

Wires 10/8/20

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Trump Extends US National Emergency With Respect to Syria for 1 Year - White House

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump is extending the US national emergency with regard to Syria for an additional year, the White House announced in a notice on Thursday.

"[I]n accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act, I am continuing for one year the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13894 with respect to the situation in and in relation to Syria," Trump said in the notice.

The announcement was a renewal of the Executive Order that the US president issued on October 14, 2019 to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States constituted by the situation in Syria, the notice explained.

"The situation in and in relation to Syria, and in particular the actions by the Government of Turkey to conduct a military offensive into northeast Syria, undermines the campaign to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [banned in Russia], endangers civilians ... and continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States," Trump said.

For that reason, the national emergency declared on October 14, 2019, must continue in effect beyond October 14, 2020, Trump added.

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Trump to Host 'Largest Virtual Rally in Radio History' on Friday - Limbaugh

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Veteran radio host Rush Limbaugh said in a statement on Thursday that US President Donald Trump plans to hold a monster virtual rally the following day by hosting a three hour broadcast in Limbaugh's regular commentary show.

"I'm thrilled to announce that our commander-in-chief, President Donald Trump, will be right here tomorrow hosting the largest virtual rally in radio history," Limbaugh said. "Be sure to tune in. You don't want to miss this. It will be special. And I am really looking forward to it."

Limbaugh has been one of the most popular and influential radio political commentators in the United States for more than a quarter of a century and has always boasted about his extremely partisan positions, language and attacks on Democrats and liberal positions.

Limbaugh, who is being treated for lung cancer, was awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in February.

Limbaugh's show attracts a cumulative weekly audience of 15.5 million listeners, making it the most listened-to radio show in the United States, Talkers Magazine announced in December 2019.

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US Republican Fundraiser Faces Charges of Illegal Lobbying Over Malaysia Fund Theft

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Former Republican fundraiser Elliott Broidy was charged with failing to register as a foreign agent in a campaign to end a Trump administration investigation of billions stolen from a Malaysian investment fund, according a federal court filing released on Tuesday.

Broidy faces charges of failing to register as a lobbyist for a foreign principle, identified only as Foreign National A, in a conspiracy to lobby the Trump administration and Justice Department "to drop or otherwise favorably resolve its matters against Foreign National A for his role in the embezzlement of billions of dollars from the 1 Malaysia Development Berhad ('1MDB)," the filing said.

Broidy, who worked for President Donald Trump and the Republican Party, became the latest person charged in connection with a US probe of the 1MBD scandal.

Broidy and Nickie Lum Davis, who earlier pleaded guilty, and the person identified as "Foreign National A" were ultimately unsuccessful in their efforts to end the US investigation, the filing said.

The also attempted, without success, to persuade the Trump administration to allow an unnamed Chinese national to return to China, the filing added.

A Malaysian court last month sentenced former Prime Minister Najib Razak to 12 years on corruption charges as he had associates siphon more than \$1 billion from 1MDB that wound up in his personal accounts, according to media reports.

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Baranov Statue Remaining in Public Domain in Sitka 'Important Outcome' - Foundation

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The decision by the city of Sitka in Alaska to keep the statue of Alexander Baranov - the first governor of Russian America - in the public domain after initially deciding to relocate it is a very positive development, Art Russe Foundation Director Rena Lavery told Sputnik.

"We consider the very fact of the physical preservation of the monument and its placement in the public domain to be the most important outcome," Lavery said.

In July, Sitka's assembly adopted a resolution to relocate the Baranov statue to the city's History Museum after a group of local activists urged legislators to remove it because of allegations of mistreatment of indigenous people.

In 1799, Baranov founded Sitka - called Novo-Archangelsk at the time - as the capital of the Russian colonies in North America.

Lavrey said after the Sitka city assembly's adoption of the resolution, the Art Russe Foundation attempted to purchase the statue and transfer it to the Museum of the Arctic in St. Petersburg, Russia.

She noted the foundation decided to undertake such a step because Baranov undoubtedly belongs to a group of people who have greatly contributed to Russian history.

"Baranov is associated with Russia's new trade partnerships established in the 18th century as well as with a breakthrough in the development of North America: the discovery and description of new lands, the construction of new settlements and industrial enterprises, including copper smelters and coal mines," Lavrey said.

The Art Russe Foundation concurrently made an effort to purchase the monument for US President Theodore Roosevelt after the New York City authorities decided to dismantle it following a wave of protests against racism and police brutality against African-Americans in the United States. However, the Foundation's request to purchase the monument remained unanswered.

Art Russe Foundation founder and entrepreneur Andrey Filatov told Sputnik that Baranov and Roosevelt were statesmen who greatly influenced the history of Russia, including the development of its statehood and economy.

"Alexander Baranov was not merely a governor of Russian colonies in North America. An incredibly gifted and energetic entrepreneur, he was involved in establishing Russia's new trade partnerships with China and the United States," Filatov told Sputnik. "His role in Russia's trade and economic development was enormous."

Filatov also noted that Roosevelt played an important role in supporting Russia during a particularly difficult war with Japan.

"It was the United States, under the presidency of Roosevelt, that mediated the 1905 peace talks, and the Portsmouth Peace Treaty signed in the United States was concluded on conditions so favorable to Russia that, on his return to the country, then-Prime Minister of Russia Sergei Witte was hailed as the winner," Filatov said.

The Art Russe Foundations' collection includes works of Russian art from the late 19th century to the late 20th century. The Foundation has set as its goal to raise international awareness of Russian art.

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White House Does Not Think Trump Got COVID-19 From Military Families - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) – The White House does not think that US President Donald Trump got the novel coronavirus after meeting with the families of soldiers who died

while serving in the military, the White House spokesperson Alyssa Farah told reporters on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, Trump suggested in an interview that he may have contracted COVID-19 during a recent meeting with the families of soldiers who died while serving in the military, saying he could not ask them to keep their distance.

"Based on contact tracing, the data we have, we don't think it arose from that event," Farah said.

Trump was hosting a meeting a reception on September 27, where Gold Star families reportedly attended.

The White House staff did take a lot of precautions for that event, Farah said.

"His point was merely that in the timeframe that he was potentially exposed, there were a number of different venues he'd been at and individuals he had interacted with that it could have come from - and by no means are blaming anyone who was present," she added.

On Friday, Trump was admitted to the Walter Reed Medical Center for treatment after announcing that he tested positive for COVID-19. Trump's doctors initially reported the US President had high fever and his blood oxygen levels dropped on Friday and Saturday. Trump was discharged from the hospital on Monday.

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Michigan Governor Thanks Law Enforcement for Thwarting Kidnapping Plot

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer in a press conference on Thursday thanked law enforcement for thwarting a militia plot to kidnap her and possibly kill her.

Earlier in the day, US authorities announced that 13 men with links to militia groups have been arrested and charged for allegedly plotting to kidnap Whitmer after she imposed a state-wide lockdown to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

"I knew this job would be hard, but I'll be honest, I never could have imagined anything like this," Whitmer said. "I want to start off by saying thank you to our law enforcement. Thank you to the fearless FBI agents and thank you to the brave Michigan state police troopers who participated in this operation."

Whitmer said President Donald Trump's rhetoric fuels hate groups, adding that his remarks at the first presidential debate for a certain militia group to "stand back and stand by" are seen as a call to action.

Whitmer said she hopes the state and federal charges against the 13 men will lead to convictions. The governor warned that any individuals conspiring to commit hate crimes will be found and brought to justice.

Moreover, Whitmer criticized Trump's handling of the novel coronavirus and mentioned there will be more hard days ahead during the pandemic.

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Biden to Take Part in Televised Town Hall on October 15 After Debate Postponed - Campaign

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden will appear in a nationally televised town hall meeting on October 15 on the night he had been scheduled to debate President Donald Trump, his campaign said on Thursday.

"Joe Biden will still show up to speak directly with voters and take their questions," Biden's Deputy National Press Secretary Matt Hill said in a Twitter message. "He will join George Stephanopoulos on ABC for a town hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania."

Earlier in the day, Trump had pulled out of his proposed second debate with Biden which had been scheduled for next Thursday, October 15. The president announced his decision after the debate organizing commission had announced it would be conducted as a "virtual" event to eliminate any risk of COVID-19 infection.

The president said a virtual debate was not a genuine debate at all and announced he was planning to go back to his schedule of campaign rallies and speeches.

Trump spent three days in the hospital after he tested positive for COVID-19 before being released on Monday. Trump in a video message after leaving the hospital said he felt fine and told Americans not to fear the virus.

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Baranov Statue to Be Placed in Sitka History Museum by October 18 - Director

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The statue of the first governor of Russian America Alexander Baranov should be moved to its permanent place in the history museum of the US city of Sitka by October 18, Executive Director Hal Spackman told Sputnik on Thursday.

"At this time, we are hopeful we can have the statue mounted and in place on or before October 18th, which is celebrated as 'Alaska Day,'" Spackman said.

In July, the city assembly adopted a resolution to relocate the Baranov statue to the Sitka Historical Society Museum, after a group of local activists urged legislators to remove it, citing mistreatment of indigenous people.

In 1799, Baranov founded Sitka - called at that time Novo-Archangelsk - as the capital of the Russian colonies in North America.

The disputed statue has been moved to the museum on September 29. The museum is temporary closed for building a mount for the monument.

Statues of several historical figures associated with racism have been removed, toppled or defaced across the United States amid nationwide protests fueled by multiple police-involved killings of African Americans.

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Texas Regulators Allow Unpermitted Oil Well to Pollute for 10 Months - Environmental Group

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Texas state officials have allowed an unauthorized oil well to generate unregulated pollution over the past ten months, the Earthworks environmental group said in a press release on Thursday.

"Today Earthworks sent a letter to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Executive Director Toby Baker and the Texas Railroad Commissioner (TRC), urging them to reject and rescind MDC Pick Pocket 21's permits after pollution was documented at the site," the release said.

Earthworks first documented pollution at the site in November 2019 and it has been operating without a required permit for most or all of that time, the release also said.

The environmental group said the ongoing emissions show a clear pattern of neglect by MDC that also reveal the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's failure to do its job to ensure that operators control emissions.

