Office of Information Governance and Privacy

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 12th St., SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

October 14, 2022

Hart Wood
American Oversight
1030 15th St. NW, B255
Washington, DC 20005
Hart.wood@americanoversight.org

RE: AMERICAN OVERSIGHT v. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY-1:21-cv-01171-TNM
ICE FOIA Case Number 2021-ICLI-00064
Nineth Release

Dear Mr. Hart:

This letter is the nineth interim response to your client's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), dated July 16, 2021. Your FOIA request seeking records related to all final talking points prepared for Secretary Nielsen regarding the MPP and issues related to it, such as plans for lodging asylum seekers in Tijuana, plans for transporting migrants to and from Tijuana, expansion of the protocol to additional ports of entry, etc.

ICE has considered your request under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A total of 500 pages of records were reviewed for this interim production. These 500 pages of records were located pursuant to a search of the Director's Office. After review of these documents, ICE has determined that 13 pages were nonresponsive, and 252 pages were duplicative. The responsive 235 pages of records are attached and have been marked 2021-ICLI-00064 1910 to 2021-ICLI-00064 2144.

ICE has applied FOIA Exemptions (b)(5), (b)(6) and (b)(7)(C) to portions of the pages produced as described below.

FOIA Exemption 5 protects inter-agency or intra-agency deliberative process privilege, attorney work-product privilege, or attorney-client privilege information. Exemption 5 protects the integrity of the decision-making processes within the agency by exempting from mandatory disclosure opinions, conclusions, and recommendations included within inter-agency or intra-agency memoranda or letters. The release of this internal information would discourage the expression of candid opinions and inhibit the free and frank exchange of information among agency personnel.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

FOIA Exemption 6 exempts from disclosure information in personnel or medical files and similar files the release of which would cause a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This requires a balancing of the public's right to disclosure against the individual's right to privacy. The privacy interests of the individuals in the records you have requested outweigh any minimal public interest in disclosure of the information. Any private interest you may have in that information does not factor into the aforementioned balancing test.

FOIA Exemption 7(C) protects records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes when production of such could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This exemption takes particular note of the strong interests of individuals, whether they are suspects, witnesses, or investigators, in not being unwarrantably associated with alleged criminal activity. That interest extends to persons who are not only the subjects of the investigation, but those who may have their privacy invaded by having their identities and information about them revealed in connection with an investigation. Based upon the traditional recognition of strong privacy interests in law enforcement records, categorical withholding of information that identifies third parties in law enforcement records is ordinarily appropriate.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact Assistant United States Attorney Sean Michael Tepe at sean.tepe@usdoj.gov.

Sincerely,

MERONICA D STONEY Digitally signed by MERONICA D STONEY Date: 2022.10.14 16:27:33 -04'00'

Meronica D. Stoney
Ligation Team Supervisor

Enclosure(s): 235 pages

cc: Sean Michael Tepe
Assistant United States Attorney
sean.tepe@usdoj.gov

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

and marijuana possession. The charges are not related to the killing of McDonnell. [IN] 3 people arrested on high-level drug charges in separate weekend incidents (Palladium Item) Palladium Item [3/2/2020 3:34 PM, Jason Truitt, 3K, Positive, Secondary] Three people were arrested on high-level drug charges in two separate incidents over the weekend. Matthew C. Gregory, 29; Jessica T. Hersey, 36; and James S. Hale, 36, all of Richmond, face several preliminary charges that include Level 2 felony dealing methamphetamine. Gregory and Hersey were arrested together after a traffic stop Saturday morning near the intersection of U.S. 40 and Airport Road. Centerville Police Department officers stopped the vehicle shortly after 10:30 a.m. after a pair of unspecified infractions. Eventually, the officers requested the help of K9 Ozzy from the Wayne County Sheriff's Office. Ozzy alerted to the vehicle, leading to a probable cause search, according to law enforcement. That search allegedly found scales, baggies, counterfeit $100 bills and pipes "heavily coated in methamphetamine." Gregory and Hersey were taken to the Wayne County Jail where a search of Hersey allegedly discovered some 25 grams of meth, marijuana, another pipe and plastic baggies "discreetly concealed," according to the sheriff's department. 55 Gregory was booked in under preliminary charges of dealing meth (Level 2 felony), possession of marijuana or hashish (Class A misdemeanor) and possession of paraphernalia (Class A misdemeanor). In addition to the meth-dealing count, Hersey was charged with counterfeiting (Level 6 felony), possession of marijuana or hashish and possession of paraphernalia. The charges are just the latest legal trouble for Gregory, who already has an open methdealing case against him. In that incident, he's facing a Level 4 felony count of dealing as well as one count each of possession of a controlled substance (Class A misdemeanor) and possession of marijuana (Class B misdemeanor). A trial is scheduled for May 5 in Wayne County Circuit Court. Gregory has previous felony convictions for possession of meth, burglary and theft and misdemeanor convictions for possession of a controlled substance and public intoxication. Hersey has been convicted of one felony in the past for possession of a narcotic drug as well as a handful of misdemeanors (carrying a handgun without a permit, possession of paraphernalia, conversion, assisting a criminal, driving while suspended and public intoxication). Suspicious vehicle call Hale's arrest came late Sunday night in the downtown area. Officers were called to Midtown MediCenter Pharmacy on South Ninth Street to check out a suspicious vehicle. When they arrived, they found Hale and allegedly could see drugs in plain view on the driver's seat. A search of the vehicle turned up more drugs, and Hale was taken into custody on preliminary charges of dealing in meth, possession of a narcotic drug (Level 6 felony), possession of a syringe (Level 6 felony) and possession of paraphernalia (Class A misdemeanor). Like Gregory, Hale already has a case against him for allegedly dealing meth. That charge is a Level 5 felony and is included with counts of possession of a controlled substance (Level 6 felony) and possession of a syringe. An initial hearing in that case is set for 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 3, in Wayne County Superior Court 1. Hale also has open drug-related cases in Preble County, Ohio. In one, he faces counts of aggravated possession of drugs (third-degree felony) and illegal use or possession of drug paraphernalia (fourth-degree misdemeanor). In the other, the charges include tampering with evidence (third-degree felony) and aggravated possession of drugs (fifth-degree felony). In both instances, he has applied for intervention in lieu of conviction, which would allow Hale to have the charges dismissed if he completes court-ordered drug treatment. [IA] Man charged with possession of fake cash pleads not guilty to drug, gun charges (Sioux City Journal) 56 Sioux City Journal [3/2/2020 12:59 PM, Nick Hytrek, 18K, Neutral, Secondary] A Sioux City man charged with possessing 174 counterfeit $100 bills in his vehicle has pleaded not guilty to drug and gun charges. Nicholas Thompson, 29, entered his written plea Friday in Woodbury County District Court to possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, felon in possession of a firearm and failure to affix a drug tax stamp. According to court documents, Thompson was a passenger in a vehicle involved in a Jan. 29 vehicle chase that began at WinnaVegas Casino in Sloan, Iowa. After the driver lost control of the vehicle and entered the ditch in the 1700 block of 330th Street, Woodbury County Sheriff's deputies located a package containing 283 grams of methamphetamine in the snow where Thompson had exited the vehicle. Deputies also found a loaded .38-caliber revolver they determined had been thrown from the vehicle's passenger side before the vehicle entered the ditch. Thompson has pleaded not guilty to one count of forgery in connection to a Jan. 8 arrest on Interstate 29 in which a deputy found the fake $100 bills. Thompson told the deputy he had won the money while gambling at WinnaVegas Casino, court documents said. The deputy also found a piece of paper on which it appeared someone had attempted to print a $100 bill. Thompson also faces an unrelated meth possession charge from a July arrest in Sioux City. [SD] Counterfeit money used at Sturgis gas station (KEVN Black Hills Fox) KEVN Black Hills Fox [3/3/2020 12:32 AM, Sunday Miller, 2K, Neutral, Secondary] Counterfeit money, it's something that's been circulating in the Sturgis community for years with the latest incident happening this past weekend. Caught on video, Sturgis police said a man entered a Sturgis gas station with a fake $100 bill. At the Cenex gas station on Lazelle Street, police said the man used the fake money to buy a water bottle. Sturgis most commonly sees an increase in counterfeit money during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Using counterfeit money is a felony that carries potential prison time. The assistant police chief said he has seen fake bills with Chinese symbols, as well as money used for movie

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

productions. "Number one we'll look at their video, see if we can try to identify who the subject is that passed the counterfeit money, with this type of a case where it was an actual 100 dollar bill, not the fake Chinese currency, we will contact the secret service and probably send the bill to them and give them a serial number of the bill as well, so they can see if it's something that's been going on in the region," said Sean Briscoe, assistant chief for the Sturgis Police Department. 57 Briscoe said counterfeit money is often made from a different material and can have imperfections, such as smeared ink. If you come across one of these counterfeit bills, report it to the police department. [OR] Police say man used fake $20s in stores across Oregon (KOIN) KOIN [3/2/2020 6:42 PM, Staff, 61K, Positive, Secondary] A man has been arrested for allegedly using counterfeit cash to buy thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise in towns up and down the Interstate-5 corridor in Oregon. Tigard police said counterfeit $20 bills were used in stores from Medford to Eugene, Salem, Hillsboro, and Tigard between December 2019 and February 2020. A total of ten transactions amounted to more than $5,000-worth of products from Macy's and JCPenney stores. Tigard police said the suspect allegedly used $2,000 in counterfeit bills for purchases in Tigard alone. Tigard Police said the department's Commercial Crimes Unit detectives were tipped off to the crimes by the retail stores and were able to identify a suspect as 41-year-old Edwin Fuller, a Los Angeles resident. Local authorities learned that Fuller was due to be released from the Clark County jail. When he was on Feb. 26, Tigard police followed Fuller to the airport and arrested him with the help of Port of Portland Police that afternoon. Fuller faces ten counts of first-degree forgery, and an additional four counts of theft, according to Tigard Police. Authorities said they believe he was involved in similar cases in other states, so Tigard's CCU has shared their investigative findings with a network of other law enforcement agencies and "loss prevention specialists across the country." [OR] Arrest Made In Counterfeiting Operation (1190 Kex) 1190 Kex [3/2/2020 9:17 PM, Staff, 919K, Positive, Secondary] Tigard Police have arrested a man who's accused of spending over $5,000 in counterfeit money. 41-year-old Edwin Fuller, of Los Angeles man, is charged with ten counts of Forgery I and four counts of theft. The charges stemmed from the suspect allegedly using counterfeit $20 dollar bills to purchase over $5,000 of merchandise at retail stores in Tigard, Eugene, Salem, Hillsboro, and Medford from December 21, 2019 to February 21, 2020. Ten transactions were conducted at Macy's and JCPenney stores, ranging from $360 to $640. In Tigard, the suspect allegedly tendered nearly $2,000 in counterfeit bills during four transactions between December 2019 and last month. Loss prevention officers at JCPenney and Macy's helped Tigard CCU detectives identify and apprehend the suspect. Tigard Police received information that Fuller was being released from a Clark County jail and trailed the suspect to the Portland International Airport, where he was taken into custody with the assistance of the Port of Portland Police. 58 The suspect is believed to be involved in similar incidents in other states. Tigard CCU detectives are sharing information with law enforcement agencies and loss prevention specialists across the country that may have similar outstanding cases. [OR] Man accused of spending $5K in fake money at retail stores across Oregon (KPTV) KPTV [3/2/2020 6:40 PM, Staff, 44K, Positive, Secondary] A California man is accused of using counterfeit $20 bills to buy more than $5,000 in merchandise from retail stores in Tigard, Eugene, Salem, Hillsboro, and Medford. Edwin Fuller, 41, of Los Angeles, is facing 10 counts of forgery in the first degree and four counts of theft. The transactions occurred from Dec. 21, 2019 to Feb. 21 this year, according to investigators with the Tigard Police Department. In Tigard, Fuller allegedly tendered nearly $2,000 in counterfeit bills during four transactions. 10 other transactions were made at Macy's and JCPenney stores, with purchases ranging from $360 to $640, according to investigators. Detectives worked with the department stores to identify and arrest Fuller. Law enforcement arrested him at the Portland airport after learning that he was being released from a jail in Clark County. Investigators are now sharing information with law enforcement agencies and loss prevention specialists across the country, as they believe Fuller has been involved in similar incidents in other states. Coast Guard [MS] Coast Guard christens cutter USCGC Stone (Breitbart) Breitbart [3/2/2020 8:38 PM, UPI, 1973K] The U.S. Coast Guard christened its ninth Legends-class National Security Cutter, the USCGC Stone, in ceremonies at Pascagoula, Miss. The vessel, formally christened on Saturday, is envisioned by the Coast Guard as able to undertake a range of high endurance cutter roles with additional upgrades available. It is a part of the Defense Department's Integrated Deepwater System Program, a 25-year program envisioned in 2012 to replace most of the U.S. Coast Guard's equipment, including aircraft, ships, logistics and command-and-control systems. The new ship is named after Elmer "Archie" Stone, one of two Coast Guard pilots who, in 1919, made the first Trans-Atlantic flight in a Navy seaplane. He is the great-uncle of Laura Cavallo, who served as the ceremonial ship's sponsor. "It's a great joy and a great pride for the United States, too," she said in ceremonies on Saturday. 59 The USCGC Stone, built by Huntington Ingalls Industries, is 418 feet in length, displaces 4,500 tons and will be commissioned in 2021. The Legend-class of ships is the largest, most technologically advanced ship in the Coast Guard and carries a crew of 120. "Over the last four years, we as a Coast Guard have interdicted 2 million pounds of illicit drugs," USCG Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said during the ceremony. "These modern cutters allow our nation to advance all of our national interests, and the success wouldn't be possible without the partnership that we find right here in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Pascagoula with HII." [CA] Top Marine, Navy and Coast Guard officers talk coronavirus at San Diego conference (San Diego Union Tribune) San Diego Union Tribune [3/2/2020 8:37 PM, Andrew Dyer, 241K] The spreading Covid-19 coronavirus so far has not affected military readiness, according to top-ranking officers in the U.S. Coast Guard, Navy and Marine Corps who spoke at a the WEST 2020 conference in San Diego Monday. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger and Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz each downplayed the effect of the virus on their services after an Army soldier stationed in Korea became the first U.S. service member to test positive for the virus last week. Gilday, Berger and Schultz each said no service members in their branches have yet tested positive for the virus. An Army spokesman confirmed the soldier is, as of Monday, the only service member to test positive. However, the spreading contagion is having an effect on operations, the chiefs said. "The coronavirus itself manifests in different ways," said Gilday. "What we're seeing across the combatant commands is a variety of steps (to mitigate the effect). We've prohibited travel up in northern Italy due to the concentration of the outbreak there. Same thing in certain spots in Asia." Gilday said the Navy is scrutinizing port visits for its ships and scaling back some naval exercises. He did not mention any specific ports or ships, but he said sailors are being screened coming and going from ships in port. "We are testing crews before they go ashore (and) testing crews before they come back," Gilday said. "We trained our med personnel to be able to identify the symptoms, test, then isolate, quarantine, until you confirm whether or not it's an active case." Schultz said the Coast Guard is helping screen commercial ships coming to the U.S. for signs of the virus. "We're working with shippers, we're working with crew members," he said. Berger said the Marines scaled back exercises in Asia, but the Corps has not been affected otherwise. "So far, not a big impact," Berger said. He said U.S. bases, including Marine Corps Station 60 Miramar, responded well when tasked with housing quarantined American citizens who were evacuated from Wuhan, China in February. WEST is a large naval conference held in San Diego each year. It attracts top military brass and defense contractors to the San Diego Convention Center and runs through Tuesday. CISA/Cybersecurity Super Tuesday brings a supersized election security challenge (Politico) Politico [3/2/2020 6:30 PM, Eric Geller, 2003K] Millions of voters across the country will cast ballots during Super Tuesday on old, insecure election equipment — even after nearly four years of handwringing and warnings about Russian election interference. The jurisdictions at risk include three of Tennessee's biggest counties — Shelby, Knox and Rutherford — where the paperless voting machines at the polls will include devices with security flaws so alarming that voters tried suing to have the equipment removed from precincts. Dozens of small counties in Texas are also sticking with risky touchscreen machines that have no paper trail to help detect tampering or malfunctions. And in California, Los Angeles County is debuting new voting machines that have drawn scrutiny for security weaknesses, as well as their developer's past alleged ties to the Venezuelan government. The news is better in other parts of the Super Tuesday map, as some counties and states have successfully replaced their old paperless voting equipment with more secure paperbased machines. But even some of this new technology presents vulnerabilities that hackers could exploit to tamper with the primaries. Other states holding primaries on Tuesday, including Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont, predominantly use the technology that most experts consider the most secure: paper ballots that voters fill out by hand. Here's a look at how the 14 Super Tuesday states compare: At risk Tennessee and Texas represent the biggest election security concerns on Tuesday. Many counties there still use machines that do not produce individual paper vote records, which cybersecurity experts consider an essential protection against hacking and malfunctions. For instance, voters in Shelby, Tenn., the state's largest and most populous county and home to Memphis, will use a touchscreen model called the Dominion AccuVote TSx that experts say has serious security flaws. Those concerns prompted voters to sue in 2018 to have the equipment replaced. In September, a federal judge dismissed the case, ruling that residents failed to show evidence of harm. Several other large Tennessee counties, including Davidson and Williamson, recently purchased paper-based voting machines. But many smaller counties still didn't have enough money or time to replace their paperless equipment before the presidential primary, 61 even though Congress gave states $380 million in federal election security grants in 2018. In some cases, local officials have simply refused to acknowledge their voting machines are vulnerable. Texas faces a similar problem: As POLITICO reported last year, dozens of small counties there lack the resources or willingness to replace their insecure machines, and the state Legislature recently punted on mandating paper-based systems until at least 2021. Some large Texas counties have recently purchased paper-based devices, including Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar and Collin. But paperless machines will remain in use in Harris County, the state's most populous jurisdiction, which includes Houston. In Oklahoma, meanwhile, the vast majority of voters will manually fill out paper ballots. But voters with disabilities will be offered the Hart eScan A/T, a device that does not produce individual paper vote records. Oklahoma's election office has denied this fact — although POLITICO independently confirmed it with two security experts — and does not plan to replace these machines. Problematic A few Super Tuesday states will use paperless devices that have been modified with printer attachments meant to provide what's known as a voter-verified paper audit trail. Security experts consider these printers a temporary fix for paperless machines but urge

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

officials to buy modern devices built around paper ballots as soon as possible. These states include Arkansas, where some counties will use Election Systems & Software's paperless iVotronic machine with a printer attachment, although a few jurisdictions have replaced those machines with modern systems. Similarly, some people in Salt Lake County, Utah, will use a printer-enabled Dominion AccuVote TSx machine in its vote centers. Otherwise, the state conducts voting by mail. Two counties in California will use the paperless AccuVote machines with printer attachments, but only for voters with disabilities. Less secure Security experts are also concerned about a type of electronic voting machine known as a "ballot-marking device," which lets voters select their choices on a touchscreen before printing out a paper slip that serves as the official ballot. These devices have surged in popularity in recent years, as local election officials scramble to replace their old paperless machines without eliminating the convenience of a touchscreen interface. But they have also prompted warnings from security experts and election-integrity activists, who say they could be vulnerable to attacks or malfunctions that cause the printed ballot to differ from the voters' selections. (Most voters don't check these ballots, studies have found.) Some ballot-marking devices print ballots with scannable barcodes. If voters don't check the text on those ballots before they're scanned, and hackers have manipulated the data embedded in the barcodes, the inconsistencies will delay the reporting of correct results. 62 All 14 Super Tuesday states will use these devices, but to varying degrees. In some states, such as Alabama, only voters with disabilities will use these electronic voting machines. In others, such as North Carolina and Texas, certain counties will rely only on these devices. One ballot-marking device that has drawn significant scrutiny is the Dominion ImageCast Evolution, which will appear in some polling places in Minnesota, Tennessee and Virginia. (Unlike Tennessee, Minnesota is a predominantly paper-based state. In Virginia, which has upgraded much of its election equipment since 2016, most voters will rely on hand-marked paper ballots.) Some security experts consider this Dominion machine riskier than other ballot-marking devices because it integrates a ballot scanner that tallies the results. The problem: Hackers who compromise the ImageCast could make it add votes to the printed ballots after voters cast them but before they're scanned. "If the cheating software can mark my ballot, after the last time I can inspect it, then the ballot seen by the recount team is not the same as I marked it," said Princeton University computer science professor Andrew Appel. Paper: The safest option Super Tuesday's most-secure swath of states will be those where the vast majority of voters hand-mark their paper ballots, while voters with accessibility issues will primarily use ballotmarking devices that experts believe have the fewest security concerns. Those include: Alabama, Colorado (a vote-by-mail state that maintains some in-person vote centers), Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Vermont and Virginia. A wild card California predominantly relies on hand-marked paper ballots, but many voters in Los Angeles County will use a new type of voting machine that raised objections from some security experts — and which the state approved only after imposing an unusual array of security requirements to address "critical flaws" and other shortcomings. Some security experts and election integrity advocates have also criticized the county's decision to award the "Voting Solutions for All People" contract to a vendor called Smartmatic, which was the subject of a congressionally requested inquiry 14 years ago into its potential foreign ties. Los Angeles County developed the system part of the county's VSAP project, which is meant to enhance security by providing a paper-based device with software that the county owns and controls. The state is requiring polling places in the county to have paper ballots on hand for voters who don't want to use the VSAP system. An estimated 63 percent of the county's voters have requested absentee paper ballots to vote by mail. 63 Senior administration officials warn of foreign influence campaigns ahead of Super Tuesday (The Hill) The Hill [3/2/2020 4:21 PM, Maggie Miller, 1762K] The leaders of eight federal agencies on Monday jointly urged the public to be vigilant of foreign influence operations around the presidential primaries ahead of Super Tuesday, also emphasizing the federal government's coordination in defending against threats to elections. In a statement released Monday, the Trump administration officials — who included Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Attorney General William Barr and acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf — noted that they "continue to work with all 50 states, U.S. territories, local officials, political parties and private sector partners to keep elections free from foreign interference." The officials cautioned that Americans "must also remain aware that foreign actors continue to try to influence public sentiment and shape voter perceptions," adding that foreign actors may attempt to "spread false information and propaganda about political processes and candidates on social media" in order to create doubt in the election system. "We remain alert and ready to respond to any efforts to disrupt the 2020 elections," the officials said. "We continue to make it clear to foreign actors that any effort to undermine our democratic processes will be met with sharp consequences." The statement was also co-signed by Defense Secretary Defense Mark Esper, acting Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Richard Grenell, FBI Director Christopher Wray, U.S. Cyber Command Commander and National Security Agency Director Gen. Paul Nakasone, and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Director Christopher Krebs. The officials emphasized that the level of "coordination" between federal agencies and state and local election officials was "stronger than it's ever been." "Our Departments and Agencies are working together in an unprecedented level of

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

commitment and effort to protect our elections and to counter malign foreign influence, but voters have a role to play too," the officials said. In order to defend against disinformation threats on social media, the senior officials recommended that American voters check their voter registration for correct information on where and when to vote, noting that the best source of information around elections was local or state election websites. "A well-informed and vigilant republic is the best defense against disinformation," the officials emphasized. The federal government has stepped up its efforts to defend against foreign interference in U.S. elections in the wake of Russian interference during the 2016 presidential election cycle. According to U.S. intelligence agencies, the Senate Intelligence Committee and the report compiled by former special counsel Robert Mueller, Russian agents launched a sweeping interference campaign involving disinformation on social media and hacking attempts on 64 election infrastructure in the run-up to the 2016 elections, with the goal of favoring the campaign of now-President Trump. Disinformation campaigns online have remained a persistent threat since then, with Barr, Wolf, Krebs, Wray and former Acting DNI Joseph Maguire penning an op-ed in USA Today in February also highlighting concerns about disinformation around elections. "We cannot prevent all disinformation, foreign propaganda or cyberattacks on our infrastructure," the officials wrote in the op-ed. "However, together, we can all help to mitigate these threats by exercising care when we share information and by maintaining good cyber hygiene to reduce the risks that malicious cyberattacks will succeed." CISA has been one of the key agencies involved in assisting state and local election officials with defending against election interference. The agency operated a situational awareness room on Election Day during the 2018 midterms to continuously monitor threats nationwide and plans to host a similar awareness room during the Super Tuesday primary elections. US warns foreign actors: Stay out of Super Tuesday or 'face sharp consequences' (ABC News) ABC News [3/2/2020 6:22 PM, Luke Barr and Alexander Mallin, 2182K] Top officials from the State Department, Department of Justice, Homeland Security Department, the FBI and U.S. Cyber Command issued an unusual joint warning on Monday to countries or other foreign actors that might try to interfere in the nation's Super Tuesday primaries: Stay out or face "sharp consequences." "We continue to work with all 50 states, U.S. territories, local officials, political parties and private sector partners to keep elections free from foreign interference," they said in the statement. "Americans must also remain aware that foreign actors continue to try to influence public sentiment and shape voter perceptions. They spread false information and propaganda about political processes and candidates on social media in hopes to cause confusion and create doubt in our system. We remain alert and ready to respond to any efforts to disrupt the 2020 elections. We continue to make it clear to foreign actors that any effort to undermine our democratic processes will be met with sharp consequences," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, U.S. Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf, acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray, U.S. Cyber Command Commander and National Security Agency Director Gen. Paul Nakasone, and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Director Christopher Krebs, said. In conversations with secretary of state offices and other state elections officials with the 14 Super Tuesday states, most expressed high confidence in the security of their elections systems and their ability to guard against any potential attempts to interfere. Meanwhile, cyber experts ABC News spoke with are calling for increased vigilance among both voters and elections officials. "We're in for a wild ride," Michael Hamilton the former CIO of the city of Seattle and current founder of cyber security company CI Security 65 Hamilton continued that it might not be the voting systems themselves that are compromised, but the technology used to tabulate the vote. "So the tablets are being used for voting, the tablets are being used by precinct volunteers to activate systems into pulling the tally of the votes," Hamilton said. He noted that that elderly precinct volunteers often aren't up on all the latest technology and introducing more into the voting systems could cause problems. Officials in Alabama say they're prepared for Super Tuesday. "We remain confident that our local election officials are as prepared as they can be. They've instructed their poll workers and their election officials as to what needs to be done and everything is in places they're ready to move ahead for the election next Tuesday," Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill said. Elections happen on a local level. The federal government provides support and helps the states conduct and run elections. Officials in Oklahoma said they are using a multi-tiered approach. "Oklahoma has an intricate, multi-layer election security system in place. We work closely with multiple agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department of Homeland Security, State Cyber Command, the FBI, and the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management," Misha Mohr the Public Information Officer Oklahoma State Election Board told ABC News. In neighboring Texas, the state with the most delegates at stake, officials say all systems are a go ahead of the primary in their state. "Texas voters can rest assured ahead of Tuesday's primary election that our office, as well as those of local and county elections officials, are committed to working hand in hand to ensure smooth elections as well as the integrity of our electoral process," Stephen Chang, the spokesman from the Texas Secretary of State's office told ABC News in a statement. Officials in several states have told ABC News they have assigned staffers to keep a close watch specifically on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and alert the company as well as the news media in the event they

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

see something suspect. Specifically, they're worried about social media posts that have incorrect information on poll closing times or erroneous location changes, things that could specifically affect voter behavior on the day of the vote. A former DHS official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity told ABC News, said that on a federal level, during the 2018 midterms, the strategy of the cyber arm of DHS, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), was to try to inform the public what was going on as much as possible and trying to "build some resilience in the public around the idea of disinformation." This former official said that they wanted to make sure that DHS was concerned with 66 election management systems, and secretary of state websites provide valuable information for people ahead of going to the polls. Another concern is the social media misinformation that the U.S. saw in 2016 and, according to one expert, it is still prevalent. "I think that clearly, foreign actors are trying to influence or impact our elections. I think our elections are critical to our foundation, our Constitution, and that every attempt should be made not just, two days before they before, Super Tuesday, but this should be an ongoing effort is to look at how do we better protect our the infrastructure that supports our right to vote as well as how do we do a better job of helping to improve the security of all the campaigns," Craig Harber, a former National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command officer told ABC News. Harber is now in private consulting for Fidelis. Harber said it is a whole of government approach to securing the elections, pointing to the fact that U.S Cyber Command is involved in securing the elections, scanning for any time of malicious interference. The greatest concern in these primaries, according to both state and federal elections officials, is the spread of disinformation on social media -- influence campaigns geared at confusing or dividing the public like we saw from the Russians' sweeping effort in 2016. "One of the things they're going to be obviously, essentially trying to do, is influence perceptions, again, through social media," Harber said. "After 2016, security has been revamped, and is the number one concern for every election officer out there," Daniel Mahoney, deputy director of the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center, told ABC News. "It's really been brought to the forefront. And I can tell you, every election officer I've talked to, is taking it extremely seriously." He said that, because of the information sharing that goes on between fusion centers, if malicious activity is detected in one voting state, it will get shared and communicated throughout the country. "Fusion centers tomorrow and all the election officers that we've spoken to are all in a state of readiness. And if something if something is to happen, we're going to be aware of it on a national level and we're going to address it on a national level," Mahoney said. Feds warn of foreign meddling ahead of Super Tuesday primaries (Washington Times) Washington Times [3/2/2020 10:55 AM, Stephen Dinan, 482K] The heads of the FBI, Homeland Security, Justice Department, State Department and the intelligence community issued an extraordinary alert Monday warning of foreign meddling in elections, just as millions of voters prepare to vote in Super Tuesday primaries. The officials didn't reveal any specific plots, but said "foreign actors continue to try to influence public sentiment and shape voter perceptions," just as Russia did in the 2016 election. "They spread false information and propaganda about political processes and candidates 67 on social media in hopes to cause confusion and create doubt in our system," the officials said. "We remain alert and ready to respond to any efforts to disrupt the 2020 elections. We continue to make it clear to foreign actors that any effort to undermine our democratic processes will be met with sharp consequences." It's not clear what those consequences are — and Democrats complain that the Trump administration has been weak in its response to the meddling from the last presidential election. The Trump officials who joined in the statement Monday are Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell, FBI Director Christopher Wray, National Security Agency Director Gen. Paul Nakasone and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Director Christopher Krebs. The officials said they've been working with states, who have the responsibility to run elections, to help them harden their defenses against tampering. But defeating misinformation on social media has proved far more tricky. The Trump officials said voters themselves must play a role in defending elections against interference. "We encourage all voters going to the polls to check your voter registration and know ahead of time when to vote, where to vote, what's on your ballot, and whether your state requires identification," the security officials said. "A well-informed and vigilant republic is the best defense against disinformation." Despite Cybersecurity Risks And Last-Minute Changes, The 2020 Census Goes Online (NPR) NPR [3/2/2020 5:01 AM, Hansi Lo Wang, 4112K] After centuries of putting pen or pencil to paper, the U.S. government is getting ready to rely on digital screens and the cloud for its first-ever primarily online census. Starting March 12, households across the country are expected to be able to participate in the once-a-decade national head count by going to my2020census.gov to complete the online census questionnaire, which is set to be open to the public through July 31. Under pressure to cut costs and keep up with these increasingly Internet-centric times, the Census Bureau is expecting, based on an earlier test run, about six out of 10 households that fill out a form on their own to do so online. For those who have limited Internet access or prefer to stay offline, the bureau is also collecting census responses over the phone and on paper forms, which are scheduled to arrive at some homes by mid-March and then in early April to every household that hasn't responded by then. "People can reply almost

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

anywhere, at any time," Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham said last month in a written statement to lawmakers on the House Oversight and Reform Committee, while also noting the web form and call centers are available in 13 languages. 68 But the planned public debut for the online census form comes amidst heightened concerns about cybersecurity risks, disinformation campaigns and technical troubles. NPR has learned that as a precaution, the bureau has increased its printing order to prepare enough paper forms for every home address in the country. Still, a snafu with the upcoming digital rollout, some lawmakers and other census advocates worry, could derail the constitutionally mandated head count and undermine public trust in data that carry at least a decade's worth of implications across the U.S. The results of the count are used to redraw voting districts and redistribute congressional seats, Electoral College votes and an estimated $1.5 trillion a year in federal funding among the states. "The Iowa primary debacle comes to mind" A nightmare scenario played out less than four years ago with Australia's census. After a series of outages caused by distributed denial-of-service attacks inundating the website for that country's first-ever "digital-first" census in 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics decided to shut down the online form for nearly two days. In social media, it gave rise to the hashtag #CensusFail. The U.S. Census Bureau has been looking for lessons from Down Under since then. But some census watchers in the U.S. say they don't have to look that far back for an incident that stokes their fears. "I must tell you the Iowa primary debacle comes to mind when I think of the census going digital," Congressional Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat who represents the District of Columbia, said with a furrowed brow before questioning Census Bureau officials during a House Oversight and Reform Committee hearing last month. Unlike the smartphone app that delayed the reporting of results from this year's Iowa Democratic caucuses, the Census Bureau's IT systems are not expected to produce new census numbers in a matter of hours. The bureau has until the end of December to start releasing the results of the 2020 census, beginning with the latest state population counts. Still, in the months leading up to that legally mandated deadline, the bureau faces an unforgiving timeline that involves not only launching an online census form, but also relying on new IT systems and other technology to hire, train and deploy as many as a half-million temporary workers to help complete the count. Beginning in mid-May, it's planning to send workers equipped with an iPhone app to collect and deliver information about people in households that have not self-responded to the census. For those who do go online to fill out the census on their own, the experience will likely boil down to spending about 10 minutes on a government website. But for the federal government's largest statistical agency, it will be a culmination of years of largely under-theradar planning, testing — including a practice run of the census in 2018 — and some lastminute changes that could turn this year's count into the most complicated yet. "The Internet is here to stay" 69 For decades, the Census Bureau has tried to rely on the Internet to gather names, dates of birth, phone numbers and other personal information about every person living in the U.S. for the national count. A little-known fact is that the first online U.S. census took place in 2000. The last-minute rollout was so quiet that the bureau did not push out any advertising or even issue a press release. "Unless someone happened to stumble across the link to the on-line form, or had some connection to the Census Bureau, he or she would not likely have known about this response mode," according to the bureau's report on its unprecedented online efforts in 2000, when a sliver of a percent of the country's more than 281 million residents were counted that way. Still, that 2002 report noted that a digital census was on the horizon. "The Internet is here to stay. The exact form and function of Census Internet options, however, is largely undeveloped," the report said. Bureau officials ultimately decided to pass on another opportunity to take the count online for the 2010 census, which turned out to be another paper-dependent count after a debacle involving handheld computers that census workers were supposed to use to collect information from non-responsive households. That count turned out to be the most expensive to date at $12.3 billion in 2020 dollars. "Behind schedule and rushed to deploy its systems" This year's census, estimated to cost $15.6 billion, could break that record. Officials at the Census Bureau hope they can keep that number from ballooning in part by cutting back on paper and collecting most of the country's census information online, as well as automating other operations by going digital. But last year, a report by the Office of Inspector General for the Commerce Department, which oversees the Census Bureau, said it found "fundamental security deficiencies" with the cloud-based IT systems for the 2020 census. Among the weaknesses, the internal watchdog group said, were incomplete plans for recovering lost census information stored in the cloud in case of a cybersecurity attack or disaster. "Many of these deficiencies indicate that the Bureau was behind schedule and rushed to deploy its systems," the Commerce OIG wrote in its June 2019 report. Questioned by Del. Norton last month during the House oversight committee hearing, Dillingham, the bureau's director, said the agency has "remedied" all of the issues highlighted by the OIG's report. "We store the data in multiple areas in the cloud to ensure security, and we back that up regularly," explained Albert Fontenot, an associate director at the bureau in charge of the 2020 census, during the hearing. "We can recover data if we had a breach or a situation like that." 70 "A burden of proof" The bureau says it has not identified any census data that have been compromised during the 2018 test run of the census. But in December, reporting by Reuters, which NPR has not been able to confirm, raised questions among some

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

census watchers about the security of the bureau's IT systems. Citing anonymous sources, Reuters reported that while no data was stolen, the website created to collect census responses was "hacked from IP addresses in Russia during 2018 testing of census systems" and that "an intruder bypassed a 'firewall' and accessed parts of the system that should have been restricted to census developers." In a rare written statement released hours after the report was published online last year, the bureau said the story "contains inaccuracies and outdated information," adding that it was "looking into every aspect" of the report and "taking all concerns seriously." NPR has learned the bureau has since concluded "no 'hack,' breach, compromise, or cyber attack occurred" during the 2018 test run, according to a Feb. 3 letter that Dillingham wrote to Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and the bureau's public information office provided to NPR. Asked by NPR whether the incidents highlighted in the report involved IP addresses linked to Russia, Kevin Smith, the bureau's chief information officer, did not directly answer, saying instead there were no "nefarious" actions by "foreign entities" during the test run. "They basically were able to see the website until we further restricted the access to just U.S. territories and U.S. states," Smith added. [Editorial note: consult source link for extended commentary] Two Chinese nationals indicted in cryptocurrency laundering scheme linked to North Korea (Washington Post) Washington Post [3/2/2020 9:13 PM, Spencer S. Hsu and Ellen Nakashima, 12625K] The United States on Monday charged two Chinese nationals with laundering more than $100 million in stolen cryptocurrency from a 2018 cyberattack linked to North Korea's illicit nuclear missile and weapons development program. The new indictment, accompanied by sanctions and a civil forfeiture complaint seizing 113 cryptocurrency accounts filed in federal court in Washington, marks the first and largest enforcement action of its kind by the United States to deter North Korea's cryptocurrency financing. "The hacking of virtual currency exchanges and related money laundering for the benefit of North Korean actors poses a grave threat to the security and integrity of the global financial system," said Timothy J. Shea, U.S. attorney for Washington. The charges come after a U.N. sanctions monitoring panel reported last summer that North Korea has raised up to $2 billion for its weapons development program through cyberattacks, including "increasingly sophisticated" raids against financial institutions and cryptocurrency exchanges to steal, launder and generate funds. 71 Large-scale attacks by North Korea on cryptocurrency exchanges that deal in virtual money such as bitcoin and Ethereum and rely on blockchain technology "generate income in ways that are harder to trace and subject to less government oversight and regulation than the traditional banking sector," the U.N. expert panel reported in August. "The United States will continue to protect the global financial system by holding accountable those who help North Korea engage in cybercrime," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said. The charges and enforcement actions Monday are linked to an estimated $250 million in stolen funds. About $68 million of the funds laundered by the two defendants flowed to nine named Chinese banks, the government said. The case underscores the role played by China's banking system that has agitated relations between Beijing and Washington, people familiar with the case said. The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control alleged that Tian Yinyin and Li Jiadong provided material support for "a malicious, cyber- enabled activity" and assisted an attack by Lazarus Group, a North Korean government cyber group that has carried out the bulk of North Korea's malicious hacks against U.S. and foreign banks, corporations and other targets. The Trump administration in September sanctioned the group, whose accused exploits include an attempted ransomware attack on hundreds of thousands of WannaCry users in 2017, and the 2014 hack of Sony Pictures after it backed a satirical movie depicting the assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The Treasury Department at that time sanctioned the Lazarus Group and two subgroups dubbed Bluenoroff and Andariel, saying all three are controlled by North Korea's primary intelligence agency, the Reconnaissance General Bureau. North Korea has resorted to hacks against financial institutions to obtain income in the face of global sanctions imposed over its nuclear program that have starved its access to foreign currency and the world banking system, experts say. The U.S. indictment, handed up Thursday and unsealed Monday, comes amid a renewed rise in tensions over North Korea's missile threat. North Korea on Monday launched two short-range projectiles off its east coast in its first weapons test in three months. The test came a year after Kim's failed summit meeting with President Trump and amid allegations that nuclear talks have broken down. Pyongyang has pledged never to give up its nuclear weapons, which the United States and its allies say must be the goal of any negotiations. North Korea has separately denied allegations of orchestrating cyberattacks and cyberheists. The U.S. actions will be seen by North Korea as part of the administration's "hostile policy," said Jung Pak, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former CIA analyst. "It highlights that the two countries are on parallel tracks. .?.?. They're going to lob missiles. We're going to do what we're doing, which is designate, investigate," Pak said. The U.S. charges appear to bolster the U.N. panel's accusations on Pyongyang's 72 "deceptive practices" and exploitation of weak enforcement by cryptocurrency exchanges and foreign banks. U.S. criminal filings allege that Tian and Li received funds from North Korean coconspirators who had attacked four cryptocurrency exchanges since 2017. Court documents do not name the exchanges, but the details link them to publicly reported hacks that the U.N. panel tied to North Korea's revenue generation efforts. They include a December 2017 hack on Youbit that

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

took 17 percent of its assets and sent it into bankruptcy, a $49 million hack on Upbit in November 2019, and $30 million stolen in June 2018 from Bithumb — all three of South Korea. Much of the laundered money came from a nearly $250 million, previously undisclosed hack in 2018 of another Asian exchange, court documents said. The intrusion came after an employee unwittingly downloaded malware while communicating with a potential client, the documents said. U.S. court documents allege that Tian and Li sent roughly 2,500 deposits with $67.3 million in stolen funds to nine Chinese banks: China Guangfa Bank, Agricultural Bank of China, China Everbright Bank, China CITIC Bank, China Minsheng Bank, Huaxia Bank, Industrial Bank, Pingan Bank and Shanghai Pudong Development Bank. Tian and Li are not in U.S. custody and are assumed by U.S. authorities to be in China U.S. court filings did not accuse the banks of any wrongdoing. Regulators said banks are typically required under "know your customer" regulations to question clients and identify the source of such large deposits, and to report suspicious transactions, several people familiar with the process said. Commercial blockchain analysis firms helped U.S. investigators trace hacked funds, knowing that although cryptocurrencies are known to attract criminals seeking anonymity, all transactions to individual accounts are recorded in public ledgers that can be amassed into large data sets. One such firm, Chainalysis, profiled Lazarus in a January report on the state of crypto-crime that said the North Korean-linked entity had conducted one of the "most elaborate phishing schemes" the industry has ever seen. Monday's actions are likely to be "just the first" of U.S. government actions to follow the money from its Lazarus revelations, Chainalysis spokeswoman Maddie Kennedy said. The firm estimated that seized cryptocurrency accounts still hold about $15 million, and it is advising clients of any exposure to accounts named by the U.S. government. "A not insubstantial part of North Korea's gross domestic product is based on stealing cryptocurrency funds," Kennedy said. U.S. authorities are "showing that … anyone who helps facilitate those who are stealing illicit funds are going to be held responsible." The investigation was a massive and complex undertaking. After identifying accounts that received tens of thousands of related transactions, U.S. investigators followed up with requests for associated customer financial account and communications records under domestic and foreign legal authorities from more than 100 private entities. 73 "These are not the only two individuals we're aware of that are involved in this type of activities," IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent Christopher Janczewski said. The case was cracked when unidentified North Korean co-conspirators made a key error covering their tracks, according to court documents. Court filings said attackers layered — or "peeled" — transfers through more than 5,000 transactions, including by using one-time use cryptocurrency wallets, through multiple countries before converting proceeds to government-backed currencies. But they failed to "peel" one bulk transfer worth about $1.6 million which investigators traced to a North Korean-linked source, the charges said. Separately investigators traced North Korean co-conspirators logging in from Pyongyang and using North Korean cellphone infrastructure, according to court documents. The same North Korean co-conspirators involved, the U.S. alleged, were also engaged at that time in a massive phishing campaign posing as advertisers for a Los Angeles firm or prospective clients or developers for cryptocurrency exchanges. The co-conspirators, court documents said, had a fake Twitter and LinkedIn page created with the name "Waliy Darwish" and Celas LLC, which produced a malicious software code that gave access direct access to the downloader's system. Celas shared a server and IP address with known malware named Fallchill that the FBI and Homeland Security Department have associated with the government of North Korea, and the Celas application used a language code associated with North Korea, court documents said. The phishing campaign targeted thousands of work and personal email accounts at exchanges around the world, including of prominent executives in the industry, court documents said. Ken Gause, a North Korean expert and director of the adversary analytics program at C.N.A., a think tank, cautioned against assuming that all hacked funds go to North Korea's nuclear program saying the Kim family, a wider elite, and civilian economy all likely benefit. Gause warned that enforcement actions may not disrupt evolving attacks, which he called "an unending game of whack-a-mole." US sanctions, charges two Chinese linked to N. Korean hack (Breitbart) Breitbart [3/2/2020 6:17 PM, AFP, 1973K] US authorities on Monday sanctioned two Chinese citizens and accused them of of laundering more than $100 million in cryptocurrency stolen in a 2018 cyberattack linked to North Korea. Tian Yinyin and Li Jiadong are accused of working with Lazarus Group, sponsored by North Korea and blamed for the April 2018 hack of an unnamed cryptocurrency exchange in which about $250 million was stolen. "The North Korean regime has continued its widespread campaign of extensive 74 cyberattacks on financial institutions to steal funds," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement. "The United States will continue to protect the global financial system by holding accountable those who help North Korea engage in cyber crime." Tian and Li received about $91 million in cryptocurrency stolen by North Korea in the 2018 hack and an additional $9.5 million from another theft, the Treasury said. It has frozen their property and assets on US territory and banned trade with them under the sanctions. Tian allegedly laundered some of the money by selling Bitcoin for prepaid Apple iTunes gift cards. The two were indicted Monday in US federal court charged with money laundering conspiracy and operating an unlicensed money transmitting business, the Department of Justice (DoJ) announced separately. DoJ said it was

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

filing a forfeiture complaint on 113 virtual currency accounts used by the defendants and others tied to their scheme, and had already seized some money. "The hacking of virtual currency exchanges and related money laundering for the benefit of North Korean actors poses a grave threat to the security and integrity of the global financial system," said Timothy Shea, the federal prosecutor in Washington. The North is under heavy US and United Nations sanctions over its nuclear program, and tries to bypass those sanctions by attacking the virtual currency system, said Don Fort, criminal investigation chief of the Internal Revenue Service. Last September, Washington issued sanctions against three North Korean entities accused in cyberattacks, including the Lazarus Group, which was involved in the theft of around $80 million from the central bank of Bangladesh. It was also accused of being behind the WannaCry attack in 2017 that affected approximately 300,000 computers worldwide including in the US, Canada and New Zealand. The heaviest hit was Britain's public health system, with hospitals virtually shut down and thousands of patients turned away, costing the government ultimately more than $112 million. Created in 2007, Lazarus Group has been known to authorities for years, with the United Nations sanctioning it in 2016. Treasury sanctions Chinese hackers for laundering previously stolen cryptocurrency (The Hill) The Hill [3/2/2020 2:41 PM, Maggie Miller, 1762K] The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control on Monday sanctioned two Chinese hackers for laundering cryptocurrency valued at $91 million previously stolen by 75 North Korean cyber criminals. The agency sanctioned Chinese nationals Tian Yinyin and Li Jiadong for providing financial and technological support for a North Korean hacking group known as Lazarus that stole $250 million from a cryptocurrency exchange in 2018. Tian and Li were sent $91 million from the funds stolen by Lazarus, as well as $9.5 million from a separate North Koreansponsored hack. Once they were in possession of the stolen funds, Tian and Li are then alleged to have transferred the money to various addresses in order to cover up where the funds originated from. About $1.4 million of the stolen cryptocurrency was transferred to Apple iTunes gift cards. As a result of the sanctions, all U.S. property of Tian and Li have been blocked, and any individuals found to be interacting with them may open themselves up to being sanctioned as well. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin harshly condemned both the Chinese hackers and ongoing North Korea cyberattacks on financial groups in a statement on Monday. "The North Korean regime has continued its widespread campaign of extensive cyberattacks on financial institutions to steal funds," Mnuchin said. "The United States will continue to protect the global financial system by holding accountable those who help North Korea engage in cyber-crime." The new sanctions come after the Treasury Department formally sanctioned the Lazarus group and two other North Korean hacking groups in September for targeting U.S. critical infrastructure, with the Treasury Department noting at the time that all three were tied to the North Korean government. The Lazarus group was also involved in the WannaCry ransomware attacks in 2017, which impacted around 150 countries and encrypted or shut down around 300,000 computers, becoming one of the largest ransomware attacks in history. North Korea is widely considered one of the most dangerous nations in cyberspace alongside Russia, China and Iran, and was estimated in August by a United Nations panel to have stolen about $2 billion to fund its weapons of mass destruction programs through cyber activities, with about $571 million attributed to cryptocurrency theft. U.S. charges two Chinese nationals with helping N.Korea steal millions in cryptocurrency (Reuters) Reuters [3/3/2020 3:34 AM, Josh Smith, 5304K] The U.S. Justice Department charged two Chinese nationals with laundering more than $100 million in cryptocurrency on behalf of North Korea, in court filings that detail Pyongyang's use of hackers to circumvent sanctions. According to an indictment filed in federal court in Washington, D.C., and unsealed on Monday, the two Chinese allegedly laundered cryptocurrency stolen by North Korean hackers between December 2017 and April 2019, helping to hide the stolen currency from police. 76 "These defendants allegedly laundered over a hundred million dollars worth of stolen cryptocurrency to obscure transactions for the benefit of actors based in North Korea," Assistant Attorney General Brian Benczkowski said in a statement. In a related civil forfeiture complaint also unsealed on Monday, Justice Department lawyers said they had seized some of the roughly $250 million that they said North Koreans hackers stole from a virtual currency exchange in 2018. Those funds were then laundered through hundreds of automated transactions designed to prevent investigators from tracing the funds, the complaint alleged. At least some of those funds were eventually used to help pay for the infrastructure in North Korea used to launch cyberattacks, according to the documents. The same North Korean hackers were linked to a November 2019 attack on a South Korean virtual exchange that netted the hackers more than $48 million in stolen cryptocurrency. "The hacking of virtual currency exchanges and related money laundering for the benefit of North Korean actors poses a grave threat to the security and integrity of the global financial system," U.S. Attorney Timothy Shea of the District of Columbia, said in the statement. The United Nations Security Council has imposed sanctions on North Korea since 2006 in a bid to choke off funding for Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. North Korea has generated an estimated $2 billion for its weapons of mass destruction programs using "widespread and increasingly sophisticated" cyber attacks to steal from banks and cryptocurrency exchanges, a confidential United Nations report said last year. The U.N. experts said North Korea's attacks against cryptocurrency exchanges

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

allowed it “to generate income in ways that are harder to trace and subject to less government oversight and regulation than the traditional banking sector.” At the time, North Korea denied those U.N. allegations, calling them a “fabrication” aimed at tarnishing the country’s image. The United States last year charged American digital currency expert Virgil Griffith with helping North Korea use cryptocurrency and blockchain technology to evade U.S. sanctions, after he attended a 2019 North Korean cryptocurrency conference. Prosecutors said he and other conference attendees had discussed how cryptocurrency technology could be used by Pyongyang to launder money and evade sanctions. Griffith’s lawyer has rejected the charges. [WV] After damaging report, W.Va. moves away from voting app (San Diego Union Tribune) San Diego Union Tribune [3/2/2020 5:32 PM, Anthony Izaguirre, AP, 241K] West Virginia is opting not to use a widely criticized voting app in the state’s coming primary elections after a blistering report found potential security flaws in the platform. 77 Donald Kersey, general counsel in the West Virginia Secretary of State’s office, said Monday that an MIT analysis of the Voatz app “gave us enough pause” to instead use a different system for the May elections. The decision came as state officials had to choose an online voting system to comply with a new law requiring electronic ballots for people with physical disabilities. Last month, an MIT study found that Voatz, which has mostly been used for absentee ballots from overseas military personnel, has vulnerabilities that could allow hackers to change a person’s vote without detection. The researchers said they were forced to reverse engineer an Android version of the app because the company hasn’t allowed transparent third-party testing of the system. The Voatz app was used to tally fewer than 200 ballots in West Virginia’s 2018 elections and didn’t have any problems, state officials said. The app has also been used in pilots in Denver, Oregon and Utah. The Boston-based Voatz has strongly disputed MIT’s research methods, accusing the analysts of acting “in bad faith.” The company said the app hasn’t had any reported issues over nine pilot elections. Voting security experts have repeatedly argued that online voting is dangerously insecure. Few states are even considering it. Alaska in 2018 explored doing so but then decided against it. After the release of the MIT report, officials in West Virginia were quick to point out that they hadn’t yet decided to use the Voatz app for the state’s new disability voting law in the coming primaries. On Friday, the Secretary of State’s office said it would use an electronic system from the company Democracy Live that will allow voters to fill out ballots online or have them printed out and mailed in. The technology has been deployed in more than 1,000 elections in the past decade and uses a portal hosted by Amazon cloud, according to a news release. [GA] Georgia AG’s office closes probe of alleged attempted hack of voter registration system (CNN) CNN [3/2/2020 6:00 PM, Devon M. Sayers, 5551K] The Georgia state attorney general’s office said Monday it has ended its investigation into the alleged hacking of Georgia’s voter registration system in 2018. "While the evidence in this case properly gave rise to concerns that were appropriately address to law enforcement, the investigation did not reveal any evidence to support ... criminal prosecution," the office said Monday in an investigative report. The investigation into what then-Secretary of State Brian Kemp’s office characterized as an attempted hack was announced two days before the November 2018 gubernatorial election in which Kemp was the Republican candidate. Kemp went on to win the election over Democrat Stacey Abrams in a close race. In series of emails, the secretary of state’s office, then run by Kemp, said led it to accuse 78 the Georgia Democratic Party of hacking its voter registration system. The emails refer to findings by a voter who said he had discovered potential vulnerabilities in the state’s voter information page and its online registration system. The voter took his concerns to the Georgia Democratic Party’s voter protection hotline to alert authorities, according to his lawyer, David Cross. At the time, Cross told CNN that the voter was not affiliated with any political party and did not want to speak to any media. He also said the voter has some software background but is not a hacker. The voter was looking up his own registration information on the state’s My Voter Page when he discovered he could access other people’s information too, Cross told CNN. The system, the voter found, doesn’t verify who’s making the query and, for that reason, it appeared to him that voters’ private information could be accessed and voter registrations could even be edited by anyone on the site. The voter went over his concerns with Cross, who has battled with Kemp over similar issues before, including a 2016 lawsuit that alleged cybersecurity vulnerabilities in Georgia’s voting system. Unclear on the implications of what the voter had found, Cross brought in a cybersecurity firm to look at the website. While that firm couldn’t verify the vulnerability either, it too saw a potential for concern, Cross told CNN. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation’s probe concluded that there was no evidence of damage to the secretary of state’s network or computers and no evidence of theft, damage, or loss of data. Georgia Democratic Party Chairwoman Nikema Williams called the investigation "a sham from the start" in a statement Monday. "Since the beginning of this whole process, Georgia Democrats have made it clear that our priority is to protect the integrity of Georgia’s democracy, while Brian Kemp and his administration have stopped at nothing to chop it down," Williams said. She added: "Georgia Democrats will continue to do everything in our power to fight back against voter suppression, protect and expand our voter rolls, and put Georgia’s voters first. We look forward to continuing this most important work, and we will help Georgia voters hold Brian Kemp, his lies, and his Republican allies accountable at the ballot box." CNN is reaching out to Kemp’s

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

office and the secretary of state's office for comment on the attorney general's office's findings. [CO] SpaceX, Tesla contractor hit by ransomware attack (Breitbart) Breitbart [3/2/2020 9:39 AM, Staff, 1973K] A Colorado-based parts manufacturer that does work for Tesla Motors and SpaceX was hit by a ransomware attack over the weekend, company officials said. Visser Precision said the "cybersecurity incident" was caused by the ransomware DopplePaymer, a file-encrypting malware, and the hackers threatened to leak files if a ransom is not paid. A spokesman said the company was a "recent target of a criminal cybersecurity incident" 79 that included data theft. Visser said it was performing a "comprehensive" investigation. A website containing the stolen files included folders from Tesla and SpaceX, as well as Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Non-disclosure agreements between Visser, Tesla and SpaceX were included in the data dump. "Because so many actors now steal data, all ransomware incidents should be considered to be data breaches and it is absolutely critical that incidents be promptly disclosed," analyst Brent Callow said. The DoppelPaymer malware was also recently used in an attack against staffing firm Allied Universal, which lost employee and business data after it refused to pay $2.3 million in ransom. National Security News Lawmakers wrangle over FBI's surveillance tools (San Francisco Chronicle) San Francisco Chronicle [3/2/2020 6:23 PM, Mary Clare Jalonick, Eric Tucker, and Lisa Mascaro, AP, 1670K] Surveillance authorities used by the FBI to fight terrorism are in danger of lapsing this month as both Democrats and Republicans concerned about government overreach negotiate possible reforms. Liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans want to overhaul the surveillance powers to ensure that the U.S. doesn't unfairly target private citizens. And Republicans angry over the FBI's investigation into President Trump's campaign and Russia want to use the looming March 15 deadline to force their own changes. The biggest unknown is Trump himself. Some Republicans are privately pushing the president — long suspicious of the nation's intelligence community — to demand immediate reforms. While Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, have both said they don't want the surveillance authorities to expire, each has to overcome significant rifts within their caucuses to move forward. Attorney General William Barr is pushing Congress to quickly renew the surveillance tools, calling them essential for law enforcement. Barr and some other Republicans have suggested renewing the powers and letting the Justice Department work on changes to the programs that wouldn't require congressional approval. At issue are three surveillance provisions, including one that permits the FBI to obtain court orders to collect business records on subjects in national security investigations. Another, known as the "roving wiretap" provision, permits surveillance on subjects even after they've changed phones; and to monitor subjects who don't have ties to international terrorism organizations. 80 The FBI calls the provisions vital in the fight against terrorism and stresses that none are tied to the surveillance problems identified by the Justice Department inspector general during the Russia investigation. The inspector general said in a report last year that the FBI made serious mistakes during four applications to eavesdrop on former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page, including omitting information that did not support their suspicions that Page was an asset of a foreign government. The concerns over the Russia investigation, amplified by Trump, have given leverage to those members of Congress in both parties who see a window to push for more oversight of government surveillance. Democrats concerned about civil liberties are agitating for changes. In the House, Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-San Jose, has so far thwarted the House Judiciary Committee's bill by saying she'll offer a series of amendments backed by some of the panel's more liberal Democrats. Lofgren would not reveal her amendments but has pushed to prohibit warrantless collection of web browsing data and strengthen oversight of surveillance measures she and other Democrats say are overreach. This week: House eyes vote on emergency coronavirus funding (The Hill) The Hill [3/2/2020 6:01 AM, Jordain Carney and Juliegrace Brufke, 1762K] Lawmakers are racing to clinch a deal on emergency funding to combat the coronavirus as more cases, and the first deaths within the United States, took place over the weekend. The House is expected to vote on billions in funding aimed at combating the illness this week, though negotiators have not yet finalized a deal. "An important step that Congress must take is to ensure the government has the resources needed to combat this deadly virus and keep Americans safe. To that end, House appropriators are working to advance a strong emergency funding supplemental package that fully addresses the scale and seriousness of this public health crisis, which we hope to bring to the Floor next week," Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said in a "Dear Colleague" letter on Saturday. A group of appropriators, led by Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) and Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), have been locked in days of negotiations over a potential package to provide supplemental funding amid growing concerns about a widespread outbreak of the virus within the United States. "We want to make sure if this stuff really spreads that we're doing our job," Shelby told reporters late last week. The administration requested $2.5 billion in funding, half of which would have been new funding. The rest would have come from existing health programs, including $535 million from fighting Ebola. They're likely to get double or triple that request. A source familiar with the talks confirmed to The Hill that negotiators are looking at providing between $6 billion and $8 billion. That's below the $8.5 billion requested by Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D- 81 N.Y.), but significantly more than the White House's request—which even some Republicans

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

characterized as too low. "I think $2 billion is a little low, I think we're probably looking at $4 billion in this process, having spoken to Democrat House members from Appropriations," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) told reporters last week during a press conference. Pelosi added in her statement that the funding package had to be comprised of new funding, and that there must be guardrails to ensure Trump "cannot use these new funds for anything other than fighting coronavirus and infectious diseases." Lawmakers are hoping to have the package ready to move by early this week. They face a tight timeline if they are going to get the bill passed by the House, Senate and to Trump's desk before leaving for a week-long recess on March 13. "I hope they can work expeditiously so the full Senate would be able to take up the legislation within the next two weeks. And I hope, as we move forward through this challenge, this body can put reflexive partisanship aside and uphold the spirit of cooperation and collaboration this will require," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said last week. The discussions on Capitol Hill come as new cases of the coronavirus were disclosed, including two deaths within the United States. The two deaths were in Washington, where Gov. Jay Inslee (D) declared a state of emergency in the state on Saturday. Meanwhile, New York confirmed its first coronavirus case on Sunday. The New York Times, citing a gene sequencing analysis, reported that the virus may have been spreading in the United States for weeks undetected. In addition to potential funding legislation, several committees will be holding hearings on the U.S. response to the coronavirus. The House Homeland Security Committee will hold a hearing on Wednesday, while the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and Commerce, Science and Transportation Committees will each hold related hearings this week. Four officials including Anthony Fauci, the director of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Stephen Hahn, the Food and Drug Administration commissioner, are scheduled to testify before the Senate HELP Committee on Tuesday. On Thursday, Kenneth Cuccinelli, the acting deputy DHS secretary, and Robert Kadlec, the assistant secretary for preparedness and response at the Department of Health and Human Services, will testify before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Super Tuesday 82 A number of highly contested primaries are expected to be determined on Tuesday evening, with multiple high-profile incumbents facing tough races to retain their seats. In Texas, Rep. Kay Granger (R-Texas), the top Republican on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, will take on Chris Putnam, a former Colleyville city council member who has garnered the support of conservative outside groups including Club for Growth. Senior Democratic Rep. Henry Cueller (Texas) will take on a challenger from the left, Jessica Cisneros, an attorney and liberal activist, who has received support from progressive members including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Democratic presidential front-runner Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.). In California, voters will choose the candidates who will face off in the special election for former Rep. Katie Hill's seat. And former Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) will take on two other candidates in the race to become the Republican nominee in what will likely be a second runoff against Democrat Ammar Campa-Najjar in the race to replace former Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.). The Alabama Senate primary will see former Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), Rep. Bradley Byrne (R-Ala.) and former Auburn football coach Tommy Tuberville (R) battle for the chance to take on Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.) in November. Sessions, who previously served as attorney general, has had a rocky relationship with President Trump. Sessions fell out of favor with Trump after having recused himself from oversight of the Russia probe and was ousted from the administration in November 2018. But the president has largely stayed out of the race. If none of three candidates breaks 50 percent the primary race will go to a runoff between the top two contenders. Surveillance Lawmakers are still trying to figure out how, or if, they will be able to extend three soon-toexpire provisions of the USA Freedom Act. Congress has until March 15 to reform, extend or end the intelligence programs, which deal with lone wolf surveillance, "roving" wiretaps and a controversial records program that lets the government request phone metadata. The legislative fight has sparked a larger debate about trying to use the reauthorization legislation to make broader changes to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and the FISA courts. So far neither chamber has been able to advance a bill related to the expiring provisions. The House Judiciary Committee yanked its bill last week after Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) threatened to force votes on several FISA-related amendments. Progressives and libertarian-minded GOP lawmakers have warned for years that they do not believe the government provides enough transparency or privacy protections for individuals targeted for surveillance. 83 Those concerns have taken root with a broader swath of Republicans after Justice Department inspector general Michael Horowitz found 17 "significant inaccuracies and omissions" in his report on the FISA warrant applications regarding Trump campaign associate Carter Page. Several Trump allies on Capitol Hill are pushing for broader FISA reforms as part of the USA Freedom Authorization. "Ranking Member [Doug] Collins and [Jim] Jordan on down have proposed good reforms, reforms that should be bipartisan that not only make sure it doesn't happen again, but put real criminal penalties in place so that if somebody does violate the law, they're fully held accountable," Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.) told reporters. Meanwhile, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) told reporters last week that Trump was supportive of his amendment that would ban FISA warrants from being used against an American citizen. It would

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

also prohibit information gathered in the FISA court from being used against an American in domestic courts. [Editorial note: consult source link for extended commentary] [OR] Indian Casino Closes After Employee Gets Coronavirus (US News & World Report) US News & World Report [3/2/2020 5:59 PM, Andrew Selsky, AP, 3020K] Leaders of an American Indian reservation in Oregon shut down its casino and several other facilities Monday after an employee contracted coronavirus, and a state health official said the virus is likely circulating and will appear in additional locations in the state. The employee of the Wildhorse Resort and Casino on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is hospitalized in Walla Walla, Washington, and is the third such case to emerge in Oregon, state and tribal officials said. The previous two other known cases occurred in the Portland area and had household contacts with each other, but the casino is 215 miles (350 kilometers) east of the city. "With having three cases fairly quickly identified, two of which we can't identify the specific source, that would indicate to us that this disease is circulating in our community and we will likely see additional cases," Dean Sidelinger, state health officer and state epidemiologist, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. Chuck Sams, communications director for the confederated tribes, said the tribe was informed Monday morning by Gov. Kate Brown and Oregon Health Authority officials that an employee of the resort and casino had tested positive for the virus. The casino, an education facility, tribal elders community center and the cultural institute were being shut down for one to two days while they are disinfected. The man worked in a confined area of the casino operation and not with the general public, Sams said. He had attended a youth basketball game at a gymnasium at the middle school in Weston, Oregon, on Saturday. School district officials have closed the gym and will clean it. Other spectators who may have been in a closed environment with the individual would be 84 considered "low-risk" exposures, the state health authority said. It is a mystery how the man came down with the coronavirus. He had not traveled to a part of the world with known cases of COVID-19, the health department said, saying in a statement that "it is considered a case of community transmission." Sidelinger said that means "we don't know who that person is who gave this individual the infection. "So it happened somewhere out in the community — by community it could have been their home, a business, another location, somewhere where they had close contact with someone who was ill, but we don't know who that case was." Those who live in and around the 172,000-acre (70,000-hectare) reservation are worried. "I think people have very strong concerns with this ... but the tribe has tried to make sure that people are calm," Sams said. "And we're just trying to make sure that there's an overabundance of precaution by these closures to clean facilities just so that we can ensure that the disease doesn't spread." Clackamas County, near Portland and the home of an elementary school where one of the other COVID-19 patients worked, declared a state of emergency. The declaration by the county board of commissioners allows the county to seek additional resources from the state. [Venezuela] Venezuela arrests officials for giving US oil data (Breitbart) Breitbart [3/2/2020 12:38 PM, Staff, 1973K] Venezuela said Monday it had arrested two officials from state oil company PDVSA for providing the US with "strategic and sensitive" details of its sanctions-hit oil operations. Alfredo Chirinos, the company's special operations chief, and Aryenis Torrealba, PDVSA's general manager of crude operations, were arrested on Friday, the commission set up to restructure the company said in a statement. "They are responsible for handing over strategic, sensitive and confidential information to the United States government," the statement said. It said the pair had "provided data" on the company's operations and logistics as well as details of Venezuela's oil trade activity. Under pressure from increased US sanctions which last month targeted a subsidiary of Russian oil giant Rosneft — a key conduit for Venezuelan oil — President Nicolas Maduro last month ordered a commission be set up to revamp the oil company. Four new vice-presidents were appointed to the company on Saturday, tasked with boosting exploration, refining, trade and finance. Washington has already imposed multiple sanctions aimed at toppling Maduro's regime, particularly by cutting his government's oil revenue. 85 Washington said it would step up pressure on Venezuela's oil trade as part of its plan to overthrow Maduro's socialist government. US officials said Rosneft handles around 70 percent of Venezuela's oil and that the country's top importer has been India, followed by China. Delhi has promised to cut down purchases because of its strong ties with the United States. Venezuela produced 882,000 barrels a day in January, according to OPEC — 25,000 bpd less than in December. However, secondary sources consulted by the 13-member oil-producers' cartel indicate that the January production figures could have been as low as 733,000 bpd. [Turkey] Rocket attack hits Turkish customs vehicle near Iran border: minister (Reuters) Reuters [3/2/2020 3:51 AM, Staff, 3020K] A rocket hit an armored vehicle carrying Turkish customs personnel in an attack near the border with Iran on Friday, killing one person and injuring others, Turkish officials said, adding that clashes were under way in the area. The rocket struck the vehicle's front wheel around 0550 GMT on Monday, Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said on Twitter. He said "the terrorists were followed and cornered", but did not specify who the attackers were believed to be. Shortly after, Turkish Trade Minister Rushar Pekcan said one of the customs agents had been killed in the attack. The office of the governor of Agri province said the vehicle was hit in transit from the Dogubayazit border area to the Gurbulak border gate, causing it to skid off the road and flip over. In did not say who had carried out the attack. The vehicle

