

02/10/21 Wednesday

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Biden Administration Calls on Supreme Court to Uphold Obamacare
by [Mary F.](#)

The Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare, is a US federal statute signed into law by former US President Barack Obama in 2010. Obamacare aims to provide affordable health insurance coverage for Americans. However, tax increases and higher insurance premiums associated with Obamacare have been criticized by some.

The Joe Biden administration on Wednesday called for the Supreme Court to uphold the Affordable Care Act.

"Following the change in Administration, the Department of Justice has reconsidered the government's position in these cases," Deputy Solicitor General Edwin Kneedler wrote, also noting that "the United States no longer adheres to the [former US president Donald Trump administration's] conclusions," [the Hill reported.](#)

The latest actions by the Biden administration reverse another position taken by the Trump administration. In November 2020, the Trump administration, along with 18 Republican state attorneys general, called on the Supreme Court to rule the Affordable Care Act unconstitutional. Republicans [have long argued](#) that a provision of the law, called the "individual mandate," which requires Americans to get health insurance or pay a financial penalty, is unconstitutional.

A ruling in the case is expected at the end of June.

According to Kneedler, however, the federal government "no longer adheres to the conclusions in the previously filed brief" submitted by the Trump administration and that the Biden administration believes that the individual provision is constitutional, [Reuters reported.](#)

Kneedler also argued that even if the court disagrees with the assertions that the individual mandate is constitutional, the rest of the law should remain in place.

Obamacare currently has the support of Democratic-led states, including California, as well as the House of Representatives.

Last month, Biden signed two executive health care orders that would reopen enrollment on federal Affordable Care Act exchanges, which will allow uninsured Americans to select healthcare policies during a special enrollment period.

"Today, I'm about to sign two executive orders that basically, the best way to describe them, to undo the damage Trump has done," Biden [said at the time.](#) "There's nothing new that we are doing here other than restoring the Affordable Care Act and restoring Medicaid to the way it was before Trump became president," he added.

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New Coronavirus Identified in Bats in Thailand Similar to COVID-19 - Study

by [Mary F.](#)

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 and which has infected over 107 million people and led to more than 2 million deaths, is believed to infect bats. The evolution and diversification of such diseases is still not fully understood.

A new [study](#) published on Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications reveals that there are bats in Thailand with a new coronavirus that matches the one that causes COVID-19. The new virus, known as RacCS203, was identified in the blood of five horseshoe bats in an artificial cave at a wildlife sanctuary in eastern Thailand. Researchers at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok conducted genomic sequencing on the virus and found that the virus shares 91.5% of the genetic code of SARS-CoV-2.

The researchers also found that the virus is similar to another virus known as RmYN02 found in bats in Yunnan, China. However, the RacCS203 virus has differences in its spike protein, which does not allow the virus to infect human cells. The spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 allows the virus to penetrate host cells and cause infection.

"We need to do more surveillance in animals," Lin-Fa Wang of the University of Singapore, who was involved in the study, told [BBC](#). "In order to find the true origin, the surveillance work needs to go beyond the border of China."

On Tuesday, the World Health Organization (WHO) team in the Chinese city of Wuhan revealed that viruses similar to SARS-CoV-2 can be identified in many animals. However, they have been unable to find concrete evidence of animal-human transmission of the virus.

According to China's head of the COVID-19 expert panel, Liang Wannian, the virus may have originated as a transmission from animals to humans.

"Coronaviruses that are genetically related with SARS-CoV-2 have been identified in different animals including horses ... bats and pangolins," Liang offered, [ABC News reported](#). "Sampling of bats in Hubei province, however, has failed to find evidence of SARS-CoV-2 in native viruses, and sampling of wildlife in different places in China has so far failed to identify the presence of SARS-CoV-2," he added.

In addition, WHO researchers concluded that the outbreak did not start in a Chinese lab.

"Our initial findings suggest that the introduction through an intermediary host species is the most likely pathway and one that will require more studies and more specific, targeted research," said Peter Ben Embarek, who led the WHO scientific delegation, [NPR reported](#).

"It was very unlikely that anything could escape from such a place. And we also know that when lab accidents happen they are of course extremely rare," Embarek added.

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Minnesota Republican Gets Stuck Upside Down During Virtual Committee Hearing
by [Mary F.](#)

Thomas Earl Emmer, an American politician, lobbyist and attorney, has served as the US Representative for Minnesota's 6th congressional district since January 2015. Emmer also served as a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives between 2005 and 2011. During an online House Financial Services meeting this week, Rep. Tom Emmer's (R-Minn.) screen became stuck upside down in the middle of a video.

"I don't know how to fix that," Emmer said when a colleague told him he was upside down on the screen. "I don't know what happened, it just came on this way. I turned it off and back on and I'm still," Emmer added.

During the video, Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) asked Emmer if he could figure out how to fix the video while other colleagues made light-hearted comments at Emmer, comparing him to the Presidio County attorney, Rod Ponton, who inadvertently appeared as a filter-generated cat during an online court hearing in southwest Texas this week.

"At least you're not a cat," one member said while another told Emmer to try "standing on your head."

"You're going viral, Tom," another added.

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Video: Someone Just Test-Fired a Trident II Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile Off US Coast by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Both the US and UK use the Trident II missile, but London's last test, in 2016, was a disaster that fanned the flames of nuclear disarmament in the UK. The Pentagon said in 2020 that it hoped to extend the missile's life for another 60 years.

Observers on Tuesday spotted a missile flight off the coast of Florida, which online researchers verified was a three-stage ballistic missile fired from a submarine, making it most likely a Trident II SLBM. No military entity has so far claimed responsibility for the launch.

When the exhaust plume from the ballistic missile was spotted shining in a bright white arc across the skies over Florida on Tuesday, [some feared aliens](#) were among us. Instead, the spectacle was identified as a ballistic missile test. According to [West Palm Beach's WPTV](#), the plume was visible as far away as the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Dutch researcher Marco Langbroek tweeted that wide swaths of the Atlantic Ocean between the Florida coast and the sea east of Ascension Island were closed to marine traffic on Tuesday, indicating the 8,400 kilometre flight path of a rocket with three stages that would also splash down in the sea.

The flight path, he noted, very closely mirrors the planned path of a 2016 test of the Trident II by the British Royal Navy, which [ended in disaster](#) when the missile went in the opposite direction, arcing toward the US mainland before its self-destruct mechanism was engaged. The missile was unarmed and London has not tested a Trident II since. There has been no indication of a similar fate for Tuesday's test.

The US Navy uses the nuclear-capable missile in its own submarines and has test-fired them in the Pacific as [recently as February 2020](#). While ballistic missile tests are far more common in

the larger ocean, some are still tested over the Atlantic, such as the test of a [French M51 SLBM](#) in June 2020, which flew from off France's west coast toward the Sargasso Sea.

The Trident II has served as the basis of the US and UK's nuclear second-strike capability since 1990. Designed with a huge warhead capacity of up to 14 [W76-2 devices](#), in practice it is only ever loaded with a maximum of four warheads, due to the constraints of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which Russia and the US [agreed to extend](#) just days ago.

In March 2020, the US Navy announced a life extension program for its Trident II D5 missiles, intending to allow them to be used until 2084.

"We need to make sure the Trident is always rock solid, because we will need to keep it for the next 60 years," Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, Director of the US Navy's Strategic Systems Program, [told The Mitchell Institute](#) of Aerospace Studies last month.

"We have the most reliable weapons systems that anyone has ever built. There have been 178 successful launches. We took that reliability and if the 16 missile tubes stay the same, we can meet the mission," Wolfe said.

In the UK, the failure of the 2016 test put wind into the sails of those [wishing to scrap](#) the country's nuclear weapons program, and the Scottish National Party has considered [adding nuclear disarmament](#) to its platform as recently as 2019. In February 2020, the defense ministry announced the development of a [new nuclear warhead](#) for the Trident II.

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US Army to Equip First Ground Battery With Hypersonic Weapons This Year, But No Missiles Before 2023

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US has not yet test-fired either of its two hypersonic missiles currently in development, but is working up increasingly vast plans for how to field the revolutionary new weapon. Both Russia and China already have hypersonic missiles in service.

The Pentagon plans to begin readying its first Army unit to field hypersonic weapons later this year, even though the US military has no working hypersonic missile, much less a working launch platform for a ground-based one.

Lt. Gen. L. Neil Thurgood, director of the US Army's Rapid Capabilities and Critical Technologies Office, [told Defense News](#) earlier this week that "By the end of this fiscal year, which is in September, all of the equipment that the unit needs plus training will be delivered to the unit."

The outlet noted, however, that while the unit will be able to train to operate the weapon, it won't actually receive a live round until at least fiscal year 2023.

Thurgood also told Defense News about the process of developing an industrial base for hypersonic weapon production, which for the Army will be headed by Dynetics and Lockheed Martin, the latter already working with the Air Force to develop an air-launched hypersonic missile. Dynetics is constructing the glide body, a hyper-maneuverable unpowered vehicle that

detaches from the missile but uses its extreme speed - upwards of Mach 5 - to close on its target much faster than a typical ballistic missile.

Their speed and maneuverability make them hard to detect and even harder to intercept, although Russia claims its [S-500 Triumph](#) air defense system can shoot them down.

Contrary to Russia and China, the US currently has no hypersonic weapon ready for use. Several are in [various stages](#) of development, including Lockheed Martin's AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid-Response Weapon (ARRW) and the Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept (HAWC) being jointly developed by Lockheed, Raytheon, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

In January, [DARPA revealed](#) its program to build a ground-launched intermediate-range hypersonic missile had advanced to the assembly and testing phase. Like other road-mobile ballistic missiles, the weapon will have a mobile transporter erector launcher (TEL) as well as a two-stage rocket and a hypersonic glide bus.

As [Sputnik reported](#), the missile's reportedly "throttleable" thrust makes it extremely dangerous, noting its deployment is only possible thanks to the Trump administration [unilaterally withdrawing](#) from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in August 2019. The treaty was intended to reduce the risk of high-speed nuclear strikes, which left nuclear powers constantly on-edge, making an accidental "response" more likely.

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Video: Striking New York Taxi Drivers Shut Down Brooklyn Bridge in Anti-Debt Protest by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The rise of ride-hailing apps like Uber and Lyft, whose drivers do not have the same licensing requirements as professional taxi drivers, has helped cause the value of taxi medallions to collapse, plunging some drivers into debt.

New York City taxi drivers on Wednesday demanding debt relief shut down the city's historic Brooklyn Bridge to call attention to their plight.

"We shut down the Brooklyn Bridge because only direct action will get us what we need: medallion debt forgiveness now!" tweeted the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a labor union representing some 21,000 professional drivers.

According to the [New York Daily News](#), medallion debt became an increasing problem in the early 2010s after the rise of ride-hailing apps like Uber and Lyft undermined the professional taxi business. A taxi medallion is a permit to legally operate a taxi in the city - a method of controlling the industry's size that has been implemented by many cities across the US, including New York City, which has over 13,000 distinctive yellow cabs.

