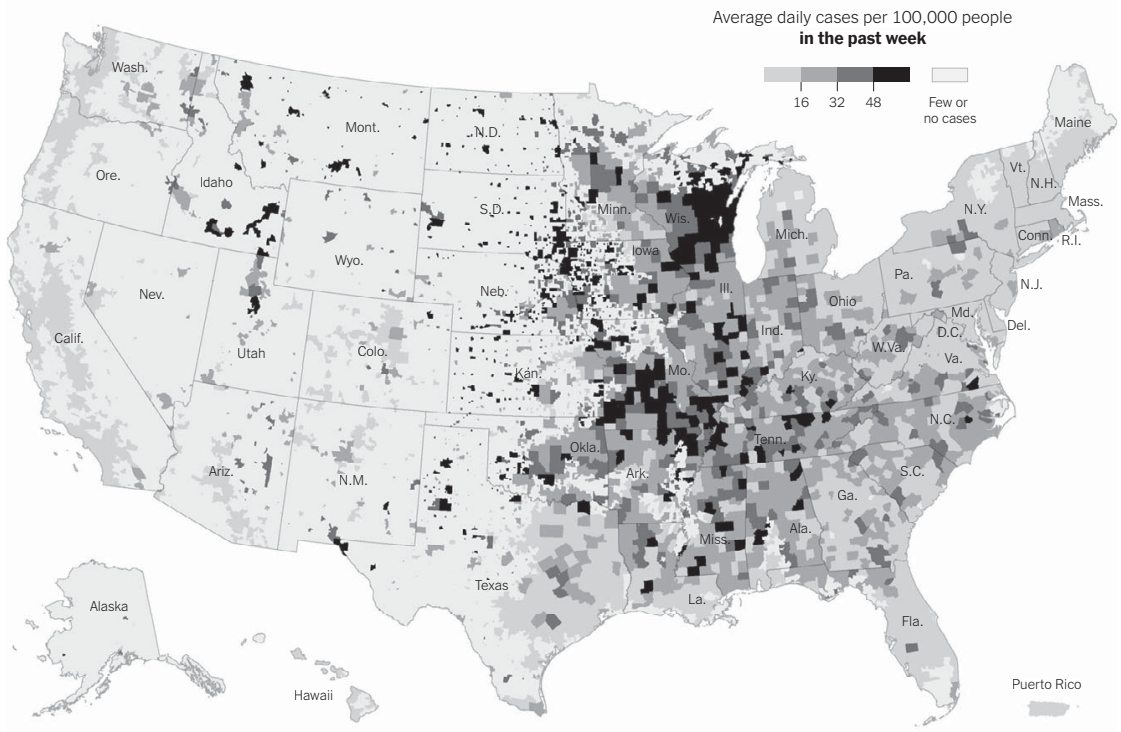
Couples in Scotland no longer have to say "I do" from behind masks. Masks remain mandatory in places of worship and hotels, as well as in other indoor public spaces and on public transportation. But Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, announced an exception for bridal couples, saying she wanted to "deliver some flexibility." Officiants were already exempt. Ms. Sturgeon said the exception for couples who marry or entered into a civil union would apply only during the ceremony and only if the couple stayed at least six and a half feet from everyone else.

Ms. Sturgeon also tightened the rules for Scottish workplaces, making masks mandatory in cafeterias, except for when someone is seated at a table. And, starting Monday, face coverings will be required in common areas in offices.

Coronavirus Update wraps up the day's developments with information from across the virus report.

Hot Spots in the United States

As of Friday evening, more than **8,075,700** people across every state, plus Washington, D.C., and four U.S. territories, have tested positive for the coronavirus, according to a New York Times database. More than **218,200** people with the virus have died in the United States.



Sources: State and local health agencies. The map shows the share of population with a new reported case over the last week. Parts of a county with a population density lower than 10 people per square mile are not shaded. Data for Rhode Island is shown at the state level because county level data is infrequently reported. Data is as of Oct. 16, 2020, at 5 p.m. Eastern.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

PUBLIC SAFETY

Face Mask Debate Recalls Seatbelt Wars of 1980s

By CHRISTINE HAUSER

A legislator in New Hampshire called it constricting. A Michigan man said it messed up his look. A sailor in Massachusetts argued the government has no right to force him to wear it.

Though they might sound familiar, those were not the refrains of people rebelling against face masks during the pandemic. Instead, they came from the seatbelt debates of the 1980s, another era when some Americans pushed back against rules meant to keep them safe.

Capitals, legislative halls, petitions and radio shows were the stages for battle over state seatbelt laws, the first of which passed in 1984. Medical workers and police officers gave firsthand accounts of how people not wearing belts died in wrecks. Opponents wondered if it was safe to be strapped into a hurtling vehicle, or complained about discomfort and government overreach.

In Massachusetts, a talk radio host and a sign painter teamed up to repeal their state's seatbelt law. A state legislator in Michigan was called hateful names. And for decades, bills have floundered in New Hampshire, which has so far lived up to its "Live Free or Die" motto in remaining the only state that does not force an adult driver to wear a seatbelt.

The fight over seatbelt laws in the United States was fraught with trying to strike a balance between individual and public interests. Those concerns have also been reflected in similar matters of health and safety, including vaccinations, helmet laws — and masks.

Alberto Giubilini, a public health ethics scholar who has compared the arguments over seatbelt laws with those of vaccination opponents, noted that seatbelts and helmets are mostly meant to protect an individual, while vaccinations and face masks are also intended to prevent harm from spreading to others.

That gives seatbelt opponents more room to argue for their personal right to imperil themselves, he said. "Many are worried about the state becoming more authoritarian," he said. "It is refusal to follow certain authority, just because it is authority."

Since 1984, when New York became the first state to have a seatbelt law, they have continued to be an uneven patchwork. Some have made it a primary violation, meaning officers can pull over a driver only for not wearing a seatbelt. Others made it secondary, meaning a driver stopped for another reason can also be given a seatbelt citation. Only 31 states extend the requirement to adults in the back seat.

Legislative records, government reports and interviews show how the efforts to draft seatbelt laws have pitted grim fatality statistics against personal complaints about comfort, freedom and efficiency.

SMITH COLLECTION/GADO, VIA GETTY IMAGES

After the first state seatbelt law passed in 1984, opponents called it government overreach that violated their personal freedom.

Here are three snapshots of those efforts and their outcomes.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, the fight over seatbelt laws was spearheaded by a sign painter and a radio host.

Robert Ford, who goes by Chip, is a 70-year-old libertarian who wears a seatbelt — but he doesn't want the government to force him to.

In the mid-1980s, he teamed up with Jerry Williams, a pioneering talk radio host who was once called "the dean of 'radio activists,'" on a crusade to repeal the state's seatbelt laws.

Their partnership began in 1985, the year of the state's first seatbelt law. Mr. Ford had dropped out of college, sailed and restored boats, and turned to sign painting. One day, he was working in Beverly Harbor when he turned on WRKO.

"I used to listen to talk radio when I was out lettering boats," he said. "I heard Jerry Williams talking about the seatbelt law."

Inspired, Mr. Ford contacted Mr. Williams, who encouraged him to get involved in efforts to repeal the legislation.

"I had never done anything political before," Mr. Ford said. "I had no idea what a ballot committee was."

Alan S. Tolz, a former producer of Mr. Williams's show, said the host devoted most of his air time in that period to encouraging people to petition against seatbelts. "It was a long civics lesson," he said. "I think he was looking at this as a libertarian issue — 'I am an adult, I will wear a seatbelt, and you don't have to force me to.'"

"And that is how we won," Mr. Ford said. "I used that argument in every debate, every talk show."

The law was repealed in 1986, making Massachusetts the first state to do so.

Mr. Williams, who died in 2003, credited what he called the "ragtag band of citizens who understood what the American Revolution was all about" for the win.

A second law passed in 1993, and Mr. Ford, who went on to testify against seatbelt laws in other capitals, gave up on fighting the Massachusetts law when his effort to repeal the new law failed.

"I washed my hands of that issue and moved on to others," he said.

But not government-mandated masks. Mr. Ford says he does not see a libertarian parallel with today's mask mandates, because their purpose is to prevent harm from spreading to others.

"You choose to wear a seatbelt, and you are only hurting yourself if you make the wrong decision," he said.

Michigan

More than 30 years ago, David Hollister, a legislator representing Lansing, was working on budget and social services issues when Richard H. Austin, the secretary of state and chairman of the Michigan Safety Council, asked him to work on the state's first seatbelt legislation.

Armed with research on how seatbelts could save lives and a survey that showed 65 percent opposed mandatory use, he proposed his first bill in 1982. It did not pass.

So he and other safety advocates got creative. Mr. Hollister put legislators in speeding cars at a General Motors testing facility. He erected a slide at the Capitol for people to experience a landing at five miles per hour.

In another stunt, or what Mr. Hollister refers to as a series of "eye-openers," he and supporters demonstrated impact by dropping pumpkins on the Capitol grounds, where they exploded. "It was the force of a head hitting the windshield at five miles per hour," he said. "People were sitting around eating sandwiches at lunch hour."

Gradually, opposition yielded. Michigan's first seatbelt law took effect in 1985. "The thing that really did it was we started arguing that the opponents were arguing for the right to go through the windshield," Mr. Hollister said.

"That is where it was similar to the mask," he said. "It is going to save lives and reduce costs. People eventually are going to come around."

New Hampshire

New Hampshire is the only state that still does not have a mandatory seatbelt law.

In 2018, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, seatbelts saved about 14,955 lives of people ages 5 and older nationwide. If everyone involved in crashes had worn seatbelts, an additional 2,549 people could have been saved, it said.

But just as wearing a mask cannot guarantee protection from infection, wearing a seatbelt has not prevented deaths in some crashes. Belted passengers have died in rollovers, been partly ejected and crushed. Some died trapped in cars in water or fire.

In 2018, opponents of seatbelt laws in New Hampshire seized on those examples in defeating a bill that would have made them mandatory, saying education and advertising would be better than a law.

Testimony from citizens and lawmakers mirrored debates over mask mandates: The "government should not protect me from myself," one said. Another called them an "example of a nanny state."

Advocates spoke of soaring medical costs or safety for the greater good.

The bill lost, 10 votes to 9.

In 2020, another seatbelt bill died, not because of votes, but for another reason: The pandemic shut down legislative sessions. Citizens Count, a nonprofit organization connecting people with elected officials, asked Facebook followers how they felt about this year's attempt. Most made sneering criticisms of government infantilization, or quoted the state motto "Live Free or Die."

"Can we finish the debate on masks first, please?" wrote one of the more than 300 people who replied.

RELIGIOUS CHARITY

Ill With Covid-19, Some Ultra-Orthodox in Israel Choose Home Care

By ISABEL KERSHNER

DAN BALILTY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A volunteer with Hasdei Amram, a small religious charity, leaving after making a home visit to a coronavirus patient in Jerusalem on Thursday.

JERUSALEM — When the elderly father of an ultra-Orthodox radio personality in Israel contracted the coronavirus recently, his family dreaded the prospect of his entering an isolated hospital ward and possibly never coming out.

So the broadcaster made a round of calls that turned up an alternative.

A small charity was offering an under-the-radar service treating mostly ultra-Orthodox and older Covid-19 patients in their homes, even in severe cases where health experts say it could endanger lives. Drawing on the services of a few doctors — and dozens of volunteers, most without medical training — it was operating out of a basement in Mea Shearim, a Jerusalem stronghold of the most extreme anti-Zionist Jewish sects that shun cooperation with the state.

Hundreds had already turned to the charity for care out of a sense that remaining with family — and avoiding public hospitals — outweighed the risks. But the project was also tinged with a general distrust of government among the ultra-Orthodox community, which appears to be increasingly going it alone in handling the pandemic and many other aspects of daily life.

Since the home-care initiative was reported by Israel's N12 news service this week, health officials and experts have responded with a mix of condemnation and curiosity. One leading epidemiologist was among those who said the approach could help ease the burden on hospitals.

The debate comes as Israel is under its second national lockdown after daily infection and death rates soared to among the highest in the world, and ultra-Orthodox areas top the virus hot spots. Health officials say that about 50 percent of those aged over 65 and under 18 who are infected in Israel are from the ultra-Orthodox community, though it makes up no more than 13 percent of the country's nine million citizens.

And the actual infection numbers may be even higher: The charity does not report coronavirus cases to the authorities, which may be skewing the national virus data on which policymakers base their decisions.

Dr. Sharon Elrai-Price, a senior Health Ministry official, denounced the operation as a "dangerous" departure and said the ministry was looking into the legality of some aspects of it.

Dr. Ran Balicer, an Israeli health care official who advises the government on the pandemic, called the charity "a gamble." A coronavirus patient's condition can deteriorate rapidly, he said, adding it was "hard to predict a moment of no return for people who might have survived had they reached the hospital in time."

But Dr. Gabriel Barbash, a leading Israeli professor of epidemiology, is among those who view the charity's approach as a possible way to ease the load on hospitals and worthy of further study. Other advocates insist that even in severe cases, a calm home environment can aid recovery.

Yitzhak Markovitz, a member of a small Hasidic sect, started the at-home care service about six months ago through his charity, Hasdei Amram. He said his patients generally avoided taking government Covid-19 tests to evade official attention and pressure to go to hospitals, adding that those factors are also why he does not report cases to the authorities.

The charity offers a limited range of treatments compared with a hospital, providing only oxygen support, medication and close monitoring by a doctor. Its services are not exclusively for the ultra-Orthodox, though most patients do come from that community.

The hardest part, Mr. Markovitz said, is recruiting doctors because they fear being investigated should anything go wrong.

The ultra-Orthodox community has long kept itself apart in an effort to shield members from outside influences. But their ways have riled many other Israelis.

Its school system operates independently of the Education Ministry. Many ultra-Orthodox men study the Torah full-time instead of working in paid jobs, and they receive government stipends to remain in seminaries while being largely exempted from mandatory military service. Many from the community live in almost exclusively ultra-Orthodox cities and West Bank settlements.

And now, their independent approach to dealing with the pandemic is exacerbating the country's religious-secular divide.

Gilad Malach, who directs the ultra-Orthodox program at the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent think tank, said the second wave of the country's coronavirus outbreak, which began this summer, was "a microcosm of the whole story of the Haredim" in Israel, referring to the ultra-Orthodox.

> ***An independent approach to dealing with the pandemic.***

"They cannot be a state within a state," he said. "If 50 percent of the sick are Haredim, it affects the whole country."

"There is a huge amount of anger and criticism over their behavior among the general population," he added. "So we are both linked to one another but more alienated from each other."

Many Israelis blame the community for the country's second full lockdown after ultra-Orthodox politicians used their political clout to thwart plans for more limited local lockdowns that would have targeted their towns. And while some ultra-Orthodox rabbis have urged compliance with government regulations against large gatherings, others have flouted them, relying more on the power of prayer.

Having large families crammed into typically small apartments has contributed to the high infection rates within the community. The independent Haredi school system has remained at least partly open while state schools have been closed.

And as in Brooklyn, inter-communal tensions have been fueled by scenes of large weddings, funerals and religious gatherings in ultra-Orthodox communities. Police enforcement has been erratic and has led to clashes.

Still, national infection rates in Israel have fallen under the lockdown restrictions, some of which are expected to be eased on Sunday.

Although Mr. Markovitz's service began with treating cases in Mea Shearim, it soon spread to other ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem and other cities. Supporters claim amazing recovery rates, far exceeding the national ones for older people.

Mr. Markovitz said that only about 20 of his 2,000 cases had ended up in the hospital and that only a fraction of those 20 ultimately died.

"What we see from this whole experience," he said, "is that when a person is in good mood and spirits, that's when the situation improves."

But critics say the project's data is unreliable.

Mr. Markovitz said he had begun keeping a register of patients only over the last month and that he currently had about 500 receiving care. He and a volunteer said that up to 170 of them had blood oxygen levels below the point at which health experts would advise hospitalization.

Families pay 1,000 shekels (just under $300) for a private visit from a doctor who takes blood samples and sends them to a private lab for testing. The price includes follow-up monitoring by the doctor, mostly remotely.

Volunteers, who are mostly seminary students, wear protective clothing to deliver drugs and donated equipment, including devices for measuring blood oxygen levels and oxygen generators. Young family members who are prepared to risk infection help care for the patient.

Patients who require intubation are transferred to Israel's hospitals, which are currently treating about 800 virus cases.

A few other organizations in Israel offer some at-home health care services for coronavirus patients. Yad Sarah, Israel's largest volunteer organization for health and home care services, has been providing oxygen devices. The public health system offers some degree of home care for mild cases. And a private clinic associated with a major Tel Aviv hospital offers high-end home treatment for wealthy virus patients at a hefty cost, according to Israeli media reports.

For Avi Mimran, a popular presenter on the ultra-Orthodox Kol Hai radio station, what mattered was saving his father. Yitzhak Mimran, 85, was running a fever and tested positive for the virus a few weeks ago.

Within an hour of calling Mr. Markovitz's charity, Mr. Mimran said, a doctor was at his father's door. The fever and some breathing problems persisted for about a week. The doctor stayed in touch twice a day, and three granddaughters tended to him.

Because he had been tested, health officials also called to check on him. Within a couple of weeks, he seemed to be feeling better.

"In the hospital corona ward, people are isolated, alone and without family," Mr. Mimran said. "They are completely cut off and that's what kills."

Mr. Markovitz insisted that his efforts were not driven by ideology or anti-Zionist sentiment.

"We are only about saving lives," he said.

NEW YORK

College's Leader Resigns After 700 Student Infections

By AMANDA ROSA

CINDY SCHULTZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The State University of New York at Oneonta shut down in-person classes in September.

The State University of New York at Oneonta on Thursday announced the abrupt resignation of its president only weeks after it experienced the most severe coronavirus outbreak of any public university in the state.

The departure of the president, Barbara Jean Morris, is one of the most high-profile over the coronavirus crisis, which has thrown many colleges and universities across the country into turmoil as they try to maintain some semblance of campus life during the outbreak.

Last month, more than 700 students at Oneonta tested positive for the virus, causing the shutdown of in-person classes. The outbreak forced state officials to send a virus control crew to the university to keep the spread from reaching the rest of the city, which is in upstate New York.

On social media, posts about students being taken out of dorm rooms in the middle of the night by men in hazmat suits were widely circulated. Photos of students partying in quarantine dorms went viral, drawing the ire of parents, staff members and town residents.

The fallout from the crisis led to a state review, a change of coronavirus protocols throughout the SUNY system and now the resignation of Dr. Morris, who did not offer any public comment on Thursday.

Officials said the university would soon begin the search for a new president. Dennis Craig, who recently served as interim president at SUNY Purchase, was named as a temporary replacement.

The mayor of Oneonta, Gary Herzig, said: "I think that we all recognize that this was a time where change was needed. It's a time for a new start."

In an interview, Mr. Herzig added: "There had been some loss of trust here amongst both the college community and the city community. Trust is everything. Sometimes you need to make changes in order to rebuild trust."

Although the university did not directly tie Dr. Morris's resignation to its handling of the outbreak, state and local officials at a news conference on Thursday announcing the change praised the efforts of Mr. Craig, who guided a successful reopening plan at SUNY Purchase, which is in Westchester County, just north of New York City.

SUNY Purchase has reported just seven cases at its campus of more than 4,000 students.

"SUNY Purchase has one of the best plans out of the SUNY system," the system chancellor, Jim Malatras, said at the news conference. "They brought back about 25 percent of their students and they have had regular testing and a very low positivity rate. President Craig led the way on that."

Mr. Malatras said Dr. Morris informed them last week of her decision to resign.

When asked if Dr. Morris's resignation was related to her handling of the virus outbreak, Mr. Malatras skirted the question, saying she resigned of "her own volition."

"I think everyone in the community would agree that there were problems collectively, but now we want to move forward," he said.

The outbreak at Oneonta began modestly with only two cases on Aug. 25, but then spread quickly.

Initially, the university tied the cases to a series of parties near campus, which led to five suspensions. Within days, 29 more positive cases were found. By Aug. 30, the university announced that 105 students — or about 3 percent of the people who were on campus or using campus facilities by then — had tested positive.

By now, more than 700 students had tested positive.

Oneonta, a school of about 6,000 students, has had almost more than double the number of virus cases that any other school in the SUNY system had.

Parents, students and resident assistants were critical of the university's reopening plan. Students were not required to provide a negative test before classes began or once they arrived on campus.

The university said the decision not to test asymptomatic students was based on guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Students who had traveled from a "hot state" or out of the country were asked to quarantine from seven to 14 days, the university had said.

It is unknown if SUNY Oneonta will reopen its campus for in-person classes for the spring semester. Rori Matthews, 20, a SUNY Oneonta student, said she doubted it would.

Ms. Matthews, who is immunocompromised and has asthma, said she was stressed by the rising number of cases and annoyed by how Dr. Morris handled the outbreak.

She said she was surprised by the news because Dr. Morris previously said during a virtual town hall event that she would not resign because of the outbreak.

Now, her resignation has just become another part of a whirlwind year.

"It was the next step in the long road that's 2020 at SUNY Oneonta," Ms. Matthews said.

CLUSTERS

In Rural West, Cramped Local Jails Are Becoming Hubs for Infections

From Page A1

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TAILYR IRVINE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

More than 300 people were infected at the Cascade County Detention Center in Great Falls, Mont., and the surrounding community is seeing its worst case numbers.

Seventeen states, including many in the Mountain West, have added more cases in the past week than any other week of the pandemic. And the spread through sparsely populated areas of rural America has created problems in small towns that lack critical resources — including doctors — even in ordinary times.

Wyoming, which did not have 1,000 total cases until June, recently added more than 1,000 in a single week. Reports of new infections have recently reached record levels in Alaska, Colorado and Idaho. And Montana, where more than half of the state's cases have been announced since August, is averaging more than 500 cases per day.

In Cascade County, more than 300 inmates and staff members have been infected in a facility meant to hold 365 people, the county's first major outbreak in a region where the virus is suddenly surging.

The county seat, Great Falls, is seeing its worst case numbers yet. The local hospital and its 27-bed Covid-19 unit are at capacity. The county health department is racing to hire new contact tracers. And Mr. Krogue, who also teaches nursing at Montana State University's Great Falls campus, has seen attendance in his classes dwindle as students fall ill or quarantine.

One place where the infections have spread has been local jails, which are confined, often crowded spaces. Jails are staples of local communities and tend to have people coming and going more quickly than prisons. Jails can hold everyone from people awaiting criminal trials for months to those picked up for a suspended driver's license for a few hours. With so many people filtering in and out, jails pose extra risks for the virus's spread — not only inside facilities but in potentially feeding outbreaks in the rest of the community.

Nationally, jails and prisons have seen disproportionate rates of infection and death, with a mortality rate twice as high as in the general population and an infection rate more than four times as high, according to recent data.

A New York Times database has tracked clusters of at least 50 coronavirus cases in a dozen rural jails in Montana, Idaho, Utah and New Mexico during the pandemic. Among them: the Purgatory Correctional Center in Hurricane, Utah, with 166 infections; the jail in Twin Falls, Idaho, with 279; and, in New Mexico, the Cibola County Correctional Center, which has reported 357 cases.

In Cascade County, infections at the jail make up about a quarter of all known virus cases in the county. Health authorities say that the jail's outbreak, which began in mid-August, was not believed to be the main cause of the community's recent surge, but that it had led to some cases. In the past two months, Mr. Krogue said, the jail released 29 people who were considered actively infected.

Great Falls, home to about 58,000 residents, is in the less mountainous part of Montana, with the Missouri River flowing through and a large oil refinery on its banks. The Cascade County Detention Center sits along a highway at the edge of town. Drive five miles in any direction and you are surrounded by wide-open plains.

Montana requires that masks be worn inside businesses and indoor public spaces, and many people in Great Falls wear them when walking around downtown's Central Avenue, where shops and cafes are still recovering from shutting down in the spring. Others go without masks, citing the open space and lack of crowds.

Bob Kelly, the mayor, said people had not been overly worried about how the jail outbreak might affect the rest of town when it started.

"I think that by the very definition of a jail, hopefully, the disease will be incarcerated, as well as the patients," he said. "Is there concern? Sure, there's concern. But is there overreaction? No."

Some residents' nonchalance about the risks of the virus, said Mr. Krogue, the jail's medical director, can be traced to a spring and early summer when almost no one in Cascade County knew anyone who had been sickened.

"We benefited from that early on," he said. "But in some ways, I think it did us a disservice, too, because it also created a certain level of complacency."

That has quickly shifted now, he said, as cases have spiked.

The number of active cases known to county officials on any given day has risen sharply to about 600, according to Trisha Gardner, Cascade County's health officer. The county has seen 1,261 cases and six deaths during the pandemic, a Times database shows. Some of the cases have been tied to the jail, she said, and others have been connected to bars and restaurants. Even figuring out what has led to some cases has been complex, she said, as residents have been reluctant to cooperate with contact tracers.

> ***As people filter in and out, the risks for getting sick grow.***

"Our hospitals are at capacity, our public health system is at capacity," she said. "It's not sustainable at this rate."

When the outbreak at the jail began, social distancing was impossible, the authorities said. Three inmates shared cells designed for two. At night, men slept on thin blue pads in every available space: on the floor in the day room, in shower stalls, in stairwells, in hallways outside of cells.

Inmates did not receive masks until August, and jail officials said many have refused to wear them.

In interviews with more than a dozen inmates and their family members, inmates described the jail during the outbreak as chaotic and unsanitary. They said their pleas for help often went unanswered by nurses and guards.

Newly arriving inmates were not always quarantined from one another before their test results were known because of a lack of space, inmates and jail officials said.

Owen Hawley, 30, said every inmate in his living area of 38 men had tested positive for the virus. He said he had been unable to eat for three days, had intensive body aches and suffered from a headache so powerful it felt as if it was "behind my eyes."

"After the fourth day of like, not eating and stuff, I just shut off, you know?" he said.

At one point, Mr. Hawley said, he and other prisoners protested the way the virus was being handled by refusing to leave their living areas and by blocking new inmates from entering. Everyone was ultimately tested, Mr. Hawley said, and each prisoner was given a disposable mask.

Sierra Jasmine Wells, 25, another inmate, said women in her dormitory had grown ill, one after the next.

"Everyone around me was getting sick and it was tough on me," she said. "By then, I had already accepted the fact that I was going to get sick."

When she became infected, she said, she was given cough syrup and Tylenol.

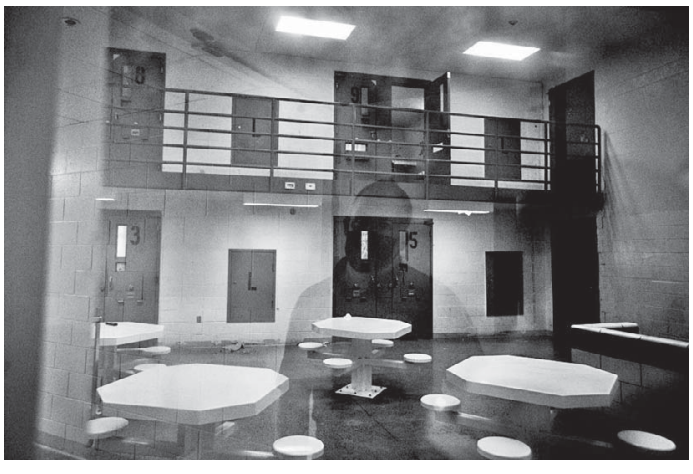
"I kind of was just left alone to deal with it," she said.

Jesse Slaughter, the county sheriff who oversees the jail, said that the jail's medical staff was doing everything it could, and that he had been seeking health care assistance from other counties. Officials defended their handling of the outbreak, noting that all inmates received standard medications including Tylenol twice a day and were taken to area hospitals when they needed added care. Seven inmates, as well as some staff members, were hospitalized. No one from the jail has died from the virus, officials said.

Mr. Krogue said that since the start of the outbreak he had been working up to 16 hours each day and sleeping in his basement, away from his wife and children. He remains healthy but says he fears bringing the virus home. The virus has slowed some in the jail, and officials have moved some inmates to other facilities, but other prisons and jails in the state are now seeing outbreaks.

"You can start to see what some of these other places experienced much earlier on, and we just didn't have that experience, but it's certainly happening now," Mr. Krogue said. "It's just real in a way that it wasn't."

Lucy Tompkins reported from Great Falls, Maura Turcotte from Chicago and Libby Seline from Lincoln, Neb. Reporting was contributed by Izzy Colón from Columbia, Mo., Brendon Derr from Phoenix, Rebecca Griesbach from Tuscaloosa, Ala., Danya Issawi and Timothy Williams from New York, Ann Hinga Klein from Des Moines, K.B. Mensah from Silver Spring, Md., and Mitch Smith from Chicago.



Left, Paul Krogue, the medical director of the Cascade County jail, said he feared bringing the virus home after a major outbreak among inmates and staff. The virus began spreading at the facility after a few infected people were arrested. Social distancing was not possible at the jail, where three inmates share cells meant for two.

LATE-STAGE TRIALS

Pfizer Says It Won't Apply for Vaccine Authorization Before Mid-November

By KATIE THOMAS and NOAH WEILAND

The chief executive of Pfizer said on Friday that the company would not apply for emergency authorization of its coronavirus vaccine before the third week of November, ruling out President Trump's assertion that a vaccine would be ready before Election Day on Nov. 3.

In a statement posted to the company website, the chief executive, Dr. Albert Bourla, said that although Pfizer could have preliminary numbers by the end of October about whether the vaccine works, it would still need to collect safety and manufacturing data that will stretch the timeline to at least the third week of November.

Close watchers of the vaccine race had already known that Pfizer wouldn't be able to meet the requirements of the Food and Drug Administration by the end of this month. But Friday's announcement represents a shift in tone for the company and its leader, who has repeatedly emphasized the month of October in interviews and public appearances.

In doing so, the company had aligned its messaging with that of the president, who has made no secret of his desire for an approved vaccine before the election. He has even singled out the company by name and said he had talked to Dr. Bourla, whom he called a "great guy."

Some scientists applauded Pfizer's announcement.

"This is good, really good," said Dr. Eric Topol, a clinical trial expert at Scripps Research in San Diego who was one of 60 public health officials and others in the medical community who signed a letter to Pfizer urging it not to rush its vaccine.

He said company officials had assured him that a vaccine would most likely not be authorized before the election, but the letter Friday is "even more solid about their not being part of any political machinations."

Dr. Bourla has pushed back against any suggestion that Pfizer's vaccine timeline was politically motivated. In September, Pfizer was the driving force behind a pledge by nine vaccine companies to "stand with science" and not put forward anything that had not been properly vetted. Earlier this month, he published an open letter to employees that said he "would never succumb to political pressure" and expressing disappointment that "we find ourselves in the crucible of the U.S. presidential election."

Pfizer is one of four companies testing a coronavirus vaccine in late-stage clinical trials in the United States, and it has been the most aggressive in its timeline estimates. Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson have said that later in the year is more likely, matching the predictions of federal health officials. (AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson's trials have been paused for potential safety concerns, which could further delay their outcomes.)

In interviews, Mr. Bourla has said that he expects a "conclusive readout" by late October, with an application for emergency authorization that could be filed "immediately."

> ***Extending a timeline well beyond Election Day despite the president's assertions.***

Pfizer's trial of 44,000 volunteers tests the vaccine by giving one group the vaccine, another group the placebo, and waiting until a certain number of people become infected with the virus. If significantly more people who received the placebo got infected, then the vaccine is considered to be effective.

A company spokeswoman said last month that Pfizer would not be anywhere near completion of its trial by the end of October and that when Dr. Bourla had referred to a "conclusive readout," he meant it was possible the outside board of experts monitoring the trial would have by that date found promising signs that the vaccine works.

In his statement on Friday, Dr. Bourla acknowledged those timelines were uncertain. "Since we must wait for a certain number of cases to occur, this data may come earlier or later based on changes in the infection rates."

He also said the company would release the results of any decision by the outside panel — good or bad — within a few days of its decision.

Dr. Bourla's statement arrived soon after the F.D.A. published new guidelines detailing how the agency would evaluate a vaccine for emergency authorization, a document published after weeks of stalling by the White House. The guidelines, which do not carry the force of law, call for gathering comprehensive safety data in the final stage of clinical trials before an emergency authorization can be granted.

In a tweet on Oct. 6, Mr. Trump accused the F.D.A. of having a political agenda with the recommendations, which he said "make it more difficult for them to speed up vaccines for approval before Election Day." Mr. Trump called it a "political hit job."

In a video he posted from the White House a day later, Mr. Trump said that a vaccine should be available before the election, "but frankly, the politics gets involved."

"They want to play their games," he said. "It's going to be right after the election."

Jonathan Martin contributed reporting.

POLICY DEBATE

White House Opposes Expanded Virus Testing, Complicating Aid Talks

*This article is by **Jim Tankersley**, **Noah Weiland** and **Emily Cochrane**.*

WASHINGTON — In late September, a Nobel Prize-winning economist emailed Dr. Scott W. Atlas, a White House coronavirus adviser, in what he saw as a last-ditch effort to persuade the Trump administration to embrace a sharp increase in testing and isolating infected patients. The plan, meant to appeal to a president who has complained that positive tests make his administration look bad, would not "generate any new confirmed cases."

Dr. Atlas, a radiologist, told the economist, Paul Romer of New York University, that there was no need to do the sort of testing he was proposing.

"That's not appropriate health care policy," Dr. Atlas wrote.

Dr. Atlas went on to mention a theory that the virus can be arrested once a small percentage of the United States population contracts it. He said there was a "likelihood that only 25 or 20 percent of people need the infection," an apparent reference to a threshold for so-called herd immunity that epidemiologists have widely disputed.

The call for more widespread testing and isolation, Dr. Atlas wrote, "is grossly misguided."

The exchange highlights the resistance in the White House toward adopting a significantly expanded federal testing program, including efforts to support infected patients in isolation and track the people they have been in contact with, even as cases and deaths continue to rise nationwide. That resistance has become a sticking point in negotiations over a new economic stimulus package, with the administration and top Democrats yet to agree on the scope and setup of an expanded testing plan.

Many public health experts, and some economists like Mr. Romer, say that a far more sweeping program would save lives and bolster the economy by helping as many Americans as possible learn quickly if they are infected — and then take steps to avoid spreading the virus.

Dr. Atlas and other administration officials playing influential roles in the government's virus response effectively say the opposite: that more widespread testing would infringe on Americans' privacy and hurt the economy, by keeping potentially infected workers who show no symptoms from reporting to their jobs.

Katherine J. Wu contributed reporting from New York.

ALEX WELSH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Since the early days of the pandemic, Paul Romer, a Nobel Prize-winning economist of New York University, has been arguing for a wide-scale testing program, costing as much as $100 billion.

Congressional Democrats have grown so frustrated with the administration's testing efforts that as part of any agreement on a new aid package, they insisted on language that would force the government to carry out a far more prescriptive national program for administering and distributing tests.

While White House negotiators resisted those demands for months, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has said he will accept such wording with minor edits. Top Democratic staff, including the top health adviser to Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, walked Mr. Mnuchin through the party's proposal on Friday, according to a person familiar with the discussion, but they had yet to announce agreement on language by early evening.

In an interview on Thursday, Dr. Atlas, who is not involved in the stimulus talks, said that the United States had a "massive" testing program over all, but that it should be used strategically to protect vulnerable populations, like nursing home residents — not young, healthy individuals who he said were at low risk of contracting the disease. He said that large-scale government test and isolate programs infringed on civil liberties, and that new research had persuaded him that herd immunity might be achieved once 20 or 40 percent of Americans are infected.

"The overwhelming majority of people who get this infection are not at high risk," Dr. Atlas said in the interview. "And when you start seeking out and testing asymptomatic people, you are destroying the workforce."

Many congressional Republicans, who prefer to leave testing decisions to states, share Dr. Atlas's concerns about federal testing programs, a complication if Mr. Mnuchin and Ms. Pelosi do agree on a nearly $2 trillion economic stimulus deal.

Mr. Mnuchin said on Thursday that the pair had settled on spending an additional $75 billion for testing and tracing. But the sides have not yet reached agreement on the language that Democrats have demanded for a national testing strategy, including timelines and benchmarks for allocating testing supplies and testing communities heavily affected by the virus. Democrats have been wary that the administration would actually spend the money as intended without specific legislative parameters.

Ms. Pelosi said she had not received proposed changes from Mr. Mnuchin as of early Friday evening, saying in an interview on MSNBC, "we're making progress — we have to have clarification in language." The pair are scheduled to speak Saturday evening.

"The devil and the angels are in the detail," she said, adding that she was opposed to "giving the president a slush fund" instead of "a prescription for what we need, what scientists tell us to need to stop the spread of this virus."

Experts from a wide range of fields have repeatedly denounced the lack of testing in the United States. Despite Mr. Trump's repeated affirmations that the country has done more testing than any other nation, researchers have noted that 991,000 or so tests done each day were still not enough to keep in check a virus that has infected more than eight million people nationwide. Tests can individually diagnose people who might unknowingly carrying the virus. At the population level, they can also help health officials monitor any spread and pinpoint and quash outbreaks before they spin out of control.

Others have cautioned against an overreliance on testing as a preventive measure, noting that, in the absence of standards like physical distancing and mask wearing, testing alone cannot fully contain a virus that spreads wherever people tend to gather, regardless of whether those infected are exhibiting symptoms.

"No testing scheme, no test is perfect. There will always be people who go undetected," said Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University who has researched and written about herd immunity. "The best way to protect the most vulnerable is to reduce the amount of virus that's in the population that can get through all of those testing schemes and cause destruction."

Dr. Atlas's position has been challenged by medical advisers around him who have backgrounds in infectious disease response, revealing a significant rift in the White House over the right approach. Dr. Deborah L. Birx, the White House's coronavirus response coordinator, has pushed for aggressive, broad testing even among young and healthy people, often clashing with Dr. Atlas in meetings.

"I would always be happy if we had 100 percent of students tested weekly," Dr. Birx said on Wednesday in an appearance at Penn State University, "because I think testing changes behavior."

Dr. Atlas at one point influenced the administration's efforts to install new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance that said it was not necessary to test people without symptoms of Covid-19 even if they had been exposed to the virus, upsetting Dr. Birx and Dr. Robert R. Redfield, the C.D.C. director.

The administration's efforts to fund federal and state testing have long been fraught. In July, as administration officials and top Senate Republicans clashed over the contours of their initial $1 trillion proposal, the White House initially balked at providing billions of dollars to fund coronavirus testing and help federal health agencies.

Since the early days of the pandemic, Mr. Romer has argued for a wide-scale testing program, costing as much as $100 billion. He had hoped to persuade Dr. Atlas that if officials could quickly identify and isolate people carrying the virus, they would slow its spread and allow normal economic activity to resume more quickly.

> ***Screening the asymptomatic is a sticking point.***

In his email, sent to Dr. Atlas's personal account, Mr. Romer proposed additional testing and isolation efforts that could allow far more Americans to return to work and shopping, generating economic activity that would be 10 or 100 times larger than the cost of the testing program itself.

In an interview, he said he also "went out on a limb" to propose a version of an expanded testing plan that might appeal to Mr. Trump, who said this year that he had instructed federal officials to slow the rate of testing because "by having more tests, we have more cases."

Mr. Romer wrote that an increase in positive test results could be "interpreted as a sign of a policy failure." He said the administration could instead consider a plan to send Americans tests they could administer themselves at home, then allow people to voluntarily self-isolate if they tested positive, which would not officially generate new "confirmed" cases.

Dr. Atlas replied that the push for such testing was the result of "a fundamental error of the public health people perpetrated on the world."

Mr. Romer said he was taken aback by the answer: "Atlas just responded in a way that just honestly made it seem like he was in over his head," he said.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Negative Tests Are Not a Full Picture, Experts Say, Pointing to Limitations

By KATHERINE J. WU

In a flurry of memos released this week and last, the White House physician, Dr. Sean Conley, stated that President Trump no longer posed a transmission risk to others — an assessment, he noted, that was largely precipitated by the results of a bevy of "advanced diagnostics." The declarations have helped clear Mr. Trump to return to the campaign trail, including a town-hall-style event hosted by NBC News on Thursday evening.

Outside experts have also said that Mr. Trump, who reportedly began feeling sick about two weeks ago, is probably no longer infectious. But most have based such assessments on the trajectory of the president's symptoms — not the results of his tests.

There exists no test that can definitively determine whether someone who caught the coronavirus is still contagious. "We do not have a test for cure, and we do not have a test for infectiousness," said Omai Garner, a clinical microbiologist at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Experts have criticized the administration's overreliance on tests to keep the coronavirus out of Mr. Trump's inner circle. Now, they said, the White House appears to be leaning too heavily on tests to break the president out of isolation.

Not all coronavirus tests are designed to detect the same parts of the virus. And a negative on one test does not necessarily guarantee a negative on another.

"We don't just look at these tests in the context of 'Coronavirus, yes or no,'" said Karissa Culbreath, a clinical microbiologist at TriCore Reference Laboratories in New Mexico. "Each test looks for a different aspect of the virus."

As recently as Tuesday, for instance, a rapid test called the BinaxNOW was unable to detect the coronavirus in Mr. Trump. But results yielded from a laboratory test, which used a slower but more accurate technique called polymerase chain reaction, or P.C.R., showed he still carried genetic material from the virus at low levels in his body.

The White House also reported using two experimental approaches on Mr. Trump: a viral culture, in which researchers in a laboratory tried to grow the coronavirus from a sample taken from the president, and a test for subgenomic RNA, a proxy for the presence of actively replicating virus.

Many types of P.C.R. and antigen tests for the coronavirus have received a green light from the Food and Drug Administration. But viral culture and probes for subgenomic RNA are not currently part of the standard testing tool kit, Dr. Culbreath said.

> **There's no way to know if a person is still infectious.**

P.C.R.-based tests are some of many among a suite of so-called molecular tests, which hunt for genetic material exclusive to the coronavirus. These tests include an amplification step, wherein the genetic material is copied over and over until it reaches detectable levels, revealing even very small amounts of the virus.

Some P.C.R.-based tests can also give an indication of how much virus is lingering in the body — a number called the cycle threshold, or C.T., which increases as the virus becomes scarcer.

A recent P.C.R. test taken by Mr. Trump yielded a C.T. of 34.3, after steadily increasing for several days. Researchers have had trouble growing the virus out of samples taken from people whose P.C.R. tests crest above the low 30s. But exceptions to this trend do exist, and cycle-threshold readings are often inconsistent among different types of P.C.R.-based tests, and even among laboratories using the same test.

"We cannot say, 'A C.T. value of 34 does not make someone infectious' across the board," Dr. Culbreath said. "It's not a universal answer."

Tests like the BinaxNOW, on the other hand, are antigen tests, which search for bits of proteins, or antigens, made by the coronavirus. Unlike P.C.R.-based tests, antigen tests do not include a step in which they amplify their targets, making them faster and more convenient but less reliable at finding the virus when it is in low abundance. Some P.C.R.-based tests are thought to be many thousands times more sensitive than antigen tests.

It's thus very possible to be antigen negative but P.C.R. positive, while still harboring the virus in the body, Dr. Culbreath said.

The BinaxNOW has emergency clearance from the F.D.A., but only when administered within seven days after the onset of symptoms. Researchers do not yet know how the test will perform in people outside this window. Mr. Trump received several of these tests during his second week of illness, all of which returned negative results.

"The tests have to be used when they're supposed to be used," said Andrea Prinzi, a clinical microbiologist at the University of Colorado, Anschutz. "That's when they're going to help you the most."

Both P.C.R. and antigen tests have another limitation: They look for hunks of the virus's anatomy — debris from the pathogen — and cannot determine whether the virus is still active. Some people who have been infected by the coronavirus may register as P.C.R. positive for weeks, even months, after they are no longer contagious or ill, simply because tests are picking up on harmless souvenirs of an infection long past.

DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

On Tuesday, a laboratory test found that President Trump carried low levels of the virus, but a rapid test came back negative. Researchers say that different techniques can have different results.

"Neither is a measure of actual, live virus," Dr. Garner said, of P.C.R. and antigen tests.

That's where viral culture comes in. Scientists can take a sample from a person's airway and then try to coax the coronavirus into infecting cells in a lab. But these procedures are not widely available to the public, because they have to be performed in a high-containment facility by people specifically trained to work with deadly pathogens.

These restrictions have led several scientists to experiment with P.C.R.-based tests that search specifically for subgenomic RNA as a possible proxy for active virus. Subgenomic RNA is a type of genetic material that is produced only after the coronavirus has infected a human cell. The compound can thus act as a sort of molecular beacon that can alert researchers to a virus that has started to reproduce itself, without the need to grow the dangerous pathogen.

Dr. Conley's memos about Mr. Trump appear to indicate that the president is no longer producing samples with detectable subgenomic RNA. Researchers have also tried to culture the coronavirus outside of his body, although few details on this have been shared. Virus that can be cultured is not necessarily transmittable, or vice versa.

Neither viral culture nor subgenomic RNA tests are approved for widespread use, Dr. Garner noted. Researchers doing these studies might not perform their experiments in the same way, making any results difficult to interpret without more information how, and by whom, they were obtained.

Guidelines published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stipulate that symptoms — not test results — should be the primary motivator for ending a person's isolation. People with mild or moderate Covid-19 should isolate for least 10 days after their symptoms start. That timeline could extend up to 20 days if their symptoms are severe.

Before advising someone to end their isolation for Covid-19, "I would want to know about their symptoms," said Dr. Krutika Kuppalli, an infectious disease physician in South Carolina. While information on tests wouldn't hurt, that data should be considered secondary to how the patient is feeling. Otherwise, the tests might be not just unhelpful, but also a "waste of resources," Dr. Kuppalli said.

"If the president meets C.D.C. guidelines, he can come out of isolation," said Dr. Alexander McAdam, director of the infectious diseases diagnostic laboratory at Boston Children's Hospital. "But I don't see testing as a get-out-of-jail-free card."

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International

The New York Times

LAM YIK FEI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong. The number of properties the office owns in the city has tripled over the last three decades.

Communist Party Steps Out of Shadows in Hong Kong

A Once-Secret Office Exerts Beijing's Will

This article is by ***Austin Ramzy****,* ***Vivian Wang*** *and* ***Chris Buckley****.*

HONG KONG — It was a classic scene from the Chinese Communist Party's repertoire: A high-ranking official descended on the home of a poor, patriotic worker, bearing gifts and wishes for a happy National Day, receiving declarations of gratitude and loyalty in return.

But the visit this month did not take place in a hardscrabble village in mainland China, where officials often make such scripted trips to show their bond with the masses. It played out in Hong Kong, the semiautonomous region where such overt displays by the Communist Party apparatus were once rare.

The much-publicized meeting carried a clear message, made all the more potent since China imposed a new national security law in Hong Kong this summer. The days of the central government exercising its will behind the scenes are over. Now, it will rule Hong Kong increasingly in the open.

"Hong Kong's responsibility to the nation should be emphasized more than ever," Luo Huining, Beijing's top official in Hong Kong, who leads the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, said in a speech a day before his visit. "Loving our country is an obligation and a righteous path rather than a choice."

For Hong Kong, the shift to more direct management by Beijing is a drastic change. The Communist Party for decades allowed the former British colony to be steered by its proxies in the civil service and the business elite.

For Beijing, subduing Hong Kong is seen as fundamental to broader national control. China's top leader, Xi Jinping, is intent on extending party dominance across the entire country, especially in Hong Kong, an enclave of resistance that erupted in protest last year.

At the heart of Beijing's new drive for control is the liaison office, its official arm in Hong Kong.

Historically, the office kept a low profile, serving — as its name implies — as a go-between, shuttling messages and demands between top Chinese officials and the Hong Kong authorities. But in recent months, the office has started regularly blaring orders and warnings that underscore its newly elevated role.

The liaison office accused a professor of instigating an anti-party insurrection. It demanded that pro-democracy politicians cancel informal primary elections. It warned Hong Kong teachers to make sure their students are immersed in patriotic Chinese values.

On Monday, two days before Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, was set to deliver her annual policy address, she abruptly announced a postponement until she could consult top Chinese leaders about her proposals. She said she would travel to Beijing to "personally explain why these measures are important."

Many of Hong Kong's traditional power brokers appear resigned to the new reality.

"It has become one-way traffic," said James Tien, a former pro-Beijing lawmaker and influential magnate.

The liaison office was born in secrecy, posing during the British colonial era as an outlet of China's main news agency. When Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, China's rulers were eager to harness the commercial energy of Hong Kong and to learn from its business leaders — and the office operated in the background.

"Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" was the mantra.

But in recent years, central leaders appeared to lose faith in that hands-off arrangement, especially as demonstrations convulsed the city.

Beijing pushed through the security law with little input from Hong Kong. It gave local leaders, including Mrs. Lam, little advance notice.

"They learned from our bitter experience," said Regina Ip, a member of Mrs. Lam's cabinet, referring to a Hong Kong government effort she led in 2003 to enact similar legislation, which was derailed by popular opposition. "What's the point of consultation?"

The law allows China's security agencies to set up offices and operate openly in Hong Kong, and a mainland official heads a new national security office. Mr. Luo, the liaison office head, is also the national security adviser.

Mr. Luo, who was appointed in January, embodies the central government's push for tighter control. While Beijing's previous top officials had spent considerable time in the city before getting promoted, Mr. Luo had minimal experience there.

LAM YIK FEI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

NAVESH CHITRAKAR/REUTERS

Luo Huining, left, leads the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government. Its publishing arm dominates book sales in Hong Kong, above.

There is little evidence that Mr. Luo speaks much Cantonese, the local Chinese language, and he has kept his distance from the city's elite. Mr. Luo rarely meets with pro-Beijing lawmakers, leaving such talks to his deputy, said Mrs. Ip.

What he does have is the trust of Mr. Xi, who appears to favor Mr. Luo as a provincial official with a specialty in cleaning up unruly provinces and wayward cadres.

Mr. Luo rose through the party ranks in Anhui, a rural, inland province. When he was transferred to Qinghai Province, he pressed forward efforts to absorb the large Tibetan minority into China's mainstream. Mr. Luo later won Mr. Xi's plaudits for purging officials in Shanxi, a coal-rich province where corruption was endemic.

Some now half-jokingly describe Mr. Luo as Hong Kong's Communist Party secretary. That title does not officially exist but conveys the shift under Mr. Luo's watch. In China, the party secretary outranks other local officials.

"The relationship between the liaison office and the Hong Kong government is already likened to a party secretary versus a mayor in China," said Eliza Lee, a professor of politics at the University of Hong Kong. "That kind of relationship will become increasingly normalized."

The liaison office's growing status can be seen in its physical footprint.

The number of properties it owns in the city has tripled over the past three decades, to include hundreds of apartment buildings, offices, retail units and parking spots. Reflecting its increased staff in the city, an office subsidiary bought at least 20 residential properties last year, according to Hong Kong records.

It also oversees a publishing company, Sino United, that dominates retail book sales in Hong Kong. At one of its bookstores, a table was piled with titles such as "Hong Kong's Disturbance," a collection of reports about the 2019 protests by China's state news agency, and "The Dawn Breaking Through Hong Kong's Dark Night" — a reference to the security law.

Newspapers owned by the liaison office, long dismissed as propaganda, are now studied for clues about Beijing's intentions in Hong Kong. Lately, the newspapers — Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po — have railed against what they call overly lenient judges who have dismissed prosecutions of protesters, and establishment lawmakers have followed with calls for judicial reforms, including establishing a council to set sentences.

Late last month, the liaison office convened a meeting with establishment politicians to discuss the legislature's priorities. According to a meeting summary sent to other members by Junius Ho, a pro-Beijing lawmaker, the office made clear that it wanted to prioritize the "three mountains" of reforming education, the judiciary and social services.

Other officials confirmed the meeting but disputed his characterization, saying the office was simply attempting to canvass views. They also said such meetings were typical, as the liaison office has traditionally helped organize the establishment bloc in the Legislative Council, by mediating conflicts and deciding who runs where in elections.

The office's expanded playbook was clear in Mr. Luo's recent visits to low-income residents. After chatting with one man, a chef who lost his job last year, Mr. Luo told his deputies to quickly find him work, according to an office statement.

Such photo ops have been relatively uncommon, and a focus on specific policies and questions of social welfare is even more unusual.

The next day, several pro-Beijing politicians called on the Hong Kong government to expand its support for low-income residents. One of them, Bill Tang, said Hong Kong had not done enough to help the unemployed, and cited the central government's campaign to end poverty in the mainland.

"I really hope that such a spirit can also be on Hong Kong," Mr. Tang said in an interview.

Xu Tianmin, the chef visited by Mr. Luo, was thrilled by the attention from Beijing.

On social media, Mr. Xu, who arrived from the mainland seven years ago, seems ardently patriotic, rallying against Hong Kong demonstrators and removing protest messages from the so-called Lennon Walls. He told one state-owned newspaper that his pro-government activism was the reason he had lost his last job.

"I never thought that I would be visited," he told another paper. "I'm so thankful to the liaison office for its concern for residents at the grass roots."

But in the days after the visit, the glow faded a little. The city's opposition camp questioned the scripted nature of the visit and reported donations of protective gear to Mr. Xu's hometown.

Mr. Xu declined to be interviewed in person, but in a brief exchange over a messaging app, he said he had not yet found full-time work and was still scraping by with temporary construction jobs.

Many people had tried to help him find a job after the news of his meeting, he said. But it was friends who reached out with potential opportunities — not the liaison office.

Cao Li contributed reporting from Hong Kong.

Man Kills Teacher In Paris Suburb, Decapitating Him

Knife-Wielding Suspect Is Shot Dead by Police

By ADAM NOSSITER

PARIS — A knife-wielding man decapitated a teacher near a school in a suburb north of Paris on Friday afternoon and was later shot dead by the police, officials said, abruptly hitting France with a national trauma that revived memories of recent terrorist attacks.

A police officer and parents with knowledge of the attack confirmed French media reports that the victim was a history teacher at the school who had shown caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in a class on freedom of expression, which had incited anger among some Muslim families.

The teacher, still unidentified by Friday evening, was immediately depicted as a martyr to freedom of expression across the political spectrum. And President Emmanuel Macron hurried to the scene of the attack Friday night.

"This was an attempt to strike down the republic," Mr. Macron said.

Seizing on the symbolic nature of an attack against a high school teacher, and reprising anti-Islamist themes he has lately emphasized, Mr. Macron said the teacher had been "the victim of a terrorist, Islamist attack."

France's antiterrorism prosecutors immediately took over the investigation of the attack, which happened at the junction of two adjoining Paris suburbs, Eragny and Conflans-Sainte-Honorine.

Much remained obscure Friday night in the absence of an official police narrative. But the underlying themes of what was known conjured up France's recent history of terrorist attacks: an assailant carefully choosing a victim thought to symbolize an offense against Islam.

In a video that widely circulated on YouTube before the attack, a Muslim parent at the teacher's school, College du Bois-d'Aulne, expresses anger that an unidentified teacher had asked Muslims in the class of 13-year-olds to leave because "he was going to show a photo that would shock them."

The assailant is not known to have a connection to the school. French media reported that he was 18 and of Russian origin.

A police union official told the French television station BFM that witnesses had seen the assailant cutting the victim's throat. The national police were called, officials said, and after having discovered the decapitated victim, confronted the assailant nearby, close to the school. Brandishing a large knife, he threatened the officers, and after refusing to surrender, was shot 10 times, they said.

French officials of all political stripes rushed to denounce the teacher's killing.

"The assassination of a history teacher is an attack on freedom of expression and the values of the republic," the president of the National Assembly, Richard Ferrand, said on Twitter. "To attack a teacher is to attack all French citizens and freedom."

THE NEW YORK TIMES

In the video, the parent details what his daughter told him had transpired in the class.

"So this week, he allowed himself to tell them, the Muslims, Muslim students raise your hands," the parent says. "So they raised their hands, and he said, 'right, leave the class.' So my daughter refused to leave and asked him, 'Why?' And he said he was going to show a photo that would shock them. And then he showed them a naked man, telling them it was the prophet."

Another parent, Carine Mendes, 41, whose child had attended the class, offered a more nuanced view of what happened.

Ms. Mendes said the teacher had suggested to Muslim students who did not want to see the cartoon that they leave the classroom temporarily, and had asked those who remained not to tell their Muslim classmates about the cartoon in order not to offend their faith.

"He really tried to do things with respect, he didn't want to hurt anyone," she said.

But in a second class where the teacher gave the course, a shocked student refused to leave the room and told her father about what happened. He was the father who later complained in the video posted online.

"A teacher was killed just for doing his job," Sophie Venetitay, a teachers' union official, told BFM.

Constant Méheut and Antonella Francini contributed reporting.

THE SATURDAY PROFILE

In Lebanon, Recreating a Legacy of Stained-Glass Marvels

By BEN HUBBARD

HAZMIYEH, LEBANON

HER hands created the gentle smile on the face of the Virgin Mary, the folds in the robes of the Four Evangelists and the glow surrounding the cherubic baby Jesus.

In three decades of exacting work, Maya Husseini had established herself as Lebanon's premier stained-glass artist, her work making the light of the Mediterranean dance in many of the country's best-known churches.

As she celebrated her 60th birthday on Aug. 3, she was looking forward to wrapping up a final project and retiring. But Lebanon had other plans.

The next day, an enormous explosion in the port of Beirut ripped through entire neighborhoods, gutting apartment buildings, killing more than 190 people and causing billions of dollars in damage. It also tore through churches housing Ms. Husseini's work, reducing a dozen of her delicate tableaus to jagged shards and twisted metal.

"Thirty years of my professional life were gone," she said in an interview after the blast in her workshop near Beirut. "Dust!"

In the aftermath, as her phone filled with images sent by distraught priests and pastors showing her work obliterated, Ms. Husseini decided that retirement would have to wait.

"I wanted to stop, but I don't have the right to stop," she said. "It is patrimony. You don't have the right *not* to bring it back the way it was."

There have always been risks to working in such a fragile medium in a country so prone to violent shocks.

Since its 15-year civil war ended in 1990, Lebanon has lived through political assassinations, Israeli airstrikes, jihadist car bombings and the influx of more than a million refugees from neighboring Syria. All of that was before new crises over the last year ravaged downtown Beirut and tanked the economy.

But Ms. Husseini's life and art had always traversed the chaos that before the Beirut blast only occasionally reached into sacred spaces.

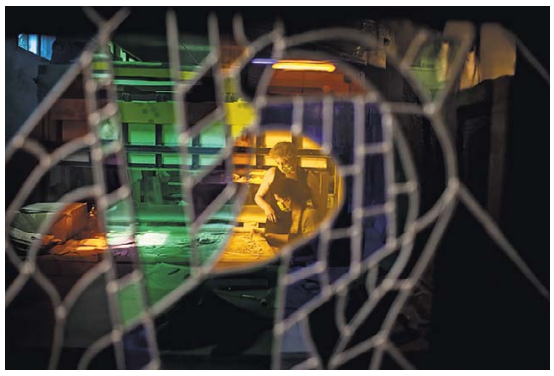
One of those was a church damaged in the 2005 car bombing that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Her first major project, extensive stained-glass images in the Notre Dame du Mont church in the mountain town of Adma, was also damaged when Israel bombed a nearby television antenna during its war with the Hezbollah militant group in 2006.

But last month's blast, the largest explosion in Lebanon's history, greatly surpassed the other blows, and the toll on her work was clear during a recent visit to her workshop outside Beirut, where the large metal door had been punched in by the impact. In the entryway sat the remains of shattered stained-glass windows from three churches and one home, in hopes that they could be repaired.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIEGO IBARRA SANCHEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

'I wanted to stop, but I don't have the right to stop. It is patrimony. You don't have the right not to bring it back the way it was.'

MAYA HUSSEINI



Above left, one of Ms. Husseini's assistants working on a piece destroyed in the Aug. 4 blast. Above right, a sketch for a window.

Inside, an energetic Ms. Husseini looked on as two assistants pieced together the paper pattern of a large portrait of Jesus, Mary and Joseph during the flight to Egypt. She had installed the original in Beirut's Saint Joseph Church in 1992 and dug up the original pattern after it was destroyed in the blast to make it all over again.

Ms. Husseini grew up in a Maronite Christian family in Beirut, where she and her four sisters went to church regularly and she began drawing at age 12. She was 15 at the outbreak of Lebanon's civil war, when an array of militias battled for turf, scarring and dividing the city.

She studied at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts and did a two-month stint focused on stained glass at Ateliers Loire in Chartres, France, home to the cathedral thought by many experts to have the finest stained-glass windows in the world.

ALTHOUGH Lebanon has more Christians per capita than any other Arab state, stained-glass windows were not common in its churches before the war, Ms. Husseini said. But after the guns fell silent in 1990, some congregations wanted to add them as the country rebuilt.

The first barrier she had to overcome, she said, was the hesitation of male church leaders to hire a woman for what was seen as physically demanding work.

"It was not often that they would trust you," she said.

Her father, an engineer who built churches, convents and religious schools, helped her get started, and she completed her first commission in 1991 — more than 1,300 square feet of glass in the church in Adma, featuring scenes from the life of Christ. The next year, she crafted images of saints and a mural of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Egypt for the St. Joseph Church in Beirut.

As her name spread, she got more jobs, ultimately designing and producing stained glass for more than 35 churches and related facilities around Lebanon. She also did facades and murals for homes and the red, yellow and blue windows of the Sursock Museum, a private art museum in Beirut.

In 2016, she completed one of her most important projects: 39 windows in the 150-year-old St. Louis Cathedral in downtown Beirut, with the annunciation of Mary, Jesus's birth, Jesus washing the disciples' feet, the crucifixion and the resurrection. Around the cathedral's cupola, she put 10 angel musicians.

"It was a lot of work," she said. Some pieces were fired in the kiln four times because of all the detail.

Her process has changed little over the years. She works only on blown glass and by hand, with no computers. After getting a commission and visiting the site to assess the light, she draws the design full size in pencil and felt-tip pen.

Each section of the drawing gets two numbers: one for its place, the other for its color. She then cuts them with special scissors and uses the pieces as patterns to cut the glass.

Panes with illustrations such as faces and clothes are painted by hand and fired in a kiln to bind the paint to the glass. The pieces are then assembled with lead strips, welded into a frame and covered with mastic, a kind of sealant, for protection.