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

was near a parking lot for freight trucks, hospital and security sources said. Several ambulances, security teams and search and rescue personnel were sent to the area. Some Turkish media reports said the attack was carried out by Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants, who have fought an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984. The PKK are active in southeast Turkey but less so in Agri. Earlier this month, Turkey closed its land and air borders with Iran over an outbreak of the new coronavirus. On Friday, Iran announced nationwide school closures as the death toll from the outbreak rose to 34. [Syria] Russia, Turkey May Have Committed War Crimes in Syria, U.N. Says (Reuters) Reuters [3/2/2020 6:13 AM, Stephanie Nebehay, 3020K] Russia killed civilians in air strikes in Syria last year while rebels allied to Turkey carried out murder and pillage in Kurdish areas, U.N. investigators said on Monday - actions it said could amount to war crimes by both Moscow and Ankara. 86 A report by a U.N. commission found that Russia - the Syrian government's main ally against rebels and militants - conducted air strikes on a popular market and a camp for displaced people that killed dozens of civilians in July and August. "In both incidents, the Russian Air Force did not direct the attacks at a specific military objective, amounting to the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas," the report said. It also described abuses by rebels allied to Turkey during an assault on Kurdish-held areas, and said that if the rebels were acting under the control of Turkish military forces, those commanders may be liable for war crimes. Paulo Pinheiro, the commission's chairman, said it had added names linked to the latest crimes to its confidential list of suspected perpetrators. It has received 200 requests from judicial authorities worldwide for information on crimes committed during Syria's nine-year war, he told a news briefing. In the report, which covered the period from July 2019 to February 2020, investigators denounced "deliberate" attacks by the Syrian government and allied forces on protected civilian sites, including hospitals and schools. "There is a war crime of intentionally terrorizing a population to force it to move. We are seeing that picture emerging very clearly for example in Idlib where, because these places are being bombed, people are having to move out," said panel member Hanny Megally. Russian-backed Syrian government forces have thrust deep into Idlib province in the far northwest in a campaign to retake the last country's significant rebel pocket. The onslaught has forced around one million civilians to flee. Up to 10 children have died from the cold in the last weeks due to living in the open at the Turkish border, Megally said. The U.N. report blamed Russia for an air strike in the city of Maarat al-Numan on July 22 when at least 43 civilians were killed. Two residential buildings and 25 shops were destroyed after at least two Russian planes left Hmeimim air base and circled the area, it said. Weeks later, an attack on the Haas compound for displaced killed at least 20 people, including eight women and six children, and injured 40 others, the report said. It also called on Turkey to investigate whether it was responsible for an air strike on a civilian convoy near Ras al Ain that killed 11 people last October. Turkey has denied a role in the strike, which the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said was conducted by Turkish aircraft. [Iran] Senior Iranian Official Dies as Death Toll Surges (US News & World Report) US News & World Report [3/2/2020 9:35 AM, Paul D. Shinkman, 3020K] A senior adviser to Iran's ayatollah has died from the coronavirus, local media reports, marking the most high profile casualty among the 66 lives lost as of Monday morning. 87 Mohammad Mirmohammadi, 71, a member of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Expediency Council, died at a state hospital, according to Iranian state radio. Several members of Iran's leadership have contracted the coronavirus, which causes a disease called COVID-19, including Iran's vice president. The council advises the supreme leader and mediates between his office and Iran's parliament. The number of people in Iran confirmed to have coronavirus surged over the weekend to more than 1,500, including more than 500 confirmed cases and 12 deaths in the last day as the country struggles to keep up with the spread of the virus. Iran has the highest death toll of any country outside China, where health officials believe the virus originated. The spread of the virus in a country like Iran with relatively porous borders poses concerns for the region. The elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps has mobilized its forces to help contain the epidemic, reportedly establishing bases across the country and deploying its forces to distribute sterilizing materials and to "disinfect hospitals and streets," Iranian state news reported Monday. Among other senior Iranian leaders who have contracted coronavirus includes Iraj Harirchi, who leads a task force to address the epidemic and initially downplayed its seriousness. Almost 300 patients have recovered from the virus and been discharged from Iranian hospitals, the report added. [Iran] Iran Islamic regime hiding exploding coronavirus count: resistance group (Washington Times) Washington Times [3/2/2020 10:50 AM, Rowan Scarborough, 482K] Iran is suffering coronavirus deaths at 20 times the official number put out by the hardline Islamic state, according to a major resistance group. Iran reports 54 deaths so far, the second highest country number after the virus' source, China, which reports nearly 3,000 fatalities. But the People's Mujahideen of Iran (MEK) said on Monday that the death toll in Iran exceeds 1,000. An official count published by Johns Hopkins University says Iran has had 978 cases, for a 5.5 percent mortality rate. China has the lion's share of sicknesses, over 80,000, and a 3.5 percent death rate. Michael Rubin, a Middle East scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said Iran could become a major conduit for spreading the virus to its neighbors. "The Iranian leadership appears more willing to blame others and sanctions rather than accept any accountability for themselves and so more people will

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

die," Mr. Rubin told The Washington Times. "It's just one more way Iran will screw over Iraq, and from Iraq it could spread in a cross-sectarian way throughout the rest of the Middle East." The Trump administration has imposed economic sanctions on Iran that exempt medical supplies and drugs. 88 MEK said that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the dominate security force protecting the mullahs' regime, is hoarding medical supplies. "Preventive medical resources and equipment are essentially in the possession of the Revolutionary Guards and regime officials," said MEK, which operates a source network throughout Iran. "Ordinary patients are deprived of many basic needs, such as masks and disinfectant liquids," it said. "The hoarding of masks and other medical equipment and their sale on the black market by the IRGC and other government agencies have become routine. Regime officials and state media have acknowledged that such equipment is sometimes sold at 10 times the actual price." Inmates are helpless to fight off infection. "Prisoners are deprived of masks and disinfectants," MEK said. "In some prisons, such as Ghezel-Hesar, even soap and detergents are not available." MEK said that a citizen sentenced to death for his part in the November street protests has contracted the disease. Marlyam Rajavi, who heads the National Council of Resistance of Iran, called on Iranians to stage protests and strikes until the IRGC relinquishes control of hospitals and doctors. MEK said there have been 300 deaths in the city of Qom and 209 in Tehran. The virus has reached the inner circle of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. On Monday, adviser Mohammed Mirmohammadi, 71, was the first government official to succumb. [Afghanistan] Pentagon Tempers Afghan Peace Expectations (US News & World Report) US News & World Report [3/2/2020 2:55 PM, Paul D. Shinkman, 3020K] AMERICA'S TOP MILITARY officer on Monday lowered expectations for peace in Afghanistan less than two days after U.S. and Taliban representatives signed a historic peace agreement and hours after the militant group claimed credit for a bombing that killed at least three people in Khost Province. "To think that there's going to be an absolute cessation of violence in Afghanistan, that is probably not going to happen," Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon alongside Defense Secretary Mark Esper. Milley referenced the terms of the highly anticipated agreement signed in Doha, Qatar, on Saturday – which has wrought widespread skepticism about its ability to deliver peace in the 18-year-old war – including that Taliban leaders will begin talks with the U.S.-backed government. The Taliban has previously refused such negotiations and has subsequently indicated it plans to resume violence against U.S.-backed Afghan forces. "To think that it's going to go to zero immmediately, that is probably not going to happen. It's 89 probably not going to go to zero," Milley said. Esper said the U.S. was still confirming the source of Monday's attack, reportedly carried out by a motorcycle bomber at a soccer game. A Taliban spokesman issued a statement the same morning that its fighters will resume offensive operations against Afghan security forces following the weeklong cease-fire that preceded Saturday's agreement. "Our expectation is that a reduced level of violence would occur and it would decrease over time, moving forward," Esper said. "This is going to be a step-by-step process." That process has wrought almost immediate criticism. The Trump administration's announcement over the weekend was historic but relatively unsurprising – that it had brokered a peace agreement with the Taliban following months of talks that have broken down on multiple occasions. And it follows nearly two decades of staggering expense in human lives and finances. Almost 3,600 allied troops have died there, alongside untold numbers of local security forces and civilian deaths. Casualty figures among Afghan troops have become so devastating in recent years that Washington and Kabul no longer allow their public release. And the Pentagon for the first time has released the amount of money it has spent on the wars in Afghanistan since 2001 – $776 billion or three quarters of a trillion dollars, surpassing the $771 billion spent on wars in Iraq, according to the latest report from the office of the congressionally appointed Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction. Some of the latest criticism came from America's closest partners in its war. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, fresh off a contested reelection victory, rejected a Taliban demand for his government to release 5,000 prisoners, saying he "has made no commitment" to do so. "It is not in the authority of [the] United States to decide, they are only a facilitator," Ghani said. He later told CNN, "The people of Afghanistan need to believe that we've gone from war to peace, and not that the agreement will be either a Trojan horse or the beginning of a much worse phase of conflict." Among the provisions in the four-page agreement is that the U.S. will withdraw all combat forces – including contractors – from the country within 14 months, provided the Taliban adheres to its pledges, principally that it prevents terrorist groups such as al-Qaida from using Afghanistan as a safe haven to attack American interests. Esper confirmed Monday that he had issued orders for an initial withdrawal down to 8,600 troops within 135 days but could not say whether that process had yet begun. He would not comment on the Taliban's latest statements of renewed violence. And Esper, along with other senior officials who have spoken publicly in recent days, did not address how the new agreement comports with the administration's criticisms that prior attempts to withdraw troops according to a calendar simply gives enemy forces a deadline can wait out. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told CBS' "Face The Nation" on Sunday that the agreement contains "a deep, complex, well thought out, multimonth-negotiated verification 90 complex and mechanism by which we can observe and hold every member of the agreement accountable." "It's going to be rocky

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

and bumpy. No one – no one – is under any false illusion that this won't be a difficult conversation," he said. "But that conversation for the first time in almost two decades will be among the Afghan people, and that's the appropriate place for that conversation to take place." Pompeo was responding to a Feb. 26 letter from 22 Republican lawmakers, including Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, criticizing the agreement. "The Taliban has a history of extracting concessions in exchange for false assurances. They will accept nothing less than a full-scale U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan as they seek to establish their totalitarian "Islamic Emirate,'" the lawmakers wrote. "Any promises the Taliban may have made to the U.S. related to counterterrorism cannot be trusted, not least because the group is a long-time ally of al-Qaeda." The letter also criticized "any secret annexes or side deals" to the agreement. Pompeo confirmed to CBS there are indeed classified elements of the agreement that will be available to Congress. [Afghanistan] Signs of trouble mar Trump deal with Taliban (The Hill) The Hill [3/2/2020 4:36 PM, Rebecca Kheel, 1762K] Days into President Trump's peace deal with the Taliban, there are already signs of trouble. The Afghan government is rejecting a prisoner swap with the Taliban that the deal says is supposed to precede negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban. Meanwhile, the Taliban said Monday it was done abiding by a partial truce, something the United States had said it expected the insurgents to continue honoring through talks between the two Afghan sides. Still, even as the fragile deal wobbled, Defense officials hailed the signing as a significant step toward ending America's longest war and cautioned against ringing its death knell quite yet. "I would caution everybody to think that there's going to be an absolute cessation of violence in Afghanistan. That is probably not going to happen," Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley told reporters Monday. "This is a significant step forward, this agreement. And it's going to lead to inter-Afghan dialogue, and it ultimately leads to a peace agreement. But to think that it's going to go to zero immediately, that probably is not going to be the case." Defense Secretary Mark Esper added that "this is going to be a long, windy, bumpy road." "There will be ups and downs, and we'll stop and start," Esper said. "That's going to be the nature of this over the next days, weeks and months." The United States and the Taliban signed a historic deal Saturday in Qatar that requires the United States to draw down to 8,600 troops in 135 days. 91 Esper said Monday he gave the U.S. commander in Afghanistan approval to start drawing down within 10 days, adding that he didn't "know if it actually physically [has] begun" yet. The deal also lays out a 14-month timeline for a full U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan if the Taliban meets its commitments to refuse safe haven to terrorist groups including al Qaeda. The signing of the deal marked a major milestone in a key foreign policy goal for Trump to end America's so-called endless wars. Seeking to fulfill a 2016 campaign promise ahead of the 2020 election, Trump made securing a deal with the Taliban a top priority. But the path for a full U.S. withdrawal remains tenuous, with some of the potential pitfalls presenting themselves just days into the deal. U.S. lawmakers are expressing concern about the stipulation for a full withdrawal. Rep. Mac Thornberry (Texas), the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, said Monday at the Brookings Institution he's "worried" because it's "not clear" what conditions would lead to a full U.S. withdrawal. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), a close Trump ally and top GOP voice on defense issues, said that while he's willing to give the deal "a try," there needs to be a U.S. counterterrorism force in Afghanistan "for years." "Let's don't do in Afghanistan what Obama did in Iraq, pull the plug on the place and allow radical Islam to come roaring back," Graham said Monday on "Fox and Friends." "We've got a chance to end this war in Afghanistan smartly and well, but we're going to need a residual U.S. force, a counterterrorism presence, for years to come, because I don't trust the Taliban to police al Qaeda and ISIS." In a floor speech, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) also warned against a "precipitous rush for the exit." He also said he looks "forward to hearing from administration officials, intelligence analysts and military officers about how they will judge compliance and determine whether the conditions are in fact met," adding that annexes not being released to the public that relate to implementation of the deal are available for senators to view in a classified setting. But though the drawdown is drawing scrutiny, what appears to be causing the most hiccups in the early days of the deal is a provision for a prisoner swap by the start of talks meant to reconcile the Taliban and the Afghan government. Under the deal, the United States "committed to start immediately to work with all relevant sides on a plan to expeditiously release combat and political prisoners." The agreement says up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners and up to 1,000 Afghan government prisoners "will be released by March 10," which is when intra-Afghan are expected to begin in Oslo, Norway. The idea of a prisoner swap drew fire from Republicans and Democrats alike, and was almost immediately rejected by the Afghan government. Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), the No. 3 House Republican and daughter of former Vice 92 President Dick Cheney, said in a statement that "releasing thousands of Taliban fighters" is one of the deal's "concessions that could threaten the security of the United States." Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-N.J.) claimed on Twitter that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had assured him and other members of Congress in February the deal would not require the Afghan government to release Taliban prisoners. "So, for just one week of less shooting, the Taliban get 4,400 U.S. troops out, and 5,000 of their fighters back," Malinowski tweeted. "The rest of the deal is all promises that they can pretty much break without consequence, and therefore likely will. I've heard that President Trump is a great deal

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

maker. I guess that means the Taliban has some pretty good negotiators." The row over prisoners is threatening to upend the intra-Afghan talks before they even begin. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said Sunday he would not release the prisoners before the intra-Afghan talks begin, something his spokesman doubled down on Monday. "The Afghan Gov has not made any commitment to release 5k prisoners before the start of any potential negotiation," Ghani spokesman Sediq Sediqqi tweeted Monday. "We need to see the significant issues; a permanent ceasefire by the Taliban, their relationship with outside state and non-state actors, and drug curtails be addressed." "We will discuss the issue of prisoners as part of the peace deal which is to be a comprehensive discussion during the negotiation," Sediqqi added in a second tweet. "A prisoner release 'cannot be a prerequisite for talks,' but must be part of negotiations. This is the right and the self-will of the Afghan people." The Taliban responded to Ghani's comments by saying it would not take place in talks until the 5,000 prisoners are released. The potential full U.S. withdrawal in 14 months is tied to the Taliban's counterterrorism pledges, not to the success of the Afghan reconciliation talks. But lawmakers and experts have warned peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without such political reconciliation. "I believe the intra-Afghan negotiations are especially critical to the future of that country and to our own significant security interests over there," McConnell said. In another potentially troubling sign for the deal, Monday saw an uptick in violence in Afghanistan. A motorcycle bomb at a soccer game in eastern Afghanistan killed three people and injured 11, though there was no immediate claim of responsibility and Milley stressed to reporters that "we don't know exactly who did that yet." The Taliban agreed to adhere to a seven-day "reduction in violence" in the week leading up to signing the agreement, but on Monday said it would resume attacks against Afghan government forces. In response, the top U.S. general in Afghanistan stressed the United States expects the Taliban to keep violence low. "The reduction in violence was a confidence builder. We're very serious about our 93 obligations and we expect the Taliban will be serious about their obligations," Gen. Scott Miller said in a statement Monday tweeted out by the U.S. Forces Afghanistan spokesman. "The United States has been very clear about our expectations — the violence must remain low." [Afghanistan] Taliban resumes violence in Afghanistan as peace deal faces major obstacle (Washington Examiner) Washington Examiner [3/2/2020 2:46 PM, Zachary Halaschak, 570K] A bomb killed three people in eastern Afghanistan as a partial truce came to a close, and the country's president rejected a key part of a larger peace deal. The deal, which was signed on Saturday by U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, has run into a major obstacle. Freshly reelected Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said Sunday that his government was rejecting part of the U.S.-Taliban pact that calls for the release of 5,000 Islamic militants. The partial truce, known as a "reduction in violence," had been in place for a week until the larger deal was signed on Saturday. The United States had hoped the Taliban would extend the truce, but the insurgent group said Monday it would now resume attacks, dealing a heavy blow to the agreement that if successful would end in a total withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region. Intra-Afghan talks were scheduled to begin on March 10, but the Taliban said Monday that it would not participate in peace talks with the government if it does not agree to release the 5,000 militants. "The reduction in violence … has ended now and our operations will continue as normal," a spokesman for the Taliban told the Agence France Press. "As per the [US-Taliban] agreement, our mujahideen will not attack foreign forces but our operations will continue against the Kabul administration forces." The comments came the same day that a bomb strapped to a motorcycle detonated outside of a soccer match in the eastern Afghan city of Khost. Three people were killed in the attack, and 11 others were wounded. Although there has been no claim of responsibility, Khost has seen insurgent activity in the past. The peace deal would have reduced U.S. troop levels in the country dramatically with a full withdrawal set for 14 months if conditions of the pact were maintained. The Taliban was overthrown by the U.S. in 2001 after forces invaded the country in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and disbanded the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Ghani worried Sunday that the agreement could result in more violence. "The people of Afghanistan need to believe that we've gone from war to peace, and not that the agreement will be either a Trojan horse or the beginning of a much worse phase of conflict," he said. [Afghanistan] China pledges support for US-Taliban peace agreement (Houston Chronicle) 94 Houston Chronicle [3/2/2020 5:28 AM, Staff, 167K] China on Monday pledged its support for the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement in Afghanistan and called for the "orderly and responsible" withdrawal of foreign troops to avoid a power vacuum and possible terrorist resurgence. Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said the reconciliation process should be "Afghanled and Afghan-owned," despite the Taliban's refusal thus far to negotiate directly with Afghanistan's elected government. China shares a narrow border with Afghanistan and is wary of crime and violence spilling over into its volatile Xinjiang region, which is on a virtual lock-down after years of antigovernment bloodshed. China has also provided aid to the Afghan government and is seeking to profit by helping develop the country's deposits of copper and other minerals. China's desire for stability and concerns about the spread of extremism are partly at odds with its desire to see its chief rival, the United States, leave the region, which it considers part of its sphere of influence. As a result, it has sought to build influence with both the government in Kabul and the Taliban. "We welcome the agreement between the U.S. and Taliban and believe it is

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

of a positive significance for the final political resolution of the Afghan issue," Zhao said. "China believes that foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan should be withdrawn in an orderly and responsible way, which will ensure a steady transition in the Afghan situation, avoid a security vacuum, and leave no chance to terrorist organizations strengthening themselves." Zhao said China was willing to "continue to be a supporter, mediator and facilitator of the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan," a reference to its friendly ties with Afghanistan's successive governments since the toppling of the Taliban government by the U.S. more than 18 years ago. The U.S. on Saturday signed a peace agreement with the insurgents to end the costly war and bring American troops home, opening the way for the first negotiations between the militants and the troubled Afghan government, which is dependent on U.S. and other foreign backing. The agreement envisions Afghan government representatives at the negotiating table with the Taliban, but only in the role of ordinary Afghans. It is also contingent on the Taliban cutting ties with terrorist groups such as al-Qaida, something it's unclear the militants are willing or able to do. [China] China's president says research centers to be set up to help contain coronavirus (Reuters) Reuters [3/2/2020 7:07 AM, Lusha Zhang, Roxanne Liu and Shivani Singh, 5304K] China's president Xi Jinping said that a series of national clinical research centers would be set up to help contain the coronavirus outbreak, state television CCTV reported on Monday. Xi, speaking on a visit to several medicine institutes in Beijing, said strenuous efforts are needed to win the battle against the epidemic and that China must offer technological 95 support to aid that campaign. He also said bio security was an important part of national security, adding that China should set up national vaccine reserves to prepare for possible prevention work. [North Korea] North Korea tests again, fires two projectiles (Breitbart) Breitbart [3/2/2020 8:00 PM, UPI, 1973K] North Korea fired two projectiles from its eastern coast on Monday afternoon, according to the South's military. Seoul's joint chiefs of staff said Monday short-range projectiles were launched from an area near the North Korean city of Wonsan at 12:37 p.m. The tests appeared to be a part of ongoing exercises that began with a live-fire military drill on Saturday. South Korea's defense ministry said the projectiles flew a distance of about 150 miles at an altitude of 22 miles. The U.S. and South Korean military are sharing intelligence following the launch. Seoul did not rule out further provocations and said that are maintaining a "posture of preparedness." The presidential Blue House responded to the tests in the afternoon, saying North Korea's actions "are not conducive to efforts to alleviate military tensions on the Korean Peninsula." "We urge the tests to stop," the Blue House said, according to South Korean news service NK Economy. Confirmation of North Korean launches of short-range projectiles come two days after Kim Jong Un presided over a live-fire military exercise, despite the regime's decision to dial down activities in response to the outbreak of the new strain of coronavirus in neighboring China. Leif-Eric Easley, associate professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, said in an emailed statement to UPI that North Korea's first missile launches of the year show Pyongyang sees little benefit in restarting diplomacy. "Pyongyang instead appears intent on raising the stakes before South Korea's April elections and before the 'Super Tuesday' primaries of the U.S. presidential campaign," Easley said. On Sunday, the 101st anniversary of the March First movement in South Korea, President Moon Jae-in said he hoped for joint cooperation between the two Koreas in the health sector. "However, North Korea responds with missiles," Moon said Sunday. South Korean's political opposition on Monday criticized Moon for his approach to policy, including the economy, response to COVID-19 and security, Newsis reported. [North Korea] North Korea launches two short-range missiles into sea (The Hill) 96 The Hill [3/2/2020 8:03 AM, Rebecca Klar, 1762K] North Korea launched two short-range missiles into its eastern sea Monday, South Korean officials reportedly said. The projectiles were fired from an area near the coastal town of Wonsan and flew about 240 kilometers, or 149 miles, northeast while reaching a height of about 35 kilometers, or 22 miles, The Associated Press reported, citing South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The JCS later told reporters the weapons are presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles, according to the AP. North Korea appears to be continuing a firing drill that the country's leader Kim Jong Un oversaw last Friday, JCS told reporters, according to Reuters. South Korea's JCS reportedly said it was monitoring for potential additional launches. Japan's defense ministry said there was no indication that the projectiles launched by North Korea reached Japan's territory or its exclusive economic zone, Reuters noted. South Korea's presidential office told the AP that defense and national security officials expressed "strong concern" over North Korea's resumption of testing activity. Nuclear talks between the Trump administration and North Korea have seemingly stalled after a summit between Trump and Kim ended suddenly last year. North Korean officials at the time demanded the removal of all U.S. sanctions if the country denuclearized. White House national security adviser Robert O'Brien told Axios in January that the White House had reached out to North Korea to resume denuclearization talks. [North Korea] North Korea fired two projectiles, ending self-imposed moratorium on weapons testing: Seoul (FOX News) FOX News [3/1/2020 11:20 PM, Edmund DeMarche, 8943K] North Korea launched at least one unidentified projectile on Monday, just days after its leader Kim Jong Un supervised an artillery drill aimed at testing the combat readiness of some of its units. The Associated Press reported that it was not immediately clear how far the unknown projectile flew. The launch would be the first of its

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

kind in 2020. Kim announced late last year that he was no longer obligated to comply with a self-imposed moratorium on testing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles. The rogue leader gave no clear indication that a resumption of such tests was impending. He also appeared to leave the door open for eventual negotiations with the U.S. There were unconfirmed reports that Pyongyang fired a second projectile. [North Korea] North Korea fires unidentified projectiles into the sea (AP) AP [3/2/2020 4:18 AM, Kim Tong-Hyung and Hyung-Jin Kim, 337K] North Korea fired two presumed short-range ballistic missiles into its eastern sea on 97 Monday, South Korean officials said, resuming weapons demonstrations after a monthslong hiatus that may have been forced by the coronavirus crisis in Asia. The launches came two days after North Korea's state media said leader Kim Jong Un supervised an artillery drill aimed at testing the combat readiness of units in front-line and eastern areas. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the projectiles were fired from an area near the coastal town of Wonsan and flew about 240 kilometers (149 miles) northeast on an apogee of about 35 kilometers (22 miles). It said the South Korean and U.S. militaries were jointly analyzing the launches. JCS officials later told reporters that the weapons were presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles. North Korea likely tested one of its new road-mobile, solid-fuel missile systems or a developmental "super large" multiple rocket launcher it repeatedly demonstrated last year, said Kim Dong-yub, an analyst from Seoul's Institute for Far Eastern Studies. Experts say such weapons can potentially overwhelm missile defense systems and expand the North's ability to strike targets in South Korea and Japan, including U.S. bases there. Kim Jong Un had entered the new year vowing to bolster his nuclear deterrent in the face of "gangster-like" U.S. sanctions and pressure, using a key ruling party meeting in late December to warn of "shocking" action over stalled nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration. He also said North Korea would soon reveal a new "strategic weapon" and insisted the country was no longer "unilaterally bound" to a self-imposed suspension on the testing of nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missiles. But Kim did not explicitly lift the moratorium or give any clear indication that such tests were impending and seemed to leave the door open for eventual negotiations. South Korea's presidential office said National Security Director Chung Eui-yong discussed the launches with the South's defense minister and spy chief, and that the officials expressed "strong concern" over the North's resumption of testing activity, which could raise military tensions. Japan said that it had not detected any projectile landing in its territory or its exclusive economic zone, and that no sea vessels or aircraft had been damaged. "The repeated firings of ballistic missiles by North Korea is a serious problem for the international community including Japan, and the government will continue to gather and analyze information, and monitor the situation to protect the lives and property of the people," the Defense Ministry's statement said. The recent lull in North Korea's launches had experts wondering whether the North was holding back its weapons displays while it was fighting the coronavirus, which state media has described as a matter of "national existence." Some analysts speculated that the North cut back training and other activities involving large gatherings of soldiers to reduce the possibility of the virus spreading within its military. Kim's latest show of force is apparently aimed at boosting military morale, strengthening 98 internal unity and showing that his country is doing fine despite outside worries of how the North would contend with an outbreak. North Korea in previous years has intensified testing activity in response to springtime military exercises between South Korea and the United States that it has described as invasion rehearsals. But the allies announced last week that they were postponing their annual drills due to concern about the coronavirus outbreak in South Korea, with soldiers from both countries being infected. The launches were the latest setback for dovish South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who despite the North's indifference has repeatedly pleaded for reviving inter-Korean engagement. In a speech on Sunday marking the 101st anniversary of a major uprising against Japanese colonial rule, Moon called for cooperation between the two Koreas to fight infectious diseases amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Asia. Amid the deadlock in larger nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration, Kim has suspended virtually all cooperation with South Korea in the past months while demanding that Seoul defy U.S.-led international sanctions and restart inter-Korean economic projects that would jolt the North's broken economy. North Korea has yet to confirm any COVID-19 cases, although state media have hinted that an uncertain number of people have been quarantined after exhibiting symptoms. North Korea has shut down nearly all cross-border traffic, banned tourists, intensified screening at entry points and mobilized tens of thousands of health workers to monitor residents and isolate those with symptoms. South Korea last month withdrew dozens of officials from an inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong after North Korea insisted on closing it until the epidemic is controlled. Kim and President Donald Trump have met three times since embarking on their highstakes nuclear diplomacy in 2018, but negotiations have faltered since their second summit in February last year in Vietnam, where the Americans rejected North Korean demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capability. Following the collapse in Hanoi, the North ended a 17-month pause in ballistic activity and conducted at least 13 rounds of weapons launches last year, using the standstill in talks to expand its military capabilities. Those weapons included road-mobile, solid-fuel missiles designed to beat missile defense systems and a developmental midrange missile that could eventually be launched from submarines, potentially

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

strengthening the North's ability to strike targets in South Korea and Japan, including U.S. bases there. In December, the North said it conducted two "crucial" tests at a long-range rocket facility that would strengthen its nuclear deterrent, prompting speculation that it's developing a new ICBM or preparing a satellite launch that would further advanced its long-range missile technology. Presidential Tweets 99 Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet1 [3/2/2020 7:26 AM] I am meeting with the major pharmaceutical companies today at the White House about progress on a vaccine and cure. Progress being made! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet2 [3/2/2020 7:42 AM] "Ever since (Mini Mike) Bloomberg's bad debate performances, his support has dropped." @abcnews Dropped a lot. Only his highly paid consultants, who are laughing all the way to the bank, still support him...And by the way, he did not poll well as mayor in handling crisis! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet3 [3/2/2020 7:55 AM] I was criticized by the Democrats when I closed the Country down to China many weeks ahead of what almost everyone recommended. Saved many lives. Dems were working the Impeachment Hoax. They didn't have a clue! Now they are fear mongering. Be calm & vigilant! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet4 [3/2/2020 9:19 AM] Jack Welch, former Chairman and CEO of GE, a business legend, has died. There was no corporate leader like "neutron" Jack. He was my friend and supporter. We made wonderful deals together. He will never be forgotten. My warmest sympathies to his wonderful wife & family! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet5 [3/2/2020 10:16 AM] As usual, Jay Powell and the Federal Reserve are slow to act. Germany and others are pumping money into their economies. Other Central Banks are much more aggressive. The U.S. should have, for all of the right reasons, the lowest Rate. We don't, putting us at a.....competitive disadvantage. We should be leading, not following! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet6 [3/2/2020 11:43 AM] .@FoxNews is working hard pushing the Radical Left, Do Nothing Democrats. They want to be, unlike their competitors, @CNN & MSDNC (Comcast), Fair & Balanced. When will they ever learn. The Radical Left never even gave @FoxNews permission to partake in their low rated debates! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet7 [3/2/2020 12:01 PM] The only people in favor of Mini Mike continuing with his hapless campaign are me and his political consultants, who are getting richer and richer by the day! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet8 [3/2/2020 2:48 PM] THANK YOU @BillCassidy for all of your support with our #MAGA Agenda. You are doing an outstanding job representing the people of Louisiana & the U.S.A. You have my Complete and Total Endorsement! #KAG2020 [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet9 [3/2/2020 2:51 PM] Congresswoman Kay @GrangerCampaign has worked hard for Texas and been a strong supporter of our #MAGA Agenda. She's strong on #2A and Securing our Border and is 100% pro-life. Kay has my Complete and Total Endorsement! [Editorial note: consult hyperlink at source link] 100 Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet10 [3/2/2020 2:55 PM] Michelle @FischbachMN7 is running for Congress in Minnesota. Michelle will protect the unborn, is Strong on Crime & Borders, Cutting Taxes, your #2A, Loves our Military, Vets, & will stand w/ our Great Farmers. Michelle has my Complete & Total Endorsement! [Editorial note: consult hyperlink at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet11 [3/2/2020 2:55 PM] THANK YOU! [Editorial note: consult article at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet12 [3/2/2020 4:32 PM] They are staging a coup against Bernie! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet13 [3/2/2020 4:47 PM] Departing for the Great State of North Carolina! [Editorial note: consult video at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet14 [3/2/2020 6:06 PM] WOW! Thank you, just landed, see everyone soon! #KAG2020 [Editorial note: consult video at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet15 [3/2/2020 8:34 PM] I was thrilled to be back in the Great city of Charlotte, North Carolina with thousands of hardworking American Patriots who love our Country, cherish our values, respect our laws, and always put AMERICA FIRST! Thank you for a wonderful evening!! #KAG2020 [Editorial note: consult video at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet16 [3/2/2020 8:52 PM] This is an incredible time for our nation—we are in the midst of the Great American Comeback! Jobs are booming, incomes are soaring, poverty is plummeting, confidence is surging, and we have completely rebuilt the awesome power of the U.S. Military. PROMISES MADE, PROMISES KEPT! [Editorial note: consult image at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet17 [3/2/2020 11:17 PM] The Democrats in the House should propose a very simple one year Payroll Tax cut. Great for the middle class, great for the USA! Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet18 [3/2/2020 11:23 PM] WOW! Sleepy Joe doesn't know where he is, or what he's doing. Honestly, I don't think he even knows what office he's running for! [Editorial note: consult video at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Tweet19 [3/2/2020 11:41 PM] Thank you @JackBrewerBSI. We're with you all the way. The American people know what's going on, they totally get it. Watch what happens in November 2020! Thank you for your continued support. Together, we are going to KEEP AMERICA GREAT! #BlackVoicesforTrump [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link] Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 101 Tweet20 [3/3/2020 1:34 AM] Australia's Central Bank cut interest rates and stated it will most likely further ease in order to make up for China's Coronavirus situation and slowdown. They reduced to 0.5%, a record low. Other countries are doing the same thing, if not more so. Our Federal Reserve has us.....paying higher rates than many

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

others, when we should be paying less. Tough on our exporters and puts the USA at a competitive disadvantage. Must be the other way around. Should ease and cut rate big. Jerome Powell led Federal Reserve has called it wrong from day one. Sad! {End of Report} RETURN TO TOP

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: DHS Daily
Sent: Tue, 9 Jun 2020 05:48:19 -0400
To: (b)(6); @techmis.com
Subject: DHS Morning Briefing (6-9-20)
Attachments: DHS Morning Briefing (6-9-20).pdf

DHS MORNING BRIEFING

Prepared for the Office of Public Affairs (OPA)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
By TechMIS
www.TechMIS.com

Mobile User Copy

TO: Homeland Security Secretary & Staff
DATE: Tuesday, June 9, 2020 6:00 AM ET

Top News

Democrats' policing overhaul targets prosecution standards, data collection, training (Roll Call)

Democrats Present Police Reform Bill Amid Nationwide Protests (Bloomberg)

House Democrats unveil police reform bill amid nationwide protests (CBS News)

Congressional Democrats pitch sweeping bill to tackle police reform, racial justice (Reuters)

Democrats unveil sweeping police reform bill that would ban chokeholds (Washington Examiner)

Barr, in FNC interview, confirms 'focused investigations' of Antifa, hammers 'dangerous' push to defund police (FOX News)

Schiff asks if defense resources provided intelligence during protests (The Hill)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The military is banned from using tear gas on the battlefield, but police can use it on crowds at home. Here's why (CNN)

Maker of tear gas used on D.C. protesters gets millions from federal government (CBS News)

Trump says no defunding, dismantling or disbanding of police (ABC News)

Cuccinelli says outcome would have been the same if George Floyd were white (The Hill)

Trump's acting DHS chief says he believes George Floyd wouldn't have been spared if he were white (CNN)

After months at sea, the final cruise ship carrying passengers makes it home (CNN)

GAO offers Congress steps to protect independence of federal watchdogs (Politico)

[NY] New York Infections Hit Lowest Since Pandemic Began: Governor (Bloomberg)

[DC] ICE, CBP agents 'demobilize' from Floyd protests in Washington, D.C., at DOJ's direction (NBC News)

[DC] Trump's National Guard 'Surge' Allowed George Floyd Protesters To 'Demonstrate Safely,' White House Says (Daily Caller)

[VA] Man Who Drove Into Protesters Said He Was a K.K.K. Leader, Prosecutors Say (New York Times)

[VA] Prosecutor: Virginia man who drove truck into crowd of peaceful protesters is a Ku Klux Klan leader (USA Today)

[VA] Man Who Drove Into Crowd Of Protesters In Virginia Claims To Be A KKK Leader (Daily Caller)

[TX] Mourners pay tribute to George Floyd as pressure mounts for U.S. police reform (Reuters)

[TX] 3 antifa members arrested after looting a Target store in Austin, says Travis County DA (Washington Examiner)

[CA] Air Force sergeant ID'd as suspect in 'ambush' killing of California deputy (FOX News)

[CA] Air Force sergeant accused of killing California deputy had explosives training, report says (FOX News)

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Federal Judges Help Free Over 230 Illegal Aliens in Last Month, Including Rapists, Murderers, Sex Offenders (Breitbart)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Abolish ICE movement storms back amid push to defund police (Washington Times)

[NC] N.C. justices back sheriffs involved in immigration program (San Francisco Chronicle)

[FL] ICE Detainees Win Class Status For Covid-19 Confinement Suit (Bloomberg)

[CA] Exclusive Photos: Open Borders Rioters Vandalize California ICE Facility (Breitbart)

Citizenship and Immigration Services

Immigrant Investors Stalled by Virus Add to Economic Worries (Bloomberg)

Customs and Border Protection

Defective, Unapproved PPE and COVID-19 Meds Seized at East Coast Ports (Breitbart)

[MI] CBP helicopter flying over protesters struck repeatedly by laser (ABC News)

[TX] $176K Bound for Mexico Seized at Texas Border Crossing (Breitbart)

[Canada] U.S. border rules loosening to allow family reunifications: Trudeau (Bloomberg)

[Mexico] Trump's pressure on Mexico puts skids on asylum seekers at border (Washington Times)

Transportation Security Administration

TSA Records Busiest Weekend In Months As Americans Start Traveling Again (Daily Caller)

Americans are reportedly booking Airbnb again, platform sees surge in domestic vacations (USA Today)

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Democrats want briefing on how FEMA will manage natural disasters amid pandemic (The Hill)

Food banks and other key programs have received a fraction of allotted coronavirus money, angering some lawmakers (Washington Post)

Hurricane season off to historically fast start. What does that mean for the rest of the year? (USA Today)

Tropical Depression Cristobal moves inland, but the flooding threat is far from over (CNN)

Tropical Storm Cristobal could regain strength by combining with new storm system after drenching South (FOX News)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Severe storm topples trees, cuts power, causes flooding (AP)

[FL] Central Florida weekend tornado tally: 3 for sure, 2 more possible (Orlando Sentinel)

[LA] Cristobal destroys protective sand dunes in Grand Isle, La., a troubling omen in what could be a rough hurricane season (Washington Post)

[LA] Trump Issues Federal Disaster Declaration As Cristobal Hits Louisiana, Weakens To A Tropical Depression (Daily Caller)

[LA] Tropical Storm Cristobal lashes southeast Louisiana; president declares federal disaster (Washington Examiner)

[MI] Michigan to seek federal disaster declaration over broken dams (The Hill)

[MI] Michigan to seek disaster declaration for counties hit by May floods (Michigan Public Radio)

[MI] Michigan seeks disaster declaration after 2 dam failures (San Francisco Chronicle)

Secret Service

States scramble to deal with potential spikes in unemployment fraud, prompting Democrats to demand answers (Washington Post)

Labor Department dodges IG plea to tighten jobless rules (Roll Call)

[MA] Two Foxboro brothers face multiple charges involving stolen credit cards (Foxboro Reporter)

[DC] Inside the Pentagon's pitched battle to stave off use of active-duty troops to quell violence on streets (Washington Examiner)

[DC] White House: 'No regrets' about handling of protesters in Lafayette Park (The Hill)

[DC] Pelosi, Schumer call on Trump to reopen Lafayette Square amid peaceful protests over killing of George Floyd (Washington Post)

[DC] Pelosi, Schumer call on Trump to take down White House fencing (Washington Times)

[DC] Barr Says Secret Service Told Trump to Go to White House Bunker (Bloomberg)

[DC] Barr contradicts Trump, says Secret Service called for him to be moved to bunker (The Hill)

[KY] Former Kentucky middle school teacher facing federal charges for online enticement of a minor, producing child porn (WHAS11)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[GA] Counterfeit “Movie Money” Passed at Lucky’s Supermarket in Menlo Last Week (WEIS Radio)

[FL] Lecanto law enforcement drug raid results in four arrests (Citrus County Chronicle)

[TX] Counterfeit money, ink, printers discovered at home in North Amarillo (NewsChannel 10)

Coast Guard

[LA] Cristobal brings flooding along Gulf Coast, Coast Guard searching for 2 missing boaters (FOX News)

[TX] Feds suspend review of Enterprise’s offshore crude oil export terminal (Houston Chronicle)

CISA/Cybersecurity

Researchers see risks in online vote system for 3 US states (Breitbart)

Study finds vulnerabilities in online voting tool used by several states (The Hill)

Minuscule number of potentially fraudulent ballots in states with universal mail voting undercuts Trump claims about election risks (Washington Post)

Why hacker ‘protests’ could be government’s biggest threat (FOX News)

The Cybersecurity 202: DARPA wants hackers to try to crack its new generation of super-secure hardware (Washington Post)

[OK] Oklahoma’s Top Elections Official Warns Misinformation is Biggest Security Threat in 2020 (Public Radio Tulsa)

Terrorism Investigations

[MD] Man accused of terror plot seek to withdraw guilty plea (ABC News)

National Security News

Who are the Americans being held as ‘political prisoners’ abroad? (FOX News)

‘Globally It’s Worsening,’ W.H.O. Says of Coronavirus Pandemic (New York Times)

[Mexico] Mexican cartels are stockpiling drugs and money amid COVID-19 pandemic (USA Today)

[Mexico] Weekend of violence lashes Mexico, sparks dispute (AP)

[Brazil] Brazil reports 679 new coronavirus deaths amid controversy over data (Reuters)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[Mali] French troops killed top al Qaeda leader in Mali, Pentagon confirms (The Hill)

[Germany] Trump Still Hasn't Told Germany That He's Pulling Out Troops (Bloomberg)

[Iran] U.S. sanctions imposed against Iranian shipping go into effect (Breitbart)

[Iran] Trump Admin Sanctions Iranian Shipping Company Tied to WMD Program (Free Beacon)

[Iran] Exclusive: Congressional Republicans to Unveil Largest Iran Sanctions Plan in History (Free Beacon)

[Iran] State Department launches new push to free American hostage Morad Tahbaz from Iran (FOX News)

[Iran] Iran Blocks Access to Nuclear Sites, IAEA Says in New Report (Free Beacon)

[Afghanistan] Taliban say they are readying for talks with Kabul leaders (AP)

[Russia] US, Russia to begin nuclear arms talks this month (The Hill)

[Russia] US and Russia to meet for nuclear arms negotiations this month (CNN)

[Russia] U.S., Russia to meet for arms control talks this month, extend invite to China (Washington Times)

[Russia] US, Russia to start nuclear arms control talks this month (San Francisco Chronicle)

[China] China's coast guard to be given wartime power, report says (Breitbart)

[China] China calls on Rick Scott to provide evidence to back up coronavirus vaccine sabotage claim (The Hill)

[China] Satellite images show Wuhan hospitals swamped months before China reported coronavirus outbreak (Washington Examiner)

[North Korea] North Korea Cuts Off All Communications Lines to South Korea (New York Times)

[North Korea] North Korea vows to cut off all lines of communication with South Korea (FOX News)

Presidential Tweets

Editorial Note: The DHS Daily Briefing is a collection of news articles related to Department's mission. The inclusion of particular stories is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse the political viewpoints or affiliations included in news coverage.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Top News

Democrats' policing overhaul targets prosecution standards, data collection, training (Roll Call)
Roll Call [6/8/2020 4:53 PM, Lindsey McPherson, 72K]
House and Senate Democrats on Monday proposed policing legislation that would revamp legal standards for prosecuting misconduct, create a national database of problem officers and improve training and practices to emphasize de-escalation over use of force.

The 134-page measure, which Democrats are calling the Justice in Policing Act, is a package of several bills designed to curb police practices of racial profiling and unnecessary use of force that has led to the deaths of black Americans.

For the most part, the legislation would only directly overhaul federal law enforcement practices. It would encourage states and localities to adopt similar changes through grants and other incentives.

One exception to that is the measure would ban all law enforcement agencies from racial profiling, allowing injured parties to file civil lawsuits in state or federal district courts.

The House Judiciary Committee is holding a hearing Wednesday and planning to mark up the legislation next week, according to Chairman Jerrold Nadler. A floor vote is expected as soon as the week of June 22.

The legislation was compiled in response to nationwide outrage over George Floyd's death in Minnesota late last month. A Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for several minutes as Floyd repeatedly said he couldn't breathe and then became unconscious as three other officers declined to intervene.

The four officers are now facing charges in Floyd's death, but that has not stopped daily protests across the country. Protesters, led in many areas by the Black Lives Matter movement, are calling for more systematic changes to end racial profiling and police brutality.

The Congressional Black Caucus led the drafting of Democrats' policing overhaul with those goals in mind. CBC Chairwoman Karen Bass called the measure "bold" and "transformative" during a press conference Monday morning announcing the bill alongside roughly two dozen House and Senate colleagues.

"A profession where you have the power to kill should be a profession that requires highly trained officers who are accountable to the public," the California Democrat said.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, also a California Democrat, called the measure a "first step," noting, "There is more to come."

"We cannot settle for anything less than transformative, structural change," Pelosi said.

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer repeated his call for the Republican majority in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

the Senate to hold a vote on policing overhauls before July 4, but he acknowledged that Republicans so far have been mostly silent on the issue.

“Democrats will not let this go away and we will not rest until we achieve real reforms,” the New York Democrat said.

Before the press conference, Democrats gathered in Emancipation Hall to hold a moment of silence for Floyd lasting 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the length of time the Minneapolis police officer held his knee against Floyd’s neck.

Accountability

The bill would update the statute for prosecuting police misconduct to make it easier to hold law enforcement officials to account.

One provision would amend the section 242 federal statue for prosecuting misconduct to change the requirement from “willfully” causing death to “knowingly or with reckless disregard.”

Another provision would change qualified immunity doctrine, which shields government officials like police from lawsuits for actions performed on the job, to take away certain defenses law enforcement uses to avoid prosecution. The measure says local or state law enforcement officers claiming they were acting in good faith or believed their conduct was lawful should not constitute immunity or defense against prosecution.

The measure would also give the Justice Department subpoena power for so-called “pattern-or-practice” investigations. Under existing statute, the DOJ’s Civil Rights Division can open independent investigations into local police departments to identify suspected patterns of excessive force, discriminatory practices and violations of the constitutional rights.

California Sen. Kamala Harris, a former prosecutor, says the subpoena power would give those investigations “teeth.”

The bill would also authorize a $100 million grant program for state attorneys general to conduct pattern-or-practice investigations.

A separate provision would authorize a $750 million grant program for states to conduct independent investigations to prosecute incidents of law enforcement using unnecessary deadly force.

In a specific response to Floyd’s death, the bill would ban federal law enforcement from using chokeholds or carotid holds. The measure would also encourage states and localities to enact similar bans by withholding certain grant funding for police from jurisdictions that don’t.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries, who has been leading a bill to ban chokeholds since a New York police officer used one to kill Eric Garner in 2014, said police tactics that cut off breathing are “unnecessary, unacceptable, uncivilized, unconscionable

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

and un-American."

"This legislation will make it unlawful," he said.

The bill would also ban the use of no-knock warrants in federal drug cases, and encourages states and localities to do so with conditions on grant money for police.
Data and training

A central element of the bill is the creation of the first government-run national database to track police misconduct. Under the measure, the DOJ would compile and maintain the National Police Misconduct Registry with data on every complaint filed against a law enforcement officer and details on any complaints and lawsuits filed and the resolution of those actions.

The goal of the database is to ensure law enforcement officers can't switch jurisdictions to avoid accountability, but only states that receive police grant funding are required to report misconduct complaints to DOJ. Other participation by states and localities would technically be voluntary.

The measure would mandate that state and local law enforcement agencies that receive federal grant money report all use of force data to DOJ, including demographic data about who the force was used against.

Several other provisions of the bill target police training. The measure would mandate racial and religious bias training and specify that deadly force can only be used as last resort after de-escalation techniques. Like other provisions of the bill, these mandates only apply to federal law enforcement officers and states receiving federal grant money for police.

Other provisions in the bill would limit the transfer of military-grade equipment to state and local law enforcement, require federal uniformed police officers to wear body cameras and require states receiving federal funds to mandate body camera use.

The bill would also seek to outlaw lynching by making it a federal crime to conspire to violate existing hate crime laws. A standalone measure to do this has passed both chambers but under different names. Kentucky GOP Sen. Rand Paul currently has a hold on the House measure, named after Emmett Till.

House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer said he's confident that policing overhaul will pass the Democratic-controlled House but he's not as optimistic about its chances in the Republican-controlled Senate.

"I am not confident that a body that has been unable to pass the Emmett Till anti-lynching bill will pass this bill," the Maryland Democrat said.

Nadler and Bass said they're talking with Republicans but none have expressed support for the bill yet.

"I will say, with 100 percent certainty that this bill will become law," Nadler said. "If not now, then Senate Majority Leader Schumer [will pass it] and [President Joe Biden] will sign it in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

January."

Not defunding police

One of the changes Black Lives Matter is seeking through its protests is for localities to spend less money on police and more on community investments that would help lift up black Americans. The demand has been shortened into a slogan of "defund the police," although most protesters are not advocating for a complete dissolution of traditional police departments.

But President Donald Trump and many congressional Republicans are accusing all Democrats of wanting to defund police, even though only a handful, like Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar, have used the slogan.

Democrats at the press conference dismissed Republicans' attacks as "distraction," saying the defund police debate is separate from the changes they're seeking.

"I can't imagine that happening in a federal way," Bass said.

The federal government has little control over state and local police, which is why Democrats' overhaul uses grant money to incentivize them to make changes.

"It's a well established congressional power that you can condition grants on state and local governments doing certain things. And that's the approach the bill takes," Nadler said.

Bass said she supports the intent behind the "defund the police" mantra — a cry for investments in black communities. She said Democrats' bill does not include any new money for policing but it includes grants for community organizations "to have projects that begin to re-envision what policing might be about in a particular neighborhood."

Separately, the CBC is working on what Bass called "a massive jobs and justice bill."

Democrats Present Police Reform Bill Amid Nationwide Protests (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [6/8/2020 3:53 PM, Erik Wasson, 6400K]
House and Senate Democrats proposed a sweeping police reform bill on Monday, hoping to turn energy from growing nationwide protests over racial injustice and police misconduct into concrete legal changes that could make it easier to prosecute and sue law enforcement officers.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and other top Democrats, before presenting the legislation at a news conference, knelt for 8 minutes and 46 seconds of silence to honor George Floyd, whose death at the hands of Minneapolis police has sparked weeks of protest.

"The martyrdom of George Floyd gave American experience a moment of national anguish as we grieve for African Americans killed by police brutality," Pelosi said. Now it is "being transformed into a moment of national action," she said, adding, "We cannot settle for anything less than transformative structural change."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Senator Cory Booker welcomed the protests building in cities and towns around the country, but stressed that concrete action was necessary.

“Empathy and sympathy and words of caring for those who have died and suffered is necessary but not enough,” Booker said. “We must change laws and systems of accountability.”

Bill co-sponsor Senator Kamala Harris, a potential choice to be Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden’s vice presidential pick, said, “We are here because black Americans want to stop being killed.” Even so, she said, “reforming policing is in the best interest of all Americans.”

The Justice in Policing Act would change the definition of criminal misconduct for police, so instead of “willfully” violating constitutional rights, an officer could be charged after doing so with knowing or reckless disregard. It would also curtail “qualified immunity” that broadly shields police officers from being held liable for civil damages for rights violations in civil lawsuits.

The next step is hearings and votes in the Judiciary Committee. The full House is scheduled to return for floor votes on June 30, but could come back earlier if the bill is ready for a vote.

The bill faces an unclear path through the Republican Senate or the White House. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell hasn’t ruled out Republican backing for some type of police reform legislation, although the GOP has resisted some proposals in the past.

“It’s something we need to take a look at,” McConnell said last week. On the Senate floor Monday, he said calls to defund police were “outlandish” and added, “well-trained law enforcement officers are an important part of creating safe communities, not something to defund or abolish.”

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in a letter to members of Congress Monday, urged lawmakers to “come together and, informed by experts, enact bipartisan policing reforms before Labor Day.”

White House spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany said President Donald Trump hasn’t yet reviewed the Democratic proposal. “But there are some non-starters in there, I would say, particularly on the immunity issue,” she said.

Attorney General Bill Barr said Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation” he opposes efforts to make it easier to sue police, arguing it would result in “police pulling back.”

Trump has seized on calls by some protesters to cut funding for police in order to attack Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden. The president held a roundtable discussion with law enforcement later Monday.

Congressional Democrats and Biden are so far not embracing calls to “defund” or “abolish” the police. Instead they are looking to create incentives for improvement by tying existing funding to changes.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“I can’t imagine that happening at the federal level,” said Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Karen Bass when asked about defunding the police. There is a need to provide more social spending in distressed communities, and cuts to the defense budget could be a way to fund that, she said. Her bill does not have any new funds for police.

“We want to work with our police departments. There are many that take pride in their work,” Pelosi said when asked about cutting funding.

The speaker is separately pushing for nearly $1 trillion in state and local aid to make up for revenue lost during the Covid-19 pandemic and has argued that failure to enact the funding would lead to layoffs of local employees.

The bill would place new limits on federal funding for local and state police by requiring bias training and the use of de-escalation tactics in order for grants to be approved. It would curtail the transfer of military weaponry to state and local police, and give subpoena power to the Justice Department’s civil rights division to investigate abuses at the state and local level.

The proposal would ban federal law enforcement from using choke-holds like the one used by police in the death of Floyd last month, as well as no-knock warrants such as the one that led to the death of Breonna Taylor in Louisville in March. It also seeks to curtail the use of racial profiling and would set a national standard on the use of force.

Lynching would be made a federal crime for the first time. The measure would require federal officers to wear body cameras, and it would create a national registry of police violations.

Bass and Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York are sponsoring the bill in the House. Harris and Booker are the leaders of the effort in the Senate.

[Editorial note: consult source link for video]

House Democrats unveil police reform bill amid nationwide protests (CBS News)
CBS News [6/8/2020 4:28 PM, Grace Segers, 2803K]
House Democrats unveiled legislation Monday morning to offer a blueprint for reforming policing policies in what is expected to be a massive bill focusing on holding law enforcement officers accountable for any misconduct and increasing transparency. The bill comes amid nationwide protests in response to the death of George Floyd.

The bill, led by the Congressional Black Caucus, was announced in a press conference with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senators Cory Booker and Kamala Harris, and other congressional Democrats on Monday morning. The bill is 136 pages, and includes reforms to make it easier to prosecute police officers for misconduct in civil court. Text of the bill, called the Justice in Policing Act 2020, was provided to CBS News by a House Democratic staffer.

Before rolling out their sweeping police reform measure, Democrats kneeled in silence in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Emancipation Hall in the U.S. Capitol for eight minutes and 46 seconds to honor Floyd and other African-Americans who have died at the hands of law enforcement.

In an interview Monday with CBS News' Nancy Cordes, Congresswoman Karen Bass, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, said she believes the groundswell of support for policing reforms demonstrates "this is a different moment in our country."

"Sometimes it takes a long time for things to change, but when it comes to this issue, what is very different this time is that you have an absolute rainbow of people who are out and in some instances in some cities, when I look at the television camera I have to look to find the African-Americans," she told CBS News. "There are people around the country now who understand this issue like never before. It used to be when when polls were done that people would say, 'I've never had a problem with police, so, I don't understand what the issue is.' I think we have finally crossed the bridge where people can say, 'It has not been my experience, but I understand it's yours.'"

Bass, a California Democrat, told reporters during a press conference earlier in the day that the package has more than 200 co-sponsors in the House and Senate.

"This moment of national anguish is being transformed into a movement of national action as Americans from across the country peacefully protest to demand an end to injustice," Pelosi said.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer urged Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to bring the bill to the Senate floor for debate and a vote before July.

"Americans who took to the streets this week have demanded change," he said. "With this legislation, Democrats are heeding their calls."

The bill would amend the requirement of intent in the federal criminal statute to prosecute police misconduct, by changing the standard of prosecution from "willfulness" to "recklessness." It would also reform qualified immunity, meaning that individuals would be able to recover damages when their constitutional rights are violated by law enforcement officers.

The bill aims to implement structural reforms at the Justice Department by granting the department's Civil Rights Division subpoena power. The bill would also incentivize state attorneys general to conduct pattern and practice investigations of local police departments, and provide grants for states to create structures for investigating police-involved deaths.

The legislation attempts to improve transparency by creating a National Police Misconduct Registry, and mandate state and local law enforcement turn over data on use of force broken out by race, gender, disability, religion and age.

The bill also aims to address cultural biases in police stations by mandating racial training. It would also change the standard for evaluating whether use of force was justified. Currently, officers only need to prove that use of force was reasonable. The bill would change the standard so that officers need to prove that use of force is necessary. The bill would also require that federal law enforcement officers wear body cameras, and limit transfer of

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

military-grade equipment to state and local law enforcement.

It would ban no-knock warrants in drug cases, meaning that police officers could not barge into people's homes without knocking first. Protesters have called for ending the practice after police officers in Louisville, Kentucky, shot and killed Breonna Taylor in her bed after entering her home on the basis of a no-knock warrant. The bill would also ban police chokeholds. Floyd died after he was pinned down by a police officer with a knee to his neck for nearly nine minutes.

The bill includes a section that makes lynching a hate crime, after the Senate failed to pass an anti-lynching bill last week. It is unclear whether this package would receive support in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Some protesters have called for defunding police departments, but the House bill does not include any funding specifically for police departments and instead would implement grants to community organizations with the aim of building partnerships which allow for greater accountability.

Bass told CBS News she does not support stripping police departments of their funding and instead backs "the need to address the problems in communities." The legislation, she said, does make an investment in policing, though not with new money.

"I think the movement around defunding the police, again, understanding that it is pushing for addressing community problems and addressing the root causes, I think that it can be used as a distraction," Bass said. "But to me, that is not as significant because the people that want to distract away from this movement are going to use anything, they're going to call for law and order, they're going to say there's a terrorist element involved. And so I am not going to be distracted by their attempt to distract what I believe are legitimate concerns that community activists are raising."

The California Democrat called the amount of support the measure has already received, with roughly 200 lawmakers on board, a "darn good start."

"I don't believe that police officers want to be in a situation where when they see another officer doing something wrong, is corrupt, abusing the public, I don't think that police officers want to work in an environment where they can't do anything, they can't say anything, they have to go along with something," Bass said. "And so hopefully this will provide support in terms of changing police culture, so that police departments don't shield folks that they know are problematic."

President Trump has accused former Vice President Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee, of supporting calls to defund police departments, although Biden's campaign said in a statement Monday the former vice president "does not believe that police should be defunded." In a speech last week, Biden called for chokeholds to be eliminated and for police training to be improved, and he committed to creating a police oversight board in his first 100 days in office if he is elected in November.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Congressional Democrats pitch sweeping bill to tackle police reform, racial justice (Reuters)
Reuters [6/8/2020 2:13 PM, David Morgan, 5304K]
U.S. congressional Democrats unveiled sweeping legislation on Monday to combat police violence and racial injustice, two weeks after George Floyd's death in Minneapolis police custody sparked nationwide protests.

The 134-page bill would take numerous steps, including allowing victims of misconduct to sue police for damages, ban chokeholds, require the use of body cameras by federal law enforcement officers, restrict lethal force, and facilitate independent investigations of police departments that show patterns of misconduct.

"A profession where you have the power to kill should be a profession that requires highly trained officers who are accountable to the public," Representative Karen Bass, who chairs the Congressional Black Caucus, told a news conference.

Democrats expect to bring the legislation to the House of Representatives floor by July 4.

Anticipating resistance in the Republican-controlled Senate, Democrats hope to enlist the aid of public sentiment as opinion polls show widespread public concern about police violence.

The bill does not address calls by protesters to defund police departments, a move advocates say would free up funds to address social ills that officers are ill-equipped to handle.

Instead, legislators said such issues would be addressed in subsequent legislation.
"We have confused having safe communities with hiring more cops ... when in fact the real way to achieve safe and healthy communities is to invest in these communities," said Senator Kamala Harris, seen as a potential running mate to Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden.

Biden's campaign on Monday said it did not support defunding police, the latest sign of how the Democratic leadership remains uneasy about the idea.

That has not stopped President Donald Trump and his Republican allies from depicting defunding as if it was a part of the Democratic platform.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy took to Twitter to showcase Republican support for police, saying: "Democrats want to defund you, but Republicans will never turn our backs on you."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declined to comment on the substance of the new legislation and instead attacked the idea of cutting police budgets to fund social programs.

"Call me old-fashioned. I think you may actually want a police officer to stop a criminal and arrest him before we try to work through his feelings," McConnell said.

After a weekend with no public events, Trump held a roundtable with law enforcement

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

officials at the White House on Monday.

Floyd's death in Minneapolis, where a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, was the latest in a string of deaths of black people at the hands of police that have sparked fresh calls for reforms. (here)

Among the legislation's provisions, Democratic aides and analysts say allowing civil lawsuits against police could prove most effective in curbing police brutality. But it is likely to face opposition from Republicans.

A Reuters investigation published last month revealed how qualified immunity (here), refined over the years by the U.S. Supreme Court, has made it easier for cops to kill or injure civilians with impunity.

Democrats unveil sweeping police reform bill that would ban chokeholds (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [6/8/2020 12:31 PM, Susan Ferrechio, 727K]
House and Senate Democrats introduced a sweeping police reform bill that would create a national reporting database and a ban on police use of the chokehold maneuver.

"It is time for this," Sen. Kamala Harris, a California Democrat, said Monday.

Democrats unveiled the Justice in Policing Act after kneeling in a moment of silence for nearly nine minutes to memorialize the death of George Floyd.

Floyd, a black man, died in police custody after a white officer knelt on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. The House bill would call for states to ban police from using the chokehold or any maneuver that places pressure on a person's neck and restricts breathing. It would ban the use of chokeholds by federal law enforcement and condition federal law enforcement funding for states on their banning the chokehold.

"The chokehold and other police tactic such as a knee to the neck, which cut off breathing and results in asphyxiation is a procedure that is unnecessary, unacceptable, uncivilized, unconscionable and un-American," said Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat and chairman of the Democratic Caucus who first introduced the measure in 2015. "This legislation would make it unlawful under our nation's civil rights laws."

The measure would also require independent investigation and independent prosecution when police misuse deadly force and require a report to be filed with the state's attorney general.

The measure would also change qualified immunity for police, making them accountable for deaths that occur by "knowingly or reckless disregard" for a person's safety.

"This is a transformational piece of legislation," Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, said. "This is an important day."

The measure would establish a national police misconduct registry, a measure that is

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

similar to one introduced in the Senate by the GOP's only black senator, Tim Scott of South Carolina.

Scott has drafted the Walter Scott Notification Act, which would compel states to track and record the details, including race, of every police shooting. States that failed to track and report the data would lose federal funding.

He first introduced the measure in 2015. It's named for Walter Scott, an unarmed black man shot to death by a white police officer after a traffic stop.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, a top GOP lawmaker and former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, is a co-sponsor along with fellow Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst, who is a member of the Republican leadership, and Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma.

House Democrats said they were planning additional measures that respond to the death of Floyd and other African Americans as well as the resulting civil unrest that has swept cities across the United States.

"We do have other legislation along the lines of jobs and justice, that gets at other issues in the community," Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Karen Bass, a California Democrat, said.

The House Judiciary Committee plans to advance the police reform measure in the coming weeks, Chairman Jerrold Nadler, a New York Democrat, said Monday.

Barr, in FNC interview, confirms 'focused investigations' of Antifa, hammers 'dangerous' push to defund police (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 9:30 PM, Gregg Re, 12006K]
Speaking exclusively to Fox News' Bret Baier on Monday outside the Department of Justice, Attorney General Bill Barr confirmed that "focused investigations" are underway that "relate to Antifa," the far-left group that President Trump has sought to designate as a terrorist organization.

"It's a very loosely organized group, and they have an unusual system of communication and organization," Barr said. "There are people who can be characterized as leaders in any given situation."

Also in the wide-ranging interview, Barr harshly criticized efforts to defund police departments, argued that some jurisdictions had gone too far in their coronavirus lockdown restrictions, and defended the U.S. Park Police's decision to clear Lafayette Park ahead of a visit by the president -- a move that came, Barr told Baier, after the attorney general himself was targeted with rocks and other projectiles.

Determining who is behind the protests has become a top priority for the DOJ, and a political football in the meantime. Former national security adviser Susan Rice has claimed "the Russians" could be involved; Minnesota officials have blamed out-of-state white supremacists, despite evidence showing that arrested individuals are overwhelmingly local.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Fox News reported last week that federal law enforcement officials are probing whether "criminal actors" are coordinating violent activities during protests over the in-custody death of George Floyd, and are looking into reports that "rocks and bricks" have been dropped off to throw at police.

"There appear to be sources of funding, and we are looking into the sources of funding," Barr said. "And, you know, there is clearly some high degree of organization involved at some of these events and and coordinated tactics that we're seeing. And we're looking into that as well. And some of it relates to an Antifa. Some of it relates to groups that act very much like Antifa. As I said, there's a witches' brew of extremist groups that are trying to exploit this situation on all sides."