The value of medallions has fallen from a high of over \$1 million to \$120,000 today, plunging between 3,000 and 5,000 taxi drivers into debt after they borrowed against the value of their medallions. The issue came into the national spotlight in 2019, after a string of suicides by indebted taxi drivers.

In addition to shutting down traffic on the bridge which spans the East River and connects Long Island and the island of Manhattan, taxi drivers paid a visit to the home of Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY), also the Senate majority leader. However, the lawmaker is currently in Washington DC, overseeing the second impeachment trial of former US President Donald Trump.

Debt specialist Haywood Miller told the [New York Times](#) that many of the drivers who bought the expensive medallions were misled by the predatory practices of banks and private lenders. "The whole thing was like a Ponzi scheme because it totally depended on the value going up," he said. "The part that wasn't fair was the guy who's buying is an immigrant, maybe someone who couldn't speak English. They were conned."

With ridership down [by at least 70% due](#) to the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial screws are being turned on drivers all the harder.

On a city [public radio show](#) last week, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said help for the drivers depended upon the city getting [COVID-19 stimulus money](#) from the federal government - a proposal lawmakers have been hammering out for months.

"If we get money from the Congress, I want to find a way to help these drivers," de Blasio said. "I don't have a specific proposal yet... But it hinges on getting the relief we need."

Last month, New York Governor [Andrew Cuomo threatened](#) to "pursue litigation" against the federal government if Congress failed to patch up the state's \$15 billion budget hole created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Twitter Reacts in Anger as GOP Figures Drop Video of Harris Purportedly Joking About Killing Trump

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A second impeachment trial in the Senate has begun for the former US president, Donald Trump, who is accused of inciting the deadly 6 January riot at the US Capitol that killed five people. As a result, some pro-Trump figures have begun to search for ways to charge Democratic lawmakers as well.

With [Trump's trial imminent](#), conservatives on Monday dug up a video of US Vice President Kamala Harris, claiming that she was joking about killing Trump, then-Vice President Mike Pence, and then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

A conservative commentator and author, Matt Margolis, tweeted the clip, saying: "Kamala Harris joked about killing Trump, Pence and Sessions with Ellen in 2018. Can we impeach her?" In order to do so, he went back to a tweet at the time the clip aired, by Washington Times columnist Tim Young.

In the [April 2018 interview](#) with Ellen DeGeneres, then-Senator Harris (D-CA) was asked the sort of fluff questions typical of daytime talk shows, including her most rebellious teenage moment and her first celebrity crush (it was singer Tito Jackson). Then, the following exchange happened:

"If you had to be stuck in an elevator with either President Trump, Mike Pence, or Jeff Sessions, who would it be?" DeGeneres asked.

After looking a bit hopeless for a second, Harris replied: "does one of us have to come out alive?" prompting a shared cackle from the two women and the studio audience.

The clip is hardly new ammunition for Trump supporters. Trump's former campaign page account, the Trump War Room, [posted and retweeted](#) the clip four times during the campaign: first on August 13, 2020, right after Harris was nominated as the Democrats' vice presidential candidate; then again on August 16, October 7, and October 27.

After Margolis refreshed memories, other conservative commentators such as alt-right ideologue Jack Posobiec and pro-Trump news outlet [Newsmax picked it up](#) again. It also prompted a ["fact check" story](#) by Newsweek.

Twitter users were generally amused by the clip and didn't agree that she should be impeached, but suggested instead that it reflected poorly upon her.

However, some folks, wise to the conflation, noted that the situation was not the same as Trump's January 6 speech immediately prior to the deadly Capitol insurrection.

An [impeachment motion](#) has already been filed this legislative period against US President Joe Biden by censured lawmaker Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA). The [controversial freshman](#) representative introduced the charges to a Democrat-dominated Congress on Biden's first day in office, accusing him of "abuse of power by allowing his son, Hunter Biden, to siphon off cash from America's greatest enemies - Russia and China." Her motion has not won support.

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Biden Announces US Sanctions Against Myanmar Military Leaders Following Recent Coup by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

In light of allegations that Myanmar's recent general elections were riddled with fraud, the country's military generals seized power from democratically-elected officials in a coup d'état and opted to impose a one-year state of emergency.

US President Joe Biden announced Wednesday that his administration would be imposing sanctions against several military leaders in Myanmar after soldiers recently detained government officials and placed the country under the command of the armed forces.

Biden noted that his administration will be placing a freeze on \$1 billion in government funds that Myanmar currently holds within the US, with similar steps being taken on other assets that aid the Southeast Asian country.

"Today, I have approved a new executive order enabling us to immediately sanction the military leaders who directed the coup, their business interests as well as close family members," Biden said during a news conference. "We will identify the first round of targets this week and we're also going to impose strong exports control."

"As protests grow, violence against those asserting their democratic rights is unacceptable and we're going to keep calling it out. The people of Burma are making their voices heard and the world is watching," he added.

Biden noted that "additional measures" may be imposed in the days to come after calling for the release of activists and political leaders, including civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Latest remarks by Biden came over a week after the US Department of State [officially recognized](#) that the Myanmar military's detention of Suu Kyi and President Win Myint constituted a coup. Following Biden's remarks, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price [told reporters](#) that the agency believes "we can certainly impose substantial costs on those who are responsible for this."

"We can impose costs that are ... even steeper" than sanctions that were previously imposed against the country, he noted.

The president [previously indicated](#) that he was working alongside US allies and lawmakers, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) in order to determine best responses to the early February coup. Biden first signaled during his February 4 address on the matter that "consequences" would befall individuals who orchestrated the coup.

The recent coup unfolded a day before the country's parliament was due to swear-in multiple individuals who had been elected during the 2020 general election.

Military leaders have explained the coup was justified under the country's constitution because the government failed to thoroughly investigate allegations of voter fraud that surfaced after candidates from the National League of Democracy party beat out individuals from the military-backed party.

In response to the military takeover, tens of thousands of people have participated in protests; however, demonstrations have turned violent after police earlier this week fired gunshots and used rubber bullets and water cannons to disperse crowds.

In an effort to squash demonstrations, the military has banned rallies and gatherings of more than five individuals. Additionally, a curfew has been imposed in cities Yangon and Mandalay, and military leadership ordered internet service providers and mobile operators to impose a ban on social media platforms Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Myanmar remains under the control of Min Aung Hlaing, the commander of the country's armed forces since 2011.

The general held his first [national address](#) on Monday and reiterated that the government failed to look into alleged election irregularities, which the election commission had previously indicated there was no evidence to back the claims. He also indicated that new elections would be held, and that a new "reformed" election commission would oversee procedures.

The military commander did not provide a timeframe for the elections, but did note that the military would ensure a "true and disciplined democracy" different from past military rules.

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Twitter Won't Lift Ban Against Trump Even if He Runs in 2024 Election, Says CFO
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Former US President Donald Trump was permanently booted from Twitter on 8 January, two days after his supporters on 6 January violently stormed the US Capitol, causing widespread

damage and leaving five dead, in a failed attempt to block the efforts of Congress to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Trump's permanent suspension from the high-profile social media platform will remain in place indefinitely, even if the former commander-in-chief runs again during the 2024 presidential election cycle, a top executive with the company has revealed.

Ned Segal, who serves as Twitter's chief financial officer, remarked during a Wednesday interview with CNBC's "Squawk Box" that once someone is stripped of their access to the platform, the decision is final.

"The way our policies work, when you're removed from the platform, you're removed from the platform whether you're a commentator, you're a CFO or you are a former or current public official," Segal said. "Our policies are designed to make sure that people are not inciting violence, and if anybody does that, we would have to remove them from the service and our policies don't allow people to come back."

When host Rebecca Quick pressed Segal for an affirmative "no" response, the Twitter official reiterated that "[Trump] was removed when he was president, and there'd be no difference for anybody who [was] a public official once they've been removed from the service."

Segal pushed back against claims that the platform lost users when it axed Trump's account, explaining that Twitter added "more [daily active users] than the average of the last four Januarys, so hopefully that gives people a sense for the momentum we've got from all the hard work we've done on the service."

He added that the company saw its daily active user count increase by 40 million people in 2020, with 5 million added in the last quarter.

Twitter was among the first social media companies to take permanent action against Trump after the deadly 6 January Capitol riot, which killed at least five people. After initially applying a 12-hour suspension on the former president's account, [Twitter announced](#) it would impose a permanent ban in light of the "risk of further incitement of violence" that stemmed from Trump's online rhetoric.

The company highlighted two tweets Trump fired off after the Capitol siege in its announcement and concluded that the commentary was in violation of the platform's policy against the Glorification of Violence.

Twitter [later banned](#) the Team Trump account and another that belonged to his digital director, Gary Coby, after officials tried to give Trump access to the account as a means of circumventing the ban. Trump had also attempted to reach his supporters through the official POTUS account, but the move was shortlived after Twitter deleted those tweets as well.

The company did not ban the POTUS profile, since it was a government account and would be transferred to the incoming Biden administration.

Other social media companies that have banned Trump include Snapchat and Twitch.

Facebook has continued to maintain what it describes as a temporary suspension on both of Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts; however, the [Facebook Oversight Board](#), an independent body, will determine whether the suspension will stand.

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Polar Vortex Blasts All of Canada Into Frigid, Subfreezing Temperatures by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

A polar vortex is a weather phenomenon in which cold air and low pressure envelop either the North or South poles during each hemisphere's winter. Every so often, however, when a winter pattern becomes disrupted, pieces of the vortex splinter off and push frigid temperatures away from the pole toward the equator.

The whole of Canada recorded one of its coldest winters this week when temps in the northern neighbor to the US were sent plummeting into the below-freezing zone thanks to a weather condition known as a polar vortex.

Weather [tracking information](#) released by the Canadian government notes that all 10 million square kilometers of Canada saw subfreezing temperatures, with the latest coldest mark - negative 37.9 degrees Celsius - recorded at Komakuk Beach in Canada's Yukon Territory. An earlier reading reported by [CTV News](#) indicated that Wekweètì, in the Northwest Territories, reached an ice-cold, negative 51.9 degrees Celsius. Citing the Environment and Climate Change Canada agency, the outlet stated the subfreezing temperature was the coldest detected in the area over the last four years.

The majority of Canada's provinces have been placed under extreme cold advisories, with officials also sending out warnings for snowfall and arctic outflow over concerns regarding bitter temperatures and rising surface pressure.

The "hottest spot" recorded within Canada was detected in Estevan Point, British Columbia. The government tracker pinpointed the temperature at 3.4 degrees Celsius.

Tyler Hamilton, a meteorologist with the Weather Network, wrote in a [Wednesday blogpost](#) that "it's no easy feat to get all 10 million square kilometers of Canada below freezing simultaneously."

"To pull off this incredibly rare and complex feat, myriad different parts of the atmosphere work together in tandem, dipping every square centimetre of Canada below the freezing mark," Hamilton explained. "For every provincial capital to remain below the freezing mark, particularly Victoria, everything has to come together to hold the frigid air coast-to-coast."

"Victoria has only spent 28 days below the freezing mark for an entire day this century, and strong winds flowing from the continental high-pressure inland will make this a reality," he added.