Nearly all of the supplies are imported — the glass from France and the lead from Canada — which has made it harder for Ms. Husseini to get them, because Lebanon's currency has lost about 80 percent of its value since last year.

"Everything is from abroad," she said. "Only the head and hands are Lebanese."

BEFORE the blast, Ms. Husseini's major remaining project was the glass for a new basilica in Jordan, near the spot in the Jordan River where it is said that John the Baptist baptized Jesus. That was to take two years, after which she planned to shift to instructing young Lebanese artisans in the craft.

Ms. Husseini was in her family's house in the mountains above Beirut when she heard the blast on Aug. 4, but she did not fully grasp its magnitude.

Her son-in-law's grandmother was injured and rushed to the hospital, and her patrons flooded her phone with heartbroken messages and photos of her shattered work blown across church floors. A few days later, she began visiting sites that had once held her glass, and it was the St. Louis Cathedral that shocked her most. Of the 39 windows she had labored over for two years, only three remained.

"That's when I felt the size of the catastrophe," she said.

In the weeks since, she has returned to work, hiring new assistants to accelerate repair jobs and beginning the lengthy process of getting materials from abroad. Fixing everything could take years, and her most extensive projects are on hold while congregations gather money for restoration.

In Europe, the stained-glass trade was traditionally passed from father to son, she said, but neither of her adult children is interested. Her son is pursuing a doctorate in Switzerland and her daughter, an interior designer, plans to emigrate to Canada.

But Ms. Husseini hopes that the repair process will teach younger artisans the trade and keep it going when she finally retires.

"If I stopped, this work would completely stop in Lebanon," she said. "And it would be a shame if it stopped."

Strangling of White Farmer Sets Off Protests on 2 Sides In a Divided South Africa

By LYNSEY CHUTEL and MONICA MARK

SENEKAL, South Africa — A young white farm manager was found earlier this month strangled and tied to a pole on a farm in the eastern part of the Free State province, police said. Two Black men were accused of the murder.

At a packed court hearing on Friday, the police captain investigating the case said that the suspects were part of a ring of livestock thieves operating in the area, and that it appeared that the motive was robbery rather than racial animus.

But the killing of the farm manager, Brendin Horner, has become the latest flash point for racial conflict in South Africa, where the segregationist apartheid regime fell almost 30 years ago. Tension is particularly high in rural farming areas where white people still own a vast majority of the farms and Black people still serve as their often impoverished laborers.

Groups representing white farmers accuse the South African government of deliberately failing to protect them. Some white activist groups say that what they call "farm murders" represent the beginning of a "white genocide" aimed at driving whites out of South Africa.

Critics see this as a deeply distorted narrative promoted by the white beneficiaries of apartheid to drum up international sympathy. They point out that violent crime is common in South Africa. The vast majority of the victims are Black.

Of 21,325 murder victims last year, 49 were white farmers — accounting for much less than 1 percent of the country's total, according to police statistics. White South Africans make up about 9 percent of the country's 58 million citizens.

At Friday's hearing, white farmers and motorcycle riders faced off with Black protesters in the red polo shirts of the leftist political party Economic Freedom Fighters, or E.F.F., outside the small rural courthouse in Senekal, a town on the banks of the Sand River. Police erected barbed wire to separate the groups, but at one point they stood nose to nose — a situation defused when volunteer marshals from both sides intervened.

On a hill outside town, white farmers waved a banner with the face of Mr. Horner and carried white wooden crosses. Some wore bulletproof vests. After reading the Bible and praying, they sang South Africa's apartheid-era national anthem.

Some of the farmers said in interviews that South Africa's lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and the resulting economic downturn, have made poor Black South Africans more desperate.

"Usually they steal for food on the table, now they're killing," said Derek Meyer, a farmer at the protest.

Khanyi Magubane, a political commentator and journalist, said of the white farmers, "They don't see the bigger picture of dysfunctionality in South Africa. Everybody is being targeted, everybody is being robbed."

JOAO SILVA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Farmers in Senekal, South Africa, where two Black men are accused of killing a white farm manager.

The farmers jeered as buses and minivans ferrying supporters of the E.F.F. drove by, some passengers singing "Kill the Boer," a liberation-era song that has since been declared hate speech.

The founding leader of the E.F.F., Julius Malema, a firebrand expelled from the ruling African National Congress party, addressed the crowd of about 2,500 from a portable stage outside the courthouse, saying, "We are here to fight and die against apartheid, because South Africa still has got apartheid."

He has tapped into long-simmering anger by calling for land redistribution. In Parliament, the E.F.F. controls 44 out of 400 seats, and accuses the majority party, the African National Congress, of moving too slowly and too cautiously on land redistribution.

A 2017 government survey found that white farmers control nearly 70 percent of farms held by individual owners in South Africa. Much of that land was brutally confiscated from African inhabitants generations ago. Of the vast tracts in Free State, where Mr. Horner was killed, three quarters of farms are owned by white South Africans, while Black South Africans own just 3 percent, the survey found.

South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, spoke out about the killing of Mr. Horner on Monday, expressing horror and sympathy, but cautioning against falsely equating the murders of white farmers with ethnic cleansing. "They are not genocidal. They are acts of criminality and must be treated as such," Mr. Ramaphosa said in his weekly presidential address.

"What happened in Senekal shows just how easily the tinderbox of race hatred can be ignited," he said.

In a nation with the world's fifth-highest murder rate, Mr. Ramaphosa has in recent months used his addresses to name murder victims, particularly women killed during the lockdown. He pointed out that three young Black men were shot dead in a car in South Africa in the same week that Mr. Horner was killed.

But the violent protests over the killing of Mr. Horner grabbed immediate and outsized attention.

On Oct. 6, several hundred white protesters gathered outside the courthouse in Senekal where the two suspects were appearing for a hearing. Some protesters set a police van on fire and stormed the court holding cells, demanding that the defendants be turned over to them.

A 51-year-old white businessman, Andre Pienaar, was later arrested and charged with attempted murder, malicious damage to property and public violence. He was denied bail.

AfriForum, a large advocacy group for Afrikaners, the descendants of the white Dutch and Huguenot settlers of South Africa, has led international efforts to draw attention to their discredited claims that white farmers are being systematically forced off their land and killed in large numbers.

In 2018, after Ernst Roets, deputy chief executive of AfriForum, appeared on a segment on Fox News in the United States with the host Tucker Carlson, President Trump said on Twitter that he was directing his secretary of state to investigate what he called "large-scale killing" of white farmers.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Roets said that the government does not protect white farmers: "It's very clear this is not a priority for them to do anything," he said.

In the courtroom on Friday, the judge was flanked by four armed police officers, government ministers occupied the benches near the front and journalists packed the room.

The country's minister of police, Bheki Cele, who had visited the town earlier in the week in a bid to de-escalate the tensions, noted in an interview afterward that four people — three of them Black — had been killed in the area since April.

"One of them is this young white man," he said.

Lynsey Chutel reported from Senekal, and Monica Mark from Johannesburg.

Tensions over race and land ownership, long after apartheid.

Inferno Threatens World's Largest Tropical Wetland

'I suffer from depression because of this. Now there is a hollow silence. I feel as though our freedom has left us, has been taken from us with the nature that we have always protected.'

SANDRA GUATÓ SILVA, a community leader and healer in an Indigenous territory called Baía dos Guató

This article is by ***Catrin Einhorn***, ***Maria Magdalena Arréllaga***, ***Blacki Migliozzi*** *and* ***Scott Reinhard****.*

This year, roughly a quarter of the vast Pantanal wetland in Brazil, one of the most biodiverse places on Earth, has burned in wildfires worsened by climate change. What happens to a rich and unique biome when so much is destroyed?

The unprecedented fires in the wetland have attracted less attention than blazes in Australia, the Western United States and the Amazon, its celebrity sibling to the north. But while the Pantanal is not a global household name, tourists in the know flock there because it is home to exceptionally high concentrations of breathtaking wildlife: Jaguars, tapirs, endangered giant otters and bright blue hyacinth macaws. Like a vast tub, the wetland swells with water during the rainy season and empties out during the dry months. Fittingly, this rhythm has a name that evokes a beating heart: the flood pulse.

The wetland, which is larger than Greece and stretches over parts of Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia, also offers unseen gifts to a vast swath of South America by regulating the water cycle upon which life depends. Its countless swamps, lagoons and tributaries purify water and help prevent floods and droughts. They also store untold amounts of carbon, helping to stabilize the climate.

For centuries, ranchers have used fire to clear fields and new land. But this year, drought worsened by climate change turned the wetlands into a tinderbox and the fires raged out of control.

"The extent of fires is staggering," said Douglas C. Morton, who leads the Biospheric Sciences Laboratory at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and studies fire and food production in South America. "When you wipe out a quarter of a biome, you create all kinds of unprecedented circumstances."

His analysis showed that at least 22 percent of the Pantanal in Brazil has burned since January, with the worst fires, in August and September, blazing for two months straight.

Naturally occurring fire plays a role in the Pantanal, in addition to the burning by ranchers. The flames are usually contained by the landscape's mosaic of water. But this year's drought sucked these natural barriers dry. The fires are far worse than any since satellite records began. They are also worse than any in the memory of the Guató people, an Indigenous group whose ancestors have lived in the Pantanal for thousands of years.

Guató leaders in an Indigenous territory called Baía dos Guató said the fires spread from the ranches that surround their land, and satellite images confirm that the flames swept in from the outside. When fire started closing in on the home of Sandra Guató Silva, a community leader and healer, she fought to save it with the help of her son, grandson and a boat captain with a hose.

For many desperate hours, she said, they threw buckets of river water and sprayed the area around the house and its roof of thatched palm leaves. They succeeded in defending it, but at least 85 percent of her people's territory burned, according to Instituto Centro de Vida, a nonprofit group that monitors land use in the area. Throughout the Pantanal, almost half of the Indigenous lands burned, an investigative journalism organization called Agência Pública found.

Now Ms. Guató Silva mourns the loss of nature itself. "It makes me sick," she said. "The birds don't sing anymore. I no longer hear the song of the Chaco chachalaca bird. Even the jaguar that once scared me is suffering. That hurts me. I suffer from depression because of this. Now there is a hollow silence. I feel as though our freedom has left us, has been taken from us with the nature that we have always protected."

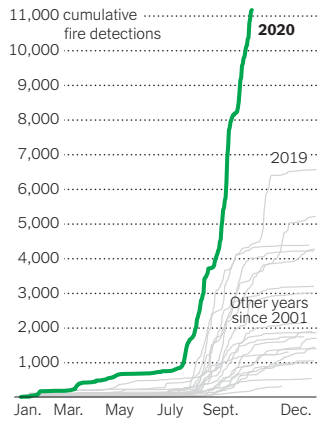
Now these people of the wetlands, some still coughing after weeks of smoke, are depending on donations of water and food. They fear that once the rains come in October, ash will run into the rivers and kill the fish they rely on for their food and livelihood.

"I couldn't help but think, our Pantanal is dead," said Eunice Morais de Amorim, another member of the community. "It is so terrible."

Scientists are scrambling to determine an estimate of animals killed in the fires. While large mammals and birds have died, many were able to run or fly away. It appears that reptiles, amphibians and small mammals have fared the worst. In places like California, small animals often take refuge underground during wildfires. But in the Pantanal, scientists say, fires burn underground too, fueled by dried-out wetland vegetation. One of the hard-hit places was a national park designated as a United Nations World Heritage site.

"I don't want to be an alarmist," said José Sabino, a biologist at the An-

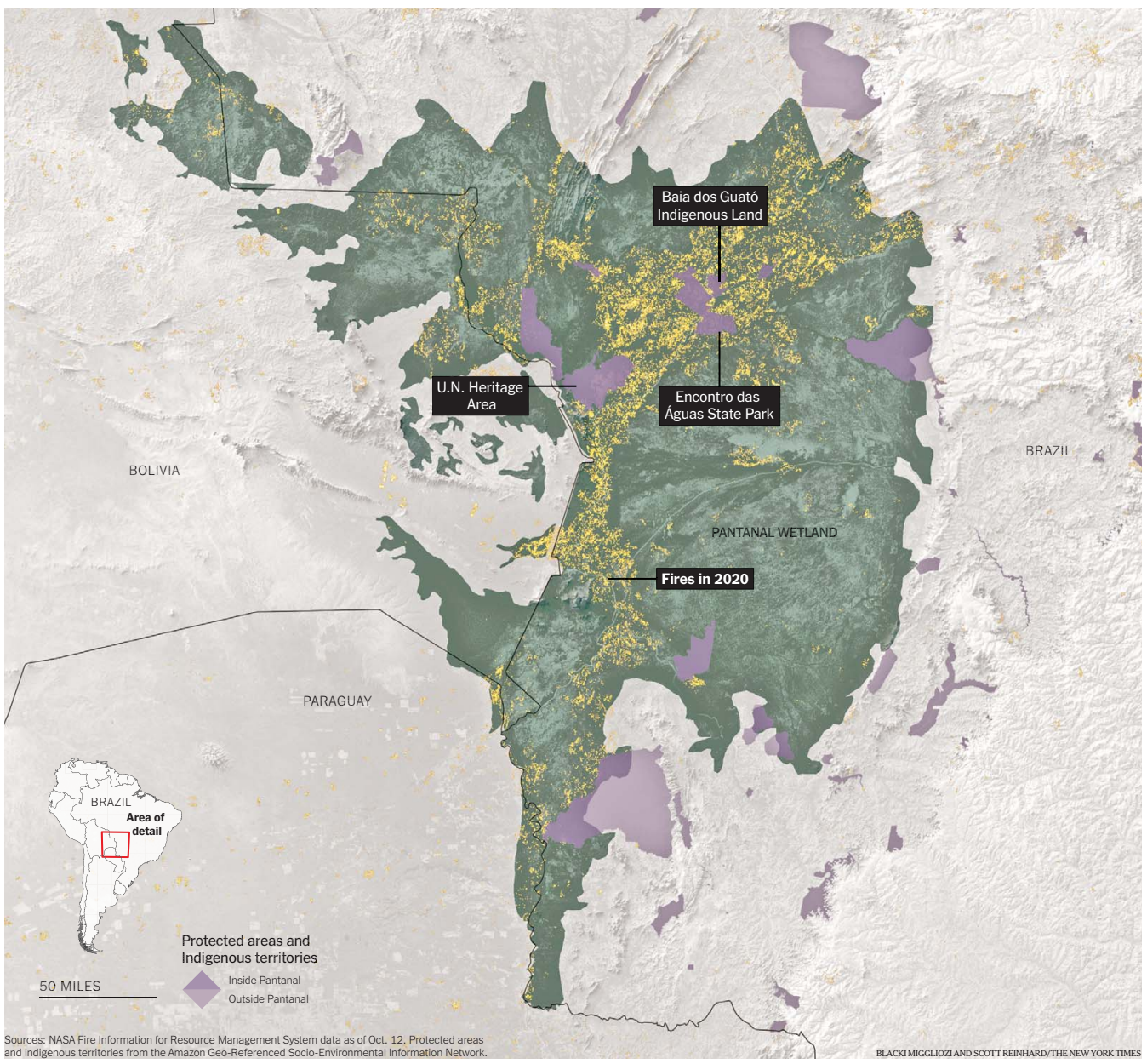
2020 Is the Most Active Fire Year on Record for the Pantanal



Note: Cumulative sum of fire detections across the Pantanal Biome. Data as of Oct. 12. Instruments on Terra and Aqua satellites have experienced periodic failures. Source: NASA Terra and Aqua satellite data, based on detections with greater than 95 percent confidence levels.

BLACKI MIGLIOZZI/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, veterinarians and volunteers at the emergency wildlife triage unit in Poconé, a region in southwest Brazil, changing the bandages of a coati that was burned in the fires. Below, the body of a cocoi heron lying in the mud.



Sources: NASA Fire Information for Resource Management System data as of Oct. 12. Protected areas and indigenous territories from the Amazon Geo-Referenced Socio-Environmental Information Network.

BLACKI MIGGLIOZZI AND SCOTT REINHARD/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Photographs by MARIA MAGDALENA ARRÉLLAGA for The New York Times

hanguera-Uniderp University in Brazil who studies the Pantanal, "but in a region where 25 percent has burned, there is a huge loss."

As the worst flames raged in August and September, biologists, ecotourism guides and other volunteers turned into firefighters, sometimes working 24 hours at a time. Fernando Tortato, a conservation scientist with Panthera, a group that advocates for big cats, visited the Pantanal in early August to install cameras for his research monitoring jaguars and ocelots. But he found the camera sites burned.

"I said to my boss, I need to change my job," Mr. Tortato said. "I need to be a firefighter." Instead of returning home to his family, he spent much of the next two months digging fire breaks with a bulldozer in an urgent attempt to protect forested areas.

One day in September, working under an orange sky, he and his team finished a huge semicircular fire break, using a wide river along one side to protect more than 3,000 hectares, he said, a vital refuge for wildlife. But as the men stood there, pleased with their accomplishment, they watched as flaming debris suddenly jumped the river, igniting the area they thought was safe. They raced into boats and tried to douse the spread, but the flames quickly climbed too high.

"That's the moment that we lost hope, almost," Mr. Tortato said. "But the next day we woke up and started again."

Mr. Tortato knows of three injured jaguars, one with third-degree burns on her paws. All were treated by veterinarians. Now, biologists are braced for the next wave of deaths from starvation; first the herbivores, left without vegetation, and then the carnivores, left without the herbivores.

"It's a cascade effect," Mr. Tortato said.

Animal rescue volunteers have flocked to the Pantanal, delivering injured animals to pop-up veterinary triage stations and leaving food and water for other animals to find. Larissa Pratta Campos, a veterinary student, has helped treat wild boar, marsh deer, birds, primates and a raccoon-like creature called a coati.

"We are working in the middle of a crisis," Ms. Pratta Campos said. "I have woken up many times in the middle of the night to tend to animals here."

Last week, the O Globo newspaper reported that firefighting specialists from Brazil's main environmental protection agency were stymied by bureaucratic procedures, delaying their deployment by four months.

Given the scope of the fires, their long-term consequences on the Pantanal are unclear. The ecosystem's grasslands may recover quickly, followed by its shrublands and swamps over the next few years, said Wolfgang J. Junk, a scientist who specializes in the region. But the forests will require decades or centuries.

Even more critical than the impact of this year's fires, scientists say, is what they tell us about the underlying health of the wetlands. Like a patient whose high fever signals a dangerous infection, the extent of the wildfires is a symptom of grave threats to the Pantanal, both from inside and out.

More than 90 percent of the Pantanal is privately owned. Ranchers have raised cattle there for hundreds of years, and ecologists emphasize that many do so sustainably. But new farmers are moving in, often with little understanding of how to use fire properly, said Cátia Nunes, a scientist from the Brazilian National Institute for Science and Technology in Wetlands. Moreover, cattle farming in the highlands has put pressure on local farmers to increase the size of their herds, using more land as they do so.

Eduardo Eubank Campos, a fifth-generation rancher, remembers his family using controlled burns to clear the land when he was a boy. He said they stopped after adding an ecotourism lodge to their 7,000 hectare property, which now includes reserves and fields on which they raise about 2,000 head of cattle and horses. This year, thanks to firebreaks, a water tank truck and workers quickly trained to fight fire, they were able to keep the flames at bay. The worst impact was on his ecotourism business, hit first by the coronavirus and then by the wildfires. It brings in three-quarters of his revenue.

Mr. Eubank Campos struggles to understand who would set fires when the land was so dry. "Pantaneiros know this is not the time to do burns," Mr. Eubank Campos said, using a term for the locals that also conveys a culture built up over centuries ranching in the wetland. "They don't want to destroy their own land."

The Brazilian federal police are investigating the fires, some of which appear to have been illegally targeting forests.

Still, when asked about the biggest threat to the Pantanal, Mr. Eubank Campos's answer highlights the region's political and cultural fault lines. "I fear those organizations that come here wanting to exploit the issue and eventually 'close' the Pantanal, turn it into one big reserve and kick out the Pantaneiros," he said.

Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, who campaigned on a promise to weaken conservation regulations, is popular in the region.

But Mr. Eubank Campos agrees with ecologists on a major threat to the Pantanal that comes from its borders and beyond.

Because ecosystems are interconnected, the well-being of the wetland is at the mercy of the booming agriculture in the surrounding highlands. The huge fields of soy, other grains and cattle — commodities traded around the world — cause soil erosion that flows into the Pantanal, clogging its rivers so severely that some have become accidental dams, robbing the area downstream of water.

The rampant deforestation and related fires in the neighboring Amazon also create a domino effect, disrupting the rainforest's "flying rivers" of precipitation that contribute to rainfall to the Pantanal. Damming for hydroelectric power deflects water away, scientists say, and a proposal to channelize the wetland's main river would make it drain too quickly.

But perhaps the most ominous danger comes from even further afield: climate change. The effects that models have predicted, a much hotter Pantanal alternating between severe drought and extreme rainfall, are already being felt, scientists say. A study published this year found that climate change poses "a critical threat" to the ecosystem, damaging biodiversity and impairing its ability to help regulate water for the continent and carbon for the world. In less than 20 years, it found that the northern Pantanal may turn into a savanna or even an arid zone.

"We are digging our grave," said Karl-Ludwig Schuchmann, an ecologist with Brazil's National Institute of Science and Technology in Wetlands and one of the study's authors.

To save the Pantanal, scientists offer solutions: Reduce climate change immediately. Practice sustainable agriculture in and around the wetland. Pay ranchers to preserve forests and other natural areas on their land. Increase ecotourism. Do not divert the Pantanal's waters, because its flood pulse is its life.

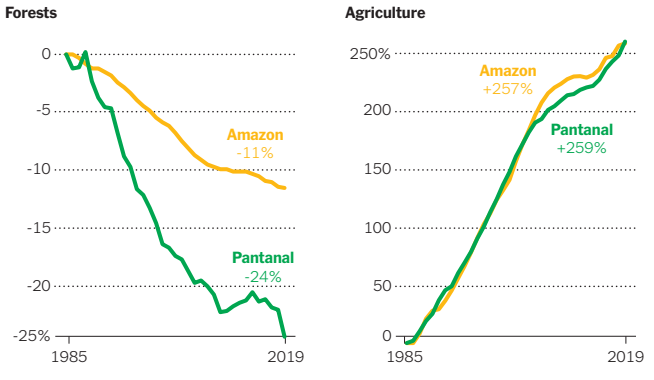
"Everybody talks about, 'we have to avoid this and that,'" Dr. Schuchmann said. "But little is done."

A jaguar at Encontro das Águas State Park, a sanctuary for endangered wildlife. Eighty percent of the park has burned.

Ernesto Londoño contributed reporting.

Forests Are Falling, Agriculture Is Rising

Percentage change in Brazilian land use



Source: MapBiomas Project—Collection 5.0 of the Annual Coverage and Land Use

BLACKI MIGLIOZZI/THE NEW YORK TIMES

French Doctor Is Charged In Hundreds Of Assaults

By CONSTANT MÉHEUT

PARIS — A retired French surgeon has been charged with the rape and sexual assault of more than 300 people, a vast majority of whom were under 15, in what could be France's biggest-ever pedophilia and sexual abuse case.

Joël Le Scouarnec, 70, a specialist in abdominal surgery, is accused of having abused 312 people over three decades at several hospitals in central and western France. The authorities said details about the identities of the victims, whose average age was 11, were included in private diaries kept by Mr. Le Scouarnec, where he described at length the sexual abuses he is accused of perpetrating. Fewer than 50 were adults.

"It is an unusual case to say the least, correctly described as extraordinary, both because of the number of its victims and the conditions that led to the exposure of the crimes," Stéphane Kellenberger, the state prosecutor in charge of the case, told reporters on Thursday.

Mr. Le Scouarnec had already been charged with sexual abuse of minors in 2017, a case that led authorities to discover the diaries.

The public prosecutor's office had initially identified 343 potential victims but eventually dismissed 31 cases because the statute of limitations had lapsed or for lack of evidence. Among the remaining 312 people, all thought to have been abused between 1986 and 2014, about 100 were most likely raped and about 200 sexually assaulted, Mr. Kellenberg said.

French laws prohibit sex between an adult and a minor under the age of 15, but it is not automatically considered rape. Further circumstances, such as the use of coercion, threats, or violence, are necessary to characterize such sexual relationships as rape.

France recently toughened laws against sex crimes and extended the statute of limitations for rape against a minor to 30 years from 20 years.

"We are faced with the pedophilia case of the century, because of the personality of the perpetrator and because of the facts," said Francesca Satta, a lawyer representing about 20 accusers.

Mr. Le Scouarnec was first arrested in 2017 after a 6-year-old girl living in his neighborhood reported him to her parents. Mr. Le Scouarnec allegedly showed her his penis and digitally penetrated her, said Ms. Satta, who is also the girl's lawyer.

That led to an investigation on sexual abuses committed against four underage girls between 1989 and 2017, including the 6-year-old girl and two members of Mr. Le Scouarnec's own family, resulting in charges of rape, sexual assault and exhibitionism. Mr. Le Scouarnec is in prison awaiting trial in the case, scheduled for late next month.

What investigators did not anticipate, however, was that a search of Mr. Le Scouarnec's home as part of this first investigation revealed much more than expected. Along with three-foot-tall toy dolls, mannequin wigs and child pornography images, police officers said they found secret diaries recounting in great detail Mr. Le Scouarnec's sexual encounters with scores of children at hospitals where he practiced between 1989 and 2017.

Mr. Kellenberg, the state prosecutor, said Thursday investigators carried out "the most exhaustive and methodical analysis possible of these elements," which took "the form of an unbearable enumeration." The diaries included "some paragraphs, elaborate and detailed, rich in details that are difficult to bear."

The children were, most of the time, abused in a hospital, while under anesthetic substances, sedation and other medical treatments, Mr. Kellenberg said.

Mr. Le Scouarnec's diaries included dates and details about the identities of the children, officials said, allowing the police to obtain their testimony, leading to the indictment Thursday.

Thibaut Kurzawa, Mr. Le Scouarnec's lawyer, denounced what he called a "show procedure," saying his client's rights of defense had been violated and his safety endangered. But he declined to comment on the charges.

Mr. Le Scouarnec had already been given a four-month suspended jail sentence in 2005 for possessing child pornography. But the sentence did not prevent him from practicing medicine.

"This is a major institutional dysfunction," said Pierre Verdrager, a sociologist who has studied pedophilia. He said medical and judicial authorities bore responsibility. He added that Mr. Le Scouarnec was part of an elite that might have shielded him from retaliation.

Mr. Kellenberger announced an investigation had been started to determine if other people had been aware of Mr. Le Scouarnec's actions and failed to report them.

Brexit Discord Brings 'Controlled Explosion' From Johnson

By MARK LANDLER and STEPHEN CASTLE

LONDON — Brexit negotiations with the European Union teetered on a precipice yet again Friday, after Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared that his government was fed up and ready for a no-deal exit from the bloc's trading system, and with his chief negotiator calling off talks scheduled for next week in London.

European leaders reacted coolly to Mr. Johnson's threat, making clear that they were ready to keep talking and acknowledging that both sides needed to give ground to reach a trade agreement by the deadline of Dec. 31.

Mr. Johnson, who had set a self-imposed deadline of this week to judge whether the talks should go on, delivered his warning after a summit meeting of European Union leaders in Brussels that resulted in what the prime minister called an unreasonable demand that Britain make the major concessions.

"They want the continued ability to control our legislative freedom, our fisheries, in a way that is obviously unacceptable to an independent country," Mr. Johnson said in a taped statement from Downing Street. "With high hearts and complete confidence, we will prepare to embrace the alternative."

For all his bluster, history suggested that the negotiations were less likely to collapse than to enter a climactic final act, promising even more of the theatrics and brinkmanship that have characterized the Brexit drama from the start.

There are genuine gaps between Britain and the European Union: The two are at odds over quotas for fishing — an issue that is highly sensitive politically in neighboring France. And the two sides have yet to agree on rules governing state aid to industry or a way to resolve disputes over this funding.

The calendar poses another risk: With the deadline for a deal fast approaching, even the loss of a week or more of talks could make it difficult for the two sides to reach a settlement in time. If they fall short, Britain would have to start trading with the bloc under what Mr. Johnson euphemistically calls Australia-style rules — in other words, under the default terms set by the World Trade Organization.

"We will prosper mightily as an independent free-trading nation, controlling our own borders, our fisheries, and setting our own laws," he said.

In fact, analysts said, Britain would face severe disruptions, including long lines of trucks at the English Channel, and a heavy blow to its economic growth, on top of the already painful dislocation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Britain's battle to contain the latest wave of infections has all but eclipsed the latest Brexit news.

Given those daunting realities, analysts said they still believed that Mr. Johnson was bluffing and would end up striking a deal. The likelihood that Britain will have to compromise, they said, made it all the more important for the prime minister to look like he is driving a hard bargain with the European Union.

ANDREW TESTA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

POOL PHOTO BY EDDIE MULHOLLAND

Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, left, has threatened to cancel negotiations with the E.U. before, but talks continue. Among other things, the parties are at odds over fishing quotas.

Sam Lowe, a senior research fellow at the Center for European Reform, a research institute, described the prime minister's statement as "high-stakes theatrics" and said he still believed that a deal was more likely than not because both sides had recently shifted on some of their red lines.

"These sorts of performances are part and parcel of the negotiations," he said. "We are at a crunch point where the difficult political compromises need to be made, but where there is also a need to appear tough for domestic audiences."

Mr. Johnson's move was a "controlled explosion," said Mujtaba Rahman, an analyst at the political risk consultancy Eurasia Group. But it masked potential openings for compromise, particularly with France on fishing rights.

Downing Street argued that the European Union had effectively ended the talks by adopting formal conclusions from its summit that called on Britain to make compromises and made no mention of an intensification of talks.

British officials said there was no point in more negotiations next Monday unless the European Union was ready to discuss legal texts in an accelerated way without Britain being required to make all the moves.

Without such conditions, officials said, the only matter worth discussing would be practical preparations for a no-deal exit, including how to handle issues such as aviation, road haulage and nuclear cooperation.

A show of toughness before settling down to real compromises.

European leaders, however, seemed to meet some of the conditions demanded by Britain, most notably when the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, acknowledged that there needed to be give and take on both sides.

"We have asked the United Kingdom to remain open to compromise, so that an agreement can be reached," Ms. Merkel said on Thursday. "This of course means that we, too, will need to make compromises."

On Friday, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, promised to "intensify" talks — as Britain has requested — and said her negotiating team would travel to London next week.

Later in the day, Downing Street said that Mr. Johnson's negotiator, David Frost, told the Europeans that it made no sense for them to come, but added that he and his interlocutor, Michel Barnier, will still speak next week — suggesting that lines of communication remain open even if there will be no formal negotiations.

Mr. Barnier's spokesman gave a different account of the conversation, saying that the two men agreed to talk again on Monday "to discuss the structure of these talks."

Financial markets took the latest drama in stride — mindful, perhaps, that as long ago as February, Mr. Johnson threatened to walk away from the negotiations within four months if things did not go his way.

"Some saber rattling is part and parcel of any international trade negotiation," wrote Kallum Pickering, senior economist with Berenberg Bank in London. "In our view, Johnson's message seems to be more of a negotiating tactic in the hope of clinching a deal rather than a genuine desire to end ongoing talks immediately."

British businesses were less relaxed, however, warning of huge price increases for consumers because of tariffs and border delays and disruptions.

"The prime minister's statement signals that we are heading into very dangerous territory," said Ian Wright, chief executive of the Food and Drink Federation, a British industry association, in a statement. "In the event of a no-deal Brexit, shoppers will — literally — pay a heavy price."

Allie Renison, a senior policy adviser at the Institute of Directors, which represents Britain's business leaders, said that "getting ready for no deal in the middle of a pandemic will be a herculean task for many businesses."

Detention of a Government Critic in Poland Raises Fears of a Crackdown

By MONIKA PRONCZUK and MARC SANTORA

A prominent lawyer and outspoken critic of Poland's government was detained on accusations of money laundering on Thursday, and was later taken to the hospital after a fall, in circumstances that remain unclear.

The lawyer, Roman Giertych, who has been involved in a series of high-profile cases against members of the governing Law and Justice party, was placed in handcuffs by a special anticorruption unit outside a Warsaw court. He has also represented prominent opposition figures, including Donald Tusk, the former president of the European Council.

Later, during a search of his home, Mr. Giertych fell unconscious on his bathroom floor and was rushed to the hospital. Further details about the incident were not immediately available from the authorities, but his daughter, Maria Giertych, said he had scuffled with an officer.

Mr. Giertych's detention comes on the heels of one of the closest presidential elections in Poland since the nation ended communist rule in 1989, with the ruling party winning a narrow victory. And in the bitterly divided country, the opposition was quick to argue that the detention was evidence that the ruling party was using the country's legal system to achieve political aims.

The authorities denied accusations that the detention was politically motivated.

The ruling party "made it fashionable to make a show out of putting handcuffs on innocent people," Radek Sikorski, an opposition lawmaker, told TVN24, a Polish television station.

Mr. Sikorski said the detention was designed to distract the public as anger builds over the government's handling of the pandemic and to intimidate both lawyers and judges.

Anatol Magdziarz contributed reporting.

AGENCJA GAZETA/VIA REUTERS

Roman Giertych, a critic of Poland's government, was hospitalized in circumstances that remain unclear. Above, Poland's Parliament.

Late Thursday, Stanislaw Zaryn, a spokesman for the authorities, said Mr. Giertych was in "good condition" and undergoing medical examinations. But Jacek Dubois, a lawyer who has worked with Mr. Giertych, said he had been told by the family Mr. Giertych's condition was "very serious."

A government spokesman, Piotr Müller, said he was unfamiliar with the case's details, but added, "I understand the anticorruption services had grounds for detention."

Mr. Giertych was expected to be charged with "appropriating company funds and inflicting upon it financial losses of great proportions, as well as of money laundering," said Anna Marszalek, a spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office.

The Polish Bar Council expressed its "greatest concern" over the detention.

"Regardless of the grounds for the detention of Roman Giertych and for searching his house, these actions are exceptional because of his professional involvement in cases in which politicians of the ruling party are involved," the head of the council said.

In recent years Mr. Giertych has become one of the most vocal critics of the government in Poland, taking special aim at judicial changes pushed through by Law and Justice and its leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

BEATA ZAWRZEL/NURPHOTO, VIA GETTY IMAGES

A lawyer involved in cases against the governing party.

After coming to power in 2015, the government took control of a tribunal responsible for upholding the Constitution and gave authority over the country's prosecutors to the Justice Ministry. It also asserted new powers to select judges and tried to purge the Supreme Court.

The actions have been condemned by international observers and have been at the heart of tensions between Poland and the European Union, which views the changes as a threat to the rule of law and the bloc's democratic values.

Mr. Kaczynski, who has also been trying to quell a rebellion in his governing coalition as he faces growing public anger over the government's handling of the coronavirus, took a post this month as deputy prime minister. The position gives him authority over the nation's security apparatus, and some observers fear that he is using that power to target critics.

Few critics of the government have been more vocal than Mr. Giertych. Most recently he accused it of mismanaging the pandemic, writing on Twitter that there was "blood on their hands."

Adam Bodnar, Poland's official ombudsman, said the manner of the arrest raised the "highest concerns and demanded explanations." He declined to comment on the merits of the case, but said he wanted to know "what circumstances justify this kind of course of action."

Mr. Giertych's wife, Barbara, who is also a lawyer, said she had been given little information about her husband's detention.

"For the first time in my life, in my professional career, I'm experiencing a situation where I don't know what is the context of the detention," she told TVN 24, a local media outlet.

Mexico Is Shaken by Drug Arrest of Ex-Defense Minister

From Page A1

defense minister from 2012 to 2018, is being charged with laundering money and trafficking heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines and marijuana from late 2015 through early 2017, according to an indictment unsealed in the Eastern District of New York on Friday.

The charges are the result of a multiyear sting that investigators called Operation Padrino. Officials say that General Cienfuegos helped the H-2 cartel, a criminal group that committed horrific acts of violence as part of its drug smuggling business, with its maritime shipments. In exchange for lucrative payouts, officials say, General Cienfuegos also directed military operations away from the cartel and toward its rivals.

The news not only casts a pall over Mexico's fight against organized crime, but also underscores the extent of corruption at the highest levels of government. General Cienfuegos was defense minister throughout the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto, who left office two years ago.

The damage to Mexico is hard to overstate. The general's arrest comes only 10 months after another top Mexican official — who once led the Mexican equivalent of the F.B.I. — was indicted in New York on charges of taking bribes while in office to protect the Sinaloa drug cartel, one of Mexico's most powerful criminal mafias.

That official, Genaro García Luna, served as the head of Mexico's Federal Investigation Agency from 2001 to 2005, and for the next six years was Mexico's secretary of public security, a cabinet-level position. In that role, he had the task of helping the president at the time, Felipe Calderón, create the nation's strategy to battle drug cartels.

If the men are convicted, it means that two of the highest-ranking and most widely respected commanders ever to oversee the war on drugs in Mexico were working with organized crime — helping the very cartels that continue to kill record numbers of Mexicans.

The two cases call into question the American role in the drug war as well. For years, American officials have helped shape and fund Mexico's strategies, and they have relied on their Mexican counterparts for operations, intelligence and broad security cooperation. If the allegations hold up, some of those same Mexican leaders were playing a double game.

"The difficulty in working in Mexico where you have this level of corruption is that you never really know who you're working with," said Mike Vigil, a former chief of international operations for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. "There's always a concern that Mexican law enforcement could compromise you, or compromise an informant, or compromise an investigation."

Both Mr. García Luna and General Cienfuegos served at the top of the government when homicides spiked to historic levels, drug cartels waged war and military operations were expanded.

A mercurial presence, General Cienfuegos symbolized the prominent role the military plays in Mexico. Commanders are granted an extraordinary amount of autonomy, seldom bowing to political pressures and typically enjoying protection by the president.

"There has never been a minister of defense in Mexico arrested," said Jorge Castañeda, a former Mexican foreign minister. "The minister of defense in Mexico is a guy that not only runs the army and is a military man, but he reports directly to the president. There is no one above him except the president."

Because of that power and autonomy, analysts and others have long suspected some top leaders of corruption. But with their elevated status, no one dared investigate — at least not in Mexico.

"This is a huge deal," said Alejandro Madrazo, a professor at CIDE, a university in Mexico. "The military has become way more corrupt and way more abusive since the war on drugs was declared, and for the first time they may not be untouchable — but not by the Mexican government, by the American government."

On Friday, responding to the arrest, Mexico's current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, both defended the military and disparaged the bad actors in it. But it was unclear whether Mr. López Obrador would step back from his heavy reliance on the military, whose role has expanded during his administration to include everything from construction to public security.

MARCO UGARTE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos, right, was arrested in Los Angeles.

Mexico's military has been a central part of the nation's domestic security since the crackdown on drug cartels began in 2006, with soldiers deployed to regions overrun by organized crime. The secretary of defense oversees that effort.

The use of soldiers trained in combat but not in policing has brought problems well beyond corruption. With the military front and center in the fight against narcotics trafficking, the Mexican government has never built an effective police force.

In December 2017, Mexico passed a security law cementing the military's role in fighting the drug war, outraging the United Nations and human rights groups. They warned that the measure would lead to abuses, leave troops on the streets indefinitely and militarize police activities for the foreseeable future.

General Cienfuegos played a crucial role in convincing politicians to pass the law, which gave the military legal permission to do what it had been doing for a decade without explicit authorization. At one point, he threatened to withdraw his troops from the streets, arguing they were not trained for domestic security and were exposed legally.

But General Cienfuegos also defended the military, saying it was the only institution effectively confronting organized crime. As drug violence rocketed, he asked again and again that the federal government provide a legal framework to protect the forces.

The 2nd major official to be arrested on drug charges in 10 months.

"Today the crimes we are dealing with are of another level and importance; they involve a lot of people, sometimes entire families, and we are acting without a legal frame," General Cienfuegos said in March 2018. "Without it, our help is impeded."

The military has repeatedly been singled out for human rights abuses and the use of excessive force, including accusations of extrajudicial killings that dogged the armed forces throughout General Cienfuegos's tenure as defense minister.

His arrest does not appear to have been a joint operation with the Mexican government. It reaches back to an American-led investigation in late 2013 of a Mexican drug cartel run by Fausto Isidro Meza Flores, a successor to the once powerful Beltran-Leyva drug organization, according to two American law enforcement officials.

Even though a group of American agents was able at the time to identify General Cienfuegos as a corrupt partner in the Meza Flores organization, there was pushback from other American and Mexican law enforcement agencies, and General Cienfuegos was never fully investigated, one of the officials said.

But by 2015, the official said, pressure to do something about General Cienfuegos increased. At least two separate American wiretaps began to pick up chatter about a powerful underworld figure who was referred to as "Padrino" and was believed to be General Cienfuegos.

The wiretaps had targeted the Sinaloa cartel and the H-2 cartel, a smaller criminal organization connected to Mr. Meza Flores's group, the former official said.

The United States attorney's office in Brooklyn has in recent months become ground zero for cases related to official corruption in Mexico.

Prosecutors there have not only charged Mr. García Luna and two of his former associates, Ramon Pequeno and Luis Cardenas Palomino, but have also prosecuted Edgar Veytia, the former attorney general of the state of Nayarit. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison last October for conspiring with the H-2 cartel.

The case against General Cienfuegos helps illustrate in some ways why it has been so difficult for Mexico to take the lead in these investigations.

Among the findings by U.S. authorities: General Cienfuegos was actively corrupting other Mexican officials by introducing high-level cartel members to those willing to swap bribes for favors.

At one point, court records say, he alerted the cartel that there was a U.S. investigation into their activities, prompting them to kill a fellow member they falsely believed to be sharing information with the authorities.

Zolan Kanno-Youngs contributed reporting from Washington, and Louis Keene from Los Angeles.

Thai Police Use Water Cannons and Arcane Law to Quell Demonstrations

By HANNAH BEECH

BANGKOK — A confrontation between the Thai authorities and antigovernment demonstrators that has escalated in recent days jumped to an uncertain new phase on Friday, as protesters were forcibly dispersed and two of the movement's participants were charged with violating an obscure law against endangering the royal family.

Riot police officers deployed powerful water cannons for the first time, drenching demonstrators with a stinging liquid and carrying out a spate of new arrests in a crackdown that has hit the protests with an arsenal of threats, diktats and detentions.

The invoking of the arcane law, which carries up to life imprisonment for committing "an act of violence against the queen's liberty," added to the tensions in Thailand, which has been periodically engulfed by political turmoil and is known for strict measures to prevent disparaging the king and his kin.

The "act of violence" was, apparently, yelling at a royal motorcade.

Two days earlier, a stretch Rolls-Royce carrying Queen Suthida Vajiralongkorn Na Ayudhya and Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti, the heir apparent, had made a surprise detour past some of the protesters, who have been calling for fresh elections and reforms to the monarchy for months.

"Oh, the royal motorcade," said Aekachai Hongkangwan, a veteran political activist, throwing his hand up in the defiant three-fingered salute that the protesters have borrowed from "The Hunger Games."

"Stay in line and keep the peace," added Bunkueanun Paothong, a college student, through a megaphone.

That was it. Both accounts were confirmed by eyewitnesses and video footage. But by Friday, both Mr. Aekachai and Mr. Bunkueanun had been charged with violating Section 110 of Thailand's criminal code — a provision so arcane that a database of Thai Supreme Court cases makes no mention of it.

With an army-drafted Constitution and some legal provisions that hark back to when the country was an absolute monarchy, Thailand has plenty of draconian offenses that can land people in jail for speaking out. A lèse-majesté law criminalizes criticism of the royal family and can mean prison sentences of up to 15 years. (Mr. Aekachai once served two years in prison for insulting the crown.) Sedition and computer crime acts have been used to incarcerate others.

ADAM DEAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Protesters Friday in Bangkok. Seven people were arrested, and two were charged with "an act of violence against the queen's liberty."

The use of Section 110, however, was unexpected. Human rights lawyers and legal scholars were left scrambling to understand what exactly constituted an "act of violence against the queen's liberty." Punishment for the crime, which also applies to acts against the heir apparent, ranges from 16 years to life in prison.

"When I was a student, the lecturer didn't teach this and just skipped this law," said Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, an opposition politician and former law professor.

On Friday, the police searched the offices of Mr. Piyabutr's political movement, under a new emergency decree that the government announced on Thursday. It bans gatherings of five or more people in Bangkok and allows the police to declare any place off-limits to protesters. The demonstrators can be held without charge for up to 30 days, without access to lawyers or relatives.

"Don't be reckless because everyone can die today or tomorrow," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said during a news conference on Friday, in what was seen as a warning to stop the rallies. "Don't challenge the grim reaper."

The protesters ignored Mr. Prayuth's advice. On Friday afternoon, thousands of them, mostly student-aged, gathered again in a steady rain, just as they had the day before in defiance of the emergency decree.

Facing up to life in prison for yelling at a royal motorcade.

On Friday evening, hundreds of riot police officers charged toward the protesters and used water cannons against them for the first time. They gushed a stinging blue liquid, compelling the demonstrators to pull back.

With a smaller contingent remaining, protest leaders called an end to the rally, saying that a retreat did not signify defeat. The police said that seven people had been arrested and that there had been injuries among both the security forces and civilians. The emergency decree was extended to Nov. 13.

The appearance of the royal motorcade on Wednesday was a shock for the protesters, who had never expected to be in such proximity to the queen and the prince. King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun, the queen and the heir apparent spend most of the year in Germany and rarely return to Thailand. (The queen is the king's fourth wife, and the prince is the son of his third wife; the king also has a noble consort, akin to an official mistress.)

Criticism of the royal family's elevated status in Thailand has been taboo for decades, but the student-led protest movement has shattered this convention.

"The goal is to change the whole political system, including the monarchy and the prime minister," said Napassorn Saenduean, a political science student at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, who watched the royal motorcade glide past on Wednesday. It was the first time that members of the royal family had gotten an extended up-close look at these discontented subjects.

Mr. Prayuth, a retired general, became prime minister in 2014, after leading an army coup that was justified, in part, as necessary to protect the monarchy. Thailand's royal family is among the world's richest, and King Maha Vajiralongkorn has extended his authority over military units and palace assets.

On Friday, a speech given by the king the day before was made public, in which the 68-year-old monarch underlined the role of the crown in Thailand.

"Now it is understood that the country needs people who love the country and love the monarchy," he said.

The protests have drawn thousands of high-school and college students, who are chronicling their political awakening on social media, even as their parents worry about a violent crackdown. Dozens of people were killed when a protest movement was cleared from the streets in 2010, the most recent bout in a country accustomed to deadly political violence.

"Every one of us wants a country that belongs to the people," said Nattarika Donhongpai, a high school student who attended the rally on Thursday evening in her school uniform. "We want everyone to come out and use their rights and voices to express everything."

Ryn Jirenuwat and Muktita Suhartono contributed reporting.

U.S. Rejects Russian Plan To Extend Nuclear Deal

By ANDREW HIGGINS

MOSCOW — Russia on Friday proposed extending a soon-to-expire nuclear arms treaty for one year without any changes, a move seen in Washington as a tactic to delay action on the treaty until after the American presidential election.

The Trump administration swiftly dismissed Moscow's proposal as a "non-starter."

The Russian offer came just two days after the Kremlin rejected as "nonsense" what the Trump administration hailed as a tentative deal to salvage the pact, the New Start treaty, the last remaining major arms control pact between the two biggest nuclear powers.

Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, who had previously pushed hard for a five-year extension of the accord, made the surprise proposal during a videoconference with his Kremlin Security Council, saying it would be "extremely sad if the treaty ceased to exist."

While boasting that "we clearly have new weapons systems that the American side does not have, at least not yet," Mr. Putin cast his offer as a gesture of good will toward "all states of the world that are interested in maintaining strategic stability." A one year-extension, he added, would allow for "meaningful negotiations" to continue up to and possibly beyond early February, when the current treaty expires.

It would also mean Russia could well be negotiating with a new United States president less hostile to the terms of the original Obama-era treaty than President Trump has been.

The offer drew a cool reception in Washington. Within hours, the Trump administration issued a statement from Robert C. O'Brien, the national security adviser, rejecting the offer from the Russian president.

"President Putin's response today to extend New Start without freezing nuclear warheads is a non-starter," Mr. O'Brien said. "The United States is serious about arms control that will keep the entire world safe. We hope that Russia will reevaluate its position before a costly arms race ensues."

Mr. O'Brien repeated the administration's proposal to extend New Start for one year, "in exchange for Russia and the United States capping all nuclear warheads during that period."

Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., the Democratic nominee, was involved in the negotiation of the original 2010 agreement and has indicated that, if elected, he would agree to a straightforward, five-year extension and work later to expand its scope.

The Trump administration has balked at agreeing to a five-year extension without revisions, an option provided for in the original treaty and one that would not require Senate approval. Mr. Trump has deemed that unacceptable because the treaty signed by President Barack Obama did not cover all of Russia's nuclear arms, or any of China's.

China, however, has refused to join any revised version of New Start, arguing that its nuclear arsenal is tiny compared with those of the United States or Russia.

While eager to salvage New Start, Russia has shown little interest in giving President Trump a foreign policy victory ahead of a United States presidential election now less than three weeks away, indicating, perhaps, that it expects Mr. Biden to win. Senior Russian officials this week poured scorn on claims on Tuesday by Mr. Trump's lead negotiator, Marshall Billingslea, of an "agreement in principle, at the highest levels of our two governments, to extend the treaty."

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei A. Ryabkov, dismissed this as fantasy. "Washington is describing what is desired, not what is real," Mr. Ryabkov, Russia's chief negotiator, said in a statement.

Russia's open mockery of the supposed deal, however, left Moscow looking churlish and risked compromising Mr. Putin's long-standing efforts to present his country as deeply committed to arms control — in contrast to the United States, which has walked away from a number of accords in the past.

Mr. Putin's proposal on Friday, said Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center and a veteran foreign policy analyst, suggested an attempt to correct any damage to Russia's image from this week's dispute, more than an offer with a real chance of being accepted.

"It is just a public relations shot in the direction of discussion in the United States," Mr. Trenin said in a telephone interview. "It just returns the ball to the U.S. and not much more."

David E. Sanger contributed reporting from Weston, Vt., and Michael Crowley from Washington.

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The New York Times

Where Life Moves Slower, and Mail-In Ballots Take Six Days

The 18,000-square mile Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation has 27 postal sites for 67,000 voters.

By MAGGIE ASTOR

DENNEHOTSO, Ariz. — Turn off the two-lane highway that runs across the Navajo Nation, just a few miles south of the Utah border, and the pavement yields instantly to the desert.

Drive slowly down an unmarked road, rocking side to side over the sandstone, and you will find the land where Darlene Yazzie's family has lived for more than a century. It is quiet here, the late-summer sun beating down on a wooden pergola, a cat asleep against a tire in the shade of Ms. Yazzie's car. When she looks at the news from outside the reservation, she said, she feels lucky to live where she does.

The trade-off is time. "Everything takes time," Ms. Yazzie said: hauling water to drink, hauling hay for the sheep, getting to the post office 10 miles away.

There are no mailboxes or mail carriers in Dennehotso or any of the other Navajo communities that dot the mesas and scrublands of northeastern Arizona, and an envelope sent from here to anywhere else in the state travels hundreds of miles through Albuquerque and Phoenix first. First-class mail can take 10 days to reach St. Johns, the county seat, about 200 miles away.

In a year in which tens of millions of people plan to vote absentee, in a state that could decide both the presidency and control of the Senate, this geographic isolation has more profound implications than ever before. About 67,000 eligible voters live in the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation, and President Trump won the state in 2016 by just 91,000 votes.

Like many Americans living under the coronavirus, Ms. Yazzie, 71, a retired public health worker, voted by mail in Arizona's primary in August after years of voting in person. Unlike many Americans, she had to complete her ballot the moment she received it — in the doorway of the Dennehotso post office, which social-distancing rules forbade her to enter — because taking it home might have meant submitting it too late.

"My son got his ballot late because the post office was closed for a while and we couldn't get the mail," she said. "You have to know which hours they're open, certain days they're closed, and I didn't want to do that again. So I just turned around and I filled it in."

The challenges for voters here resemble the challenges for Native American voters on many reservations, but size multiplies them. At more than 18,000 square miles, the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation alone is larger than any other reservation in the country. But it has only 27 postal locations, some of them open just three or four hours a day.

This is roughly equivalent to having 13 mailboxes in the entire state of New Jersey.

When Four Directions, a Native American voting rights group, sent test mailings this summer, it found no post office on the reservation from which first-class mail arrived at the appropriate county recorder's office in less than six days. By comparison, it took less than 18 hours for mail from Scottsdale, an affluent city outside Phoenix, to reach the Maricopa County office.

These numbers are the basis for a lawsuit, in which Ms. Yazzie is the lead plaintiff, that Four Directions filed against the Arizona secretary of state, Katie Hobbs, to extend the deadline for counties to receive ballots from voters on the reservation. It argues that the state's uniform Nov. 3 deadline violates the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by giving Navajo voters less opportunity to vote than other Arizonans, and calls for ballots received from the reservation by Nov. 13 to be counted as long as they are postmarked by Election Day.

A spokeswoman for Ms. Hobbs, a Democrat, said that she would comply if the court ordered an extension, but that she had no authority to change the deadline because it is set by Arizona law. Her office has given counties $1.5 million to increase voting access for "tribal and rural communities," distributed about 24,000 voter registration forms as inserts in Native American publications, and run radio announcements in the Navajo language.

Mr. Trump's campaign opposes the suit on the premise that giving voters on the reservation more time would disadvantage voters off the reservation.

Both sides acknowledge that the implications are significant. A deadline extension, Mr. Trump's lawyers said in opposing it, "would unquestionably affect the share of votes that candidates in the state of Arizona receive."

While the Navajo Nation is not politically homogeneous — its president, Jonathan Nez, is a Democrat, while its vice president, Myron Lizer, endorsed Mr. Trump at the Republican National Convention — it is much bluer than Arizona as a whole. In 2016, when Mr. Trump won by 3.5 percentage points statewide, Hillary Clinton won by double digits on the reservation.

A district court let the existing deadline stand, ruling that the plaintiffs had not proved it affected them more than rural voters outside the reservation. Four Directions appealed, arguing that the plaintiffs needed only to demonstrate that they had "less opportunities to participate in the political process than other Arizona citizens due to their race or color," not "to establish a difference between the tribal members who are part of a protected class of voters and other non-Indian yet also 'rural' voters."

On Thursday, the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed the district court's ruling, concluding that the plaintiffs lacked standing to sue because their complaint discussed obstacles for voters on the reservation at large but, the judges said, did not establish that the plaintiffs were personally affected.

There will almost certainly be further litigation, but the trouble, once again, is time: The ruling on Thursday effectively guarantees that the deadline will remain in place for this election.

The Navajo and their supporters in other tribes were prepared for that possibility, having spent the past few weeks doing what Native Americans have long done: organize on the assumption that the U.S. government will not help them.

Navajo leaders have used events to distribute food and supplies, begun during the pandemic, to encourage voter registration as well. On one day in September, more than 500 families received informational materials in the communities of Chilchinbito, Rough Rock and Many Farms, Mr. Nez said.

Separately, a team led by Donna Semans, the grass-roots organizing director at Four Directions and a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, has spent weeks training Navajo Nation residents to register their neighbors.

Volunteers arrived at training sites and, without leaving their cars, received registration forms and personal protective equipment, including masks, gloves and portable ultraviolet lights. They worked in paid shifts and, within a month, registered about 2,000 voters in Tuba City, Kayenta and Window Rock.

But the biggest challenge is still ahead. Many of these voters, plus thousands more across the reservation, are now requesting mail-in ballots — and while there are several ways Arizonans can submit ballots, none are easily accessible on the reservation.

There is only one postal location per 681 square miles on the reservation, compared with one per 15 square miles in Scottsdale, according to an expert report filed in the Yazzie v. Hobbs lawsuit by Bret Healy, a consultant for Four Directions, and Jean Schroedel, a professor of public policy at Claremont Graduate University.

Early-voting sites accept mail ballots, but there is only one per 1,532 square miles on the reservation, compared with one per 17 square miles in Scottsdale, the report found. Election Day voting sites are one per 306 square miles on the reservation compared with one per 13 square miles in Scottsdale. And there are few ballot drop boxes on the reservation, even though Mr. Nez's administration has asked county officials to add more.

Voters can also submit ballots at county recorders' offices, but there are none on the reservation, which spreads over three counties. The Coconino County office, in Flagstaff, is about 80 miles from Tuba City, the county's largest on-reservation community. The Navajo County office, in Holbrook, is more than 170 miles from its largest on-reservation community, Kayenta. And the Apache County office, in St. Johns, is more than 130 miles from its largest on-reservation community, Chinle.

For Navajo voters, "There isn't a single ballot delivery system in Arizona that is even close to equal," Mr. Healy said. "These aren't geographical accidents — why the postal sites are where they are and that there are so few of them — and it's not an accident of geography where the county seats are. That fundamental, unequal access is a result of politics."

In many states, outside groups would be allowed to collect voters' sealed ballots and deliver them to the county recorders' offices, but that is illegal in Arizona. (The Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that this ban violated the Voting Rights Act in part because it disproportionately affects Native Americans, who face so many barriers to returning their own ballots. But Republicans appealed the case to the Supreme Court, and it will not be resolved before the election.)

In 2018, Four Directions hired hundreds of Navajo Nation residents to drive voters to and from the polls. It is planning a similar effort this year, as extensive as its budget will allow. But the pandemic makes ride-sharing harder to organize safely, and the fact that so many people are using mail ballots means there will be demand for transportation to more locations: drop boxes and early-voting sites as well as traditional Election Day precincts.

The protracted legal battles, too, have made it hard to set strategies.

Arizona's voter registration deadline was originally Oct. 5, after which Four Directions planned to turn to get-out-the-vote efforts. Then the deadline was extended to Oct. 23, so they continued their registration efforts instead. On Tuesday, the deadline was cut back to Thursday.

"I've heard people say it's not their fault that we're located where we're located, and it's not — but this is where they live, and they have just as much right to vote as anybody else," Ms. Semans said. "All we're trying to do is bring equality like we were promised."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHARON CHISCHILLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

'Everything takes time.'

DARLENE YAZZIE, who filled out her primary ballot in the doorway of her post office, which is 10 miles away, the moment she received it because she didn't want it to arrive late.

The Navajo Nation is politically heterogeneous: Jonathan Nez, above left, its president, is a Democrat who supports Joseph R. Biden Jr., while its vice president, Myron Lizer, right, a Republican, endorsed President Trump at the national convention. But the nation votes more Democratic than Arizona as a whole.

Donna Semans, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, has been training Navajo Nation residents to register voters.

2020 Election

State of the Race

The Week in Numbers

This was the week that Joe Biden's lead over President Trump settled firmly into the **double digits**, according to a range of national polling averages — including The Upshot's calculator. Some credible polls, including one released on Friday by The Associated Press/NORC, put Mr. Biden's lead as high as **15 points**.

Two New York Times/Siena College polls in the Carolinas showed Mr. Biden edging ahead of the president in North Carolina, **46 percent to 42 percent**, while Mr. Trump held an **eight-point** lead in South Carolina. Winning North Carolina would be a huge boost for Mr. Biden, who is polling more strongly in a number of swing states that appear to be stronger bets. South Carolina would be icing on the cake.

Democratic Senate candidates outpaced Republican incumbents in fund-raising in key races across the nation last week, including in Maine, where Sara Gideon announced raising **$31 million** more than Senator Susan Collins, the Republican incumbent.

A Snapshot of Current Polling Averages

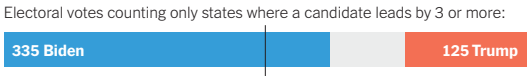
	POLLING LEADER	IF POLLS ARE AS WRONG AS THEY WERE IN... 2016	2012
United States	**+10 Biden**	+7	+14
New Hampshire	**+11 Biden**	+8	+14
Minnesota	**+10 Biden**	+2	+11
Wisconsin	**+9 Biden**	+1	+12
Michigan	**+9 Biden**	+4	+13
Pennsylvania	**+8 Biden**	+3	+9
Nebraska 2*	**+7 Biden**	+9	+2
Nevada	**+7 Biden**	+9	+10
Maine 2*	**+5 Biden**	+6	+10
Arizona	**+5 Biden**	+3	+3
Florida	**+4 Biden**	+1	+5
North Carolina	**+3 Biden**	+2	+3
Iowa	**+2 Biden**	+5	+6
Georgia	**+2 Biden**	<1	+1
Ohio	**<1 Biden**	+6	+1
Texas	**+2 Trump**	+4	+3

Estimates based on poll averages on Friday at 5:24 p.m. Eastern. Figures are rounded.

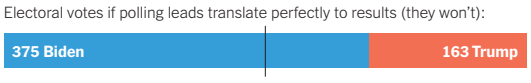
* In Maine and Nebraska, two electoral votes are apportioned to the winner of the state popular vote, and the rest of the electoral votes are given to the winner of the popular vote in each congressional district. (Maine has two congressional districts, and Nebraska has three.)

Exploring Electoral College Outcomes

Electoral votes counting only states where a candidate leads by 3 or more:



Electoral votes if polling leads translate perfectly to results (they won't):



Electoral votes if state polls are as wrong as they were in 2016†:

† Poll error in 2016 is calculated using averages of state polls conducted within three weeks of Election Day.

Our poll averages include all polls collected by FiveThirtyEight. The estimates adjust for a variety of factors, including whether a poll represents likely voters, whether other polls have shifted since a poll was conducted, and whether a pollster has leaned toward one candidate in a state or nationwide. Polls are weighted by recency, sample size, and by whether they're conducted by a firm with a track record of success. Source for polls: FiveThirtyEight polling database.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Joseph R. Biden Jr. was pressed on policy in his town-hall event on ABC as President Trump sparred with Savannah Guthrie on NBC.

NEWS ANALYSIS

A Split-Screen View of America's Big Choice

By ASTEAD W. HERNDON and ANNIE KARNI

When NBC announced a town hall event with President Trump that was scheduled for the same time as ABC's town hall program with the Democratic nominee, Joseph R. Biden Jr., Democrats were enraged. Celebrities spoke out, including some of NBC's own talent, and liberals on social media made grand plans to boycott the event in an effort to send a message to Mr. Trump and the network.