Protests near the White House, Barr observed, had become so violent that the Secret Service moved Trump to the bunker underneath the White House. The mayhem, which also included the burning of St. John's Church and the harassment and assault of a Fox News reporter, necessitated action, Barr said -- even though some media organizations have said Lafayette Park was cleared solely for Trump's "photo-op" near the church.

"The image has somewhat been mis-created, in the sense that I haven't seen any videos on TV of all the violence that was happening preceding that," Barr said. "I personally saw projectiles thrown, and two were thrown at me and the police officers there. And my security detail made me move back because they said that projectiles had been landing in a certain area -- things like rocks, bottles were thrown at me."

Barr reiterated that the move to clear the park and move the White House perimeter out one block was the right one.

"As I've said, the president of the United States should be able to walk one block from the White House out to the 'church of presidents,'" Barr said. "He should be able to do that. And, you know, this canard that this exercise was done to make that possible is totally false. I don't see anything wrong with the president walking over to the church."

Authorities initially insisted tear gas had not been used on those park protesters, before walking that statement back.

Demonstraters, Barr said, have become extreme not only in their actions but also their demands, including their push to defund police departments.

"Demonizing police" is "wrong" and "dangerous," Barr asserted. "We put these individuals into highly charged, dangerous situations where their own life is at stake ... and we have to make sure we treat them fairly in those circumstances."

Barr added that it's important to understand that there are approximately 900,000 police officers in the country, and that it would be a mistake to view all police forces as a monolith.

He also pointed out that Chicago had just experienced its deadliest 24 hours in a 60 year period, with more than 18 murders -- all unrelated to police.

Should police be defunded, Barr said, "You would have increases in vigilantism and

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

increases in chaos in the city." Barr added it's "been shown" that more killings would result.

Research by Harvard economist Roland G. Fryer Jr. has determined that when police pull out of communities, black deaths tend to increase. Frey also found no evidence of racial bias in police shootings.

And, Zaid Jilani wrote in The Guardian that Baltimore saw a brutal rise in murders after police pulled back there.

"We saw the police department arrest less during a period of high crime," the Rev. Kinji Scott, a community activist "who lost a brother and a cousin to homicides in other cities," told Jilani. "So what happened is you have a community of emboldened criminals."

However, Lisa Bender, the president of the Minneapolis City Council, dismissed concerns from anyone worried about not having police to call -- telling CNN on Monday that they were speaking "from a place of privilege."

At the same time, "the police chiefs, the rank-and-file officers understand the need for change and there has been great change," Barr said.

The attorney general touted President Trump's First Step Act, as well as his push for school choice and the creation of opportunity zones to spur investment in low-income areas.

Barr indicated that the federal government should help set standards that abolish the use of police chokeholds and similar techniques. After kneeling for several minutes, top Democrats on Monday introduced a sweeping criminal justice reform bill, which includes a limitation on police officers' qualified immunity to certain forms of lawsuits for misconduct on the job.

Critics say qualified immunity, a judge-made doctrine, is necessary to protect police from complaints that would punish officers for reasonably executing their duties in stressful situations, or complaints intended to harass officers. Democrats charge, however, that qualified immunity is a shield for bad behavior and has enabled a culture of misconduct.

The "Justice in Policing Act of 2020" would also establish a registry of police misconduct, and would specifically allow officers to be punished for violating constitutional rights "knowingly or with reckless disregard." The federal standard currently requires that officers "willfully" violate constitutional rights to face prosecution -- a significantly higher standard of proof.

Further, the federal standard for use of force would change from "reasonableness" to situations where it is "necessary to prevent death or serious bodily injury."

Additionally, the attorney general said, the DOJ was taking a look at jurisdictions' approach to the coronavirus, amid widespread hypocrisy on the issue -- starting from the early days of the crisis to the present. (Even the man who dressed as the Grim Reaper to condemn beachgoers is now protesting against police.) Barr's DOJ has taken steps to fight what it perceives as potentially unconstitutional restrictions on religious worship and other gatherings.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The Trump campaign told Fox News earlier Monday that the president would soon resume his trademark rallies. The change-up follows statements by many Democrats in charge of big cities -- including several who once insisted on strict quarantine measures -- championing the nationwide mass demonstrations over Floyd's death , sans social distancing.

Epidemiologists, too, have abruptly changed their tune, even though they once said lockdown measures were so important that they justified widespread unemployment and business closures.

"I think given the uncertainty involved and the very fast pace of the infection, especially in certain areas, the original 30-day or so -- and even maybe with some extensions -- measures were appropriate," Barr told Baier. "But I think that as time has gone by, the degree of impingement on fundamental liberties has never been anything like this in the United States nationally, forbidding people from engaging in their livelihood, telling them to stay home. It's just sort of a form of house arrest in many places."

Barr added: "There have never been more pervasive or widespread limitations on American liberty than this since slavery. I'm not saying this is a form of slavery. I'm just saying that these are extremely broad limitations. And I think the time has come to restrike the balance and be more limited in what we did and more critical."

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

Schiff asks if defense resources provided intelligence during protests (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 3:03 PM, Zack Budryk, 3408K]
House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) on Monday requested information on any intelligence resources the Defense Department may have provided the federal government in its response to the protests against police brutality that have swept the nation in the two weeks since George Floyd's death.

In a letter to Joseph Kernan, undersecretary of Defense for intelligence and security, Schiff asks for information on whether combat support agencies have assisted domestic military or federal law enforcement responding to the protests.

He further asked for details about any inquiries or requests the Trump administration or Pentagon may have made to prepare for such support.

"The sudden and impulsive manner in which the Armed Forces and law enforcement components from across the federal government have been mobilized to date, and the lack of public transparency regarding their orders, operations, authorities, and chains of command and accountability, is deeply troubling," Schiff wrote.

Army briefs House panel on response to DC protests
Thousands of LA protesters arrested over curfew won't be charged
"We are concerned that they have been or might be asked to undertake unlawful or unethical activities that could violate civil liberties and erode even further the legitimacy of, and trust in, the military and law enforcement," he added.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“The American people deserve, and expect, that the IC [intelligence community] will scrupulously honor its obligation to respect their civil liberties when conducting its vital mission of keeping our nation safe,” Schiff’s letter states. “At this key moment in our history, it is critical that the public retains confidence and trust in the U.S. military and in the IC. The Defense Intelligence Enterprise, sitting uniquely at the intersection of these two institutions, has a special obligation in this regard.”

The letter comes after numerous states deployed the National Guard in response to the protests, with the federal government doing the same for the D.C. National Guard. President Trump ordered the withdrawal of forces from Washington on Monday.

The military is banned from using tear gas on the battlefield, but police can use it on crowds at home. Here’s why (CNN)
CNN [6/8/2020 4:32 PM, Harmeet Kaur, 12317K]
The use of tear gas to disperse crowds has come under criticism again as demonstrators nationwide continue protesting systematic racism and police brutality following the death of George Floyd.

Top health experts have warned that using the chemical agent could help the coronavirus spread because it irritates the lungs and makes people cough. And organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union have pointed out that the chemical agent is banned in war.

If tear gas is banned on the battlefield, why then can law enforcement use tear gas on civilians at home? Here’s what to know.
What tear gas is

First off, it’s important to understand what exactly tear gas is.

Tear gas, also referred to as a riot control agent, is a chemical compound that can render people temporarily unable to function by irritating the eyes, nose, mouth, lungs and skin, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The two most common riot control agents are chloroacetophenone (CN) and chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS), the CDC says.

Despite its name, tear gas actually comes in a powdery solid form. The agents CN and CS are deployed as tear gas when the pressurized powder is mixed into a liquid formulation that is then released into the air as droplets or particles.

Tear gas can cause excessive tearing, burning or blurred vision, as well as a runny nose or a burning sensation inside the nose, according to the CDC. It can also cause difficulty swallowing, chest tightness, coughing, shortness of breath and a feeling of choking.

Someone who has been exposed to tear gas will usually experience its effects for about 15 to 30 minutes after they have been removed from the source and cleaned off, the CDC says. Those who are exposed to riot control agents at close proximity or in a closed space

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

can experience long-term effects, such as blindness, glaucoma or respiratory failure.

How its use is legal

A few years after the end of World War I, world leaders convened in Switzerland and agreed to prohibit "the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices" as well as "the use of bacteriological methods of warfare," according to the Geneva Protocol of 1925.

The agreement banned the use of chemical and biological weapons in warfare, though it did not specify what gases exactly were outlawed.

The US didn't ratify the agreement until 1975, under President Gerald Ford. When it did, it reserved the right to use riot control agents to control "rioting prisoners of war," among other exceptions.

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly finalized the Chemical Weapons Convention, which banned the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and required countries to destroy the chemical weapons and production facilities it possessed.

Included in the agreement was also a ban on riot control agents in warfare. Such agents were defined as "any chemical not listed in a Schedule, which can produce rapidly in humans sensory irritation or disabling physical effects which disappear within a short time following termination of exposure."

The Chemical Weapons Convention went into effect in 1997. But notably, the agreement included an exception allowing law enforcement to use riot control agents for "domestic riot control purposes."

In recent years, tear gas has been used to quell civil unrest, not just in US cities, but in Hong Kong, Cairo and Rio de Janeiro.

Portland, Denver and Seattle are among cities that have suspended the use of tear gas to disperse crowds, at least temporarily.

Maker of tear gas used on D.C. protesters gets millions from federal government (CBS News)
CBS News [6/8/2020 5:28 PM, Stephen Gandel, 2803K]
Safariland, the controversial maker of the tear gas used to clear protesters near the White House last week, and two of its distributors have generated more than $137 million in sales from the U.S. government in the past three and a half years, according to a CBS MoneyWatch review of federal spending data.

The sales, up from $83 million in the prior three-and-a-half-year period, do not include money spent by local law-enforcement agencies on Safariland tear gas. There have been multiple reports of tear gas used on protesters in Minneapolis, where George Floyd died in police custody last month, and elsewhere in recent weeks as protests against police racism

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

spread across the country.

Federal records show the Department of Justice last year bought 160 canisters of Spede-Heat from distributor A2Z Supply. Spede-Heat canisters hold mace gas and can be shot from a distance of as much 150 feet. The canisters cost about $26 each and are manufactured by Safariland subsidiary Defense Technology.

Safariland's website says Spede-Heat should not be shot directly at people because "serious injury or death may result." A Spede-Heat canister was among the tear gas devices found by a local Washington, D.C., CBS reporter near the White House last week.

Safariland's production of tear gas and its use by the U.S. as well as foreign governments has propelled the growth of the company in recent years. It also has made Safariland a pariah on Wall Street, and its CEO, Warren Kanders, a target for activists. Private equity powerhouses Blackstone Group and KKR have exited their investments in Safariland in the past few years following public criticism for their ties to the company.

Safariland is one of the largest companies in the multi-billion dollar — and growing — business of supplying tear gas to federal agencies, police departments and foreign governments. It also makes rubber bullets and batons, as well as helmets and body armor. Safariland has about $500 million in revenue and 600 employees.

In 2016, research firm Marketsandmarkets estimated that the non-lethal weapons market would grow by more than 8% a year through 2020 to $8.4 billion, driven in part by "political disputes, violence and civil unrest." The report pointed to the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia as potential growth markets for tear gas and other non-lethal weapons.

Earlier this week, market research firm Orbis Research issued a 100-page report on opportunities in the "Riot Control Systems" market. Safariland is listed as one of the industry's top players.

Kanders, with an estimated net worth of $700 million, according to Forbes, was pressured to quit the board of the Whitney Museum of American Art last year following months of protest after it was found that Safariland supplied the tear gas fired on a group of asylum seekers, including children, at the U.S.-Mexico border. At the time, Kanders said that he was not a fair target, emphasizing that his company helps save police officers lives.

In addition to Safariland, Kanders also heads Clarus Corp., a $340 million publicly traded sporting equipment conglomerate of which he owns more than 20%. Clarus disclosed in an April filing that it paid Kanders $5.5 million in salary, stock and other compensation over the past three years.

Last week, the Instagram page of Clarus's popular mountain climbing brand Black Diamond posted a black page in solidarity with anti-police violence protesters across the U.S. On Saturday, in a statement on Instagram, the company acknowledged it was aware of "widespread concerns" about its "association" with Kanders and Safariland. The statement said the company supports Black Lives Matters and "peaceful protesters." It also pledged to donate $250,000 to support "peoples of color in the outdoors."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Safariland was started as a holster company in the 1960s by California entrepreneur Neale Perkins, who named the company after trips he had taken to Africa with his father. In 2004, Goldman Sachs helped the company raise $300 million in a structured finance deal. Kanders acquired control of the company in 2012 and became its CEO in a leveraged buyout with the help of private equity giant Blackstone, which bought a minority stake in the company and eventually lent it up $160 million.

Safariland declined to comment for this article.

Safariland doesn't disclose its financial information. But it had $45 million in annual operating profits, according to a 2015 article in Private Debt Investor. That was up from $10 million when Kanders bought it just three years earlier, accord to the trade publication. Kanders said at the time that Blackstone had been instrumental in helping him grow the company.

Blackstone transferred its stake in Safariland to rival private equity firm KKR in 2018 through a complex transaction that involved dozens of loans. A Blackstone spokesperson confirmed to CBS MoneyWatch that it no longer has any financial ties to Safariland. KKR earlier this year sold its remaining stake after it also faced public criticism for its ties to the company.

KKR and Blackstone aren't the only private equity firms that have financed companies that make tear gas. Carlyle Group is a minority owner of Combined Systems, which is also a producer of chemical weapons for law enforcement.

Combined Systems recorded $3.8 million in sales to the federal government last year, up from $2.3 million in 2018. Just over $1.8 million in sales came from chemical-dispensing and stun grenades.

A source close to Carlyle Group told CBS MoneyWatch that the firm's small stake in Combined Systems produces no income for the firm and that it has been written down to zero.

Pacem Solutions, a privately owned manufacturer of tear gas weapons, named Joseph Schmitz, a former campaign adviser to President Donald Trump, as its chief legal officer and chair of its advisory board in 2018. The following year, Pacem had more than $1 million in sales to the federal government, up from zero in the previous decade. Nearly $150,000 of those sales are listed as for "military chemical agents," according to federal records.

On Thursday, the American Civil Liberties Union sued Mr. Trump and other government officials on behalf of the Washington, D.C., chapter of Black Lives Matter. The suit claims the use of tear gas on the protesters violated their constitutional rights.

Jamil Dakwar, director of the ACLU's human rights program, said the organization has previously looked into the issue of whether makers of tear gas can be held liable for injuries caused by their products, but is now focused on law enforcement's use of the weapons.

Dakwar said the ALCU has long had concerns about the use of tear gas and that the coronavirus pandemic amplifies those objections given the damage it can do to people's

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

lungs. Tear gas tends to cause people to cough, as well as burn the eyes.

"It creates a severe health risk to people who are subject to it," Dakwar said. "We have been contacted by a number of members of Congress to look at the way tear gas is being used."

Trump says no defunding, dismantling or disbanding of police (ABC News)
ABC News [6/8/2020 4:48 PM, Ben Gittleson, 3795K]
President Donald Trump on Monday sent a clear message during a White House roundtable with members of law enforcement: The police are doing a "fantastic" job.

"There won't be defunding, there won't be dismantling of our police and there is not going to be any disbanding of our police," he said at the afternoon event.

"We want to make sure we don't have any bad actors in there, and sometimes, you'll see some horrible things like we witnessed recently, but 99 -- I say 99.9, but let's go with 99% of them are great, great people, and they've done jobs that are record setting -- record setting," Trump said.

The president repeated that country's current crime statistics are "among the best numbers we've ever had in terms of recorded history."

"There's a reason for less crime, it's because we have great law enforcement. I'm very proud of them," he added.

Trump made the comments surrounded by top administration officials and half a dozen external participants that included attorneys general from Florida and Kentucky, the national president of the Fraternal Order of Police, the president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and representatives of police departments in Illinois and Colorado.

Attorney General William Barr said federal law enforcement understands distrust of the criminal justice system and acknowledged that for most of U.S. history, the law was discriminatory.

"Law enforcement fully understands and has understood for some time, the distrust that exists in the African American community toward the criminal justice system," Barr said, adding that he is "optimistic" for future reforms.

After the president's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner spoke, Trump called him "my star."

"Hopefully at this time, where there's a lot of people in the country who are feeling different pain and feeling different concerns, law enforcement can be a leader and coming together and helping us work towards bringing solutions that could bring this country forward," said Kushner.

The roundtable comes on the heels of Minneapolis City Council announcing Sunday that it would disband the city's police force in the wake of Floyd's death and long-standing issues

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

with police conduct.

"They want to end the police department -- quote end the police department in Minneapolis -- end. What does that mean? End it," Trump said, noting he saw reports in the papers. "They abandoned their police precinct, something I've never seen before. You had a mayor that asked them to abandon, and now they've abandoned the mayor, it looks like."

Trump called it the "opposite of far thinking" but said once he brought in the National Guard "it was like magic."

He said the roundtable would continue to discuss how policing can be done "in a lot more gentle fashion."

"But we can't give up the finest, law enforcement anywhere in the world is nothing like it," Trump said. "So we're going to be discussing some ideas and some concepts and some things, but we won't be defunding our police.

Trump added, "I guess you might have some cities will want to try but it's going to be very, very sad situation."

As Congress begins to chart a path forward on police reform, Majority Leader McConnell Monday afternoon on the Senate floor also swatted down the idea of any proposal that would defund police in exchange for additional social work and mental health programs, calling the matter "outlandish."

"I'm all for social work, and mental health," McConnell said. "But call me old fashion, I think you may actually want a police officer to stop a criminal and arrest him before we try to work through his feelings."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has dismissed emerging calls to defund the police but unveiled with House Democrats earlier Monday a sweeping policing reform bill to "work with our police departments."

"There are many who take pride in their work and we want to be able to make sure that the focus is on them, she said, acknowledging Congress could "rebalance some of our funding" for police on mental health and policing in schools.

Former Vice President Joe Biden's campaign also came out against the growing push to join the movement, saying instead he supports the "urgent need for reform."

"As his criminal justice proposal made clear months ago, Vice President Biden does not believe that police should be defunded. He hears and shares the deep grief and frustration of those calling out for change, and is driven to ensure that justice is done and that we put a stop to this terrible pain," Biden campaign spokesman Andrew Bates wrote in a statement released Monday.

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, in a briefing moments before President Trump opened up the roundtable to press, offered a preview of Trump's remarks, saying he was "appalled" by calls and pointed to Democrats.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

"This is rolling back protective layers in our homes and places of business. He's appalled by it. It's remarkable from the Democratic party," McEnany said.

Cuccinelli says outcome would have been the same if George Floyd were white (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 12:36 PM, John Bowden, 3408K]
Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Ken Cuccinelli said Sunday that he doesn't believe race played a factor in the police killing of George Floyd, a black man whose death in Minneapolis has sparked two weeks of protests and calls for police reform.

Speaking with CNN's Wolf Blitzer, Cuccinelli referred to former Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin as a "bully" but added that he saw no racial implications in the video of Floyd's arrest, which showed Chauvin, who is white, kneeling on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes while the unarmed man says he can't breathe.

"What I heard in that 8 1/2 minute clip was someone who was a bully, who is abusing his position of authority and power in the law," Cuccinelli said.

"And I have a funny feeling, I don't know anything about his professional history, but I have a feeling that we're going to find that he wasn't necessarily that well thought of as a role model among law enforcement through the time of his career, to say the least," he added.

Four officers are now facing charges related to Floyd's death, including Chauvin, whose case was upgraded to second-degree murder after state Attorney General Keith Ellison (D) took control of the investigation.

Demonstrations have erupted around the country, as well as internationally, in response to Floyd's death. Many elected officials have publicly indicated support for the protests and the wider Black Lives Matter movement in recent days, including Republicans such as Sen. Mitt Romney (Utah), who marched with protesters in Washington, D.C., on Sunday.

"There are individuals who are racist, they're a small number," Cuccinelli, a former Virginia attorney general, told CNN. "I would suggest that a bigger problem that can be filtered and trained for is simply bullying."

President Trump is reportedly considering addressing the nation in response to the protests after his calls for state leaders and the military to respond forcefully to demonstrations have been blasted by members of both parties.

Trump's acting DHS chief says he believes George Floyd wouldn't have been spared if he were white (CNN)
CNN [6/8/2020 1:35 PM, Paul LeBlanc, 12317K]
Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Ken Cuccinelli said Sunday that he does not believe that George Floyd's life would have been spared if he were white.

Floyd, a black man, was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis last month. His death

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

has sparked nationwide protests against racism and police violence.

Asked by CNN's Wolf Blitzer if he thought Floyd would still be alive if he were white, Cuccinelli said, "No, I don't think he would."

"What I heard in that eight-and-a-half minute clip was someone who was a bully, who is abusing his position of authority and power in the law," Cuccinelli said in reference to the police officer who kept his knee on Floyd's neck.

"And I have a funny feeling, I don't know anything about his professional history, but I have a feeling that we're going to find that he wasn't necessarily that well thought of as a role model among law enforcement through the time of his career, to say the least."

His comments provide a vastly different view of America than that of the thousands of protesters who are demanding justice for Floyd and seeking to call attention to decades of police abuse toward black Americans as a result of what they say is institutionalized racism in law enforcement agencies.

Cuccinelli, however, joined other Trump officials who claimed Sunday that systemic racism is not an issue in US law enforcement.

"There are individuals who are racist, they're a small number," he said, adding that "I would suggest that a bigger problem that can be filtered and trained for is simply bullying."

As a result, he said, "we should challenge that attitude when we find it among officers and it should be worked into the training to work it out. It is a very tough balancing act that law enforcement officers that are doing their job have to conduct every day."

His comments echo the message of Attorney General William Barr, who said in an interview with CBS earlier Sunday, "I think there's racism in the United States still but I don't think that the law enforcement system is systemically racist."

"I understand the distrust, however, of the African American community given the history in this country," Barr said.

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf similarly dismissed the idea that racism is a problem in law enforcement, arguing instead that "some" officers "abuse their jobs."

"Painting law enforcement with a broad brush of systemic racism is really a disservice to the men and women who put on the badge, the uniform every day, risk their lives every day to protect the American people," Wolf told ABC.

[Editorial note: consult source link for video]

After months at sea, the final cruise ship carrying passengers makes it home (CNN)
CNN [6/8/2020 9:58 AM, Francesca Street, 12317K]
After a six-month odyssey around the world, during which it was hit by coronavirus and saw the oceans dramatically empty of other vessels, the last cruise liner still carrying passengers

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

has made its final port of call, delivering its eight guests to a world vastly changed from the one they set sail in.

The MV Artania cruise ship tied up in the Germany port of Bremerhaven on Monday, operator Phoenix Reisen confirmed to CNN Travel, bringing an end an epic return voyage from Australia that saw the ship make numerous diversions en route to drop off crew members.

All eight passengers still on board were due to disembark by midday local time.

Artania's arrival comes more than two months after the last major leisure ships carrying significant numbers of passengers were taken out of commission, as the cruise industry slammed the brakes on sailing amid the global pandemic.

While the Costa Deliziosa, the MSC Magnifica and the Pacific Princess -- the final significant vessels overseen by industry group Cruise Lines International Association -- docked in April, Artania kept on sailing, the end of its journey still weeks away.

The ship, which can carry up to 1,200 passengers, set sail on an 140-day world cruise from Hamburg, Germany on December 21, 2019.

In March, coronavirus caught up with the cruise when 36 passengers tested positive for the virus following a check from Australian health officials when the ship arrived in in Fremantle, Western Australia.

Those affected were quarantined in local hospitals, according to Phoenix Reisen.

Three people who were on the ship have since died -- two male passengers, one aged 69 and one aged 71, and one 42-year-old male crew member.

The Artania's healthy guests stayed quarantined on the Artania until their repatriation flights at the end of March. Hundreds of Artania passengers, the majority of whom were German, flew back from Western Australia to Frankfurt, a handful stayed in hospital in Australia to recover.

And eight passengers decided to travel back home via ocean, rather than via airplane. These travelers were subsequently granted the surreal status of becoming the last cruise ship passengers at sea.

They watched the world change, countries lock down and reopen again, all while they remained at sea, the last cruisers of the world's oceans.

But while the journey home to Europe after Artania left Australia on April 18 should've taken a few weeks, it was extended by stop offs in Southeast Asia in order to repatriate many of its remaining crew members.

Some European crew had been able to fly home from Perth to Frankfurt alongside passengers. The rest of the crew remained on the ship, with the Artania making calls in Bali and Manila to allow workers to return home.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Around 75 crew members stayed on board until Bremerhaven to help ensure smooth operation of the ship.

Along the way, Captain Morten Hansen kept passengers, coworkers, cruise fans and loved ones in the loop via his Facebook page.

Norwegian-born Hansen has been commanding cruise ships since 2001 and will be recognizable to some as the star of the TV series "Crazy for the Sea," a German reality show that documents cruise ship life.

During the Artania's long journey, Hansen posted videos in which he spoke candidly from the cabin and published photographs of the sights spotted from the ship.

When the ship was quarantined in Perth, crew members received postcards from school children in the city.

The idea was to forge a connection between the quarantined crew -- caught up in the pandemic and marred by the cruise industry's declining reputation -- and a panicked city that was feeling increasingly threatened by cruise ships and the Covid threat.

"The cards are written lovingly, sensitively and individually for everyone. It was just heart warming and moving," wrote Hansen on Facebook, holding up his card.

There were other special moments -- on Mother's Day, Hansen took a little detour from his planned route in order to map out the shape of a heart.

And right before the ship left Perth, two crew members brought together by these extraordinary circumstances, decided to tie the knot and were married in a ceremony officiated by Dr Gabriele Maluga, the Honorary Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Western Australia.

Future of cruising

Phoenix Reisen said passengers were due to finish disembarking the Artania by midday local time.

But while most cruise ship travelers are now back home, many cruise ship crews remain stuck on ships across the world, awaiting return amid reports of struggling mental health and difficult conditions.

On Monday, in recognition of World Ocean Day, activists across the world were hosting a virtual "Rally to Clean Up Cruising" today, which focuses on how the industry could change its environmental impact when cruising restarts.

GAO offers Congress steps to protect independence of federal watchdogs (Politico)
Politico [6/8/2020 8:03 PM, Kyle Cheney, 4207K]
Lawmakers could take steps to prevent President Donald Trump or other executive branch leaders from undermining the independence of federal watchdogs, according to a new

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

report from Congress' internal audit agency.

Trump, who has bristled at the independence of inspectors general, has leaned heavily on temporary appointees to fill the powerful posts, leaving them more susceptible to pressure from within the administration. In some cases, he's turned to officials who already serve in senior roles inside the agency, tasking them to both run the departments and monitor them for waste and mismanagement — a position that could make independent oversight impossible.

The Government Accountability Office, Congress's internal watchdog, says lawmakers could require those "dual-hatted" employees to recuse themselves when their independence could be called into question — and to vow in writing to protect the identity of whistleblowers who normally turn to inspectors general for protection.

"If agency employees do not have confidence that their disclosures to IGs will be kept confidential, there will be a chilling effect," GAO chief Gene Dodaro said in the report, delivered to 10 Republican and Democratic lawmakers on the congressional oversight committees. "Potential whistleblowers may refrain from coming forward with valuable information on instances of wrongdoing if they believe the acting IG is susceptible to pressures to release whistleblower identities to agency management."

The GAO report lands amid growing alarm in Congress about Trump's treatment of inspectors general. In April, Trump removed the intelligence community's inspector general, Michael Atkinson, over his decision to inform Congress about the existence of a whistleblower complaint accusing Trump of wrongdoing — a disclosure required by law. Trump last month removed State Department inspector general Steve Linick, later attributing the decision to a request from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was the subject of at least two reviews Linick was conducting.

In between, Trump demoted the acting inspector general of the Pentagon, who had been slated to oversee a government-wide review of the federal coronavirus response, and he nominated a replacement for the acting Health and Human Services inspector general, days after assailing her for a report that faulted the federal government's preparedness for the pandemic.

"Given the unique role that IGs play within the executive branch, they should be protected from removal to the limits allowed by the U.S. Constitution," Dodaro concluded.

Democrats howled at Trump's actions, accusing him of attempting to dismantle one of the only functional checks on his administration's actions, and even some Senate Republicans took exception to Trump's efforts to abruptly dismiss the Senate-confirmed Atkinson and Linick without notice.

GAO's report suggests steps Congress could take to address situations like these, particularly in the case of Linick's replacement, an agency insider and Pompeo ally who is expected to retain his original position. Among Congress' options, per GAO:

Prohibit Trump from removing inspectors general without cause.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Require the administration to notify Congress when an inspector general is placed on administrative leave, not just when they're designated for removal.

Require periodic reporting on inspector general vacancies and the impact on oversight of lingering vacancies.

Require agencies to document threats to the independence of inspectors general and efforts to reduce them.

Mandate that inspectors general who face conflicts or threats to independence recuse themselves from affected investigations.

GAO spends much of its report focused on the conflict between temporary inspectors general who hold dual positions in the agencies they're purported to oversee.

"Their existing portfolios of work and relationships may be more likely to appear to constitute threats of bias, familiarity, undue influence, or management participation than those of differently situated acting IGs," Dodaro concluded, noting that independence is part of the statutory requirement and that acting IGs aren't absolved of it.

Citing the GAO report, top Democrats on the House Oversight Committee said Trump should rescind the appointments of acting inspectors general at the State Department and Department of Transportation who also serve in other capacities reporting to agency leadership.

"This abuse must end," Reps. Carolyn Maloney, Gerald Connolly and Stephen Lynch said. "President Trump has attacked the independence of IGs to cover up what is obvious — his Administration is failing us, and they are afraid of truly independent oversight."

A White House spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

GAO suggests that Congress could establish a line of succession inside inspector general offices, automatically elevating assistant watchdogs to the top spot if a vacancy occurs, or requiring that any replacements come from inside the inspector general office, rather than at the whim of the executive.

Dodaro's report was sent to Sens. Gary Peters (D-Mich.), Tom Carper (D-Del.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.), Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and James Lankford (R-Okla.), all members of the Senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. It was also sent to House Oversight Committee Chair Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), ranking Republican Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) and Reps. Gerald Connolly (D-Va.) and Jody Hice (R-Ga.), the chairman and ranking member of the oversight subcommittee on government operations.

[NY] New York Infections Hit Lowest Since Pandemic Began: Governor (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [6/8/2020 8:44 PM, Staff, 6400K] Video HERE
New York Governor Andrew Cuomo says the infection rate in the state fell to 1.2% on Sunday, the lowest since the pandemic began in March. He speaks at his daily briefing.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[DC] ICE, CBP agents 'demobilize' from Floyd protests in Washington, D.C., at DOJ's direction (NBC News)
NBC News [6/8/2020 5:10 PM, Julia Ainsley, 7718K, Neutral, Primary]
At the direction of the Justice Department, agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement as well as Customs and Border Protection are "demobilizing" from the protests in the nation's capital, spokespeople from both agencies told NBC News.

The immigration agencies, both of which fall under the Department of Homeland Security, had been taking commands from Attorney General William Barr as he mobilized several federal law enforcement agencies to respond to protesters in Washington.

The use of federal agents, particularly those involved in forcibly clearing protesters out of Lafayette Square in front of the White House ahead of President Donald Trump's walk to St. John's Church last week, has been heavily criticized, including by D.C.'s Mayor Muriel Bowser.

One DHS official said a small number of Border Patrol agents will continue to support police at protest areas in Arizona and California.

At its height, nearly 400 border agents and officers from the Washington region were deployed to respond to protesters.

The Daily Beast was first to report that ICE and CBP were pulling agents out of D.C.'s protest response.

The Justice Department did not respond to a request for comment or say whether it would also downscale the number of other federal agents following protests over the weekend that were largely peaceful. The FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Park Police, Bureau of Prisons, Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives, the Secret Service and U.S. Marshals have all been involved in efforts to quell protests in Washington.

[DC] Trump's National Guard 'Surge' Allowed George Floyd Protesters To 'Demonstrate Safely,' White House Says (Daily Caller)
Daily Caller [6/8/2020 11:56 AM, Christian Datoc, 339K]
Trump administration officials told the Daily Caller that President Donald Trump's deployment of the National Guard in Washington, D.C. ensured that the protests in the nation's capital over the weekend of June 6 and 7 were dramatically more peaceful than those that took place the weekend prior.

Senior White House officials told the Daily Caller that the protests, in both the District and cities across the country, didn't "spontaneously" turn peaceful overnight and attributed the "decisive" deescalation to coordination between local law enforcement and National Guard troops.

"Juxtapose Washington, D.C. two weekends ago, when there was widespread vandalism, property damage, and arson with this past weekend," White House director of strategic communications Alyssa Farrah told the Daily Caller. "It was night and day."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“The streets of America didn’t spontaneously become peaceful last week,” she continued. “It was a direct result of President Trump calling on Governors and Mayors to surge the National Guard in their states and restore law and order on America’s streets so that peaceful protestors could demonstrate safely. That is precisely because President Trump took decisive action to secure the streets of our Nation’s Capital and restore law and order.”

White House officials contrasted the weekend’s successful, peaceful protests with those from the weekend prior, which injured roughly 60 United States Secret Service agents and 40 National Park Police officers. In total, the White House estimates that more than 700 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers have been injured by violence stemming from the protests.

Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Protective Services told the Daily Caller that more than 150 federal buildings across the country were damaged by protesters. Property damage in Minneapolis alone currently exceeds $55 million.

Trump urged governors last week to deploy additional National Guard troops to “dominate” the streets. His vow to mobilize military assets to contain the violence earned critiques from many, including former Defense Secretary James Mattis, but the Daily Caller reporters noticed a distinct change in protesters behavior following Trump’s Monday comments.

Over the past week, protesters in D.C. actively condemned looting and destruction of property, and the Daily Caller captured multiple instances of protesters preventing individuals from committing similar acts.

The D.C. demonstrations on June 6 and 7 drew more than 10,000 participants, marking the largest George Floyd protests to date, but they resulted in no reported violence or arrests.

Though the White House has yet to formally propose reforms to police departments, as requested by some protesters, Trump is hosting a roundtable Monday with law enforcement officials at the White House. Vice President Mike Pence also met black community leaders last week for input on how to attempt to address racial inequality.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Democrats plan to unveil police reform legislation Monday, but a senior administration official told the Daily Caller on Sunday that Democratic leadership did not consult the White House or Republican leadership on the bill.

[Editorial note: consult source link for video]

[VA] Man Who Drove Into Protesters Said He Was a K.K.K. Leader, Prosecutors Say (New York Times)
New York Times [6/8/2020 6:01 PM, Jacey Fortin, 40577K]
A man drove a vehicle into a group of protesters outside Richmond, Va., on Sunday, the authorities said, and identified himself as a leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Prosecutors said they were investigating the episode as a possible hate crime.

The Henrico County Police Division said it received a call about the episode, which happened in Lakeside, just north of Richmond, shortly before 6. p.m.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“Several witnesses reported that a vehicle revved their engine and drove through the protesters occupying the roadway,” the police said in a statement. The driver, Harry H. Rogers, 36, of Hanover County, Va., was arrested and charged with assault and battery, the police said.

Across the United States, people have been gathering to protest police brutality after George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man from Minneapolis, died after a white police officer pressed a knee into his neck for nearly nine minutes.

There were no reports of serious injuries after the episode in Lakeside on Sunday, and the person who called the police was checked by emergency responders at the scene and refused further medical treatment, the police said.

A lawyer for Mr. Rogers could not immediately be reached for comment on Monday afternoon. It was unclear whether Mr. Rogers’s claims about his membership in the Ku Klux Klan were true. He is currently being held without bond.

“The accused, by his own admission and by a cursory glance at social media, is an admitted leader of the Ku Klux Klan and a propagandist for Confederate ideology,” said Shannon L. Taylor, the Commonwealth’s Attorney for Henrico County. “We are investigating whether hate crimes charges are appropriate.”

Studies indicate that membership in the Ku Klux Klan has been declining for decades, but that the overall number of hate groups in the United States has been growing in recent years. A report from the Southern Poverty Law Center found that the number of white supremacist groups has been rising since 2017, and data from the Anti-Defamation League shows that the use of white supremacist propaganda is growing across the country.

In a separate episode in Seattle on Sunday night, a man with a pistol drove a car through a crowd of protesters, the authorities said. Video footage from the scene showed a car moving on a crowded street toward an intersection where protesters were gathered near a Seattle Police Department station house in the city’s Capitol Hill neighborhood.

The reports from Seattle and Henrico County echoed a deadly episode in Charlottesville, Va., nearly three years ago, when a man plowed his car into a crowd of demonstrators protesting a white-supremacist rally, killing one woman and injuring at least 19 other people.

“Protesters acting peaceably, well within their constitutional rights of assembly, should not have to fear violence,” Ms. Taylor said. “We lived through this in Virginia in Charlottesville in 2017. I promise Henricoans that this egregious criminal act will not go unpunished. Hate has no place here under my watch.”

[VA] Prosecutor: Virginia man who drove truck into crowd of peaceful protesters is a Ku Klux Klan leader (USA Today)
USA Today [6/8/2020 9:30 PM, Staff, 8982K]
A man who drove his pick-up truck into a crowd of peaceful protesters in Richmond, Virginia over the weekend is an admitted leader of the Ku Klux Klan, according to prosecutors.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Henrico County Police identified the man as 36-year-old Harry H. Rogers of Virginia. Rogers has been charged with assault, battery, attempted malicious wounding and felony vandalism in the Sunday night incident.

Henrico Commonwealth Attorney Shannon Taylor said in a tweet that a "cursory glance" at Rogers' social media and his own admissions to authorities revealed that he was a leader of the white supremacist group.

Harry Rogers appeared in Henrico Court Monday morning where he agreed to receive a court-appointed attorney, according to CBS 6 News. A Henrico judge denied Rogers' bond during Monday's hearing.

According to witnesses, Rogers drove down a median before revving his engine and driving into the protesters. A person who was wounded in the incident doesn't appear to have serious injuries, said Taylor.

"Protesters acting peaceably, well within their constitutional rights of assembly, should not have to fear violence," added Taylor. "We lived through this in Virginia in Charlottesville in 2017. I promise Henricoans that this egregious criminal act will not go unpunished. Hate has no place here under my watch."

In 2017, James Alex Fields Jr. deliberately drove into a crowd of people peacefully protesting a Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, killing one and injuring 19. Fields was sentenced to life in prison for federal hate crime charges last year.

According to interviews with witnesses by CBS 6 News, protesters urged the driver to stop. One witness said that Rogers was already parked and waiting at the scene where protesters planned to march.

[VA] Man Who Drove Into Crowd Of Protesters In Virginia Claims To Be A KKK Leader (Daily Caller)
Daily Caller [6/8/2020 3:21 PM, Marlo Safi, 339K]
A Virginia man who drove through a group of protesters Sunday admitted to being a Ku Klux Klan leader, numerous sources reported.

Harry Rogers, 36, was charged with attempted malicious wounding, destruction of property and assault and battery after he drove his pickup truck through a group of protesters in the Richmond area Sunday, NBC Washington reported.

In court Monday, Rogers claimed he was the president of the Ku Klux Klan in Virginia and the highest-ranking member not in prison, Henrico County Commonwealth's attorney Shannon Taylor said according to WTVR.

"The accused, by his own admission and by a cursory glance at social media, is an admitted leader of the Ku Klux Klan and a propagandist for Confederate ideology," Taylor said in a statement according to WTVR. "We are investigating whether hate crimes charges are appropriate."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

No one was reported injured from the incident. The protests were over the death of George Floyd, making the allegations especially serious, according to Taylor.

“The allegations are incredibly serious … particularly during this time when we are having real conversations about racism, real conversations about social inequalities and the idea of the injustices that are happening,” Taylor said, NBC Washington reported.

Taylor also recalled a similar incident from August 2017, when avowed white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. drove his vehicle into a crowd of counter-protesters at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, killing protester Heather Heyer.

“We lived through this in Virginia in Charlottesville in 2017,” Taylor said according to NBC Washington. “I promise Henricoans that this egregious criminal act will not go unpunished. Hate has no place here under my watch.”

Rogers is set to appear in court in August.

[TX] Mourners pay tribute to George Floyd as pressure mounts for U.S. police reform (Reuters)
Reuters [6/8/2020 1:37 PM, Erwin Seba and David Morgan, 5304K]
Hundreds of mourners streamed into a Texas church on Monday to honor African American George Floyd, who died in police custody two weeks ago, as pressure mounted in Congress and across the United States for sweeping reforms to the justice system.

Demonstrators’ anger over the May 25 death of Floyd, 46, is giving way to a growing determination to make his case a turning point in race relations and a lightning rod for change in the way police departments function across the country.

Floyd died after Derek Chauvin, the white officer accused of killing him, knelt on his neck for nine minutes in Minneapolis. A bystander’s cellphone captured the scene as Floyd pleaded with the officer, choking out the words, “I can’t breathe.”

The incident triggered two weeks of protests in U.S. cities, deepening a political crisis for President Donald Trump, who repeatedly threatened to order active duty troops onto the streets to put an end to bursts of looting and vandalism.

In Houston, where Floyd grew up, American flags fluttered along the route to the Fountain of Praise church as hundreds of people, wearing masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, formed a procession. Some bowed their heads, while others made the sign of the cross when they reached Floyd’s casket.

“I’m glad he got the send-off he deserved,” Marcus Williams, a 46-year-old black resident of Houston, said outside the church. “I want the police killings to stop. I want them to reform the process to achieve justice, and stop the killing.”

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, who is challenging the Republican Trump in a Nov. 3 election, met Floyd’s relatives for more than an hour in Houston on Monday,

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

according to the family's lawyer Benjamin Crump.

"He listened, heard their pain, and shared in their woe," Crump said on Twitter. Floyd will be buried on Tuesday.

In Washington, Democrats in Congress unveiled legislation that would make lynching a hate crime and allow victims of misconduct and their families to sue police for damages in civil court, ending a legal doctrine known as qualified immunity.

Their 134-page bill also would ban chokeholds and require the use of body cameras by federal law enforcement officers, restrict the use of lethal force, and facilitate independent probes of police departments that show patterns of misconduct.

It does not call for the funding of police departments to be cut or abolished, as some protesters and activists have sought. But lawmakers called for spending priorities to change.

"We have confused having safe communities with hiring more cops on the street ... when in fact the real way to achieve safe and healthy communities is to invest in these communities," Senator Kamala Harris, seen as a potential running-mate to Biden, said at a briefing.

Trump, who has portrayed himself as a defender of law and order during the protests, "is appalled by the defund-the-police movement," White House spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany told a media briefing. She said Trump was weighing various proposals in response to Floyd's death.

Biden does not support the movement to defund police departments as a response to police brutality, but is in favor of the "urgent need" for reform, a spokesman for his presidential campaign said on Monday.

Democrats vowed to bring the legislation in coming weeks to the floor of the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. The support of the Republican-controlled Senate and Trump would be needed for the measure to become law if it passes the House.

COURT HEARING

Huge weekend crowds gathered across the country and in Europe. The high-spirited atmosphere was marred late on Sunday when a man drove a car into a rally in Seattle and then shot and wounded a demonstrator who confronted him.

Police killings have sparked calls for reforms here and renewed calls for racial equality as the United States reopens after weeks of unprecedented lockdowns for the coronavirus pandemic.

Bail for Chauvin, the officer who was captured on video with his knee on Floyd's neck, was raised to $1.25 million, from $1 million, during a court hearing in Minneapolis on Monday, Minnesota's Star Tribune reported.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Chauvin, who is charged with second-degree and third-degree murder as well as second-degree manslaughter, appeared on video link, handcuffed in an orange jumpsuit and sitting at a small table.

Three other officers have been charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter. All four officers have been fired.

Tensions have been running high in the Minnesota city. A majority of the members on the city council pledged on Sunday to abolish the police department in favor of a community-led safety model, a step that was unthinkable before Floyd's death.

[TX] 3 antifa members arrested after looting a Target store in Austin, says Travis County DA (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [6/8/2020 10:26 AM, Mike Brest, 727K]
Police arrested three people whom they say are members of antifa for looting a Target in Austin, Texas late last month, according to the Travis County District Attorney's Office.

The three people — identified as Lisa Hogan, 27, Samuel Miller, 22, and Skye Elder, 23 — were among a group of about 20 people who broke into the building, stole items, and damaged property on May 31.

Hogan was charged with riot and burglary of a building, Miller was charged with criminal mischief and burglary of a building, and Elder was charged for burglary of a building. Bond was set at $25,000 per charge for each person.

Members of the Austin Police Department Special Response Team arrived shortly after the break-in and apprehended the trio. The property damage and merchandise stolen has been valued at over $20,000.

A press release from the office of District Attorney Margaret Moore said the three people "are known members of a local anti-government group, which is a self-identified communist/socialist ANTIFA group."

"While I fully support the rights of freedom of speech and assembly, I cannot tolerate the subversion of peaceful protest by engaging in wanton destruction and theft," Moore said. "These arrests are important to protecting not only the property owners, but, even more importantly, the peaceful protesters whose message should be heard."

The statement said there is an ongoing investigation involving the Austin Police Department, the Travis County District Attorney's Office, and the FBI.

"The violence, threat to life, and destruction of property we have seen in Austin and other parts of the country, jeopardizes the rights and safety of all citizens, including peaceful demonstrators," said Christopher Combs, special agent in charge of the FBI's San Antonio Division.

President Trump has blamed the left-wing antifa movement for violent demonstrations across the country in several cities, including looting, arson, and major clashes between

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

protesters and law enforcement. The president said late last month the U.S. would designate antifa a domestic terrorist organization.

The protests began last week after George Floyd, a black man, died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed a knee into Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes during an arrest.

Attorney General William Barr said "many places" across the country were seeing violent protests spurred by "anarchic" and "far-left extremist groups." He added that agitators were using "antifalike tactics" and that many of them were traveling from out of state to participate in the protests.

Barr later added that the violence being "instigated and carried out" by "antifa and other similar groups" in connection to nationwide rioting is "domestic terrorism and will be treated accordingly."

[CA] Air Force sergeant ID'd as suspect in 'ambush' killing of California deputy (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 6:00 AM, Dom Calicchio, 12006K]
A suspect facing first-degree murder charges in Saturday's shooting death of a California sheriff's deputy is an active-duty sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, authorities said Sunday.

He was shot during his capture in Santa Cruz County and was being treated in a hospital for non-life-threatening injuries, authorities said.

Carrillo is accused of fatally shooting Santa Cruz County Deputy Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller, 38, in what authorities have described as an ambush attack in Ben Lomond, an unincorporated town of about 6,000 residents in the Santa Cruz Mountains, south of the San Francisco area.

Two other law enforcement officers were injured in the incident, including a California Highway Patrol officer wounded by gunfire.

CALIFORNIA AMBUSH LEAVES 1 DEPUTY DEAD, 2 OFFICERS HURT. The suspect was arrested after allegedly attempting a carjacking while trying to flee from the ambush scene, the Santa Cruz Sentinel reported.

"There's a lot that we don't know at this point," Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart told the newspaper.

"I ask that the community be patient as we go through this investigation and the grieving process."

"There's a lot that we don't know at this point. I ask that the community be patient as we go through this investigation and the grieving process."

The FBI is investigating a possible link between the Santa Cruz shootings and the May 29 shooting death of a Federal Protective Service officer in Oakland, Calif., according to The

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Associated Press.

A second officer was critically injured in that incident.

Both cases involved gunmen using a van, authorities said.

Authorities released photos of the van seen near the Oakland shooting but it was unclear if it was the same van linked to the Santa Cruz County shooting.

The slain officer in Oakland was identified as Dave Patrick Underwood, 53, of Pinole, who was providing security at the Ronald V. Dellums Federal Building, a U.S. courthouse in downtown Oakland.

FEDERAL PROTECTIVE SERVICE OFFICER KILLED IN OAKLAND SHOOTING DURING GEORGE FLOYD PROTEST IDENTIFIED. Underwood was the brother of Angela Underwood Jacobs, who was a Republican candidate in a U.S. House primary in Southern California to fill the congressional seat vacated by Democrat Katie Hill.

Jacobs resigned from the race prior to the primary.

No suspect has been identified in the Oakland case but surveillance cameras captured images of a white Ford van that is believed to have been used by the suspect or suspects.

Gutzwiller, a 14-year veteran of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, was hit by gunfire after he and other law enforcement officers pursued a van after receiving a call that the van contained weapons and bomb-making devices, Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart said.

Gutzwiller and another deputy chased the van to the driveway of a home in Ben Lomond, where they were ambushed by gunfire and explosives when they exited their vehicle.

Gutzwiller was shot and later died in a hospital while the other deputy was wounded by gunfire or shrapnel.

A third officer, from the California Highway Patrol, was shot in a hand, Hart said.

The death was ruled a suicide, according to the Air Force.

Travis Air Force Base spokesman 2nd Lt. Mike Longoria said he did not know if Carrillo had any special training in weapons or bombs, the Sentinel reported.

The spokesman said any data regarding past disciplinary action involving Carrillo was still being sought but added that such information "Would not be generally releasable" to the public, the newspaper reported.

[CA] Air Force sergeant accused of killing California deputy had explosives training, report says (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 1:21 PM, Greg Norman, 12006K] Video: HERE
The Air Force sergeant accused of killing a California deputy and wounding two other

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

officers in an ambush attack over the weekend reportedly was taught “explosive ordnance awareness” last year while training to join an “elite security unit” within the branch.

Steven Carrillo, who will be charged with first-degree murder in the death of 38-year-old Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller, became a “Phoenix Raven Team Leader” following his completion of a rigorous instructional program at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey, Air Force officials told CBS San Francisco.

“The two-week, 12-hour-a-day course at McGuire covers cross-cultural awareness, legal considerations, embassy operations, explosive ordnance awareness and more,” the Air Force wrote in October 2018 article, describing what it takes to become a member of "an elite security unit that’s filled with individuals trained for a specific job: protecting aircraft and crews from enemy assaults while on the ground in austere and dangerous areas.”

The article was accompanied by a picture of Carrillo undergoing the Phoenix Ravens team training process a month earlier.

Carrillo, 32, attempted a carjacking and was shot during his arrest Saturday, police say. He is now being treated at a hospital for non-life-threatening injuries.

The incident unfolded when Gutzwiller and the other officers responded to a 911 call around 1:30 p.m. about a suspicious van in Ben Lomond, an unincorporated area near Santa Cruz. The caller said there were guns and bomb-making devices inside, according to Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart.

When deputies arrived, the van pulled away and the deputies followed. The van went down a driveway at a home, and the deputies were ambushed by gunfire and explosives after getting out of their vehicle.

Gutzwiller was wounded and later died at a hospital. Another deputy was wounded by gunfire or shrapnel and was struck by a vehicle as the suspect fled. A third officer from the California Highway Patrol was shot in his hand, Hart said.

The owner of a marijuana dispensary in the area told the San Francisco Chronicle that he ran into Carrillo on Saturday prior to his arrest.

Patrick McCue, who runs Redwood Coast Dispensary, said the wife of an employee first called the store to warn them of an active shooter nearby. He and another worker – while watching surveillance cameras -- then spotted people running around in the parking lot and decided to go outside to investigate.

“I noticed a guy crouching by a truck and I said, ‘Hey, can I help you?’” McCue told the newspaper. “Then I noticed he had an assault rifle.”

McCue says he and the worker thought Carrillo might have been an off-duty cop responding to the attack, so they didn’t panic.

“Then he told me, ‘I’m not going to hurt anybody. I’m in a jam, can you just give me your keys?’” McCue said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The store owner says he denied the request and then barricaded himself inside the dispensary until Carrillo was arrested.

“I’m considering myself lucky that he wasn’t still pulling the trigger,” McCue later told the San Francisco Chronicle. “The real tragedy is a good officer was targeted for something he had nothing to do with.”

The motive for the ambush remains unclear.

Carrillo had arrived at Travis Air Force Base, about 50 miles northeast of San Francisco, in June 2018, and was a member of the 60th Security Forces Squadron, a base spokesman told the Associated Press.

Carrillo’s wife, Monika Leigh Scott Carrillo, who was also in the Air Force, was found dead in an off-base hotel in May 2018 while she was stationed in South Carolina. She was 30.

Her death was investigated by the Sumter County Sheriff’s Office, in coordination with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and ruled a suicide, according to the Air Force.

Meanwhile, the FBI is investigating a possible link between the Santa Cruz shootings and the May 29 shooting death of a Federal Protective Service officer in Oakland.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Federal Judges Help Free Over 230 Illegal Aliens in Last Month, Including Rapists, Murderers, Sex Offenders (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 9:07 PM, John Binder, 1711K]
In the last month, federal judges have ordered the release of more than 230 illegal aliens in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody — over 65 percent of which have either criminal convictions or are accused of crimes.

Since the beginning of the Chinese coronavirus crisis, federal judges have ordered the release of 429 illegal aliens — 327 of which have been convicted or accused of crimes.

Over the last month, even as states have started lifting their lockdown orders, federal judges continued to help free from ICE custody a total of 237 illegal aliens since May 6. About 156 of those illegal aliens freed from custody have been convicted or accused of crimes.

San Francisco, California, officials have released 89 illegal aliens. Eighty-seven of those illegal aliens have been accused or convicted of attempted murder, burglary, domestic violence, drunk driving, homicide, kidnapping, lewd acts with a minor, and robbery.

In San Diego, California, 91 illegal aliens have been released. Twelve of those illegal aliens have been accused or convicted of aggravated assault, burglary, drug possession, and drunk driving.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Other cities seeing mass release include:

56 illegal aliens released in Los Angeles, California — 47 of which have been accused or convicted of assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder, child cruelty, homicide, and juvenile sex offenses.

57 illegal aliens released in Boston, Massachusetts — 54 of which have been accused or convicted of assault, child abuse, domestic violence, drug trafficking, and rape.

53 illegal aliens released in New York City, New York — 51 of which have been accused or convicted of assault, cruelty toward a child, drug possession, drunk driving, sexual assault, and rape.

29 illegal aliens released in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — 28 of which have been accused or convicted of assault, drug trafficking, and voluntary manslaughter.

25 illegal aliens released in Detroit, Michigan — 23 of which have been accused or convicted of assault, domestic violence, homicide, and drunk driving.

10 illegal aliens released in Chicago, Illinois — eight of which have been accused or convicted of homicide, possession of a controlled substance, and theft.

Today, there are anywhere between 11 and 22 million illegal aliens residing in the U.S. Nearly eight million of those illegal aliens hold American jobs that would otherwise go to Americans in sectors like farming, construction, production, service, and transportation.

Abolish ICE movement storms back amid push to defund police (Washington Times)
Washington Times [6/8/2020 5:25 PM, Stephen Dinan, 496K]
Anti-ICE protesters assaulted an immigration detention facility in California over the weekend, smashing windows and vandalizing vehicles, reviving the “Abolish ICE” movement that was, in many ways, the precursor to the current “Defund Police” effort.

A 46-minute video posted to YouTube by someone in the crowd captured the mayhem, showing protesters waving Mexican flags, shouting obscenities, smashing windows and scrawling graffiti. At one point the video captures a woman holding a Mexican flag and throwing objects, apparently at employees.

The man taking the video, who identifies himself as the Highdesert Community Watch News Network, seemed stunned that the gathering turned so confrontational after what he said was a mile and a half march.

The protest took place at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Adelanto, California, run by GEO Group, a private contractor, which said the crowd was being fueled by wrong information, including that children were being held there.

“Unfortunately, the dishonest narrative and lies that are being spread about the services our company provides on behalf of the federal government continue to lead to the endangerment of our employees, as witnessed yesterday,” GEO Group said in a statement.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“While we support peaceful protests and the constitutional right to free speech, our employees, who are on the front lines caring for all those in our facilities, should never be met with acts of violence,” the company said.

At the White House, press secretary Kayleigh McEnany compared the Abolish ICE movement to the Defund Police movement that’s arisen in some communities and among some Democratic politicians in the wake of the killing of George Floyd.

“We all remember the Defund ICE movement — they want to defund Immigration and Custom Enforcement and now they want to defund the police. This is extraordinary,” she said. “This is rolling back the protective layers that protect Americans in their homes and in their places of business.”

She said President Trump was “appalled by it.”

Protesters held signs such as “Free R Kids” and screamed to “give my children back.”

“A couple mothers here are crying for their children,” the man taking the video narrated.

GEO said children are not housed at the Adelanto facility, and never have been.

Both ICE and GEO have said misinformation and heated anti-ICE rhetoric places them in danger.

Last year, at the height of the Abolish ICE movement, spearheaded by immigrant-rights activists and some liberal Democrats in Congress, GEO facilities were targeted for attacks.

Shots were fired into a building in San Antonio, Texas, that housed both GEO and ICE offices, and a man armed with a rifle attacked a GEO-run detention facility in Tacoma, Washington. The man was attempting to ignite a propane fuel tank to cause an explosion when he was killed.

[NC] N.C. justices back sheriffs involved in immigration program (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [6/8/2020 5:04 PM, Gary D. Robertson, AP, 496K]
The North Carolina Supreme Court has ruled state judges don’t have authority to release immigrants held by a county sheriff working on behalf of the U.S. government with documents directing them to be detained.

The state Supreme Court said in a ruling Friday that Superior Court Judge Yvonne Mims Evans wrongly ordered the release of the defendants.

The justices unanimously upheld portions of a Court of Appeals ruling that vacated 2017 orders by Evans involving Carlos Chavez and Luis Lopez, who were held in the Mecklenburg County jail but could be released on bond. Lopez had been charged with breaking and entering, while Chavez faced impaired driving and assault on a female charges, the opinion said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Then-Mecklenburg Sheriff Irwin Carmichael had entered a 287(g) agreement with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to carry out immigration laws and detain immigrants that ICE agents say were subject to deportation. Carmichael declined to release Chaves and Lopez, even though Evans declared them to be unlawfully held, because they were subject to immigration-related arrest warrants and detainers. While the men ultimately were placed in ICE custody, the Supreme Court declared that ruling in the matter was still in the public interest.

In Friday's ruling, Associate Justice Sam Ervin IV wrote the trial judge's authority was superseded by federal law because Carmichael participated in the 287(g) program.

Although Evans was allowed to examine whether she had authority to grant their requests, Ervin wrote for the seven justices, "an examination of the applications themselves should have led the trial court to summarily deny petitioners' habeas corpus petitions."

Sheriffs in Alamance, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Henderson, Nash, Randolph and Rockingham counties participated in the 287(g) program as of May. Some departments previously withdrew from the program after a change in leadership. Carmichael successor Gary McFadden and Wake County Sheriff Gerald Baker pulled out after their 2018 election victories.

Whether all North Carolina sheriffs should cooperate with ICE detainers became a big issue at the General Assembly in 2019. The Republican-controlled General Assembly passed a bill requiring sheriffs to comply with requests by federal immigration agents to hold inmates they believe are in the country unlawfully. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed the bill, calling it unconstitutional and politically motivated. Several newly elected Democratic sheriffs, including Baker and McFadden, had halted their offices' cooperation with ICE.

The Court of Appeals panel hearing the Mecklenburg case addressed the authority of sheriffs who don't participate in such agreements, according to a footnote in the 32-page opinion. But that issue wasn't before the panel and "has no binding effect in future cases," the footnote reads.

[FL] ICE Detainees Win Class Status For Covid-19 Confinement Suit (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [6/8/2020 4:47 PM, Porter Wells, 25K]
Immigration detainees at three facilities in Miami who say ICE has been unconstitutionally indifferent to their risks of contracting Covid-19 may pursue their claims as a class, the Southern District of Florida ruled.

The certified class, calculated to be about 1,400 individuals, will be comprised of all civil immigration detainees held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement at Krome, BTC, and Glades "when this action was filed, since this action was filed, or in the future," Judge Marcia G. Cooke said for court June 6. The omnibus opinion disposed of a number of overlapping motions.

Many of the 58 named plaintiffs say they have preexisting health conditions like diabetes, HIV-AIDS, and heart disease that puts them at higher risk of falling ill during the coronavirus

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

pandemic. ICE is accused of violating the detainee's rights to reasonable safety and detention standards without due process of law by maintaining a high population density, keeping bunks and chairs too closely together, and by failing to address sanitation concerns.

ICE was also ordered by way of preliminary injunction to provide the detainees "unrestricted" access to hand soap, hand sanitizer, and disposable towels while the lawsuit progresses. The agency must also supply staff with face masks, distribute more cleaning products, and post information about the coronavirus in common areas. The court also said it expects weekly reports on released detainees, transferred detainees, and the status of the remaining population.

ICE argued in May that detainees who have been moved to new detention facilities outside of the court's jurisdiction no longer have standing to complain about their confinement at the Miami-based facilities.

The court disagreed in its Saturday order, stating that the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida "shall retain jurisdiction over all class members who are transferred to other facilities regardless of where those facilities are located."

King & Spalding LLP is class counsel. Prada Urizar PLLC, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the University of Miami School of Law Immigration Clinic, Americans for Immigrant Justice, and the Rapid Defense Network also represent the plaintiffs.

The case is Gayle v. Meade, S.D. Fla., No. 20-cv-21553, 6/5/20

[CA] Exclusive Photos: Open Borders Rioters Vandalize California ICE Facility (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 9:49 PM, John Binder, 1711K]
A group of open borders activists turned violent at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) processing center in Adelanto, California on Sunday.

About 300 protestors showed up at the building, which is facilitated by the GEO Group, with Mexican flags and signs demanding the release of illegal aliens held in ICE custody.

Despite local police being on the scene, sources told Breitbart News that officers stood by as the protesters launched rocks at the building and employees' vehicles. Protesters also wrote "F*ck ICE" across the building and burned an American flag.

The protesters smashed windows at the ICE facility and apparently vandalized 44 vehicles on the facility's grounds. Another three San Bernardino Sheriff's Office vehicles were vandalized by protesters.

Exclusive photos obtained by Breitbart News reveal the extent of the damage:

"The safety of our employees and those entrusted to our care is our highest priority," a GEO Group spokesperson told Breitbart News. "Unfortunately, the dishonest narrative and lies that are being spread about the services our company provides on behalf of the federal

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

government continue to lead to the endangerment of our employees, as witnessed yesterday."

"While we support peaceful protests and the constitutional right to free speech, our employees — who are on the front lines caring for all those in our facilities — should never be met with acts of violence," the spokesperson said.

Open borders protesters have consistently vandalized ICE facilities across the United States, demanding illegal aliens be released from custody. Last year, activists splashed fake blood on a Florida ICE facility and blocked employees from entering the building.

In 2018, "abolish ICE" protesters targeted agents in the city of Portland, Oregon, shouting racial slurs at Hispanic and black ICE agents, as Breitbart News reported. The protesters videotaped themselves beheading a doll of President Trump using a guillotine.

Citizenship and Immigration Services

Immigrant Investors Stalled by Virus Add to Economic Worries (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [6/8/2020 5:51 AM, Genevieve Douglas, 25K]
A U.S. program that grants green cards to immigrant investors faces serious disruptions during the coronavirus pandemic despite some Trump administration support, potentially hindering the nation's economic recovery.

President Donald Trump exempted the EB-5 program in his April proclamation suspending green card applications from outside of the country. But consulate closures abroad and stalled U.S. business projects, such as those in the construction industry, have immigrant investors scared that their chances to become lawful permanent residents are dwindling.

The EB-5 program hit an impasse after consulates around the globe closed in March to curb the spread of the coronavirus, said Carolyn Lee, an Ithaca, N.Y.-based immigration attorney who specializes in the program, which assigns about 10,000 employment-based green cards annually.

"This year we stand to lose thousands of the precious visa numbers," Lee said, explaining that unclaimed EB-5 visas at the end of a fiscal year are redistributed to other employment-based green card categories for the next year. "It's really a tragedy."

And lost visas can translate into millions of dollars in lost investments, including job creation, in the U.S. economy. "These are entrepreneurs who have been successful at home—here they're stimulating the economy and they're job creating machines," attorney Mitch Wexler of Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy in Irvine, Calif., said. "We should be making it easier, not harder, for these folks."

The EB-5 program allows immigrants to qualify for a green card if they invest the required minimum amount in a U.S. commercial entity that creates at least 10 jobs for U.S. workers. A final regulation from the Department of Homeland Security went into effect in November to raise the minimum investment amounts required for a green card to $900,000 and $1.8 million, depending on employment area, up from $500,000 and $1 million.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Economy Driving Investment Interest

At its peak, the EB-5 program brought in nearly $11 billion and created more than 355,000 U.S. jobs in 2014 and 2015, according to a report based on U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services data. The program has been particularly popular with investors from China, Vietnam, and India.

Immigrant investors have the ability to pool their money through regional centers that connect them with commercial enterprises. The centers make up about 95% of the EB-5 program. Projects often involve components for new construction and ongoing business operations, such as hotels, nursing homes, commercial real estate ventures, among others.

The program's popularity in the last decade corresponded with the economic recovery from the Great Recession. But a growing backlog of green cards available to investors has led to waning interest in the last couple of years.

When the investment levels for the program went up last fall, the market for the program "immediately died," Wexler, who represents EB-5 investors, said. Now, however, the coronavirus might be sparking interest in the program for individuals who fear impending immigration restrictions from the White House on temporary visa programs.

Opponents of the program don't see EB-5 playing a similar role in the wake of the latest economic downturn.

"As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, the United States should not be dependent upon foreign countries—especially hostile ones like China—for either investment capital or business growth," said Matt O'Brien, research director at the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which supports lower immigration levels.

"We are better off encouraging American entrepreneurs and businesses to invest profits here, rather than offshore," O'Brien said in an email. "While an infusion of foreign capital from foreigners who want U.S. residency might appear to be a good idea, experience demonstrates that the bulk of profits generated through foreign capital investment tends to be rapidly expatriated, either in the form of remittances or offshore re-investment, rather than being re-invested in the United States."

Agency Response to Pandemic Disruptions?

For some program participants, concerns remain over how USCIS, the agency responsible for adjudicating visas and immigration benefits, will handle investment project disruptions.

Although construction is classified as an essential business, Covid-19 has, at times, resulted in work stoppages. The pandemic has also led to significant dips in operational revenue for the businesses created, Lee said.

"If an EB-5 project's business plan required ongoing construction and resulting job creation within a certain time frame, which can't now be done, it's worrying," she added. Those delays could qualify as a "material change" to the business plan, and USCIS deems

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

material changes as a reason to revoke EB-5 petitions.

But that may not deter future interest. In January, USCIS announced that starting March 31, applications for the EB-5 program would be processed according to existing visa availability instead of on the “first in, first out” basis officers were following. This means the agency now gives priority to petitions where visas are immediately available, or soon will be available.

“Applicants are realizing it’s probably in their best interest, if they want a life in America, it’s best to get a green card as quickly as possible,” Wexler said. And for many immigrants, especially those already in the U.S., the EB-5 program is the fastest way to do that, he said.

Customs and Border Protection

Defective, Unapproved PPE and COVID-19 Meds Seized at East Coast Ports (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 12:18 PM, Bob Price, 1711K]
U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers assigned to east coast ports of entry seized multiple shipments of defective and unapproved PPE and COVID-19 medications. The shipments came to the U.S. in mid-May from China, Hong Kong, Israel, Nigeria, UAE, and the United Kingdom.