Canada is expected to endure chilly temperatures for the next several days. The US will also see cold weather, with the [National Weather Service](#) already issuing wind chill warnings for northern parts of Montana, North Dakota and Minnesota. Similarly, a winter weather advisory has been initiated in states including Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee and West Virginia, among others.

The [Weather Channel](#) reported that a snowstorm is likely to strike much of the southern US early next week, with some states that typically teeter between rain and snow mixtures more than likely seeing inches of snow.

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'Trump in Heels' Files Lawsuit Claiming Virginia GOP is Suppressing Her Gubernatorial Campaign
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Amanda Chase, a Virginia state senator, gubernatorial candidate and self-proclaimed 'Trump in heels,' has filed a lawsuit against the Virginia Senate after a bipartisan vote approved a measure rebuking Chase's "pattern of unacceptable conduct" following the deadly January 6 riot at US Capitol building.

Chase, a second-term Republican state senator, filed a lawsuit against the Republican Party of Virginia on Tuesday, alleging the party is using an "illegal" nomination method to tank her gubernatorial candidacy.

"It's official; I just filed a lawsuit against the Republican Party of Virginia," [Chase tweeted](#).

"They've chosen an illegal nomination method and have yet to remedy the situation. Unless something changes, the SCC, not the people, will choose our statewide candidates. We the People know best."

Chase, who describes herself as 'Trump in heels', [asserted](#) that the Republican party should be using "an inclusive nomination method that allows the people to participate and chose [sic] their next Governor."

At the present moment, it is likely the Virginia GOP will hold a convention to nominate gubernatorial candidates. While a primary has only been in used in four of the last 13 gubernatorial elections, Chase's lawsuit highlights that a convention would not be permitted, as Virginia Governor Ralph Northam only allows gatherings of up to 250 people.

"When all Delegates assemble for the entire state, it is estimated a convention would have at least 5,000 Delegates to as many as 10,000 Delegates under one roof," the lawsuit reads, as reported [by WRIC](#). "Accordingly, the decision of the Defendant by its State Central Committee to hold a convention nomination method is unlawful at this time and is likely to be unlawful through June 8, 2021."

State Senator Sues Virginia State Senate

Chase was [recently censured](#) by the Virginia Senate following her January speech in which she argued that the individuals protesting the results of the election on January 6 "were not rioters and looters," but "patriots who love their country and do not want to see our great republic turned into a socialist country."

The state senator later clarified that the "patriots" she was referring to were those who attended Trump's speech outside the White House "before all the mayhem took place." She also claimed that "patriots" referred to veterans and police officers.

Nevertheless, the Virginia legislature passed [Senate Resolution](#) No. 91 on January 27, a bipartisan rebuke of the state lawmaker.

According to the document, which listed incidents dating back to 2019, Chase has a "pattern of unacceptable conduct." The senator has also displayed "a disregard for civility in discourse with

colleagues" and made "false in misleading statements both in committee and on the Senate floor," according to the resolution.

Chase fired back against the measure, alleging in a federal lawsuit that she suffered "public embarrassment, humiliation, mental anguish and loss of seniority" over the censure. She also claimed the senate resolution has "negatively impacted" her campaign for higher office.

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CDC Now Recommends Double-Masking for Optimal Protection Against COVID-19

by [Evan Craighead](#)

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director, Rochelle Walensky, has clarified that new mask recommendations "do not change the specific recommendations about who should wear a mask or when they should wear one," but instead "provide new information on why wearing a well-fitting mask is so important."

Weeks after the one-year official anniversary of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic, the CDC introduced new guidelines on Wednesday recommending those in the US make sure their face mask fits snugly and has multiple layers. In some cases, a second face mask may be advised.

"Make sure your mask fits snugly against your face. Gaps can let air with respiratory droplets leak in and out around the edges of the mask," the [updated guidance](#) details. "Pick a mask with layers to keep your respiratory droplets in and others' out. A mask with layers will stop more respiratory droplets getting inside your mask or escaping from your mask if you are sick."

The CDC release emphasized that one should only layer up by wearing a "cloth mask that has multiple layers of fabric" or by donning "one disposable mask underneath a cloth mask."

"The second mask should push the edges of the inner mask against your face," the federal health agency advises.

According to the CDC, one should not "combine two disposable masks," as they are "not designed to fit tightly and wearing more than one will not improve fit." Furthermore, one should not combine a KN95 mask with any other mask.

Health officials, like Dr. Stuart Cohen, a chief of infectious diseases and director of hospital epidemiology and infection control at UC Davis, also point out that some cloth masks can be enhanced by a "particulate filter."

"There are some cloth masks that have a filter you can put in a pouch. That's functionally double-masking. So there are some masks that are, by themselves, acceptable," Cohen told [Rolling Stone](#) earlier this week. "Double-masking is a way of trying to turn your regular mask into more of an N95-type situation—where it's tighter, where you've added an extra layer, where the virus droplets have to do a lot more dancing to get through," the health professional added. "So it protects both you and the people that you're with."

The CDC has also [published findings](#) from two recent studies that highlight "the importance of good fit to maximize mask performance" and "more effectively slow the spread of COVID-19."

"CDC conducted experiments to assess two ways of improving the fit of medical procedure masks: fitting a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask, and knotting the ear loops of a medical procedure mask and then tucking in and flattening the extra material close to the face," researchers detailed in the February 10 release. "Each modification substantially improved source control and reduced wearer exposure."

"The data in this report underscore the finding that good fit can increase overall mask efficiency," researchers wrote. "Multiple simple ways to improve fit have been demonstrated to be effective."

The report concluded by highlighting that "continued innovative efforts to improve the fit of cloth and medical procedure masks to enhance their performance merit attention."

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Netizens Rejoice as Released Capitol Riot Footage Shows Officer Goodman Directing Romney to Safety
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) was one of several lawmakers specifically targeted by the pro-Trump rioters that stormed Capitol Hill and forced their way into the US Capitol building to protest the results of the 2020 presidential election. Four rioters and one police officer died as a direct result of the attack.

House impeachment managers on Wednesday opened former US President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial with never-before-seen footage of Capitol Police officer Eugene Goodman leading Romney to safety as rioters were storming the Capitol building on January 6. "Officer Goodman passes Sen. Mitt Romney and directs him to turn around in order to get to safety," narrated impeach manager Stacey Plaskett, the 5th delegate to the US House of Representatives from the US Virgin Islands' at-large congressional district.

"On the first floor, just beneath them, the mob had already started to search for the Senate chamber. Officer Goodman made his way down to the first floor where he encountered the same insurrectionists we just saw breach the Capitol," she added.

Goodman, who has been [recommended](#) to receive the Congressional Gold Medal for his efforts, was lauded for what many describe as his acts of "heroism" in confronting the pro-Trump mob.

"It tears your, your heart and brings tears to your eyes, that was overwhelmingly distressing and emotional," the Utah senator said in response to seeing the video, as reported by NBC's [Jullie Tsirkin](#).

Romney, a critic of Trump, increasingly faced backlash after he [broke ranks](#) as the sole GOP senator to vote to convict Trump of abuse of power in the former US president's first impeachment trial in 2020. Trump, who was also impeached on a charge of obstruction of Congress, was on 8 January impeached in the House for a second time, for "incitement of insurrection".

A day before the 6 January Capitol Hill attacks, Romney was confronted by an unnamed individual who openly questioned why the Utah senator is not supporting Trump, who switched to being a Republican several years ago after decades as a Democrat.

"We have a Constitution, the constitutional process is clear," Romney [asserted](#), speaking of the Electoral College vote certification process. "I'll follow the Constitution, and I'll explain all that when we meet in Congress this week." "Well, you haven't supported him, and you didn't even support him in the election," the individual was overheard saying in a [since-deleted video](#). "You were voted in as a conservative to represent the conservative constituents. Period."

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Video: Bruce Springsteen Super Bowl Ad Pulled by Jeep After DWI Revelation
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Iconic musician Bruce Springsteen starred in his very first ad over the weekend, a Jeep commercial that aired during the Super Bowl and saw him call for national unity amid troubling times. Unfortunately for 'The Boss,' the ad didn't have much of a lifespan on the carmaker's YouTube page after an arrest report surfaced.

The American automaker, Jeep, yanked its Springsteen Super Bowl TV commercial from its YouTube page on Wednesday after reports detailed that the musician and songwriter who crafted the megahit "Born in the USA" was arrested in late 2020 for consuming alcohol at a national park.

The New Jersey native was arrested by law enforcement rangers on November 14, 2020, at the Garden State's Gateway National Recreation Area, which covers some 27,000 acres, including Sandy Hook beach. The iconic band leader was charged with driving while intoxicated, reckless driving and consuming alcohol in a closed area.

A spokesperson for the National Park Service confirmed the incident to the [Wall Street Journal](#), but did not offer any other details regarding the arrest, except that Springsteen had been "cooperative throughout the process."

TMZ was the first to [report](#) on the November arrest.

Springsteen's Jeep commercial has the musician driving in a vintage CJ-5, initially speaking about a chapel that sits in the exact middle point of the continental US. At the heart of Springsteen's message, however, is a call to Americans to meet in "the middle" and move past divisiveness.

"We can make it to the mountaintop, through the desert, and we will cross this divide. Our light has always found its way through the darkness, and there's hope on the road up ahead," Springsteen says between alternating video clips. The ad ends with a dedication to the "ReUnited States of America."

A spokesperson for Jeep, which is owned by the multinational Amsterdam-based automotive manufacturing corporation Stellantis, told the Journal that the ad was "[paused](#)" so that the "actual facts [of the arrest] can be established," adding that "it would be inappropriate for us to comment on the details of a matter we have only read about and we cannot substantiate."

Springsteen is expected to appear before a federal judge later this month.

The musician has no known prior arrests related to the consumption of alcohol. In Springsteen's 2016 autobiography, he discussed having been raised by an alcoholic father whose behavior "convinced me to never go there." He noted in his book that he didn't consume alcohol until he was 22.

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Criminal Complaint Details Bruno Mars Impersonator Swindled 63-Year-Old US Woman Out of 100K

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Houston, Texas, resident Chinwendu Azuonwu, the individual who allegedly posed as Bruno Mars, was taken into custody this week after being charged last month with money laundering, a third-degree felony.

As Valentine's Day approaches, one 63-year-old Texas woman is seeking to recoup funds she allegedly lost to love after she was tricked into a fake virtual relationship with someone, or some persons, pretending to be American pop star Bruno Mars.

Keith Houston, the Harris County Assistant District Attorney with the Cyber Crimes Division, detailed that the 63-year-old North Richland Hills woman was catfished - duped - by someone posing to be Mars while she was on her own quest for love.

The woman, who remains unnamed, "stated that she now knows that she was never communicating with the real Bruno Mars, only an unknown individual," according to [cops cited](#) in a criminal complaint filed in the Harris County District Court.

"But at the time she was communicating with 'Bruno Mars,' she believed him to be the real Bruno Mars because he had sent her multiple texts and photos of Mars while he was on tour." According to the court filing, the man allegedly impersonating Mars asked the unnamed woman to send \$10,000 to "a friend of the band" to assist with tour expenses.