Instead, the split screen of Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden at concurrent town halls painted a vivid picture of the stark choices before American voters. Mr. Biden was pressed on policy plans from climate change to criminal justice, hammering home his core message that the Trump administration had fumbled the coronavirus pandemic. Mr. Trump sparred with Savannah Guthrie of NBC, the moderator, refusing to give clear answers on his own coronavirus diagnosis and whether he denounces the violent conspiracy theory of QAnon. In the end, the contrast was so stark that one of Mr. Trump's senior advisers compared Mr. Biden's town hall event to Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" (though she meant it as an insult). Even the Democrats who were initially wary of the events learned a lesson that Mr. Trump's campaign team has come to know, at times painfully: Not all airtime is necessarily helpful to the president.

President and Nominee Dance Around Loyalty

The split screen of Judge Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation hearings unfolding on Capitol Hill as Mr. Trump addressed voters directly raised questions for both the president and his Supreme Court nominee about how much they are expecting from each other in the coming months.

Did Mr. Trump have a litmus test for Judge Barrett, when it came to politically charged issues like overturning Roe v. Wade, or how she might rule in an upcoming case that could decide the future of the Affordable Care Act? Would Mr. Trump expect Judge Barrett to rule for him if a dispute over the Nov. 3 election comes before the Supreme Court? Both Mr. Trump and Judge Barrett were asked those questions this week, and both claimed that there was never a loyalty pledge — sought or given.

"It would be totally up to her," Mr. Trump said on NBC on Thursday night. "I would think that she would be able to rule either for me or against me. I don't see any conflict whatsoever." Judge Barrett, for her part, said she would not allow herself "to be used as a pawn to decide this election for the American people." But here's what the president has communicated.

• **Mr. Trump has said the Supreme Court may decide the election outcome.** He has also said he wants Judge Barrett confirmed by Election Day, in part because he assumes the results of the election could be in dispute and he is "counting" on the court to "look at the ballots."

• **He has been explicit about the Affordable Care Act.** Mr. Trump has said he wants justices who would "do the right thing" and invalidate the health care law. Judge Barrett said this past week: "I'm not here on a mission to destroy the Affordable Care Act. I'm just here to apply the law and adhere to the rule of law."

• **Mr. Trump has made it abundantly clear he prizes loyalty.** The president never forgave his first attorney general, Jeff Sessions, for recusing himself from the Russia investigation, ridiculing him over the decision for years. In recent weeks, he has even been publicly critical of William P. Barr, the current attorney general, because the Justice Department's investigation of the Obama administration found no wrongdoing and did not bring any criminal charges. And the Supreme Court has not been off limits for criticism from this administration. Vice President Mike Pence in August denounced Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. as a "disappointment to conservatives" after he sided with the Democratic appointees on a series of cases.

Trump Wants Rallies. Aides Aren't So Sure.

President Trump's plan from now until Election Day is to pack in as many rallies as physically and monetarily possible (Air Force One is not a cheap lift for a campaign that has been struggling financially.) But the strategy, favored by a president who adores adoring crowds, has some people in his orbit questioning whether it's the best way to further his re-election chances in the final days of the race.

The preaching-to-the-converted sessions in airport hangars across battleground states are no longer being carried on national television, and most of the attention they attract is for the images of people packed together, most without masks on.

Some Trump campaign aides argued that the rallies still drive the local news in critical areas and allow the campaign to gather information from low-propensity voters who they can try to turn out at the polls. But even they admit the rallies are not without their downsides.

• **Polls show that the vast majority of Americans think Mr. Trump contracted the coronavirus because he didn't take proper precautions:** When the president shows up at an airport hangar and brags about how large the crowd is, it seems like a warning sign for what not to do in the middle of a highly contagious pandemic.

• **Trump's best pitch is to broaden his economic appeal:** He doesn't do that at rallies, where over the past week he has begged suburban women to like him, made wildly inflated claims about his own achievements and floated conspiracy theories about his political opponents.

• **But it keeps him happy and busy:** Mr. Trump has pushed his campaign advisers to book more rallies, and they admit that without the rallies he would probably spend more unscheduled "executive time" watching television and tweeting, activities that come with their own sets of downsides.

Harris Pauses Travel To Send a Message

Senator Kamala Harris of California, Mr. Biden's running mate, abruptly suspended travel this past week after a senior staff member tested positive for the coronavirus. The staff member, in addition to a flight crew member who had also tested positive, had not been in close contact with Ms. Harris, but the campaign pulled her from events through the weekend as a stated precaution. The campaign said Ms. Harris was not quarantining and had continued to test negative for the coronavirus. So why is she off the campaign trail? Politics.

The Biden campaign wants to create a contrast with the Trump administration on all things coronavirus. As the White House and Mr. Trump continue to obfuscate on the precise details of the president's diagnosis, and the gap in time between his last negative test and his first positive one, Mr. Biden's campaign is trying to show voters — and the media — that it is taking the virus seriously. Consider this:

• **Dems in array:** The Democratic Party is united in its indictments of Mr. Trump's handling of the virus, and its goal of expanding health care and combating climate change; those are the issues that unite the party's candidates across the country. In Mr. Biden's town hall event, and in Ms. Harris's vice-presidential debate, they both started by criticizing the Trump administration's pandemic response. On Thursday, the Democratic National Committee paid for floating billboards outside Mr. Trump's town hall event that read: "Trump lied. People died."

• **The White House keeps providing them opportunities:** Mr. Trump has continued to push back against accepted mitigation strategies such as mask wearing. On Thursday night, Mr. Trump repeatedly cited anecdotal evidence that mask wearing did not necessarily help prevent infection with the virus, even as his own public health experts stress its importance. In fighting this battle, he has created an opening that Mr. Biden is seeking to exploit.

ANNA MONEYMAKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Judge Amy Coney Barrett tried to distance herself from President Trump's stated expectations of Supreme Court justices.

Also This Week

• In Ohio, the overwhelming number of mail-in ballot requests has slowed service in several counties. In Summit County, ballots were delayed until Oct. 10, with the rest of the initial batch of 95,000 not mailed until Oct. 12.

• In Texas this past week, hours before early voting began in the state, a three-judge federal panel upheld an order by Gov. Greg Abbott limiting counties to one drop box apiece for ballots. The result forced high-density cities to shut down dozens of ballot drop boxes they had planned to use.

• Indian-Americans are the second largest immigrant group in the country. Mr. Trump tried engaging this group with a rally in Houston last year, but Indian-Americans are leaning toward the Democrats. Ms. Harris has something to do with it, but most respondents were turned off by Mr. Trump's attacks on immigration and people of color.

Isabella Grullón Paz and Giovanni Russonello contributed reporting.

2020 Election

Trump Shrugs Over His Debts, but Test Awaits

From Page A1

cial institutions at the Treasury Department under President Bill Clinton and now teaches law at Fordham University. "If the captain gives a personal guarantee for the ship, he will be less likely to sink it."

Mr. Trump was asked about the debt in response to an investigation by The New York Times published last month based on a review of more than two decades of his tax-return data. The investigation found that Mr. Trump had personally guaranteed $421 million of his companies' debts, with more than $300 million coming due within four years.

The Times also found evidence that Mr. Trump might have difficulty repaying or refinancing the loans without liquidating assets. His main source of income in recent decades — a total of more than $427 million from entertainment and licensing deals that were fueled by his fame — has all but dried up. That cash enabled a buying spree of failing golf courses, and propped up those businesses as their losses mounted. In recent years, Mr. Trump has burned through most of the cash, stocks and bonds at his disposal and has recently explored the sale of some of his holdings, including the Trump International Hotel in Washington.

The investigation revealed that Mr. Trump's finances were under stress, with losses that allowed him to pay just $750 in federal income taxes for 2016 and 2017, and nothing at all in 10 of the previous 15 years. Also hanging over him is a decade-long audit battle with the Internal Revenue Service over the legitimacy of a $72.9 million tax refund that he claimed, and received, after declaring huge losses. An adverse ruling could cost him more than $100 million.

The tax-return data obtained by The Times does not by its nature identify the lender for most of Mr. Trump's debts. But the borrowing businesses and largest amounts track with the personal financial disclosures he has been required to file with the U.S. government as a candidate and president.

The bulk of the debt appears to be owed to Deutsche Bank, one of the few lenders that would do business with Mr. Trump in the last decade, even after he defaulted on past loans.

The tax records, for example, show that the largest loan balances at the end of 2018 that Mr. Trump had personally guaranteed were $160 million on his Washington hotel and more than $125 million on his Doral golf resort. His disclosure forms indicate that Deutsche Bank was the lender on both loans. Mr. Trump had also personally guaranteed $60.3 million of debt owed by one of his entities, DJT Holdings. His Chicago tower, another Deutsche Bank borrower, is among the many businesses he controls through that holding company.

Deutsche Bank is the only mainstream financial institution that has been consistently willing to do business with Mr. Trump. And even that lender has required him to personally guarantee what he has borrowed.

David Enrich contributed reporting.

ANNA MONEYMAKER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

SCOTT MCINTYRE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Trump regularly loses money on his hotel in Washington, above, and he has explored selling it. Debts coming due are also linked to his Doral golf resort, left.

As The Times has reported, Deutsche Bank and Mr. Trump have had a long and fraught relationship, with the bank at times being hesitant to lend to Mr. Trump, including refusing to advance him money during his 2016 campaign.

Deutsche Bank has spent billions of dollars trying to transform itself into a global player, a strategy that has pushed it to take outsize risks that have repeatedly landed it in trouble with U.S. regulators. In recent years, the Justice Department has investigated whether the bank has complied with laws meant to stop money laundering and other crimes. And in 2017, the Justice Department completed a deal with the bank that required it to pay $7.2 billion for its sale of toxic mortgage securities in the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis.

According to Mr. Trump's disclosure forms and property records, the only other significant lender to his businesses since 2012 has been Ladder Capital.

Mr. Trump's reputation among lenders was sealed over the decades that his Atlantic City casinos repeatedly filed for bankruptcy. Ben Berzin, a retired executive vice president and senior credit officer at PNC Bank who dealt with Mr. Trump over the casino loans, said banks got "an expensive education," and the ones that did not demand a personal guarantee got burned.

"They lent on the aura of success," he said. "And things went really wrong."

Mr. Trump's most lucrative investment is one run by another company: a 30 percent share with Vornado Realty Trust in two office buildings, one in Manhattan and the other in San Francisco. Mr. Trump withdrew $125.5 million from his share of the partnership's profits from 2010 through 2018, the records show.

The Times's totals for Mr. Trump's debts do not include $950 million that the Vornado partnership borrowed on the two buildings in 2012 from four lenders, including Deutsche Bank. Tax records issued to Mr. Trump show he is not responsible for any of that debt.

Large loans are set to come due amid declining revenue.

The debt that Mr. Trump has personally guaranteed was only part of the total debt and other liabilities shown in his tax records for the end of 2018. Additionally, Mr. Trump's businesses owe more than $200 million for which he is not personally responsible.

During the town hall, Mr. Trump said that the $421 million in debt was not a concern, apparently clinging to his long-held assertion that his net worth is more than $10 billion.

"What I'm saying is that it's a tiny percentage of my net worth," Mr. Trump said

"When you look at vast properties like I have, and they're big and they're beautiful and they're well located, when you look at that, the amount of money, $400 million, is a peanut, it's extremely underlevered," he added, seemingly using his own version of the financial term "underleveraged."

In a dire situation, Mr. Trump could try to sell some assets or properties to cover a loan coming due. But loans are usually based on the profitability of the business borrowing the money.

Tax records for the businesses on which he borrowed the bulk of the money suggest that refinancing may be a challenge. Doral and his Washington hotel, with more than $300 million in debts coming due, have posted regular losses. And in addition to the debt he owes, Mr. Trump has put a net of $261.8 million cash into the businesses to help keep them afloat.

And he appears to have spent much of the cash and investments he had on hand just a few years ago, as his income from entertainment and endorsements began a steep decline.

In January 2014, he sold $98 million in stocks and bonds, his biggest single month of sales in at least the last two decades. He sold $54 million more in stocks and bonds in 2015, and $68.2 million in 2016. A financial disclosure released in July shows that he had as little as $873,000 in securities left to sell.

Mr. Trump's businesses reported cash on hand of $34.7 million in 2018, down 40 percent from five years earlier.

Mr. Carnell, the former Treasury official, said Mr. Trump's personal guarantee on the debts put his lenders, primarily Deutsche Bank, in an "awkward" spot, in part because banks are subject to federal regulation and Mr. Trump has displayed a willingness to push the Justice Department to investigate perceived foes.

"The Donald Trump approach to law is all legal levers would be fair game in pressuring or punishing a bank," he said.

Democrats See Donations Surge With ActBlue Haul

By REBECCA R. RUIZ and RACHEL SHOREY

Democratic candidates in competitive Senate races received another surge in donations over the last few months, with some breaking fund-raising records in their states and many entering the final weeks of the campaign with significant stores of cash, according to new quarterly filings with election authorities this week.

ActBlue, the central platform for donations to Democratic candidates and causes, announced that from July 1 to Sept. 30, it had processed $1.5 billion in contributions — an amount roughly equal to what the site raised during the entire 2018 election cycle, and one far exceeding the $623.5 million that the equivalent Republican platform, WinRed, took in during the quarter.

Mark Kelly, the Democratic Senate candidate in Arizona, was among those who reported raising another enormous sum. Mr. Kelly's campaign took in more than $38.7 million in those three months, and polls in the state show him with a widening advantage over the Republican incumbent, Senator Martha McSally. His campaign indicated that it had entered October with $18.8 million in cash on hand.

Ms. McSally's campaign reported raising $22.6 million in the period, with nearly $12.2 million in the bank.

In the Kentucky Senate race, the Democratic candidate, Amy McGrath, raised $36.9 million in the quarter. Her campaign, seeking to unseat Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, reported having nearly $20 million in cash on hand. Mr. McConnell's campaign raised less than half of that, $15.8 million, and reported $13.9 million in cash on hand.

In Maine, the Democratic challenger, Sara Gideon, took in $39.4 million in her effort to unseat Senator Susan Collins, the Republican incumbent, whose campaign raised $8.3 million. Ms. Gideon reported $22.7 million in cash on hand, compared with nearly $6.6 million for Ms. Collins, who received an endorsement from former President George W. Bush in August.

Jaime Harrison, the Democrat challenging Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, shattered the record for Senate campaign fund-raising in a quarter, taking in more than $57 million in the period in question. Mr. Harrison's campaign reported having nearly $8 million in cash at the start of the month.

Mr. Graham's campaign reported having raised $28.5 million over the same time. With the senator leading slightly in polling in South Carolina and his leadership of the Senate Judiciary Committee drawing particular attention in his push to confirm President Trump's third Supreme Court nominee, his campaign indicated that it had nearly $14.8 million in cash on hand.

In Iowa, the Democratic challenger, Theresa Greenfield, raised more than $28 million, compared with the incumbent Republican, Senator Joni Ernst, another member of the Judiciary Committee, who took in $7.2 million. Ms. Greenfield reported nearly $9.5 million in cash on hand, more than double Ms. Ernst's $4.3 million.

In Georgia, the Democrat Jon Ossoff raised $21.3 million, almost four times the $5.6 million brought in by his Republican opponent, Senator David Perdue. Mr. Ossoff's campaign entered this month with $8.3 million in the bank, roughly the same amount that Mr. Perdue declared.

In his bid to represent Montana in the Senate, Gov. Steve Bullock, a Democrat, drew $26.9 million in the quarter, his campaign announced, and had nearly $2 million in cash on hand. His Republican opponent, Senator Steve Daines, raised $11.5 million over the same period and reported nearly $3.5 million on hand.

In North Carolina, the Democratic challenger Cal Cunningham — a former state senator who has maintained a narrow lead in his bid to oust Senator Thom Tillis, even as that race has been upended by a texting scandal and health worries in recent weeks — reported raising more than $28 million. Mr. Cunningham's campaign indicated $4.2 million in cash on hand. Mr. Tillis, seen as one of his party's more vulnerable incumbents, reported raising $6.6 million and having roughly that same amount on hand to spend.

In Kansas, the Democrat Barbara Bollier reported raising about $13.5 million, a quarterly record for any candidate ever running for any office in Kansas, and ending the quarter with $7.6 million in cash. Her Republican opponent, Representative Roger Marshall, reported raising just over $2.9 million and ending the quarter with $1.7 million on hand.

A $1.5 billion boost that outpaces G.O.P. contributions.

In Alabama, the Democrats' vulnerable incumbent, Senator Doug Jones, raised $10.4 million, compared with the $3.4 million reported by his Republican challenger, Tommy Tuberville. Mr. Jones's campaign reported $7.9 million in cash on hand, compared with Mr. Tuberville's $1.7 million.

And in Texas, M.J. Hegar, a Democratic former Air Force helicopter pilot challenging Senator John Cornyn, a Republican, reported raising nearly $14 million and concluding the quarter with $8.5 million in cash. Mr. Cornyn, whose place on the Judiciary Committee has also been prominent during Judge Amy Coney Barrett's Supreme Court nomination hearings, reported raising just over half of what his opponent had — $7.2 million — with $8 million in cash on hand.

On ActBlue, the average contribution amount was $47, according to a news release, indicating strong energy among smaller-dollar, grass-roots donors. The site processed record donations during the weekend after Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died.

In Dueling Town Halls, the Divergence Between the Candidates Is Clear

By ADAM NAGOURNEY and SHANE GOLDMACHER

If the American people had to endure 90 minutes of cross-talk and interruptions last month at the first presidential debate, the alternative — clashing, simultaneous town hall events on Thursday with President Trump and former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. — was not much of an improvement. Mr. Trump tested positive for the coronavirus after the first debate and, citing safety, the presidential debate commission declared that the second debate would have to be virtual. Mr. Trump refused, so Mr. Biden scheduled a town hall on ABC. Mr. Trump then scheduled his own on NBC — at the exact same time.It's an open question whether Mr. Trump's gambit of trying to push Mr. Biden off the stage worked to his advantage. Mr. Biden's whole campaign strategy has been to fly at a low altitude toward victory.

15.1 million
Viewers on average of Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s town hall meeting on ABC, according to Nielsen.

13.5 million
Viewers of President Trump's town hall on the NBC broadcast network, which includes simulcasts on MSNBC and CNBC.

PRESIDENT TRUMP Miami on NBC

Mixed Message on QAnon

After Mr. Trump went through days of headlines and headaches as a result of his refusal to condemn white supremacy during the first presidential debate, he was ready on Thursday to offer a hedge-free denunciation. "I denounce white supremacy, OK?" he said to the moderator, Savannah Guthrie, almost before she had finished her question.

The rare forcefulness on the topic made Mr. Trump's mealy-mouthed refusal, minutes later, to disavow the false QAnon conspiracy theory all the more stark.

Ms. Guthrie might have delivered the most memorable line of the night when she quizzed Mr. Trump about a recent retweet of a discredited conspiracy theory that Mr. Biden had orchestrated actions to have SEAL Team 6, one of the country's elite military units, killed to cover up the supposedly faked death of Osama bin Laden. Mr. Trump said with a shrug, "I'll put it out there."

"I don't get that," Ms. Guthrie replied. "You're the president. You're not, like, someone's crazy uncle."

Views of Public Health

Masks are politically popular. They are embraced as a public health necessity by experts and a broad cross-section of the American public. One of Mr. Trump's own advisers, Chris Christie, said Thursday he had been "wrong" not to wear a mask at the White House. But Mr. Trump, despite having recently contracted the coronavirus and requiring hospitalization for it, still cannot bring himself to arrive at a full-throated embrace of mask-wearing.

The pandemic has upended American life like no other event, and death rates per capita are higher than in other developed nations, yet Mr. Trump continued to claim that his administration's response had been a success. "We're a winner," Mr. Trump declared, talking about "excess mortality." He added, "What we've done has been amazing, and we have done an amazing job."

A Missing Agenda

Mr. Trump had kind words for conspiracy theorists; he wouldn't say whether he had tested negative for the coronavirus on the day of the first debate ("Possibly I did. Possibly I didn't"); and he continued to undermine the legitimacy of the 2020 vote. He did not have much to say, however, about a sweeping second-term agenda.

When Ms. Guthrie gave him a chance to make his closing pitch for another four years, he began, "Because I've done a great job." There were few other specifics beyond the classic Trumpian boast. "Next year," he promised, "is going to be better than ever before."

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR. Philadelphia on ABC

Managing the Pandemic

Mr. Trump minimized the danger of the virus, despite having been hospitalized after falling ill with it. He has poked fun at Mr. Biden for wearing a mask and has resisted the idea of making masks mandatory. Mr. Biden said that he himself would take a vaccine by the end of the year, and would urge other Americans to do so, "if the body of scientists say that this is what is ready to be done and it's been tested." He also said he might support making vaccines mandatory — but acknowledged that such a measure would be difficult to enforce.

On Packing the Court

Mr. Biden did make one bit of news: After energetically avoiding the question recently, he signaled that he would announce before Election Day whether he supports expanding the number of seats on the Supreme Court. But he said he wanted to wait until after the Senate had acted on the nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett to replace Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Many Democrats have called for expanding the Supreme Court after Mr. Trump and Senate Republicans charged forward with filling the vacancy created by Justice Ginsburg's death. Mr. Biden has made it clear in the past that he did not support the idea. He has avoided the question during the campaign by saying he didn't want to play into Mr. Trump's hands and turn attention away from what Republicans were doing with the Ginsburg vacancy. But he agreed with the moderator, George Stephanopoulos, that voters had a right to know his views, and he set out a schedule for disclosing them.

What if He Loses?

Mr. Biden is in many ways an entirely conventional candidate for the White House, particularly compared with Mr. Trump. So his willingness to answer questions about what he would do if he lost was striking: As a rule, that's a question candidates avoid.

When a voter asked about how he might try to influence a second Trump administration if he lost, Mr. Biden said he would probably go back to teaching, "focusing on the same issues relating to what constitutes decency and honor in this country." He added, "It's just a thing that got me involved in public life to begin with."

Mr. Stephanopoulos leaned in with a question: What will it say about the country if Mr. Trump is re-elected?

"Well, it could say I'm a lousy candidate and I didn't do a good job," Mr. Biden said. "I hope that it doesn't say that we are as racially, ethnically and religiously at odds with one another as it appears the president wants us to be."

2020 Election

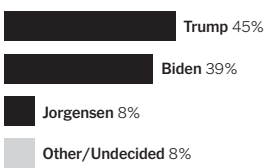
A Reliably Red State, Alaska Could Become A Late Battleground

By NATE COHN

The reliably Republican state of Alaska has soured on President Trump's job performance, but Republicans still lead the state's races for president, Senate and U.S. House, according to a New York Times/Siena College poll released Friday.

Over all, Mr. Trump leads Joe Biden, 45 percent to 39 percent, with 8 percent supporting the Libertarian candidate, Jo Jorgensen. Similarly, Dan Sullivan, the incumbent Republican senator, leads the Democratic nominee, Al Gross, by 45 to 37, with 10 percent backing the Alaska Independence candidate, John Howe.

New York Times/Siena College Poll of Likely Voters in Alaska



Based on a New York Times/Siena College poll of 423 likely voters from Oct. 9-14.
THE NEW YORK TIMES

In a rematch of 2018's House race, the Republican Don Young, the longest-serving member of Congress, leads the Democratic nominee, Alyse Galvin, 49 percent to 41 percent — about the same margin as his seven-point win two years ago.

Alaska has emerged as an unlikely battleground in the late stages of the campaign, as Democrats and Republicans have rushed to run advertisements in both the House and Senate races. The state has voted Republican in every presidential election since 1964, and Republicans enjoy a significant advantage in party registration and party identification, according to the survey. But many Alaskans have turned against Mr. Trump after backing him by 15 points against Hillary Clinton four years ago, creating a potential opening for the Democrats in a state with an independent streak.

Today, 47 percent of Alaskans say they approve of how Mr. Trump is handling his job as president, while the same number disapprove.

Although Alaska remains a long shot for Democrats, many voters are backing a minor-party candidate, so there is an unusual amount of uncertainty. Democrats can also hope that their candidates will bolster their standing over the final three weeks; they remain less known than the Republican incumbents and enter the final stretch with a significant financial advantage.

The G.O.P. challenge is centered in Anchorage, a once reliably Republican city where all three Republican candidates now trail. The president won Anchorage by five points four years ago, but Mr. Biden leads by nine in the survey, 47-38. The city represents a larger share of its state's population than any other city except New York City.

No one would confuse Anchorage for a part of the Sun Belt, but politically there are surprising resemblances. The city is relatively well educated, diverse, traditionally Republican, and it has a large energy sector. As with other parts of the country, the president's weakness is driven by a significant deficit among college-educated white voters. Alaskans in that group back Mr. Biden by almost 40 percentage points — one of his largest leads among the group of any Times/Siena poll so far.

Democrats have sought to capitalize by nominating two candidates, Ms. Galvin and Mr. Gross, who describe themselves as independents. The state has a long independent streak, and unaffiliated voters represent a majority of the state's electorate — whether by registration or self-identified party identification. An independent candidate won the governor's race in 2014, and 12 percent of voters backed a variety of minor-party candidates in the 2016 election. Mr. Trump won only 51 percent of the vote in 2016 — about the same percentage as his tally in traditional battleground states like Ohio or Iowa.

If Democrats were to prevail in either race, it would offer the party an unusual path to control of the Senate and, less obviously, the presidency. The U.S. House will decide the presidency in the event of an Electoral College tie, with each state congressional delegation receiving one vote. Heading into the election, Republicans enjoy a 26-23 lead in state congressional delegations, with two split evenly between the parties. A Democratic win in Alaska, which has only one congressional district, would greatly endanger the Republican path to a majority of state delegations.

But a significant number of the president's detractors remain hesitant to embrace the Democratic candidates. And while Republicans have lost significant ground in Anchorage, they have maintained most of their support elsewhere in the state, thanks to overwhelming margins among white voters without a degree. Republicans also have surprising strength among nonwhite voters who did not identify as Alaska Native or Native American, like Hispanic or multiracial voters.

An unusual amount of uncertainty as voters sour on Trump.

Part of the challenge for Democrats might simply be the ballot itself. The Alaska ballot, as well as the Times/Siena poll, characterizes Mr. Gross and Ms. Galvin as "Democratic nominees" rather than as independents, which some Democrats fear could undermine their appeal to unaffiliated voters. Perhaps as a result, many of the state's independent voters say they will back Mr. Howe, the Alaska Independence candidate, for Senate.

Polls taken well before an election tend to overstate the eventual support for minor-party candidates at the ballot box, but Alaska's long history of supporting minor-party candidates at least raises the possibility that these candidates will retain an unusually large share of support.

If the minor-party candidates do see their support fade down the stretch, as has happened many times before, it is not obvious whether Democrats or Republicans would be poised to benefit.

In the presidential race, Ms. Jorgensen's supporters split evenly on the president's job performance, but they say they backed Mr. Trump by a three-to-one margin four years ago.

Based on job approval numbers, Mr. Howe appears to have a more Republican-friendly group of supporters. They say they voted for Mr. Trump by a two-to-one margin in 2016, and they approve of his performance by a wide margin as well.

The two Alaska incumbents, Senator Sullivan and Representative Young, appear to have particular strengths. Unlike the president, Mr. Sullivan has a positive favorability rating, with 48 percent favorable and 39 percent unfavorable. He wins 10 percent of voters who disapprove of the president.

Mr. Young has an advantage of his own: unusual support from the state's far-flung Alaska Native and Native American communities, who represent around half of the state's nonwhite vote. Alaska Natives have a long record of splitting their tickets in favor of incumbent Republicans, like Mr. Young, but they can be a challenge for pollsters to reach. Many communities do not have internet or road access.

The Times/Siena survey of 423 likely voters in Alaska was conducted from Oct. 9-14 on landline and cellular telephones. An analysis indicates that the survey had success in reaching Alaska Natives in the outlying western parts of the state. It had less success with voters on the North Slope, in towns like Utqiagvik — formerly known as Barrow. In terms of the poll result, the survey could be biased if Alaska Natives on the North Slope are significantly different from those in the western and southwestern parts of the state, though the results by precinct in the 2016 election suggest the two regions are similar enough for the purpose of political survey research.

Over all, Alaska Natives made up 13 percent of likely voters in the poll. Mr. Young led among the fairly small sample of 45 Alaska Natives or Native Americans who participated in the survey, even though the same voters backed Mr. Biden and Mr. Gross.

ASH ADAMS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dan Sullivan, center, the incumbent G.O.P. senator, has a more favorable rating than the president.

TheUpshot

The Upshot provides news, analysis and graphics about politics, policy and everyday life.
nytimes.com/upshot

Ballots Delayed After Demand Overwhelms Ohio Printer

By REID J. EPSTEIN

As the presidential election headed into the final stretch in late summer, counties in Ohio and Pennsylvania worried that a deluge of absentee ballot requests would swamp their printing capacity. So dozens of them contracted with Midwest Direct, a Cleveland mailing company.

But when it came time to print and ship Ohio ballots early last week, it was Midwest Direct that was overwhelmed. Several Ohio counties that expected absentee ballots printed by the company to land in voters' mailboxes are now scrambling to print them themselves or find a last-minute contingency plan less than three weeks before Election Day.

In Pennsylvania, for instance, nearly 30,000 ballots sent to voters in Allegheny County, which includes Pittsburgh, went to the wrong addresses.

The counties had provided the company with lists of tens of thousands of requests weeks in advance. The company's inability to meet demand has underscored the stress that mail voting has put on the nation's election process as the coronavirus pandemic curtails in-person voting. Midwest Direct is the primary outside provider of absentee ballots for 16 Ohio counties, though many also have their own in-house operations.

Midwest Direct is owned by two brothers, Richard Gebbie, the chief executive, and James Gebbie, the chairman. This summer they began flying a Trump 2020 flag above Midwest Direct's headquarters on the west side of Cleveland. It was a curious juxtaposition — a company in the business of distributing absentee ballots through the mail showing a preference for a president who has spent months denigrating the practice of voting by mail.

"We have freedom to vote for who we want and support who we want," Richard Gebbie said in an interview last month. "We fly a flag because my brother and I own the company and we support President Trump."

Mr. Gebbie said he didn't "have an opinion" on Mr. Trump's false claims that voting by mail was corrupt and rife with fraud, but he emphasized that the ballots his company mailed met strict security standards.

"The security in the vote-by-mail process both in how we process and how the counties handle the ballots is very secure," he said.

Distribution of the ballots is another matter. When it came time to actually ship the forms, the Gebbies' company found an array of counties angry that they did not receive ballots as promised.

ANGELO MERENDINO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Trump campaign flag flew over Midwest Direct, a Cleveland mailing company that has had issues getting ballots to voters.

There is no evidence Midwest Direct has done anything improper with the ballots. Election security experts said there was little any vendor could do to tamper with the integrity of absentee ballots.

Tammy Patrick, a senior adviser for elections at the public policy foundation the Democracy Fund and a former elections administrator in Arizona, said ballots are printed without regard of which voter will receive them, and mailers like Mr. Gebbie's company do not have access to the partisan attributes of specific voters.

Several counties now scrambling to fill their botched orders.

When Midwest Direct failed to deliver promised ballots to some of its Ohio clients, Frank LaRose, the Ohio secretary of state, recommended that counties begin printing ballots in-house or "develop a contingency plan," said Jon Keeling, Mr. LaRose's spokesman.

"They overpromised and underdelivered," said Diane Noonan, the director of the Butler County Board of Elections. "We would get different answers from different people we talked to. Was I happy with it? No I was not."

With Midwest Direct unable to deliver ballots to Butler County, a suburb of 383,000 people north of Cincinnati, Ms. Noonan on Tuesday decided to print and ship the rest of her county's ballots in-house.

Ohio is once again a battleground state, after Mr. Trump carried it by eight percentage points in 2016. A poll conducted last week for The New York Times and Siena College found former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. with a one-point lead over Mr. Trump.

The counties with the biggest volume of delayed absentee ballots are urban and suburban counties with large populations. Summit County, encompassing Akron, and Lucas County, which includes Toledo, were two of just eight Ohio counties to back Hillary Clinton in 2016. Butler County, a historically Republican county, gave 61 percent of its vote to President Trump.

Cuyahoga County, which includes Cleveland and is Ohio's second-largest county, also has an absentee ballot contract with Midwest Direct but has had no problems getting its ballots printed and shipped, according to Mike West, a spokesman for the Board of Elections there.

But some Cuyahoga County voters have reported ballot delays similar to those in other counties.

Pam Ogilvy, a high school social studies teacher from Parma, Ohio, said she requested an absentee ballot in mid-September. The Cuyahoga Board of Elections website first said her ballot would be shipped by Oct. 6, the first day Ohio ballots could be released. A subsequent update said it would be shipped by Oct. 12. Her ballot finally arrived Friday — 10 days after it was first supposed to be mailed.

Ohio ballots can be counted if they are postmarked by Nov. 2, the day before Election Day. They can also be returned in person to a county board of elections before the polls close Nov. 3.

Richard Gebbie declined to be interviewed this week. In a statement released to clients Thursday, he said the delays occurred because counties underestimated the amount of ballots they would need printed.

"It is fair to say today that no one — not the various boards of elections, not Ohio's secretary of state, not our company — anticipated the staggering volume of mail-in ballot requests that has actually occurred," he said. "The estimates provided to us from the counties were not what ended up as the reality."

The Trump flag is no longer flying over its headquarters this week.

In Summit County, ballots from Midwest Direct were delayed until Oct. 10, with the rest of the initial batch of 95,000 not mailed until Oct. 12, according to Tom Bevan, a Democrat who sits on the Board of Elections.

In Lucas County, 60,000 ballots that Midwest Direct promised to send on Oct. 6 were not mailed until a week later, said Pete Gerken, a county commissioner.

And in Pennsylvania, 28,879 voters in Allegheny County, home to the state's second-largest concentration of Democratic voters, were sent incorrect ballots as part of a batch of more than 32,000 ballots that were mailed beginning Sept. 28, according to the county Board of Elections.

Mr. Gebbie has in recent years made small donations to Republicans running for federal and state office. He gave to Mr. LaRose and Dave Yost, the Ohio attorney general.

Online, Mr. Gebbie has written several public Facebook posts questioning the potency of the coronavirus and he criticized Taylor Swift after she accused Mr. Trump of seeking to dismantle the Postal Service.

Local officials said Midwest Direct offered a variety of explanations for why the promised absentee ballots were slow to be delivered, from mechanical breakdowns to a higher volume of ballot requests than anticipated. Mr. Gerken, the Lucas County commissioner, said there was little communication from Midwest Direct about why absentee ballots were not Toledo-bound.

"We have lost nine to 10 days in the process and those days are not recoverable," Mr. Gerken said.

For Ohio, the delays in shipping absentee ballots come as Mr. LaRose, the Republican secretary of state, has forbidden counties from installing more than one drop box to deposit absentee ballots. The delay in receiving requested ballots has driven more voters to early-voting sites, which are also limited to one per county.

"It's completely insufficient for a county of this size," said Representative Marcy Kaptur, an Ohio Democrat whose district includes Toledo. "This year voting was supposed to be so much more simple but it's more complex."

Nick Corasaniti contributed reporting.

AD WATCH

'Your Daughters Are Listening': Hitting Trump Over Sexist Remarks

President Trump's rude and demeaning comments to and about women are no secret. Just last week, he called Senator Kamala Harris, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, a "monster." A new ad from the Lincoln Project urges voters to consider what it would be like to have a different kind of president — a man, it suggests, who actually respects women.

THE MESSAGE The ad sharply contrasts Mr. Trump with Joseph R. Biden Jr., elevating Mr. Biden's selection of Ms. Harris as his running mate as proof that he "doesn't just value a female voice but chooses one to be his right-hand woman."

The 90-second ad opens with two directives: "Imagine a young girl looking in the mirror, searching for role models in the world to give her hope that one day she, too, can make a difference. Now imagine how she feels when she watches women being verbally attacked." Cue a series of clips that show Mr. Trump belittling women, including female reporters. "Your daughters are listening," the ad says.

Then as the music soars, the ad encourages viewers to "imagine a different future for her" — one with Ms. Harris as Mr. Biden's "right-hand woman." It closes with a note of hope that doubles as a warning: "Your actions on Nov. 3 will define who she sees."

The ad does not cover the sharply divergent views both men — and both parties — have on issues that affect women, including women's reproductive rights.

FACT CHECK Mr. Trump is known for his sexist remarks, and the clips the ad shows are real. Mr. Biden, on the other hand, has long styled himself a champion of women. He still refers to the Violence Against Women Act as his proudest legislative achievement and he said months before he selected Ms. Harris as his running mate that he would name a woman to his ticket.

WHERE IT'S RUNNING A slightly modified 60-second version of the ad is running nationally on Fox News, MSNBC and CNN, according to Advertising Analytics. It began airing on Thursday morning.

THE TAKEAWAY The 2016 Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, ran a similar ad four years ago. It did not work.

And the Lincoln Project is a group of Never Trump Republicans founded almost exclusively by men, so this ad has a tone somewhat equivalent to when men stand up and say "as a father of daughters" to denounce bad behavior by other men.

Still, the juxtaposition between the two candidates is powerful and likely to resonate with voters who are tired of Mr. Trump's rhetoric. *SYDNEY EMBER*

2020 Election

Trump Campaign Lawyers Are Aiding a Leading QAnon Supporter

By DANNY HAKIM

Senior lawyers for the Trump campaign set up a small law firm last year that is working for Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican House candidate in Georgia with a history of promoting QAnon, a pro-Trump conspiracy theory.

While federal filings show that the firm, Elections L.L.C., principally collects fees from the president's campaign and the Republican National Committee, it also does work for a number of congressional candidates, and none more so than Ms. Greene, underscoring the connections between QAnon and Mr. Trump and his inner circle. The latest example came Thursday night, when President Trump repeatedly declined to disavow QAnon at a televised town hall.

Ms. Greene is one of several Republican candidates who openly espouse the collection of bogus and bizarre theories embraced by followers of QAnon, who have been labeled a potential domestic terror threat by the F.B.I. and who former President Barack Obama warned Wednesday were infiltrating the mainstream of the Republican Party. QAnon imagines, falsely, that a Satanic cabal of pedophile Democrats are plotting against Mr. Trump, plays on anti-Semitic tropes and stokes real world violence — and has been expounded on at length by Ms. Greene in videos.

Elections L.L.C. was founded last year by Justin Clark, Mr. Trump's deputy campaign manager, and Stefan Passantino, a former top ethics lawyer in the Trump White House. Matthew Morgan, the Trump campaign's counsel, is also a partner at the firm. Ms. Greene's campaign has made 14 payments to the firm since last year, worth nearly $70,000 in total, the most of any congressional campaign.

Mr. Passantino appears in records filed with the Georgia secretary of state as the lawyer who incorporated Ms. Greene's campaign committee, though the full scope of his work for the candidate is unclear. He also does legal work for a Georgia political operative, Jason D. Boles, who is a personal friend of Ms. Greene's and who helped set up her campaign. (Mr. Boles has been a recent subject of controversy, after it emerged that he had helped bankroll an effort to infiltrate and discredit voting rights groups in North Carolina.)

Mr. Passantino worked in the White House as a deputy counsel in charge of ethics policy until 2018, and among other things, he dealt with personal financial disclosures related to the president's eldest daughter and adviser, Ivanka Trump. Last year, he was hired by the Trump Organization to handle investigations by Democrats in the House of Representatives. Some of the money that the Trump campaign has paid to Elections L.L.C. has also been directed to him, federal filings show, though it is not clear for what work.

Neither Mr. Clark, Mr. Morgan nor Mr. Passantino commented for this story. In a statement, the Trump campaign said, "Elections L.L.C. is a law firm like many others that do campaign work. Just like any other law firm, its lawyers have clients that have no relationship to other lawyers of the firm or their clients."

The campaign did not elaborate further, nor did it say whether Mr. Passantino was the only lawyer who had performed work on Ms. Greene's behalf. Ms. Greene's campaign did not reply to requests for comment, but earlier this year she told Open Secrets, a site run by the Center for Responsive Politics, that Mr. Passantino worked as her lawyer and Elections L.L.C. did compliance work related to elections filings.

The fact that a law firm with close ties to the White House is doing work for one of the most prominent proponents of QAnon shows how quickly the conspiracy theory has moved from the far-right fringe to the center of Republican politics, presenting a significant challenge to the party at a time when it is already being rejected by many moderate voters.

Ms. Greene has said, without evidence, that after the 2018 elections there was "an Islamic invasion into our government offices," once questioned whether a plane had actually crashed into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, and has said we have "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take this global cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles out." She has also suggested that "Saudi Arabia, the Rothschilds, and Soros" — referring to George Soros, the financier and supporter of progressive causes — are "the puppet masters that fund this global evil."

While some of her comments have been condemned by House Republicans, Mr. Trump has embraced her candidacy and called her "a future Republican star" and "a real WINNER!" He has also frequently retweeted postings by QAnon followers. During a contentious exchange at the televised town hall Thursday over his promotion of false conspiracy theories, he said of QAnon: "I know nothing about it. I do know they are very much against pedophilia. They fight it very hard."

His campaign has presented an uneven response to QAnon. It canceled the appearance of a QAnon-connected speaker at the Republican National Convention this summer, and last month, Vice President Mike Pence canceled an appearance hosted by QAnon supporters.

But campaign officials have struggled to explain their support for Ms. Greene.

"QAnon is not something that we focus on," Tim Murtaugh, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, told MSNBC in August when asked about Ms. Greene. "We have a lot of things that we work on here in the campaign," he added. "And chasing down various conspiracy theories is not one of them."

Ms. Greene, for her part, said in a Fox News interview published in August that QAnon was not a focus of her campaign, adding, "My campaign message the entire time was save America, stop Socialism."

The creation of Elections L.L.C. reflects an ongoing pattern by Trump campaign officials of collecting payments through new businesses they set up around the campaign, a practice honed by the former campaign manager, Brad Parscale, before his ouster this summer. Mr. Clark also set up a firm called National Public Affairs last year with Bill Stepien, who replaced Mr. Parscale as campaign manager in July.

The founders of Elections L.L.C., Mr. Clark and Mr. Passantino, are also both prominent partners at Michael Best, a Wisconsin-based law firm that has an affiliated lobbying and government relations firm chaired by Reince Priebus, the former R.N.C. chairman, who worked with both men while he served as Mr. Trump's first White House chief of staff. Mr. Clark is on leave from Michael Best, while Mr. Passantino chairs its government regulations and public policy practice.

The firm's managing partner, David Krutz, said that Elections L.L.C. had no affiliation with his firm and said Mr. Passantino "maintained a clear division of work" between the two firms. (An associate at Michael Best, Nathan Groth, has also done work for Elections L.L.C.)

With Election Day approaching, Ms. Greene appears to be assured of victory. Her primary opponent, a conservative neurosurgeon named John Cowan, used the slogan "All of the conservative, none of the embarrassment," and once told Politico, "She deserves a YouTube channel, not a seat in Congress. She's a circus act."

But Ms. Greene handily prevailed in her heavily Republican district, and her Democratic opponent has dropped out of the race.

"The Republican establishment was against me," Ms. Greene said in her victory speech after a runoff in August. "The D.C. swamp is against me. And the lying fake news media hates my guts. It's a badge of honor."

DUSTIN CHAMBERS/GETTY IMAGES

JESSICA HILL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican congressional candidate in Georgia, has posted videos going into detail about the QAnon conspiracy theory. Justin Clark, President Trump's deputy campaign manager, co-founded a firm that works for Ms. Greene.

Stephanie Saul contributed reporting and Rachel Shorey contributed research.

Fearing a Rout on Capitol Hill, Republicans Start to Break Ranks With the President

By CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — For nearly four years, congressional Republicans have ducked and dodged an unending cascade of offensive statements and norm-shattering behavior from President Trump, ignoring his caustic and scattershot Twitter feed and penchant for flouting party orthodoxy, and standing quietly by as he abandoned military allies, attacked American institutions and stirred up racist and nativist fears.

But now, facing grim polling numbers and a flood of Democratic money and enthusiasm that has imperiled their majority in the Senate, Republicans on Capitol Hill are beginning to publicly distance themselves from the president. The shift, less than three weeks before the election, indicates that many Republicans have concluded that Mr. Trump is heading for a loss in November. And they are grasping to save themselves and rushing to re-establish their reputations for a coming struggle for their party's identity.

Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska unleashed on Mr. Trump in a telephone town hall event with constituents on Wednesday, eviscerating the president's response to the coronavirus pandemic and accusing him of "flirting" with dictators and white supremacists and alienating voters so broadly that he might cause a "Republican blood bath" in the Senate. He was echoing a phrase from Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, who warned of a "Republican blood bath of Watergate proportions." Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, one of the president's most vocal allies, predicted the president could very well lose the White House.

Even the normally taciturn Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, has been more outspoken than usual in recent days about his differences with the president, rejecting his calls to "go big" on a stimulus bill. That was a reflection of the fact that Senate Republicans — who have rarely broken with the president on any major legislative initiative in four years — are unwilling to vote for the kind of multitrillion-dollar federal aid plan that Mr. Trump has suddenly decided would be in his interest to embrace.

"Voters are set to drive the ultimate wedge between Senate Republicans and Trump," said Alex Conant, a former aide to Senator Marco Rubio and a former White House spokesman. "It's a lot easier to get along when you're winning elections and gaining power. But when you're on the precipice of what could be a historic loss, there is less eagerness to just get along."

Republicans could very well hang on to both the White House and the Senate, and Mr. Trump still has a firm grip on the party base, which may be why even some of those known for being most critical of him, like Mr. Sasse and Senator Mitt Romney of Utah, declined to be interviewed about their concerns.

But their recent behavior has offered an answer to the long-pondered question of if there would ever be a point when Republicans might repudiate a president who so frequently said and did things that undermined their principles and message. The answer appears to be the moment they feared he would threaten their political survival.

If some Senate Republicans have written off Mr. Trump's chances of victory, the feeling may be mutual. On Friday, the president issued his latest Twitter attack on Senator Susan Collins of Maine, one of the most endangered Republican incumbents, apparently unconcerned that he might be further imperiling her chances, along with the party's hopes of holding onto the Senate.

In a statement on Friday, Mr. Romney assailed the president for being unwilling to condemn QAnon, the viral pro-Trump conspiracy movement that the F.B.I. has labeled a domestic terrorism threat, saying the president was "eagerly trading" principles "for the hope of electoral victories." It was his second scathing statement this week criticizing Mr. Trump, although Mr. Romney coupled both screeds with critiques of Democrats, saying the two parties shared blame.

> A sense that 'the laws of political gravity' are still in full force.

Yet Mr. Romney and other Republicans who have spoken up to offer dire predictions or expressions of concern about Mr. Trump are all sticking with the president on what is likely his final major act before the election: the confirmation of Judge Amy Coney Barrett, a favorite of conservatives, to the Supreme Court.

The dichotomy reflects the tacit deal congressional Republicans have accepted over the course of Mr. Trump's presidency, in which they have tolerated his incendiary behavior and statements knowing that he would further many of their priorities, including installing a conservative majority on the nation's highest court.

Still, the grim political environment has set off a scramble, especially among Republicans with political aspirations stretching beyond Mr. Trump's presidency, to be on the front lines of any party reset.

"As it becomes evident that he is a mere political mortal like everyone else, you're really starting to see the jockeying taking place for what the future of the Republican Party is," said Carlos Curbelo, a former Republican congressman from Florida who did not support Mr. Trump in 2016. "What we heard from Senator Sasse yesterday was the beginning of that process."

In an interview, Mr. Curbelo said that his former colleagues have known for months that Mr. Trump would one day become "subject to the laws of political gravity" — and that the party would face the consequences.

"Most congressional Republicans have known that this is unsustainable long term, and they've just been — some people may call it pragmatic, some may call it opportunistic — keeping their heads down and doing what they have to do while they waited for this time to come," he said.

It is unclear whether Republicans will seek to redefine their party should the president lose, given that Mr. Trump's tenure has shown the appeal of his inflammatory brand of politics to the crucial conservative base.

"He still has enormous, enormous influence — and will for a very long time — over primary voters, and that is what members care about," said Brendan Buck, a former counselor to the last two Republican House speakers.

What Mr. Sasse and Mr. Cruz may be aiming for, he added, is a last-ditch bid to preserve Republican control of the Senate.

"If you're able to say it out loud, there is an effective message that a Republican Senate can be a check on a Democratic-run Washington," Mr. Buck said. "It's just hard to say that out loud because you have to concede the president is done."

On the campaign trail, Republicans are privately livid with the president for dragging down their Senate candidates, sending his struggles rippling across states that are traditional Republican strongholds.

"His weakness in dealing with coronavirus has put a lot more seats in play than we ever could have imagined a year ago," said Whit Ayres, a Republican pollster and consultant. "We always knew that there were going to be a number of close Senate races, and we were probably swimming against the tide in places like Arizona, Colorado and Maine. But when you see states that are effectively tied, like Georgia and North Carolina and South Carolina, that tells you something has happened in the broader environment."

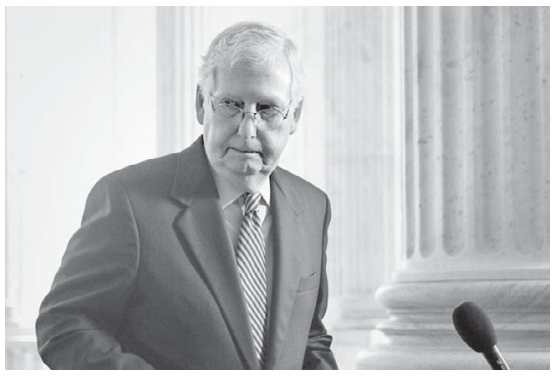
In 2016, when Mr. Trump, then a candidate, looked increasingly likely to capture the party's nomination, Mr. McConnell assured his members that if he threatened to harm them in the general election, they would "drop him like a hot rock."

That did not happen then and it is unlikely to now, with Republicans up for re-election readily aware that Democratic voters are unlikely to reward such a rebuke, especially so close to Election Day. But there have been other, more subtle moves.

Despite repeated public entreaties from Mr. Trump for Republicans to embrace a larger pandemic stimulus package, Mr. McConnell has all but refused, saying senators in his party would never support a package of that magnitude. Senate Republicans revolted last weekend on a conference call with Mark Meadows, the president's chief of staff, warning that a big-spending deal would amount to a "betrayal" of the party's base and tarnish their credentials as fiscal hawks.

A more personal rebuke came from Mr. McConnell last week when the Kentuckian, who is up for re-election, told reporters that he had avoided visiting the White House since late summer because of its handling of the coronavirus.

"My impression was their approach to how to handle this was different from mine and what I insisted that we do in the Senate," Mr. McConnell said.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNA MONEYMAKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Senator Mitch McConnell, left, the normally tight-lipped Republican majority leader, rejected President Trump's calls to "go big" on a stimulus bill. Senator Ben Sasse, Republican of Nebraska, unleashed on Mr. Trump in a phone call with constituents on Wednesday.

DISTORTIONS

A Right-Wing Satire Site That Sometimes Tricks a Bit Too Well

By KEVIN ROOSE

On Friday, President Trump tweeted an article from an unusual source: The Babylon Bee, a right-wing satire site that is often compared to a conservative version of The Onion.

Via @TheBabylonBee Wow, this has never been done in history. This includes his really bad interview last night. Why is Twitter doing this. Bringing more attention to Sleepy Joe & Big T

Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

"Twitter Shuts Down Entire Network to Slow Spread of Negative Biden News," read the article's headline. The article was a joke, but it was unclear whether Mr. Trump knew that when he shared the link, with the comment "Wow, this has never been done in history."

Emma Goldberg, a reporter for The New York Times, recently profiled The Babylon Bee, and wrote about how the site's satire is frequently mistaken for reality.

I chatted with Ms. Goldberg about her article, The Babylon Bee's habit of skirting the line between misinformation and satire, and how it capitalizes on its audience's confusion.

So, Emma, you wrote about The Babylon Bee, a satirical news site I've been fascinated by for a long time. It's basically the right-wing version of The Onion, right?

Exactly. And what fascinated me in reporting this is that I've followed The Onion for a long time — but The Babylon Bee currently gets more traffic than them, at least according to their internal numbers.

That's so interesting! (As an aside, I'm looking at some engagement data from Facebook now, and it's telling me that The Babylon Bee has gotten about 45 million interactions with its Facebook page in the last year, compared with 35 million for The Onion.) Why do you think The Bee is doing so well?

Well, they certainly don't pull any punches. Their mantra seems to be that everything is fair game: the left, the right, Trump. And in general, on the right, swiping at Trump is considered a red line, but The Bee doesn't seem to care.

They've also tapped into a large audience of people who aren't hard-line Trumpers, but are much more pissed off by the outrage that Trump generates on the left.

Right, sort of the anti-anti-Trump crowd. And the people who run the site, are they pro-Trump? What do they see themselves as doing, within the larger conservative movement?

They are ambivalent about their views on Trump, but they also proudly identify as Christian conservatives. But I noticed that their early coverage of Trump, back in 2016, was much more vitriolic than today's. They called him a psychopath, or a megalomaniac. Now they're more bemused by him and the ghoulish ways he's described on the left.

But I think their willingness to swipe at him, even gently, gets at an important element for successful humor. What the media scholar Brian Rosenwald told me is that the humor always has to come before the politics.

So this is a blog about distortions and misinformation, and one thing I've noticed recently is that a lot of The Babylon Bee's most successful articles in terms of online engagement are the ones that are . . . less obviously satirical.

Totally. And that's landed them in some hot water.

Like, one from the other day was called "NBA Players Wear Special Lace Collars to Honor Ruth Bader Ginsburg."

People were sharing that thinking it was real.

Yes!

They certainly play to that for virality — their best content is right on the reality-satire line.

I'm wondering the extent to which being a satire site — which makes them exempt from Facebook's fact-checking program — has allowed them to traffic in misinformation under the guise of comedy. Do you think that's a deliberate strategy?

Well, that's a great question, because it's been a big source of controversy for them. They've had a few articles that were fact-checked by Snopes and rated "false." Which The Bee's writers and editors claim prompted Facebook to threaten them with being demonetized (Facebook denies this). The Bee's founder, Adam Ford, has claimed that Snopes fact-checked them in ways that were "egregious," with standards that wouldn't be applied to, for example, The Onion.

The Bee feels that they're being targeted unfairly. But Snopes has poked at the fact that theirpieces can sometimes be easily mistaken for real news — which might fall on them, not their readers.

Politics aside, it sort of speaks to the impossible nature of being a satirical site in the age of the mega-platform. Because on one hand, you've got to write things that are so obviously made up that they can't reasonably be mistaken for real news, but also close enough to the truth to be funny.

One hundred percent. Truth is funnier than fiction these days.

One thing I've wondered is what the whole "owning the libs" media industrial complex (which I'd categorize The Bee as belonging to, even if they wouldn't) will do if Trump loses in November. Do you get the sense that The Bee cares who wins the election, from the standpoint of comedic potential?

What's funny is that because they aren't Trump loyalists, they can see an advantage for their comedy either way. In some senses, comedy comes a lot easier when you're not the party in power. But on the other hand, Trump is such an absurd figure that he can lend himself to some really wild caricatures. The editor in chief of The Bee told me Trump is great for comedy, so he'd be happy to see him win — a little later, he added that maybe they're sick of Trump humor and ready for a change. They also see a lot of humor opportunity in the Biden camp, especially playing off the "Sleepy Joe" motif.

So what I'm taking from this conversation is: The Babylon Bee is not a covert disinformation operation disguised as a right-wing satire site, and is in fact trying to do comedy, but may inadvertently be spreading bad information when people take theirstories too seriously?

For the most part. But they also seem to find it pretty funny when their content is mistaken for real news — and they're not exactly going overboard to stop that.

Every day, Times reporters will chronicle and debunk false and misleading information that is going viral online.

In the Suburbs, Women Who Supported Trump in 2016 Have Soured on Him

From Page A1

College. Among men, the race is tied.

Mr. Trump's suburban deficit has emerged as a significant problem for his re-election bid, one that's left the president begging with women to come home.

"Suburban women, will you please like me?" the president said at a rally in Johnstown, Pa., this week. "Please. Please."

For Ms. Rabinovitch, no amount of pleading will undo the damage of the past four years. On a chilly October evening in a suburban Columbus backyard, she gathered with three other women, all mothers of young children, to discuss their political evolutions.

Not all of them voted for Mr. Trump, but all carry regret about 2016. For them, the president's words and actions have forced an intimate re-examination of their deep-rooted, more conservative political identities — taught in church and school and inherited from their families — and some things that are even more personal: their sense of morality and the values they hope to impart to their children.

Perhaps most worrisome for the president and his party is that the shift could go beyond Mr. Trump on the ballot this year, and outlast him. Armed with tumblers of wine, the women described how Mr. Trump had turned them off from a Republican Party they once supported, one that they now see as intertwined with the president's divisive rhetoric.

"I cannot imagine a Republican candidate that I would rally behind," said Hannah Dasgupta, who is a stay-at-home mother of two school-age children and grew up in a conservative home. "Wow, that's mind-blowing to think about. That's a huge departure."

Ms. Dasgupta, 37, said she had never liked Mr. Trump but had been unable to support Hillary Clinton in 2016. For Ms. Dasgupta, who was raised attending Christian schools, opposition to abortion was central to her political beliefs. After Mrs. Clinton offered an unapologetic defense of abortion rights in the final presidential debate, Ms. Dasgupta cast her ballot for Gary Johnson, the Libertarian candidate.

"The crazy thing is like, I wouldn't know the guy if he was sitting next to me," Ms. Dasgupta said. "I don't think I could identify him. But those Republican roots were deep, and the abortion issue is strong."

Over the past four years, Ms. Dasgupta's views on abortion have shifted to the left as her opinion of the president has sunk. She has grown tired of explaining his actions — such as his comments in this week's town hall questioning the effectiveness of mask-wearing — to her young children.

She connects her support of Mr. Biden to her role as a mother, saying that she spends time teaching her children basic skills like sharing and speaking respectfully — traits she believes the president lacks.

"In the last four years, my children have grown and developed more than he has in regards to the way he speaks to other people, the way he speaks about other people," she said.

Katie Paris, the founder of Red, Wine and Blue, an all-female team of "P.T.A. mamas and digital divas" focused on organizing suburban female voters for Ohio Democrats, hears such sentiments frequently.

She believes that for Democrats to keep the support of women like Ms. Dasgupta, they must recognize the intimate nature of their politics. Ms. Paris's philosophy of political organizing is a mix of David Plouffe, the famed Democratic data guru, and Brené Brown, the research professor who has become a viral self-help star.

Ms. Paris, who brought together the group of women around the backyard firepit, believes that moving away from a political identity takes "courageous conversations." And the way to encourage people on that path involves "being vulnerable with each other about what's going on in our lives at a personal level."

Many suburban women already have doubts about Mr. Trump, she said, but may be reluctant to express their political opinions, particularly to a young campaign organizer from out of state. Her group hires as organizers women who have lived in their suburban communities for over a decade, tapping into their existing networks of class parents and tee-ball coaches.

"We can't leave this all on Black voters to carry all the weight in Ohio," added Ms. Paris, who is white. "It's going to take all of us."

She and her team are particularly proud of their large presence on social media. One recent viral effort featured women posting photos of themselves in aprons and curlers with Democratic campaign signs while holding cocktails, a spoof on Mr. Trump's Twitter appeals to the "Suburban Housewives of America."

Ms. Paris and the Democrats hope to repeat the strategy that won their party control of the House in 2018, driving up their margins among suburban women in swing districts.

They have some reason for optimism: Four years ago, Mr. Trump won Ohio by eight percentage points. Now, polling shows a tied race. Still, Ohio may remain out of reach for Democrats this year. The 2018 strategy was far less successful there than elsewhere in the Midwest, and the popular incumbent Senator Sherrod Brown was the only Democrat to win statewide. The perennial swing state has trended Republican recently, and plenty of female voters still support the president.

"I've heard people say, 'How can you vote for Trump when you're a woman and the things he says about women?'" said Rachel Antonelli, 35, a banker in Delaware, Ohio, who is pregnant with her second child and plans to vote for Mr. Trump. "Personally, what I care about is that he gets things done for the country."

Since the summer of racial justice protests and unrest around the country, Republicans have tried to woo back white suburban women with a focus on "law and order," stoking racial fears and depicting the increasingly diverse suburbs as the sole province of white, affluent families. According to William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, white people made up 77 percent of the population in inner-ring suburbs in 1990; today they are 58 percent, he said.

The women in Columbus, who are all white, described the killing of George Floyd as a seminal event in their political awakenings, one that drew attention to issues of racism and police violence beyond their personal purview.

"I'm not going to lie and say, like, in February, I was worried about racism in America," said Ms. Rabinovitch, who has a 4-year-old son. "Like, I wasn't."

The video of Mr. Floyd's killing, she said, forced her to acknowledge structural problems in American society.

"I have to think of everybody," she said. "So if I'm voting against Donald Trump, that's not a vote for me or a vote for my son. That's a vote for everyone. Everyone's sons."

In the final months of the campaign, the pandemic and its cascading effects on schools and the economy have deepened the opposition to Mr. Trump among female voters.

Unlike some of the women in her social circles, Andrea Granieri knew four years ago that she couldn't back Mr. Trump. Raised in a conservative Catholic family, her vote for Hillary Clinton was the first she had ever cast for a Democrat.

"I just looked at my daughter, who was 3 at the time, and the way that he talked about and treated women," said Ms. Granieri, 34, who lives in Anderson Township, a suburb of Cincinnati. "I was just like, I cannot put a check next to his name."

After Mrs. Clinton lost, Ms. Granieri found herself becoming increasingly engaged in local Democratic causes. Her involvement escalated after the pandemic began, and she found herself juggling a full-time job at a charter school and home-schooling her own children along with the pressure of her husband's losing some of his work.

"I felt like, do you understand?" she said. "Like, I am on my last shred of sanity here. And you guys have no idea. You're not sending help. I don't know how much longer I have to do this."

A Facebook post she wrote about her frustrations with the state's Republican leadership captured local attention, becoming a piece of campaign mail for a candidate for the State Senate.

"I had so many regrets after 2016, because I took for granted that — I just thought Hillary would win," Ms. Granieiri said. "I'm determined not to have regrets on Nov. 4 this time."

HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hannah Dasgupta, with her daughter Priya, 5, in Ohio, said she was tired of explaining President Trump's actions to her children.

DA'SHAUNAE MARISA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Katie Paris is the founder of Red, Wine and Blue, a team focused on organizing suburban female voters for Ohio Democrats.

DA'SHAUNAE MARISA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Kate Rabinovitch voted for Mr. Trump in 2016. "I thought, 'Oh, what's the worst that could happen?'" She supports Mr. Biden.

Jessica Cheung contributed reporting.

New Jersey Democrats Lead in Ballot Returns

By TRACEY TULLY

With less than three weeks to go before a pandemic-era election that is being conducted mainly by mail, Democrats in New Jersey are returning ballots at rates that outpace Republicans in some of the state's most conservative strongholds.

In the rural north, on the Jersey Shore and in horse country, Democrats are beating Republicans to the mailbox — and the drop box — in an election where every voter was mailed a paper ballot to turn in by Nov. 3.

In Ocean County, home to more Republicans than any other part of the state, nearly 39 percent of registered Democrats had voted as of Wednesday, compared with 25 percent of Republicans, county records show. Rural Sussex County had a nearly identical split: More than 39 percent of Democrats had returned ballots by Wednesday, compared with 24 percent of Republicans.

While many states have seen a surge in mail-in voting, New Jersey is one of only four states where the rate of return has already eclipsed 25 percent of the state's total turnout four years ago.

Pollsters, lawmakers and campaign consultants see it as a sign of intensity among Democrats eager to show their displeasure with a polarizing president and a measure of distrust among Republicans toward mail voting — a method President Trump has attacked, without evidence, as being ripe for fraud.

Republican leaders say they expect a surge of in-person ballot delivery closer to Election Day.

"They're very suspicious of the mail," said State Senator Joseph Pennacchio, a Republican chairman of the president's re-election campaign in New Jersey who is recommending voters use drop boxes. "If you had a $100 bill, would you trust putting $100 in the mail? Of course not."

Still, two years after a watershed midterm election that saw Democrats flip four of the state's congressional seats, political analysts say the mail-in trend could suggest more trouble for Republicans already fighting to retain a foothold in an increasingly liberal state.

Before Representative Jeff Van Drew switched parties in December, there was only one Republican representing New Jersey in Congress: Chris Smith, who is in his 20th term in office. Mr. Van Drew, a vocal opponent of the president's impeachment, is now in a fight for his political life against Amy Kennedy, a first-time candidate and former schoolteacher who is married to a nephew of President John F. Kennedy.

A poll released this month showed Ms. Kennedy with a five-point advantage in the conservative-leaning district, which the president won in 2016.

But it is a contest between State Senator Tom Kean Jr. and Representative Tom Malinowski — in a district that cuts across a northern swath of New Jersey — that many observers are watching most closely.

Mr. Kean, a Republican, is a son of Thomas H. Kean, a respected former governor who led the investigation into the Sept. 11 terror attacks; Mr. Malinowski is a freshman Democrat elected in 2018 as part of a so-called blue wave aligned against Mr. Trump.

Given Senator Kean's name recognition and family ties, the outcome of the race — rated likely to "lean Democratic" by the Cook Political Report — is seen as something of a litmus test for centrist Republicans.

"Does Tom Malinowski romp over Kean?" asked Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

"And does that mean the Tom Kean Sr. brand of Republicanism is dead?" he added.

County clerks were required to mail ballots to every registered voter in New Jersey no later than Oct. 5. In many parts of the state, election officials began issuing ballots in the middle of September, enabling voters to submit their ballots more than a month before Election Day by mail, or to an election office or secure drop box.

Residents may also hand deliver paper ballots on Nov. 3 to their polling place or an election office; people with disabilities can request to use voting machines.

As it did in other states, the Trump campaign sued New Jersey to try to block mail voting and early ballot counting, which is expected to start in just over a week.

Mr. Pennacchio said the shift to paper ballots was a political power play by Democrats, dressed up as a pandemic-related safety necessity.

"There is no reason in the world that New Jersey cannot vote in person," said Mr. Pennacchio, who noted people have still been standing in lines inside stores and outside motor vehicle offices. This week, Gov. Philip D. Murphy, a Democrat, also permitted full-contact winter sports like basketball and wrestling to begin in schools.

Mr. Pennacchio, a Brooklyn-born dentist and one-time Democrat who now helps to lead the Republican Party in Morris County, called Mr. Trump a "poster boy for traditional values" who had not lost sight of his constituents.

"He may butcher the King's English occasionally, and God knows he tweets too much, but he's got my back," Mr. Pennacchio said. "When he went to Washington, he took me with him."

The ballots trickling in offer only an early snapshot of voter response to the broadest test of mail voting in New Jersey, and the numbers are changing by the day.

But the rate of return has raised eyebrows among rank-and-file Republicans.

In Hunterdon County, Republicans control county government and outnumber Democrats by about 13,000 voters. But by the end of last week, 43 percent of its registered Democrats had voted, compared with 25 percent of Republicans in a county that sits within Mr. Malinowski's district.

CHRISTINA PACIOLLA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Nicole Flaherty places her ballot in a ballot box accompanied by her children in Cinnaminson, N.J.

"It says there's a real passion," said Christine Todd Whitman, a Republican from Hunterdon County and the only woman to be elected governor in New Jersey.

Ms. Whitman is a vocal opponent of Mr. Trump and a leader of Republicans and Independents for Biden, a group that has endorsed former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. for president.

If Mr. Trump loses, Ms. Whitman said, his supporters will be relegated to a wing of the party, and centrists can begin to rebuild. If he wins, the work will be more difficult, she said, but not impossible.

"We're going to have to work hard to get it back, but it doesn't mean it's dead," Ms. Whitman said of the party that she, like her father and grandfathers before her, once helped to lead.

"We are not going to stop trying to give the American people a center party," she added, "because that's where most people are."

But support in New Jersey for a Republican Party overhauled in the image of Mr. Trump is also on clear display in the full-throated embrace of the president by Republicans locked in close congressional races in swing districts, and at raucous rallies for the president.

A campaign-style event in February featuring Mr. Trump in Wildwood, N.J., drew thousands of ardent fans, many of whom endured freezing temperatures as they waited in line for two days.

An early turnout that shows 'a high level of enthusiasm.'

On Labor Day weekend, supporters of the president gathered off the coast for a flotilla that participants estimated drew 2,400 boats.

In a televised debate last week, Mr. Van Drew hewed closely to Mr. Trump's positions on issues including immigration, policing and the origin of the coronavirus, which, Mr. Van Drew said, "probably came from a laboratory — we don't know if this was even genetically mutated." Scientists and U.S. intelligence agencies agree that the overwhelming likelihood is that the virus evolved in nature.

David Richter, a Republican running to unseat Andy Kim — a Democratic congressman who notched a narrow win to flip the seat in 2018 — had been dismissive of the president after he was jostled out of the running in the Second Congressional District by Mr. Van Drew's party switch. But now, after he rented a home in an adjacent district to challenge Mr. Kim, his fund-raising site professes that he "proudly stands with President Trump."

POOL PHOTO BY EDWARD LEA

Republican Representative Jeff Van Drew debates his Democratic challenger, Amy Kennedy, who has a five-point advantage.

New Jersey is one of just four states where the early rate of ballot return is already more than 25 percent of its total turnout in 2016, according to the United States Elections Project, an information hub run by Michael McDonald, a professor at the University of Florida.

Jesse Burns, executive director of the nonpartisan League of Women Voters of New Jersey, said she believed the uptick in voting was directly linked to the pandemic.

Voters this year are animated not only by marquee races, she said, but by elections for local school boards and county legislatures, which became far more relevant to their day-to-day lives as residents struggled to find virus testing sites or adapted to remote education.

"People realize that they are making decisions about how their children will attend school," Ms. Burns said.

John Froonjian, the executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, pointed to the July primary, when even candidates who had no opponents drew record numbers of votes.

Votes for Representative Donald Norcross, a Democrat who ran unopposed in the primary, were twice what they were two years ago when he had two challengers. Mr. Kim, who had no primary opponent, got 79,423 votes, outpacing the combined 58,592 votes cast for Mr. Richter and his opponent, Kate Gibbs, who were locked in a hard-fought race for the Republican nomination.

"All these signs show a high level of enthusiasm," Professor Froonjian said. "It's like they can't wait to vote."

Billionaire Is Spending Millions to Defeat New York Democrats

By JESSE McKINLEY

ALBANY, N.Y. — For months, state Democratic leaders have been contemplating a once-unthinkable scenario: Capture a few more State Senate seats, and their party could win a supermajority in a chamber long controlled by the Republicans.

Lauder

Money was on their side, as was momentum: Democrats seized the Senate in the 2018 midterms, and next month's election is expected to further reflect New York's unfavorable view of President Trump, the Republicans' national standard-bearer.

But Ronald S. Lauder, the billionaire cosmetics heir, is trying to level the playing field.

In the last few weeks, a new independent expenditure group founded by Mr. Lauder has emerged as a financial lifeline for the Republicans. That group, Safe Together New York, has poured $2.9 million into radio, digital and television advertisements aimed at six State Senate races, including four with Democratic incumbents.

All told, Mr. Lauder has committed $4 million to the group, whose professed goal is to roll back recent criminal justice laws that it says benefit "criminals at the detriment of law abiding New Yorkers."

"We need politicians in office that will keep New York safe," the group's website reads.

Some Democrats, however, wonder if the effort is to prevent their party from winning a two-thirds supermajority: Democrats hold 40 of 63 seats in Albany's upper chamber and would need to pick up only two additional seats, barring defections.

A supermajority would enable the Legislature to pursue veto-proof progressive initiatives without the typically required blessing of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, a third-term Democrat who worked closely with Republicans during his first two terms in office. (The State Assembly is already dominated, by a two-to-one ratio, by Democrats.)

A Democratic supermajority would give the Legislature far more sway in the all-important budget negotiations in Albany, which have long been controlled by Mr. Cuomo, a fiscal centrist, and could pave the way for more taxes on the rich, an idea that the governor has opposed.

So, by giving money to Republicans in State Senate races, Mr. Lauder — whose brother and nephew have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the governor's election campaigns — may be indirectly helping Mr. Cuomo.

Richard Azzopardi, a senior adviser to the governor, discounted any speculation that Mr. Cuomo could benefit from fewer Democrats in the Senate.

"We're proud of the legislation we passed, and any connection to whatever this is exists only in the overactive minds of conspiracy traffickers," Mr. Azzopardi said.

The infusion of cash from Mr. Lauder — who is also a longtime supporter of conservative causes (he gave $100,000 to two Trump re-election committees and another $100,000 to the Republican National Committee in August 2019) — will help Republicans, who are facing a gap in campaign funds. The latest campaign finance report showed the New York State Senate Republican Campaign Committee with a little under $1 million on hand; the Democrats' campaign committee had nearly three times that.

Republicans acknowledge playing defense on some of their open seats, but are running hard on several issues — like last year's bail reform laws, which were opposed by many law enforcement officials — that coincide with both Mr. Trump's calls for "law and order" and the warnings from Mr. Lauder's political action committee.

"If you're not safe, if you don't feel your community is safe, if you don't feel your leaders have a handle on public safety, and are supporting the men and women who go out and defend us and protect us, then everything else doesn't matter as much," said State Senator Robert G. Ortt, the Republican minority leader. "You can't get to those next things if you can't protect people."

A cosmetics heir offers a financial lifeline to the Republicans.

Among the Democrats being targeted by Mr. Lauder's PAC are three first-term incumbents in moderate districts on Long Island, including in Suffolk County, which Mr. Trump won in 2016. Chief among them is Senator Monica R. Martinez, who was among of a wave of younger progressives elected in 2018, when Democrats won eight Republican-held seats in the Senate and seized the majority.

One attack ad against Ms. Martinez, paid for by Mr. Lauder's group, shows a person cocking a gun, and other gritty sounds and imagery, including sirens. "New York's crime wave is no accident," a narrator says. "Monica Martinez voted for it." It mentions her vote for bail reform and ends with a blunt pitch: "Monica Martinez: More Crime."

Similar ads target two other Senate Democrats on Long Island — Kevin Thomas and Jim Gaughran — as well Senator Andrew Gounardes of Brooklyn. Two Democratic candidates — Jim Barber and John Mannion — running for seats vacated by Republicans are also facing negative ads paid for by Mr. Lauder.

Ms. Martinez called Mr. Lauder's involvement "a slap in the face of my voters," noting that crime rates on Long Island were among the lowest in the nation.

"He's a New York City billionaire getting involved in a district that has nothing to do with him," the senator said in an interview.

Mr. Lauder, 76, has been active in politics for decades, mounting a failed bid for mayor in New York City in 1989, and then, four years later, energizing and funding a successful campaign to establish term limits in the city. He currently serves as the president of the World Jewish Congress and his own foundation.

Leonard Lauder, Mr. Lauder's brother and fellow Estée Lauder heir, has been a major contributor to Mr. Cuomo over the years, as has Leonard Lauder's son, William P. Lauder, the current executive chairman of the Estée Lauder Companies. State records show that each man has given more than $100,000 to Mr. Cuomo's campaigns since 2010.

Mr. Lauder declined to comment on his motivations for backing Republicans in the State Senate. Christian Browne, a Long Island lawyer and a spokesman for Safe Together New York, said the group was focused on incumbents who voted for bail reform and other changes to the criminal justice system, claiming that "without a safe environment, New York City and New York State will decline."

As for speculation that the actual goal was to deprive the Democrats of a supermajority, Mr. Browne called that "a strange idea."

"Do they think we are concerned with their ability to override the governor's vetoes?" he said of the Democrats. "The fact is the politicians who voted for these bad laws cannot defend them, so they try to distract from the issue by making up an oddball claim that this group wants to steal their supermajority chances. Sorry."

Norman Reimer, the board chairman of New Yorkers United for Justice, which worked to get bail reform passed, described the PAC's attacks as "bad-faith fearmongering."

"There is no connection whatsoever between pretrial reforms and any spike in crime," he said.

Whatever the motivation, Democratic leaders in the Senate seem bullish about their re-election chances, despite the spending spree on their opponents' behalf.

"We've grown used to large amounts of dark money trying to affect our Senate races," said Senator Michael Gianaris, the deputy majority leader who oversees the Democratic conference's political operations. "And we've won even while being outspent."

Prosecutors Issue Protest Against Judge For 9/11 Trial

By CAROL ROSENBERG

WASHINGTON — Proceedings in the long-delayed trial at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, of five men accused of plotting the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks hit a new roadblock on Friday when the military assigned an Air Force judge to preside in the case, and war court prosecutors declared the officer unqualified for the job.

The chief of the military commissions named Lt. Col. Matthew N. McCall as the sixth judge to handle the death penalty case since arraignment in 2012. He is a deputy chief circuit judge for the Air Force at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia but has served less than two years as a military judge, prompting prosecutors to file a protest on Friday night.

"While respectful of Lt. Col. McCall's military career and achievements, the government does not believe he is qualified to preside over this case based on the information available," prosecutors wrote in a two-page notice.

The rules for military commissions trials require a judge at the war court to have been a military judge in one of the services for at least two years. The prosecutors added that if Colonel McCall did not recuse himself from the case on his own, they would seek to remove him.

The development cast further doubt on when and how prosecutors will be able to restart pretrial proceedings, yet alone the anticipated yearlong trial, in the case against Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and four other prisoners at Guantánamo who are accused of conspiring with the 19 hijackers who killed 2,976 people in New York and in Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon.

The case has had a number of judges assigned to it, and this year, one chose to retire, another filled in on an administrative basis and a third lasted two weeks before recusing himself, citing personal ties to New Yorkers who were "directly affected" by the attacks.

The military assigns an Air Force judge to preside in the Guantánamo case.

The Senate confirmed Colonel McCall's promotion to colonel on July 30, although his elevation in rank has yet to take place in a Pentagon system that handles the promotions on a rolling basis. Once it becomes official, he would have to serve in the rank for three years to be eligible for full retirement with a colonel's benefits, circumstances that suggest he could remain on the bench long enough to see the complex conspiracy case to a trial.

Colonel McCall also appears to have no such conflicts. His official biography showed he was a law clerk in Hawaii at the time of the Sept. 11 attacks and before that attended law school at the University of Hawaii.

He was admitted to the Hawaii bar on Nov. 1, 2001, has been deployed at least once to Iraq, for six months in 2006 and 2007 as a prosecutor, then focused on military defense work from 2008 to 2013. He was a defense lawyer in 2009 at the Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field in the Florida Panhandle and also served as a senior defense counsel in Charleston, S.C.

More recently, the Sept. 11 trial has been hampered by changes in personnel, logistical challenges and the coronavirus pandemic. Combined, they have stalled most litigation and forced cancellation of every pretrial hearing in the case since February.

Now, coming construction to fill a gap in available housing at the base makes clear that the Pentagon is planning for a 2022 trial start date.

The Defense Logistics Agency recently ordered more than 150 prefabricated, single-occupancy quarters from a Las Vegas company for $11.6 million, with a delivery date of January and February 2022. A village of 375-square-foot houses would be installed on an obsolete airfield at the court compound, Camp Justice, for the lawyers and other professional staff participating in the Sept. 11 trial.

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The 45th President The Supreme Court

Democrats' Anger Over Barrett Could Mean Big Changes for the Senate

By CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — Judge Amy Coney Barrett is on a glide path to the Supreme Court, but she will leave behind a Senate badly torn by its third confirmation blowup in four years, with the potential for severe repercussions should Democrats take control next year.

The decision by Senator Mitch McConnell and Republicans to push through Judge Barrett's nomination to the high court on the eve of the election, after blocking President Barack Obama's pick under similar circumstances in 2016, enraged many Democrats who saw it as a violation of Senate norms and customs. With some already contemplating consequential changes, they were coming under increased pressure from progressive activists demanding payback, in the form of an end to the legislative filibuster and an expansion in the size of federal courts should Joseph R. Biden Jr. triumph in the presidential race and Democrats take the Senate.

In the aftermath of the confirmation hearing, Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, said it would be premature to discuss what Democrats might do if they won the Senate majority. But he did not dismiss the idea that changes could be in store should the party prevail, only to hit roadblocks erected by a Republican minority in 2021.

"First we have to win the majority because if we don't, all of it is moot," he said in an interview. "If we do, I've told my colleagues that everything is on the table if they jam through this nominee."

Democrats have been hesitant to discuss their plans should they gain power, not wanting to provide Republicans — who are playing defense around the country — with an issue that could alienate voters. Mr. Biden has pointedly declined to give his opinion on adding seats to the courts, but during a Thursday night town-hall-style interview on NBC, he said he was "open" to the idea depending on how Republicans handled Judge Barrett's nomination.

Yet even before the current fight, progressive groups were urging Democrats to ditch the filibuster, which allows the minority to block legislation by setting a 60-vote threshold for action.

An aftermath shaped by which party holds the majority.

Judge Barrett's nomination only added fuel to that fire. Activists — and some senators — say allowing the filibuster to remain in place if Democrats took control would hand minority Republicans the ability to block Mr. Biden's agenda as they did Mr. Obama's, maintaining the gridlock that has plagued Washington. Eliminating the 60-vote requirement would probably also be a prerequisite if Democrats decided to pursue enlarging the Supreme Court.

Republicans say ending the ability to filibuster would destroy the Senate by weakening the minority rights that have historically been a cornerstone of the institution. They say the cry for change amounts to a tantrum by Democrats who have been outmaneuvered on judges, comparing it to a 2013 showdown when Democrats changed rules to ease judicial confirmations and ultimately opened the floodgates for Mr. Trump to install more than 200 new judges.

"For nearly 20 years, any time the confirmation process has temporarily disappointed Democrats, they have insisted the system is illegitimate and rules need tearing up," Mr. McConnell, the Kentucky Republican and majority leader, said this week.

Advocates for expanding the court say it is only fair, since Republicans thwarted Mr. Obama from filling a Supreme Court vacancy in 2016 with 11 months remaining in his tenure while also holding open scores of lower court vacancies so they could be filled by Mr. Trump. And they have made it clear that they want Democrats to take a bare-knuckled approach, pressing for Senator Dianne Feinstein, the courtly 87-year-old Californian who is the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, to be shoved aside from the chairmanship in favor of someone more ready to do battle with Republicans.

For now, the confirmation conflict looms as a major subject in the election, which is shaping up as a referendum on the future of the Senate.

Republicans say the fight could boost some of their endangered incumbents by reminding voters of the value of Senate control when it comes to judges. They argue that Judge Barrett resonated with their voters as a high achieving, ardently anti-abortion conservative woman.

ERIN SCHAFF/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Senator Lindsey Graham said his state likes conservative Supreme Court justices. "Amy Barrett fits South Carolina," he said.

"I can just say in South Carolina, people like conservative judges, that there's a preference for conservative Supreme Court justices," said Senator Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican and the Judiciary Committee chairman who is in a tough battle to hold his own seat. "Amy Barrett fits South Carolina."

Yet Mr. Graham acknowledged Thursday that Democrats "have a good chance of winning the White House" — an outcome that would also significantly boost their prospects of taking over the Senate.

Given their limited procedural weapons, Democrats said they believed they did about as well as could be expected by keeping the confirmation hearing focused mainly on the potential threat to the Affordable Care Act posed by the nominee. The health care access message helped sweep them to a House takeover in 2018 and dovetailed with what Democratic challengers are emphasizing in their campaigns this year.

"The American people now know that the Republicans are all for taking away their health care, whether through legislation or through the courts," said Mr. Schumer, who planned the strategy with Democrats on the Judiciary Committee.

Democrats also managed to avoid getting drawn into a debate over Judge Barrett's Catholicism, despite the best efforts of Republicans to lure them into one in hopes of provoking a backlash. Top Democratic campaign strategists say they have seen gains in polling in individual races with voters who considered the Republican rush to confirmation an overreach.

"You are motivating people to vote," Senator Amy Klobuchar told Republicans on the panel.

Whether Democrats would move to gut the filibuster, expand the court or institute other changes would depend on multiple factors even should they win. Mr. Biden, a former longtime member of the Senate, would be cautious about upending an institution he reveres. In addition, how the Republicans respond to a Democratic takeover would be a major consideration. Plus the margin of victory and the size of the party divide in the Senate would also factor into the debate.

But should Democrats plunge ahead, they would no doubt point to the handling of Judge Barrett's nomination as one justification. As Republicans batted away an effort by Judiciary Committee Democrats to slow the nomination, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Democrat of Rhode Island, raised the prospect of such retaliation.

He warned Republicans that they would have little room to complain because of the way they steamrollered Democrats by fast-tracking Judge Barrett's nomination, pushing for a vote before her hearing was even concluded to make certain she would be seated by the Nov. 3 election.

"Don't think when you have established the rule of 'because we can' that should the shoe be on the other foot, you will have any credibility to come to us and say, 'Yeah, I know you can do that but you shouldn't because of X, Y or Z,' " he cautioned his Republican colleagues. "Your credibility to make that argument at any time in the future will die in this room and on that Senate floor if you continue to proceed in this way."

JASON ANDREW FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Demonstrators protested outside the Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Judge Amy Coney Barrett this week in Washington.

Expand Court to Counter Vote Suppression, Liberals Say

By CHARLIE SAVAGE

WASHINGTON — Progressive activists who want Democrats to expand the Supreme Court and pack it with additional liberal justices are mustering a new argument: Republican-appointed jurists, they say, keep using their power to make it harder for Americans to vote.

Backed by a new study of how federal judges and justices have ruled in election-related cases this year, the activists are building on their case for why mainstream Democrats should see their idea as a justified way to restore and protect democracy, rather than as a radical and destabilizing escalation of partisan warfare over the judiciary.

The study, the "Anti-Democracy Scorecard," was commissioned by the group Take Back the Court, which supports expanding the judiciary. It identified 309 votes by judges and justices in 175 election-related decisions and found a partisan pattern: Republican appointees interpreted the law in a way that impeded ballot access 80 percent of the time, versus 37 percent for Democratic ones.

The numbers were even more stark when limited to judges appointed by President Trump. Of 60 rulings in election-related cases, 85 percent were "anti-democracy" according to the analysis.

"There is a systematic pattern of Republican-appointed judges and justices tipping the scales in favor of the G.O.P. by making voting harder," said Aaron Belkin, a political-science professor and the director of Take Back the Court.

Edward Whelan, president of the conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center, questioned the value of reducing judicial decisions to statistics. Noting that many of the cases this year come from the aberrational circumstances of the pandemic — litigants are trying to get judges to relax local restrictions in light of the need for social distancing — he argued that showing deference to established rules does not necessarily mean hostility to voting.

"The idea that you are going to come up with feeble statistical evidence of judges acting partially, and you are going to use this as a reason to pack the court — to ensure that the Supreme Court acts partially in the direction you want — strikes me as weak," he said.

Mr. Belkin argued that the study results should be seen as part of a larger critique of how American democracy has become "rigged" in favor of conservatives, entrenching minority rule of the country.

Even when Democrats enjoy the support of a majority of voters, they often still lose elections, he said: The Electoral College in presidential races and the Senate's structure disproportionately empower conservative-leaning voters in sparsely populated states.

And even when Democrats do manage to win elections, he said, they have a harder time governing. Senate Republicans can use the filibuster to obstruct enacting new laws on matters like expanding health care or limiting greenhouse-gas emissions. If Democrats succeed in enacting new such laws or regulations anyway, Republicans turn to their allies in the judiciary to strike them down.

A majority of American voters cast their ballots to give Democrats the White House — and with it, the power to appoint judges — in all but one presidential election dating to 1992, and Democrats appear likely to win the popular vote for the fourth straight cycle next month. Nevertheless, conservative, Republican-appointed judges firmly control the judiciary.

That is because the Republican presidential candidate twice prevailed despite losing the popular vote — in 2000 and 2016 — and because Senate Republicans, empowered by low-population states, have used hardball tactics to block nominees by Democratic presidents, like Judge Merrick Garland in 2016, and then to rapidly confirm those put forward by Republican ones, as they are about to do with Judge Amy Coney Barrett.

Against that backdrop, Mr. Belkin argued, the new data suggests that even if Democrats win both chambers of Congress and the White House next month and pass laws to make it easier for Americans to vote, they could face a de facto veto by the judges the Republican Party has installed. And more generally, he argued, the entrenched power of that cohort appears likely to keep making it harder for future election outcomes to reflect the will of the majority.

Take Back the Courts declined to identify the political scientist who performed the study but is releasing its methodology and data set for scrutiny.

Mr. Belkin, who also runs the Palm Center, a social science research institute that focuses on gay, lesbian and transgender rights, said law students at Yale and Stanford checked the data set for accuracy under the oversight of a University of Michigan law professor, Leah Litman, who wrote an essay in The Atlantic last month discussing the partisan pattern in election-litigation cases.

The rulings included numerous challenges to state-imposed limits on ballot access that have come under scrutiny in light of the disruptions caused by the pandemic, including requirements to obtain signatures from other people and deadlines and other limits on absentee or mail-in ballots.

For example, in April the Supreme Court ruled, 5-to-4, to block extended voting in Wisconsin despite the coronavirus pandemic. All five justices in the majority were appointed by Republican presidents and all four in the dissent were Democratic appointees.

A similar pattern held at the district and appeals court level in cases as diverse as whether Georgia and Wisconsin must count absentee ballots postmarked by Election Day even if the post office delivers them a few days later, or whether it was constitutional for the Texas governor, a Republican, to limit ballot drop-off sites to one per county.

By volume, most of the cases involved district court judges. But the pattern held when isolated to the 87 votes in the database by appellate judges: 81 percent of such rulings by Republican-appointed judges interpreted the law in a way that made it harder to access the ballot, versus 35 percent of rulings by Democratic-appointed judges.

Whether Democrats will try to expand the judiciary was a recurring theme at Judge Barrett's confirmation hearings. On Monday, for example, Senator Ben Sasse, Republican of Nebraska, argued that changing the size and composition of the court would politicize the judiciary.

"Depoliticizing the court looks a lot like letting courts and judges do their jobs and the Congress do our job," Mr. Sasse said. "You don't like the policies in America? Great! Elect different people in the House and in the Senate and in the presidency. Fire the politicians at the next election."

But Mr. Belkin argued that the American democratic process for deciding who should be elected to Congress and the White House is broken — and should the conservative tilt of the judiciary remain in place for the foreseeable future, it will amplify the problem.

"The data in this scorecard indicate the danger that federal courts pose to democracy," Mr. Belkin said. "The only way to restore democracy and contain that danger is to reform federal courts."

Justices to Hear Challenges To Trump's 2-Count Census

By ADAM LIPTAK

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court announced on Friday that it would hear a case on whether the Trump administration can exclude undocumented immigrants from the calculations it will use in apportioning congressional seats. The court put the case on a fast track, saying it will hear arguments on Nov. 30.

Judge Amy Coney Barrett, President Trump's Supreme Court pick, will most likely be on the court by then.

The announcement followed an order by the court on Tuesday allowing the administration to cut short the 2020 census count. The administration had said it needed to do so to meet a deadline for submitting its tabulations by the end of the year, allowing President Trump to control the process even if he loses the November election.

The case the court agreed to hear on Friday concerns whether those tabulations should include undocumented immigrants. If the court rules for the administration, it would upend a consensus that the census must count all residents, whatever their immigration status, and would generally shift both political power and federal money from Democratic states to Republican ones.

The Constitution requires congressional districts to be apportioned "counting the whole number of persons in each state," using information from the census. To this end, a federal law requires the president to send Congress a statement setting out the number of representatives to which each state is entitled after each decennial census.

In July, President Trump issued a memorandum taking a new approach. "For the purpose of the reapportionment of representatives following the 2020 census," the memorandum said, "it is the policy of the United States to exclude from the apportionment base aliens who are not in a lawful immigration status."

"Current estimates suggest that one state is home to more than 2.2 million illegal aliens, constituting more than 6 percent of the state's entire population," the memorandum said, apparently referring to California. "Including these illegal aliens in the population of the state for the purpose of apportionment could result in the allocation of two or three more congressional seats than would otherwise be allocated."

Mr. Trump ordered Wilbur Ross, the secretary of commerce, to provide him with two sets of numbers, one including unauthorized immigrants and the other not. It was not clear how Mr. Ross would derive the second set of numbers, as the Supreme Court last year rejected his efforts to add a question on citizenship to the census.

The new policy was challenged by two sets of plaintiffs, one a group of state and local governments and the United States Conference of Mayors, and the second a coalition of advocacy groups and other nongovernmental organizations.

A three-judge panel of the Federal District Court in Manhattan ruled that the new policy violated federal law. In an unsigned opinion, the panel said the question was "not particularly close or complicated."

"The secretary is required to report a single set of figures to the president — namely, 'the tabulation of total population by states' under the 'decennial census' — and the president is then required to use those same figures to determine apportionment using the method of equal proportions," the panel wrote, quoting the relevant statutes.

Much of the panel's opinion concerned whether the plaintiffs had suffered the sort of injury that gave them standing to sue. It concluded that the new policy made it less likely that undocumented immigrants and others would participate in the census, harming its accuracy. Census data is used for many purposes, including how hundreds of billions of dollars in federal spending are distributed.

Are undocumented immigrants to be deemed 'persons'?

The case, Trump v. New York, No. 20-366, was complicated by the order on Tuesday allowing the administration to end the census count, which may undercut the three-judge panel's reasons for finding standing.

In asking the Supreme Court to step in, the Trump administration, represented by the acting solicitor general, Jeffrey B. Wall, defended the new policy, saying that the term "persons in each state" can be understood to require "a sovereign's permission to remain within the jurisdiction."

In response, Barbara D. Underwood, New York's solicitor general, representing state and local governments, said the administration was asking the court to endorse a stunning departure from the nation's traditions. "Since the Founding," she wrote, "the population base used to apportion seats in the House of Representatives has never excluded any resident based on immigration status."

In a separate response, groups represented by the American Civil Liberties Union said the administration's new policy violated the federal statute and the Constitution.

"The president does not have discretion to pencil out persons included in the actual enumeration to create a separate apportionment base of his own liking," the brief said.

On Friday, after the court acted, Dale Ho, a lawyer with the A.C.L.U., said the administration's plan was unlawful.

"President Trump has repeatedly tried — and failed — to weaponize the census for his attacks on immigrant communities," Mr. Ho said in a statement.

White House Unleashes Blitz of Policy Changes

From Page A1

But the Trump administration is also working to fill key vacancies on scientific advisory boards with members who will hold their seats far into the next presidential term, committees that play an important role in shaping federal rule making.

Few of the planned shifts have drawn more scrutiny and criticism than a Labor Department proposal to set federal standards for defining when a worker is an independent contractor or an employee, a step that could affect millions of workers.

The issue has come to a boil as states like California have tried to push companies like Uber and Lyft to classify workers as employees, meaning they would be entitled to benefits such as overtime pay and potentially health insurance, a move that the companies have challenged.

The proposed Labor Department rule creates a so-called economic reality test, such as whether workers set their own schedules or can earn more money by hiring helpers or acquiring new equipment.

The department, in the proposed rule, said it cannot predict how many workers may see their status change as a result of the new definitions because of "uncertainties regarding magnitude and other factors."

But it is nonetheless pushing to have the rule finished before the end of Mr. Trump's first term, limiting the period of public comment to 30 days, half the amount of time that agencies are supposed to offer.

That has generated letters of protest from Senate Democrats and 22 state attorneys general.

"Workers across the country deserve a chance to fully examine and properly respond to these potentially radical changes," said a letter organized by Senator Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington, and signed by 16 other Democratic senators.

The Departments of Labor and Homeland Security are using a tactic known as an interim final rule, more typically reserved for emergencies, to skip the public comment period entirely and to immediately enact two regulations that put much tougher restrictions on work visas for immigrants with special skills. The rule change is part of the administration's longstanding goal of limiting immigration.

The Homeland Security Department is also moving, again with an unusually short 30-day comment period, to adopt a rule that will allow it to collect much more extensive biometric data from individuals applying for citizenship, including voice, iris and facial recognition scans, instead of just the traditional fingerprint scan. The measure, which the agency said was needed to curb fraud, would also allow it for the first time to collect DNA or DNA test results to verify a relationship between an application for citizenship and someone already in the United States.

A third proposed new Homeland Security rule would require sponsors of immigrants to do more to prove they have the financial means to support the individual they are backing, including three years' worth of credit reports, credit scores, income tax returns and bank records. Anyone who accepted welfare benefits during the previous three years would be unable to sponsor an immigrant unless a second person agrees to do so.

The agency is limiting public comment on that change to 30 days as well.

Unlike most of the efforts the administration has pushed, the rules intended to tighten immigration standards would expand federal regulations, instead of narrowing them. They also come at a considerable cost, estimated to be more than $6 billion just for the new demands related to immigrants' biometric data and proof of financial capacity for those sponsoring immigrants.

The Environmental Protection Agency, which since the start of the Trump administration has been moving at a high speed to rewrite federal regulations, is expected to complete work in the weeks that remain in Mr. Trump's term on two of the nation's most important air pollution rules: standards that regulate particulates and ozone that is formed based on emissions from power plants, car exhaust and other sources.

These two pollutants are blamed for bronchitis, asthma, lung cancer and other ailments, causing an estimated 7,140 premature deaths a year in the United States, according to one recent study. The agency is proposing to keep these standards at their current levels, provoking protests from certain health experts and environmentalists who argue that the agency is obligated to lower the limits after new evidence emerged about the harm the pollutants cause.

Scott Pruitt, who served as the E.P.A. administrator in the first 17 months of Mr. Trump's tenure, set as a goal before he left office to get these new standards adopted by December 2020, even though the agency had previously expected they would not be finished until 2022.

The agency also is rushing to complete a series of regulations that will almost certainly make it harder for future administrations to tighten air pollution and other environmental standards, including a limit on how science is used in rule making and a change to the way costs and benefits are evaluated to justify new rules.

Mr. Trump has played a direct role in pushing to accelerate some regulations. Among them is a provision finished this summer, nicknamed "bomb trains" by its critics, that allows railroads to move highly flammable liquefied natural gas on freight trains. Mr. Trump signed an executive order last year directing the Transportation Department to enact the rule within 13 months — even before it had been formally proposed.

The change was backed by the railroad and natural gas industry, which has donated millions of dollars to Mr. Trump, after construction of pipelines had been blocked or slowed after protests by environmentalists.

But the proposal provoked an intense backlash from a diverse array of prominent public safety officials. Among them were groups representing thousands of mayors, fire chiefs and fire marshals nationwide and even the federal government's own National Transportation Safety Board, which investigates fatal transportation accidents.

The gas is stored in 30,000-gallon rail tanks at minus 260 degrees to keep it compressed. But if accidentally released during an accident, it would rapidly expand by nearly 600 times as the temperature rises and cause a "boiling liquid expanding vapor explosion" that if ignited could not be quickly extinguished, potentially resulting in widespread injury or death in a populated area, the fire chiefs warned.

> ***Democrats will have recourse to reverse rules if they assume control of Congress.***

"It is nearly certain any accident involving a train consisting of multiple rail cars loaded with L.N.G. will place vast numbers of the public at risk while fully depleting all local emergency response forces," Harold A. Schaitberger, the president of the International Association of Fire Fighters, wrote in a letter opposing the proposal.

The Transportation Department still adopted the rule and rejected proposed speed limits for the trains, generating a petition for a court review by 14 states and the District of Columbia.

"Studies on how to safely transport liquefied natural gas by rail are still ongoing, and this administration has rushed to implement a rule that will needlessly endanger people's lives and threaten our environment," Michigan's attorney general, Dana Nessel, said.

Even while the challenge is underway, the Transportation Department has moved to enact another rule easing safety standards, in this case removing a requirement intended to limit the number of hours truck drivers are allowed behind the wheel and to mandate rest periods.

Certain drivers who carry agricultural products would now be exempt from this federal mandate in a standard that would again be adopted as an "interim final rule," meaning it would be put in place before any public comment is accepted, under the plan announced by the agency.

"Fatigued truck drivers remain a stubbornly high cause of fatal highway accidents," said James Goodwin, a lawyer at the Center for Progressive Reform, a nonprofit group that tracks regulatory actions. "The law permits agencies to take short cuts when there are extraordinary circumstances that call for them. That is not present here."

LUKE SHARRETT/BLOOMBERG

FUEL TRANSPORT A provision would allow highly flammable liquefied natural gas on freight trains.

STEFANI REYNOLDS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

EMISSIONS The E.P.A. seeks to keep current standards for power plant and car exhaust emissions.

KARSTEN MORAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

GIG WORKERS Defining independent contractors vs. employees will affect ride-share drivers.

Trump, in Quick Reversal, Approves Disaster Relief For California in Wildfires

By THOMAS FULLER and DERRICK BRYSON TAYLOR

MORAGA, Calif. — President Trump reversed himself on Friday, approving a package of wildfire disaster relief for California hours after officials from his administration had explained why the state should not receive the aid.

The abrupt turnaround came after the president spoke with Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, and Representative Kevin McCarthy, a Republican and the House minority leader, with the White House saying the men "presented a convincing case" for their state to receive the aid.

The disaster relief aid covers six major wildfires that scorched more than 1.8 million acres, destroyed thousands of structures and caused at least three deaths last month.

"Just got off the phone with President Trump who has approved our Major Disaster Declaration request," Mr. Newsom said in a statement. "Grateful for his quick response."

The relief package adds to the 68 fire-related aid packages for California that Mr. Trump has approved during his tenure: 61 for firefighting, five for disaster relief and two for support of emergency services.

California has suffered a series of huge fires since August, when freak lightning storms ignited hundreds of blazes, some of which grew to be the largest in modern state history. Subsequent fires in September tore through parts of the Sierra Nevada and wine country north of San Francisco.

Earlier on Friday, Judd Deere, a White House spokesman, referred to the Federal Emergency Management Agency when he said aid for the September fires "was not supported by the relevant data that states must provide for approval and the president concurred with the FEMA administrator's recommendation."

Lizzie Litzow, the agency's press secretary, said damage assessments of some of the fires that started in early September, which included one of the largest fires in state history, "were not of such severity and magnitude to exceed the combined capabilities of the state, affected local governments, voluntary agencies and other responding federal agencies."

The initial rejection was unusual but not unprecedented: A 2017 report by the Congressional Research Service found that from 1974 to 2016, presidents denied requests for disaster relief an average of 2.9 times per year during nonelection years, and 2.1 times in a year with a presidential election.

Since the enactment in 1953 of a federal disaster relief act, presidents have been authorized to issue declarations that provide states with federal assistance in response to natural and manmade incidents. The requests are judged based on criteria that take into account damage to infrastructure, existing insurance coverage and a state's population, among others. But the president ultimately has the authority to approve or reject a disaster aid request, whether or not the criteria are met.

Mr. Newsom said Friday morning that he would appeal the denial — and had apparent success in persuading the president during their afternoon phone call.

Mr. Trump's reversal on the aid came after members of his party in California also urged him to change his mind. "I am writing to respectfully request your reconsideration," State Senator Andreas Borgeas, a Republican, wrote Mr. Trump in a letter on Friday. The Creek Fire, which ravaged parts of Mr. Borgeas's district, "caused unprecedented damage during these most unprecedented times," he said.

While the state did not include a specific dollar amount in its request, Mr. Newsom had written that because of a recession induced by the coronavirus pandemic, California went from a projected $5.6 billion budget surplus to a $54.3 billion projected deficit. "California's economy is suffering in a way we have not seen since the 2009 Great Recession," he said in the request, which came in the form of a letter to Mr. Trump.

Infrastructure damage estimates from the fires had exceeded $229 million, Mr. Newsom said, adding that "recovery efforts remain beyond the state's capabilities."

The handling of wildfires has become highly politicized during Mr. Trump's presidency, aggravating tensions between the conservative administration and one of America's most liberal states. California has sued the president on dozens of issues ranging from the environment to immigration. Last year, the president threatened to cut off funding for wildfire relief unless California improved the management of its forests.

"Billions of dollars are sent to the State of California for Forest fires that, with proper Forest Management, would never happen," Mr. Trump tweeted in January 2019. "Unless they get their act together, which is unlikely, I have ordered FEMA to send no more money."

That threat from Mr. Trump alarmed both Republicans and Democrats in the state. Miles Taylor, a former senior Trump administration official who has endorsed Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s presidential campaign, said in August that Mr. Trump's reluctance to aid California was overtly political.

"He told us to stop giving money to people whose houses had burned down from a wildfire because he was so rageful that people in the state of California didn't support him and that politically it wasn't a base for him," Mr. Taylor says in a campaign video.

However, many of the largest fires in California over the past four years have ravaged areas that tend to vote Republican.

And wildfire experts say Mr. Trump's analysis of the causes of the blazes is problematic because most of California's forests are on land owned by the federal government and their maintenance largely falls under the responsibility of his administration.

As wildfires have become hotter, more intense and more destructive in recent years, liberals and conservatives have been locked in a debate over the reasons. During a visit to California in September, Mr. Trump said "I don't think science knows" what is happening when the state's secretary for natural resources pressed him on the changing climate.

"One camp is saying it's all climate change driven, and the other is saying it's all forest management," said Malcolm North, a forest ecologist at the University of California, Davis. "The reality is that it's both."

Mr. Newsom last month requested the disaster declaration to include statewide hazard mitigation, as well as public assistance for seven counties.

The state this year has suffered four of its five largest wildfires in modern history. One, the Creek Fire that started on Sept. 4, had burned 344,000 acres as of Friday; destroyed more than 850 buildings; threatens thousands more; and has forced more than 24,000 people to evacuate. It is 60 percent contained.

This year, more than 8,500 wildfires have burned over 4.1 million acres in California, Cal Fire said in its statewide fire summary on Thursday. At least 31 people have died in those fires, the agency said.

The threat of more fires this year continues to haunt the state. With record-breaking temperatures and high winds this week, large parts of Northern California were placed under "red flag warnings" and the state's largest utility cut power to more than 50,000 households in an effort to reduce the possibility that its equipment could ignite new fires.

Thomas Fuller reported from Moraga, and Derrick Bryson Taylor from London. Jill Cowan contributed reporting from Los Angeles, and Annie Karni from Washington.

ERIC THAYER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lighting backfires last month to stop the progress of the Bobcat Fire in Monrovia, one of 8,500 wildfires in California this year.

When a Call to Action Is a Facebook Post Away

From Page A1

President Trump on Second Amendment grounds. The rise and fall of his Kenosha Guard reflects the current spirit of vigilantism surfacing across the country.

Organizations that display weapons have existed for decades, with hot-button issues like immigration or Second Amendment rights inspiring people who think the Constitution is under threat. Ever since the 2017 white nationalist march in Charlottesville, Va., armed groups have become fixtures at demonstrations around the country, though membership numbers remain opaque.

With the approaching election ratcheting up tensions, armed groups that assembled via a few clicks on the keyboard are more visible and more widespread. Some especially violent groups were rooted in longstanding anti-government extremism, like the 14 men charged with various crimes in Michigan this month.

Starting in April, demonstrations against coronavirus lockdowns prompted makeshift vigilante groups to move offline and into the real world. This became more pronounced amid the nationwide protests after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis — with some armed groups claiming to protect the protesters while others sought to check them.

When Mr. Trump was asked at last month's presidential debate about activity by right-wing extremists, including the violence in Kenosha, he declined to outright condemn such groups, and told one far-right group to "stand back and stand by."

Experts who study violent groups say that many are unstructured and do not undertake basic steps like training together. They are usually just a fraternity with a shared goal, like the groups in Oregon that patrolled back roads amid wildfires, hunting mostly imagined looters or arsonists.

In Kenosha, police officers were caught on video expressing appreciation to the gunmen and handing them bottles of water, prompting criticism that law enforcement officers encouraged the armed groups.

But soon after, the sheriff tried to distance his department. "Part of the problem with this group is they create confrontation," David Beth, the Kenosha County sheriff, told reporters at a news conference. Asked later about any investigation, the Sheriff's Department said it had not referred any cases linked to the Kenosha Guard for prosecution, and the Police Department did not respond.

Mr. Mathewson first tried to muster the Kenosha Guard in June after the city had small protests because of Mr. Floyd's death. A little more than 60 people responded. Then, on Aug. 23, video emerged that showed a Kenosha police officer firing seven times toward Mr. Blake's back. When protests disintegrated into property destruction, Mr. Mathewson said, he thought law enforcement was overwhelmed.

After two nights of demonstrations, he posted an event on Facebook called "Armed Civilians to Protect our Lives and Property." He named himself commander of the Kenosha Guard and added an open letter to the police telling them not to interfere.

Several hundred people volunteered to participate and around 4,000 expressed approval. His call to arms spread to other platforms, like Reddit. Infowars, the website that traffics in conspiracy theories, amplified it, as did local right-wing radio stations.

"You cannot rely on the government or the police to protect you," Mr. Mathewson said.

STEPHEN MATUREN/REUTERS

LYNDON FRENCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

After Kevin Mathewson, left, made an appeal on Facebook to his neighbors in Kenosha, Wis., to "take up arms to defend out City tonight from the evil thugs," on Aug. 25, people carrying rifles gathered.

Before forming the Kenosha Guard, he had seen reports focused on armed groups deploying in Minneapolis and in Portland, Ore. "It was so far from me that it did not seem real," he said. "When it happens in your own backyard, your own city, it is like, 'Jeez, what can I do?'"

"I am pro-Second Amendment, but I am not a right-wing nut job," he added.

Posts on Facebook amplified the sense of siege in Kenosha by spreading false rumors that murderous gangs from Milwaukee, Minneapolis and Chicago were coming to ransack the city of 100,000 people.

Jennifer Rusch, 47, a hair stylist, clicked on Mr. Mathewson's webpage to find armed men to protect her business. "Facebook had a lot to do with making everybody hysterical," she said. "Now we know 99 percent of it was lies."

People messaged Mr. Mathewson from around Wisconsin and other states, asking where to deploy. He could not handle the avalanche of responses flooding his cellphone, he said.

"People thought we had some kind of command staff or a structure, but it was really just a general call to arms" meant mostly for his neighbors, Mr. Mathewson said.

Jerry Grimson, 56, a former campaign manager for Mr. Mathewson during his run for alderman, responded by organizing his own neighbors to come out. "There was no way we were going to let people burn down our homes," he said.

That night, Mr. Mathewson stuck to the entrance of his subdivision, WhiteCaps, at least seven miles from the city center. Photographs show him wearing a baggy red Chuck Norris T-shirt and knee-length camouflage shorts, with a rifle slung over his chest. He passed the early evening sitting outside on a lawn chair with some armed neighbors and then went to bed early. "I kind of felt a little bad that I got this in motion, but then I was home by 9," he said.

While he slept, downtown Kenosha boiled over.

Witnesses blamed the violent disarray partly on the fact that many gunmen downtown were strangers to one another, with some on rooftops acting as spotters to call in reinforcements and no one in command.

To Raymond K. Roberts, a real estate investor and six-year Army veteran who monitored the vigilantes, the parade of jacked-up pickup trucks filled with armed men resembled Afghanistan. He noticed that law enforcement officers largely ignored the men.

The gunmen never seemed to realize that all of the combat weaponry made Black residents like himself uneasy, Mr. Roberts said, and that the community would have preferred to protect itself. "They just had this assumption that we don't exist," he said.

As tensions surged, with protesters and armed enforcers tussling, the authorities say that Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old from nearby Illinois, opened fire with a military-style semiautomatic rifle, killing two protesters and seriously wounding a third. He faces homicide charges and has become a poster boy for the far right.

Mr. Mathewson says he remains unsure which armed men downtown responded to his call, and he denied having any contact with Mr. Rittenhouse.

Longtime Kenosha residents said they were conflicted over Mr. Mathewson, with his behavior angering some and others praising his years as an independent watchdog. Fans noted that he had chased down surveillance videos that exposed bad police behavior and, before leaving his alderman post in 2017, pushed for police body cameras that have still not been bought. But critics said he had turned himself into a nuisance by transforming political differences into personal vendettas.

Angie Aker, a community activist, initiated a criminal complaint against him as an accessory to the protest deaths. "I think he invited people in who were looking for a reason to shoot," she said. There is also a federal lawsuit that names Mr. Mathewson, along with Mr. Rittenhouse and Facebook, among others, for depriving the four plaintiffs of their civil rights; one is the partner of a victim and the three others allege that armed men assaulted them.

Mr. Mathewson said what he did was covered by free speech.

After the shootings, Facebook barred Mr. Mathewson for life, removing his personal and professional pages. He said he lost 13 years of photo archives, including videos of his daughter and son taking their first steps and a memorial page for his mother.

Mr. Mathewson said that for now, he had no plans to revive the Kenosha Guard. His wife has had enough of the spotlight, he said, with his phone ringing continually.

"I am getting love and hate from all over the country," he said.

LYNDON FRENCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

LYNDON FRENCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jennifer Rusch, saying that Facebook stoked hysteria, sought armed men on Mr. Mathewson's website to protect her business. Ray Roberts said that the police largely ignored the vigilantes.

Buffalo Police Camera Catches Judge Pushing And Threatening Officer

By ED SHANAHAN

The video begins with the Buffalo police arriving at the scene of a vulgarity-laced dispute between two sets of neighbors over where someone parked a car. On one side: a shirtless man and his wife, in a pink top; on the other, a family that lives across the street.

As the officers try to separate them, the woman in pink continues to scream. One officer tells her to be quiet. She refuses, and another officer moves to restrain her. Her husband rushes up and pushes the officer.

"Dude," the shirtless man says, "you better get off my wife," adding an obscenity for emphasis.

The man is a New York Supreme Court justice, Mark J. Grisanti, and he is not shy in citing his connections as he speaks to the officers, invoking his friendship with the mayor and his ties to the police.

Justice Grisanti, who is white, was not criminally charged — and at least one Buffalo official is asking whether the authorities let him off easy because of his status and race. After the video from the June episode surfaced this week, Justice Grisanti is also facing scrutiny from a judicial disciplinary panel.

"I highly doubt that if it was an African-American man with no authority that this would have ended the same way," said Darius G. Pridgen, the president of Buffalo's Common Council. Mr. Pridgen, who is Black, added that he did not take issue with the actions of the officers at the scene, who detained Justice Grisanti and his wife, Maria.

"What happened after that is what's cloudy in the minds of many people, especially in the African-American community," he said, adding: "I have heard explanations. I don't understand them."

A lawyer for Justice Grisanti, Leonard D. Zaccagnino, did not respond to a request for comment.

The body camera footage, first obtained through public records requests and published by Law360 and the television station WKBW, captured an altercation that Justice Grisanti says in the video is the latest chapter in a long-running neighborhood feud.

The officer's attempt to handcuff Ms. Grisanti follows several warnings, the video shows. The move sends Justice Grisanti into a rage and prompts him to launch into several warnings of his own.

"My daughter and my son-in-law are both police officers," he says. "I'll call them right now."

"You arrest my wife, you're going to be sorry," he adds, continuing to pepper his threats with obscenities. His speech is slurred while he speaks. He tells the officers it is because he was punched, but one of them says that he "smells like cheap beer."

"If you don't get the cuffs off her right now, you're going to have a problem," Justice Grisanti continues. At another point, invoking Buffalo's mayor, he says, "Listen, I'm good friends with Byron Brown."

After he has been trying to explain himself for several minutes, he apologizes to the officer he pushed for trying to "tackle" him. But he then tells the officers they should "chill out," calling it "constructive criticism."

"Let me give you some constructive criticism," one of the officers responds angrily. "You want to drop another copper's name?" the officer yells before putting the judge in handcuffs.

"You want to make us look dirty, is that what you want to do?" the officer continues, his voice rising. "So how am I helping you now?" he says as he tightens the cuffs.

The officer adds: "You're dropping everybody's name with a badge and you're expecting special treatment. How does that look like to everybody in this environment right now?"

"It doesn't look good," Justice Grisanti says, adding, "You're right."

Kait Munro, a spokeswoman for the Erie County district attorney, John J. Flynn, responded to a request for comment by referring to a statement issued in July after no charges were filed. She said the decision "was at the discretion of the Buffalo police."

"It was their decision to not file any charges," she said.

But Capt. Jeff Rinaldo, a police spokesman, said the decision not to charge the judge and his wife had been made "in consultation with" the district attorney's office. "As far as the officer not charging Mr. Grisanti for being shoved, that was the officer's discretionary call," he said.

Michael DeGeorge, a spokesman for the mayor, said it was Mr. Brown's policy not to interfere in police investigations.

As for the potential professional repercussions facing Justice Grisanti, Lucian Chalfen, a spokesman for the state court system, said court officials were aware of the incident involving the judge, "as is the state Commission on Judicial Conduct."

Gina Mele, a member of the family that was fighting with the Grisantis when the police arrived, said that she and her husband had been contacted by a commission investigator.

Conduct that raises questions about why no charges were filed.

The emergence of the video appears to have already affected Justice Grisanti's job in one way. On Thursday, as reported by Law360 and confirmed by Mr. Chalfen, he recused himself from several lawsuits against the Buffalo Police Department that he had been presiding over.

The move came after ethics experts contacted by Law 360, a legal trade publication, questioned how impartial Justice Grisanti could be in cases involving the police given his comments.

At one point during the footage, while trying to explain his actions to a detective, he says, "I'm 100 percent for you guys."

"I know you are," the detective replies.

"We're all on the same page with everything," Justice Grisanti adds.

The June altercation was not his first public tussle.

In 2012, when he was a state senator, he got into a scuffle in a lobby bar at a Seneca Nation casino in Niagara Falls. He said he had been attacked after trying to mediate a dispute between two other men, but several witnesses said he was the aggressor. No charges were filed.

Justice Grisanti, 55, was appointed to the state's Court of Claims by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo in 2015 and designated as a Supreme Court justice in 2018, according to court officials. He presides over civil cases and earns $210,900 a year.

He served two terms in the State Senate before becoming a judge and may be best known to New Yorkers as one of four Republican senators to vote in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage in 2011, giving Mr. Cuomo the margin needed to pass the law.

He had promised as a candidate to oppose the legislation, and Mr. Cuomo recalls in his 2014 memoir, "All Things Possible," the fraught deliberations that consumed then-Senator Grisanti up until the vote.

"He was torn and noncommittal, but I could tell that he got it," Mr. Cuomo wrote, describing the four Republican senators who voted "yes" on same-sex marriage as "profiles in courage" and part of "my pantheon of political heroes."

New York City's First Lady Drops Plan to Seek Office

By JEFFERY C. MAYS

For much of Mayor Bill de Blasio's second and final term, it seemed a foregone conclusion that New York City had not seen the last of his family. His wife, Chirlane McCray, was openly toying with the idea of running for public office.

Earlier this year, she narrowed her sights to one office: Brooklyn borough president.

But that was before New York City was shaken by protests against discriminatory policing and battered by the coronavirus, and the resulting fallout — a rise in shootings and homicides, huge revenue shortfalls and shuttered schools and businesses — has vexed Mr. de Blasio, all but cementing his unpopularity with voters.

Ms. McCray has also invited scrutiny through her leadership of ThriveNYC, a nearly $1 billion mental health initiative that has been criticized as wasteful, overly ambitious and lacking any tools to measure its success.

With the viability of a political campaign suddenly in doubt, Ms. McCray said on Thursday that she would not be running for office next year and planned instead to focus on the city's recovery during Mr. de Blasio's final year as mayor.

To many, the announcement felt like the beginning of the end of the de Blasio era in New York.

"We have a horrible economic downturn, the pandemic, and schools are in flux," said Robert Cornegy Jr., a councilman from Brooklyn who is running for the borough's presidency. "That's not helpful to the case for electing the mayor's wife."

Until recently, it seemed as if Ms. McCray was expanding her visibility in the administration.

There was a $9 million effort in Brooklyn to help new mothers. Mr de Blasio named her to head a commission to create more diverse monuments. She was also a co-leader of a commission on racial justice that Mr. de Blasio created in the wake of the health and economic disparities further exposed by the pandemic.

Recently, Ms. McCray launched a podcast about mental health with BRIC, a media and arts institution in Downtown Brooklyn.

"I became more comfortable being out front in my role as first lady," Ms. McCray said in an interview Friday about her activities and decision to explore a run for borough president.

Ms. McCray said she is proud of the work that ThriveNYC has done, and she said she saw the role of borough president as a way of continuing that.

"I spoke to a couple of dozen people about the fact that I was seriously considering running, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that there was a lot of support," she said. "Of course you can't judge by what people say, you have to judge by what they do."

But the pandemic seemed to damage the mayor's political capital. The mayor and Ms. McCray had been calling labor and ecumenical leaders recently about her candidacy, and the response was unenthusiastic, according to several people familiar with the conversations.

"Her prospects of success were tied to the work that the mayor was doing," said Antonio Reynoso, a councilman from Brooklyn who is also running for borough president. "In some ways, the election would have been a referendum on him."

The pandemic had recently eroded one of Mr. de Blasio's longest and strongest alliances: his ties to the Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn, which he represented when he was a councilman.

Some members of the community have criticized Mr. de Blasio and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo as singling out their community for closing schools and businesses to help prevent an uptick in coronavirus infections

David G. Greenfield, a former member of the City Council who is now chief executive of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, said he recently received a call from a candidate for Brooklyn borough president who wondered if Ms. McCray would control the Orthodox Jewish vote.

"I said that may have been the case six months ago, but now the mayor's relationship with the Orthodox community is at the lowest point it has been at since his time in public office," Mr. Greenfield said. "I wouldn't say it's the end of his administration, but its the beginning of the end."

Bill Neidhardt, a spokesman for Mr. de Blasio, said the mayor's "multiracial, working-class coalition in Brooklyn" is still intact.

"Despite what some elite prognosticators have said, that base is still there and it still strongly backs the mayor," Mr. Neidhardt said. "It would have backed the first lady as well."

More National news appears on Page A28.

Jesse McKinley contributed reporting. Sheelagh McNeill contributed research.

Corrections

NATIONAL

An article on Wednesday about a new philanthropic award misstated Edafe Okporo's connection to the RDJ Refugee Shelter. He is its director, not its founder.

TRACKING AN OUTBREAK

An article on Friday about efforts to reopen a high school in Manhattan during the coronavirus pandemic misspelled the name of a parent of a Hunter College High School student. She is Meika Mustrangi, not Mika Mustrungi.

Errors are corrected during the press run whenever possible, so some errors noted here may not have appeared in all editions.

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It's back to school — or is it?

Coronavirus Schools Briefing

The New York Times has launched a newsletter featuring the news, tips and guidance you need to understand what's happening, make informed decisions during the pandemic and feel in control again.

Sign up for the newsletter.
nytimes.com/schoolsbriefing

The New York Times

Bernard Cohen, Lawyer in Landmark Mixed-Marriage Case, Is Dead at 86

By NEIL GENZLINGER

FRANCIS MILLER/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION, VIA GETTY IMAGES

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bernard S. Cohen, far left, and Philip J. Hirschkop, co-counsels in Loving v. Virginia. Above, Mildred and Richard Loving in 1965. The couple married in 1958 but were told they could not live together in Virginia because of the state's Racial Integrity Act.

A 'simple letter' to Robert Kennedy sparked a legal battle to the Supreme Court.

"Dear Sir," began the letter from Washington that found its way to Bernard S. Cohen at the American Civil Liberties Union in June 1963. "I am writing to you concerning a problem we have. Five years ago my husband and I were married here in the District. We then returned to Virginia to live. My husband is white, and I am part Negro and part Indian."

The letter, from Mildred Loving, went on to explain that when she and her husband, Richard, returned to Caroline County, Va., to live, they were charged with violating Virginia's law against mixed-race marriages and exiled from the state.

"It was that simple letter that got us into this not-so-simple case," Mr. Cohen said later. The not-so-simple case was Loving v. Virginia, which Mr. Cohen and his co-counsel, Philip J. Hirschkop, eventually took to the Supreme Court. In a landmark unanimous ruling in 1967, the court said that laws banning interracial marriage, which were in effect in a number of states, mostly in the South, were unconstitutional.

Mr. Cohen died on Monday at an assisted-living center in Fredericksburg, Va. He was 86.

His son, Bennett, said the cause was Parkinson's disease.

The Lovings had married in 1958. Five weeks later they were in their home in Caroline County when the county sheriff and two deputies burst in and arrested them. They pleaded guilty to violating the state's Racial Integrity Act and were sentenced to a year in jail; a judge, Leon M. Bazile, suspended the sentence on the condition that they leave the state and not return together for 25 years.