CBP officers assigned to a Philadelphia port of entry on May 15 inspected a shipment from Israel and found 10 boxes of respirator masks that appeared to be of poor quality. Officials said the masks were made in China, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials.

The officers consulted with inspectors from the FDA who determined the 10,000 respirator masks to be in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act, officials reported. The manufacturer is also not registered with the U.S. and did not have an Emergency Use Authorization to import KN-95 masks.

CBP officers assigned to other ports of entry all across the Baltimore Field Office area of responsibility found other shipments of counterfeit and unapproved Coronavirus PPE and medicines. The ports included Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and the Ports of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, and Wilmington, Delaware.

The officers teamed up with FDA inspectors and carried out 12 seizures after May 16, officials stated. The seizures included:

25 unapproved and counterfeit COVID-19 test kits;

10 other counterfeit N95 respirator masks;

more than 2,300 Lianhua Qingwen Jiaonang capsules;

more than 700 additional tablets, pills, capsules, and sachets of unapproved medicines, including Hydroxychloroquine, Oseltamivir, Zithromax, Panadol, and unknown medicines;

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

nearly 4,000 doses of Huoxiang Zhengqi dripping pills, an unproven herbal cold remedy; and

nine packages of Virus Shut Out lanyards.

“These products are not on the current Emergency Use Authorization List nor are the manufacturers on the list of firms who have provided compliance notification to the FDA,” CBP officials said in a written statement. “As such, the products are inadmissible to the United States for violating the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.”

“Predatory scammers continue to prey on consumer fear by peddling these counterfeit or unapproved and potentially dangerous products as legitimate COVID-19 protective equipment or medicines,” said Casey Durst, CBP’s Director of Field Operations in Baltimore. “Customs and Border Protection officers will continue to work with our consumer safety partners to identify and seize products that could potentially harm American consumers.”

The seized products were reportedly destined to Florida, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

[MI] CBP helicopter flying over protesters struck repeatedly by laser (ABC News)
ABC News [6/8/2020 3:31 PM, Mina Kaji, 3795K]
A U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) helicopter hovering over crowds of people at a Detroit protest on June 3 was struck multiple times by a green laser fired from across the U.S.-Canada border, officials said.

"It’s like being hit with a camera flash at night time," Phil Petro, the pilot, told ABC News’ transportation correspondent Gio Benitez. "You can have flash blindness and then not be able to see well."

Petro said he initially maneuvered the helicopter in an attempt to prevent the laser strikes from coming directly into the cockpit, but the perpetrator didn’t stop firing.

"The behavior of the suspect was recalcitrant," Petro said. "They knew what they were doing. They were aiming and adjusting their aim on purpose, with purpose to strike the aircraft repeatedly."

The CBP helicopter has special tools that can precisely pinpoint locations with help from local law enforcement.

"Once they started hitting us again we were able to immediately put our camera system onto the offending individual, and then we were able to record them continue to get us with the laser," Petro said. "This is great, direct evidence that will be used in courts and their prosecution."

The perpetrator, who police later identified as 22-year-old Ali Zuhair, was shooting the laser from Windsor, Ontario. He was charged in Canada with mischief, two counts of failure to comply with a release order and breach of probation order.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Petro said he suffered some eye irritation after the strikes but considers himself lucky that he was not blinded.

According to the latest data from the Federal Aviation Administration, there were over 6,000 reported laser incidents in 2019, up from 5,000 in 2018.

Lasers can be a threat to larger commercial jets as well.

In 2012, a JetBlue pilot suffered an eye injury after a green laser was pointed directly into the cockpit.

It is a federal crime to shine a laser into a cockpit of an aircraft. Offenders could be sentenced to up to 20 years in prison and pay a $250,000 fine.

[TX] $176K Bound for Mexico Seized at Texas Border Crossing (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 4:20 PM, Bob Price, 1711K]
Presidio Port of Entry Customs and Border Protection officers seized nearly $176,000 cash as smugglers attempted to move it to Mexico.

Office of Field Operations officers assigned to the Presidio Port of Entry on Sunday teamed up with Border Patrol agents, Homeland Security Investigations special agents, and the Presidio Police Department to seize a large quantity of U.S. currency found in a vehicle. The bust followed a search of the vehicle after the CBP officer became suspicious of the driver, according to U.S. officials.

Officers working the outbound lanes to Mexico observed a compact sedan approaching for inspection. During an initial interview, the office became suspicious and referred the driver to a secondary inspection station.

A K-9 officer trained to detect currency alerted to the front quarter panels of the small car. The officers conducted a physical search of the vehicle and found 12 bundles U.S. currency hidden in non-factory compartments on the driver and passenger sides of the car.

The officers placed the man under arrest for attempting to exit the United States with undeclared currency in excess of $10,000.

CBP officers counted the currency which totaled $175,935 USD.

“The combined efforts of our CBP officers working together with U.S. Border Patrol agents, Homeland Security Investigations agents and Presidio Police officers in the outbound area creates a force multiplier effect that results in significant seizures,” CBP El Paso Director of Field Operations Hector Mancha said in a written statement. “Every single dollar we stop from being smuggled out of the country makes it harder for criminal organizations to further their illegal activity.”

[Canada] U.S. border rules loosening to allow family reunifications: Trudeau (Bloomberg)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

BNN [6/8/2020 12:05 PM, Staff, 257K] Video: HERE
Canada's ban on non-essential crossings of the U.S.-Canada border is being loosened slightly to allow some families to reunite, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Monday morning.

The revision means immediate family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents will be allowed in, as long as they have no sign they might have COVID-19 and no reason to believe they might have caught it.

The border restrictions still require anyone entering the country from the United States to self-isolate for two weeks to reduce the risk of spreading the novel coronavirus.

"If you don't follow these rules, you could face serious penalties," Trudeau warned.

The change applies at midnight Monday night in the Eastern time zone.

Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino called the change "very incremental," targeted and focused on a small number of people.

Canadians always have a right to return to this country from abroad, but some families have been divided because of some of their members' citizenship status.

The measure is aimed at families with unusual circumstances, such as when one parent is not a citizen.

The border with the United States has been closed since March, except for goods and certain categories of essential workers.

The current agreement with the United States expires June 21, but it has been extended twice already for a month at a time.

[Mexico] Trump's pressure on Mexico puts skids on asylum seekers at border (Washington Times)
Washington Times [6/8/2020 10:28 PM, Stephen Dinan, 496K]
The U.S. had just witnessed the worst month on record for illegal immigrant parents and children streaming across the southern border in May 2019, and an irate President Trump took to Twitter demanding Mexico do something about it — or else face crippling tariffs.

Top Mexican officials scurried to Washington to negotiate and emerged a year ago this week promising to deploy tens of thousands of national guard forces and expand the so-called Remain in Mexico policy by taking back more Central Americans who had used Mexico as a transit point.

Results were nearly instantaneous.

Mexico apprehended 81,000 migrants from June to September, up 46% compared with the year before.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Farther north, the Border Patrol went from catching 84,000 illegal immigrants traveling as families in May to just 42,000 in July. By January, it was fewer than 5,000.

Border Patrol holding facilities, designed to accommodate maybe 4,000 migrants, had been bursting with five times that number last May. By early this year, they were below 4,000.

The coronavirus has only accelerated those trends, with the Trump administration using a powerful public health law to immediately expel most unauthorized border crossers.

But officials say without the groundwork laid by last year's negotiations with Mexico, COVID-19 could have been a border disaster.

Now, a year on, all sides in the debate are studying what went right and what didn't.

Andrew R. Arthur, a former immigration judge who is now a resident fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies, said the deal with Mexico was a watershed in U.S. relations with its southern neighbors.

"For a long time, we've had this paternalistic attitude toward our regional partners. Trump has made them part of the conversation, has indicated to them that they play a role, that they have their own international obligations," Mr. Arthur said. "This is forcing those countries to live up to their obligations."

In particular, he said, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is committed to curtailing the power of the cartels that control the illegal immigrant flow, and the Mexican people were getting fed up with their country being used as a transit point for Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans.

At the time, many analysts in the U.S. dismissed the agreement as insubstantial. Some doubted its existence until Mr. Trump waved a copy at reporters on the White House lawn.

The U.S. agreed to speed up asylum processing, while Mexico agreed to deploy its national guard to its southern border with Guatemala and to expand the Migration Protection Protocol, a U.S. program better known as "Remain in Mexico" because American authorities pushed asylum-seekers back across the border to wait in Mexico for their immigration hearings.

Both sides said they would revisit the issue after 45 days and 90 days. If things didn't improve, Mr. Trump said, he reserved the right to impose the stiff tariffs he had threatened.

Instead, he found himself effusively praising Mexico.

The Migration Policy Institute, in its one-year analysis, said the deal has "marked a new chapter" in cooperation between the two countries, and in Mexico's own efforts to patrol its territory.

"Recognized by both governments for successfully reducing irregular migration to the U.S.-Mexico border, the agreement also increased bilateral communication around migration, bolstered Mexico's enforcement and humanitarian protection capacity, and helped identify

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

significant institutional limitations," wrote Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, the MPI analyst.

He said Mexico saw a surge in its own requests for humanitarian protection last year from nearly 30,000 to more than 70,000.

But he said it's not clear whether Mexico's own infrastructure is up to the task of accommodating those new humanitarian migrants or housing the ones the U.S. has sent back to wait under the MPP.

The MPP began even before last June's deal but had been used for fewer than 10,000 people. The borderwide expansion to which Mexican authorities agreed last June paved the way for another 55,000 people over the next 10 months, according to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse.

Only a fraction of those cases had been heard by the time the coronavirus struck, putting a hold on the hearings.

Immigration rights advocates say making truly desperate and needy asylum-seekers wait in Mexico has been disastrous. Human Rights First, in a report last month, said it had documented 1,114 cases of murder, rape, kidnapping and other assaults on people sent back under the MPP.

The Washington Office on Latin America said Mr. Trump has now tied the stiff border policies to stopping the coronavirus, making them all the more potent — and wrong.

WOLA, in its one-year look-back, also questioned whether the policies won't keep the numbers low for long.

"The border and migration restrictions and the economic downturn seen under COVID-19 doesn't mean that long-term migration trends will grind to a halt; indeed, we predict an increase in migration as governments begin to lift restrictions," WOLA said. "This makes it all the more urgent that both the United States and Mexico move away from deterrence-first migration policies that place migrants and asylum seekers at risk and curtail their ability to seek protection."

Mr. Arthur also said the agreement is no substitute for Congress stepping in — though he added that lawmakers need to fix parts of U.S. law and court rulings that created the loopholes migrants used to take advantage of the situation.

"Until there actually is congressional action, we're going to be relying on the Mexican government to control their border," he said, adding that while they have their own incentives to do so, "you never know when public sentiment in Mexico's going to change about this."

Transportation Security Administration

TSA Records Busiest Weekend In Months As Americans Start Traveling Again (Daily Caller)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Daily Caller [6/8/2020 4:24 PM, Thomas Catenacci, 339K]
More than 400,000 Americans boarded flights Friday and Sunday marking the first time since March that number has been surpassed, the Transportation Security Administration said Monday.

A total of 441,255 people traveled in the air Sunday while 419,675 people traveled Friday, according to the TSA. Sunday's number of fliers marks the highest number of air travelers since March 22.

The air travel milestone comes as states continue to open up following the coronavirus pandemic. States around the country began imposing stay-at-home orders in March. State restriction wreaked havoc on the U.S. and global economies.

Despite the good news for air travel, TSA's figures still suggest there is a long way to go. On the same Sunday in June 2019, there were 2.6 million air travelers, according to TSA. That's an 83% decrease in air traffic year-over-year.

For comparison, the week of June 1, 2020 averaged 361,610 air travelers per day compared to 2,469,449 per day the same week in 2019. The week of May 25 averaged 305,358 air travelers per day compared to 2,423,438 per day the same week in 2019. The week of May 18 averaged 264,683 air travelers per day compared to 2,437,484 per day the same week last year.

The U.S. unexpectedly added 2.5 million jobs in May while the unemployment rate decreased, and the U.S. stock market rallied on the back of this news Friday.

President Donald Trump declared victory, saying Friday's jobs report showed that the economy was returning to normal.

The stock market continued its rally Monday. In response Trump tweeted, "Jobs coming back FAST. Next year will be our greatest ever!"

Meanwhile, 400,000 New Yorkers were expected to return to work Monday as New York City began reopening.

Americans are reportedly booking Airbnb again, platform sees surge in domestic vacations (USA Today)
USA Today [6/8/2020 11:56 AM, Dalvin Brown, 8982K]
After months of cabin fever during the pandemic, Americans are starting to get away again, and it's reportedly causing a spike in Airbnb vacation rentals.

The number of nights booked in the USA was higher from May 17 to June 3 compared with the same weeks in 2019, according to Airbnb via Bloomberg. Among the most popular sites for stays are Southern California's Big Bear Lake and the Smoky Mountains, per the report.

Similar domestic holiday booking trends are happening in other countries, including Germany, Portugal and South Korea, Bloomberg reported.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The travel industry across the world was rocked by the fallout from the coronavirus as people were instructed to stay at home. In May, Airbnb let go of 25% of its workforce after people curtailed plans to rent homes belonging to strangers.

Other vacation rental sites, including Expedia Group's Vrbo and Booking Holdings, are seeing a rise in reservations as states reopen, Bloomberg reported. Travel and vacations still aren't back to normal as Americans aren't flying nearly as much as they used to.

Sunday, the Transportation Security Administration noted 441,255 domestic travelers in the USA, far fewer than the 2,669,860 people who took to the skies on that day a year ago.

It's unclear if or when travel will return to pre-pandemic levels, though the hotel and hospitality industry rushed to update cleanliness procedures to boost confidence among wary travelers.

Airbnb rolled out sanitary guidelines for hosts, and the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) launched an industrywide initiative to use cleaning products with high concentrations of bacteria-killing ingredients.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Democrats want briefing on how FEMA will manage natural disasters amid pandemic (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 3:47 PM, Rachel Frazin, 3408K]
House Democrats are pressing for answers on the government's readiness to manage natural disasters amid the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter on Monday to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Peter Gaynor, lawmakers on the House Oversight and Reform Committee expressed concern that the agency "may not have the staff and other essential tools to successfully respond to multiple natural disasters during the ongoing coronavirus crisis."

The Democrats asked for a remote video hearing on FEMA's plans on topics including how it will maintain social distancing if there is a need for mass evacuations and temporary shelters and how it plans to keep staff healthy.

"Aside from guidance released by FEMA largely focused on recommendations to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments for hurricane season preparations, FEMA has not made public its plans for preparing for and responding to multiple natural disasters in the coming months, including overcoming limitations on resources," the lawmakers wrote.

"This information is vital to prepare for high-intensity natural disasters that may include tornadoes, flooding, hurricanes, and wildfires," they added.

Gaynor is slated to testify before the Senate on Tuesday in a hearing titled "Evaluating the Federal Government's Procurement and Distribution Strategies in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

FEMA in May released a guidance saying that because of COVID-19 associated risks, occupancy rates at temporary shelters "will be adjusted" and said that other places such as hotels and motels could be used instead.

Exclusive investigation on the coronavirus pandemic: Where was...
House Judiciary seeks briefing on Trump order to slash regs to assist...
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted that this Atlantic hurricane season, which began June 1, could have 10 hurricanes, including six major storms.

In a separate but related incident, thousands in Michigan were forced to evacuate last month after two dams burst.

Food banks and other key programs have received a fraction of allotted coronavirus money, angering some lawmakers (Washington Post)
Washington Post [6/8/2020 6:00 AM, Erica Werner, 18460K]
More than two months after passage of the $2 trillion Cares Act, funding for some key programs to address the economic devastation from the coronavirus is moving out slowly or not at all. Even after the United States added 2.5 million jobs last month, 20 million people remain out of work and federal bureaucracies charged with processing record sums of money to respond to the crisis are struggling to snap into action.

The Cares Act directed $850 million for food banks, but less than $300 million has been sent out so far, according to Democratic staff members on the Senate Appropriations Committee. That's despite unprecedented demand, with the number of people served at food banks increasing by more than 50 percent from a year ago, according to a recent survey by the nonprofit group Feeding America.

Similarly, Congress appropriated $9 billion in March for the Community Development Block Grant and Emergency Solutions Grant programs, which fund health facilities, child care centers, and services for seniors and homeless people, among other things. Only about $250 million of that money has been obligated.

In another example, $100 million dedicated specifically to help nursing homes certify compliance standards for issues like infection control remains unspent two months after it became law as part of the Cares Act. Another $100 million to help ensure access to broadband for Americans in rural parts of the country also remains unspent.

A separate $100 million appropriation to help the Federal Emergency Management Agency purchase personal protective equipment for firefighters also hasn't been spent. Additionally, less than half the $16 billion Congress dedicated over four separate pieces of legislation to bulking up critical medical supplies in the Strategic National Stockpile has been spent, according to the Democrats' calculations.

Democrats are not alleging deliberate foot-dragging by the Trump administration, even though a political fight has developed over how quickly to act on the next relief bill. Instead, Democrats say that the federal bureaucracy is not rising to the challenge and acting with the urgency that a crisis of unprecedented magnitude demands.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“In preparing for and responding to this pandemic, status quo bureaucracy is not satisfactory. It is clear evidence that President Trump has failed to meet this urgent challenge, and it is up to Congress to act,” Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (Vt.), top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said in a statement to The Washington Post. “The Trump administration’s failure to get these resources out the door and into our communities is not a sufficient reason for slow-walking the next, desperately needed emergency relief bill.”

Independent analysts say that government agencies simply may be struggling to handle enormous new demands placed on them, especially with large portions of their workforce abruptly forced to adjust to working from home.

“When you have a great deal of funds to try to get out quickly, the system just only has a certain amount it can do,” said Bill Hoagland, a senior vice president at the Bipartisan Policy Center and former Republican staff director for the Senate Budget Committee. “I don’t think there’s any dastardly effort here trying to slow anything down. It’s just a simple matter of, there’s only so much a system can do at one time.”

Overall, about half of the more than $3 trillion approved by Congress over four separate coronavirus bills has been obligated or committed, according to calculations by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

The slow movement on other aid funding cuts across the government, illustrating the sudden challenge to agencies that in some areas have dwindled in size under the Trump administration. Programs administrated by the Pentagon, the Agriculture Department, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Health and Human Services are among those that have been slow to get off the ground.

Agency spokespeople defended their responses, offering a variety of explanations for the status of funds and in several cases insisting they’re moving as quickly as they reasonably can. In a couple of cases they disputed the Democrats’ calculations. Trump administration officials and the president himself have vigorously defended their response to the pandemic overall, predicting an economic revival as the nation begins to reopen, especially with Friday’s unexpectedly positive jobs report.

“This shows that what we’ve been doing is right,” Trump said Friday as he hailed the unexpected drop in unemployment.

Other parts of Congress’s relief legislation have moved more quickly, though an enormous $500 billion Treasury fund has also been slow to get off the ground. Money in a new small-business loan program sped out the door after its creation in the Cares Act, despite a number of glitches. The Treasury Department moved quickly to get stimulus checks to more than 150 million American households. Some large grants to nursing homes, state governments and hospitals have been delivered, although questions have been raised about the sums and speed in those areas, too.

Leahy and Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.), along with other Democratic senators, raised concerns about the pace of Pentagon spending in a recent letter to Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper. Among other issues, they raised the question of Defense Production Act spending. Democrats say only $180 million has been obligated out of $1 billion Congress

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

provided to increase the industrial capacity of U.S. manufacturers to produce supplies such as personal protective equipment.

“Lacking further information from the department on its plans for these funds, we are unable to answer simple questions such as whether the U.S. government is doing everything in its power to address shortfalls in supplies which are not only needed at this moment, but also in preparation for a predicted second wave of coronavirus infections,” the senators wrote.

In a statement responding to the senators’ letter, Jonathan Rath Hoffman, assistant to the secretary of defense for public affairs, said that the Pentagon has been transparent about its use of funds. The agency submitted a spending plan to Congress late last week, ahead of a deadline set in the Cares Act.

“The Department remains committed to legally and responsibly executing these funds on the highest priorities to protect our military and their families and safeguard our national security capabilities. As we have seen, this is an evolving and dynamic situation where priorities and requirements change, which is why it is so important that we remain faithful and accountable stewards of the taxpayer dollar,” Hoffman said.

“The Department continues to aggressively identify critical Defense Production Act (DPA) Title III investment opportunities to enhance capacity and throughput of our domestic industrial supply chain, enabling security and resiliency.”

The Housing and Urban Development department, which is responsible for Community Development Block Grants and Emergency Solutions Grants, said in a statement that HUD is in the process of reviewing and executing plans submitted by grantees “according to an unprecedented expedited process to speed up the time from action plan review to money-in-their-hands. This is the fastest the process has ever been.”

The agency said that it was “well within the allowable time frame” in executing the funds. It said that it had reserved funding for the first wave of grants 39 days after the Cares Act was signed into law, which it said was “a record.”

Addressing the slow start in the rural broadband program, USDA said: “The application window for the ReConnect Program CARES Act funding closed on April 15, 2020. USDA anticipates publicly announcing CARES Act ReConnect Program investments in the coming weeks.”

As for the food bank money, USDA contended that all of the funds had been distributed to states, “much of which is being passed on to foodbanks and the feeding networks on the front lines. … As orders come in from states, USDA is working to rapidly procure over $600 million in food. Expedited deliveries are expected to begin in June.”

Kate Leone, chief government relations officer at Feeding America, said in an interview that she did not fault USDA, because the procurement process for getting food to food banks is always slow, partly to ensure that appropriate guardrails are in place. “It’s just a convoluted process … it’s just that for an emergency it does slow things down,” Leone said.

The Strategic National Stockpile is administered by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Preparedness and Response at HHS, where a spokesperson said that while only $6.8 billion has been obligated to date — less than half of Congress's $16 billion allocation — "the quantities of supplies purchased far exceeds what was or is currently available from manufacturers and distributors. There simply is not any more product to buy without taking supplies away from the healthcare delivery partners that need it most right now. ASPR is continuing to identify opportunities and award contracts for delivery of product over time to replenish the SNS, but to date, the limited supplies that have been produced and delivered to the SNS are being deployed to support states with immediate needs."

HHS said it has been "transparent that more supplies are needed," and said that planning is underway "to achieve a capacity to meet 90 days of need," which will require a combination of actions to increase the supply of personal protective equipment. The administration has developed a plan to restructure the Strategic National Stockpile "implementing lessons learned from recent pandemics. Our next generation SNS will be improved."

As for the nursing home funds, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has identified $80 million that it said would be allocated "based on performance-based metrics" to help states increase infection control surveys of their nursing homes.

The $100 million to assist firefighters is set to be released by the Federal Emergency Management Agency based on a competitive grant program. Fire departments, emergency medical services organizations and state fire training academies were eligible to apply. The application period closed May 15, and FEMA said that it was working to review the applications and expedite the funding.

Hurricane season off to historically fast start. What does that mean for the rest of the year? (USA Today)
USA Today [6/8/2020 3:34 PM, Doyle Rice, 8982K]
With Tropical Storm Cristobal's landfall along the Gulf Coast this week, the 2020 hurricane season is off to a historically fast start.

Cristobal, which made landfall in southeast Louisiana on Sunday, became the earliest third tropical storm on record when it was named June 2.

Cristobal was preceded by Arthur and Bertha, which both formed in May before the official start of the season, which was June 1.

All of the first three storms affected the USA, which hasn't happened since 2004, according to hurricane specialist Eric Blake of the National Hurricane Center.

But some hurricane records can be deceiving, experts say: Although official hurricane records go back to 1851, improvements in sensing technology have allowed us to detect weak storms that may not have been named even 25 years ago, Colorado State University meteorologist Phil Klotzbach told USA TODAY. "And we certainly missed storms prior to the satellite era (before 1966)," he said.

Does this busy start to the hurricane season indicate a wild year ahead? Maybe not.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

"Early season storm activity doesn't necessarily correlate with how much overall hurricane activity the season has," Klotzbach said.

As an example, Blake noted that in 1997, five storms formed by mid-July, then only three formed the rest of the year.

He said the relationship between early season storms and overall activity is most meaningful for June and July storms that form way out in the deep tropics: "Those storms tend to portend an active year, but it is no guarantee," he said.

Still, almost all forecasts are pointing to an unusually active season – not because of the early storms, but because atmospheric and oceanic conditions are primed for hurricane formation. For instance, Colorado State University meteorologists last week upped their prediction for the hurricane season to 19 named storms, of which nine will be hurricanes. (A typical season has 10 named storms, of which six are hurricanes.)

This is primarily because of the absence of an El Niño, an area of warmer-than-average sea water in the Pacific. El Niño tends to increase upper-level westerly winds across the Caribbean into the tropical Atlantic, tearing apart hurricanes as they try to form, Colorado State University said.

Even more threats could soon arise, AccuWeather said: Meteorologists are monitoring another area of showers and thunderstorms in the Atlantic for tropical development late this week.

Of course, the forecast of an unusually active hurricane season is occurring against the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which the disaster policy group SmarterSafer Coalition called a "cataclysmic scenario."

The typical protocols of packing evacuees and cots into a high school gymnasium during an emergency could pose significant public health risks if social distancing and medical screening controls are not followed. There is also the need for shelters to be adequately equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment items and sanitizers.

“The coronavirus public health emergency won’t stop the threat of hurricanes, and in many ways makes responding to other disasters even more challenging,” said Samantha Phillips, director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

Tropical Depression Cristobal moves inland, but the flooding threat is far from over (CNN)
CNN [6/8/2020 10:25 AM, Jennifer Gray, 12317K]
Tropical Depression Cristobal is on the move, carrying incredible amounts of rain to the Mississippi River valley.

The flooding threat will be a huge concern during the next two to three days. Flood watches and warnings stretch for a thousand miles -- from the Gulf Coast, all the way up to Wisconsin -- and include more than 15 million people.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

According to the National Hurricane Center, "flash flooding, and new and renewed river flooding is possible, especially where heavier rainfall occurs over portions of the Gulf Coast through the Mississippi River valley."

The greatest threats for flash floods will be over the next 24 hours in the lower Mississippi River valley and stretching up through the Ozarks in Arkansas and Missouri. Some of these areas could see 10 inches of rain, with isolated amounts up to 15 inches, according to the National Hurricane Center. Many times the rainbands produced by tropical systems will set up over the same area -- causing continuous rain for hours -- causing life-threatening flash flooding.

"Inland flooding has resulted in more deaths in the past 30 years from hurricanes and tropical storms in the US than any other threat. Though wind speeds and storm surge are important, and get a lot of the headlines, flash flooding from intense rainfall associated with the storm's rainbands impact for more people and stretch over a much larger area," said CNN Meteorologist, Brandon Miller.
Cristobal will be able to make it farther northward in the next 24 to 36 hours than most landfalling tropical systems are able to go without being absorbed by another nontropical weather system. This is thanks to a ridge of high pressure over the central US, allowing Cristobal to move well inland while maintaining its tropical status.

Cristobal will eventually lose its tropical characteristics over the next few days as it interacts with an advancing cold front in the Upper Midwest. Miller said. "The winds will actually increase again, even though the storm will no longer be 'tropical.' Winds could gust as high as 50 mph for parts of the Great Lakes and into Canada by the middle of the week. So while Cristobal will no longer be a tropical storm, it will still be a formidable one."
Cristobal made landfall on Sunday evening around 5 p.m. local time, between the mouth of the Mississippi River and Grand Isle, Louisiana.

Tropical Storm Cristobal could regain strength by combining with new storm system after drenching South (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 8:45 PM, Frank Miles, 12006K]
Tropical Storm Cristobal could soon renew its strength by uniting with another storm system coming from the west to form one giant cyclone, forecasters warned, as missing boaters were found safe and sound.

In Louisiana, two boaters were found Monday afternoon in good condition after their boat sank in a deepwater straight near Slidell on Sunday, officials said.

The two told deputies they survived in the water by clinging to one life jacket Sunday afternoon and Sunday night before they were able to reach the shore Monday morning, St. Tammany Parish sheriff's Sgt. Suzanne Carboni said in a statement.

The pair then swam across a marshy area and were found sitting on the porch of a camp, Carboni said.

"We were largely spared," Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Cristobal provided the state with “a good test” of overall hurricane response and preparedness, particularly combined with ongoing coronavirus response efforts, the governor said.

President Trump agreed to issue an emergency declaration for Louisiana, officials said.

After drenching much of the South, forecasters said they expected the remnants of Cristobal to unleash fierce winds, heavy rain and thunderstorms on much of the Midwest by Tuesday.

A very strong storm system sweeping out from the Rocky Mountains is expected to meld with Cristobal in the next couple of days, said Greg Carbin, who has overseen forecasts at the Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

“The two will eventually merge into a large cyclone,” Carbin said. “It’s a pretty fascinating interaction we’ll see over the next couple of days.”

Wind gusts of up to 45 mph are expected in Chicago by Tuesday night, the National Weather Service added. Boaters were being warned of gale-force winds on nearby Lake Michigan on Tuesday and Wednesday.

High winds could be felt from Nebraska to Wisconsin, forecasters said. In parts of Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota, the gusty winds and low humidity will bring the threat of wildfires in areas with dry grass, National Weather Service forecasters warned. Any blazes that start will spread rapidly, they said.

Cristobal weakened into a depression early Monday after inundating coastal Louisiana and ginning up dangerous weather along most of the U.S. Gulf Coast, sending waves crashing over Mississippi beaches, swamping parts of an Alabama island town and spawning a tornado in Florida.

Heavy rainfall and a storm surge continued posing a threat across a wide area of the Gulf coast after Cristobal made landfall Sunday afternoon packing 50-mph winds between the mouth of the Mississippi River and the since-evacuated barrier island resort community of Grand Isle.

At 5 p.m. ET Monday, the storm was centered about 110 miles north of Monroe, Louisiana, with top winds of 35 mph. It was moving north at 18 mph.

Cristobal’s remnants could be a rainmaker for days. Its forecast path takes it into Arkansas and Missouri by Tuesday, then through Illinois and Wisconsin to the Great Lakes.

“It’s very efficient, very tropical rainfall,” National Hurricane Center Director Ken Graham said in a Facebook video. “It rains a whole bunch real quick.”

In their last update on Cristobal from the hurricane center, forecasters said up to 15 inches of rain could fall in some areas, and could cause significant river flooding across the mid and upper Mississippi Valley.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

Severe storm topples trees, cuts power, causes flooding (AP)
AP [6/8/2020 8:15 AM, Staff, 3832K]
Severe weather packing heavy rain and winds gusts of more than 70 mph toppled trees and caused power outrages and localized flooding in North Dakota.

The National Weather Service said two weather systems rolled through Fargo overnight Sunday and early Monday.

A wind gust of 71 mph was recorded at Hector Airport. Another gust caused vehicles to slide on Interstate 29 between Harwood and Argusville, KFGO reported.

Xcel Energy and Cass County Electric reported nearly 5,000 customer lost power during the storms. The National Weather Service said power lines were down in Dilworth.

A large tree was toppled outside the Clay County Courthouse in Moorhead, Minnesota. Debris from fallen branches clogged storm drains causing flooding in Fargo.

The weather service said heavy rain and large hail was reported in the northern Valley.

[FL] Central Florida weekend tornado tally: 3 for sure, 2 more possible (Orlando Sentinel)
Orlando Sentinel [6/8/2020 2:37 PM, Joe Mario Pedersen]
Three tornadoes touched down over the weekend in Central Florida, the National Weather Service of Melbourne confirmed, and a weather team is investigating whether there were two more in Lake Monroe near Sanford and in the Mount Dora area.

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings said Monday that 42 homes and businesses were damaged by the tornadoes, causing an estimated $955,700 in damage.

While not directly responsible for the tumultuous weather around Central Florida, Tropical Storm Cristobal did play a part in producing favorable conditions for funnel clouds to take form, said John Pendergrast, an NWS meteorologist.

Florida's unique position between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic leaves it vulnerable to tornado formation when a hurricane begins spinning in the Gulf, Pendergrast said.

"We call it the active weather side, when [Florida] is on the eastern peripheral of the storm, we get a lot more active weather here," Pendergrast said. "Heavy rain, tornadoes, and severe weather become likely. A hurricane doesn't have to be nearby, either; as was the case here, but it produced conditions favorable for tornadoes."

These conditions include "directional wind sheer," which is an event that leads to differing directional wind speeds in the upper atmosphere.

As a result, multiple tornado events took place around Central Florida with the first two

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

reports happening in two areas of Orlando.

The first was a land spout with a weak formation around the Premier Outlets area near Oakridge Boulevard, the NWS said.

However, it was the second tornado that made headlines the following day, when an EF1 tornado formed Saturday night in downtown Orlando.

The National Weather Service determined that the twister, with winds of 100 to 105 mph, started as a water spout on Lake Conway at 7:20 p.m. and lifted back to the sky at 7:32 p.m. near Lake Lawsona. There were no reports of injuries. Although, there was property damage.

Most of the damage was caused by trees falling onto homes, the NWS said. The Lake Margaret Village apartment complex took the brunt of the tornado, with several buildings damaged. Heavy damages were also reported along Catherine Street just a few blocks south of State Road 408.

The following day, another funnel cloud appeared at around 3:40 p.m. in Emeralda near Lake Griffin, but did not produce any noteworthy damage, the NWS said.

[LA] Cristobal destroys protective sand dunes in Grand Isle, La., a troubling omen in what could be a rough hurricane season (Washington Post)
Washington Post [6/8/2020 6:16 PM, Ashley Cusick, Richard A. Webster, and Matthew Cappucci, 18460K]
Tropical Storm Cristobal dumped several inches of rain here in southeastern Louisiana late Sunday, temporarily flooding the only highway in and out of town and destroying more than a mile stretch of sand dunes the federal government built to protect the vulnerable community of about 1,400 people that sits precariously on the Gulf of Mexico.

Though the majority of homes and businesses were spared significant damage from a weakened storm, Police Chief Laine Landry said it is a troubling sign not only for Grand Isle, a barrier island located 108 miles south of New Orleans, but for all of the people across the region.

“We are the first line of defense when it comes to storm surge,” Landry said. “If the state loses our line of barrier islands, your next beachfront is going to be just south of New Orleans. It’s scary.”

The third named storm of the new hurricane season shifted inland on Monday, where Cristobal could cause serious flooding as its tropical remnants swirl up the Mississippi River Valley. Heavy rainfall and pockets of flooding probably will accompany the storm all the way to Canada.

Flash flood watches stretch more than 1,000 miles, from the Florida Panhandle to central Wisconsin. The unusual system has the potential to become the nation’s farthest north and west tropical depression in more than two centuries of record-keeping.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The onslaught of hazardous weather comes barely a week into hurricane season in a year already teeming with activity. Cristobal was the earliest third-named storm on record, achieving that status on June 2. Weather experts predict it could be a particularly rough season for the United States, meaning places like Grand Isle could see more threats in coming months.

Grand Isle Mayor David Camardelle said he has been in contact with the state's congressional delegation, pleading for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to not only fix the damaged sand dunes but also make them stronger by fortifying them with rocks.

Before Cristobal, the dunes were 160 feet wide. By Monday morning, they had lost nearly 100 feet, exposing an interior, sand-filled tube that is supposed to stabilize the entire structure.

"I'm not a sand man, I'm a rock man," Camardelle said. "Anybody that's got a beautiful place on Grand Isle facing the Gulf of Mexico, they all want rocks so they can sleep at night. If another tropical depression comes, it will wash the tube into the Gulf. This is an emergency."

As is sometimes the case with significant storms, the storm surge was more of a threat than the winds. The National Hurricane Center warned that hazardous storm surge was ongoing across the Gulf Coast on Monday, with onshore flow as the system draws north maintaining that threat.

On Sunday, winds gusted to 57 mph in Bayou Bienvenue, La., while Gulfport, Miss., saw a gust of 60 mph. Ship Island, located offshore, measured a wind gust of 64 mph.

But a storm surge of 6.2 feet was observed in Shell Beach, La. — a greater surge than experienced in Miami during the passage of Hurricane Irma in 2017. Because the storm slowed as it approached the coast, and the peak surge coincided with high tide, the surge was significantly higher than anticipated.

Grand Isle is accustomed to being battered by storms, surviving Hurricane Betsy in 1965, Katrina in 2005 and Gustav in 2008, among others. As Cristobal churned in the Gulf of Mexico early Saturday morning, Camardelle ordered a mandatory evacuation, though he knew most locals would choose to shelter in place.

"They know what they're doing. They're used to every type of storm," he said, adding that the coronavirus didn't impact their storm plans. Grand Isle has experienced only one confirmed positive case, he said. "Like my grandpa told me when I was a little boy, 'We live on a barrier island. The gulf breeze is always blowing. You always got fresh air. There's not too many germs out there.'"

By Monday afternoon, most of the water had receded from Grand Isle, though large pools still sat under many of the island's colorful, elevated homes.

Highway 1 had reopened and life was largely returning to normal. Dena King, 67, and Carolyn Angelette, 72, were back at work. Blue tarps still covered several computers at their Island Realty office, but it was business as usual otherwise.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Neither woman evacuated.

“I knew it wasn’t going to be that big,” King said.

King — who lost her home here during Hurricane Katrina — said she had three or four feet of water in her yard yesterday, but her home stayed dry. Angelette’s home also was spared damage, though the 20 feet of sandy beach behind it appeared to have been washed away.

“We deal with this all the time,” King said of the island’s propensity for flooding. “It’s frustrating, because you don’t know what the storms are going to do. But you lift things up in your house, you move your car to higher ground and you let the water rise. There’s not much more you can do.”

Angelette agreed. “The wonderful thing about Grand Isle is all the flooding is forgotten really soon,” she said. “And we forget it soon because of what we get here before the floods and in between. The way of living here is really awesome. That’s what makes you forget.”

Dean Blanchard, owner of Dean Blanchard Seafood Inc., wasn’t as lucky. His seafood distribution company is located outside of Grand Isle’s levee protection system. By 10 a.m. Sunday, despite clear skies, he watched helplessly as the waters began to rise all around him.

“You could have had lawn chairs and been outside suntanning and the whole time the water is coming up,” said Blanchard, who estimates he sustained several hundred thousand dollars’ worth of damage to his equipment. But he said he has no intention of leaving his home.

“We live in paradise,” he said. “Everybody wants waterfront property. Well, we got waterfront, waterside and waterback. Water everywhere.”

[LA] Trump Issues Federal Disaster Declaration As Cristobal Hits Louisiana, Weakens To A Tropical Depression (Daily Caller)
Daily Caller [6/8/2020 1:17 PM, Chris White, 339K]
Cristobal weakened to a tropical depression Monday morning after smashing into Louisiana and other parts of the southern United States on Saturday, bringing with it 50-mph winds and heavy rainfall.

President Donald Trump granted Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards’s request for financial assistance to pay for the state’s disaster response on Sunday. Edwards, a Democrat, declared a state of emergency Thursday ahead of the storm’s landfall, prompting many parishes to follow his lead.

“We are continuing to work with our federal partners on those parts of the request that have not been addressed,” Edwards wrote in a tweet Sunday night. “Our citizens have weathered many storms, and I’m certain that they will this time as well.”

Cristobal arrived Saturday afternoon, landing between the Mississippi River and the barrier

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

island resort community of Grand Isle, which was later evacuated, according to NBC News.

The storm's trajectory takes it inland through Louisiana and Mississippi on its way to Arkansas and eastern Missouri on Monday night and Tuesday before reaching Wisconsin by Wednesday. The storm will continue to weaken through Tuesday, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said Monday.

Up to 12 inches of rain could fall in some areas of the South, with storm surges up to five feet, according to some forecasts. The weather service warned that the rain would contribute to rivers flooding on the central Gulf Coast and up into the Mississippi Valley.

"It's very efficient, very tropical rainfall," National Hurricane Center Director Ken Graham said in a Facebook video. "It rains a whole bunch real quick."

[Editorial note: consult source link for video]

[LA] Tropical Storm Cristobal lashes southeast Louisiana; president declares federal disaster (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [6/8/2020 8:30 AM, David Jacobs, 727K]
Heavy rains and high winds lashed the Gulf Coast Sunday afternoon as Tropical Storm Cristobal neared land.

President Donald Trump on Sunday announced he would grant Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards' request for a federal disaster declaration, which allows the federal government to help pay for the state's disaster response. Edwards declared a state emergency on Thursday, and many parishes have followed suit, with some calling for voluntary evacuations.

Cristobal was expected to maintain tropical storm strength through landfall Sunday evening. The National Hurricane Center reported tropical storm-force winds along the coast from southeastern Louisiana to Alabama. Sustained winds reached 50 miles per hour with gusts of up to 64 miles per hour.

Heavy rainfall and storm surge were threatening an area stretching from southeast Louisiana to the Florida panhandle. At 4 p.m. Cristobal was about 65 miles south of New Orleans and headed north at 7 miles per hour, a bit faster than the 5 miles per hour reported earlier in the day but slow enough to raise concerns about lingering rain.

The storm was expected to turn north-northwest during the night, moving across southeast Louisiana through Monday morning and across Arkansas and Missouri Monday afternoon into Tuesday, forecasters said.

Cristobal is expected to produce rainfall accumulations of 4 to 8 inches across portions of the central to eastern Gulf Coast into the lower Mississippi Valley, with isolated amounts up to 12 inches. Flash flooding and widespread flooding on smaller streams across portions of the central Gulf Coast into the lower Mississippi Valley are likely, the National Hurricane Center said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[MI] Michigan to seek federal disaster declaration over broken dams (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 9:00 PM, Rebecca Klar, 3408K]
Michigan Gov. said Monday she will request a federal disaster declaration over damage caused by two dams that failed last month.

Whitmer said she will send a letter to the federal government within the next week requesting the declaration for impacted areas after the dams failed in Midland County.

"When the president approves our full request, federal assistance will be unlocked to help people and businesses get back on their feet and repair some of the damage that this flooding has caused," Whitmer said during a visit to Midland County, according to video reported by Michigan Live.

ADVERTISEMENT. "A declaration helps us provide everything from crisis counseling services to individuals to debris removal and road repair as well as opening up access to low-interest loans for homeowners and renters, businesses, farms, and nonprofits that have been impacted by this event," she added.

The failure of the two dams damaged about 2,500 houses and businesses and caused more than $200 million in damage, Mark Bone, chairman of the Midland County Board of Commissioners, reportedly said.

Bone said only about 8 percent of the homes impacted by flooding had flood insurance coverage, according to Michigan Live.

He reportedly said that, based on current estimates, about 150 homes were completely destroyed and about 790 homes suffered major damage.

"It's unlike anything seen in 500 years, I feel like I've said that many items over the course of the last three months. We're going through something unlike anything any of us have seen in our lifetime, and yet here we are," Whitmer said.

"Getting back to normal is going to be a herculean undertaking, but with the federal government's help, we can get it done and we will."

In May, approved Whitmer's request for a disaster declaration for the impacted areas.

When the dams failed, Whitmer declared a state of emergency in Midland County.

Thousands of residents were forced to evacuate amid the coronavirus outbreak.

[MI] Michigan to seek disaster declaration for counties hit by May floods (Michigan Public Radio)
Michigan Public Radio [6/8/2020 5:31 PM, Steve Carmody, 37K]
Gov. Gretchen Whitmer plans to ask for a federal disaster declaration for parts of Michigan hard hit by flooding last month.

Heavy rains flooded towns and overflowed dams in parts of mid-Michigan, including Midland

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

and Gladwin Counties. Thousands were forced to evacuate their homes as the Tittabawassee River rose to a record height. Weeks later, many people are still cleaning and repairing their homes and businesses.

Midland County Commission Chairman Mark Bone estimates the flooding caused at least $200 million in damage in his county alone. He estimates 2,500 homes were damaged, of which only 8% had flood insurance. Bone says nearly 1,000 homes were either completely destroyed or suffered major damage from the flood.

“This community is a strong community,” says Bone. “We are ready to rebuild.”

Whitmer’s emergency declaration included Midland, Gladwin, Saginaw, Arenac and Iosco counties. The Whitmer administration is still collecting damage assessments from the counties impacted by May’s floods.

In Sanford Monday, Gov. Whitmer helped pack food and other supplies for those still recovering the May 19th flood.

Whitmer says expects to send her letter requesting the declaration next week.

“When the president approves our full request, federal assistance will be unlocked to help people and businesses get back on their feet and repair some of the damage this flooding has caused,” says Whitmer.

President Donald Trump has already signed an emergency declaration for the May flooding. The declaration freed up FEMA and other federal agencies to assist with recovery efforts.

By requesting a disaster declaration, Gov. Whitmer is seeking to free up more federal funding to assist communities to recover.

The May 19th flood has been a serious blow to Midland businesses, already reeling from the state’s ‘Stay-at-Home’ order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sue MacKellar owns a couple of small businesses in Midland.

Her events business was already largely shuttered by the pandemic. She says the flood inundated her four Airbnb’s.

MacKellar says her events business has lost more than 70% in sales due to the shutdown and May’s floods.

“This time of year is like Christmas for our events and things that are going on. And it was just totally gone,” says MacKellar.

MacKellar says the government should do more to help small businesses recover.

[MI] Michigan seeks disaster declaration after 2 dam failures (San Francisco Chronicle)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

San Francisco Chronicle [6/8/2020 6:08 PM, Anna Liz Nichols, AP, 496K]
Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said Monday she is requesting a federal disaster declaration for the Midland area, where a failure of two dams destroyed 150 houses and caused more than $200 million in damage.

Under a disaster declaration, Whitmer said she hopes to gain Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance as soon as possible to provide a wide range of service such as crisis counseling, road repairs and loans to homeowners.

The nearly 100-year-old Edenville Dam in Midland failed on May 19, forcing 10,000 residents to evacuate their homes as flood waters raged through the area.

"We're going through something unlike anything any of us have seen in our lifetime and yet here we are," Whitmer said. "Getting back to normal is going to be a Herculean undertaking, but with the federal government's help we can get it done and we will."

Midland County Commission Chairman Mark Bone said most of the houses damaged by the flood were not in a flood zone, so only about 8% had flood insurance coverage. There was $175 million in damage to homes, businesses and nonprofits, he said, and $34 million to public property.

"We're excited and we are ready," Bone said. "This community is a strong community, they're ready to rebuild, the volunteers here have been amazing and we're ready to go. There's been a mourning period, we're still mourning a little bit, but we're ready to go forward."

President Donald Trump issued an emergency declaration in May, after Whitmer sent a request which he signed during a visit to the state.

Whitmer said she will send a letter requesting the disaster declaration in the next week.

Secret Service

States scramble to deal with potential spikes in unemployment fraud, prompting Democrats to demand answers (Washington Post)
Washington Post [6/8/2020 6:00 AM, Tony Romm, 18460K]
Senate Democrats are calling on the Trump administration to release more details about an alleged criminal operation designed to defraud state unemployment programs across the country, fearing these systems remain vulnerable to attack amid the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

The lawmakers' concerns stem from a memo the U.S. government circulated in May indicating scammers may have harnessed stolen Social Security numbers and other personal information to obtain weekly jobless benefits. The attack appeared to target states including Washington, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Florida at a time when roughly 40 million Americans were seeking benefits as a result of the coronavirus and in need of financial support.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Little else is known about the incident, leading lawmakers including Sen. Patty Murray (Wash.), the top Democrat on the Senate's leading health committee, and Sen. Ron Wyden (Ore.), who leads the party on the Senate Finance Committee, to demand answers. They also called on the government to dedicate new resources toward helping states defend themselves against similar criminal operations, particularly as they race to get critical jobless aid to Americans who need it most.

"We all share a common goal of ensuring the integrity of the unemployment insurance (UI) program," lawmakers wrote in a letter to Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia, later adding: "Safeguarding state UI systems against unscrupulous actors who seek to exploit the current public health crisis for economic gain requires a holistic response by the federal government in partnership with states."

The Labor Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The growing fears about rampant fraud reflect only the latest headaches to plague the country's unemployment insurance program, a benefits system backed by federal regulators but largely run by the states. Many agencies buckled under the initial, unprecedented demand, all the while struggling to implement a federal coronavirus relief package that expanded benefits to new workers and increased weekly payments by $600. The resulting bureaucratic hurdles and technical glitches left many out-of-work Americans awaiting much-needed aid for weeks.

But these outdated computer systems — and states' race to get cash in the hands of workers who need it most — also appear to have opened the door for potential criminal activity. Such scams seem to have targeted at least seven states, according to a memo from the U.S. Secret Service from early May recently posted online by the state of Michigan.

"It is extremely likely every state is vulnerable to this scheme and will be targeted if they have not been already," federal officials warned at the time.

The hardest hit appears to be Washington, which reported a "dramatic rise" in incidents involving people applying for unemployment aid fraudulently. Washington officials recently indicated there have been as many as $650 million in fraudulent claims, about half of which the state has recovered. A spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Federal officials previously said that some recipients of Washington's unemployment checks have been sent to individuals residing out of state. The fraud ring, which may be based in Nigeria, appears to have obtained those benefits by using personal information harnessed from local first responders, government personnel and school employees, according to the unreleased Secret Service document.

"Responding to criminal schemes seeking to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic has become the primary investigative focus for the Secret Service," Beth Celestini, a special agent with the Secret Service, said in a statement. "Recent partnerships have resulted in the prevention of hundreds of millions in fraud losses, and the initiation of dozens of ongoing investigations."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Michigan, meanwhile, halted payments on Friday for about 340,000 claims, or 20 percent of its total, out of concern about potential fraud. Oklahoma officials indicated in emails obtained by local reporters that there were 80,000 suspicious claims in late May. And Pennsylvania said it ceased paying checks on 58,000 claims for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, a new federal program authorized under the Cares Act that provides jobless aid for those typically ineligible for weekly benefits.

Spokespeople for unemployment agencies in Michigan, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania did not respond to requests for comment. It is not clear whether these suspected fraudulent claims, detailed in prior public statements and media reports, are part of the same scheme identified in states like Washington.

The lack of details alarmed congressional Democrats, many of whom are seeking to augment federal unemployment benefits further before they are set to expire at the end of July. They asked the Labor Department in their letter to detail by later this month when they learned of the criminal operation, how they're seeking to combat it and the total number of fraudulent claims submitted.

Signing the letter with Murray and Wyden were Democratic Sens. Mazie Hirono (Hawaii), Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.), Edward J. Markey (Mass.), Jack Reed (R.I.), Maria Cantwell (Wash.) and Elizabeth Warren (Mass.).

Labor Department dodges IG plea to tighten jobless rules (Roll Call)
Roll Call [6/8/2020 5:48 PM, Mark Bocchetti, 72K, Neutral, Secondary]
Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia isn't expected to ask Congress to revisit the law that expanded jobless benefits to the self-employed to require proof of earnings when he testifies before the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday, according to a department memorandum.

Officials indicated in the same memo that the department sees the issue as one for Congress, and that it would "consult with Congress and offer technical assistance" if lawmakers opt to amend what is now self-certification of earnings. The memo acknowledges "increased potential for fraud."

The department's memo Friday to the Office of the Inspector General is an indication that officials are refusing to change policy — unless lawmakers direct them to — after the inspector general warned of a "high risk of fraud" if the self-employed aren't required to show proof of earnings. The inspector general's warning to the department came in a May 26 memo released publicly. Inspector General Scott S. Dahl said last week he would leave the post on June 21.

The issue potentially would affect many of the 10.7 million now receiving jobless benefits under provisions of the roughly $2 trillion COVID-19 relief act that expanded unemployment to the self-employed, gig workers, independent contractors and others, if the department advised the states to begin requiring documentation of earnings.

Such documentation is required under the Disaster Unemployment Assistance program, on which the coronavirus program is modeled, but agency lawyers maintain that Congress, in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

drafting the law, specified only two conditions: that a claimant is not eligible for regular unemployment benefits, and he or she "is self-employed, is seeking part-time employment, does not have sufficient work history, or otherwise would not qualify for regular unemployment…"

However, claimants are required to self-certify eligibility, potentially facing criminal prosecution if they make false statements in claiming benefits.

Senate Democrats wrote Scalia on Friday raising the issue of fraud in unemployment programs, citing press reports that the Secret Service had detected organized fraud rings targeting the expanded program. But the letter asked the department only to put "additional guidance, resources and support" into fraud prevention.

"Safeguarding state UI [unemployment insurance] systems against unscrupulous actors who seek to exploit the current public health crisis for economic gain requires a holistic response by the federal government in partnership with states," the senators said.

In its reply to the OIG, Labor Department lawyers said that states should require documentation if the claimant seeks a benefit higher than the minimum, set by the law at one half the state average weekly benefit. But even those who get the minimum also receive a $600 plus-up also authorized by the law, through the end of July.

[MA] Two Foxboro brothers face multiple charges involving stolen credit cards (Foxboro Reporter)
Foxboro Reporter [6/8/2020 2:00 PM, David Linton, 10K, Positive, Secondary]
Police say they recovered stolen goods and arrested two brothers after executing a search warrant at their home Monday morning.

James Devlin, 21, and his younger brother, John Devlin, 20, face charges in Wrentham District Court of receiving stolen property valued at more than $1,200, misusing a credit card and breaking and entering, police said.

They were arrested after police executed a search warrant about 6:30 a.m. at their home at 6 Truax Lane off Route 106 with the help of Sharon police.

During the search, detectives recovered some of the merchandise allegedly purchased with credit cards stolen during two recent break-ins.

The credit cards were used to rack up about $2,175 in charges, police said.

Some of the stolen items included a large-screen television, computer equipment and gaming consoles.

Detectives also recovered a large amount of counterfeit U.S. currency which will be turned over to the U. S. Secret Service, according to police.

The arrests came as a result of an investigation into recent break-ins at a pool house outside a local home and a motor vehicle, police said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The suspects allegedly used a credit card of one of the victims at several Foxboro area stores, buying several expensive items.

A break in the case came after Detective Michael Alberts was able to identify the suspects through security camera footage at several of the retail businesses.

Police are still investigating and additional charges may be filed.

[DC] Inside the Pentagon's pitched battle to stave off use of active-duty troops to quell violence on streets (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [6/8/2020 7:05 AM, Jamie McIntyre, 727K, Neutral, Secondary]
A WEEK ON THE BRINK: One week ago today, the Pentagon was scrambling to get enough riot-trained National Guard troops to avoid what it considered its last, worst option: deploying military police from the 82nd Airborne Division on the streets of the nation's capital.

"We came right up to the edge of bringing active [duty] troops here, and we didn't," Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy told reporters in a Sunday conference call. "We didn't want to do it," he said. "We did everything we could to not cross that line."

SUNDAY NIGHT: On May 29, demonstrations in the wake of George Floyd's death had turned violent in the streets around the White House. The Secret Service and U.S. Park Police, backed up by a small number of D.C. National Guard troops, were outnumbered by protesters, including some who looted stores, defaced buildings, and lit fires, including in the basement of the historic St. John's Episcopal Church across Lafayette Square from the White House.

"That Sunday evening, our soldiers and airmen, they were in the park with the second row behind law enforcement," said McCarthy. "We had five soldiers hit in the head with bricks. One of which has a severe concussion."

"There was a lot of confusion and not knowing just what we were dealing with," he said.

One of the protesters tried to jump the White House fence, said Maj. Gen. William Walker, who commands the guard in D.C. "On a couple of occasions, they penetrated the line, and our guardsmen held the line and kept people from advancing on to the White House proper."

"Sunday evening, security elements were almost overwhelmed," said McCarthy. "We needed to put additional support down there to ensure we could enable peaceful demonstration and prevent another evening like we had Sunday night."

MONDAY: By the next day, President Trump was telling the Pentagon that he was prepared to deploy active-duty troops to restore order, a drastic measure that would require invoking the 200-year-old Insurrection Act. Some units from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and Ft. Drum, New York, were already on the move to be staged outside the city.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Both Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley opposed the move, advocating that the mission be restricted to guard troops, who are trained to assist in times of civil unrest.

“The decision was made to have at the ready, and on hand in the vicinity, some regular troops,” said Attorney General William Barr on CBS. “But everyone agreed that the use of regular troops was a last resort and that as long as matters can be controlled with other resources, they should be.”

That set off a scramble to locate guard troops from other states that could be quickly moved to D.C.

But Barr denied reports on CBS and AP that in a stormy White House meeting, Trump said he wanted 10,000 federal troops on the streets ASAP. “That’s completely false,” he told CBS’s Margaret Brennan. “The president never asked or suggested that we needed to deploy regular troops at that point.”

MONDAY NIGHT: The facts of what happened Monday night in Lafayette Square remain in dispute, including when protesters began throwing frozen water bottles and what kind of riot-control agents were employed by police as they moved to clear the park in advance of a 7 p.m. curfew and President Trump’s visit to the fire-damaged church to hold up a Bible.

In Sunday’s conference call with reporters, Walker at first said the actions by protesters began before Park Police began the aggressive clearing action, but after being challenged by a reporter who was at the scene, he conceded the violence may have been after police began pushing the crowd back.

“Your summarization of what happened Monday night, having been there, was entirely — from my own eyes — was completely incorrect,” said Thomas Gibbons-Neff of the New York Times. He reported that Park Police initiated the attack into the crowd and that everything that happened afterward was a result of that.

“I don’t know what ultimately triggered the Park Police to make the clearing,” said McCarthy. “So I’m sorry if there was confusion about that.”

TRUMP DECLARES VICTORY: After a week of mostly peaceful demonstrations and a lifting of curfews, the Pentagon is now sending all the active-duty troops back to their bases and out-of-state guard troops back to their home states.

“I have just given an order for our National Guard to start the process of withdrawing from Washington, D.C., now that everything is under perfect control,” Trump tweeted Sunday, the day after an estimated 45,000 demonstrators filled the streets of downtown Washington. “They will be going home, but can quickly return, if needed. Far fewer protesters showed up last night than anticipated!”

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: In his Sunday appearance on Face the Nation, Attorney General William Barr said he does not believe that America’s law enforcement system is “systemically racist.”

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“I think we’ve been in a phase of reforming our institutions,” he said, and “reform is a difficult task. … I think one of the best examples is the military. The military used to be an explicitly racist institution. And now, I think it’s in the vanguard of bringing the races together and providing equal opportunity.”

BLACK GENERALS MATTER: In recent days, three black generals, one current, two retired, have spoken passionately about the racism they experienced coming up through the ranks.

Gen. Charles Brown, who is poised to be the first black Air Force chief of staff, posted a powerful video on Friday titled “What I am Thinking About.”

“I’m thinking about how full I am with emotion, not just for George Floyd, but the many African Americans who have suffered the same fate as George Floyd. I’m thinking about protests in my country ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty. The equality expressed in our Declaration of Independence and the Constitution that I’ve sworn my adult life to protect and defend,” Brown says as he appears to struggle to keep his emotions in check.

“I’m thinking about a history of racial issues and my own experiences that didn’t always sing of liberty and equality,” he continues. “I’m thinking about wearing the same flight suit with the same wings on my chest as my peers and then being questioned by another military member, ‘Are you a pilot?’ I’m thinking about some of the incidents and comments made without awareness by others,” he said. “I’m thinking about being a captain at the O club with my squadron and being told by other African Americans that I wasn’t black enough since I was spending more time with my squadron than with them.”

Retired Gen. Vincent Brooks, the former U.S. Korea commander, shared his experience as an African American man in the U.S. Army in a post on the website of the Harvard University Belfer Center, where he is a senior fellow.

“On my journey, there have been many episodes, painful to remember. In my youth as a military child, in my time at West Point, and in my military career, even during my time as an Army general, I was personally impacted by explicit and implicit bias, as was my father, as were my grandfathers and their fathers.”

Brooks writes that he feels both dismay and disappointment by recent events. “Dismay, because I remember too many personal encounters with issues of racism, explicit and implicit, that I hoped I would never see again” and “disappointment, because a sacred trust has been breached,” which he said “puts at risk our national security if Americans believe their military has become a domestic political instrument.”

“The recent actions by the President of the United States, in threatening the commitment of active duty troops for law enforcement if governors were not tough and did not ‘dominate the streets,’ and in maneuvering the two most senior leaders of the U.S. military — the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — into a position that politicized them by their presence during a time of active demonstrating and contested crowd control, breached this sacred trust.”

Retired Gen. Colin Powell, the first black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaking on

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

CNN, said he was proud that retired officers are speaking out, even though traditionally, many avoid commenting on political issues.

“We have a Constitution, and we have to follow that Constitution,” he said. “And the president has drifted away from it. I’m so proud of what these generals and admirals have done and others have done.”

Powell opposed Trump in 2016 and said he will vote for Joe Biden this year.

“I was deeply troubled by the way in which he was going around insulting everybody, insulting gold star mothers, insulting John McCain, insulting immigrants — and I’m the son of immigrants — insulting anybody who dared to speak against him,” Powell said.

“And that is dangerous for our democracy. It is dangerous for our country. And I think what we’re seeing now, the most massive protest movement I have ever seen in my life, I think this suggests that the country is getting wise to this, and we’re not going to put up with it anymore.”

TRUMP’S RETORT: “Colin Powell was a pathetic interview today on Fake News CNN,” Trump tweeted after Powell’s appearance. “In his time, he was weak & gave away everything to everybody - so bad for the USA. Also got the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ totally wrong, and you know what that mistake cost us? Sad! Only negative questions asked.”

TROOPS REDUCTIONS IN GERMANY: Powell also criticized Trump for his decision to withdraw 9,500 troops from bases in Germany, apparently without asking for or heeding the advice of the Pentagon and without consulting U.S. allies in Europe.

Trump’s plan would cut the 34,000 U.S. troops in Germany by about one-third and cap the number at 25,000.

“It seems to all come out of the White House, without consultation with our Joint Chiefs of Staff. This is not the way the system is supposed to work.” Powell said.

“The president,” Powell said, “needs to understand the Constitution, understand the restraints on him and his authority, and talk openly with his military authorities about what is the right thing to do — and not fire them when he doesn’t get the answer he likes.”

ON THE OTHER HAND: “This reduction appropriately rebalances away from Europe, which is prosperous and relatively secure, and shifts the burden of joint security responsibilities to allies who can afford it,” said Enea Gjoza, a senior fellow at Defense Priorities.

“Those who lament this decision as a dangerous signal of weakening U.S. commitment to Europe fail to point to any concrete problem that it will cause. That is because the current U.S. military presence in Germany is a relic of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union posed an existential threat to Western democracies weakened by World War II. Today, the EU’s GDP is 11 times greater than Russia’s, and EU nations collectively outspend Russia 5-to-1 on their militaries. There is no threat to Europe meriting a large U.S. ground presence on the continent.”

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

INDUSTRY WATCH: Northrop Grumman has been awarded a contract by NASA to execute the preliminary design and development of “HALO,” the Habitation and Logistics Outpost.

“The HALO module represents a critical component of NASA’s Gateway serving as both a crew habitat and docking hub for cislunar spacecraft, or spacecraft that navigate between the Earth and the moon,” the company said in a statement. “HALO will feature three docking ports for visiting spacecraft, including the Orion spacecraft and other lunar support vehicles.”

HALO is to be deployed in lunar orbit as the first crew module of the NASA Gateway, a space station orbiting the moon providing vital support for long-term human exploration of the lunar surface and deep space.

[DC] White House: ‘No regrets’ about handling of protesters in Lafayette Park (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 3:30 PM, Morgan Chalfant, 3408K]
White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Monday that the White House has no regrets about how federal law enforcement forcibly cleared protesters from Lafayette Square the week prior.

“There’s no regrets on the part of this White House,” McEnany said at a briefing Monday afternoon. “I’d note that many of those decisions were not made here within the White House. It was [Attorney General William] Barr who made the decision to move the perimeter. Monday night Park Police had also made that decision independently when they saw all the violence in Lafayette Square.”

McEnany defended the decision by the U.S. Park Police to use chemical agents to clear protesters from the park outside the White House, claiming police issued three warnings before doing so and that protesters hurled projectiles at law enforcement officers.

“That was unacceptable. Park Police acted as they felt they needed to at that time in response,” McEnany said. “We stand by those actions.”

McEnany also pointed to a fire set at historic St. John’s Church and video of a demonstrator carving a piece of cement from the sidewalk as evidence of violent protests accompanying peaceful demonstrations against the police-involved death of George Floyd. McEnany said the incidents — which occurred on Sunday, the day before Lafayette Square was cleared — contributed to the decision to expand the perimeter around the White House.

The Trump administration has withstood growing scrutiny for the clearing of the park over the past week. Religious leaders and some Republicans have criticized the administration for using force to clear the group of largely peaceful protesters shortly before President Trump staged a photo opportunity at St. John’s Church. James Mattis, Trump’s first Defense secretary, issued a stern rebuke of the president last week over the events and his threat to use the military to quell protests.

The Hill’s reporter who observed the scene of the protest last Monday did not observe

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

projectiles being thrown. The Hill reported at the time that some protesters taunted and jeered at law enforcement.

In an interview on CBS's "Face the Nation" on Sunday, Barr said the actions of law enforcement were appropriate and insisted those demonstrating on Monday "were not peaceful protesters." Barr also said the decision to expand the perimeter around the park was made independently of Trump's decision to walk to St. John's Church, echoing remarks he made last week.

Trump also said last week that he believed the situation was "handled very well."

[DC] Pelosi, Schumer call on Trump to reopen Lafayette Square amid peaceful protests over killing of George Floyd (Washington Post)
Washington Post [6/8/2020 3:36 PM, Felicia Sonmez, Neutral, Primary]
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) on Monday called on President Trump to reopen Lafayette Square, one week after authorities pushed back largely peaceful protesters by charging at them with mounted police and firing canisters that sent plumes of noxious smoke into the crowd.

In a letter to Trump, the two Democratic leaders emphasized that the square "has long been a venue where Americans can gather to freely exercise their constitutional rights in close proximity to the White House."

"You have now erected heavy, semi-permanent steel fencing to wall off the Square," Pelosi and Schumer wrote. "Your conversion of this unique public park in the heart of our Nation's capital to what looks like a militarized zone denies citizens access to the park and sends the worst possible message to the American public and people around the world."

They added "Lafayette Square should be a symbol of freedom and openness, not a place behind which the leader of our Executive Branch cowers in fear of protesters who are crying out for justice."

On June 1, police aggressively cleared a crowd of largely peaceful demonstrators from outside the square, which is across from the White House, amid protests over the Memorial Day death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, in Minneapolis police custody.

In the past week, the barriers encircling the White House have expanded, with more than a mile of tall metal fencing now surrounding the executive mansion. The Secret Service told CNN the additional fencing will remain up until Wednesday.

In addition to Pelosi and Schumer, D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) has also voiced concern about the extension of security barriers beyond the White House perimeter. "Keep in mind that's the people's house," Bowser said at a news conference Thursday. "It's a sad commentary that the [White] House and its inhabitants have to be walled off."

Pelosi and Schumer said in their letter Monday that the Trump administration's explanation that the square should be closed for security reasons is "not sufficient," noting that the usual measures "have for a quarter of a century been adequate to protect the White House

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

complex from terrorism and all manner of other threats."