"This behavior illustrates both MDC's blatant disregard for the law and TCEQ's complicity with it," the release said.

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US Takes Steps to Mitigate Risks of Foreign Drones - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States revised its policy to mitigate risks related to foreign-made drones, the Department of Justice said in a statement on Thursday.

"The Department of Justice today announced that its Office of Justice Programs (OJP) has issued a revised policy governing the award of grants for the purchase and operation of foreign-made Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)," the statement said.

The new policy allows grant recipients to use OJP funds only if they promote public safety and mitigate the risks of cyber intrusion and foreign influence, it added.

The policy prevents using funds for purchasing or operating drones manufactured by entities considered by the US as vulnerable to extrajudicial direction from a foreign government.

Applicants also should ensure their ability to mitigate the risks posed by malware or unauthorized collection of user information, data theft, or electronic hijacking, the statement added.

"We take seriously concerns about the use of foreign-made UAS and the potential for related data compromise," Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen said. "It is paramount that funding recipients take effective measures to safeguard sensitive information and the public's privacy and civil liberties while operating these systems in a safe and secure manner."

Companies must be ready to follow these requirements in order to obtain a grant for drones, the Department of Justice said.

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US Military Readiness Not Impacted After Pentagon Leaders Quarantine - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US military readiness has not been impacted by the decision of several senior defense officials to self-quarantine after being exposed to the novel coronavirus, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley said in a statement on Thursday. "America is capable and ready to defend the homeland and support our allies and partners," Milley said. "The Joint Chiefs and I remain in constant communication while in quarantine and the chain of command remains the same. There has been no impact on our ability to effectively plan, coordinate and synchronize efforts to defend our nation."

On Tuesday, Defense Department spokesperson Jonathan Hoffman said several senior US military leaders were self-quarantining after meeting with the vice commander of the Coast Guard, Charles Ray, who tested positive for the novel coronavirus on Monday.

The defense officials include US Air Force Chief of Staff Charles Brown, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday and Chief of Space Operations Gen. John Raymon, according to media reports.

Hoffman said that as of Tuesday none of the defense officials who had contact with Ray had shown symptoms associated with the novel coronavirus infection.

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Ukraine Deports 2 US Neo-Nazis Seeking to Join Azov Battalion - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Ukraine expelled two US Neo-Nazis who tried to join the far-right extremist Azov Battalion, BuzzFeed news reported on Thursday.

Video footage released by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) showed two members of the US-based Atomwaffen Division (AWD) being escorted to their aircraft, the report said. Officials declined to release the men's names, the report added.

The AWD, which began forming terror cells in the United States in 2016, has been linked to several murders, according to US advocacy groups.

The right-wing extremist Azov Battalion has been widely accused of committing war crimes in Ukraine's southeastern regions (Donbas), where local citizens have established the self-proclaimed people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

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US Imposes Sanctions on 18 Iranian Banks - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated 18 Iranian banks in new sanctions action targeting the country's financial sector, the US Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today's action to identify the financial sector and sanction eighteen major Iranian banks reflects our commitment to stop illicit access to US dollars," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement. "Our sanctions programs will continue until Iran stops its support of terrorist activities and ends its nuclear programs."

All but one of the 18 banks was punished under an executive order that targets Iranian government financial resources used to support the nation's nuclear program, missile development, terrorism and terrorism proxy networks as well as malign influence in the region, the statement said.

The Treasury Department also sanctioned one bank pursuant under a separate executive order that targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction, the statement added.

The sanctions freeze bank assets that are located in the United States or controlled by US persons.

The United States has imposed a broad array of sanctions on banks, oil and other sectors of Iran's economy following the Trump administration's 2018 withdrawal from a multinational nuclear agreement with Tehran.

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US Conducts Training to Respond to Weapons of Mass Destruction Used for Assassination

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United State has conducted a virtual training with international partners to detect and respond to the use of weapons of mass destruction for assassinations, the US Department of State said in a statement on Thursday.

"This week, the United States conducted a virtual training with key international partners from across the globe to help first responders, scientists, and security officials detect and respond to incidents where the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is suspected as a tool of assassination," the statement said.

The State Department accused Russia of using such weapons to target adversaries for assassination, including the alleged attempts to poison former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the United Kingdom as well as opposition figure Alexey Navalny.

"Addressing such threats are a significant international security priority," the statement said.

This virtual exercise is first in a series of bilateral and multilateral training sessions sponsored by the United States to help address the threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Russia has repeatedly denied the allegations it was involved in the Skripal and Navalny incidents.

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Canada, Ford Investing \$1.3Bln to Build Electric Vehicles - Trudeau

TORONTO, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Canadian federal government along with the province of Ontario and Ford Canada are investing up to \$1.36 billion to retool existing facilities for zero-emissions vehicle manufacturing, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters on Thursday.

"The Government of Canada, in partnership with the Government of Ontario and Ford Canada is investing C\$1.8 billion [\$1.36 billion USD] to transition Ford's Oakville assembly plant to making zero-emission electric vehicles," Trudeau said.

The federal and provincial governments will each invest \$223.42 million in the project with Ford Canada contributing the rest.

The announcement follows a deal between Ford and its unionized employees for investment in new electric vehicle lines last month and is part of Trudeau's pandemic recovery plan.

Electric vehicle production at the Oakville and Windsor plants is expected to commence in 2024, with the first vehicles rolling off the line in 2025, according to Unifor National President Jerry Dias.

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FBI Arrest Six Men in Alleged Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor - US Attorney

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Six men have been arrested for allegedly plotting to recruit local militia members as part of a plan to kidnap Democratic Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and overthrow her government, US Attorney for the Western District of Michigan Andrew Birge said in a press conference on Thursday.

"Last night, the FBI and Michigan state police arrested six individuals charged in a federal complaint with conspiring to kidnap the Governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer," Birge said. The six individuals arrested and charged include Adam Fox, Barry Croft, Ty Garbin, Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta, Birge said, adding that they each face up to life in prison.

The men allegedly conducted surveillance at Whitmer's vacation home and planned to kidnap and take her to a remote location in the state of Wisconsin to face a trial for treason, according to a court filing.

The group had been meeting since June and contacted a militia in Michigan to help with their plan, the court filing said.

The men used the Second Amendment Rally in June at the Michigan state capitol building to try to recruit people, the court filing said. The filing added that one of the men said they needed 200 men to raid the capitol building, assault law enforcement, take hostages and try the governor for "treason."

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel added that her office has filed anti-terrorism charges against seven other individuals with links to the Wolverine Watchmen militia group. Nessel said these individuals allegedly attempted to identify the home addresses of law enforcement officers in order to target them and make threats of violence with intentions of instigating a civil war. Nessel said these individuals also trained for plans to attack the Michigan capitol building to kidnap government officials, including Whitmer.

Protesters, including some armed with long rifles, gathered in mass demonstrations outside the Michigan capitol building after Whitmer imposed a state-wide lockdown to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

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Seven Other People Self-Isolating After UN Refugees Chief Contracts COVID-19 - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - A total of seven individuals who have been in close proximity to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi are now self-isolating following his positive test result for COVID-19, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday. On Wednesday, Grandi said via Twitter he had contracted COVID-19 and has been working remotely. The high commissioner said he had mild symptoms and hoped to recover soon. "In total, seven other people who were in close contact with the high commissioner on Monday are now self-isolating for 14 days, watching for any symptoms," Dujarric said. "So far, as of yesterday, no one had developed any symptoms."

Dujarric said that after testing positive for the virus, Grandi has been following all medical procedures and local guidelines implemented in Switzerland, where he is based.

Over the last two weeks, Grandi has traveled to Geneva, Brussels, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, according to Dujarric.

The spokesman added that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres wished Grandi well in his recovery.

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US Public Needs More Details on Trump's Health - House Speaker Pelosi

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The US public deserves to know more details about President Donald Trump's health condition after contracting COVID-19, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Thursday.

"I think the public deserves to know the health condition of the president," Pelosi said. Pelosi said more than 30 people in the White House have been infected by COVID-19 yet there is still no acceptance about what needs to be done. Last Thursday, Trump announced he tested positive for COVID-19 before entering the hospital for three days. He was released on Monday, claimed his was fine, and called on Americans not to be afraid of the virus.

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Biden Rejects Trump Proposal to Push Back Next Debate to October 29 - Campaign

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden rejected President Donald Trump's proposal to delay the next debate until October 29 as a precaution following the president's COVID-19 diagnosis, his campaign said in a statement on Thursday. "Donald Trump doesn't make the debate schedule; the Debate Commission does," the statement said. "We look forward to participating in the final debate, scheduled for October 22, which already is tied for the latest debate date in 40 years. Donald Trump can show up, or he can decline again. That's his choice."

Earlier on Thursday, the Presidential Debate Commission said the next debate would be held on October 15 in a virtual format "in order to protect the health and safety of all involved." But Trump shortly afterward announced that he would not do a debate in a virtual format, saying this was "not acceptable."

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US House Speaker Says No to Standalone Airline Relief Bill

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters on Thursday she will not support a standalone relief bill for the airline industry. President Donald Trump in a tweet on Tuesday urged the House and Senate to pass \$25 billion in airline industry aid. The president earlier this week postponed talks on a multi-trillion COVID-19 relief package until after the election. "There is no standalone bill without a bigger bill," Pelosi said when asked about the standalone airline aid legislation pushed by Republicans. Pelosi said she would not back a standalone bill without assurances of broader legislation to help employees in other industries, families and school children in dealing with COVID-19.

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US Imposes Sanctions on 18 Iranian Banks - Treasury

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has designated 18 Iranian banks in new sanctions action targeting the country's financial sector, the Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today's action to identify the financial sector and sanction eighteen major Iranian banks reflects our commitment to stop illicit access to US dollars," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement. "Our sanctions programs will continue until Iran stops its support of terrorist activities and ends its nuclear programs."

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Twitter Removes More Accounts Allegedly Tied to Russia, Iran - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Twitter removed more accounts allegedly tied to Russia, Iran and three other states for pushing misinformation, the company said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today we are disclosing five distinct networks of accounts to our archive of state-linked information operations," the statement said. "The accounts that we have published in our archive today - the only archive of its kind in the industry - include independent information operations that we have attributed to Iran, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Thailand and Russia." The company permanently removed all 1,594 accounts associated with the five networks for violating manipulation policies.