Not only did the North Richland Hills woman fulfill the request, but days later she issued an additional \$90,000 upon request, according to court documents. A second suspect, Basil Amandi, has been named in the filing, as the individual was the recipient of one of the alleged bank transfers.

The Harris County assistant district attorney highlighted that this type of scam is common and, while the primary suspect, in this case, is a Nigerian national and American citizen, like-minded swindlers use the tactic around the world.

"West Africa or China. I've seen them come back to Iran, even North Korea on occasion," he told KPRC.

"They will spend months talking to people online. Sometimes they will even borrow a little bit of money and return it to build up trust. They're not stupid people, these scammers. They are very much sophisticated con artists."

"What these people do is they will recruit people to open up bank accounts. So what you have is, you have the people at the bottom opening the bank accounts, people in the middle that are doing the recruiting and communicating with the hackers, and then the hackers," he added. Both Azuonwu and Basil, his alleged accomplice, have been charged with money laundering, a third-degree felony that can carry a sentence of two to 10 years behind bars in the US.

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Immigrant Advocacy Group Disappointed White House Discouraging Migrants From Coming to US

EL PASO, February 10 (Sputnik) - Immigrant advocacy group Border Network for Human Rights in a state said it is deeply disappointed the Biden administration is discouraging asylum-seeking migrants from coming to the US southern border.

Earlier in the day, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said due to the pandemic and the administration not having time to put in place humane process for processing asylum-seeking migrants, "now is not the time to come and the vast majority of people will be turned away."

"The Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) is deeply disappointed in the Biden administration's decision to continue the practice of denying people their right to seek asylum and the ongoing rhetoric of a 'border crisis' that serves to further criminalize immigrants," the group said in the release on Wednesday.

Asylum processes at the border will not occur immediately and will take time to implement, Psaki added.

BNHR Executive Director Fernando Garcia said in the release that the Biden administration is contributing to the false narrative that characterizes migrants as a problem and threat.

Immigration legislation has not yet been formally proposed on Capitol Hill, however, President Joe Biden has ordered a review of US immigration policies and has taken action to halt strict Trump-era immigration policies formed to deter migrants from coming to the United States.

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Security Footage, Police Calls Revealed at Trump's Trial to Support Case for Impeachment

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Impeachment managers unveiled previously unknown security footage and police radio transmissions to show the violence of the US Capitol assault and its immediate danger to senators who are deliberating about whether to convict former President Donald Trump over last month's events.

House impeachment managers - congressmen sent to the upper chamber to act as prosecutors - seek to prove that Trump is guilty of the insurrection incitement by refusing for months to accept his election defeat and sparking with a fiery speech in front of the White House his

loyalists' attack as a last-minute bid to prevent the congressional certification of Joe Biden's victory.

Impeachment manager Eric Swalwell told senators on Wednesday that they were a mere "58 steps away from where the mob was amassing and police was rushing to stop them." He demonstrated a video of the chamber's majority leader Chuck Schumer being ushered to safety by his gun-wielding security detail.

"Seconds later, they returned and ran back down the hallway, and officers immediately shut the door and used their bodies to keep them safe," Swalwell commented on intense footage.

He praised congressional staff for "grabbing and protecting electoral ballots the mob was after." Another impeachment manager Stacey Plaskett revealed footage of Vice President Mike Pence's evacuation from the Capitol already breached by rioters.

"A mob was looking for Vice President Pence because of his patriotism, because the Vice President had refused to do what the President demanded and overturn the election results.

During the assault on the Capitol extremists reportedly coordinated online and discussed how they could hunt down the Vice President," she said. "Again, that is a mob that was sent by the President of the United States to stop the certification of an election."

Police radio transmissions, also revealed for the first time, conveyed a chilling sense of panic among officers as they were outnumbered, overwhelmed and bitten down by attackers.

"Multiple Capitol injuries. Multiple Capitol injuries... They are throwing metal poles at us... Give me DSO up here now. DSO. Multiple law enforcement injuries. DCO, get up here," an officer screamed for reinforcements. "We just had an explosion to go on up here. I don't know if they are fireworks or what, but they are starting to throw explosives."

The defense lawyers will take the floor later to respond. Trump's lawyers so far have defended his statements as "free speech" while reminding everyone that their client has condemned violence. The defense team has urged the Senate to dismiss allegations as unconstitutional and "self-evidently wrong."

Each side is given up to 16 hours over two days to present its case. A two-thirds majority will be needed for conviction, meaning that at least 17 of the 50 Senate Republicans have to break ranks and join their Democratic colleagues.

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US Treasury Chief Yellen Says Cryptocurrencies 'Growing Problem'

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen during a roundtable discussion said the misuse of cryptocurrencies for criminal activity and terrorism is a growing issue.

"The misuse of cryptocurrencies and virtual assets is a growing problem, too," Yellen said on Wednesday. "I see the promise of these new technologies, but I also see the reality: cryptocurrencies have been used to launder the profits of online drug traffickers; they've been a tool to finance terrorism."

Earlier this week, the price of Bitcoin hit a record high on news that Tesla invested \$1.5 billion in the digital currency.

Yellen made her remarks at the US Financial Sector Innovation Policy Roundtable event this week that brought together policymakers, regulators, and experts from the private sector to discuss important global financial issues.

Earlier on Wednesday, the European police agency Europol said ten hackers have been arrested in an international investigation into a series of sim-swapping attacks that stole \$100 million in cryptocurrencies from celebrities in the United States.

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US Concerned About Decline of Media Pluralism in Hungary - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about a decline in media diversity in Hungary and the potential departure of popular radio station Klubradio, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"We are deeply concerned about declining media pluralism in Hungary," Price said in the release on Wednesday. "The imminent loss of the broadcasting license of one of the country's most popular radio stations, Klubradio, threatens the departure of yet another independent voice from Hungary's airwaves."

The United States urges Hungary to promote an open media environment, Price said. A court in Budapest upheld a decision not to renew the license for Klubradio, one of Hungary's last independent radio stations that usually aired segments with opposition figures in the country. The radio station had its license revoked last year for allegedly violating rules on advertising, among other issues. The license will expire on February 14 but the radio station will still be able to operate online.

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US Calls on Turkey to Immediately Release Turkish Businessman Osman Kavala - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United States calls on Turkey to immediately release Turkish businessman Osman Kavala, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"The United States again calls on Turkey to immediately release Osman Kavala from detention," Price said on Wednesday. "The specious charges against Kavala, his ongoing detention, and the continuing delays in the conclusion of his trial, including through the merger of cases against him, undermine respect for the rule of law and democracy."

The United States urges Turkey to ensure a just and transparent resolution in the Kavala case that is in line with domestic laws and international obligations.

Price said the United States is also concerned about charges filed against US citizen Henri Barkey in connection to the Kavala case, adding that the charges are baseless.

Kavala had been in detention for more than three years before he was acquitted last February of having ties to the anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013. He was immediately rearrested with a new set of charges leveled against him, this time accusing him of having played a role in the failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.

Kavala, a prominent businessman, has been involved in philanthropy, supported cultural and human rights foundations in Turkey. He denied all charges leveled against him.

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US, Japanese Top Diplomats Express Concern Over China's 'Assertiveness' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a telephone call with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi discussed existing concerns over China's increased assertiveness around the Senkaku Islands, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke again today with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi...The Secretary and the Foreign Minister also expressed concern over increased Chinese assertiveness around the Senkaku Islands following China's enactment of a new coast guard law," Price said on Wednesday.

Blinken reaffirmed that the Senkaku Islands fall within the purview of Article V of the US-Japan security treaty, Price said.

Japan and China both claim the territory, referred to in Beijing as the Diaoyu Islands, since they are located next to the important international shipping routes and potentially containing large oil

and gas reserves. The United States took control of the territory after World War II and then returned the islands back to Japan.

Blinken and Motegi also discussed strengthening cooperation with partners to address the military coup in Myanmar, Price said.

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RPT - US, Japanese Top Diplomats Express Concern Over China's 'Assertiveness' - State Dept.

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Small Aircraft Crashes in Canada's Capital, Lone Occupant Dead - Authorities

* TORONTO, February 10 (Sputnik) - A small airplane has crashed at an airport on the outskirts of Ottawa and the sole person in the aircraft has died, the Ottawa Police Service said.

"One person, believed to be the lone person on board the plane, was located deceased at the scene today," Ottawa Police Service said via Twitter on Wednesday evening.

The Ottawa Police Service also said they have not yet identified the victim.

The airplane crashed at Carp Airport, located in a rural community some 25 minutes east of the Ottawa city center.

Canada's Transportation Safety Board issued a statement saying it has deployed a team to the accident site.

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US 'Long Way' From Strong Labor Market, Meaningful Inflation - Federal Reserve Chair

NEW YORK, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is still very far from a strong jobs market due to the protracted coronavirus crisis while at the same time inflation is not expected to grow meaningfully in the near term, Federal Reserve Chairman Jay Powell said in an address to the New York Economic Club.

"We are a long way from a strong labor market," Powell said on Wednesday. "Achieving maximum employment will require more than supportive monetary policy and requires contributions from across government, private sector."

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs at the height of the business lockdowns in March and April, but rebounded with 2.5 million jobs in May and 4.8 million in June. For both September and October, less than 700,000 jobs were added each month. In November, there were 245,000 additions while December saw a loss of 140,000 jobs - the first such decline since April - before netting 49,000 jobs in January.

Turning to inflation, Powell said he monitored a broad range of indicators and readings in the next several months will not mean much.

"We could also see a burst of spending that also causes temporary price increase, but my expectation is that it will be neither large nor sustained," Powell said.

The Federal Reserve typically has an inflation target of 2 percent and above, which signals a vibrant economy, before it considers raising the interest rate. The central bank has held US rates at near zero for almost a year now due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Some economists have said they expect a "reflation" of the US economy from President Joe Biden's planned \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, though acknowledging that the impact will likely be minimal.

The US economy contracted 3.5 percent in 2020, after marking a 2.2 percent growth in 2019.

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Russia Calls on US to Stop 'Reckless' Saber-rattling in Black Sea - Embassy

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The Russian Embassy in the United States in a statement called on Washington to stop reckless saber-rattling in the Black Sea following the joint exercising conducted by two US Navy guided missile destroyers, two Turkish Navy frigates and accompanying aircraft.

"We call on the [US] military to stop reckless saber rattling and mind their business in the territorial waters of the United States," the embassy said via Twitter on Thursday. "The peace and security of the Black Sea need no alien interference."

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Russia calls on US to stop 'reckless' saber-rattling in Black sea - embassy
Sputnik

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Modi Assures Trudeau India Will Do Its Best to Supply Canada With Vaccines - Statement

TORONTO, February 10 (Sputnik) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during their telephone conversation that India would do its best to supply Canada with coronavirus vaccines amid a shortage in the country.

"Was happy to receive a call from my friend Justin Trudeau. Assured him that India would do its best to facilitate supplies of COVID-19 vaccines sought by Canada," Modi said via Twitter on Wednesday.