"It is simply not credible to claim that the current protests justify the oppressive walls you have erected in response," they wrote. "We therefore urge you to tear down these walls, reopen Lafayette Square, and allow the public to gather there for you and all the world to hear their voices."

[DC] Pelosi, Schumer call on Trump to take down White House fencing (Washington Times)
Washington Times [6/8/2020 11:27 AM, Gabriella Muñoz, 496K, Neutral, Secondary]
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer on Monday demanded President Trump break down new barricades around the White House, accusing him of turning a public park into a "militarized zone."

Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Schumer rejected the White House's argument that its new fencing and expanded perimeter were necessary security precautions, arguing that there was "adequate" measures already in place to protect the White House complex from "terrorism and all manner of other threats."

"Your conversion of this unique public park in the heart of our nation's capital to what looks like a militarized zone denies citizens access to the park and sends the worst possible message to the American public and people around the world," the Democratic leaders wrote in a letter. "Lafayette Square should be a symbol of freedom and openness, not a place behind which the leader of our executive branch cowers in fear of protesters who are crying out for justice."

The new, semi-permanent fencing began going up last week after federal law enforcement forcibly cleared protesters from the area near Lafayette Square ahead of the president's photo-op in front of St. John's Episcopal Church.

Though unrest and property damage rocked the capital when protests first began, the demonstrations have been largely peaceful over the past few days.

Some protesters had illegally breached the temporary barricades, while other demonstrators have taken to hanging "Black Lives Matter" banners and similar posters on the fencing itself.

In a statement issued Friday, the Secret Service said the fencing will remain up until June 10.

"These closures are in an effort to maintain the necessary security measures surrounding the White House complex, while also allowing for peaceful demonstration," the statement read. "Security fencing has been erected and the areas are clearly marked."

[DC] Barr Says Secret Service Told Trump to Go to White House Bunker (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [6/8/2020 8:49 PM, Chris Strohm, 6400K]
Attorney General William Barr said that the U.S. Secret Service told Donald Trump to go to a secure part of the White House as large protests unfolded outside, contradicting the

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

president's account of what happened.

"Things were so bad that the Secret Service recommended that the president go down to the bunker," Barr said Monday evening in an interview on Fox News. "We can't have that in our country."

The opposing versions of what occurred center on the night of May 31, as demonstrations over the death of George Floyd had spread to the capital.

Trump last week denied going to the bunker for his safety. "Well, that was a false report," Trump said Wednesday on Brian Kilmeade's Fox News Radio show. "I was there for a tiny, little short period of time. It was much more for an inspection."

On the previous Friday night, demonstrators skirmished with the U.S. Secret Service in Lafayette Square outside the White House. Floyd, an African-American Minneapolis man, had died in police custody on May 25.

The clashes occurred alongside an outer ring of temporary fencing set up along the edge of the park, leading to six arrests and "multiple" injuries among the agency's personnel, the Secret Service said.

Barr said that when a crowd of protesters was forcibly cleared from the park last Monday to make way for Trump to pose for photos outside St. John's Church, "we were reacting to three days of extremely violent demonstrations right across from the White House. A lot of injuries to police officers. Arson."

The attorney general, a longtime advocate of a muscular presidency, played a key role in the removal of the protesters, who were demonstrating peacefully. He stood in the square as police in riot gear prepared to move against them. He said that some of the demonstrators were throwing rocks and bottles, although that wasn't seen on video.

He has given conflicting accounts of how the order to disperse the demonstrators came about. During a news conference last Thursday, Barr said he made the decision to expand the perimeter of Lafayette Square. But during his interview with Fox News on Monday, Barr said the Park Police made the decision.

The clearance of Lafayette Square, and Trump's threat to send federal troops to cities and states to quell unrest touched off widespread criticism, including from Jim Mattis, his former Defense secretary and a retired Marine general.

[DC] Barr contradicts Trump, says Secret Service called for him to be moved to bunker (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 7:09 PM, Morgan Chalfant, 3408K]
Attorney General William Barr said Monday that Washington, D.C., protests last month were so violent that the U.S. Secret Service recommended President Trump be moved to an underground bunker at the White House, undercutting the president's own claims that he visited to the bunker for an "inspection."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Barr made the comment during an interview with Fox News's Bret Baier that aired Monday evening in which he defended the decision by federal law enforcement to forcibly clear peaceful protesters from Lafayette Square outside the White House last Monday.

"On Monday, we were reacting to three days of extremely violent demonstrations right across from the White House, a lot of injuries to police officers, arson," Barr said. "Things were so bad that the Secret Service recommended the president go down to the bunker. We can't have that in our country. So the decision was made. We had to move the perimeter one block. That is what we were doing."

Barr's remarks appeared to confirm reports from multiple news outlets that Trump was rushed to the bunker, known as the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, the evening of Friday, May 29, as protests around the White House grew in intensity.

Trump disputed the reports in an interview with Fox News Radio last Wednesday, claiming he visited the bunker during the day to inspect it.

"I went down during the day, and I was there for a tiny, little, short period of time, and it was much more for inspection," Trump said. "These problems are during the night, not during the day."

Trump denied that the Secret Service recommended he move to the bunker for safety reasons but claimed that "they said it would be a good time to go down, take a look, because maybe sometime you're going to need it."

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[KY] Former Kentucky middle school teacher facing federal charges for online enticement of a minor, producing child porn (WHAS11)
WHAS11 [6/8/2020 4:02 PM, Staff, Positive, Secondary]
A former Kentucky middle school teacher is facing federal charges involving minors, the US attorney's office announced Monday.

Robert Alan Thompson, 33, of Hodgenville, Kentucky has been charged wtih online enticement of a minor and production of child pornography. Thompson is a former middle school teacher in both Franklin and Hardin counties.

According to the Complaint Affidavit, following execution of a state search warrant, Thompson told investigators that he received two pictures of teen boys ages 13 and 14 from Matthew Lyons.

According to the US attorney, Lyons was charged in April 2020 on several child exploitation offenses, including sex trafficking of a child, online enticement, and attempted production of child pornography.

During a forensic search of Thompson's phone, investigators say a detective with the Kentucky Attorney General's Office Department of Criminal Investigation discovered Thompson's social media discussions with a minor. A further investigation revealed that the

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

child was one of Thompson's former middle school students. Investigators say Thompson urged the student to send him sexually explicit images and the child complied.

Hardin County fired Thompson following his arrest on related state charges in April.

The online enticement charge carries penalties of not less than 10 years and not more than life in prison. The production of child pornography charge carries a mandatory minimum term of 15 years in prison and a maximum of 30 years in prison. A conviction under either or both charge also involves fines and Supervised Release of at least five years and could be any number of years up to an including life.

The Kentucky Office of Attorney General, Department of Criminal Investigations, with assistance from the United States Secret Service, Kentucky State Police, and Radcliffe Police Department, conducted the investigation.

[GA] Counterfeit "Movie Money" Passed at Lucky's Supermarket in Menlo Last Week (WEIS Radio)
WEIS Radio [6/8/2020 9:00 AM, Marc Summers, Neutral, Secondary]
An employee at Lucky's Supermarket in Menlo alerted the Chattooga County Sheriff's Office about counterfeit money that was used to purchase some items late last week.

A store cashier told a deputy that Thursday, June 4th, a man used a counterfeit $20 bill that was marked "movie money" to purchase $10.68 in items and received $9.32 in change. The clerk said that the man waited until her checkout lane was busy before getting in line. After the customer had already left, the cashier discovered the money was phony. The incident was caught on surveillance video.

The case remains under investigation by the Sheriff's Office.

[FL] Lecanto law enforcement drug raid results in four arrests (Citrus County Chronicle)
Citrus County Chronicle [6/8/2020 4:21 PM, Fred Hiers, 6K, Positive, Secondary]
A raid last week by Citrus County Sheriff's Office Tactical Impact Unit at a Lecanto home resulted in four arrests and the confiscation on drug-making supplies, drugs and counterfeit money, according to the arresting agency.

The CCSO deputies obtained and executed a search warrant June 4, 2020, at a house at 153 S. School Ave., Lecanto after receiving a tip that the home was being used to make methamphetamine, according to the CCSO news release.

While searching the home, detectives found the remnants of "one-pot" methamphetamine manufacturing equipment and chemicals, according to the CCSO release.

One-pot methamphetamine laboratories are portable and create small batches of the drug and involves combining all the common household ingredients in one container.

The CCSO release said detectives also discovered methamphetamine at the home in addition to counterfeit US currency.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The raid led to four arrests.

They were:

Brandon Wesley Cofield, 33, of 153 S. School Ave., Lecanto.

Deputies charged Cofield with manufacturing methamphetamine, renting, leasing, or owning a house that is a nuisance drug dwelling, possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia. His bond was set at $18,000.

Katie Anne Egbert, 21, of Hernando.

Deputies charged Egbert with possession of a controlled substance, manufacturing counterfeit US currency, and possession of drug paraphernalia. Her bond was set at $8,000.

Matthew Thomas Jefferson, 27, of 1030 Dartmouth Terrace, Inverness.

Deputies charged Jefferson with manufacturing methamphetamine, possession listed chemicals, possession of controlled substance with intent to sell, manufacturing counterfeit US currency, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Total bond was set at $26,000.

Surleta McMahon, 36, of 153 S. School Ave., Lecanto.

She was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia

Bond was set at $1,000.

[TX] Counterfeit money, ink, printers discovered at home in North Amarillo (NewsChannel 10)
NewsChannel 10 [6/8/2020 4:31 PM, Madison Carson, 8K, Neutral, Secondary]
Potter County Sheriff's deputies found counterfeit U.S. bills along with ink cartridges, printers and a firearm at a home on Ramada Trail Friday.

On June 5, the deputies obtained and executed a search warrant for a home located on Ramada Trail.

According to the PCSO, deputies discovered a firearm, several printers believed to be used for criminal activity, counterfeit U.S. bills, ink cartridges and pages of bills that had not been trimmed.

They also recovered a camper trailer believed to be stolen, along with an ATV believed to be stolen.

The suspect was not present at the time of the search warrant.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

PCSO contacted the Secret Service for assistance with the ongoing investigation.

Coast Guard

[LA] Cristobal brings flooding along Gulf Coast, Coast Guard searching for 2 missing boaters (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 10:10 AM, Travis Fedschun, 12006K] Video: HERE
The third named storm of the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, which roared ashore in Louisiana Sunday, is now bringing the threat of flooding as the Coast Guard continues to search for two missing boaters.

Cristobal, now a tropical depression, is moving northward on Monday morning over north-central Louisiana, with maximum sustained winds of 35 mph, as it brings the threat of heavy rains further north.

The storm made landfall Sunday night, inundating coastal areas with storm surge and causing several rescues across the region.

Multiple agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard, are now involved in a search for two boaters who were reported missing on Sunday as the storm came ashore.

The Coast Guard said in a news release that Ted Roach and Jennifer Lingoni left Salt Bayou near Slidell, La., at 1 p.m. Sunday on a 20-foot yellow skiff and were scheduled to be back at approximately 1:30 p.m.

The two never returned, spurring the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office to alert the Coast Guard around 3:33 p.m. of the two people missing.

A Coast Guard helicopter aircrew, the Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries are now searching for the two boaters, officials said.

Elsewhere in Louisiana, the storm surge pushed water over one section of a levee in St. Bernard Parish, located east of New Orleans.

Roadways in the area also flooded, as officials urged residents not to travel outside the levee system unless "absolutely necessary."

As of Monday morning, officials said there is still over a foot of floodwaters in the Ysclockey and Delacroix areas.

Neighborhoods in Slidell, La., also experienced flooding from storm surge and heavy rain. Residents in Palm Lake told FOX8 the historic neighborhood had homes lifted at least 12 feet above the ground after Hurricane Katrina. Some reported water in their garages.

Rising water on Lake Pontchartrain near New Orleans pushed about two feet of water into the first floor of Rudy Horvath's residence — a boathouse that sits on pilings.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Horvath told The Associated Press he and his family have lived there a year and have learned to take the occasional flood in stride. They've put tables on the lower floor to stack belongings above the high water.

"We thought it would be pretty cool to live out here, and it has been," Horvath said. "The sunsets are great."

Flooding was still reported in Mandeville, La., on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain on Monday.

Mandeville Fire/EMS said multiple water rescues were reported near Fontainebleau State Park on Monday as Cristobal sent high water and waves onto shoreline areas.

Rescue officials said that 10 people were rescued on Monday by members of the water rescue team. An additional 19 people were evacuated from their cabins by state park employees.

Elsewhere in south Louisiana, water covered the only road to Grand Isle and low-lying parts of Plaquemines Parish at the state's southeastern tip. "You can't go down there by car," shrimper Acy Cooper said Sunday of one marina in the area. "You have to go by boat."

Rain fell intermittently in New Orleans famed French Quarter on Sunday afternoon, but the streets were nearly deserted, with many businesses already boarded up due to the coronavirus.

The Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans said the city's aging street drainage system had limits, so residents should avoid underpasses and low-lying areas prone to inevitable street flooding.

Further east, coastal Mississippi news outlets reported stalled cars and trucks as floodwaters inundated beaches and crashed over highways.

On the City of Biloxi Facebook page, officials said emergency workers helped dozens of motorists through floodwaters, mostly on U.S. 90 running along the coast.

In Alabama, the bridge linking the mainland to Dauphin Island was closed much of Sunday. Police and state transportation department vehicles led convoys of motorists to and from the island when breaks in the weather permitted.

President Trump tweeted on Sunday he was approving and signing an emergency declaration for Louisiana, which will "help with all aspects of the big storm that is currently hitting your shores."

[TX] Feds suspend review of Enterprise's offshore crude oil export terminal (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [6/8/2020 4:24 PM, Sergio Chapa, 271K]
Federal officials have temporarily suspended their review of an offshore crude-oil export terminal proposed by Houston pipeline company Enterprise Products Partners and

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Canadian pipeline operator Enbridge.

Citing unanswered questions from the companies about the project description and a list of affected landowners, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration said Monday it stopped the clock on drafting an environmental impact statement for the Sea Port Oil Terminal.

Enterprise and Enbridge hope to build an underwater pipeline and an offshore export terminal on an oil storage tank farm in Brazoria County. The terminal would accommodate supertankers that can haul 2 million barrels of crude oil in a single shipment.

The companies didn't immediately respond for comment.

As the lead developer in the project, Enterprise filed its application for the terinal in Jan. 2019. Enbridge scrapped similar plans for a tank farm and offshore export terminal and joined Enterprise's project in December.

Under federal law, maritime officials have 365 days to review the application but can stop the clock as needed. The agency experienced delays in reviewing the project because of a federal government shutdown last year.

The proposed project faces opposition by area landowners and the Washington, D.C.-based environmental group Earthworks. Residents of the towns of Oyster Creek and Jones Creek have voiced environmental and safety concerns about new tank farms being built in their communities.

Joining thousands of public comments filed against the terinal, the Surfside Beach City Council voted unanimously March to oppose the project.

"While MARAD's stop clock order is no surprise given SPOT's inability to provide permitting agencies with crucial information in a timely manner, MARAD has the information it needs to deny SPOT's Deepwater Port License now," Earthworks energy campaigner Ethan Buckner said. "SPOT is widely opposed by impacted communities because it threatens drinking water, public health, the endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, and the region's robust tourism-dependent economy."

CISA/Cybersecurity

Researchers see risks in online vote system for 3 US states (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 11:58 AM, Staff, 1711K]
An online voting system approved in three US states is vulnerable to manipulation by hackers and may not protect ballot secrecy, according to an analysis by security researchers.

Scientists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and University of Michigan said in a research paper released Sunday that Democracy Live's OmniBallot platform represents "a severe risk to election security and could allow attackers to alter election results without detection."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The report comes with election officials scrambling following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic to enable remote voting in the November election to limit risks from crowded polling stations.

According to the researchers, OmniBallot has been approved as an option voting system in Delaware, West Virginia and New Jersey.

The report is the latest from security researchers warning of risks from online voting, stemming from the difficulty of ensuring voter authentication while keeping ballots secret and guarding against fraud and intimidation.

It comes amid a heated debate on expanding mail-in ballots, the most commonly used absentee voting system, which has been denounced by President Donald Trump.

According to the MIT and Michigan researchers, “OmniBallot uses a simplistic approach to Internet voting that is vulnerable to vote manipulation by malware on the voter’s device and by insiders or other attackers.”

Additionally, they concluded that Democracy Live “appears to have no privacy policy,” and “receives sensitive personally identifiable information — including the voter’s identity, ballot selections, and browser fingerprint — that could be used to target political ads or disinformation campaigns.”

Despite growing interest in online voting, many specialists have warned that these systems lack adequate security.

They acknowledge that the COVID-19 outbreak “has forced states to prepare for the possibility that voters may not be able to vote safely in person in coming elections.”

The research paper urges voters to avoid using OmniBallot and says mail-in ballots are generally far safer.

The “next-safest option is to use OmniBallot to download a blank ballot and print it, mark it by hand, and mail it back or drop it off,” the scientists said.

The company, based in Washington state, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Study finds vulnerabilities in online voting tool used by several states (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 5:50 PM, Maggie Miller, 3408K]
Researchers with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Michigan found multiple security vulnerabilities in an online voting tool being used by at least three states.

The study evaluated Democracy Live’s OmniBallot, a program that Delaware, New Jersey and West Virginia are using to allow military personnel and voters with disabilities to cast ballots amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The company also has a contract with the Defense

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Department to provide ballots to military personnel overseas.

According to the paper published Sunday, the system opens up the voting process to a range of vulnerabilities that could lead to election interference.

“We conclude that using OmniBallot for electronic ballot return represents a severe risk to election security and could allow attackers to alter election results without detection,” the researchers wrote.

The OmniBallot system consists of voters receiving step-by-step directions emailed through Democracy Live’s cloud portal, hosted by Amazon Web Services. Voters are then able to submit their ballots electronically or mail them back to state officials.

Researchers said a malware virus on a voter’s device could manipulate their ballot selections, and that Democracy Live did not do enough to protect the private information of voters from use in disinformation campaigns or targeted ads.

With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing election officials to consider new methods of voting, some states have considered moving the process online. The authors of the report cautioned against doing so, despite the increased chances of keeping voters safe while allowing disabled voters to cast their ballots.

“Increasing voter access is a laudable goal,” the researchers wrote. “Voters who are sick, disabled, or stationed overseas sometimes face substantial obstacles to participation, and the coronavirus pandemic threatens to disrupt in-person voting for everyone. However, elections also face substantial risks from cyberattacks — risks that are magnified when delivering or returning ballot online.”

J. Alex Halderman, a professor of computer science and engineering at the University of Michigan and a co-author of the report, tweeted Sunday that voters should mail their ballots instead, an option that both Democracy Live and many states are offering during the pandemic.

“Bottom line: OmniBallot’s ballot delivery and marking can be valuable tools for helping voters participate *if* officials take precautions we suggest,” Halderman tweeted. “Online voting, however, is a severe danger to election integrity and privacy, and we urge jurisdictions not to deploy it.”

CEO Bryan Finney told The New York Times that Democracy Live was necessary to “enfranchise the disenfranchised,” such as those with disabilities, and that “no technology is bulletproof.”

Democracy Live did not respond to The Hill’s request for comment on the report.

A source close to Democracy Live told The Hill that the company’s voting systems have been tested by the Department of Homeland Security and that there have been no instances of hacking during the time the Defense Department has worked with the company. The source also argued that voting online during the pandemic may be the only option for ensuring some disabled voters, such as those who are blind, are able to

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

participate.

The concerns over Democracy Live's voting system come months after MIT researchers published a separate paper detailing cyber vulnerabilities in Voatz, a voting app that was used in multiple states during the 2018 midterm elections. Among the vulnerabilities discovered was the ability to change the votes.

Experts have raised concerns about any type of online voting as election officials have considered this option during the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple federal agencies sent a private warning to states in May describing online voting as "high risk" and creating "significant security risks to voted ballot integrity, voter privacy, ballot secrecy, and system availability."

Minuscule number of potentially fraudulent ballots in states with universal mail voting undercuts Trump claims about election risks (Washington Post)
Washington Post [6/8/2020 2:54 AM, Elise Viebeck, 18460K]
As nearly every state expands its capacity for absentee voting this year, President Trump and his GOP allies have attacked the process as prone to rampant fraud.

"MAIL-IN VOTING WILL LEAD TO MASSIVE FRAUD AND ABUSE," Trump tweeted last month. " . . . WE CAN NEVER LET THIS TRAGEDY BEFALL OUR NATION."

But a Washington Post analysis of data collected by three vote-by-mail states with help from the nonprofit Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) found that officials identified just 372 possible cases of double voting or voting on behalf of deceased people out of about 14.6 million votes cast by mail in the 2016 and 2018 general elections, or 0.000025 percent.

The figure reflects cases referred to law enforcement agencies in five elections held in Colorado, Oregon and Washington, where all voters proactively receive ballots in the mail for every election.

The minuscule rate of potentially fraudulent ballots in those states adds support to assertions by election officials nationwide that with the right safeguards, mail voting is a secure method for conducting elections this year amid the threat of the novel coronavirus — undercutting the president's claims.

Until now, the polarized debate about ballot fraud has largely featured individual anecdotes from around the country of attempts to vote illegally. The voting figures from the three states examined by The Post provide a robust data set to measure the prevalence of possible fraud.

Current and former election officials in the three states said allegations that mail voting fosters widespread cheating are not only defied by the data, but also do not acknowledge the sophisticated and tightly controlled ways that voting operates in their jurisdictions, which have layers of security designed specifically to root out fraud and build confidence in the system.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“When I have the opportunity to give a tour of our facility to a skeptic of vote-by-mail or a skeptic of the process — someone concerned about fraud or security — they turn into believers,” said Julie Wise, elections director in King County, Wash., which includes Seattle and has operated a fully vote-by-mail system since 2009.

Questions about the security of mail ballots have taken on new urgency in recent months as the voting landscape nationwide is transformed by the coronavirus pandemic. All voters in every state but two — Mississippi and Texas — now have the right to cast mail or absentee ballots for the midyear primaries after the pandemic led 14 states to relax their rules. Many states are now considering extending those changes for the general election in November.

In the past two decades, Republicans and Democrats have embraced absentee and mail ballots as a way to make voting easier, expand participation and lower election costs. But Trump has attempted to sow doubts about the system’s security, repeatedly describing mail voting as a threat to the integrity of American elections.

For the first time, Twitter responded last week by appending fact-checking labels to two of the president’s tweets claiming that mail ballots are “fraudulent” and would be “robbed” out of mailboxes or “even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed.” Trump responded with fury, claiming that Twitter was stifling free speech.

Large-scale voting by mail “would be a free for all on cheating, forgery and the theft of Ballots,” he wrote in defiance of experts. “Whoever cheated the most would win.”

Bill Bradbury, a Democrat who oversaw Oregon’s implementation of all-mail elections starting in 1999 as secretary of state, said the president is misleading the public.

“It’s very discouraging to me to have him labeling the way we vote as totally fraudulent, which is just BS,” Bradbury said.

“People go to jail if they try to cheat on elections in Oregon,” he added. “I just find that comment just not very smart and not based on the facts.”

Election officials and security experts said certain measures are important for preventing fraud in mail voting, such as accurate voter rolls and a method of authenticating ballots such as signature matching. Such safeguards have been put in place over time in the five states that currently run universal mail elections: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

As states move quickly to expand mail voting in response to health concerns, not all have implemented the full range of security measures.

“We’ve had so much time to really fine-tune those processes,” said Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman, a leading Republican advocate for mail voting. “That’s probably my biggest concern with this rapid ramp-up to expand absentee voting or move to a vote-by-mail model is: Do they have the time to build up that capacity?”

The most recent high-profile case of ballot fraud took place in North Carolina, where the results of a 2018 congressional race were overturned amid an investigation of alleged absentee ballot tampering by a Republican operative, who was charged with felonies in an

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

operation that is still under investigation.

But election officials from Colorado, Oregon and Washington — which have conducted statewide mail elections for a combined four decades — said they have rarely, if ever, seen attempts to cheat their systems.

“There are so many steps to this process that I can’t say it’s impossible, but to me, it’s nearly impossible,” said Joan Lopez, clerk and recorder of Arapahoe County, in the suburbs of Denver. “The process — it’s a lockdown.”

Detecting fraud

Despite long-running and increasingly politicized debates about voter fraud, an interstate effort to measure its prevalence emerged only in the past several years.

Initial findings in the project are based on the work done by ERIC, a nonprofit consortium of 30 states that began in 2012 with assistance from the Pew Charitable Trusts to help states catch and erase errors from their voter rolls. This is accomplished with a sophisticated data-matching tool that compares registration lists between states and against other records, helping to identify duplicate registrations and entries for people who have moved or died.

A 2016 pilot study found that the system could identify potential cases of improper voting by analyzing states’ voter history data to detect whether individuals voted twice, in multiple states or on behalf of a deceased person. States are responsible for distinguishing between administrative errors and potential fraud.

After the 2016 study, 112 cases of potential fraud out of about 11 million ballots cast in five states were turned over to law enforcement authorities, or 0.00001 percent, according to states’ public announcements.

Sixteen states participated in the study of the 2018 general election, but not all have released their figures. Those that have include two all-mail states: Colorado and Washington.

Washington announced last month that it had referred 142 cases of suspected improper voting in 2018 to local election officials, or 0.00004 percent of the more than 3.1 million votes cast.

Wyman, who has been involved with ERIC since its inception, said the data shows that fraud is far from common — “exactly what my gut was telling me.”

“No rate is acceptable,” Wyman said of improper voting, adding that even the tiniest evidence “drives election officials crazy.”

“But it is also not rampant fraud,” she said.

Wise noted that any election involves risks of fraud or error but said she found it even more difficult to guarantee the integrity of the vote when she administered in-person contests, a process with its own vulnerabilities and complications.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“I was never able to reconcile an election. I was never able to come to the canvassing board and say, ‘We have zero discrepancies.’ . . . The points of opportunity for risk in polling places are extremely high in my book,” she said.

Still, critics of mail ballots say they provide a bigger opening for fraud than in-person voting because state voter registration rolls contain errors and could allow ballots to be sent to ineligible voters or wrong addresses. And vote-buying schemes may be harder to detect in by-mail elections, as would voter coercion and intimidation, they note.

AD

“I view this as a real threat to the integrity of our elections,” Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton said of mail voting during a House subcommittee hearing last week. He added: “It’s the wrong way to vote if you’re concerned about secure voting.”

Current and former election officials in vote-by-mail states said their systems are designed specifically to mitigate these risks, starting with a regular stream of mail contact with voters to establish that the address listed for them on the rolls is accurate. The ERIC system, as well as regular checks against DMV, death and other records, flag voter registration entries that may need updating. Federal law also requires states to conduct basic list maintenance.

Once voting begins, the linchpin of the process is a ballot return envelope, which typically requires the voter’s signature and includes a unique bar code linked to that voter’s record. When the ballot is returned and the bar code is scanned, no other ballot can be cast by that voter for that election.

“I hear chatter a lot about Washington State mailing millions of ballots into a black hole, into the wind,” said Julie Anderson, auditor of Pierce County, Wash., which includes Tacoma. She said many people don’t understand how the envelope design prevents double voting, comparing would-be cheaters to people who purchase a single movie ticket online and print dozens of copies with the goal of admitting others free.

“When the attendant scans your bar code, that’s it,” she said. “All the tickets you gave your friends — they’re out of luck.”

Other safeguards

The other mainstay of election security in vote-by-mail states is the signature verification process. Election workers are trained by law enforcement agencies to detect when a signature on the ballot envelope does not match signatures in a voter’s file. Discrepancies trigger a review that could end with a voter proving his or her identity — or being reported to law enforcement for possible ballot tampering.

“Every time I explain that every single signature is reviewed, it immediately shuts down any attempt at disqualifying mail ballots as fraught with voter fraud,” said Jocelyn Bucaro, director of elections for the city and county of Denver. “It’s next to impossible to manipulate an election through signature forgery.”

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

In Multnomah County, Ore., which includes Portland, elections director Tim Scott said he could name two cases in 12 years where a person tried to intentionally vote with another person's ballot. Typically, people just aren't aware of the rules, he said.

"When we challenge a voter on their signature, we send them a letter . . . and sometimes they call us back and say, 'Oh, well, I let my spouse or my roommate sign for me. I told them it was okay, so therefore it's okay, right?' They're not aware that signature is a piece of the security process," Scott said.

All-mail states have implemented a range of other safeguards to ensure ballots are secure at all times, including dropboxes under 24-hour surveillance cameras, rules that two people be present with any ballot from the moment of receipt or collection, and detailed logs and reconciliation rules that require votes to be accounted for, down to the ballot.

The best available data indicates that voter fraud in all-mail elections is rare.

The Post analyzed the total number of cases of suspected improper voting reported by state officials in five all-mail elections: the 2016 general elections in Colorado, Oregon and Washington and the 2018 general elections in Colorado and Washington.

Of the five, the rate of potential improper voting ranged from 0.000014 percent in Colorado in 2016 to 0.00004 percent in Washington in 2018. It is unknown how many of the cases led to criminal charges.

Separately, Oregon — which held its first statewide mail election in 1993 — had just 82 felony convictions under its election statutes between 1990 and 2019, according to public records obtained from the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, a government panel. The total included convictions for crimes not related to mail voting.

Even a database maintained by the Heritage Foundation, which conservatives frequently cite as evidence that voter fraud is prevalent, lists only 1,285 cases out of hundreds of millions of votes cast.

The number of cases related to absentee ballots is even less — 204 in the past 20 years, compared with a quarter-billion votes cast by mail during that time, according to an April analysis of the Heritage data by Amber McReynolds, chief executive of the National Vote at Home Institute and a former Denver elections director, and Charles Stewart III, a political science professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"That's one six-millionth of one percent of all votes!" Edward Perez, global director of technology development for the OSET Institute, a nonprofit election technology organization, wrote in an email. ". . . On a 100-mile road, a six-millionth of a percent is less than half an inch."

Hans von Spakovsky, manager of Heritage's election law reform initiative, said in a statement that the think tank's database "is only a sampling, not a comprehensive list."

"But it demonstrates the vulnerability of our election system to those willing to exploit those vulnerabilities to win elections," he added.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The burden this year is on election officials who are less experienced with high-volume voting by mail and the range of practices required to do it securely. A number of states do not have a signature verification rule, including Connecticut, Maryland and New Hampshire, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. States such as Alaska, Louisiana and Virginia require a witness to sign the ballot, but they do not match voters' signatures.

Wyman said that the questions swirling around mail voting "are good, healthy checks on our democracy," adding: "I welcome those hard questions and I welcome people criticizing what we do and challenging whether or not it is valid."

Why hacker 'protests' could be government's biggest threat (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 11:17 AM, Emily DeCiccio, 12006K] Video: HERE
As demonstrators across the country protest against police brutality and the killing of George Floyd, cybersecurity expert Marty Puranik warns about the potential of cyberattacks against police networks and local and state government servers.

"There's a number of hacker groups that have been defacing police websites, government websites," Puranik told Fox News. "I think it's something that hackers are looking to do and it's something that everybody needs to be aware of."

Puranik, who serves as CEO of cloud hosting provider Atlantic.net, explained that defacing or rendering government sites inoperable can create a situation where citizens lose confidence in the government and its ability to respond to events such as a burglary or home invasion. In turn, citizens may become more alarmed and take matters into their own hands.

Puranik advised to always double check the address bar in the browser to look for the "https" in front of the particular site.

"If a hacker group, for example, were to redirect the website to an impersonating website, it would show up in your address bar in your browser," said Puranik. "If you suspect something's wrong with it, call the department directly...and find other sites that have the phone number you're looking for to make sure they match what you're seeing on the website."

Puranik also noted that there has been an uptick in terms of bots and troll activity, where users will see the same tweets being sent out by multiple handles. According to Politico, China and Russia have flooded Twitter with hashtags and other content apparently aimed at sowing dissent across the United States. Puranik added that disinformation campaigns are "pretty typical nowadays with any kind of social unrest or social event, even with coronavirus."

The best way of combatting disinformation, Puranik explained, is for people to use trusted sources and to check the names of those sources because fake sites make sure their names are close to well-known news sites to deceive users.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“Most important is that you don’t listen to rumors or things you read online, because tens of thousands of bots could be retweeting things,” explained Puranik. “So you might read it two, three, 10 times and start thinking it’s true because all these other people are saying it, but it’s not necessarily true at all, so remain extra vigilant.”

The Cybersecurity 202: DARPA wants hackers to try to crack its new generation of super-secure hardware (Washington Post)
Washington Post [6/8/2020 7:18 AM, Joseph Marks, 18460K]
The Pentagon’s top research agency thinks it has developed a new generation of technology that will make voting machines, medical databases and other critical digital systems far more secure against hackers.

Now, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, which helped invent GPS and the Internet, is launching a contest for ethical hackers to try to break into that technology before it goes public. DARPA is offering the hackers cash prizes for any flaws they find using a program called a “bug bounty.”

The new technology is based on re-engineering hardware, such as computer chips and circuits, so that the typical methods hackers use to undermine the software that runs on them become impossible. That’s far different from the standard approach to cybersecurity, in which tech companies release a never-ending stream of software patches every time bad guys discover a new bug.

If industry widely adopts the new systems, DARPA researchers believe they can finally shift the tide in a battle that has favored hackers over defenders basically since the birth of the Internet.

“It [would have] a huge, huge impact,” DARPA Microsystems Technology Office Program Manager Keith Rebello, who’s running the program, told me. “About 70 percent of all cyberattacks are due to hardware vulnerabilities. If we can fix those permanently, we can take a large portion of the attack surface away.”

DARPA has built model versions of several different computerized systems that use the new hardware and that cybersecurity pros will try to break into.

The agency purposefully chose some of those models to demonstrate the dangers of the current generation of poorly secured hardware and to show how much safer the world could be with more secure versions, Rebello told me.

The biggest ticket item is a voter registration database. State and federal election officials have identified such systems as one of the greatest vulnerabilities if hackers from Russia or elsewhere try to undermine the 2020 election. Kremlin-linked hackers successfully broke into voter databases in Illinois and Florida in 2016, though there’s no evidence they changed any votes.

If DARPA can prove its version of the database is far tougher to hack, that could be a game-changer, allowing officials to be far more confident about election security.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Another model for the bug bounty is a medical database containing research into the novel coronavirus — information that FBI and Department of Homeland Security officials say is being targeted by Chinese hackers.

“We wanted to use demonstrations that are relevant to show the impact that we can have with this technology,” Rebello told me.

The program, which is officially called System Security Integration Through Hardware and Firmware, or SSITH, started in 2017 and will run for another year. So there will be time to make fixes based on problems the cybersecurity pros uncover.

The secure hardware itself is funded by DARPA but is being built by researchers and academics at places like Lockheed Martin, the University of Michigan and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

This is the first bug bounty for the DARPA hardware program, but such programs have become increasingly popular in government in recent years.

DARPA is working with the Defense Digital Service, a technology tiger team inside the Pentagon that has managed bug bounties for the Army, Navy and Air Force and recently helped find hackable bugs in systems on a U.S. fighter jet.

The project is also being managed by the cybersecurity company Synack, which specializes in running bug bounties and has worked with the Defense Digital Service on some of its earlier projects.

The largest share of the hacking will be done by cybersecurity pros who work regularly with Synack and have expertise in a number of specialized areas, including hacking hardware. There will also be a broader part of the program that’s basically open to anyone with hacking experience who isn’t barred from working with the government, such as people on terrorist watch lists.

“This is a wide pool of people with different skill sets that we might not always find in government,” Rebello said. “We’ll have three months for the hacker community to experiment and take things apart, and try and reverse-engineer our hardware to see if they can break it.”

DARPA couldn’t say how much money it expects to pay out to hackers who find bugs. Synack said its payouts “typically range from hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars for very severe vulnerabilities.”

The new secure hardware won’t be commercially available in time for the election in November or probably to protect research for a coronavirus vaccine.

But Rebello is hopeful it will start being integrated into some commercially available computer chips in the next two to four years, he told me.

A handful of companies have already expressed interest in piloting some version of the system, including the British firm Arm Holdings, he said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The rush is on because cybersecurity is going to grow far more important during the next decade.

That's partly because critical business sectors will be doing far more of their work using online systems, such as manufacturing, medicine, transportation, energy and agriculture. The Internet will also begin connecting to a slew of new devices that weren't networked before, such as driverless cars, thermostats and home security systems, creating far more opportunities for hackers.

"The attack surface is going to explode, so we really need to start thinking about how we can rein that in," Rebello said. "And having secure hardware, I think, is one very important key to solving that puzzle."

[OK] Oklahoma's Top Elections Official Warns Misinformation is Biggest Security Threat in 2020 (Public Radio Tulsa)
Public Radio Tulsa [6/8/2020 6:00 AM, Matt Trotter, 5K]
Oklahoma's top elections official says misinformation is likely the biggest threat to the state's elections in 2020, ahead of cyber threats and physical tampering.

State Election Board Secretary Paul Ziriax said misinformation can include false information about election laws and procedures, like claims different parties will be voting on different days.

"Also, and this is becoming all too common, there's a growing trend of false accusations of voter suppression or voter fraud. Now, can suppression happen? Can fraud happen? Sure, but there are safeguards in place against both," Ziriax said.

Ziriax said misinformation should be reported to local and state election officials. He told the University of Southern California Election Cybersecurity Initiative Oklahoma's statewide but siloed system is well-protected from other threats.

Like 2016, foreign actors could again be a major source and amplifier of that misinformation with social media posts aimed at voters. Sarah Mojarad, a misinformation expert with the University of Southern California, said no one was immune four years ago.

"Oftentimes, misinformation and bots are associated with one party in particular; however, … on both sides of politics and both sides of the election, misinformation and bots were influencing the discussions," Mojarad said.

Mojarad said rather than just sharing something, social media users should check out where and who a post came from first. Information coming from only one place, on a website with a URL that mirrors a credible site (think publicradiotulsa.org.ru) or that tries to incite an emotional response should raise red flags about accuracy.

[Editorial note: consult audio at source link]

Terrorism Investigations

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[MD] Man accused of terror plot seek to withdraw guilty plea (ABC News)
ABC News [6/8/2020 6:32 PM, Michael Kunzelman, AP, 3795K]
A former Coast Guard lieutenant accused of plotting politically motivated killings inspired by a far-right mass murderer asked a federal appeals court on Monday to let him withdraw his guilty plea or else throw out his sentence of more than 13 years in prison.

In a court filing, a defense attorney argued that Christopher Hasson's 160-month prison term was roughly four times longer than sentencing guidelines would have called for if U.S. District Judge George Hazel had not mistakenly applied a "terrorism enhancement" to the sentence.

Prosecutors didn't charge Hasson, 50, with any terrorism-related offenses. He pleaded guilty last October to possessing unregistered and unserialized silencers, being a drug addict in possession of firearms and illegal possession of tramadol, an opioid painkiller.

The judge "clearly erred by finding Hasson's offenses were intended to promote a federal crime of terrorism," assistant federal public defender Cullen Macbeth wrote.

Prosecutors have until June 29 to respond in writing to Macbeth's filing. The appeal was filed with the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Federal prosecutors called Hasson a domestic terrorist and self-described white nationalist. In an earlier court filing, prosecutors said Hasson appeared to be planning attacks inspired by the manifesto of Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian far-right terrorist who killed 77 people in a 2011 bomb-and-shooting rampage.

Prosecutors also claimed Hasson drew up what appeared to be a computer spreadsheet hit list naming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and Democratic presidential hopefuls, including Elizabeth Warren. He also mentioned several network TV journalists, including MSNBC's Chris Hayes and Joe Scarborough and CNN's Chris Cuomo and Van Jones.

When investigators searched Hasson's basement apartment in Silver Spring, Maryland, they found 15 guns, including seven rifles, and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

Stephen Hart, a defense witness who is an expert in violence risk assessment, rejected prosecutors' theory that Hasson intended to carry out an attack.

Macbeth said prosecutors' claims are primarily based on a handful of internet searches and two unsent letters he wrote more than a year before his arrest. Hasson's lawyers have questioned why federal authorities haven't produced any reports to support their claims that Hasson was actually a violence risk.

"Its failure to do so suggests that either the government conducted a threat assessment and found Hasson non-violent, or it was unwilling to conduct an assessment because it feared the results would show Hasson was not a threat. Both possibilities undermine (Hazel's) factual finding," Macbeth wrote Monday.

Hasson had faced a maximum prison sentence of 31 years at sentencing.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Hazel said he believes the officer was preparing to carry out a “mass casualty assault as a way to act out his white nationalist views.”

“The need to protect the public is of paramount importance,” the judge said.

Hasson said he has never harmed anybody in his life and wasn’t planning to hurt anyone “in any way, shape or form.” But he apologized to his family, his colleagues and to the public, saying he knew his actions alarmed many people.

“I am embarrassed by these things and sorry for the pain they have caused,” he said.

Adm. Karl Schultz, the Coast Guard’s commandant, has said Hasson was being “involuntarily separated” from the guard without “any rights, benefits and retirement pay, which he may have otherwise been entitled.”

National Security News

Who are the Americans being held as ‘political prisoners’ abroad? (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 1:16 PM, Hollie McKay, 12006K]
After almost two years ailing behind bars in the bowels of an Iranian prison and coming down with the novel coronavirus, cancer survivor Michael White last week was freed and brought home.

The U.S. Navy veteran joins the ranks of scores of Americans brought home under President Trump’s aggressive push to free unfairly detained citizens – yet there are many others still languishing in all corners of the globe.

"Iran is a prime example of the different approaches taken by the current and previous U.S. administrations. While diplomacy was an essential feature of both, in each instance, it was wielded differently," Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow and Iran expert at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), told Fox News. "Specifically, the Trump administration has been able to maintain a policy of maximum pressure on Iran while securing the release of Americans. This was not the case in 2016, where a fatally flawed nuclear deal went into effect, and pallets of cash were delivered."

While there is believed to be thousands of U.S. citizens incarcerated abroad, the U.S. State Department distinguishes those alleged to have been involved in crimes with those considered to be political pawns, sometimes referred to as hostages, held by foreign governments and often aimed at leveraging deals or purporting to coerce the U.S. government.

The number of exact political prisoners remains classified, although one former government officials closely connected to the matter told Fox News that the number is likely between 50 and 100 and spawning multiple countries. Not all cases are made public, for varying reasons in that often diplomats prefer to handle negotiations quietly, but many are brought into the limelight often by frustrated family members hoping to garner media attention.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

So what Americans are known to still be detained abroad?

IRAN

The U.S. is still seeking freedom for businessmen Baquer Namazi and his son Siamak Namazi, who remain in Iran under dubious charges.

Baquer, a dual Iranian-American citizen, was apprehended by authorities while on business in Iran – along with his son – in 2015 and both were sentenced to 10 years in prison for "collusion with an enemy state," pointing to the United States.

While Siamak remains in the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran, 84-year-old Baquer "is out of prison but still very sick and not allowed to leave Iran despite his frail condition and need for urgent medical attention," his son Babak Namazi said in a statement last week.

Meanwhile, Morad Tahbaz – a fellow Iranian-American who also holds British citizenship – was arrested in early 2018 and last year slapped with 10 years imprisonment for "contact with the enemy U.S. government." Tahbaz is a well-known conservationist and co-founder of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, which aims to study and protect the endangered Asiatic cheetah.

In a statement regarding White's release last week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo additionally called for their release, stressing that "the United States will not rest until we bring every American detained in Iran and around the world back home to their loved ones."

RUSSIA

The U.S. is yet to bring home Paul Whelan from Russia. The former U.S. Marine, 50, was arrested by security agents in Moscow in December 2018, accused of having a USB drive that contained classified information and of being a foreign agent.

At the time, Whelan – who had traveled to Russia multiple times since 2006 – said he returned to attend a wedding when he was seized by authorities. Prosecutors are seeking an 18-year prison sentence for Whelan, who holds multiple passports, including the U.K. and Ireland. Concerns have also been sparked for his health, given that he underwent emergency hernia surgery late last month.

His trial is ongoing.

SYRIA

In Syria, the government of Bashar al-Assad's government is believed to have detained at least two Americans: psychologist Majd Kamalmaz and freelance journalist Austin Tice.

Kamalmaz, according to the FBI, is a Syrian-American who was treating refugees in the region from war-ravaged Syria. In February of 2017, the now 62-year-old traveled to his native land to visit an elderly family member in Damascus.

"During this trip, he was also looking to establish a clinic to aid those who have been

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

traumatized by the Syrian civil war. A day after arriving, Kamalmaz was stopped at a Syrian Government checkpoint in Mezzeh, a suburb of Damascus, and has not been seen or heard from since that day," U.S. officials stated. "Kamalmaz is diabetic and requires regular medication."

And there is former U.S. Marine-turned-journalist Austin Tice, 37, who vanished amid the nation's brutal civil war in 2012. After his disappearance, a video emerged of him blindfolded and being marched into the hills at the behest of what appears to be armed insurgents; however, multiple officials have since claimed that such a clip was likely a ruse and that he was jailed by the Syrian regime.

In December 2018, Tice's parents announced during a press conference that they had received new proof-of-life information indicating that he was still alive.

VENEZUELA

As relations between the U.S. and Venezuela have continued to sour, concerns were heightened earlier this year with regards to the wellbeing of the "CITGO 6" – five U.S. citizens and one legal resident who have been detained by the Maduro regime for more than two years.

Alirio Zambrano and his brother Luis Zambrano, and former CITGO vice presidents Jorge Toledo, Tomeu Vadell, and Gustavo Cardenas and president Jose Pereira remain in custody.

"Still to this day, he has not been allowed to see his lawyer. No one has really seen him; we don't know what he looks like or what his condition is," Veronica Vadell, the daughter of Vadell, told Fox News on Monday. "It has been 930 days. Now with COVID and everything there on lockdown, all we can do is sit around in limbo."

Veronica noted that while they receive "sporadic phone calls" from their father, who can say very little, he is technically in a state of "forced disappearance" as he has not been able to visit with a lawyer and nobody has confirmed his presence in the maximum security facility.

"My father needs to be released on a humanitarian basis. He is going to be 61 in August, and he has cardiovascular and respiratory issues," she continued. "We're desperate for anything to happen."

His trial was slated to begin in March but was canceled as the global cornavirus pandemic struck, and a new date is yet to be set.

The American oil executives employed by the Houston-headquartered CITGO, a division of Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, were initially seized by officials in late November 2017 – after being lured to the Venezuelan capital of Caracas for a meeting – and slapped with corruption charges.

More recently, former U.S. Special Forces operators Airan Berry and Luke Denman were detained in early May following a bizarre, ill-equipped effort to overthrow Maduro. The Trump administration has rejected any involvement in the operation, which was foiled by

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

agents loyal to the Caracas leadership long before it was executed.

CHINA

Americans who operated an English teaching program, China Horizons, remain under the thumb of Chinese authorities.

On Sept. 27, 2019, Idaho native Alyssa Petersen, 28, the director of the program – which enabled college students to visit China and teach English as a second language – was suddenly arrested near Shanghai. Two days later, the company's owner and founder, Jacob Harlan, was also detained by police under the guise that they were both "illegally moving people across borders."

Last November, Petersen, and Harlan were released on bail, but the family has said the two have since been taken back into custody and that the prison is under lockdown as a result of the novel coronavirus.

According to updates issued by Peterson's family on a GoFundMe page seeking financial aid to bring her home, her case has reached the "prosecution phase."

"She wakes up when told; she goes to sleep when told. She spends her day in a Jail Cell or walking in a circle counting steps. She cannot have any contact with anyone outside of a Consulate Officer who can visit once a month and a Lawyer," Peterson's sister wrote. "The investigation could take months, even years without proper legal representation. Alyssa needs a Lawyer Now, and they aren't cheap. We are desperately seeking help to raise funds to offset the substantial legal fees and fines that will occur as we struggle to help Alyssa gain her freedom."

John Cao, 60, a North Carolina-based pastor and lawful resident, is also being held on the same charge of illegal border maneuvering.

Cao – who turned to Christianity after coming to America in his 20s– devoted much of his life to building schools and providing financial aid to ethnic minorities oppressed in Burma, but was sentenced to seven years behind bars in China in March 2018 in what many officials deem a "wrongful conviction."

According to Michael Rubin, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the number of Americans detained under dubious circumstances fluctuates with time.

"The three biggest offenders in recent years have been Iran, North Korea, and Cuba, with Lebanon and Egypt also holding Americans prisoner from time to time," he said. "The problem in many of these countries – Iran, Russia, Cuba, etc., is they tend not to recognize American citizenship for those who had emigrated to America. It takes an act of parliament, for example, for Iran to recognize the revocation of Iranian citizenship even if an Iranian American doesn't want to be considered Iranian. Too many dual national travelers make it worse by – for the sake of ease – traveling on a non-American passport."

The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

On its website, it vows that one of its highest priorities is aiding Americans who have been incarcerated. However, the department stresses that it can ensure prison officials are providing appropriate medical care, contact family and friends and provide a list of English-speaking attorneys, it cannot merely get citizens out of jail, pay legal or medical fees, or state to the court whether someone is innocent or guilty.

Following failed efforts to free U.S. journalist James Foley from ISIS captivity in Syria, the Obama administration in 2014 developed a "hostage fusion cell" to better coordinate the release process and ensure that the government, intelligence agencies, and the FBI were adequately sharing information and that coordinated responses were in place.

"There should be no rank ordering of U.S. hostages abroad. Wherever Americans are detained abroad, priority number one must be their safe and speedy return," added Taleblu. "No jurisdiction or person matters more than any other."

'Globally It's Worsening,' W.H.O. Says of Coronavirus Pandemic (New York Times)
New York Times [6/8/2020 4:29 PM, Staff, 40577K] Video: HERE
The World Health Organization said that the number of new daily coronavirus cases worldwide hit a new high on Sunday.

[Mexico] Mexican cartels are stockpiling drugs and money amid COVID-19 pandemic (USA Today)
USA Today [6/8/2020 10:30 AM, Beth Warren and Karol Suarez, 8982K]
The COVID-19 pandemic is making meth more expensive in much of the U.S.

Travel restrictions at U.S.-Mexico border crossings and abroad have made it harder for cartels to move drugs and drug profits without detection, according to agents with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

"There's been stockpiling of drugs and money on both sides of the Southwest border, and money laundering activity has decreased," said J. Todd Scott, special agent in charge of the DEA's Louisville Field Division.

"People, in general, aren't moving; stuff isn't moving," he said. "Cartels function best when they can kind of move undercover, move with the legitimate commerce."

Travel restrictions to and from China have also slowed the importation of precursor chemicals, which cartels use to make meth and fentanyl. Cartels, in turn, have slowed the amount of meth sent to America.

To lessen the financial blow, cartels have inflated the price of drugs, especially meth, according to drug agents across the country.

"About half of our field divisions are reporting price increases at the retail level of meth and increases for fentanyl" across the country, said Scott, who directs agents and intelligence analysts in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia.

"There's less of it out there, they're gonna charge more."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

‘Every arm of cartels are having to adjust’

In Los Angeles, a major hub for Mexican cartels, meth prices have doubled. At the end of last year, a trafficker could buy a pound at wholesale from a cartel associate for $900. But then prices began to rise, climbing to $1,800 to $2,000 per pound, said Bill Bodner, special agent in charge of the DEA’s Los Angeles Field Division.

The street-level price of fentanyl and crystal methamphetamine, called "ice," have increased in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, said Vic Brown, executive director of Appalachia High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task forces. State lockdowns and the recommended reduction of travel have slowed drug trafficking along interstate corridors as well, he said.

“With methamphetamine, we’re seeing prices have gone up across the state of New Mexico,” said Will Glaspy, head of High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task forces in the Southwest Border New Mexico Region.

In the DEA New England Field Division —which also includes Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Maine, Rhode Island and New Hampshire — investigators noticed slight price increases for fentanyl and cocaine at the end of May, but no increase for meth in their region, said division spokesman Timothy Desmond. The virus hasn’t hampered drug sales, he said.

The coronavirus also has impacted Mexican cartels’ global business.

The cartels have struggled to get drugs in and money out of Australia, said Kevin Merkel, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s Australia attaché. This is now the most sought-after illicit drug market with users willing to pay a much higher price for top-quality Mexican meth than American buyers.

"As businesses are having to adjust, every arm of cartels are having to adjust," Merkel said.

Meth prices started to climb in Australia in May and have doubled in some areas, the drug agent said. A kilo of meth used to cost between $90,000 to $130,000 but is now garnering up to $200,000, he said. Cocaine, harder to get during the pandemic, followed a similar spike. With dealers paying more, they’re passing that additional cost to users.

See also:Why the coronavirus pandemic is fueling drug overdoses in Kentucky

In East and Southeast Asia, the supply of meth and other synthetic opioids has swelled, causing prices to fall, according to a May report of the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime.

"While the world has shifted its attention to the COVID-19 pandemic, all indications are that production and trafficking of synthetic drugs and chemicals continue at record levels in the region," Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, said mid-May.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

As people who are addicted scramble to pay more for their fix, agents predict an increase in car, garage and home burglaries as well as thefts.

"I would be very surprised if over the next three to four months, we didn't see property crimes go up," said Bodner, head of LA drug agents. "When prices go up, addicts have to pay, and they have to get the money from somewhere."

The money paid for drugs is stockpiling in the U.S. and Australia, as cartels are leery of getting caught during a time of reduced travel.

During a 10-week period beginning in March, drug agents in the Los Angeles area seized $10 million in drug money, Bodner said. That's more than double drug profit seizures during the same time period last year. He explained that traffickers who used to limit money stored in stash houses to $100,000 to $200,000 are now keeping $1 million or more.

After law enforcement stumbled onto several large stockpiles of drug proceeds, cartels made quick changes.

"They're having to resort to the old-fashioned way of putting money back in the trunk of a car and driving it south," Bodner said.

Virus also impacts drug agents
As cartel members and associates have made adjustments during the pandemic, so have investigators.

"Routine hand-to-hand drug deals or buys you might have done a few weeks ago are a little tougher to pull off now," Scott, the DEA agent in Louisville, said. "But the bigger investigations, the wire intercepts, the long-term complex conspiracy cases are still going on.

"We've got enough gear to go out and do the arrests we need to do."

Scott moved from Texas to Kentucky in May during the pandemic to lead the DEA's Louisville Field Division. He had to use video conferencing to meet his new agents, who he said continue to "vigorously" pursue cases.

"It hasn't been easy, and we've had to get a bit creative in how we safely approach our operations, but we haven't let the pandemic stop our efforts to support DEA's mission and keep our communities safe," he said.

Merkel, over DEA operations in the Far East, oversees one of the divisions most impacted by the virus. Several of his agents and their families were evacuated from China, Indonesia and parts of Manila. Those agents, temporarily relocated to Washington, D.C., have remained in contact with their counterparts in their host countries to coordinate investigations as well as search warrants and arrests.

"They're on the other side of the world still getting their job done," Merkle said. "It's impressive."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Across the U.S., federal agents are wearing face masks, gloves and eye protection to search suspects' homes and make arrests.

In New York, police and DEA agents teamed to shut down a drug ring in the Bronx in May with more than a million dollars in heroin and fentanyl.

"Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we arrested six drug traffickers who aptly branded their product 'coronavirus'," DEA Special Agent in Charge Ray Donovan, over the New York Division, said in a tweet.

However, some police departments remain concerned about safety and want to hold off on interviews and searches and instead focus on surveillance.

"Some of those departments don't want their guys going out," said Glaspy, who oversees the task forces at the border that team federal agents with local and state police.

In Mexico, cartels capitalize on pandemic

In Mexico, cartels are finding ways to capitalize on the virus. That includes fighting over drug sales and coveted routes as police and military are having to turn their focus from traffickers to civil unrest as a result of the coronavirus, which has killed more than 13,000 people in Mexico.

"That obviously distracts law enforcement from controlling many highways and many drug distribution points, and that could promote the trafficking or domestic sale of drugs," said Eduardo Guerrero Gutiérrez, a public safety consultant and political analyst based in Mexico City.

The cartel turf wars have contributed to a spike in homicides, which topped 11,535 by the end of April, according to the report from country's security ministry. At that pace, the country is expected to suffer one of its deadliest years since record keeping began in 1997.

All the while, during the pandemic, cartels are delivering food and essential household items to impoverished residents in Mexico to garner local support and mark their turf.

Cartel members are boasting about their supposed good deeds on social media, posting videos and photos of boxes of supplies branded with their cartel name, such as CJNG, for the Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generción or its leader "El Mencho."

But, the cartels are stealing the food they hand out from markets in Mexico in an attempt to bolster their image and profit off the pandemic, Merkel said.

"It's disgusting."

The food handouts are a common propaganda campaign for cartels, said Javier Oliva, political and social sciences professor and researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

"The truth is that they just hand out 30 or 40 boxes," not enough to lessen the poverty, Oliva said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

"They only want to show the message, 'Here we are,'" especially to rival cartels.

In contrast, the cartel also frequently uses social media to spread fear by posting photos and videos of kidnappings, torture and killings of rivals, which was detailed in a November Courier Journal special report on the cartel and El Mencho.

Will virus have lasting impact on drug war?
Drug agents expect cartels to resume traditional money laundering and drug smuggling methods once flights and traffic at the border increase. They don't know if cartels have found new ways to get drugs from Mexico into the U.S. amid travel restrictions that they could continue to use.

"It's far too soon to know exactly how COVID-19 is affecting the cartels," Scott said during an interview in Louisville. "We just don't have enough data."

In Los Angeles, Bodner agreed, but added: "The drug business is a pretty efficient market.

"They're always looking for new opportunities."

Merkel said agents will investigate how cartels adjusted during the pandemic to find new ways to attack them.

"We've seen what can happen when cartels are disrupted on a global scale," he said. "We're going to attempt to exploit that as much as we can."

[Mexico] Weekend of violence lashes Mexico, sparks dispute (AP)
AP [6/8/2020 6:39 PM, Alfredo Peña, 1891K]
After a weekend of drug-gang killings left almost three dozen people dead in the industrial state of Guanajuato, as well as confrontations along the border, Mexico's president cited it Monday as an example of "neoliberal polices that have been a resounding failure."

A group of men attacked a drug rehabilitation center in Irapuato, Guanajuato on Saturday and killed 10 people there, but those were just part of 34 murders committed in the state over the weekend.

The state is home to a growing industrial sector, including a half-dozen foreign auto manufacturers. But the state is the scene of a bloody turf battle between the Jalisco Cartel and the home-grown Santa Rosa de Lima gang.

"During the whole neoliberal period Guanajuato has grown by 5 percent per year and has seen investment and new auto plants opening, but it is in first place for homicides," President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Monday.

López Obrador has rejected direct confrontation with drug cartels and bet on long-term social programs, like job-training and scholarships, to reduce the number of young people recruited by drug gangs. But he thinks government-run programs — not the kind of private-sector job creation that is happening in Guanajuato — is needed.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

It's all part of López Obrador's proposals for a "new economy," where progress and well-being is not just measured by economic growth.

"So are we are just going to measure Gross Domestic Product? Shouldn't peace be measured? People's welfare, their tranquility?" said López Obrador, who has proposed a new "Well-being Index" to measure progress, instead of relying on GDP.

The Mexican Employer's Federation quickly retorted that "People's well being is achieved with a sound economy and jobs, not with a new "Well-being Index." The federation, which has been critical of López Obrador for not implementing economic stimulus programs during the coronavirus pandemic, said "if the economy collapses, the well-being of Mexicans also collapses."

Projecting ideological differences onto the continued violence in Guanajuato — which is governed by the conservative National Action Party — is nothing new. Guanajuato leads Mexico in homicides, though state officials blame out-of-state killers from the Jalisco Cartel, based in a neighboring state. Guanajuato, with just 5% of Mexico's population, accounts for about 13% of the country's murders. López Obrador said the state accounted for 20% of the country's homicides last week.

The approach to handling the violence has also differed; while López Obrador's federal National Guard has been posted to Guanajuato, those officers largely perform guide duty and routine patrols. But Guanajuato's state police has more directly gone after the gangs, with the result that, on June 1, four police officers were gunned down by gangs in the city of Celaya.

López Obrador has said "you cannot fight violence with more violence," and has practiced a more hands-off approach toward fighting the cartels.

But the limits of that policy were on display over the weekend in the northern border state of Tamaulipas, where the burned-out wreckage of five home-made tanks used by warring drug cartels littered a road just a few miles from the U.S. border. The cartels weld metal plates onto trucks to create the tank-like vehicles, known as "monsters."

A bystander was killed during the cartel shootouts in which the armored vehicles were destroyed, and her two daughters were wounded. The woman made a living producing charcoal near the city of Camargo, Tamaulipas, and was hit by gunfire Sunday at a gas station where she had gone to buy food.

The gun battles had started Friday, when gunmen told local residents not to go out on the streets. The Northeast Cartel, once a part of the Zetas, is trying to win control over the area around Miguel Aleman from the Gulf cartel.

The remnants of the old Gulf and Zetas cartels have been fighting bloody turf battles over that stretch of the border for about a decade. Mexican marines once patrolled the area and tried to keep the cartels in check, but they have since pulled off land duty and the National Guard and army have struggled with the problem.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

A local official speaking on condition of anonymity said that the army had failed to show up during the gunbattles despite repeated calls.

[Brazil] Brazil reports 679 new coronavirus deaths amid controversy over data (Reuters)
Reuters [6/8/2020 7:40 PM, Pedro Fonseca, Eduardo Simões, 5304K]
Brazil reported 679 new COVID-19 deaths and 15,654 additional confirmed cases on Monday, as controversy grew over the country's official coronavirus data amid allegations of manipulation from a senior lawmaker.

Brazil's Health Ministry removed data from its website over the weekend and stopped releasing cumulative totals for coronavirus deaths and infections. The move came soon after it released two contradictory sets of data.

The numbers the government issued on Monday were the same as those reported earlier by the National Council of Health Secretaries (Conass), which brings together the heads of Brazil's state health departments but is separate from the federal health ministry.

According to Conass, Brazil's death toll now stands at 37,134, the world's third highest after the United States and Britain. There were 707,412 confirmed cases as of Monday, the second highest level after the United States.

In a statement on Monday, the health ministry said its weekend dataset problems stemmed primarily from mistakes in the numbers from two states that were later corrected.

But discrepancies in the daily death toll it reported prompted criticism from across the political spectrum, including a call for a congressional inquiry.

"By changing the numbers, the Ministry of Health covers the sun with a sieve," Rodrigo Maia, speaker of the lower house, said on Twitter.

"The credibility of the statistics needs to be urgently recovered. A ministry that manipulates numbers creates a parallel world in order not to face the reality of the facts," he added.

Senator Eliziane Gama, leader of centrist party Citizenship, asked the Senate to open an inquiry into the numbers, while the World Health Organization (WHO) stressed the importance of "consistent and transparent" communication from Brazil.

For Carlos Machado, head of research at the National School of Public Health, the lack of dependable data in Brazil is dangerous.

"Not having updated and reliable data during a pandemic of this proportion is like driving in the dark," he said.

"While we do not have a vaccine, information is the best weapon we have," he added.

[Mali] French troops killed top al Qaeda leader in Mali, Pentagon confirms (The Hill)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The Hill [6/8/2020 2:13 PM, Ellen Mitchell, 3408K]
French troops last week killed a top al Qaeda leader in northern Mali, the Pentagon confirmed on Monday.

French officials announced on Friday that two days earlier forces killed Abdelmalek Droukdal, the head of the extremist group's affiliates in North Africa and the Sahel.

Droukdal was involved in all aspects of al Qaeda in the region, including financing, planning and carrying out terrorist attacks, according to a U.S. Africa Command statement.

"Droukdal was the engineer behind expanding [the group's] ideology throughout the Sahel and Maghreb, and more recently into western Africa, where al-Qa'ida aligned elements have conducted attacks and kidnappings from Nigeria to Cote d'Ivoire," Rear Adm. Heidi Berg, Africom's director of intelligence, said in the statement.

"He was responsible for numerous attacks and the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians."

French Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly wrote on Twitter Friday that Droukdal died with "several of his close collaborators."

The U.S. military provided intelligence for the mission.

"The cooperation that led to the elimination of this high-level al-Qa'ida leader shows the value of our partnerships and the return on investment these mutually beneficial relationships bring to U.S. and international security," Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, Special Operations Command Africa commander, said in the statement.

U.S. forces are in West Africa to train and assist security forces in an effort to quell extremist Islamic groups including Boko Haram and those that pledge loyalty to the Islamic State and al Qaeda.

Reports emerged late last year that Defense Secretary Mark Esper was mulling greatly reducing or completely withdrawing U.S. troops from West Africa — a plan that would focus on several hundred American troops deployed in Niger, Chad and Mali — though such a move has been met with pushback on Capitol Hill.

[Germany] Trump Still Hasn't Told Germany That He's Pulling Out Troops (Bloomberg)
Bloomberg [6/8/2020 9:15 AM, Raymond Colitt and Patrick Donahue, 6400K]
Chancellor Angela Merkel's government said it's received no official word from Washington on plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Germany, the latest sign of deteriorating relations between the two countries.

"As of this hour, there is no official confirmation by the appropriate authorities in the United States whether these plans will really be carried out or not," Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said during a press conference in Berlin on Monday, days after the news was reported by numerous media outlets. "We're only aware of the information that is in the press."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Merkel's chief spokesman, Steffen Seibert, earlier had a similar response when asked at a regular news conference.

President Donald Trump's directive to pull 9,500 troops from Germany caught authorities off guard and underscored just how much relations between Washington and Berlin have cooled.

"The fact is that the presence of U.S. soldiers in Germany serves the overall security of NATO, so American security as well," Kramp-Karrenbauer said. "That's the basis of our cooperation."

Merkel and Trump have sparred repeatedly over issues from international trade to defense strategy. The two have also taken divergent paths to combating the coronavirus. Last month, she snubbed the U.S. president's plan to hold an in-person Group of Seven summit in June.

"The president is punishing Merkel not only for rejecting his invite to a G-7 that is clearly a political stunt here in occupied Washington but for other perceived slights," Jim Townsend, a former Pentagon official for European and NATO policy, wrote on Twitter. "It's so transparent. Allies wonder if they're next."

While Trump has long insisted that Germany must step up defense spending, Merkel has stood her ground on a broad range of issues, insisting on a multilateral, rules-based approach to global economic affairs and backing a pipeline that is to carry Russian gas to Germany despite U.S. opposition.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg vowed to push for more political unity in the transatlantic alliance and said the coronavirus pandemic is magnifying a range of threats to the security of the alliance. He cited Russian military muscle-flexing, Middle East terrorism, state-sponsored disinformation and China's geopolitical rise.

"Military strength is only part of the answer -- we also need to use NATO more politically," Stoltenberg told an online event on Monday. "This means bringing all the issues that affect our security to NATO's table, so that we can forge stronger consensus sooner and more systematically."

Lawmakers and government officials in Berlin criticized Trump's troop decision, which would cut U.S. forces in Germany by slightly more than a quarter, as an affront.