Twitter said it wants to build public understanding on how state actors abuse and undermine open democratic conversations.

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Trudeau Says Canada Keeping Close Eye on US Election, Prepared for Any Eventuality

TORONTO, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government is closely monitoring developments in the US presidential election campaign and preparing for any eventuality, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters on Thursday.

"We are all watching the US election with close attention because of its potential impact on the Canadian economy and on Canadians," Trudeau said. "As we watch the American election unfold, we are, of course, going to be prepared for various eventualities but we are certainly hopeful that all will proceed smoothly."

When asked about Wednesday's vice-presidential debate between sitting US Vice-President Mike Pence and Democratic challenger Kamala Harris, Trudeau said that he would not

comment on events south of the border but expressed hope for a smooth transition of power following the election.

Trudeau also took the time to thank premiers as well as other top officials and leaders for not bringing "overly political elements" into Canada's pandemic response.

Canadian analysts and policy makers are keeping a close eye on developments south of the border and there is concern about how an unpredictable US election will impact the country, especially following a number of trade disagreements between the two nations.

Canadian officials are also watching with extreme attentiveness how the possible transition of power will proceed following the election. US President Donald Trump has shied away from directly answering if he would ensure a peaceful transition of power after the elections, saying that he would need to assess the situation and there are fears of escalating tensions between different groups of Americans amid ongoing civil unrest in the United States.

The United States presidential election is set to be held on November 3.

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FBI Arrest Six Men in Alleged Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor - Affidavit

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Six men have been arrested for allegedly plotting to recruit local militia members as part of a plan to kidnap Democratic Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and overthrow her government, an FBI affidavit revealed on Thursday. The men allegedly conducted surveillance at Whitmer's vacation home and planned to kidnap and take her to a remote location in the state of Wisconsin to face a trial for treason, the court filing said.

The group had been meeting since June and contacted a militia in Michigan to help with their plan, the court filing said.

The men used the Second Amendment Rally in June at the Michigan state capitol building to try to recruit people, the court filing said. The filing added that one of the men said they needed 200 men to raid the capitol building, assault law enforcement, take hostages and try the governor for "treason."

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UN in Touch With Kyrgyz Senior Officials to Find Peaceful Resolution - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations maintains contact with senior officials in Kyrgyzstan to find ways to reach a peaceful resolution of the current crisis following the results of Sunday's disputed parliamentary elections, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Thursday.

"Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Asia Natalia Gherman has been following the situation very closely and is in touch with senior Kyrgyzstani officials to explore ways in which the United Nations can assist the country in finding a peaceful resolution to the current situation," Dujarric said. "The resident coordinator is also in touch with the authorities in Bishkek."

Dujarric added that until a negotiated solution is reached, the United Nations urges all Kyrgyz actors to uphold the rule of law and continue to exercise restraint and refrain from violence. "We continue to be very concerned about the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic," the spokesman added.

Mass protests erupted in the post-Soviet Central Asian republic on Monday in response to what many considered an unfair general election. Protesters, led by supporters of the parties which failed to pass the threshold for winning seats in the parliament, clashed with law enforcement and stormed the parliament building, which also serves as the office of the Kyrgyz presidents. Prime Minister Kubatbek Boronov stepped down on Tuesday and has been replaced by an opposition politician, Sadyr Japarov. In a sign of a split in the ranks of Kyrgyz opposition, some of the parties have refused to recognize Japarov. The dissenters formed an opposition council, called for the president's impeachment and the parliament's dissolution and vowed to elect another prime minister.

The unrest in Kyrgyzstan has left one person killed and more than 1,000 people injured.

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US Capital Area Health Officials Urge White House Visitors to Test for COVID-19

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Health officials in the US capital area urged local residents on Thursday to test for the novel coronavirus if they were visiting the White House as the region faces a new spike of pandemic.

"If you have worked in the White House in the past two weeks, attended the Supreme Court announcement in the Rose Garden on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2020, and/or have had close contact with others who work in those spaces or attended those events, you should get a test for COVID," the officials said in public guidance.

They complained about the "growing numbers" of positive COVID-19 cases among staff working in and near the White house on September 26, and those who attended the event at that day.

"There may be other staff and residents at risk for exposure to COVID positive individuals," read the guideline signed by health officials from the US capital and nine major neighborhoods in the states of Maryland and Virginia.

People, who were identified as a contact, should put themselves to quarantine even if they have a negative test, the guideline added.

On October 7, Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia registered over 2,600 new positive COVID cases and 33 fatalities, local officials said.

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Trump Campaign Agrees to Debate Biden on October 22, 29 - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump agrees to postpone the two remaining debates with his Democratic nominee Joe Biden by a week to October 22 and October 29, the Trump campaign announced on Thursday.

"We agree that this should happen on October 22, and accordingly, the third debate should then be shifted back one week to October 29," its statement said. "Americans deserve to hear directly from both presidential candidates on these dates, October 22 and 29."

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Biden to Talk US Voters on October 15 as Trump Rejects Virtual Debate - Campaign

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden plans to take questions from voters in lieu of the October 15 virtual debate rejected by President Donald Trump, while offering to debate the president in an unspecified format a week later, Biden Campaign Manager Kate Bedingfield said in a press release on Thursday.

"Joe Biden will find an appropriate place to take questions from voters directly on October 15th, as he has done on several occasions in recent weeks. Given the President's refusal to participate on October 15th, we hope the Debate Commission will move the Biden-Trump Town Hall to October 22nd, so that the President is not able to evade accountability," Bedingfield said. Trump refused to meet Biden after the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates changed the in-person event to a virtual format due to the president's coronavirus inspection.

Trump told Fox News that a virtual format requires sitting behind a computer with a moderator able to "cut you off whenever they want."

However, Biden's offer to debate Trump on October 22, keeps the prospect of a second in person clash alive, with an extra week for the US president to recover.

The Trump campaign, meanwhile, said the president would hold a rally on October 15.

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Pentagon Has No Comment on Reports of F-16 Fighter Jets in Azerbaijan

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department has no comment regarding reports of F-16 fighter jets in Azerbaijan, a Pentagon spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday.

On Wednesday, The New York Times published satellite imagery, dated October 3, that the newspaper said showed at least two F-16 fighters deployed at Ganja International Airport in Azerbaijan. The report said the planes were likely operated by the Turkish Air Force.

"I have nothing for you on that," the spokesperson said.

Armenia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, which controls most parts of Nagorno-Karabakh, said that Azerbaijan had launched an offensive on the breakaway region, and both declared martial law and mobilization.

Most countries, including Russia, have called on the warring parties to cease hostilities and settle their differences via dialogue. However, Turkey has vowed to support Azerbaijan with all the needed means.

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**US Offers \$5Mln Reward Venezuela National Over Involvement in Transnational Crimes-
Pompeo**

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is offering a reward of up to \$5 million for information that would result in the arrest of Venezuelan person Samark Jose Lopez Bello for his involvement in transnational crimes, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a release on Thursday.

"Today, the US Department of State announces a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of Venezuelan national Samark Jose Lopez Bello for participating in transnational organized crime," Pompeo said.

Pompeo explained that the reward is being made in connection with previously made reward offers of up to \$10 million for former Venezuelan Vice President Tareck Zaidan El-Aissami Maddah and up to \$5 million for National Superintendent of Cryptocurrencies Joselit de la Trinidad Ramirez Camacho.

"Lopez Bello worked with others in an effort to violate and evade OFAC sanctions imposed pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act and related regulations. He was charged by indictment, along with El-Aissami and Ramirez, in the Southern District of New York with several transnational crimes," Pompeo said.

At the end of September, Pompeo announced the United States has offered two rewards of up to \$5 million each for information leading to the arrest or conviction of former Venezuelan Minister of Electricity and his deputy.

Earlier in September, the United States sanctioned Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and several other officials for cooperation with Iran and alleged attempts to manipulate the country's parliamentary elections.

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State Dept. Says US Monitoring Russian Missile Tests After Zircon Launch

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is watching Russian missile tests which informs Washington's arms control policies, a State Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday commenting on the Zircon hypersonic cruise missile demonstration. On Wednesday, Russia's Chief of General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov told President Vladimir Putin that the hypersonic cruise missile Zircon was launched from the White Sea and successfully hit a target in the Barents Sea at more than eight times the speed of sound. "We continue to monitor Russian military activity and missile tests, which inform our arms control and security policies," the spokesperson said.

Upon the completion of state tests, Zircon will enter service with the Russian Navy's submarines and surface ships, the chief of the General Staff added.

Putin praised the successful test as a highly important step toward equipping the Russian armed forces' with modern weapons.

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US Confirms Participation in OSCE Minsk Group Meetings on Karabakh- State Dept. to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States confirms that it will participate in all meetings on Nagorno-Karabach convened under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, a US State Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Thursday.

"The United States has urged the sides to return to substantive negotiations under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chair led process," the spokesperson said. "As a Co-Chair country, the United States will participate in meetings convened under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group."

Earlier on Thursday, a Sputnik correspondent reported that the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs - Russia, France and the United States - and Azerbaijan are currently holding negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh in Geneva.

The State Department spokesperson said the US position on Nagorno-Karabakh has been clear - both sides must cease hostilities immediately and work with the Co-Chairs to return to substantive negotiations as soon as possible.

"As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States remains committed to helping the sides achieve a peaceful and sustainable settlement to the conflict," the spokesperson said.

The French mission at the United Nations' Geneva headquarters told Sputnik that the meeting is held behind closed doors in a secret location outside the United Nations.

The Russian mission confirmed to Sputnik that Russia's Co-Chair Igor Popov arrived in Geneva earlier on Thursday.

The hostilities in Azerbaijan's Armenian-dominated breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh erupted on September 27 when both parties accused each other of violating the existing ceasefire.

Most countries, including Russia, have called on the warring parties to cease hostilities and settle their differences via dialogue. However, Turkey has vowed to support Azerbaijan in whatever way the latter may need.

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US Senators Question Calls for New Round of COVID-19 Relief for Airlines - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Congress should reject a second package of taxpayer-funded grants for airlines- which continue flying planes loaded with empty seats during the novel coronavirus pandemic - unless lawmakers find another source of money, US Senators Pat Toomey and Mike Lee said in a press release on Wednesday.