The two leaders also discussed ongoing farmer rallies in India's capital - reportedly a point of contention between the two countries - as well as climate change, a statement from the Canadian Prime Minister's Office said. Reports have suggested that India is displeased by Trudeau's stated support for the protests as well as the public backing of the unrest by other Canadian officials who India has accused of having ties to the Khalistan separatist movement. Canada is in the midst of a vaccine shortage that worsened after producers Pfizer and Moderna slashed deliveries to the country in recent weeks. The Trudeau government has received the brunt of the criticism for

According to the government's vaccine distribution czar, Maj. Gen. Dany Fortin, Canada will likely experience a shortage of vaccine doses through to the end of the first quarter of 2021.

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Toyota to Introduce 3 New Electric Vehicles in US This Year

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Toyota, which electrified the global auto with the Prius hybrid electric car in the late 1990s, announced plans to add three new electric models to its product lineup this year.

"We continue to be leaders in electrification that began with our pioneering introduction of the Prius nearly 25 years ago," Toyota Motors of North America Executive Vice President of Sales Bob Carter said in a press release on Wednesday.

The lineup will expand with two new all electric, battery powered vehicles and one plug-in hybrid, Toyota said.

By 2025, Toyota's goal is to have 40 percent of new vehicle sales be electrified models, and by 2030 the company expects an increase to nearly 70 percent, according to the release.

The world's first mass-produced hybrid vehicle, the Toyota Prius, launched in Japan in 1997.

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Biden Says Pentagon to Provide China-Related Recommendations in Next Few Months

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced the creation of a new China Task Force at the Pentagon to provide recommendations on US military strategy to his administration within the next four months.

"The task force will work quickly, drawing on civilian and military experts across the department to provide within the next few months recommendations to Secretary Austin on key priorities and decision points so that we can chart a strong path forward on China-related matters," Biden said in remarks to Defense Department personnel during a visit to the Pentagon.

The Pentagon said in a fact sheet that the China Task Force will review high-priority matters related to Beijing, including bilateral defense relations, intelligence and US alliances and partnerships and issue recommendations within the next four months.

No final public report is anticipated, but the Defense Department will share its findings with Congress and other stakeholders, the Pentagon said.

Biden said the United States needs to meet the growing challenges posed by China to keep peace and defend US interests in the Indo-Pacific and around the world.

He added that the United States needs to enhance its capabilities in cyberspace and ensure it is in a position to lead in a new era of competition "from the deep sea to outer space."

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US Health Agency Recommends Double-Masking to Boost Protection Against COVID-19

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in new guidance said double masking could increase protection against contracting COVID-19.

"Wear one disposable mask underneath a cloth mask. The second mask should push the edges of the inner mask against your face," CDC guidance posted on Thursday said under a section on how to enhance protection.

A CDC study found that double masking can block more than 92 percent of infectious particles.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky during a White House briefing, said the recommendations are based on a series of laboratory experiments in which various masking options were tested using aerosolized particles the size of respiratory emissions that transmit the coronavirus.

"New scientific data released today do not change the specific recommendations about who should wear a mask or when they should wear one, but they do provide new information on why wearing a well-fitting mask is so important to protect you and others," she said.

The CDC also recommended using masks with a flexible nose wire and tightening the mask by knotting elastic loops that go over the ear. The CDC also suggested mask fitters, a reusable device that fits a frame placed on the front of a mask with straps behind the neck.

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Republicans Lose 140,000 Voters From Party, Democrats Lose 79,000 in January - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Almost 220,000 voters left the Republican and Democratic parties in January alone, nearly two thirds of them from the Republicans, US media reported.

Almost 140,000 voters departed from the Republican Party alone in 25 US states during the first month of the year according to an analysis of public voting records, The Hill reported on Wednesday.

The Republicans lost more than 33,000 voters in the state of California, the most populous state in the United States that has been regarded as totally dominated by the Democrats over the past 18 years, the report said.

The Republicans also lost proportionately significant numbers of voters in Arizona and Pennsylvania, both of which were closely contested in the November 3, 2020 presidential election. Some 12,000 voters left the party in Pennsylvania in the Northeast and 10,000 more in Arizona in the Southwest, the report also said.

About 79,000 Democrats also left their party in January according to public records, according to the report.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik)

US REVIEWES FOREIGN POLICY

* Biden said during a visit to the Defense Department on Wednesday that he would never hesitate to use force to defend the United States and its interests, but stressed that he would only do so as a last resort after exhausting other options.

* The Defense Department China Task Force will provide recommendations in the next few months on China-related matters that at present pose a challenge to the United States, Biden said.

MYANMAR DEVELOPMENTS

* US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he has approved an executive order to immediately impose sanctions on Myanmar military leaders who are responsible for the coup in the country.

* The United States expects its partners will collectively roll out actions in response to the Myanmar coup, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

* UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews warned the country's security forces against the use of excessive force in mass protests given that such acts may amount to international crimes.

* Mass protests continue in Myanmar for the fifth consecutive day against the seizure of power by the military despite the ban on assembly of groups of more than four people, media reported.

HOUTHIS ATTACK AGAINST SAUDI ARABIA

* A civilian plane at Abha International Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia caught fire as a result of an attack carried out by the Yemeni Shia rebel Houthi movement, the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia said on Wednesday, adding that the situation is currently under control.

* The United States has denounced the Houthi attack at the civilian airport in Saudi Arabia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters.

* Yemen's Houthi leaders will be wrong to think the Biden administration will ignore their recent attacks, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

PUTIN ON MEETING WITH MACRON

* At a meeting with chief editors of Russian media, Russian President Vladimir Putin told the details of the first phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron, during which he offered Russian experts' assistance in studying the samples seized after the incident with Alexey Navalny and assured that if they found "at least something," a criminal case will be opened, one of the participants in the meeting told Sputnik.

NORD STREAM 2 PIPELINE

* German Environment Minister Svenja Schulze refuted reports about alleged billion-dollar "deal" between Germany and the United States on Nord Stream 2, noting that there was no "dirty deal."

* Germany is in talks with the United States on US potential sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, but these talks are not public, the deputy spokeswoman for the German government, Ulrike Demmer, said.

* German Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz was urgently summoned to the Bundestag for hearings on the situation in Russia and around the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, the meeting is being broadcast on the parliament's website.

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Biden Says Pentagon to Provide Recommendations on China-Related in Next Few Months

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon's China Task Force will provide recommendations in the next few months on China-related matters that pose a challenge to the United States, President Joe Biden said on Wednesday.

"Today I was briefed on a new DoD[Pentagon]-wide China Task Force that Secretary [Lloyd] Austin is standing up to look at our strategy and operational concepts, technology and force posture and so much more," Biden said in a press briefing. "The task force will work quickly, drawing on civilian and military experts across the department to provide within the next few months recommendations to Secretary Austin on key priorities and decision points so that we can chart a strong path forward on China-related matters."

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Biden Says Will Never Hesitate to Use Force When Necessary to Defend US

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said during a visit to the Pentagon on Wednesday that he would never hesitate to use force to defend the United States and its interests, but stressed that he would only do so as a last resort after exhausting other options. "As a commander-in-chief I will never hesitate to use force to defend the vital interests the American people and our allies around the world when necessary," Biden said at the Pentagon in remarks to US Department of Defense personnel. "But I believe force should be a tool of last resort, not first."

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Biden Welcomes News That Saudis Released Women's Rights Activist From Prison

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden welcomed on Wednesday reports the Saudi Arabian authorities released from prison women's rights activist Loujain Al-Hathloul.

"I have some welcome news that the Saudi government has released the prominent human rights activist Loujain Al-Hathloul from prison," Biden said at the Pentagon. "She is a powerful advocate for women's rights, and releasing her was the right thing to do."

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US, Partners to Collectively Roll Out Actions in Response to Myanmar Coup - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United States expects its partners will collectively roll out actions in response to the Myanmar coup, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

Price's comments came after President Joe Biden announced that he has approved an executive order to impose sanctions on Myanmar's military leaders who were responsible for the coup.

"We have heard from some of our partners, what they are working on, what they will be able to present," Price said in a press briefing. "I think as you hear from us this week and as you hear more from our partners, it will be very clear that what we are collectively rolling out will impose steep and profound costs on those responsible for this coup."

Biden said the US government is taking steps to prevent Myanmar military leaders from having access to \$1 billion in government funds held in the United States. The US government will also impose strong export controls and freeze assets that benefit the Myanmar government while maintaining support directly to the country's people, he said.

Last week, hours before the newly-elected parliament was due to convene, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency. State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and ousted President Win Myint, along with other top officials accused of election fraud, have been put under house arrest.

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US Will Not Let Yemen's Houthis 'Off The Hook' for Recent Attack - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Yemen's Houthi leaders will be wrong to think the Biden administration will ignore their recent attacks, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"Houthi leadership will find themselves sorely mistaken if they think this administration is going to let off the pressure, is going to let them off the hook for the reprehensible conduct that they continue to undertake," Price said in a press briefing.

Price added that the Biden administration will have more to say on the matter in the coming days.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen said a civilian plane at Abha International Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia caught fire as a result of an attack carried out by the Houthi movement.

Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria responded by saying the opposition movement hit warplane airfields at the Abha airport via four drones on Wednesday afternoon and the strike "was accurate."

President Joe Biden has suspended arms sales to Riyadh and reportedly informed Congress it would remove the Houthis from the US foreign terrorist organizations list as part of a US diplomatic effort to end the war in Yemen.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels since 2014. A coalition of states led by Saudi

Arabia launched a military operation to support the internationally recognized Hadi government in 2015. The Houthis continue to maintain control over a vast part in the north of the country, including the capital of Sanaa.

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US Fiscal 2021 Budget Deficit at \$736Bln After Growing by \$163Bln in January - Treasury

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The US budget deficit stands at \$736 billion in the first four months of fiscal 2021, growing \$163 billion in January alone, the Treasury Department said in its monthly balance sheet reported on Wednesday.

Outlays for October to January amounted to \$1.92 trillion while receipts totaled \$1.19 trillion, resulting in the \$736 billion deficit, according to the balance sheet.

In January alone, outlays were at \$547.5 billion while receipts totaled \$384.7 billion, resulting in the \$163 billion deficit.

In fiscal 2020, The Treasury reported a budget deficit of \$3.13 trillion.

That budget shortfall came after the issuance of roughly \$3 trillion of aid by Congress under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide grants and loans to US businesses as well as relief to individuals amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2021 deficit so far would include an additional \$900 billion COVID-19 relief passed under the Trump administration in November. It is set to grow as current president, Joe Biden, seeks Congressional approval for a separate \$1.9 trillion stimulus package.

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Griffiths, Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Meet to Discuss Yemen's Political Process

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths on Wednesday met in Riyadh with Saudi Deputy Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman to address the resumption of the political process in Yemen, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"[Martin Griffiths] met today in Riyadh with the Saudi Deputy Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman and other senior Saudi officials," Dujarric said. "They discussed the latest developments in Yemen and ways to resume the political process."

While in Saudi Arabia, Griffiths also hold a meeting with his counterpart US Special Envoy Timothy Lenderking to discuss ending the conflict in the Middle Eastern country.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels for over six years now. The former is backed by a military coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia.

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White House Says Report on Biden TikTok Plan 'Not Accurate'

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - A report regarding the Biden administration's approach to the sale of TikTok's US operations is not accurate, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

Earlier, The Wall Street Journal reported that President Joe Biden shelved indefinitely his predecessor Donald Trump's plan to force TikTok to sell its US operations in consonance with court decisions that ruled in favor of the Chinese video sharing application.

"It's not accurate to suggest that there is a new proactive step by the Biden White House," Psaki said in reaction to the report.

Psaki said the Journal report "conflated" two processes - one going through the courts and the other through the Treasury, which decides on actions such as sanctions. The Biden administration, Psaki added, is conducting a review that has expanded beyond TikTok, but she had non no timetable to provide.

"There is a rigorous process that's ongoing... I will note that we are comprehensively evaluating the risks to US data, including from TikTok, and will address them in an effective and decisive fashion," she said.

Trump had championed the prospective sale of TikTok's American operations to a US group that included Oracle Corp and Walmart Inc. Successful legal challenges by TikTok's owner, China's ByteDance Ltd, stalled his effort.

The battle against TikTok was one of Trump's signature nationalism moves against what he called China's spying on America and Beijing's theft of US intellectual property. His administration alleged that through their TikTok accounts, the private data of Americans was exposed for ByteDance to share without permission with the ruling Chinese Communist Party and subject to further abuse.

US executives at TikTok vehemently denied the Trump administration's charge.

TikTok managed to stall the sale of its US entity through successful court challenges in the United States just before the November election, ensuring Trump's plans never got beyond that.

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US Guided Missile Destroyers, Turkish Frigates Conduct Drills in Black Sea - Sixth Fleet

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Two US Navy guided missile destroyers, two Turkish Navy frigates and accompanying aircraft have carried out joint exercises in the Black Sea, US Naval Forces Europe-Africa/US Sixth Fleet announced in a press release on Wednesday.

"The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Donald Cook, USS Porter and a US Navy P-8A from Patrol Squadron 46 participated in joint air and surface exercises with Turkish

frigates Orucreis and Turgutreis and two Turkish F-16 fighters alongside reconnaissance aircraft in the Black Sea," the release said.

The US Navy ships and aircraft joined the Turkish maritime forces in an integrated surface, air, subsurface warfare exercise to enhance the tactical proficiency of the ships and aircraft through precision command, control and communication, the Sixth Fleet said.

"We welcome this opportunity for American Navy ships USS Donald Cook and USS Porter to conduct exercises with the Turkish armed forces in the Black Sea. As NATO Allies, we share a commitment to peace and stability in Europe and the Middle East," US Ambassador to Turkey David Satterfield said in the release.

The warships hunted for a simulated submarine in their joint exercise working with the US P-8 Poseidon, the release added.

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Austin, Norway Defense Minister Discuss US B-1 Bombers Deployment - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Norwegian Defense Minister Frank Bakke-Jensen have discussed the deployment of US B-1 bombers in Norway, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Secretary Austin thanked Minister Bakke-Jensen for hosting rotational US Marines for cold weather training and underscored the importance of continued training, operations, and cooperation in the High North," Kirby said. "Notably, the United States recently announced that it would deploy a B-1 Lancer Bomber squadron for Bomber Task Force missions out of Orland Air Base to improve interoperability with our allies and partners in the High North and across Europe."

Kirby also said the two officials reaffirmed the US-Norway strategic defense relationship and agreed to continue talks during the upcoming NATO Defense Ministerial gathering.

The US media reported earlier this week on the upcoming B-1 aircraft deployment to Norway. A spokesperson for the US Air Force in Europe told Sputnik at the time that the bombers have not arrived yet.

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US, Partners to Collectively Roll Out Actions in Response to Myanmar Coup - State Dept.

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Price's comments came after President Joe Biden announced that he has approved an executive order to impose sanctions on Myanmar's military leaders who were responsible for the coup.

"We have heard from some of our partners, what they are working on, what they will be able to present," Price said in a press briefing. "I think as you hear from us this week and as you hear more from our partners, it will be very clear that what we are collectively rolling out will impose steep and profound costs on those responsible for this coup."

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Biden Tested for Coronavirus Every 2 Weeks Despite Being Vaccinated - White House

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is being tested for the novel coronavirus every two weeks as a precaution measure despite having being vaccinated, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Wednesday.

"The President's doctor believes that is reasonable to test the President every two weeks," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Psaki explained the White House medical staff considers the measure to be appropriate given that the vaccine he received provides 95 percent protection rather than full protection.

Biden was last tested on February 4, Psaki noted.

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US Top Diplomat Blinken, Cavusoglu Expected to Chat in Coming Days - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to speak to his Turkish counterpart, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, in the coming days, US Department of State spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Wednesday.

"I would expect the Secretary and his Turkish counterpart will have an opportunity to chat, to connect in the coming days," Price said.

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US Policy on Russian S-400 Unchanged, Washington Has 'Profound' Concerns About System

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The US policy on Russia's S-400 air defense systems remains unchanged and Washington still has profound concerns about the system, US Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

Price made the remarks in a press briefing when asked whether the US would consider a proposal in which Turkey de-activates its S-400s in order to resolve a row between Washington and Ankara over the latter's purchase of the defense systems.

"Our policy when it comes to S-400 has not changed," Price told reporters. "We have very profound concerns about the S-400 system, and the S-400 system in the context of our NATO allies."

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US House Impeachment Managers Show Senate Evidence of Mob Plans to Kill Pelosi, Pence

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The US House impeachment managers on Wednesday showed during the Senate trial of former President Donald Trump law enforcement and court records as evidence of former US president loyalists' intentions to kill the House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Mike Pence.

The impeachment managers are presenting the case for convicting Trump over the January 6 incident at the US Capitol by a group of his supporters who protested lawmakers certifying electoral slates from several states that Trump considers invalid and continues to say was robbed of election victory.

An affidavit from a whistleblower, disguised as W-1, claimed that a radical group of protesters "said that anyone they got their hands on they would have killed, including Nancy Pelosi."

A document shown during the presentation pointed out that W-1 stated the members of the group said "they would have killed [Vice President] Mike Pence if given the chance."

The whistleblower also claimed that the group confessed to their plans to return to Washington for the presidential inauguration on January 20 "to kill every single 'm-fer' they can."

"W-1 stated the men said they all had firearms or access to firearms," the affidavit said.

The US House managers also presented court records mentioning a video of a suspect saying, "We were looking for Nancy to shoot her in the friggin' brain, but we didn't find her."

"Your affiant believes that the 'Nancy' Bancroft was referencing is Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi," according to the file.

The managers seek to prove Trump incited insurrection by refusing to accept election defeat and delivering a fiery speech in front of the White House that sparked the incident at the Capitol. Trump's lawyers have said the Senate trial is unconstitutional for he is no longer a president and can not be removed from office, and the trial serves as political theater to prevent their opponent from running for office.

In addition, Trump's lawyers have also said his speech in front of the White House is protected under the First Amendment and the former president explicitly called on his supporters then to protest peacefully and patriotically.

The defense will take the floor later.

Each side is given up to 16 hours over two days to present their case. A two-thirds majority is needed to convict the former president.

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US Will Not Let Yemen's Houthis 'Off The Hook' for Recent Attacks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Yemen's Houthi leaders will be wrong to think the Biden administration will ignore their recent attacks, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"Houthi leadership will find themselves sorely mistaken if they think this administration is going to let off the pressure, is going to let them off the hook for the reprehensible conduct that they continue to undertake," Price said in a press briefing.

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UN Financial Situation Improves in 2021, But Budget Remains 'Tight' - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nation's budget continues to be limited despite the greater number of countries paid their annual dues for 2021 that at the same period last year, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"We are slightly ahead on the honor roll as we were at the same time last year," Dujarric said.

"Budgets continue to be tight, the Secretary-General will continue to manage the finances of this organization in a very prudent and conservative way."

According to the United Nations, a total of 38 member states have paid their regular assessments fully, compared to 35 countries that did so in 2020.

The United Nations' honor roll represents a list of member states that paid their regular budget dues in full within the 30-day due period specified by the organization's financial regulations.

This year, the period by which member states should pay their dues is February 11.

Dujarric noted that for the foreseeable future, UN employees would now have to walk two or three flights, referring to the budget crisis last year that forced the world body's Secretariat to turn off escalators at UN headquarters in New York to save up money.

Amid a severe budget crisis in October 2020, the UN Secretariat put in place a set of measures, such as restricting the travel of staff, limiting heating and air-conditioning services and adjusting hiring practices to curtail spending.

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US to Impose New Sanctions on Myanmar Military Leaders in Response to Coup - Biden

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he has approved an executive order to immediately impose sanctions on Myanmar military leaders who are responsible for the coup in the country.

"Today, I've approved a new executive order enabling us to immediately sanction the military leaders who directed the coup, their business interests, as well as close family members," Biden said. "We will identify a first round of targets this week."

Biden pointed out that the US government is taking steps to prevent Myanmar military leaders from having access to \$1 billion in Burmese government funds held in the United States.

The US government will also impose strong export controls and freeze assets that benefit the Myanmar government while maintaining support directly to the Burmese people, he said.

In addition, Biden called on the Myanmar military to relinquish power and to release State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi along and other detained officials.

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UN 'Very Alarmed' by Houthi Drone Attacks on Saudi Civilian Airport - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is alarmed by the attack on the civilian airport in Saudi Arabia perpetrated by Yemen's Houthi opposition movement, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Wednesday.

"We are very alarmed by the reports of drone attacks by the Houthis on the Abha airport in Saudi Arabia, and we, of course, condemn all attacks that target civilians or civilian infrastructure," Dujarric said.

A civilian plane at Abha International Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia caught fire because of an attack carried out by the Houthis, the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen said on Wednesday. The coalition said the situation at the airport is under control.

However, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria said the opposition movement hit warplane airfields at the Abha airport via four drones on Wednesday afternoon and the strike "was accurate."

The attack coincided with US Special Envoy Timothy Lenderking's first trip to the region and his efforts to end the war in Yemen.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels since 2014. A coalition of states led by Saudi Arabia launched a military operation to support the internationally recognized Hadi government in 2015. The Houthis continue to maintain control over a vast part in the north of the country, including the capital of Sanaa.

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Democratic Impeachment Prosecutor Describes Trump as 'Inciter-in-Chief'

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Democratic prosecutor Jamie Raskin during Donald Trump's impeachment trial on Wednesday denounced the former president as the Inciter-in-Chief of a dangerous insurrection.

The first full day of impeachment arguments got underway at the US Senate, where congressman Raskin and other House managers are presenting the case for convicting the former president for allegedly inciting the Capitol riot. The opening arguments on the impeachment article come a day after the Senate voted to affirm the legality of the trial.

"Donald Trump surrendered his role as Commander-in-Chief and became the Inciter-in-Chief of a dangerous insurrection. And this was... the greatest betrayal of the presidential oath in the history of the United States," Raskin said.

House managers, who act as prosecutors, are seeking to prove that Trump incited violence by refusing for months to accept his election defeat and with a fiery speech in front of the White House sparked the attack on the Capitol by his loyalists who sought to prevent the congressional certification of Joe Biden's victory.

"He assembled, enflamed and incited his followers to descend upon the Capitol to stop the steal, to block Vice President Pence and Congress from finalizing his opponent's election victory over him," Raskin said.

He alleged that Trump was fully aware that violence might ensue.

"The evidence will show you that he saw it coming and he was not remotely surprised by the violence," Raskin said. "He had been warned that these followers were prepared for a violent attack targeting us at the Capitol through media reports, law enforcement reports and even arrests."

He claimed that Trump watched the attack on TV "like a reality show" with "delight, enthusiasm, confusion as to why others around him weren't as happy as he was."

"When his mob overran and occupied the Senate and attacked the House and assaulted law enforcement he... reveled in it. And he did nothing to help us as Commander-in-Chief. Instead, he served the Inciter-in-Chief sending tweets that only further incited the rampaging mob," Raskin said.

He vowed to prove that Trump was "no innocent bystander, whose conduct was totally appropriate and should be a standard for future presidents."

"If you become Inciter-in-Chief to the insurrection you can't expect to be on a payroll as Commander-in-Chief to the Union," Raskin said.

Trump's lawyers have defended his statements as "free speech" urging the Senate to dismiss as unconstitutional and "self-evidently wrong" allegations that their client had a role in the attack.

They will take the floor later.

Each side is given up to 16 hours over two days to present its case. A two-thirds majority will be needed for conviction, meaning that at least 17 of the 50 Senate Republicans have to break ranks and join their Democratic colleagues.

The Senate determined on Tuesday by a 56-to-44 vote that it has jurisdiction to try the former president.

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Biden added that the US government is taking steps to prevent Myanmar military leaders from having access to \$1 billion in Burmese government funds held in the United States.

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Biden to Announce Pentagon Review of US Strategy Toward China - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will announce later on Wednesday a Defense Department review of the United States' strategy toward China, the Wall Street Journal reported citing administration officials.

Biden will launch a task force led by the Defense Department's top China specialist Ely Ratner that will explore the military's footprint in Asia, the report said. The task force will factor in the latest intelligence, the existing alliances and partnerships and other aspects of US strategy, the report added.

The US president is expected to make the announcement during his first trip to the Defense Department later in the day.

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US Federal Emergency Agency Sets Up New COVID-19 Vaccination Sites in Texas - Governor

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) -The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the state of Texas are setting up new test mass vaccination sites to inoculate people against the novel coronavirus in the cities of Houston and Dallas, Governor Greg Abbott said in a press release on Wednesday.

"Governor Greg Abbott today announced that FEMA is establishing mass community vaccination sites in the DFW Metroplex and Houston," the release said. "These federal pilot sites, which will be based at AT&T Stadium, Fair Park and NRG Stadium, are part of a joint effort to support vaccination efforts in underserved areas."

The sites will be operated by FEMA in partnership with the state of Texas through the Texas Division of Emergency Management and local officials, Abbott said.

"These mass community sites will allow us to expand access to COVID-19 vaccinations in underserved communities and help us mitigate the spread of the virus," Abbott said. Preparations and construction at the three locations is now underway and the sites are expected to be open to eligible members of the public beginning on February 24, the release added.

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Twitter to Uphold Ban on Trump, Even if He Runs for Office Again - Chief Financial Officer

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Twitter will continue to ban former US President Donald Trump permanently from its social media platform, the company's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Ned Segal said in an interview on Wednesday.

"When you're removed from the platform, you're removed from the platform," Segal told CNBC.

"Our policies are designed to make sure that people are not inciting violence. He was removed when he was president and there'd be no difference for anybody who'd been a public official once they'd been removed from office."

Twitter was the first social media platform to take action against Trump after the storming of the US Capitol in a riot on January 6.

The US Senate continued with the second day of Trump's second impeachment trial on Wednesday.

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UN Strongly Condemns Mali Attack That Injured 20 Peacekeepers - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations strongly condemned the attack on a base in Mali that wounded 20 peacekeepers, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali's temporary base in Kerena, located near the city of Douentza in central Mali, was targeted by what the United Nations described as a "complex" attack.

"We, of course, strongly condemned the attack," Dujarric said, adding that MINUSMA had taken all necessary measures on the ground to ensure that the injured members receive appropriate treatment.

Dujarric said since the beginning of the year, MINUSMA - the deadliest mission the United Nations operates - has lost five peacekeepers and seen 46 others being injured in violence perpetrated by armed groups.

Mali remains plunged in a security crisis due to jihadist activities rising from the 2012 Islamist insurgency, launched as a separatist mutiny. UN peacekeepers, who have been deployed to the country since 2013, are regularly targeted and attacked by terrorists.

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US Condemns Houthi Attack at Civilian Airport in Saudi Arabia - White House

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has denounced the Houthi attack at the civilian airport in Saudi Arabia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Wednesday.

"We condemn the Houthi attack today at the Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia - [a] civilian airport," Psaki said. "We will continue our diplomatic outreach and engage with various stakeholders including members of Congress, humanitarian aid organizations, the UN Special Envoy and others to bring a negotiated settlement to end the war."

A civilian plane at Abha International Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia caught fire as a result of an attack carried out by Yemen's Houthi movement, the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen said on Wednesday. The coalition said situation at the airport is under control.

Psaki noted that the attack coincides with US Special Envoy Timothy Lenderking's first trip to the region and his efforts to bring a lasting peace to Yemen.

"The Houthis meanwhile continually demonstrate a desire to prolong the war by attacking Saudi Arabia including attacks on citizens," she said.

Psaki reiterated that the focus of United States efforts will continue to be on diplomacy to end the war via the United Nations-led process, impose a ceasefire, open humanitarian channels and restore peace talks.

"We believe that remains the best path forward," she said.

Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria responded by saying the opposition movement hit warplane airfields at the Abha airport via four drones on Wednesday afternoon and the strike "was accurate."

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthi rebels since 2014. A coalition of states led by Saudi Arabia launched a military operation to support the internationally recognized Hadi government in 2015. The Houthis continue to maintain control over a vast part in the north of the country, including the capital of Sanaa.

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UK Coronavirus Variant May Dominate Pandemic in US by March - Fauci

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US health officials anticipate the B117 strain of the novel coronavirus that originated in the United Kingdom will become dominant in the United States by March, National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease Director Anthony Fauci said on Wednesday.

"We're concerned that over the next month or so it might become dominant," Fauci said during a White House briefing by US health officials.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said the UK variant now accounts for 1 percent to 4 percent of US coronavirus cases.

Fauci said existing vaccines appear more than 95 percent effective against the UK variant of the novel coronavirus in laboratory tests.

The South African 351 strain of the novel coronavirus appears more problematic given that laboratory tests show a five- to six-fold diminution of overall efficacy, Fauci added.

A South African vaccine trial has indicated the vaccine appears effective in protecting against severe and often fatal cases of COVID-19 even if recipients are susceptible to less-severe infections, according to Fauci.

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US Condemns Houthi Attack at Airport in Saudi Arabia - White House

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has denounced the Houthi attack at the civilian airport in Saudi Arabia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters on Wednesday.

"We condemn the Houthi attack today at the Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia - [a] civilian airport," Psaki said. "We will continue our diplomatic outreach and engage with various stakeholders including members of Congress, humanitarian aid organizations, the UN Special Envoy and others to bring a negotiated settlement to end the war."

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Russia Repatriates 274 Children from Camps in Syria, Iraq, Will Return 96 More - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - Russia has repatriated 274 children from refugee camps in Syria and Iraq since the end of 2018 and is preparing to return almost 100 more from Syria, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

"Since December 2018, 274 children were returned to Russian Federation from conflict areas: 122 from Iraq and 152 from Syria," Nebenzia said in a Security Council meeting. "We have the paperwork ready for 96 children who are currently in refugee camps in Syria."

According to Nebenzia, at the end of December last year, Russia repatriated 19 children from Syria aged three to 15.

At the same time, several UN member states prefer to "just close their eyes" on the fate of their nationals sheltered in refugee camps, such as the Al-Hawl camp in northern Syria, Nebenzia said.

The diplomat called on these countries to make utmost effort to repatriate their people, and, particularly, children, to protect them from the violence propagated by terrorists.

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Biden to Deliver Remarks on US Response to Myanmar Coup at 1:00 p.m. EST - White House

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will deliver remarks on Wednesday afternoon about the US response to the Myanmar coup, the White House said.

"In the afternoon, the President will deliver remarks on the administration's response to the coup in Burma in the South Court Auditorium," the White House said in a media advisory.

Last week, hours before the newly-elected parliament was due to convene, Myanmar's military overthrew the government and declared a year-long state of emergency. State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and ousted President Win Myint, along with other top officials accused of election fraud, have been put under house arrest.

The Biden administration has called on Myanmar's military to relinquish power and threatened to take non-military action if it did not change course. US officials have said the administration has been consulting with allies and partners on the situation in Myanmar.

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IS Gains Strength, Poses Threat of Spreading to Southern African States - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) is posing a threat that it may spread to the countries of Southern Africa, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told a UN Security Council meeting on Wednesday.

"The threat of [the Islamic State] is gaining strength in the Sahara and the Sahel and areas of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The [Islamic State] entities in the greatest Sahara are trying to create the Islamic caliphate," Nebenzia said. "Given that the fighters are gaining root in Central Africa, there is a threat that they will spread to Southern African states."

Nebenzia cited the current difficult situation in Mozambique, where armed groups affiliated with the Islamic State have been threatening the country's gas fields in order to gain a source of funding.

UN Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism Vladimir Voronkov echoed the Russian ambassador's concerns about the growing threat the Islamic State poses in Africa.

Voronkov specifically warned that the Islamic State Central Africa Province, with its presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, is currently emerging as a strong affiliate of the terror group that is employing sophisticated tactics and capabilities.

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Biden to Deliver Remarks on US Response to Myanmar Coup at 1:00 p.m. EST - White House

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US Senate Resumes Trump's Impeachment Trial

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's impeachment trial resumed on Wednesday as the US Senate proceeds to hearing arguments for and against convicting him of instigating last month's violent attack on Congress. Each side - House managers, who act as prosecutors, and Trump's lawyers - has 16 hours over two days for presentations.

House managers, who are the first to take the floor, plan to use previously unseen security footage to show "extreme violence" of the January 6 assault and make clear how close Trump's loyalists came to lawmakers, the Washington Times said.

They seek to prove that Trump incited violence by stubbornly refusing to accept the election defeat and bar him from holding any public office including running for president in 2024.

Trump's lawyers have urged the Senate to dismiss as unconstitutional and "self-evidently wrong" allegations that their client had a role in the attack on the Capitol by his loyalists who sought to prevent the congressional certification of his loss to Joe Biden.

The Washington Times quoted an unnamed aide to the prosecution who believes it is unlikely that all 16 hours will be consumed. The trial could wrap up as early as the weekend, the article said.

The Senate determined on Tuesday on a 56-to-44 vote that it has jurisdiction to try former the president. A two-thirds majority will be needed for conviction, meaning that at least 17 of the 50 Senate Republicans have to break ranks and join their Democratic colleagues.