But the ultimate impact on the country's security is seen as limited. The U.S. troop strength in Germany has dwindled to about 34,500 from a peak of 274,000 during the 1960s, and Kramp-Karrenbauer implied the biggest blow would be to the people involved.

German-American cooperations is "the basis on which many American soldiers have become a real element within German society, have been well integrated in communities, and play an important role," she said.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[Iran] U.S. sanctions imposed against Iranian shipping go into effect (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 10:55 PM, UPI, 1711K]
The Trump administration imposed sanctions against Iran on Monday that target the Middle Eastern nation's shipping network over allegations of supporting Tehran's proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The sanctions, previously announced in December, went into effect Monday against the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines and its Shanghai-based subsidiary E-Sail Shipping Company after a 180-day wind-down period to allow humanitarian goods companies time to find alternative methods to ship their wares into the Middle Eastern nation, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

"Now that this generous delay has come to an end, those in the commercial and maritime industries doing business with Iran must use carriers or shipping methods other than IRISL or E-Sail; any government, entity or individual that chooses to continue doing business with IRISL and/or E-Sail now risks exposure to U.S. WMD sanctions," he said.

Sanctions against IRISL and E-Sail Shipping Company come into effect today. Despite Iran's claims that it will never develop nuclear weapons and associated delivery systems, the Iranian regime has continued to pursue and procure proliferation-sensitive items.— Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) June 8, 2020

In December, Pompeo told reporters IRISL was "the shipping line of choice" for Iranian procuring agents and has contributed to Tehran's proliferation of WMDs. ESAIL, he said, ships "illicit materials" from Iran's Aerospace Industries Organization that oversees its weapons industry.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani balked at the round of sanctions when they were announced late last year, vowing to either bypass them or "compel the enemy to repent."

The Trump administration has repeatedly imposed sanctions against Tehran as part of its so-called maximum pressure campaign to force it back to the negotiation table over a new nuclear pact after President Donald Trump withdrew from an Obama-era multination nuclear accord with Iran in May 2018.

On Monday, Pompeo urged international authorities to investigate all activity in their ports associated with the two Iranian shipping companies and to "take appropriate action to put a halt to it."

"The world must be vigilant and take action to prevent Iran from acquiring proliferation-sensitive items that further threaten regional stability and security," he said.

[Iran] Trump Admin Sanctions Iranian Shipping Company Tied to WMD Program (Free Beacon)
Free Beacon [6/8/2020 5:30 PM, Adam Kredo, 108K]
The Trump administration on Monday reimposed sanctions on Iran's shipping industry due to its efforts to import ballistic missile technology and other equipment used as part of Tehran's weapons of mass destruction program.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The State Department announced that sanctions will be slapped on the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) and a subsidiary corporation based in China, which has helped Iran skirt sanctions in the past. The sanctions on the entities were lifted for the past six months to help Iran import medical goods needed to aid its response to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Now that this generous delay has come to an end, those in the commercial and maritime industries doing business with Iran must use carriers or shipping methods other than IRISL" or risk facing "exposure to U.S. WMD sanctions," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

Iran's shipping sector is key to its import of illicit missile technology and other nuclear proliferation-sensitive technologies tied to the country's atomic weapons program.

"Despite Iran's claims that it will never develop nuclear weapons and associated delivery systems, the Iranian regime has continued to pursue and procure proliferation-sensitive items in violation" of United Nations accords barring such activity, Pompeo said.

[Iran] Exclusive: Congressional Republicans to Unveil Largest Iran Sanctions Plan in History (Free Beacon)
Free Beacon [6/8/2020 5:00 AM, Adam Kredo, 108K]
Congressional Republicans will unveil this week the largest package of Iran sanctions in history, an unprecedented plan that aims to cripple Tehran's global terrorism enterprise and bankrupt the cash-strapped regime, according to a copy of the legislative package exclusively obtained by the Washington Free Beacon.

The Republican Study Committee (RSC), the largest caucus of GOP lawmakers in Congress, will on Wednesday release a massive legislative proposal targeting malign regimes across the globe, including Russia, China, and Iran. The policy proposal includes more than 140 new initiatives intending to reassert Republican leadership on the foreign policy stage.

The Iran portion includes "the toughest sanctions that have ever been proposed by Congress on Iran," according to Rep. Mike Johnson (R., La.), the RSC's chairman. It would greatly expand the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign and force the removal of several contested policies that Republicans argue have kept the Iran nuclear accord on life support since President Donald Trump abandoned it in 2018.

The legislative proposal specifically tackles some of the thorniest issues in U.S. foreign policy: contested American taxpayer aid to Lebanon and other Middle Eastern nations controlled by Iran, sanctions waivers that have kept Tehran's nuclear program alive, and the 2002 authorization for use of military force in Iraq, which Republicans view as severely outdated given the rise of numerous new terror factions.

Johnson and Rep. Joe Wilson (R., S.C.), head of the RSC's foreign affairs and national security task force, told the Free Beacon that their proposal is more than a conservative wish list. Some Democrats could support many of the priorities, including foreign policy leaders such as Sen. Robert Menendez (D., N.J.), Rep. Ted Deutch (D., Fla.), and Rep.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Eliot Engel (D., N.Y.)—all of whom have expressed concerns about the Iran nuclear deal and Tehran's regional ambitions.

"We're not doing this for messaging purposes," Johnson said. "Many of these things we would expect and should be bipartisan because this is one of these issues that every person who looks at the situation objectively should agree to."

The most significant proposal, however, is likely to pit Republican lawmakers against elements in the Trump administration. In a move likely to spark a turf war with the State Department, the RSC is calling on Congress to unilaterally cancel a set of sanctions waivers that have legitimized Iran's nuclear program and increased its footprint in Iraq.

The waivers are one of the biggest points of contention between the Trump administration and Iran hawks in Congress. While a months-long pressure campaign in May forced the State Department to cancel waivers for Iran's nuclear facilities—including a military bunker that formerly housed the country's atomic weapons program—others still remain in place.

The most significant current waiver allows Iran to sell electricity to Iraq. Under this waiver, the countries inked a two-year $800 million electricity deal late last week, providing Tehran an even greater foothold into Iraq's economy and government.

Under the GOP's new plan, the administration would be barred from lifting sanctions without first obtaining consent from the House and Senate. It also would take the unprecedented step of sanctioning every Iraqi militia group responsible for attacking the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad earlier this year. Most of these groups are not currently subject to U.S. sanctions.

Republicans are "concerned that there needs to be consistency about" America's Iran sanctions policy, Johnson said, acknowledging that these waivers undermine the president's maximum pressure campaign.

Other proposals complement policies already undertaken by the Trump administration, such as efforts to invoke the snapback of all international sanctions on Iran that were originally lifted as part of the landmark nuclear deal.

With a United Nations-endorsed arms embargo on Iran set to expire in October, Republican hawks and their allies in the administration now see snapback as key to stopping countries like Russia and China from selling arms to the Islamic Republic.

To further the possibility of snapback, the RSC proposes new legislation mandating the United States to use its influence at the U.N. Security Council to ensure international sanctions are reimposed.

If the arms embargo on Iran is not extended, Congress could play a central role in crafting new embargoes on the sale of weapons to Iran. This would include "new sanctions on the arms industries of countries like Russia and China that return to selling weapons to Iran, the banks facilitating any sale of weapons to Iran, and the companies shipping weapons," according to the proposal.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

U.S. aid to Lebanon has also emerged as a top priority for Republican lawmakers—and a potential flashpoint between them and the Trump administration.

While the State Department has aggressively defended the millions in U.S. taxpayer aid provided each year to the Lebanese government and its military, Republicans are increasingly willing to criticize a policy they say emboldens Hezbollah, the Iranian terror proxy controlling the country.

For the first time, the RSC and its allies are calling for a complete halt of U.S. aid in Lebanon, potentially paving the way for a showdown with typically hawkish Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Earlier this year, Pompeo told the Free Beacon his administration still views U.S. aid to Lebanon's armed forces as beneficial.

Both Johnson and Wilson said there is no valid reason to continue awarding Lebanon with taxpayer aid as Hezbollah systematically takes control of the country.

"They're using U.S. taxpayer dollars supposedly to counter Hezbollah, and that may have been true in the past, but it does not appear to be true anymore," Johnson said. "That money is being spent in ways that are counterproductive to our goals in the region."

Other sanctions would target Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's multibillion-dollar financial empire, as well as the country's petrochemical, financial, and automotive sectors.

The GOP also recognizes that in the years since the 9/11 terror attacks, the regional threat landscape has shifted dramatically. They are now calling for a reassessment of the war authorizations granted in 2001 and 2002—a call certain to rankle antiwar Democrats who view these authorities as carte blanche for the administration to wage endless wars.

The RSC argues that both war authorizations are out of date and do not give the president adequate authority to combat a bevy of new terror factions, primarily those armed and funded by Iran.

While Democrats have pushed to have these authorizations revoked, Republicans view them as critical to the U.S. military campaign against these growing factions.

"We're not going to take the Ilhan Omar approach," Rep. Wilson said. "It's important we don't open the door for Ilhan and AOC [Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D., N.Y.)] and the thirty leftists who call for disbanding the American military."

[Iran] State Department launches new push to free American hostage Morad Tahbaz from Iran (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 8:07 PM, Louis Casiano, 12006K]
The State Department is launching a new push to free an American hostage being held in an Iranian jail, shortly after Navy veteran Michael White was freed from nearly two years' imprisonment in the Islamic Republic.

Morad Tahbaz -- an Iranian-American conservationist who also holds British citizenship -- was arrested in January 2018 with eight members of his Persian Wildlife Heritage

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Foundation and handed prison sentences of between four and 10 years for "contact with the enemy U.S. government." The punishment was part of a crackdown on those with dual citizenship amid tensions with the United States and other western nations.

Tahbaz previously founded the foundation with the goal of studying and protecting the endangered Asiatic cheetah.

Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, detailed Tahbaz's plight in a State Department video posted to Twitter late last week.

"His crime? Trying to save an endangered species from extinction," Hook said. "Apparently the Iranian regime is unable to distinguish between saving animals from committing espionage."

He said Tahbaz has been suffering from "serious medical problems" and is at high risk to contract the coronavirus, as thousands of inmates in Iranian jails already have.

"He cannot get the medical supervision he needs while in a prison cell," Hook added.

Hook noted that the world's Asiatic cheetahs, of which there are fewer than 50 left, are all located in Iran. He said Tahbaz traveled to the country to document its biodiversity and published a book of photographs in 2017 featuring animals native to the country, writing, "Without help, Iran will lose more species and the world will be a poorer place for it."

His work was so admired, Hook said, that the Iranian national soccer team designed custom jerseys with cheetahs emblazoned on them.

At the time of his arrests, Tahbaz was working in Iran on conservation causes with the endorsement of the United Nations Development Program and had been granted government permits, Hook said. In addition, three Iranian ministries concluded there was no evidence to name Tahbaz as a spy, he added.

Hook urged conservationists around the world to join academic figures, researchers and celebrities -- including Leonardo DiCaprio -- from more than 70 nations who have publicly defended Tahbaz and called for his release.

"All governments who have diplomatic relations with Iran should convey their opposition to his cruel prison sentence," he said. "Since Iran's Supreme Leader [Ali Khamenei] and foreign minister [Mohammad Javad Zarif] are so active on Twitter, perhaps they can tell us why Morad should spend another day in prison.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last week that the U.S. "will not rest until we bring every American detained in Iran and around the world back home to their loved ones."

Last week, another American detained in Iran during the Trump administration was released after four months of negotiations between the State Department and Tehran.

Michael White was arrested in July 2018 while visiting his girlfriend in Iran and later sentenced to 10 years in prison for allegedly insulting Khamenei and posting private

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

photographs on social media. He initially had been released in March on a medical furlough but ordered to stay in Iran.

White told Fox News, "It's great to be free."

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[Iran] Iran Blocks Access to Nuclear Sites, IAEA Says in New Report (Free Beacon)
Free Beacon [6/8/2020 4:59 AM, Adam Kredo, 108K]
Iran is blocking international access to critical nuclear sites and has quickened the pace of its uranium enrichment program, shortening the time it would take the country to build a nuclear weapon, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and U.S. experts.

In violation of international accords, Iran continues to stockpile enriched uranium, the key component in an atomic weapon, and is blocking access for international inspectors seeking to provide oversight of several sites believed to be part of Iran's clandestine program, according to a nonpublic IAEA report distributed to partner nations on Friday.

The IAEA report indicates that Iran is in breach of safeguards enacted by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is overseen by the international agency. By blocking access to several nuclear sites, Iran is preventing the agency from accounting for undeclared nuclear materials currently in use by the regime.

Iran also has made a sizable increase in the amount of low-enriched uranium it keeps in the country, another violation of U.N. mandates barring Tehran from stockpiling nuclear material. Because of this, Iran has shortened the time it needs to successfully build a nuclear weapon.

A State Department spokesperson confirmed that Iran is expanding its nuclear endeavors describing it as a "transparent attempt to generate negotiating leverage and extort the international community."

The United States will "continue imposing maximum pressure on the Iranian regime until it ceases its destabilizing activities and negotiates a comprehensive deal," the official said.

If Iran fails to abide by international laws, it will "face the consequences of even deeper and broader sanctions," according to the State Department.

U.S. officials remain "deeply concerned about Iran's ongoing refusal to cooperate with the IAEA regarding possible undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran," the official said, adding that Iran must be forced to comply with IAEA demands.

"Iran is attempting to stall the IAEA's investigation, stating that it requires further clarification and does not want its refusal of access to be called 'denial,'" Andrea Stricker, a nuclear proliferation expert with the Foundation For Defense of Democracies, told the Washington Free Beacon. "The IAEA is pushing back forcefully, stating there are 'no legal ambiguities regarding the Agency's rights and obligations' and its requests are 'strictly in accordance

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

with the Safeguards Agreement and the Additional Protocol.'"

Since January, Iran has refused to permit IAEA inspectors access to two sites believed to be part of Iran's nuclear program and currently storing undeclared materials.

There is also evidence that Iran is continuing enrichment work at its Fordow site, an underground bunker that once housed the country's atomic weapons program. Under U.N. regulations, work at Fordow is subject to international sanctions. This evidence could also provide ammunition for the United States to petition the U.N. Security Council to enact what is known as snapback, a full reimposition of sanctions that were lifted as part of the nuclear deal signed during the Obama administration.

Iranian leaders have made clear in recent months that the country will continue enriching uranium, in violation of the nuclear accord, until European nations provide it with greater access to cash.

[Afghanistan] Taliban say they are readying for talks with Kabul leaders (AP)
AP [6/8/2020 8:42 AM, Kathy Gannon, 3795K]
The Taliban have started putting together their agenda for negotiations with the political leadership in Kabul, Taliban officials said, a significant first step toward talks seen as perhaps the most critical next phase in the Afghan peace process.

No date has yet been set for negotiations but Washington's peace envoy is currently crisscrossing the region in efforts advance the U.S.-Taliban accord signed earlier this year.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the architect of Washington's deal with the Taliban, was in Pakistan over the weekend, meeting with the political and military leadership, according to a U.S. Embassy statement on Monday.

The Taliban leadership council, meanwhile, began taking proposals from its members in preparation for the start of negotiations, Taliban officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

They cited Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhunzada, who expressed the insurgent group's readiness to participate in the talks with Kabul.

A sticking point ahead of the talks was the exchange of prisoners between the warring sides. After stalling for weeks, the prisoner swaps unfolded and by Monday, the government had released 2,710 Taliban prisoners, according to Javid Faisal, spokesman for the national security adviser's office in Kabul.

Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen says the insurgents have so far freed 531 Afghan military and civilian government personnel they held captive. Shaheen, however, tweeted that the government freed so far only 2,284 Taliban prisoners. The discrepancy could not be immediately explained, but the Taliban have been counting only those prisoners they had listed as part of the U.S.-Taliban deal.

This deal calls for the Kabul government to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners and the Taliban

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

to free 1,000 government and military personnel ahead of the negotiations — an exchange billed as a goodwill gesture.

The accord, signed Feb. 29, was seen as Afghanistan's best chance for peace and an opportunity for U.S. and NATO troops to leave the war-torn country after nearly two decades of fighting.

The withdrawal of international forces, which has already begun, is tied to promises from the Taliban that they will not allow Afghanistan to be used as a staging arena for attacks against the United States and its allies.

Washington also wants Taliban's help in battling the Islamic State group, based in eastern Afghanistan and increasingly active in recent weeks. The U.S. has blamed IS for a horrific attack on a maternity hospital in Kabul last month that killed 24 people, including two infants and several mothers. IS has also claimed responsibility for several attack over the past two weeks, including on a busload of journalists that killed two people.

Khalilzad, who was in Doha, Qatar, meeting the Taliban at their political headquarters before going to Pakistan, was expected sometime on Monday in Kabul for a meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as well as his longtime political rival, Abdullah Abdullah. The two have since signed a power-sharing agreement.

Sediq Sediqi, a spokesman for Ghani said the president would like to see talks with the Taliban start in one month. However, he did not clarify whether the Afghan government would release the remaining 2,000 plus Taliban prisoners beforehand, which has been a pre-condition for the start of negotiations.

[Russia] US, Russia to begin nuclear arms talks this month (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 7:03 PM, Ellen Mitchell, 3408K]
U.S. and Russian officials will meet later this month for nuclear arms control negotiations, a top Trump administration arms control official said Monday.

Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea tweeted that he and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov have agreed "on time and place for nuclear arms negotiations in June," referring to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which places limits on deployed nuclear warheads.

Billingslea added that China was also invited to the talks but said it's unknown if the country will participate.

"Will China show and negotiate in good faith?" Billingslea asked.

Officials from Washington and Moscow are set to meet in Vienna on June 22, Bloomberg reported on Monday.

The administration and Russia have an option to agree to renew New START, which is set to expire in February, for a further five years. But the future of the deal has been put on shaky ground after Trump announced late last month that he is withdrawing from another

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

pact between the two nations, the Open Skies Treaty.

Arms control advocates are now worried the administration may let New START expire if it does not get China to participate in wider nuclear talks.

Also worrying advocates is Billingslea — the man tapped to negotiate an extension or replacement deal — who has made no guarantees that the administration won't pull out of this treaty as well.

"We know how to win these races, and we know how to spend the adversary into oblivion," Billingslea said during a think tank event last month. "If we have to, we will, but we sure would like to avoid it."

New START caps the number of deployed nuclear warheads the United States and Russia can have at 1,550 apiece, places limits on deploying weapons that can deliver the warheads and creates a verification regime that includes 18 on-site inspections per year.

The agreement, which was negotiated by the Obama administration, is set to expire Feb. 5.

The administration now wants Russia and China to agree to a broader arms control treaty, which would put in place stricter verification measures and cover several new Russian weapons systems.

China, because it has far fewer known warheads than Russia or the United States, has repeatedly rejected joining arms control talks. But Billingslea said he expects Moscow to bring Beijing to the conversation.

"Beijing, like Moscow, is intent on building up its nuclear forces and using those forces to try to intimidate the United States and our friends and our allies," he said. "If China wants to be a great power — and we know it has that self-image — it needs to behave like one."

[Russia] US and Russia to meet for nuclear arms negotiations this month (CNN)
CNN [6/8/2020 5:00 PM, Jennifer Hansler, 12317K]
US and Russian officials will meet later this month for nuclear arms negotiations, a top US arms control official announced Monday.

Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea said that he and his Russian counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, have agreed "on time and place for nuclear arms negotiations in June."

The Trump administration has abandoned a number of key arms control pacts, most recently the Open Skies Treaty, in favor of seeking a three-party agreement with Russia and China. The insistence on a trilateral agreement is widely seen as a way to scuttle New START, the nuclear reduction treaty between the US and Russia that is set to expire in February 2021. Beijing has dismissed calls to participate in trilateral talks.

In his tweet Monday, Billingslea said that China had been invited to this month's discussions, writing, "Will China show and negotiate in good faith?"

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The arms control envoy reiterated last month that it is their expectation that a future arms control agreement will be multilateral, telling reporters, "We do absolutely expect that whatever arrangements are reached, the Chinese will be part of a trilateral framework going forward."

Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Arms Control Association, said it is unclear what incentive China would have to join the talks, given the disproportionate size of its nuclear arsenal in comparison to that of Russia and the US. The latter two countries "possess about 85% of the world's nuclear weapons" -- "more than 10 times the deployed number of strategic nuclear warheads as China, Britain and France combined," he said.

Moreover, Kimball noted that the administration's escalated rhetoric toward China amid the coronavirus pandemic will not have helped bring them to the table.

In remarks at the Hudson Institute last month, Billingslea dismissed "the notion that China should not be expected to engage in nuclear arms control until it has built up to US and Russian levels" as "an outdated display of Cold War logic."

Kimball told CNN that the US and Russia meeting to discuss nuclear arms control matters is "good, but this is no reason to celebrate because the Trump administration's position seems to remain the same."

"They're refusing to pick up Russia's offer to extend New START," he said, referencing "They appear to be still demanding new agreements that can't be negotiated before New START expires, not only with Russia, but with China. So, I'm not jumping up and down for joy."

Last month, Ryabkov called the administration's approach to the New START "quite strange" and said "it would be in everyone's interest" to extend the deal.

"My view on this is that chances for the new START Treaty to be sustained are rapidly moving close to zero, and I think that on February 5, 2021, this treaty will just lapse, and it will end," he told The National Interest.

In his remarks at the Hudson Institute, Billingslea said that the administration hoped to avoid "an unnecessarily expensive buildup in a three ways arms racing context" between the US, China and Russia, but warned that the US was prepared to "spend into oblivion" to beat them.

Kimball said the comments reflect "a dangerous philosophy about nuclear weapons," adding, "No one wins an arms race."

Ryabkov said Billingslea's comments were noted.

"We will never, ever allow anyone to draw us into an arms race that would exceed our own capabilities," he said. "But we will find ways how to sustain this pressure, both in terms of rhetoric and also in terms of possible action."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[Russia] U.S., Russia to meet for arms control talks this month, extend invite to China (Washington Times)
Washington Times [6/8/2020 3:11 PM, Lauren Meier -, 496K]
The U.S. and Russia have agreed to meet for a round of arms control talks this month and have also invited China to attend the negotiations, the Trump administration's presidential envoy for arms control said.

Last month, Marshall Billingslea, a veteran national official appointed to the State Department post in April, told The Washington Times that before Moscow begins to think about any kind of extension of the New START nuclear arms limitation treaty, Russia must "bring the Chinese to the negotiating table" as well.

"Today agreed with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov on time and place for nuclear arms negotiations in June," Mr. Billingslea tweeted Monday.

The Russian government has proposed extending the New START between the U.S. and Russia for another five years, a move that could be made without congressional approval under the treaty.

"China also invited. Will China show and negotiate in good faith?" the envoy continued.

Chinese government officials have repeatedly said Beijing has no interest in joining three-way talks on an expanded New START deal — which is set to expire next year — because their arsenal is far smaller than those of the U.S. and Russia.

Critics of China joining a trilateral arms agreement have argued that Beijing has been engaged in an extensive expansion of strategic nuclear forces that remains cloaked in secrecy by the ruling Communist Party and the military.

The weapons include at least 10 types of missiles, from long-range to short-range ballistic and cruise missiles. China also is close to deploying ultra-high-speed hypersonic missiles capable of striking U.S. targets with maneuvering warheads in less than 30 minutes.

[Russia] US, Russia to start nuclear arms control talks this month (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [6/8/2020 5:28 PM, Deb Riechmann, AP, 1891K]
The U.S. and Russia have agreed to start arms control talks this month as the only remaining treaty between the two largest nuclear powers is poised to expire in less than a year, Marshall Billingslea, President Donald Trump's special envoy for arms control, said Monday.

Russia has offered to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires in February, but Trump wants to see a three-way nuclear arms treaty that includes China. Beijing, which is expanding its nuclear arsenal but is not nearly as big as the ones held by the U.S. and Russia, has expressed little to no interest in negotiating or signing a pact.

"Today agreed with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov on time and place for nuclear arms negotiations in June. China also invited. Will China show and negotiate in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

good faith?" Billingslea tweeted.

A senior administration official said the talks would begin June 22. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the talks and spoke only on condition of anonymity.

Russian officials and many arms control experts agree that China, as a rising power, should be part of a nuclear arms accord. However, many think the existing one should be extended because they don't think there's enough time left to negotiate a new deal, especially one that includes China for the first time.

A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Geng Shuang, said in January that China has "no intention to participate" in trilateral arms control negotiations. Billingslea, however, is optimistic that Beijing will want to join in and be seen as a world power.

New START imposes limits on the number of U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear warheads and launchers. If it were to collapse, it would be the first time in 50 years that the U.S. does not have the ability to inspect Russian nuclear forces, said Rose Gottemoeller, a former undersecretary of state for arms control and international security.

Russia President Vladimir Putin recently endorsed Russia's nuclear deterrent policy, which allows him to use atomic weapons in response to a conventional strike targeting the nation's critical government and military infrastructure.

The new document is in line with Russian military doctrine and reaffirms that the president could order nuclear retaliation in response to a nuclear attack or aggression involving conventional weapons that "threatens the very existence of the state." But the policy document now offers a detailed description of situations that could trigger the use of nuclear weapons. They include an enemy strike on "critically important government or military facilities of the Russian Federation."

[China] China's coast guard to be given wartime power, report says (Breitbart)
Breitbart [6/8/2020 11:37 AM, Staff, 1711K]
China is pursuing an amendment to the law that would allow its coast guard to receive instructions from Beijing's military during wartime, according to a Japanese press report.

Yomiuri Shimbun reported Monday China's National People's Congress is working on revising the law on the People's Armed Police Force.

The planned amendment is expected to add "various duties of wartime" to China's coast guard, according to the report.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's war power was also mentioned in the report. Beijing's Central Military Commission, under the direct control of Xi, could instruct the armed police force. Alternatively, the People's Liberation Army's system of five Theater Commands could instruct the coast guard at wartime, the report says.

China's armed police force is primarily tasked with maintaining domestic security, counterterrorism activities and guarding the nation's nuclear facilities.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Since 2018, the armed police force has been under the direction of the Central Military Commission.

According to the Yomiuri, the latest development implies China is “strengthening the military characteristics of its coast guard.”

The move is “necessary to warn neighboring countries,” the Japanese newspaper said.

A Beijing-based Japanese diplomatic source told the Yomiuri if the amendment is approved, China’s coast guard would be able to collaborate with Chinese naval ships in the East China Sea, where China and Japan have clashed over territorial rights.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pursued improved ties with Xi. A summit, planned for the spring, was canceled in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic.

The Japan Times reported last month Japanese politicians are calling for holding off summit plans, citing Chinese interference in Hong Kong.

Japanese lawmakers have also expressed “serious concern” regarding the ongoing crackdown against protesters, according to the report.

[China] China calls on Rick Scott to provide evidence to back up coronavirus vaccine sabotage claim (The Hill)
The Hill [6/8/2020 2:08 PM, Rebecca Klar, 3408K]
China is challenging Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) to provide evidence backing up his claim that China is trying to sabotage the development of a coronavirus vaccine.

“Since this lawmaker said he has evidence that China is trying to sabotage western countries in their vaccine development, then please let him present the evidence. There’s no need to be shy,” Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said Monday at a daily briefing, according to Reuters.

Scott on Sunday accused China of trying to slow down the development of a coronavirus vaccine.

“We have got to get this vaccine done. Unfortunately we have evidence that communist China is trying to sabotage us or slow it down," Scott said Sunday on the BBC’s "Andrew Marr Show."

Scott was pressed twice on what evidence he has to back up his claims.

"It came to our intelligence community. ... I’m on Armed Services, so clearly there’s things I can’t discuss. ... I get provided information. But there’s evidence that they’ve been trying to either sabotage or slow it down," Scott responded.

Scott repeated his claims Monday in a tweet responding to an op-ed in the Global Times, China’s state-run newspaper.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“Communist China & its propaganda outlets like the Global Times are working overtime to try to hide their #Coronavirus failures & their efforts to steal or sabotage vaccine research,” Scott tweeted. “The world is wising up to China’s role as an adversary to freedom-loving people around the world.”

In response to calls for Scott to cite evidence to back up his accusations, a spokesperson for the senator pointed to a release regarding a bill he and his GOP colleagues introduced last month that aims to prevent China from “stealing or sabotaging American COVID-19 vaccine research.”

The press release cited a May announcement from the FBI to “raise awareness of the threat to COVID-19 related research” and the targeting of research by China.

The release also cited a joint advisory from the U.K.’s National Cyber Security Centre and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security regarding activity by groups against organizations involved in COVID-19 responses. The advisory does not explicitly warn China is trying to sabotage vaccine development.

[China] Satellite images show Wuhan hospitals swamped months before China reported coronavirus outbreak (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [6/8/2020 11:17 AM, Anna Giaritelli, 727K]
Satellite footage of five hospitals in the Chinese city of Wuhan show dramatic spikes in vehicle traffic late last summer and early fall compared to the prior year, an indication that the coronavirus may have been spreading across the city months before it was reported to the World Health Organization, according to a Harvard Medical School study.

Researchers studying 350 commercial satellite images found nearly double the number of vehicles parked outside the health centers versus the same time in 2018, according to an ABC report on the study. Dr. John Brownstein, a Harvard medical professor who led the project, said the surge in traffic “coincided with” a spike in Chinese internet searches of “certain symptoms that would later be determined as closely associated with the novel coronavirus,” such as diarrhea and respiratory symptoms.

“Something was happening in October,” said Brownstein, the director of the medical center’s Computational Epidemiology Lab. “Clearly, there was some level of social disruption taking place well before what was previously identified as the start of the novel coronavirus pandemic.”

The Harvard report shows 112 cars parked outside of the Wuhan Tongji Medical University on Oct. 10, 2018, compared to 214 cars on Sept. 12, 2019. At the Wuhan Tianyou Hospital, 171 cars were documented outside on Oct. 10, 2018, compared to 285 cars on Oct. 17, 2019. At Hubei Women and Children Hospital, 393 cars were spotted Oct. 10, 2018. A year later, on Oct. 17, 2019, there were 714 cars parked.

The study also found massive declines in the amount of vehicular traffic in at least one public place. The Huanan Seafood Market parking lot was filled with 219 cars on Sept. 12, 2019, just as the hospitals were getting busier. By Feb. 4, 2020, as China grappled with the

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

spread of the virus, only 10 cars were in the lot.

“What we’re trying to do is look at the activity — how busy a hospital is,” Brownstein said. “And the way we do that is by counting the cars that are at that hospital."

Former acting Homeland Security Undersecretary John Cohen told ABC that the study raised questions about when the coronavirus first arrived in the United States.

“This study raises serious questions about whether the coronavirus was first introduced into the United States earlier than previously reported and whether measures announced in late January restricting travel from China were too little, too late,” said Cohen.

The U.S. has seen nearly 2 million confirmed cases since January. More than 7 million people worldwide have tested positive for the coronavirus, and 400,000 people have died.

[North Korea] North Korea Cuts Off All Communications Lines to South Korea (New York Times)
New York Times [6/8/2020 10:23 PM, Choe Sang-Hun, 40577K]
North Korea said on Tuesday that it would cut off all communication lines with South Korea, including military hotlines, as it vowed to reverse a recent détente on the Korean Peninsula and start treating the South as an “enemy.”

North Korea made the decision when its top officials in charge of relations with the South, including Kim Yo-jong, the sister of the supreme leader, Kim Jong-un, met on Monday, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency said.

The officials “stressed that the work toward the South should thoroughly turn into one against the enemy,” the North Korean news agency reported on Tuesday. “We have reached a conclusion that there is no need to sit face to face with the South Korean authorities, and there is no issue to discuss with them, as they have only aroused our dismay.”

Shortly after its announcement, North Korea refused to pick up the phone on Tuesday morning when the South made its routine daily call on the military hotlines between the two countries, officials in Seoul said.

The North’s tone on Tuesday was a sharp reversal from two years ago, when a rare inter-Korean rapprochement culminated in South Korea’s president, Moon Jae-in, visiting Pyongyang, becoming the first South Korean leader to address a large North Korean crowd.

Inter-Korean relations have rapidly deteriorated since Kim Jong-un’s second summit meeting with President Trump, held in Vietnam in February of last year, ended without agreement on dismantling North Korea’s nuclear weapons program or easing United Nations sanctions on the country. North Korea’s economic isolation has subsequently deepened with the global coronavirus outbreak.

Since Mr. Kim’s diplomacy with Mr. Trump collapsed, North Korea has stepped up pressure on the South to ignore Washington’s pressure and improve inter-Korean economic ties even

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

before the North denuclearized. It demanded the reopening of the joint tourism venture at its Diamond Mountain resort complex and of a joint industrial park in Kaesong, both of which had served as key sources of cash until they were shut down in disputes between the two Koreas.

When the South refused to restart the ventures, calling on the North to first move toward denuclearization, North Korea turned increasingly harsh toward Mr. Moon's government.

Last Thursday, Ms. Kim, a senior adviser to her brother, warned that North Korea would begin scrapping inter-Korean agreements to ease tensions unless South Korea stopped the release of anti-Kim leaflets by defectors from the North.

When Mr. Kim and Mr. Moon met in April of 2018 and again in September that year, they signed agreements to improve relations and cease all hostile acts along the border, including cross-border propaganda, like leaflets and loudspeaker broadcasts. As part of such efforts, the two Koreas also installed a hotline linking the offices of Mr. Kim and Mr. Moon and set up a liaison office in Kaesong, just north of the border in North Korea.

But anti-North activists in the South, mainly defectors from the North, have continued to send leaflets by balloon. North Korea has long bristled at these leaflets, which typically depict Mr. Kim as a cretinous dictator toying with nuclear weapons.

On Tuesday, North Korea said that it had decided to "cut off all the communication and liaison lines" between the two Koreas, including the hotlines between their leaders' offices and their militaries. The North said its move was only the start of what it called "phased plans for the work against the enemy."

South Korea has long emphasized the importance of those hotlines to avert unintended armed clashes between the two militaries at times of rising tensions on the peninsula.

The two Koreas have run a telephone hotline at the so-called truce village of Panmunjom and later at the inter-Korean liaison office. Duty officers from both sides man their telephones. But when bilateral relations soured in the past, one of the first things North Korea often did was to cut off the line — only to reopen it later.

South Korea has criticized the North Korean defectors for raising tensions by releasing the leaflets. Last week, it said it was discussing a new law to ban such leaflets.

In recent days, when defectors approached the border zone to release plastic bottles filled with rice afloat on a river, hoping that they will reach North Koreans, angry South Korean villagers blocked the roads. They accused the defectors of raising tensions and polluting the river.

[North Korea] North Korea vows to cut off all lines of communication with South Korea (FOX News)
FOX News [6/8/2020 7:15 PM, Bradford Betz, 12006K]
North Korea on Tuesday vowed to cut all lines of communication with South Korea, according to its state news agency KCNA.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The North has threatened for days to close its inter-Korean liaison office with the South if it did not stop defectors from throwing anti-Pyongyang pamphlets over the border.

KCNA reported that the North will end lines of communication at the liaison office, as well as other hotlines with the South as its first step.

The outlet said that North Koreans have “been angered by the treacherous and cunning behavior of the South Korean authorities with whom we still have lots of accounts to settle.”

It further called the allegedly anti-Pyongyang material “a sign of hostility to all our people.”

“We have reached a conclusion that there is no need to sit face to face with the South Korean authorities and there is no issue to discuss with them, as they have only aroused our dismay,” the report said.

KCNA further reported that Kim Jong Un’s sister, Kim Yo Jong, and other top officials have “stressed that the work towards the South should thoroughly turn into the one against an enemy.”

The announcement signifies a dramatic reversal of diplomatic gains made in the past two years. North-South relations have deteriorated in recent months.

In early May, North and South Korean troops exchanged gunfire along their border, though it didn’t cause any known casualties on either side.

The North Korean threats come amid a prolonged deadlock in its broader nuclear diplomacy with the U.S.

Presidential Tweets

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet1 [6/8/2020 8:30 AM] Tremendous sincerity, what a guy. Hard to believe, with this kind of political talent, his numbers would “tank” so badly in Utah! [Editorial note: consult retweet at source link]

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet2 [6/8/2020 8:33 AM] LAW & ORDER, NOT DEFUND AND ABOLISH THE POLICE. The Radical Left Democrats have gone Crazy!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet3 [6/8/2020 8:48 AM] CNN Polls are as Fake as their Reporting. Same numbers, and worse, against Crooked Hillary. The Dems would destroy America!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet4 [6/8/2020 8:57 AM] The Lamestream Media refuses to talk about our Country’s record setting Jobs Numbers, which are indicating GREATNESS, and soon!

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet5 [6/8/2020 9:02 AM] 96% Approval Rating in the Republican Party. Thank you!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet6 [6/8/2020 11:31 AM] Big day for Stock Market. Smart money, and the World, know that we are heading in the right direction. Jobs coming back FAST. Next year will be our greatest ever!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet7 [6/8/2020 11:44 AM] This year has seen the lowest crime numbers in our Country's recorded history, and now the Radical Left Democrats want to Defund and Abandon our Police. Sorry, I want LAW & ORDER!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump
Tweet8 [6/8/2020 3:14 PM] I have retained highly respected pollster, McLaughlin & Associates, to analyze todays CNN Poll (and others), which I felt were FAKE based on the incredible enthusiasm we are receiving. Read analysis for yourself. This is the same thing they and others did when we defeated.....Crooked Hillary Clinton in 2016. They are called SUPPRESSION POLLS, and are put out to dampen enthusiasm. Despite 3 ½ years of phony Witch Hunts, we are winning, and will close it out on November 3rd! [Editorial note: consult image at source link]

{End of Report} **RETURN TO TOP**

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Sat, 30 May 2020 01:17:19 +0000
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper
Cc: #ERO CHIEFS OF STAFF
Subject: RE: URGENT OPA Issue: UNIVISION 45 requests immigration history for Cuban alien / comment on today's vigil

Good Evening (b)(6);
This is cleared by ERO.

Thank You
(b)(6);

STATEMENT: APPROVED BY ERO HOUSTON AND OPA PRIVACY

(b)(5); (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

ON BACKGROUND:

ICE's detention authority is based on the furtherance of an alien's immigration proceedings, and if so ordered, their removal from the country. Federal immigration laws mandate the detention of certain categories of aliens, including terrorist aliens, aliens with certain criminal convictions, arriving aliens, and aliens in the expedited removal process. Further, some aliens who are not subject to mandatory detention may be detained for various reasons including, but not limited to pending criminal charges, public safety concerns, flight risk, as well as final orders and recent border crossers awaiting removal.

Aliens processed for removal receive their legal due process from federal immigration judges in the immigration courts, which are administered by the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR). EOIR is an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice and is separate from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and ICE. Immigration judges in these courts make decisions based on the merits of each individual case. ICE officers carry out the removal decisions made by the federal immigration judges.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2020 8:34 PM
To: #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Subject: URGENT OPA Issue: UNIVISION 45 requests immigration history for Cuban alien / comment on today's vigil

ALCON,

Please review the statement below for release to Univision Houston.

DEADLINE: ASAP (Reporter's deadline is 8 CST)

ISSUE: Univision Houston requested immigration history/status for (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) a 35-year-old illegal alien from Cuba.

STATEMENT: APPROVED BY ERO HOUSTON AND OPA PRIVACY

Cuban national (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) entered U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody on Dec. 4 as an arriving alien under the Immigration and Nationality Act. He was initially apprehended in July 2019 by the US Border Patrol after illegally entering the US near El Paso, Texas. He remains in ICE custody pending disposition of his immigration proceedings.

ON BACKGROUND:

ICE's detention authority is based on the furtherance of an alien's immigration proceedings, and if so ordered, their removal from the country. Federal immigration laws mandate the detention of certain categories of aliens, including terrorist aliens, aliens with certain criminal convictions, arriving aliens, and aliens in the expedited removal process. Further, some aliens who are not subject to mandatory detention may be detained for various reasons including, but not limited to pending criminal charges, public safety concerns, flight risk, as well as final orders and recent border crossers awaiting removal.

INTERNAL BACKGROUND:

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Immigration History

ERO Houston – (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

On July 14, 2019, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) encountered (b)(6); after he entered the United States without inspection near El Paso, TX. (b)(6); claimed a fear of returning to Cuba and requested asylum. USCBP issued a Notice to Appear, Form I-862, pursuant to section 212(a)(7)(A)(i)(I) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended. USCBP enrolled (b)(6); in the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and returned (b)(6) to Mexico.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

On August 29, 2019, ERO El Paso Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA) filed (b)(6); Notice to Appear, Form I-862, with the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR).

On October 8, 2019, USCBP paroled (b)(6); into the United States at the Paso Del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, TX to attend an immigration hearing. OPLA served (b)(6); an Additional Charges of Inadmissibility/ Deportability, Form I-261, changing (b)(6); from an entry without inspection to an arriving alien. An immigration judge (IJ) reset (b)(6); case for him to obtain an attorney. USCBP returned (b)(6); to Mexico.

On October 30, 2019, USCBP paroled (b)(6); into the United States at the Paso Del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, TX to attend an immigration hearing. An IJ reset (b)(6); case for him to complete an application for relief. USCBP returned (b)(6); to Mexico.

On December 3, 2019, USCBP paroled (b)(6) into the United States at the Paso Del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, TX to attend an immigration hearing. An immigration judge reset (b)(6); case for him to translate evidence he provided to the court. (b)(6); claimed a fear of returning to Mexico.

On December 4, 2019, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) screened (b)(6); under the MPP; and found he had established a clear probability of persecution in Mexico. USCBP transferred custody of (b)(6); to ERO El Paso at the El Paso Service Processing Center in El Paso, TX.

On March 12, 2020, ERO El Paso transferred (b)(6) to ERO Houston at the Joe Corley Processing Center in Conroe, Texas.

On March 13, 2020, ERO Houston completed a Notice to EOIR: Alien Address, Form I-830, to change venue from El Paso to Houston.

Criminal History:
N/A

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) univision.net>
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2020 3:36 PM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) ce.dhs.gov>
Cc: .Houston-NewsAssignmentEditors (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @Univision.net>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); UNIVISION.NET>
Subject: UNIVISION 45- STATMENT REQUEST

Hello (b)(6);

I hope this email finds you well.

We are currently working on a story related to a simultaneously two 24-hour vigils at Karnes "Family Residential Center" in Karnes City and Joe Corley Detention Center in Conroe Tx that took place this morning.

Univision 45 wants to request an statement regarding this vigil and specifically about the detention of a epidemiologist detained at the Joe Corley center. **His name is** (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6);
(b)(7)(C)

Our deadline is 8pm (central time)

Thanks for the assistance in the matter.

Thanks!

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Sent: Sat, 30 May 2020 00:34:20 +0000
To: #ICE OPA ERO Issue Paper;(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
Subject: URGENT OPA Issue: UNIVISION 45 requests immigration history for Cuban alien / comment on today's vigil

ALCON,

Please review the statement below for release to Univision Houston.

DEADLINE: ASAP (Reporter's deadline is 8 CST)

ISSUE: Univision Houston requested immigration history/status for (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) a 35-year-old illegal alien from Cuba.

STATEMENT: APPROVED BY ERO HOUSTON AND OPA PRIVACY

Cuban national (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) entered U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody on Dec. 4 as an arriving alien under the Immigration and Nationality Act. He was initially apprehended in July 2019 by the US Border Patrol after illegally entering the US near El Paso, Texas. He remains in ICE custody pending disposition of his immigration proceedings.

ON BACKGROUND:

ICE's detention authority is based on the furtherance of an alien's immigration proceedings, and if so ordered, their removal from the country. Federal immigration laws mandate the detention of certain categories of aliens, including terrorist aliens, aliens with certain criminal convictions, arriving aliens, and aliens in the expedited removal process. Further, some aliens who are not subject to mandatory detention may be detained for various reasons including, but not limited to pending criminal charges, public safety concerns, flight risk, as well as final orders and recent border crossers awaiting removal.

INTERNAL BACKGROUND:

(b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

Immigration History

ERO Houston – (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

On July 14, 2019, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) encountered (b)(6); after he entered the United States without inspection near El Paso, TX. (b)(6); claimed a fear of returning to Cuba and requested asylum. USCBP issued a Notice to Appear, Form I-862, pursuant to section 212(a)(7)(A)(i)(I) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended. USCBP enrolled (b)(6); in the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and returned (b)(6); to Mexico.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

On August 29, 2019, ERO El Paso Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA) filed (b)(6); Notice to Appear, Form I-862, with the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR).

On October 8, 2019, USCBP paroled (b)(6); into the United States at the Paso Del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, TX to attend an immigration hearing. OPLA served (b)(6); an Additional Charges of Inadmissibility/ Deportability, Form I-261, changing (b)(6); from an entry without inspection to an arriving alien. An immigration judge (IJ) reset (b)(6); case for him to obtain an attorney. USCBP returned (b)(6); to Mexico.

On October 30, 2019, USCBP paroled (b)(6) into the United States at the Paso Del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, TX to attend an immigration hearing. An IJ reset (b)(6); case for him to complete an application for relief. USCBP returned (b)(6); to Mexico.

On December 3, 2019, USCBP paroled (b)(6); into the United States at the Paso Del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, TX to attend an immigration hearing. An immigration judge reset (b)(6); case for him to translate evidence he provided to the court. (b)(6); claimed a fear of returning to Mexico.

On December 4, 2019, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) screened (b)(6); under the MPP; and found he had established a clear probability of persecution in Mexico. USCBP transferred custody of (b)(6); to ERO El Paso at the El Paso Service Processing Center in El Paso, TX.

On March 12, 2020, ERO El Paso transferred (b)(6); to ERO Houston at the Joe Corley Processing Center in Conroe, Texas.

On March 13, 2020, ERO Houston completed a Notice to EOIR: Alien Address, Form I-830, to change venue from El Paso to Houston.

Criminal History:
N/A

From: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) univision.net>
Sent: Friday, May 29, 2020 3:36 PM
To: (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @ice.dhs.gov>
Cc: .Houston-NewsAssignmentEditors (b)(6); (b)(7)(C) @Univision.net>; (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

(b)(6); UNIVISION.NET>
Subject: UNIVISION 45- STATMENT REQUEST

Hello (b)(6);

I hope this email finds you well.

We are currently working on a story related to a simultaneously two 24-hour vigils at Karnes "Family Residential Center" in Karnes City and Joe Corley Detention Center in Conroe Tx that took place this morning.

Univision 45 wants to request an statement regarding this vigil and specifically about the detention of a epidemiologist detained at the Joe Corley center. **His name is** (b)(6); (b)(7)(C)
(b)(6);
(b)(7)(C)

Our deadline is 8pm (central time)

Thanks for the assistance in the matter.

Thanks!

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: DHS Daily
Sent: Sun, 26 Jul 2020 07:46:06 -0400
To: (b)(6); @techmis.com
Subject: DHS Morning Briefing (7-26-20)
Attachments: DHS Morning Briefing (7-26-20).pdf

DHS MORNING BRIEFING

Prepared for the Office of Public Affairs (OPA)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
By TechMIS
www.TechMIS.com

Mobile User Copy

Editorial Note: The DHS Daily Briefing is a collection of news articles related to Department's mission. The inclusion of particular stories is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse the political viewpoints or affiliations included in news coverage.

TO: Homeland Security Secretary & Staff
DATE: Sunday, July 26, 2020 8:00 AM ET

Top News

Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in Texas as two other storms threaten Hawaii and the Caribbean (CNN)

Ken Cuccinelli: Federal Agents Could Sue Pelosi for Libel — 'Speaker of the House Knows That She's Using Nazi Allusions' (Breitbart)

For racial justice protests, US taps tactical border squads (San Francisco Chronicle)

[NY] House lawmakers to launch probe into DHS excluding NY from Trusted Travelers Program (The Hill)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[VA] DHS boss Chad Wolf's home targeted by Shut Down DC for leftist 'rally' (FOX News)

[IL] Three men charged with federal gun crimes in Chicago after Trump sends hundreds of federal agents to the city (FOX News)

[TX] US officials raid Chinese consulate in Houston believed to be spy hub (FOX News)

[TX] Hanna becomes first hurricane of 2020 Atlantic season as it barrels toward Texas (The Hill)

[TX] Virus-hit Texas braces as 2020's first hurricane, Hanna, takes aim (Breitbart)

[TX] Hanna becomes hurricane as it heads toward virus-weary Texas (Houston Chronicle)

[TX] Hanna officially becomes a Category 1 hurricane (ABC News)

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in Texas (CNN)

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in South Texas (CBS News)

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall on Padre Island, COVID-19 complicates storm response (Houston Chronicle)

[TX] Hanna, first hurricane of Atlantic season, slams ashore in Texas with 100 mph wind gusts (Washington Post)

[TX] Hurricane Hanna's winds battering south Texas coast, area hit hard by COVID (Reuters)

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in Texas (ABC News)

[WA] Seattle police declare riot amid ongoing protests (The Hill)

[WA] Seattle Riot: Police Arrest 25 After 'Explosives' Thrown at Officers (Breitbart)

[WA] Police declare riot at Seattle protests, make arrests (AP)

[OR] Federal Officers in Portland May Have Permanent Eye Damage After Protesters Shine Lasers in Their Faces (Breitbart)

[OR] FBI says it's investigating 'specific violations of federal law' not ideology in Portland protests (The Hill)

[OR] Big protest crowd gathers again in Portland over Feds' presence (Los Angeles Times)

[OR] Portland rioters used metal spikes to target federal vehicles: CBP leader (FOX News)

[OR] Federal agents clash with Portland protesters, use tear gas (The Hill)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[OR] Feds clash with Portland protesters again, hours after judge denied Oregon's request to restrict agents' actions (FOX News)

[OR] Fires and Pepper Spray in Seattle as Police Protests Widen Across U.S. (New York Times)

[OR] Tear gas deployed as thousands join Portland's 57th night of protests (CBS News)

[OR] Portland protesters breach fence; police declare riot (AP)

[OR] One Person Stabbed During Portland's 58th Night of Protest (Breitbart)

[CA] Demonstrators Attack Federal Buildings in L.A. in Solidarity with Portland (Breitbart)

[CA] Police windows smashed, courthouse lobby set ablaze following huge Oakland rally (San Francisco Chronicle)

[HI] Hurricane threatens Hawaii with surf, winds, flooding (San Diego Union Tribune)

[HI] Hurricane Douglas to swipe Hawaii, producing flooding rain, damaging winds and huge waves (Washington Post)

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Judge denies Trump administration request to delay deadline to release migrants from ICE detention centers (The Hill)

[TX] Three Human Smugglers Sentenced for Texas Stash House Operation (Breitbart)

Citizenship and Immigration Services

Universities Brand 'Drama Therapy' And 'Journalism' as STEM Majors to Circumvent Immigration Policy(Free Beacon)

Customs and Border Protection

Legal groups sue US to stop expulsion of children previously held in hotel rooms (The Hill)

[TX] Migrant camp shrinks as hope for asylum dwindles (Houston Chronicle)

[TX] Stash House Operation Disrupted in Texas near Mexican Border (Breitbart)

[WA] Acting CBP commissioner Mark Morgan says positioning of federal agents in Seattle 'just makes sense' (FOX News)

[OR] CBP chief: 'Criminals' in Portland used metal spikes to target federal vehicles (Washington Examiner)

[OR] Acting CBP Commissioner: Portland Mayor Is Telling Feds to Go Home, But Not Criminals (Breitbart)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[CA] 300 lbs of meth, fentanyl seized in tractor-trailer smuggling attempt (San Diego Union Tribune)

[Mexico] Four months in, coronavirus travel restrictions strain cross-border relationships (San Diego Union Tribune)

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Coronavirus updates: U.S. deaths top 1,000 for four consecutive days (Washington Post)

[AZ] Internal FEMA memo reveals Arizona coronavirus patients taken to New Mexico over staffing shortages: report (The Hill)

Secret Service

[FL] CCPD: Cape man arrested after dropping drug stash in front of officers (Cape-Coral-Daily-Breeze)

[UT] Suspect arrested after allegedly going to same store twice with counterfeit bills (St George News)

[CA] Credit card skimmers found at Morro Bay gas station (KSBY - TV)

National Security News

[United Kingdom] UK Defence Secretary says will boost ability to handle space threat from Russia, China (Reuters)

[China] Beijing Slams Forced U.S. Entry to China's Houston Consulate (Bloomberg)

Top News

Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in Texas as two other storms threaten Hawaii and the Caribbean (CNN)
CNN [7/25/2020 6:29 PM, Madeline Holcombe and Amir Vera, 7975K]
Three separate storm systems are threatening the United States and the Caribbean this weekend.

They are Hurricane Hanna in the Gulf of Mexico, Hurricane Douglas in the Pacific Ocean and Tropical Storm Gonzalo in the Atlantic. This is where things stand with all three:

Hurricane Hanna

Hanna made landfall on Padre Island, Texas, Saturday at 5 p.m. CT, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Hanna, the first hurricane of the season in the Atlantic, had sustained winds of 90 mph, making it a high-end Category 1 hurricane.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The storm went through a rapid intensification on Saturday, meaning that its top wind speed had increased at least 35 mph in the last 24 hours.

Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 32 counties in Texas on Saturday and requested a federal emergency disaster declaration request, which allows the federal government to provide "public assistance, direct financial assistance, and hazard mitigation assistance."

A hurricane warning is in effect for Port Mansfield to Mesquite Bay. And a storm surge warning -- meaning life-threatening surges of water from the coastline is possible -- is in effect from Port Mansfield to Sargent.

Storm surges of up to 5 feet are possible in some areas, including Corpus Christi Bay.

Heavy rain -- 6 to 12 inches -- is expected in south Texas and the Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas through Sunday night.

About 3 to 5 inches of rain are expected along the upper Texas and Louisiana coasts.

A hurricane in the Atlantic at this time of year is somewhat ahead of the norm. The Atlantic's first hurricane does not normally form until about two weeks into August.

Hanna is the first hurricane to hit Texas in the month of July since Hurricane Dolly in 2008.

Significant structural damage was reported in Port Mansfield, about 60 miles north of the Texas border with Mexico, according to the National Weather Service office in Brownsville.

Wind gusts of 83 mph were reported in the area and gusts of 103 mph were recorded in the western eye wall of the storm by the Ricon Del San Jose observation, according to the weather service.

Nueces County Judge Barbara Canales told reporters Saturday that officials were "highly concerned" about storm surges. She urged residents in the western and northern parts of the county to remain indoors.

"We know these are areas that have historically had issues with flooding and drainage issues and so the best thing you can do to be prepared for the storm as it approaches is to stay put," she said.

Abbott said the response to the storm is complicated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. During a hurricane, people normally shelter with family and friends and come together as communities in response to a storm, he said.

"That coming together will continue to provide the ability for Covid-19 to transmit from one person to another," Abbott said, adding that "we cannot allow this hurricane to lead to a more catastrophically deadly event by stoking additional spread of Covid-19 that could lead to fatalities," he added.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Hurricane Douglas

Hurricane Douglas is approaching Hawaii but is forecast to weaken before it reaches the island chain this weekend.

Douglas peaked as a Category 4 storm early Friday and is now a Category 2 storm with winds of 110 mph. Steady weakening is expected to continue over the next 36 hours as it approaches Hawaii

"Recent model trends indicate a northward shift to the path of the hurricane. Regardless of its exact track and whether it makes a direct landfall, severe impacts are still anticipated across the islands as the threats extend well away from the storms center," said CNN meteorologist Derek Van Dam. "Hurricane force winds extend 25 miles from the center and tropical storm force winds extend outward up to 105 miles, meaning this doesn't need to be a direct landfall to have serious consequences."

When Douglas reaches the island chain Saturday evening or Sunday morning, it will likely be a Category 1 hurricane or strong tropical storm, forecasters said.

A hurricane watch is in effect for all of Hawaii except the island of Kaua'i.

President Donald Trump approved an emergency declaration for Hawaii ahead of Hurricane Douglas, according to a statement from the White House.

The declaration authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide "assistance for the counties of Hawaii, Kauai, and Maui and the City and County of Honolulu," the statement said.

A hurricane watch was in place for the island of Hawaii, as of 2 p.m. ET, according to Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency.

Hawaiian Airlines canceled all neighbor island flights on Sunday and select flights Sunday evening between Honolulu and Maui and the island of Hawaii, according to a statement.

Douglas will bring the threat of flash flooding and landslides/mudslides, along with strong winds that may cause power outages and damaging surf.

Tropical storm-force winds are forecast to arrive on the island of Hawaii as early as Saturday evening local time. The hurricane center forecast between 6 to 10 inches of rain for portions of the islands with isolated maximum totals of 15 inches are possible, especially in higher terrain.

The storm also will create large swells that are likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions for several days.

Tropical Storm Gonzalo

Tropical Storm Gonzalo is set to move through the southern Windward Islands on Saturday, bringing heavy rain and strong winds to the islands.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Gonzalo is no longer expected to impact the larger islands of the West Indies -- including Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, Martinique and St. Lucia -- as a strong tropical storm or Category 1 hurricane but as a weaker tropical storm.

"Conditions for Tropical Storm Gonzalo have been less than ideal for its survival. Even though gusty winds and heavy showers will impact the Windward Islands today, the storm has been fighting dry air since its inception. Once it passes the Windward islands and enters the Caribbean, we should see its eventual demise," Van Dam said.

Rainfall is expected to total 1 to 3 inches for much of the affected areas.

Gonzalo is expected to weaken and dissipate in the beginning of next week as it moves through the southern Caribbean.

Gonzalo has already set the record for the earliest-named seventh storm, in what is shaping up to be a busy hurricane season.

Ken Cuccinelli: Federal Agents Could Sue Pelosi for Libel — 'Speaker of the House Knows That She's Using Nazi Allusions' (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 10:02 AM, Jeff Poor, 1912K]
Friday, during an interview that aired on Fox News Channel's "The Ingraham Angle," acting Department of Homeland Security Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli weighed in on the civil unrest plaguing several American cities.

Guest host Lisa Boothe asked Cuccinelli why those cities should not have to deal with the consequences given that the elected leadership in those cities was allowing it to happen. He also argued House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) should be held accountable for her "libelous" statements regarding the agents of the entities involved in the effort to protect federal government property.

"You know, I'm this close to agreeing, except we have a federal mission at the Department of Homeland Security, governed by statute," Cuccinelli replied. "And we've also heard people, this isn't constitutional. And real quick, Lisa, I'd point people to Article I, Section 8 Paragraphs 1, 9 and 18 and the statutes that have been written under it. And one of those statutes charges the Department of Homeland Security with protecting federal properties like this courthouse and Edith Green building there in Portland. So we're not only within the boundaries of the Constitution, we have a statutory charge, and that's the mission we're pursuing there."

"And when you see such libelous, slanderous comments from people who know better, let's not kid ourselves," he continued. "The Speaker of the House knows that she's using Nazi allusions to refer to correct professional law enforcement officers. If I was a CBP agent, if I was an ICE agent, if I was an FPS agent, I might just sue her for libel."

Cuccinelli went on to speculate what motivations might be behind those statements made by Pelosi and her ilk.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“One of the sad things right now about the political arena is that the Left views an important part of their base, as people who believe violence is an acceptable way to achieve your goals,” he said. “And we saw Mayor Wheeler go out last night. He is way out there. He’s radical Left, as you said in your introduction. He’s basically turned much of the city over to these violent criminals. And he’s tied the hands of his own police department. I feel bad for them – the Portland Police Bureau. And last night he thought he could go out and appease the mob and control them. And he went out and spoke to them. He was booed. They called for his resignation.”

“The right historical analogy has nothing to do with Germany,” Cuccinelli continued. “It has to do with the Bolsheviks. And last night that mayor was a Menshevik, the socialists who went out and thought they could control that revolution, and the bloodthirsty Bolsheviks came in and killed them all. This mob is out for blood. They are not there to protect the First Amendment or to exercise first amendment rights. We all respect those people. At every night that 75 to 100 people and then 1,000 more come later, and start attacking these buildings and the law enforcement officers protecting them.”

For racial justice protests, US taps tactical border squads (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [7/25/2020 5:32 PM, Ben Fox, AP, 422K]
They are the most highly trained members of the Border Patrol, agents who confront drug traffickers along the U.S.-Mexico border and track down dangerous fugitives in rugged terrain.

One day this past week, they were in a far different setting — a city park in Portland, Oregon, looking for two people suspected of throwing rocks and bottles at officers guarding the downtown federal courthouse.

Beyond the debate over whether the federal response to the Portland protests encroaches on local authority, another question arises: whether the Department of Homeland Security, with its specialized national security focus, is the right agency for the job.

It’s not just the Border Patrol Tactical Unit that has been called to duty in Portland. DHS has dispatched air marshals as well as the Customs and Border Protection Special Response Team and even members of the Coast Guard.

“The Department of Homeland Security was never intended as a national police force let alone a presidential militia,” said Peter Vincent, a former general counsel for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is also an agency within DHS.

The deployment of DHS agents and officers is legal, both under existing law and an executive order President Donald Trump signed June 26 to protect federal property and monuments. But it has made the agency, created to improve the nation’s response to terrorism, a target of widespread criticism.

Congress plans to delve into the issue Friday, when the House Homeland Security Committee holds a hearing on the federal response to the protests in Portland and Trump’s announcement that he plans to send federal agents to Chicago and Albuquerque, New Mexico, to help combat rising crime while making “law and order” a central theme of his

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

reelection campaign.

“Americans across the country are watching what the administration is doing in Portland with horror and revulsion and are wondering if their cities could be President Trump’s next targets,” said Rep. Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat who is chairman of the committee.

As of Monday, there were 114 federal agents and officers deployed to downtown Portland, according to an affidavit from Gabriel Russell, the regional director of the Federal Protective Service, the DHS component that provides security for federal buildings.

Protests have been taking place in Portland since May 26 but the federal agents kept a “defensive posture” by staying inside federal buildings until July 3, Russell said in the affidavit, filed in response to a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union seeking protections for journalists and other legal observers covering the demonstrations.

That night, according to Russell, protesters attempted to set fire to the federal courthouse and DHS deployed a Rapid Deployment Force as part of “Operation Diligent Valor.”

That same night, Trump stood before Mount Rushmore and accused protesters around the country who have pushed for racial justice of engaging in a “merciless campaign to wipe out our history.” He later criticized officials in Portland for allowing demonstrations to get “totally out of control."

The officers deploying to Portland are “highly trained,” and many wear camouflage because that’s their duty uniform on the southwest border, according to acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf, responding to charges of a militarized response to the protests.

In addition to their previous training, they took a 90-minute online course on the mission and jurisdiction of the Federal Protective Service, police powers and criminal regulations, according to a course description provided to The Associated Press.

Richard Cline, principal deputy director of the protective services, told reporters that DHS officers are given additional training to ensure they act within guidelines established by the Justice Department as they assist an organization that was “quickly overwhelmed” by violent demonstrators.

Wolf also defended tactics such as tear gas, rubber bullets and having officers sweep people off the street into unmarked vehicles, evoking images of a secret police force.

“We are only targeting and arresting those who have been identified as committing criminal acts, like any other law enforcement agency does across the country every single day of the week,” he said.

On Wednesday, agents from the Border Patrol Tactical Unit, known as BORTAC, set out from the federal courthouse just after midnight in pursuit of two people in dark clothing and carrying makeshift shields suspected of throwing rocks and bottles at officers, according to court records.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The agents struggled with the two, eventually restraining them and turning them over to the Federal Protective Service. One, a 19-year-old man, was charged with felony assault of an officer.

In addition to rocks and bottles, agents and officers at the courthouse have been struck with ball bearings, improvised explosives, fireworks, and balloons filled with paint and feces, Russell said. Some have also had lasers shined at their eyes.

At least 28 officers have been injured and officers have made at least 43 arrests, mostly for misdemeanors.

While the use of BORTAC officers in this environment is unusual, it's not unprecedented, said Michael Fisher, a former senior official with the agency and member of the unit.

BORTAC officers have been used to serve warrants on suspects considered dangerous, protected emergency personnel during natural disasters and were sent to Los Angeles during the 1992 riots, Fisher said.

"What was happening in Portland is the police were not enforcing ... the laws and it just escalated and that's the reason it's gone on well over 50 days now," said Fisher, who now runs a security company.

Local officials have in turn accused DHS of inflaming the situation, an argument bolstered by the fact that protests grew larger as controversy intensified over the tactics of the federal agents.

Former DHS officials concede the agency has worked with state and local law enforcement before, with the consent and cooperation of local authorities. But in Oregon, officials have accused the federal government of inflaming the situation and asked it to withdraw.

Vincent, who left ICE in 2014 and now works as a consultant, said some current officials are "extraordinarily uncomfortable" with what they have been asked to do in Portland.

"I am deeply concerned as someone who believes in the mission of the agency and knows and respects its officers and agents that these activities will irreparably damage the agency's reputation," he said.

[NY] House lawmakers to launch probe into DHS excluding NY from Trusted Travelers Program (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 4:57 PM, J. Edward, 2343K]
Democrats on the House Homeland Security Committee announced Saturday that they are launching an investigation into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) after the agency dmitted to making inaccurate statements regarding its decision to bar New York residents from participating in the Trusted Traveler Program (TTP).

The TTP streamlines customer check-ins through security at airports and international borders.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Mo.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, and Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-N.Y.), chairwoman of the border security subcommittee, sent a letter to acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf and Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) John Wagner requesting interviews and documents related to the statements they made in front of the committee and in court.

“The decision to exclude New York from Trusted Traveler programs always appeared to be political retribution and now we know it was,” Thompson and Rice said in a statement.

“It appears DHS officials made false statements to Congress – an intolerable turn of events for a Department charged with enforcing Federal law. Through our investigation, we will seek to understand why this happened and determine who is responsible,” they added.

DHS announced Thursday that it was restoring the TTP for New Yorkers "effective immediately" after New York state amended its "Green Light Law" in December that allowed undocumented immigrants to apply for driver’s licenses. The law had initially barred DHS from accessing information from the Department of Motor Vehicles unless ordered by a judge.

DHS argued that the original law infringed on national security efforts and barred the state from accessing the TTP.

The state of New York promptly sued the Trump administration over the decision, arguing that New York residents were being unfairly singled out for political purposes, considering other states and cities including Washington, D.C., have similar laws.

DHS officials falsely stated both in court and under congressional oath that no other states had similar programs.

DHS walked back those claims this week.

A Thursday court filing in the case said DHS and CBP "deeply regret the foregoing inaccurate or misleading statements and apologize to the court and [New York] for the need to make these corrections at this late stage."

"These revelations undermine a central argument in defendants’ briefs and declarations to date: that CBP is not able to assure itself of an applicant’s low-risk status because New York fails to share relevant DMV information with CBP for TTP purposes," the filing continued.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) said Friday that the DHS policy was “political exploitation” and that Wolf and his deputy, Ken Cuccinelli, violated their oath of office and should be investigated by Congress.

“It was all politics all the time. It was all exploitation all the time. And they hurt this state because of it. You cannot use government for political exploitation,” he said at a press conference. “It is illegal, what they did. And I believe acting Secretary Wolf and acting Deputy Cuccinelli, they violated their oath of office.”