"For the past six months, the American taxpayers have spent \$25 billion covering the payroll obligations of passenger airlines," the release said. "The excess capacity of the airline sector will not be resolved in the near future and continuing to force the entire payroll obligation onto the taxpayers is not sustainable."

Instead of collecting another round of grant funding, airlines should take advantage of low-interest, long-term loans that are still available under the CARES Act to survive the pandemic.

"The favorable terms of these loans will make it possible for the airlines to repay the taxpayers once air travel picks back up," the release said.

Any legislation to help airlines should offer "adequate protections for taxpayers," the release added.

The travel data company, Cirium, found that 43 commercial airlines have failed since January this year, compared to 46 in the whole of 2019 and 56 in all of 2018. A failed airline is one that has completely ceased or suspended operations, according to Cirium.

US airlines continue to crisscross the nation with a surfeit of empty seats while some international flights are nearly empty. Congress required that airlines continue servicing existing routes as a condition to receive \$25 billion in grants under the CARES Act.

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Nebenzia Says Tested Negative for COVID-19, Urges All in UNSC Envoys to Get Tested Often

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Thursday that he tested negative for the presence of the novel coronavirus and encouraged every envoy at the UN Security Council to get tested often in order to ensure the safety of everyone.

"Just before this meeting, I underwent a coronavirus test, and I have to tell you that it was negative," Nebenzia told a UN Security Council meeting. "I would urge all of you to undergo

these tests as frequently as possible for your own security, for the security of everyone in this room."

Thursday meeting on the situation in Mali marked the return of the UN Security Council members to their proper venue - the UN Security Council Chamber - for the first time since March.

Inside the Chamber, ambassadors could be seen wearing face masks and seating less than six feet apart from each other with plexiglass barriers installed between them. Some ambassadors took the masks off in order to deliver their statements, but a number kept the masks when speaking.

The UN Security Council stopped in-person meetings following the novel coronavirus outbreak in New York City after lockdowns were put in place in March.

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Trump Says He Could Not Tell Military Families to Stay Distanced During Recent Event

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) – US President Donald Trump on Thursday suggested that he may have contracted COVID-19 during a recent meeting with the families of soldiers who died while serving in the military, saying he could not ask them to keep their distance.

"They all came in and they all talked about their son and daughter and father. They all came up to me with their story," Trump told Fox Business, referring to a recent meeting with so-called Gold Star families.

Trump was probably referring to a reception that he hosted at the White House on September 27, and which several Gold Star families and high-ranking military leaders reportedly attended. The president said he had close encounters with about 35 people at the event, saying all of the families' personal stories were "sad but amazing."

"I could not say: 'Back up, stay at 10 feet,'" Trump recalled. "They wanted to hug and kiss me." On Friday, Trump was admitted to the Walter Reed Medical Center for treatment after announcing that he tested positive for COVID-19. Trump's doctors initially reported the US President had high fever and his blood oxygen levels dropped on Friday and Saturday. Trump was discharged from the hospital on Monday.

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Republicans' Confidence in US Election Vote Count Matches Record Low - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Just 44 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents believe the presidential election will be decided with accurate ballot tallies, tying the lowest level ever recorded for a major political party, a new Gallup poll revealed on Thursday.

"The 11-percentage-point drop since 2018 in the national figure on confidence in election accuracy is largely driven by a 34-point drop among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The GOP's [Republican Party] current 44% level of confidence is the lowest Gallup has recorded for identifiers/leaners of either major political party in its trend dating back to 2004," a press release explaining the poll said.

Democrats, on the other hand, have become slightly more confident in election accuracy since 2018, although the 74 percent who are now "very or somewhat" confident falls short of the 83 percent recorded during the presidential election four years ago, the release said.

President Donald Trump's repeated claims the widespread mail voting during the coronavirus pandemic will lead to massive fraud provides the most likely explanation for Republican concerns, the release added.

Of possible complications that could occur in the election, absentee ballots not being counted because they arrive late is the one that Americans see as the most problematic, with 55 percent predicting it will be a major problem. Nearly as many, 53 percent, say people casting fraudulent votes is a major problem, according to the release.

From: Willis Witter - willis.witter@sputniknews.com

Subject: US Republicans' Confidence in US Election Vote Count Matches Record Low – Poll

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Trump Says He Stopped Taking Most Therapeutics for COVID-19, But Remains on Steroids

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in an interview on Thursday that he has stopped taking most of the prescribed therapeutics for the novel coronavirus, but still remains on steroids.

"I stopped, I don't take them any more," Trump said. "I think I've taken almost nothing. I think I am finished with just about everything.

Trump also said he will continue taking a prescribed steroid for a little bit longer.

"They have a steroid, it's not a heavy steroid, they have that go a little bit longer. But I am almost not taking anything," he said.

Trump emphasized that he feels great after the treatment he received.

Last Thursday, Trump announced that he and First Lady Melania Trump tested positive for the coronavirus. Trump was transferred to the Walter Reed Medical Center for treatment the following day and was released from the hospital on Monday.

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Lockdowns That Succeed Containing Epidemic May Lead to Faster Economic Recovery - IMF

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Effective lockdown measures that successfully contain an epidemic like the novel coronavirus outbreak may lead to a faster economic recovery, the International Fund (IMF) said on Thursday.

"The effectiveness of lockdowns in reducing infections suggests that lockdowns may pave the way to a faster economic recovery if they succeed in containing the epidemic and thus limit the extent of voluntary social distancing," the IMF said.

The IMF also said it anticipates the short-term economic costs of lockdowns could be compensated by stronger medium-term growth and the strict measures may lead to positive effects for the economy.

"This is an important area for future research," the IMF said.

The IMF urged policymakers to pursue other alternative measures, such as contact tracing, promoting mask wearing and encouraging people to work from home to mitigate risks as such measures could have lower short-term economic costs than lockdowns.

"As the understanding of the virus transmission improves, countries may also be able to deploy targeted measures rather than blunt lockdowns, for example by focusing on protecting vulnerable people and restricting large indoor gatherings," the IMF said.

The IMF called on local authorities to act decisively to ensure the lockdowns' effectiveness.

"Lockdowns must be sufficiently stringent to reduce infections significantly," the IMF said.

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Trump Says Will Not Do Virtual Debate After Organizers Change Format

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Thursday announced that he would not participate in the next debate against Democratic nominee Joe Biden after organizers said the event would be held in a virtual format to guarantee participants' safety.

"I heard that the Commission a little while ago changed the debate style. And that's not acceptable to us," Trump said. "I'm not going to do a virtual debate."

The Commission on Presidential Debates announced in a statement earlier on Thursday that the next debate between on October 15 would be held in a virtual format, with both candidates participating from remote locations "in order to protect the health and safety of all involved."

Trump's campaign manager Bill Stepien called the changes unilateral and "pathetic," adding that Trump would hold a rally instead of participating. He argued that the debate could be handled safely because Trump will have taken multiple COVID-19 tests before then.

"For the swamp creatures at the Presidential Debate Commission to now rush to Joe Biden's defense by unilaterally canceling an in-person debate is pathetic," Stepien said in a statement.

"We'll pass on this sad excuse to bail out Joe Biden and do a rally instead."

Biden, when asked about his reaction to Trump's decision to skip the debate, told reporters in Delaware that it was too soon to respond.

"We don't know what the president is going to do. He changes his mind every second. For me to comment on that now would be irresponsible," Biden said. "If I can follow the commission's recommendations. If he goes off and he's going to have a rally, I'll — I don't know what I'll do."

On Friday, Trump was admitted to the Walter Reed Medical Center for treatment after announcing that he tested positive for COVID-19. Trump's doctors initially reported the US president had high fever and his blood oxygen levels dropped on Friday and Saturday. Trump was discharged from the hospital on Monday and said he feels well after being treated for contracting the novel coronavirus.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Remain High at 840,000 - Labor Department

(Updates with details in paras 3, background in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The number of US workers seeking jobless benefits remained high last week, with some 840,000 Americans filing for unemployment benefits, Labor Department data showed on Thursday, in a sign that the job market continues to struggle seven months into the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"In the week ending October 3, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 840,000," the Labor Department said. It revised claims in the previous week upward to from 837,000 to 849,000, putting the current week's drop at 9,000.

Continuous claims for the latest week declined to 11 million from nearly 12 million the previous week, a possible indication that some of the unemployed are going back to work. However, at least some of the decline can be attributed to people who have used up the maximum 26 weeks of state assistance and are now collecting aid through a 13-week federal extended-benefits program.

The labor market lost 21 million jobs between March and April before recovering about half of those over the subsequent months.

The US economy shrank at its fastest pace in history in the second quarter of 2020, contracting by 31.4 percent amid widespread lockdowns due to the pandemic. While economic data has been encouraging in recent months, recovery from the pandemic itself has remained spotty.

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Trump Says He Will Have US Troops in Afghanistan Brought Back Home By Year End

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in an interview with Fox Business on Thursday that he would bring US forces in Afghanistan back to the United States by the end of 2020.

When asked about the ongoing withdrawal from Afghanistan and about the timing for bringing all US troops in Afghanistan back home, Trump said, "Shortly, by the end of year."

"We are in negotiations," Trump said. "I've been bringing them home. We are down to 4,000 troops in Afghanistan, and I'll have them home by the end of the year. They are coming home, you know, as we speak."

On Wednesday, Trump pledged that the remaining US servicemen should be withdrawn from Afghanistan by Christmas.

The US government reduced the number of its troops in Afghanistan to 8,600 in July and another 4,000 troops are expected to leave in the fall.

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Trump Says He Is Not Contagious At All, Feels Great

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that he does not think he is contagious after having contracted the novel coronavirus and being treated for it.

"I do not think I am contagious at all," Trump told Fox Business, adding that he feels great.

Trump said he will be tested again "very soon," but did not specify a timeframe.

"When you catch it, you get better, and then you are immune," Trump said.

The US president noted that many people who wear face masks, including Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, also contracted the novel coronavirus.

Last Thursday, Trump announced that he and First Lady Melania Trump contracted the novel coronavirus. Trump was taken to the Walter Reed Medical Center on Friday and released on Monday.