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Georgia Secretary of State Office Receives Prosecutor Letter About Trump Election Probe

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - The office of the Georgia Secretary of State has received a letter from the Fulton County prosecutor on its opening a criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 state election results, a spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"I can confirm that we received a letter," the spokesperson said, but declined to provide more details.

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IS May Be Able to Orchestrate Attacks Across Globe in 2021 - UN Counter-Terror Chief

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) could regain the capacity to organize attacks around the world this year,

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism Vladimir Voronkov told a UN Security Council meeting on Wednesday.

"Member States warn that ISIL [Islamic State] could regain the capacity to orchestrate attacks in different parts of the world in the course of 2021," Voronkov said, citing the twelfth report of the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the threat posed by Islamic State to international peace and security.

Voronkov noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of exposure to Islamic State propaganda has continued to grow outside conflict zones as people spend more time at home and online.

"This could lead to a sudden rash of attacks in some countries, when COVID- 19-related movement restrictions ease," he said.

Voronkov also pointed out that the pandemic could further aggravate the longer-term threat by the Islamic State as the socio-economic crisis and political fallout contribute to expanding the number of people vulnerable to radicalization.

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US, UN Special Envoys Meet in Saudi Arabia to Discuss Ending Yemen War - Embassy

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy Timothy Lenderking met with his UN counterpart Martin Griffiths in Saudi Arabia and discussed ending the conflict in Yemen, the US Embassy in Riyadh announced in a statement on Wednesday.

"Special Envoy Lenderking met UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths today in Riyadh to discuss ending the war in Yemen," the US Embassy said via Twitter.

On Thursday, US President Joe Biden said the United States was stopping all support for the Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen, but would continue to defend Riyadh against other

threats. Biden also vowed to step up diplomatic efforts aimed at solving the conflict by peaceful means and appointed veteran diplomat Timothy Lenderking as his special envoy for Yemen. The United Nations considers Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 80 percent of the population, or 24.1 million people, in need of humanitarian assistance.

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UN Expert Warns Myanmar Against Unnecessary Use of Force in Protests - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, February 10 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews on Wednesday warned Myanmar security forces against the use of excessive force in mass protests given that such acts may amount to international crimes.

"I am alarmed at the increasing levels of force against peaceful protesters," Andrews said in a statement. "Myanmar military personnel and police need to know that 'following orders' is no defense for committing atrocities and any such defense will fail, regardless of their place in the chain of command. International crimes are manifestly unlawful."

The expert said it was crucial for security forces to stand down before there are more casualties among protesters exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

"Security forces, including commanders, soldiers and other security personnel have a moral, professional and legal obligation to protect the people of Myanmar, not provoke or assault them," Andrews added.

For the fifth consecutive day mass rallies have continued in Myanmar on Wednesday. Several thousand people are protesting across the country against the military coup, despite the ban on assembly of groups of more than four people.

According media reports, police used teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to disperse largely peaceful protesters who have been calling on the military to relinquish power and release detained officials, including State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.

The Myanmar military seized power on February 1, hours before the newly-elected government was due to begin the inaugural parliament session. The military claimed that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party stole the election on November 8.

The military declared a one-year nationwide state of emergency, pledging to hold a new election after it expires.

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Twitter to Uphold Ban on Trump, Even if He Runs for Office Again - Chief Financial Officer

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Twitter will continue to ban former US President Donald Trump permanently from its social media platform, the company's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Ned Segal said in an interview on Wednesday.

"When you're removed from the platform, you're removed from the platform," Segal told CNBC. "Our policies are designed to make sure that people are not inciting violence. He was removed when he was president and there'd be no difference for anybody who'd been a public official once they'd been removed from office."

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Biden Picks Deputy Energy, Labor Secretaries to Aid Turnaround Efforts - White House
WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has tapped David Turk for the post of Deputy Energy Secretary and Julie Su for Deputy Labor Secretary in an effort to turn around the worst energy and employment situation in the United States in nearly a century, the White House said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Turk and Su will help advance President Biden's Build Back Better agenda by rebuilding America's middle class and creating an equitable clean energy future we can depend on," the statement said.

US energy markets are just emerging from the worst oil market collapse in history pressured by the coronavirus crisis. While crude prices themselves have more than doubled from last April's lows, the Biden administration is also focused on redirecting the industry's focus on fossil fuels to one that depends on renewables like solar and wind.

Turk, who will serve Biden's Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, was previously Deputy Executive Director of the International Energy Agency, the statement noted.

Su, who will serve Biden's Labor Secretary Nominee Marty Walsh, is currently secretary of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency. She oversees the state departments and boards that enforce labor laws - including minimum wage and occupational safety standards - and provide state disability, unemployment insurance benefits and other worker welfare.

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Inadequate COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Upsets Over Two-Thirds of Americans - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - A 71 percent majority of Americans say they are not satisfied with the way the vaccination process is going in the United States amid a parallel increase in the number of adults willing to be vaccinated, a new Gallup poll revealed on Wednesday.

"[Seventy-one percent] of Americans are now willing to be vaccinated, up from 65 percent in late December and the highest recorded since July, when the measure was first included in Gallup's probability-based online tracking survey," Gallup said in a press release explaining the poll.

As with most other COVID-19 measures, partisans' satisfaction levels with the vaccination process diverge. Republicans are about evenly divided, with 49 percent satisfied and 51 percent dissatisfied, while Democrats (79 percent) and independents (63 percent) are largely dissatisfied, the release said.

Gallup noted an "upward trajectory" in Americans' willingness to be inoculated following a low point of 50 percent in September.

The latest 71 percent of US adults willing to be vaccinated is the highest on record, and the first measurement that includes a reading for those who have already been vaccinated (9 percent), the release said.

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Georgia Prosecutors Open Probe Into Trump Attempts to Overturn Election Results - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Prosecutors in the US state of Georgia are pursuing a criminal investigation into whether former President Donald Trump attempted to overturn the state election results, the New York Times said on Wednesday citing unknown sources familiar with the situation.

"Prosecutors in Fulton County have initiated a criminal investigation into former President Donald J. Trump's attempts to overturn Georgia's election results, including a phone call he made to Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in which Mr. Trump pressured him to 'find' enough votes to help him reverse his loss," the report said.

Fulton County's recently elected Democratic prosecutor Fani Willis sent on Wednesday a letter to the state government officials, including Raffensperger, asking them to keep materials related to Trump's call and explained the request is a part of a criminal investigation.

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Jury Indicts Pennsylvania Man on Threat to Murder Senators Charge - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - A federal grand jury has indicted a man in his seventies living in the state of Pennsylvania on a charge of threatening to murder US senators, the Department of Justice announced in a press release on Wednesday.

"The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced that Kenelm L. Shirk, age 71, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, was indicted on February 3, 2021, by a federal grand jury for threatening to murder members of the United States Senate," the release said.

On January 21, Shirk was stopped by the Pennsylvania State Police in his vehicle while traveling to Washington, DC and a search of his vehicle recovered several firearms and large amounts of ammunition, the Justice Department said.

"Shirk was then taken into custody by the Pennsylvania State Police and charged with making terroristic threats," the release said.

Shirk made his initial appearance before Magistrate Judge Susan Schwab on February 9, 2021, and pleaded not guilty to the federal charges. He was detained pending a trial that was scheduled for April 5, the Justice Department said.

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US Coast Guard Rescues 3 Cuban Nationals Stranded on Caribbean Island for 33 Days

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - Three Cubans, two men and a woman stranded on the Bahamas' Anguilla Cay for more than a month, were airlifted to safety in a rescue announced by the US Coast Guard on Wednesday.

"A Coast Guard Air Station Miami HC-144 Ocean Sentry spotted three people waving a makeshift flag while on routine patrol, Monday. The aircrew dropped them food, water and a radio to establish communications while a Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater MH-60 helicopter crew deployed to the scene," a Coast Guard press release said.

On Tuesday, the helicopter crew hoisted the two men and one woman and transferred them to Lower Keys Medical Center with no reported injuries.

Anguilla Cay includes a number of tiny islands between Cuba and the US state of Florida, most of which have no permanent inhabitants.

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Biden Shelves Trump Efforts to Force China's TikTok to Sell US Business - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has shelved indefinitely his predecessor Donald Trump's plan to force Chinese video sharing app TikTok to sell its US operations, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday, citing people familiar with the situation.

Trump, in his last few months in office, had championed the prospective sale of TikTok's American operations to a US group that included Oracle Corp and Walmart Inc.

Successful legal challenges by TikTok's owner, China's ByteDance Ltd, stalled the effort, and Biden, in office since January, has decided to leave matters as they are as he undertakes his own review of potential security risks from Chinese tech companies, the report said.

"We plan to develop a comprehensive approach to securing US data that addresses the full range of threats we face," the Journal quoted National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne as saying. "This includes the risk posed by Chinese apps and other software that operate in the US. In the coming months, we expect to review specific cases in light of a comprehensive understanding of the risks we face."

The battle against TikTok was one of Trump's signature nationalism moves against what he called China's spying on America and Beijing's theft of US intellectual property. His administration alleged that through their TikTok accounts, the private data of Americans was exposed for ByteDance to share without permission with the ruling Chinese Communist Party and subject to further abuse.

Administrators of TikTok — a video sharing platform that allows users worldwide to film themselves dancing in their living room, lip-synch jokes, capture animal antics, and share other slivers of personal life — vehemently denied the Trump administration's charge.

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Canada to Spend Nearly \$12Bln Over Next 8 Years on Public Transit Projects – Trudeau

TORONTO, February 10 (Sputnik) – Canada's federal government is committing to spend nearly \$12 billion on public transit projects over the next eight years, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday.

"I can announce today that we are investing almost C\$15 billion [\$11.82 billion USD] for new public transit projects over the next eight years," Trudeau said during a virtual news conference. The prime minister added that a permanent \$2.36 billion public transit fund would come into effect in 2026.

The new funding is in line with his government's climate plan, Trudeau said, explaining that the funding would go towards investment in net-zero emission buses and pathways for cycling. Nearly \$4 billion of the funding will be appropriated through the state-run Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB),

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Facebook to Reduce Political Content in Some Feeds in Coming Weeks

WASHINGTON, February 10 (Sputnik) – Facebook will temporarily limit the amount of political content that appears in the news feeds of users in Canada, Brazil and Indonesia this week, and in the United States in the coming weeks, the company's Product Management Director Aastha Gupta said on Wednesday.

"We will temporarily reduce the distribution of political content in News Feed for a small percentage of people in Canada, Brazil and Indonesia this week, and the US in the coming weeks," Gupta said in a blog post.

The move is a part of a broader effort by the company to better understand users' different preferences for political content, Gupta said. In the coming weeks, the company will test "a number of approaches" and conduct surveys to gain more insight about users' preferences regarding political content.

"During these initial tests we will explore a variety of ways to rank political content in people's feeds using different signals, and then decide on the approaches we'll use going forward," she said.

The new policy will exclude COVID-19 information from authoritative health institutions, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from these tests. Content from official government agencies and services will also be exempt, Gupta added.

The company promises keep some kinds of political content available on the platform. "It is important to note that we're not removing political content from Facebook altogether," Gupta said.

However, she noted that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said that a common piece of feedback the company receives from users is that they do not want political posts "to take over" their news feeds.