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[VA] DHS boss Chad Wolf's home targeted by Shut Down DC for leftist 'rally' (FOX News)

FOX News [7/25/2020 5:51 PM, Sam Dorman, 10362K]

A leftist group is targeting the home of Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf for a rally, which would make him the latest Trump administration figure to have protests outside his house due to politics.

The group Shut Down DC is planning gather Sunday outside of Wolf's Alexandria, Va., home. According to a Facebook post, the group will "demand that federal agents be removed" from cities like Portland, which has been rocked by nearly two months of protests and sometimes violent riots.

"Trump's Department of Homeland Security is invading our cities," the group said, reiterating a common refrain regarding the administration's attempts to quell violence in U.S. cities. As of Saturday afternoon, 13 people were marked as attending the event while 47 said they were interested.

An email about the rally was also sent to activists, according to the Washington Examiner. It accused federal agents of violently attacking "protesters and bystanders" and "kidnap[ping] people in unmarked vans" -- accusations that DHS' Customs and Border Protection has denied. In a press release, the group also suggested that Wolf would "use DHS to silence political opposition" in the event of a contested result in November's presidential election.

This wouldn't be the first time a member of Trump's Cabinet has been harrassed outside of their homes. During the migrant crisis in 2018, Wolf's predecessor, Kirstjen Nielsen, also encountered protesters outside of her home in Alexandria. DHS, in particular, has become a lightning rod for criticism as it has implemented President Trump's anti-illegal immigration agenda.

As leftist groups did then, Shut Down DC is calling for an abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). It also wants "every person detained by CBP to be freed." That would presumably include individuals who committed federal crimes in Portland.

DHS did not immediately respond to Fox News' request for comment. However, CBP Commissioner Mark Morgan has been adamant about the need for federal law enforcement to quell violence in Portland and safeguard federal facilities there.

"The minute that we remove our presence from that building, this country would watch the courthouse burn to the ground at the hands of these criminals," he told Fox News on Thursday.

Unrest in Portland has resulted in multiple injuries to CBP agents, including three who could have been permanently blinded by laser attacks, the White House said.

Wolf has similarly defended his agents and blasted what he described as "criminals" fueling chaos in Portland.

Multiple allegations have surfaced claiming that CBP has been heavy-handed while dealing with the unrest.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

"The actions of the militarized federal officers are flat-out unconstitutional and will not go unanswered," the American Civil Liberties Union warned earlier this week.

Morgan has denied his agents are a "secret police" and maintains that they follow normal law enforcement protocol when interacting with individuals in Portland. Morgan also maintained that his agents haven't arrested people unless they had "reasonable suspicion" or "probable cause" to believe they have committed a federal crime.

Meanwhile, Oregon politicians have accused the administration of abusing its authority.

"Not only is the Trump administration violating the constitutional rights of Portlanders," City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly said in a press release, "but they are also attempting to use Portland as a proving ground for fascism, and they plan to invade cities across the country, cities that are political targets of the president."

Both the Justice Department and DHS have announced internal inquiries into CBP's behavior but Morgan says he's "not worried" about the outcome. "I haven't seen any reports at all that indicated that the CBP law enforcement professionals out there have done anything wrong," he told Fox News.

[IL] Three men charged with federal gun crimes in Chicago after Trump sends hundreds of federal agents to the city (FOX News)
FOX News [7/25/2020 1:56 PM, Vandana Rambaran, 10362K]
Prosecutors charged three men in Chicago with federal gun crimes Friday-- the first charges under the Justice Department's new crime initiative in the city.

Hundreds of federal officials poured into Chicago in recent days as part of President Trump's "Operation Legend," aimed at tackling violent crime and gun offenses.

Romeo Holloway, 21, was arrested Tuesday night by federal and local law enforcement officers for illegally possessing a loaded handgun.

Darryl Collins, 30, was arrested Wednesday afternoon by Chicago police for illegally possessing ammunition, which was in a loaded handgun, according to the criminal complaint.

Both men had previously been convicted of felonies for unlawful possession of a firearm or ammunition

Federal and local law enforcement officers also executed a search warrant at the home of Darryl Phillips, 22, of Chicago, early Wednesday morning. Officers discovered a semiautomatic handgun in a bedroom, the complaint said.

A special agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), said the firearm was equipped with an auto-sear device, or "switch," allowing the gun to fire more than one shot without manually reloading, the complaint states.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Officers from the ATF, FBI, U.S. Marshals Service and Drug Enforcement Administration are working alongside local and state police as part of the Trump administration's plan, the Department of Justice said.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot initially resisted the initiative, but later said Trump has her support, as her city struggles to tamp down gun violence.

However, the plan faces skepticism from citizens, especially as the timing coincides with increased scrutiny of other U.S. cities such as Portland, Ore., where federal agents stormed protests to protect federal property. Over a hundred agents are facing an investigation by the Justice Department for their use of aggressive tactics such as pepper spraying and striking unarmed protesters and making questionable arrests.

"This is not patrol. This is not against civil unrest," U.S. Attorney John Lausch said on Wednesday as Trump made an announcement of his plans. "This is working with the Chicago Police Department to do what we can to reduce the staggering violent crime we're facing right now."

Lausch, a former federal prosecutor like the mayor, is a longtime friend of Lightfoot and will be leading the initiative.

[TX] US officials raid Chinese consulate in Houston believed to be spy hub (FOX News)
FOX News [7/25/2020 11:12 AM, Marisa Schultz, 10362K]
U.S. officials pried open the doors of the Chinese consulate in Houston on Friday and took over the building shortly after Chinese officials vacated the facility on orders from the Trump Administration.

Federal officials and local law enforcement surrounded the Houston facility Friday afternoon as the Chinese officials moved out of the building that the Trump Administration contends was a hub of spy activity by the Chinese Communist Party.

Forty minutes after the 4 p.m. eviction deadline passed, U.S. officials broke into a back door of the consulate and a man believed to be a State Department official led the way of the U.S. takeover, the Houston Chronicle reported.

Photographs show federal officials and a locksmith trying to force their way into the vacated Consulate General of China. U.S. officials had tried three other entrances but couldn't get in. Security teams donning U.S. State Department emblems on their shirts stood guard. The Houston Chronicle reported that the local fire department entered the building, too.

Tuesday night, hours after the Trump Administration announced its directive for the Chinese to vacate, the Houston Fire Department responded to fires at the courtyard of the building -- an apparent effort to destroy documents. Chinese officials refused to allow the first responders to enter to put out the fires, Fox 26 in Houston reported.

All morning Friday, consulate workers were spotted loading up two U-Haul trucks and vehicles and tossing trash bags into a nearby Dumpster in an attempt to meet the U.S.'s 4

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

p.m. eviction deadline, the Chronicle reported.

“We can confirm that the PRC Consulate General in Houston is closed," a State Department spokesperson told Fox News.

After the Chinese officials packed up and left, U.S. teams began to force their way in. After two hours of gaining entry, the government officials loaded into a van and drove away, leaving the Houston Police and security teams behind at the scene, the Houston Chronicle reported.

The U.S. alleged that the consulate was a nest of Chinese spies who tried to steal data from facilities in Texas, including the Texas A&M medical system and The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo this week called the Houston complex "a hub of spying and IP theft." Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., said the consulate was a "massive spy center [and] forcing it to close is long overdue."

China called the allegations “malicious slander” and responded by ordering the U.S. to close its consulate in the western Chinese city of Chengdu.

U.S. officials were spotted packing up and moving out of the Chengdu consulate Saturday as thousands of people gathered to watch the Americans forced to exit on Beijing’s orders.

The South China Morning Post reported that three trucks and a bus were seen entering and leaving the U.S. compound while other workers left on foot with the arms full of boxes and files. Reuters reported the American consulate emblem was taken down and security was tight outside the facility for the moveout in the tit-for-tat consulate closures.

[TX] Hanna becomes first hurricane of 2020 Atlantic season as it barrels toward Texas (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 10:15 AM, Tal Axelrod, 2343K]
Tropical Storm Hanna was upgraded to a hurricane on Saturday morning, becoming the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic season as it barrels toward Texas.

The National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Hanna had strengthened and gained winds of more than 75 miles per hour, making it a Category 1 storm. It is expected to strengthen as it continues moving closer to the Texas coast.

As of Saturday morning, Hanna was located roughly 100 miles away from Corpus Christi, Texas, and was moving west at 9 mph. It is expected to make landfall later Saturday, and a hurricane warning is in effect for parts of Texas.

Some areas of Texas are anticipated to get six to 12 inches of rain, while others will get 18 inches through Sunday night.

Kleberg County, south of Corpus Christi, has already issued a voluntary evacuation order.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The storm comes as Texas is already grappling with an alarming surge in COVID-19 cases, with the governor issuing a statewide mask order and rolling back the state's reopening plan.

While Hanna is the first hurricane of the Atlantic season, Hurricane Douglas is also nearing Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean. The storm peaked at Category 4 on Friday, though it is expected to weaken before making landfall this weekend.

"Douglas is expected to move near or over portions of the Hawaiian Islands this weekend, and there is an increasing chance that strong winds and heavy rainfall could affect portions of the state beginning on Sunday," the NHC said in an update earlier this week.

[TX] Virus-hit Texas braces as 2020's first hurricane, Hanna, takes aim (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 9:46 AM, AFP, 1912K]
Texas, already struggling with a surge in coronavirus cases, was bracing Saturday after storm Hanna strengthened into the first Atlantic hurricane of 2020, with meteorologists warning of heavy rain, storm surge and potentially life-threatening flash flooding.

The storm, with wind speeds of around 80 miles per hour (130 kilometers per hour), strengthened to a Category 1 hurricane overnight and is expected to make landfall by afternoon or early evening, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

It could bring storm surges of up to five feet and drop up to 18 inches of rain on parts of south Texas, the NHC said, warning of dangerous flash flooding.

Hanna was about 85 miles southeast of Corpus Christi, Texas, at 10:00 am local time (1500 GMT), and was moving west at about seven miles per hour, an NHC advisory said.

Expected to make a slight turn later in the day, it "should make landfall along the Texas coast within the hurricane warning area this afternoon or early this evening," the advisory continued.

Storm warnings were already in effect along Texas's Gulf Coast early Saturday. In Corpus Christi, a city of 325,000, officials closed libraries and museums as residents braced for the storm, local media reported.

Hanna will roar ashore as Texas is already facing a huge surge in coronavirus infections, with officials instituting a state-wide mask mandate to try to curb the spread of the disease.

Two other storm systems were churning Saturday: Pacific Hurricane Douglas, bearing down on the Hawaiian islands, and Tropical Storm Gonzalo in the Atlantic, near the Windward Islands.

Douglas — at one point a powerful Category 4 hurricane — has weakened to a Category 2 storm with wind speeds of 105 miles per hour.

The NHC said Saturday the storm would continue to weaken as it approaches Hawaii, "potentially passing dangerously close to, or over, the islands late tonight through Sunday

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

night," bringing high winds and heavy surf.

Hurricane warnings were in effect Saturday in Hawaii and Maui counties as well as Oahu.

Meanwhile, Gonzalo was pouring heavy rain on the Windward Islands, but the tropical storm was expected to weaken and dissipate by Sunday night.

[TX] Hanna becomes hurricane as it heads toward virus-weary Texas (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [7/25/2020 10:31 AM, Juan A. Lozano, AP, 206K]
Tropical Storm Hanna was upgraded to a hurricane Saturday, moving toward the Texas coast and threatening to bring heavy rain, storm surge and possible tornadoes to a part of the country trying to cope with a surge in coronavirus cases.

The storm, which is the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, was expected to make landfall Saturday afternoon or evening south of Corpus Christi, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said Saturday morning. It had maximum sustained winds of 75 mph (120 kph) and was centered about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east-southeast of Corpus Christi and was moving west at 9 mph (15 kph).

Many parts of Texas, including the area where Hanna is expected to come ashore, have been dealing with a spike in coronavirus cases in recent weeks, but local officials said they were prepared for whatever the storm may bring.

"And don't feel like since we've been fighting COVID for five months, that we're out of energy or we're out of gas. We're not," Corpus Christi Mayor Joe McComb said Friday. "We can do these two things together and we're going to win both of them."

Corpus Christi is in Nueces County, where health officials made headlines when they revealed that 60 infants tested positive for COVID-19 from July 1 to July 16.

Farther south in Cameron County, which borders Mexico, more than 300 confirmed new cases have been reported almost daily for the past two weeks, according to state health figures. The past week has also been the county's deadliest of the pandemic.

Cameron County Judge Eddie Treviño, the county's top elected official, said he was awaiting word Friday of whether hotels would be used to house recovering COVID-19 patients in order to free up hospital beds.

"If there's any benefit to be gained from this, it's that people have to stay at home for a weekend," Treviño said.

Officials reminded residents to wear masks if they needed to get supplies before the storm arrives or if they have to shelter with neighbors because of flooding.

The main hazard from Hanna was expected to be flash flooding, Chris Birchfield, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Brownsville, said Friday. Forecasters said Hanna could bring 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of rain through Sunday night

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

— with isolated totals of 18 inches (46 centimeters) — in addition to coastal swells that could cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions.

Coastal states scrambled this spring to adjust emergency hurricane plans to account for the virus, and Hanna loomed as the first big test.

South Texas officials' plans for any possible rescues, shelters and monitoring of the storm will have the pandemic in mind. Gov. Greg Abbott said various resources to respond to the storm were on standby across the state, including search-and-rescue teams and aircraft.

Treviño said shelters would keep families socially distanced if any need to evacuate their homes.

In the Mexican city of Matamoros, located across the border from Brownsville, volunteers worried whether the tropical storm would affect a makeshift migrant camp near the Rio Grande where about 1,300 asylum seekers, including newborn babies and elderly residents, are waiting under the U.S. immigration policy informally known as "Remain in Mexico."

Erin Hughes, a volunteer at the camp who is a civil engineer from Philadelphia, said tropical storms pose a devastating threat since the camp is located on a floodplain, and that she and others were monitoring the river's water level.

As of Saturday morning, there was a storm surge warning in effect for a stretch of coast south of Corpus Christi from Baffin Bay to Port Mansfield. Storm surge up to 5 feet (1.5 meters) was forecast for that area. People were advised to protect life and property from high water.

Tornadoes were also possible Saturday for parts of the lower to middle Texas coastal plain, forecasters said Friday. A hurricane warning remained in effect for Port Mansfield to Mesquite Bay, which is north of Corpus Christi, and a tropical storm warning was in effect from Port Mansfield south to Barra el Mezquital, Mexico, and from Mesquite Bay north to High Island, Texas.

Forecasters said Hanna could bring 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of rain through Sunday night — with isolated totals of 18 inches (46 centimeters) — in addition to coastal swells that could cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions.

Meanwhile, Tropical Storm Gonzalo was still on track to move across the southern Windward Islands on Saturday afternoon or evening. Gonzalo was moving west near 18 mph (30 kph) with maximum sustained winds at 40 mph (65 kph), the National Hurricane Center said Saturday morning.

Gonzalo is forecast to bring 1 to 3 inches (3 to 8 centimeters) of rain, with isolated totals of 5 inches (13 centimeters). A tropical storm warning was in effect for Tobago and Grenada and its dependencies. The storm was expected to dissipate by Sunday night or Monday, forecasters said.

Gonzalo and Hanna broke the record for the earliest seventh and eighth Atlantic named

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

storms, respectively, according to Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach. The previous records were Gert on July 24, 2005, and Harvey on Aug. 3, 2005, Klotzbach said.

Cristobal, Danielle, Edouard and Fay also set records for being the earliest named Atlantic storm for their alphabetic order.

[TX] Hanna officially becomes a Category 1 hurricane (ABC News)
ABC News [7/25/2020 7:55 AM, Reed McDonough, 29K] Video: HERE
Hurricane Hanna has formed in the Gulf of Mexico as a Category 1 hurricane with sustained winds of 75 mph around the eye wall.

Hanna is strengthening and the National Hurricane Center says it is expected to make landfall in southern Texas on Saturday evening.

Conditions along the southwestern Gulf coast, in particular southern Texas, are expected to deteriorate through Saturday.

The main threats will be dangerous tides and a storm surge along with extreme rainfall.

Tropical Storm Warnings, Hurricane Warnings, Storm Surge Warnings and several Flood Alerts are in place this morning along the southern Texas coastline.

Flood alerts are in place from the Mexico/Texas border to southwestern Louisiana as Hanna is expected to bring over 12 inches of rain locally to parts of southern Texas through the end of the weekend.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Douglas remains a Category 3 hurricane as of 3 a.m. EST with sustained winds of 115 mph and is moving WNW at 20 mph toward Hawaii.

Douglas is expected to pass dangerously close or pass over the Hawaiian Islands Saturday night into early Monday morning.

Douglas will bring a triple threat of damaging winds, flooding rain and dangerous surf, especially along eastern shores.

A Hurricane Watch is in effect this morning from Oahu to the big island of Hawaii.

Elsewhere, Gonzalo remains a Tropical Storm as of 3 a.m. EST with sustained winds of 40 mph and is moving west at 17 mph.

The storm is weakening as it heads south of the Windward islands and may lose its tropical storm status on Saturday, thus becoming a tropical depression.

However, the storm is expected to bring dangerous surf and torrential rains to the southern Caribbean islands Saturday through Sunday night when it will reach Aruba.

Heat alerts are in place this morning for 10 states from the Pacific Northwest to the

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Midwest.

Today's heat index values are expected to hit the triple digits in parts of the Midwest.

Meanwhile, a new potential heat wave is building across the eastern U.S. as Heat Index Values are expected to be near or above 90 degrees from the Carolinas to New York City today through the middle of next week.

Some spots will even see Heat Index Values soar into the triple digits for the second week in a row.

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in Texas (CNN)
CNN [7/25/2020 9:59 AM, Staff, 7975K] Video: HERE
Hurricane Hanna has made landfall on Padre Island, Texas, according to the National Hurricane Center. The storm had sustained winds of 90 mph, making it a high-end Category 1 hurricane. CNN Meteorologist Tyler Maudlin has the latest on the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic season.

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in South Texas (CBS News)
CBS News [7/25/2020 8:02 PM, Staff, 2540K]
Hurricane Hanna officially made landfall Saturday just south of Corpus Crisiti, Texas, on Padre Island at 6 p.m. ET with maximum sustained winds of 90 mph. Hanna has potential for damaging winds and severe flooding. Hanna made landfall 6 mph short of being labeled a Category 2 storm, according to the Texas Division of Emergency Management.

Hanna made a second landfall at 7:15 p.m. ET in Kennedy County, Texas, again with maximum sustained winds of 90 mph, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued a State Disaster Declaration for 32 counties as the storm made its first landfall.

Hanna was upgraded from a tropical storm to a hurricane while it still churned off the coast of Texas on Saturday, becoming the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Most of the commercial flights scheduled to fly into Corpus Christi International Airport on Saturday had been canceled due to the impending storm. Flights schedules to depart or arrive on Sunday were still on as of Saturday evening, although the city noted that could change depending on the severity of the storm.

The 2020 Atlantic season is likely to be one of the most active in recorded history because of abnormally warm water and other climate conditions. Hanna is already the eighth named system of the young 2020 season in the Atlantic so far, putting it ahead of a record pace set in 2005 by 10 days.

Near-historic sea surface temperatures are providing jet fuel-like energy to tropical systems. Much of the main tropical development region – stretching from the Caribbean to Africa – is seeing record-high water temperatures, illustrated with the deep shades of red below.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

With Hanna, hurricane hunters found both hurricane force winds and a pressure that was dropping quickly on Saturday morning – a sign of an intensifying storm. Hurricane warnings and storm surge warnings are in effect for the South Texas coast.

Hanna will make landfall near Corpus Christi, where storm surge was being seen Saturday morning on Whitecap Beach. Storm surge flooding is expected to max out at 3 to 5 feet.

Wind gusts over 90 mph are possible near the coast. That is strong enough to down trees and powerlines, with power outages expected.

Rainfall will be the biggest threat. Widespread 6 to 12 inches is likely, with some pockets seeing up to 18 inches. The heaviest band will hit from Corpus Christi to Brownsville and points west. Flash flooding will be widespread.

Elsewhere in east Texas, north of the storm, bands of tropical downpours will bring localized flooding and isolated, fast-moving tornadoes.

The storm will weaken overnight, but rain will linger through Sunday.

Hanna is one of three significant systems churning Saturday morning.

Hurricane Douglas

In the Pacific, Hurricane Douglas is a Category 2 storm with winds over 100 mph. The storm was located 590 miles east-southeast of Honolulu, Hawaii, moving west-northwest at 18 mph.

Because the storm is forecast to weaken and the eye wall may only skirt coastal areas, the system is not expected to produce catastrophic winds. Still, wind gusts over 75 mph are possible.

The biggest threat is huge waves offshore pushing very dangerous surf toward shore. Also, rainfall is expected to total 3 to 6 inches, which may cause mudslides in hilly areas. The storm will weaken and move away on Monday.

Hawaiian Airlines announced Saturday that all transpacific and inter-island flights scheduled for Sunday were canceled.

Tropical Depression Gonzalo

Meanwhile, Tropical Depression Gonzalo is much weaker, with winds decreasing to about 35 mph on Saturday afternoon. The government of Trinidad and Tobago canceled a Tropical Storm Warning that was in effect for Tobago and Grenada.

Gonzalo or its remnants are expected to move across the southeastern Caribbean Sea on Saturday and Sunday.

Behind that, another disturbance emerging off Africa has a good chance of becoming the

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

next named system of the Atlantic season within a couple of days. This system will need to be watched closely, as the computer forecast models show it may become a strong system heading toward the Caribbean and perhaps the U.S. mainland, eventually.

With the main period of hurricane season arriving about two to three weeks early, experts say the U.S. should be prepared for a very trying and active few months ahead.

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall on Padre Island, COVID-19 complicates storm response (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [7/25/2020 7:28 PM, Dylan McGuinness and Erin Douglas, 206K]
Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration Saturday for 32 South Texas counties facing Hurricane Hanna, a dangerous storm the governor said is exacerbated by the challenge of COVID-19.

Strong wind gusts, storm surges and heavy rainfall that can cause life-threatening flash flooding threatened the lower Rio Grande Valley and Corpus Christi areas on Saturday. At the same time, emergency efforts in Texas were complicated by COVID-19, which continues to spread rapidly throughout Texas, particularly in the same South Texas regions hit by Hanna.

Abbott warned that the storm may worsen the COVID-19 pandemic in those areas, and he implored residents to keep the virus in mind as they seek to protect their lives and loved ones.

“Any hurricane is an enormous challenge,” Abbott said. “This challenge is complicated and made even more severe, seeing that it is sweeping through an area that is the most challenged area in the state for COVID-19.”

Hanna strengthened to a hurricane-level storm early Saturday morning and started thrashing the region between Corpus Christi and Brownsville in the early afternoon. It made landfall on Padre Island at 5 p.m. The storm was set to mostly skirt the Houston region, though weather officials said some of its outer bands would make for a wet and gusty weekend.

Hurricane Hanna developed strong winds between 55 and 70 miles per hour with gusts up to 90 miles per hour, according to the National Weather Service. The storm has a potential for winds up to 110 miles per hour.

Storm surges continue to pose a threat to coastal communities. The National Hurricane Center warned of life-threatening flash flooding and storm surges between Port Mansfield and Sargent. Near Corpus Christi, morning storm surges flooded Highway 361, which connects Mustang Island and Port Aransas to the mainland, according to the National Weather Service.

COVID-19 during a hurricane

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Hanna marks the first test of the state's hurricane response efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus is still rapidly spreading across Texas, and Friday saw a three-day streak of the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in a single day in the state, according to a Houston Chronicle data analysis. There were 181 new deaths confirmed, bringing the statewide total to 4,795.

The South Texas region currently inundated by Hurricane Hanna emerged as a COVID-19 hotspot in recent weeks. The Rio Grande Valley, a vast region of south Texas that encompasses Brownsville, Harlingen to South Padre Island, has struggled to contain the virus. Hidalgo County, which includes McAllen, reported 813 new cases on Friday and 33 deaths. Hidalgo County's total case count is nearing 15,000 and there have been 433 COVID-19 deaths.

Further north in the Corpus Christi metro area, Nueces County had a spike of 354 cases reported on Friday, bringing the county total to 9,961.

The hurricane disaster declaration, which includes most Houston-area counties, allows Abbott to waive statutes and regulations that would impede a rapid response, and it also opens the door for potential federal assistance, which Abbott has requested. Those responses will include COVID-19 testing for evacuees and additional personal protective equipment for first responders. In addition to deploying search and rescue teams to the affected areas, Abbott said the National Guard and Texas agencies are sending 17 emergency teams to shelters to test people for COVID-19.

San Antonio opened its Freeman Coliseum, where the Red Cross will assist local efforts. The Coliseum will be used as a medical shelter with capacity for 100 patients, and it will also serve as a checkpoint for evacuees to obtain a hotel voucher. San Antonio opened hotels to shelter evacuees, an effort to limit the crowding typical of usual hurricane evacuation efforts.

Elected officials in the threatened regions told residents to take precautions for the hurricane, and beach communities were urged to voluntarily evacuate.

Officials urged residents to be cautious of COVID-19 and avoid going out into the storm. Nueces County Judge Barbara Canales, during a Corpus Christi media briefing, called the hurricane "Mother Nature's stay-at-home order," and Corpus Christi Mayor Joe McComb reminded those leaving the beaches to keep masks on while traveling. He urged residents to resist going to the beach to watch the storm.

"Don't ever underestimate the power of water and what it can do," he said. "It's not forgiving."

Widespread power outages in Corpus, South Texas

Thousands of homes across South Texas lost power Saturday afternoon. As of 5 p.m., more than 31,000 customers had lost power in the Coastal Bend Area, according to data from AEP Texas, the electric service provider for the region.

Outages were most frequent in the Corpus Christi area. In Nueces County, which includes

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Corpus Christi, more than 19,000 customers in the county had lost power as of 5 p.m., about 12 percent of the county. In neighboring Kleberg County, 1,600 had lost power Saturday afternoon, or 13 percent of the county.

Outages were also prevalent further south as well in Hidalgo County, which includes McAllen, where 1,700 lost service Saturday. AEP Texas does not have a restoration time estimate, and the company said it would begin efforts to restore power after the storm passes and it is safe to do so.

“As the storm intensifies and moves closer to making landfall, AEP Texas crews will be called to shelter-in-place until the storm passes and crews can safely operate,” said Omar Lopez, AEP Texas spokesperson in a statement Saturday.

Oil and gas operations in Hanna’s path

Corpus Christi is home to several refineries and petrochemical plants located along Nueces Bay. The Port of Corpus Christi, which primarily services the oil and gas industry, suspended all ship traffic Friday night, and crews prepared the port for a hurricane.

The reopening of the ship channel and the port condition returning to normal is dependent upon the weather, according to a statement from the Port of Corpus Christi.

Operations at CITGO’s Corpus Christi refinery are continuing, a spokesperson said Saturday morning. The refinery, which is located on 890 acres on the coast of Nueces Bay and employs more than 1,000 employees and contractors, has the capacity to process 167,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

“We have procedures in place to ensure the safety of our employees, contractors and surrounding communities, while focusing on the continuous supply of product to our customers,” said Jennifer Lira, a CITGO spokesperson.

Valero’s Bill Greehey Refineries complex and Flint Hills Resources’ east and west refineries are also in Hanna’s path on Nueces Bay. Spokespersons at Valero and Flint Hills Resources did not immediately respond to a request for comment Saturday.

[TX] Hanna, first hurricane of Atlantic season, slams ashore in Texas with 100 mph wind gusts (Washington Post)
Washington Post [7/25/2020 8:12 PM, Matthew Cappucci, Andrew Freedman and Jason Samenow, 13480K]
Hanna, the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic season, is barging into South Texas unleashing wind gusts over 100 mph, torrential rain, and storm surge inundation along the coast. The storm officially made landfall at 5:00 p.m. central over Padre Island, Texas. It comes as Pacific storm Hurricane Douglas bears down on Hawaii and as two other systems whirl out over the Atlantic during what it is expected to be an abnormally active season. A record number of storms have already occurred to this point.

A hurricane warning remains in effect for a roughly 100-mile stretch of coastline on either side of Corpus Christi, Tex., between Port Mansfield and Port Aransas. A tropical storm

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

warning covers remaining coastal communities from the U.S.-Mexico border north through Port O'Connor. Some of the same areas that were struck by Category 4 Hurricane Harvey on Aug. 25, 2017, are being hit again.

On Saturday afternoon, the National Weather Service reported "significant structural damage" in Port Mansfield with winds gusting over 80 mph. "Severe damage" was reported to a pier on North Padre Island where nearby winds topped 100 mph. PowerOutage.us indicated over 50,000 customers without power in South Texas as of Saturday evening.

A dangerous storm surge is affecting areas just north of where the center is coming ashore. The surge is the storm-driven rise in ocean water above normally dry land at the coast. Storm surge warnings extend from near Baffin Bay to Sargent, where the water may rise up to 2 to 6 feet above normally dry land, resulting in coastal inundation. The maximum surge of 4 to 6 feet was predicted between Baffin Bay and Corpus Christi Bay, where the surge was expected to be the highest since Hurricane Allen in 1980.

Images from social media showed water inundating parts of downtown Corpus Christi Saturday afternoon.

In addition to coastal flooding, South Texas will also be subjected flash flooding from heavy rain as well. Up to 18 inches of rain are expected as Hanna's torrential rain bands focus deep tropical moisture. As of Saturday evening, already 7 to 10 inches of rain had fallen along the South Texas coast in the area just south of Port Mansfield, where a flash flood warning was in effect.

A local state of disaster was declared in Hidalgo County, which borders Mexico and is located to the west-northwest of Brownsville, given "expected catastrophic flooding."

Hanna's impending landfall comes at a time when the United States continues to be gripped by the coronavirus pandemic; Texas ranks second among the states with the most new cases in the past week, and South Texas has been hit particularly hard. According to the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, the seven counties from Corpus Christi south to Brownsville and inland along the Mexican border, which are likely to see Hanna's strongest winds and heaviest rains, have diagnosed a total of 18,420 active covid-19 cases. Many of these cases have occurred in the past few weeks.

The pandemic complicates storm shelter and relief operations as social distancing requirements and other prevention efforts are taken into account, with FEMA and state agencies tasked with responding to both the coronavirus and hurricanes.

Hidalgo County has recorded the third-highest number of fatalities statewide, with at least 433.

More than 2,000 miles to the east, another storm — Gonzalo — was gasping for life as it trekked west, bound for the Windward Islands. A tropical storm warning was up for St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tobago, and Grenada, where gusty winds and several inches of rain are possible.

Simultaneously, a third Atlantic system south of the Cape Verde islands bears watching and

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

has an increasing likelihood of tropical development once it approaches the Lesser Antilles during the first half of next week.

Tracking Hanna

As of 7 p.m. central time Saturday, Hanna was centered 10 miles northwest of Port Mansfield, heading west-southwest at 8 mph. Due to interaction with land, its peak winds had dropped to 85 mph.

Hanna had intensified at an impressive clip since Friday morning, its peak winds increasing 50 mph from a low-end tropical storm (with 40 mph maximum winds) to a high-end Category 1 hurricane with 90 mph maximum winds at landfall.

On Saturday afternoon, an eye also became visible at the center of the storm, indicating intensification was continuing through to landfall. Wind gusts had topped 100 mph at Laguna Madre, Texas, which is adjacent to South Padre Island.

The storm's peak winds will continue to gradually weaken as it moves further inland.

Rainfall and flood threat

In South Texas, a broad 6 to 12 inches of rainfall is likely, with localized 15- to 20-inch amounts. Rainfall rates of up to 4 inches per hour could occur. This rainfall output, the Weather Service warned, could prompt "many evacuations and rescues" as waterways rapidly overflow, roads and parking lots become "rivers of moving water," and floodwaters enter structures.

Farther north, a spattering of tropical downpours were affecting the Houston-Galveston area, while another cluster of rains was deluging the Golden Triangle of Port Arthur, Beaumont and Orange. In this zone, lesser amounts are predicted, with 2 to 4 inches likely. However, if the storm's rain bands pass repeatedly over the same area, a couple isolated amounts exceeding 6 or 7 inches, could lead to flooding.

Wind and surge

As Hanna makes landfall, wind gusts over 100 mph may be possible near the storm's center. Winds will decrease away from the immediate center but could still cause power outages.

Where the strongest winds occur, the Weather Service warned of the possibility of "considerable roof damage," "large trees snapped," and "roads impassable from large debris."

North of where the center comes ashore, the onshore wind is expected to generate a substantial storm surge. In Corpus Christi, Aransas Bay, Copano Bay and Matagorda Bay, a 4- to 6-foot surge is anticipated. Farther north toward Galveston Bay, a 1- to 2-foot surge is more probable.

These magnitudes will be realized if the greatest surge occurs around high tide. High tide

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

will be at 7:18 p.m. Saturday in Corpus Christi.

The surge, the Weather Service warned, could cause damage to buildings, wash out roads, cause major beach erosion and result in “moderate damage to marinas, docks, boardwalks, and piers.”

Tornadoes

A few tornadoes and waterspouts are also possible within the feeder bands north of Hanna’s center. The organization of tropical cyclones, which features counterclockwise near-surface inflow and clockwise outflow, or exhaust, produces an environment of high wind shear. Wind shear is a change of wind speed and direction with height.

That shear can be enhanced when systems make landfall. Any feeder-band thunderstorms embedded in that highly sheared atmosphere can rotate, presenting the risk for a few tornadoes and waterspouts.

A tornado warning was issued about 40 miles west southwest of Houston shortly before 7 a.m. local time Saturday.

The National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center has drawn a level 2 out of 5 “slight risk” for severe weather — in the form of tornadoes — for South Texas.

A waterspout or two can’t be ruled out elsewhere along the Gulf Coast, as far north as Louisiana.

Gonzalo

Tropical Storm Gonzalo was sputtering westward Saturday morning, centered about 180 miles east of Trinidad. On satellite, a small, disheveled clump of thunderstorms was all that marked Gonzalo’s presence. The storm appears barely capable of surviving another day, and, after bringing a couple inches of rain and breezy winds to the southern Windward Islands on Saturday will likely disintegrate on Sunday.

A third system to watch

As if the twin cyclones were not enough to keep track, a third tropical wave emerged off the coast of Senegal in Africa.

When Gonzalo moved through earlier in the week, it helped transport water vapor into the upper atmosphere. By saturating the air column, Gonzalo was able to pave an easier path for this new fledgling tropical wave to trek westward, while fending off dry air encroaching from the “Saharan Air Layer.” That gives it better odds of development.

The National Hurricane Center currently estimates a 50 percent likelihood the wave of low pressure will consolidate into a tropical depression, the precursor to a tropical storm.

It will continue moving west in the coming days, probably moving into a favorable environment for strengthening. Given its eventual path and potential to affect land, it bears

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

watching.

A bigger picture

As a whole, the tropics are blistering with activity, in stark contrast to the ominous quiescent that enveloped the Atlantic Basin just one week ago. Hanna's formation on Thursday evening demolished the previous record for a season's earliest "H" storm — formerly held by Tropical Storm Harvey, which formed on Aug. 3, 2005 — as the latest domino to topple in a record-busy start to hurricane season.

The season has already featured the earliest "C," "E," "F" and "G" storms on record — Cristobal, Edouard, Fay and Gonzalo.

A season's eighth named storm typically doesn't develop until closer to late September.

As the season's first hurricane, Hanna comes about two weeks early. The average first hurricane in the Atlantic basin forms around Aug. 10.

Hanna's central pressure, which dropped to at least 973 millibars, marks the lowest pressure for a storm in the Gulf of Mexico during July since Hurricane Alex in 2010. The lower the pressure the strong the storm in most cases.

Atmospheric scientists had been warning that the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season could be a hectic one, with large-scale atmospheric circulations and patterns, like a developing La Niña, favoring an increased number of storms.

Meanwhile, ultra-warm waters could help make those that form more intense and wetter, with a greater potential for storms to undergo rapid intensification.

The warming seas are largely a symptom of human-induced climate change.

[TX] Hurricane Hanna's winds battering south Texas coast, area hit hard by COVID (Reuters)
Reuters [7/25/2020 7:00 PM, Erwin Seba, 5304K]
Hurricane Hanna strengthened on Saturday as it made landfall on the Texas coast and threatened an area of the country that has been battered by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent weeks.

Hurricane-force winds punished the southeastern Texas coast, ripping piers out of bays and tearing roofs off homes. The National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that a potentially deadly storm surge was likely across a broad swath of land. Hanna made landfall on Padre Island Saturday afternoon.

Hanna, a Category 1 hurricane on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale, came ashore on Padre Island and later made a second landfall in Eastern Kennedy County, Texas.

It is forecast to weaken as it moves inland over south Texas tonight and into northeastern Mexico on Sunday, but it could spawn powerful tornadoes on the coastal plains.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“Any hurricane is an enormous challenge,” Texas Governor Greg Abbott said during a Saturday briefing about the storm. “This challenge is complicated and made even more severe, seeing that it’s sweeping through an area that is the most challenged area in the state for COVID-19.”

Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 32 counties in Texas that are in the storm’s path.

Hanna is the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic season and strikes as the coronavirus pandemic complicates everything from figuring out how to social distance in emergency shelters to finding bed space for anyone hurt in the storm in hospitals that are packed with COVID-19 patients.

On Saturday afternoon, the storm was located about 70 miles (115 km) south of Corpus Christi in Texas, packing maximum sustained winds of 90 miles per hour (145 kph), the NHC said.

“The combination of a dangerous storm surge and the tide will cause normally dry areas near the coast to be flooded by rising waters moving inland from the shoreline,” the Miami-based forecaster said.

Hanna could bring flash flooding, with up to 15 inches (38 cm) of rain in pockets of southern Texas and northeastern Mexico.

The storm is not expected to affect offshore oil and gas production. Energy companies have not evacuated workers or shut down production from their Gulf of Mexico platforms because of Hanna.

The Texas area struck by Hanna has struggled to contain outbreaks of COVID-19 in recent weeks. Cases along the state’s coast have soared into the tens of thousands, and more than 400 people in Corpus Christi’s city of 325,000 were hospitalized with the novel coronavirus on Friday, according to city data.

Corpus Christi Mayor Joe McComb warned residents who live in flood-prone areas to heed coronavirus precautions when deciding to evacuate.

“Take several masks with you because you might be there a couple days if you’re in a flood area,” McComb said, according to the Tribune. “We don’t want to expose anyone during this storm. ... Even when you’re in the house, I recommend wearing a mask if you’re in crowded conditions.”

[TX] Hurricane Hanna makes landfall in Texas (ABC News)
ABC News [7/25/2020 9:04 PM, Dan Peck, 29K] Video: HERE
Hurricane Hanna battered southern Texas with sustained winds of 85 mph and continued to deliver heavy rain and flash flooding as it moved inland late Saturday.

The Category 1 hurricane was moving west at about 8 mph when it made landfall at Padre Island, about 15 miles north of Port Mansfield, around 5 p.m. local time on Saturday.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Very heavy rain, strong winds and storm surge impacted the south Texas coast, the worst of it south of Corpus Christi, down to the mouth of the Rio Grande River.

While wind and storm surge were notable along the coast during the afternoon, very heavy rain and the potential for widespread flash flooding across the Rio Grande Valley was the biggest concern into Saturday night. Rainfall totals over extreme southern Texas to the Mexico border could lead to dangerous flash flooding.

"Any hurricane is an enormous challenge, this challenge is complicated and made even more severe seeing it is sweeping through an area that is the most challenged area in the state for COVID-19," said Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. "We cannot allow this hurricane to lead to a more deadly event by stoking COVID-19 leading to more fatalities."

Abbot said disaster declarations have been made in 32 counties.

The National Weather Service in Brownsville reported "significant structural damage" in nearby Port Mansfield and a gust up to 83 mph.

As is usually the case with land-falling tropical systems, isolated tornadoes are possible along the southern Texas coast through Saturday evening.

Hanna will begin to rapidly weaken Saturday tonight and Sunday morning as it moves into northern Mexico. However, it will continue to bring widespread heavy rain and the threat of dangerous flash flooding across the Rio Grande Valley even as the wind speeds go down.

An excessive amount of rain is forecast for extreme southern Texas, south of Corpus Christi, including Port Mansfield, Brownsville and down along parts of the Rio Grande Valley. Rainfall totals of 6 to 12 inches are expected which could produce widespread flash flooding.

Isolated rain totals of over a foot are possible into early Sunday as Hanna begins to moves into northern Mexico.

Hurricane Douglas approaches Hawaii

Meanwhile near Hawaii, Hurricane Douglas weakened to a Category 1 hurricane with sustained winds down to 90 mph Saturday afternoon local time. It was moving west-northwest at 16 mph and was about 300 miles east of the Big Island at 4 p.m.

A hurricane warning is in effect for Oahu, including Honolulu. A tropical storm warning is in effect for the Big Island and Maui, while a tropical storm watch is in effect for Kauai.

The weakening trend will continue as it closes in on Hawaii and Douglas will pass near the islands on Sunday. It will likely pass close enough for heavy rain, strong winds and rough surf to impact parts of the state. However, a slight shift in the track could change impacts either way.

Douglas will impact the islands as a low-end Category 1 hurricane. While wind and coastal

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

impacts are a concern, very heavy rain will likely be the biggest impact with several inches possible and the potential for flash flooding, landslides and mudslides.

On the current track, the island of Maui and higher elevations have the greatest chance of bearing the worst impact.

On Saturday, President Donald Trump approved Hawaii's emergency declaration request in response to Hurricane Douglas. The request allows Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate emergency response efforts.

[WA] Seattle police declare riot amid ongoing protests (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 11:34 PM, Marina Pitofsky, 2343K]
The Seattle Police Department declared a demonstration in the city Saturday night a riot after buildings were vandalized and multiple fires were set.

Approximately 2,000 people gathered in the area that was previously known as the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP) in the city's Capitol Hill neighborhood to demonstrate. Thousands of protesters occupied the CHOP in Seattle for weeks earlier this year when police left their east precinct following clashes with protesters demonstrating over the death of Floyd. Most protesters had left the zone by late last month.

The demonstrations were in solidarity with ongoing protests in Portland, Ore., that were sparked by the police killing of George Floyd earlier this year, according to multiple reports.

Police arrested at least 25 people in Seattle as of Saturday night.

The Trump administration announced on Thursday that it was sending a tactical border patrol team to Seattle amid ongoing protests. The team is similar to those that were deployed to Portland to protect federal property that has been damaged by protesters.

After demonstrators began marching through the area, five trailers at a construction site for a juvenile detention center were set ablaze, CBS News reported. Seattle police said protesters also spray painted the city's 12th police precinct and tried to disable security cameras.

Police reported some demonstrators also broke windows on vehicles, businesses and a court facility. Officers also said they are investigating possible "explosive damage" to a precinct and reports of explosives being "thrown or fired at officers."

Three officers were injured amid the protests, including one who was hospitalized with an injury to his leg due to the explosives, according to police. Two officers were treated and returned to duty.

Police deployed flash grenades and pepper spray before arresting protesters, The New York Times reported.

The demonstration came a day after a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order that lifted a ban on Seattle officers using tear gas and pepper spray on crowds.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The declaration from the police department comes as the Trump administration has upped the presence of federal law enforcement in Democratic cities throughout the United States. On Wednesday, President Trump announced that federal agents would be sent into Chicago and Albuquerque, stating that the cities were overcome with "violent crime."

[WA] Seattle Riot: Police Arrest 25 After 'Explosives' Thrown at Officers (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 10:09 PM, Joshua Caplan, 1912K]
The Seattle Police Department declared a riot and arrested 25 people after "explosives" were thrown at officers when a protest turned violent in the city's Capitol Hill neighborhood on Saturday.

FOX 10 reports:

Up to 1,000 protesters gathered about 2 p.m. Saturday for a peaceful march in solidarity with unrest and violent demonstrations in Portland. By 4 p.m., crowds had broken away from the protest, setting fires to construction trailers at the Juvenile Detention Center and attacking camera crews.

Police reported multiple explosions in the area and multiple fires, including one inside the East Precinct, where rioters breached a security fence to vandalize the building. Police are investigating "possible explosive damage" to the walls of the East Precinct and more explosives being thrown at police.

Seattle police said the protesters were arrested for assaults on officers, obstruction, and failure to disperse. Prior to announcing the arrests, police shared a photo of flammable objects being hurled at officers.

Q13FOX correspondent Simone Del Rosario and others shared photos and video of protesters clashing with officers, along with images of heavily damaged buildings in the area.

Shortly after, Q13FOX reporter Brandi Kruse also shared footage of a nearby Starbucks, which was destroyed after it was set ablaze.

Unrest in Seattle comes after President Donald Trump sent tactical border officers to the city on Thursday in an effort quell soaring crime in Democrat-controlled cities across the United States.

KIRO 7 reports:

The Special Response Team is similar to tactical teams operating in Portland, where violence and protests have raged for nearly eight weeks in the Oregon city. Federal agents have been in Portland for most of July. […]

Agents for the Special Response Team operate under the umbrella of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Times reported. They are typically deployed for intense law enforcement operations. […]

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, told KIRO-TV that it was appropriate to seek help from the federal government.

Speaking to the New York Times, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan (D) said she spoke with acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, who told her that the federal government would not be sending additional officers before communicating with municipal leaders.

DHS spokesperson Alexei Woltornist said it would be sending fewer agents to Seattle than Portland, which has been plagued by ongoing riots.

“There is no large-scale deployment of personnel to Seattle at this time. As threats warrant, any large-scale use of law enforcement assets will involve close coordination with local law enforcement,” Woltornist stated. “There are no other cities across the country that have the same threats and lack of local law enforcement support as we are experiencing in Portland.”

Earlier this month police cleared the “Capitol Hill Occupied Protest” zone after two fatal shootings. A group had occupied several blocks around a park for about two weeks following standoffs and clashes that were part of the nationwide unrest over the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Prior to Saturday’s protests Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best had announced officers would be armed with pepper spray and other weapons, promising officers would not use tear gas and urging demonstrators to remain peaceful.

“In the spirit of offering trust and full transparency, I want to advise you that SPD officers will be carrying pepper spray and blast balls today, as would be typical for events that carry potential to include violence,” Best said.

At an emergency hearing on Friday night, U.S. District Judge James Robart granted a request from the federal government to block Seattle’s new law prohibiting police from using pepper spray, blast balls and similar weapons.

The temporary restraining order halts the law that the Seattle City Council passed unanimously last month after confrontations that have largely been peaceful but were occasionally marked by violence, looting and highway shutdowns. The law intended to de-escalate tensions between police and demonstrators was set to take effect on Sunday.

But the U.S. Department of Justice, citing Seattle’s longstanding police consent decree, successfully argued that banning the use of crowd control weapons could actually lead to more police use of force, leaving them only with more deadly weapons.

[WA] Police declare riot at Seattle protests, make arrests (AP)
AP [7/26/2020 4:02 AM, Sally Ho and Chris Grygiel, 422K]
Seattle police declared a riot Saturday following large demonstrations in the city’s Capitol Hill neighborhood and deployed flash bangs and pepper spray to try to clear an area near where weeks earlier people had set up an “occupied protest zone” that stretched for several blocks.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Authorities said rocks, bottles, fireworks and mortars were thrown at officers as they attempted to clear the area over the course of several hours stretching into Saturday night.

Via Twitter, police said they arrested at least 45 people for assaults on officers, obstruction and failure to disperse. Twenty-one officers were left with mostly minor injuries.

Earlier, protesters in Seattle broke through a fence where a youth detention facility was being built, with some people setting a fire and damaging a portable trailer, authorities said.

Thousands of protesters had initially gathered peacefully near downtown in a show of solidarity with fellow demonstrators in Portland, Oregon, where tensions with federal law enforcement have boiled over during protests stemming from the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Initially there was no sign of law enforcement near the Seattle march. Later, Seattle Police said via Twitter that about a dozen people breached the construction site for the King County youth detention facility. Also, police said protesters broke out windows at a King County court facility.

Earlier this week King County Executive Dow Constantine, in response to long-standing demands by community activists, said he would work to eliminate youth detention centers in the county by 2025.

After the fire at the construction site authorities said they had ordered people to leave a different area, in a section of Capitol Hill, near downtown, where the East Precinct is. At least one person broke through a fence line at the precinct, authorities said, and moments later a device explosive that left an 8-inch (20-centimeter) hole in the side of the precinct.

Earlier this month police cleared the “Capitol Hill Occupied Protest” zone after two fatal shootings. A group had occupied several blocks around a park for about two weeks following standoffs and clashes that were part of the nationwide unrest over the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Prior to Saturday’s protests Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best had announced officers would be armed with pepper spray and other weapons, promising officers would not use tear gas and urging demonstrators to remain peaceful.

“In the spirit of offering trust and full transparency, I want to advise you that SPD officers will be carrying pepper spray and blast balls today, as would be typical for events that carry potential to include violence,” Best said.

At an emergency hearing on Friday night, U.S. District Judge James Robart granted a request from the federal government to block Seattle’s new law prohibiting police from using pepper spray, blast balls and similar weapons.

The temporary restraining order halts the law that the Seattle City Council passed unanimously last month after confrontations that have largely been peaceful but were occasionally marked by violence, looting and highway shutdowns. The law intended to de-

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

escalate tensions between police and demonstrators was set to take effect on Sunday.

But the U.S. Department of Justice, citing Seattle's longstanding police consent decree, successfully argued that banning the use of crowd control weapons could actually lead to more police use of force, leaving them only with more deadly weapons.

[OR] Federal Officers in Portland May Have Permanent Eye Damage After Protesters Shine Lasers in Their Faces (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 3:33 PM, Hannah Bleau, 1912K]
At least three federal officers responding to the chaos in Portland may have permanent eye damage after demonstrators shined lasers in their faces, Federal Protective Service (FPS) Deputy Director of Operations Richard Cline said this week.

Cline detailed how demonstrators have attacked officers trying to quell the unrest, throwing various projectiles and shining lasers into their eyes as they set fires and vandalize public and private property across the city.

"You've seen the green lasers that are being used out there, we have three officers who currently have eye injuries and they may not recover sight in those eyes from those laser attacks," he said during a press conference this week.

Cline said they have since purchased special glasses to shield the officers' eyes from those attacks and prevent those eye injuries.

Cline also said that they were moving to convert their officers' names to their badge number because "about 38" of their officers have been doxxed — a reality that coincides with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's (D-NY) move to introduce legislation requiring federal law enforcement officers to identify their agency, last name, and identification number while on duty.

Federal officers faced violent protesters again on Thursday night as a large group of protesters breached the fence surrounding the federal courthouse, prompting a response from federal law enforcement. According to the Portland Police Bureau, demonstrators hurled "large projectiles" at officers and flashed them with lasers.

[OR] FBI says it's investigating 'specific violations of federal law' not ideology in Portland protests (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 3:44 PM, J. Edward Moreno, 2343K]
The FBI defended its actions in ongoing confrontations between federal agents and demonstrators in Portland, Ore., claiming federal law enforcement was focusing only on people committing violence and damaging federal property.

Protesters have dominated the streets of Portland since early June, when demonstrations sparked across the country after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who died in police custody. Federal agents have used force against protesters in Portland several times this month, throwing protestors into unmarked vans and tear-gassing the city's mayor.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Federal law enforcement, which was deployed by the Department of Homeland Security, has said it is protecting federal property, such as the federal courthouse in downtown Portland.

Renn Cannon, special agent in charge of Portland's FBI field office, said in a statement Friday that the bureau is investigating "specific violations of federal law, including arson, the use of improvised explosive devices, and interstate transportation of stolen goods."

President Trump and other conservative lawmakers have advocated for a more assertive approach to quelling protests. Democrats have called for probes into the administration's use of federal law enforcement in Portland and in other cities since Floyd's death.

Cannon stressed that the FBI does not align itself with ideology of a particular group and is concerned only with addressing violence and crime.

"Our focus is not on membership in particular groups but on individuals who commit violence and criminal activity that constitutes a federal crime or poses a threat to national security," Cannon said. "The FBI does not and will not police ideology."

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[OR] Big protest crowd gathers again in Portland over Feds' presence (Los Angeles Times)
Los Angeles Times [7/26/2020 1:19 AM, Melissa Etehad, 1825K]
The mood in downtown Portland, Ore., late Saturday evening was lively and protesters appeared rejuvinated as several thousand people took to the streets in front of the federal courthouse once more, calling for federal agents to leave and an end to police brutality and racism.

Federal agents deployed tear gas into the crowd starting around 11 p.m., shortly after emerging from the Mark O. Hatfield U.S. Courthouse, which has been the epicenter of nightly protests for two months and has caught the attention of people across the country.

That sense of solidarity surfaced Saturday when protests erupted once more in cities across the U.S., including Seattle and downtown Los Angeles.

The protests in Seattle, however, turned chaotic and according to the Associated Press, 21 officers suffered minor injuries and 40 arrests were made.

In Portland, protesters from all walks of life came out to show support for the Black Lives Matter movement, including teachers, Portland-area healthcare workers and LGBTQ allies.

Like previous nights, protesters wearing gas masks and helmets continued their standoff with federal agents by setting off fireworks and using leaf blowers and hockey sticks to return the plumes of white tear gas back toward federal agents.

Mitchell Felton, 26, and his friend Zach Woods, 21, were among the protesters who saw federal agents as they emerged from the federal courthouse.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

The pair are from South Carolina and were on a road trip when they decided to stop in Portland in order to participate in the protest.

“We decided to come because we wanted to show our support to Portland and for the Black Lives Matter movement,” Felton said.

Up the street, about a block away from the federal courthouse, protesters started an impromptu dance story.

Nearby, Eboni Washington, 36, said she felt compelled to come out because she wants to demonstrate solidarity with protesters who have taken to the streets in cities across the country Saturday to protest against police brutality and the presence of federal officers sent by President Trump.

“I’m proud to be Black. And I want to show everyone that what we need right now is more solidarity,” she said as she leaned against a building about a block from the federal courthouse.

“Especially in Portland. I have friends who’ve gotten shot by the police. I’m here for them.”

By 1 a.m., protesters had torn down the protective fence that lined the perimeter of the federal courthouse.

[OR] Portland rioters used metal spikes to target federal vehicles: CBP leader (FOX News)
FOX News [7/25/2020 3:29 PM, Marisa Schultz, 10362K]
Criminals used metal spikes to target the vehicles of federal law enforcement agents dispatched to Portland in the latest effort by violent protesters to damage federal property, according to a top Trump administration official.

Mark Morgan, the acting commissioner of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), tweeted out a picture Saturday of dark spikes inside what looked like a federal law enforcement clear evidence bag.

"Early this morning, metal spikes were used by criminals in Portland to puncture the tires of CBP vehicles," Morgan wrote on Twitter.

CBP officials did not immediately respond to Fox News’ request for more information on the number of vehicles damaged and whether anyone has been charged.

The tweet comes as Morgan has been calling out "violent anarchists" rioting in the streets, damaging federal property and hurting officers in Portland, a hotbed of civil unrest after 58 consecutive nights of protests.

Local Democrats in Oregon want the federal forces out of the city, claiming their presence has fanned the flames of aggression, and they’ve accused President Trump of abusing his power for an election year political stunt.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Morgan, however, said local leaders need to clamp down on the criminals and took to Twitter to illustrate how the situation has gotten out of hand in Portland.

He re-tweeted a video purporting to show rioters using power tools to saw through a fence protecting the federal courthouse in Portland. Morgan outlined another night of violence that included rioters throwing rocks, launching fireworks, attacking officers with mortar-style fireworks and lasers, and igniting a fire inside the fence, he said.

"These are not the actions of peaceful protesters," Morgan wrote. "These are the actions of violent anarchists who are looking to harm federal law enforcement and federal property. This violence must end. Local leadership needs to step up, denounce these actions, and regain order."

Overnight, a CBP officer sustained a chemical burn resulting from a substance thrown by rioters, another suffered a severe blow to his face from a hard object and a third is injured with a possible broken bone, Morgan said.

The latest injuries are on top the more than two dozen already sustained by federal agents.

In court papers filed Tuesday, lawyers for the government said 28 federal law enforcement officials have been injured during the rioting, including broken bones, hearing damage, eye damage and a dislocated shoulder.

There are 114 federal officers from the Federal Protective Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Marshals Service protecting federal facilities in downtown Portland.

"The most serious injury to an officer to date occurred when a protester wielding a two-pound sledgehammer struck an officer in the head and shoulder when the officer tried to prevent the protester from breaking down a door to the Hatfield Courthouse," the U.S. attorneys said in court papers reviewed by Fox News.

Meanwhile, dozens of protesters and journalists have also been injured in the violent stand-offs with law enforcement. Among the most seriously wounded is Donavan La Bella, 26, who was hospitalized with a fractured skull when a deputy U.S. marshal shot him in the head with an impact munition while La Bella was holding a stereo over his head across the street from the courthouse, the Oregonian reported.

Federal officers pepper-sprayed and used batons to beat another protester, Christopher David, a 53-year-old Navy veteran, as he tried to speak to them, the paper said.

[OR] Federal agents clash with Portland protesters, use tear gas (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 10:53 AM, Marty Johnson, 2343K] Video: HERE
Protesters and federal agents faced off again Friday night in downtown Portland, with protesters shooting fireworks toward the federal courthouse and agents responding with tear gas.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Thousands of protesters were on hand, and the demonstration lasted into the early hours of Saturday, The Associated Press reported. According to the wire service, federal officers marched down the street outside the federal courthouse around 2:30 a.m. Saturday, using tear gas at close range to disperse remaining protesters.

The Federal Protective Service — the law enforcement group usually tasked with protecting the country's federal buildings — said that the protest was deemed an unlawful assembly and that officers were injured during the night.

Black Lives Matter protests have dominated downtown Portland since George Floyd died during an encounter with Minneapolis police in late May. The majority of the protests have originated around the federal courthouse, resulting in damage to the building.

The damage prompted acting Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Chad Wolf to deploy DHS agents to the city in late June to help protect the courthouse and other federal buildings in Portland's downtown.

However, the presence of the officers has only exacerbated the situation, with clashes between the two sides frequently escalating to violence.

The conduct of the officers has been called into question after reports late last week surfaced of agents in unidentifiable military fatigues picking up protesters in unmarked vans and detaining them.

Congressional lawmakers have expressed outrage over the situation, while the Trump administration has doubled down on its hard-line stance against the protests that have roiled the country for nearly two months.

President Trump this week lauded the work the officers have done in Portland and signaled that he would send additional federal agents to other "Democratic" cities.

"I'm going to do something — that I can tell you," Trump said Monday. "We're not going to let New York and Chicago and Philadelphia and Detroit and Baltimore and all of these — Oakland is a mess. We're not going to let this happen in our country. All run by liberal Democrats."

[OR] Feds clash with Portland protesters again, hours after judge denied Oregon's request to restrict agents' actions (FOX News)
FOX News [7/25/2020 7:12 AM, Associated Press, 10362K]
A persistent crowd of protesters remained outside the federal courthouse in Portland, Oregon, into the early hours of Saturday as fireworks were shot at the building and plumes of tear gas, dispensed by U.S. agents, lingered above.

Thousands of people gathered in Portland streets hours after a U.S. judge denied Oregon's request to restrict federal agents' actions when they arrest people during protests that have roiled the city and pitted local officials against the Trump administration.

By 8 p.m. hundreds of people, most wearing masks and many donning helmets, had

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

already gathered near a fountain, one spot where groups meet before marching to the Hatfield Federal Courthouse and the federal agents there. They chanted and clapped along to the sound of thunderous drums, pausing to listen to speakers.

Among various organized groups, including Healthcare Workers Protest, Teachers against Tyrants, Lawyers for Black Lives and the “Wall of Moms,” was Portland Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, who spoke to protesters outside the Justice Center.

By 9 p.m. the crowd grew to several thousand. People, pressed shoulder to shoulder, packed the area and overflowed into the streets as they chanted "Black Lives Matter” and “Feds go home” to the sound of drums.

As the night carried on protesters vigorously shook the fence surrounding the courthouse, shot fireworks towards the building and threw glass bottles. Many times these actions were met by federal agents using tear gas and flash bangs.

The flow of tear gas caused protesters to disperse, some becoming sick as others remained towards the front of the courthouse with leaf blowers directing the gas back to the courthouse. Federal agents had leaf blowers of their own to counteract.

Daniel Pereyo was one protester who was tear-gassed.

Pereyo said he had been at the nearby park watching drummers and fireworks being shot, when his face and eyes began to burn.

“It’s extremely painful,” he said. “It’s not the worst pain ever, but it is discomforting and it’s distracting.”

As the clouds of gas floated down the street, protesters would swiftly regroup and return to chant and shake the fence that separates the people on the street from federal agents and the courthouse.

Federal Protective Service declared the gathering as “an unlawful assembly” and cited that officers had been injured.

The federal agents, deployed by President Donald Trump to tamp down the unrest, have arrested dozens during nightly demonstrations against racial injustice that often turn violent. Democratic leaders in Oregon say federal intervention has worsened the two-month crisis, and the state attorney general sued to allege that some people had been whisked off the streets in unmarked vehicles.

U.S. District Judge Michael Mosman said the state lacked standing to sue on behalf of protesters because the lawsuit was a “highly unusual one with a particular set of rules.”

Oregon was seeking a restraining order on behalf of its residents not for injuries that had already happened but to prevent injuries by federal officers in the future. That combination makes the standard for granting such a motion very narrow, and the state did not prove it had standing in the case, Mosman wrote.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Legal experts who reviewed the case before the decision warned that he could reject it on those grounds. A lawsuit from a person accusing federal agents of violating their rights to free speech or against unconstitutional search and seizure would have a much higher chance of success, Michael Dorf, a constitutional law professor at Cornell University, said ahead of the ruling.

“The federal government acted in violation of those individuals’ rights and probably acted in violation of the Constitution in the sense of exercising powers that are reserved to the states, but just because the federal government acts in ways that overstep its authority doesn’t mean the state has an injury,” he said.

The clashes in Portland have further inflamed the nation’s political tensions and triggered a crisis over the limits of federal power as Trump moves to send U.S. officers to other Democratic-led cities to combat crime. It’s playing out as Trump pushes a new “law and order” reelection strategy after the coronavirus crashed the economy.

Protesters in Portland have been targeting the federal courthouse, setting fires outside and vandalizing the building that U.S. authorities say they have a duty to protect. Federal agents have used tear gas, less-lethal ammunition that left one person critically injured and other force to scatter protesters.

The lawsuit from Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum accused federal agents of arresting protesters without probable cause and using excessive force. She sought a temporary restraining order to “immediately stop federal authorities from unlawfully detaining Oregonians.”

David Morrell, an attorney for the U.S. government, called the motion “extraordinary” and told the judge in a hearing this week that it was based solely on “a few threadbare declarations” from witnesses and a Twitter video. Morrell called the protests “dangerous and volatile.”

Rosenblum said the ramifications of the ruling were "extremely troubling."

“While I respect Judge Mosman, I would ask this question: If the state of Oregon does not have standing to prevent this unconstitutional conduct by unidentified federal agents running roughshod over her citizens, who does?" Rosenblum said in a statement. "Individuals mistreated by these federal agents can sue for damages, but they can’t get a judge to restrain this unlawful conduct more generally.”

Before the federal intervention, Mayor Ted Wheeler and other local leaders had said a small cadre of violent activists were drowning out the message of peaceful protesters. But the Democrat, who was tear-gassed this week as he joined protesters, says the federal presence is exacerbating a tense situation and he’s repeatedly told them to leave.

Homeland Security acting Secretary Chad Wolf denied that federal agents were inflaming the situation in Portland and said Wheeler legitimized criminality by joining demonstrators, whom Trump has called “anarchists and agitators."

In the lawsuit, Oregon had asked the judge to command agents from the U.S. Department

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

of Homeland Security, the Customs and Border Protection, the Federal Protective Service and the U.S. Marshals Service to stop detaining protesters without probable cause, to identify themselves before arresting anyone and to explain why an arrest is taking place.

Agents have arrested 28 people in Portland this week, including seven from Thursday night's protests, when they used tear gas to force thousands of demonstrators from crowding around the courthouse. Protesters projected lasers on the building and tried to take down a security fence. They scattered as clouds of gas rose up and agents fired crowd control munitions.

The Department of Homeland Security said that during Thursday's demonstrations one federal officer was injured and that "no injuries to protesters or rioters have been reported."

Wolf said Tuesday that at least 43 people have been arrested on federal charges at that point.

They face federal charges including assaulting federal officers, arson and damaging federal property, U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams said. All the defendants are local and were released after making a court appearance.

U.S. officers "working to protect the courthouse have been subjected to nightly threats and assaults from demonstrators while performing their duties," according to a statement from Williams' office.

[OR] Fires and Pepper Spray in Seattle as Police Protests Widen Across U.S. (New York Times)
New York Times [7/26/2020 4:57 AM, Mike Baker and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, 28290K]
Weeks of violent clashes between federal agents and protesters in Portland, Ore., galvanized thousands of people to march through the streets of American cities on Saturday, injecting new life into protests that had largely waned in recent weeks.

One of the most intense protests was in Seattle, where a day of demonstrations focused on police violence left a trail of broken windows and people flushing pepper spray from their eyes. At least 45 protesters had been arrested as of early evening, and both protesters and police officers suffered injuries.

Carrying signs such as "Feds Go Home" and shouting chants of "No justice, no peace," some among the crowd of about 5,000 protesters stopped at the site of a future youth detention center and lit buildings there on fire. Some smashed windows of nearby businesses, ignited a fire in a coffee shop and blew an eight-inch hole through the wall of the Seattle Police Department's East Precinct building, the police said.

"At this point, we declared the event to be a riot, and several orders to disperse were given," the Seattle police chief, Carmen Best, said at a news conference.

The police responded by firing flash grenades, showering protesters with pepper spray and abruptly rushing into crowds, knocking people to the ground. After a flash grenade left one woman with bloody injuries, police officers shoved people who had stopped to help her.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

In Austin, Texas, the police said one man was shot and killed just before 10 p.m. during a protest in the city's downtown. In a live video from the scene, protesters are seen marching through an intersection when a car blares its horn. Seconds later, five shots ring out, followed shortly after by several more loud bangs.

The man who was killed may have approached a vehicle with a rifle before he was shot and killed, Officer Katrina Ratcliff said. Ms. Ratcliff said the person who shot and killed the man had fired from inside the vehicle. That person was detained and is cooperating with officers, she said. No one else was injured.

"All I know is that someone dying while protesting is horrible," Mayor Steve Adler of Austin said in a statement. "Our city is shaken and, like so many in our community, I'm heartbroken and stunned."

In Los Angeles, protesters clashed with officers in front of the federal courthouse downtown. Videos showed people smashing windows and lobbing water bottles at officers after protesters said the police fired projectiles at them.

The federal courthouse in Portland has been the scene of nightly, chaotic demonstrations for weeks, which continued again into Sunday morning, as thousands participated in marches around the city, the 59th consecutive day of protests there. Earlier, a group of nurses in scrubs had joined an organized group of mothers in helmets and fathers in hard hats, all assembled against the fence of a federal courthouse where federal agents — a deployment that has been a key focus of the recent demonstrations — have been assembled.