By 1963 that restriction had begun to chafe, since they had relatives in Virginia and Ms. Loving missed "walking on grass instead of concrete," as she put it. A relative noticed her distress.

"I was crying the blues all the time, so she said, 'Why don't you write Robert Kennedy?'" she recalled in a 1992 interview with The New York Times. "She said that's what he's there for."

Mr. Kennedy was the attorney general at the time, and Ms. Loving did indeed write to him, asking if the national civil rights legislation then being formulated would provide any relief. Mr. Kennedy in turn suggested she write to the A.C.L.U., where Mr. Cohen was a longtime volunteer.

Mr. Cohen acknowledged that he was not particularly well versed in the relevant areas of law. He faced other obstacles as well, not the least of which was Judge Bazile, whose rulings in the case included this oft-cited declaration: "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, Malay and red, and He placed them on separate continents, and but for the interference with His arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages."

He began by filing a motion to set aside the sentence, but Judge Bazile took no action on it for months; the Lovings became concerned that they'd been forgotten. But in 1964 a law professor introduced Mr. Cohen to Mr. Hirschkop, who had only recently graduated from law school but knew civil rights litigation. He helped steer the case onto a path that eventually brought it to the Supreme Court, where, Mr. Hirschkop said in a phone interview, he argued that the Virginia law was a violation of the equal protection clause of the Constitution and Mr. Cohen argued that it was also a due process violation.

"Under our Constitution," Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in finding in their favor, "the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the State."

Bernard Sol Cohen was born on Jan. 17, 1934, in Brooklyn. His father, Benjamin, was a furrier, and his mother, Fannie (Davidson) Cohen, was a homemaker.

He grew up in Brooklyn and graduated from the City College of New York in 1956 with a degree in economics. He graduated from Georgetown Law School in 1960.

Bennett Cohen said that, after the Loving case, his father did a lot of work in environmental law. In one case, he said, "the Jewish boy from Brooklyn represented some Christmas tree farmers whose whole crop of Christmas trees was destroyed by acid rain." That lawsuit, he said, forced nearby power plants to reduce their pollution.

From 1980 to 1996, Mr. Cohen served in the Virginia House of Delegates, where among his accomplishments were measures that restricted smoking — a hard sell in a tobacco state like Virginia. Over the years, the story of the Loving case was told in a 1996 Showtime movie; the 2011 HBO documentary "The Loving Story," directed by Nancy Buirski; and the 2016 feature film "Loving," based in part on that documentary.

Richard Loving was killed in a car accident in 1975. Mildred Loving died in 2008.

In addition to his son, Mr. Cohen is survived by his wife of 61 years, Rae (Rose) Cohen; a daughter, Karen Cohen; and three grandchildren.

In 1994, when Mr. Cohen received a distinguished service award from the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, he gave an acceptance speech in which he lamented that public opinion of lawyers had turned negative, focusing on a few big-dollar civil verdicts and stereotyping anyone seeking redress in the courts as being part of an overly litigious society.

"There seems to be months of trial time available for Pennzoil to sue Texaco and for Polaroid to sue Kodak," he said, "but cluttering the court with everyday people has become bad form, bad habit, bad business."

He worried, he said, about the chilling effect.

"In a society of laws, driven by centers of economic and financial power," he said, "if the courts are not available for the average person to seek justice, then the average person will not receive justice."

Eitan Haber, 80, Rabin Aide and Israeli Wordsmith

By ISABEL KERSHNER

JERUSALEM — At one of the most traumatic moments in Israel's history, it was up to Eitan Haber, the trusted confidant of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, to announce to the nation Mr. Rabin's shocking death.

Emerging to face reporters and an emotional crowd at the entrance of the hospital on the night of Nov. 4, 1995, Mr. Haber read out the text he had scrawled on the back of the prime minister's schedule for the next week: "The government of Israel announces, with astonishment, great sadness and deep sorrow, the death of the prime minister and defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, who was murdered by an assassin tonight in Tel Aviv."

Mr. Haber, who after many years as a journalist served as Mr. Rabin's political aide and speechwriter, crafted the words that became lodged in the national consciousness at many of the country's key junctures.

He died on Oct. 7 at his home in Tel Aviv, the city of his birth. He was 80.

His death, after a yearslong battle with colon and pancreatic cancer, Parkinson's disease and other illnesses, was confirmed by Yediot Ahronot, the newspaper that was his journalistic home for most of the last six decades.

President Reuven Rivlin of Israel eulogized Mr. Haber as "the knight of the written and precise word," adding that he had turned unforgettable moments of history into "masterpieces that shaped the national memory."

Mr. Haber joined Yediot Ahronot in 1960 and served as its military affairs correspondent for the next 25 years. He sent sharp and haunting dispatches from the battlefield; he once described the "kingdom of silence" near the Suez Canal during the 1973 war,

Turning events into 'masterpieces that shaped the national memory.'

where Israel's dead soldiers lay with their boots sticking out of blankets that were always too short.

He also wrote of peace, as one of the first Israeli reporters allowed into Egypt to cover the talks that led to the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty, the first between Israel and an Arab country.

Mr. Rabin, as defense minister, recruited Mr. Haber in 1985 to serve as his communications adviser. He filled that role for five years, spanning the tumultuous period of the first Palestinian intifada, to which Mr. Rabin responded with force.

When Mr. Rabin stepped down in 1990, Mr. Haber went back to his newspaper. He returned to public service after Mr. Rabin led the Labor Party to victory in the 1992 election, becoming director of his office. Mr. Rabin served as both prime minister and defense minister of the new government, which signed the Oslo Accords, Israel's first peace agreements with the Palestinians.

Mr. Haber was part of the small team that worked secretly on Israel's 1994 peace treaty with Jordan.

He then wrote the words that Mr. Rabin famously delivered in his address to the United States Congress that year:

"I, military I.D. Number 30743, retired general in the Israel Defense Forces in the past, consider myself to be a soldier in the army of peace today. I, who served my country for 27 years as a soldier, I say to you, to Your Majesty, the King of Jordan, I say to you, our American friends: Today we are embarking on a battle which has no dead and no wounded, no blood and no anguish. This is the only battle which is a pleasure to wage — the battle for peace."

Mr. Haber's last public mission was arranging Mr. Rabin's funeral, which was attended by President Bill Clinton, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, King Hussein of Jordan and a long list of other world leaders. Describing Mr. Rabin in his anguished eulogy as his teacher, his guide and a second father, he said: "Yitzhak, this is the last speech. There won't be any more."

He then produced a blood-stained page with the lyrics of a song that the hospital staff had retrieved from Mr. Rabin's pocket on the night he was fatally shot by Yigal Amir, a Jewish extremist who vehemently opposed the concessions made to the Palestinians.

Mr. Haber read out the words of the anthem "Song of Peace," which Mr. Rabin had been singing on the stage along with the crowd at a peace rally minutes before he was killed.

Mr. Haber was born on March 12, 1940, to Yehuda Haber, who worked for the local chamber of commerce, and Tova Haber, a homemaker. His father supported the right-wing Herut movement, led by Menachem Begin, and Eitan began writing for its youth paper as a young teenager. Just as he switched with aplomb between the worlds of journalism and public service, he also passed between Israel's political right and left with relative ease.

He began his obligatory military service at 18, writing for the Israeli Army's Bemachaneh magazine. It was when he was sent to cover events along the northern frontier that he first met and befriended Mr. Rabin, who was the chief of the northern command.

NATI HARNIK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Eitan Haber read — from a bloodstained page — lyrics from the "Song of Peace" at Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's funeral in 1995.

Mr. Haber joined Yediot Ahronot the day after he left the army.

He is survived by a daughter, Michal; a son, Ilan; and four grandchildren. His wife, Gila, died in the mid-1980s.

After Mr. Rabin's death, Mr. Haber went back to writing for Yediot Ahronot and presented radio and television programs. He wrote or co-wrote more than a dozen books, most of them with other leading Israeli journalists and dealing with Israel's military and security affairs.

In a poignant television interview in September 2019 with Kan, Israel's public broadcaster, Mr. Haber, weakened in body but not in mind, seemed to be taking his leave. Recalling the night of Mr. Rabin's assassination, he remembered walking out into the dark — and the commotion at the hospital entrance — to make his announcement.

"It seems to me," he said, "that from that day Israel ceased to be a normal, orderly country."

He also spoke openly of his illness.

"I could die from it tomorrow," he said. "That's not so bad. We've done our part for 60 years."

Deaths

Braunstein, Richard
Hanson, Julia
Hoberman, Dorothy
Levin, Michele
Rad, Babak
Salavert-Rocco, A.
Stone, Maxine
Wallace, Joyce
Winkelmann, Don

BRAUNSTEIN—Richard L.
On Monday, October 5, 2020, Richard L. Braunstein, loving husband, father and grandfather, passed away at the age of 87. Richard (Dick) was born on September 13, 1933 in Brooklyn, NY to Saul and Iris (Deutsch) Braunstein. After graduating from New York University, he received his law degree from Harvard Law School in 1957. He joined the New York Bar in 1958 and the District of Columbia Bar in 1959. Mr. Braunstein was introduced by his uncle, Seymour Deutsch, to Washington tax lawyer Bernard J. Long, joining Long's firm in 1958. In 1960 the Long firm merged with the Washington communications law firm, Dow, Lohnes and Albertson (DL&A), establishing for DL&A its corporate and tax practice. Mr. Braunstein practiced with DL&A (later known as DowLohnes, PLLC) until his retirement from the firm in 2014 when the firm merged with Cooley LLP. He became a partner of DL&A in 1965 and succeeded Mr. Long as leader of the corporate/tax practice. Mr. Braunstein ultimately led the firm in decades of expansion, becoming its senior partner and chairman. He led the establishment of New York and Atlanta offices, while representing many large communications companies and their owners. He possessed a keen intellect, but perhaps what set him apart was his unique ability to feel genuinely that his clients' business and tax issues were his own and to try to solve them with that mindset. After his retirement, Mr. Braunstein continued consulting on matters concerning some of his longstanding, and well-beloved clients. He enjoyed lifelong friendships with his clients and colleagues. His loyalty, generosity, brilliant legal mind and boundless energy defined his many years of practice. Richard had a passion for classical music, and could be found under the tent at the Aspen Music Festival every summer. He was known for his kindness, generosity and compassionate spirit. Richard was preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife Leslianne; his children, Karen (John) Burgett and Douglas (Julie); his sister Barbara; his four grandchildren, Noah, Justin and Grace Burgett and Brooke Braunstein, and by extended family members and friends. The family will hold a memorial service on Sunday, October 25, 2020, at 3pm via Zoom. The family requests donations in Richard's memory be sent to Children's National Hospital, 111 Michigan Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20010, childrensnational.org/giving

HANSON—Julia Rebecca.
Julia was born on June 21, 1923 to two loving and nurturing parents, Maggie and John Simmons, who believed in prayers to guide their way. She had two brothers John and George Simmons, deceased. "Julia what are you going to be when you grow up?" Julia's mantra was "I am going to be a Teacher " and that she did! When Prayers were not answered as asked, it appeared that God made the corrections. To reach her goal she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics at Hunter College, New York City, a Masters' Degree in the teaching of Mathematics at Columbia University, and then took thirty credited courses in various aspects of teaching. In 1959, she married her soul mate, Ellsworth T. Hanson and spent 46 Beautiful years together. Only Death parted them in 2005. Upon retirement she became an income tax practitioner as her business, often performing these services freely. Her mark upon this earth will be that of encouragement rather than criticism, giving rather than receiving, speaking positively rather negatively and Gods love. Her joy was in freely giving. She bids farewell to seven nieces three nephews, one God child and many grand-neices and nephews and a great many friends. A visitation will be held Sunday from 2:00pm till 4:00pm at the Stanley S Segura Funeral Home, Inc., 614 S. Hanover St., Nanticoke.

HOBERMAN—Dorothy,
died peacefully at home on October 13, 2020, lifelong New Yorker born March 29, 1923. Cherished wife of the late Solomon Hoberman, beloved mother of James Hoberman (Shelley) and Jane Hoberman (Bob Kelly), adored grandmother to Mara, Jesse, Anna, Will and Zoe, and fond great-grandmother of six. A serious reader and a serious wit. She loved Astaire and Rogers, attended Brooklyn College, worked as a social worker, volunteered as a museum docent. May her memory be for blessing. Contributions in her name can be made to WNYC.

LEVIN—Michele "Micki,"
passed away October 15th at the age of 70 after a courageous effort to overcome a rare cancer. Micki is survived by her devoted husband Edward Brill and their two sons Marty and Gary, as well as their adored grandchildren, Henri and Julien, and their parents Ed's son Ben and his wife Marie. She is also survived by her brother Marc and her sister Sharon, brother-in-law Elliott Asbel, and their daughter Marilyn. She (and her shoes) will be missed by her cherished Tibetan Terrier, Milo. She is the daughter of the late Walter and Bea Levin. Micki spent her early life in Woodmere, NY and then the family relocated to Miami. Micki was a gifted clinical psychologist with a private practice. She always had the time to help family and friends with empathy and humor. She had a zest for life, loved to meet new people, and entertain. She could whip up a meal on a moment's notice and was known for her warm gatherings and scrumptious food. Along with Ed she was an active member of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun on the Upper West Side and leaves behind many friends in the community. Her family home on Fire Island was a source of joy and appreciation of nature and long-standing friendships. Micki and Ed devoured New York City culture. They attended museums, theater, dance, and musical performances taking advantage of all the city had to offer. They traveled widely. Micki was a keen photographer and studied painting. She applied her eye for design and style and was an ardent shopper who always found the best sample sales. She will be remembered for her big smile, big heart, the sparkle in her eyes, and her laughter. Micki left us too early but will remain with us in loving memory. Donations may be made to Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation for the Depression and Bi-Polar Support Alliance at DBSAlliance.org.

RAD—Babak (Bobby).
Babak Rad, AKA Bobby Rad has sadly passed away at 62. His Burial will be held at west Chester Hills cemetary, at 400 Saw Mill River Rd., NY on Sunday, October 18, 2020 at 12 pm.

SALAVERT-ROCCO—Agnes
Agnes passed peacefully July 24 after a courageous battle with cancer. Born 1963 in Aurillac, France, she's predeceased by parents, Albert and Yvonne Salavert. She's sorely missed by husband Steve, children Mateo and Lucia of Brooklyn, NY, and siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews in France. She was a superstar in the optical industry, specializing in designer eyewear and accessories. She most recently worked for Bruno Chaussignand, a company she nurtured, grew and was intensely passionate about. She'll be missed by friends and colleagues, especially at the optical shows where she shone so brightly. Please visit her Facebook and GoFundMe pages.

STONE—Maxine.
1933 - 2020. Maxine passed away on October 15, 2020 at the age of 87, surrounded by family. Born and raised in New York City and later settling in Port Washington where she built a family and business with the love of her life, Allan Stone, who predeceased her by 33 years. Maxine's life can be measured by the positive impact she had on others. She believed in and was committed to family, friendship and community and enriched the lives of those who had the pleasure to be part of her circle. She was a devoted Mother of Audrey and Jacob Kurland, and Charles Stone and Anne Zissu. Cherished grandmother of Rebecca, Marshall and Jackie, and Alex Kurland, and Ben and Hava Stone. Loving great-grandmother to Sophie Kurland. Maxine is also survived by her Sister, Deane Smigrod.

WALLACE—Dr. Joyce,
pioneering AIDS doctor, creator of housing and healthcare for prostitutes and drug addicts, died quickly and painlessly with her son by her side on October 14th, 2020. Dr. Wallace was brilliant and funny, often inappropriate and beloved. She is survived by her daughter Julia Query and son Ari Kahn, their spouses and four grandchildren. The funeral will be live streamed on Sunday at 1pm, youtube.com/channel/UCkd NusbBRXOBK9NrAFn2NwQ. Friends are invited to visit a memorial website: kudoboard.com/boards/GArgAvsn.

WINKELMANN—Don.

"It's been a good run" Don Winkelmann, cherished and beloved husband of Breege, loving father of Kurt, Margret, Karen, and a wise and respected colleague to many, passed away at home in Santa Fe, New Mexico on October 8th, 2020 by his wife's side. He died as he lived, relaxed, accepting and peaceful. Donald Lee Winkelmann was born in Culbertson, Nebraska on July 18th, 1931. His first job, at 4, was as a mascot for the local football team. (His duty was to march with the cheerleaders which, he noted, gave him a lifelong interest in football and pretty women.) After the Korean War broke out, Don joined the Air Force, training in its Intelligence service. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Minnesota, two degrees from the University of Nebraska and honorary doctorates from Punjab Agricultural University and the Colegio de Postgraduados in Chapingo, Mexico. Don was given a generous offer to pursue an MBA at Harvard Business School but did not accept. Later in life he wrote and lectured at various universities as a Woodrow Wilson fellow. Don began teaching at Iowa State University as Professor of Economics in 1962. He moved to Mexico in 1966, working with the Ford Foundation to establish a graduate department in agricultural economics at the newly created Colegio de Postgraduados at Chapingo. This was the first program of its type in Mexico; students came to it from all over Latin America. In 1972, he joined the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). He headed the Center's Economics program as their first economist, where he emphasized the adoption of improved technologies and methods for effective on-farm research. This established CIMMYT'S international status in Mexico and built wider links with Mexico and its institutions. Don became Director General of CIMMYT from 1985-1994. He attracted a unique cadre of talented people to work for him, partly because he was always open to thought-provoking and wide-ranging discussions with anyone who had ideas to keep up, while preserving a consistent focus on the important issues. One of his key accomplishments during this time was in developing CIMMYT'S 1988 Strategic plan. Don has devoted his career to advancing agriculture and its research, bringing together academics to the private and public sector and benefiting developing countries around the world. In recognition of his contributions he was awarded La Condecoracion del la Orden del Aguila Azteca (The Order of the Aztec Eagle) from the President of Mexico. This is the highest distinction given to a foreigner from the Mexican Government. Bill Gates commented that CIMMYT did more to feed the hungry of the world than any other nonprofit and that the expansion of CIMMYT represented a very important and global trend - that newly industrialized countries are becoming leaders in efforts to help less developed countries. Don's sense of humor was historic. A lover of words, he kept a Webster dictionary in his CIMMYT office and introduced a range of new terms to his associates: Latent synergies (a social disease), Paradigm (part of the U.S. currency) Social capital (as in Texcoco is the social capitol of Mexico) International public goods (things that fell off the back of a truck at the border). In 1995, Don became Chairman of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The goal of CGIAR was to alleviate poverty and protect the environment in developing countries through improved agricultural technologies. This work was close to Don's heart. CIGAR was responsible for 16 international centers, including CIMMYT, and for allocation of CGIAR financial resources among the centers. Don travelled during this time to rougher and more remote areas of the world. He travelled the roads less travelled. He recalled joining Nobel prize winner Norman Borlog and Jimmy Carter explore whether CIMMYT would be willing to channel Carter's work on maize through Sub-Saharan Africa. Retiring in 2000, Don became active in Santa Fe public interest organizations, particularly in the Santa Fe Council on International Relations. He also followed immigration issues closely and volunteered with the International Folk Art Market. He enjoyed the Santa Fe Symphony, skiing, running, hiking, travelling and tennis, and wine evenings with endearing close friends. Don was a Renaissance man of eclectic tastes, with an eye for beauty, whether it was art, nature or music. As a friend and partner, he endeavored to extend one's horizons and stretch one's intellect. He was a philosopher who would freely share his immense knowledge and experience. His immediate reaction on meeting another person was, "Tell me about yourself." He was a true gentleman with a whimsical sense of humor, and a great listener, with a hearty laugh and a caring, compassionate, and loving heart. He was a man of integrity who dwelt not in regret but in truth. Men wanted to be with him. One of Don's favorite quotes was from Xenophanes: "The God's did not reveal, from the beginning, All things to us, but in the course of time through seeking we may learn and know things better." Don was preceded in death by his father Alfred Winkelmann, mother Ella (Bishoff) Winkelmann. He is survived by his loving wife, Breege O'Reilly-Winkelmann. He is also survived by his "marvelous" children Kurt Winkelmann (Janine), Margret Smith (Roger), and Karen Winkelmann (Paul Worley), and their mother Nancy Wolfe. Don is also survived by his previous wife Maki Winkelmann. Don leaves a sister, Jean Hardy (Bob), brother Jim Winkelmann (Sara), brother David Winkelmann (Cathy), five beautiful grandchildren and numerous nieces, nephews, colleagues, and dear friends throughout the world. We thank Don's wonderful nurse Kris Knuttle, caretakers Gladys, Barb, Farley and Kimi for their love and attention to Don during his final months. We thank his doctors: Dr. Katz, Dr. Perea, Dr. Bowden and Dr. Mc Ginnis. Don deeply appreciated his team and felt supported in every way. Thank you from all of us. No memorial will be held at this time. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the community education and cross-cultural education programs at the Santa Fe Council on International Relations, 413 Grant Avenue D, Santa Fe NM 87501. My dearest love, as they say in the old country, "Hasta luego."

In Memoriam

BALLEN—Natalie.
Wife, Mother,
Grandmother, GG
Loved, missed and
remembered every day.
Your family

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF DEATHS MAY BE TELEPHONED FROM WITHIN N.Y.C. TO (212) 556-3900; OR OUTSIDE N.Y.C. TO TOLL FREE 1-800-458-5522; OR SUBMITTED ONLINE AT ADVERTISING.NYTIMES.COM (SELECT "IN MEMORIAM") FOR THE FOLLOWING EDITIONS: Until 4:30 P.M. the day before for Tuesday through Saturday editions, until 5:00 P.M. on Friday for Sunday's Nationwide Edition, until 12:45 P.M. Saturday for Sunday's New York Region edition, until 2:00 P.M. Sunday for Monday's editions. Photos must be submitted by noon the day prior to publication Tuesday through Friday. Photos for Saturday, Sunday and Monday must be submitted by 12 noon on Friday.

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Opinion

The New York Times

MICHELLE GOLDBERG

Trump's Misogyny Might Finally Do Him In

DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

RECENTLY I HAD the chance to watch an online focus group of seven women from swing states who had voted for Donald Trump in 2016 but who had become disaffected with him. Convened by Sarah Longwell, a founder of Republican Voters Against Trump, the session was in some ways a deeply depressing experience.

Several of the women said that, because they don't believe what they hear from mainstream media, they have a hard time distinguishing truth from falsehood. One woman, in North Carolina, cited something she'd heard in a Trump ad as a reason she's unlikely to vote for Joe Biden, and said she wished Ben Carson would step into the race.

Another from the same state said she was "scared" about the election because she doesn't trust Kamala Harris. A woman from Florida had already voted for Joe Biden, but a few of the others were considering voting third party.

Yet their disgust with the president was palpable. A well-spoken woman with grown children from central Pennsylvania appeared to have mentally rewritten the history of the last election to justify her vote. She'd opted for Trump, she said, thinking that it would be "refreshing" to have a president with a business background. In her recollection, it was only after he won that he revealed his true character.

"His Twitter, his comments, things that he was recorded saying, his misogyny — I was just, like, horrified and embarrassed," she said. Looking back, she didn't think she knew about the "Access Hollywood" tape before she voted: "I certainly hope that I didn't, because it was a disgusting comment. I would think that had I known that might have given me pause." She's now torn between voting for Biden or for the Libertarian candidate, Jo Jorgensen.

I strongly suspect she's remembering wrong — the "Access Hollywood" story would have been very hard to miss in October 2016. But it's telling that she can no longer quite imagine how she could have supported Trump after hearing him boast about his penchant for sexual assault. It's another tiny piece of evidence that 2020 could be the year Trump's misogyny finally catches up with him.

Four years ago, many of us were counting on right-leaning women to deliver a decisive rebuke to Trump. Lots of journalists, myself included, wrote about the group Republican Women for Hillary.

After the appearance of the "Access Hollywood" tape, female Republican governors and members of Congress were far more likely than their male peers to withdraw their endorsements. Katie Packer, deputy campaign manager of Mitt Romney's 2012 bid, imagined a reckoning in her party after Trump's loss. "There's going to have to be a denunciation of this guy," she told me then.

Needless to say, there wasn't. Most women did indeed vote for Hillary Clinton, but Trump won either a plurality or an outright majority of white women,

If women defeat Trump, it will be because of all he's done to defeat them.

enough to give him the presidency. There turned out to be far less of a political penalty for vulgar misogyny than some of us realized.

Four years later, it's hard not to feel an unnerving sense of déjà vu. Once again, the polls show a potentially historic gender gap in the presidential election.

Journalists are reporting on all the women Trump has turned off. Last I checked, FiveThirtyEight gave Trump a 13 percent chance of victory, almost exactly the same odds he had three weeks before the election in 2016. For America to survive as a liberal democracy, this time has to be different. Is it?

Longwell, who has conducted around 50 focus groups over the last three years, most of them with women, believes it is. "I have seen these people moving away in real time," she says of the participants' relationship to Trump. And "it dropped off a cliff right around Covid, plus economic downturn, plus George Floyd."

As Longwell tells it, there were some Trump voters who turned on him almost immediately after the election, but many others who continued to support him despite disliking him personally. "They said he was a narcissist, said he was a bully, but they also don't like Democrats, don't like the media, don't trust anything, and they were hanging in," she said.

Then Trump's incompetence came home. "Once the pandemic hit, once there were personal consequences for their lives, there was an absolute shift in how people talked about Donald Trump," said Longwell.

She started hearing "a ton of pain" in the focus groups. Cancer survivors with suppressed immune systems feared leaving the house because people in their community wouldn't wear masks. "Or they've got young kids that aren't in school, or somebody in their family is furloughed, or they couldn't go see their parent who died," she said.

Women's job losses due to Covid have been enormously disproportionate; in September alone, around 617,000 women 16 and over left the work force, nearly eight times the number of men. They've borne the brunt of closed schools. The Pandemic Parenting Study, which is tracking over 100 Indiana mothers, has found growing marital strife over child care.

"Mothers blame themselves for these conflicts and feel responsible for reducing them, including by leaving the work force, beginning use of antidepressants, or ignoring their own concerns about Covid-19," said a recent paper drawing on the study's data. None of this can be separated from the collapse in women's support for Trump.

If Trump loses, it won't be just because enough women recognize him as a deranged bigot. It will because he blighted too many of their lives.

In the focus group, a Wisconsin woman introduced herself as a full-time mother who, "on top of being at home," now has to be a full-time teacher. One of her kids is gravely ill, and people who refuse to wear masks infuriate her. "It drives me nuts, people who don't do it just because they don't want to," she said.

She tries to avoid almost all political news, and doesn't trust what she does come across. Where she lives, she said, she hasn't seen a single Biden sign, and she knows very little about the former vice president. But she's planning to vote for him. If women defeat Trump next month, it will be because of everything he's done to defeat them first. □

LETTERS

The Sharp Contrast at Two Town Halls

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "A Disruptive Trump vs. a Deliberate Biden in a Split-Screen Duel" (news article, Oct. 16):

The Tale of Two Town Halls revealed even in their briefest snippets the worst of President Trump and the best of Joe Biden.

For Mr. Trump, it was his statement that "I'll put it out there — people can decide for themselves," when asked about his retweeting of the bizarre conspiracy theory that a Navy SEAL team was executed in order to cover up the faked death of Osama bin Laden. That's like saying it's just fine for a supermarket to put rancid food out on the shelves and leave it up to consumer preference as to whether it's bought.

For Mr. Biden, it was his overall tone, which even a senior adviser to the Trump campaign described as like watching an episode of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." But after almost four years of living in the maelstrom of frenetic craziness of the Trump presidency, the American public is ready for a leader who keeps up his guard while allowing it to relax and lower its shoulders.

CHUCK CUTOLO, WESTBURY, N.Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

At the ABC News town hall with Joe Biden Thursday night, a Pennsylvania voter asked a crucial if often overlooked question: "Does President Trump's foreign policy deserve some credit?" In a recent public statement, about 200 international relations and foreign policy scholars answered that very question negatively, viewing his foreign policy "largely as a failure."

From the failed trade war with China to the abdication of international leadership on the pandemic and climate change, Trump administration policies have harmed the United States and the world.

The scholars do not mince words about the overall price we pay, writing, "The result is greater instability, insecurity and human suffering." Coming from colleges and universities all over the country, they come to one simple conclusion: "We need new leadership."

JEREMY PRESSMAN
WEST HARTFORD, CONN.

The writer is an associate professor of political science at the University of Connecticut.

TO THE EDITOR:

It really comes down to personal style. President Trump is like *this*. Joe Biden is like *that*. That's how I see this playing field.

I voted for Mr. Trump in 2016 because of the way he does things. I happen to like his personal style — all things considered. As for lying? I expect *everyone* to lie. So that's not something to which I give any consideration when selecting a leader.

I like Mr. Trump because he is uncouth, unpredictable, uncontrollable and maybe just a bit crazy. I happen to like that in a leader. I want a leader who can put countries like Russia and China on edge and off-balance. I also want a leader who can tell the press to take a hike when it starts to look more like a propaganda machine than a news agency. Come to think of it, I want a leader who can tell everyone to go to hell.

But I don't see anyone — *anyone* — on the Democratic side who has either the desire or even the ability to confront the big, bad world on its own terms. I actually see Democrats as having slightly masochistic tendencies. Pain and suffering seem to resonate with them . . . just a bit too much for my liking.

ARTHUR SAGINIAN
SANTA CLARITA, CALIF.

TO THE EDITOR:

Let us fly in the face of precedent for the moment and take President Trump at his word: He says again that he knows virtually nothing about QAnon.

May we then ask the president why, considering all the times he has been asked about QAnon and its possible terrorist threat, he has not yet asked someone who works for him to explain to him what the organization is?

GARY LEVINE, JERUSALEM

TO THE EDITOR:

Savannah Guthrie told President Trump that when he is retweeting conspiracy theories he is not "someone's crazy uncle." According to Mary Trump, he is.

MICHAEL GORMAN, CHICAGO

Mixed Messages on Virus

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trump Advisers' Warnings on Virus Fueled Sell-Off" (front page, Oct. 15):

It seems that the president's advisers spent an awful lot of time warning members of the financial community and a conservative think tank about the coronavirus. Too bad they didn't bother to tell the American people or the hospitals that would soon be under siege.

DANIELE GERARD, NEW YORK

The Complicit Republicans

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "'We Are Staring Down the Barrel of a Blue Tsunami': Senator Slams Trump" (news article, Oct. 16):

Senator Ben Sasse, a Republican from Nebraska, has seen the light after nearly four years. He is finally speaking out about how destructive the Trump presidency has been. But he is not taking responsibility for the role that he and other Trump sycophants have played in creating our current and future crises in health, finance and the environment.

Hard-core politics in the Senate from the right has made negotiation and compromise impossible. The hypocrisy of the Supreme Court hearings is the final blow. If a blue tsunami occurs (and I hope it does for the future of this country), Republicans like him have only themselves to blame.

MARY FORSBERG
HIGHLAND PARK, N.J.

Megan Thee Stallion, Icon

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Why I Speak Up for Black Women," by Megan Thee Stallion (Op-Ed, Oct. 14):

I am an elderly Black grandmother in love with Megan Thee Stallion's artistry and politics.

Living the personal *is* political. To be young and unapologetic in one's radical Black womanhood gives me hope for the next generations.

SAFIYA E. BANDELE, BROOKLYN

ROGER COHEN

A Last Stand for White America

LESS THAN 20 DAYS. It has been a long, hard road to this election. I see fearful faces, those of tormented migrants at the Mexican border, and hate-filled faces, those of the white nationalists in Charlottesville chanting, "Jews will not replace us."

Donald Trump has been all about the fear of replacement, or as it's sometimes called, "the great replacement." His has been the stand — I am tempted to say the last stand — of whites against nonwhites.

Of America-first nationalists against migrants; of straight people against L.G.B.T.Q. people; of the gunned-up against the unarmed. Of Trump against all those he believes would *replace* the likes of him.

All means have been used — lies, brutality, incitement. But fear has been Trump's main weapon. Fear, which depends on pitting one group against another, is the currency of the Trump presidency. It is therefore no surprise that the America that is about to vote is probably more fractured than at any time since the Vietnam War.

"The great replacement" is a phrase generally attributed to a French writer, Renaud Camus, who said: "The great replacement is very simple. You have one people, and in the space of a generation, you have a different people."

That, of course, is a good definition of America.

Of its vitality, its churn, its reinvention, its essential openness. The America that Trump would deny. He wants to freeze a white America. Some strange blend of Norman Rockwell and "Mad Men," in an imaginary United States strutting across a world pliant to its will. Behind "America first" lurks a very un-American credo.

Change can be frightening, which is what the great replacement conspiracy theory hinges on. Camus warns grotesquely of a "genocide by substitution," the replacement of a white French and European order by Muslim hordes in a plot orchestrated by cosmopolitan elites. In Trump's case, read a white American order replaced by brown Mexican rapists and Black pillagers.

France is worried about Muslims from North Africa. Germans were once so worried about Jews replacing them that they killed six million of them. In a world of mass migration, fear rages: Some idea of the nation will be diluted or lost!

America is particularly susceptible to fear today because the world has changed in unsettling ways. Power has migrated eastward to Asia. America's recent wars have been unwon. By midcentury, non-Hispanic whites will constitute less than 50 percent of the population.

It is frightening to see an industry disappear, like coal in Kentucky. Trump understood that he could be the voice of that fear. He would build a wall to keep those brown people out!

He is an impostor. He puffs out his chest, Mussolini-style, but he is a bone-

A choice between a true renewal and a warped fantasy of the past.

spur coward. A narrow ramp makes his limbs tremble. He is good at getting the blood up. He is good at undoing. He is not good at getting anything constructive done.

Less than 20 days.

America will decide whether to opt for the future or burrow self-destructively into some warped fantasy of the past. It will decide whether to reinvent itself again or turn mean and further inward.

As Edward R. Murrow remarked, "We cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home."

That was in 1954, at the height of McCarthyism. For Senator Joseph McCarthy, the danger to the Republic came from Communist infiltration of American life. The real danger came from his obsessions. From the purges and blacklists that branded countless Americans as un-American.

Murrow, a great journalist, stood up to McCarthy.

Donald Trump does business the McCarthy way. He deals in specters: immigrants, and Muslims, and brown people, and Black people, and L.G.B.T.Q. people.

As with McCarthy, however, the real danger comes from Trump's obsessions, not from these imagined enemies.

American freedom is in decline. The freedom to think, because thought depends on truth. The freedom to dissent, because Trump believes he has "the right to do whatever I want as president." The freedom to breathe, because Trumpism — its nepotism, its cozying to dictators, its incessant *volume* — is suffocating.

The freedom inextricable from the American idea that I, a naturalized American, hold sacred with an unreasonable ardor.

No, we cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home. We can only defend those who trample human dignity and human rights. As Trump has done with cavalier abandon.

Is it unreasonable to see renewal in a 77-year-old man, Joe Biden? No. We live in the real world, where the perfect cannot be the enemy of the good. Indecency demands the restoration of decency. That's ground zero of this election. The choice was starkly evident in the televised town hall events Thursday as Trump spouted wild far-right conspiracy theories while Biden had the self-deprecating honesty to say that if he lost, it could suggest he's "a lousy candidate." Biden is not a lousy candidate; he is a good man, a brave man. I doff my hat to any parent who survives with such dignity the loss of two of his four children.

Of McCarthy, Murrow observed: "He didn't create this situation of fear; he merely exploited it — and rather successfully. Cassius was right. 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.'"

The fault is in ourselves. Time for Americans to look in the mirror — and realize their America is irreplaceable if it is lost. □

It's Not Easy Being an Optimist

Jennifer Finney Boylan

THE optimist, according to an old joke, believes that this is the best of all possible worlds. The pessimist fears that the optimist is right.

Mainers are accustomed to second-guessing good news. Which is what you'd do, too, if you'd experienced enough late-season ice storms. This year, over 200,000 of us lost power in the wake of a furious blizzard. In April.

Maybe this is what gives so many Mainers a dark turn of mind. There's a story about the time Mark Twain gave a reading at a bookstore near Bangor, to a crowd that mostly sat there in stony silence. Afterward, Twain heard a couple talking. The wife said, "I think he might have been the funniest person I've heard in my life." The husband replied, "I'll tell ya, he was so funny, it was all I could do to keep from laughing."

Maine voters aren't laughing this fall. Everything feels too high-stakes. Our Senate race — Senator Susan Collins versus the Maine House speaker, Sara Gideon — might well decide whether the Democrats take back that chamber.

But it's not just the high stakes that have us on edge; it's also the race itself. This month, the Wesleyan Media Project described the Maine Senate race as the most negative in the country. (One of the nicest of the negative ads says, "Gideon had her cake — and ate it too!") A Bangor Daily News poll released last week found Ms. Gideon and Senator Collins within a single point of each other. Last month, in an act that one lawmaker called "political terrorism," unknown persons in Bowdoinham burned a sculpture of a donkey. And over in Rockland, two police officers were fired after beating porcupines to death with their nightsticks.

Last Monday, in hopes of finding a little escape, my wife and I drove out to Acadia National Park, on Mount Desert Island. Our route took us through both of our state's congressional districts — the reliably blue First, which went for Hillary Clinton in 2016, and the rural and more conservative Second, which went for Donald Trump. I tried to get a sense of how the 2020 Maine vote is going to go by counting yard signs. My poll gave an edge to Joe Biden and Ms. Gideon — but just barely. (There was also one sign still up for Bernie Sanders.)

A Trump-Pence sign in Trenton had been edited by someone with a can of spray paint; the candidates' names had been overwritten with a big orange "$750" (the amount of taxes Mr. Trump paid in 2016).

> Everything feels too high-stakes for Maine voters.

We also saw lots of ghosts and skeletons and gravestones, evidence that many Mainers take Halloween almost as seriously as Christmas. In one yard a pair of zombie hands rose out of a tomb. Not far away was a sign: "TRUMP"

Four years ago — almost to the day — we were all reeling from the "grab them by the pussy" tape. How confident I was then that Americans would find this kind of talk repulsive! How sure I was that we were just weeks away from electing our first female president! I was wrong, of course.

Things look better for Joe Biden now than they did for Hillary Clinton then, if you believe the polls anyhow. But then the Mainer in me remembers the six months of winter lurking beyond every summer day and those zombie hands crawling out of the ground.

In Acadia, we rode our bikes through the sparkling autumn sunshine, drove our car up Cadillac Mountain, ate popovers and chowder at the Jordan Pond House.

The next day we went down to Thunder Hole, a rock formation where the Atlantic crashes into a cavern. We sat down on a chunk of granite, two old people with our arms wrapped around each other, feeling the spray on our faces. We had been there together as a young couple 32 years ago.

The day before, Supreme Court Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas had issued a rant against marriage equality, which they called a "novel constitutional right" in defiance of religious liberty.

I wondered whether the coming election will decide not just the fate of the presidency and the Senate, but that of my marriage as well.

Deedie and I got back to Belgrade Lakes in time to watch the vice-presidential debate that night. The next morning I went outside to split some wood. The sky was blue from stem to stern, and as I stood in the dooryard, holding my ax, I felt a rush of good cheer. Could I trust the optimism I felt? Could it be that just this once, my hopes would not get crushed, as the saying goes, "flatter than a pounded hake"?

As I stood there by the woodpile I heard a sound. I looked over to see a porcupine emerging from the woods. He was the fastest porcupine I'd ever seen. If you didn't know better, you'd think he had the whole Rockland police force chasing after him.

It was so funny, it was all I could do to keep from laughing. □

JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN, *a contributing opinion writer, is a professor of English at Barnard College. Her most recent book is "Good Boy: My Life in Seven Dogs."*

IAN ALLEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In a Mountain Town, Preparing for Dark Times

Christopher Solomon
TWISP, WASH.

AT DAWN the deer are as thick as cattle in the valley bottom, feeding on what remains after summer's final haying. Soon, hunting season's first shot will scatter them to higher country, where winds shake the aspens' first golden coins to the ground. There's not much time. So they eat the stubble without pause, fattening up for the hungry months ahead.

At the river, the water is skinny but runs cold again with the return of freezing nights. The trout feel the change and are voracious. This makes them reckless, and the fishing is good in the squinting hours around sunrise. I tie on an October caddis and skate the fly over the water in the blue morning. Big trout lunge after it, detonating the quiet.

It is autumn again in the mountains of the West, and what is not gracefully dying is desperate to live.

I live in the lap of tall peaks in Washington's North Cascades, where the turn from summer to fall always mixes beauty with melancholy. October's yellow afternoons smell of winter at the edges. The soft ovation of the cottonwoods sends another round of leaves adrift on the water. Everything lovely harbingers an ending. Nothing gold can stay, as Frost wrote.

Even in the lovely moments, a franticness belies the season here, the underlying rhythm of life in hard places. The black bear roots for the last frost-shriveled berries. The fish lurches to the fly. The woodcutter's saw screams in the quiet forest, as she piles the rounds that will warm her family. All of us in our fashion rush to lay in the things we need before winter descends.

I stand in the river, ice water girdling my hips, and I cast, and cast again. I am as ravenous as the trout. I, too, need something to sustain me. But what, exactly?

This autumn feels different than those of the past. The wistfulness of the season is stronger, and the pace of the days feels more urgent. All spring and summer, as places such as New York suffered terribly because of the pandemic, we enjoyed our relative isolation and the lack of outbreaks. Our valley wants for many things, but we do not lack for elbow room. When the news, and the numbers, grew ever more awful we simply headed outside, alone or together, as we sought the solace of open spaces, as Gretel Ehrlich put it.

The other asset that makes this place special is its sense of community. Late each autumn the already-small population of the valley shrinks smaller still, as avalanches close one of the few roads to Seattle and the snowbirds migrate south. People who have scattered to the woods and peaks and fields all summer now return, and the community knits itself together again for the cold winter months, buried in snow.

There are Tuesday night science talks at the Red Barn, and pickup hockey at the rink on Wednesdays, and costume parties at the Grange Hall. Friends crowd into snug, stove-lighted places and they share meals featuring the tomatoes they canned the previous summer. We are the rancher's cattle pushed down from summer range by first snow to gather together closely for the winter, warmer together.

> As the virus spreads, we look to winter and wonder whom we can pull close.

In an era of contagion, though, closeness is treacherous. We are told to stay out of each other's homes. We are advised to avoid gatherings. What makes us human — the need for connection, for human touch — is now suspect.

And so my friends and I fish too long when we should be picking the last frost-sweetened plums. We put our hands on the still-warm granite of the climbing pitch rather than cook down the applesauce. We take ridgeline hikes among larch the color of struck matches when we should be at the work desk. We run for hours through the mountains without thought of tomorrow's soreness, or the firewood left uncut.

We tear at the days immoderately, like animals, and we wolf them down, hoping to fill a hole we see yawning ahead. There's not much time. The forecast calls for snow up high this week — "termination dust," the locals call it.

And so we also grab at the invitations to dinner outside with others — invitations that once felt casual but that now feel urgent. We sit on the patio drinking summer drinks long after summer is gone, ignoring the shivering night. We look for more human connections to make, wondering who we can safely pull close, whose friendship will keep us both warm. We are laying by memories for winter, as the bear puts on fat, in hopes what we have will be enough for the long, dark times to come. □

CHRISTOPHER SOLOMON *is a contributing editor at Outside*

Jacob Blake Is My Nephew. My Family Is Suffering.

Rick Blake

HOTELS, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, media interviews. In recent months, this has been the daily ordeal of my brother, Jacob Blake Sr. — or as we call him in our family, "Big Jake."

He regularly visited the hospital bedside in Milwaukee where his son, my nephew, lay partly paralyzed for over a month before being transferred to a spinal rehabilitation facility in Chicago.

At first, Jacob Blake Jr. — "Li'l Jake" — was semiconscious. Bullets had ripped through his slim body when a police officer shot him seven times in the back outside an apartment complex in Kenosha, Wis., on Aug. 23.

His small legs were chained to the steel frame of the hospital bed.

"Chains should not be placed on a human being," I remember my brother saying.

At his first hospital visit, he just sat by his son's side holding his hand. The silence was broken only by the beeps and clatter of hospital monitors.

Our family was preparing for painful news about the prognosis. But one day, as his father held his hand, Li'l Jake opened his eyes and said the words every father wants to hear: "Daddy, is that really you? I love you."

To my brother and our entire family, this was a deliverance. Li'l Jake was alive.

Our story is different from those of many families whose lives have been devastated by police brutality — our Li'l Jake survived. But in mostly every other way, the experience is similar.

When the cameras stop rolling, the lights fade and public attention turns away, we're left with our pain, and we return to the battle against racism and for justice and reform.

My brother, who has recently spent six to eight hours a day with Li'l Jake at his rehabilitation facility, is a massive man. He was once a defensive tackle at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina. He also has diabetes, heart disease and chronic neuropathy.

The shooting of his son has forced him to put himself at further risk during a pandemic that disproportionately affects Black men and others in our community.

MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/GETTY IMAGES

Jacob Blake Sr. with the family of Breonna Taylor last month.

> Police violence takes a largely invisible toll on Black families.

The toll on my brother has gone largely unnoticed — except, of course, by members of our family. One night, he sat in the dark on a rock next to the hotel where he was staying, so sick and tired he couldn't move, his hand swollen to the size of a catcher's mitt from gout.

By chance, the director of the hospital where Li'l Jake was being treated found him, and he was taken to the emergency room for treatment.

Despite this kind of setback, my brother knows he must keep going, willing his big body to take the next step each day. For his son. For his family. For justice. "If I have to sacrifice myself for my son and my family, so be it," he has told me.

After Big Jake was released from the hospital the morning after being admitted, he began convulsing and vomited several times in his hotel room.

Still sick, my brother forced himself to an airport conference room for a meeting scheduled with Senator Kamala Harris. Before she arrived, he had to go outside. He did not want to throw up in front of her.

Ms. Harris proceeded to the meeting room not knowing that he was sick. But once she found out, she behaved like a family member.

"Jacob," Ms. Harris said, "you need to get better for yourself and because your voice is very important."

As he prepared to go to the hospital yet again, he gave a thumbs-up and wearily pushed on. For Li'l Jake and for justice, not only for his family, but for so many other families as well.

This has been a grueling family ordeal for the two Jakes. But not only for them. My brother's three adult children, Jakorey, Letetra and Zietha, have wearily traveled with their dad from events like August's March on Washington to hospital waiting rooms. Li'l Jake's 20-year-old brother was taken to a hospital in Illinois and treated for depression.

That facility is about 100 miles from Wisconsin. Yet my brother knew he had to be there, even if it meant turning around again after just a few hours to be with Li'l Jake. This exhausting journey has become familiar to our family.

This kind of sacrifice is not new. Generations of our family have risen above their tribulations.

My father, the Rev. Jacob S. Blake, marched with Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma to Montgomery and fought for fair housing in Illinois. My uncle, Rev. Eustace L. Blake, led a protest against police brutality in Newark, N.J., in 1964.

He urged his parishioners at the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church to actively participate in African-American organizations like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. "The price of freedom is not cheap," he told them.

Other family members helped found community service organizations and were steel and hospital workers union members. Still others pushed the ideals of this nation forward by working to end segregation in New York City public schools and in other places around the nation.

These generations connect this family at this moment of truth. The truth that we, too, are human beings. The truth that the late sage John Lewis said is the "foundation of all things." The truth that cannot be denied, tarnished or whitewashed.

Yes, we are weary. We as an African-American community are weary. We are tired of this fight to "prove" the value of our humanity — a truth that should be self-evident. But justice in this country is still for some and not for others.

That there are still two systems, one for the privileged and one for the rest of us.

Some of us know the truth: that oppression of a people cannot be justified in any way or in any era. With exhausted bodies and voices, we continue to pay a high price.

But as tired as we may be, we, like my brother, keep putting one foot in front of the other for our survival and for justice in this nation. Apparently we still have miles to go. □

RICK BLAKE *is the uncle of Jacob Blake.*

Accusing Barr of Abusing His Power, Veteran Prosecutor Exits Justice Dept.

By KATIE BENNER

WASHINGTON — A 36-year veteran of the Justice Department this week accused Attorney General William P. Barr of abusing his power to sway the election for President Trump and said he was quitting, making him the third sitting prosecutor to issue a rare public rebuke of the attorney general.

"Barr's resentment toward rule-of-law prosecutors became increasingly difficult to ignore, as did his slavish obedience to Donald Trump's will," Phillip Halpern, a federal prosecutor in San Diego, said in a letter published Wednesday in The San Diego Union-Tribune. "This career bureaucrat seems determined to turn our democracy into an autocracy."

Mr. Halpern said he chose to retire as well, calling Mr. Barr "a well-trained bureaucrat" without prosecutorial experience and alleging that he scorned honest apolitical prosecutors and selectively meddled in the criminal justice system to help Mr. Trump's allies.

He said he would have quit earlier but stayed on because he worried that the department under Mr. Barr would have interfered in his prosecution of former Representative Duncan D. Hunter, Republican of California, who pleaded guilty in December to conspiracy to steal campaign funds.

The condemnations by Mr. Halpern and the two other prosecutors, one in Seattle and one in Boston, broke with a longstanding practice by Justice Department lawyers not to publicly discuss internal affairs.

"I have never seen sitting prosecutors go on the record with concerns about the attorney general," said Paul Butler, a professor at Georgetown Law who served as a federal prosecutor during Mr. Barr's earlier tour as attorney general in the George Bush administration. "This is unprecedented."

He said that during Mr. Barr's first stint as attorney general, line prosecutors did not feel the sense of crisis that they feel now. "Trump is the difference," Mr. Butler said. "Barr was attorney general, but he was still beholden to the president, and he didn't put the pressure on the attorney general that Trump has."

OLIVER CONTRERAS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Attorney General William P. Barr was criticized by Phillip Halpern, the third federal prosecutor to publicly denounce him.

Kerri Kupec, a Justice Department spokeswoman, did not respond to a request for comment on the letters or to a question about whether the two prosecutors still at the department who spoke out would face disciplinary action.

More than 110,000 people work at the Justice Department, and internal disagreement is common, as at any large organization; the disputes sometimes spill into view through news reports. The department and its prosecutors have come under tremendous scrutiny under Mr. Trump, as he has publicly criticized prosecutors for charging his allies and said that he wanted them to put his political enemies in jail.

Mr. Butler pointed to a recent book by Andrew Weissmann, a prosecutor on the Russia investigation, as an example of how the norm of the department's rank and file remaining quiet had softened. Mr. Weissmann's book gives an inside looking into some of the deliberations that took place during the investigation and criticized the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, for being overly cautious.

Mr. Mueller publicly pushed back on some of Mr. Weissmann's claims in a rare public statement.

"Even five years ago, that would have been shocking," Mr. Butler said of the back-and-forth.

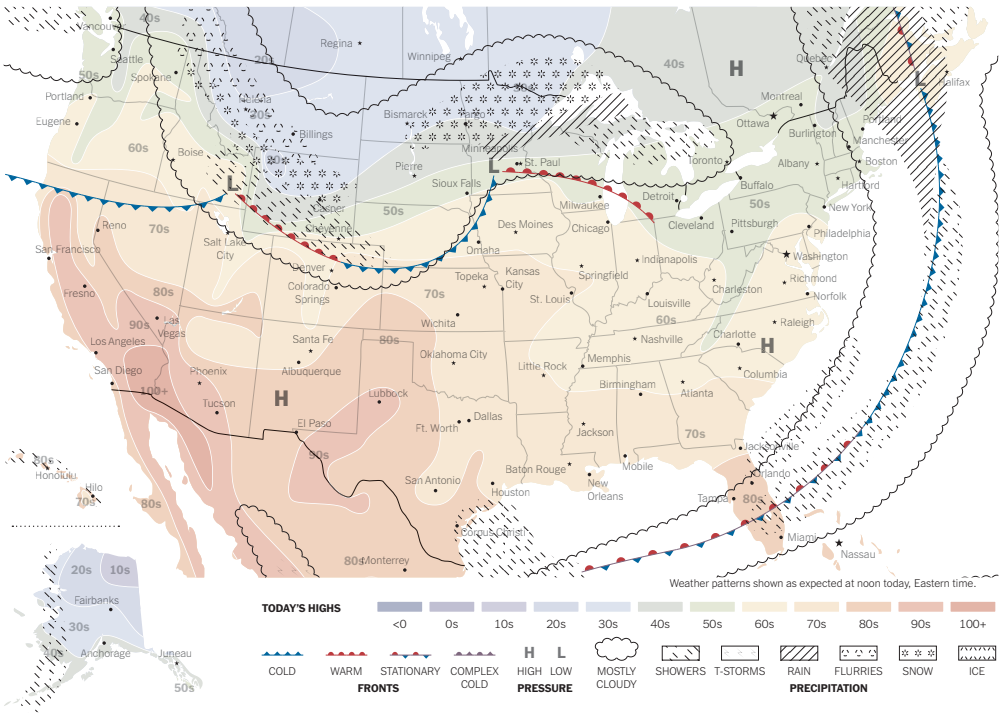
But he argued that the three prosecutors' critiques of Mr. Barr were particularly unusual. "Most people in the past would have been afraid that they would be tainted or blackballed from future jobs for publicly criticizing the attorney general," Mr. Butler said. "But I don't think that these letter writers will suffer consequences outside of the department."

Mr. Halpern, who worked under six presidents of both parties, said that he observed colleagues quitting and that highly qualified lawyers seemed unwilling to apply to be federal prosecutors because of how Mr. Barr helmed the department.

"I always believed the department's past leaders were dedicated to the rule of law and the guiding principle that justice is blind," Mr. Halpern said. "That is a bygone era, but it should not be forgotten."

Weather Report

Meteorology by **AccuWeather**



Metropolitan Forecast

TODAY .....Clearing, chilly

High 59. The cold front and low pressure system that brought rain will move away. Dry weather and sunshine will return for much of the day. The air will remain rather chilly.

TONIGHT .....Clear

Low 47. A chilly night will unfold under a clear sky. The clear sky and a slight breeze will allow the temperature to drop low enough for frost to occur in some suburban and rural areas.

TOMORROW .....Partly sunny

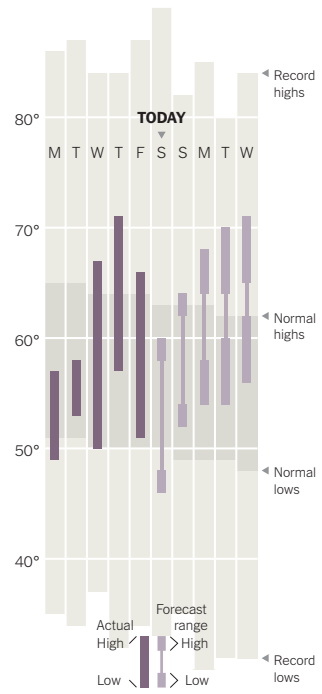
High 63. A ridge of high pressure will be building over the area, bringing dry and settled weather. Expect sunshine with a light breeze and afternoon temperatures at near-average levels.

MONDAY .....Mostly cloudy

High pressure will shift off the coast and the next cold front will approach from the west. This will result in increased cloud cover. The odds of rain during the day are low.

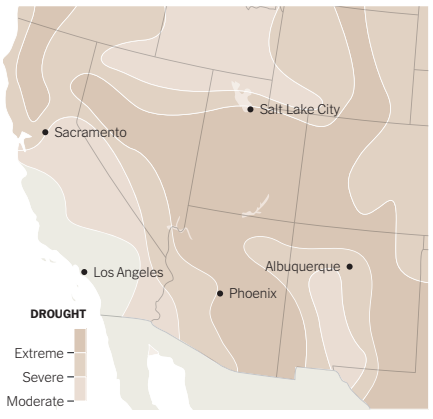
TUESDAY
WEDNESDAY .....Variably cloudy

Tuesday will be cloudy and mild with a chance for a shower. The high will be 67. Wednesday will bring clouds and periodic sun. The high will be 68.



Highlight: Extreme Drought in the West

Extreme drought continues to expand across the southwestern United States due to a lack of rainfall and well-above-normal temperatures. Large portions of Utah, Nevada, Arizona and Colorado have had very little rainfall since the summer. The weather pattern will not bring any significant rainfall to this region for at least the next six to 10 days. The storm remains well to the north.



National Forecast

A storm will leave the Northeast today. In most areas of New England, rain will simply end, but in the mountains across the northern tier, a change to snow may bring a few inches of accumulation to the high elevations. Dry air will sweep in from the central Appalachians as the day progresses.

Another storm will spread rain across the Upper Midwest with accumulating snow over the northern tier.

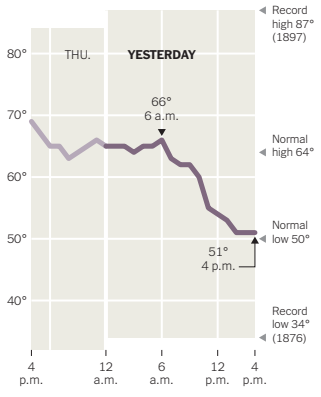
A third storm is forecast to spread more snow across western and southern Montana and northern Wyoming with showers farther south to northern Colorado.

Showers will linger over South Florida as much of the rest of the nation will have a dry day with sunshine. Hot weather will persist in the Southwest, but a cooling trend is forecast for next week.

Metropolitan Almanac

In Central Park, for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday.

Temperature



Avg. daily departure from normal this month ..... +1.2°

Avg. daily departure from normal this year ..... +2.2°

Reservoir levels (New York City water supply)

Yesterday 73%
Est. normal 74%

Precipitation (in inches)

Yesterday 1.20
Record 2.15

For the last 30 days
Actual 4.22
Normal 4.42

For the last 365 days
Actual 46.53
Normal 49.92

LAST 30 DAYS

Air pressure
High ..... 30.14 4 p.m.
Low ..... 29.99 3 a.m.

Humidity
High ..... 96% 1 p.m.
Low ..... 66% 10 a.m.

Heating Degree Days

An index of fuel consumption that tracks how far the day's mean temperature fell below 65

Yesterday 6
So far this month 71
So far this season (since July 1) 107
Normal to date for the season 148

Trends

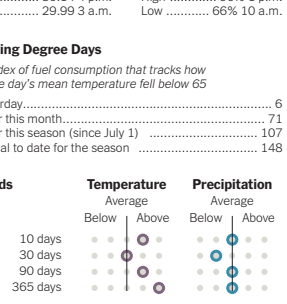
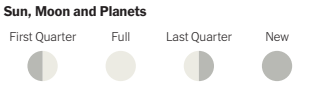


Chart shows how recent temperature and precipitation trends compare with those of the last 30 years.

Recreational Forecast

Sun, Moon and Planets



Sun	RISE	7:10 a.m.	Moon	R	7:56 a.m.
	SET	6:12 p.m.		S	7:04 p.m.
	NEXT R	7:11 a.m.		R	9:15 a.m.
Jupiter	R	1:52 p.m.	Mars	S	6:51 a.m.
	S	11:12 p.m.		R	6:08 p.m.
Saturn	R	2:15 p.m.	Venus	R	4:01 a.m.
	S	11:44 p.m.		S	4:49 p.m.

Boating

From Montauk Point to Sandy Hook, N.J., out to 20 nautical miles, including Long Island Sound and New York Harbor.

Wind will be from the northwest at 15-30 knots, easing a bit this afternoon. Waves will be 2 feet on New York Harbor and Long Island Sound and 3-5 feet on the ocean. Visibility will become unrestricted.

High Tides

Atlantic City	8:17 a.m.	8:38 p.m.
Barnegat Inlet	8:34 a.m.	8:55 p.m.
The Battery	9:03 a.m.	9:23 p.m.
Beach Haven	9:59 a.m.	10:18 p.m.
Bridgeport	12:06 p.m.	---
City Island	12:02 p.m.	---
Fire Island Lt.	9:27 a.m.	9:46 p.m.
Montauk Point	9:39 a.m.	10:06 p.m.
Northport	12:13 p.m.	---
Port Washington	12:00 a.m.	12:14 p.m.
Sandy Hook	8:41 a.m.	9:00 p.m.
Shinnecock Inlet	8:23 a.m.	8:47 p.m.
Stamford	12:11 p.m.	---
Tarrytown	10:52 a.m.	11:12 p.m.
Willets Point	12:03 p.m.	---

Northeast Foliage

As a storm departs, windswept heavy rain and high mountain snow will give way to clearing across New England. Except for showers in western New York, dry weather and sunny skies will prevail elsewhere. Many areas will have a frosty start, and the air will have a crisp and cool feel throughout the day.

Cities

High/low temperatures for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday, Eastern time, and precipitation (in inches) for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday.
Expected conditions for today and tomorrow.

C ..... Clouds
F ..... Fog
H ..... Haze
I ..... Ice
PC ..... Partly cloudy
R ..... Rain
Sh ..... Showers
S ..... Sun
Sn ..... Snow
SS ..... Snow showers
T ..... Thunderstorms
Tr ..... Trace
W ..... Windy
– ..... Not available

N.Y.C. region	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
New York City	66/ 51 1.20	59/ 47 PC	63/ 53 PC
Bridgeport	69/ 60 0.28	60/ 45 PC	63/ 53 PC
Caldwell	63/ 55 0.59	60/ 38 PC	63/ 48 PC
Danbury	60/ 54 0.59	57/ 33 PC	60/ 45 PC
Islip	66/ 59 0.45	58/ 41 PC	63/ 52 PC
Newark	64/ 56 0.68	61/ 42 PC	63/ 50 PC
Trenton	61/ 52 1.08	58/ 37 S	62/ 46 PC
White Plains	62/ 55 0.60	57/ 40 PC	60/ 49 PC

United States	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Albany	52/ 38 0.18	55/ 34 PC	57/ 45 PC
Albuquerque	71/ 47 0	79/ 49 S	80/ 48 S
Anchorage	37/ 30 0	41/ 33 PC	39/ 32 C
Atlanta	67/ 46 0	66/ 49 S	70/ 55 PC
Atlantic City	68/ 45 0.76	60/ 45 S	64/ 56 PC
Austin	74/ 53 0.14	79/ 68 PC	90/ 71 PC
Baltimore	58/ 40 0.33	62/ 39 S	66/ 47 PC
Baton Rouge	71/ 49 Tr	76/ 60 S	83/ 66 S
Birmingham	66/ 42 0.04	70/ 53 S	76/ 58 S
Boise	65/ 47 0	67/ 43 PC	62/ 44 PC
Boston	70/ 48 0.14	56/ 42 R	60/ 48 S
Buffalo	51/ 39 0.04	56/ 45 PC	62/ 47 C
Burlington	54/ 42 0.32	55/ 39 PC	60/ 48 PC
Casper	64/ 39 0	47/ 21 PC	47/ 28 C
Charlotte	65/ 40 0.14	64/ 42 S	67/ 48 S
Chattanooga	65/ 41 0.06	67/ 48 S	71/ 54 S
Chicago	56/ 39 0.01	64/ 45 W	48/ 36 Sh
Cincinnati	57/ 36 0	62/ 47 S	63/ 50 PC
Cleveland	53/ 37 0.02	57/ 46 PC	60/ 45 PC
Colorado Springs	62/ 45 0	77/ 36 PC	54/ 32 PC
Columbus	55/ 34 0.01	59/ 44 PC	62/ 49 PC
Concord, N.H.	63/ 44 0.26	54/ 31 R	60/ 36 PC
Dallas-Ft. Worth	72/ 51 0	77/ 68 S	86/ 58 W
Denver	70/ 48 0	72/ 32 PC	55/ 37 PC
Des Moines	56/ 42 0	68/ 35 W	44/ 30 R
Detroit	55/ 36 0	57/ 47 C	60/ 38 C
El Paso	77/ 51 0	89/ 58 S	90/ 55 S
Fargo	46/ 33 0	40/ 21 Sn	38/ 18 C
Hartford	62/ 43 0.21	58/ 35 PC	62/ 44 PC
Honolulu	87/ 74 0	86/ 75 C	87/ 75 Sh
Houston	69/ 55 0.36	79/ 71 PC	85/ 70 PC
Indianapolis	58/ 36 0	64/ 49 PC	62/ 42 Sh
Jackson	68/ 43 Tr	74/ 54 S	81/ 64 S
Jacksonville	87/ 62 0.01	73/ 64 PC	80/ 66 PC
Kansas City	62/ 47 0	72/ 42 W	47/ 34 Sh
Key West	87/ 80 0.31	87/ 80 T	86/ 80 Sh
Las Vegas	87/ 60 0	91/ 63 S	91/ 63 S
Lexington	57/ 33 0.05	61/ 44 S	65/ 53 PC
Little Rock	66/ 42 0	70/ 56 S	76/ 60 C
Los Angeles	98/ 65 0	93/ 62 S	82/ 63 S
Louisville	60/ 39 0	66/ 51 S	67/ 54 C
Memphis	64/ 42 0	69/ 56 S	75/ 61 C
Miami	83/ 77 0.56	87/ 78 T	86/ 79 T
Milwaukee	54/ 37 0.01	59/ 43 Sh	47/ 32 C
Mpls.-St. Paul	47/ 37 0.02	54/ 29 PC	42/ 27 C
Nashville	61/ 37 0.05	67/ 50 S	72/ 60 PC
New Orleans	72/ 59 0	77/ 66 S	84/ 71 PC
Norfolk	73/ 51 0.34	62/ 53 S	69/ 59 S
Oklahoma City	67/ 47 0	75/ 58 W	66/ 42 W
Omaha	59/ 47 Tr	69/ 34 PC	45/ 31 C
Orlando	90/ 70 0	85/ 71 PC	85/ 72 Sh
Philadelphia	59/ 44 1.16	60/ 42 S	65/ 51 PC
Phoenix	101/ 70 0	98/ 67 S	97/ 68 S
Pittsburgh	53/ 32 0.03	58/ 41 S	64/ 48 PC
Portland, Me.	65/ 48 0.11	51/ 36 R	58/ 44 S
Portland, Ore.	63/ 50 0	64/ 52 C	62/ 52 PC
Providence	70/ 47 0.09	58/ 39 R	61/ 47 PC
Raleigh	68/ 42 0.60	63/ 41 S	68/ 48 S
Reno	75/ 42 0	82/ 44 S	82/ 43 S
Richmond	58/ 40 0.72	61/ 40 S	68/ 48 S
Rochester	50/ 34 0.05	56/ 38 PC	62/ 47 C
Sacramento	95/ 56 0	93/ 55 S	90/ 54 S
Salt Lake City	65/ 47 0	72/ 46 S	70/ 48 S
San Antonio	74/ 57 0.07	78/ 66 PC	90/ 72 PC
San Diego	86/ 65 0	86/ 64 PC	79/ 65 PC
San Francisco	90/ 62 0	85/ 59 S	76/ 56 PC
San Jose	94/ 61 0	91/ 60 S	84/ 56 S
San Juan	84/ 78 0.75	87/ 77 Sh	87/ 76 Sh
Seattle	62/ 50 0	57/ 51 C	60/ 53 Sh
Sioux Falls	54/ 43 0	57/ 25 W	41/ 26 PC
Spokane	62/ 42 0	56/ 39 PC	49/ 42 R
St. Louis	64/ 43 0	71/ 52 W	60/ 42 Sh
St. Thomas	84/ 78 1.05	87/ 79 Sh	87/ 78 Sh
Syracuse	53/ 37 0.31	59/ 39 PC	62/ 50 PC
Tampa	90/ 71 0	88/ 72 S	88/ 73 T
Toledo	56/ 33 0	60/ 48 PC	63/ 39 C
Tucson	98/ 63 0	98/ 62 S	95/ 63 S
Tulsa	70/ 52 0	73/ 59 W	64/ 43 Sh
Virginia Beach	74/ 52 0.25	62/ 53 S	68/ 55 S
Washington	57/ 41 0.21	62/ 43 S	65/ 50 S
Wichita	67/ 49 0	76/ 46 W	51/ 36 W
Wilmington, Del.	56/ 39 1.11	60/ 39 S	63/ 48 PC

Africa	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Algiers	75/ 50 0	75/ 49 S	76/ 49 S
Cairo	86/ 68 0	87/ 66 S	88/ 68 S
Cape Town	82/ 53 0	72/ 55 C	68/ 53 C
Dakar	90/ 79 0	90/ 80 PC	90/ 80 S
Johannesburg	86/ 58 0	84/ 63 S	88/ 65 PC
Nairobi	80/ 60 0.02	78/ 58 T	78/ 58 C
Tunis	70/ 58 0	73/ 54 S	72/ 54 PC

Asia/Pacific	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Baghdad	96/ 66 0	96/ 63 PC	96/ 61 PC
Bangkok	86/ 77 0.64	82/ 74 T	80/ 73 R
Beijing	66/ 47 0	73/ 41 S	71/ 41 PC
Damascus	86/ 54 0	86/ 49 PC	89/ 50 PC
Hong Kong	86/ 77 0	85/ 72 PC	84/ 73 PC
Jakarta	92/ 77 0.22	91/ 77 T	91/ 77 Sh
Jerusalem	79/ 62 0	78/ 60 S	80/ 61 S
Karachi	102/ 79 0	102/ 84 PC	98/ 79 C
Manila	93/ 79 0	89/ 78 T	88/ 77 C
Mumbai	91/ 81 0.06	90/ 80 R	90/ 80 PC
New Delhi	94/ 64 0	93/ 69 PC	93/ 69 PC
Riyadh	90/ 61 0	92/ 60 PC	93/ 61 S
Seoul	61/ 43 0.02	66/ 43 S	69/ 45 S
Shanghai	63/ 60 0.25	72/ 60 C	73/ 61 PC
Singapore	90/ 79 0.02	89/ 79 T	89/ 80 T
Sydney	69/ 63 0.02	82/ 66 C	73/ 59 Sh
Taipei City	86/ 73 0.05	77/ 73 T	80/ 73 C
Tehran	78/ 57 0	74/ 52 PC	74/ 52 PC
Tokyo	64/ 59 0.15	58/ 55 R	64/ 59 PC

Europe	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Amsterdam	54/ 40 0	53/ 45 PC	55/ 45 Sh
Athens	77/ 63 0	80/ 60 PC	78/ 62 Sh
Berlin	52/ 40 0.01	52/ 41 C	50/ 38 Sh
Brussels	52/ 40 0	52/ 42 PC	55/ 43 C
Budapest	52/ 45 0.40	50/ 41 C	53/ 38 Sh
Copenhagen	54/ 42 0.14	52/ 45 PC	52/ 42 C
Dublin	54/ 43 0.04	52/ 43 PC	55/ 48 PC
Edinburgh	51/ 36 0	51/ 41 C	49/ 45 PC
Frankfurt	54/ 41 0.14	51/ 41 PC	54/ 41 C
Geneva	57/ 43 0.01	51/ 41 PC	56/ 37 PC
Helsinki	43/ 32 0	49/ 39 PC	43/ 31 R
Istanbul	75/ 64 0	76/ 62 PC	71/ 61 PC
Kiev	56/ 48 0.04	56/ 42 R	48/ 40 C
Lisbon	70/ 53 0	67/ 54 PC	73/ 59 PC
London	55/ 43 0	56/ 45 PC	56/ 47 PC
Madrid	61/ 37 0	65/ 42 PC	70/ 45 PC
Moscow	50/ 36 0.16	42/ 35 PC	50/ 37 R
Nice	65/ 52 0	65/ 52 PC	65/ 53 PC
Oslo	52/ 38 0	48/ 36 PC	48/ 29 PC
Paris	55/ 42 0	55/ 41 PC	58/ 41 C
Prague	47/ 42 0.48	46/ 37 C	48/ 40 C
Rome	64/ 55 0.26	64/ 48 Sh	66/ 47 PC
St. Petersburg	45/ 35 0	46/ 32 PC	40/ 36 C
Stockholm	47/ 32 0.21	48/ 33 PC	40/ 31 PC
Vienna	47/ 41 0.42	49/ 40 C	52/ 38 C
Warsaw	47/ 38 0.02	46/ 37 C	48/ 36 Sh

North America	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Acapulco	88/ 77 0.04	88/ 75 T	88/ 77 T
Bermuda	81/ 74 0.03	81/ 75 PC	82/ 76 S
Edmonton	34/ 25 0.07	30/ 11 S	29/ 13 S
Guadalajara	82/ 58 0	82/ 57 PC	84/ 57 PC
Havana	90/ 73 0	86/ 74 T	86/ 74 T
Kingston	91/ 78 0	89/ 79 T	88/ 78 T
Martinique	88/ 74 0.30	87/ 75 Sh	87/ 74 PC
Mexico City	68/ 52 0	75/ 52 PC	77/ 52 PC
Monterrey	74/ 67 0.01	82/ 61 PC	89/ 62 S
Montreal	53/ 48 0.30	55/ 40 S	57/ 47 C
Nassau	87/ 78 0.23	86/ 78 T	86/ 78 Sh
Panama City	90/ 74 0.03	86/ 74 T	84/ 74 T
Quebec City	52/ 47 0.32	46/ 33 R	56/ 40 PC
Santo Domingo	88/ 73 0.24	87/ 72 T	88/ 72 T
Toronto	52/ 37 0	55/ 45 S	58/ 41 C
Vancouver	54/ 49 0.35	54/ 46 R	54/ 48 C
Winnipeg	37/ 23 0.01	39/ 22 PC	37/ 20 PC

South America	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Buenos Aires	70/ 63 0	75/ 67 PC	81/ 71 S
Caracas	91/ 74 0.15	90/ 75 T	89/ 74 T
Lima	68/ 61 0	67/ 60 S	66/ 60 PC
Quito	70/ 51 0	69/ 51 C	70/ 52 Sh
Recife	84/ 77 0.02	85/ 76 PC	85/ 76 PC
Rio de Janeiro	77/ 70 0.04	76/ 68 PC	80/ 70 PC
Santiago	73/ 48 0	82/ 51 PC	78/ 47 PC

3 ECONOMY
Even though eight million Americans have slipped into poverty since May, consumer spending continues to rise.

5 YOUR MONEY ADVISER
As enrollment time looms, many employers appear ready to help more with workers' health insurance.

7 SPORTS
Randy Arozarena, the breakout star of the playoffs, is a native of Cuba, but his heart is in Mexico.

'It's Fall! Here We Are!'

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR LLORENTE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Past the low canopy of Lee Sims Chocolates, below, Halloween fare will soon be followed by the holiday rush. The store again let customers walk in after Labor Day.

A Morsel Of a Shop Survives

A Jersey City institution is once again bursting with chocolate and customers.

By KEVIN ARMSTRONG

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — Valerie Vlahakis, the owner of Lee Sims Chocolates, a mom-and-pop shop between a florist and a pharmacy on a scruffy block in McGinley Square, eyed ghosts in her display window as she waited for patrons to return.

It was two days after Labor Day, but the 10-foot-wide storefront was already decorated for Halloween. After nearly six months of making do with online sales and curbside pickups during the pandemic, Ms. Vlahakis had unlocked the front door to welcome walk-ins.

No announcement was posted. It was a test. She wanted to see who noticed and rushed back for nonpareils and nougats. Inside, a skeleton staff scurried to fill empty shelves with winking pumpkin pops and hollow chocolate witches.

"Look at us!" said Ms. Vlahakis, a bespectacled septuagenarian. "It's fall! Here we are!"

She paused.

"And we're back!"

What the shop lacks in width it makes up for in longevity: The family business goes back seven decades at the site. Each year, Ms. Vlahakis and eight employees melt, mold, box and peddle 150,000 pounds of chocolate. On Valentine's Day, the demand is such that Lee Sims devotees line up outside, on Bergen Avenue, and a worker enforces a one-in, one-out policy.

One February, a customer alerted Ms. Vlahakis that Mayor Jerramiah Healy was waiting in line. "I said, 'And?'" she recalled. "He was fine standing out there like everyone else."

Now Ms. Vlahakis must quickly make the transition from reopening to ramping up for the busiest stretch of the chocolatier's calendar. By the time it's two weeks before Christmas, the store will be sending out 250 packages a day.

It was not always clear that Lee Sims would survive this year. Typically viewed as quaint, the store's tight quarters became a liability in March as the coronavirus coursed through New Jersey. Ms. Vlahakis felt Covid-19's toll when she received an increase in bereavement gift orders online, and her workers, several of them single mothers who commute on public buses, were nervous. In a business built on efficiently moving chocolate bun-

CONTINUED ON PAGE B6

Social Sites Flip-Flop In Run-Up To Election

By KATE CONGER and MIKE ISAAC

SAN FRANCISCO — It is the 11th hour before the presidential election. But Facebook and Twitter are still changing their minds.

With just a few weeks to go before the Nov. 3 vote, the social media companies are continuing to shift their policies and, in some cases, are entirely reversing what they will and won't allow on their sites. On Friday, Twitter underlined just how fluid its policies were when it began letting users share links to an unsubstantiated New York Post article about Hunter Biden that it had previously blocked from its service.

The change was a 180-degree turn from Wednesday, when Twitter had banned the links to the article because the emails on which it was based may have been hacked and contained private information, both of which violated its policies. (Many questions remain about how the New York Post obtained the emails.)

Late Thursday, under pressure from Republicans who said Twitter was censoring them, the company began backtracking by revising one of its policies. It com-

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

Films Race To Put Nov. 3 In the Plot

By NICOLE SPERLING

Jeff Daniels agreed to play James Comey in Showtime's "The Comey Rule" on the promise that the four-hour miniseries would be released ahead of the election. The documentary filmmaker Alex Gibney worked at a breakneck pace to complete his feature-length film "Totally Under Control," an indictment of the Trump administration's handling of the coronavirus, so it could debut before Nov. 3.

And Aaron Sorkin began courting streaming companies at the end of May when it became clear that the global pandemic would impede Paramount Pictures' ability to release his film about protests at the 1968 Democratic convention in theaters this year.

For Mr. Sorkin, the decision to forgo a traditional theatrical release — "The Trial of the Chicago 7" became available on Netflix on Friday — was all about being part

CONTINUED ON PAGE B4

Can't Wait To Upsize? Not So Fast

Ron Lieber
YOUR MONEY

Home has become work and school for millions of people. Many residences needed to somehow shift overnight to accommodate two workplaces and multiple classrooms because of the coronavirus.

With schools and businesses signaling that these conditions will extend at least through the spring, it's no surprise there is a stampede of people seeking more space. But when so many are acting on instinct, the best move may well be to slow down and ask some counterintuitive questions.

Try this one on for size: Should the house you're thinking of as a starter home be your forever home instead?

This is a tricky subject, like many of the biggest questions in personal finance, because of the complex stew of money and feelings that are involved.

CONTINUED ON PAGE B4

The Digest

TELEVISION

Roth Is Stepping Down As Warner Bros. TV Chief

Hollywood's season of executive turnover continues.

Warner Bros. announced on Friday that Peter Roth, the head of its television studio for more than two decades, will step down early next year.

This is the latest high-level change for the industry, which has seen turnover at HBO Max, Netflix and NBCUniversal in the last two months.

Mr. Roth joined Warner Bros. in 1999, and the studio has made a significant number of hit shows while he's been in charge, including "The Big Bang Theory," "The West Wing," "Gilmore Girls" and "Two and a Half Men."

With Mr. Roth's departure, speculation will turn to his replacement. Channing Dungey, who abruptly departed her executive position at Netflix last week, has held discussions for a high-level position with Warner Bros., according to two people familiar with the talks.

JOHN KOBLIN

FITNESS

Pedals on Stationary Bikes Are Recalled by Peloton

EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

Peloton recalled clip-in pedals on about 27,000 of its bikes after it received reports of broken pedals causing injuries, including five that needed stitches or other medical care. The recall applies to pedals on bikes sold between July 2013 and May 2016, Peloton said in a post on its website. It came after 120 reports of the pedals breaking and 16 reports of injuries.

The recall is a setback for a company that has emerged as one of the major winners of the quarantine economy. The bikes, at $1,895 plus a $39 monthly subscription fee for access to live-streamed classes, are some of the priciest available on the market.

"We take pride in providing the best equipment, proprietary network software, and world-class streaming digital fitness and wellness content that our members love," Amelise Lane, a spokeswoman for the company, said in a statement.

Peloton said it recommends users change their pedals annually, and customers should stop using the faulty pedals immediately.

JENNY GROSS

MUSIC

Stock Falls on Second Day For Company Behind BTS

Big Hit Entertainment Co. Ltd., the management agency of South Korean K-Pop group BTS, saw its stock fall as much as 23 percent on Friday, extending losses from its debut the previous day as pricing eased after pre-listing hype.

Analysts said the lower price is more reasonable for a company which relies heavily on one boy band for revenue.

Analysts said Big Hit's valuation based on its initial public offering (I.P.O.) price was on par with comparable K-Pop agencies.

BTS accounted for 97.4 percent of Big Hit's revenue in 2019 and 87.7 percent in the first half of 2020, a regulatory filing showed.

"Big Hit's reliance on BTS is still absolute when including non-management, indirect sales such as merchandise, intellectual property and content," said Hyundai Motor Securities analyst Kim Hyun-yong. "It must make all-out efforts to create a post-BTS revenue source."

REUTERS

S&P 500 INDEX
+0.01%
3,483.81

DOW JONES INDUSTRIALS
+0.39%
28,606.31

NASDAQ COMPOSITE INDEX
–0.36%
11,671.56

10-YEAR TREASURY YIELD
0.76%
+0.02 points

CRUDE OIL (U.S.)
$40.88
–$0.08

GOLD (N.Y.)
$1,900.80
–$2.40

S&P 500 Ekes Out Gain in Wobbly Session

By The Associated Press

STOCKS & BONDS

Wall Street closed out a choppy week of trading with more of the same on Friday as a late-afternoon stumble led stock indexes to a mixed finish.

The S&P 500 ended the day just a fraction of a point higher after a burst of selling erased a 0.9 percent gain. Despite a three-day stretch of losses, the benchmark index still managed to finish higher for the week, its third straight weekly gain.

Big Tech and energy companies fell while health care and industrial stocks rose. The Dow Jones industrial average also eked out a gain, while the Nasdaq composite posted its fourth straight loss.

The market had been up for much of the day after the government reported that retail sales rose in September for the fifth straight month. That report appeared to overshadow new data showed U.S. industrial production had its weakest showing last month since the spring.

The market's late-day fade capped a week of volatility for stocks as companies began reporting their third-quarter results and traders' hopes for a new round of economic stimulus from Washington dimmed.

The S&P 500 rose 0.47 points to 3,483.81. The Dow gained 112.11 points, or 0.4 percent, to 28,606.31. The Nasdaq fell 42.32 points, or 0.4 percent, to 11,671.56. The Russell 2000 index of small-cap stocks dropped 5.08 points, or 0.3 percent, to 1,633.81.

Despite the market's downbeat finish, the major stock indexes have already recouped most of their losses from September's market swoon.

Stocks have been mostly climbing this month, but trading became choppy this week as ongoing talks between Democrats and Republicans on an economic stimulus package failed to deliver results. Investors have been hoping that Washington would provide more financial support for the economy since July, when a $600-a-week extra benefit for the unemployed expired.

Traders have been watching economic data closely to see whether the loss of that beefed-up unemployment aid would lead to an overall pullback in spending. On Thursday, the Labor Department said the number of Americans seeking unemployment aid increased last week to 898,000, a historically high level that underscores how the economy continues to be hobbled by the pandemic and recession that erupted seven months ago.

Friday's retail sales report provides some encouragement, suggesting Americans' appetite for spending remained solid last month. The Commerce Department said retail sales rose 1.9 percent percent in September, the fifth straight monthly increase. The report initially juiced shares in retailers and other companies that rely on consumer spending, but most of those gains evaporated by the end of the day.

Other data point to persistent weakness in the economy. The Federal Reserve said on Friday that U.S. industrial production fell 0.6 percent last month, the weakest showing since April's 12.7 percent skid amid widespread business shutdowns because of the pandemic. Economists had been expecting an increase.

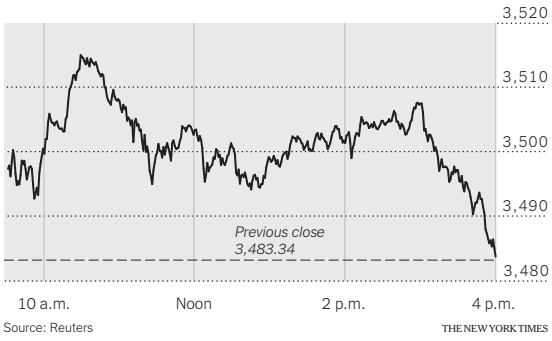
Across the S&P 500, analysts are expecting companies to report another drop in profits for the summer from year-ago levels. But they are forecasting the decline to moderate from the nearly 32 percent plunge from the spring, reflecting some signs of improvement in the economy since then.

Analysts have been raising their earnings forecasts for how companies fared in the third quarter after lowering them sharply ahead of the second quarter. That means it will be tougher for companies reporting results over the next few weeks to beat expectations.

The credit card issuer Ally Financial rose 2.7 percent after it reported better-than-expected results, while the logistics company J.B. Hunt Transportation Services sank 9.7 percent after its results fell short of expectations.

The S&P 500 Index

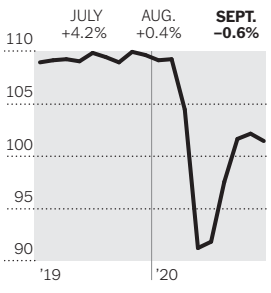
Position of the S&P 500 index at 1-minute intervals on Friday.



Source: Reuters THE NEW YORK TIMES

Industrial Production

Index of total industrial production, 2012 = 100, seasonally adjusted.



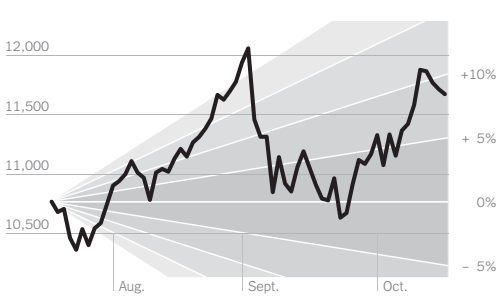
Source: Federal Reserve THE NEW YORK TIMES

What Happened in Stock Markets Yesterday

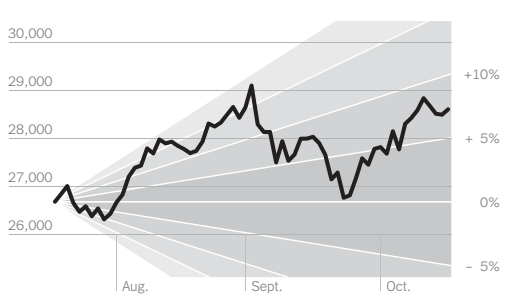
POWERED BY REFINITIV

S&P 500 3483.81 ↑0.01%

Nasdaq Composite Index 11671.56 ↓0.4%



Dow Jones industrials 28606.31 ↑0.4%



Best performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. General Electr (GE)	$7.29	+6.1%
2. Pfizer Inc (PFE)	37.95	+3.8
3. Alaska Air Gr (ALK)	39.35	+3.5
4. Westrock Co (WRK)	40.98	+3.4
5. Laboratory Cor (LH)	199.09	+3.3
6. Autodesk Inc (ADSK)	259.97	+3.2
7. General Motors (GM)	33.45	+2.6
8. Regeneron Ph (REGN)	599.74	+2.5
9. Medtronic PLC (MDT)	110.13	+2.4
10. United Rental (URI)	192.94	+2.4

Worst performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. J B Hunt Tra (JBHT)	$128.04	–9.7%
2. Schlumberger (SLB)	14.97	–8.8
3. Halliburton C (HAL)	12.25	–6.3
4. Devon Energy (DVN)	8.95	–5.0
5. Occidental Pe (OXY)	10.09	–4.9
6. HollyFrontier (HFC)	20.16	–4.9
7. Marathon Oil (MRO)	4.07	–4.7
8. CH Robinson (CHRW)	100.23	–4.7
9. Citizens Fina (CFG)	26.61	–4.6
10. Diamondback (FANG)	29.29	–4.4

Most active

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE	VOLUME IN MIL.
1. General Electr (GE)	$7.29	+6.1%	169.0
2. Apple Inc (AAPL)	119.02	–1.4	115.0
3. Bank of Ameri (BAC)	24.24	+0.4	58.3
4. Ford Motor Co (F)	7.67	+0.7	47.4
5. Wells Fargo & (WFC)	22.86	–0.4	43.1
6. Pfizer Inc (PFE)	37.95	+3.8	40.7
7. Schlumberger (SLB)	14.97	–8.8	39.8
8. Carnival Corp (CCL)	14.08	+0.4	39.4
9. American Airl (AAL)	12.46	+1.9	32.6
10. Boeing Co (BA)	167.35	+1.9	31.7

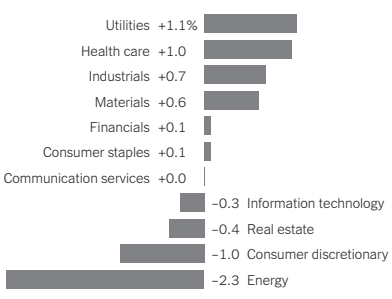
Long- and intermediate-term government bonds

	TOTAL RETURN 1 YR	TOTAL RETURN 5 YRS	TOTAL ASSETS IN BIL.
1. Vanguard Total Bond Market Index Adm(VBTLX)	+7.3%	+4.1%	$119.8
2. Dodge & Cox Income(DODIX)	+8.3	+5.1	67.0
3. Fidelity US Bond Index(FXNAX)	+7.3	+4.0	55.3
4. Metropolitan West Total Return Bd I(MWTIX)	+8.3	+4.4	51.7
5. Fidelity Series Investment Grade Bond(FSIGX)	+8.9	+5.0	35.6
6. Baird Aggregate Bond Inst(BAGIX)	+8.2	+4.6	29.2
7. American Funds Bond Fund of Amer A(ABNDX)	+9.8	+4.3	28.2
8. Baird Core Plus Bond Inst(BCOIX)	+8.1	+4.9	25.4
9. Western Asset Core Plus Bond I(WACPX)	+7.6	+5.5	24.0
10. Vanguard Interm-Term Bond Index Adm(VBILX)	+9.1	+4.8	19.6

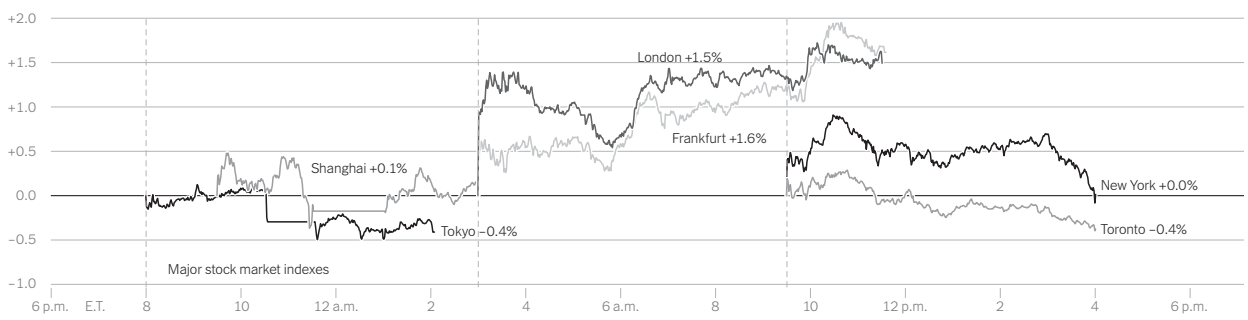
Source: Morningstar

Sector performance

S&P 500 SECTORS

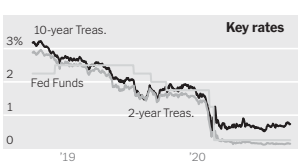


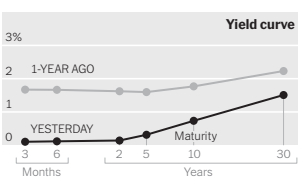
How stock markets fared yesterday in Asia ... ... in Europe ... and in the Americas.



What Is Happening in Other Markets and the Economy

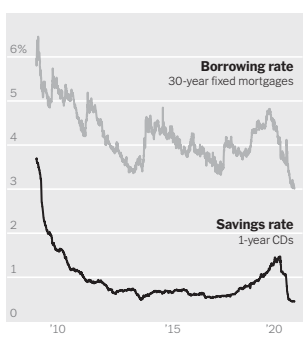
Bonds





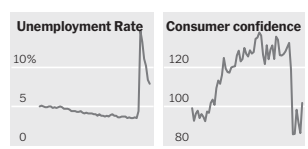
Currencies

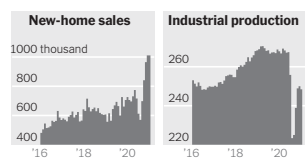
Consumer rates



Commodities

Economy





Social Platforms Flip-Flop on Election Policies

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

pleted its about-face on Friday by lifting the ban on the New York Post story altogether, as the article has spread widely across the internet.

Twitter's flip-flop followed a spate of changes from Facebook, which over the past few weeks has said it would ban Holocaust denial content, ban more QAnon conspiracy pages and groups, ban anti-vaccination ads and suspend political advertising for an unspecified length of time after the election. All of those things had previously been allowed — until they weren't.

The rapid-fire changes have made Twitter and Facebook the butt of jokes and invigorated efforts to regulate them. On Friday, Senator Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, said he wanted to subpoena Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's chief executive, to testify over the "censorship" of the New York Post article since the social network had also reduced the visibility of the piece. Kayleigh McEnany, the White House press secretary, said that Twitter was "against us." And President Trump shared a satirical article on Twitter that mocked the company's policies.

"Policies are a guide for action, but the platforms are not standing behind their policies," said Joan Donovan, research director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School. "They are merely reacting to public pressure and therefore will be susceptible to politician influence for some time to come."

A Twitter spokesman confirmed that the company would now allow the link to the New York Post article to be shared because the information had spread across the internet and could no longer be considered private. He declined further comment.

A Facebook spokesman, Andy Stone, said: "Meaningful events in the world have led us to change some of our policies, but not our principles."

For nearly four years, the social media companies have had time to develop content policies to be ready for the 2020 election, especially after Russian operatives were found to have used the sites to sow discord in the 2016 election. But even with all the preparations, the volume of last-minute changes by Twitter and Facebook suggests that they still do not have a handle on the content flowing on their networks.

PRAKASH SINGH/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Twitter, led by Jack Dorsey, on Friday began letting users share links to an unsubstantiated New York Post article about Hunter Biden.

That raises questions, election experts said, about how Twitter and Facebook would deal with any interference on Election Day and in the days after. The race between Mr. Trump and his Democratic challenger, Joseph R. Biden Jr., has been unusually bitter, and the social media sites are set to play a significant role on Nov. 3 as distributors of information. Some people are already using the sites to call for election violence.

Alex Stamos, director of the Stanford Internet Observatory and a former Facebook executive, noted that after Mr. Trump recently made comments to his supporters to "go into the polls and watch very carefully," some companies — like Facebook — created new policies that forbid a political candidate to use their platforms to call for that action. The companies also prohibited candidates from claiming an election victory early, he said.

"These potential abuses were always covered by very broad policies, but I think it's smart to commit themselves to specific actions," Mr. Stamos said.

From the start, the New York Post article was problematic. It featured purported emails from Hunter Biden, a son of Joseph Biden, and discussed business in Ukraine. But the provenance of the emails was unclear, and the timing of their discovery so close to the election appeared suspicious.

So on Wednesday, Twitter blocked links to the article hours after it had been published. The company said sharing the article violated its policy that prohibits users from spreading hacked information. It also said the emails in the story contained private information, so sharing the piece would violate its privacy policies.

But after blocking the article, Twitter was blasted by Republicans for censorship. Many conservatives — including Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio and Ms. McEnany — reposted the piece to bait the company into taking down their tweets or locking their accounts.

Twitter soon said it could have done more to explain its decision. Jack Dorsey, Twitter's chief executive, said late Wednesday that the company had not provided enough context to users when they were prevented from posting the links.

His reaction set off a scramble at Twitter. By late Thursday, Vijaya Gadde, Twitter's top legal and policy official, said that the policy against sharing hacked materials would change and that the content would no longer be blocked unless it was clearly shared by the hackers or individuals working in concert with them. Instead, information gleaned from hacks would be marked with a warning label about its provenance, Ms. Gadde said.

The internal discussions continued. On Friday, Twitter users could freely post links to the New York Post article. The company had not added labels to tweets with the article as it said it would.

At Facebook, the recent policy changes have grabbed attention partly because the company said on Sept. 3 that it did not plan to make changes to its site until after the election. "To ensure there are clear and consistent rules, we are not planning to make further changes to our election-related policies between now and the official declaration of the result," Mr. Zuckerberg wrote in a blog post at the time.

Yet just a few weeks later, the changes started coming rapidly. On Oct. 6, Facebook expanded its takedown of the QAnon conspiracy group. A day later, it said it would ban political advertising after the polls closed on Election Day, with the ban lasting an undetermined length of time.

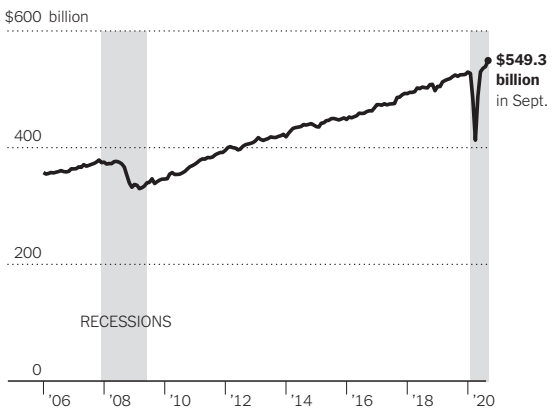
Days later, Mr. Zuckerberg also said Facebook would no longer allow Holocaust deniers to post their views to the site. And less than 24 hours after that, the company said it would disallow advertising related to anti-vaccination theories.

Facebook's Mr. Stone positioned the changes as a natural response to what it called "a historic election," as well as the coronavirus pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests.

"We remain committed to free expression while also recognizing the current environment requires clearer guardrails to minimize harm," he said.

But there is one change Facebook hasn't made. After reducing visibility of the New York Post article on its site on Wednesday and saying the article needed to be fact checked, the social network has continued to stick by that decision.

Monthly Retail Sales



Note: Seasonally adjusted advance monthly sales for retail and food services

Source: Commerce Department

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ANDREW SPEAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The baking aisle of a Kroger grocery store in West Chester, Ohio.

Consumer Sales Are Rising As More Sink Into Poverty

By MICHAEL CORKERY and SAPNA MAHESHWARI

Eight million Americans have slipped into poverty since May, and there are 11 million fewer jobs than before the pandemic. And yet, for the fifth straight month, people continued to pull out their wallets and spend more on cars, sporting goods and clothing.

Consumer spending rose 1.9 percent in September, the Commerce Department said on Friday, more than twice the rate of increase that most economists had predicted. Retail sales have fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels and "jump started," according to one economist, a "nascent economic recovery."

"We thought we would see negative impacts on spending by now, but these are surprisingly strong sales gains," said Scott Anderson, an economist at Bank of the West. "We thought catastrophic joblessness would weigh more on confidence, but it has risen."

These seemingly contradictory trends — recovering consumer spending on the one hand and worsening poverty on the other — partly reflect the inequalities in the American economy that have existed for years, but have been amplified by the pandemic.

While millions of Americans have lost their jobs and are struggling to pay their rent and utilities bills, millions of others continue to work remotely, enjoying rising stock market investments, strong home values and low interest rates that are making big purchases like a new car easier.

"It is a two-tiered world," Beth Ann Bovino, chief U.S. economist at S&P Global, said.

The spending power of lower-income Americans had been boosted by the trillions of dollars of stimulus that the federal government has pumped into the economy, increasing household incomes. But economists have been warning for months that most of that money, which came in the form of checks this spring and $600 a week in additional unemployment benefits, has already been spent.

"Lower-income households don't have the spending power that they once had," Mr. Anderson said. "A lot of them, unfortunately, are getting lost in the shuffle, and it is partly what you are seeing in this data."

Strong auto sales were the largest factor behind the spending increase in September. Vehicle sales rose 3.6 percent from August, as more Americans who are forsaking air travel during the pandemic have upgraded their automobiles, or bought a car for the first time. Gasoline sales also increased slightly, suggesting that more people were venturing out as schools, offices and businesses reopened.

There were other signs in the data that, even as cases of the coronavirus began to surge across the country last month, people's shopping habits were returning to some level of normalcy.

Sales at clothing and department stores rose 11 percent, which some economists attributed to back-to-school spending, which typically happens earlier in the summer. Sales of health and beauty products, which seemed less necessary in the heart of the lockdowns this spring, increased 1.5 percent.

At grocery stores, which had experienced record sales and profits fueled by panic buying at the start of the pandemic, sales were mostly flat.

The early weeks of the pandemic were disastrous for retail sales, which dropped 8.3 percent in March and then fell 16.4 percent in April. Sales bounced back strongly in May and June, when stores reopened after lockdowns, but growth has since slowed. Sales rose 0.6 percent in August, after a 0.9 percent gain in July.

Sustaining growth through the holidays could be challenging.

In a research note on Friday, Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said the September sales increase was a "welcome" sign for the health of the economy.

"The problem is the virus," he wrote. "Cases are rising at only a modest pace in the more populous states, but we can't be sure that will continue, and the message from states where cases have risen to very high levels is that economic activity begins to suffer very quickly."

Mr. Shepherdson and other economists say sustaining sales growth through the holidays and into early next year could be challenging, unless Congress can pass another round of stimulus. Eventually, they say, the high unemployment rate in the service industry will begin to weigh on spending and eventually on white-collar sectors of the economy like finance and tech.

"The permanent scarring of the economy will go beyond airlines and small business owners," Mr. Anderson said. "No one will be untouched by this."

Spending Surge Increases Federal Deficit To $3.1 Trillion

By ALAN RAPPEPORT

WASHINGTON — The federal budget deficit soared to a record $3.1 trillion in the 2020 fiscal year, official figures showed on Friday, as the coronavirus pandemic fueled a surge in spending and a drop in tax receipts brought by households and businesses struggling with economic shutdowns.

The federal government spent $6.55 trillion in 2020, while tax receipts and other revenue trailed at $3.42 trillion. Much of the spending came from the $2.2 trillion economic relief package that Congress passed in March, which was financed by government borrowing. Total debt held by the public topped $21 trillion at the end of September, a record level.

The shortfall underscores the long-term economic challenge facing the United States as it tries to emerge from the sharpest downturn since the Great Depression. Interest rates are low — meaning it costs less for the government to borrow money — but the ballooning deficit is already complicating policy choices as Republicans resist another large stimulus package, citing concerns about the U.S. debt burden.

The deficit — the gap between what the U.S. spends and what it earns through tax receipts and other revenue — was $2 trillion more than what the White House's budget forecast in February. It was also three times as large as the 2019 deficit of $984 billion.

According to the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, the nation's debt has now surpassed the size of the economy, amounting to 102 percent of gross domestic product.

"It is hard to believe we now owe a full year's worth of output," said Maya MacGuineas, president of the committee. "We weren't supposed to cross this threshold for over a decade, but here we are."

Ms. MacGuineas noted that the last time America's debt exceeded the size of the economy was at the end of World War II, and that it took years of balanced budgets to bring it down.

The annual deficit was the largest since 2009, when the United States recorded a $1.4 trillion shortfall during the financial crisis.

SAMUEL CORUM/GETTY IMAGES

Russell T. Vought, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, printed the budget proposal in February.

In a statement accompanying the annual budget report, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin highlighted the extraordinary level of money that has been pumped into the economy this year to combat the recession and prop up the economy. Russell T. Vought, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, said that as the recovery continued, the fiscal picture would improve as companies hired back workers and people began spending more money.

Federal agencies including the Treasury Department, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services saw their spending soar as they funneled loans to small businesses, subsidized farmers and provided funding for hospitals. Much of the money also went to households through stimulus checks and enhanced unemployment benefits that gave workers an extra $600 per week.

The nation's debt has surpassed the size of the economy.

That spending was crucial to preventing families from falling into poverty and keeping businesses afloat. New research from the Federal Reserve released this week showed that Americans used one-time stimulus checks to save money and pay off debt.

Households spent just 29 percent of the money they received earlier this year, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said in a post on its website, citing its Survey of Consumer Expectations, conducted in June and August. Another 36 percent of the cash was saved, while 35 percent was used to pay down debt.

Even the most ardent deficit hawks agreed that the virus, which shut down large swaths of the economy and tossed millions out of work, necessitated a huge fiscal response.

But with Election Day approaching, Republican lawmakers have shown little appetite for more spending, despite the fact that millions remain unemployed and previous aid has largely dried up. While the White House and Democrats want to bankroll another $1 trillion-plus aid package, Senate Republicans are preparing a $500 billion bill to vote on later this month. Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Democrats support a $2.2 trillion package, while President Trump has endorsed going higher than the $1.8 trillion proposal the White House previously proposed.

On Thursday, he told Mr. Mnuchin, who is leading the negotiations, to make a bigger offer and said, "go big or go home."

The Treasury secretary acknowledged this week that the deficit is a long-term concern but said now is not the time to worry about bringing it down. Given low interest rates and the severe nature of a health crisis that has stalled so many parts of the economy, he said the deficit was not an immediate priority.

"When you're in a war — and we're in a war against Covid — you spend what it takes to get rid of it," Mr. Mnuchin said on Wednesday at the Milken Institute conference. "And that's what we've done."

Treasury officials had no estimate for next year's deficit, but it is likely to be smaller unless another aid package is approved.

It appears unlikely that either Mr. Trump or his Democratic opponent, Joseph R. Biden Jr., would make significant progress in reducing the debt. While Mr. Trump has promised to tackle the deficit in a second term, he has also pledged to continue cutting taxes for individuals and corporations, while offering few details about how those would be paid for.

Mr. Biden wants to raise taxes on corporations and the wealthiest Americans to help pay for additional spending on health care, infrastructure and education. But those tax increases, while estimated to raise about $4.3 trillion, would not completely cover the costs of his spending proposals, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

Low Rates Aside, Upsizing Now May Not Be Your Best Idea

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

First, the money. A home is an asset with a value that could make up a substantial proportion of your net worth. Hopefully, that value grows over time. And right now, with mortgage rates at record lows, it's tempting to go as big as possible.

But there are other things you could do with any extra money that you might otherwise put toward a bigger or better home. That incremental amount could go into retirement savings instead, or a 529 college savings plan. Or you could give it away to people who don't have the luxury of contemplating these sorts of trade-offs.

The case for staying small need not be some scolding ode to parsimony. A more modest home can leave more money in the budget for travel, expensive hobbies, or a getaway abode by a lake or mountain. Living smaller also helps the environment.

Now, those emotions. Spending more for a bigger dwelling doesn't make sense unless there is a high psychic return on the extra space. But if you've never lived bigger, it's hard to predict how much happier it will make you. And how do you weigh that qualitative return against quantitative trade-offs rendered in dollar figures?

There are some facts to keep in mind.

Ever since the collapse in the housing market during the last big recession, the idea that your house is not, in fact, an investment vehicle has become common. Wise as this is, it doesn't change the fact that a home is still an asset. And you should think hard about how any such asset might appreciate (or not) over time.

So much of any growth will depend on where you live, and too many of the these kinds of conversations are framed around places like the San Francisco Bay Area, parts of Brooklyn or gentrifying areas where there have been enormous gains in property values.

Nationally, however, the numbers aren't so steep. Data from CoreLogic's home-price index shows that over the past 20 years, the average increase for single-family homes priced at 125 percent or more of the median home price in their region is just 3.4 percent annually. For homes at the 75 to 100 percent level, the gain has been 4.3 percent.

Consider maintenance costs, too. A newer home — say, less than five years old — might require just 1 percent of the purchase price in annual expenses, said John Bodrozic, a co-founder of HomeZada, a tool that helps owners keep track of costs and improvements. But if your home is 25 years old or more, 4 percent is a better estimate. If history is any judge, putting money into stocks over periods measured in decades should yield a better return.

Good professionals really can help determine what "return" ought to mean to you, though. Joe Chappius, a financial planner in Buffalo, suggested one basic strategy: Consult a few elders.

Find someone you trust who traded up 10 years ago, Mr. Chappius said. Very few of his clients who did so now think it was the best financial decision they ever made. More often, they have two rooms they rarely use.

A financial pro can also help you prioritize, including getting

ROBERT NEUBECKER

you and your spouse, if you have one, to agree on goals and dreams — and what's worth sacrificing in the present to achieve all of the former and reach for some of the latter.

Once that baseline is set, they have specialized software that can make talking about the financial trade-offs easier. Mr. Chappius and Jeff Wolniewicz, partners in the firm Complete Wealth, walked me through their process this week using numbers that are typical for their home-seeking (or home-reaching) clients.

For any given trading-up transaction, a client might need to move $1,000 more per month to the housing budget. What might that mean right now? Perhaps it's just a severe reduction in travel or eating out. But if money is already pretty tight, it could mean that no saving for a child's college can even begin — and a $500 slug of monthly savings can ultimately pay for well over half of the cost of a state school.

Or trading up could require a reduction in retirement savings that might extend your time in the work force. For people who love what they do, perhaps that's no problem. But how prepared are you to decide that now?

"We're using the numbers to bring things back to a values-based conversation," Mr. Wolniewicz said.

There may be a compromise solution if you're craving more space. An addition to your home might be possible — and cheaper than a move. Ditto an interior renovation that allows for more people to be more productive without interruption.

"The thing about Covid is that it's hopefully a short period, but it really puts a very fine point on the need for flexible spaces that can do double duty," said Sarah Susanka, who has been preaching that gospel ever since 1998, when her book "The Not So Big House" came out. "It's an acoustical issue."

Danika Waddell, a financial planner in Seattle, suggested another framing question: What might you regret if you stay small?

Get granular here and think beyond the pandemic, if you possibly can.

Is your love of hospitality and large gatherings one that you would act on frequently? Hosting Sunday supper each week in a newly oversized great room can bring joy beyond measure. But maybe you're just letting your desire to host a few holidays each year dictate your feelings about a six-figure real estate decision.

If you're a parent, are you fine with your house not being the place where the gang gathers? (Or would you actually rather not have teenagers hooking up in the basement guest room or smoking pot in the yard?)

And when relatives come to visit, will you regret having to put them up in a hotel? Maybe not! But if you want them around for an entire season each year, for many years to come, the bigger house could make sense if you are certain.

"The people who are generally the most happy are the ones who avoid the more, more, more and understand what is enough for them," Mr. Wolniewicz said. "That takes courage, to stand firm on what your enough is, especially if it's in contrast to what the world says you should want more of."

Streaming Services Race To Put Nov. 3 in the Plot

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

of the conversation when the conversation was happening.

"There is going to be exhaustion a year from now," he said in a recent interview. "Now is when you want to release it."

Hollywood rarely shies from politics. This election cycle, however, a plethora of movies, documentaries and TV miniseries are hitting the marketplace with immediate relevance. That stands in contrast to the usual industry practice of waiting for events to pass into history before depicting them onscreen. Think Oliver Stone's "JFK" or Spike Lee's "Malcolm X."

(Mr. Sorkin's "Chicago 7" falls into that category, too, though the nationwide protests this summer give it urgency, as does Mr. Sorkin's meant-for-the-moment dialogue like having Abbie Hoffman, one of the Chicago 7 activists, say when he testifies during the trial, "I think the institutions of our democracy are wonderful things which right now are populated by some terrible people.")

"I can't think of any writer-director who ever had the opportunity I had, to write about the collapse of a building while it was still collapsing," said Billy Ray, who began working on "The Comey Rule" in 2018 when Mr. Comey, the former F.B.I. director, released his memoir, "A Higher Loyalty." The miniseries, which features Brendan Gleeson as President Trump, generated mostly positive reviews, and the first episode was seen by 2.5 million people across various platforms and the second by 2.1 million.

Whether these projects can influence the election is another matter. And with less than three weeks until Election Day, the window to reach undecided voters is quickly closing anyway.

"The percentage of voters who are swayable in the states that matter are 2 to 5 percent," said Tanya Somanader, the chief content officer for Crooked Media, a left-leaning political content company, who was a strategist in the Obama administration. "And that number is collapsing by the day because people are voting early."

That won't stop Hollywood from trying. Last month, Amazon Studios released the documentary "All In: The Fight for Democracy," which tracks Stacey Abrams's run for governor in Georgia in 2018 and its contested result and examines the history of voter suppression in the United States. The film was accompanied by a 22-city bus tour and an extensive voter-registration drive.

"We are hoping to inspire people to fight for what is theirs," said Liz Garbus, who directed the film with Lisa Cortés.

On Wednesday, HBO will debut "537 Votes," a documentary about the disputed 2000 presidential election. The director Adam McKay ("Vice") is the executive producer. On the same day, the magazine The Atlantic will unveil its first documentary, "White Noise," about the rise of far-right nationalism.

Next Friday, Amazon will start streaming "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm," a sequel to the 2006 satire starring Sacha Baron Cohen as the clueless Kazakh journalist Borat. While the plot has not been revealed, the film's trailer shows Mr. Cohen's alter-ego crashing the Conservative Political Action Conference while Vice President Mike Pence is speaking. (Mr. Cohen also plays Mr. Hoffman in "Chicago 7.")

Showtime will debut Alexandra Pelosi's "American Selfie: One Nation Shoots Itself," an examination of the country's hyperpartisan landscape over the past 12 months, next Friday, too. "Us Kids," a documentary centered on the teenagers turned activists from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the March for Our Lives movement, will become available via Alamo Drafthouse Virtual Cinema on Oct. 30.

BEN MARK HOLZBERG/SHOWTIME, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jeff Daniels stars as James Comey and Holly Hunter portrays Sally Yates in Showtime's "The Comey Rule."

Mr. Gibney began his "Totally Under Control" project in May after the coronavirus ripped through New York, killing one of his friends and putting another one on a ventilator. He and his co-directors, Ophelia Harutyunyan and Suzanne Hillinger, trace the administration's delayed response, its failure to secure proper protective equipment and the subsequent politicization of science regarding the pandemic.

The documentary features, among others, Dr. Rick Bright, the whistle-blower from the Department of Health and Human Services; Kathleen Sebelius, the department's secretary under President Barack Obama; and Max Kennedy Jr., a grandson of Robert F. Kennedy who sent an anonymous complaint in April to Congress detailing the "dangerous incompetence" of the Trump coronavirus task force, for which he was a volunteer.

"I hope it makes a huge difference," Mr. Gibney said of his film, which became available on demand on Tuesday and will stream on Hulu next week.

"It's a crime film, and the crimes we discovered were fraud and negligence," he added. "If you are looking at it from the perspective of 'Did this administration do all it could to protect American citizens?' — that's an important piece of information to have when you are going to the voting booth."

Hollywood's liberal leanings have long been known, and that has not changed this year. Last month on Instagram, Dwayne Johnson announced his support for Joseph R. Biden Jr., the Democratic presidential nominee. Mr. Johnson was soon followed by Taylor Swift. Last week, a group of naked actors including Sarah Silverman, Mark Ruffalo and Tiffany Haddish demonstrated in a viral video the proper way to send in a mail-in ballot.

Their efforts are not usually welcomed by those on the right. "It's not that they actually reject entertainment," Ms. Somanader of Crooked Media said, "but rather they feel they are being rebuked by the people who entertain them."

That's not stopping Mr. Sorkin, who argues that actors have as much of a right to their political opinion as dentists do. The day before "The Trial of Chicago 7" became available on Netflix, HBO Max showed the "The West Wing Special," a restaging of an "ode to voting" episode of the NBC show Mr. Sorkin created in 1999, to promote voting via Michelle Obama's When We All Vote initiative.

With "The West Wing" often seen as a "liberal fantasy," Mr. Sorkin expects a withering response from conservatives. He even wrote his defense into remarks the actor Bradley Whitford read at the start of the special:

"We understand that most people don't appreciate the benefit of unsolicited advice from actors, and if HBO Max was going to point a camera at the 10 smartest people in America, we would gladly clear the stage for them," Mr. Whitford said. "But the camera is pointed at us, and we think that the risk of appearing obnoxious is too small a reason not to do something if we can get even one person to the polls."

Ex-Fox News Host Repeats Virus Misinformation on His Show

By TIFFANY HSU

In the latest episode of Eric Bolling's show from the Sinclair Broadcast Group, "America This Week," the conservative broadcaster perpetuated misinformation about the origin of the coronavirus pandemic and measures that help slow its spread.

In the episode, which was posted to several Sinclair station websites this week, Mr. Bolling made claims, which scientists have widely disputed, that the coronavirus was manipulated in a Chinese laboratory. He also questioned the effectiveness of face coverings and lockdowns, despite evidence that they are instrumental in limiting transmissions.

"It's damn near certain this virus has to have been altered in a Chinese lab," Mr. Bolling said in his monologue. "No way this is your routine 'guy and girlfriend chow down on an uncooked bat turned into a virus.'"

Mr. Bolling, a former Fox News host, also said that "closing down cities and economies and wearing your tube socks around your face hasn't slowed the virus down."

In an interview on Friday, after the liberal media watchdog group Media Matters for America raised concerns about the episode, Mr. Bolling said the segment was being edited to remove some of his statements before airing this weekend on dozens of Sinclair stations. Sinclair, which is known for its conservative stances, owns or operates nearly 200 television stations and reaches 39 percent of American households.

Sinclair says that it will edit out some of Eric Bolling's claims.

Ronn Torossian, a Sinclair spokesman, said in a statement that Mr. Bolling "did not provide necessary context when providing commentary about the recent rise in new coronavirus cases."

"Eric remains committed to discussing important issues, but in this instance recognizes that his words may be misinterpreted," Mr. Torossian said.

Mr. Bolling stood by his unsubstantiated claims that Chinese scientists had tampered with the virus. He did not cite studies to support his belief but said, "I read a lot," adding, "Some of my closest friends are doctors." On Friday, an online version of the show still included those claims.

Mr. Bolling's claim followed similar statements by a guest last month on the Fox News show hosted by Tucker Carlson. Scientists have concluded that the coronavirus "is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus" and linked it to bats. Suggestions that the virus was engineered at some point to become more dangerous are "just nonsense," other scientists said.

Mr. Bolling has been a conduit for virus-related misinformation before. In a July segment of his Sinclair show, he interviewed the discredited scientist Judy Mikovits, who was featured in a debunked video called "Plandemic." Ms. Mikovits shared false claims linking Dr. Anthony Fauci, a national infections-disease expert, to the creation of the coronavirus. Sinclair pulled the segment, saying on Twitter that it was "not appropriate to air."

In the interview, Mr. Bolling said his comment on face coverings was not meant seriously. "For two years, I've worn masks on airplanes," he added. "I believe in masks."

Dr. Robert Redfield, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said last month that the pandemic could be controlled in six to 12 weeks if all Americans wore face coverings, calling them "the most important, powerful public health tool we have."

Virus Briefing

BEVERAGES

Coca-Cola Pulls the Plug On Tab, an Icon of the 1970s

The Coca-Cola Company is discontinuing Tab, its first diet soda brand that became a cultural icon in the 1970s and retains a small but loyal cult following to this day.

For years, rumors have circulated that the soda giant was planning to end the brand, which was introduced in 1963 and was initially marketed to women with the message that the zero-calorie beverage would keep their waistlines trim.

The possibility of its demise had prompted Tab's most devoted fans — who call themselves Tabaholics — to reach out to the company to complain and even sign petitions demanding that Coca-Cola keep Tab alive.

But this time, it is really over: Tab is going away amid an effort by Coca-Cola to "retire select underperforming products" by the end of this year, the company announced on Friday.

Coca-Cola said that plans to streamline the company's beverage brands were "underway well before the coronavirus outbreak," but that supply chain disruptions and changing consumer behavior the pandemic brought prompted the company to speed its efforts.

Other outgoing products from Coca-Cola include Odwalla, Coca-Cola Life, Diet Coke Fiesty Cherry and Sprite Lymonade.

GILLIAN FRIEDMAN

U.S. ECONOMY

Hotel Companies Beg President to Provide Relief

Big hotel companies, desperate for relief as pandemic lockdowns keep travelers away, are going to new lengths in their quest for help: Instead of asking the Treasury and the Federal Reserve to expand an emergency loan program so they can gain access to it, they're asking President Trump.

The Fed is running a series of emergency loan programs in response to the pandemic recession, including one that supports bank lending to midsize businesses. The Fed's loans are protected against credit losses by insurance money held by the Treasury, and Secretary Steven Mnuchin has substantial say over how much risk the programs take on.

Mr. Trump has basically no control over the programs, which the Fed designs and runs, because the central bank answers to Congress and not to the White House.

But Mr. Trump is Mr. Mnuchin's boss, and so this week, chief executives from the big hotel chains, including Hyatt, Marriott and Hilton, made a plea directly to the president.

"We strongly urge you to use your executive authority to direct the Treasury to encourage the Federal Reserve to amend and expand the Main Street Lending Program," they wrote in a letter dated Oct. 15.

The hotels are asking for an asset-based lending facility — one that ties loans to physical collateral like real estate, for instance — or more flexible standards around how indebted borrowers are allowed to be. They have pushed for such changes for months to little avail, making their case to the Fed and Treasury directly and to members of Congress.

JEANNA SMIALEK

Bailout of Trucking Company Comes Under Scrutiny

The Trump administration has failed to provide justification for why a struggling trucking company, YRC Worldwide, was entitled to a $700 million loan that came from a pot of money intended to help companies considered critical to national security, according to report released on Friday by the Congressional Oversight Commission.

YRC was the first firm to get a loan through a $17 billion program set up by Congress in March to help companies designated as critical to national security weather the pandemic. The loan, awarded in July, came after the Treasury Department said YRC qualified "based on a certification by the secretary of defense that YRC is critical to maintaining national security."

The funding quickly drew scrutiny for a number of reasons, including YRC's shaky financial position before the virus, its web of connections to the White House and the administration's rationale that a trucking business shipping supplies to military bases is crucial to the nation's safety. YRC lost more than $100 million in 2019 and was being sued by the Justice Department over claims it defrauded the federal government for a seven-year period.

In responses to the Congressional Oversight Commission, which was created to monitor how the stimulus funds are being spent, the Treasury Department and the Department of Defense shed little light on why YRC was approved for the loan.

Brook DeWalt, a Department of Defense spokesman, declined to comment, saying the department would have to "take a look" at the report first. *ALAN RAPPEPORT*

Ground Shifts for Real Estate Investing

More people are putting money into specific buildings and moving it away from cities and retail.

Wealth Matters

By PAUL SULLIVAN

Peter Starrett and Sharon Arthofer are wealthy investors who come from different business backgrounds, but both are looking to put more of their money into an asset that has suffered during the pandemic: real estate.

For many investors, that would mean choosing funds that buy scores of buildings around the country. Instead, Mr. Starrett, who ran several retail companies before becoming a private equity executive, and Ms. Arthofer, an entrepreneur, are investing directly in specific buildings in just a few places.

The strategy is riskier — putting several million dollars, for instance, into one residential building versus using that same amount to invest in dozens of buildings. If the investment works out, however, it will offer greater returns and tax benefits.

That's a big if, especially in the pandemic, when certain classes of properties, like offices, stores and restaurants, have been hit particularly hard by vacancies and tenants unable to pay their rent. But people like Mr. Starrett and Ms. Arthofer argue that they have more control when they invest in particular buildings with a group of other individuals.

"There's no doubt this has really been an eye opener," Ms. Arthofer, of San Marino, Calif., said. "Brick-and-mortar retail has completely changed."

Or as Mr. Starrett, who lives in Los Angeles, put it: "I had big questions about it in March when I couldn't do anything. But I've been through a few of these downturns in the past, and I've learned patience."

Real estate is likely to remain a favorite of wealthy investors because it can be owned indefinitely, has predictable cash flow and usually appreciates in value. But investors are looking for different types of real estate than they were at the beginning of the year, according to a report released on Monday by Withersworldwide, an international law firm. The firm talked to people who work in property and land development as well as academics, architects and hospitality workers about what the future of real estate might look like.

Before the pandemic, investors in cities like New York and London, where retail and residential properties profited because people lived close together. With coronavirus flare-ups in many cities around the world, investors now are looking for the opposite, said Vasi Yiannoulis-Riva, a partner in the real estate group at Withersworldwide.

ROZETTE RAGO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sharon Arthofer, an entrepreneur from San Marino, Calif., says the pandemic "has really been an eye opener" and has changed priorities.

A strategy for the risk tolerant that can offer greater returns and tax benefits than funds.

Commercial property deals in big urban areas have stalled, and she has been working with wealthy individuals buying estates outside cities like New York.

"I've done more residential deals in Connecticut in the last few months than in the past couple of years," Ms. Yiannoulis-Riva said. "We're seeing a lot more ultra-high-net-worth folks interested in larger properties that have offices and pools. Their belief is even when people return to work, they probably won't commute five days a week anymore."

As a result, she said, some of the savviest and most risk-tolerant investors have been looking at commercial buildings in the suburbs. These buildings could be part of a new model for companies that want employees to return to the office but can't accommodate them all with social distancing at their headquarters.

Investors are also looking at residential developments that reimagine how business can use their ground floors. Instead of being anchored by restaurants or stores, as they were at the start of the year, these properties may have tenants, like a pharmacy or a doctor's office, that will remain through future pandemics. Investors are also looking at industrial spaces that can serve as a warehouses for shippers and e-commerce companies.

For people who own retail or office space where the tenants are struggling to pay rent, Ms. Yiannoulis-Riva has blunt advice: Hold on, if you can. "Right now, it's going to be hard to sell unless you're selling at a discount or it's a distressed property with a lender who's putting pressure on you to unload it at a discount," she said.

Ms. Arthofer said she had focused on multifamily buildings ever since she helped her mother manage a real estate portfolio that her father had build up in the Washington area. Ms. Arthofer and her husband now have 40 percent of their investments in real estate.

"I'm a great believer in multifamily," Ms. Arthofer said. "People pay their rent. They don't want to lose their homes. In our strip retail centers, there's roughly 75 percent who are paying and 25 percent who are not. But in our apartment buildings, 95 percent are paying their rent."

Ms. Arthofer and Mr. Starrett invested through a sponsor, Lion Real Estate Group, which finds the buildings. The group is betting that an emerging trend before the coronavirus — the attraction of young people to apartments in cities like Austin, Texas, and Nashville — will be a long-term winner.

That strategy has benefited from the uneven spread of the coronavirus, which has left those cities relatively spared, and from the drop in mortgage rates.

"You have to say, 'I don't know what is going to happen in three to five years,'" said Jeff Weller, managing principal and a founder of Lion Real Estate Group. But if you can lock in a 2.5 percent interest rate, he added, this is the lowest your rents are going to be, so you can also say, "My cash flow in Year 6 or 7 could be phenomenal."

Unlike investors in real estate funds, which often look to sell properties by a certain time and even unload their best-performing assets earlier to increase their rates of return, individual investors who buy buildings themselves can choose when or if they want to sell.

In group deals, though, they're limited partners, so while they receive many of the benefits of owning a property outright, the final say on when it is going to be sold is up to the general partners who brought the investors together.

Mark Holdsworth, founder and managing partner at Holdsworth Group, a family office, invested heavily in real estate after BlackRock bought the investment firm he helped found in 2018, Tennenbaum Capital Partners, in 2018. His focus has been on apartment buildings, and now real estate accounts for around 30 percent of his family office's investment portfolio, an amount he said he hoped to increase.

Mr. Holdsworth has often invested through sponsors who pull together other wealthy individuals to buy a building. Some of the properties have been sold sooner than he would have liked.

"Generally, I've been fortunate in that sponsors have gotten good premiums on the ones they've sold," Mr. Holdsworth said. "I'm always sorry to see the cash flow go. But I can put that money into another 1031 exchange."

That number refers to a section in the Internal Revenue Code that is the basis for most commercial real estate transactions. Section 1031 allows sellers of a property to avoid paying tax on the gains by buying a new property within a set amount of time. Real estate investors have used that section to build wealth for decades. But it could come to an abrupt end. Joseph R. Biden Jr. has vowed to end the preferential tax treatment if elected president.

And that has added urgency in an uncertain time. "If you're going to do it," Ms. Yiannoulis-Riva said, "get it done."

Reducing the Pain of a New Insurance Year

Many employers indicate that they will take on more of the costs of health coverage for workers.

Your Money Adviser

By ANN CARRNS

Open enrollment season is here again for workers fortunate enough to have health insurance through their job.

Workers could pay 4 to 5 percent more for their health premiums next year, according to various estimates of cost increases.

That's in line with increases in recent years, even as the pandemic continues to bring economic challenges and uncertainty for workers and their employers. People may use more medical services in 2021 because they put off routine care this year during the pandemic shutdowns. And the costs of treating coronavirus cases continue while the country awaits a vaccine.

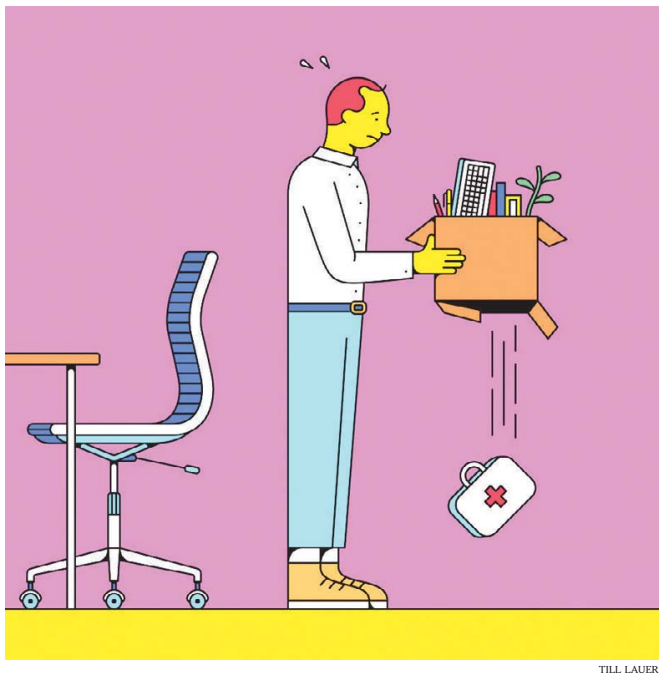
Still, many employers have indicated that they are trying to avoid major changes in health benefits for next year, to avoid jarring workers already stressed by the pandemic. Some employers may absorb much of the cost increase so workers pay about the same in premiums as they do this year, said Steve Wojcik, vice president for policy with the Business Group on Health.

"Quite a number are recognizing the financial challenges employees face," said Mr. Wojcik, whose organization represents employers on health care and benefit matters.

Of more than 1,100 employers responding to a survey by the benefits consultant Mercer since early July, more than half said they would make no changes of any kind that would reduce their costs in 2021. Just 18 percent said they would take steps to shift more costs to employees, like increasing co-payments and raising deductibles — the amount workers pay out of pocket for care before the plan starts paying.

"That's very good news for employees," said Tracy Watts, a senior consultant at Mercer.

This year, the average annual family health premium increased 4 percent to more than $21,000, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Workers, on average, contributed about $5,600 toward the cost, and employers paid the rest. (Kaiser surveyed 1,765 randomly selected employers with three or more workers. About half of the interviews were done before employers had felt the full effect of the pandemic.)



TILL LAUER

Most Americans have employer-provided health insurance. But during the pandemic, millions lost their jobs and related benefits. Estimates vary, but a study from the Commonwealth Fund published this month suggests that as many as 14.6 million people — 7.7 million workers and nearly seven million dependents — had lost employer-based coverage as of June because of the pandemic-induced recession.

It's unclear how many of those people lost coverage permanently. Some job losses may have been temporary, and some workers may have continued paying the full cost of their group coverage through the federal COBRA program. Others may have found coverage through Medicaid, the government health plan for the poor, or under the Affordable Care Act, which expanded Medicaid coverage in some states and authorized the sale of subsidized, private health plans through federal and state marketplaces.

(The future of the Affordable Care Act's safety net is uncertain, as a court challenge to the law awaits a hearing before the Supreme Court, scheduled for the week after the Nov. 3 presidential election.)

Like many workplace meetings, benefits discussions are moving online during the pandemic. Many employers are shifting to virtual enrollment fairs, instead of holding traditional gatherings in the office cafeteria.

In some employer offerings, Mercer said, workers can earn points for "visiting" online information booths and earn the chance to win gifts, like an iPad.

Care itself is also increasingly moving online. About half of large employers will offer more virtual care options in 2021, according to the Business Group on Health. Many people became more comfortable with seeing doctors remotely during the pandemic, whether for an online visit with their own doctor or a session with an independent telehealth provider, said Ellen Kelsay, president and chief executive of the group. Employers also expect to expand virtual options for mental health treatments, via online sessions, videos and apps.

Many employers said they expected to add on-site health clinics next year, according to the Business Group on Health. Some types of businesses, including manufacturing and health care companies, have found that on-site clinics have been useful for coronavirus screening and testing as well as for telehealth services, Ms. Kelsay said.

Q. and A. About Open Enrollment

How should I choose a health plan?

Open enrollment periods vary by employer, but typically last several weeks. When evaluating options, employees should be careful to review a plan's network of doctors and hospitals, said Cheryl Fish-Parcham, director of access initiatives with Families USA, a health care advocacy group. Some employers may offer "narrow" network plans at lower cost, but those plans typically include a limited number of doctors and a single hospital. Some plans are "open," meaning you can go outside the network for a fee, but others pay nothing unless you are within the network, she said.

You may want to call to confirm that your regular doctor participates in the plan. "Make sure it includes the providers you want," Ms. Fish-Parcham said.

If you take medication regularly for a chronic condition, she added, make sure the plan's prescription benefit covers it.

If your employer offers multiple plan choices, said Tracy Watts, a senior consultant at Mercer, you should take the time to compare the total cost of coverage for each option — don't just look at the premiums. She advises taking the total premium and subtracting any contributions made by your employer, such as to a health savings account, to compare the cost of different plans.

"Do the math," she said.

To see your total potential financial exposure, add the plan deductible. If you are generally healthy and don't take regular medication, a plan with a higher deductible may save you money. If you can't afford unexpected costs, a lower deductible — typically with a higher premium — may be the best option. The average deductible for an individual is $1,644, Kaiser found.

Theresa Adams, senior knowledge adviser at the Society for Human Resource Management, said many workers didn't take enough time to evaluate benefits. She encouraged them to make use of online tools offered by their employers to help choose options and to reach out with questions.

How much can I contribute to a health savings account in 2021?

Contribution limits ticked up for next year, the Internal Revenue Service announced. The maximum contribution is $3,600 for an individual and $7,200 for family coverage. (People 55 and older can save an extra $1,000.) H.S.A.s, however, are available only with specific types of health plans with high deductibles — at least $1,400 for individual coverage and $2,800 for family coverage for 2021. Typically, your employer will specify if a plan is H.S.A. qualified.

Some plans have a different option, called a health care flexible spending account. You can contribute to it before taxes, via paycheck withdrawals, to pay for care and products that your health plan doesn't cover. Contribution limits are lower than with an H.S.A., and if you change jobs, your flexible spending account doesn't go with you, as an H.S.A. does.

When is open enrollment for the Affordable Care Act marketplace?

According to Healthcare.gov, open enrollment for coverage starting on Jan. 1 runs from Nov. 1 through Dec. 15. Open enrollment for state-run marketplaces may vary.

The legal challenge to the health law before the Supreme Court isn't expected to affect this year's open enrollment, as the court's decision probably wouldn't come before next summer.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR LLORENTE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lee Sims Chocolates, owned by Valerie Vlahakis, made do for six months with curbside service and online sales. "I want five feet of chocolate in the customer's face," Ms. Vlakahis's father once said when designing a display.

Bursting With Chocolate and Customers

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

nies into children's baskets, they knew Easter always brought shoulder-to-shoulder shopping down the aisle.

To remind Ms. Vlahakis of her inherited responsibility, she keeps a sign that reads "DON'T SCREW IT UP" above her desk. In short order, she halted the two manufacturing lines in the off-site kitchen, laid off workers and sent a mass email directing the 3,000 customers in her database to the store's website, which was previously an afterthought.

To help finish the Easter and Passover rush, one employee worked with Ms. Vlahakis in a back room. Online orders came all the way from California and Alaska, where grandchildren of former Jersey City residents had moved over the years. Those sales, along with a successful bid for disaster relief, steadied the enterprise. Now it's time to build up inventory again.

"It's crazy," Ms. Vlahakis said. "I'm tense about how things are going to be. I've got a broken hydraulic pump in the kitchen that is going to set us back. Life!"

Such is the challenge for retail shops as the economy looks to rebound from the pandemic's costly lockdowns. After filing multiple relief applications, Ms. Vlahakis was ready to give up, but her accountant filed again without her knowledge and received an $8,000 grant from the Small Business Administration. That also made her eligible for a 30-year loan of $76,000 at 3.75 percent interest, which she accepted.

Both eased her ability to pay medical insurance for employees and bring them back. With that secured, conversations with sales representatives switched from health concerns to commerce.

"It has gone from 'Is everyone OK?' to 'Are you ready to buy again?'" Ms. Vlahakis said.

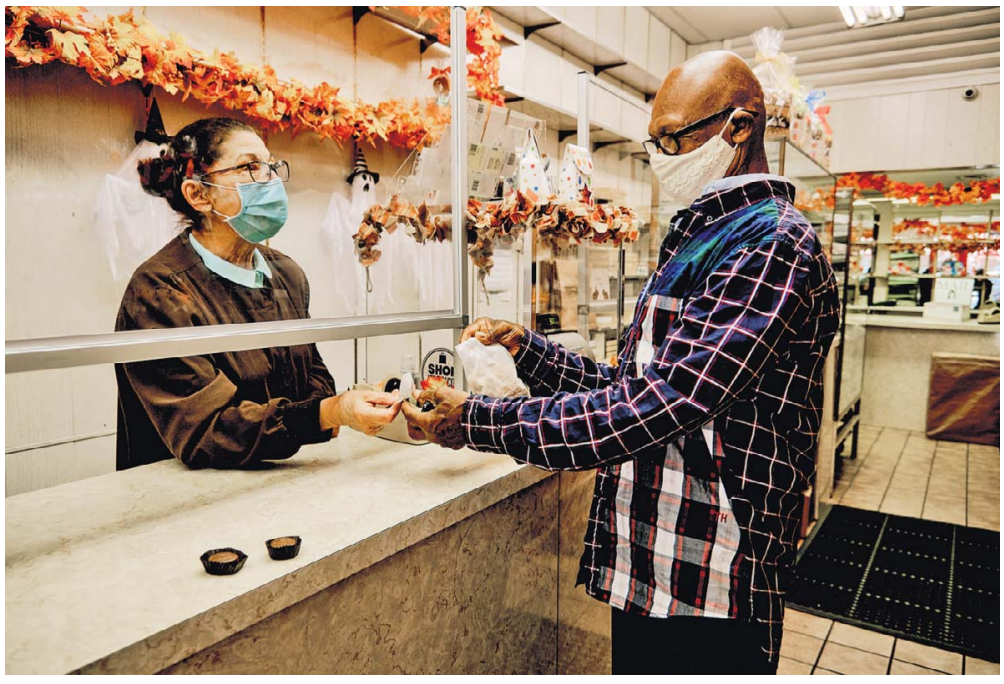
Her grandfather George Sousane, who immigrated from Sparta in Greece, bought the shop with a partner in the 1940s, when it was a soda fountain and candy establishment. By 1955, her parents, Catherine and Nicholas, had taken over and shifted to chocolate only.

Nicholas Vlahakis, a retired Marine, stood 6 foot 4, smoked cigars and could tell you to the penny what was coming out of every square inch of the store. Catherine wore blazers and skirts, drew customers in with her polite demeanor and wrote down their favorite confections on index cards that she kept in a Rolodex.

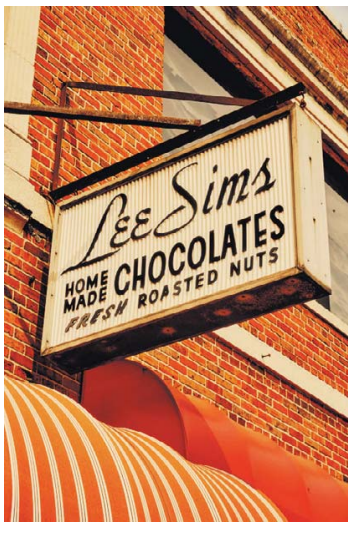
They had fierce debates over what went in the window. He was an aggressive marketer, who, when designing the showcase just inside the front door, said, "I want five feet of chocolate in the customer's face."

The husband and wife were strivers, and took pride in building the business. Catherine was the architect of their best-selling pyramids, stacking wrapped boxes filled with chocolates, cookies and nuts. And while she was likely to be found behind the scenes, Nicholas could be anywhere, including molding chocolate in an alcove beneath the stairs.

As their fortunes rose, they went from hand-dipping items to coating them with enrober machines, acquired storage space in neighboring basements and bought a three-story building a half-mile west for a bigger kitchen. Twice a year, they sent out brochures to increase their mail-order business. Each box of chocolates was emblazoned with the store's logo — an artist's palette with three paintbrushes — and the slogan "Candy Making as an Art."



Ms. Vlahakis, above, felt the toll of Covid-19 with an increase in bereavement gift orders for Sims, which her parents took over in the 1950s. She received disaster aid, letting her bring back employees. "It has gone from 'Is everyone OK?' to 'Are you ready to buy again?'" she said.



Ms. Vlahakis marveled at her parents' efforts. Her father was "like a mole, all over the place," but "my mother was something else," she said. "People come in and reminisce about my father, and I'm like, damn, she was as important, if not more."

Valerie was not groomed to take over the business. She and her sister, Alison, grew up in a Victorian house on Staten Island, where her extended family lived within a five-block radius. She planned to attend City College of New York and live with girlfriends in Manhattan, but her parents steered her to Bethany College, a small liberal arts school in West Virginia. The Greek Orthodox couple saw it as an opportunity for her to learn that the world was more than a collection of Jewish and Catholic enclaves.

Ms. Vlahakis studied history and political science, and later taught special education at Mark Twain Junior High in Coney Island before returning to the shop in the early 1990s after growing weary of the politics of the education world.

Alison had already taken the Lee Sims brand over the Bayonne Bridge to Staten Island, where she opened her own store, but their father was not thrilled with her sister's return. She started by studying the business at the molecular level, tracking chocolate's flow from the cooling tunnel to the cash register, through pumps and compressors. The family basked in the product's freshness, and ranked it somewhere above grab-and-go bars and below Godiva.

"There's no secret recipe," Ms. Vlahakis said. "It's physics and chemistry."

Her parents retired to Florham Park, N.J. At 76, her mother died of breast cancer, and Ms. Vlahakis, then living in Manhattan, moved in with her father, who continued to visit the store just to sit and look around. He died at 83 in 2000.

'It's crazy. I'm tense about how things are going to be. I've got a broken hydraulic pump in the kitchen that is going to set us back. Life!'

Valerie Vlahakis, the owner of Lee Sims Chocolates.

Ms. Vlahakis still lives in Florham Park, and reports to the Jersey City kitchen in her smock, which is the color of milk chocolate, by 8 a.m. each workday. She has no plans to retire, and her sister continues to operate the Staten Island store with her daughter, Kerry. Workers who started under her father tell Ms. Vlahakis that they can still smell his cigar smoke in the kitchen, where two copies of his obituary are displayed.

"Like it's haunted!" she said.

With the reopening, customers outnumber ghosts in the store again, and a chocolate carousel is spinning in the window. To protect herself and her staff at the counter, Ms. Vlahakis, who wears a mask and asks that customers do the same, installed plexiglass. Only three patrons can come in at a time, but a cross section of the diverse city parades through each day. One recent afternoon, an assistant prosecutor picked up five bags filled with boxes, a vagrant bought a bar with loose change and a St. Peter's University student asked whether she could use Apple Pay. Ms. Vlahakis does not take Apple Pay, but joked that she could dip an apple in chocolate instead.

Susan Butler was buying for a reunion with high school friends. She informed Ms. Vlahakis that when she was pregnant with her daughter, her daily exercise was walking a few blocks to Lee Sims to pick up chocolate and then walking back.

"Oh, when was that?" Ms. Vlahakis said.

"Well, she's 51 now!" Ms. Butler said.

During the lockdown, Ms. Butler worried that the shop would be closed forever. "It's a landmark, a piece of home," she said. "Most of the places we grew up with, like the bakery, are gone. It's memories to us."

Rob Giumarra, a 47-year-old actor who lives on a horse farm 50 miles north of Jersey City, first came three years ago with a girlfriend and, now three girlfriends removed, remains a patron. He asked for a quarter-pound of dark sea-salt caramels and a quarter-pound of truffles. As Ms. Vlahakis rang him up, Oreos dipped in dark chocolate caught his eye.

"Oh, ho, ho!" he said. "I didn't know you had those. Next time."

He paid and exited. Twenty-seven seconds later he returned.

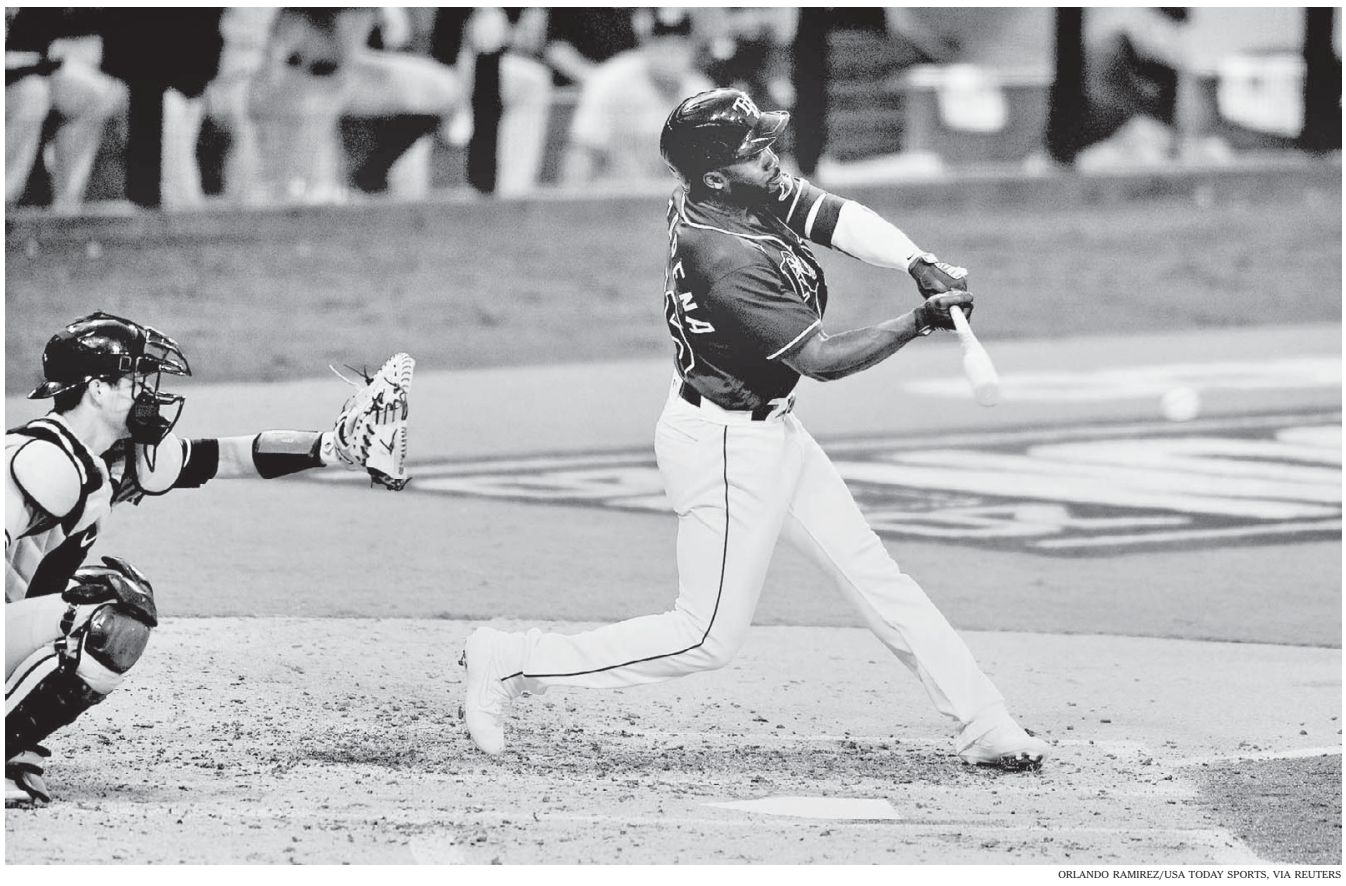
"Uh, oh. What did you forget?" Ms. Vlahakis said.

"Nothing," Mr. Giumarra said. "I need a quarter-pound of them Oreos. Too damn good."

From $38 a Month in Cuba to Playoff Stardom for the Rays

Growing in Mexico as a player and as a person.

By JAMES WAGNER



ORLANDO RAMIREZ/USA TODAY SPORTS, VIA REUTERS

The Rays outfielder Randy Arozarena has become the breakout star of the postseason after appearing in just 42 regular-season games over two seasons. "Everybody is just in awe every time he steps into the box," a teammate said.

SAN DIEGO — Randy Arozarena was born in Arroyos de Mantua, a small town on the northwest coast of Cuba, a four-and-a-half-hour drive from Havana. He has fond memories of dancing in the streets and playing soccer, his first love, with his brothers and his friends. He remembers his father watching him play for the Vegueros de Pinar del Río, a professional Cuban baseball team. His nickname is El Cohete Cubano ("The Cuban Rocket").

Make no mistake, Arozarena is Cuban. But deep down, his heart has become intertwined with the country only 30 minutes away from San Diego's Petco Park, where he has starred for the Tampa Bay Rays over the past two weeks.

Mexico is where Arozarena, 25, found a home after fleeing Cuba on a small boat five years ago, where his daughter was born two years ago and where he started a journey that vaulted him to the major leagues last year. And one day, he hopes to wear the country's uniform in international competitions.

"I feel like I represent Mexico," he said in Spanish during a recent interview. "I have a daughter in Mexico, and I'd do it in honor of her and for the part of my career that I spent in Mexico, and for all the friends I've made in Mexico."

Arozarena's experience is familiar to many of his fellow Cuban-born players in Major League Baseball. The island is their homeland, but dozens have escaped the communist country to chase their dreams, often putting their lives in the hands of smugglers or taking harrowing boat rides.

Arozarena said that after his father died unexpectedly of an allergic reaction to shellfish in 2014 and he began feeling alienated by his team in Cuba — he was left off Pinar del Río's roster for the 2015 Caribbean Series in Puerto Rico despite hitting .291, as officials feared he might defect — he decided that he needed to leave to provide for his mother and two younger brothers.

"At 19, I earned more than my mom," Arozarena said. In his first season in Cuba, he said, he made $4 a month and then eventually $38 a month.

So in June 2015, Arozarena said, he took an eight-hour boat ride, and saw waves over 15 feet en route, to Isla Mujeres, just off the coast from Cancún. Defecting Cuban baseball players must establish residency in a third country before they can be cleared by the U.S. government and sign as free agents with an M.L.B. team. From where Arozarena lived in Cuba, Mexico was the shortest journey.

The list of people he knew in Mexico upon his arrival: "No one."

Through an agent, Arozarena was eventually connected to Guillermo Armenta, then a scout for the M.L.B. Scouting Bureau who also oversaw player development for the Toros de Tijuana of the Mexican professional baseball league.

The first time Armenta worked with Arozarena, in Mérida — the largest city on the Yucatán Peninsula, not far from where Arozarena first arrived — he saw the athletic potential. Armenta said a skinny Arozarena first ran the 60-yard dash in 6.9 seconds, as fast as an average major league player. He eventually improved his time to 6.38 seconds.

"He ran like a lighting bolt," Armenta said.

After being asked to train Arozarena a few more times, Armenta convinced him that he should come to Tijuana to develop at the Toros' academy, which had sent other prospects to major-league organizations.

JOHN G MABANGLO/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

At the academy, Armenta said, Arozarena had so little to his name that he shared cleats and batting gloves with another prospect during workouts. He grew frustrated as M.L.B. teams scouted him and gave him looks in private work outs but declined to sign him.

One day, Armenta jokingly gave Arozarena what he thought was an impossible challenge: A team will sign you, he said, if you can walk on your hands from home plate to first base. Arozarena announced that he had done gymnastics in Cuba, flipped onto his hands and did it.

"I thought, 'Wow, this kid is a super athlete,'" Armenta said.

After struggling in his brief Mexican League debut with the Toros — five games in 2016 — Arozarena starred for their feeder team, the Toritos, winning a batting and stolen bases title, and refining his power stroke. The St. Louis Cardinals signed him to a $1.25 million contract.

Arozarena made his major-league debut with St. Louis on Aug. 14, 2019, and hit .300 in 20 at bats over 19 games. Tantalized by Arozarena's talent, the Rays traded for him, coughing up their top pitching prospect at the time.

His Rays debut this year was delayed until Aug. 30 because of a positive coronavirus test. While isolating, he said, he loaded up on chicken and rice — all he knew how to make — and did 300 push-ups a day. And although he wasn't an everyday player upon his return, he earned regular duties by hitting .281 with seven home runs in only 23 games.

"He came here without anything that he has now," Armenta said from Tijuana in a phone interview. "But look at him now. That's Randy."

In the postseason, Arozarena has been by far the best hitter in the Rays' offense. He blasted three home runs in five games to help topple the Yankees in the American League division series. And in a celebratory dance competition set to Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" after Tampa Bay won the series, Arozarena beat his teammate Brett Phillips by busting out the moves — including spinning on his head — that he used to do with his brothers and friends back in Cuba. It was the type of joy that has come to exemplify the Rays and Arozarena this postseason.

"Life is too short," he said. "And that's what how we do it: enjoying every moment that life brings."

In the first five games of the A.L. Championship Series against the Houston Astros, Arozarena crushed three more home runs. His six postseason home runs tied the record for the most by a rookie in major league history, matching Evan Longoria's mark with the Rays in 2008, the last time Tampa Bay had advanced this far.

"Everybody is just in awe every time he steps into the box," Rays catcher Mike Zunino said of Arozarena. Rays Manager Kevin Cash said Arozarena's accomplishments were more impressive given that he had no previous experience against many of the pitchers.

Arozarena wouldn't be doing this if not for his formative time in Mexico. At the Toros' academy, he grew not only as a player but as a person. Teammates and staff members there helped him buy his first cellphone and open social media accounts (he is now active on Instagram and hosts Facebook chats with fans).

Before the Rays swept Toronto in the best-of-three first round of the 2020 playoffs, Arozarena posed for a photo with a friend he hadn't seen since their days together at the Toros' academy: Alejandro Kirk, a Mexican catcher with the Blue Jays.

"He's Mexican because of his love of the homeland," Armenta said of Arozarena.

If Arozarena had his way, he would still play in the Mexican winter leagues, as he did for the Mayos de Navojoa in Sonora in three previous off-seasons. He said he loves living in Mérida because it is tranquil and the warm weather year round reminds him of his native island.

His family is around, too: his brother, Raiko, plays for the Cafetaleros de Chiapas, a third-tier Mexican soccer team, and his mother makes him Cuban food often — although he still indulges in his favorite Mexican dish, carne asada tacos.

"It's like living in Cuba," he said.

But of course, Arozarena is not. The only bond he feels with his homeland, he said, is the family and friends he left behind and the little town where he was born "where everyone knows me and everyone loves me, and where they loved my dad and I'm proud of being from." He added that "the situation in Cuba is bad."

Last year, President Trump reversed an agreement negotiated by the Obama administration in which M.L.B. and the Cuban Baseball Federation had eased the path for players to compete in the United States without defecting. Arozarena said he still hopes conditions will improve one day for all Cubans, including ballplayers.

"There's a lot of Cuban players that want to represent Cuba, for example, in a World Baseball Classic or an important tournament, but because of politics, they can't," he said, adding later, "For my part, I wouldn't represent Cuba until everything changes."

Until then, Arozarena has a few more goals: Win a World Series, have his mother watch him play in the major leagues in person, and become a Mexican citizen. He said he had already taken the citizenship test and was waiting to hear back in order to apply for a passport. He has time: The World Baseball Classic originally scheduled for 2021 was tentatively postponed two years because of the pandemic.

"I'm Cuban, but it'd be an honor for me to represent Mexico," he said, "and for my daughter."

College Football Keeps on Rolling, Blind to Any Consequences

KURT STREETER
SPORTS OF THE TIMES

The news that Alabama Coach Nick Saban tested positive this week for the coronavirus gave an uppercut jolt to big-time college football, which is doing all it can to continue with its season — pandemic be damned.

What will the jolt change?

So far, after announcing the positive test, Saban has said he feels fine. "I'm not really concerned that much about my health," he told reporters in a Zoom call from the isolation of his home.

On Friday, Alabama said Saban had tested negative in a follow-up examination. If he clears two more tests and still shows no symptoms, he could be allowed to coach on Saturday when his team plays Georgia.

This, of course, is a disease shrouded in uncertainty. Saban is 68 years old, an age that makes him particularly vulnerable should he fall ill. But no matter what happens, nothing that has transpired this week in Tuscaloosa will faze major college football, which keeps twisting itself into knots, straining to rationalize playing games amid a pandemic that has led to at least 217,800 deaths in the United States so far.

Even with infection possibly hitting its most famous coach, the mind-set of the college game's most vigorous enablers has not altered. They are bent on moving forward.

"He knows the risks," they say. "Let's keep going."

"Move on."

Just look at how this season is unfolding. We've got teams playing on campuses that are seeding outbreaks in cities, regions and towns. Tuscaloosa is just one of them.

None of that matters to those who would grasp for any rationalization just so they can have some college football.

Move on, they say. Go and play.

We've got teams traveling state to state on buses and planes. Teams staying in cramped hotels. Teams gathering in the confines of visitor locker rooms.

In its third game of this season, the Crimson Tide rolled into Oxford to play Mississippi. Saban, who regularly wears a mask and is a stickler when it comes to protecting against the virus, suggested that he might have been exposed to the virus during that trip.

With their sprawling counts of players, coaches and support personnel, the movement of college teams around the country for games every week doesn't exactly help slow down the virus. But to the enablers, the excuse makers, those who want to normalize sickness, that does not mean much.

Move on, they say. Move on.

Even if it means holding games in front of frothing crowds. After his team lost to Texas A&M last weekend, Florida Coach Dan Mullen said the boisterous crush at College Station had been a factor in the defeat. So he promptly called for 90,000 Florida fans to show up for the Gators' next game at home in Gainesville, against Louisiana State.

Virus outbreaks in teams and on campuses don't mean much to enablers.

Distancing? Crowd control? The virus? Why bother?

Then came karma. Florida reported this week that at least 19 of its players had tested positive. The Gators' battle this weekend against L.S.U., one of the most anticipated matchups of the erratic season, has been postponed.

Speaking of L.S.U., most of its players have had the virus this season, according to Coach Ed Orgeron.

So it goes. Rutgers. Clemson. North Carolina. Virginia Tech. Kansas State. All of these teams, each with supposedly tight protocols, have experienced outbreaks. Mississippi is grappling with the virus. Vanderbilt cannot play this weekend because so many of its players are infected.

No worries. Move on.

After first announcing the suspension of football until after Jan. 1, the Big Ten and the Pac-12 reversed course and bowed to the need to chase the tens of millions in television revenue by holding a season. By early November, both conferences will be playing again.

Both claim to have a magic formula: better testing and increased safety measures.

If this magic formula does not work as planned, if more coaches and players fall ill, expect a hail of the now typical excuses from college football enablers.

And expect little to change.

This virus starts as an isolated ember before becoming a blazing fire. It hardly stays confined to the individual. What happens when the young quarterback, who may not even have symptoms or shrugs them off, goes to fraternity row and inadvertently keeps the spread going? What happens when he unwittingly takes his illness home to his parents? And when he gives his coach a hug and passes on the virus?

"We are all in this together, all of us connected," said Dr. Cyrus Shahpar, director of the epidemic prevention team at Resolve to Save Lives, a nonprofit group that focuses on global disease prevention.

Shahpar cited a list of long-term health problems that can hobble anyone infected with the virus. "Every organ system can be affected," he said. "Lungs. Kidneys. Heart. Neurological problems. We don't have a lot of experience with the virus. We don't know the long-term ramifications. We still have a lot to learn."

We still have a lot to learn. Exactly. And much to fear. But even with one of the most revered coaches in college football possibly infected with the virus, the enabling chorus will not fade.

Move on, they say. Move on.

SOCCER

Do Dogs Bark in a Specific Language, Etc.

RORY SMITH
ON SOCCER

Precisely 51 seconds elapse between pressing "record" on Zoom and Carlo Ancelotti asking the question that, according to those who work with him, is never far from his lips these days. "Do you know Crosby?" he says, leaning forward in his chair. It is very important to Carlo Ancelotti that you should know about Crosby.

Until the turn of the year, Ancelotti was one of the unlucky ones: He was someone who had never been to Crosby. He had been to Liverpool a few times, of course — as manager of Chelsea and Real Madrid and Napoli — but he had never had the chance, on those flying visits, to venture much farther than his team's hotels.

In the first few weeks after taking the job as Everton manager last December, though, Ancelotti had to set out with his wife to find a place to call home. They did not want to live in one of the luxury apartments in the city's center: They have three dogs — a Pomeranian, a Jack Russell/Poodle cross, and one of lineage Ancelotti has not yet committed to memory — and so prefer a bit of open space.

He wanted somewhere comfortable, not especially ornate or flashy or grand, and quiet. His days, he said, tend to be spent at the training facility, and his nights with family.

But nor did he want a long commute from one of the essentially fortified villages south of Manchester that constitute North West England's footballer belt. All of which led someone at the club to recommend Crosby — on the coast, just outside the city, refined but not knowingly exclusive — as a happy medium.

Ancelotti and his wife were smitten. In the intervening months, a colleague jokes, the 61-year-old Ancelotti has seemingly taken on an unofficial role as Crosby's minister for tourism. "It's a beautiful place," he said. He got to know it especially well over those long spring months of lockdown, walking his dogs along the water. Ever since, he has been keen to alert others to Crosby's charms.

"It's close to the sea," he said. "There's a beautiful beach. A long beach. There is really nice cycling, really nice walks. You can walk all the way to Formby on the coastal path. There are the Gormley statues, 100 of them, on the beach. I really like it."

Hearing Ancelotti — this stylish, urbane Italian whose glittering career has been spent almost exclusively in Europe's great cities, from Rome to Milan, Milan to London, London to Paris, and on to Madrid and Munich — spend the days before the season's first Merseyside Derby evangelizing the charms of Crosby is something of a surprise.

MICHAEL REGAN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, VIA POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

"I am not a manager. I am a man that works as a manager," Carlo Ancelotti of Everton emphasized.

But then Ancelotti is not an easy man to fit into a stereotype. He is a man who has devoted his life to soccer, and yet he did not miss it at all during lockdown, happily spending time doing other things.

He is a manager who has won almost everything — who has more right than most to be considered one of the finest coaches of his generation — but who has never tried to build up a myth of his own greatness. Instead, he presents himself as a sort of midrange human resources executive.

In an age when soccer is in thrall to the cult of the manager, he resists the idea that it should be his identity. He is, he said, not a Manager; he is just someone who does that as a job.

In a culture when most of his peers cultivate an image of relentless obsession, Ancelotti is refreshingly, and almost heretically, three-dimensional.

This week, for example, Ancelotti's mind might have been filled with thoughts of Saturday's derby against Liverpool. Everton has not beaten its city rival in the Premier League in a decade, but it goes into this weekend's fixture top of the nascent table, unbeaten this season, its neighbor wounded by a humiliating 7-2 defeat against Aston Villa last time out.

Ancelotti could have been forgiven, then, for wanting to talk only about the work he has done to revive Everton, the promise his team is showing, the renewed sense of optimism and ambition he has fostered.

But — though he happily discussed all of that — he was also happy to talk about: the origins of and appropriate nomenclature for Parmesan cheese; whether dogs bark in a specific language; the Netflix documentary series "The Cuba Libre Story"; "Game of Thrones"; and, of course, Crosby.

A successful manager whose interests range far beyond his sport.

None of this is irrelevant to understanding how it came to be that Ancelotti, winner of three Champions League trophies and coach of some of the world's finest teams, finds himself — at 61 — trying to restore Everton to its former glories, and doing a far better job of it than many expected.

In a way, Everton is an unusual coda to a career. Most managers spend their early years at "project" clubs, trying to shape a middling power into a showcase of their talents, and then take their reward later on, in the form of the chance to take charge of one of the game's superpowers.

Ancelotti at Everton somehow inverts that pathway. It is 21 years since he took charge of Juventus, after cutting his teeth at Reggiana and Parma — the two sides of the great Parmesan cheese debate, the only subject on which Ancelotti feels the need to choose his words especially carefully — and he has had a seat at European soccer's top table ever since.

Now, though, he finds himself on the other side of the divide. The Everton job, he said, "is exactly the same." The fundamental challenge a manager faces is that all of the players want to play.

"It doesn't matter if they earn a lot of money, if they are famous," he said. "They want to play. That is the good aspect of this world.

"I have managed superstars — Cristiano Ronaldo, Zlatan Ibrahimovic — but they are superstars outside the training ground. The atmosphere outside builds the superstar. In the dressing room, they are exactly the same. At the end, I have to manage people, not players. They are not players: They are people who play football. I am not a manager. I am a man that works as a manager. I think this is an important point."

However dazzling the players' talent, however vast their profile, however high their ambitions, his task is still to build a rapport with them, to "manage them when they are sad," to tell them to "celebrate their successes and manage their defeats," to convince them to believe in his ideas, to persuade them to share their thoughts with him. That reciprocity, he said, is crucial. "I got a lot of my ideas from the players," he said.

He is there to provide balance. Last season at Everton was tortured; he needed to restore faith (though he demurs from the idea that he actually did it). Now that the whole club is floating on air, he has to prevent his players from getting carried away.

This is all exactly what he did at Real and A.C. Milan and at Bayern Munich. What is different now, he concedes, is the context. There are, in Ancelotti's worldview, two types of club: company clubs and family clubs. He has, it is no surprise to learn, largely worked at company clubs. There, the job is to arrive and to win.

At family clubs, the task is different. "It is to build something, to leave your stamp on a team," he said. "You live better, work better in a family club. You can be more yourself. The target for every manager is to train the top teams. But also to fight to build a top team can be a great motivation."

Ancelotti is relishing that challenge, and he is meeting it quite nicely, as the burgeoning devotion to him among Everton's fans demonstrates. But, tempting though it is to frame it as a story of a manager finding a new lease on life in a new and different project, such a reading would not be entirely accurate.

One of the things Everton's players appreciate most about Ancelotti, by all accounts, is that even though he demands complete focus at work, he does not engage with them solely as footballers. He is as likely to pull them aside to ask if they have seen anything interesting on television as he is to offer some morsel of tactical advice.

That, ultimately, is the reason that Ancelotti is here, and it may be the reason that he and his team are thriving. His energy for soccer is undimmed because he is not defined by it. His appetite for his work remains because he is not consumed by it.

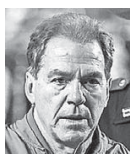
"Some managers do have that obsession to try to find something different," he said. "But you can be tired of football if you have the obsession of football." That is not a weakness, a shortcoming. It is a strength. His sport, and his work, are important to him, but they are not the only things that are important to him. Other things matter, too. Now: Do you know Crosby?

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Will Saban Still Coach Against Georgia?

By ALAN BLINDER

Nick Saban, the feared and renowned football coach at Alabama, said he tested positive for coronavirus on Wednesday.



Nick Saban

But there is a game on Saturday. A very big game, in fact: No 3. Georgia at No. 2 Alabama, a matchup that could help shape the College Football Playoff.

Yet Saban, frequently shown on television as a scowling sideline taskmaster, might have to watch from home. Or maybe not.

How sick is he?

Alabama said from the moment it announced Saban's positive test on Wednesday that the 68-year-old coach was asymptomatic. Saban spoke to reporters on a Zoom call a few hours after he received the test result, and he made his regular star turn on a radio show Thursday night.

"I don't have any symptoms. I don't have a fever," Saban said Thursday. "They do all those oxygen tests and all that stuff, and everything's normal."

Alabama said Friday that Saban had been tested again on Thursday and that the result had been negative, raising the possibility that the coach's earlier screening had yielded a false positive. Jeff Allen, an associate athletic director, said Friday that Saban was without symptoms.

Contrary to some internet speculation, there has been no evidence that Alabama's announcement was a ruse to play mind games with Georgia.

So, can Saban do anything now?

He coached practice via Zoom after he tested positive and headed home, watching with a camera angle that allowed him to see 22 players at once.

"You see a lot more because you're seeing the big picture rather than specific things," Saban, who normally works at the front side of the defense, said Thursday night. "So it was a little interesting. I guess that's why Coach Bryant always stood up in that tower."

Bear Bryant won six national championships at Alabama. Saban has won five.

Would they really let Saban call in from home during the game?

No. Steve Shaw, the N.C.A.A.'s national coordinator of football officials, issued a rules interpretation that said a homebound coach could not "call into the press box or the sideline for anything related to coaching purposes." Shaw also concluded that a coach could not use video-conferencing technology to beam himself into the locker room during games. The ban on "any virtual session with the team," which is related to broader limits on the use of technology by coaches on game days, begins 90 minutes before kickoff.

Are those rules a conspiracy against Alabama?

Nah. Shaw issued his memo in September, and Mike Norvell, Florida State's coach, missed a Sept. 26 game at Miami after he tested positive for the virus.

Les Miles, the Kansas coach who tested positive this month, said Friday that although he had received medical approval to travel to Saturday's game at West Virginia, he would stay in Lawrence because there was "too much unknown about this virus for me to feel 100 percent confident that I won't transmit it to someone who comes into close contact with me."

Saban said Thursday that there "ought to be a better way" for an isolated head coach to play a role on game day. "You ought to be able to have some kind of communication with the sidelines, just like I have communication with somebody on the field during practice," he said.

Didn't Hugh Freeze coach from what was basically a hospital bed?

Yes. But that wasn't during a pandemic, and other people could still be near Freeze, the Liberty coach.

Since Saban tested negative on Thursday, is there any way people can get out of isolation faster?

There is. The Southeastern Conference's health and safety protocols include a multiday procedure that can lead to an asymptomatic person who tested positive exiting isolation quicker than anticipated.

Within 24 hours of a positive result, the person may take a second polymerase chain reaction test, which experts consider the gold standard for detecting the virus. If that test returns a negative result, the person can take two more P.C.R. tests, each separated by 24 hours.

If those tests also show negative results and the person remains asymptomatic, the player, coach or staff member "may be released from isolation and medically cleared to return to athletics activities only," according to the SEC's guidelines.

Although Alabama said that Saban tested negative on Thursday, it has not announced a result of his Friday screening. To be allowed to return for the Georgia game, he would need to test negative on Friday and Saturday. Kickoff is scheduled for just after 8 p.m. Eastern.

Is that policy a conspiracy to help Alabama?

No. The SEC has frequently revised its medical protocols, and the league's chancellors and presidents approved the procedure for asymptomatic people on Oct. 8. The conference released its standards on Monday, two days before Saban's positive test.

If Saban really is absent, who's in charge for Alabama?

Saban said that Steve Sarkisian, Alabama's offensive coordinator, would take the lead.

"I would hate not to be at the game on Saturday," Saban said, "if that's what this turns out to be."

PRO FOOTBALL

Positive and Negative Tests Sow Confusion for Colts and Patriots

This article is by ***Ken Belson****,* ***Andrew Das*** *and* ***Katherine J. Wu****.*

The Indianapolis Colts on Friday briefly joined the growing group of N.F.L. teams dealing with a potential outbreak of coronavirus cases. Hours later, though, the team announced that the "four individuals" who tested positive for the virus had been retested and confirmed to be negative.

After the Colts said they were closing their practice facility, the New England Patriots — who had just emerged from a virus-inflicted week off — canceled their Friday practice session after recording one new positive. A second New England player initially tested positive as well on Friday, but the follow-up screening yielded a negative result.

The confusion in Indianapolis mirrored a similar series of events last Friday involving the Jets, who closed and then quickly reopened their training facility after an initial positive result was not confirmed in a second test. The uncertainty and disruption also cast new doubt on the reliance on rapid testing to spot, and prevent, virus outbreaks as the league plows ahead with its schedule.

Although rapid tests for the coronavirus are faster, more convenient and cheaper than typical laboratory tests, they are far less accurate. They more frequently miss cases of the coronavirus, as well as mistakenly label healthy people as infected.

The news of the Patriots' new case came a day after two of the their most important players, quarterback Cam Newton and cornerback Stephon Gilmore, were taken off the team's reserve/Covid-19 list and returned to practice. Newton, who joined the Patriots this season, and Gilmore, the 2019 N.F.L. defensive player of the year, are expected to play when the Patriots face the Denver Broncos on Sunday afternoon. The team said the game, which had been postponed a week after New England's earlier virus outbreak, would go ahead as planned.

In Indianapolis, the Colts called off practice and sent their employees home after announcing the team had determined it was dealing with "several" positives, only to call everyone back hours later. "The four positive samples were retested and have been confirmed negative," the team said in an update posted on Twitter. After consulting the league, the Colts said, they reopened their practice facility "and will continue preparation for Sunday's game."

The Colts were just the latest team to announce positive tests in the past few weeks, a group that has included the Tennessee Titans, the Patriots and, as of Thursday, the Atlanta Falcons. The outbreaks have scrambled the N.F.L. schedule, forced the league to strengthen its virus protocols, and raised questions about its decision to press ahead with the game schedule without creating a restricted environment like the so-called bubble used by the N.B.A.

Several N.F.L. game dates have already been changed, and each new postponement causes a cascading series of changes in the complicated matrix that is the league's schedule.

Any complications with Sunday's Patriots-Broncos game in New England, though, could create the most serious scheduling problems yet. When the league postponed the teams' meeting last weekend, it solved the scheduling complication by allowing New England and Denver to use their original date as a bye week, and by shuffling several games against other opponents later in the season.

But since N.F.L. teams only get one bye week per season, that has left the league with no flexibility if it is forced to postpone any more games involving either team. By insisting on its normal schedule format, even as virus cases continue to rise in dozens of states, the N.F.L. has little choice but to try to play Sunday's game — provided the Patriots do not confirm any additional cases — or to pursue adding an 18th week to the calendar to allow for makeup games.

SCOREBOARD

BASEBALL

M.L.B. PLAYOFFS

LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES
(Best-of-7; x-if necessary)
American League
(All Games on TBS)
Tampa Bay 3, Houston 2
At San Diego
Sunday, Oct. 11: Tampa Bay 2, Houston 1
Monday, Oct. 12: Tampa Bay 4, Houston 2
Tuesday, Oct. 13: Tampa Bay 5, Houston 2
Wednesday, Oct. 14: Houston 4, Tampa Bay 3
Thursday, Oct. 15: Houston 4, Tampa Bay 3
Friday, Oct. 16: Houston (Valdez 5-3) vs. Tampa Bay (Snell 4-2)
x-Saturday, Oct. 17: Houston (McCullers Jr. 3-3) vs. Tampa Bay (Morton 2-2), 8:37 p.m.
National League
(Fox or FS1)
Atlanta 3, Los Angeles 1
At Arlington, Texas
Monday, Oct. 12: Atlanta 5, Los Angeles Dodgers 1
Tuesday, Oct. 13: Atlanta 8, Los Angeles Dodgers 7
Wednesday, Oct. 14: Los Angeles Dodgers 15, Atlanta 3
Thursday, Oct. 15: Atlanta 10, Los Angeles Dodgers 2
Friday, Oct. 16: Los Angeles Dodgers (May 3-1) vs. Atlanta (Minter 1-1)
x-Saturday, Oct. 17: Atlanta (Fried 7-0) vs. Los Angeles Dodgers (Buehler 1-0), 4:38 p.m. (FS1)
x-Sunday, Oct. 18: Atlanta vs. Los Angeles Dodgers, 8:15 p.m. (Fox and FS1)

WORLD SERIES
(Best-of-7; x-if necessary)
At Arlington, Texas
(All Games on Fox: Times TBA)
Tuesday, Oct. 20:
Wednesday, Oct. 21:
Friday, Oct. 23:
Saturday, Oct. 24:
x-Sunday, Oct. 25:
x-Tuesday, Oct. 27:
x-Wednesday, Oct. 28:

N.F.L. STANDINGS

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	4	1	0	.800	139	142
N. England	2	2	0	.500	97	92
Miami	2	3	0	.400	136	113
Jets	0	5	0	.000	75	161
South	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pct**	**PF**	**PA**
Tennessee	4	0	0	1.000	122	90
Indianapolis	3	2	0	.600	126	88
Houston	1	4	0	.200	110	140
Jacksonville	1	4	0	.200	109	147
North	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pct**	**PF**	**PA**
Pittsburgh	4	0	0	1.000	118	87
Baltimore	4	1	0	.800	149	76
Cleveland	4	1	0	.800	156	149
Cincinnati	1	3	1	.300	102	126
West	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pct**	**PF**	**PA**
Kansas City	4	1	0	.800	149	110
Las Vegas	3	2	0	.600	151	152
Denver	1	3	0	.250	82	98
L.A. Chargers	1	4	0	.200	110	125

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Dallas	2	3	0	.400	163	180
Phila.	1	3	1	.300	113	145
Washington	1	4	0	.200	89	142
Giants	0	5	0	.000	81	133
South	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pct**	**PF**	**PA**
Carolina	3	2	0	.600	122	118
New Orleans	3	2	0	.600	153	150
Tampa Bay	3	2	0	.600	139	112
Atlanta	0	5	0	.000	122	161
North	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pct**	**PF**	**PA**
Green Bay	4	0	0	1.000	152	101
Chicago	4	1	0	.800	105	100
Detroit	1	3	0	.250	99	127
Minnesota	1	4	0	.200	132	152
West	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pct**	**PF**	**PA**
Seattle	5	0	0	1.000	169	135
L.A. Rams	4	1	0	.800	136	90
Arizona	3	2	0	.600	128	102
San Fran.	2	3	0	.400	124	114

Sunday, Oct. 18
Houston at Tennessee, 1
Washington at Giants, 1
Cincinnati at Indianapolis, 1
Atlanta at Minnesota, 1
Chicago at Carolina, 1
Detroit at Jacksonville, 1
Cleveland at Pittsburgh, 1
Denver at New England, 1
Baltimore at Philadelphia, 1
Jets at Miami, 4:05
Green Bay at Tampa Bay, 4:25
L.A. Rams at San Francisco, 8:20
Open: L.A. Chargers, Las Vegas, New Orleans, Seattle
Monday, Oct. 19
Kansas City at Buffalo, 5
Arizona at Dallas, 8:15

SOCCER

M.L.S. STANDINGS

EAST	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto FC	11	2	5	38	29	17
Philadelphia	10	3	5	35	32	16
Columbus	9	4	4	31	27	14
Orlando City	8	2	7	31	29	17
New England	7	4	7	28	20	16
N.Y.C.F.C.	8	7	3	27	23	16
Red Bulls	7	8	3	24	21	22
Nashville SC	5	6	6	21	15	17
Montreal	6	10	2	20	27	35
Chicago	5	8	4	19	22	26
Atlanta	5	9	4	19	18	21
Inter Miami CF	5	10	3	18	18	27
Cincinnati	4	10	4	16	10	28
D.C. United	2	10	6	12	15	32
WEST	**W**	**L**	**T**	**Pts**	**GF**	**GA**
Seattle	9	4	3	30	35	17
Portland	9	5	3	30	37	29
Kansas City	9	6	2	29	29	23
Los Angeles FC	7	7	3	24	39	33
FC Dallas	6	4	6	24	22	17
Minnesota	6	5	5	23	26	21
San Jose	6	7	5	23	28	43
Vancouver	7	11	0	21	22	39
Real Salt Lake	5	7	6	21	24	29
Colorado	5	4	4	19	25	20
Houston	4	7	7	19	25	30
LA Galaxy	4	9	3	15	21	34

Saturday, Oct. 17
Kansas City at Chicago, 3:30 p.m.
Miami at Montreal, 7 p.m.
Sunday, October 18
NYCFC at Columbus, 6 p.m.
Orlando City at Red Bulls, 7 p.m.
D.C. United at Cincinnati, 7:30 p.m.
Atlanta at Toronto FC, 7:30 p.m.
Houston at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Real Salt Lake at Colorado, 9 p.m.
Los Angeles FC at Portland, 10 p.m.
Vancouver at LA Galaxy, 10:30 p.m.
Seattle at San Jose, 10:30 p.m.

N.W.S.L. SCHEDULE

Saturday, Oct. 17
North Carolina at Orlando, 4 p.m.
Utah at Reign FC, 8 p.m.

GOLF

PGA CJ CUP

At Shadow Creek Golf Course
North Las Vegas, Nev.
Purse: $9.75 million
Yardage: 7,527; Par: 72
Second Round

Xander Schauffele	66-64—130	-14
Tyrrell Hatton	65-68—133	-11
Russell Henley	66-68—134	-10
Talor Gooch	70-65—135	-9
Jason Kokrak	70-66—136	-8
Collin Morikawa	71-65—136	-8
Matthew Fitzpatrick	69-68—137	-7
Lanto Griffin	70-68—138	-6
Justin Thomas	72-66—138	-6
Kevin Streelman	68-70—138	-6
Tyler Duncan	67-71—138	-6
Hideki Matsuyama	70-68—138	-6
Harry Higgs	72-67—139	-5
Ian Poulter	69-70—139	-5
Billy Horschel	70-70—140	-4
Andrew Landry	71-69—140	-4
Jason Day	70-70—140	-4
Jon Rahm	67-73—140	-4
Joaquin Niemann	72-68—140	-4
Viktor Hovland	75-66—141	-3
Harris English	75-66—141	-3
Mark Hubbard	70-71—141	-3
Daniel Berger	71-70—141	-3
Sebastian Munoz	71-70—141	-3
Sergio Garcia	71-70—141	-3
Brian Harman	71-71—142	-2
Rickie Fowler	74-68—142	-2
Kevin Na	76-66—142	-2
Brooks Koepka	74-68—142	-2
Rory McIlroy	73-69—142	-2
Richy Werenski	74-68—142	-2
Abraham Ancer	69-73—142	-2
Tom Hoge	73-70—143	-1
Carlos Ortiz	72-71—143	-1
Patrick Cantlay	71-72—143	-1
Hanbyeol Kim	74-69—143	-1
Cameron Champ	74-69—143	-1
Joel Dahmen	68-75—143	-1
Cameron Smith	69-74—143	-1
Louis Oosthuizen	70-73—143	-1
Bubba Watson	74-69—143	-1
Si Woo Kim	69-74—143	-1
Danny Lee	71-72—143	-1
Robby Shelton	73-70—143	-1
Ryan Palmer	68-76—144	E

TRANSACTIONS

N.F.L.

NEW YORK GIANTS — Activated LB David Mayor from injured reserve.
CAROLINA PANTHERS — Placed OL Tyler Larsen on reserve/COVID-19 list. Placed DE Yetur Gross-Matos on injured reserve.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed QB Kyle Lauletta to the practice squad.

Arts
The New York Times

A.O. SCOTT | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

The Flickering Future of Movie Theaters

JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES

The pandemic and entertainment from Netflix and other streaming services are keeping moviegoers at home, prompting some film fans to rethink the role of cinemas.

By A.O. SCOTT

WILL MOVIEGOING SURVIVE the pandemic? The question sounds both trivial — there are surely graver matters to worry about — and unduly apocalyptic. Movie theaters, after all, have reopened in many parts of the country, and some people went to see "Tenet" last month. But not as many as Warner Bros. had hoped for, and few enough to start the fall film season under a pessimistic cloud.

Lately, the news has only become grimmer. On Oct. 5, Regal Cinemas, the second-largest exhibition chain in the United States, announced that it would temporarily shut down its more than 500 theaters. Studios have pushed most of their high-profile 2020 holiday releases into 2021 — for now. And last week Disney let it be known that the new Pixar feature, "Soul," originally scheduled to open in theaters in June, would debut on the Disney+ streaming platform in December, bypassing multiplexes altogether.

That news was a teaser of sorts for the corporate blockbuster that arrived on Monday: the announcement of a restructuring at Disney that would, in the words of the chief executive, Bob Chapek, involve "managing content creation distinct from distribution." "Our creative teams," Chapek's statement explained, laying on the poetry, "will concentrate on what they do best — making world-class, franchise-based entertainment — while our newly centralized global distribution team will focus on delivering and monetizing that content in the most optimal way across all platforms."

Those words don't exactly pronounce a death sentence for theaters, but they do express a bottom-line indifference about their future. Whether cinemas survive, Disney will find screens and viewers. Netflix, which is sprinkling some of its 2020 releases into theaters, has built a subscription empire on the belief that people would just as soon stay home and surren-

CONTINUED ON PAGE C2

Moviegoers at an AMC theater in Franklin, Tenn., after it was reopened in August. The specter of empty movie houses was haunting Hollywood well before the pandemic.

Art Is Long. This Case Is Longer.

After 75 years and 15 claims, a bid to regain dozens of lost treasures inches forward.

By MILTON ESTEROW

The judge presiding over perhaps the longest-running art restitution dispute had not been born when the family of Baron Mor Lipot Herzog, one of Hungary's most prominent bankers, filed a claim in Budapest in 1945 for a collection of 2,500 artworks, tapestries and pieces of Renaissance furniture.

After 75 years, the case files from the still unresolved claim hold hundreds of thousands of pages in English, Hungarian, Russian, Polish, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch. There have been 11 court decisions, five appeals and 15 claims by roughly 30 lawyers in the United States, Hungary, Russia, Poland, France, Germany and Switzerland.

A vast majority of works from a collection that once included 10 El Grecos and paintings by Goya, Velázquez, Hals, Courbet, Van Dyck, Corot, Renoir, Monet and

CONTINUED ON PAGE C5

HERZOG FAMILY ARCHIVE

Corot's "Portrait of a Woman" was once Baron Mor Lipot Herzog's.

JAMES PONIEWOZIK | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Today's Anxieties Viewed Through Yesterday's Lens

Ahead of the election, televised theatrical productions of recent vintage explore democracy.

THE EPISODE "Hartsfield's Landing," from the third season of "The West Wing," first aired in February 2002, which was approximately 200 years ago.

Donald Trump was still two years from joining "The West Wing" on NBC with "The Apprentice" — his main TV gig at the time was co-starring with Grimace in a commercial for the McDonald's Big 'N Tasty burger. Mark Zuckerberg had yet to start classes at Harvard. Elections played out at the relatively staid tempo of network TV news. And an idealistic network drama about politics could still be a Top 10 show, averaging over 17 million viewers an episode.

On Thursday, HBO Max premiered a stage performance of "Hartsfield's Landing." Its ostensible purpose was to benefit the nonprofit group When We All Vote. But it couldn't help seeming like the prying open of a time capsule.

It's not alone, however, in trying to fit in one last civics lesson before the polls close. It joins several stage works arriving on TV — a hip-hop musical, a furious feminist read of the constitution, a quirkily political theatrical concert — that are framing the anxieties of 2020 within the pop culture of the last two decades.

Nostalgia for Norms

As TV series go, "The West Wing" was a relative no-brainer to adapt for the stage. Its creator, Aaron Sorkin ("To Kill a Mockingbird"), always sounds as if he were writing

'The West Wing' and David Byrne play on American stages.

for the theater even when he isn't.

Recorded under coronavirus protocols at the Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles, the performance instantly recalls why the series was such an intoxicating entertainment and seductive ideal. The original cast members are grayer, but their interactions still sparkle. (Sterling K. Brown fills in for John Spencer, who died in 2005.)

But the format also underscores the distance between then and now, as if the poli-

CONTINUED ON PAGE C4

It's Documentary Season, Too

The directors of a film about coronavirus are hoping to have an impact.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEON AND PARTICIPANT

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG

WASHINGTON — As the coronavirus raged out of control this spring, Alex Gibney, an Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker who has released two other movies this year, embarked on a secret project: a film that would "tell the origin story" of the pandemic that has cost more than 215,000 Americans their lives.

He wanted to know if the carnage could have been prevented.

The resulting documentary, available now to rent through services like Amazon and Apple (and next week to stream on Hulu), lays bare what Mr. Gibney calls "a story of staggering incompetence."

It contrasts the response in South Korea, where fewer than 450 people have died, to that of the United States, where, in January, President Trump declared the outbreak "totally under control," the phrase from which the film takes its title.

As a Washington correspondent who writes about health policy for The Times, I've been covering the Trump administration's coronavirus response.

I spoke with Gibney and his co-directors, Suzanne Hillinger and Ophelia Harutyunyan, about "Totally Under Control."

Our conversation was edited and condensed for clarity. (Full disclosure: Michael D. Shear, a Times White House correspondent, is featured in the film, and Eric Lipton, a Times investigative reporter, was a consultant.)

SHERYL GAY STOLBERG We'll begin at the beginning. I'm interested in knowing how this idea came to you.

ALEX GIBNEY A friend of mine had died from Covid, another friend was two weeks on a ventilator. I had other friends who were desperately trying to get into hospitals, being turned away, couldn't get tests. And it occurred to me that there was something deeply wrong with the federal response to Covid. And so I thought it would be important to do a film — and a film that hopefully could come out quickly — that would focus on the early days, to go back to the origin story to the weeks and months when a lot of this pain and suffering could have been prevented.

STOLBERG Why compare the United States and South Korea?

GIBNEY Because otherwise you might get lost in the notion that something like this just happened, and there wasn't anything we could do about it. And, South Korea, a country with a highly dense urbanized population — 51 million people — seemed an appropriate comparison.

STOLBERG Did you film this in secrecy?

GIBNEY We didn't announce it — I think that's the best way of saying it — to avoid publicity going in, in hopes of trying to persuade people to talk to us.

STOLBERG You interviewed people outside the administration. Did you ask for anyone else inside to talk to you?

SUZANNE HILLINGER I put in a request to the White House for Trump and Pence. I put in a request for the entire White House coronavirus task force, H.H.S. I put in requests for Azar [Alex M. Azar II, Mr. Trump's health secretary]; Kadlec [Bob Kadlec, the assistant secretary for preparedness and response]; CDC; a few other high-level officials and experts. I never got a no, but I never got a yes.

Top and above, two scenes from the coronavirus documentary "Totally Under Control."

STOLBERG Welcome to my world. To me, the newsiest and the most compelling element of the film was the interview with Max Kennedy, a young volunteer who led a crew of other 20-somethings — working with their own computers and cellphones — on a fumbling hunt for supplies overseen by the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. How did you find him?

GIBNEY We were looking for him and then we got a tip from one of our executive producers that she knew him and would we be interested in being put in contact. He provided us, I think, with a level of detail that had not been available in any of those other pieces and that was really jaw-dropping. There was a lot of material from him that we weren't able to include.

STOLBERG Do tell.

OPHELIA HARUTYUNYAN There was a very Kafka-esque story, where the volunteers were told that if they get any tips for any ventilators, they should send them to a specific person at FEMA, and so they would forward these leads to this FEMA rep. And then she came to them one day and she said: "You know, why are you forwarding these leads to me? I have nothing to do with ventilators, so please have people forward these to this link on the FEMA website for ventilators." And Max said that when he went on the website, it was very unclear but when he clicked on enough links, he actually got redirected to an email, and that email would forward to Max Kennedy's team. So they were forwarding these ventilator leads to themselves.

STOLBERG You also interviewed Rick Bright, the federal whistle-blower, who says he pleaded with higher-ups in the administration to take the pandemic more seriously, and Mike Bowen, a mask manufacturer, who spent 13 years trying to get the federal government to stock up on medical masks. Did it surprise you that they choked up while talking to you?

HARUTYUNYAN No. These are people who go into the health profession because they want to help people, they want to give people better lives, they want to protect Americans. It's a very emotional responsibility they have, and I think it's deeply frustrating to not be able to do that.

STOLBERG Why do you think there was such a difference in the outcome in South Korea and the United States? Is it because our politics are so polarizing?

HARUTYUNYAN The politics in South Korea are actually just as polarizing as they are in the U.S., but because they had the experience of enduring MERS [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, another illness caused by a coronavirus], they knew how bad this could get and they set politics aside. That is something that our administration was not capable of doing.

STOLBERG One thing that blew my mind was the South Korean system of contact tracing, finding people on their cellphones. Did you ask anybody if that had been considered here?

HARUTYUNYAN When we interviewed the South Korean folks we would always ask, "Do you think that's something that could happen in America?" I think the South Korean people have decided that the public health is more important than privacy.

STOLBERG An editor wondered if this film would be the "Fahrenheit 9/11" — the Michael Moore film released the summer before the 2004 election — of the coronavirus pandemic.

GIBNEY I hope it has an impact — a powerful impact like "Fahrenheit 9/11" did. Here's the thing, though: we made it as a film that was just about competence. And that's what we were looking at, to see whether or not this thing had been bungled. We also made it to have an impact — as in right now. That was always the intent. And I think that particularly for those people who are still undecided, this issue of the pandemic is huge.

STOLBERG The timing of this film is no accident, three weeks before the election.

GIBNEY There were a lot of people who felt that we should collect evidence but wait for a year or so, and then render a historical verdict on this moment. But in this case, it was important to put that story before the American public, at a time when they were making a critical choice about the future of the country.

STOLBERG So now you have had this really dramatic event that has just happened. The president gets coronavirus and the whole White House becomes a hot spot. I couldn't help but wonder if you were thinking, "Wouldn't it be a great ending?"

GIBNEY A week ago Thursday, we officially finished the film. And so, we debated long and hard: Should we open up the film? Should we delay it? And ultimately, we ended up putting a card in the film that says, "The day after this film was finished, President Trump declared positive for coronavirus." It was a way of saying that we were ending a film there, but the story goes on.

A.O. SCOTT | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

The Flickering Future of Theaters

BRIDGET BENNETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Regal Cinemas theater in Las Vegas. Regal announced this month that it would temporarily shut down its more than 500 theaters in the United States.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

der to the algorithm. Those two companies together control an ever-larger share of the global attention span, and their growing reach can't help but raise troubling thoughts in a movie lover's mind.

What if the pandemic, rather than representing a temporary disruption in audience habits and industry revenues, turns out to be an extinction-level event for moviegoing? What if, now that we've grown accustomed to watching movies in our living rooms or on our laptops, we lose our appetite for the experience of trundling down carpeted hallways, trailing stray popcorn kernels and cradling giant cups of Coke Zero, to jostle for an aisle seat and hope all that soda doesn't mean we'll have to run to the bathroom during the big action sequence?

The specter of empty movie houses was haunting Hollywood (and the press that covers it) long before the Covid-19 plot twist. In most recent years, ticket sales were flat or declining, a malaise masked by seasonal juggernauts like episodes in the "Avengers" saga or the chapters of the third "Star Wars" trilogy — by Disney's mighty market share, in other words. And even the periodic triumphs of non-franchise, or at least non-Disney, products — "Get Out" and "Joker"; "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "American Sniper" — were faint puffs of wind in the sails of a becalmed schooner, or teacups of water bailed from the hull of a listing liner or some other suitably disastrous nautical metaphor.

Still, the ultimate catastrophe seemed unthinkable, and for good reason. The history of cinema is in part an anthology of premature obituaries. Sound, color, television, the suburbs, the VCR, the internet — they were all going to kill off moviegoing, and none succeeded. Cultural forms, and the social and private rituals that sustain them, have a way of outlasting their funerals. How many times have we heard about the death of the novel? Of poetry? Painting? Broadway theater? Rock 'n' roll? The arts in modern times can resemble a parade of exquisite corpses. The dead don't die.

Perhaps no art form has remade itself as frequently and dramatically in so short a life span as film (which technically speaking isn't even film anymore). Over the past hundred-some years, "going to the movies" has encompassed a lot of different ways of leaving the house, and a corresponding variety of destinations: Curtained-off carnival booths; grand palaces with gilded ceilings and velvet seats; Bijoux and Roxys on small-town main streets; suburban drive-ins and shopping-mall multiscreens; grindhouses, arthouses, repertory houses and porno parlors. Most recently, in response to the soulless sameness of the megaplexes, a new kind of gentrified cinema has emerged, with reserved seating, food service and artisanal cocktails delivered to your seat.

So which one are we mourning? What are we defending? A frequent answer, offered both by those who worry that movies will die and by those who insist that they can't, is community, the pleasure of sitting in the dark among friends and strangers and partaking of a collective dream. That picture strikes me as idealized if not downright ideological, a fantasy of film democracy that has rarely been realized.

Did you buy your ticket online, or did the site reject your credit card? Did you wait in line only to find out that what you wanted to see was sold out? Was the person in the seat in front of you texting through the sad parts, while the person behind you kicked the back of your seat? Was the theater full of crying babies? Talkative senior citizens? Unruly teenagers? Or — what may be worse — did you find yourself, on a weeknight a few weeks into the run of a well-reviewed almost-hit, all but alone in the dark?

Was the floor sticky? Was the seat torn? How was the projection? Was there masking on the edge of the screen, or did the image just bleed onto the curtains? Was the sound clear?

These were common cinephile complaints in the pre-pandemic era, and we shouldn't let them be washed away in the nostalgia of this moment. Moviegoing was often as communal as a traffic jam, as transporting as air travel, and the problems went deeper than lax management or technological glitches.

The problem, to return to Chapek's memo, was "world-class, franchise-based entertainment" — not every instance of it, but the models of creation and consumption the idea imposed. The big theater chains were kept alive by Disney, which dominated the domestic box office by ever greater margins, and which seemed almost uniquely able to produce the kind of big-event movies that could attract the masses on opening weekend. Those films, parceled out every other month or so, at once raised financial expectations among the exhibitors and helped break the habit of regular movie attendance among audiences. There was less and less room — literally fewer rooms, but also less collective bandwidth — for nonfranchise entertainment.

At least at the multiplexes. The movie audience didn't vanish, it splintered. Some stayed home, now that genuine cinema — not prestige TV, but restored classics and new work by established auteurs — could be found on streaming. Midlevel art-house distribution was kept alive by newish companies like A24 and Neon, which distributed Oscar winners like "Moonlight" and "Parasite."

The pictures were, in several ways, getting smaller: somewhat cheaper to make, and also less dependent on mass popularity. But it was also true that some of the most interesting films of the past half-decade — especially in languages other than English — had a hard time finding screens and oxygen.

The shuttering of theaters has accelerated this tendency, at least for the moment. In the absence of blockbusters, small, audacious movies have popped up like mushrooms on a forest floor — signs of life amid the general decay, but fragile and too easily overlooked or trampled underfoot.

Will the return of independent theaters, however many remain, help those little movies survive? Will a return to normalcy herald the next stage in an emerging duopoly, with the two dominant companies — Netflix and Disney — using big screens to showcase selected content, treating theaters as a kind of loss leader for their lucrative subscription services?

But maybe that's putting it the wrong way. Making predictions, in addition to being foolish, is an expression of passivity, an acceptance of our diminished role as consumers of culture. Instead of wondering what might happen, what if we thought about what we want, and thought of ourselves not as fans or subscribers, but as partners and participants?

I'll see you at the movies.

ROSLYN SULCAS | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

In France, a Dance Festival Delivers the Essential

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's solo 'Goldberg Variations' is an early highlight in Montpellier.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNE VAN AERSCHOT, VIA MONTPELLIER DANSE

JULIA GAT, VIA MONTPELLIER DANSE

From top: Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker performing her two-hour dance solo "Goldberg Variations," with Pavel Kolesnikov at the piano, in Vienna in August; the two at Montpellier Danse in France; and Emmanuel Gat's "LoveTrain2020."

MONTPELLIER, FRANCE — At the end of her new solo, "Goldberg Variations," on Tuesday night at the Montpellier Danse festival, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker held up a hand to stop the applause. "I want to thank you for being here," she said. "This is a difficult time; without live audiences, there would be no performing arts."

The solo was supposed to have had its premiere in May and been presented again during the Montpellier festival's 40th-anniversary season this summer. Then, like every other cultural event in Europe and beyond, the festival was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic. But unlike many summer festivals, which pushed back their programming to 2021, Montpellier Danse has gone ahead, and so has "Goldberg Variations," which had brief runs in Belgium and Austria this summer before coming here.

Jean-Paul Montenari, the director of Montpellier Danse, isn't pretending that it's business as usual at this year's festival, which opened on Sept. 19 with Dominique Bagouet's 1990 "So Schnell" and will close on Dec. 28 with a work by Mourad Merzouki. "The dance professionals from all over the world, the intensity of many performances happening at once, the encounters in the street, the heat of summer, all of that is gone," Mr. Montenari said in an interview. With a great deal of juggling, the festival managed to keep 75 percent of its program, he added.

And he echoed Ms. De Keersmaeker's point. "The essential is there: presenting work to an audience."

Still, coronavirus cases have spiked again in France, and on Wednesday night President Emmanuel Macron imposed a curfew of 9 p.m. in nine cities, including Montpellier. The good news is that the theaters can remain open; the festival has simply moved shows to a 7 p.m. curtain.

On Tuesday, Ms. de Keersmaeker's gratitude seemed reciprocated by the audience, who sat rapt (and masked) through the two-hour work, in which she dances to Bach's monumental composition played by the remarkable young Russian pianist Pavel Kolesnikov. Her decision to make a solo piece was oddly apposite. In interviews, Ms. De Keersmaeker has said that she began to create the solo in New York in January, while working on the Broadway production of "West Side Story," well before the coronavirus was perceived as a global problem. After the show shut down, she returned to her home in Belgium, suddenly free of her usual commitments to her company and school, and continued to develop the material.

It's been 40 years since Ms. De Keersmaeker began her professional career with another solo, "Violin Phase," also made in New York. She recently turned 60, and "Goldberg" is a long way from the insistent formal brilliance of "Violin," though there are echoes. They are soft but present, the reverberations of 40 years of life lived, experienced and shown in the body.

Ms. De Keersmaeker, who begins the piece in a sheer black dress and ends it in gold sequined shorts and trainers — "Go, 60-year-old women!" a woman behind me said — can sometimes look like a teenager onstage, but she doesn't try to impress with her physical prowess. Her movement is simple: the spiraling turns, swinging legs, gestural vocabulary and sudden weighted drops of the body that always inform her work, and that can seem casual, almost pedestrian without the athletic attack of her younger dancers. But that casualness is deceptive; as she moves, Ms. De Keersmaeker and Mr. Kolesnikov become partners in an exploration of the large-scale architecture and the tiny nuances of the music.

What is it to dance? she seems to ask. What do our bodies know? As she moves through the variations, Ms. De Keersmaeker often echoes musical patterns: canon, counterpoint, retrograde, modulation. But her movement and fleeting facial expressions suggest emotions, memories, history. In both music and dance, this "Goldberg Variations" offers virtuosity and experience — of life, of the stage — resolved into simplicity.

Mr. Montenari, the festival's director since 1983, said he chose to open the festival (now called "Montpellier Danse 40 Version Two") with "So Schnell," reconstructed by Catherine Legrand, to honor Bagouet, who founded the festival in 1980 and died, of AIDS, in 1992. Ms. Legrand took away the colorful costumes of the original, and dressed the dancers all in black; watched on video (the festival gave me access to films of several works that had already taken place), the effect was spare and arresting, with a clean, Merce Cunningham-influenced vocabulary and scattered patterning that often evokes bird or animal life.

The anniversary edition was to celebrate a new generation but also look back at the festival's history, Mr. Montenari said. In addition to Bagouet, he programmed artists he considered important to the festival: Jiri Kylian of the Lyon Opera Ballet, Raimund Hoghe, Ms. De Keersmaeker and Emmanuel Gat. (The Batsheva Dance Company, a frequent visitor to the festival, was supposed to bring a new work by Ohad Naharin, but was unable to travel.)

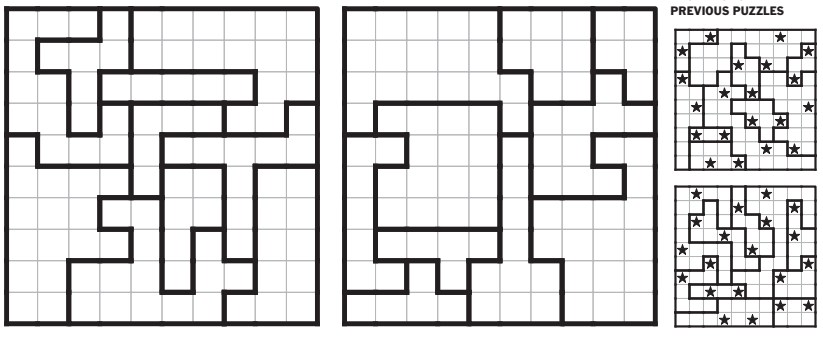
"Jean-Paul has a way of acknowledging the process of an artist he believes in, rather than specific pieces," said Mr. Gat, an Israeli choreographer who lives in Montpellier. "You don't have the sense that this is your only chance." His new work, "Lovetrain2020," his 10th piece for the festival, premiered in early October.

Even onscreen, "Lovetrain2020" was marvelous, a rambunctious yet rigorously staged piece for 14 dancers, set to tracks by the British pop group Tears for Fears (big in the '80s), outlandishly costumed by Thomas Bradley: ruffles, peculiar shapes, huge skirts, missing parts of clothes, plaid mixed with satin.

Mr. Gat melds gestural detail with larger-scale movement, sometimes working against the music's rhythms, sometimes with them, frequently in silence. This eccentric physical dialogue with the music — mostly in a minor key and vaguely gloomy in content (did you know that the group's name comes from their interest in primal scream therapy?) yet somehow gloriously singalong — is exhilarating.

"Lovetrain2020" is everything the small-scale, often somber work made for video during the past months is not. It's loud, joyous, physical, close. Although it's a million miles from the introspection and internalization of "Goldberg Variations," the two dances are alike in a very important way. Both are celebrations — of the body, of performance, of life.

Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

Wit Twister

First _ _ _ _ _ _ of the U.S. Constitution,

George Washington leaps from his tomb to shout,

"A tyrant _ _ _ _ _ _, but you know the solution:

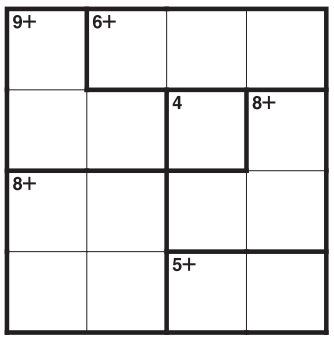
He won't _ _ _ _ _ _, so you must *vote* him out!"

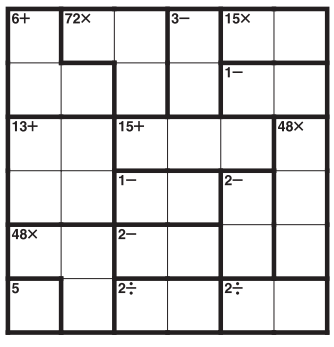
Complete the verse with words that are anagrams of each other. Each underline represents a letter.

PUZZLE BY NANCY COUGHLIN

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER Einstein

KenKen





ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

4	1	3	2
1	4	2	3
3	2	1	4
2	3	4	1

2	5	6	1	3	4
6	2	5	3	4	1
5	1	2	4	6	3
4	3	1	6	5	2
1	4	3	5	2	6
3	6	4	2	1	5

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

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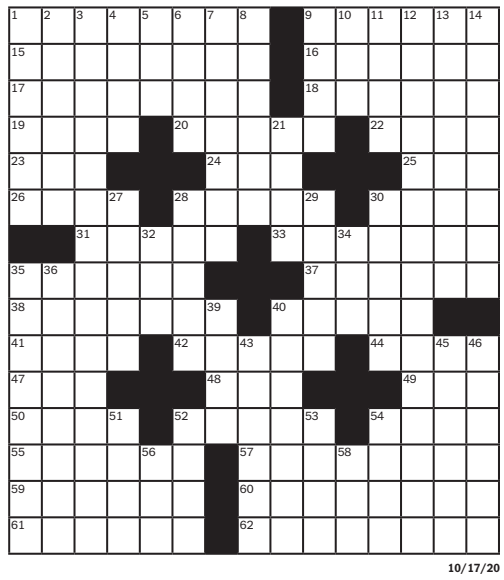
Crossword | Edited by Will Shortz

PUZZLE BY VICTOR BAROCAS AND BRAD WILBER



10/17/20

ACROSS

1 Pattern of five shapes arranged like this puzzle's central black squares
9 Highlands memorials
15 Like Davy Jones's locker
16 Request before a deal
17 Type face?
18 Treaty signed by Carter and Brezhnev
19 Some last a lifetime
20 Grind
22 Hunger (for)
23 Summer Mass. hrs.
24 ___ Yonath, 2009 Chemistry co-Nobelist
25 No-goodnik
26 Roman's foe in the Gallic Wars
28 Building supports
30 "Veep" actress Chlumsky
31 About to explode, maybe
33 Do some supermarket work
35 More repulsive
37 Chemistry student's expense
38 With 61-Across, two-time N.C.A.A. football champs of the 2010s
40 Inexperienced with
41 Puts away
42 Alternatives to Nikes
44 God with a chariot pulled by goats
47 Overseer of millions at work, perhaps
48 Govt. research grant org.
49 Ending with xylyl
50 Goblins, old-style
52 Follow
54 Changed one's tune, in brief?
55 One side of the Ural Mountains
57 Who definitely isn't the real McCoy?
59 Setting for "The Great Escape"
60 Present person
61 See 38-Across
62 One of five depicted in this puzzle

DOWN

1 NATO alphabet letter before Romeo
2 Needing to be tucked in, say?
3 Disclaimer hinting at false humility
4 Brings home
5 Shout, in Chamonix
6 SOS responder, for short
7 Newborn
8 Site of Coleridge's "stately pleasure-dome"
9 Paper alternative to plastic
10 Political commentator Navarro
11 "___ never work"
12 Whence a memorable emperor's fall
13 Gadfly
14 Reaction to an unexpected joke
21 ___ City (Baghdad district)
27 Ornaments
28 Sharpen, as a razor
29 Palindromic tennis champ of the 1990s
30 Hitting
32 Bronze: Lat.
34 Old ___
35 Tailgate party sight
36 French dessert of fruit encased in sweet batter
39 Theater director Trevor with three Tonys
40 Language from which "peyote" comes
43 Unfortunate event
45 Flamingo's support, often
46 Blush
51 Flounder relative
52 Brain wave readers, for short
53 "Really? Is *nobody* on my side now?"
54 Rackets
56 Something to shoot for
58 Morocco's next-largest city after Casablanca

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

H	O	N	O	R	S	■	O	R	S	■	E	D	A	M
A	M	A	Z	O	N	■	B	A	T	F	L	I	P	S
L	A	D	Y	D	I	■	I	M	A	L	L	S	E	T
T	H	E	M	S	T	H	E	B	R	E	A	K	S	■
S	A	R	A	■	■	I	S	L	E	S	■	■	■	■
■	■	■	N	E	E	D	■	E	D	H	E	L	M	S
H	E	A	D	T	R	I	P	■	■	■	M	O	R	E
A	C	C	I	D	E	N	T	S	H	A	P	P	E	N
N	C	A	A	■	■	■	A	C	I	D	T	E	S	T
S	E	I	S	M	I	C	■	E	T	S	Y	■	■	■
■	■	■	U	T	A	H	N	■	■	S	A	S	S	■
■	J	U	S	T	A	S	I	T	H	O	U	G	H	T
Z	E	P	P	E	L	I	N	■	E	M	I	G	R	E
E	N	C	O	D	I	N	G	■	E	N	T	R	E	E
E	A	S	T	■	A	G	E	■	D	I	S	O	W	N

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JAMES PONIEWOZIK | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Today's Anxieties In Yesterday's Lens

EDDY CHEN/HBO MAX, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

HBO, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

JOAN MARCUS/AMAZON, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

From above, Martin Sheen reprised his "West Wing" role for a staged performance of a 2002 episode; David Byrne, foreground, in "David Byrne's American Utopia"; and Heidi Schreck in "What the Constitution Means to Me."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

tics and cultural tempo of the early aughts themselves were now period-piece revival material.

Premiering in 1999 after a run of relative 20th-century institutional stability, "The West Wing" believed that the system worked, even if the people in it could always be better.

President Josiah Bartlet (Martin Sheen) was an aspirational Gallant to reality's Goofuses. In the late Bill Clinton era, he was a fantasy of morally upstanding, unapologetic liberalism. In the Bush years, he was a fantasy of a proudly intellectual president. Today — well, take your pick. Wanting better leaders never goes out of style, but the series's reverent institutionalism now seems much more remote.

"Hartsfield's Landing" takes its title from a subplot in which the aide Josh Lyman (Bradley Whitford) frets over the results from the first small town to vote in the New Hampshire primary. It's an odd story because Bartlet is running for renomination essentially unopposed. But for a show enamored with retail democracy in all its absurdity, it's too much to resist. (One does wonder, if the episode had been written in 2020, whether someone might at least note the inordinate power that the quaint tradition gives a handful of white voters.)

This affection for civic ritual, in norms-trampling Trumpian times, now seems star-crossed and naïve. As the actor Samuel L. Jackson put it during an act break, "Our politics today are a far cry from the romantic notion of 'The West Wing.'" Even the central metaphor of the episode, Bartlet's playing his advisers at chess, seems sadly nostalgic in an era dominated by players who prefer to kick over the board.

"The West Wing" was always a palliative fantasy. The election arc eventually led Bartlet to run against the Republican governor of Florida, Robert Ritchie (James Brolin), a proud anti-intellectual who shared political DNA with George W. Bush. Bartlet decided to own his erudition rather than run from it, sarcastically shredded his opponent in a debate and won re-election in a landslide.

Two years later, George W. Bush became what is now the only Republican since his father won in 1988 to earn a majority of the popular vote.

Well, fantasy is part of what TV is for. And fantasy can be a strong motivator: Arguably, part of what fuels Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s campaign against the Twitter president today is the promise, however improbable, of returning to a time of relative comity, reverence and quiet.

But the show fed a lot of fantasies that have smashed hard and ugly against reality. "The West Wing" was smitten with the power of words. But in the real world, there is no speech so masterly that it stuns your rivals into awed silence, no debate argument so irrefutable that your opponent can't just bark "Wrong!" over it a hundred times.

It's nice to think that going high always beats going low, but we know now what "The West Wing" learned as it steadily lost audience to the likes of "The Bachelor." What works in scripted drama does not necessarily fly in a reality-TV world.

Remixed by Reality

Connoisseurs of a different form of political idealism got it in July when Disney+ streamed the filmed performance of Lin-Manuel Miranda's founding-father musical, "Hamilton."

If "The West Wing" was the progressive pop-cultural fantasy of the Clinton-Bush years, "Hamilton" was its Obama-era answer. (Miranda previewed a snippet at a White House poetry jam in 2009.) Its hip-hop score and its pointed casting of actors of color to play white dollar-bill figures embodied an America resolved to expand its political and cultural range of portraiture.

At its Broadway premiere in 2015, and through the campaign of 2016, there was a kind of triumphalism in the discourse around it. America's first Black president was finishing his second term; his female former secretary of state was, surely, about to replace him. Inclusion had won.

There were still people outside the "Hamilton" spirit, of course. But a candidate who ran on building walls and demonizing immigrants — they get the job done! — would surely fail. The day after the "Access Hollywood" tape came out in October 2016, Miranda hosted "Saturday Night Live" and sang Donald Trump's epitaph with his own lyrics: "He's never gonna be president now."

But hubris was never really the spirit of Miranda's musical. Its music and casting spoke backward in time to a country that talked the talk of liberty and equality but would take centuries to attempt to walk the walk. It was a story of leaders compromising their ideals, of setback and backlash; of planting seeds of hope that you would never live to see grow.

It took the shock of 2016 — the world turned upside down — to bring that aspect of "Hamilton" to the fore. The film premiered on Disney+ the same Independence Day weekend that the president gave a vicious speech at Mount Rushmore that accused antiracism protesters of attacking American history itself.

Watched in that moment, the musical suddenly felt more defiant, combative and urgent. (As it did after the 2016 election, when the cast called out the vice president-elect, Mike Pence, in the audience of a performance.)

It was engaged in an argument, not in the past but right now, over whose faces get carved into stone and whom history belongs to. Fittingly for a show about underdogs, it was playing from the standpoint not of the regime but of the rebellion.

The "Hamilton" that came to Disney+ was the same one that played on Broadway in June 2016, when the film was shot. And it was entirely different. Not a single line had changed. Reality provided the rewrite.

A Celebration and a Requiem

Two more politically minded stage shows airing on TV this weekend originated during the current administration, yet they already find themselves reframed by current events. Amazon's "What the Constitution Means to Me," Heidi Schreck's fact-filled feminist lament of how women's bodies have been "left out of this document from the beginning," is more plangent and vivid after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who has an audio cameo in the show.

One of the season's most stirring statements comes from a concert movie. "David Byrne's American Utopia," on HBO and HBO Max starting Saturday, looks superficially like a sequel to the art-pop of "Stop Making Sense," the Jonathan Demme film of Byrne's heyday with Talking Heads. (Even the natty gray outfits he and his band wear recall his absurdist '80s big suit.) And the film, directed by Spike Lee, is kinetic, visually playful fun.

But a message slips in elliptically, the only way Byrne knows how to travel. He begins alone onstage, serenading a model of a brain. We're born, he says, with more neural connections than we end life with. Does that make us dumber as we age, or better?

"Utopia" dances to the answer by skipping through Byrne's catalog, synthesizing a worldview. He's always had a fascination with homes and houses (burning down the, this is not my beautiful, etc.). Now he builds those blocks into an argument: that a full life means starting from your brain — your first, hermetic home — and then building connections with other people and inviting them in.

This might be a cornball message coming from someone other Byrne, who, as he describes himself, has always been skittish of guests and gregariousness. (That big suit looked like a kind of armor.) Nor has he been politically didactic, preferring the approach of Dadaists like Hugo Ball, who provided the lyrics for "I Zimbra," "using nonsense to make sense of a world that didn't make sense."

But time changes everyone. As "American Utopia" goes on, its politics become more explicit, addressing voting and immigration, building to Janelle Monáe's racial-justice anthem "Hell You Talmbout" — which, Byrne adds self-consciously, he called Monáe about to make sure she was OK with having "a white man of a certain age" perform it.

Finally, Byrne and company bike the streets of Manhattan to the tune of his "Everybody's Coming to My House." It feels like a light ending until you recall that the stage production of "Utopia" closed in February, just before the pandemic shut down Broadway and nobody was coming to anybody's house anymore.

Viewed today, the show's quirky communitarianism — its idea of America as a polymorphous, all-welcoming dance party — feels like both celebration and requiem for the irreplaceable delight dancing together on a stage. (In all these staged-film productions, the shut-in's medium of TV is filling in now for the community of Broadway and the multiplex.)

But it also plays like a call to action. We've had to close up our houses for now. We might as well take advantage of the pause, "American Utopia" says, to think about what kind of home we want to live in once we get to open up again.

FILM REVIEWS

FREEDIA GOT A GUN

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 28 minutes. Watch on Peacock.

The New Orleans bounce music queen Big Freedia is armed with empathy. She doesn't just talk lucidly about how her life has been irrevocably shaped by gun violence in the documentary "Freedia Got a Gun," she does something about it.

The film (streaming on Peacock) wisely avoids biographical documentary tropes, instead functioning more like a call to arms to address the gun violence epidemic in New Orleans. Freedia is forthright and unsentimental about her experiences. Her brother, Adam, was killed in 2018. She discusses how the territorial nature of the low-income housing areas of the city would go on to inform her music.

Freedia is self-aware enough to know, however, how she can use her platform, often stepping back to center on those who have been affected. While visiting correctional facilities and the families of victims, she gives space to those affected, allowing them to speak. Her hope is to work with one kid at a time to ensure he avoids not only being part of the prison system but also experiencing the traumas of violence facing Black men in New Orleans. If the film sometimes drifts into after-school-special aesthetics, that can be forgiven for the striking empathy it has for its community members.

When "Freedia Got a Gun" risks being unrelenting in its pain, the director Chris McKim leaves room for levity. At one moment, the film documents the recovery of a young man paralyzed from being hit by a stray bullet. His mother recounts telling her son he could get an iPhone if he worked on regaining his speech during his rehabilitation. She makes a wily smile, deadpanning, "Sam started talking."

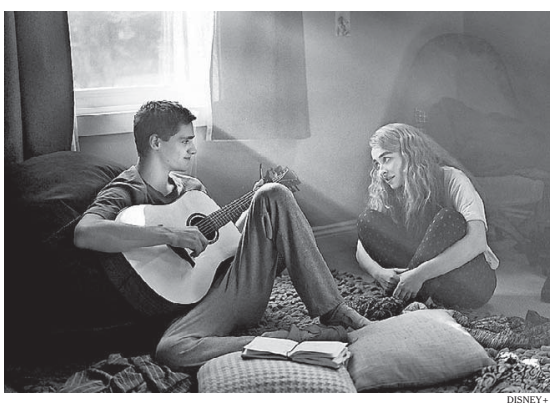
Freedia's beguiling charisma carries the film, and it makes the case that her impressive power, in conjunction with collective action, could help carry a movement, too.

KYLE TURNER

CLOUDS

Rated PG-13 for brief strong language. Running time: 2 hours 1 minute. Watch on Disney+.

In 2012, the terminally ill 17-year-old Zach Sobiech learned he wouldn't live through the following year. To grapple with his grief and the pallor it cast over his first serious relationship, Zach wrote a love song called "Clouds" about his girlfriend, about cancer and about letting go. The ballad went viral, inspiring a celeb-studded lip-sync video including Jason Mraz, Bryan Cranston and Sarah Silverman, plus a visit from the actor-turned-director Justin Baldoni, who flew to the Sobiech home in Minnesota to interview Zach and his family for the digital docu-series "My Last Days."



DISNEY+

Fin Argus and Sabrina Carpenter in "Clouds," directed by Justin Baldoni.

After Zach's death, "Clouds" hit No. 1 on the iTunes singles charts. As an encore, Baldoni has directed a folksy feature by the same name, streaming on Disney+, which presents Zach as a beatific teenager who left too soon. Played with goofball charm by Fin Argus, Zach opens the film flaunting his bald head and gyrating pelvis for the class talent show while belting "Sexy and I Know It."

Big on hugs and scant on plot, the gentle, hazy script (by Kara Holden) is jolted by dramatic moments, like Zach bathing in the healing waters of Lourdes, France, and a seemingly self-destructive incident behind the wheel, which is quickly ushered away unresolved as if to shrug, that's life.

"My Last Days" also inspired Baldoni's first feature, the significantly profitable 2019 romance "Five Feet Apart" about a young couple with cystic fibrosis. The uncharitable reading is the director is aware that tragedies forge a sturdy shield against nitpicks about, say, the meandering pace. Better to be generous until it's clear he intends a franchise.

Yet, while "Clouds" is as doe-eyed and puppyish as an acoustic serenade, Baldoni is wise to recognize that attention must be paid to Zach's survivors, who include his parents (Neve Campbell and Tom Everett Scott); his girlfriend (Madison Iseman); and his best friend and bandmate, played by the vibrant Sabrina Carpenter, who'd hoped to eventually win over her unrequited first love.

AMY NICHOLSON

Art Is Long. This Restitution Case Is Longer.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

Gauguin are still missing, and the Herzog family believes that many are in Russia, Poland, France and many other countries where works are thought to have traveled in the chaos of World War II and its aftermath.

But the heirs have focused in recent years on reclaiming dozens of artworks, including three El Grecos, a Courbet and a Corot, that are now in three Hungarian museums and a university in Budapest. Those works, valued at more than $100 million by the heirs, are the subject of the most recent legal case, which is still winding its way through federal courts in Washington.

"It's the third generation and fourth generation who is actively pursuing the quest to restitute the memory of the Herzog family, to right the provenance of the looted artworks," said Agnes Peresztegi, a lawyer who has represented members of the family for 20 years.

Over the years, the dispute has drawn in all kinds of participants. The United States ambassador to Hungary tried to negotiate a settlement in 1997. Seven United States senators — including Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York and Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts — expressed their views on the case in behalf of the heirs.

But Hungary has argued that the Herzog heirs no longer own the art, citing among other rationales that compensation had been paid in 1973 and resolved any claims made by United States citizens against Hungary, a position the heirs dispute.

Thaddeus J. Stauber, a lawyer who represents the government of Hungary in the current suit, said, "Hungary owns the artworks at issue through lawful purchase, gift, and the uniform application of property laws."

Herzog's collection, known as one of the finest in Europe, became so impressive and expansive because his "appetite for collecting was insatiable," said Konstantin Akinsha, an art historian and leading expert on World War II looted art. "His home had no space for the family, and they moved into other homes. All the walls in Herzog's study were covered by El Greco paintings."

When Herzog died in 1934, his collection was inherited by his wife, Janka, and then, after she died in 1940, his three children — Erzsebet, Istvan and Andras. It was then hidden by the family in various locations in Hungary, including bank vaults in Budapest.

Hungarian and Nazi officials found most of the hiding places and took the artworks to the Majestic Hotel in Budapest, the headquarters of Adolf Eichmann, who went to Hungary in 1944 to help carry out Hitler's extermination of the Jews. When Soviet troops approached the city, Eichmann and Hungarian officials sent works to Germany. Other works were left behind in Budapest's Museum of Fine Arts.

After the war, when the Allies repatriated looted art that was recovered, some Herzog works were returned to Hungary in anticipation that they would eventually be given back to the rightful owners. But many ended up in state museums, where, Herzog family members say, they once bore labels that said "From the Herzog Collection."

The heirs began to make claims in Hungary within a few months after the end of World War II.

For nearly two decades, Erzsebet's husband, Alfonz Weiss de Csepel, wrote to officials in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the United States. The National Archives in Washington has copies of 350 pages from his letters.

Donald Blinken, who was United States ambassador to Hungary between 1994 and 1997, said he worked with Erzsebet's daughter, Martha Nierenberg, to negotiate an agreement with the Hungarian minister of culture under which works would be returned to the family which, in acknowledgment, would give several back to Hungary.

"We thought we had a deal, but a year later we found out that they had reneged," Mr. Blinken said in an interview.

In 1999, Mrs. Nierenberg filed suit in Budapest asking for 12 works and won in a lower court, but Hungary's Supreme Court overturned the judgment in 2002. Three years later, the lower court ruled she was entitled to only one painting. She appealed and lost in 2008.

In 2010, the legal battle shifted to the United States when three Herzog heirs filed a suit in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. The suit was partly funded by the Commission for Art Recovery, which was founded by Ronald Lauder in 1997 to help governments and museums restitute art stolen during the Nazi era.

VIA KASOWITZ BENSON TORRES LLP

Heirs began to make claims within a few months of the war's end.

For years the issue has been whether the United States courts have jurisdiction in the matter. American law does not permit lawsuits against state-owned museums abroad, but there are exceptions, including in cases where property has been taken in violation of international law, an approach that the Herzog heirs have been pursuing.

"We are asking for the return of works or to be compensated for the heirs' interest in the works," said Alycia Benenati, a lawyer for the heirs who has been on the case for 10 years.

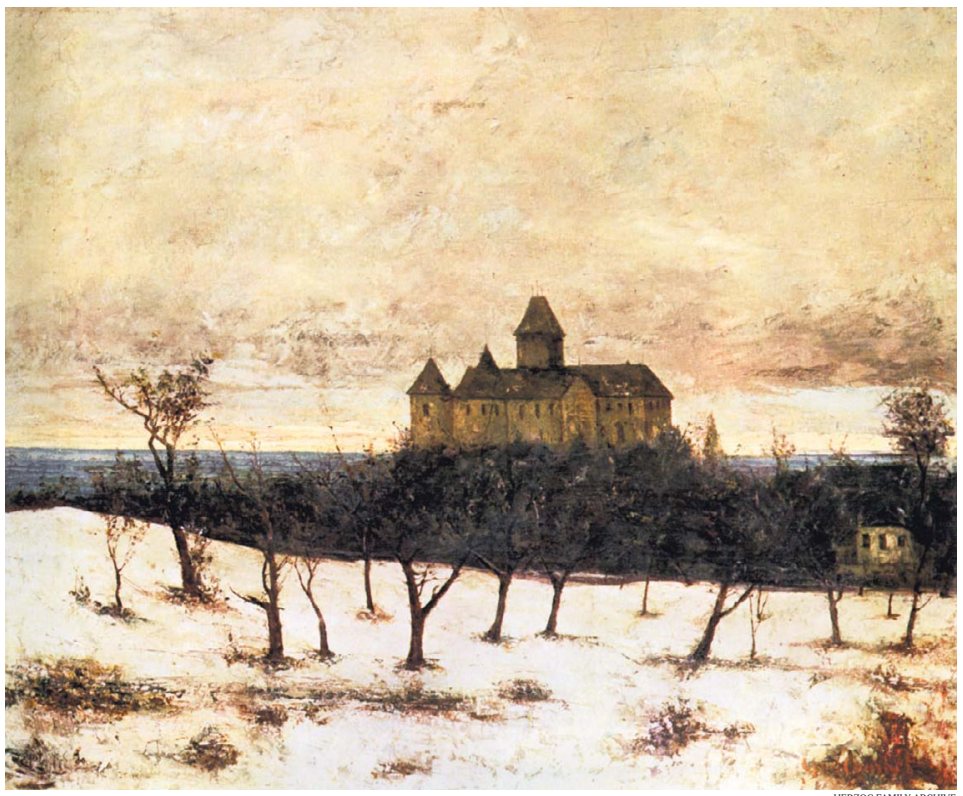
Hungary's efforts to restitute looted art have been the subject of some criticism, most notably from Stuart E. Eizenstat, an adviser to the State Department and an expert on Holocaust-era looted art. He negotiated the Washington Principles in 1998 in which 44 nations agreed to making best efforts to return the art. But at a conference in Berlin in 2018 he was especially critical of Hungary, which he said possessed "major works of art looted on its territory" during World War II and had "not restituted them" despite "being repeatedly asked" to address the matter.

But in May, Judge Ellen Huvelle of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia dismissed the Hungarian government from the case on jurisdictional grounds. She did allow the case to go forward against the Museum of Fine Arts, the National Gallery and the Museum of Applied Arts, as well as the University of Technology and Economics in Budapest.

In July, Judge Huvelle granted Hungary's request to have the District Court of Appeals review whether the case against the museums and the university in Hungary should also be dismissed. No date has been set for the court hearing.

Though much of the case has revolved around legal technicalities, one of the Herzog heirs' lawyers said she hoped it could ultimately become a litigation based on the merits of the family's claim.

Ms. Peresztegi said: "Last year, the French Supreme Court held that as a matter of principle, no lawful purchase and no application of property law can override the fact that a property was taken as a result of Nazi persecution. I expect that the United States courts will reach the same moral and just conclusion."



HERZOG FAMILY ARCHIVE

Top, Baron Mor Lipot Herzog (seated, second from right) and family. Heirs seek the return of Courbet's "The Chateau of Blonay (snow)," above, in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts.

But at this point, the two sides cannot even agree on how long this case will take to get resolved. "The suit will be over in a year," said Mr. Stauber, who is representing Hungary.

"It could drag on for a few more years," Ms. Peresztegi said.

Representatives of the Herzog heirs believe they have identified other looted works in Poland and in France, and they have been pursuing those as well. Several years ago, Poland agreed after lengthy negotiations to return a Courbet landscape that had been at the National Museum in Warsaw to the heirs, who sold it at Christie's in 2014 for $545,000.

"I want to see a resolution," said David L. de Csepel, a grandson of Herzog's daughter who lives in Altadena, Calif., and filed the suit with two other Herzog heirs. "I'm 54 years old, and I don't want it passed on to the next generation."

ELISABETH VINCENTELLI | THEATER REVIEW

Those on the Front Lines Didn't Sign Up for This

Marisa Tomei, Billy Porter and Rosie O'Donnell dramatize the words of nurses pushed to the brink.

V, the writer and performer formerly known as Eve Ensler, seen here in a screen grab, conducted the interviews that serve as source material for the play.

NURSES ARE KNOWN to be caring, patient, full of equanimity. You don't go into the profession for cushy hours and padded salaries, and nurses are selflessly devoted to their jobs and their patients.

But the way Covid-19 has been handled in this country had pushed many of them to the brink. Nurses are now scared and angry to an unprecedented degree, at least if we go by the new virtual docu-play "That Kindness: Nurses in Their Own Words."

Based on interviews conducted by V, the writer and performer formerly known as Eve Ensler, the work-in-progress "That Kindness" (which the Brooklyn Academy of Music is streaming through Monday, in cooperation with two dozen theaters around the country) slowly builds up from feel-good stories of nurses discovering their vocation to seething evocations of frustration and even fury.

"*That,* I did not sign up for!" reads one of the intertitles dividing the narrative into short sections. Billy Porter's Tony gets that line, and he is a former military nurse who is used to tough situations. Andrea (Connie Britton) is just as agitated talking about her resentment of the selfish people who don't take basic precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. She is enraged by those who refuse to wear masks, who travel to attend disease-spreading parties. "Am I going to die for this person?" she asks.

V shaped the source material into a play with help from her longtime collaborator James Lecesne, whose work inspired the Trevor Project. The collagelike format and bare-bones, talking-head staging (V also directed) are similar to Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen's play "The Line," about Covid-19 emergency medical workers. The cast includes Marisa Tomei, LaChanze and Rosie O'Donnell, among others, and everybody is terrific. Even the disparities in sound quality and occasional fluffed lines add to the mounting sense of urgency and exasperation.

As V explains in a prologue, her 2010 uterine cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment — a grueling experience she recounted in her solo show "In the Body of the World" — instilled in her a devoted admiration for nurses. They are "a sacred kind, a holy species," she says, deemed to be "radical angels of the heart." That last adjective is key, because for V, who wrote the wildly influential "The Vagina Monologues," the body is political, making nurses frontline combatants in a struggle for fair treatment and access to care.

Toward the end of the show, Sarah (Rosario Dawson) bitterly points out that many of her peers give up on the profession, finding it too hard to stomach a system in which corporate values take precedence over patients. "That Kindness," which was produced with help from National Nurses United and the California Nurses Association, has a definite activist slant.

Considering the situation in which we find ourselves, you have to wonder how it could be any other way.

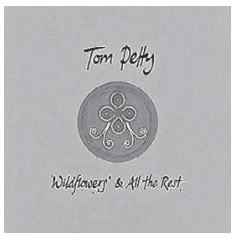
CRITIC'S PICK

That Kindness
Available through Oct. 19 on YouTube; bam.org

LINDSAY ZOLADZ | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

The Raw Roots of Petty's 'Wildflowers'

A deluxe collection of his blockbuster 1994 solo album reveals the ache and despair of a man at a crossroads.



'I've read that "Echo" is my "divorce album," but "Wildflowers" is the divorce album. That's me getting ready to leave. I don't even know how conscious I was of it when I was writing it.'
TOM PETTY TO WARREN ZANES, HIS BIOGRAPHER

ONE DAY IN 1993, Tom Petty opened his mouth, and a new song came out, fully formed.

"I swear to God, it's an absolute ad-lib from the word 'go,'" he later told the writer Paul Zollo of the title track from his melancholic and masterful second solo album, "Wildflowers." "I turned on my tape-recorder deck, picked up my acoustic guitar, took a breath and played that from start to finish."

The extraordinary new collection "Wildflowers & All the Rest" lets listeners experience that mystical, intimate moment: The first home-recorded demo of "Wildflowers" is among the five-disc release's many spoils. (There are also 14 more home recordings, a live album, a disc of alternate takes and unreleased recordings of the 10 other tracks that would have made the cut had "Wildflowers" become the double album that Petty, who died in 2017, initially intended.) In a murmured vocal, Petty sounds like a man fumbling for a light switch and never quite finding it, though a quick flash of luminescence brings a lyric that expresses something simple and true: "Far away from your trouble and worry," he sings in his tender drawl, "You belong somewhere you feel free."

Like a lot of great songwriters, Petty believed he channeled his music from somewhere else, so it wasn't like him to immediately consider exactly who or what a new song was "about." ("I hesitate to even try to understand it," he said of his gift in Peter Bogdanovich's 2007 documentary, "Runnin' Down a Dream," "for fear that that might make it go away.") But some time later, Petty's therapist floated his own theory: "That song is about you. That's you singing to yourself what you needed to hear."

That analysis, Petty recalled to his biographer, Warren Zanes, "kind of knocked me back. But I realized he was right. It was me singing to me."

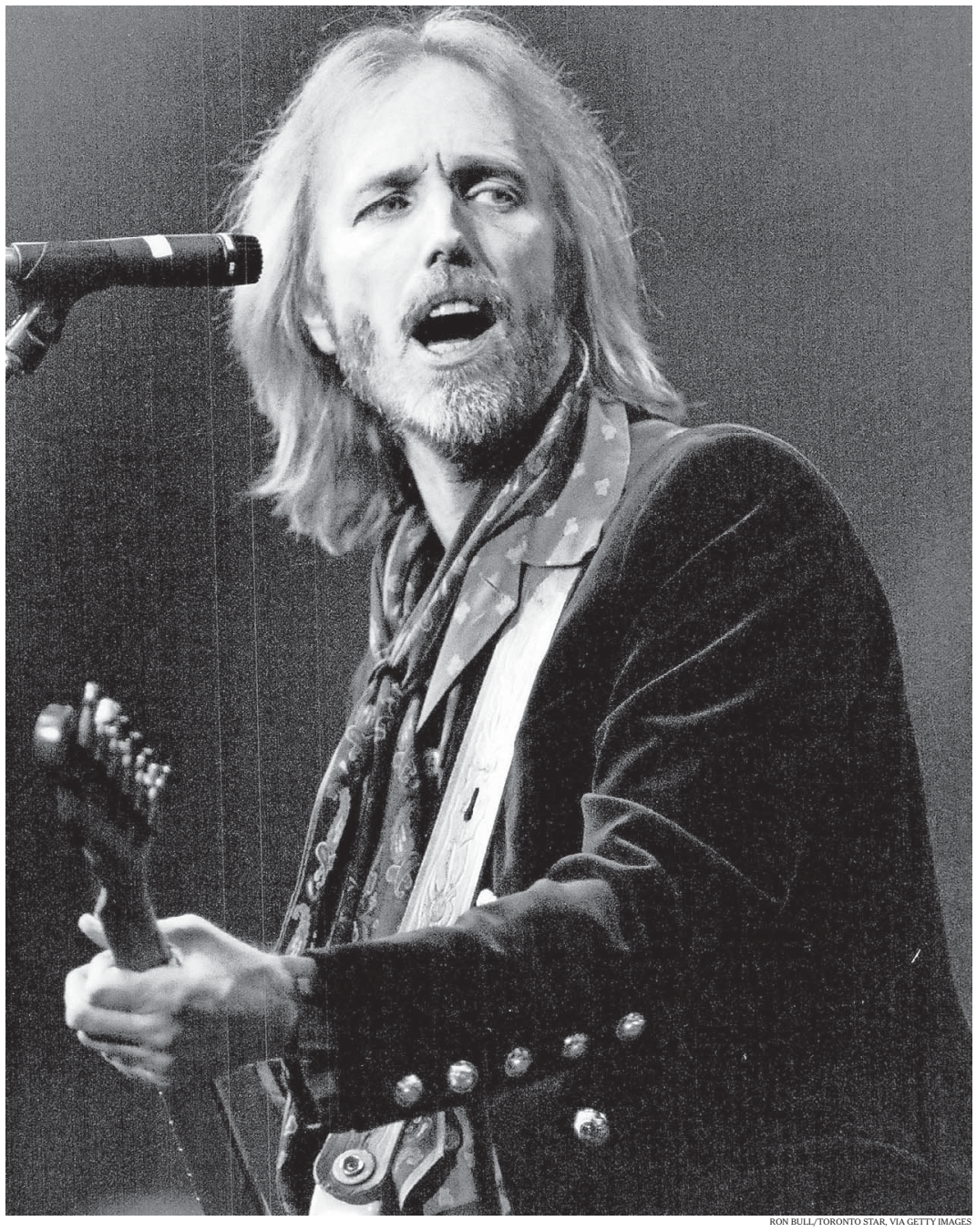
From the outside, in the early '90s, it would have been surprising to hear that Tom Petty needed reassurance from trouble and worry: The wryly grinning rock star appeared to have the Midas touch. Petty was then entering his second decade with the Heartbreakers, the tight, rollicking band that he and some fellow North Floridian pals had formed in the early 1970s; in the years since, they had put out a long, consistent string of hit albums that seemed to hover somewhere above the music industry's passing trends.

By the late '80s, and his late 30s, Petty had not only met his heroes (Roy Orbison, George Harrison, Bob Dylan and Jeff Lynne) but formed a band with them, the Traveling Wilburys. He and Lynne had also recently recorded "Full Moon Fever" (1989), Petty's first solo album, which they captured quickly with charmed and refreshing ease. His record label almost didn't put it out because it didn't think it was commercially viable, despite its first two tracks being "Free Fallin'" (!) and "I Won't Back Down" (!!). Instead, it became his biggest seller yet.

And yet Petty was, throughout all the ostensible highs, outrunning some internal demons that overtook him the minute he slowed down. His two-decade marriage was failing. (His wife, Jane Benyo, had been with him since "the age of 17" — a fact that Petty's friend Stevie Nicks had once misheard because of Benyo's Florida accent; you can fill in the rest of the story from there.) Petty's stormy relationship with the Heartbreakers drummer Stan Lynch was threatening the band's future. And there were all sorts of intrusive memories that he'd been trying to bat away since leaving Florida, of a childhood with a sick, saintly mother and an abusive father whose version of Southern masculinity he could never quite live up to. In the respite after the Heartbreakers released the Lynne-produced "Into the Great Wide Open" in 1991, Petty entered the most searching and fertile creative period of his career.

"There was definitely tension in his life," the "Wildflowers" producer Rick Rubin recalled of the album's sessions in Zanes's biography, adding that it "seemed he didn't really want to leave the studio. Like he didn't want to do anything else in his life. I think he wanted to take his mind off whatever was going on at home."

But of course that all spilled out in the songs he was writing, which were at turns raw, funny, hopeful and, just below the surface, throbbing with an almost constant ache. "In the middle of his life, he left his wife, and ran off to be bad — boy, it was sad," Petty sings atop the richly textured acoustic guitar and a lightly shuffling beat of "To Find a Friend." (Ringo Starr just happened to swing by the studio one day and obliged to sit in.) By the chorus, though, Petty's jokey, I-know-a-guy facade has fallen away and revealed a confession of startling first-person vulnerability: "It's hard to find a friend."


RON BULL/TORONTO STAR, VIA GETTY IMAGES

"Wildflowers and All the Rest" pulls back the curtain on the making of Tom Petty's second solo album.

Petty had long proven himself to be a writer of incisive economy — a rock 'n' roll Hemingway in tinted shades. He had a knack for assembling simple, everyday words into spacious and evocative phrases: Even on the page, to say nothing of all he brings to the recorded vocal, there's an entire short story in the five words, "And I'm free/Free *fallin'*."

One of the geeky joys of "Wildflowers & All the Rest" is observing Petty at the absolute peak of his songwriting powers, making small, intelligent tweaks to these songs in progress. Sometimes it's a single world, a few letters. During the sessions, the guitarist and longtime collaborator Mike Campbell had brought Petty a driving riff around which he wrote a song he called "You Rock Me" — tentatively, because he knew that was an awful title. In the collection's liner notes, Campbell recalls Petty keeping the problem of that lyric on the back burner for months, then one day he arrived at the studio with a monosyllabic eureka: *wreck*. "You Rock Me" is a cliché. "You Wreck Me" is a whole vibe.

Toggling back and forth between the home recordings, alternate takes and the completed album versions reveals Petty subtly moving puzzle pieces around: A hummed bridge melody from the title track's demo finds its home in "To Find a Friend"; "Climb That Hill" moves through two different arrangements before being cut from the finished record. Perhaps most fascinating is the evolution of "You Don't Know How It Feels," which shifts from a somewhat pensive home-recorded ballad to, on the live album, an anthemic, smoke-'em-if-you-got-'em crowd-pleaser. In between, the recording that made the track a hit adds in the drummer Steve Ferrone's indelible beat, as produced by Rubin, a co-founder of Def Jam Recordings. "The nature of the drum pattern, how loud the beat was mixed, spoke to the hip-hop producer in me at the time," Rubin says in the liner notes, "and gave a new flavor to the Petty palate."

Like its predecessor, "Wildflowers" was a hit: It went triple platinum in less than a year, making it Petty's fastest-selling record. Even its staunchest believers were not expecting it to become such a smash. "I think the reason I was surprised," Rubin said in Zanes's book, "has to do with the idea of a grown-up making a good record. There were so few grown-ups making good records that it really stood out, for just that reason."

Sometimes the songs arrive at certain truths before their singer does. "I've read that 'Echo' is my 'divorce album,'" Petty told his biographer, referring to his 1999 effort, "but 'Wildflowers' is the divorce album. That's me getting ready to leave. I don't even know how conscious I was of it when I was writing it." By that time table, then, "Wildflowers" is also prelude to the darkness to come: Petty's debilitating depression, and a mid-90s heroin addiction he kept hidden from almost everyone in his life.

And so the deep despair is there, too, in the rich soil of these songs. But what makes it bearable, and makes the record so timelessly listenable, is everything else that's mixed in: humor, wisdom, a little randiness and a palpable sense of hope. I still find the final song on "Wildflowers," "Wake Up Time," to be the saddest song Petty has ever written: verses of last-call, midlife musings ("You used to be so cool in high school, what happened?") followed by a chorus's inner-child yowl, "You're just a poor boy, alone in this world." But it's also one of his most hopeful. By its end — in this big, calming voice, as warm as the sun — he has become a third character, assuming the role of the kind of parent he always needed.

"It's wake up time/Time to open up your eyes/And rise/And shine." That's Petty singing to himself again. Self-soothing with the creation of yet another perfect song.

Detroit Museum Inquiry Finds No Misconduct

A whistleblower complained about the loan of an El Greco.

By GRAHAM BOWLEY

The Detroit Institute of Arts said Wednesday that a three-month review of a whistleblower complaint against its director and board chair found they had not skirted conflict of interest rules when the museum borrowed a $5 million El Greco painting owned by the director's father-in-law.

The complaint centered on the painting "St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata" that the museum hung in its medieval and Renaissance galleries. The director, Salvador Salort-Pons, said that his family's interest in the painting was properly disclosed and that he informed the institute's chairman, Eugene A. Gargaro, about the plan to lend it to the institute.

Whistleblower Aid, a nonprofit law firm in Washington representing staff members, said Mr. Salort-Pons should have taken more care in avoiding potential conflict of interest problems. In a complaint filed in June with the Internal Revenue Service and the Michigan attorney general, it said that he should have recused himself completely from the loan procedure and formally informed the entire board as well as the public about any family interest.

Whistleblower Aid said that a lack of transparency surrounding the artwork cloaked a situation that could financially benefit the director and his family, since a painting's exhibition on the institute's walls could burnish the painting's value.

But the review, by the Washington law firm Crowell & Moring, found differently, the institute said. "The investigation found that the Board Chair and Director acted in all respects with the best interests of the DIA in mind and did not find that they or any employee or volunteer at the DIA engaged in any misconduct related to the allegations included in the whistle-blower complaint," the museum said in a news release. "There was no finding of any intention to mislead or hide information, nor was there any finding of any conflict of interest, violation of DIA policy or violation of applicable law."

The institute said the law firm's report would not be made publicly available.

In the news release, it said the firm "undertook an exhaustive review of key documents, interviews with numerous persons with relevant knowledge, and review of applicable law, related peer group policies and industry association guidance and best practices."

It said the review had identified possible changes that could be made to the DIA's processes and policies in order to avoid the appearance of conflicts of interest "and to clarify potential policy ambiguities," but it said it could not give details about what these are until the board has considered them further.

John N. Tye, founder of Whistleblower Aid, said in a statement that neither he nor his clients were contacted by the law firm that conducted the review. That and the fact that the report was not being made public "are sure signs that DIA is not serious about addressing the conflicts of interest disclosed by our clients," he said.

The complaint was filed at a time when other concerns about Mr. Salort-Pons's management style and DIA's treatment of its Black employees were roiling the institute.

DIA said a separate investigation into workplace culture, carried out by another team from the same law firm, was nearing conclusion.

BRITTANY GREESON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

An outside law firm hired by the Detroit Institute of Arts found no conflict of interest in the loan of a painting to the museum by the museum director's father-in-law.