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Trump Says There Is Very Good Chance of Reaching Stimulus Deal

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in an interview with Fox Business on Thursday that there is a very good chance that his administration will reach a stimulus deal with rival Democrats in Congress after talks on a COVID-19 relief package sputtered earlier this week.

"I think we have a really good chance of doing something," Trump said when asked about the ongoing talks.

Trump abruptly halted the negotiations on Tuesday, before relaunching an effort to reach a more limited relief bill with aid for airlines and \$1,200 stimulus payments for US citizens.

Congress passed four packages of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in the second quarter of this year, dispensing roughly \$3 trillion to disburse as loans and grants to businesses, paycheck protection for workers and personal aid to qualifying US citizens and residents.

The White House and its Democrat rivals in Congress have been locked in a stalemate since on a successive package to the CARES, arguing over the size of the next relief, as thousands of Americans, particularly those in the airlines sector, risked losing their jobs without further aid.

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Next Debate Between Trump, Biden on Oct 15 to Be Virtual - Organizers

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The next debate between US President Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Joe Biden on October 15 will be held in a virtual format, with both candidates participating from remote locations, the Commission on Presidential Debates announced in a statement on Thursday. "In order to protect the health and safety of all involved with the second presidential debate, scheduled for October 15, 2020, The Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) announced the following today: The second presidential debate will take the form of a town meeting, in which the candidates would participate from separate remote locations," the statement said.

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RPT: REVIEW - Pence, Harris Trade Accusations Through Plexiglass in High Stakes VP Debate

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris sparred on a broad range of issues during their only vice presidential debate, but in a much more level-headed manner than their running mates did last week.

The stakes at this vice presidential were higher than usual because of President Donald Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis. The diagnosis raised concerns over longevity of both presidential candidates - the Republican incumbent, who is 74, and his 77-year-old Democratic opponent, Joe Biden - and the aptitude of their running mates to step in.

Wednesday's debate was also unique because, out of an abundance of caution, organizers installed plexiglass shields between the two candidates.

The two vice presidential candidates clashed over the Trump administration's handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic, plans for an economic recovery, foreign policy, climate change, and police violence before closing the debate by discussing voter fraud.

"Senator Harris, it's a privilege to be on the stage with you," Pence greeted his opponent and congratulated Harris, the first woman of color running for Vice President, on the historic nature of her nomination.

Prior to the debate the White House Physician Jesse Schonau announced that Pence had not been in close contact with President Donald Trump or other administration personnel who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus disease since last week.

COVID-19

The first round of questions dealt with the pandemic, during which Harris called the White House's handling of the crisis the "greatest failure of any presidential administration in US history." She accused the Trump administration of covering up the seriousness of the virus. Pence said Trump suspended travel from China while Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden opposed that decision.

The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year.

Pence added that if Trump did not take the unprecedented step of shutting down the economy the US could have lost 2.2 million people. Pence also said if swine flu was as lethal as COVID-19 in 2009, two million Americans would have died when Joe Biden was vice president. Pence said the US wants to improve relations with China but will hold Beijing accountable over COVID-19.

TAXES, TRANSPARENCY

Harris hit back by raising concerns about the vaccine while Pence demanded that she stop undermining confidence in it.

Harris then said it would be good to know who Trump owes money to and if he is making decisions based on his debt. Trump paid \$750 in taxes, she noted, and owed \$400 million in debt. Pence countered by saying Trump has paid tens of millions of dollars in taxes.

In terms of policy, Harris said Biden would repeal Trump's tax bill. Pence said trump cut taxes across the board, with the average American family receiving \$2,000 in cuts. Pence also claimed that Biden will raise taxes.

Harris said Biden's economic plan will create seven million more jobs than Trump's plan.

CLIMATE, FRACKING

The candidates then battled about climate change policies. Harris said Biden will invest in clean energy and research so the US is an innovation leader.

Pence said Biden would not only raise taxes but would end fracking, a claim Harris quickly refuted. The vice president also said Biden will bring in more regulation, abolish fossil fuels and economically surrender to China.

Pence said a strong free market economy has led to a clean environment. The Trump administration, he added, has done it through innovation, natural gas and fracking.

"What's remarkable is the United States has reduced CO2 more than the countries that are still on the Paris Climate accord, but we've done it through innovation," Pence said on Wednesday.

"And we've done it through natural gas, and fracking."

Harris struck back by accusing the Trump administration of not believing in science.

IRAN

The debate then turned to the topic of relations with Iran, with Harris lobbing an opening salvo.

"Look at the Iran nuclear deal, which now has put us in a position where we are less safe because they are building up what might end up being a significant nuclear arsenal," Harris said on Wednesday. "Because of of Donald Trump's unilateral approach to foreign policy, coupled with is isolationism, he pulled us out and has made America less safe."

Pence boasted of Trump's decision to order the killing of Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani.

POLICE VIOLENCE

Harris vowed that a Biden administration would reform policing including imposing a ban on choke-holds in light of the violence against Blacks.

Pence refuted the notion that the US justice system was systemically racist, calling it an "insult" to law enforcement. He said while there was no excuse for what happened to George Floyd, there is also no excuse for rioting.

The vice president said African Americans were 19 times more likely to be prosecuted for minor drug offenses than whites and Hispanics when Harris was attorney general of California. Harris said her role as attorney general in California is a model of what the US needs to do and what will happen in a Biden administration.

ELECTION INTEGRITY

The final round dealt with several issues around the integrity of the November 3 election. Harris accused Trump of trying to suppress the vote. In addition, Harris also encouraged Americans to vote early.

Trump has repeatedly warned that mail-in ballots will lead to voter fraud.

Trump and Biden are scheduled for the second presidential debate in Miami, Florida, on October 15. The US president previously tweeted that he looks forward to participating in the debate with Biden although he is still recovering from the novel coronavirus disease.

The Democratic presidential nominee has said that further debates are possible if approved by "the scientists." Trump and Biden also have a third debate scheduled on October 22 in Nashville, Tennessee.

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2020 US Election

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The US vice presidential candidates in their first and only debate sparred over a range of issues including voter fraud on the same day the White House sounded the alarm that foreign hackers could change the tally on election day.

HARRIS-PENCE DEBATE

US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris attacked each other over the pandemic, Iran, climate change, police violence, and voter fraud on Wednesday night during their first and only debate less than a month before the November 3 presidential election. There was much at stake given the final two presidential debates might be canceled due to President Donald Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis. Wednesday's debate was also unique because, out of an abundance of caution, organizers installed plexiglass shields between the two candidates.

ELECTION SECURITY

The Trump administration is concerned foreign hackers will attack local US government websites to change vote totals during the November 3 election, White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Wednesday.

"My biggest concern on something that can happen on the Election Day - hackers hacking to the Secretary of State website to change vote totals," O'Brien said at the University of Nevada's William Boyd School of Law.

Russia, Iran and China are "leading influencers" on the US election, he added.

Tehran called these accusations untrue. Moscow and Beijing have both consistently refuted Washington's accusations of interference.

EARLY VOTING

Republican officials have lost an attempt to limit early voting in the US state of Texas to only two weeks before the November 3 national elections, the state Supreme Court ruled on Wednesday. "In re the State of Texas from Harris County; 14th Court of Appeals District motion to vacate stay order dismissed as moot, stay order issued September 15, 2020, lifted," the court announced in its decision.

Early voting in Texas will therefore start as originally scheduled on October 13, because of the Supreme Court ruling.

RUSSIA'S EXPECTATIONS

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed the belief that US democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden was resorting to "harsh anti-Russia rhetoric," while President Donald Trump was in favor of boosting the bilateral relations.

"As for the candidate from the Democratic party, I can say we see quite a harsh anti-Russia rhetoric. Unfortunately, we are already used to it," Putin said in an interview with the Russia-24 broadcaster.

Russia does not anticipate any significant breakthroughs in its relations with the United States regardless of the outcome of the November presidential election, and believes only minor progress is possible, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday.

"I have to admit we should not expect any serious breakthroughs on the US-Russia track regardless of today's administration in the White House or the one that will be there after November 3," Antonov said. "We have to be ready that it will require a lot of time to stabilize US-Russia relations, to straighten these ties. And only then can we talk about a period of improvement in US-Russia relations... If we manage to achieve anything, these, of course, will be small but positive steps."

OSCE MISSION

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) will provide an accurate assessment of the US presidential election despite the pandemic's impact on the composition of the observer mission, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) spokesperson Katya Andrusz told Sputnik.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for ODIHR's election observation activities and we were unable to deploy a mission to the US general elections that was as comprehensive as we had planned, our observation will result in an accurate and objective assessment as in all other countries across the OSCE region in which we observe," Andrusz said on Wednesday.

Andrusz noted that OSCE observer mission to the US general election opened on September 29.

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RPT - US Restrictions on Foreign Students, Journalists May Not Happen Soon - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Restrictions on non-immigrant visas for foreign students and journalists proposed by the US government may not come into force soon and will face strong opposition from affected organizations, National Capital Legal Services founder Elizabeth Krukova told Sputnik.

On September 24, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced an initiative to limit visas for foreign students in the United States to two and four years. The initiative also calls for restricting the duration of visas issued to foreign journalists to 240 days with an opportunity to obtain an extension of up to 240 days.

"This specific change would require formal procedure of going through publication, comment and only later implementation," Krukova said. "Considering how many other laws would have to be addressed, many of which having even more detrimental affect than this specific regulation, I would not expect changes to happen any time soon, if at all, as it relates to this specific law."

The new DHS proposal, affecting F, J and I visas, are now open for public comments until October 26. The agency will consider opinions, draft a final rule and submit it to the Office of Management and Budget for review.

"Only after that could a final rule be published as the law," Krukova said.

Litigation could temporarily or permanently stop the final rule from taking effect, she added.

The lawyer did not rule out that US universities, as the most affected party, would appeal this initiative.

"The process for making changes to this specific law has been launched, possibly some universities would take it to litigation," she said.

Krukova noted that if the upcoming elections on November 3 would turn for another US President, it does not mean that the changes to the federal register would be automatically reversed. She also did not rule out that this regulation will go into effect before the results of the upcoming elections is known.

"If this regulation does go into law, then only when and if a different president would be inaugurated this country can start seeing some changes to the laws, whereas difference in policies are likely to take place much earlier," she noted.

Foreign journalists will be more affected by the proposed rule than student visa holders, as their period of stay of only 240 is significantly shorter, the lawyer said.

"Needless to mention how inconvenient it would be to be filing extensions of stay, be fingerprinted and waiting for an answer from immigration authorities whether the request for extension of stay is approved, whereas the approval frequently takes a year or more," she explained. "Also not clear how a specific news agency is supposed to be planning for a replacement journalist to come, while the US consulates overseas are not scheduling appointments for issuance of visas."

At present, foreign journalists can stay in the United States as long as they continue to perform their duties in compliance with the terms of admission.

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RPT - OSCE to Deliver Accurate Assessment of US Election Despite COVID-19 Limits - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) will provide an accurate assessment of the US presidential election despite the pandemic's impact on the composition of the observer mission, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) spokesperson Katya Andrusz told Sputnik.

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Andrusz noted that OSCE observer mission to the US general election opened on September 29.

"ODIHR's election observation is based on a long-term, consistent methodology that has been developed over many years and is used everywhere we observe," she explained.

Andrusz said the OSCE will present its interim report on the 2020 presidential election in the United States in the coming weeks.

"We will publish an interim report in the coming weeks," Andrusz said. "Shortly before the election, we will be joined by our partners from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and together with them ODIHR will present a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions at a press conference on 4 November."

The spokesperson went on to say that it will be possible to take part in the press conference in person and online, with personal attendance restricted due to health safety measures.

"ODIHR will publish a final report summing up the observation approximately two months after the end of the election process," she concluded.

The US is set to hold the presidential election on November 3. Incumbent President Donald Trump is running as the candidate of the Republican party, while former vice president Joe Biden is running as the Democratic candidate.

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RPT: REVIEW - Pence, Harris Trade Accusations Through Plexiglass in High Stakes VP Debate

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris sparred on a broad range of issues during their only vice presidential debate, but in a much more level-headed manner than their running mates did last week.

The stakes at this vice presidential were higher than usual because of President Donald Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis. The diagnosis raised concerns over longevity of both presidential candidates - the Republican incumbent, who is 74, and his 77-year-old Democratic opponent, Joe Biden - and the aptitude of their running mates to step in.

Wednesday's debate was also unique because, out of an abundance of caution, organizers installed plexiglass shields between the two candidates.

The two vice presidential candidates clashed over the Trump administration's handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic, plans for an economic recovery, foreign policy, climate change, and police violence before closing the debate by discussing voter fraud.

"Senator Harris, it's a privilege to be on the stage with you," Pence greeted his opponent and congratulated Harris, the first woman of color running for Vice President, on the historic nature of her nomination.

Prior to the debate the White House Physician Jesse Schonau announced that Pence had not been in close contact with President Donald Trump or other administration personnel who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus disease since last week.

COVID-19

The first round of questions dealt with the pandemic, during which Harris called the White House's handling of the crisis the "greatest failure of any presidential administration in US history." She accused the Trump administration of covering up the seriousness of the virus. Pence said Trump suspended travel from China while Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden opposed that decision.

The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year.

Pence added that if Trump did not take the unprecedented step of shutting down the economy the US could have lost 2.2 million people. Pence also said if swine flu was as lethal as COVID-19 in 2009, two million Americans would have died when Joe Biden was vice president. Pence said the US wants to improve relations with China but will hold Beijing accountable over COVID-19.

TAXES, TRANSPARENCY

Harris hit back by raising concerns about the vaccine while Pence demanded that she stop undermining confidence in it.

Harris then said it would be good to know who Trump owes money to and if he is making decisions based on his debt. Trump paid \$750 in taxes, she noted, and owed \$400 million in debt. Pence countered by saying Trump has paid tens of millions of dollars in taxes. In terms of policy, Harris said Biden would repeal Trump's tax bill. Pence said Trump cut taxes across the board, with the average American family receiving \$2,000 in cuts. Pence also claimed that Biden will raise taxes.

Harris said Biden's economic plan will create seven million more jobs than Trump's plan.

CLIMATE, FRACKING

The candidates then battled about climate change policies. Harris said Biden will invest in clean energy and research so the US is an innovation leader.

Pence said Biden would not only raise taxes but would end fracking, a claim Harris quickly refuted. The vice president also said Biden will bring in more regulation, abolish fossil fuels and economically surrender to China.

Pence said a strong free market economy has led to a clean environment. The Trump administration, he added, has done it through innovation, natural gas and fracking.

"What's remarkable is the United States has reduced CO2 more than the countries that are still on the Paris Climate accord, but we've done it through innovation," Pence said on Wednesday. "And we've done it through natural gas, and fracking."

Harris struck back by accusing the Trump administration of not believing in science.

IRAN

The debate then turned to the topic of relations with Iran, with Harris lobbing an opening salvo.

"Look at the Iran nuclear deal, which now has put us in a position where we are less safe because they are building up what might end up being a significant nuclear arsenal," Harris said on Wednesday. "Because of Donald Trump's unilateral approach to foreign policy, coupled with his isolationism, he pulled us out and has made America less safe."

Pence boasted of Trump's decision to order the killing of Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani.

POLICE VIOLENCE

Harris vowed that a Biden administration would reform policing including imposing a ban on choke-holds in light of the violence against Blacks.

Pence refuted the notion that the US justice system was systemically racist, calling it an "insult" to law enforcement. He said while there was no excuse for what happened to George Floyd, there is also no excuse for rioting.

The vice president said African Americans were 19 times more likely to be prosecuted for minor drug offenses than whites and Hispanics when Harris was attorney general of California. Harris said her role as attorney general in California is a model of what the US needs to do and what will happen in a Biden administration.

ELECTION INTEGRITY

The final round dealt with several issues around the integrity of the November 3 election. Harris accused Trump of trying to suppress the vote. In addition, Harris also encouraged Americans to vote early.

Trump has repeatedly warned that mail-in ballots will lead to voter fraud.

Trump and Biden are scheduled for the second presidential debate in Miami, Florida, on October 15. The US president previously tweeted that he looks forward to participating in the debate with Biden although he is still recovering from the novel coronavirus disease.

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The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year.

Pence added that if Trump did not take the unprecedented step of shutting down the economy the US could have lost 2.2 million people. Pence also said if swine flu was as lethal as COVID-19 in 2009, two million Americans would have died when Joe Biden was vice president. Pence said the US wants to improve relations with China but will hold Beijing accountable over COVID-19.

TAXES, TRANSPARENCY

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UPDATE 5 - Harris, Pence Close Debate in Exchanges Over Election Integrity

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COVID-19

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Pence added that if Trump did not take the unprecedented step of shutting down the economy the US could have lost 2.2 million people. Pence also said if swine flu was as lethal as COVID-19 in 2009, two million Americans would have died when Joe Biden was vice president.

TAXES, TRANSPARENCY

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IRAN, CHINA

Pence said the US wants to improve relations with China but will hold Beijing accountable over COVID-19.

The debate then turned to the topic of relations with Iran, with Harris lobbing an opening salvo.

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USA Today Washington Bureau Chief Susan Page is moderating the debate which is being held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

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UPDATE 4 - Harris Clashes With Pence Over Iran Deal, Police Violence in Late Rounds of Debate

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris attacked each other over the pandemic, Iran, climate change, and police violence as their one and only debate entered the final rounds.

COVID-19

The first round of questions dealt with the pandemic, during which Harris called the White House's handling of the crisis the "greatest failure of any presidential administration in US history."

She accused the Trump administration of covering up the seriousness of the virus.

Pence said Trump suspended travel from China while Biden opposed that decision.

The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year.

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Harris Says Trump Made US Less Safe By Withdrawing From Iran Nuclear Deal

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Senator Kamala Harris said during the vice presidential debate that President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Iran nuclear deal has made the United States less safe.

"Look at the Iran nuclear deal, which now has put us in a position where we are less safe because they are building up what might end up being a significant nuclear arsenal," Harris said on Wednesday. "Because of of Donald Trump's unilateral approach to foreign policy, coupled with is isolationism, he pulled us out and has made America less safe."

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UPDATE 3 - Pence Exchanges Accusations With Harris on COVID-19, Climate Change, China

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris attacked each other over the Trump administration's handling of the pandemic as well as transparency in the first round of their one and only debate before the election.

The first round of questions dealt with the pandemic, during which Harris called the White House's handling of the crisis the "greatest failure of any presidential administration in US history."

She accused the Trump administration of covering up the seriousness of the virus. Pence said Trump suspended travel from China while Biden opposed that decision. The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year. Pence added that if Trump did not take the unprecedented step of shutting down the economy the US could have lost 2.2 million people. Pence also said if swine flu was as lethal as COVID-19 in 2009, two million Americans would have died when Joe Biden was vice president. Harris hit back by raising concerns about the vaccine. Pence demanded that Harris stop undermining confidence in the vaccine. Harris then said it would be good to know who Trump owes money to and if he is making decisions based on his debt. Trump paid \$750 in taxes, we now know he is in debt for \$400 million. Pence countered by saying Trump has paid tens of millions of dollars in taxes. In terms of policy, Harris said Biden would repeal Trump's tax bill. Pence said trump cut taxes across the board, average American family received \$2,000 in cuts. Pence also claimed that Biden will raise taxes. Harris said Biden will invest in clean energy, research so the US is an innovation leader. Pence said Biden would not only raise taxes but would end fracking, a claim Harris quickly refuted. The vice president also said Biden will bring in more regulation, abolish fossil fuels and economically surrender to China. Harris said Biden's economic plan will create seven million more jobs than Trump's plan. The candidates then battled about climate change policies. Pence said a strong free market economy has led to a clean environment. The Trump administration, he added, has done it through innovation, natural gas and fracking. "What's remarkable is the United States has reduced CO2 more than the countries that are still on the Paris Climate accord, but we've done it through innovation," Pence said on Wednesday. "And we've done it through natural gas, and fracking." Harris struck back by accusing the Trump administration of not believing in science. Pence said the US wants to improve relations with China but will hold Beijing accountable over COVID-19. There is more at stake than usual on Wednesday night's given the final two presidential debates might be canceled due to President Donald Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis. Wednesday's debate is also unique because, out of an abundance of caution, organizers installed plexiglass shields between the two candidates. USA Today Washington Bureau Chief Susan Page is moderating the debate which is being held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

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Pence Says Trump Administration Reduced CO2 More Than Countries Still on Paris Accord

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Vice President Mike Pence said in the general election vice presidential debate that the United States has reduced carbon dioxide (CO2) more than the

countries that are still parties to the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"What's remarkable is the United States has reduced CO2 more than the countries that are still on the Paris Climate accord, but we've done it through innovation," Pence said on Wednesday. "And we've done it through natural gas, and fracking."

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UPDATE 2 - Pence, Harris Spar Over COVID-19 Handling, Transparency in First Round of Debate

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Pence said Trump suspended travel from China while Biden opposed that decision.

The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year.

Pence added that if Trump did not take the unprecedented step of shutting down the economy the US could have lost 2.2 million people. Pence also said if swine flu was as lethal as COVID-19 in 2009, two million Americans would have died when Joe Biden was vice president. Harris hit back by raising concerns about the vaccine. Pence demanded that Harris stop undermining confidence in the vaccine.

Harris then said it would be good to know who Trump owes money to and if he is making decisions based on his debt. Trump paid \$750 in taxes, we now know he is in debt for \$400 million. Pence countered by saying Trump has paid tens of millions of dollars in taxes.

In terms of policy, Harris said Biden would repeal Trump's tax bill. Pence said trump cut taxes across the board, average American family received \$2,000 in cuts. Pence also claimed that Biden will raise taxes.

Harris said Biden will invest in clean energy, research so the US is an innovation leader.

There is more at stake than usual on Wednesday night's given the final two presidential debates might be canceled due to President Donald Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis. Wednesday's debate is also unique because, out of an abundance of caution, organizers installed plexiglass shields between the two candidates.

USA Today Washington Bureau Chief Susan Page is moderating the debate which is being held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

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UPDATE - Pence, Harris Open Debate Sparring Over COVID-19 Handling

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris attacked each other over the Trump administration's handling of the pandemic in the first round of their one and only debate before the election.

The first round of questions dealt with the pandemic, during which Harris called the White House's handling of the crisis the "greatest failure of any presidential administration in US history."

She accused the Trump administration of covering up the seriousness of the virus.

Pence said Trump suspended travel from China while Biden opposed that decision.

The vice president also said the administration has tens of millions of doses of the vaccine that will be ready before the end of the year.

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Pence, Harris Take Stage for Only Vice Presidential Debate Before US Election

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris took the stage in Utah to kick-off a high-stakes vice presidential debate with less than a month before election day.

There is more at stake than usual on Wednesday night's given the final two presidential debates might be canceled due to President Donald Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis.

Wednesday's debate is also unique because, out of an abundance of caution, organizers installed plexiglass shields between the two candidates.

USA Today Washington Bureau Chief Susan Page is moderating the debate which is being held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The debate, which is getting underway now shortly after 9:00 p.m EST, is expected to be divided into nine 10-minute segments, each devoted to a different topic.

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OSCE to Deliver Accurate Assessment of US Election Despite COVID-19 Limits - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) will provide an accurate assessment of the US presidential election despite the pandemic's impact on the composition of the observer mission, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) spokesperson Katya Andrusz told Sputnik.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for ODIHR's election observation activities and we were unable to deploy a mission to the US general elections that was as comprehensive as we had planned, our observation will result in an accurate and objective assessment as in all other countries across the OSCE region in which we observe," Andrusz said on Wednesday.

Andrusz noted that OSCE observer mission to the US general election opened on September 29.

"ODIHR's election observation is based on a long-term, consistent methodology that has been developed over many years and is used everywhere we observe," she explained.

Andrusz said the OSCE will present its interim report on the 2020 presidential election in the United States in the coming weeks.

"We will publish an interim report in the coming weeks," Andrusz said. "Shortly before the election, we will be joined by our partners from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and together with them ODIHR will present a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions at a press conference on 4 November."

The spokesperson went on to say that it will be possible to take part in the press conference in person and online, with personal attendance restricted due to health safety measures.

"ODIHR will publish a final report summing up the observation approximately two months after the end of the election process," she concluded.

The US is set to hold the presidential election on November 3. Incumbent President Donald Trump is running as the candidate of the Republican party, while former vice president Joe Biden is running as the Democratic candidate.

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US Restrictions on Foreign Students, Journalists May Not Happen Soon - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Restrictions on non-immigrant visas for foreign students and journalists proposed by the US government may not come into force soon and will face strong opposition from affected organizations, National Capital Legal Services founder Elizabeth Krukova told Sputnik.

On September 24, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced an initiative to limit visas for foreign students in the United States to two and four years. The initiative also calls for restricting the duration of visas issued to foreign journalists to 240 days with an opportunity to obtain an extension of up to 240 days.

"This specific change would require formal procedure of going through publication, comment and only later implementation," Krukova said. "Considering how many other laws would have to be addressed, many of which having even more detrimental affect than this specific regulation, I would not expect changes to happen any time soon, if at all, as it relates to this specific law." The new DHS proposal, affecting F, J and I visas, are now open for public comments until October 26. The agency will consider opinions, draft a final rule and submit it to the Office of Management and Budget for review.

"Only after that could a final rule be published as the law," Krukova said.

Litigation could temporarily or permanently stop the final rule from taking effect, she added. The lawyer did not rule out that US universities, as the most affected party, would appeal this initiative.

"The process for making changes to this specific law has been launched, possibly some universities would take it to litigation," she said.

Krukova noted that if the upcoming elections on November 3 would turn for another US President, it does not mean that the changes to the federal register would be automatically reversed. She also did not rule out that this regulation will go into effect before the results of the upcoming elections is known.

"If this regulation does go into law, then only when and if a different president would be inaugurated this country can start seeing some changes to the laws, whereas difference in policies are likely to take place much earlier," she noted.

Foreign journalists will be more affected by the proposed rule than student visa holders, as their period of stay of only 240 is significantly shorter, the lawyer said.

"Needless to mention how inconvenient it would be to be filing extensions of stay, be fingerprinted and waiting for an answer from immigration authorities whether the request for extension of stay is approved, whereas the approval frequently takes a year or more," she explained. "Also not clear how a specific news agency is supposed to be planning for a replacement journalist to come, while the US consulates overseas are not scheduling appointments for issuance of visas."

At present, foreign journalists can stay in the United States as long as they continue to perform their duties in compliance with the terms of admission.

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Trump Says Remaining Number of US Troops in Afghanistan Should Be Home by Christmas

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump in a statement said the remaining number of American forces in Afghanistan should be withdrawn from the country by Christmas.

"We should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas!" Trump said on Twitter on Wednesday.

The number of US troops in Afghanistan was drawn down to 8,600 in July and another 4,000 troops are expected to leave in the fall.

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Trudeau's Concessions to Avoid Election to Cost Nearly \$15Bln Over Next 2 Years - Report

TORONTO, October 8 (Sputnik) - Concessions made by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to avoid a federal election in the fall will cost Canadian taxpayers \$14.39 billion over the next two years, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) said in three cost-estimate reports.

Last month, after Trudeau outlined his vision for the impending economic recovery in a Throne Speech delivered on his behalf, the Prime Minister faced a vote of non-confidence, which would have brought down the incumbent Liberal government and triggered an election.

Canada's New Democrat Party (NDP) asked that the Liberal government present legislation that would keep the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) - a \$1,400 benefit for workers affected by the novel coronavirus pandemic - intact and introduce paid sick leave in order to support the recovery plan.

The PBO estimates that the Canada Response Benefit (CRB), which replaces the CERB, will cost \$9.69 billion in 2020-2021 and \$3.84 billion in 2021-2022, while the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) will cost \$451.68 million in 2020-2021 and \$414.73 million in 2021-2022.

A separate report found that the cost of the Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit (CRCB) - a \$377.02 weekly benefit for those who spend at least half of their time caring for someone affected by the novel coronavirus will cost \$844 million in 2020-21 and \$161.37 million in 2021-22.

The cost of the two concessionary programs is expected to total \$14.39 billion, while total cost of the three COVID-19 recovery benefit programs, including the CRCB, is expected to be \$15.45 billion over the next two fiscal years.

The PBO also announced that a four-week extension of the CERB will cost an additional \$4.04 billion bring the initial \$18.14-billion program to \$57.84 billion.

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Trump Says COVID-19 Treatment He Received Will Be Available to US Public for Free

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said the novel coronavirus treatment he received of Regeneron's polyclonal antibody cocktail will be made available to the public for free.

"If you're in the hospital and you're feeling really bad, I think we're going to work it so that you get them and you're going to get them free," Trump said in a pre-recorded video message on Wednesday. "Especially if you're a senior, we're going to get you in there quick. We have hundreds of thousands of doses that are just about ready."

Trump added that the US public can also receive Eli Lilly's antibody treatment. He said he has authorized the emergency use of these treatments.

Moreover, Trump said a novel coronavirus vaccine will be available in the United States after the November 3 election.

Trump announced on Thursday that he and First Lady Melania Trump contracted COVID-19. The US president was taken to the hospital on Friday for treatment and was released on Monday to continue recovering at the White House.

Trump was treated with the remdesivir antiviral treatment, an 8 gram dose of Regeneron's polyclonal antibody cocktail, and the steroid drug dexamethasone.

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Azerbaijan Reports 30 Casualties, 144 Injuries Among Civilians in Karabakh - Mission to UN

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - At least 30 Azerbaijani civilians were killed and more than a hundred injured in the ongoing clashes in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan Mission to the United Nations Third Secretary Lala Mehdiyeva said during a UN General Assembly Third Committee meeting.

"Thirty Azerbaijani civilians were killed and 144 wounded. Sixty-six civilian facilities and 427 houses have been destroyed," Mehdiyeva said on Wednesday. "The casualties include women and children. An entire family of five was annihilated."

Hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-dominated breakaway region from Azerbaijan, erupted on September 27 when both parties accused each other of violating the existing ceasefire.

Mehdiyeva called for an investigation into what she termed were "egregious war crimes," adding that foreign mercenaries have been recruited to participate in the military operations against Azerbaijan.

"Foreign mercenaries have been recruited as volunteers and used in combat operations against Azerbaijan," she said.

Armenia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, which controls most parts of Nagorno-Karabakh, said that Azerbaijan had launched an offensive on the breakaway region. Since, Armenia declared martial law and full mobilization while Azerbaijan declared martial law and partial mobilization.

Numerous countries, including Germany and Russia, have called on the warring parties to cease hostilities and settle their differences by engaging in dialogue. However, Turkey has vowed to support Azerbaijan in any way the country needs.

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Trump Supreme Court Pick Holds Talks With Dems on Senate Judiciary Panel - White House

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Supreme Court nominee Judge Amy Coney Barrett held phone conversations with Democratic Senators on the judiciary committee about her legal philosophy, White House spokesperson John Deere said in a statement.

"During these calls, the Judge emphasized the importance of judicial independence and spoke about her judicial philosophy and family. Judge Barrett is looking forward to her upcoming hearing on October 12th," Deere said on Wednesday.

The judge spoke with six members including Senators Diane Feinstein, Patrick Leahy, and Dick Durbin.

US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is trying to push through Barrett's confirmation on the Court before the presidential and congressional elections on November 3 when Democrats hope they will retake control of the Senate from the Republicans.

However, Democrats have vowed to block Barrett's confirmation and Democratic presidential candidate and former vice president Joe Biden has called on the party in Congress to prevent her being approved.

President Donald Trump wants the pick confirmed immediately because he thinks the election will be decided before the Supreme Court over voter fraud due to mail-in ballots.

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US Orders Citibank to Pay \$400M In Penalty for Risk Management Failures - Comptroller

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Citibank has been assessed to pay a \$400 million civil penalty because of widespread failures in its risk management, data handling and internal controls, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) said in a news release.

"The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency today assessed a \$400 million civil money penalty against Citibank of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, related to deficiencies in enterprise-wide risk management, compliance risk management, data governance, and internal controls," the release said on Wednesday.

The OCC took its actions based on Citibank's unsafe or unsound banking practices for its long-standing failure to establish effective risk management and data governance programs and internal controls, the release explained.

"The agency also issued a cease and desist order requiring the bank to take broad and comprehensive corrective actions to improve risk management, data governance, and internal controls. The order requires the bank to seek the OCC's non-objection before making significant new acquisitions," the release said.

The failure also resulted in a violation of OCC guidelines setting up improved standards for large insured US national banks and similar institutions, the release added.

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Canadian Supreme Court Denies Retrial for 2 Men Convicted of Terror Plot

TORONTO, October 8 (Sputnik) – The Supreme Court of Canada ruled to end the retrial bid of two men convicted on terror charges in 2015.

Raed Jaser, a permanent Canadian resident of Palestinian descent and Tunisian national Chiheb Esseghaier were sentenced for plotting to derail in 2013 a VIA Rail passenger train heading from New York to Toronto.

Canada's Supreme Court on Wednesday sided with government attorneys who appealed a Court of Appeal ruling that said the jury in the original trial was improperly selected. The Supreme Court said in the ruling that written reasons for the decision would follow.

Legal counsel for each of the two men had argued that the courts should have honored Esseghaier's and Jaser's request for rotating triers with exclusion unsworn jurors over fears of bias against the two visible-minority Muslim men.

Both men, neither of whom are Canadian citizens, were sentenced to life behind bars in 2015.

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Trump added that the US public can also receive Eli Lilly's antibody treatment. He said he has authorized the emergency use of these treatments.

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RPT- Trump Says US Coronavirus Vaccine Will Be Available Right After November Election

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in a pre-recorded video message that a novel coronavirus vaccine will be available in the United States after the November 3 election.

"I think we should have it before the election, but frankly, the politics gets in the way and that's Okay, they want to play their games," Trump said on Wednesday. "It's going to be right after the election."

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US Office of Director of National Intelligence Releases 1,000 Trump-Russia Probe Documents

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) sent a large binder with nearly 1,000 documents to the US Justice Department for an investigation of how the debunked Trump-Russia collusion probe began, ODNI chief John Ratcliffe said.

"At my direction, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has provided almost 1,000 pages of materials to the Department of Justice in response to Mr. [John] Durham's document request, including a new batch that Justice Department lawyers are now able to view immediately," Ratcliffe said in a statement to the Axios news website on Wednesday. Attorney General William Barr appointed US Attorney John Durham to investigate allegations that Obama administration officials weaponized US intelligence in an attempt to defeat President Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and then undermine the Trump presidency. Trump seeks an expedited declassification and release of materials that he believes will give him a political advantage, presumably ahead of the November 3 election, according to media reports.

The release follows a series of Trump Twitter messages accusing the Obama administration of orchestrating a "treasonous plot" against him by investigating allegations of his campaign's ties to Russia.

An investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller that dominated the first two years of the Trump presidency yielded a report concluding that no collusion had occurred.

Newly released declassified documents implicate former CIA Director John Brennan for having known that the allegations against Trump were untrue and the working of his rival, Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, and having briefed then President Barack Obama about them.

Trump supporters have long anticipated that the Durham probe will result in indictments of senior Obama administration officials for participating in what they call a coup against the duly elected president.

Thus far, Durham has obtained a single guilty plea from a former FBI lawyer who admitted altering a document needed to obtain a surveillance warrant on former Trump adviser Carter Page.

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US to Reduce Forces in Afghanistan to 2,500 by Early 2021 - National Security Advisor

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States will reduce the number of American forces in Afghanistan to 2,500 by early next year, White House National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said during a foreign policy discussion at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

"As of today, there are under 5,000, and then we'll go to 2,500 by early next year," O'Brien said on Wednesday.

The number of US troops in Afghanistan was drawn down to 8,600 in July and another 4,000 troops are expected to leave in the fall.

O'Brien said progress in the ongoing intra-Afghan talks will be slow and hard, but a necessary step if the United States wants to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan.

On February 29, the United States and the Taliban signed a peace agreement that paved the way for reducing violence, gradual foreign troops withdrawal from Afghanistan and starting intra-Afghan negotiations.

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Trudeau Defends \$692M In Supercluster Program After Report Says Initiative Behind Targets

TORONTO, October 8 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau defended his government's \$692-million-dollar supercluster program during Question Period after a report that said the initiative is falling short on set targets.

On Tuesday, Canada's Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) said in a report that of the \$78.42 million allotted for the program at the time of the probe, only \$22.62 had been tapped into and of which 59 percent - \$13.57 million - was spent on operating and administration costs.

"We're investing across the country to help innovative industries that will prepare us for the future and the jobs of the future... that's why we're investing so much in the superclusters, because we have trust in the future that Canadians are building," Trudeau said on Wednesday.

The PBO estimates that even in the event all the money is spent, the initiative would create only 27,000 jobs, instead of the promised 50,000 and it is unclear whether they would be permanent.

The report also said that it is "highly unlikely" that the program would create the promised \$37.70 billion in additional economic growth in the next ten years.

The report found that of the \$819.66 million promised by non-federal partners only \$135.73 have been committed towards projects.

The PBO added that the government would have to find an additional 355 projects to meet its objective, while private and academic partners would have to commit funding to 223 more projects.

The Trudeau government announced the initiative in the 2017 budget, investing millions of dollars into digital, protein, manufacturing, artificial intelligence and ocean superclusters.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and representatives of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) noted the demand for political and diplomatic assistance to Baku and Yerevan for stabilization around Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Foreign Ministry said after the meeting.

* The Azerbaijani armed forces have not conducted any strikes of Armenian territory during the latest round of hostilities along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh, President Ilham Aliyev said.

* Aliyev said that Turkey was in no way involved in the Karabakh conflict, despite all sorts of "rumors and insinuations."

* French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said that talks on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh within the efforts of France, Russia and the United States to settle the conflict would take place in Geneva on Thursday and in Moscow on Monday.

* The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is seriously concerned about the potential impact on civilian populations by the deadly clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and is closely monitoring the situation on the ground, UNHCR spokesperson Shabia Mantoo told Sputnik on Wednesday.

RUSSIA'S ZIRCON MISSILE TEST-LAUNCH

* Russia launched a Zircon hypersonic cruise missile from the White Sea and the projectile successfully hit a target in the Barents Sea at a speed exceeding Mach 8, Russia's Chief of General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov told President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday.

* Russia is not trying to show its muscles by test-launching the hypersonic cruise missile Zircon, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Russia does not anticipate any significant breakthroughs in its relations with the United States regardless of the outcome of the November 3 presidential election and believes only a minor progress is possible, Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday.

* Antonov said that he has been invited twice to the US State Department to discuss the political crisis in Belarus and was warned that Russia should not interfere in the country's affairs.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

* The Italian Council of Ministers has decided to extend the country's novel coronavirus-related state of emergency until January 31, 2021, sources in the government told reporters.

* The US State of Wisconsin will open a field hospital to treat COVID-19 patients due to the record uptick in hospitalizations, Governor Tony Evers said in a release on Wednesday.

* The epidemiological situation in Russia is getting worse, there is an increase in new coronavirus cases in 60 regions, the situation is stable in 20 and some regions even see incidence falling, Russia's chief public health official Anna Popova said.

GLOBAL ECONOMY

* More than 150 million people may fall into extreme poverty throughout the world by 2021 as a result of the economic contraction caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic, the World Bank said in a report on Wednesday.

* US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin is trying to negotiate with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi a narrower COVID-19 stimulus deal to help struggling airlines, after President Donald canceled talks over a larger bill, Congress spokesperson Drew Hammill said.

KYRGYZSTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Alexander Bortnikov in his role as Chairman of the Council of Heads of CIS Security Agencies held a telephone conversation with Kyrgyz Security Council's Deputy Secretary and Chairman of the State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan Omurbek Suvanaliev, expressing support to efforts to normalize the situation in the republic, an informed source said.

* Kyrgyz lawmakers have launched an impeachment procedure against President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, Kanybek Imanaliev, a parliamentarian from opposition party Ata-Meken, told Sputnik.

* Kyrgyzstan's new opposition coordination council proposed on Wednesday opposition politician Tilek Toktogaziev as a candidate to the post of the prime minister, a Sputnik correspondent reported.