Protesters in several cities said the smoke-filled videos of federal agents firing tear gas and shoving protesters in Portland had brought them to the streets on Saturday.

"Portland is leading," said Chantelle Hershberger, an organizer with Refuse Fascism who was part of the Los Angeles activists protesting the presence of federal agents in Portland, where city officials have opposed the presence of the federal officers. "They're showing what it looks like to stay in the streets despite police oppression, despite the federal forces being sent in. This kind of energy is actually what's needed."

Bipasha Mukherjee, 52, of Kirkland, Wash., said she has been protesting on the streets since May and said it was worrisome to her to see such aggressive tactics by the police.

"This is not the country I immigrated to," said Ms. Mukherjee, who arrived from India more than 30 years ago. "It feels like we are rapidly becoming a fascist state and a police state."

Michaud Savage of Seattle said the protests there were aimed at both local authorities and the deployment of federal officers who have waged a crackdown against a long-running protest in Portland. Mr. Savage said the law enforcement tactics in Portland, which have included the use of tear gas and crowd-control munitions, were dangerous and inappropriate.

"It's a very hard slide in an extremely violent direction," Mr. Savage said as he washed his

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

eyes of pepper spray and nursed a wound on his arm from a flash grenade.

But Ms. Best, the Seattle police chief, said a number of demonstrators also used violence. Some were tossing concrete blocks from a rooftop to the street below, she said. The coffee shop that was set afire had occupied apartments above it that had to be evacuated, she said.

“We support everyone’s First Amendment right for free speech and to gather and assemble in such a way,” she said. “But what we saw today was not peaceful. It was not a peaceful demonstration at all, and criminal acts were occurring throughout the city, and many people were at risk.”

Other demonstrations took place on Saturday in New York, Omaha and Oakland, Calif., among other cities.

In Omaha, KMTV-TV reported that demonstrators turned out in solidarity with the Portland protests and also in response to the death of James Scurlock, a Black man killed by a white bar owner in May. The police arrested 75 to 100 people Saturday night, KMTV reported.

In Richmond, Va., riot police fired chemical agents at hundreds of protesters who had marched through the city and gathered around the Richmond Police Department. The police said some protesters had set fire to a city-owned dump truck outside the station.

At a protest in Aurora, Colo., a hectic scene played out as people marched along an interstate highway.

During that protest, someone drove a car into demonstrators, the Aurora Police Department said, although it was unclear if the car struck any protesters. The police said a protester had also “decided to fire off a weapon,” which struck at least one other person. That person was taken to a hospital and was in stable condition, the police said, and a second person later showed up to the hospital with a graze wound.

In addition to marching in solidarity with the Portland protesters, the demonstration in Aurora was also in response to the death of Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old massage therapist who died several days after officers put him in a chokehold last summer.

Mr. McClain’s death was one of several that have occurred in police custody around the country that received fresh attention following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May. Mr. Floyd’s death ignited mass protests that drew millions to the streets in dozens of cities, but the demonstrations waned in most places.

Seattle and Portland, however, have seen extended demonstrations. Seattle protesters at one point laid claim to several blocks of the Capitol Hill neighborhood and declared an autonomous zone. After a series of shootings there led the police to clear the area, protests had subsided.

Protests in Portland, meanwhile, have continued, with some of the heaviest demonstrations around federal buildings in the city. On Saturday, crowds marched from near the federal courthouse to a hotel several blocks away where federal agents who had been dispatched

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

to the city were thought to be staying.

“Get out of bed with the feds,” the protesters chanted.

Later in the night, thousands of people returned to the federal courthouse. Some threw fireworks at the officers protecting the building, while others worked to break down the fence surrounding it. Just before midnight, federal officers began lobbing tear gas and flash grenades over the fence, dispersing crowds, while the group of mothers who have been a fixture at the protests stood firm with linked arms, protected with gas masks.

Craig Gabriel, an assistant U.S. attorney in Oregon, said at a news conference earlier on Saturday that federal agents had arrested 60 people at protests in Portland and were pursuing charges against 46 of them.

Several federal agents had been injured by fireworks and lasers that protesters shone into their eyes, he said.

Harry Fones, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security, whose agents are among those clashing with protesters, In on Saturday that the demonstrators were little more than “violent anarchists rioting on the streets.”

Protesters in Washington, D.C. planned to hold a demonstration on Sunday at the Virginia home of Chad Wolf, the Secretary of Homeland Security, in response to the deployment of federal agents in Portland.

After President Trump issued an executive order to protect statues and federal property, the Department of Homeland Security sent tactical teams to the city, beginning a series of clashes that have resulted in injured protesters, inspector general investigations and calls from local leaders for federal agents to leave.

Protest crowds in that city have swelled into the thousands, and demonstrations there were continuing. This week, federal officials deployed a tactical team to Seattle as well, and protesters cited that development as one reason for Saturday’s demonstrations.

[OR] Tear gas deployed as thousands join Portland’s 57th night of protests (CBS News)
CBS News [7/25/2020 7:50 PM, Caroline Linton, 2540K]
Thousands joined in Portland’s 57th night of protests outside the federal courthouse on Friday, starting with peaceful demonstrations that eventually led to clashes between protesters and officers who are deployed to quell the protests. Fireworks were launched around 11 p.m., leading federal agents to deploy tear gas, Portland police said.

One person was stabbed as the crowds dispersed several hours later, Portland police said in a statement.

According to CBS Portland affiliate KOIN, about 1,000 people had gathered in front of the Multnomah County Justice Center by 9:15 p.m as speeches were given on the steps in front of the building. Within an hour, the crowd swelled to 2,000 as groups demonstrating

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

throughout the city, including teachers, lawyers and the Wall of Moms, converged at the Justice Center.

Portland police said that at 10:58 p.m., the crowd began shaking the fence that had been erected to protect the federal courthouse while others shot fireworks over the fence. After federal law enforcement issued a warning, they used various "munitions" to disperse the crowd.

After tear gas was deployed by federal law enforcement, a protester was seen throwing a Molotov cocktail toward the federal courthouse. More rounds of tear gas were then fired, KOIN reported.

Many in the crowd had come prepared with gas masks, shields, leaf blowers, power tools, fireworks and lasers, police said. Hundreds of people still tried to dismantle the fence or climb it, and some threw fireworks and set small fires, police said.

This lasted for over three hours, according to police. At about 2:30 a.m. there was a report of a stabbing. Portland police began investigating before eventually locating the victim, who was then transported by ambulance to the hospital. The victim's condition is unknown.

Federal law enforcement officers have been deployed to Portland to protect the courthouse, where protests first broke out over the death of George Floyd, but have since become about the federal officers deployed to the city.

While Oregon and Portland city officials have repeatedly asked federal officers to leave the city, President Trump praised the officers earlier this week, saying they were doing a "fantastic job." The Trump administration is planning to deploy officers to other cities, including Chicago and Kansas City, Missouri.

[Editorial note: consult video at source link]

[OR] Portland protesters breach fence; police declare riot (AP)
AP [7/26/2020 5:14 AM, Gillian Flaccus And Sara Cline, 422K]
Authorities declared a riot early Sunday in Portland, Oregon, where protesters breached a fence surrounding the city's federal courthouse building where U.S. agents have been stationed.

Police described via Twitter the "violent conduct of people downtown" as creating a "grave risk of public alarm." Police demanded people leave the area surrounding the courthouse, around 1:20 a.m. Sunday, and said that those who fail to adhere may be arrested or subjection to teargas and impact weapons.

By 1:40 p.m., both federal officers and Portland police could be seen on the streets, surrounding the courthouse, attempting to clear the area and deploying teargas.

In the hours leading up to the declared riot, thousands of people gathered in the city Saturday evening for another night of protests as demonstrations over George Floyd's killing and the presence of federal agents sent by President Donald Trump showed no signs

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

of abating.

Crowds began to march toward the city's federal courthouse around 9:15 p.m., some marching from 5 miles (8 kilometers) away. A big group of demonstrators in the North Portland neighborhood also paraded by the police precinct there, which was roped off and had officers in riot gear standing outside the building.

They paused outside a downtown hotel, where federal agents are staying, chanting "Feds go home" and yelling the names of Black people killed by police.

As protesters marched down the streets, the Portland Police Bureau posted on social media for people to not walk or block the street as they may be subject to charges such as disorderly conduct and interfering with peace officers.

Hundreds of others crossed the Steel Bridge around 11 p.m. to the courthouse, meeting up with thousands of people that had already been tear-gassed by federal agents.

The fence surrounding the building had flowers and banners draped across as federal agents emerged from the courthouse to inspect it. They were met with fireworks shot over the fence.

Federal agents tossed canisters of teargas at the crowd, while people ran towards the plumes, picked up some of the canisters and threw them back over the fence.

As some protesters attempted to cut the fence using power tools, streams of pepper spray were spewed at the crowd.

At the nearby Justice Center, images and words were projected onto the building including "Keep fighting. Keep pushing."

During demonstrations the previous night federal agents repeatedly fired tear gas to break up rowdy protests that continued into the early morning Saturday. Authorities say six federal officers were injured and one person was arrested.

Demonstrations have happened in Oregon's largest city nightly for two months since Floyd was killed in Minneapolis in May. Trump said he sent federal agents to Portland to halt the unrest but state and local officials say they are making the situation worse.

There were demonstrations for police reform and against the increased presence of federal law enforcement in cities across the country Saturday. In Seattle, police declared a riot Saturday afternoon following large demonstrations and deployed flash bangs and pepper spray to try to clear crowds. Authorities made more than 40 arrests said 21 officers suffered mostly minor injuries.

Chuck Lovell, the Portland police chief, released a video message on social media Saturday night calling for peace.

"Across the country people are committing violence, supposedly in support of Portland," Lovell said. "If you want to support Portland then stop the violence, work for peace. Portland

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

police officers and police facilities have been threatened.

“Now more than ever, Portland police need your support. We want to be with you in the community and working on the real relationships that will create change. We want to get back to the critical issues that have been hijacked by people committing crimes under the cover of the crowds.”

Late Friday, a federal judge denied a request by Oregon’s attorney general to restrict the actions of federal police.

The Federal Protective Service had declared the gathering in Portland that began Friday evening an unlawful assembly. Harry Fones, a Homeland Security spokesman, said at a news conference Saturday afternoon some people launched large fireworks, threw hard projectiles and used power tools to damage property.

Craig Gabriel, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon, said at the news conference that of the six federal officers who were injured, one suffered a concussion and another was taken to the hospital for burns.

He said one person was arrested for failing to comply with orders. That person was later released without charges, bringing the total number of people arrested on or near the courthouse property since early July to 60.

___

Cline reported from Salem. Cline is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues.

[OR] One Person Stabbed During Portland’s 58th Night of Protest (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 2:09 PM, Hannah Bleau, 1912K]
Portland’s 58th night of protests saw one individual stabbed as demonstrators shot fireworks over the federal courthouse fence, lit fires across the downtown area, and hurled objects at federal law enforcement officers.

Demonstrators, many of whom were equipped with “gas masks, shields, leaf blowers, power tools, fireworks, and lasers,” attempted to dismantle the fence surrounding the federal courthouse late Friday night, according to the Portland Police Bureau (PPB).

While some tried to cut the fence with power tools, others hurled various objects — including fireworks — over the fence, targeting federal law enforcement.

Arsonists set fires throughout the area, including in the middle of an intersection, prompting a response from federal law enforcement.

Police received reports of a stabbing shortly after 2:30 AM in close proximity to the intersection fire.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Per the PPB:

Federal law enforcement were out on the street at the time. Portland Police officers began investigating the stabbing and trying to find the victim. Portland Police officers located the victim and medics with them provided first aid. The victim was transported to the hospital by ambulance. Portland Police officers took the suspect into custody nearby. While investigating the stabbing, Portland Police gave public address announcements to people in the crowd ordering them to stay back while officers conducted their investigation.

Early Saturday morning, Portland Police declared the activity outside the courthouse an unlawful assembly and ordered the crowd to disperse. Portland Police officers ultimately came into the area to "secure the scene at SW 3rd Avenue and SW Salmon Street so Portland Fire & Rescue could respond to put out the fire there."

Federal Protective Service (FPS) Deputy Director of Operations Richard Cline announced this week that at least three federal officers responding to the chaos in Portland may have permanent eye damage due to demonstrators shining lasers into their eyes.

"You've seen the green lasers that are being used out there, we have three officers who currently have eye injuries and they may not recover sight in those eyes from those laser attacks," he said this week.

[CA] Demonstrators Attack Federal Buildings in L.A. in Solidarity with Portland (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/26/2020 12:57 AM, Joel B. Pollak, 1912K]
The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) declared a tactical alert on Saturday evening, mobilizing officers in response to attacks on federal buildings downtown by demonstrators who had marched in solidarity with protests in Portland.

Several federal buildings were vandalized and had their windows smashed. Demonstrators also blocked traffic in the area.

The Los Angeles Times reported:

Los Angeles police issued a citywide tactical alert Saturday night in response to protests downtown, allowing the department to have more officers and resources available.

Sgt. Anthony Costello said there had not been any major problems with the majority of the crowd but that there were some isolated incidents of vandalism, including some broken windows and graffiti at the federal building downtown.

According to several media reports, demonstrators organized the protests in response to federal agents being sent to Portland, Ore., to put down nightly protests that began two months ago following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

The Times neglected to report that the Portland protests had been violent, vandalizing a federal courthouse and attempting to set it on fire. Several federal law enforcement officers were also injured after being attacked by demonstrators. Federal officers are not attempting

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

to “put down nightly protests,” but to protect federal buildings local officials will not defend.

Democrats have described the federal officers as Nazi “Gestapo,” while the mainstream media has downplayed the violence, leading White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany to play a montage Friday of video from violence in Portland. None of the cable news networks covered the montage; Fox News cut away when profanity appeared onscreen.

On Friday, L.A.Mayor Eric Garcetti reiterated his support for the Portland protests, which he said Thursday “represent the best of our democratic ideals.” He denied the protests had been violent, saying “individual” acts did not define the whole.

[CA] Police windows smashed, courthouse lobby set ablaze following huge Oakland rally (San Francisco Chronicle)
San Francisco Chronicle [7/26/2020 2:36 AM, Joaquin Palomino, 422K]
Downtown Oakland was on high alert Saturday night following a protest that drew thousands of people in a show of solidarity against racial injustice and in support of protesters in Portland, Ore.

While most of the crowd remained non-destructive, a fire was set at the Alameda County Superior Courthouse and police station windows were smashed hours after protesters had peacefully marched from Frank H. Ogawa Plaza along Broadway.

“Agitators within the crowd of demonstrators have set the Alameda County Superior Courthouse on fire. Please avoid the area. We are calling for peace and to have safe spaces and safe places for tonight’s demonstration. #WallofMoms,” the Oakland police tweeted around 10:30 p.m. A video shot by a journalist for the Associated Press showed a fire in the courthouse lobby.

In another tweet, police said that some people used “fireworks and dangerous projectiles" to “assault officers." Police also said that some windows on one of their buildings were shattered, and messages were spray painted on the walls. Reports and photos from the scene showed protesters projecting images like “defund police” onto the building, and using graffiti as well as flares and fireworks.

“Breaking windows, spray painting, shooting fireworks and pointing lasers at officers and helicopters,” Oakland police said on Twitter. “We ask for organizers to keep the protest peaceful. #WallofMoms”

It is unclear why the department specifically referenced “Wall of Moms,” a movement that is spreading from Portland — where the group is resisting heavy-handed federal tactics — to other parts of the nation, including the Bay Area. A flier for Saturday’s protest does not state the organizers.

Earlier in the evening, a string of speakers at the Frank H. Ogawa Plaza had addressed systemic racism, police misconduct and other issues related to injustice.

Marchers then proceeded down Franklin Street, past murals of George Floyd and Breonna

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Taylor, both killed by police, and down Broadway to the Oakland police headquarters and back. Some repeated the name of Sean Monterrosa, the young man killed by Vallejo police in June.

Most people in the diverse crowd were wearing masks, from bandannas to full respirators.

Similar demonstrations reportedly unfolded across the country Saturday. Thousands took to the streets in Seattle — where federal law enforcement agents are also on standby — in a protest that police later declared a riot, according to the Seattle Times. In the Bay Area, a protest was planned in Palo Alto.

The Trump administration recently threatened to send federal law enforcement agents to Oakland to respond to the ongoing protest movement, as they have already done in Portland. The threat from the president has drawn sharp rebukes from city and state leaders, as well as local residents.

“When we see our citizens being brutalized by the tactics the president is using, that’s the line, we can’t allow that,” said Xochitl Martinez, 64, a Vietnam war vet who attended Saturday’s protest. “I can’t ignore my oath and turn my head. ... That oath never expires.”

“To have that type of free speech responded to with literal force by the federal government is something that’s really being downplayed by a lot of news sources,” said Amelia Clute, who spoke Saturday afternoon before the protest started. “We can’t lose track of how serious and grave of a situation that could turn into: The beginnings of true fascism.”

The protests in Portland, which have lasted roughly 60 days, began after police killed George Floyd in Minneapolis. They have mostly been peaceful, according to local news reports, though a small number of people have damaged property.

Trump sent federal law enforcement officers to Portland in early July, saying the months-long protests had gotten out of control and the city had failed to respond. “Their leadership has, for months, lost control of the anarchists and agitators,” he tweeted this week.

Some state and local officials have asked that federal officers leave Portland, saying they’ve only increased tension and caused damage to the city. A U.S. Marshal shot a protester in the head July 11 with impact munition, fracturing his skull, and there have been reports of at least one protester being detained by an unmarked vehicle without probable cause.

Crowd sizes at nightly protests in Portland have reportedly grown since federal forces were sent in. Activists and politicians said a similar trend would unfold in Oakland — or elsewhere in California — if Trump were to follow through with his threat to deploy agents.

“We are not experiencing any civil unrest right now, but I can think of nothing more likely to incite it than the presence of Trump-ordered military troops into Oakland,” Mayor Libby Schaaf said in a July 20 social media posting.

[HI] Hurricane threatens Hawaii with surf, winds, flooding (San Diego Union Tribune)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

San Diego Union Tribune [7/25/2020 11:09 AM, Audrey McAvoy, AP, 248K]
Hawaii on Saturday geared up to face a hurricane that threatened to pummel the islands with dangerous surf, strong winds and flash floods even as residents grappled with escalating numbers of coronavirus cases.

Powerful storms are familiar to many in Hawaii who have spent the past several summers preparing for tropical cyclones. But the pandemic adds a new twist.

Luke Meyers, the administrator of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, urged people get ready by learning about the hazards where they live.

“We know that things are going to get wet, things are going to blow and things are going to slide,” Meyers said.

Hurricane Douglas was 440 miles (705 kilometers) east of Hilo early Saturday It was packing winds of 105 mph (165 kph), making it a Category 2 hurricane.

The National Weather Service forecasts Douglas will weaken as it passes over cooler waters and encounters wind shear closer to the Hawaiian Islands. Meteorologists predict it will be near-hurricane strength as it nears the Hawaiian Islands Saturday and Sunday.

The coronavirus was complicating preparations for the American Red Cross, which operates emergency shelters on behalf of local governments.

Many volunteers who normally staff the shelters are older or have pre-existing health conditions that put them at higher risk of getting severely sick if infected by the virus. Many of these volunteers are thus staying home this storm.

At the same time, each shelter will have less capacity because of the physical distancing requirements to prevent the spread of the disease, and more shelters (and workers) will be needed to accommodate people.

Shelters will need 60 square feet (6 square meters) per person or family instead of the 10 square feet (1 square meter) per person needed in the past.

Maui Mayor Michael Victorino said his county won’t open as many shelters for Douglas as a result of the staffing situation. But he still expects to have enough room for those who need to evacuate because there are so few tourists visiting during the pandemic. Travelers are normally some of the biggest users of Maui’s shelters during hurricanes.

The CEO of the Pacific Islands region of the American Red Cross was understanding of those uncomfortable about volunteering during the pandemic. Diane Peters-Nguyen put out a call for others who might be able to help.

“We do ask people to think about that and take care of themselves and their family first. But if they’re able, we really appreciate those that can, to respond,” she said.

Hawaii has some of the lowest coronavirus infection rates in the nation, but COVID-19 numbers have been rising in recent weeks. On Thursday and Friday, the state reported 55

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

and 60 new confirmed cases, both of which were record highs.

At Pearl Harbor, the Navy began moving ships and submarines out to sea where they will stay until the threat from the storm subsides. The Navy will either secure its aircraft in hangars or fly them to other airfields.

Hawaiian Airlines canceled all Sunday flights and some Saturday flights between Honolulu and the other islands.

Hawaii is used to stocking up on food and other essentials to ride out hurricanes. Yet in one sense it is ill-prepared for the storms because so many of Hawaii's single-family homes are older structures built before building codes were changed in the 1990s to take account of hurricane hazards.

A 2015 state report warned that these homes "will be vulnerable to structural collapse under a hurricane's high wind pressures and wind-borne debris" unless they have been retrofitted.

Hawaii has been spared the worst in recent years as major hurricanes either weakened as they approached or skirted the main islands all together.

In 2018, Hurricane Lane came toward the state as a Category 5 storm and dumped more than 50 inches of rain on the Big Island, which is mostly rural. Forecasts had called for Lane to slam into Honolulu but strong wind shear largely broke up the storm just south of the state's biggest city.

Hurricane Iniki made landfall on Kauai as a Category 4 hurricane in 1992. More than 41% of the island's homes were damaged or destroyed by the storm.

[HI] Hurricane Douglas to swipe Hawaii, producing flooding rain, damaging winds and huge waves (Washington Post)
Washington Post [7/25/2020 5:29 PM, Ian Livingston, 13480K]
Hurricane Douglas is rapidly closing in on the Hawaiian Islands. While it has weakened below major hurricane status, the current forecast brings it on a dangerous trek through the Pacific archipelago starting tonight and lasting into early Monday.

If Douglas makes landfall in Hawaii as a hurricane, it will become the third storm in the modern record to do so. Many other storms have weakened rapidly on approaches similar to that of Douglas, torn apart by strong upper-level winds that tend to be present, as well as cooler ocean temperatures.

Hurricane watches are in effect for the Big Island and Maui while Oahu was placed under a hurricane warning.

"The close passage of Douglas brings a triple threat of hazards, including but not limited to damaging winds, flooding rainfall, and dangerously high surf, especially along east facing shores," the Central Pacific Hurricane Center wrote.

Hanna's impending landfall comes at a time when the United States continues to be gripped

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

by the coronavirus pandemic, which complicates storm shelter and relief operations as social distancing requirements and other prevention efforts are taken into account. Currently, FEMA as well as state agencies are tasked with responding to both the coronavirus and the storm.

In an interview about the storm, Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell said, “This is a double whammy.” That was in reference to the fact that covid-19 is surging in the state as Douglas approaches.

State officials are urging people to shelter at home and only leave as a last resort.

Hurricane Douglas peaked earlier in the week as a Category 4 Hurricane, with maximum sustained winds of 130 mph. However, Douglas has steadily weakened as it tracks over waters that are cooler than required to power the most intense tropical cyclones. Water temperatures where it maximized its intensity were close to the mid-80s, whereas it’s currently traversing waters in the mid-70s.

Rounding the base of a large high pressure area to its north, Douglas is moving quickly toward Hawaii. With a forward speed of 18 mph, the storm had maximum sustained winds of 90 mph as of 11 a.m. Hawaii time.

Besides cooler waters, the Pacific Hurricane Center points to “relatively low vertical wind shear values [that are] forecast to affect the tropical cyclone during the next day or so,” indicating a relatively slow decrease in strength is likely in the near term.

Large waves that Douglas has kicked up are already impacting the islands, and they’ll only grow in size and intensity during the short term. The CPHC expects: “life-threatening surf and rip current conditions for a couple of days.” Local inundation and beach erosion are also anticipated.

By Sunday afternoon, Hurricane Douglas is forecast to pass about 30 miles north of the island of Maui and have sustained winds of 80 mph. Tropical storm conditions (sustained winds greater than 39 mph) are anticipated there, with hurricane conditions (sustained winds greater than 74 mph) possible should the track shift slightly south.

Sunday night, Douglas is forecast to pass over Kauai as a strong tropical storm.

The current forecast brings Douglas directly over Oahu Sunday evening as a hurricane with 75 mph winds.

NWS Honolulu writes, “Damaging winds may begin as early as late tonight across parts of Maui and the Big Island, possibly spreading westward to the rest of the state on Sunday.” They also point out that there should be limited focus on the track, given widespread impacts across the island chain. Localized winds higher than other places may also occur in mountainous regions as well as high rises, they warn.

Flooding rain may end up the most widespread feature of Douglas across the islands.

The local NWS forecast calls for as much as five to 10 inches of rain as the storm passes,

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

with some amounts of up to 15 inches possible. Significant flooding is anticipated along rivers and tributaries. This may be enhanced on the north side of the islands where winds will blow onshore, although flooding is possible just about anywhere.

The current track forecast shows that Hurricane Douglas may come within 30 miles of Honolulu, which is the main logistical hub for the island chain.

Since Douglas is a fairly small tropical cyclone, small shifts in its track or intensity fluctuations can mean major differences for the islands in its projected path. Should Douglas swing farther north, impacts could be significantly lessened, although large waves and gusty winds are likely in just about any scenario.

“Even if the center remains offshore, severe impacts could still be realized over the islands, as they extend well away from the center,” the NWS warned.

Although it is a warm-weather island destination, Hawaii’s location in a cooler area of sea surface temperatures has historically protected it from anything but the rare hurricane strike. There have only been two hurricane landfalls in modern times; Category 1 Hurricane Dot in 1959 and Category 4 Iniki, which caused widespread damage on Kauai in 1992. Both of those curved northward from the south, where there is a shorter trip across cool waters, rather than moving in from the east like Douglas is.

Due in large part to human-caused global warming, increasing water temperatures and a somewhat shifted storm track in a warming world may bring increased hurricane threats to Hawaii moving forward.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Judge denies Trump administration request to delay deadline to release migrants from ICE detention centers (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 9:35 PM, J. Edward Moreno, 2343K]
A federal judge denied a request from the Trump administration to delay its deadline to release migrants from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers.

U.S. District Judge Dolly Gee ruled in late June that children in ICE detention centers must be released “with all deliberate speed,” due to coronavirus infections within facilities. The judge have the federal government a deadline of July 17 to comply. She later extended the deadline to July 27 after a motion from the Trump administration.

The administration sought another extension, which Gee denied Saturday.

“There will be no family separation without parental consent, regardless of whether a know-your-rights protocol exists or not,” Gee wrote in her order.

In her June ruling Gee, an Obama appointee, cited recent outbreaks of the virus at two ICE facilities, saying the centers “are ‘on fire’ and there is no more time for half measures.”

NBC News reported this week that despite the fact that the deadline to release those in ICE

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

custody was days away, the administration has not yet let many migrants go, with 346 children and parents still in custody.

The litigation comes as outbreaks have surged across the country, with California, Texas, Arizona and Florida — all states with ICE detention facilities — becoming hot spots for the disease.

[TX] Three Human Smugglers Sentenced for Texas Stash House Operation (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 12:19 PM, Bob Price, 1912K]
A federal judge in the Southern District of Texas handed down prison sentences to three men involved in human smuggling and stash house operations. The trio smuggled more than 1,000 people in less than a year into Texas under extremely dangerous conditions.

“This is another case that illustrates the dangers of human smuggling and sadly, how Houston is an important hub for it,” U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas Ryan Patrick told Breitbart Texas in response to an inquiry. “Aliens were loaded into boarded-up trailers in July and August heat to be moved from point to point.”

U.S. District Court Judge Alfred H. Bennett handed down a 36-month prison sentence to 47-year-old Rene Camacho, a U.S. citizen from Houston, following his December 2019 guilty plea. His sentence also included a 24-month period of supervised release following the completion of his prison term.

Two Mexican nationals also pleaded guilty in December to the conspiracy to smuggle and transport illegal aliens.

The judge previously sentenced 49-year-old Albino Vargas-Hernandez, a Mexican national who lived in Houston, and 22-year-old Hiram Lamarca-Gonzalez, another Mexican national residing in Houston to 42 and 36 months in prison respectively for their roles in the human smuggling and stash house operations.

Prosecutors told the judge the three men carried out a complex human smuggling scheme that utilized multiple drivers to transport illegal aliens. The operators utilized money transmitters and ledgers to keep track of their illicit enterprise that brought in more than $1.4 million in proceeds.

“These three individuals operated a vast human smuggling network that preyed on the desperation of foreign nationals hoping to get into the United States,” U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agent in Charge Mark Dawson said in a written statement. “In just the last year, they are responsible for smuggling more than 1,000 people into the country. With today’s sentencing, we have sent a resounding message that HSI is committed to aggressively target human smugglers and smuggling organizations who seek to undermine our nation’s immigration laws and victimize people for profit.”

Prosecutors proved that the three men engaged in human smuggling from July 9, 2018 to August 22, 2018. During that period investigators reported the smugglers utilized multiple

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

boarded up mobile homes to warehouse their human cargo, Breitbart Texas reported.

In addition to the people and money recovered in the investigation, agents recovered multiple firearms.

Judge Bennett ordered the forfeiture of a residence valued at $130,000 and $224,774.86 in cash and cashier's checks seized during the investigation.

ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations officials told Breitbart that Vargas-Hernandez and Lamarca-Gonzalez will be placed in removal proceedings pending the completion of their prison terms. They are currently in federal custody pending transfer to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

The judge allowed Camacho to remain on bond pending a future surrender date to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

During the month of June, U.S. Attorney Ryan Patrick and the Southern District of Texas team of prosecutors carried out 610 immigration prosecutions. The District of Arizona was second with 132 prosecutions on immigration-related cases.

Citizenship and Immigration Services

Universities Brand 'Drama Therapy' And 'Journalism' as STEM Majors to Circumvent Immigration Policy(Free Beacon)
Free Beacon [7/26/2020 4:59 AM, Yuichiro Kakutani, 7975K]
Several American universities are expanding the scope of their science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in an attempt to circumvent U.S. immigration law, which allows international students who major in STEM subjects to stay in the country two years longer than counterparts who major in the humanities. New York University, for example, now includes journalism, classics, and drama therapy under its STEM umbrella.

NYU is one of a number of universities exploiting a U.S. immigration policy that requires most international students to leave the country a year after finishing their studies—but permits those who studied STEM disciplines to work for an additional two years. The policy is part of the Department of Homeland Security's Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which aims to shore up the United States' supply of engineers and tech workers.

The result has been a dramatic increase in the number of foreign students seeking the STEM exemption—it ballooned to nearly 70,000 in 2018 from just over 2,000 in 2008 as the University of California, Berkeley, Boston University, California State University, and others have classified journalism, media studies, and digital media arts as STEM programs.

CSU said that it followed DHS guidelines when it made its decision to label certain programs as STEM. None of the other schools responded to requests for comment.

While many schools have moved to classify subjects like economics and business as STEM fields, few have exploited the existing loophole as much as NYU. The New York school now insists that hundreds of subjects—from physics and chemistry to journalism and classical

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

civilization—are STEM programs.

The introduction of foreign workers into the U.S. labor market has come at the expense of American workers, according to immigration attorney Sara Blackwell, who told the Washington Free Beacon that the DHS program increases competition for domestic workers and depresses wages because employers are exempt from paying Medicare and Social Security taxes for international students.

"If an American student and a foreign student with the exact same grades go to an employer, that employer has a lot of incentive to hire the foreigner over the Americans," she said. "At the same time, your parents who are now getting into the Social Security and Medicare age are going to be at a disadvantage because the employer doesn't have that money in that pot."

On paper, the DHS is supposed to regularly monitor American universities. But such audits rarely occur, according to Lora Ries, a former DHS official and senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation. Ries said the department responsible for enforcing the provisions is underfunded and deterred by the potential public relations fallout that a crackdown would elicit.

"Because that ICE office is not heavily resourced, the compliance aspect of it and the monitoring is lacking," she said. "And, you know, is ICE going to kick out some well known university from this program? Imagine the flak they would take for that."

A report published by the ombudsman for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) found that the program is "vulnerable to fraud" due to understaffing—one ICE employee is responsible for as many as 240 schools. The report also found that the program exhibits "significant vulnerabilities" that allow it to act as a conduit for Chinese espionage. Chinese students are the top beneficiaries of the OPT program as they represent more than one in three international students studying in the United States.

"While OPT was created with the benign intention of offering foreign students the opportunity to gain work experience in their area of study … it is currently being used by government actors from countries such as the PRC as a means of conducting espionage and technology transfer through some portion of the many thousands of foreign nationals who have obtained OPT employment in the United States," the report found.

Some schools appear to have anticipated potential legal consequences for exploiting the OPT loophole. Berkeley, for example, provides a template letter to all international students to submit to federal authorities to "avoid any confusion by USCIS." Rachelle Peterson, the director of policy at the National Association of Scholars, said that schools are incentivized to play "fast and loose with visa rules" to boost international student admissions.

"'STEM' means whatever it takes to keep high-paying international students pouring in. The effort by NYU and others to expansively define STEM demonstrates the verbal gymnastics colleges and universities regularly engage in to pad their bottom lines," Peterson said. "Colleges and universities frequently see our nation's visa rules as a system to game for their own financial benefit."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Customs and Border Protection

Legal groups sue US to stop expulsion of children previously held in hotel rooms (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 8:56 AM, Marty Johnson, 2343K]
The ACLU has sued the Trump administration in an attempt to stop the government from expelling migrant children who were being detained in hotel rooms without being able to properly seek refuge in the U.S.

The Associated Press reported earlier in the week that children who had arrived at the border without their parents were being detained in a trio of Hampton Inn hotels in Phoenix, Ariz., and in McAllen and El Paso, Texas.

On Friday, the owners of the Hampton in McAllen said that they had ended all reservations of the rooms used to detain the children, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) confirmed that all of the minors had been taken away from the hotel, but would not disclose where they had been taken, noting security concerns.

According to the AP, the hotels have been used nearly 200 times to detain migrant children, with some children as young as 1.

Federal law dictates that most children who arrive at the border should be sent to shelters and eventually placed with family sponsors.

However, the administration is trying to circumvent this rule due to the coronavirus pandemic, citing a directive from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“The Trump administration is holding children in secret in hotels, refusing to give lawyers access to them so it can expel them back to danger without even a chance for the children to show they warrant asylum,” Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, told the wire service.

The ACLU filed the suit with the District Court in Washington, D.C., along with the Texas Civil Rights Project, Oxfam and The Center for Gender and Refugee Studies.

Hilton, which owns Hampton Inn, said in a statement Friday evening that it does not support its hotels being used to detain minors.

"Our policy has always been that hotels should not be used as detention centers or for detaining individuals. We expect all Hilton properties to reject business that would use a hotel in this way," the company said in a statement.

In a letter to Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf on Friday, a group of congressional Democrats expressed "deep alarm" to the detention of the migrant children.

“We are gravely concerned that the CDC order is being grossly misused to circumvent asylum and child welfare protections,” lawmakers said in the letter.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

[TX] Migrant camp shrinks as hope for asylum dwindles (Houston Chronicle)
Houston Chronicle [7/25/2020 6:24 PM, Silvia Foster-Frau, 206K]
An encampment of U.S. asylum-seekers in Matamoros has dwindled to less than half its size as the coronavirus pulses across the Americas.

Migrants are leaving the camp, across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, out of fear and futility as immigration courts close indefinitely and cases of COVID-19 began to appear in their community. Some are going to other parts of Mexico to start a life there. Others are returning to the violence and persecution from which they fled in their home countries.

“There’s people who are scared and want to go home. And people who are fatigued from being here. They can’t endure it all,” said Perla, 45, a Nicaraguan asylum-seeker who asked her last name not be used for fear of retribution. “Hope is ending.”

As recent as last month, the camp of tents and tarps was home to 2,500 asylum-seekers, stuck in the nearly defunct U.S. “Remain in Mexico” program. But only about 1,000 migrants are left there. A census by the nonprofit Angry Tias and Abuelas counted 960 migrants at the camp, including at least 300 under the age of 17.

Perla has been living at the encampment since last August awaiting U.S. asylum proceedings. She was selected to be leader of the Nicaraguans and gets paid to help in the Global Response Management’s pharmacy trailer. She said she’s holding out until September, the month of her next hearing. But if it gets postponed?

“I don’t know what I’ll do. I don’t want to think about it,” she said. She’s at the camp after fleeing violence and persecution with her 7-and 8-year-old granddaughters.

An increasing number of migrants are quarantined in the camp. After the first positive coronavirus case three weeks ago, at least four more migrants have tested positive, with many more awaiting test results. Nearly two-dozen are in isolation. Some volunteers think they may have to start “reverse quarantine” procedures - where those who are healthy are isolated from the majority-sick population.

“Definitely COVID has been a tipping point for some people,” said Elizabeth Cavazos, a volunteer at Angry Tias and Abuelas, a group that has been providing resources to the camp residents for months. “Remember these are people who are already stress-saturated.”

On Friday, the Department of Justice announced that all courts for Migrant Protection Protocols - the government’s term for its “Remain in Mexico” policy — will be closed indefinitely citing coronavirus risks.

The courts are on the edge of the U.S.-Mexico border, some of them pop-up tents that cost millions of taxpayer dollars to build to adjudicate MPP migrant cases. The migrants crossed the international bridge at their appointed court date, were escorted into the white tent, and then videoconferenced before a judge in San Antonio.

Since March, the Justice Department has been pushing back migrants’ court dates to a month or two in advance, requiring migrants to come to the bridge at their appointed time

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

and then receive a new notice with a date a few months ahead.

But now, as Texas and other states grapple with a coronavirus surge, the courts are shutting down until three criteria are met: Texas, Arizona and California are all in phase three of reopening (only Texas has reached that phase); the federal government's global health advisory lowers to level two (it is currently at level four "Do Not Travel); and until all the states at Mexico's northern border are "yellow" in the country's stoplight system (Tamaulipas, where Matamoros is located, is red).

Once all three criteria are met, there will be social distancing protocols, mask requirements, temperature screenings and capacity considerations as the courts reopen, according to the DOJ.

Mexican state authorities report more than 13,500 cases of coronavirus in Tamaulipas, and its two border cities have its highest numbers: about 2,590 cases in Matamoros and 2,969 in Reynosa.

Because of the continued court postponementst, many of the migrants at the camp have been waiting for over a year, relying on outside donations to survive. They're camped next to the international bridge and the Rio Grande on a piece of Mexican federal land. Some got jobs in Matamoros, but many of those establishments have been shut down because of the pandemic.

Informal classes taught by educated asylum-seekers for the young children also have ended, Perla said.

The courts closing "has definitely sparked conversation about 'Well, what can we do?' And that's why we are trying to find resources for them to pursue other avenues of asylum in Mexico or relocating. It definitely feels like the straw," said Cavazos.

She said Angry Tias and Abuelas is looking into reintegration programs for the migrants that decide to attempt to take root in Mexico. The decision is a gamble: there have been dozens of reports of kidnappings and extortion of U.S. asylum-seekers who were caught in "Remain in Mexico."

"That light at the end of the tunnel, it keeps getting pulled further and further away," said Cavazos. "For them, God is a great mitigator, and that's who they keep hanging on to. But you know, it's hard when you keep getting thrown obstacles."

Perla said she doesn't think the camp will close. Too many people put too much on the line to bear the thought that it was all for nothing, and give up.

"I really cant go back to my country. Just the other day they burned the house of a family member," she said. "And I can't turn back after coming here with all those dreams, after all those sacrifices and all that I've paid. We have to endure. We will."

[TX] Stash House Operation Disrupted in Texas near Mexican Border (Breitbart)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Breitbart [7/25/2020 4:25 PM, Bob Price, 1912K]
Rio Grande Valley Sector U.S. Border Patrol agents and Hidalgo County Constables Office (HCCO) Precinct 4 deputies teamed up to disrupt a stash house operation occurring in a rural neighborhood near Mission, Texas.

While investigating a residence believed to be operating as a stash house on July 22, agents observed a vehicle leave the residence with numerous people inside. Constable deputies conducted a vehicle stop and identified six occupants in the vehicle as foreign nationals illegally in the United States.

Agents and deputies returned to the residence and located a small structure in the back yard which held an additional 16 people found to also be in the country illegally. The foreign nationals all came to the U.S. from the countries of Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, according to information obtained from U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials.

This story reads like a routine criminal investigation in South Texas. Photographs of the stash house tell a much more in-depth story of human suffering. The old saying a picture is worth a thousand words make sense when presented before someone who has been to countless stash houses during their law enforcement career.

A Border Patrol agent assigned to the Rio Grande Valley Sector looked at the following photographs and described to Breitbart the conditions he saw and how they compared to stash house operations he previously encountered

The agent immediately noticed the lack of windows along one side of the structure. Instead, there appeared to be a painted sheet of plywood covering what was most likely a window or door at one time.

This is designed to prevent escape, the agent explained. The agent also observed no exterior lighting under the overhangs and only one window covered by burglar bars on the outside.

Why is everything boarded and barred?

Two reasons, the agent explained, no electricity or to keep those held inside from getting out.

The agent said the small air conditioning window units are commonly seen at stash houses but, “in my experience,” rarely work. If they do have them, most smugglers would not allow them to run the A/C because of the cost. They do not care enough about the people they are smuggling, the agent said. They are treated as sub-human in most cases we work. Wires dangling from the TV dish are just hanging down, not even connected to anything.

No windows were located near the only entrance observed for the structure, the agent continued.

When you open the door to a typical stash house you rarely see any furniture — only mattresses lining the floor beyond the path of the door’s ability to swing inward — one after

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

another. The agent explained this is a very common theme in human smuggling stash houses.

It is also common for smugglers to take migrants' shoes and often clothing from the migrants so they cannot escape. They use it as a form of punishment or intimidation in some cases.

In the south Texas brush, everything has a thorn so you are not getting far without shoes on your feet, the agent explained.

Last week Breitbart reported a similar incident in neighboring Starr County, Texas, where Border Patrol agents working in collaboration with the sheriff's office made entry into a residence and rescued 23 migrants inside held against their will by an armed gunman.

Officials responded to the stash house after a victim called for help via a cell phone. They were all rescued safely, according to law enforcement. Officials reported the migrants to be from Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico.

There is another factor unseen in these photographs — the extreme heat of the South Texas summer. Many of these structures have no running water or bathroom facilities. It is common for migrants to be forced to use buckets or only be allowed to go outside during the night to relieve themselves and quickly return.

The mistreatment of men, women, and children is a common theme told to U.S. law enforcement once removed from the prying eyes of the smugglers. Stories of beatings and rapes during their journey to the U.S. add another layer of trauma that agents need to contend with while fighting to end human smuggling along the southwest border.

In April 2016, Breitbart's Brandon Darby and Bob Price reported on the abuses of migrants throughout the human smuggling process.

The article explains the series of stash houses migrants are forced into along the human smuggling pathways. It also highlights the sexual abuse of women and assaults on men held in multiple stash houses as they move from Central America through Mexico and into the U.S. interior.

[WA] Acting CBP commissioner Mark Morgan says positioning of federal agents in Seattle 'just makes sense' (FOX News)
FOX News [7/25/2020 10:53 AM, Julia Musto, 10362K] Video: HERE
Criticism of the deployment of federal agents -- who have a "responsibility" to protect American cities -- is unwarranted, Acting CBP Commissioner Mark Morgan stated Saturday.

In an interview on "Fox & Friends Weekend," Morgan said that strategic positioning in Seattle was "spot on" as leaders there put politics over public safety.

"[U.S. Department of Homeland Security Sec. Chad Wolf] would be abdicating his responsibility based on what we're seeing and based on the past violence we've seen in Seattle not to preposition resources in case there is violence in Seattle that we're seeing in

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

Portland," he asserted. "It just makes sense and it's common sense."

"Again, Title 40, u.s.c. 1350. I encourage everybody to go read that. It tells the secretary, 'you will, you must protect these federal facilities,'" Morgan said.

The commissioner pushed back on claims agents were roaming streets and unlawfully spiriting away protesters.

"Again, just flat out that's a lie. That's not what's happening," he said. "We are there defending that federal courthouse against violence."

"We have individuals – criminals, not protesters, -- every single night they are going there arming themselves with weapons. From knives to guns to bats to crowbars: they are trying to burn down that building," added Morgan. "That is the truth."

"And so, when you see a federal officer or agent out there in Portland, it's because they are going to arrest somebody with probable cause that's tried to burn the building down or assault them. And, I support them 100 percent," he told the "Fox & Friends Weekend" hosts.

Morgan also said any claims that protests would remain peaceful if not for the presence of these agents are "preposterous."

"I mean, it's unbelievable. So, the mayor in Portland is saying federal agents and officers, 'you go home, stop doing your statutory authority, and watch the criminals burn the seat of American justice to the ground.' That's what we will see," he remarked.

"So, instead of telling the criminals to go home, he tells the federal agents doing their job protecting Americans to go home. It's outrageous, it's ridiculous, and it's dangerous," Morgan concluded.

[OR] CBP chief: 'Criminals' in Portland used metal spikes to target federal vehicles (Washington Examiner)
Washington Examiner [7/25/2020 5:08 PM, Haley Victory Smith, 394K]
The acting commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection said "criminals" in Portland used metal spikes to puncture the tires of federal vehicles during protests in the Oregon city.

Mark Morgan shared a photo of the spikes in a tweet Saturday morning.

"Early this morning, metal spikes were used by criminals in Portland to puncture the tires of @CBP vehicles," he said.

In recent days, federal agents have established a presence in Portland in order to protect a federal courthouse there. Some have claimed that these officers are snatching innocent protesters off the street, in some cases using unmarked vehicles.

On Friday, a federal judge denied the Oregon attorney general's motion to restrict federal

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

police activity in the city. In his decision, the judge wrote, "The State has presented just one example of an arrest without probable cause and one example of an unreasonable seizure." He added, "It has presented no evidence of any official orders or policies and has presented no evidence that these allegedly illegal seizures are a widespread practice."

In a post to Twitter last night, Morgan listed some of the tactics he has observed from rioters on the streets of Portland, including throwing flaming objects, shooting ball bearings at officers, and directing fireworks at the courthouse's entry. He also detailed injuries suffered by a few of his officers, stating that one suffered a chemical burn.

"These are not the actions of peaceful protesters," he said. "These are the actions of violent anarchists who are looking to harm federal law enforcement and federal property. This violence must end. Local leadership needs to step up, denounce these actions, and regain order."

Protests in the city have persisted for weeks since the death of George Floyd in late May in Minneapolis police custody.

The inspectors general from the departments of Justice and Homeland Security announced on Thursday that they will investigate the actions by federal law enforcement in both Portland and Washington, D.C.

[OR] Acting CBP Commissioner: Portland Mayor Is Telling Feds to Go Home, But Not Criminals (Breitbart)
Breitbart [7/25/2020 7:59 PM, Ian Hanchett, 1912K]
On Saturday's broadcast of the Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends," acting Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Mark Morgan slammed Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler by saying that the mayor is telling federal agents and officers to stop acting under their statutory authority and to "watch the criminals burn the seat of American justice to the ground." Morgan also stated that the mayor, "instead of telling the criminals to go home," is telling "the federal agents doing their job, protecting Americans to go home."

Morgan said that the claim that it is the federal agents and officers who are inflaming the situation and creating violence is "preposterous" and it is "unbelievable."

He continued, "So, the mayor in Portland is saying, federal agents and officers, you go home. Stop doing your statutory authority, and watch the criminals burn the seat of American justice to the ground. That's what [we will] see. So, instead of telling the criminals to go home, he tells the federal agents doing their job, protecting Americans to go home. It's outrageous. It's ridiculous. And it's dangerous."

Morgan also stated that Wheeler and Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan (D) of "putting politics over public safety."

[CA] 300 lbs of meth, fentanyl seized in tractor-trailer smuggling attempt (San Diego Union Tribune)
San Diego Union Tribune [7/25/2020 6:31 PM, Kristina Davis, 248K]
More than 300 pounds of methamphetamine and fentanyl were found stashed in the sleeper

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

cab of a tractor-trailer truck Thursday as it tried to cross from Mexico into San Diego, authorities said.

The truck arrived at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry about 7 a.m. with a shipment of recycled cardboard, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The truck was inspected after a scan showed anomalies in the cab.

Officers found two black duffel bags, stuffed with 64 cellophane-wrapped bundles. The packages contained 286 pounds of meth and 26 pounds of fentanyl, according to CBP.

The driver, a 36-year-old Mexican man with a valid border-crossing card, was arrested.

“Even in the midst of a global pandemic, we continue to see attempts to move hard narcotics across the border and into U.S. communities,” said Pete Flores, director of field operations for CBP in San Diego.

The U.S.-Mexico border remains closed to non-essential traffic due to the coronavirus, although the travel limits do not apply to commercial trade.

[Mexico] Four months in, coronavirus travel restrictions strain cross-border relationships (San Diego Union Tribune)
San Diego Union Tribune [7/25/2020 9:00 AM, Wendy Fry, 248K]
When Dulce Castañeda, 28, woke up March 20 in her family’s Playas de Tijuana home, her mother was panicked.

“Go. You have to cross ... NOW,” she was told.

News was just trickling out that the U.S. and Mexico would soon close their shared border to all non-essential travel to slow the spread of coronavirus. Not waiting to hear specifics of the travel restrictions, Castañeda, a driver for Greyhound, hugged her 52-year-old mother goodbye and headed for the pedestrian crossing in San Ysidro, not knowing when they would see each other again.

Four months later, families like Castañeda’s in Tijuana, and across the globe, remain separated. Countries worldwide have shut down or significantly reduced travel in hopes of slowing the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

That has played havoc with many of the at least 4 million Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in cities along the 1,954-mile U.S. southwestern border. Those who are allowed to cross daily face delays that have been averaging around three hours by vehicle at the San Ysidro port of entry crossing, but sometimes exceed six hours. Pedestrian crossings at the Ped East crossing average two-hour waits, but can drag as long as four hours.

The U.S. restrictions on non-essential travel that went into effect March 21 effectively invalidate short-term visas that allow for brief crossings into U.S. or Mexico border cities to visit family, get medical care or shop.

Trump administration officials stressed health reasons for the restrictions, but there was a

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

hint of “America first” in them as well. Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf spoke of lessening “the strain on health systems in our border communities, and taking away important and life-saving resources from American citizens,” when he announced the restrictions. They were extended on April 20, May 19, June 16 and on July 16.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection closed lanes and processing facilities and reduced staff, using the logic that cross-border travel should be significantly reduced with non-essential travel eliminated. When the restrictions first went into effect, border traffic dropped by 70 percent, according to CBP.

U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, people who work in the U.S. with valid work visas, and those traveling for education or documented medical reasons are still allowed to travel across the border with the proper documentation. But Border officials acknowledge that travelers may face increased wait times in passenger and commercial operations due to restricted crossings and temporary closures of processing lanes.

“We monitor and make operational adjustments daily, depending on the totality of the workload we have at each port. While the non-essential travel restrictions are in place, we are focused on maintaining wait times for workers crossing during the weekday morning peak hours similar to what they were before the restrictions came into effect,” the agency said in a statement.

The latest extension of the restrictions remains effective until August 21, when federal officials will re-evaluate their need. Rates of cases in Baja California have dropped significantly and officials are considering loosening business restrictions statewide. However, cases in California continue to spike after some say the state began reopening too abruptly.

Baja California’s governor and health secretary have been outlining a much more gradual reopening process, but residents complain the state’s ability to enforce the orders is insufficient. Some businesses, such as nightclubs in Rosarito, have already reopened by getting local exemptions from the mayor or ignoring the state orders altogether.

Mexican authorities have also conceded the actual number of cases is certainly much higher across the nation, including in Baja, because of a lack of testing.

“The Department of Homeland Security is in close contact with our Canadian and Mexican counterparts regarding this extension, and they agree on the need to extend their non-essential travel restrictions as well,” said Wolf in a statement about the latest extension.

For families that straddle the border, the impact has been psychological as well as financial. In addition to the health worries many of them face in their jobs, the separation complicates things like child and elder care and education.

“I feel like I have to pick a side — either the U.S. or Mexico,” said Castañeda, a U.S. citizen.
With the future uncertain for her pre-pandemic job — driving bus passengers to Oakland — Castañeda chose to ride out the COVID-19 lock-down in her apartment in Bonita, where U.S. wages are typically much higher.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“The interesting part of all this is that even though these border restrictions are aimed at the mobility of asylum seekers or tourist visa holders, U.S. citizens are also impacted and many of them have stopped crossing altogether,” said Estefania Castañeda Pérez, a PhD candidate at the University of California Los Angeles, who studies the border. (She is not related to Dulce Castañeda.)

Sandra Rojel, 27, is a dual citizen who lives in San Diego. Under the regulations, she’s technically allowed to cross in both directions, but she says bringing medicine to her mother in Tijuana has become nearly impossible.

“Before the restrictions went into effect, I would come at least once or twice a week. The lines were very short and very fast. But now, it takes the whole day just to cross,” she said on July 17, while waiting at a pedestrian crossing across the border from San Ysidro.

Rojel said now she is only able to cross once a month at the most, leaving her mother without her medical supplies, mostly over-the-counter medicines only available in the U.S.

“What’s affecting her even more though is that I haven’t been able to see her ... so I can’t lose so much time waiting and also it’s putting us at more risk,” Rojel said, referring to the crowded conditions in the border line, where travelers have not been socially distancing.

Castañeda Pérez recounted talking to a single mother for her dissertation research who had to choose between unemployment and leaving her two daughters home alone in the middle of the night in Tijuana to cross the Otay Mesa port of entry, after border officials temporarily suspended overnight and early morning processing.

Hundreds of cross-border workers began sleeping in their cars or on the sidewalk in May to be able to cross into the United States and arrive at work on time.

“She had to get in line at midnight to work her 9-to-5 job the next day,” said Castañeda Pérez. “And then she only was seeing her children for a couple hours when she got home after 7 p.m., if she wanted to get any sleep at all.”

Castañeda Pérez said it reminded her of her own childhood when she went to school in the San Diego-area while living in Tijuana, before millions of dollars of investments in border infrastructure made crossing much more efficient and reliable, boosting cross-border trade and travel.

“It’s surreal to be back in that time now because it was so traumatizing for all of us,” she said.

Some countries, like Canada, are this month slowly starting to allow foreign nationals to reunite with their immediate family members under strict conditions.

Families at the U.S.-Mexico border, however, continue to face long border waits, uncertain travel guidelines and strict restrictions against all unnecessary cross-border travel, which includes visiting family members on the other side.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

“They keep in touch with each other via Skype or Zoom,” said Castañeda Pérez. “Others, on the San Diego side, aren’t even able to take care of family members in Tijuana or bring medicine to them that is essential for their well-being.”

Castañeda Pérez said anxiety over spreading or contracting the coronavirus during cross-border travel and fear about the increasingly militarized U.S. border — which predates coronavirus — is also playing a role in deciding not to cross and visit family.

“It reminds me of what crossing was like post-9/11,” she said, describing how border agents assume people are not allowed to cross unless they can provide documentation to prove otherwise, which slows processing down and increases border waits.

Luis Mercado, 23, said he waited nearly 10 hours at one point to cross back into the United States by vehicle after bringing essential food and medicine to his uncle, who lives in Playas de Tijuana and is completely home-bound because of health risk factors.

Now he says he walks back across, which also has drawbacks.

“You just don’t ever know how long it could take. One day, it could be normal or it could take forever, and we’re all crowded together here with no social distancing,” said Mercado.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Coronavirus updates: U.S. deaths top 1,000 for four consecutive days (Washington Post)
Washington Post [7/25/2020 10:09 PM, David J. Lynch, Meryl Kornfield, and Marisa Iati]
The United States edged closer to a single-day coronavirus infection record with more than 74,000 new cases Friday, approaching the mark set just one week ago, as the pandemic that has burned through the country for months showed no sign of easing.

More than 1,000 Americans have died each day between Tuesday and Friday, the worst tally of human loss since late May.

Even as President Trump insists that children must return to school in a matter of weeks, the nation appears no closer to controlling this worst-in-a-century medical emergency than it was months ago.

The number of patients hospitalized with covid-19 has roughly doubled over the past month as the disease caused by the novel coronavirus tightened its grip on states such as California, Florida, Texas and Arizona. U.S. hospitals treated 59,670 people on Friday, just shy of the mid-April record of 59,940, according to the Covid Tracking Project.

At least 143,000 Americans have died of covid-19 and more than 4.1 million have been infected, according to data tracked by The Washington Post. As of Saturday evening, the seven-day averages for new cases hit fresh highs in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Kentucky, Alaska, Mississippi, Missouri, Indiana, Kansas and California, according to The Post’s tracking.

Montana’s one-day case high increased by more than half from its previous high — from

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

144 cases on July 15 to 221 on Saturday. Hawaii's single-day infections count also set a record.

California, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas and Florida set records for their seven-day averages of daily deaths.

The galloping outbreak appears to have bested efforts to return the economy to normal functioning, at least for now. After regaining almost one-third of the nearly 21 million jobs lost when most nonessential businesses closed this spring, the U.S. economy appears to be losing momentum.

Workplace activity has slumped in the hardest-hit states and is plateauing elsewhere, leaving the number of Americans working "roughly unchanged" over the past month, the bank said.

A new Census Bureau survey of U.S. households was even more downbeat. It found 5 million fewer Americans saying they were employed than in a similar survey two weeks earlier.

The economy is set to suffer a further blow within days as funding for enhanced unemployment benefits and a federal moratorium on evictions both expire. The Senate recessed for the weekend, with Republicans unable to unite behind an alternative to House Democrats' proposed $3 trillion economic rescue legislation.

Lawmakers had spoken of reaching a deal before the end of the month, when millions of jobless Americans will see their additional $600-per-week benefits vanish. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said Friday he hoped for a compromise, including funding for schools and health programs, "in the next few weeks."

Any measure is likely to be the last legislative remedy for the pandemic-inspired recession before the November election.

Notes of caution were also sounded on the medical front. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's top infectious-disease expert, said states hit hard by the virus in recent weeks need to halt or reverse their reopenings while they grapple with infection surges. During a live interview with The Post, Fauci said a coronavirus vaccine would probably not be "widely available" until "several months in" to 2021.

The Food and Drug Administration is warning consumers that at least 77 hand-sanitizer products may contain methanol, a toxic compound that can cause blindness or even death.

In states where cases have ballooned, officials are weighing additional public health measures to slow the spread of the virus, even as they battle resistance from some quarters.

Citing a recent rise in infections, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell (D) banned the sale of takeout alcoholic drinks at bars and restaurants, effective Saturday. The mayor's announcement at a news conference Friday came after Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards (D) ordered the state's bars closed for on-premise consumption earlier this month.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

In Washington state, a federal judge rejected a legal challenge to Gov. Jay Inslee's coronavirus edicts. While Republican state lawmakers argued for a preliminary injunction against the Democratic chief executive's use of emergency powers, which they called unconstitutional, U.S. District Judge Benjamin Settle ruled that other state officials, not Inslee (D), were responsible for enforcing the orders.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) said state nursing-home inspectors would start being tested for the coronavirus regularly. The change, announced Friday, comes on the heels of a Los Angeles Times report revealing that inspectors were not tested before they entered the facilities and could have been bringing the virus to vulnerable residents.

Other states moved toward loosening restrictions, even as the virus raged there. The secretary of Florida's Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Halsey Beshears, signaled that he planned to start talking with bars and breweries about how they can return to business. His announcement came as Florida's average number of deaths rose for the third straight day.

In Texas, bar owners themselves were fighting for the ability to reopen. Nearly 800 owners there said they would participate in "Freedom Fest" on Saturday, and openly defy a June 26 order by Gov. Greg Abbott (R) to shut down, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported.

Even as the pandemic rages, an information battle to define it continues.

A conservative television network on Saturday canceled a planned program advancing a baseless conspiracy theory that Fauci was responsible for the creation of the coronavirus. The allegation originated with the former medical researcher behind the debunked "Plandemic" documentary.

Amid fierce criticism, Sinclair Broadcast Group on Saturday said it had decided to postpone the program to bring together "other viewpoints and provide additional context."

The "America This Week" program would have featured host Eric Bolling interviewing former researcher Judy Mikovits, who claims that Fauci "manufactured" the coronavirus and shipped it to Wuhan, China, where the outbreak began. A chyron during the segment reads: "DID DR. FAUCI CREATE covid-19?"

The segment was first reported on by Media Matters, a liberal media watchdog.

In a statement on its Twitter account, Sinclair, which has 191 stations, insisted it was not "aligning with or endorsing" Mikovits's views and said it supported Fauci "valiantly."

Bolling later told The Post that "this segment does need to be reworked to provide better context, and as such we are delaying the airing of the episode for one week."

"Let me also add that I have immense respect for Dr. Fauci and recognize him as the leading expert on this topic," he said in a statement. "For the past two months, I have consistently pursued the opportunity to bring Dr. Fauci on air so that he may provide critical information to the public about the virus. The invitation stands."

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

A Sinclair spokesperson and Mikovits did not immediately respond to The Post's requests for comment.

Also Saturday, Hurricane Hanna, the first hurricane of the 2020 Atlantic season, threatened to complicate efforts to social distance as coastal communities in Texas prepared to shelter in place. Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez told residents to bring soap and hand sanitizer with them if they are forced to evacuate their homes.

Although the United States has logged more cases of the virus than any other country, the pandemic continued to make waves around the world this weekend.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un imposed a lockdown on the city of Kaesong and declared a state of emergency after someone there was found to have symptoms of the coronavirus, the Associated Press reported, citing North Korea's state-run media. That country has reported no confirmed cases of the coronavirus since the pandemic began.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro announced that he had tested negative for the coronavirus after testing positive July 7 and previously expressing skepticism about the virus and measures to address it.

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Transport removed Spain from its list of safe nations to visit as Spain saw an uptick in daily cases. Anyone returning to the U.K. from there will be required to self-quarantine for two weeks.

[AZ] Internal FEMA memo reveals Arizona coronavirus patients taken to New Mexico over staffing shortages: report (The Hill)
The Hill [7/25/2020 11:03 PM, J. Edward Moreno, 2343K]
An internal memo from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) showed coronavirus patients in Arizona were taken to New Mexico because of staffing shortages and a lack of hospital beds.

The memo, obtained by ABC News, did not specify how many patients were moved across the state border. Arizona is among the states in the South and western U.S. currently experiencing a record surge in coronavirus cases.

According to the Arizona Department of Health, 86 percent of hospital beds are currently in-use in the state, down from 91 percent earlier this month.

The memo also said 85 percent of critical care beds are in-use in Georgia, where coronavirus cases have surged in recent weeks. Health leaders in the state told Fox 5 Friday that hospitals are seeing a large jump in patients.

In Arkansas, the Hot Springs area reported a 198.1 percent increase in new cases this past week, with 145 new cases, the memo said, noting that most of the cases are in the Ouachita River Unit prison.

Ouachita River, like dozens of other prisons across the countries, has been a hotspot for

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

the disease.

The pandemic continues to grow in the U.S., recording over 1,000 coronavirus-related deaths Friday for the fourth straight day this week, according to the COVID Tracking project.

Secret Service

[FL] CCPD: Cape man arrested after dropping drug stash in front of officers (Cape-Coral-Daily-Breeze)
Cape-Coral-Daily-Breeze [7/24/2020 12:00 AM, Staff, 2K, Positive, Secondary]
A man answering the door at the scene of a reported overdose dropped a box full of drugs in front of the officers to whom he was speaking, resulting in multiple charges Thursday night.

Cody Wynn, 24, of 1101 S.E. 22nd Terrace, was charged with two counts of possession of a controlled substance without a prescription, possession of cocaine, possession of drug paraphernalia, and possession of counterfeit money (more than 10 bills), according to a release issued by the Cape Coral Police Department Friday. Wynn was additionally found to have a felony violation of probation warrant.

Officers had responded to the Casa Loma Motel at 3608 Del Prado Boulevard South after receiving a drug overdose call. As they arrived at the door, Wynn left the room and began speaking with officers, the release states. While doing so he "dropped the box he was holding on the ground, spilling a plethora of drugs onto the ground," police said, adding after Wynn was arrested in connection with the drugs, he also was found to be in possession of counterfeit U.S. currency. A CCPD detective who is also a department liaison to the Secret Service then responded regarding the counterfeit money.

Wynn was transported to the Lee County Jail where he remained in custody late Friday afternoon.

[UT] Suspect arrested after allegedly going to same store twice with counterfeit bills (St George News)
St George News [7/25/2020 9:04 AM, Cody Blowers, 15K, Positive, Secondary]
A local man was arrested at a convenience store in Hurricane after he reportedly went to the same store with counterfeit bills in his possession twice and was met by the same clerk who called the police.

On Tuesday morning, a man purchased a few items at a convenience store in Hurricane, and during the transaction, the suspect handed the cashier five $5 bills and requested a $20 bill and five $1 bills in exchange, according to charging documents filed with the court.

As the man was getting into his vehicle, the cashier checked the bills and discovered that all five were fake, which is when the clerk wrote down the license plate number and called police. Officers responded to the store and took a report, along with the counterfeit currency.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

On Thursday morning, the suspect returned to the convenience store where the same cashier was working, who then called police once again.

Officers responded and detained the suspect, later identified as Jason Pronto, 42, of Hurricane, and confirmed with the clerk that it was the same man who was in the store two days earlier.

The suspect told officers he was unaware the bills were fake, but he admitted being in the store Tuesday morning, the report states.

During a search of the suspect, officers found a $10 bill that appeared to be counterfeit, as well as one count each of misdemeanor possession of paraphernalia and a controlled substance.

Pronto remains in custody on $5,000 bail.

This report is based on court records and arrest documents and may not contain the full scope of findings. Persons arrested or charged are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law or as otherwise decided by a trier-of-fact.

[CA] Credit card skimmers found at Morro Bay gas station (KSBY - TV)
KSBY - TV [7/25/2020 1:38 AM, Staff, 46K, Neutral, Secondary]
Morro Bay police are investigating the discovery of several credit card skimmers at a local gas station.

On July 23, a San Luis Obispo County Weights and Measures employee reportedly found eight skimming devices installed in several gas pumps at the Sinclair Gas Station on Morro Bay Boulevard.

Police say all other gas stations in Morro Bay were checked but no other skimming devices were located.

Investigators are asking anyone with information about this case to contact Det. Marvos at (805) 772-6229 or Crime Stoppers at (805) 549-STOP.

National Security News

[United Kingdom] UK Defence Secretary says will boost ability to handle space threat from Russia, China (Reuters)
Reuters [7/25/2020 8:28 PM, Staff, 5304K]
Britain will boost its ability to handle threats posed by Russia and China in space as part of a foreign, security and defence policy review being conducted by the UK government, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said late on Saturday.

On Thursday, Britain said it was concerned about a Russian satellite test which involved the launch of a projectile with the “characteristics of a weapon”.

“This week we have been reminded of the threat Russia poses to our national security with

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT